

EASA Media Anthropology Network
E-Seminars Series
<http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm>

Barcelona Post-Workshop E-Seminar

Discussion about the workshop

MEDIA PRACTICES AND CULTURAL PRODUCERS
EASA Media Anthropology Network Second Workshop
held in Barcelona, Spain, November 6-8, 2008

December 2 – December 13 2008

Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson [sbh at hi.is](mailto:sbh@hi.is)

Tue Dec 2 00:21:05 PST 2008

Dear list,

As many of you know the 2nd EASA Media Anthropology Workshop was held in Barcelona November 6-8. Cutting edge papers by 4 key note speakers (Elizabeth Bird, Don Slater, Dorle Drackle, Nick Couldry) and 20 young academics presentations and about 30 participants made the event quite a success.

As many of you didn't have a chance to attend the meeting we will run a post-workshop seminar on this list.

The post-workshop starts now. I want to invite Dr. Elisenda Ardèvol to post her intro and summary of the workshop to the list.

In order for you to prepare questions and/comments you can do three things:

1. Respond to the summary presented by Dr. Elisenda Ardèvol and/or the response by Dr. Mark Deuze who is our discussant.

2. Go online and find the workshop and papers presentations at following sites:

<http://mediacciones.es/media-practices-workshop-videos-of-the-meeting/>

<http://mediaciones.es/dorle-drackle-keynotecultural-producers-in-the-field-of-digital-technologies/>

<http://mediaciones.es/don-slater-keynote-new-media-development-and-globalization-communicative-ecologies-and-social-change/>

<http://mediaciones.es/nick-couldry-keynote-theorising-media-as-practice-some-further-reflections/>

<http://mediaciones.es/elizabeth-bird-keynote-from-media-response-to-mediated-practices-the-challenges-to-ethnographic-methodology/>

3. request paper copies from the list of participants. The list of titles and abstracts of papers can be found at:

http://www.media-anthropology.net/barcelona_abstracts.pdf

In order to get in touch with participants contact information can be found at: <http://www.media-anthropology.net/events.htm>

All the best, Sigurjon

Coordinator, Media Anthropology Network
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Elisenda Ardèvol [eardevol at gmail.com](mailto:eardevol@gmail.com)

Tue Dec 2 01:54:32 PST 2008

Dear list,

First of all, I would like to thank Sigurjon for opening the floor for the post-workshop on "media practices and cultural producers" debate and Mark Deuze for kindly accepting the role of discussant. I also want to express my gratitude to all the participants of the workshop for making it possible, and specially to our keynote speakers that triggered so challenging issues for the discussion.

I would like to start by sharing my impressions and thoughts about the two main objectives of the workshop and posit some questions for the debate. I develop them further below and also I attach it in a word document for easily reading.

The first objective was to bring together researchers, scholars, professionals and students interested in an anthropological perspective of media but with an open minded inter-trans-mixed disciplinary approach in order to reinforce our common projects and the interchange of research experiences. We think that this objective was fully accomplished in that for two days we reviewed work-in-progress research on topics such as: co-presence and self-image in videoconference and webcam communication; Canadian networking indigenous self-representation; collective memory, pop venues and digital people's practices; favelas (shanty towns) on the Internet and Internet in the favelas: Internet localisation and the digital divide in Brazil; Internet activism: expectations and frustrations with the trade union movement in Britain; media activism

in digital documentary film in India; the making of Islamist religious TV series in Indonesia; the limits of production and distribution of young people's videos with violent content in Spain; the rise of a mourning self-help online community in Italy; fan communities and media outlets in Brazil; and many other posters, debates and informal discussions around the imbrications between cultural production, media practices and digital technologies. The common understanding was that nowadays we cannot study current media production and consumption without taking into account digital media-related practices.

The second objective of the workshop was to explore ways of doing research on digital media practices and their implications for the understanding of people's interaction with media. This will be the focus of the conversation that I wish to open on this list with the following remarks on the Barcelona workshop.

What follows is a very personal and summarised version of the four keynotes in which speakers tested the foundations of the very concepts that sustained the workshop's claims, that is how we use theoretical concepts and how we think about 'cultural producers' and 'media practices'.

- Questioning 'cultural producers'

Dorle Drackle opened the workshop by challenging the term 'cultural producers' as a way of understanding people's interactions with media. She argued that 'cultural producer' describes what people do with digital technologies in terms of 'content production' and 'joining social networks', a flat description that involves a cultural industry perspective and to identify people as audience or consumers, and people's products as commodities, seeing their activity as alienated or confronted to mass media hegemony. She claims that 'producing' does not take into account other people's activities related to digital technologies such as being present to others, acting as mediators between worlds, acquiring literacy skills, being a social entrepreneur, connecting with friends and family, engaging people in common goals, bringing electricity to an isolated village as technological developers, relating people with artefacts and political issues, etc. All these activities are not understandable in the 'classical' or 'critical' paradigm of media studies (Frankfurt School). They might be better understood in terms of 'cultural mediation', understanding 'mediation' in the sense of transformative practices (Latour). Digital technologies are not passive intermediaries but actants that are put into work in very different ways creating heterogeneous networks and processes of cultural mediation, so people engaged with those networks' in-between activities could be better defined as 'cultural mediators'.

- Des-articulating media and technology narratives.

Don Slater discussed the main question of studies of the 'impact' of ICTs on society and how they help or not to reduce poverty. The idea was to reveal the narratives that involve development policy programmes, arguing that such narratives are based on unequal North/South relations in which the North brings the theories and the South provides the data. The problem is then what are the 'best practices of technology introduction' without questioning the

narratives that articulate North/South relations and the 'global' narratives of the so called 'Information Society'. He argues that the notion of 'media' does not provide a sturdy frame for the study of people's worlds as it carries with it the presupposition that 'media' is the same in different cultural contexts. We must search for an analytical symmetry to des-articulate the language of legitimation of policies based upon the impact of ICTs in society. This has to be based upon an analytic language different from these performative narratives. 'The media' is a Western term (Raymond Williams), it has to do with urbanization, producer/consumer relations and has also a political agenda. Instead of speaking about media, it might be better to speak about 'communicative practices' or 'communicative ecology', understanding it as the whole structure of communication and information flows in people ways of life. The question then is: what are people assembling to make communication happen? And to look at the mundane bricolage, routines and stabilizations, to seek the actors know-how and to understand ecology as an orchestration of spaces. To understand people's communication ecologies, it is necessary to do ethnography first, and not to impose our previous narratives and categories such as Media or ICTs in our questionnaires. We must depart from studies that only want to measure the impact of determinate media in people's life or the frequency of exposure to it. This ethnographic research strategy with a conceptual reformulation of communication technology that eludes the topics of western narratives opens an array of new possibilities to understand people communicative ecology in different contexts and settings, such as rural Ghana.

- But media are media...

In contrast, Nick Couldry does not think that we must depart from media studies, but to go further in developing media theory in a way that overcomes 'mediacentrism' and the collapse of media research after the ethnographies of reception turn and the current pluralization of media interfaces and trajectories. He argues that media research has been centred in: a) interpreting media text and analyzing media political economy; b) studying audiences reception from impact theories to encoding/decoding and ethnographies of reception that have shown the unpredictable, amorphous and ineffable ways of audience response to media (Hall, Morley, Ang, Bird). He urges a search for new descriptive languages proposing to think media AS practice. He explained that he initially has proposed to think media from a theory of practice perspective (Schatzki et altr.) but not to propose the concept of 'media practice', which has been so successful. Media AS practice means to de-centre text and media institutions -which claim to be 'the' media- from the core of the scene and to look at what people do with media or do and say related to media. To study media as practice means, for example, to study a practice such as 'keeping up with the news' and to look for the articulations and des-articulation of this practice with other practices such as 'political engagement'. It implies also to look at how media is crossing different fields of activity, for example, professional health system, and which things are done through media and how. This new perspective promotes an expansion of the research field and new research questions related with how social orders emerge from practices.

- What about cultural practices?

For Elizabeth Bird, the question is how media are incorporated into everyday communicative and cultural practices, such as popular rituals like weddings. She proposes to look at everyday people's life and how media scripts and genres permeate cultural practices, from special occasions to mundane moments. Like Mark Hobart, she argues that we should focus on 'media-related practices' rather than people's media responses and to analyze 'mediated practices' and 'mediated moments': how ritual and significant life moments are performed like media products, shaped by media scripts, forms or genres, and how moments of trivial life become 'media content', as in the YouTube popular celebrities cases of 'I like turtles' or 'Don't tase me, Bro!'. Our popular cultures, she argues, are interwoven with media scripts and texts. In 'media-saturated' cultural contexts, cultural production cannot be explained by a clear division between producers and audiences. So Bird does not propose a radical theoretical break. Classical anthropological concepts and theories are still useful but we need an intercultural perspective and to develop a methodology based on three angles: we must not forget rhetorical analysis but anchor it in ethnographic fieldwork and cross-cultural comparison.

- So, what do we mean by media?

To recap, the threads of discussion running through these challenging proposals have to do with the destabilization of taken for granted concepts regarding media studies, the necessity to be careful with the theoretical concepts we use in relation to transcultural comparison and understandings, and to develop methodologies ethnographically grounded as a guarantee against 'big' theories that not take into account people's agency and cultural ontologies. In that sense, 'practice' was generally accepted as a wide theoretical-methodological frame for understanding people's doings but 'media' was more problematic:

Does 'media' have to be understood in terms of 'mediation' following the Latourian turn, as processes of translation and transformation, so mediation technologies do not necessary refer only to digital mediated communication nor to mass media outlets?

Must the term 'media' be dropped from our analytical vocabulary because it is a folk concept of western societies that implies power narratives?

Is the concept of 'communication' more inclusive and exhaustive for cultural comparison than 'media'? What are the implications of both terms? What do they exclude or include?

Can we talk about 'media' as a useful concept to understand an array of practices that involve the unequal production, distribution, broadcasting and circulation of symbolic products in contemporary societies?

best,
Elisenda

Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson [sbh at hi.is](mailto:sbh@hi.is)

Tue Dec 2 02:05:38 PST 2008

Dear List,

I want to thank Elisenda for posting her summary and comments.

It is now over to our discussant, Mark Deuze. He will post his comments today or tomorrow.

After that I will announce the floor open for questions and/or comments.

All the best, Sigurjon.

Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson [sbh at hi.is](mailto:sbh@hi.is)

Tue Dec 2 02:11:15 PST 2008

Dear list,

The 4th option for preparing for participation in the post-workshop seminar is now available. Please go to:

<http://drop.io/medianthrop>

Password: barcelona

There, you'll find papers presented at the workshop. This will only be opened during the post-workshop seminar.

All the best, Sigurjon.

Mark Deuze [mdeuze at indiana.edu](mailto:mdeuze@indiana.edu)

Tue Dec 2 18:51:51 PST 2008

dear colleagues and friends,

let me first express my sincere regrets for not attending the workshop in Barcelona. The papers are truly magnificent, and I am truly privileged to be part of (y)our discussion afterwards on the impact of the work presented on our field. After reading the keynoters' comments and Elisenda's beautiful impressions, I've prepared a couple of remarks and early thoughts that may or may not be helpful in moving the debate ahead. either way, I hope you will forgive me for rambling at times, and I look forward to being "talked down" as one of my favorite American tv show hosts says.

all of that said, here goes - with apologies for the lengthy post. In the discussion ahead, I promise to keep any comments to a minimum, while encouraging all listers to express themselves in any way they see fit regarding the work of the participants of the workshop, and/or Elisenda's or my comments.

yours sincerely, Mark.

Media Practices, Cultural Producers, and the Study of Media Life

Life in today's liquid modern society is all about finding ways to deal with constant change, whether it is at home, at work, or at play. Over the last few decades, all these key areas of human existence have converged in and through our concurrent and continuous exposure to, use of, and immersion in media, information and communication technologies. Our media environment has become a key site of how we give meaning to the converging context of how we live, work, and play, as media connect us to each other, to our entertainment, and to our work - all at the same time.

The whole of the world and our lived experience in it can indeed be seen as framed by, mitigated through, and made immediate by pervasive and ubiquitous media. This world is what Roger Silverstone has labeled a "mediapolis": a mediated public space where media underpin and overarch the experiences of everyday life. Instead of continuing to wrestle with a distinction between media and society, I propose we begin our thinking with a view of life as lived in media.

In the comments of especially Nick Couldry and Dorle Drackle, but in a real sense of all contributors to the workshop I see connections to such a frame of mind, where we for example call this a collapsing of the (agricultural) categories of media production and consumption into "media as practice" or a recognition of "mediation" as a significant variable in a digital and networked context. Regardless of the choice of term or concept, a common understanding hopefully emerges that to continue to intellectually disentangle media with life does not seem to be a particularly inspiring endeavour - if only because the human brain also does not really see a difference between a mediated and a non-mediated experience. In fact, I would like to argue that much of the paradigmatic dilemmas of media research stem from its stubborn insistence on the fact that media exist somewhere "out there", and only get meaning because either meaning is put into or taken out of them. I guess I am advocating a return of McLuhan's maxim of media as extensions of man, with the caveat that people tend not to become automatons in the production circuit, but indeed express tremendous agency when engaging with (in) media.

Please allow me to share an excerpt from a piece I recently drafted on this issue. The first and foremost implication of a conception of a media life as a life in media (rather than with media), is we are now all living inside our very own "Truman Show": a world characterized by pervasive and ubiquitous media that we are constantly and concurrently deeply immersed in, that dominate and shape all aspects of our everyday life.

The psychiatrists Joel and Ian Gold have recently suggested that the combination of pervasive media, classic syndromes such as narcissism and paranoia, and an emerging media culture where the boundaries between the physical and virtual world are blurring produces a new type of psychosis (as documented in patient case histories): a "Truman Show Delusion" (TSD).

TSD is coined after the motion picture "The Truman Show" (1998), in

which actor Jim Carrey portrays the life of a man who does not know his entire life is one big reality television show, watched by millions all over the world. People who suffer from TSD are more or less convinced that everything around them is a décor, that the people in their lives are all actors, and that everything they do is monitored and recorded.

McGill University's Ian Gold attributes TSD in an interview with Canadian newspaper the National Post to "unprecedented cultural triggers that might explain the phenomenon: the pressure of living in a large, connected community can bring out the unstable side of more vulnerable people [] New media is opening up vast social spaces that might be interacting with psychological processes" (July 19, 2008, p.A1).

In a background story in the International Herald Tribune several experts confirm TSD and intriguingly suggest that "[o]ne way of looking at the delusions and hallucinations of the mentally ill is that they represent extreme cases of what the general population, or the merely neurotic, are worried about" (August 30, 2008, p.7).

The Summer 2008 issue of the British Journal of Psychiatry describes the common TSD symptoms as follows: "First, there is the sense that the ordinary is changed or different, and that there is particular significance in this. This is coupled with a searching for meaning, which, in this case, results in the 'Truman explanation'. The third feature is a profound alteration of subjective experience and of self-awareness, resulting in an unstable first-person perspective with varieties of depersonalization and derealization, disturbed sense of ownership, fluidity of the basic sense of identity, distortions of the stream of consciousness and experiences of disembodiment."

I go in-depth regarding this here, as this brief narrative possibly shows how the TSD can be considered an example of looking at the definition and role of media as completely woven into the fabric of our lives. This is not so much a normative warning against the impact or effects of media on society, but rather an investigation of the integration of media and society - a "media life" perspective, if you will.

If media and life are not distinct categories anymore, and the boundaries of life offline and online are blurring beyond meaningful distinction, and the production and consumption (and mediation) of culture are remixable or otherwise interchangeable - what then is the object of study when we propose to research media?

Jodi Dean has argued that the Web is a "zero institution" in the sense of Levi Strauss and Zizek's use of the concept, meaning an empty signifier functioning to allow people to express membership of a global collective, tribe or culture - even while these people represent radically different groups or belief systems.

Dean goes on to suggest that the Web is a particularly powerful zero institution, "as its basic elements seem a paradoxical combination of singularity and collectivity, collision and convergence. It brings together both the unity and the split, both the hope and the antagonism, the imaginary and the Real in one site" (2002: 167).

If we can postulate that the more than 1 billion internet users worldwide are indeed increasingly living their lives vicariously through a zero institution that allows them to self-express individually contributing to a more or less harmonic collective intelligence (as Pierre Levy puts it), it becomes indeed necessary to do research that emphasizes particularity, as Don Slater suggests.

On the other hand, I respectfully disagree with Elisenda Aredevol's call to go against "big" theories. Zygmunt Bauman has been among those warning against one of the biggest fallacies of our time: that of "think globally, act locally." If the phenomena we are studying have in common that they do not respect boundaries (that means for example: terrorism, tourism, global warming, culture and capital, and indeed everything involving media), I'd argue we desperately need big, bold, and creative theories.

In other words: as scholars of the media with deep respect for agency and a critical awareness of the interconnections of our objects of study we need to think local, and act global.

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Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson [sbh at hi.is](mailto:sbh@hi.is)

Tue Dec 2 19:49:58 PST 2008

Dear list,

I want to thank Mark Deuze for posting his thoughtful comments.

The floor is now open for all to post their questions and/or comments. Please, respond directly to the list i.e. [medianthro at esaonline.org](mailto:medianthro@esaonline.org)

All the best, Sigurjon.

Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson [sbh at hi.is](mailto:sbh@hi.is)

Wed Dec 3 10:19:38 PST 2008

Dear list,

While you are gathering your thoughts on Elisenda's and Mark's comments about the Barcelona Workshop - and thinking about the presentations online and papers from the workshop - I want to remind the list that majority of participants at the workshop are members of this list.

It would be interesting to hear from workshop participants about their thoughts on the many issues raised at the workshop - and their thoughts on the posts so far.

All the best, Sigurjon.

Postill, John J. [Postill at shu.ac.uk](mailto:j.postill@shu.ac.uk)

Thu Dec 4 09:41:56 PST 2008

I am pleased to see in the opening discussion following the Barcelona workshop that the thorny issue of the need to undertake media comparisons across cultures has been raised a few times. I say 'thorny' because the question of comparison seems to me long overdue in the anthropology of media. Perhaps it hasn't yet been attempted because of its positivist associations within anthropology as a whole, not to mention the fear that 'cultures' may have to be the main units of comparison. At any rate, it is often forgotten that one usage of the notion of ethnography that has framed a great deal of (media) anthropological research is the concept of 'ethnographic regions' (Barnard and Spencer 1996, Fardon 1990).

My question to those who've proposed that we undertake comparative studies - and to the list in general - is: How do we go about it? I for one would be very interested in a meeting that brought together regional specialists from two regions (say Insular Southeast Asia and the Caribbean, to mention two regions where I'm familiar with the media anthropology literature) to compare and contrast notes, i.e. a meeting focussed on cross-regional comparison. (I understand Caribbean media anthros have already met?). My guess, and this relates to Elisenda's summary of Don Slater's paper, is that each ethnographic region would throw up quite a different set of key media questions.

John

References

Barnard, A. & Spencer, J. (1996). Encyclopedia of social and cultural anthropology. London: Routledge

Fardon, Richard (1990) Localising Strategies: regional traditions of ethnographic writing. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press

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Thu Dec 4 10:08:44 PST 2008

I take John's point about media comparisons and would like to note that some of us have been trying to do this vis-à-vis advertising over the years. I suspect that media anthropologists interested in comparison will need to look long and hard at the financial structures underpinning media forms, rather than at rather vague concepts of "culture".

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Sarah Pink [S.Pink at lboro.ac.uk](mailto:S.Pink@lboro.ac.uk)
Thu Dec 4 10:22:49 PST 2008

I think comparison is a valuable focus for anthropologists, but the problem is one of finding valid units of comparison. One way of thinking about this is what would it involve if we were to compare media practices - perhaps by focusing on a specific technology. What I think we would find is that different practices involving the same technology would be situated differently: so we would not just be comparing cultures, financial structures, regions and whatever else. Rather we would be comparing the different practices around media technologies that emerge when the 'same' technologies are differentially situated in relation to a whole constellation of things (and by things I mean not just other artefacts, but human and material agencies, biographies, discourses, moralities, the weather and much more).

IN saying this I am not trying to down play culture. I think we need to deal with culture as a concept if we are going to make comparisons worth while. The idea of anthropological regions is also interesting if used cautiously because it can reveal some of the things that people who engage with media in particular contexts might (or might not) have in common. However I am definitely not calling for a debate on this list about what culture is. Rather I would suggest that anyone undertaking a comparison of media practices that are differently situated needs to make a decision about how to theorise culture in ways that are coherent with the wider theoretical framework they are using

Sarah

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Thu Dec 4 10:55:58 PST 2008

By the way although John is right that comparison was rather criticised in the latter part of the C20 there have been some very interesting works outside media anthropology which demonstrate its worth and how it might be done:

Fox and Gingrich (2003) ANTHROPOLOGY, BY COMPARISON (London: Routledge)
Geurts (2002) CULTURE AND THE SENSES: BODILY WAYS OF KNOWING IN AN AFRICAN COMMUNITY

and in my own book HOME TRUTHS (2004) I have (amongst other things) compared Spanish and British domestic practices

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Mikala Hansbøl [mhan at dpu.dk](mailto:mhan@dpu.dk)

Thu Dec 4 11:16:01 PST 2008

Just a brief comment on this interesting discussion. It may be interesting for anyone wanting to pursue this further to engage with Marilyn Strathern's extremely interesting book Partial Connections. I've found Marilyn Strathern's book extremely useful for discussions on differentiations and comparisons as events. Also STS/ANT researcher - empirical philosopher - Annemarie Mol's book The Body Multiple about ontological multiplicity, which takes up on Strathern's fractal approach is a central piece of interest to my PhD research on enactments of ICTs and e-learning in everyday livings. I find that within 'my field' of research, there is too much taken for granted talk about new digital media, new technologies, and too much use of monolithic terms like ICT and media. What is needed is maybe not so much a discussion about culture (though also important) as discussions about the makings of the essences of "the new", "the old", "regionalities", ICTs and media, including discussions about the (everyday) collations, comparisons, differentiations, methods of archiving etc. involved in any research. I see a need to be more curious about what makes things things to compare to begin with :-). This is especially interesting (to me) today, with the increasing focus on evidence based research and (in DK) standardizations - standardized/-ing instruments/technologies. What makes standards standards?

Greetings,

Mikala

Daniel Taghioff [danieltaghioff at yahoo.com](mailto:danieltaghioff@yahoo.com)

Thu Dec 4 22:02:54 PST 2008

I think John raises an important issue here.

The question of comparison is actually implicated with the issue of mediation.

@Mikala How do standards arise? Carey makes the point that the mediation of trainlines across America is what brought about standard time from town to town. Now it is the mediation by another emerging technology-related set of practices which is bringing new standardising dynamics.

Carey: Communication as Culture

<http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&source=web&ct=res&cd=3&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.scholars.nus.edu.sg%2Flandow%2Fpost%2Fpoldiscourse%2F2views.html&ei=FL84SYXXKKKusgKkvMS0BA&usg=AFQjCNGsBa99Sfq6XwjwdhjFTCc8QaJ7cQ&sig2=cgh7MvSE0KT53u30lQo4XA>

Surely this is part of what Marcus was touching on in discussing multi-sited ethnography, particularly the issue of how wholes emerge out of the connections in practice.

Marcus: Ethnography through Thick and Thin

<http://books.google.com/books?id=byHDqIs03d0C&printsec=frontcover&dq=Marcus:+Ethnography+through+thick+and+thin&num=40&ei=Zr84SdX0IKOSkASC0-WtCA>

@ Brian. I think this idea of Marcus's about how wholes emerge gives leverage on the notion of "Financial Structures". Surely these are regularities that emerge dynamically from human decision-making in practice? Certainly within Economics there have been calls for more ethnographic studies of financial decision making:

Needed: A New Empiricism

Barbara R. Bergmann, University of Maryland and American University

<http://www.bepress.com/ev/vol4/iss2/art2/>

And lets us remember that money, or more generally systems for tokens of exchange, are in themselves social practices, which need not always look the same, either accross time or space. Bernard Lietaer designed the Euro, and talks about this very cogently:

The Future of Money

<http://www.transaction.net/money/book/>

This makes comparative work more rather than less urgent. The financial and media practices that are drawing lines across the world bear comparison with the kinds of "networking practices" that people like Juris studies in "Networking Futures."

<http://books.google.com/books?id=rqSzVeCAuYwC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Juris+Networking+Futures&num=40&ei=ncA4SdX4LYbWlQTrio2ACQ>

Now we can look at the differences between spatially expressed regions, or the differences in and between the networks that join regions, and so also approach things in terms of how the relations constitute the objects. But surely we cannot discard comparative work, since it is the transitive character of media practices that makes them recognisable as such.

Oh @Sarah, spot on: situated practices. Situated, not splintered off from the rest of the world.

Daniel

giulia battaglia [giu_bat at hotmail.com](mailto:giu_bat@hotmail.com)

Thu Dec 4 22:22:08 PST 2008

In line with the idea of cross-regional comparison and in line with few discussions that happened during the workshop I pose a question that did not get a clear answer in Barcelona though it had been acknowledged as something that 'everybody had been asking but nobody in such a direct way'.

The way how Nick Couldry presented his argument was by assuming a distinction between 'saturated media countries' and 'non saturated media countries'. Don Slater instead gave examples of countries that may be considered 'non media saturated' (my reading) which are extremely 'technological saturated' (my reading). One of this may be India (he also talked about Ghana but I prefer to underline India as my region of research).

My question was: by questioning 'media', 'media practices', 'cultural media production-reception' and so on, we still create dichotomies between two different worlds: media saturated, non media saturated. However, other technological saturations are happening in places that may be considered non media saturated. How do we therefore apply those media analyses/theorizations in places that may be read as 'non media saturated' but are 'technological saturated'? By taking also Dorle idea of 'mediation' which is something more than media productions, how can those approaches work?

I am very much in line with the idea of cross-cultural comparison and somehow I got interested in Media anthropology 5 years ago through this comparison. There is a brilliant course of Comparative Media Studies that have been running for years now in SOAS under the programme of Media anthropology which tries to question exactly this dichotomy.

I am settled in India finishing off my 20 months fieldwork and I can say that the most difficult part of my work is to find in anthropology as well as in media studies theories or works which can support or can be something to relate and confront with some of my findings. Many of the assumptions which are the starting point for an argument are not valid in India and in India there is not enough literature (at least in my field of research) which can be used as a counter vision of those assumptions.

I was therefore glad to hear a presentation such as Don Slater that brought to an heterogeneous group of media studies and anthropology, empirical examples of places in which pre-theoretical-assumption do not work.

I thank the list for the opportunity of debating important issues during the workshop and now in the list. For whoever is interested about the work that I am conducting in India, my presentation is posted under the link of participants and it is called: Media activisms and contemporary media practices of digital documentary filmmaking in India.

giulia

Giulia Battaglia

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Postill, John [J.Postill at shu.ac.uk](mailto:J.Postill@shu.ac.uk)

Fri Dec 5 03:02:52 PST 2008

On the question of cultural producers raised by Dorle Drackle and followed on by Mark Deuze, I'm concerned about where this post-structuralist talk about fluid media practices, actants, networks, new mediators, etc. - linked by its proponents to a move away from the study of 'the culture industry' - leaves the study of media production.

Take for instance, from a practice-theoretical perspective, the present generation of dual practitioners who want to establish and maintain a foothold in academia and another in news journalism or film-making or software. Surely they operate across two very different worlds of mediated practice, each world with its own essential media practices (e.g. publish or perish in academia) and inessential practices (e.g. blogging in academia - at least at present)?

John

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Mikala Hansbøl [mhan at dpu.dk](mailto:mhan@dpu.dk)

Fri Dec 5 03:22:05 PST 2008

In line with Sarah (I think), I believe that we need to attend much more to the heterogenous sociomaterial practices - which may be difficult to describe and delineate in (multi-)cultural (and comparative) terms (I believe that Giulia's trouble may be a good illustration of this). Daniel is right in suggesting that we should be curious about what mediation is (maybe, however, we should start by not thinking in terms of either culture or communication). I did not write "how do standards arise?", however. I wrote "what makes standards standards". I do not believe that there is one easy answer to this question. Standards are not just brought into being once and for all. We need to look more into the ongoing movements of things. I like Latour's (in Pandora's Hope, 1999) suggestion that circulating references are ways of holding something constant through processes of translations. Therefore, to even begin to think in terms of "Cross-regional comparison" seems to me to be engaging with some central assumptions about (co-)existences which we should be more uncertain about.

Mikala

Mikala Hansbøl [mhan at dpu.dk](mailto:mhan@dpu.dk)

Fri Dec 5 04:18:45 PST 2008

I'm not familiar with Drackle and Deuze, but as an Industrial PhD student in Microsoft Denmark (inscribed at the Danish University School of Education - where I'm currently sitting in my office and writing), I guess that I could be a representative of 'the people' John is referring to. I do not consider myself, however, as "operating across two very different worlds of mediated practice". First of all, I've been engaging in praxiographic studies of relationships between ICTs, learning, and everyday livings in collaboration with a business college. Inspired (very much :-)) by Marilyn Strathern, I'd rather understand and describe my different engagements as taking part in moving the contexts of knowledge. I'm neither fully immersed into Microsoft nor the business college nor any other institution for that matter. I'm not a dual practitioner. I don't recognize academia as one world, and industrial life as another. Whether partially engaged with Microsoft, university and/or a business college, I'm in the 'business' of knowledge-making and thus also media-production. This (in my experience) is not because I'm (currently) an Industrial PhD Student (I'm also currently a non-conjured - is that what you call it? - associate professor).

I think that we should be careful not to a priori understand (and romanticize) media practices as fluid (whatever that means). I understand media practices as sociomaterially enacted. I agree, that

inside certain industrial relationships, what is being acknowledged as media production and knowledge making practices may not be the same as inside certain academic relationships. But I don't believe that we can generalize about essential relationships. Essences are on the move, in a moving world. We can be curious about these movements of the relationships of things, or we can study things in relation to certain imaginaries of the essential relationships of things.

Maybe as a not-English-native-speaking newcomer to this list, I've failed to understand John's important point, but I felt that I should comment :-).

Sarah Pink [S.Pink at lboro.ac.uk](mailto:S.Pink@lboro.ac.uk)
Fri Dec 5 04:41:14 PST 2008

Perhaps one way to resolve this part of the debate is to start thinking about how practice theory and ANT might be usefully combined for understanding the multiple agencies involved in media processes and how these are articulated and intersect through practice. Although there are perhaps so many different appropriations and renderings of practice theory and ANT in existing literature it might be fun finding a starting point for such a study.

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Guido Ipsen [guido.ipsen at uni-dortmund.de](mailto:guido.ipsen@uni-dortmund.de)
Fri Dec 5 06:00:17 PST 2008

Even though self-advertising is not the best of practices, I should like to draw your attention to the upcoming publication on media practices, edited by John Postill and Birgit Bräuchler: "Theorising media and practice" Oxford: Berghahn. Maybe the present discussion will also find some reconciling answers therein.

Otherwise, I think there is a rather simple solution to the seemingly broad chasm between "poststructuralist talk" and "media production".

If we take a look at the history of communication theory, it has moved from the idea of "senders", "receivers" and "messages" to the idea of "texts", "processes", and "practices". From the encouraging theories of Bühler's (<http://www.unikassel.de/fb8/misc/lfb/html/text/6-3frame.html>) and Cassirer's (cf. <http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/events/heidcasseng.pdf>, pp. 9ff) on culture and media and communication, we saw the structuralizing of the field by Jakobson and his followers, and the deconstruction of this crystallized theory by Barthes (work and text, death of the author),

Derrida, Foucault, and the ensuing schools of poststructuralism.

Well, I think we should try and go back to the roots, and this is where the theories of Schulz von Thun, Hall, and - from the philosophical, sociological faction, Luhmann and Habermas help us out. The key is to first understand that communication is what I like to call a 'phase', in the sense of an ever-shifting continuum, similar to the idea of light being at the same time particle and beam in physics. Any act of communication rests on a huge network of previous textualizations, and is hence indeed anchored in a maze of texts. Nevertheless, there is a systemic basis of communication: it serves a given purpose (e.g., forming a community by implementing social semiosis), so I choose the pragmatist escape route from the postmodernist trap: Let us not think about "senders" and "receivers", but about 'actors'. Think about "context" as something that frequently emerges from communication, like an experience horizon, not merely a given joint basis of senders and receivers. Let us conceive of "media" as a field of creativity in communication defined by practices in processes, not technological means that define and guide communication.

In pursuing this theoretical access to communication, we will soon find that despite the endless chain of signification that each act of communication carries with it like a tail, there is some - actually, a lot of - originality to communication acts, and hence also to media production. This originality rests in the profile of actors (these can be persons, institutions, teams, stakeholders...), in the complexities of the context (shared contexts, intercontexts, transcontexts, global contexts, social contexts), and in the application of the media (whoever says a radio only serves the purpose of listening to news or music?).

In short, it is imperative to recognise the anchors that these three aspects (and others, such as settings, which are ignored by most theorists) of communication set in the communicational phase. Communication - and media - can be charted empirically using such a profiling approach, which embraces the idea of production, practices, and processes, but does not deny the facts of semiosis (or chain of signification, as the poststructuralists prefer to call it). The important moment here is to accept the idea of purpose in communication - even though I might risk of being called a teleological ignorant ;-)

Purpose IS a definite point of reference for analysis. I admit it, I am a pragmatist, so if you ask what purpose means here, I use the term in the sense of William James (cf. /Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking/ 1907, see also: http://www.brocku.ca/MeadProject/James/James_1907/James_1907_toc.html).

This is a very brief sketch of my ideas concerning the topic, I am currently writing my "second book" about this in the field of professional communication (An introduction to the theory and practice of professional communication), but the mechanisms work in other areas of communication too. I have carried out various empirical experiments, which showed that actor profiles can be matched with specific media usage, and are indeed context-sensitive. Going more into detail would definitely go beyond the possible scope of a single mailing, but if you are interested in more of this, maybe the network is the right place to post some text once my book is ready for the public.

Not sure this helped solving the question, but never mind and apologies if I went astray.

best,
Guido

Postill, John [J.Postill at shu.ac.uk](mailto:John.Postill@shu.ac.uk)

Fri Dec 5 06:10:52 PST 2008

When speaking of practitioners within a given professional or occupational field I think it's important to distinguish between what we might call apprentices (e.g. PhD students, or trainee journalists) and established practitioners. Perhaps my use of the phrase 'establish and maintain a foothold' was misleading. I should've spoken of individuals who want to develop a dual career and earn a living as both media practitioners and international academics, which strikes me as a very difficult thing to do. Last year I attended a workshop on 'peer production' at Nottingham Trent University (UK) in which a researcher called Tere Vaden presented his findings about the career paths of free/open source workers in Finland. He found a lot of fluidity and idealism and digital bohemia among young programmers in their 20s, but for those in their 30s with families to build, the economic imperatives came first. To quote Vaden:

"Celebrators of flux or prophets of cybercommunism: hackers still need to eat and need electricity for their machines of immaterial labour. If we analyse the current trends in some of the crown-jewels of the free/open source movement, such as GNU/Linux development and the Wikipedia, we quickly notice that not only is a new ethics or mode of knowledge production initiated but also very old-fashioned trends of profit-making and colonisation of knowledge are reasserted."

<http://www.ntu.ac.uk/p2pworkshop2007/programme/56392gp.html>

John

Guido Ipsen [guido.ipsen at uni-dortmund.de](mailto:guido.ipsen@uni-dortmund.de)

Fri Dec 5 06:24:07 PST 2008

Hits my topic. 100%. it shows how important it is to analyse peoples's profiles as actors in communications - including their social backgrounds.

Guido

David Hakken [dhakken at indiana.edu](mailto:dhakken@indiana.edu)

Fri Dec 5 06:24:28 PST 2008

On Dec 4, 2008, at 1:22 PM, Sarah Pink wrote:

> I think comparison is a valuable focus for anthropologists, but the
> problem is one of finding valid units of comparison.

One suggestion that has long informed my work is that of Fred Eggan and the idea of "controlled comparison"--finding cultural units that are similar in many ways, including scale, but vary in regard to a dimension of interest, do fieldwork in both places, see what other things the factor of interest seems to be connected to...

I did this re: Norway and Sweden and the role of the state in promoting user involvement in systems development; wanted to do it with regard to Free/Libre and/or Open Source projects in Malaysia and Singapore but didn't convince NSF...

In general, coping with comparison, and the bigger issue behind it, effective generalization, is essential to development of any anthropology, including one of communication and information technology

David

angela dressler [dressler at tugamail.com](mailto:dressler@tugamail.com)

Fri Dec 5 08:21:27 PST 2008

i have been following the discussion rather passively yet. it has yet taken a very interesting itinerary parting from elisendas summary to articulate on our academic/media etc. practice right now.

i can fully understand john and appreciate his reference and the quotes given. as i myself am a journalist cum anthropologist, in my mid-thirties now - economic imperatives and establishment apparently become important keywords. though i rather prefer underscoring the notion of being established. at the moment - and i hate citing sascha lobos digital boheme as i dont like this guy, his iroquese hairdo and i almost hate facing him working next to me in my favourite cafe rapidly typing on his brandnew airbook keyboard... however: it is boheme or avantgarde and not established yet :)

so i think john is pretty right hinting that identity / authenticity et al. is easier to establish, if you consecrate yourself to one professional terrain and not two or even new, avangardisitc insecure ones.

anyway, i would love to throw in a thought on the workshop in barcelona. mainly on slaters brilliant talk and the thought provoking one dracklé gave. both of them opened up terminologies: drackle moving from a subject-and product specific notion of a cultural producer towards a notion that focusses rather anthropological issues aside from any cartesian view.

slater on the other hand reminded us of some very basic notion that coins anthropology (wheter social or cultural) when he refered to ethnography as means to discover and discuss "other" possible media-terms aside of our western ones.
(my reading of the talks)

however, both do something quite the same: they do des-articulate terminology in a manner typical for social/cultural anthropology. in reference to the traditional british social anthropology as slater does or in a more theoretical manner refering to the somehow younger french

connection, listing Latour and perhaps Derrida above all. To put this in a more productive way one should probably call it re-articulate instead of using the rather negative prefix des-.

Being involved with media and communication studies, as well as with media anthropology (here in Germany) I noticed that what obviously makes the difference here is the use of standardized in the media and communication section and the non-standardized methods in the anthropological. Since the notion of the digital, internet technology etc came in I could see a kind of methodological mash-up in these fields.

May I use the talks mentioned above to very conservatively ask for a stronger appropriation of the anthropological in all of this? I was taught that anthropology is a fluid discipline itself, concerned with new ways of seeing things rather than establishing and labelling categories. (I do know I am an idealist and institutions are about something else than being idealistic). And I was quite happy to hear any of the key note speakers strengthening this thinking.

Underscoring critical approaches and the meta-level, instead of thinking about functioning terminology, possibilities to make things comparable etc... might sound a bit pseudo-elitist and perhaps does not match any of the criteria. However, quite conservative a vow here towards the anthropological in media anthropology :)

best,
angela

Mark Deuze [mdeuze at indiana.edu](mailto:mdeuze@indiana.edu)

Fri Dec 5 09:02:00 PST 2008

dear all,

first off: I am not trained in anthropology. I'd be happiest to consider myself "post-disciplinary", or at least the kind of historian of the near future that considers anything as data and is reluctant, with Angela, to engage in "labelling categories" rather than embracing "new ways of seeing."

so with due respect to John, Mikala and Guido, the question whether or not something is or counts as "media production" or what exactly the terminology is to be holistic in studying what people do with media (cf. the "sociomaterially enacted" practice of actors/contexts/media, and so on), but how to look at people and media as analogous first, and second how this interwovenness of media and everyday life can be theorized as remediating (in the sense of Bolter & Grusin) intricate ways of exploitation as well as avenues of (co-)creative agency.

its interesting that Mikala rejects John's suggesting as belonging to (at least) two "worlds", instead opting for a relatively autonomous sphere of action. to me, that sounds very post-materialist, middle-class, and Western (and I mean that in a non-critical way; I like to think the same of myself and my work). on the other hand, especially African theorists remind us about the need to acknowledge

our "belonging" (Francis Nyamjoh comes to mind) - not as absolute determinants, but perhaps more in a polycentric way (as Baumann has suggested).

i hope the discussion keeps flowing - I'm learning a lot, thanks!

cheers, Mark

Mikala Hansbøl [mhan at dpi.dk](mailto:mhan@dpi.dk)

Fri Dec 5 10:24:24 PST 2008

It is interesting how things may be read :-). I agree with both Angela and Mark - I think. We should look to the different entanglements of things and not at things autonomously (e.g. names, titles, categories). Actually, that's how I thought I presented myself. And not, as an autonomous person - as Mark writes. I don't think of myself as belonging to two worlds, and I don't think of myself as autonomous. But I think of myself as partially engaging and partially connected with multiple contexts of knowledge on the move (not necessarily in a coherent and unidirectional manner :-). I'm not an educated anthropologist either. My majors in university were psychology and communication studies. Since 2002, I've been affiliated with the Institute of Educational Anthropology at the Danish University of Education (DPU - before recognized as a university, today the Danish University School of Education (still by the name DPU) has become a division of Aarhus University). Since the fall of 2008 DPU has undergone several radical transformations. The Institute of Educational Anthropology no longer exists (well almost doesn't exist, I recieved a mail to the educational anthropology list today) and I'm now affiliated with the Institute of Didactics (I didn't have a saying in this - I just altered my signature and moved to a different office). Since 2002 I've been participating in the Research Programme of Media and ICT in a Learning Perspective (MITL) . My movements around university (DPU - counting by now 4 different office locations) can be viewed in relation to this. MITL is now located under the Institute of Didactics. It used to be a transdisciplinary programme with participants from all institutes.

So, now you may understand better, why I oppose being described (anyway, John, I understand that you were talking about someone else, which Angela identifies with) as belonging to two worlds. It simply doesn't make sense to describe my movements (movements of me) like this. But this does not make me autonomous. I'm not engaging with a holistic but a fractal understanding (not to get caught up in words... I hope :-). Parts and (w)holes are relational matters, and I believe that this discussion began in the middst of many different things, some of which relates to John, Angela, Sarah, Brian, me and...It's interesting... let's continue...

Weekend greetings,

Mikala

Mikala Hansbøl // ErhvervsPhD-stud. og ekstern lektor

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Fri Dec 5 10:36:20 PST 2008

And by the way... thanks to everyone participating in this discussion so far for many interesting references to the workshop in Barcelona (which I unfortunately did not participate in - I clearly missed out on a great lot) as well as literature I didn't know about, which I'll definitely be looking more into.

I find Sarah's suggestion about looking more into different enactments of practice theories interesting and worthwhile pursuing further... I also look forward to getting my hands on the new book edited by John Postill and Birgit Bräuchler: "Theorising media and practice" Oxford: Berghahn, which Guido hinted to :-).

Elisenda Ardèvol [eardevol at gmail.com](mailto:eardevol@gmail.com)

Fri Dec 5 18:17:02 PST 2008

Hi, List!

I am also following these multiple interesting threads of debate!

Regarding comparison, I do not have so much experience in doing comparative research, in part, because of my suspicion about comparative methods, in the direction that John and Sarah have talked about. But my impression reading the list contributions is that comparative scope is at the core of anthropology. In the sense that as Giulia posited it, when working with previous concepts in a new scenario we feel that some of them do not fit with our data and we have to reformulate them or to add new concepts to the list that, at the same time, gives way to a revision of our previous theoretical models. That happened within the old anthropology of religion, for example, with the inclusion of new terms such as 'tabu', and more recently, with the work of Turner and Singer those advocate to eliminate the boundaries that separate religion from performance, just because Singer found that the Indians he studied in Madras do not differentiate between them. Turner says that Singer found himself "confronted with a series of concrete experiences, the observation and recording of which seemed to discourage the mind from entertaining and applying the synthetic and interpretative concepts that I brought with me. These experiences had an intrinsic fascination, which also tended to discourage the broad reflective view to which I had been accustomed". (Turner, *The anthropology of performance*, 1986: 22).

I think that Mikala point out the convenience to adopt a very abstract and analytical framework such as ANT, that for my understanding, reintroduces in a new way the old question of the need of an 'ethic' theoretical framework that can cope with the different 'emic' realities that we are faced to without relegating reality to an illusion or to reducing it to an immaterial social construction. That is to accept that multiple versions of reality are coexisting without considering that they are different manifestation of one single reality, neither that they are part of an infinite set of possible realities. I think that the formulation of these new ontology theories have a future. Following them, comparison is not a question of studying different practices involving the same technology, because in this framework, you cannot presuppose that it will be 'the same' technology. So, here we are...

Elisenda

Elisenda Ardèvol [eardevol at gmail.com](mailto:eardevol@gmail.com)

Fri Dec 5 18:55:13 PST 2008

In the middle of this passionated cross-posted discussion, I was dealing in my mind with Mark's example of Truman show for exemplifying the imbrications of media in all aspects of our everyday life as an exponent of our living in a "liquid society". How a film like 'The show of Truman' can be reused and remixed to create a new psychological syndrome... It made me laugh! Everyday are appearing this kind of new syndromes in the newspapers! But, in fact, I find 'The Truman's show' a very interesting film and great cultural performance of the dreams and nightmares of modernity. Playing with the modern imaginary, we can say that Truman's myth is rooted into the narratives that describe the 'civilizatory' process as a departure from natural life, a breakdown with our unmediated connection to nature that entails a subjective experience of denaturalisation, excision and loss. From this perspective, pre-technological life is seen as more authentic than media life, and face to face communication seems more natural than other mediated forms of communication. Truman's myth also deals with the belief in the autonomy of the individual agency and the question of social (or divine or mechanical, non-human) total control. And, finally, Truman's myth points to the quest for authenticity linked to the also modern binary opposition between spontaneous (true) and performed (fake) behaviour. The resolution to those imaginary tensions appeared clear to my mind: or going back to nature or accepting our cyborg condition. Two images of total fusion and redemption. But only one is actually available: Media life is our authentic way of life. If you don't accept this way out, then you might develop the Truman Show Delusion (TSD) pathology! Be aware if you are catch of modern narratives and liquid societies!

Elisenda :-)

Elisenda Ardèvol [eardevol at uoc.edu](mailto:eardevol@uoc.edu)

Sun Dec 7 12:12:58 PST 2008

yeah, Guido! I agree in general terms with you. I proposed a "divertimento" following Mark's reference to Truman's film. Precisely, what I wanted to playfully explore was the Truman's mythology as a hype exponent of the narratives of modernity.

I also was trying to use the concept of Turner's 'cultural performance' to make sense of Truman's myths. Following Turner, cultural performances are composed of 'cultural media', modes of communication which include not only spoken language, but such nonlinguistic media as song, dance, acting out, and graphic and plastic arts. Cultural performances do not merely 'reflect', even perform, social order, but they are also reflexive, they are critical and/or evaluative narratives about social order (Turner, 1986:22-23).

At the same time, I wanted to reflect about 'liquid society' as a cultural model for society, similar to the 'Society of Information'. I think, trying to follow Slater arguments, that these models are powerful narratives that homogenize social and cultural diversity in the way that make us think that all of us are under the same unstoppable trends. From my point of view, they are not analytical concepts, but synthetic descriptions, metaphors to represent 'our society' or the society 'we want to be', but very puzzling tools for undergoing fieldwork and analysing our data.

Elisenda

Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, NY: PAJ Publications, 1986.

Mark Pedelty [pedelty at umn.edu](mailto:pedelty@umn.edu)

Sun Dec 7 12:54:58 PST 2008

I agree that the binary between authentic vs. real is simplistic and misleading. However, the fact that human reality has always been a human construct should not lead to another facile conclusion: that therefore all types of cybernetic construction are simply more of the same. There is both old and new in new cybernetic media worth exploring in its complexity, especially because of the increased capacity it contains to discipline bodies under the guise of liberation (much more so than any pre-station of shells).

I find the Truman Show to be much more than simplistic "hype." It resonated for a reason. Frankly, I find it more sophisticated as a representation of the problems of modern representation than most academic renderings of the same question. The moment of recognition as Truman drives into town and walks around in sudden suspicion--ending with him confiding his paranoia to his fake "friend"-- was artfully crafted, from the Phillip Glass soundtrack to, I hate to admit, Jim Kerry's everyman. Are academic discussions of simulacra (old and new) really that superior?

Please never make me defend a Hollywood film again. :)

Mark Pedelty (note: not the "Mark" that started this conversation)

Daniel Taghioff [danieltaghioff at yahoo.com](mailto:danieltaghioff@yahoo.com)

Sun Dec 7 21:24:20 PST 2008

I really agree with Mark P's comment

I think that academic work is very much a process of picking apart distinctions and seeing which one you can jettison without losing analytical traction. Authentic versus real seems to fail as a distinction in a great deal of cases.

Perhaps this leave us with a closer focus on degrees and kinds of mediation, without an operable fully-mediated or fully-unmediated category, such distinctions of degrees and kind take on more significance.

Somehow this brings me back to the earlier discussion on ANT and practice theories. Firstly I am not clear how separate these approaches are - not out of knowledge but out of ignorance.

I have personally tended into a "communities of practice" approach to study mediated activism, because the process of learning and becoming is so crucial for the activists I am approaching. You might call this "apprenticeship" or "legitimate peripheral participation," although even core members are involved in this ongoing learning, though they are perhaps more set in their ways.

This learning and becoming element seems to involve more than "identification" because it is about how the whole set of practices as well as the recognitions of agency seem to shift as a complex (and contradictory) association.

Now I end up using ideas about articulation to look at the constitutive relations "between" and "within" "communities of practice". Now this is problematic, but there are indeed differences between the professional practices of say Lawyers and Journalists, ones that are significant for my analysis and cases.

Now this raises questions for me:

1) How do Practice approaches and Actor Network Theory Approaches address the processes of becoming for different kinds of "cultural producer."

For instance from Elizabeth Bird's abstract (my Indian small-town internet won't let me watch the videos, sadly)

"They might be better understood in terms of 'cultural mediation', understanding 'mediation' in the sense of transformative practices (Latour)."

OK, this sounds like it is related to a community of practice focus on learning and becoming as part of a group, but how?

2) How does one understand the relations between various groups of "cultural producers?" Activists encounter Lawyers and Journalists, all three groupings might be seen as "cultural producers" but how are they articulated or formed by their relations, and what does this say about how "publics" are formed?

Both Don Slater and Nick Couldry touch on this.

But if you compare and contrast their approaches, I end up thinking: surely "Media" or "Not necessarily media" is dependent on a sense of what various groupings of people are trying, broadly speaking, to achieve, and the relations between them?

Now of course we have to do the ethnography to get at the complexity of this. But it seems that the Media / Not Media dichotomy is blinding us to the complex and inter-related roles of these professional / power groupings a bit, leading us into what seem like blind alleys such as "Cultural Producer." So perhaps "Media / Not Media" is no longer a dichotomy that is serving its purpose, where it is used foundationally that is.

Surely the issue is a more general struggle over meanings, which cultural production and other communities of practice, including "the media" and journalism sit within?

3) There is an issue here that Practice theories tried to transcend, in terms of avoiding an A-priori splitting of structure and agency. We have heard about how agency is interpolated in practice (Hobart) or formed in practice and learning (Lave and Wenger.) What more do we find out about attempts to transcend such dichotomies from ANT?

Are these questions too general? I apologise if they were covered in the presentations my Indian broadband is not giving me a good viewing experience of the workshop right now.

Daniel

Peterson, Mark Allen Dr. [petersm2 at muohio.edu](mailto:petersm2@muohio.edu)

Sun Dec 7 21:30:48 PST 2008

Yes but surely the difference between something like the Truman Show and an academic paper on simulacra is that the former is a summarizing symbol (to use Ortner's still sometimes useful terminology) and the latter is an elaborating symbol.

Oops--introduced another dichotomy.

Mark (also not the Mark who introduced this discussion)

Mark Allen Peterson
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Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson [sbh at hi.is](mailto:sbh@hi.is)

Mon Dec 8 01:13:38 PST 2008

Dear list,

We are running a post-workshop e-seminar and I hope that you are enjoying the discussion so far. There are two tiny but important reminders that I want to share with you:

The seminar ends next Saturday (Dec 13).

And that the e-seminars can only work with active participation on your behalf. So please, post your comments and/or questions.

All the best, Sigurjon.

Estrid Sørensen [estrid.sorensen at staff.hu-berlin.de](mailto:estrid.sorensen@staff.hu-berlin.de)

Mon Dec 8 06:01:17 PST 2008

Dear list,

the problem of comparison, and the reason for reservation toward doing comparison has to do with the a priori theoretical definition of regions, cultures, financial structures, technologies, or whatever we want to compare. Comparative studies typically define a 'tertium comparationis': that in regard to which two regions, cultures, structures, technologies etc. are compared. Thereby, the study fixates certain features of region, culture etc. as 'the same' across regions, cultures etc. but that may vary to a certain degree, which is the target of the comparison. The 'tertium comparationis' is 'third' because it is external to the two regions, cultures etc. compared. It is defined by the theory, the researcher or other, not by the region, culture etc. To many ethnographically oriented scholars, this poses a methodological problem, because it moves us away from the field site's definition of the region, culture etc. For instance, comparing a technology in two different settings, as Sarah suggests, means that we define what this technology is prior to investigating it in practice. It may indeed be that 'this' technology is so different in the two different practices, that it no longer makes sense to talk about 'the same' technology: only, if we stick to a 'technical' definition of a technology - as the 'bits and bytes' - (that is 'outside' the social) which most of us working with technology from a social science perspective rather try to avoid.

Together with a few colleagues finding themselves in similar situations I was part of a special issue of 'Comparative Sociology' on 'thick [or ethnographic] comparison', where our common question concerned not comparison but comparability: the question of how phenomena come to be comparable. This is not meant as a reflexive question in which the

author must account for his theoretical a priori, but a focus on how comparability emerges out of the involvement in the field. My contribution about "multi-sited comparison" suggests a method that starts out as a non-comparative multi-sited ethnography, that through the involvements in various sites come to 'reveal' 'tertiary comparisons' that are not 'third' - i.e. external - to the study, but internal to the involvement of research endeavour with the field sites. By focusing on comparability prior to the question of comparison, I have been surprised to find lines of comparison that I for sure would not have defined, had I set these prior to my study.

Link to the special issue:

<http://brill.publisher.ingentaconnect.com/content/brill/comps/2008/00000007/000000003;jsessionid=11fivgqmxwi0.alice>

Estrid Sørensen

Sheyma Buali [sheymabuali at yahoo.co.uk](mailto:sheymabuali@yahoo.co.uk)

Tue Dec 9 14:25:39 PST 2008

I hope I didn't miss the beginning of this conversation, but I definitely find it interesting: In my course "Theoretical and Contemporary Issues on Media" we also watched Truman Show as a filmic example of Baudrillard's "Simulacra", but my question - now that I see that my tutor wasn't the only one who drew the relevant relation between the two, is: did the producers/writers of "Truman" know they were creating a filmic example of Baudrillard, or was it the cinematic response to the chaos created by the reality show genre new at that time? It seems all the reality shows could fall into the "simulation" trap as everyone does end up getting used to the idea of being in the environment that they are put in. The interesting thing for viewers - whether main stream viewers or academic - is how the people in the program deal with this "reality". It's all hype. There is a certain "freedom" that residents of the "big brother house" get in knowing that they have a mass anonymous audience, reversely, there is a "freedom" in being part of that audience and knowing that you aren't the one in the looking glass. But - according to my reading of Simulacra, what (we) they don't realize is that there is an entire outside world, simulated to push (us) them in the direction/path that has already been chosen, making (us) them not necessarily under the glass, but part of controlled entity. Is "Truman" summarizing us - or our contemporary reality? Or is he summarizing Baudrillard's essay on our contemporary reality?

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Tue Dec 9 14:31:56 PST 2008

These are worthwhile questions. I should like to point out that the simulacra are not merely on the media. Discourse is full of simulacra, thinking about the notable phenomenon that a majority of investors believed in the discursive values created by investment bankers, which did not find a countervalue in the real world, and hence the financial

crisis. Has anybody done some research in how media discourse enhances the readiness of people to believe in virtual worlds?

Best,
Guido

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Tue Dec 9 18:38:57 PST 2008

I'm not particularly interested in the intentions of producers in this case. One can easily explain the Truman show as an effort to imaging pushing reality shows to their nth level. One of the things I like about the Truman Show, though, is that it offers us a version of simulacrum that goes beyond the Platonic definition to a more Baudrillardian approach.

What I mean is that the term originates with Plato, who used it to distinguish between two modes of representation, the icon is a representation that is recognized as such, and hence participates in the idea of the thing it represents. The simulacrum by contrast, seeks to counterfeit reality and confuse the representation/reality distinction, hence capturing only the outer form of things. Fredric Jameson makes a similar distinction in taking as his example of simulacra photorealism, in which people create paintings that are copies not of real things but of photographs of real things.

Deleuze and Baudrillard offer a more complex definition. Deleuze insists that the simulacrum is not any copy of a copy but must refer to something that undermines the normal distinction drawn between copy and model. A copy, no matter how many times removed, is nonetheless [definehttps://muconnect.muohio.edu/owa/?ae=PreFormAction&t=IPM.Note&a=ReplyAll&id=RgAAAABMrHLH0I5WRbYiHcCm0xofBwD1d5OJMP7oSoNBuNN89ULOABoUIVelAAD1d5OJMP7oSoNBuNN89ULOAPgL%2f8SRAAAJ#d](https://muconnect.muohio.edu/owa/?ae=PreFormAction&t=IPM.Note&a=ReplyAll&id=RgAAAABMrHLH0I5WRbYiHcCm0xofBwD1d5OJMP7oSoNBuNN89ULOABoUIVelAAD1d5OJMP7oSoNBuNN89ULOAPgL%2f8SRAAAJ#d) by some relationship to an original. A simulacrum, on the other hand, takes on a life of its own.

Baudrillard offers a continuum:

1. Representation. The image is the reflection of a basic reality.
2. Counterfeit. The image masks a basic reality.
3. Simulation. The image masks the absence of a basic reality.
4. Simulacrum. The image bears no relation to any reality.

As I understand this, a straightforward documentary about the everyday life of an everyman named Truman in middle America would be a representation. A scripted, acted film about the everyday life of an everyman in middle America passing itself off as a documentary would be a counterfeit. A typical "reality show" about this everyman, in which some elements are scripted and some spontaneous, but all is edited would be a simulation. But the Truman Show offers us a representation of a simulacrum in that Truman's entire world is simulated, and what's more, is not a copy of any particular place but represents a distilled non-space like Main Street USA in DisneyWorld (one of Baudrillard's favorite examples of simulacra)

The Truman Show also raises for me important questions ignored by poststructuralists. Poststructuralists like to write about signs and

representations without any but the most vague, anecdotal or conjectural relation to real people. But the Truman Show can remind us that all signifying systems are such only to particular people. The breakdown of distinction between reality and representation is quite different for the producers, the audience and Truman.

Rather than simply designating things simulacra and turning simulacra into a theoretical black box, I encourage my students (and myself) to try to think about what is what kind of simulacrum to whom in what contexts.

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Tue Dec 9 20:22:35 PST 2008

"Simulacrum. The image bears no relation to any reality."

But there is your simple dichotomy again. The implied idea is that the representation is not "reality", or to put it another way that it is not a 'real' representation. It is only in this way that a representation can bear no relation to any reality.

Even if representations take on a mythical quality where they are articulated most strongly with a stream of other representations, they still bear a relation to those representations, which are in turn also situated in some way in practice.

So even with ideas like simulacra, you cannot escape the about-ness of representation, that it is transitive and refers in some way or another to a set of embodied practices, even if those relationships are not made clear via the act of representation.

There is no dichotomy between real and not real because it is a classic case of one hand clapping, all things are real in their way, the question, rather is how, and as Mark Petterson and Mark Hobart point out, also to whom and when, in what particular situation?

So questions about simulacra do not get you away from questions of practice (of what people do), even if they do help you to avoid the idea that practice is necessarily defined by truth relations with a material base.

What does this say about the Truman show? Well look at the resources that were thrown at creating Truman's reality. This idea of the free play of representation reminds me of ideas about perfect information in the "free market". This "free" play of ideas, very much like democracy, takes an enormous investment to achieve, and so is not really "free" in the lunch sense of the word (or necessarily in the political sense either).

I remember teaching English in the Swedish Stock Exchange, and working with a guy who set up the mainframes that handled transactions on the stock markets. It costs millions and millions to create an environment where information was near "perfect" and "liberated" from the messiness of practice.

This leads me to believe that the ongoing fascination with simulation in Euro-American social science is actually very strongly tied to wealth. It is a bit like the film *Solaris*, where our desires are so readily met that it blurs any sense of limit.

Is this emphasis on simulacra one that fits well with an anthropology that presumably needs to take account of the circumstances of the broad bulk of humanity? Not that there is a problem with taking account of seduction and simulation etc... but there are also the limits that people meet in their situated practices, which feel very strong when sat in rural (ish) India.

Daniel

Daniel Taghioff

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Tue Dec 9 21:26:09 PST 2008

I think you are reading Baudrillard more transparently than he intends. As I understand him and Deleuze, the point is that there are certain kinds of representations that confound the normal distinctions people make between representation and reality. His continuum is intended as a way of drawing attention to the fact that there are multiple ways of straining referential relations.

But I agree with you, Daniel. This is just my point.

Structuralists and their poststructuralist heirs generally continue to operate through dichotomies as if these have some kind of inherent reality. Concepts like simulacrum are good/useful for the anthropologist to think with only insofar as we pay close attention to the local contexts in which simulacra are constituted. The ethnographically interesting questions include:

What constitutes a simulacrum to a particular people in what circumstances? What is the nature of "reality" for these people that is being confounded? Confounded in what sense? And What practices produce simulacra and what institutional resources enable these practices?

Mark

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Wed Dec 10 01:54:52 PST 2008

Daniel Taghioff wrote:

I have personally tended into a "communities of practice" approach to study mediated activism, because the process of learning and becoming is so crucial for the activists I am approaching. You might call this "apprenticeship" or "legitimate peripheral participation," although even core members are involved in this ongoing learning, though they are perhaps more set in their ways.

The problem with the notion of 'communities of practice' is that it entails, as Gee (2005) says, 'group membership or a sense of belonging' which may not always apply to the media-related processes and practices that we encounter in the field - although it might do in some cases.

Ursula Rao (forthcoming) has an interesting discussion about how politicians in North India operate across the boundaries separating vernacular journalism and party politics - which connects nicely with Sarah Dickey's earlier work on film star fan clubs as an alternative (albeit less prestigious) route into politics in Tamil Nadu. She finds Bourdieu's notion of fields rather too orderly for the rough and tumble of contemporary Indian politics and journalism (see also Couldry 2003 on some problems with Bourdieu's field theory when applied to media questions).

In my own ongoing work on local-level internet activists in suburban Kuala Lumpur, I have found Bourdieu's field and practice theories very useful to understand digital media and 'the production of locality' (Appadurai), but Bourdieu doesn't have much to say, for instance, on those conflicts that migrate across fields of practice - here I have found the classic Manchester School political anthropology of V. Turner (social dramas, arenas, etc) and more recent political anthropology of John Gledhill far more useful.

References

Couldry, Nick. 'Media Meta-Capital: Extending the Range of Bourdieu's Field Theory.' *Theory and Society* 32, no. 5-6 (2003), pp. 653-677.

Rao, U. (forthcoming) Embedded/embedding media practices and cultural production. In Bräuchler, B. and J. Postill (eds) *Theorising Media and Practice*. Oxford and New York: Berghahn.

John

PS I blogged this note about Gee (2005) a couple of months ago (incidentally, I find his understanding of affinity spaces rather too conflict-free and idealised):

Gee, J. (2005
<<http://www.cambridge.org/uk/catalogue/catalogue.asp?isbn=0521544920>>)
Semiotic social spaces and affinity spaces. In D. Barton and K. Tusting
(eds) Beyond
<<http://johnpostill.files.wordpress.com/2008/07/mythology.jpg>>
Communities of Practice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

James Gee argues in this chapter that the popular notion of
'communities of practice
<<http://books.google.com/books?id=heBZpgYUKdAC&printsec=frontcover&dq=communities+of+practice&ei=4AyHSMvPIJDOjgHD8oSNBg&sig=ACfU3U2JfYWzXTsl0tdsWmeZJxqxVQJ43g>> ' (Wenger, see also Lloyd 2007
<<http://johnpostill.wordpress.com/2008/07/22/anthropological-study-of-the-ubuntu-linux-community-of-practice/>>) is of little use to
understand increasingly common forms of sociality that do not entail
group membership or a sense of belonging, e.g. real-time strategy
computer games. Instead of communities of practice he proposes the
notion of 'affinity spaces'. These are spaces in which people from a
variety of backgrounds come together to pursue a common endeavour or
goal. Gee's epitome of an affinity space is the strategy game Age of
Mythology (AoM), a plural world in which the common endeavour of
playing and transforming the game takes precedence over questions of
racial, class or gender identity; a world with various routes to
participation, informal leadership and status in which newbies and
masters share the same space, and different kinds of knowledge (tacit,
intensive, extensive, etc) are fostered and valued. The author suggests
that educationalists have much to learn from affinity spaces such as
AoM. Thus most school classrooms appear to be hierarchical, lack a
common endeavour or opportunities for participation, value one or two
hegemonic forms of knowledge, and so on.

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Wed Dec 10 02:46:32 PST 2008

Dear contributors and list

I'm not sure if the producers of the Truman show knew about
Baudrillard. They attempted to satirise reality shows, product
placement, and the auteur director to some extent. Remember Ed Harris
costumed in beret etc? However the film set or film location is always
at least simulation and understood as this by all filmmakers and
broadcasters. Filmmakers accrue "appropriative expertise" in changing
places to spaces. The atmosphere on film set lots like Pinewood or
Shepperton does feel very "dead" until the latest simulation is ready
to shoot. There is of course some relation to reality in the script,
sets which pastiche real places or reconstruct historical period. There
is an art in raising the energy (and money) to speed up for the
adrenalin of the shooting stage. The Truman show is one of a number of
films/series which show gaps between realities in that characters who
been dropped from the show or can't keep up with the act (Carrey's
character's father, wife and drinking friend) flout the town/island/set
system. This is a feeling one always has working in movies. Since
filmmaking is my own work, teaching and my fieldwork, the
representation, simulation and embodied situation are always in
dialogue. Surely this is the case with life in general and perhaps to

do with consciousness of apparently different realities in the same temporal moment. It's just that with more of a simulacra such as Second Life or computer generated imagery in animation it feels as if there another layer on top of the first illusion. Last week in Poland at Camerimage (a specialist cinematography film festival) I watched Karlwalter Lindenlaub talking through a powerpoint on the making of The Chronicles of Narnia and the process between him as Director of Photography and the Visual Effects Team. The film was shot in four separate countries because of complicated financing and with five hundred crew on the first unit and three hundred on the second unit. VFX had not two or three personnel, but a truckload of kit and about thirty assistants measuring on set all the time for everything that would be matched back and forth. The sets shown were castles and the London Underground.

On Radio 4 this morning there was a vigorous discussion on the ethics of the showing tonight of a man dying (pre-filmed, not on air, on Sky TV - I won't be watching) in an assisted suicide situation. His family are following his wishes as is his American documentary maker friend, in showing this momentous event. Given that death is portrayed in many movies, though rarely on the news (in the UK at least), and also on the internet, what is the difference for an audience consuming the event as image? Is the difference in the viewer capacity to tell the between liveness and death in actuality or in the 'quality of performance' (the way life leaves, colour changes in skin etc) being so different to that of an actor/clever make-up? How will we know this is really happening? Baudrillard's simulacra never had life, so doesn't know death or life. It is an illusion.

Cathy Greenhalgh

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Wed Dec 10 12:01:40 PST 2008

May I add to the questions raised below:

What are the experience horizons/frames of references that allow people to accept a simulacrum for "reality"?

And I suggest that we paraphrase the terms as follows, so we do not need to further concern ourselves with philosophical musings on what reality is:

"Reality" is what can be experienced, i.e., cognized and signified outside discourse (which includes both linguistic and media discourse). Which means, cognition of non-discursive "reality" does not prevent humans from cognising something imitated, virtual, etc. (e.g., mimicry in nature) Only, these are still not simulacra. A simulacrum is then what can be experienced through discourse exclusively. The tricky thing is that as soon as "real" experience is introduced to discourse, simulacra are easily constructed - and consumed. The more attractive the discourse, the higher the probability of not knowing whether the discursive artifact in question has in fact a non-discursive source.

The difficulty of drawing the line here is also what makes me think that it is mainly the frame of reference which helps us to understand discursive artifacts in the first place.

Best,
Guido

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Wed Dec 10 17:37:14 PST 2008

I like this. And I think it opens up opportunities to integrate simulacra into a communities of practice approach, since it addresses specific shared frames of reference.

I would further refine it. Within the world of discourse, simulacra specifically involve indexical relations. Indexes, of course, involve meaning through connection and are a crucial part of Peircean semiotics. Unlike the Saussurean/Barthean semiology of signifier and signified, simplistic dichotomies that exist without context (except reference to a vague shared code), Peirce attended to the fact that some signs seem to link the world of discourse to the world of experience.

A simulacrum involves signifiers that refer only to one another and not back to any concrete "original".

Thus we might refine Baudrillard's "precession" by examining what "realities" (horizons/frames of reference) particular signifiers evoke.

Representation: A sign indicates an experienced reality.
Counterfeit: A sign falsely indicates an experienced reality
Simulation: A sign indicates a generic, possible reality
Simulacrum: A sign refers only to other signs yet constitutes an experienced "reality".

One of Peirce's (and Sebeok's) favourite examples of an index is the bullethole in the wall which the detective uses to solve the mystery. The bullethole is a real-world phenomena that leads us into a world of discourse as we seek to interpret it.

Representation: The bullet hole indicates the gun used in the murder.
Counterfeit: The bullet hole was deliberately created by someone to create a false indication to impede the murder investigation.
Simulation: The bullet hole itself is part of a scenario in a staged scenario or training film for policemen studying forensics.
Simulacrum: Digital simulation of how bullets enter walls as part of a training program for policemen studying forensics.

Or consider the most common form of index from sociolinguistics:

Representation: An accent indicates a speaker's social origins
Counterfeit: A speaker fakes an accent in order to falsely indicate social origins
Simulation: A comedian produces an exaggerated accent for comic/parodic purposes.
Simulacrum: A comedian (I'm thinking of Sid Caesar here) produces complete gibberish that sounds like he is

speaking a foreign language. Or for example, my daughters, having lived in Egypt for many years, can produce a faux Arabic by mixing a few genuine words with strings of Arabic phonemes to convince non-Arabic speakers they can speak fluent Arabic.

The point of this is not to categorize specific signifying performances as one kind of simulation or another but to help us recognize the indexical complexity of simulation.

Also note that (again, consistent with a Peircean semiotics) audience plays a crucial role here. Sid Caesar's faux German, Italian, Spanish, French and Russian won't sound even vaguely authentic to Germans, Italians, Spaniards, French and Russians respectively, and he cannot perform a faux English before an English speaking audience. Beyond this we have all the institutional context issues that Daniel raised: what kind of economic, political/legal, social and cultural infrastructure is required to generate these simulacra? i.e. why would there be clubs where people go to listen to a man pretend to speak a foreign language? Why was it funny to them?

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Wed Dec 10 23:41:42 PST 2008

I'm entering this conversation late, which is frustrating to me since there's so much to say and, more importantly, so much to unpack. Thank you all for such an interesting discussion. So excuse me as I offer thoughts in non-integrated nuggets, made all the more scattered by the lack of coffee:

1. Someone asks: What are the experience horizons/frames of references that allow people to accept a simulacrum for "reality"?

I'm not sure I'm comfortable with such a question that risks characterizing people engaging with media and mediations as dupes (apologies if I have misunderstood). The question suggests that the world of simulacra are entirely closed and I am having a hard time with this.

Drawing on *The Truman Show* (1998) may enforce these notions. This film is a relic of its time, but a decade old now is hopelessly outdated for addressing the ways people engage with media today. It may have even been so at the time given it is a fantasy of top-down media control that, in fact, celebrates its power. The producer not only creates a complete world for Truman (which is not quite the equivalent of the spectator's experience of media) but he creates a satisfying world for the viewers who are edified by the story produced. Although we ought

remember that Truman's love is arranged through casting—that he must leave the bubble does not change the suggestion that he found love on television. And back to the viewers: they find satisfaction through watching the story of his love. And indeed, the show—of his life and escape—is so powerful, no one watches anything else. What a fantasy for the media producer!

I also call this film outdated since it does not address the reality of media engagement today. It is hard to believe but YouTube is only 3 years old and it has radically changed how people engage and communicate with video. Participatory media are part of the game (and one could argue have been for some time). Are the people who watch really hopeless and helpless dupes? Online people talk back to producers in ways that can actually have impact on the television programmes they watch. They can write fanfiction and produce video mashups that allow for creative play and expressions of worlds and identities omitted from the official versions. And these too, have real-world impact as producers send cease and desist letters to these kids by the caseload.

The thing I embrace about media anthropology (in the fantasy of the non-anthropologist) is the recognition of social practice and exchange in the study of media. I would hope that anthropologists do not forget about the exchanges in the hopes of maintaining distinctions and dichotomies that may not be sufficient in appreciating the complexities of media worlds.

Some years ago, I looked at the phenomenon of On Location TV Tours in New York. The tours offered the usual: shooting locations for Sex and the City, The Sopranos, and at times, films shot in NY. Among the sites on display were the buildings that served as establishing shots for the residences and workplaces of television programmes. In some ways, these were most fascinating for their separation from any aura-residue of the television/film presence. But these buildings were nonetheless familiar, immediately recognisable as the homes of television characters.

One would think that this would be the tour where one found the hopeless dupes who could not tell the difference between reality and simulacra, but this was not the case. The tours certainly celebrated these worlds, but also played with the slippage between the represented worlds and the one in which we were physically travelling. The impossibility of income allowing for homes in certain neighbourhoods was a favoured topic of the tour-guide; this obsession with real estate may have made it the most New York tour I attended of all the tours I sampled. (And indeed, like all the New York- non-TV- Tours I sampled, this one also told stories of co-op boards and fees.) The tour guide didn't neglect New York history on this tour either, and one ought remember that history can also be a ghostly presence: Something happened here although the physical residue of that is also long gone. Ultimately, this tour played with all the sites, overlaying them with stories and information. And by discussing the incongruity of all the worlds in the single site, created more opportunities for the tourist, who could move back and forth and play with the significance of each aspect of the site.

Television was one of many ways into creating a relationship with a site, but I don't think anyone was actually duped. (In fact, on every tour I attended, the tour guide brought up the mythical TV tourist—the one who couldn't tell the difference,) I wonder if the better question here would be, what are the forms of play and engagement between the simulacrum (whatever that actually is when it's at home) and the lived world. How do people engage with these worlds and for what benefits/purposes?

2. There is a reference in the discussion to the simplicity of the Saussure/Barthes approach as compared to Peirce's index and icon. I would think all allow for productive engagements with the slippages that occur when people cannot fully distinguish between index and icon, or denotation and connotation (rather than signifier and signified). It is this slippage and uncertainty that gives the study of documentary such purchase. One engages with representations of reality that are taken seriously and used at times within a scientific frame. I suspect that film form leads certain people to comfortably take the icon for index. At the same time, as I write this, I suspect that I am uncomfortable creating an easy distinction.

3. The Solaris reference would be one to push. I'm not sure which Solaris Daniel was discussing (the Lem novel, the Tarkovsky film, or the Soderbergh remake—these multiple adaptations, the context of their making, and the political economy of their situation all lending continued purchase the discussions of mediation and simulacra). Nevertheless, given that the story addresses the internal life of the astronauts and the hallucinations they generate and experience, I would love for more discussion on how this can be tied to simulation, mediation, etc. Have we been talking about affect?

Dayenu.

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Thu Dec 11 02:27:39 PST 2008

First, I should like to support Mark P's idea of integrating Peircean semiotics into the topic. Having said so much, I should like to give a quick response to Leshu's mail.

I do not think that Mark's and my suggestions offer to perceive media/mediation as dupes in themselves. Naturally, media can be used for duping people, and many are - including myself at times when the fake is produced well enough.

The problem/disagreement about the semiotic approaches may be solved easily, however, or so I believe. One of the crucial points where the status of the media artifact as being rooted more in reality or in media semiosis (previously I used the term discourse, but semiosis fits more into Peircean terminology), is **media immersion**.

Surely you are aware of the sociolinguistic principle of code switching: Speakers who travel from community to community, if competent to do so, will switch their linguistic code. I suggest that a media audience does the same, namely switching the code of referencing.

Experiencing the "real world", as in the New York tour Leshu mentions, means applying the experience horizon, (or dynamic object, in Peircean terms) of "real life" to the media artifact. Surely, we all know it was made in the studios. The "Friends" don't really go to that café, Kirk never went to the centre of the Galaxy (or will never be going, given the reference is to the future;-)), the actors played well or badly, the script was all right, and so forth; we can discuss all this. Except for cases of delusion, the worlds are quite clearly separated. However, immersion into the media world plays a crucial role. Experiencing a movie means to participate in the movie world. Béla Balázs wrote as early as 1938 that film destroyed the distance of the piece of art. (English: The Theory of Film, London 1952 - don't have the English version at hand, here the German quote plus a translation) "Die bewegliche Kamera nimmt mein Auge, und damit mein Bewußtsein, mit: mitten in das Bild, mitten in den Spielraum der Handlung hinein. Ich sehe nichts von außen. Ich sehe alles so, wie die handelnden Personen es sehen müssen. Ich bin umzingelt von den Gestalten des Films und dadurch verwickelt in seine Handlung. Ich gehe mit, ich fahre mit, ich stürze mit - obwohl ich körperlich auf demselben Platz sitzen bleibe." - "The moving camera takes my eye, and with it my mind, right into the picture, right into the frame of action. I see nothing from without. I see everything as the acting characters must see it. I am engulfed by the characters of the film and thus become entangled into the action. I walk along, I drive along, I fall along - even though I remain seated on the very same chair." I propose that accepting a media artifact as "working" means to switch codes - to blot out parts of the experience horizon of "real life" and thus accept another, which works well with the fictional world. Naturally, our media competence allows us to do so. Watching a movie, the audience is not contemplating the artificial nature of film. They cry for characters who die, they hope for the ones they cherish, all because they accept the frame of reference created by the film as a possible alternative to "reality". The degree of remoteness/reference can be sketched by the four-level-model suggested by Mark (may I call it this way, Mark?). The varying levels of reference also help to explain such phenomena as I studied in fan forums of action/science fiction series and movies. The fans have a hard time accepting that in effect the characters are pure inventions, supposedly because fan immersion is much stronger than average audience immersion. Characters and actors are discussed as if these were two completely separated worlds. This is a good example of reference-switching. In the Truman show, the reference switching is nicely shown in the very last scene, where the two workers, after the finale of the series, briefly switch to their "audience frame of reference", asking one another to switch channels and look for something else to watch. Immersion is suddenly disrupted for a moment here.

As to the Peirce/Barthes discussion, if mentioning Barthes, the question of analysing media texts is much more complex. Barthes denotation remains with a sign regardless of its perception from "reality" or "media". A hole in the wall is, basically, a hole in the wall. Barthes is not concerned with the question whether it is a "real" hole, a natural hole, an artificial hole, or a virtual hole. This is where I also prefer Peirce over the structuralists, but for another of his trichotomies: Peirce argues that a sign is composed from qualities, so-called Qualisigns. The actual signs are then Sinsigns, and if agreed upon by consensus as carrying meaning beyond their single occurrence,

they become meaningful signs by rule, or law: Legisigns. So the bullethole has some qualities, one of which being its real/artificial/virtual nature. A bullethole in a wall is thus different from a bullethole in a wall in a movie. However, if the qualities of a real bullethole are mimicked well in a movie, then the hole will be accepted by the audience - having said so much, whoever has experienced real bulletholes? Narration of how the bullethole came into being is also important for the movie, the reference to such narration again being an index, but of different origin. For Barthes, the question of connotation arises on another level of the sign, which is predominantly the co-occurrence of signs with other signs. The "myth", in Barthes terminology, is then created because the assembly of signs suggests a meaning that goes beyond the denotation of the individual signs. However, the question of whether there is virtuality of simulation in the individual signs is not part of his problem.

And yes, we should talk about affect, but then again I surmised we were already doing so. Effect means drawing a new experience model from a cognition, which causes either a strengthened belief, or a changed belief. Strengthened belief means the person in question will continue to pursue his goals and act accordingly in the future, changed belief means the person will change goals and/or action models. Media are very important here, and again I may refer to my study of fan forums: Fans rather withdrew from participating in a franchise in the case of a radical change such as relaunches (Bond, Battlestar Galactica and the upcoming Star Trek are good examples) than accepting the new world of reference (including me: an "old school" fan, I am not watching the new Bond movie, or: only if I have to do so as a scholar). Hence, we may presume that the established code of reference does play an important role for the audience's perception of other media artifacts, as does the readiness to switch codes.

If the media code of reference becomes strong enough, the switching to other codes may become difficult. This is where "simulacra" gain power over experience horizons. The next question is their effect on the "real" context of reference. And then we can talk which of Mark's levels of referencing carries which effect, and presto, let's do some empirical work on this. ;-) Cheers, sorry for the long mail.
Guido

Leshu Torchin [lt40 at st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:lt40@st-andrews.ac.uk)

Thu Dec 11 02:44:47 PST 2008

Guido actually brings up an interesting issue for me:

To what extent are linguistic models useful for dealing with audio-visual media? This is a topic regularly addressed when semiotics are brought into film and media studies, and I think we are finding the limits of this use. (I'm afraid, there is no 'surely' about socio-linguistic principles-- this is not my area of expertise. If I am to draw upon any theoretical framework, it would be one of dragging that was brought up by Chris Rojek, I believe.)

As for the tours-- 'surely' everyone knows this isn't real. But people visit these sites anyway, and that is something to bear in mind,

particularly when there is anxiety over the person's ability to determine the difference between reality and simulacra. So what is it being accessed?

Leshu Torchin [lt40 at st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:lt40@st-andrews.ac.uk)

Thu Dec 11 02:54:01 PST 2008

Apologies to Guido. I see he deals with the topic of semiotics and media. Nonetheless, I remain suspicious of the uses and feel these questions stay are the heart of the study.

Peterson, Mark Allen Dr. [petersm2 at muohio.edu](mailto:petersm2@muohio.edu)

Thu Dec 11 06:19:24 PST 2008

Guido's answer is full and complete. I have little to add except to point out that semiotics is not derived from linguistics. Saussure conceived of his structural linguistics as one part of a wider field of semiology studying meaning more generally. It's true that he did not develop this, but it is certainly what Barthes thought he was doing.

But even if one can make the argument that semiology and structuralism are rooted in linguistics, the same is not at all true of semiotics which Peirce developed as part of his effort to create a unified science of mind. Many of his concepts were borrowed by linguists because of their utility, but language was not really what Peirce had in mind when he conceived of and developed his semiotic. Indeed, few of his examples are linguistic.

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Elisenda Ardèvol [eardevol at gmail.com](mailto:eardevol@gmail.com)

Thu Dec 11 15:04:56 PST 2008

This discussion brings back the question of cultural production and its relation to media. And also the question of "text" and how people are engaged with audiovisual "texts", interpreting them, making inferences, or just remaking, remixing, sharing and creative playing with the "texts", its narratives and features, as Leshu reminds us. Even more, as Bird tell us, people enact media scripts in daily life and in rituals of passage. In that sense, I will agree with Marc Deuze that media practices and media "texts" are incorporated into the life of a lot of people and the question of affection and attachment becomes crucial.

Then, we also can ask, in Daniel mood, how do Semiotic approaches, Practice approaches and Actor Network Theory Approaches address the processes of media object engagement for different kinds of "cultural producer."?

Elisenda

Cooke, Mike (GfK NOP, UK) [mike.cooke at gfk.com](mailto:mike.cooke@gfk.com)

Thu Dec 11 15:09:13 PST 2008

So what do you suggest as possible answers to the questions you pose?

Sent from my BlackBerry Wireless Device

Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson [sbh at hi.is](mailto:sbh@hi.is)

Sat Dec 13 00:05:53 PST 2008

Dear List,

The Barcelona post-workshop e-seminar is now closed.

I want to thank Mark Deuze and Elisenda Ardèvol for sharing their comments with the list and participating in the discussion! I also want to thank other list members for their participation!

Transcript of the seminar will be available next week on our website.

Our next e-seminar is scheduled 6-22 January 2009.

Then Ulrika Sjöberg and Ingegerd Rydin (Halmstad University, Sweden) will present their working paper called "Family talk about media portrayals of immigrants."

Comments by Kira Kosnick (Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main, Germany).

You can read the abstract of the paper at:

http://www.media-anthropology.net/sjoeberg_rydin_abstract.htm

I wish you all happy holidays.
Sigurjon.