

**EASA Media Anthropology Network
e-Seminar Series**

<http://www.philbu.net/media-anthropology/workingpapers.htm>

**E-Seminar on Katarina Graffman's working paper "The cruel masses"
(23-30 November 2004)**

E-seminar starts now, from John Postill

Dear all

As announced last week, the first EASA Media Anthropology Network e-seminar begins today and will end in a week's time (30 Nov). Through this mailing list, we'll be discussing Katarina Graffman's (Uppsala) working paper on Swedish TV producers. You can find the paper at <http://www.philbu.net/media-anthropology/workingpapers.html>

The rules of the e-seminar are simple:

- 1. The e-seminar opens with the discussant's comments on the working paper.**
- 2. The author then replies to those comments.**
- 3. The rest of list members can then add their comments, questions to the author, points of information, etc.**
- 4. Participants should identify themselves by name and institution, e.g. Katarina Graffman (Uppsala).**
- 5. Contributions should be kept as brief and focussed as possible.**
- 6. Contributions should be sent in the body of the email, not in an attachment.**
- 7. The usual offline seminar norms of courtesy and constructive criticism apply.**

So let's get started! Immediately after this email I'll be posting the discussant's comments and later today we'll be hearing from Katarina.

Best wishes

John

EASA Media Anthropology Network
www.media-anthropology.net

To join, or for further information please contact:
Dr John Postill
University of Bremen
jpostill@usa.net

Disussant's comments, from Mark Hobart (London SOAS)

Introduction

First of all, let me start with an apology. It is 1.30 on a Monday morning before I have found time to write my comments on this very interesting piece. I fear it may not do it the justice it deserves.

The cruel masses indicates precisely why media studies needs to take anthropological approaches to media seriously. It addresses a set of issues that have been largely marginalized in much media studies to date – namely the world of producers approached ethnographically as inherently problematic (or to be problematized), rather than as a straightforward process.

As a short paper, inevitably The cruel masses raises more interesting questions (sometimes implicitly) than it can fully answer in the space available, and so is highly suitable as the start of a discussion. In general terms, perhaps it would have been better if the questions had emerged slightly more clearly, either at the beginning or even the end, as an indication of where the research was heading. Also there is a slight contradiction between the method, ethnographic fieldwork, and the presentation of results, which give the impression of relying heavily on quotations from interviews, supplemented by general observations of production. The nuances of differences between different producers and what producers say and what they do has no real opportunity to emerge. However I take it that this is primarily because of constraints of space. It does however point to a crucial feature of

ethnography: its capacity to give readers the evidence with which to engage critically with the materials, which disappears in generalized accounts.

The central idea is neat and works well: an inquiry into the sequential assumptions that Swedish TV producers in one company make about their imagined audiences. The paper whet my appetite for more detail than the paper could provide. The general argument is well taken though and makes very good sense.

And, as with all ethnography, it raises broader questions, here not just about what comparative studies of producers might throw up but about Swedish society itself.

Specific thoughts

My subsequent comments are a mixture of the specific and general, largely in the order that the thoughts came to mind while reading.

I was struck, first of all, by a degree of closure. The producers mostly imagined a single viewer – statistical or referential. Producers themselves are equally described as highly atomized agents, almost auteurs: the most complex description is of a producer, editor and executive producer/project leader (p 5). This raises questions about the extent analytically to which agency might usefully be considered as complex (Collingwood, *The new Leviathan*; Inden, *Imagining India*). The television producers with whom I have discussed the issue in various Asian countries all stress the degree to which agency is complex, distributed and rapidly changing in the process of production. This stands in contrast to the appearance of the producer as central during key aspects of shooting. This raises interesting questions therefore about a possible disjuncture between observation and reflexive commentary; and possibly between cultural styles of attributing agency.

As the notion of the 'average person' is central to her analysis, Katarina might find Ian Hacking's *The taming of chance* interesting. There he describes the emergence of the idea of the 'normal' and 'average' with all their multiple senses – ambiguities which are neatly encapsulated in the producers'

comments. The average and normal are at once, gerundively, valuable and dismissable.

The shift from the average person to the reference person is interesting, though I remained slightly unclear (perhaps because I had to read the piece fast) as to how and under what circumstances this remained a statistical notion as against an instantiation of a single or multiple known people. The figure that is arguably missing is Bakhtin's idea of 'the superaddressee'.

On my reading this figure is clearly not the same as the reference person, as it is a much more idealized interlocutor – indeed it looks rather like the producer lying back on the couch watching her/his own programme. In general I would have liked a slightly more developed account of the idealized nature of the relationship. Producers are imagining viewers. The paper is an exercise in such imagination, its routinization – or its lack. On this point, rather pedantically, it may be worth distinguishing 'construct', 'constitute', 'survey', 'imagine' etc., each of which indicates a quite different relationship of creating something as an object of thought or action.

'Construct' has a strong idealist heritage. While this fits rather well, it should then presumably come at the end of the analysis of the particular practices of producers.

On this score, perhaps for reasons of brevity, Katarina slips into borrowing essentialisms – e.g. "It is the producers who are 'the conduits of corporate ideologies'" (p 2). I question whether the producers constitute such a clear category except in very general terms. The idea also reifies and essentializes ideology in a way that might have been acceptable in the early 80s, but looks a little dated, whether you agree with it or not, after Laclau's *The impossibility of society*. On the conduit metaphor, Michael Reddy wrote an interesting article (*The conduit metaphor – a case of frame conflict in our language about language*. In *Metaphor and thought*. ed. A. Ortony, Cambridge: Univ. Press.)

On p 4 I found myself wanting to know a great deal more about the circumstances under which Katarina elicited the statements from various producers. The point of ethnography is often not so much what people say as the circumstances under which they say it. That is missing. My impression is not just what Katarina went on to explicate, namely the idea of difference, but despite their protestations, a strong sense of the producers' sense of superiority. If it is not also condescending, I think I would like an explanation of how this could be. It certainly stands in stark contrast to how Indonesian television producers talk about their audiences, which is as much more complex unpredictable and critical. And here we come to my main thought about the paper: this is in a way an ethnography of how an élite imagines the masses. All the techniques – the repeated and insistent closure around singularities (a single average/representative viewer), the refusal to consider 'the normal as in a 'normal distribution' as a complex and varied phenomenon, the caricature in the selection of the viewer's attributes, the use of 'facts' produced by the in-group itself – are those by which an élite reaffirms its sense of superiority. Again I would like to know what are the specifically Swedish modulations.

On p 5 there is a crucial sentence. "The construction the average person is a strategy that does more to facilitate the communication within the TV institution than help the producers to build up a perception of the viewers."

This gives us an insight into a second theme that is latent in this paper, namely that the average viewer is at best a token of a type that is marginal to another issue, about which producers might

(or might not) be less willing to talk, namely their competition with one another both within and outside particular companies. One TV producer once said to me: “Audience ratings are how producers keep score between their rival programmes”. This in turn is not the only index, as the piece implies, of success (cf. the remarks about ratings as currency later). Reviews of programmes are never mentioned, neither are awards. I would like to know how they fit or complicate the picture.

On p 5 again there is a suggestive difference between what female and male producers imagine as the desirable attributes of programme hosts. The point needs expanding.

On p 6, the quotation of the female producer about her concerns at different stages of production is telling and well worth building on. It fits the whole argument about there being a dynamic to imagining.

The theme of the producer as viewer is not new (p 11). However the problem of the producer’s ‘innocence’ is now a fairly well developed theme. At this stage however I did find myself finally getting concerned at how I was continually being forestalled from a critical engagement with the piece by the repeated use of ‘producers’ as a blanket category. This is an essentialism that I think should be disposed of very early. All Katarina’s evidence points to interesting differences, mostly obviously based on gender and experience.

For this reason, I did not find the conclusion particularly satisfactory, nor that it really reflected the richness of the materials. For example, the statement (p 13) that “The producer and the audience share frame of references, making decoding possible” does not follow. First, as AFC Wallace noted (in Culture and personality), we do not need to assume shared understanding or shared frames of reference in any act of communication. All we need, and may assume, is that there are rough structures of equivalence between speakers/broadcasters and listeners/viewers. We know nothing about what up to one million viewers made of what they watched (or at least the frame of reference they had – and how would one establish that?). That is a quite different study. The synthesis is revealing. The producers’ account of the framework is the one that matters, because viewers are disarticulated – indeed they are so disarticulated that even the producers could not access their articulations if they wanted.

Conclusion

This is a very interesting and provocative piece. I hope it will stimulate discussion and I am sure it will lead to Katarina writing interesting articles and perhaps a monograph based on her thesis.

Two main theoretical issues emerge for me. The first is the need for anthropologists interested in media to start considering more critically the whole question of the way that studies of the mass media make assumptions about the relationship of elites and masses, and often enshrine those assumptions, so making us complicit with the producers. The second is the need to be critical of the categories that the participants themselves use. This is easier when culture shock ensures the recognition of difference. It is harder when both are parts of the same, or cognate, intellectual élites.

Katarina Graffman's answer

First I would like to thank Mark for his comments. I never had the opportunity to get comments from any media anthropologist while working on the thesis. My supervisor is an expert on Sami people, not media. This can be a problem when writing a thesis at a smaller department like the one in Uppsala.

Second, there is always problem when the text is long and in depth (the thesis) and you have to cut it. This article was presented at a conference in 35 pages, then I had to cut it trying to publish it in Television and New Media. When cutting, it is hard to remain the full meaning. Unfortunately the thesis is written in Swedish.

So, here are my short comments.

A contradiction between the method and the presentation of result.

Yes, the article is relying of quotations, but not only from interviews, also from daily work at the company. The problem for me was that there were only 11 producers working at the company and I had to keep their identity hidden. The TV production world in Stockholm is small and everyone who works with television knows each other. This chapter in the thesis was the most difficult to clarify how and when because it is about attitudes, values and how to relate to the viewer.

Reviews of programmes are mentioned in the long version! Reviews are very important, of course. All programs at the production company got high, even better than calculated, figures, so the producers thought that their construction of the viewer was correct. They didn't have to question this static person. Neither the reference person.

Three years after writing the thesis I agree with Mark that the conclusion isn't satisfactory. It is more complicated than "producers and audience share frame of references". My next project is actually to study how this rough structures of equivalence between producers/broadcasters and viewers works, to compare the producers' framework with actual viewers'.

This is really a short comment from me. Hope to get some ideas from the rest of you!

Katarina Graffman

From Mark Peterson (Miami)

I think this is a potentially significant contribution to the ethnography of media production. It is particularly interesting in addressing the problem of the imagined audiences whose existence, if only as a discursive construct, enables producers to do the work they do.

I want to emphasize Mark Hobart's point that a key underdeveloped theme of this paper is found on page 5, where the author reflects on the fact that media production is not just about sending a message to a set of receivers:

"The construction the average person is a strategy that does more to facilitate the communication within the TV institution than help the producers to build up a perception of the viewers."

Audience marketing research, intuition and ratings are all strategies through which producers struggle over and through the work of making television.

Because it is work, it is a social activity in which they are also making themselves as social persons. Work on production by Powdermaker, Pedelty, Dornfeld and others has pointed in this direction. In my review of this work in "Anthropology and Mass Communication" I argue:

"Studies of modes of production reveal that media producers work within a complex network of relations between various institutions and agencies that have various kinds and degrees of power over aspects of media production. A second method of ethnography of media production involves focusing on this network as an ongoing construction of the social actors working in it: a field of production. Such a field has its own autonomous logic, and its own signifying systems according to which producers ascribe values to things in the field. These fields are sites of struggles not only over the meaning of the text but many other things: money, status, pleasure, fantasy, identity, authority, and so forth. Pierre Bourdieu describes the objects of struggle in a field of cultural production as capital: economic, social, linguistic, and symbolic.

The positions of various social actors in the field is determined by the kinds of capital they possess. Struggles occur as "the occupants of these positions seek, individually or collectively, to safeguard or improve their position and to impose the principle of hierarchization most favorable to their own products" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 101). This "imposition" involves the ability of some agent or agents to dominate the field by defining what will count as valuable within a given field (particularly, as I argued above, what shall count as authorship). That is, by controlling what counts as valuable, dominant social agents can induce others to struggle over rewards within a system that already favors their position. Once established, such a dominant position becomes orthodox; it is the system of values according to which people measure their own success and competence, and against which people rebel. Establishing one's own position as orthodox is not the endgame, however; domination is always incomplete. Defining an orthodox position never completely suppresses the heterodox positions that various agents seek to promote as a new orthodoxy.

Media producers, as social actors in the field, find that certain kinds of actions (those established as orthodox) are valued and rewarded while others are unrewarded or censured. Through this, they build up a sense of habits and predispositions toward certain kinds of actions and against

others. While actors often take note of their own positions and attempt to strategize about what actions will best serve them, more often they act according to their life experience, that is, to the internalized and largely unconscious sense of how things are, which they have acquired through their life experience. The field of production is thus constituted by their habitual actions, even as their habitual actions constitute the field as a meaningful place, with sense and value enough to make worthwhile the investment of one's energies.

One advantage of such an approach (whether or not we adopt Bourdieu's particular language for it) is that it allows us to look at social actors not simply as occupying specific roles but as struggling over them, even as they struggle over creating a text. When a director in Hollywood, for example, seeks to assert his control over writers and actors, he does so by invoking not only his own hierarchical position but his personal track record of success, claims about how things are supposed to be done, and claims about what audiences want (often referring to other films that are similar and dissimilar to the one currently in production).

The director's success or failure in marshaling such symbolic, cultural, and social resources has effects not only for his or her future work, but for those of other directors working with these writers and actors. Social actors can also operate collectively, as in a guild for example.

Studying the social field demands the ethnographer's presence in everyday practices of media production. Observing the kinds of authority marshaled during particular moments of struggle gives the ethnographer a knowledge of the kinds of capital valued in the field; observing the successes and failures of various forms of capital gives the ethnographer an understanding of the relative weight of these various forms of capital and of the relations of authority and subordination that run between the various positions in the field.

Any field of media production is thus organized around two domains that mutually construct one another. At one level, there is the primary domain of media production that brings together the social actors into the particular network and set of relations required to construct texts. At a second level is the set of issues at stake in the field for the actors as persons (as opposed to roles in the productive system):

wealth, status, power, pleasure, identity. Linking these two domains is a complex web of signification involving not only technical skills and knowledge, but ethics (what interpretation/representation is right?), aesthetics (what interpretation/representation is correct?), and audience (what interpretation/representation do consumers need or desire?).

Recognizing that there is a web of signification defining the values that will count in a particular field is important. Values and meanings never merely serve to rationalize and justify relations of production; they also crosscut them, creating opportunities to challenge, redefine, and argue about how things out to be done. The concept of the social field gives us a metaphor for talking about the network of social relations in which media production takes place. It lets us turn our attention from the specificities of roles as functions within the organization of media production and to ask what else goes on within, around, and through the relations between men and women occupying these roles. The goal is to be able to describe the ways in which authority and power are negotiated as actors pursue their own ends within a particular social configuration. This involves neither reducing the structure to modes of production by exposing how things are "really" done (according to a set of values already held by the analyst) nor reducing the structure to a set of roles and functions in the ideational world described by media producers themselves. A description of the "fields" of media production should describe the sets of values that bound the

field. It is through and around such sets of values that relations of production, and particularly relations of power and authority, are negotiated.

Central to this kind of analysis is the recognition that media production is always a site of struggle over what the meaning of the text is to be and, further, that this struggle is, for participants, never only about the text but always also about power, status, wealth, and identity. Relations of production are roles in a system of text production, but these roles are always occupied by people engaged in struggles over salaries, authority, promotion, self-worth, recognition, and power. These struggles are articulated through systems of values—appeals to aesthetics, ethics, rules, tastes, and so forth. Descriptions of fields of media production are descriptions of the systems in which agents engage in contestation and negotiation over authorship and audience in order to simultaneously construct texts and identities" [END OF QUOTE].

The relevance of this to Katarina's paper is that these producers are not just imagining an audience in order to communicate to that audience; they are struggling within a social field that offers them opportunities for promotion, pay and power. Invocations of audience are, among other things, capital in this struggle.

Elisenda Ardevol Piera

Dear all,

First of all, I want to express my congratulations to Katarina for her work. It was very interesting to read her paper on her fieldwork, and I was really engaged by her ethnographic description. Thanks also to Marks work as discussant.

I agree with Mark in many points, especially in reference to the need of this kind of studies, not only from a theoretical or academic perspective, but also from an applied point of view. I think that her results may be important for the same producers she is studying and for the media industry in general. I also profoundly agree with the implicit subject of how an “elite” images the masses, or how we relate or selves to the masses as new forms of creating social differences. While in Cultural Studies we have overpassed the Frankfurter idea of the masses and low/high culture, we see the conflict still present in our society and in cultural industry workers.

For me, the paper arises two more questions: first, the conceptual framework of the thesis. I think that Katarina conceptual framework runs away from essentialism, taking the “audience” as a discursive reality. This question, but, I think has to be sustained during all the analytical description, and sometimes, it seems lost. Second, the “native” analysis of failure. I think that this point of the meta-analysis may be very productive, from a CTS perspective as well as from the point of view of decision making.

Failures must be explained, but not success! That strategy makes that the axes of “average person” are not questioned.

Finally, I don't understand very well the relation between “The cruel masses” title and the content developed. May be is a “native” expression? Or it refers to the “tyranny” of the “audience”?

Going on,
Elisenda

Brian D. Moeran

Dear Katarina, Elisenda, and the two Marks

Thank you Katarina for writing, and the others for taking the trouble to comment on, this week's paper, which I have now finally got round to reading. I have one or two comments which in part complement those already made by Mark H and others.

1. In my understanding, producers are different from directors/editors. The former deal with finance and budgets; the latter with the "creative" side of film making. In this sense, this distinction adheres to the creative versus humdrum personnel economic property outlined by Richard Caves for creative industries in general. Perhaps Katerina, as Mark suggests, you might want to disentangle these roles and clarify who does what and why. What are the tensions between them? And how do they resolve them? (I well recall one day when I finished my weekly comedy programme in Japan some three and a half decades ago when the director told me to do more of the same funny stuff, while the producer [representing the sponsor] told me not to be so funny!)

2. In my own experience -- primarily limited to advertising and print media -- but also noted in passing by Mark, all media address a **minimum** of two audiences. One of these is the sponsor; another is the "general public"; a third is the "social (or art) world" in which those producing a media form work. What I have referred to as the "multiple audience" property of creative industries is not mentioned by Caves in his otherwise admirable work, but needs careful disentanglement because it can affect media content quite radically. This we know best from work done on advertising and sponsorship in particular. But it goes beyond the advertisers, for whom "readerships" and "average readers" are constructed in the first place. For example, during recent research in Japan, I learned that one reason that the Editor-in-Chief of *Vogue Nippon* insisted on using top-quality foreign fashion photographers and Caucasian models every month was not because he believed that his readers hankered after images of slim white women with blonde hair as part of an assumed Japanese inferiority complex of some kind. Rather, it was because he was trying to get those working in the fashion world in Paris, New York, London and Milan to take his magazine, and his staff, seriously. This then enabled him to gain access to fashion information ahead of other magazines and score minor coups from time to time. The "average readers" were totally left out of this game, even though they were the ones being asked to read and delight in the fashion stories published monthly by *Vogue Nippon*.

3. My third point, or suggestion, is on a rather different tack. As you are well aware, Katerina, Scandinavian countries are known for their egalitarian ideology (not always put into practice, as the elitism of the TV producers reveals!). This means that the notion of "average" takes on a rather special nuance that may make your study of Swedish TV production a little special. Marianne Lien has written rather nicely about the "ordinary" celebrity and consumers in her study of Viking Foods marketing of ready-made foods in Norway (The *Bon Appetit* project in her *Marketing and Modernity* book). There may be something in this that could inflect your own discussion of the Swedish TV producers' construction of their average viewers.

Best wishes,
Brian

John Postill

Like Mark Hobart I found the distinction between 'the average person' and 'two or several reference persons' highly intriguing. It seems to match perfectly the common distinction made in social psychology between 'prototypes' and 'exemplars'. People confronting new situations or knowledge are said to make use of both these mental constructs to make sense of them. I don't know, however, whether this tells us more about socio-cognitive universals or about the psychologists' own cultural proclivities! At any rate, these are not notions arising from producers confronting new situations but rather seemingly routinised notions.

Like others, I would've liked to see a discussion of the specifically Swedish nature of this workplace, e.g. as Brian Moeran points out, how producers articulate some of the tensions within the social democratic discourse prevalent in that country.

Jens Kjaerulff

Katarina,

Thank you for subjecting your work to be the first 'guinea pig' for this 'e-seminar' format on the medianthro-mailinglist. In my opinion you have provided us with a delightfully humorous piece of reading that I quite enjoyed!

I will confine my input to one question:

Although it is apparent that the producers among whom you did fieldwork, in a sense 'construct' a viewer ongoingly as they go about their work, I was somewhat struck by what I read (or possibly mis-read) as the relatively poor extent to which this viewer is in fact 'constructed' in a more restricted, technical sense. I would see the various examples you mention of statistical representations of this viewer, as 'constructions' in this more restricted, technical sense of which I am thinking.

But 'intuition', 'gut feelings' and so forth, seem to figure quite profoundly in practice as far as more 'qualitative' representations go.

Interestingly, and probably predictably, quite a diversity of images seem to eventuate (e.g. Holiday-neighbors, relatives, etc). This in turn would in my intuition seem somewhat impractical from a hard-nosed 'production' point of view, for instance with regards to how the continued production (after the initial ratings have come out) is to be steered. You bring this out on page 12, where you mention that work either continues 'unchanged' or is modified: how does one in fact ensure that the continued work unfolds in accordance with a strategy of either 'changing' things, or not, when this qualitative image seemingly is relatively diverse and 'untamed', as it were?

So I am wondering, if the production environment really doesn't have some ways or techniques of 'stream-lining' the qualitative dimensions of the viewer-image, i.e., of indeed 'mediating knowledge' in some more institutionalized and constraining fashion, about the envisioned or targeted qualitative features of the 'reference-person'?

You speak of 'discursive constructions', and of course your informants sought to verbalize their idiosyncratic 'gut feelings' in their communication with you. But is a 'gut feeling' or intuition necessarily 'discursive'? Or turned around, was something in some shape of 'discourse' (writing or dictate otherwise) in fact circulated to stream-line specifics of the qualitative characteristics of the reference person (other than that imputed in the statistical artifices)?

I might have missed or misunderstood this as I read; or you might have left this aspect out because of the limited space allowed in a paper.

Alternatively, an ax I like to grind more widely (so don't take it personally, Katarina, but as a wider invitation to debate), is that the word 'construction' (as with a few other words) is thrown around too carelessly in qualitative research. Would a word like 'perceive', as a replacement for 'construct' in your title, do justice to at least the qualitative image-handling of 'the viewer' on part of the producers, as you represent them in your analysis?

It's a long time since we met in Hamburg Katarina, good to see signs of life from you - congratulations on the completion of your dissertation, although I now read that it is a while ago!

Cheers // Jens

Katarina Graffman' s answer

Dear all,

I am very thankful to all comments regarding my paper. And especially hi to Jens, long time no see!

Below I comment some of the questions.

Brian suggests that I should clarify the tensions between the creative and the financial role in production. At the production company the producer are both. All productions have a strict budget so the persons working in a team are quit few. So the producer have both the financial responsibility and the creative. In some productions there is an editor, with content responsibility. The difference is remarkable within public service in Sweden. There, a production always have someone responsibly for the budget and someone else for creation. "We can't afford that" is the explanation from the commercial company.

Some of you have commented about the average in a Swedish context with the history of social democracy and egalitarian ideology.

In my thesis I discuss this in depth, that is the red thread. It is especially intresting that the producers maintain that the TV which is produced must be "good" and "qualitative". A large number of the program produced were spoken of in terms of "public education", exactly the same word public service television use!

The production company attempts to acquire a piece of national symbolic capital to be turned into economic capital by reformulating a Swedish tradition to fit into a modern, commercial TV system. The positive sounding words "public education" are established in the Swedish national discourse and connected to the public service ideology of social responsibility. The producers' explanation as to way the company produces popular education, i.e. the satisfaction of the viewers' demand for entertaining knowledge and information, is more audience oriented and sounds less commercial. The producers represent the audience, an audience with "good taste" because they watch the programs produced by the company.

The title "cruel masses" refers, as Elisenda notes, to the tyranny of the audience. Even if the producers are sure of their roles as "experts", knowing what the masses want/need, they also know that the masses suddenly can zap, be bored with feature, soaps or what ever program that blip in the screen.

Katarina

Response to Graffman, the Cruel Masses, from Daniel Taghioff

I have looked through the interesting responses to Graffman's piece. It is an important piece of work, especially in many of the questions it runs into. But I wonder if the type of ethnographic approach taken fits well with the problems it tries to address. Here is a response piece I wrote when I first read the piece. I apologise for not picking up properly on the themes of others who have responded.

Graffman's piece is an interesting in its attempt to get to how producers envision their audience as they produce TV programmes. Whilst I have personally, whilst living as a non-Swede in Sweden, often encountered a strong sense of "the average person" as a humorous element ("Svensson") in conversation, and whilst Sweden had, historically, a fairly homogeneous population (although the Saame minority in Northern Sweden stands out), her *approach* to her fieldwork seems, nonetheless, to de-emphasise difference. {Which is suprising now that I have learnt that her supervisor specialises in Saame issues.}

There is little sense of how producers might disagree and conflict in their articulation of "the average person" and how this might lead to compromises or to ambiguities {or plain old impositions} in how things are presented, in order to cope with these differences in perspective.

It is also not clear how this "average" person is related to particular programmes (is their a different average person for each type of program?) Nor is it clear how these different averages are constituted within the organisation. How these "averages" were used as a currency within the organisation was pointed out by the author, but the implication was that they were a currency because they had defined referential content, rather than that they were a currency because they lacked referential content, or that they acted as a focus for dispute of that referential content. So the discursive processes by which these "averages" were produced or conflicted over were not brought out in the article.

There was only one reference to an exchange, rather than a singular quote. {This is a methodological point about approaching discourse as *between* people rather than primarily *from* individuals.} This was the paraphrasing of a gendered disagreement over the appearance of a female presenter. That *difference* {in producer opinion} only makes such a tokenistic appearance in the piece is disappointing. Presumably the female presenter ended up wearing the kind of normal-but-attractive clothing that allows both a sense of nearness and a sense of pleasing-ness to the eye at the sense time. Perhaps not, but it is not inconceivable that disagreement and multiple meanings would be part of constituting the "average" as a currency within the organisation.

An investigation of the types of discussions and disagreements that go on around what an average audience is, would have been more revealing: Perhaps a focus group methodology might have helped, although maybe this would have been difficult in practice. At the very least, the inconsistencies the author did detect in the ways in which the averages were framed should have been followed up in discussions with producers, preferably between producers. The conclusion that producers have an idealised image of the average, and thus must be basing their programmes on their own "real" experience is disappointing, since it specifically avoids addressing the issue of the social construction of these averages within the production company. Surely producer's

lives are not all so identical so as to transparently determine the content of their programmes without discussion and disagreement emerging?

Since Sweden now has around 1 Million immigrants, in its population of 9 Million, presumably the issue of difference is becoming more pressing in studying television production. If the “average person” survives as a notion despite this, this needs explaining. Do immigrants (1 in 9 people approximately) do not show up in ratings figures. Are producers exclusively of “Swedish” extraction? There are quite a lot of fairly successful immigrants living in central Stockholm, are they under-represented in TV production? How is non-standard sexuality dealt with? Sweden is also not really a “classless society,” what of deprivation in the urban suburbs? These issues of difference are topical in public debate in Sweden right now, since the “Integration Minister” likened homosexual acts to sex between a human being and an animal.

Now, perhaps these issues are not being dealt with by producers, but that implies the question of how is the appearance of homogeneity maintained in the face of visible differences? Perhaps the sense of the “otherness” of the “cruel” masses is related to this. Don’t people look more similar to each other from further away, especially if they are enemies?

Hope this adds *something* to the comments that have come before.

Daniel Taghioff

.....
Daniel Taghioff
Media Program
School of Oriental And African Studies

Katarina Graffman answer to Daniel T

The thing is that producers never problematized the concept average (average is definitely not the same as "Svensson").

They never discussed different kind of viewers, were not interested in learning more, very seldom read any statistic about the population, nor other kind of data/reports about actual viewing behaviour ect. They always defined the viewer as Swedish, there were not one working at the company with a different background (except one from Finland). I think it is important to remember that "the average" is used as a code within the institution, and as mentioned before, as long as this code is working, meaning at least one million viewer every program, there is no need to look into the construction "average". But now, when things start to change, more channels, technique that allow skipping ads ect, maybe it will be different.

First e-seminar, closing remarks from John Postill

Dear all

I'd like to close the seminar on Katarina Graffman's 'Cruel masses' by thanking Katarina for kindly agreeing to be our first presenter and for responding to a whole range of questions, even over the weekend! Special thanks to our discussant, Mark Hobart, for his thoughtful opening remarks, and many thanks to all of you for participating in this experiment.

Given the high quality of the contributions, and if there are no objections, we'd like to upload the discussion in PDF format onto the website as it could be a useful resource for others working on the anthropology of media.

Our second e-seminar is scheduled for Tuesday 11 January to Tuesday 18 January. We'll be discussing a fascinating paper by Jonathan Skinner (Queen's University Belfast) on an online community set up by Montserrat exiles who had to flee this Caribbean island following a volcanic eruption. The discussant will be Birgit Bräuchler (Munich) who's carried out research on religious conflict and the internet in the Moluccas (Indonesia), see <http://www.easaonline.org/networkbiossa-f.htm#BB>

We're now looking for working papers for seminars from February onwards, so please let me know if you have a paper to share. As usual, if you have any information related to the anthropology of media to share with the network, just send an email directly to medianthro@abyznet.net

Best wishes

John

EASA Media Anthropology Network
<http://www.media-anthropology.net>

To join, or for further information please contact:
Dr John Postill
University of Bremen
jpostill@usa.net