

EASA Media Anthropology Network
E-Seminar
22 October – 5 November 2008
<http://www.media-anthropology.net/>

Dr. Eric Rothenbuhler (Texas A&M University)
[Media anthropology as a field of interdisciplinary contact](#)

ABSTRACT

Media anthropology is a rapidly developing new field of interdisciplinary studies. With roots going back decades in both Communication and Anthropology, nevertheless this work has only recently coalesced under the label Media Anthropology and its contributing authors come into dialogue. In turn this has produced a moment of intellectual self-consciousness about the tasks of defining this field of study and debating its parameters. This essay argues that media anthropology is and would most profitably continue to be a field of contact between two disciplines, rather than generating a new disciplinary frame of its own. Often this contact is rudimentary, but productively so. Anthropologists and communication scholars approach Media Anthropology from different directions with different histories and for different purposes. It is not only natural, but productive, that they would make differing choices of concepts, methods, and interpretations. This is as it should be and attempts to discipline Media Anthropology will either fail or bleed the territory of its vitality.

Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson [sbh at hi.is](mailto:sbh@hi.is)
Wed Oct 22 00:50:53 PDT 2008

Dear list,

Today we start our 23rd e-seminar! We will discuss until Eric W. Rothenbuhler's paper "Media Anthropology as a Field of Interdisciplinary Contact" until November 5.

For those who still haven't read Rothenbuhler's paper there is still time. The paper is available at our website at <http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm>

The discussant Ariel Heryanto will post his comments to the list late this evening (Wednesday) or tomorrow (Thursday).

Eric W. Rothenbuhler will then hopefully respond to these comments sometime on Thursday or Friday.

After Eric's response I will then invite further postings from the floor.

All the best, Sigurjon.

Dr. Eric W. Rothenbuhler, Department of Communication, Texas A&M University. Rothenbuhler's teaching and research address media anthropology and communication systems ranging from ritual through community to media industries. He is co-editor (with Mihai Coman) of *Media Anthropology* (2005, Sage). Author of *Ritual communication: From everyday conversation to mediated ceremony* (1988, Sage), which has been translated to Polish (2003), and co-editor (with Greg Shepherd) of *Communication and Community* (2001, LEA). He was Review and Criticism Editor for the *Journal of Communication* (1997-99) and currently serves on the Editorial Boards of *Journal of Communication*, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, and *The Radio Journal*. He is author or co-author of over 50 articles, chapters, essays, and reviews on media, ritual, community, media industries, popular music, and communication theory. He is currently at work on a cultural history of the US radio industry 1947-62, especially regarding the development of Top 40 and other radio formats as systems of social knowledge and cultural expression. For further information about Dr. Rothenbuhler go to <http://comm.tamu.edu/People/rothenbuhler.html>.

Dr. Ariel Heryanto, Asia Institute, University of Melbourne. Ariel Heryanto is the author of *State Terrorism And Political Identity In Indonesia: Fatally Belonging* (Routledge, 2006), co-editor of *Popular Culture in Indonesia; Fluid Identities in Post-Authoritarian Politics* (Routledge, 2008), and *Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia; comparing Indonesia and Malaysia* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2003). He is currently a member of the Human Ethic Research Sub-Committee, The University of Melbourne. Before joining the University of Melbourne he taught in Indonesia and Singapore. His first two university degrees are in Education. He received his Master of Arts degree from the University of Michigan, USA in Asian Studies, and his Doctorate of Philosophy from Monash University, Australia in Anthropology. While in Indonesia, his country of birth, he was active in literary and theatrical production. He has been writing opinion columns (now over 600 in total) for major newspapers and magazines in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. For further information about Dr. Heryanto go to <http://www.asiainstitute.unimelb.edu.au/people/staff/heryanto.html>.

Ariel Heryanto [arielh at unimelb.edu.au](http://www.asiainstitute.unimelb.edu.au/people/staff/heryanto.html)

Wed Oct 22 11:52:23 PDT 2008

Comments on Eric W. Rothenbuhler's "Media Anthropology as a Field of Interdisciplinary Contact"

Ariel Heryanto

I thank Eric for his fine essay, and moderator Sigurjon for inviting me to offer some comments. But first, some disclaimer and a brief note of my background. Although I had some formal training in anthropology in

the early 1990s, and I have been interested in media studies since my student days, my professional work has been institutionally based in area studies (Southeast Asian/Indonesian). This will have obvious bearing on my comments.

I find Eric's paper both fascinating and instructive. Unfortunately, as a new and fairly inactive member of this mailing-list I am ill-equipped to relate his insights to the older postings of relevance. My apologies if my comments have in fact been discussed with elaboration in the past postings of the mailing-list. Eric's message is clear and it is presented in a friendly and yet effective and elegant style. The paper demonstrates the author's breadth of knowledge in both anthropology and media studies, as well as his depth of engagements with key issues in each. I enjoyed and learned so much from reading the essay, especially the first two sections: "What is Media Anthropology?" (pp. 2-5) and "What is the Promise of Media Anthropology?" (pp. 5-8). These sections can be very helpful for anyone new in the debate, and I suspect there are more than a few of them among first-time participants in the listservs e-seminar.

What intrigues me most from Eric's paper is his section "What are the controversies about media anthropology?" (pp. 9-17). My comments will focus on just this issue, and its immediately related questions. While I agree with his main points in this crucial section, in one fundamental aspect his views and perspective deserve further discussion. I suspect in his attempt to maximize clarity, or for the sake of convenience or for provoking a debate, Eric appears to have presented an oversimplified picture of anthropology as a discipline, and an overstatement of the discipline's distinctiveness from and contrasts to media studies. Such exposition is presented as a basis for Eric's defensive response to criticism from some unidentified anthropologists of the work in media anthropology by colleagues whose home bases are primarily in communication and media studies.

As someone whose work has largely been non-disciplinary, cross-disciplinary, and occasionally anti-disciplinary, I have no objection to Eric's argument "that media anthropology is and would most profitably continue to be a field of contact between two disciplines, rather than generating a new disciplinary frame of its own" (p. 1). I am sympathetic to his observation that "[a]nthropologists and communication scholars approach Media Anthropology from different directions with different histories and for different purposes. It is not only natural, but productive, that they would make differing choices of concepts, methods, and interpretations" (p.1).

Given the complexity and diversity that have developed in today's anthropology, it would be unnecessary or unfair to demand anyone from within let alone outside the discipline to give a comprehensive portrayal of the discipline in order to say anything about its productive contacts with other disciplines. I do not have the competence to offer such an account for this discussion myself, and I would not expect the same from an essay written by someone else for our discussion in this forum. Notwithstanding this, I did not expect a suggestion to the effect that anthropology is a discipline that aims primarily "to study indigenous communities of distant societies" (p. 11).

I admit I have not followed very closely the debates in the discipline

since my graduation from the school of anthropology and worked as an area study specialist. But even a cursory observation of the discipline is sufficient to convince me that the discipline has been so open and it has welcome an overwhelmingly rich and complex diversity, including a heavy dose of auto-criticism, that makes it more difficult to make a brief and quick portrayal of the discipline. Indeed some of the attractive attributes of anthropology are precisely its hybridity and fluid identity, making it less and less sensible or possible to draw a clear boundary where its farthest territory ends, and its next neighbour begins. (see footnote 1)

Since my student days in the 1990s, it was already obvious that the long history of the discipline's naivety in studying "others" had come to a close. A decade ago it was evident that the discipline had gone a long way from its colonial tradition of studying "indigenous communities of distant societies". Back in the late 1980s and early 1990s "self-reflexology" was in vogue in anthropology, and so were imported insights from post-structuralism, post-colonial studies, and the subaltern studies. Western anthropologists did serious ethnographic inquiries "at home". Surely, despite all these developments, even to this day one still occasionally encounters remnants and legacies of colonial anthropology across campuses and conferences. But I would be surprised if today an anthropologist would assume the continued existence of a "distinct societies and cultures" (p. 20), clearly bounded, free from the invasion of modernity without being ironic or appearing ridiculously laughable.

The recent development in anthropology did not take place purely voluntarily or a result of an internal dynamics within the discipline. Rather, it was prompted at least in part by the challenges from a growing number of academic and non-academic persons from those "indigenous communities of distant societies". These people and those they represent had previously existed in anthropology as little more than muted objects of analysis by distant observers who studied them with some degree of piety, contempt, romanticism or curiosity. The recent changes render the old and familiar "we-versus- they" trope in anthropology highly problematic and obsolete. The same is also true with Southeast Asian studies that began largely as a study of the region, its people and history by Western Europeans and later North Americans. (see footnote 2)

Eric's paper raises the question whether media anthropology is an exception, where adopting the old and colonial legacies of anthropology is both justified and arguably the best option for media and communication scholars. I am reluctant to suggest that this is exactly what Eric intends to argue, but many of his points border that line of thought.

I suspect Eric's line of argument is a consequence of his aim and strategy of writing a defence for media anthropology, and especially for the work in this area by communication and media scholars. "In this paper I want to focus on some criticisms by anthropologists of the work of communication and media scholars" (p. 9), he says. In particular, Eric wishes to respond to criticism from "its more traditional practitioners" (p. 9) that allege the work in media anthropology from "media studies often appear inadequate. The ethnographic work is often not rigorous enough. The theoretical work is often out of date" (p. 9).

Unfortunately, and this is my main disappointment from Eric's otherwise fine essay, there is no specific cited examples of such criticism, their sources, their identified authors, and the contexts of relevance. So it is hard to assess their merits, and whether or not such criticism warrants a response.

Incidentally, Asian studies has frequently been challenged by questions which are not very different from those that Eric mentions with reference to media anthropology. At stake is no less than the area studies' legitimate existence as a special major degree granting unit within a university, especially at a time of financial stringency. The nature, aims, and quality of such criticism vary, and one needs to deal with the specific to offer a proper response. Since the Cold War ended, Southeast Asian studies (as a child of the War) has found itself standing feebly on an increasingly shaky ground. Understandably, many colleagues in area studies become hyper-sensitive to criticism. Some of them develop a sieged mentality, exaggerating the real or potential threats and hostility from the traditional and more established disciplines. I hope I have misread the final sections of Eric's paper, but I sense similar sentiments there.

Not only has Eric explicitly deployed the we-versus-they dichotomy, or what he calls "a structured pair of oppositions" (p. 11) to describe the supposedly distinct interests and activities of anthropology and those of communication and media studies. At length Eric describes and justifies the rationales for the latter scholars' special interest in the older work of the former, pertaining to theories of myth, story, symbol, hero, or icon (p.14). He believes that many anthropologies ("they") have failed to understand the needs and interests, and thus failed to appreciate the merits, of scholars in communication and media studies ("us"). He objects to "their" unfair and invalid criticism, demands, and imposition of "their" standards on "our" presumably separate and equally sovereign territory and preferred practice. He warns that "attempts to discipline Media Anthropology will either fail or bleed the territory of its vitality" (p. 1).

As much as I am sympathetic to Eric's plea, I am sorry to hear that Eric has not seen more friendly responses from contemporary anthropologists than those already discussed in his paper to the media anthropological work by scholars from communication and media studies. Could it be that this is a result of his narrow definition of anthropology and anthropologists, focusing mainly or exclusively on those he describes as "traditional practitioners" (p. 9) of the discipline? In case my earlier reference to area studies has appeared to be distraction to the issue at hand, let me add one more note below.

In the past two decades or so, Asian studies has been reinvigorated by a new wave of interests in the robust production, circulation, and consumption of popular culture. This is immediately related to the dramatic growth of the media industry in the region. One major region in the production of these contemporary cultures (particularly music and television dramas) is East Asia (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong). Another major area of production is India, especially in music and film. Although Southeast Asia has not been a major producer in comparison to those two, its over half a billion people constitute the major consumers of those products from both East and South Asia. Significantly to our concerns, the newly industrialized Southeast Asia is also home of the

cosmopolitan professionals and global capitalists who are also strongly religious.

Indonesia is currently dubbed both the world's largest Muslim-populated nation and the world's third liberal democracy, where election campaigns are heavily infused with sorcery (Bubant 2006). The current president (Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono) won the election in 2004 after singing in the final contest of Indonesian Idol, and has since released two music albums. Indonesia is also home of the world's largest Buddhist temple (Borobudur) and host of the world's largest jazz festival (Li 2008), and where horror and supernatural themes are the most popular genre of television drama series and feature films (Heeren 2007). This is a world where collective interests supersede those of individuals, and where one's social status, political and economic opportunities are significantly determined by one's family background.

Unsurprisingly, Routledge has established a list of publication series devoted specifically to the study of contemporary Asia, including its vibrant media and culture. Asia opens widely a new set of intellectual opportunities and challenges for open-minded anthropologists and communication/media studies scholars (and many others) to explore new questions and address issues, not least those raised by Eric. But this opportunity is lost if we retain the narrow and increasingly obsolete conception of anthropology as a discipline that concentrates on a study of non-industrial nations or isolated villages, with distinct culture on one hand. And on the other hand media and communication studies are conceptualized mainly as disciplines devoted to the analysis of secular societies, with "a culture that values rationality above all things" (p. 6) and "where the individual reigns supreme" (p. 21). Asian anthropologists and Asian media scholars (just as anthropologists of Asia and media scholars of Asia) can easily identify neither with "we" nor "they" in Eric's dichotomous intellectual world.

Changes in anthropology, as changes in history elsewhere, do not necessarily represent a progression for the better. Many old texts in anthropology (as in other disciplines) have demonstrated that their merits stand the test of time. Many of these old texts do not emphasize or reduce non-western, non-industrial people and histories as distinct and isolated. There is no reason why contemporary anthropologists (or communication and media studies scholars for that matter), should not seriously adopt insights from these older texts, and prefer to engage with them instead of the more recent work.

The real issue is not what materials one uses or their disciplinary or temporal origins. The issue is what one will do with these selected sources and materials in one's own work, and how this will produce something innovative and effective that will contribute something significant to the broader communities of scholars across disciplines, and non-scholars alike. Unless proven otherwise, I remain unconvinced that recuperating "a structured pair of oppositions" (p. 19) -- with or without a "wink" such as Eric's -- between anthropology and communication/media studies is one strategy that will bring more advantages than disadvantages to media anthropology. Despite this minor difference in approaches, I share Eric's vision that "media anthropology will grow richer, more varied, and more productive to the extent we maintain that somewhat less organized, less disciplined approach" (p. 22).

Notes

1. The work of Clifford and Marcus (1986) that Eric cites, but also others that he does not cite such as Clifford (1988); Kahn (1989, 2001a, b); Ortner (2000); Paley (2002); and Scheper-Hughes (1995) illustrate the point. Given the time and space constraints (Eric's paper reached my mailbox when I was half a globe away from my home base, attending a hectic series of conference panels), I can only drop a few references of relevance that came to mind, purely for illustrative purposes that should also make my bias more explicit. Being conscious of potentially misrepresenting the broader picture of today's anthropology, I am hesitant to mention my random selection of references in the main body of my comments. I will be happy to try to elaborate if subsequent postings demand me to do so with further reference details.
2. See Bowen (2000); Chou and Houben (2006); and Heryanto (2007).

References Cited

- Bowen, John (2000) "The Inseparability of Area and Discipline in Southeast Asian Studies: A View from the United States", /Moussons/, 1: 3-19.
- Bubant, Nils (2006) "Sorcery, corruption, and the dangers of democracy in Indonesia", /Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute/, 12: 413-31.
- Chou, C. and Houben, V. (eds) (2006) /Southeast Asian Studies; Debates & New Directions/, Singapore: ISEAS.
- Clifford, James (1988) /The Predicament of Culture/, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Heeren, Katinka van (2007) "Return of the Kyai: representations of horror, commerce, and censorship in post-Suharto Indonesian film and television", /Inter-Asia Cultural Studies/, 8(2): 211-26.
- Heryanto (2007) "Can There Be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian Studies?", in L.J. Sears (ed.) /Knowing Southeast Asian Subjects/, Seattle; University of Washington Press, pp. 75-108.
- Kahn, Joel (1989) 'Culture: Demise or Resurrection?' /Critique of Anthropology/, 9 (2): 5-26.
- _____ (2001a) 'Anthropology and Modernity', /Current Anthropology/, 42 (5): 651-80.
- _____ (2001b) /Modernity and Exclusion/, London: Sage.
- Li, Richard (2008) "All that jazz, in Indonesia", /Taipei Times/, Sunday, Mar 16: 19.
- Ortner, Sherry B. (2000) 'Some Futures of Anthropology', /American Ethnologist/, 26 (4): 984-91.
- Paley, Julia (2002) "Toward an Anthropology of Democracy", /Annual Review of Anthropology/, 31:469-96.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy (1995) 'The End of Anthropology', a review of Clifford Geertz' After The Fact, in /New York Times Review/, Sunday 7 May: 22-3.

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

Wed Oct 22 13:51:19 PDT 2008

Thanks to Ariel for his comments!!

It's over to Eric now!!!

All the best, Sigurjon.

Eric Rothenbuhler [rothenbuhler at tamu.edu](mailto:rothenbuhler@tamu.edu)
Thu Oct 23 18:59:01 PDT 2008

Greetings All,

My thanks to Ariel Heryanto for a thoughtful and kind set of comments on my working paper. His criticisms were addressed directly to the weakest points of my argument, exactly where I would have gone with my own critique. He offers them with insight and intelligence, as well as a kindly manner. Ariel's comments about work in Asian Studies and the example of Indonesia in particular are fascinating and I will add several of his references to my list of items to read.

I want to keep my comments here very short so that the discussion can be opened to the list as soon as possible. I was travelling all day yesterday, am scrambling to catch up today, taught tonight, and have a half a day of meetings tomorrow as well as more teaching. No one wants to wait until I have time to compose something as thoughtful and well documented as Ariel's comments.

Ariel quoted me saying "it is not our job as communication scholars, though, to study indigenous communities of distant societies" and interpreted it as evidence that I would characterize anthropology as being directed to the study of indigenous communities in distant societies. That was not my intention and as he points out, it is obviously not a correct characterization of contemporary anthropology. It might, though, be a reasonable characterization of what the ethnographic method was invented for originally—and there might still be some habits of thought that follow that line. Field work is still expected of dissertations in many departments; anthropologists still list their sites of field work on their CVs. An ethnography that involves travel to a distant place, several months or a couple years of residence, and maybe learning another language does not need to be explained; something short of that, that calls itself ethnography, does need to be justified. It is the lack of "time in the field" that has often been the focus of criticism by anthropologists of communication work—which is not to say there haven't been some studies that would have benefitted from more time spent observing a larger range of activities, just to make the point that the presumption is still present that ethnography is something done over lengthy time spent elsewhere.

That all said, Ariel did catch me making a rhetorical move in which I implied a narrow vision of anthropology while defending, or implicitly praising, communication and media studies for pursuing something broader and more open. He senses that I may be othering Anthropology as I move toward the conclusion of the paper in which I present the two fields as a structured pair of oppositions. Well, yes. Though I certainly hope I am not othering any people, it is my purpose to talk about this literature and that literature and how their tendencies are different from each other.

Regarding Ariel's reasonable request that I provide citations for the criticisms of communication and media studies work using anthropological theories and methods, I will have to write more later. Let me note now, though, that today's mail brought me the new issue of *Communication, Culture, and Critique*, which has an article by Patrick Murphy "Writing Media Culture: Representation and Experience in Media Ethnography." Its second sentence

cites critiques of media ethnography by Abu-Lughod, Bird, Drotner, Juluri, Nightingale, Radway, and Spitulnik. I note, though, that all of them were published in the 1990s and the purpose of his article is to report progress in the field. I may be happy to learn that I am harboring an old complaint and should let it go.

Once again, my thanks to Ariel. I look forward to reading everyone else's comments. I promise to write more later.

Cheers,

Eric

Eric W. Rothenbuhler
Professor of Communication

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

Fri Oct 24 00:52:56 PDT 2008

Thanks to Eric for his response! The floor is now open to all on the list to participate in discussion about Eric's paper, Ariel's comments and Eric's response!

Looking forward to your participation!!!!

All the best, Sigurjon

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

Sat Oct 25 01:53:14 PDT 2008

Dear All

A reminder that our EASA media e-seminar is on until November 5 and that you are all welcome to post brief comments or questions through the mailing list. We are currently discussing Eric Rothenbuhler's paper "Media Anthropology as a Field of Interdisciplinary Contact", see PDF at <http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm>

All the best
Sigurjon

John Postill [jpostill at usa.net](mailto:jpostill@usa.net)

Sat Oct 25 03:17:39 PDT 2008

I think Eric Rothenbuhler's timely paper brings out into the open a number of issues that had been circulating within media anthropological circles, both privately and publicly (incl. via this mailing list). It certainly reinforces my own impression about the existing disciplinary divides at work beneath the broad umbrella of 'media anthropology', e.g. when it comes to media and ritual. While most anthropologists who've studied media have largely avoided the concept of ritual, this is precisely one key area of interest for non-anthropologists attracted to the anthropology of media. I agree with Eric

that it makes little sense to judge a discipline by the standards of another, and that specialists in a particular discipline will have their own aims and interests.

My question to Eric (and to others on this list) is: In your view, given these considerable disciplinary differences, are there any specific media questions of general interest within the broad contact zone of 'media anthropology' that could lead to future collaborative work across the disciplinary divides?

John

Dr John Postill
Senior Lecturer in Media
Sheffield Hallam University
Sheffield S11 8UZ
United Kingdom
j.postill@shu.ac.uk
<http://johnpostill.wordpress.com/>

**Guven Witteveen [anthroview at gmail.com](mailto:anthroview@gmail.com)
*Sat Oct 25 04:54:18 PDT 2008***

E-seminarians - Greetings from middle Michigan in the north of the USA,

Eric's working paper is truly food for thought and gives a compact tour that covers a lot of ground at the right speed and height so we can see the main contours of the intellectual landscape below. I am thankful for that, Eric! It has been a long time since I've read rich discussion that requires some chewing before taking it in. I will re-read the essay a few more times at least before I understand the full meaning.

My remark comes from the point of view of an anthropologist interested most in visual ways to supplement the intellectual efforts we make. As a new reader of MediaAnthropology, this quote caught my attention:

"Media anthropology is the label that has most recently come into use for a territory of contact between two fields. Briefly, it represents both the use of anthropological concepts and methods within media studies and the study of the media by anthropologists."

My question is whether the inverse statement also is true:

...the use of MEDIA STUDIES concepts and methods BY ANTHROPOLOGISTS and the study of the ANTHROPOLOGY by MEDIA STUDIES SCHOLARS.

In other words, has this inter-disciplinary intersection been mostly characterized by Media Studies scholars who supplement their toolkit with concepts and methods from Anthropology, as well as some anthropologists who have begun to investigate the scale and diverse streams of discourse found at the center of Media Studies? Or is there more:

have those venturesome anthropologists not only investigated the subjects taken up routinely in Media Studies, but also trialed some of the concepts and methods from Media Studies in their social analyses elsewhere? And indeed have the media studies scholars newly equipped with anthropology

ideas and techniques turned away from their central subjects and also observed Anthropology's own stream of discourse, too?

The reason I ask about equity in this inter-disciplinary space is that the relationship between the disciplines may not be balanced or may not be fully extended yet. Is the older field of Anthropology only useful to media studies scholars for its lens (its approaches and preoccupying issues)? Is the younger field of Media Studies only useful to anthropologists who focus on the media found in industrialized, highly mediated societies? Or can the lens from media studies also serve anthropologists elsewhere? And can media studies scholars usefully focus on the subjects that anthropologists dwell upon?

Thus, in the inter-disciplinary space of Media Anthropology, can the normal subjects of each discipline be usefully examined by the opposite party? Can the main tools of each discipline be usefully adapted by the opposite party? Or is the relationship unequal, with Media Studies drawn only to the tools of anthropology; and Anthropology drawn only to the subjects of media studies?

---Guven Peter Witteveen

Eric Rothenbuhler [rothenbuhler at tamu.edu](mailto:rothenbuhler@tamu.edu)

Sat Oct 25 10:13:08 PDT 2008

Very good question John. In contrast to the two fields' differing interests in and uses of concepts like ritual, as you point out, there are at least two areas of empirical work in which approaches seem more similar and collaboration should be productive.

One of those is the study of audiences, interpretation, discourse, etc., and the other is the study of production processes. Both are crucially important, though it seems to me that the latter area has not yet gotten all the attention it deserves.

In regard to audiences it seems to me that there is a fairly natural convergence going on and I will leave it to others more active in that literature to discuss the issues.

Regarding media production, the number of anthropologically-informed studies of media production, work places, occupations, and so on is increasing and building a fascinating and valuable literature. This work can be put into a useful dialog with sociological work in the production of culture tradition (e.g. Richard Peterson) as well as the still valuable work done on journalism in the 1970s and 1980s (starting with Gaye Tuchman, but carried forward by many others in sociology, communication, and journalism; Berkowitz has a useful reader called *Social Theories and the News* that collects samples of that literature). Cultural histories of media industries, on the one hand, and the political economy perspective on media industries on the other, can also usefully be brought into the dialog.

What do other folks think are the most fruitful areas for collaboration between scholars based in anthropology and those based in media studies?

Cheers,

Eric

Eric Rothenbuhler [rothenbuhler at tamu.edu](mailto:rothenbuhler@tamu.edu)

Sat Oct 25 10:13:40 PDT 2008

Another very good question--and big--and provocative. I look forward to seeing what others think--while I stall for time to ponder it myself.

Cheers,

Eric

Sarah Pink [S.Pink at lboro.ac.uk](mailto:S.Pink@lboro.ac.uk)

Sat Oct 25 14:25:06 PDT 2008

Many thanks to Eric for a very thought provoking paper. The paper raised several issues for me, which most probably emerge because while Eric is writing from a media/communications perspective I am writing from the perspective of someone whose work is rooted in anthropology but also drawn towards other disciplines. The comments below are meant in the sense of trying to think these issues through:

1. I have always thought of anthropology as a discipline and as media/communications studies as a field of interdisciplinary research with a particular focus. So following from this I would be interested to know why Eric refers to Media/Communications study as a discipline? Even if one was to agree that both anthropology and media/communications are both disciplines, they would be disciplines in very different senses of the term. This difference would not simply be related to the amount of time they have been established, but, because the nature of a 'discipline' that is by nature interdisciplinary is very different from anthropology, sociology, geography, etc. I know these comments could be contested: anthropologists often do much of their most interesting work at the intersections of anthropology and other disciplines, so no discipline is 'pure' unto itself anyway; perhaps media and communications theories are developing in ways that might be said to be specific to that discipline. This point is perhaps better explained in terms of my next one:

2. Personally I DO think it is problematic to simply take 'old', 'outdated' anthropological theories because they appear suitable for understanding particular aspects of media cultures or communications practices etc. Taking a specific theory about ritual and ritual process, involves not simply following that theoretical model as a way of understanding one aspect of, for instance, a communications process. Rather it should also imply ascribing to the much wider way of understanding the world and human/material/technological relations that that 'old' or 'outdated' theory was part of. So I would argue that theory works best when its use is embedded in a set of basic theoretical commitments, which may well be modified or developed further on the basis of empirical research. That is why I think John Postill and Birgit Braeuchler's forthcoming THEORISING MEDIA AND PRACTICE volume has the potential to do a really useful job: in exploring anthropology, media and practice theory they are examining how a theoretical debate that might potentially enable us to understand processes

of social and technological change, the constitution of identity, and much much more, can be implicated in the understanding of media.

3. Going back to my first point then, it is from academic disciplines (like sociology, anthropology, geography) that such 'grand' theory is emerging e.g. in the form of theories of space and place, practice, and more. If we want to understand discourse, ritual, symbol, myth, etc, then I think we also need to situate these understandings within a wider theoretical frame: this might be through a commitment to practice theory, to spatial theory/theories of place or whatever. But what I am trying to say is that it is not enough to cherry pick useful theories from anthropology to use to understand particular media/communications forms or processes. Rather these theories should be coherent with a wider theoretical commitment to understanding the world in all its materiality, sensoriality, power relations etc etc etc in a particular way.

4. To continue some of my quibbles on another part of the paper, I also think that it is mistaken to equate anthropological research practice with long-term ethnographic fieldwork. I know that some anthropologists, and I am sure some on this list, will disagree with me. However there are many reasons why doing long term fieldwork in another distant culture is totally impractical and not always necessary for some anthropologists. To start with doing anthropological research about people's lives in their homes (whether or not about media) raises this issue - the fieldwork would take many years and be enormously intrusive. Second, many anthropologists teach in universities and have families, making it difficult to relocate for more than a week at a time, let alone a year. In this sense not all anthropological research comes up to the traditional standards of long term ethnographic research in anthropology either. To practice anthropology therefore, in my view then needs to be defined beyond the ethnographic method to point to some other, probably theoretical engagement with the discipline as well as the quality of the sorts of research encounters with others it involves. This also raises the question of 'what is anthropology' - which is something I am not going to attempt to answer. But this leads me to another comment: if media scholars are borrowing anthropological methods, which probably means doing ethnography, but without engaging in the epistemological foundations of those methods, then are the methods still anthropological when they are used for the purposes of media/communication studies? Ethnography is used widely across academic disciplines/interdisciplines as well as anthropology. But when a sociologist or geographer uses ethnography it is not referred to as sociological anthropology or geographical anthropology. So why would the use of ethnographic methods by a media or communications scholar be media anthropology?

Thanks again to Eric for presenting a paper that has invited these thoughts
Sarah

Professor Sarah Pink
Programme Director, Sociology
Department of Social Sciences
Loughborough University
LE11 3TU

s.pink@lboro.ac.uk
<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ss/staff/pink.html>

Mark Pedelty [pedelty at umn.edu](mailto:pedelty@umn.edu)
Sat Oct 25 14:53:55 PDT 2008

Thanks, Eric:

As an Anthropologist who has landed in a School of Journalism and Mass Communication, I was very interested to read your paper and found your assessment accurate and insightful. I sat down with the intent of asking a short question and it turned into a tome. My apologies. Skip to QUESTION below if you would like to avoid the diatribe against Cultural Studies and other thoughts generated by reading your essay.

First, a comparative aside regarding a third discipline: Cultural Studies. Working on popular music for the last ten years, I have been amazed by the dominance of the Cultural Studies approach, one which often lacks both the semiotic depth and holism of ethnography, on one hand, or the heuristic specificity, rigor, and breadth of formal Social Science and quantitative methods, on the other. Frankly, I find all methods useful, when applied in a relevant way, and completed with effort, intelligence, and appropriate humility. Relative to our topic, we know very little, and need all the knowledge we can produce. Policing borders is a losing game and I am not trying to do that. Instead, I am suggesting that both Comm/Media Studies and Anthro are on firmer methodological footing than Cultural Studies and more couch-bound approaches. We have that in common. To give you an example, there are many ethnographers in Anthro and Comm that criticize "Social Science" approaches. When the same criticism is articulated in Cultural Studies, ethnography is often lumped with the "other" Social Science approaches as overly positivistic (referring to ethnography as "fieldwork" automatically invokes the positivistic rhetoric of science as study in a naturalistic context as opposed to text without context.) As I will argue below, and seems to be a thrust of Eric's paper, there is more commonality between anthropologists and communication scholars studying media than there are differences.

Of course, Anthropology and Comm both claim to be open to multiple methods, but knee-jerk absolutes based on methodological approach dominate both. Quants and Quals alike project a sublimated politics on both, as if numbers intrinsically favor the Right and cultural study inherently supports the Left. The quals and quants do covert battle on hiring committees and what have you. Pity the fool who authentically values both basic approaches to the world. Yet, it seems that the situation is preferable to Cultural Studies, where knowledge seems to be based more on one's critical reading of text rather than research. Fairly bold claims are more or less based on name, theoretical abstraction safe from messy realities of human contact, and making straw men of opposing approaches. Comm and Anthro both have an admirable commitment to DOING something beyond text and talk to learn about the world.

Frankly, I think Eric is representative of the relatively close relationship between cultural Comm research and similar research in Anthropology. Granted, many differences still exist, and those of us straddling the disciplines do feel great frustration at times. For one thing, Comm departments are not set-up well for long term research or the ethnographic publication cycle and format. However, the honest desire is there in Comm for cultural approaches.

Anthro still seems to be catching up, building a field where several already exist. As late as the mid 90's, those conducting ethnographic studies of media had a very hard time finding relevant discussions going on at the AAA, yet there had been a large network of cultural researchers of media in various Comm disciplines for decades. Several people have pointed to the outstanding Media School in Hamburg in the late 90's as a watershed moment for the subdiscipline (or whatever we are calling it). Very true. Thanks, Dorle. Thinking back to that moment we can see how far we've come and how far we have to go. I remember giving students in Hamburg an assignment: imagine an ethnography of a virtual community. They looked at me like I was insane, offered several reasons never to do so (not "real" human contact—which is face-to-face in, dare I say, small rural or urban "villages"). Then, being one of the sharpest set of grad students I have ever had the privilege of working with, they came up with many clever ideas. Many years later, while attending a virtual ethnography conference in Amsterdam, it was apparent to me that other fields were diving headfirst into territory that more anthropologists should also inhabit. Why weren't the main virtual ethnography texts penned by anthropologists? Why has so much of the lit been written by others borrowing from anthropological theory. Christine Hine and others have done wonderful work, but they would welcome more anthropological involvement. Truth is, there are conservative elements to anthropology that keep many from recognizing the value and reality of mediate ways of life that connect our traditional villages, metaphorically speaking, to other ways of being. There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio...

Let's be honest, as it relates to media matters, in the 90's we were, for all intents and purposes, "behind." We have Mark Peterson to thank for compiling a meaningful history and longer term trajectory for media studies in Anthropology. However, the frightening and exciting thing is that we are continuing to write that history. It is not something "there" so much as a wish and intent, being made more real each year, in large part thanks to this listserve. Increasingly, anthropologists studying media find themselves straddling less borders, able to draw on more "indigenous" knowledge from their own discipline. However, despite the fact that anthro has been a font of theory for media researchers of all sorts, the critical mass of media research is still taking place in disciplines organized around, and designed to study, media. Eric's paper shows how interested other disciplines are in interacting with anthropologists. He also show that one does not need to come from Anthro to do what we have been calling Media Anthropology. Do we want to build a field or, recognizing the proliferation of hybrid fields, should we worry less about boundaries and field definitions and more about doing good work across borders? One indicator of disciplinary maturity will be when there are less discussions framed by the trope of disciplinary exceptionalism (Anthro having more sophistication in theory, etc.) I say that recognizing the incredible contradiction of having started this message with a diatribe against Cultural Studies. Perhaps every community needs a common enemy. :)

QUESTION:

One paragraph surprised me and I'd like to know if anyone has relevant information? Eric states:

"There are, after all, more anthropologists than communication and media scholars, their field is older, more institutionalized, and more respected. The professional socialization process trains the young anthropologist to

feel that institutional support as a power in his or her own thinking. We media scholars are socialized to imagine ourselves always borrowing, always working furtively at the margins."

I agree about the respect issue, although, let's face it, everything outside the Sciences is regarded as second tier by the academy and society at large. It is a matter of degrees (in both senses of the term). The "borrowing" assertion is also true. Even Comm scholars with great depth of theoretical knowledge seem to come with an odd theoretical disclaimer and an unnecessary sense of insecurity.

It is the assertion of size that has me perplexed. Media Studies, as something that is part of the many Communication Colleges, Journalism and Mass Communication departments, Cultural Studies, etc., at least in the US. Comm writ large seems to have many more practitioners than Anthropology. We happy few "media anthropologists" would not fill up a large room, let alone the slew of hotels required for the ICA, NCA, AEJMC, or IAMCR. I am struck by the size, funding, and breadth of the various Communication disciplines. While their size and presence is somewhat inversely related to prestige (Harvard will never have the largest or "most prestigious" Comm program), the related associations seem huge compared to the AAA and EASA, and there is a much greater critical mass of media study going on in Comm than Anthro. Increasingly, I know the AAA and especially EASA have more media panels, but I still remember the day when those of us doing media related work were few and far between and "media anthropology" was just a good idea. Have we really grown that quickly? What are the relative numbers in each discipline? Could you explain that comment, Eric?

Thanks,

Mark

Mark Pedelty
Associate Professor
School of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Minnesota
206 Church Street SE, 219 MurH
Minneapolis, MN 55455

(612) 205-4514
[pedelty at umn.edu](mailto:pedelty@umn.edu)

Elizabeth Bird [ebird at cas.usf.edu](mailto:ebird@cas.usf.edu)

Sun Oct 26 04:17:54 PDT 2008

Having mulled over Eric's paper for a day or two, I happily found that Mark Pedelty and Sarah Pink had jumped more rapidly on several of the points I was planning to make, so I'll try not to go over the same ground.

I'd like to pick up on something Sarah says at the end of her commentary, because it expresses exactly my reaction to the whole issue of "media anthropology." I know that Eric is very committed to defining some kind of "discipline" called this, and I appreciate his thoughtful discussion. However, I fundamentally disagree that there is such a thing, or that there needs to

be. If I understand rightly, Eric is suggesting that there is the "discipline" of "media studies," and then there is anthropology, and that Media Anthropology is a hybrid and possibly new discipline, (or perhaps subdiscipline). But as Mark and Sarah point out, media studies is not a discipline but a field of study. Communication is arguably a discipline, but communication is not media studies - there are departments of communication in which media study is only a small element. Media studies as a field is inherently and necessarily interdisciplinary - almost any social or behavioural science, humanity, and many natural science departments could (and do) offer courses on the of media (insert psychology, anthropology, sociology, biology, history). And they do so from often very different perspectives, using very different methodologies.

As Sarah points out, just because a sociologist uses ethnography, that doesn't mean she is doing media anthropology - it just means she is doing the sociology of media using ethnographic methods. And just because an anthropologist is studying media, that doesn't necessarily make him a "media anthropologist" - although he may be doing anthropology of the media, in the same way someone might be doing anthropology of religion, or something else. In addition, increasing numbers of anthropologists are looking more closely at media as a factor in their research, even if that research isn't first and foremost about media - Michaela di Leonardo, for example, argues that we can't understand contemporary western culture without seriously considering media. Does that make her a media anthropologist? And is the question of who is or is not a Media Anthropologist even an interesting one?

It seems that Eric is trying to carve out a particular piece of media studies - probably the piece that uses qualitative, ethnographically-inspired methods - and then tie it to those anthropologists who study media, and call it Media Anthropology. I am not sure what is to be gained by that. To me, the term "media anthropology" is useful shorthand within the discipline of anthropology - I sometimes use it to describe what I do to other anthropologists, in the same way my colleagues refer to themselves as "medical anthropologists," or "environmental anthropologists." But I see it as a very loose term, and I would resist efforts to define it as some kind of new discipline with a particular kind of approved methodology. As Mark points out, probably most "media anthropologists" would use a more qualitative ethnographic approach. But ethnography has always incorporated quantitative dimensions as well - which is why, for example, my department's graduate program requires training in advanced quantitative and qualitative methods. Look at any anthropological methods textbook (e.g Bernard etc), and one will see that the range of approaches defined as part of the ethnographer's toolkit is far wider than participant-observation - and the methodological debate within anthropology is no longer about how long one spent in the field (as Sarah points out).

In my career, I have spent time in anthropology departments, as well as in Journalism and Mass Comm., Humanities, and Interdisciplinary Studies. I've always thought of myself as an anthropologist whose field of interest includes the study of media, and for years, the only place I could really find a critical mass of scholars with similar interests was in Communication and Media Studies. Still is, for the most part, which is why I will always go to ICA as often as AAA or SfAA. But I am thrilled to find more and more colleagues within anthropology who find that they can no longer study cultural processes without attempting to understand the role of the media in constituting meaning. Like me, they have gratefully borrowed heavily from some strands of scholarship in communication and media studies, just as media

studies people have borrowed from anthropology, but have not by definition become anthropologists. I agree with a lot of what Eric says - this is an exciting, cross-disciplinary field of study, and I hope it continues to be so. But I don't see any particular reason to curb that eclecticism by trying to define and reify some new "discipline" called Media Anthropology.

S. Elizabeth Bird, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair
Department of Anthropology
University of South Florida
SOC 107, 4202 E. Fowler Ave.
Tampa, FL 33620
Email: ebird@cas.usf.edu

Guven Witteveen [anthroview at gmail.com](mailto:anthroview@gmail.com)

Sun Oct 26 05:11:20 PDT 2008

Eric writes,

"What do other folks think are the most fruitful areas for collaboration between scholars based in anthropology and those based in media studies?"

I point to the most obvious mode to bring diverse scholars into collaboration -- project based work: select a subject, context, cultural production or genre of mutual interest, then pursue the project together from issues outline, research design, observation and sources gathering, analysis and discussion, and then at last presentation and co-authoring for publication.

Are there precedents specifically for scholars trained in the two fields intersecting in this way?

On a parallel line, beginning in the early 1950s for perhaps dozen years, I think, a multi-disciplinary social science group from the U. of Michigan took up residence in rural west Japan (Okayama) to document, inquire and discover patterns of society there.

--Guven Witteveen, [anthroview at gmail.com](mailto:anthroview@gmail.com)

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

Sun Oct 26 09:14:21 PDT 2008

I have sat and stared at this debate as it has unfolded, and it strikes me that perhaps we are debating with slightly the wrong focus. "Media Anthropology" like any other form of solidarity, is not something that one finds out there, but more something that one does. So we chase our own tails in trying to pin it down.

So the questions seem to be more strategic in character.
e.g. What do we stand to gain or lose by defining "Media Anthropology" as a nodal point rather than as a collection of edges?

This brings in what we have discussed in terms of Media scholars using ethnography, as well as Anthropologists approaching media and mediation.

There is an argument for Media Anthropology as a nodal point theoretically speaking, since ethnographic approaches to mediated practices, of which "The Media" are a subset, although a very strong example, is becoming such a crucial part of so many social science discourses.

Are there methodological arguments for defining this nodal point more strongly? Does the ethnography of "Media" and "Media-related practices" have particularities that throw a strong enough light on the methodology employed elsewhere to justify it being built its own little academic house? In other words are the methodological returns high when considering investing in Media Anthropology?

And the costs? Does defining "Media Anthropology" cut students off from "Media" departments and "Anthropology" departments more than the divide between those disciplines already does?

I think we can discuss all these questions perfectly well, in terms of what are good ways forward for "us" as some sort of "proto-tribe" (I apologise in advance for the use of this term) without necessarily needing to pin down what "Media Anthropology" is, although it is very interesting to consider what it ("we"?) may be becoming.

Daniel

Daniel Taghioff

Skype: taghioff

Email: daniel at taghioff.info

Christopher Joseph Westgate [westgate at tamu.edu](mailto:westgate@tamu.edu)

Sun Oct 26 09:19:53 PDT 2008

The curious reader will recognize my electronic domain. While I work with Eric, and have great respect for his scholarship, do not let that influence how you read my contribution to this discussion. For Eric and I productively disagree on several issues, including but not limited to the place of power in communication studies. I understand power as central to "the communicative" construct, while he interprets it as one cultural indicator among many other important ones. We also approach research questions quite differently: I am more of a humanist than a social scientist. I consider these as productively rather than fundamentally marked contrasts.

Allow me to enter the conversation at this point and respectfully disagree with Bird's interpretation of Eric's commitment to "defining some kind of discipline called this." Eric acknowledges in the first line of his abstract that media anthropology "is a rapidly developing new field," not a body of work to discipline (my underscore). He frames media anthropology as a "field of contact between two disciplines:" communication (not a media studies isolate, as this thread supposed) and anthropology. I do not see any strategic moves toward reification in his essay. Instead, I think Eric has a concern for the contextual study of symbols, values, events and social acts based in thicker concretizations. In fact, he concludes with a proposal for a "less organized, less disciplined" approach (p. 16).

While he acknowledges media anthropology "could become an established field, or even a new discipline," I do not read any evidence of advocacy for the latter at the expense of the former. Rather, I sense a seasoned scholar's receptivity to exciting possibilities that could result from conversations between anthropologists who study media among other social forces and media studies' scholars who draw on anthropological, sociological, or historical methods to answer particular kinds of questions. That does not mean strict adherence to participant observation (see p. 4 of Eric's essay where he and Coman redress unilateral methodological claims). Yet this conversation does encourage scholars to use the most appropriate tools- qualitative or quantitative- to answer our research question(s). There's a bit of a paradox here for a humanist, of course. Yet I never said I find no use for my earlier training in social-scientific methods.

Whether or not I identify as a media anthropologist misses the point. Following Grossberg, cultural studies as a project concerned with context rather than a discipline focused on objects (with apologies to Mark) has already demonstrated the fluidity and multiplicity of professional identities in the academy. I cannot find evidence in Eric's paper of a closed call for a unitary disciplinary identity but rather an open invitation for a trans-disciplinary field of contact. To ask whether we reflexively identify as "media anthropologists" returns us to an earlier period of monolithic identity construction based in a nervous need to tiptoe on intellectual property where the "no trespassing" sign collapsed long ago. I do not see a request or requirement for this in Eric's paper. "Media anthropology" may appear as a crossroads of sorts where we communication and anthropology scholars meet each other coming and going, with winks at Eric and Flannery O'Connor. We need not equate the adjectival modifier (disciplinary territory) with a new noun (discipline).

I do not think we're returning to an old or uninteresting question, but trying to advance what we know with recent, cutting-edge scholarship. And I suggest Bird, Pedelty and Rothenbuhler all serve as fine examples of that advancement.

Warm regards,
Christopher

Eric Rothenbuhler [rothenbuhler at tamu.edu](http://rothenbuhler.at.tamu.edu)
Sun Oct 26 10:50:38 PDT 2008

Dear All,

My thanks to Sarah, Mark, and Elizabeth for their thoughtful comments and questions—and my thanks to EASA and the whole list for this opportunity to discuss our ideas. I dare say there is a uniquely nervous thrill to having your ideas reviewed in public like this. How many times will I find myself wondering, why did I say that? I will use Sarah's series of questions as a way to organize my responses to all three writers and then add a few other thoughts at the end if they do not come up along the way.

(As I logged back on to post this I found two new comments on these issues, each offering some intriguing and worthwhile ideas. Let me post this anyway and get back to those later.)

Regarding the disciplinarity of communication or media studies: A funny thing happened on my way to this place. I was trained in the model of communication as an interdisciplinary field of study, at the Annenberg School at USC.

(Where we also took it for granted that by "communication" we meant media and mass communication—an issue that will re-emerge below.) Only one of my major professors had a degree in communication, if I remember correctly, and he was primarily a social psychologist of media audiences and public opinion; the others had their origins in sociology, political science, film, or literary studies. Our first year survey of theories course was a potluck dinner in which instructors, methods, conceptual frames, and topics shifted radically every two weeks. I actually chose communication rather than sociology for the greater intellectual freedom I thought it offered, though I proceeded to study sociology and to pursue a very sociological form of communication study. I have spent the rest of my career pursuing serious study of a host of neighboring fields: sociology, anthropology, music, and performance studies; in the last few years I've been trying to become a historian and most recently wondering how much I don't know about art. Maybe that's next.

Despite all that, through twenty five years of teaching and research in communication, I have become convinced that there is such a thing as a discipline of communication and media studies—though it has almost nothing to do with the current institutional arrangements of our communication and media departments. Most American universities now have some kind of a communication department, many have more than one, some have schools or colleges. These units come with a confusing variety of names: Communication, communication studies, communication arts, communication science, speech, speech communication, media studies, media arts, mass communication, telecommunication, journalism, journalism and mass communication, radio, television, and film, film studies, cinema studies, etc. (not to mention advertising, public relations, corporate communication, strategic communication, etc.) Even this diversity of names cannot coherently sort the diversity of curricula and research programs inside those units. It is remarkably difficult to predict from knowledge of one communication department to what would be found inside another one.

Of course we can find plenty of intellectual diversity among anthropology departments too. My point though, is that the institutional units within which communication studies are pursued are the results of institutional history more than intellectual design. This is reflected too in our plethora of professional associations and journals: National Communication Association, International Communication Association, Broadcast Education Association, Society of Cinema and Media Studies, University Film and Video Association, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication—to name only the largest of those based primarily in the US. I have recently been compiling information for a five-year report on the activities of the telecommunication media studies group in my department; we found we had published 53 journal articles in 45 different journals and 35 book chapters, only two of which appeared in the same book. So these structures and activities do not show the markers of a discipline in the same sense as sociology, political science, psychology, economics, or anthropology.

Mark is right, though, to raise the question of the number of communication scholars versus anthropologists. If we organized all of those folks into one national association and put all of that teaching and research into one department on each campus, might it add up to more people than we find in anthropology? I don't know—and I shouldn't have made the claim without checking the numbers. Certainly he is right, if this was his point, that

there are more media scholars in one or another sort of communication department than there are media anthropologists in anthropology departments. On the other hand, among all those media scholars, a much smaller number are interested in and knowledgeable of anthropological theory and methods. And my guess is that on this list the anthropologists outnumber the communication/media scholars—though I have been repeatedly surprised how many of my colleagues in communication are lurking on the list, reading occasionally but not participating.

In addition to some kind of a communication, journalism, media, or film program, these days most every university also has some individual scholars examining media or communication issues in departments of sociology, history, political science, psychology, English and other languages, literature, women's studies, Africana studies, Hispanic studies, music, art, etc. From their point of view, as expressed by Sarah and Elizabeth, media or communication is a topic of research, a field of study, but not a discipline. Those with a home discipline, as we say, bring its frames of reference and major conceptual touchstones to their work on the topic of media or communication. Sarah argues for the importance of this, rather than cherry picking concepts here and there and reapplying them absent the larger conceptual frames in which and for which they were designed. I agree with her.

Somewhat to my surprise I found myself convincing myself several years ago that I was a communication theorist, that there was a discipline of thinking there that offered a perspective, a conceptual frame that I could use in the study of other topics. For example, just as a sociologist might use perspectives on social organization to study communication processes, I found myself using perspectives on communication to study social organization. After years of writing and teaching about the usefulness of conceiving communication as a cultural phenomenon, I found new insights by viewing culture as a communicative phenomenon. As Sarah says, "theory works best when its use is embedded in a set of basic theoretical commitments" and for me, those commitments involve seeing the world as communication and the idea that communication is a symbolic activity by which we construct ourselves and the world we live in. I can find colleagues who share that perspective, though, in departments of anthropology, history, sociology, or the rest of campus as well as in communication. My sense of the disciplinarity of communication and media studies has to do with how we think, not how our work happens to have come to be organized institutionally.

Some other smaller issues: Re. the name media anthropology, I think its origins and still most of its uses are in anthropology as a convenient descriptive label for the work some folks do—as Sarah and Elizabeth discuss. In communication and media studies, folks using ethnographic methods usually describe themselves as doing ethnography, not media anthropology—as Sarah proposes. Media ethnography is a fairly common descriptive term but media anthropology has not become so popular. Mihai Coman and I chose media anthropology as the name of our book because we liked it as simple, straightforward description. We were not really trying to found a new discipline, though, actually, we did hope the name would catch on.

Along those lines I'm afraid Elizabeth misunderstands me a bit—or perhaps is offering a symptomatic reading indicating that I misunderstand myself a bit. She is right that I am disciplinary in my thinking about communication and media studies (she has been present in other contexts when I was positively Quixotic in that regard). But the opening and the closing of my essay argued

against disciplining media anthropology. It is not my goal "to define it as some kind of new discipline with a particular kind of approved methodology."

Regarding ethnography and other issues of method, I'm rather sorry I brought that up. First, it is not an area of the literature in which I have stayed caught up very well. Second, it is an area in which there has come to be less difference between anthropologists studying the media and media scholars whose work is influenced by anthropology. Third, my impression is that the literature is growing and changing with more open, flexible, and creative attitudes toward methods—as Sarah, Mark, and Elizabeth each discuss. Without taking the risk of naming names for fear of leaving out important folks, I can say that each of these three has done important work that illustrates the benefits of that greater openness about innovating methods to fit new situations.

Well that's more than enough from me—and my goodness written discussions sure are more time consuming than talking ones. Who's next?

Cheers,

Eric

Eric Rothenbuhler [rothenbuhler at tamu.edu](mailto:rothenbuhler@tamu.edu)

Sun Oct 26 10:56:32 PDT 2008

Very productive idea Daniel has here: let's look at "media anthropology" as a form of solidarity--or a symbol of it--or a name for it--or a ritual invocation of it. Hmm, that would be a communicative construction of it, wouldn't it? the list itself, of course, is a communicative construction of an intellectual world we live inside.

Cheers!

Eric

Eric Rothenbuhler [rothenbuhler at tamu.edu](mailto:rothenbuhler@tamu.edu)

Sun Oct 26 11:18:56 PDT 2008

I got excited and hit send before I thought about the other half of Daniel's suggestion.

If media anthropology is a communicative construction then it is, as Peirce says about signs, something somebody does in some situation for some purpose. As Daniel elaborates, we need to think about our purposes and our situations and let that influence how we construct the symbolic object.

Or, here's another way to think about the same point, inspired by a talk I heard Klauss Krippendorf give many years ago on "a design approach to theory." Our colleagues in the art school and the music school don't expect theory to describe or explain reality so much as they expect it to be useful in their activities of composition and criticism. We could learn from that example. To the extent we live inside worlds of our own symbolic construction--and we are theorizing the processes of symbolic construction--we could use our theory

to design our worlds and then evaluate our theory by the happiness of our results.

Cheers,

Eric

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

Mon Oct 27 00:10:08 PDT 2008

Greetings from India. I swore to myself I would concentrate on my fieldwork and just lurk on these lists. But what the hell, it's diwali chotta, the kids are out playing, all the editors and reporters I'm working with have no time for me today, so I'll indulge.

Let me share a "field" anecdote from a Midwestern university. For four years I have taught a highly successful course called world media, which focuses on bringing anthropological methods and theories to bear on case studies (Bollywood, Nigerian and Ghanaian video films, representations of Arabs in Hollywood, al-Jazeera, Japanese hip-hop, telenovelas, etc). For two years it was taught under a special seminar number, then for two years as a special topics course. But when the department tried to make it a permanent course with its own course number an objection was filed by the Communications department, which teaches a course called "International Media" which they feel is essentially the same course.

Or rather, some of them feel that way. Like many Comm departments, ours is a polyglot combining Mass Communication, Strategic Communication and Speech Communication, the last of which is further subdivided into organizational communication, interpersonal and relational communication, and rhetoric. Speech communication is the biggest in terms of majors, minors and faculty but has its disciplinary boundaries nibbled away by English, which teaches rhetoric and linguistics. The focus in the Comm department is on doing. Theory in this department is supposed to lead to better practice.

Except there is a small coterie of faculty within mass comm who study (rather than do) media and want to form a small division called "Media Studies" They recognize that all over the university there are courses with "media" in the title. Every language program has film (and sometimes TV) courses, sociology, gerontology, history, geography, most regional studies programs all have media courses. Even geology has a course on volcanoes in real life and in movies.

>From a university administrator's point of view, it would make sense (i.e. be cheaper) to run an interdisciplinary media studies program in which students would take core courses in Media Studies ("the boring courses" as one mass comm. prof said) and then take lots of media courses from other departments.

These profs want to avoid this. They can't take media courses away from those departments that already teach them, but they can try to block departments from creating new courses. In a nutshell, they are trying to colonize the term "media" on topical grounds ("we are the field that studies media").

My response was rooted in disciplinary claims: anthropology is a discipline with its own epistemologies, disciplinary perspectives, theoretical paradigms and methodological toolkits. If we turn our focus on "media", we bring these

to it, and it is therefore a different way of approaching media than what is taught in their international media course.

Their counterargument was that because they are interdisciplinary, they already encompass anthropology. "Some of my best friends are anthropologists" one faculty member actually assured me, naming two members of this list as evidence. She does "ethnographic fieldwork" by teaming up on a relatively short term basis (from a few weeks to a few months) with social organizations seeking to use media to further their agendas. She works with translators and sometimes anthropologists. This faculty member actually cited my use of Eric's (and Mihai Coman's) book *Media Anthropology* (in which I have a chapter) against me, because "most of the authors aren't anthropologists, they are communication scholars who read and work with anthropologists" (i.e. they are more like her than me).

My point here is that of course Daniel is right and these terms "Media Anthropology", "Anthropology", "Communication," "Fieldwork," "Ethnography" and such are cultural constructions. But like all cultural constructions they are tied to institutions and resources—i.e. power. Policing disciplinary boundaries is an ugly business but doing it—and failing to do it—can both have important institutional consequences.

I am therefore sceptical about the emergence of a fruitful new discipline or field of "media anthropology" even in anthropology. I'd agree with Elizabeth, as I understand her: lots of anthropologists are incorporating media into their work but they are not really media anthropologists unless that work contributes theoretically to a larger understanding of the functions and meanings of media in human societies rather than contributing to our understanding of, say, modernity as a class marker.

I have argued elsewhere that the most fruitful forms of interdisciplinary work involve scholars reading in other disciplines from within their own disciplinary traditions. Elizabeth Bird has drawn rich insights from cultural studies but her work remains anthropological. Mark Pedelty has drawn fruitfully on theories and paradigms in the sociology of media but these are rewoven through the loom of his ethnographic practice.

I like Christopher Westgate's reading of Eric's paper as proposing a site of contact between disciplines, which is how I understand his book, and what I believe this list has evolved into. And this kind of interdisciplinary intercourse can be very exciting and fruitful.

Mihai Coman [mcoman53 at yahoo.com](mailto:mcoman53@yahoo.com)

Mon Oct 27 03:04:49 PDT 2008

Dear All

I have followed the discussion generated by Eric paper with a growing feeling of a "deja vu". The same type of reactions (sometime from the same voices) raised when I submitted my views on the same issue (see http://www.media-anthropology.net/coman_maoverview.pdf) - and echoed few months latter on the Osorio's article (<http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm>) It's seems that the epistemological view on the border and crossing the border between anthropology and communication studies generates the same lines of argumentation - even Eric was obliged to take the same steps I took, looking for common advantages (the promise of MA) and unilateral disadvantages (the

controversial area - the quality of ethnographic work done by Comm students & the inadequate use of anthropological concepts by the same group of "intruders").

Eric's overview is challenging and I believe that putting two sciences or disciplines in the mirror of their conceptual design is always useful and thoughtful. More than this Eric makes an important point (which is echoed by Marc Hobart's remarks in our reader *Media Anthropology*):

"Not only is it that each is looking in the other literature for something it lacks in its own, but that they are each looking for what the other is trying to overcome, to compensate, to leave behind". His final remarks on the "filling the gap" aspirations and processes that explain the sudden interest of communication scholars in anthropology (and the reluctance of Hard anthropologists!) are very rich in suggestions and epistemological perspectives. In fact media anthropology raised as an effort to go beyond and to look for answers to phenomena that were perceived as inadequately explained by the existing theories and sciences (considered as the standard tool for a certain object - such as sociology for media effects, and so on). Which brings us to the same question - how adequate is or can a transfer of a concept, theory or research method from the field where it was conceived to give answers to a specific topic in another field. But, dear friends, this is the main and obsessive question of cultural anthropology from the XIX century to present days! But until now the problem was how could adequate tools designed during the study of "modern" society be used in the study of Non-modern ones. And now we are fighting with the intriguing reversal - how adequate could be tools designed to explain the "otherness" when we apply them in order to understand and explain our sameness. Same old story! or Same old story?

Best

Mihai Coman

Erkan Saka [sakaerka at gmail.com](mailto:sakaerka@gmail.com)

Mon Oct 27 07:10:51 PDT 2008

While I am looking forward to hearing feedback for my dissertation draft and working on a campaign against web censorship in Turkey, here are my unstructured notes on the reading and discussions.

1. Regarding the use of older anthropological concepts, such as ritual etc. A non-disciplinary approach to these over-studied concepts, terms, notions etc might bring out new openings. It means a fresh air. When one is stuck with his/her disciplinary means, new light comes from others out of traditional disciplinary boundaries (like the Media Studies). So I am very much excited for the usage of these by communication scholars. Yes, these usages may not be sophisticated in the eyes of anthropologists but as long as there is academic and theoretical innovation, one should go for it. Maybe this will also lead anthropologists to have a new level of innovative work.

[For this use of older terms, I have also in mind the Deleuzian approaches. I don't claim to have a substantive interpretation but the way Deleuze approached a philosopher could go for us here, too (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilles_Deleuze#Deleuze.27s_interpretations). Why shouldn't we transgress, violate the older theory in order to produce new?]

2. I totally agree with Sarah in

To continue some of my quibbles on another part of the paper, I also think

that it is mistaken to equate anthropological research practice with long-term ethnographic fieldwork.

This has been an issue for more than a decade now but it seems that it is still institutionally the case in many departments. And the gatekeepers in funding institutions can still accuse the applicant of not designing "a good fieldwork".

3. Eric's portrayal of media anthropology is exciting. it is a field of encounter. it doesn't need to be defined or structured as a (sub) discipline at this stage. This field of encounter is still at the early phases of knowledge production and accumulation. It remains to be seen whether it will stay as an assemblage and disappear or will turn into an apparatus....

--

Erkan Saka

* Ph.D. Candidate at the Department of Anthropology in Rice University, Houston, TX

Field diary: <http://erkansaka.net>

* Instructor at the Faculty of Communication in Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey

Richard Wilk [wilkr at indiana.edu](http://wilkr.indiana.edu)

Mon Oct 27 08:52:09 PDT 2008

Dear Colleagues

I share Mihai's sense of Deja Vu, and sympathize with the position Eric states in the paper. The dilemmas and contradictions of creating new spaces of contact and debate in academia are common all across the social and natural sciences and humanities. I have been lucky/misfortunate enough to have worked in several other 'contact zones' like gender studies, economic anthropology, and now food studies. The same kinds of problems and issues keep cropping up - and in each case our attempts to envision and participate in new kinds of intellectual community and debate are tied down by institutional problems, contending loyalties, and the various traditions we were trained in, as well as the need to divide our attention and effort between all of our jobs; teaching, researching, public service, mentoring, building institutions etc. Oh yes, and make a living and have a life.

The sad fact is that Universities are a product of the 19th century. They reflect the obsession of the time with dividing up the world into territories, and history into periods, with turning every form of intellectual inquiry into a profession modeled on law or medicine. This monumental effort to fit the world into a neat set of boxes never succeeded, but we have been able to hide that failure by conspiring to believe in 'progress' - holding out the hope that someday we will find the theory, develop the right methods, or make the discovery that will reveal the truth about the way the world works.

In the meantime, those of us who have a sense that something is wrong with the way we produce and communicate knowledge have been moving towards the interstices, the gaps, the zones of 'friction' (to use Tsing's metaphor). And the creaking steam engine of the University has

sometimes been willing to accommodate us, to let us work ourselves into a frenzy trying to meet its antique demands. But I have to admit that I am getting very skeptical about the idea that if we can find the right gaps, build more territories, find new topics, create new interdisciplines which overlap or combine the old categories, we are going to get somewhere new. Instead what I have seen is a continuing reproduction of the same kinds of institutional structures, boundaries, and modes of knowing which have caused the problem in the first place. Instead of building new varieties of discipline, or moving across the boundaries, I think we need to do a more fundamental analysis of why old categories of knowledge are not working. I have to admit that this is why I like Latour's actor-network theory so much - not that I think I really understand it - but it seems to me to question our fundamental categories, like the 'social', the 'technological' and the 'individual' in a way which opens up space for asking new questions which cannot even be phrased using the terms we have inherited from the existing disciplines. Whatever and wherever a 'media anthropology' goes, I hope it asks questions at this level. And the most fruitful collaborators might not be those who seem to be defining their work as being about "media" at all. Instead they might be others who are trying to get out of the comfortable, but dark and moldy cages which they were trained to inhabit.

--

Richard Wilk, Prof. of Anthropology and Gender Studies, Indiana Univ.

Lidia Marte [moth at mail.utexas.edu](mailto:moth@mail.utexas.edu)

Mon Oct 27 11:14:48 PDT 2008

Dear all,

I have also been enjoying the threads of discussions generated by Eric's paper (and past essays), I just wish to share few points:

- 1) Both Cultural Anthropology and Media Studies are interdisciplinary fields, it seems paradoxical that after achieving canonic status, these and other areas of academic production of knowledge become suddenly nervous and eager to policing their boundaries. Who benefits from such rigid framings, what is so scary about un-pinnable areas of collaboration and research?...
- 2) The study of media (or of communication and representation more broadly), is not an exclusive object-subject of cultural anthropology and media studies, linguistics, cultural studies, literary studies, social history among others, have contributed insights theoretically and methodologically...
- 3) I have been engaged lately with a similar discussion about Diaspora and Queer Studies; some scholars think that appropriation of these frameworks dilute their power, others (myself included) propose that it is precisely their wiggly nature what makes them so generative and democratic. It seems to me that to engage Media Anthropology as a 'contact zone' as Eric suggests (as a space of research and social action through which we use whatever tools are most appropriate to our particular positionality), is the most productive. In terms of academic niches, the cultural studies model has shown that such a zone is possible.

Debates such as this are necessary and generative, I don't mean to suggest we should suspend this dialogue. I find, for example, that many 'seeds' for new directions in our research are planted through such exchanges.

Lets keep the harvest coming!

Lidia Marte, PhD
Lecturer, Dept. of Anthropology
University of Texas at Austin

Eric Rothenbuhler [rothenbuhler at tamu.edu](mailto:rothenbuhler@tamu.edu)

Mon Oct 27 13:17:11 PDT 2008

Great story Mark--and it well illustrates the institutional constraints on intellectual ferment. Some will always see ferment as rotting; others as productive. Some see departmental structures and boundaries as protecting; others as inhibiting. Here at A&M I am trying to build a media studies program within the communication department AND an interdisciplinary network of faculty and students across departments. But some see that as a suspicious activity--it could be an attempt to steal resources, you know.

Cheers,

Eric

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

Wed Oct 29 14:29:13 PDT 2008

Dear All

We are now one week into our EASA media e-seminar. We are currently discussing Eric Rothenbuhler's paper "Media Anthropology as a Field of Interdisciplinary Contact", see PDF at <http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm>

I encourage you all - and in particular new members - to join in the discussion but you are all welcome to post brief comments or questions through the mailing list. Longer posts are also welcome!!!!

The seminar ends November 5th.

All the best
Sigurjon

Philipp Budka [ph.budka at philbu.net](mailto:ph.budka@philbu.net)

Thu Oct 30 01:47:33 PDT 2008

Dear Eric and List,

First let me thank Eric for his very interesting paper, which deals with

important aspects about the research/"contact" field of media anthropology and how it developed over the years. In doing so, it also raises some crucial questions.

I will concentrate in my comment on the concept of interdisciplinarity and its possible consequences for our field of interest. Is it the best fitting concept to understand what happens in the field of media anthropology? What does it mean compared to other concepts of disciplinary contact and exchange?

Basically, I like the idea that media anthropology developed out of the "inter-disciplinary contact" between (social and cultural) anthropology and media and communication studies, as Eric puts it. It nicely indicates the richness of theoretical concepts and methodological tools invented and used as well as re-invented and re-used by different disciplinary branches under the umbrella of media anthropology.

On the other hand Eric proposes that out of this interdisciplinary contact, which evidently resulted in interdisciplinary research and teaching projects and thus interdisciplinary knowledge production not only in the Anglo-American sphere (e.g. Schroeder & Voell 2002 for a German example), either a new discipline of media anthropology or a "less disciplined" area/field of research/teaching can result.

Following Helga Novotny (2003), I argue that media anthropology is heading towards "transdisciplinarity", which can be understood as a way of transgressive knowledge production that "does not respect institutional boundaries". Particularly for scientific fields that are situated on the boundaries between sciences, media technologies and societies, such as science and technology studies, internet studies, and also media anthropology, transdisciplinarity is of high and increasing importance (e.g. Novotny 2003, Strathern 2005).

As for example Dan Sperber (2003) argues, there seems to be a correlation between the popularity of inter- and transdisciplinary projects and the constantly increasing dissemination of information and communication technologies such as the internet. Through these new communication technologies, researchers are no longer completely relying on disciplinary institutions as channels of contact, recognition and authority. Our media anthropology mailing list is, as Eric points out, a nice example for this development.

Transdisciplinary research projects and approaches also try to open disciplinary gates to exchange with non-academic organizations, such as NGOs for instance, which I find of utmost importance particularly in (media) anthropology research.

Deploying an evolutionary model, one could argue that disciplinarity resulted in multi-disciplinarity, then inter-disciplinarity and finally (will result in?) trans-disciplinarity (cf. e.g. Budka et al. 2005). Each step is deeply embedded into societal, technological, and cultural contexts and thus is changing when they are changing.

I like the idea and the concept of transdisciplinary research because it concentrates on knowledge transfer and transgression instead of disciplinary knowledge demarcation. It is more fluid and less fixed and therefore more flexible and adaptable. But it needs of course more

testing in concrete projects and fields, such as media anthropology. As I understand it, this doesn't mean the end of academic disciplines. It is only a (necessary) approach to deal with the issues we are confronted with in our (academic) daily lives.

Looking forward to another week of stimulating inter- and transdisciplinary discussions with all of you!

All the best,

Philipp

References

Budka, P., Mader, E., Stockinger, J. and A. Borsdorf (2005). From inter- to transdisciplinary content production in web based learning systems: experiences with LASON and OEKU-Online, in M. E. Auer, U. Auer and R. Mittermeir (eds.), International Conference Interactive Computer Aided Learning: Ambient and Mobile Learning. Kassel: Kassel University Press.

Novotny, H. (2003): The potential of transdisciplinarity?, from the CNRS symposium "Re-thinking interdisciplinarity", Online:
<http://www.interdisciplines.org/interdisciplinarity/papers/5>

Sperber, D. (2003): Why rethink interdisciplinarity?, from the CNRS symposium "Re-thinking interdisciplinarity", Online:
<http://www.interdisciplines.org/interdisciplinarity/papers/1>

Strathern, M. (2005): Experiments in interdisciplinarity, in Social Anthropology 13/1, 75-90.

--

Philipp Budka

+43 (0) 650 95 28 244

Dreyhausenstrasse 18/7

1140 Wien, Austria

[ph.budka at philbu.net](mailto:ph.budka@philbu.net)

<http://www.philbu.net>

Philipp Budka [ph.budka at philbu.net](mailto:ph.budka@philbu.net)

Thu Oct 30 03:33:27 PDT 2008

I forgot one reference in my last e-mail:

Schroeder, I.W. and S. Voell (eds.). 2002. /Moderne Oralitaet. Ethnologische Perspektiven auf die plurimediale Gegenwart/. Marburg: Curupira.

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/bibliographies.htm#sz>

Best,

Philipp

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

Thu Oct 30 04:55:32 PDT 2008

I wish to clarify a point I made about Media Anthropology as a form of solidarity.

I agree with the discussion as far as it is going in the direction of "what are the forms that media anthropology takes in the face of the strategic challenges we face as a more or less defined grouping."

I also think we need to consider how a resource like this list and the site could be turned towards supporting those efforts, with Mark and Erik's discussion of their particular political situations useful as contexts for this.

But I do not think that regarding Media Anthropology as a form of solidarity that we do is the same as regarding it as a sign. As a form of solidarity that we do it is, to my mind, a practice, and a community thereof, where membership is earned through said practices.

I am guessing that my comments were interpreted in that way because the notion that a community or solidarity is fluid is associated more or less automatically with signs and symbols, due to discussions on social constructivism and the linguistic turn etc... But I am not sure that such an assumption really holds well in most situations.

The law is a set of signs, and some laws outlast the buildings they are written in. Conversely capitalism has a way of reconfiguring the physical world that also undermines the idea that flexibility is necessarily a property of signs, and fixity a sign of materiality. I think such an association between fixity and materiality is really another expression of the "idea of structure" (Which could do with a Collingwood-style treatment in my opinion.)

Practice ideas help us to see that forms of social solidarity do not fit with such dichotomies. Such a practice view is the way forward for Media Anthropology in my mind. To put it another way, what are the specific sets or types of project by which we hope to define Media Anthropology into the future, and what do we see, from our situated experiences, as the types of issues we need to address in that?

If one is looking to establish a department in Media Anthropology, how might that look? If you are organising trans or interdisciplinary work, what are the issues that tend to come up? In a sense we are looking for a menu of mapped strategic options to share in order to support one another. So the discussion might be more "what are the implications of each of these options." Rather than "what is media anthropology" which is a discussion we have already wrestled with.

Daniel

Christopher Joseph Westgate [westgate at tamu.edu](mailto:westgate@tamu.edu)

Thu Oct 30 07:11:36 PDT 2008

Hi Philipp,

I like the idea of trans-disciplinarity. I proposed something similar in my post a few days ago. Why does multi-disciplinarity precede and not follow inter-disciplinarity in the hypertextual, evolutionary model of content production? Do these lateral approaches to a field hold in cases of linear readings outside computer-mediated communication? How do we know?

Warm regards,

Christopher

Philipp Budka [ph.budka at philbu.net](mailto:ph.budka@philbu.net)
Thu Oct 30 07:28:52 PDT 2008

Hi Christopher and List,

As far as I understand e.g. Novotny et al. and according to the experience we made in several inter- and transdisciplinary knowledge production projects, multi-disciplinarity is more like a canon of disciplinary voices, whereas inter-disciplinarity aims to integrate those voices to jointly create something new. Trans-disciplinarity on the other hand goes one step further in neglecting and/or rejecting disciplinary boundaries as such. But there are of course multiple ways of interpreting...

Both, inter- and transdisciplinary research efforts need a lot of time, energy and motivation and are therefore challenging to all who are participating.

The evolutionary model, I was proposing, is of course highly debatable. Nevertheless, I think it would also work outside of hypermedia or new media production.

All the best,

Philipp

Georgina Born [gemb2 at cam.ac.uk](mailto:gemb2@cam.ac.uk)
Thu Oct 30 07:48:14 PDT 2008

Dear Philipp, Christopher and list,

I've been watching this discussion with interest, particularly as it veers towards conceptual issues of inter / multi / transdisciplinarity. These are indeed foggy terms in contemporary knowledge and practice, as well as in research funding! That's the reason why myself, an anthropologist of media and cultural / knowledge production, along with Andrew Barry, Marilyn Strathern, Gisa Wieszkalnys and Elena Rockhill undertook an empirical research project on interdisciplinarity in recent years, of a post-Nowotny kind. The results may be interesting for this debate. As well as Strathern's helpful book, *Commons and Borderlands*, there is a primarily conceptual paper that we wrote for *Economy and Society*, which tries to discern key differences between the various forms of interdisciplinarity, specifically three distinct 'modes' and three 'logics': here's the reference for those interested -

A. Barry, G. Born and G. Wieszkalnys, 'Logics of interdisciplinarity',
Economy and Society, v. 37, n. 1, 2008 (February).

all the best,

Georgina Born.

Eric Rothenbuhler [rothenbuhler at tamu.edu](mailto:rothenbuhler@tamu.edu)

Thu Oct 30 09:48:06 PDT 2008

Thanks All for these interesting ideas and the references--more for the
pile of things to read.

I have also been rethinking my ideas about the nature of
disciplines--maybe I should call them habits of thought more than ideas.

The classic models of a social science discipline like economics,
psychology, or sociology were founded in the era of nation states and it
is no accident that we tend to think of them with nationalistic
metaphors: territory, borders, control, identity, inter-relations, etc.

Maybe the newer "disciplines" like communication or media studies should
be thought of as founded on network models. Maybe their strength is in
their interconnection rather than their control of territory. Maybe
their centrality is located in their diffuseness--they are central
everywhere, rather than having their own unique center.

This is pretty raw thinking on my part--I look forward to reading the
articles Philipp and Georgina have recommended.

Cheers,

Eric

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

Thu Oct 30 14:03:34 PDT 2008

Hi Phillip,

I also like the transdisciplinary approach over inter, multi, and non. The
discussion is a bit reminiscent of those that take place in explicitly
interdisciplinary programs. I was in The School of Interdisciplinary
Studies at Miami University for four years and have attended numerous
conferences at Evergreen State, an institution set up to intentionally
overcome disciplinary narrowness through exploring all of the prefixes.
While parsing out the differences between these terms is an interesting
theoretical exercise, it strikes me that it rarely leads to revolutionary
or even evolutionary changes in institutional practice unless departments
and colleges are designed with that mission in mind.

This might be a moment when such a reorganization is possible and welcomed.
At least in the US, Comm programs are flush with money but terrified of the
future. Existential questions abound, such as "how will news media earn a

living in the Internet age?" An alarming and growing proportion of our graduates now go into corporate PR and advertising, at the expense of journalism itself. Students are asking the same existential questions we all do and steering away from some of the more ennobling media professions.

Anthropology has experienced its own ongoing crises, fighting for diminishing resources against disciplines with market and professional connections. Psychology, for example, seems not to be experiencing such a crisis. The insecurity over anything that articulates anthropology with ethnography of village life are one tip off. Such framing threatens to relegate us to the administrator's "past" file as they envision the new university. In addition to knowing that we are much more than imagined by administrators, we know that it is also a common perception that has some of those in charge seeing us as increasingly irrelevant in a world that is "globalizing." When limited good thinking takes hold, anthropology often seems to lose out to related departments with greater market clout and larger numbers of students.

I mention all this because it strikes me that a productive alliance is possible around media at the institutional level, synthesizing complementary resources and expertise across the current disciplines and overcoming the silly turf wars that several respondents have decried (which I did little to help with my sideswipe at Cultural Studies). From the arts to the sciences it is being recognized that the solo researcher model and single disciplinary perspective is outdated and that it takes a team of collaborators to study most issues effectively. While I doubt the new umbrella could ever be "Media Anthropology," because that would be a conversation stopper outside the discipline, the idea of reorganizing our efforts at the institutional level is excellent. I hope that we can create new institutional structures oriented around the concept of transdisciplinary media studies. Perhaps we could be more issue focused and less driven by disciplinary inertia. New institutes on the environment are a possible model. Media-centered institutes might show the same promise, as long as no discipline dominates to the exclusion of the others. This listserve, with its nicely loose definition of what constitutes media anthropology, is also a good model.

Mark

**Elizabeth Bird ebird@cas.usf.edu
Thu Oct 30 14:43:34 PDT 2008**

I am really enjoying the discussion of interdisciplinarity, but also wanted to bring up something else that Eric's paper suggested for me.

He and others have mentioned that while communication researchers have quite often found older anthropological ideas like myth, ritual, and narrative to be interesting ways to approach media, anthropologists of media generally have not, preferring mostly to do ethnographies of media production or reception. Personally, I have found myth to be an interesting way to look at media, but I don't think many other anthros have, with occasional exceptions (e.g. Lee Drummond's *American Dreamtime*). I do have some issues around the way some communication people have applied ideas of myth, but that's not really what I want to talk about here.

More broadly, I've been thinking about why communications and cultural studies people are very comfortable with studying media content (whether through the lens of myth/ritual or not), and making suggestions about how those texts relate to culture. Yet anthropologists seem to have avoided textual analysis like the plague. Some anthropologists used to study movies and other popular culture texts, but as Mark Peterson notes in his book, this rarely now happens. I have just finished putting together an edited book on the anthropology of news and journalism, and it includes almost no content analysis of news at all - the essays are great, but they almost all address production and reception, because that was all people submitted.

I am wondering why? I think it's something to do with the way ethnographic fieldwork has become almost the only acceptable form of "doing anthropology," - a point made very well in Gupta and Ferguson's book *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. An anecdote: A couple of years ago, I and a grad student submitted a paper to *Visual Anthropology Review*, which was an interpretive analysis of a popular film, applying Keyan Tomaselli's idea of ethnography as "expeditionary discourse," and attempting to show how the film played out a similar ethnographic discourse. We weren't trying to suggest that this would necessarily be the way all audiences saw it, but we thought it was an anthropologically-informed reading. We received possibly the most scathing rejection I have ever had. The reviewer rejected it on the grounds that "this is not anthropology," and "anthropologists do not do textual analysis except of ethnographic film." Having stated upfront that we were well aware of the literature on audience reception, but were actually doing something else, we were told that we were "remarkably uninformed," and should go away and read some anthropological audience literature (including some by me!).

My point here is not to complain about being rejected, which we all are many times. Quite possibly the paper was simply bad (although it was subsequently published unchanged in a book on *American Visual Cultures*, edited by communication people, not anthropologists). But I found it very interesting that it was rejected not so much on the basis of quality, but because this is not what anthropologists do. We must apparently always engage with people, and not with their texts.

There are all sorts of reasons why textual analysis is problematic without working with actual audiences. But I would argue that anthropologists, like media scholars in other disciplines, could profitably address media texts as cultural documents. A few have - Mark Peterson wrote a really interesting article on press coverage of the Danish Mohammed cartoon controversy. And when talking about news in particular, I think that if we are to understand what meanings people make of it, we surely need to understand the dominant meanings encoded in the texts. Our methods probably wouldn't be the kind of quantitative word counts that some in mass comm do, but they could emulate the very interesting interpretive work that many cultural communication scholars do. Some linguistic anthropologists are doing it, but their work doesn't seem to intersect much with those who identify as media anthropologists.

This may seem a little far from Eric's paper, but I think it's relevant. People coming out of communication who are talking about "media

anthropology" often include interpretive work on texts under that title, and they often invoke anthropological theories that some in anthropology dismiss as outdated (which is why perhaps they don't do it.) One topic for this exciting trans/interdisciplinary media studies space could be where textual analysis fits into "real" anthropology.

This was meant to be a quick comment - sorry I let it ramble on!

Liz

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

Thu Oct 30 17:31:36 PDT 2008

I think that the anthropological study of media, taken as a body of work, falls into two categories both of which are cross-disciplinary in different ways.

The first consists of what most of us refer to as media anthropology. It is work like that of Bird, Pedelty, Hannerz, Postill and many others which places some aspect of human engagement with media at the center, describing and theorizing about it. It applies anthropological methods and theories to some topic of media. This work is interdisciplinary in that it draws insights from other disciplines but develops them in the light of the author's ethnographic understanding, as Pedelty does from media sociology.

The second consists of anthropologists studying some topic who happen to encounter media use among the community they are studying and must write about it in theoretically informed ways. These anthropologists necessarily turn to broad literatures on media from sociology, cultural studies and elsewhere to assist them in making sense on what's happening in their empirical data. An early example is Gail Landsman's book on the Ganienkah Mohawk uprisings in New York in the 1970s and 1980s. The book is about Ganienkah social, economic and political organization and their construction of identities through a sometimes violent encounter with the state. This necessarily included a chapter on how they engaged, used and were used by the New York news media, to understand which she turned to the sociology of news (Tuchman, Schudson, Gitlin, etc)

As for Eric's question about imagining disciplines, I've always liked Wittgenstein's model of the spotlight, in which there is a bright core which then diminishes as it radiates outward and blends with other lights, which have their own cores. In this model, there are cores and peripheries but no clear borders or boundaries.

BUT-and this is the point Mark Pedelty and I keep making-disciplinary gatekeeping, the effort to draw circles around the fuzzy perimeters of the spotlights is usually not driven by an intellectual fervor but by real and perceived institutional concerns and constraints. The anecdote I offered earlier gives an example of two programs, anthropology and media studies struggling over the teaching of a course. The battle is about identity in the institution. It unfortunately involves not only trying to delimit others but in the process limiting ones self. In this case, anthropology has strongly positioned itself at my institution in the last eight years as being about the international, the transnational and the global, while media studies is struggling to create an identity for itself within the institution. The

ultimate arbiters, as Mark points out, are a bureaucratic bean counters who need to see each program as fitting the vision of university they are selling to prospective students and (in the case of state-funded schools) legislators.

Mark Allen Peterson

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

Thu Oct 30 18:45:13 PDT 2008

This is a really interesting point.

I have a confession: I love content analysis. Not only the really good, methodologically sound sort in which text selection and analysis are driven by clearly stated assumptions but even the methodologically junky stuff where the author just draws selectively from all over the place to make his or her point without attention to contradictory evidence. It's almost all interesting, especially when it is about a tv show or movie I watch or my kids watch. When i see an article about Buffy (my middle daughter's obsession) I download it and read it at home at bedtime for fun like a novel.

Historically speaking, textual analysis makes up the bulk of what the few anthropologists who engaged with media did in the early years (Powdermaker and Carpenter being important exceptions--and Powdermaker says in her biography that she always intended to do content analysis and that Paul Fejos, director of the Viking Fund (now Wenner-Gren) who funded the project, directed her to ethnography of film production)

I think it is telling that many of us who began doing anthropology of media in the 1980s, as it was beginning to take off in anthropology, have ended up in specifically interdisciplinary career trajectories. Mark Pedelty was in interdisciplinary studies at Miami, now Mass Comm at Minnesota. Elizabeth, I think you have degrees in both Anthro and Comm, right? I know you flit back and forth between disciplinary journals. I'm in an interdisciplinary international studies program and although anthropology vets my research for promotion and tenure, they've been very generous about not asking awkward P&T questions like why only two of my articles have appeared in core anthropology journals. Even though i stay close to anthropological linguistic forms of discourse analysis, i don't think i could have published the article Elizabeth refers to in a core anthro journal)

I believe that Elizabeth is right, that ethnography has become a touchstone by which anthropological gatekeepers vet what is "real" anthropology and what isn't. I think this move by anthropology is rooted in a shift caused by concerns over where the hermeneutic shift in anthropology instituted by Geertz was leading us. I think Geertz's caustic review of James Clifford's *Routes* in the *New York Review of Books* lays down some implied ground rules about what is, and what isn't acceptable hermeneutic practice in anthropology that have become used by the gatekeepers of our sacred lore (i.e. peer-reviewed journals)

In my book, I suggest that the work of anthropologist Elizabeth Traube is exemplary content analysis--perhaps the last gasp of this in mainstream anthropology. And it scared the crap out of many anthropologists who were disturbed by the idea of doing anthropological "readings" of media texts. But

cultural studies people loved Traube, and her Ferris Buehler article (first published in Cultural Anthropology) has been reprinted in at least one Cultural Studies reader. Lee Drummond subsequently very specifically linked content analysis to myth analysis in a fairly sophisticated way and was rewarded by being almost completely ignored.

(Some of the comm people who want to make use of anthropological accounts of myth could fruitfully read Drummond. And maybe this would bring him back into vogue. The core of his work is summarized in this quotation from his book "'we harbor, at the base of our consciousness, a compelling, fearful need to believe that our values and social institutions make sense, a need threatened by a vision of a world of stark contradictions and shifting, multiple realities.'" (1996:26) I also recommend his related work on "intersystems" published in the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute).

In a response to a critique of her work as failing to be ethnographic, Traube lays out a defense of content analysis and the production of multiple "readings" of texts from different subject positions. I wrote in my book that the idea of subject positions without any actual people in them makes many anthropologists very uncomfortable. The shift within the discipline has clearly been to ethnographically informed content analysis, in which we read the texts over the shoulders of our situated informants (i.e. Mankekar, Abu-Lughod).

But in pursuit of my own interdisciplinary agendas (influenced in part by my participation in Eric's interdisciplinary book) I have increasingly been coming back to the trope of myth, and it looms large in the introduction to a forthcoming co-edited book I am doing on the Muhammed cartoon controversy with a Swedish anthropologist, Peter Hervik.

If anyone is interested, I've attached the first nine pages of that introduction, which lays out my own efforts to justify the use of myth as a trope for analyzing news withing an anthropological paradigm.

All the best,

Mark Allen Peterson

Eric Rothenbuhler [rothenbuhler at tamu.edu](mailto:rothenbuhler@tamu.edu)

Sat Nov 1 05:11:59 PDT 2008

Liz and Mark have done an excellent job of identifying and illustrating something I was only vaguely pointing at--and they make several smart observations and reading and thinking suggestions along the way. I've already forwarded this exchange to a couple students who aren't on the list--and I'm rethinking some of my own argument. Maybe the text/people distinction really is at the center of the inter-disciplinary tension I've been feeling. If so, then it is so easy to negotiate I hardly understand what the trouble was about. Many of the "older" anthropologists I still like to read and teach, like Levi-Strauss and Mary Douglas (and Eliade too, though he's not exactly an anthropologist) are folks I find useful because they give me ideas how to think about texts. There, that was an easy way to make the point. Thank you Liz.

And while Mark is confessing that he loves content analysis, even the junky kind he says, I'll confess that I like the really junky kind: straight counts. Have you seen those bubble graphs that the New York Times has produced based on word counts from the McCain/Obama debates? Yes, McCain really does say "my friends" more often than almost anything else in his vocabulary. I think that stuff is cool and fun--and sometimes "how many?" really is a worthwhile research question.

Cheers,

Eric

John Postill [jpostill at usa.net](mailto:jpostill@usa.net)
Sat Nov 1 05:58:25 PDT 2008

A number of seminar participants have called for interdisciplinary and/or transdisciplinary ways of studying media. Richard Wilk has gone as far as proposing a post-disciplinary world of networked knowledges (for he regards disciplines, like nation-states, to be the products of 19th century European forms of territorialism).

Whilst fully supportive of projects and networks - such as this one - that bring together different disciplines, I feel I have to put in a good word for the 'normal science' work that goes on within disciplines and their progeny: subdisciplines. This is no doubt partly a reflection of my own thorough disciplining in social anthropology (BA, MA, PhD) and specialisation in the anthropology of media. But it's also a realisation of the advantages of mid-range specialisation, i.e. of specialising in a disciplinary domain of knowledge such as the anthropology of media that is neither too large nor too small, and then finding interesting questions to pursue in order to make a contribution to that domain/subdiscipline.

It is precisely because of the inevitable proliferation of academic specialisms that we need scholars who can work across these specialist domains. But we cannot do without the specialists.

John

John Postill [jpostill at usa.net](mailto:jpostill@usa.net)
Sat Nov 1 07:05:47 PDT 2008

----- Original Message -----

Received: Sat, 01 Nov 2008 01:10:40 PM GMT

From: Jay Ruby <[ethnographic at embargmail.com](mailto:ethnographic@embargmail.com)>

To: "John Postill" <[jpostill at usa.net](mailto:jpostill@usa.net)>

Subject: Re: [Mediantthro] In praise of specialisation

To John and the list,

I completely agree with John. For 30+ years I have been fighting for the recognition of visual anthropology as a legitimate sub-field of socio-cultural anthropology. At the same time I have urged U.S. visual anthropologists to work with and get to know visual soc, the media and cultural studies folk, etc. There is the nasty spector of

tenure that we should consider. At some point of sort of very traditional group will decide on our academic future. Being multi-disciplinary will probably not help much.

Jay Ruby

**Thorolf Lipp [lipp at arcadia-film.de](mailto:lipp@arcadia-film.de)
*Sat Nov 1 07:37:50 PDT 2008***

Hi folks,

in my mind, the problem really goes much further. We cannot do without the specialists, o.k. We can likewise not do without interdisciplinarity, fine. Most media anthropologists do both anyway, I suppose.

There is a third dimension that's overall probably more important: I am talking about cross-institutional approaches that try to free themselves from the inner logic of the academic (or any) system in order focus on what needs to be focused on.

Best,
Thorolf

**John Postill [J.Postill at shu.ac.uk](mailto:J.Postill@shu.ac.uk)
*Sun Nov 2 07:37:48 PST 2008***

Eric Rothenbuhler wrote:

"What do other folks think are the most fruitful areas for collaboration between scholars based in anthropology and those based in media studies?"

I agree with Eric that one potentially very fruitful area is media production, and in fact, as announced recently on this list there's a media anthropology network workshop coming up soon in Barcelona on "Media practices and cultural producers"

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

Other areas that strike me as potentially rewarding include (I'm sure other people will have their own priorities):

1. Understanding media from a practice-theoretical perspective. As mentioned before through this list, a Berghahn volume co-edited by Birgit Brauechler and myself is forthcoming on this topic, but this is only a first step. I'm sure there will be future opportunities for further collaborations here, perhaps even collaborative research (while bearing in mind the limitations of this theoretical approach, e.g. not terribly good, it seems to me, on international crises and their media aspects)

2. The whole question of how to conceptualise the technological dimensions of media (the subject of a recent media anthro session in Ljubljana, see website), particularly given the unexamined tendency towards sociocultural determinism that we find in many media ethnographic accounts.

3. Media and sexual practices; we had not long ago an e-seminar on Bart Barendregt's research into mobile phone pornography in Indonesia, but it seems to me that we still know very little - anthropologically speaking - about what people do sexually with media contents and artefacts. For some reason, we media anthropologists have so far been less interested in sex than the rest of the world.

John

Craig Campbell [ccampbel at ualberta.ca](mailto:ccampbel@ualberta.ca)
Sun Nov 2 10:28:13 PST 2008

I'd like to say that I've been enjoying this discussion very much. I've just joined this list and will offer a short introduction in another email but would like to come out of the shadows to say the following:

With training in Anthropology, Sociology, and Visual Art I'm particularly interested in the disciplinary contact zones. One term that I've found particularly productive for thinking this kind of contact zone is Intermedia. Thus I agree heartily with Eric R. and John Postill that the contact zone of anthropology (or sociology) and media production is critical.

Since the late 1960s the term 'intermedia' has been circulating on the margins of Fine Arts (a few departments actually using it to label their sub-area or specialization). I like it because it defamiliarizes the singular 'Media' (dissociating it from its typical association with Mass corporate media). Talking of intermedia for me also rejects the primacy of media categories, encouraging intermedia cross-pollinations. Electronic media and inexpensive production systems has done more for the breakdown of media categories than anything else to date.

Asking what this contact zone means is crucial. Where interdisciplinarity often has proven to be more about cross-disciplinary pillaging (with some collateral effects of true interdisciplinarity). What I would hope to get out of the intermedia contact zone is a productive area of collaboration that is founded on disciplinary respect, rather than one that assumes the 'other' discipline is mishandling its concepts and needs to be relieved of a select few ideas of techniques.

So we then ask, what do anthropologists have to learn from the techniques, pedagogies, world views, positionalities, etc. of media production? Flipping the lens delivers the same imperative to media producers. From the position of anthropology I am more prone to see the deficiencies in the work of media producers: their lack of cultural literacy or commitment to careful engagement with cultural difference, for example. But with an intermedia imperative I'm also trying to read anthropology back through the lens of media production (which isn't any single discipline but which shares some core assumption and techniques among its practitioners). Rather than just

picking up a camera or drawing out a comic and calling that intermedia ethnography, I want to re-explore my assumptions through the disciplinary rubrics of media producers.

I'll give one example here: When training their 'initiates,' media producers (in Fine arts departments, anyway) typically make use of studios, where students share resources; where they work on individual projects in parallel to one another. This studio environment of parallel media production allows for powerful informal engagements and critiques. At various points the instructor will gather the students together for informal critiques. This is where all the students hang their work-in-progress (or project it, mount it, etc.) and generate a discussion about each work. The craft of writing in the humanities and social sciences in any university I have seen has fallen by the side. Notwithstanding greatly reduced class sizes (which already produces a far more impressive learning environment than the enormous lecture theatres of the humanities and social sciences) the Visual Arts studio can teach anthropologists and sociologists a great deal about learning and perfecting our craft. I have seen this in action in my own research studio at the University of Alberta (Intermedia Research Studio). There are a great many other examples (not only pedagogical) where true interdisciplinarity can enrich our practice.

My central point is that the intermedia approach defamiliarizes both media studies and visual ethnography and is a powerful way of labeling the conjuncture of anthropology and media production. I don't propose it as a subdiscipline but a practical idiom that can clear a space for the legitimization of the work. This, I think, has been the thrust of Jay Ruby and others who have advocated on behalf of visual anthropology over the years. We might also think of the excellent work done by Arndt Schneider and Chris Wright in *Contemporary Art and Anthropology*, not to mention other works already mentioned in this discussion.

The proof of the pudding is, of course, in the eating. Who is actually and fruitfully doing ethnographically informed media production, where each component is contingent on the others? And for someone like myself (I am at the start of my career): how do we generate disciplinary acknowledgement (valuation) of this work?

regards, Craig

Craig Campbell

Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson [sbh at hi.is](mailto:sbh@hi.is)
Mon Nov 3 04:45:25 PST 2008

Dear all,

Our ongoing e-seminar will end next Wednesday. So, there is still time to post brief questions or comments.

All the best, Sigurjon

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

Wed Nov 5 01:15:03 PST 2008

Dear all,

The e-seminar is now closed! I want to thank Eric Rothenbuhler and Ariel Heryanto for their participation in the seminar - and of course the many that posted their comments on to the list. A transcript of the seminar will be available on our web site within a few days.

The dates for our next e-seminar will be announced later today or tomorrow.

Then, we will discuss a paper by Dr. Ulrika Sjöberg and Dr. Ingegerd Rydin (both at Halmstad University) titled "Family talk about media portrayals of immigrants." Discussant will be Dr. Kira Kosnick (Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main).

Enclosed is the abstract of the paper and short bios about Sjöberg, Ingegerd and Kosnick.

ABSTRACT: Family talk about media portrayals of immigrants

While much media research has focused on how the media represent immigrants and ethnic minorities, this paper examines how media coverage of immigrants is perceived among migrant families in Sweden.

The analysis is based on results from the three-year project 'Media practices in the new country' (funded by the Swedish Research Council) and involves immigrant families (mainly with children in the ages 12-16) living in Sweden with origin from countries such as Greece, Kurdistan, Iran, Lebanon, Somalia, Syria, Turkey and Vietnam. The methodological approach is ethnographic with extended in-depths interviews and observations in the homes of the families (both adults and children) as well as to some extent visual methods, such as disposable cameras. The approach implies close readings of how media use (e.g. television, Internet, print media) is perceived and negotiated within the private sphere of the informants' homes. It also gives a unique insight into family discourse about these matters, since parents and children are interviewed, sometimes together.

A key concept for the project is citizenship, which traditionally, e.g. within jurisprudence and political science, has been tied to the issue of national identity. However, within sociology and social psychology citizenship is seen in a broader sense, which includes other kinds of identities, such as cultural, social and religious identity as well as informal and formal participation. By ideally providing an equal flow of information and promoting communication among people, media might be seen as a facilitator of a living democracy. However, in today's media saturated society with increased access to different media (e.g. minority, transnational, national and local media) claims are raised that democracy is under threat and that multicultural civil society tends to be fragmented, encouraging exclusion rather than inclusion between cultural groups. Do specific cultural readings encourage the formation of, for example, so called 'media ghettos' and/or 'multiple public sphericules'? If so, what are

the implications for identity processes and how citizenship and participation in society is perceived? Thus, the paper takes as its task to illuminate the complex relationship between different readings of certain media texts in order to attain knowledge about the role of media in the perception of the Swedish (Western) society in terms of cultural codes, language, values, norms, and traditions. The study shows that there is close interconnections between specific media readings and the perception of, for example, dominating discourses in society related to immigration. Several key issues are discussed among the informants in order to confirm cultural affiliation such as the search for the 'truth' and media objectivity, seeking alternative portrayals of reality from transnational media (e.g. Al-Jazeera). Other topics raised are cultural imperialism, non-ethical Western journalism in terms of lifestyle, values and violence, but also the need of belonging to a national mediated public sphere. The paper shows that, despite predominant critical voices, it is not simply about minority and diasporic media displacing local and national media but rather that the informants prefer a mixed-up media usage.

Bio

Ingegerd Rydin is Professor in Media and Communication Studies at Halmstad University, Sweden. Her research interests cover issues related to young audiences (media reception), young people's media production, portrayal of children and young people in the media and media's role in the lives of migrant children. She is currently engaged as project leader in the project 'Media practices in the new country' and a project on 'Young people as media consumers in ten years'. Rydin is co-editor of the book 'Mediated crossroads. Identity, youth culture and ethnicity. Theoretical and methodological challenges' (2008, Nordicom).

Ulrika Sjöberg is Senior Lecturer at Media and Communication Studies, Halmstad University, Sweden. Her main research interests involve young people's media use, media and ethnicity and media literacy among pupils and teachers. She is currently working with the projects 'Media practices in the new country', 'Mediated childhoods in multicultural families in Greece', 'Media literacy from an educational perspective,' and 'internet appropriation among college students: a global and contextual approach'. Her most recent publication (co-editor) is 'Mediated Crossroads. Identity, youth culture and ethnicity. Theoretical and methodological challenges' (2008, Nordicom).

Discussant: Kira Kosnick - Professor of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology at Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main. With a background in cultural anthropology and sociology, her work focuses on minority media practices, Turkish migration to Europe and urban spaces. Her latest book is *Migrant Media: Turkish Broadcasting and Multicultural Politics in Berlin* (2007). In this study she tries to elaborate a new approach to "migrant media" in relation to the larger cultural and political spaces through which immigrant life is imagined and created. She is currently beginning an ERC-funded project on ethnic club scenes in European metropolitan centres.

Sigurjón B Hafsteinsson [sbh at hi.is](mailto:sbh@hi.is)
Wed Nov 5 15:30:39 PST 2008

Dear all,

Our next e-seminar is scheduled between January 6 and January 20th 2009.

Ulrika Sjöberg and Ingegerd Rydin (both Halmstad University) will present their working paper titled "Family talk about media portrayals of immigrants." Discussant is Kira Kosnick (Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main).