

**Media Anthropology Network
European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA)
E-Seminar Series**

**Joint e-seminar with
EASA's Anthropology and Mobility Network (ANTHROMOB)**

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>

**E-Seminar 61
Media and Mobility**

**Opening Statements by
Rebecca Carlson, Tokyo Medical and Dental University
Jamie Coates, Sophia University
Jordan Kraemer, New York University
Noel B. Salazar, University of Leuven**

24th of October – 14th of November 2017

Dear All,

Our 61st E-Seminar "Media and Mobility" is now open!

The E-seminar has been organised as a result of a collaboration between the Media Anthropology Network's and the EASA's Anthropology and Mobility Network.

The aim of the seminar is to share and extend the theoretical and methodological discussions that emerged during the "Anthropologies of Media and Mobility" Workshop that took place in Cologne on the 14th-16th of September, 2017 <https://mediamobility.wordpress.com/>.

This e-seminar follows an unusual structure in comparison to our usual seminars. Rather than having a full paper to comment on and a discussant, we have 4 opening statements by Rebecca Carlson (Tokyo Medical and Dental University), Jamie Coates (Sophia University), Jordan Kraemer (New York University) and Noel B. Salazar (Co-convenor EASA Anthropology and Mobility Network, University of Leuven) that reflect upon the topic of media and mobility in general and the workshop in Cologne in particular.

Please find these statements in a single PDF document at <http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars> and feel free to post questions, ideas and reflections directly to the list as the discussion is now open to all.

Looking forward to the next two weeks.

Veronica

Dear All,

First, I would like to thank Rebecca Carlson, Jamie Coates, Jordan Kraemer and Noel Salazar for providing us with opening statements about this e-seminar's topic: 'media and mobility'. While Rebecca and Noel reflect upon the Cologne workshop in September 2017, which was entitled 'anthropologies of media and mobilities', Jamie discusses intersections of media and mobility studies and Jordan, on the other hand, introduces us to her ethnographic research on young people's use of mobile phones in Berlin. Each statement poses and opens important questions about the relationship of media and mobility and their (anthropological/ethnographic) studies. And this e-seminar might be a further step in an attempt to discuss at least some of these.

Rebecca notes that quite a few presenters at the Cologne workshop stated that there is 'no mobility without fixity'. A statement that reminds me of the close connection between continuity and change and the related difficulties of separating the two (e.g. Borofsky, 1994; Moore, 1994). Reading Rebecca's report, I was wondering about the difference between 'movement' and 'mobility'; the conceptual necessity of differentiating and how this is being

accomplished in (ethnographic) practice.

In his statement, Jamie discusses some of these questions by proposing his 'media/mobility manifesto'. He argues that 'movements came to bear meanings in the form of mobility' and that meaning has gained 'the ability to move in new ways through media'. 'Mobility', he states further, is not 'movement'. A perspective that I, being not too familiar with mobility research, find highly interesting. He also illustrates the close connection between mobility and media (studies) through their relevance to (anthropological) studies of globalization and modernity and thus socio-cultural change. However, Jamie writes that he is 'increasingly unsure whether we should, or how we might, distinguish between mobility, movement, media, and mediation as processes' or if we should understand mobility in terms of mediation or mediation as mobility. He concludes that 'a focus on mediation encourages us to remain attentive to processes of signification in an inclusive, processual, and pluralistic sense.' I absolutely agree, but would like to remind us, that there has been some debates - also in media anthropology - about the conceptual value of 'mediation', particularly in relation and distinction to alternative concepts such as 'mediatization' that emphasize in particular the aspect of change (e.g. Couldry, 2008).

Jordan asks in her text what is mobile about mobile phones 'and what kinds of movement do they index?' Even though I very much like this intro text, it would be great to learn a bit more about the results of Jordan's ethnographic study. Maybe you can give us a few more details about the 'mobile qualities' of mobile/smart phones and how you gathered your results. I am particularly interested in how you managed to integrate the materiality of the phone as communication device into your analysis and how you dealt with 'the media-tech-related movement' or mobility of people during fieldwork.

In his statement, Noel writes that at the Cologne workshop he noticed, on the one hand, a lack of definitions of the 'key concepts' of 'media' and 'mobility'. On the other hand, he experienced 'different understandings of what "media" and "mobility", both as objects of study and analytical lenses, refer to'. But 'finding a common framework' is necessary to initiate more 'intense collaborations' between media and mobility studies (in anthropology). A helpful endeavour to get a better understanding of, for instance, current mobile media practices. Noel understands 'mobility' as 'an assemblage of movement, experience and social imaginaries', and media as 'data storage materials as well as communication channels?'. Here, I would be particularly interested what you think of Jamie's approach to privilege mediation over media.

Thank you and all the best,
Philipp

References

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Couldry, N. (2008). Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of digital storytelling. *New Media & Society* 10(3), 373-391.

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Jamie Coates jamie.coates@gmail.com

28 Oct 2017

Dear all, I'd like to firstly thank Philipp for kickstarting our conversation,

However, perhaps more importantly I'd like to thank Medianthro for their willingness to collaborate and host a small discussion after our recent workshop. As someone who was in the unfortunate position of helping with the organization but not being able to attend in the end, it's great to be included as part of the follow up.

I thought I might re-phrase or shorten the core question in my small reflection, partly as a response to Philipp, Noel, Rachel, and Jordan. My wee 'manifesto' was intended to think through the question of whether the object of our analysis (to paraphrase Noel) is a process or a thing. I then played with the notion that if we are focusing more on processes then perhaps it would look something like what I described.

In relation to Noel's reflection, I agree wholeheartedly that some core methodological orientations (particularly fieldwork) ensure that there is a lot shared between the supposedly different fields of mobility and media research. I also agree that we need a stronger shared conceptual framework. My conviction is that processual thinking holds the most fruitful solutions to some of the conceptual issues we face. Noel's two definitions of mobility and media are good working definitions of mobility and media as 'things'. If we were to run with these definitions then I would perhaps suggest adding a different conceptual vocabulary of processes that might help us think about how media and mobility (as things) relate to each other. Eriksen's recent adaptation of various key ideas from Bateson etc. in *Overheating*, for example, provides some interesting processual keywords (double bind, schizmogogenesis etc.). Clarifying whether media and mobility are things we study, or processes we use for thinking, might be a useful step in the direction of what I think Noel is looking for.

Rachel summarises and refines the discussion of 'fixity' that several scholars (such as in David Morley's talk) have been working on since the conception of the term (im)mobility. I agree wholeheartedly that we need to attend to the experience of being stuck, and the power relations that shape motility, however, whenever I think of the examples used to explore fixity I often note how much movement and labour circulates the efforts to keep certain people in place. From border patrols to the circulation of certain ideas, resources, and technologies, it seems as though being stuck or having diminished motility is as much a product of other powerful mobilities. In my own work on Chinese migrants in Japan, for instance, many of my interlocutors note a feeling of being 'stuck' while also constantly on the move, something I have related to Lauren Berlant's idea of cruel optimism and the 'impasse' in a forthcoming paper (2018). So perhaps feeling stuck can be a part of movement as much as its counterpoint.

Jordan's chapter sounds like a fantastic start. In particular, I was very interested to hear about the term 'Handy'. In mainland standard modern Chinese (*putonghua*) the term for a mobile phone is reminiscent of 'handy'. *Shouji* (hand-device) is the standard short term for a mobile

phone, although it doesn't seem to have the same connotations of wordplay and convenience as in German. In Japanese, *keitai* is the common term for a mobile phone, and also refers to an object that is carried in the hand. With these similarities in mind, I wonder whether Jordan would interpret these terminologies as symptomatic of mobile telephony as 'encod(ing) western understandings of personhood and subjectivity as discrete and indivisible' (10) in Japan and/or China? Larissa Hjorth's work on *keitai* decoration and the complex intertextual production of self suggests that mobile technologies can be simultaneously individuating and collectivizing. Are similar processes underway in Germany?

I'd like to thank Philipp for the attention he paid to the slightly jumbled reflection I submitted and particularly his reminder about mediatization. I was hesitant to raise this term as I am somewhat uncomfortable with the way it has been used to declare epochal shifts. I admit I haven't read enough of the mediatization literature to do it justice, but my impression has often been that it is more focused on the proliferation and ubiquity of media (as things) in our lives, with subsequent social consequences, rather than a shift in the process of mediation. Consequently, I'd interpret mediation and mediatization as complementary ideas, although I'd be happy to hear if I have somehow misunderstood the common use of these two ideas

Thanks again
Jamie

John Postill john.postill@rmit.edu.au

29 Oct 2017

Hi everyone

Sorry I couldn't be at the event, but it's great to be able to join the conversation via email.

I think the etymological approach to the comparative study of mobile devices may be a red herring, at least ethnographically. Surely it is more important to find out what people at different times and locations do with, and make, of various devices? Whether they call it a handy, a cell phone or something else, will be of marginal significance in most cases.

On the other hand, when it comes to theorising our findings, words like handy, handphone, keitai, etc, etymology can help us reflect critically on our own metaphors and tacit assumptions about the seemingly obvious key features of mobile techs, incl. their mobility. Many studies have shown, for instance, that in places where they've never had a landline, 'mobile' phones can be remain fixed to a living area - they are handy, but not very mobile. Here we'd have to distinguish between the potential and actual uses of a given media artefact (perhaps as a way around the tech affordances rabbit hole?).

Like Philipp, I'd be interested to hear more about the theoretical implications of Jordan's research in late 2000s Berlin. Likewise, it'd be good to have some more empirical examples for the more theoretical pieces.

One issue that could be interesting to explore and help ground the discussion is how people's mobile phone routines often change when they travel or move to another country. I imagine there's already an emergent

research literature on this?

Thanks for a terrific initiative

John

Jamie Coates jamie.coates@gmail.com

30 Oct 2017

Hi all

What I was trying to suggest with my comment about the similar meanings and etymology for mobile phones is that sometimes the terms we use aren't all that significant. Or at least, they might not be as unique as they seem at first glance when we compare them more broadly (because despite cell and handy seeming different, other places seem to use much more proximate terms). I'd really like to hear more about why Jordan states that the handy 'encodes' a certain kind of western subjectivity, and how this relates to the question of whether or not the handy moves.

In terms of examples for my own theoretical reflections, here is a bit more context. I have mostly conducted research with young Chinese migrants in Tokyo who live in an area that has attracted some attention because of a few proposals to have the area renamed Tokyo Chinatown. The people I work with in this area are in constant communication with wide networks afforded through various digital technologies, but they also engage in a variety of local scale mediations and circulations of various things, significations and people. What might mobility and media look like in this dense, highly mediatized urban setting among migrants who move around all day but also interact with each other at fairly local scales? Even the smallest social interactions are rife with processes of mediation, mobility, and communication. For example, it is common practice among Chinese owners of businesses in the local district I worked to send a gift to new enterprises. If the owner of the new enterprise is already within one's social media networks then the following scenario would typically take place: multiple mediated conversations online about the new business would lead to established business-owners sending one of their staff or friends to go over to the new business to personally deliver a gift. In this context, a lot of processes are taking place, and I cannot see any point in only thinking from the perspective of mobility or media. Who or what counts as media here? And how are these various mobilities related to one another? The embodied mobility of personally delivering the item is intended to carry a message, and that message is mediated on behalf of the established business-owner. In this sense, is the gift and the person delivering it not a process of mediation much like the digital technologies that deliver messages too? The fact that these practices occur among people who are also defined by their movement across borders (ie. migrants), and who are engaging more widespread politics of community formation (communication?), adds another level of complexity to the issue.

One solution would simply be to define/analyse things in line with the emic criteria of the people we work with. But part of the reason why I'm interested in playing with some of these ideas is because when I asked my interlocutors about 'media' and/or 'mobility' they often said that these two categories/domains don't make that much sense to them (in interviews and

conversations it made more sense to ask about specific things like TV, iPhones, and specific social media platforms). Even though these terms exist in Chinese, in daily life they were unlikely to use them, and so they seemed like they were more relevant to researchers as analytical tools than they were as emic categories of daily activity among those I worked with. That also suggested to me that we actually define the ‘things’ in our field (including forms of media and mobility) is much more context specific than we might assume

Rebecca Carlson carlson@temple.edu

30 Oct 2017

Hello all,

I think an interesting question is here, around the notion of defining our terms. Since I teach global health and medical anthropology now, I spend a lot of time thinking about and reading (even proof reading!) public health research. Sometimes, what those researchers do seems infinitely easier than the work of anthropology. Measure some blood pressure, plug the results into a linear regression analysis with some other points like sociodemographic data and maybe BMI and poof, significant relationships are proved! In this type of work, terms like BMI or sociodemographic are sometimes defined, although often not very clearly, but they are very, ever rarely questioned. Indeed why would they need to be? After all, they are scientific notions and the statistics prove they are valid, right?

In our case, while we represent the results of our work in language, and so precision in word choice and definition is key, inherent in that process is a continual questioning of meaning: what do we mean when we write mobility, and what do our subjects mean when they speak (or as Jamie points out, do not speak) such words. This is precisely because our unit of analysis is socially constructed ‘webs of meaning’ (apologies for the throw-back quote). For me, the strength in this is the continual emphasis on not taking the ‘taken-for-granted’ for granted. It is critical to that process then that we simultaneously build definitions (culture) only to tear them down collectively later (see the culture debate). This is exactly why ethnographies situate themselves in the terms and ideas they use, (one device of which is unfortunately lineages of string citations). But sometimes, I think our words and their definitions can get away from us and we can get lost in meta-analysis and endlessly remaking terms. In those times, it is helpful for me personally to reorient myself in the basic foundations of the anthropological endeavor. This can help me see media as a thing and a process, a tool which both extends social logics and remakes them, and see mobility as both actual and virtual, and physical and imagined from many scales and on a continuum with, and not an opposite of, immobility.

I’m sure these thoughts are relatively obvious and juvenile so please excuse me for making them anyway. I guess I feel that if we settled on one definition, then we’d lose both the productive power of questioning and cover over the complexities we observe around us. At the same time, I still find it really valuable to ask these questions, while I try to accept that they can’t be, and maybe shouldn’t be, settled. For me, the workshop was a great opportunity to see the different approaches and definitions, and be reminded that there are perspectives I cannot see because at the very least my position in the world as an American academic and with research located in only a few life-worlds blinds me to them. I was reminded of this during our drone discussion when I realized that what might seem to be a domesticated

friendly object to me, can be only a militarized object of terror to someone else. It reminded me again to look past everyday articulations of use to the ‘webs.’

Thank you to Philip for organizing this discussion and to the other contributors as well for their thoughtful comments. It’s hard to contribute to an email discussion when we don’t have time to check that all our citations and reasonings are in order, (it certainly keeps me from responding), but I hope we can continue to have a useful, if slightly imprecise from my end, discussion anyway.

Take care,
Rebecca

Noel B. Salazar nbsalazar@gmail.com

30 Oct 2017

Dear all,

First of all, thanks for those who have participated so far in this interesting exchange of ideas. Philipp wanted to know what I thought about Jamie’s approach to privilege mediation over media. If I understand Jamie correctly, he isn’t advocating to privilege processes over ‘products’ but rather stressing the fact that we haven’t paid enough attention to the former in both studies of media and mobility. I entirely agree with this. However, I’d see this also in the sense understood in ‘processual archaeology’, namely that the main aim of our studies of media and mobility should be to answer questions about humans and human society.

Mobility is almost by definition a process, involving both temporal and spatial dimensions. Of course, one can choose to neglect the entirety of the mobility process and focus instead on one element (a ‘product’ of mobility). Most migration scholars, for instance, study what happens to migrants after the actual migratory movement (e.g. how migrants integrate in the host society). I have a hard time drawing parallels when it comes to media, because that’s not really my field of study (but I’m sure others here will have good ideas!).

I’m not sure whether ‘mediation’ is a useful concept here (but, again, I’m not familiar with any literature on this concept in the context of media studies). In general, mediation refers not to a process, but to an intervention in a process. The broker, for example, is a classic figure in anthropology, particularly in studies of political relationships (and the existing literature distinguishes between various types of mediation). I see many types of mediation at work in media practices, but need some help to identify the media process(es).

These are just some ideas indicating the conceptual issues I face when thinking through some of the thought-provoking suggestions made by Jamie and others.

Looking forward to receiving more input on this,

Noel

Dear all,

Thank you all for the thought-provoking opening statements and comments made so far. And thank you to Veronica and Philipp for hosting this discussion. There are so many things already on the table that it's hard to be brief, so I will just add some thoughts to the issue of 'being stuck':

Like Rebecca, I have also been fascinated with thinking through the issue of immobility and being stuck as addressed in David Morley's keynote, and was reminded of how Nichola Khan used the term 'stuckedness' in her article on 'Immobility', in which she refers to Ghassan Hage:

Studies of immobility are not exclusively associated with transnational migration. In relation to desires for upward social and economic mobility, Hage (2009: 98) proposes the conditions of permanent crisis and existential trauma that many people inhabit under neo-liberal economics and contemporary capitalism have produced an intensification and normalization of a sense of 'stuckedness'. Whilst 'existential mobility' describes the imaginary sense one is 'going somewhere', 'imagined existential stuckedness' is the feeling life is going nowhere. One can be upwardly socially mobile, 'moving,' yet if one feels one is not moving or accumulating goods and capital as fast as others, 'mobility envy' may ensue. The heroic ability to 'stick it out,' Hage argues, produces a noble assertion of one's 'freedom as a human.' This overrides the de-humanization implied by a situation of 'stuckedness,' and a pathological scenario in which the more one invests in waiting, the harder it is to stop. (Khan 2016: 100)

Apart from the different meaning of mobility here, which points at social progress and status, I find very interesting to think about how being stuck does not necessarily describe a powerless, passive mode, but may also evoke a sense of determination over one's time, a sort of freedom to not have to move. If we think of the German term *Muße*, for example, it is a sort of vacancy or leisure time that is often filled with the same activities as waiting, but has an active and almost luxurious connotation, because it also means you can afford to not move. Waiting, in contrast is often connoted with passiveness, powerlessness and a low social status (as some chapters draw out in Hage's 2009 volume on 'Waiting').

On the other hand, I had to think of my own research with touring musicians, where one of my interlocutors Penny, a bass player, singer and guitarist with several musical projects, used the term 'stuck' by referring to 'having to travel' and not being able to choose when to stop and rest. As a reaction to this feeling, she then rented a house in order to not feel 'stuck outside', as she termed it, and to grant herself the freedom to be in one/ her own place.

Then again, if we think of refugees for example here in Germany, apart from their obvious displacement, they are often forced to change locations many times within Germany due to how the asylum process is (mal-?)organized. Here, one might say they are stuck in movement while aspiring to stay in one place, while in the between-times they are often stuck waiting for all kinds of bureaucratic processes when they want to make a move (i.e. towards a legal status). I do not mean to brush over this issue so easily (and am certainly not an expert on it), but would just like to use this as an example to remind us to pay attention also to the various

meanings of metaphors we use for immobility, as ‘stuck’ may in some cases refer to being mobile just as much as to being immobile. I guess ‘stuck’ is relational to the general situation, and therefore it describes rather a lack of change than mobility or immobility.

Reading the discussion here, and especially John’s comment about the ‘actual’ mobility of mobile tech devices, I had to think of one discussion we had at the workshop in Cologne about battery life, and how the need to charge one’s phone often pushes one into a period of forced immobility (we discussed this on the example of Marina-Nerina Boursinou’s paper who has done fieldwork with forced migrants in Greece who use online maps for their routes, but need to stop at times to charge their phones). Access to electricity as well as money to buy credit, as Heather Horst pointed at in her keynote, should not be taken-for-granted factors when we speak about mobile phone technologies and uses, as for example a lack of credit means that many functions of one’s mobile device can only be used when connected to wifi, meaning at times to be ‘stuck’ in one place in order to continue to move (we all know this from traveling in pre-roaming times or non-roaming territories when we have to stop somewhere to load a map, for example).

Best wishes
Anna Lisa

References

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31 Oct 2017

Dear all,

Thanks again for engaging with my intentionally provocative discussion of definitions and etc. Rebecca is right to remind us that we don’t want to fix our terminology, and that it’s more important (as John suggests) that we pay more attention to what people do. With that in mind however, I think it’s useful to remember that the folks we work with often define their terms and that it is fun and useful to trace the contours of these language games while also thinking of the potential theoretical consequences of these shifts in terminology.

Part of the reason why I’m playing with differentiating between things and processes comes from similar discussions to those mentioned by Anna and Rebecca in relation to being stuck etc. In Chinese a common term for the migrant life is ‘the floating life’ where floating is seen as both a state of hope and anguish, caught up in flows of opportunity and occasionally stuck with nowhere to go. This state is reminiscent of the desire for ‘existential mobility’ (the trope of floating actually holds its roots in a range of Buddhist/Taoist metaphors related to existential impermanence). I became interested in distinguishing between mobility as a thing and a process because of the way recent discourses of mobility in the Sinophone world contribute to this existential impermanence and immobility. As Julie Chu notes, mobility has

become a qualisign of the modern Chinese subject, and so a failure to move is often portrayed as a failure on a more existential level. One of the things I've noted among the Chinese migrants in Japan, but also within wider Sinophone media analysis, is the tendency to posit various forms of mobility as objects of desire. Study overseas, migration, and tourism, become 'things' in a discursive/mediated/symbolic form, yet the 'cluster of promises' that make up these 'things' are also assembled in such a way that they are impossible. Much like the 'American Dream' that is impossible but nonetheless spurs everyday life in the US in a variety of problematic ways, in the Sinophone world 'mobility' is a rhetorical object that acts as a form of cruel optimism for many.

I get the sense that Penny's feeling of being stuck while having to travel resonates with my interlocutors' experiences, albeit in a context where the dreams of touring and the dreams of making a living out of performing could also be assembled in potentially 'cruel' ways.

Running out of batteries, and other issues with the materiality of media technologies, is a really fun and fruitful topic of discussion. But it also links to why I started to think about mediation (or some other term, I'm getting the sense that it is simply too loaded a term for what I am trying to get at, maybe communication is better). In my own fieldwork, running out of batteries, or the internet dropping out, was often the reason for resorting to other forms of communication (including just sending a person to convey a message). This suggested to me that a range of human and non-human actors (ie. things) could be deployed for a similar purpose/process. One other example in Japan was visitors' difficulties in getting a local phone contract. This often meant that they had to jump between different wifi hotspots, creating distinct patterns of movement across Ikebukuro. There wasn't much free wifi in Ikebukuro at the time, and so people would cluster and move in response to the available spaces. This then became a way Chinese business owners would attract tourists to their restaurants and shops.

In response to Noel's comment that mediation is often an intervention rather than a process. The way I had initially defined it wasn't really in line with the conventional use of mediation, but I think it's clear that I'll need to find a different word to convey what I'm getting at as its clear mediation is simply too loaded a term.

Thanks again
Jamie

Rebecca Carlson carlson@temple.edu

31 Oct 2017

So why is it then that "mediation" as a theoretical concept is so loaded? Perhaps, we could answer this by looking at who is variously laying claim to it. It seems to be part of carving out areas or topics of expertise, in the field of (digital) technology studies for example, rather than a limitation of the term itself. Personally I have never really engaged with the turn to mediation in media studies because to me, anthropology is simply the study of mediation. Maybe you might disagree with me? I don't see anything that isn't being mediated all the time, in one way or another. Our social systems intervene on our understanding of the world just as our tools do, and just as we in turn intervene on them.

I was rather drawn instead to what William Mazzarella called ‘the politics of immediation’ (2006) because ultimately I am fascinated by how modern forms of knowledge-making (from national-identity to pesky little things like scientific ‘facts’ and bio-medical ideas about health) powerfully mediate our ideas and experiences precisely because they appear, or pretend, to be NOT-mediating. And as we know from Latour and Woolgar’s study of the scientific lab (1979)--and other research of course--that a lot of intensive work across many actors/things (actants if you prefer) goes into erasing ambiguity, naturalizing or disappearing these discourses, to have them fade into the background--also a hallmark of bureaucracy and modern forms of computing. This returns to what was pointed out at the workshop, which is how can we attend to what is precluded. For me, there emerges a lingering question about how our methods can uncover or track immediation when the subjects/objects of our study are engaged in continual erasure. Consider the recent revelation that the alt-right media champion Milo Yiannopoulos and others fueled the GamerGate controversy by encouraging others to pretend to be feminists so that they could get close to, and then public reveal the personal data of, women gamers and journalists who were targeted. This is a hallmark of historic racist fervor-whipping, adapted to contemporary vulnerabilities of identity theft and online-turned-offline harassment such as swatting. (https://www.buzzfeed.com/josephbernstein/heres-how-breitbart-and-milo-smuggled-white-nationalism?utm_term=.pfnbqgzx#om2MW5040) All this reminds us of the very active, conscious and hegemonic masking of the co-opting of online modalities (ways of being and communicating) by powerful elites and other neoliberal capitalist logics.

In my own fieldwork, which has many overlaps with what Jamie and Anna discuss, American fans of Japanese popular culture who move to Japan are driven by their fascination with Japanese commodified "culture," as Jamie says, as objects of desire. It is from media items such as manga/comics and anime--along with their licensing, localization and advertising which mark them as being from Japan--that these fans first learn about discourses of Japaneseness and grow a desire to "move" or transform culturally. While their interests then drive them to migrate, they do so having internalized the idea that they are not- (and can never be) Japanese. Fans then are simultaneously moving geographically, while becoming stuck socially, as once in Japan they are in many ways, conspicuously Western, marginalized and excluded from mainstream society both legally and socially. (Ironically, one fan told me recently that it was only after she moved with her Japanese husband to Indonesia that she felt included since she could easily enter the Japanese-living-abroad community as one of them.)

I'm not sure if this contributes to the discussion at all, or merely pushes it back to my own interests, but I've enjoyed reading others thoughts so far, so thank you,
Rebecca

Scott MacLeod sgkmacleod@worlduniversityandschool.org

31 Oct 2017

Dear John, Rebecca, Phillipp, Noel and All,

What's your language focus here?

All the best,

Scott

Jamie Coates jamie.coates@gmail.com

1 Nov 2017

Dear all,

Rebecca, thanks for the excellent discussion! I totally agree that anthropology, in many ways, has always been about mediation. The definition I gave for mediation was intended to capture this somehow, but as you show the term itself is too connected to a range of other debates. I really enjoyed your discussion of immediation too. Hadn't read it, but I like the way you've adapted it to a wider interrogation of anthro (and media in Japan)

Scott, I was wondering if you might elaborate on what you mean by 'language focus'?

Thanks

Jamie

Scott MacLeod sgkmacleod@worlduniversityandschool.org

1 Nov 2017

Hi Jamie, John, Rebecca, Philipp, Noel and All,

By 'language focus'? It seems to me that with the advent and development of smartphone computers that the mediation of anthropological research as process will be extended significantly with translators such as Google Translate etc, as well as by mobile groups learning host countries' languages, for example. The conversation that develops in ethnographic fieldwork participant observation processes and in terms of "Who can speak for whom" (a paper I wrote in 2002 - <https://web.archive.org/web/20050311101726/http://scottmacleod.com:80/2002May20Hacki ngSpeak.htm>) will grow significantly in these regards too. I think "media and mobility" ethnographers in all ~200 countries' official languages (and re World University and School's planned online universities in all ~200 countries official languages - https://wiki.worlduniversityandschool.org/wiki/Nation_States - which are both wiki, like Wikipedia in 358 languages, and MIT OCW-centric in its 7 languages - including its anthropology departments' courses), and indeed in all 7,099 living languages, which WUaS plans to grow wiki schools in for open teaching and learning (and Wikimedia in August announced a 7,000 language focus in looking toward 2030), will be able to help the mobile find their own voices through media in new ways. And media ethnographers can help grow this conversation.

Thanks,
Scott

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1 Nov 2017

Thanks Scott

Interesting question. I think that some of the issues we've discussed in relation to charging your phone etc. and immediation would reveal similar issues. I could imagine a future where new translation technologies might afford new mediations for the mobile, but that at the same time, whenever those technologies break down, mistranslate or don't operate as intended in some other way, they will reveal a set of vulnerabilities that suggest translation tech is not the panacea some have suggested recently. For instance, for anthros, what is the likelihood that reliance on translation tech will encourage people to not learn the languages of the places and people with whom they reside or study? Will it make anthropologists lazy linguists? Translation tech seems to be changing the face of tourist experiences in China at the moment for example (from anecdotes from friends etc.) but these are fairly simple linguistic encounters. What might happen when we start trying to communicate more complex arguments in these mediated forms?

At the same time, I am eager to see an increase in multi-lingual digital worlds, so several of the links you provide look hopeful

Scott MacLeod sgkmacleod@worlduniversityandschool.org

1 Nov 2017

Thanks for the feedback!

Scott

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1 Nov 2017

Dear All,

Thank you very much for this e-seminar, which has been very stimulating for me. I am following it with great interest and I appreciate all the work behind it. Also, many congratulations on what looks like a great event in Cologne.

I have been shy to comment as I feel like I may not be well versed in the mobility studies literature that the Cologne workshop is built upon. I am thinking, however, along the same lines with Rebecca about anthropology being simply the study of mediation regardless of the emergent theories around the concept of mediation. As an all-encompassing category in this sense, mediation does not seem to be a productive analytical tool. Yet considering mediation as interchangeable with communication, as Jaime suggested in an earlier comment, and communication as a critical constituent of social life, I would think that the talk about media/mobility is a significant, if not the primary, locus of analysis in ethnographic studies of media/mobility. Situated discourse around media would be something especially to analyze rather than something that we just do not want to miss out to complement the etic perspective. My work on Kurdish media and the production of discourses around Kurdish films (2013, 2014) is probably limiting me here and I apologize for it. I find it crucial, though, to analyze how agents talk about media and what such discourse does to the movement of media texts, for instance. I find performance studies literature within linguistic

anthropology very beneficial, though a bit outdated, in such analysis, especially of the ways in which agents entextualize (rendering media extractable from its immediate context), decontextualize, and recontextualize media (Bauman and Briggs 1990). This goes along with Jamie's provocative distinction between media as thing and media as process. Considering media as always a process, I was intrigued during my fieldwork by how my informants were constantly trying to make media processes into media things in order to talk about them and in doing so accomplishing many social ends which constitute critical windows on culture, politics, and history.

Here I may be stuck with the conceptual challenge the opening statements undertake so productively and I am sorry if I am recycling the discussion or pushing it to my interests. But to finish, I feel like the focus on discourse around the processes of media would be valuable in scrutinizing the intersections between media and mobility.

Once again, thank you very much for this terrific conversation. I truly appreciate it.

All the best from Istanbul,

Suncem

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1 Nov 2017

Thank you all for a thought-provoking discussion on media and mobility, and for extending the workshop beyond its physical venue in Cologne.

1. Enabling movement and 'seeing' movement

Rebecca Carlson's opening comments offer an exciting set of questions. Referring to an 'inconsequential graph', she suggests: 'Itself a part of the power geometry which engenders both moving and seeing movement, the graph participates in the media spectacle of diverting attention away from the drone as weaponized object and onto, in very neoliberal fashion, the civic responsibility of the individual who wields it recreationally.'

The argument that media engender both moving and seeing movement is especially instructive. Not limited to the drone illustration by any means, the relation between enabling movement and seeing the movement has a broader conceptual purchase. I find this analytic useful for my work on digital media debate cultures and political participation. At a discursive level, I wonder how tweets engender movement (of ideas, opinions, information, abuse) and enables seeing this movement through trending metrics, popularity scores and network graphs. I find this analytic particularly helpful in understanding the velocity of social media messaging, and the experience of ‘feeling’ this momentum for online users.

This brings a different set of questions to the framework of ‘media and mobility’ and the attendant forms of agility, motility and preparedness that characterize online debating habits. In this sense, mobility need not always be crossing physical boundaries but a more encompassing sense of shifting positions, ideologies and indeed, places and borders. This suggests that the movement and the ability to ‘see’ the movement embeds meaning in ways that media and mobility are intrinsically entwined. It opens up at least two important aspects of media: gamification and performance. Both these come with a variety of experiences depending on the context: fun (as we see in online abuse cultures, Udupa 2017 Gaali cultures, *New Media and Society*), ontological security (as with the moving refugees using mobile phones to ‘see’ for themselves the landscape into which they are moving and ‘see’ that there are others too moving with them), as well as a crippling sense of being seen (again, with refugees being marked out in social media as smart phone equipped ‘privileged’ people). Of the many ways to conceptualize the relation between media and mobility, I find the analytic of ‘moving’ and ‘seeing the movement’ very helpful since it can open up the performative and gamified contexts of digital media cultures. Jamie Coates insightfully analyses: ‘All of these assemblages of meaning, deterritorialized and reterritorialized across the globe, suggest that, just as movements came to bear meanings in the form of mobility, so too has meaning gained the ability to move in new ways through media.’ One of the key elements of this meaning making of movements is the ability to narrativize, represent and ‘see’ movement.

2. Mediation and mediatization:

Noel’s distinction between mobility as ‘an assemblage of movement, experience and social imaginaries’, and media as ‘data storage materials as well as communication channels’ would benefit from Jamie’s provocative questions on mediation. Here, it is useful to emphasize that mediation signals the processes of mediatization which is different from an all-encompassing ‘mediation’ as ‘epitomizing processual ontology’. Philipp Budka rightly draws attention to Couldry’s distinction between mediation and mediatization. In my work, I refer to mediatization to emphasize the growing prominence of media resources for the non-media spheres (media ‘meta capital’ - Couldry) and the tensions of media production and consumption conceptualized as a field (Bourdieu). ‘Mediation, as a social phenomenon, may or may not include deliberate strategizing or an institutionalized field of interventions’ (Udupa, 2012, 822). Emphasizing the institutionalized field of practices brings the important aspect of reterritorialization processes at work (whether by the state, vigilante user groups or commercial media). As Rebecca asks: ‘If these electronic and migratory circuits project themselves as deterritorialized through aggressive effacement of their ongoing reterritorialization (of course, for Deleuze and Guattari these are the same)--at work in algorithms, increased surveillance and other older, more familiar, forms of boundary

maintenance--how can we see, let alone interrogate (diminished) capacities for movement and meaning making?'

3. Mobile media sociality

We look forward to reading Jordan's book on mobile phone use among transnational Europeans, a glimpse of which is available in his comments. I was intrigued by the ethnographic vignettes, and his observation that, 'In this sense, I consider how mobile devices encode western understandings of personhood and subjectivity as discrete and indivisible.' He uses the German word 'handy' in a very interesting way, which reminded me of a scene I witnessed in India. At a packed public gathering, I saw a 'personal assistant' - one of the several aides surrounding a prominent figure - answering a call on the cell phone, as he dutifully walked behind a politician, the chief guest for the event. The assistant whispered into the phone and realized the call was important. He instantly rubbed the mobile phone on the soft fabric of his shirt, moving the gadget in one gentle linear stroke just above his belly before passing the phone to the politician. The entire act lasted just a few seconds, and the phone was now in the politician's hand. The soft rub was to eliminate bad breath - a sign of respect than a mere matter of odor and health.

In this illustration - a very common sight in my field - mobile phones are 'handled' by the subordinates (one more twist to 'hand'). This reveals a form of sociality that is very different from individual personhood that mobile phones seemingly embody. It would be helpful then to place the discussions on mobile phones within a broader, comparative discussion on mobile phone cultures (for eg: Doron and Jeffrey 2015 on the Indian cellular phones). I also wonder if Jordan could elaborate a little more on 'the media-tech-related movement'. What kind of movements are these? How are they middle class and why are they 'cosmopolitan aspirations'? Of course we will wait for the book, but more thoughts here would be fantastic.

Sahana Udupa

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2 Nov 2017

Dear All,

Thank you Jamie and Noel for your quick response on my comment/questions. And thanks to you all for this very interesting exchange of ideas and experiences.

Sahana asks Jordan to "elaborate a little more on 'the media-tech-related movement'". This lego-like word construction was actually mine, related to my question how Jordan managed to deal with the mobility of people and their communication devices during her fieldwork.

All the best,

Philipp

Dear all,

Thank you very much for this inspiring and fascinating discussion.

I could not be in Cologne, but I would like to contribute to the debate with a simple note and question on the concept of mobility. In my work on social media in southeast Turkey, I described the uses of social media as the movement from offline to online worlds, which have their own social life and are ruled by their own social norms. Especially people who face constraints on physical mobility caused by social norms or lack of resources etc., move to online spaces and live there several hours every day. Limited physical mobility leads to offline-online mobility. Also, social media and the internet have been extensively described as spaces or worlds that are inhabited by their users (see also Daniel Miller 2016; Tom Boellstorff 2015; XinYuan Wang 2016).

Digital (and media) anthropology can contribute to the study of mobility by broadening this concept to include the migration between offline and online spaces that does not involve physical movements. How can we reconceptualise the concept of mobility to take into account the proliferation of online/virtual spaces?

Thank you very much for the interesting debate,

Best,
Elisabetta Costa,

Dear all,

Thank you very much for a thought-provoking discussion.

I have been particularly fascinated by the discussion on terminology and the relation between mediation and mobility. The discussion makes me think of AbdouMaliq Simone's 'People as Infrastructure', which has been useful for me in thinking about media. Having mainly studied media in a military dictatorship, I have been led to pay particular attention to the movement that is fundamental to both media and mobility as I have seen the military doing its utmost to limit or control movement of people and things, whether through barb wire, huge stone walls, the blocking of websites, imprisonments and much, much, much more. With this focus comes a natural attention to what enables people and things to move.

Simone writes,

Infrastructure is commonly understood in physical terms, as reticulated systems of highways, pipes, wires, or cables. (...) By contrast, I wish to extend the notion of infrastructure directly to people's activities in the city. African cities are characterized by incessantly flexible, mobile, and provisional intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used. These intersections,

particularly in the last two decades, have depended on the ability of residents to engage complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices. These conjunctions become an infrastructure's platform providing for and reproducing life in the city.

This leads me to Jamie's valuable example about hand-delivered gifts among Chinese business owners in Tokyo and his question about 'who or what counts as media here?' To me, this question hits the head of the nail of the challenge of defining media. Inspired by Jamie's thinking of this question as empirical as well as analytical, I wonder if it might be useful to invoke Ingold's (2008, 2013) notion of correspondence as a way to understand media in relational terms?

Cheers,

Nina

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8 Nov 2017

Dear all,

I'd like to thank Nina for highlighting something that influenced my thinking, but I forgot to identify. I read Ingold's 'On human correspondences' (2017) not long before writing my entry and definitely see his concept as helpful in this discussion. In particular, I think the way I was thinking of mediation was reminiscent of what Ingold calls 'Interstitial differentiation' which is 'the way in which difference continually arises from within the midst of joining with, in the ongoing sympathy of going along together' (2017:13). In a state of correspondence with the world, our encounters mediate the world, and this state of mediation is what produces 'things'. Following this train of thought I envisioned movement and mediation as kindred processes. Reframed in this way, what constitutes media or mobility may also depend on the particular correspondence we hope to analyze. So we could potentially say something like, in the correspondences of gift giving, the gift and the person accompanying/gifting it act as media, whereas a smartphone that needs to be charged is no longer media, or at least becomes not-quite-media for a period of time.

I really enjoyed Elisabetta's question about moving between different digital and analogue spaces. My Chinese interlocutors treat the various social media and games they engage in as distinct spaces, and in particular, the differences between social media such as WeChat,

Facebook, and Line in the Sino-Japanese context mean that they operate as quite distinct spaces that relate to different socialities. In contrast some other forms of digital stuff (movies and television streaming for instance) do not have the same kinds of spatial qualities. What might be the differences between space and content in this context? I think it has something to do with the interactional and recombinant properties of certain kinds of digital stuff, which in turn make platforms (or should we just call them spaces?), but I would be curious to hear what others think. Nina's mention of correspondence also inspires me to think about another question in relation to Elisabetta. In as much as people might go on and offline (ie. engage in spatial ways), mobile technologies such as smartphones etc. also mean that we often occupy multiple spaces at the same time. The digital and the analogue are often in correspondence with each other. Right now, for example, I am both on a train and online and on several social media platforms

Thanks again for comments and ideas

jamie

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14 Nov 2017

Dear All,

The E-Seminar is now closed. We would like to thank all the members of the media and mobility team who took the time to write the position papers, and all of you who participated to the seminar. The transcripts will be available soon on our website.

all the best

Veronica