Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology

Edited by Nina Brown, Laura Tubelle de González, and Thomas McIlwraith

American Anthropological Association
2300 Clarendon Blvd, Suite 1301
Arlington, VA 22201

ISBN: 978-1-931303-55-2

http://www.perspectivesanthro.org

This book is a project of the Society for Anthropology in Community Colleges (SACC) http://sacc.americananthro.org/ and our parent organization, the American Anthropological Association (AAA). Please refer to the website for a complete table of contents and more information about the book.

Media Anthropology: Meaning, Embodiment, Infrastructure, and Activism

Bryce Peake, University of Maryland, Baltimore County
bpeake@umbc.edu
http://the-political-ear.com

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the history of media anthropology including initial resistance to media as a topic of anthropological study.
- Identify the major categories of media that are studied by anthropologists.
- Explain how anthropologists explore the meaning of media and media experiences including the ways meaning can be shared or contested by individuals and communities.
- Evaluate innovative approaches to media anthropology including autoethnography, photo voice, participatory photography, and fabrication.
- Assess the importance of mechanical and cultural infrastructure for the exchange of ideas.

Media is a word that can be used to describe a set of technologies that connect multiple people at one time to shared content. Media anthropologists study mass communication (broadcast radio and television) and digital media (Internet, streaming, and mobile telephony) with a particular interest in the ways in which media are designed or adapted for use by specific communities or cultural groups. Many research projects focus on **media practices**, the habits or behaviors of the people who produce media, the audiences who interact with media, and everyone in between.

Many classic anthropological concepts are incorporated in studies of media. For example, in her ethnography of Egyptian television soap operas, *Dramas of Nationhood* (2004), Lila Abu-Lughod sought to understand how watching these programs contributed to a shared sense of Egyptian cultural identity. In her ethnography, *Romance on the Global Stage* (2003), Nicole Constable examined how the Internet was transforming ideas about marriage and love by contributing to new kinds of "mail-order bride" economies in which men in the United States could communicate with women thousands of miles away. Utilizing classic ideas about ritual and community life pioneered by Margaret Mead and Bronislaw Malinowski, Tom Boellstorff's book *Coming of Age in Second Life* (2015) explored the ways that people were building realistic communities using virtual reality software like Second Life. Anthropological concepts of ritual, magic, taboo, and organic solidarity can be used effectively to examine the role that media plays in the lives of individuals and communities. Like other specializations in anthropology, studies of media are also organized around a commitment to long-term ethnographic fieldwork and cultural relativism.

This chapter introduces some of the theories, insights, and methodologies of media anthropology. At the heart of media anthropology is the assertion that **media practices**

are not universal. Whether we are discussing how television is viewed, how public relations coordinators negotiate corporate hierarchies, how Facebook statuses are created and circulated, or how cellular towers are built, the local cultural context plays an important role.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MEDIA ANTHROPOLOGY

Media anthropology has a surprisingly long history. In 1950, Hortense Powdermaker completed the first ethnographic and social scientific study of Hollywood studios. Her book, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*, preceded by approximately a decade the formation of the academic field of media studies and the theories of mass culture that are popular today. Powdermaker, a student of Franz Boas, was at the forefront of mass communication studies.

Powdermaker's groundbreaking study of media was immediately disavowed by others in the social sciences who believed that media was a topic unworthy of study. "Hollywood as 'Dream Factory' Just Nightmare to Femme Anthropologist," a book review in *Variety* read.[1] A review of the book in the *American Sociological Review* dismissively stated: "The notion, for some time suspect, that previous investigation of a primitive tribe uniquely qualifies a person to study a sophisticated society… is now revealed to be absurd. The anthropological method *here* [in sophisticated society] consists of little more than a series of inane analogies."[2] And so, with the continuation of time, anthropology left the study of mass media to scholars in sociology, political science, and psychology.

Figure 1: Anthropologists have only recently begun ethnographically studying journalists. Here, a Latina journalist working for a conservative, Catholic news outlet interviews a Donald Trump impersonator at a pro-Trump Rally. How, anthropologists might ask, do transnational identities and religion impact perceptions of American politics? Photo by Bryce Peake.

Mass media became a central part of life after World War I and influenced even those cultures that outsiders considered isolated or "primitive." Anthropologists of that era developed two different excuses for avoiding the study of media. The first was the need to distinguish cultural anthropology from journalism. As Elizabeth Bird (2009) wrote, ethnographers were often dismissed as overqualified journalists. Anthropologists who wanted to be seen as scientists (as sociologists often were) wanted to distance themselves as much as possible from mass media, a subject regarded as unserious. Cultural anthropologists also suspected that elitist book and journal editors might dismiss poor ethnographic work as "mere journalism" undeserving of "serious" scholarly consideration. Second, through the 1980s, the discipline of cultural anthropology wanted to distinguish itself from the rising fields of American and British cultural studies, disciplines that had a central interest in interpreting media as "texts" that could reveal cultural values. The cultural studies approach was generally not based on holistic ethnography, which cultural anthropologists continued to see as the defining feature of their profession.[3]

Today, media is a much more mainstream object of analysis in American cultural anthropology and media research also offers a significant career path for many young anthropologists. The company ReD, for example, hires anthropologists as consultants to help telecommunication and media companies innovate new technologies. These anthropologists use social theory and ethnographic

methods to help create media technologies for the future. Similarly, major technology companies like Intel and Microsoft employ a number of anthropologists in their artificial intelligence, social media, networked systems, and "Internet of Things" labs. These anthropologists combine corporate work with research, publishing some of the most cutting edge research in the fields of anthropology *and* technology in disciplines like Human Centered Computing. These professionals draw on debates in media anthropology to inform new developments in media technologies, communication and advertising strategies, and culturally-specific programming.

MEANINGFUL MEDIA

What do media anthropologists do to better understand media practices? Media anthropologists typically organize their studies of media in two ways. **First**, they choose a category or type of media: mobile telephones, radio, television, Internet, or others. The choice of media to be studied varies widely between anthropologists. Some media anthropologists work on a topic that crosses multiple technologies (such as radio, which is both broadcast via airwaves and streamed via the internet). Others concern themselves with a particular technology like mobile phones (which play music, allow for phone calls, and support gaming communities) and explore how that single technology contributes to different types of media practices. Some media anthropologists even study the people who study media (such as a study of people who work as advertising researchers, or studies of media scientists in different countries).

Figure 2: Media anthropologists frequently study the connection between politics and representation. Here, a Brexit information booth sponsored by the Gibraltarian government provides an Instagram frame to pose with. An anthropologist might ask: why do people think Instagram, and photos, are a medium for political participation? Photo by Bryce Peake.

Second, media anthropologists locate their ethnographic studies within a particular community. The way media anthropologists define "community" varies. Some may choose to study a "virtual" community like Tom Boellstorff did in his study of the virtual reality platform Second Life. Others may choose to study how a geographical community, such as a town or a region, uses, adapts, or transforms under the influence of a certain kind of media or technology. This is the approach taken by Lila Abu-Lughod and Nicole Constable in the examples mentioned above. Media anthropologists may also study the ways that mass communication and digital media connect diasporic communities, cultural communities dispersed from their original homelands.

Many media anthropology projects have focused on questions of meaning. **Meaning** refers to the ideas or values that accompany the exchange of information. Historically, some media scientists assumed that the meaning of information was unaffected by its transfer between communities or by the medium of its transfer. In other words, they believed that information would be interpreted the same way regardless of how it was communicated, or who was receiving it. Anthropologists have demonstrated that the reality is much more complex. In her book *Dramas of Nationhood*, Lila Abu-

Lughod asked questions about how nationally televised Egyptian soap operas were interpreted by those who watched them. Her research revealed several important insights. First, what soap opera directors and writers *intended* for a television show to mean was not necessarily what communities of watchers *interpreted* the show to mean. Simply put, producers cannot wholly control meaning or the value(s) that will be identified by a group of watchers. Second, different media give different messages or meanings. If the same message is broadcast on radio and television, the histories and cultural associations of these two technologies affects the meaning of the message being conveyed. Televised soap operas were interpreted quite differently, for instance, than the spoken poetry Abu-Lughod had studied in her previous research in Egypt. Third, Abu-Lughod demonstrated that **there is no universal way of consuming media; media consumption is bound to culture**. How Egyptian women participate in listening to or watching soap operas together, the practices of who sits where, of what can or cannot be eaten during a show, or of when a show might be aired, is all bound to the norms and values of the community. These three assertions about meaning are broadly applicable to all cultures and have set the agenda for most academic and professional research in media anthropology.

Unlike other academic fields that study media and meaning, **media anthropologists focus on how producers and audiences share or contest different types of meaning**. Ethnographies by media anthropologists typically focus on the ways producers of media assume, or seek to stimulate, a particular set of feelings in audiences, and how audiences can give feedback to media producers. In his ethnography of advertising agencies in Sri Lanka, for example, Steven Kemper (2001) observed that "when they are able, advertising agencies hire local staff" because they can "think like," and thus sell to, local audiences.[4] In the process, local advertising staff become the audiences they imagine others to be and their work helps to define a new class of consumers who purchase globalized media products. Media production and consumption are interconnected, one creating the conditions for the other.

Many media anthropology projects have focused on mass communication, the process of sending a message to many people in a way that allows the sender complete control over the content of a message—although, as described above, not control over the meaning. This is the definition of **mass communication:** one-to-many communication that privileges the sender and/or owner of the technology that transmits the media. Such a description is not without its challenges. As Francisco Osorio (2005) argues, talking drums like those used in New Guinea not only fit the definition of mass communication—a message sent from one to many that privileges the sender—the talking drums example also reveals the ways in which there is an implicit prioritization of electricity in media anthropology, an assumption that mass communication involves electrical technology. This is ethnocentric given the uneven distribution of electrical infrastructure. Dominic Boyer, an anthropologist who has written ethnographies about both energy infrastructures like electricity and German journalists writing international news, proposed that we move from media anthropology to an "anthropology of mediation."[5] Rather than use a universal definition of what counts as media to the anthropologist, Boyer's term **anthropology of mediation** focuses on the way images, speech, people, and things become socially significant or meaningful as they are communicated. The focus is shifted away from the technology itself, a controversial approach that some have criticized for transforming media anthropology into an "anthropology of everything."

As a result of this proposal for an anthropology of mediation, some anthropologists have started to study the physical human senses that make meaningful interactions with media possible. As Charles Hirschkind (2006) argues for example, the power of a cassette tape sermon in Egypt in "lies not simply in its capacity to disseminate ideas or instill religious ideologies but in its effect on the human

sensorium… the soundscape produced through the circulation of this medium animates and sustains a substrate of sensory knowledges and embodied aptitudes."[6] Hirschkind is suggesting that the feeling that Muslim listeners experience while listening to the sermons—rather than the precise meaning or value of the information— is more significant for understanding the appeal of these tapes. This is an example of research that focuses on mediation rather than simply assessing the meaning of the information transferred.

Sensory approaches to mediation present some methodological dilemmas. When media anthropologists study meaning ethnographically they can ask audiences what a particular example of media *means* or what a person finds *meaningful* about it. Anthropologists studying the sensory dimensions of mediation do not have direct access to how audiences *feel* media. We can ask how audiences feel, but describing a feeling involves translating physical sensation into language, a difficult process. To get around this problem, ethnographers of mediation have used innovative approaches to participant-observation that include techniques from psychoanalysis,[7] depth interviews that closely analyze how audiences create meaning rather than what meaning is,[8] and autoethnographic approaches in which the anthropologist explores his or her own personal experiences. These research techniques are used to reduce the gap between what people experience and what they can describe.[9]

Figure 3: Media anthropologists frequently ask how transnational media create a sense of community and change the ways people engage with their environments. At this Indian restaurant on the Mediterranean island of Gozo, restaurant owners have removed a street sign and mounted a TV in its place in order to show Italy playing in a European Union Football Association Cup Match. A family sits and eats. As Mario, the man on the end, explained "It was the only seat to watch the match left in the entire [village]… I would be the only person on the island that didn't [watch it] if I wasn't here." Photo by Bryce Peake.

Debates about the significance of media, mediation, meaning and the senses have occurred primarily in the context of studies of mass communication because mass communication technologies like broadcast radio, television, and cinema are the most globally available. While people in Europe and the United States might speak of the death of older "legacy" media like radio and VHS tapes, these mediums play crucial roles in the lives of peoples in other places. Lynn Stephen (2012), for example, describes how the takeover of a local radio station by a group of women protesters was crucial to their efforts to organize around human rights issues in Oaxaca, Mexico.[10] Brian Larkin (2008) has discussed the economic importance of pirated VHS tapes of recent films in Nigeria, a country in which gross domestic product cannot be easily calculated due to the size of various shadow economies.

While mass communication is a form of one-to-many communication typically broadcast on widely available channels, digital media is a much more personalized many-to-many communication that involves the use of digital signals. In her ethnography of LGBT youth in rural America, Mary Gray (2009) argued that the Internet's more closely controlled access points allowed queer youth to carve out online spaces for their emerging identities. The importance of these online spaces for

developing personal identity also meant that it was difficult to distinguish between "online" and "offline" personas. Gray took a meaning-focused approach to understand the ways in which rural LGBT youth create identities and feelings of belongingness in concealed online worlds. Jeffrey Juris (2008) has argued that the Internet interactions allowed anti-corporate, anti-globalization activists in Spain, Indonesia, and the United States to *feel* the threat represented by the Group of Eight summit (a meeting of eight of the largest world economies). These feelings generated a sense of solidarity that was not reducible to language. Both these projects demonstrate the relationship between meaning and feeling that is a part of mass communication.

If digital media has opened up a space for us to think critically about the transformation of mass media and people's relationships with it, so too has digital media opened up new career paths for anthropologists. Increasingly, media anthropologists are taking key positions in technology, advertising, public relations, and broadcasting industries. Dawn Nafus, an ethnographer who works and conducts research in open-source software communities, has led multiple user experience research projects at Intel Labs. Her time is divided between writing academic publications on the anthropology of emerging technologies and doing user testing for Intel's latest innovations in computing and wearable technology.[11]

WHAT MAKES MEDIA POSSIBLE?

Since the 1990s, anthropologists have successfully studied a range of mass communication and digital media, but it is only recently that anthropologists have started studying the technologies that make these forms of connection possible. Broadly speaking, infrastructures are the material technological networks that allow for the exchange of goods, ideas, waste, people, power and finance over space. When used to refer to media, infrastructure includes the pipes, concrete, wires, people, values, electricity, software protocols and other technologies that allow for the movement of information. Brian Larkin (2008), a media anthropologist working in Nigeria, noted that the geographical location of cinemas in the city of Kano was based on the colonial requirement that there be a 440 yard buffer zone between white and black populations. This requirement controlled the ways that electrical grids and transportation routes were developed. In this way, various entangled infrastructures are implicated in the forms of taboo, desire, and fantasy shared by members of a society in locations like the movie theater. Similarly, in his ethnography of Brazil's first telecommunication engineers, Gerald Lombardi (1999) describes how engineers "spoke in reverent tones about the selfless dedication of … fellow workers as they fought … to keep Brazil at the forefront of telephonic progress."[12] "Telephonic progress" via infrastructure was an ideal of the Brazilian state and its workers because it was considered "modern" and made Brazil competitive in the eyes of global spectators. It was not phones that made Brazilian engineers feel or describe themselves as modern, but the capacity for making telephony possible.

Figure 4: In Madrid, cables for internet, telephony, and television run alongside the train tracks. Historically, train routes have been principle to media infrastructure. How, media anthropologists ask, does media infrastructure change our understanding and relationship to travel? Photo by Bryce Peake.

There are two types of media infrastructure: mechanical infrastructure and cultural infrastructure. **Mechanical Infrastructure** includes the apparatuses that bring networks of technology into existence. **Cultural Infrastructure** refers to the values and beliefs of communities, states, and/or societies that make the imagining of a particular type of network possible. In the foreword to an ethnography on India and the rise of historical archives, Nicholas Dirks (2002) captures the sense of a cultural infrastructure perfectly when he describes how archives *function*, that is how the archive does ideological work, in producing *and* preserving ideas about Indian nationalism. It was the belief in nationalism that made the colonial archive possible as a container of various media—letters and notes, newspapers and telegraphs believed to define the Indian state.

Complicating the study of mechanical infrastructure is the fact that this infrastructure consists of the same technology it uses to run. Information systems, for instance are both made of and run by computers. Typically, an infrastructure is different from a technology. A road is the infrastructure for a car; a pipe is the infrastructure for oil. As Graham and Marvin (2001) argue about the computer, computing is made possible by the electricity that powers the computer, the system of telematics that allow computers to transmit and receive information, and software protocols that delimit a computer's uses. The electricity, the telematics, and the software protocols all rely on computing. What may distinguish the twenty-first century is its reliance on computing as the infrastructure of everything, from oil production to data storage, electricity management to the production of concrete.

For media anthropologists, the ways in which media and communication infrastructure organize everyday life are significant. Mechanical infrastructure affects not only the engineers and bureaucrats who execute and plan projects, but also the millions of people who rely on information exchanged through the infrastructure, drive vehicles through the infrastructure, and whose property rights are often usurped by the construction of infrastructure. At the same time, cultural infrastructure is also important. As Christian Sandvig (2012) describes in his ethnography of building indigenous Internet infrastructure on the Santa Ysabel Native American Reservation, anthropological studies of media and communication infrastructure must weave together considerations of both kinds of infrastructure in order to understand how these infrastructures are transformed by cultural values, technological standards, legal regulations, and scientific and engineering techniques. Some anthropologists work professionally designing media technologies or consulting with engineers, bureaucrats, and communities on the construction of media infrastructures. Cathy Baldwin, for example, is an anthropologist at the World Resources Institute Urban Development and Mobility Project. She is known for her research on civil engineering and

Figure 5: Media anthropologists frequently use unique methods to better understand how technology users make sense of their use habits. Here, anthropologists with Intel Labs use a pile and sort approach, asking the user to write down meaningful types of data on sticky notes they will then organize. Photo by Bryce Peake.

community participation. Working with communities to maximize various forms of access, Baldwin's career is based on the belief that physical and natural environments should strengthen a community's capacity to stay resilient when afflicted by human-created and natural disasters—particularly climate change.

Practicing Anthropologist: Cathy Baldwin

Cathy Baldwin is an interdisciplinary anthropologist, writer, musician, and consultant who has done anthropological research on city and urban infrastructure, environment, and health.

How did you bring your anthropological training into consultancy work?

My objective was always to be an applied researcher working in policy or think tanks, but I didn't think about how until I graduated. During my doctoral fieldwork, I gave regular feedback to a government minister (Member of Parliament in my fieldwork town) who was working on a program to promote an inclusive British identity. After graduating I did some applied research and a book chapter for a think tank at Oslo University on how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) used information and computing technologies (ICTs) to empower poor communities in developing countries.

What types of collaborators does an anthropologist studying infrastructure encounter?

When doing impact assessments in the infrastructure sector, you work with distressed community members worried about uncertain change, so it's crucial to have a sympathetic, diplomatic manner in order to talk effectively with them. You also need to be able to find ways of communicating social issues to engineers. This can be challenging as it is often unfamiliar territory and beyond their concerns. The most effective solution is to be able to present community concern as it might apply to them and their family members. For instance, "How would your mum feel if…." The policy world is full of people who like findings summarized in short bullet points in non-anthropological language. By the time you are ready with your material to do so, any theory used to underpin an argument that leads to a practical, implementable recommendation has been amalgamated into a point expressed in everyday language. It is still possible to use anthropological ideas at this stage, but they have to be grounded in practical action.

If you could choose one substantial contribution anthropologists can make to both the development and study of city infrastructure, what would it be?

Social anthropologists are well equipped to foresee, understand, and analyze how dynamic social change processes springing from the physical, biophysical or industrial landscape affect communities, and to study how people engage with technologies. These are important skills that can guide the design of projects or structures, and inform strategies adopted to manage the good and bad effects. While I see my colleagues mapping economic, environmental, or physical changes and processes, I can insert the social aspect.

What advice do you have for current anthropology students interested in working on infrastructure, and perhaps media and communications infrastructure, in the future?

Diversify your skill set as much as possible beyond just ethnographic methods as they are just one small option outside academia. Intern at the World Bank in one of its urban programs, or a large engineering consultancy, or an urban development think tank or policy organization. Media and communications infrastructure is a totally separate topic, but there are some urban firms that look at telecommunications infrastructure as well as standard city systems.

ICT4D, or information and communications technologies for development, is an interesting branch of international development where there are studies and NGOs working on practical projects with communities and anthropological input is valued. Also some of the ICT or technology companies such as Microsoft and Intel employ anthropologists to do consumer studies of how people use media and technologies. Genevieve Bell is the most famous employee of Intel, as their in-house corporate anthropologist.

With all infrastructure topics, anthropologists inevitably analyze how people interact with their structures, use infrastructure, what its social and cultural effects are, what values and assumptions inform its design etc. You need to be good at thinking in practical terms about the social and community consequences of hard structures. Understanding dynamic social change processes is also an asset, and how much change is caused by structural as opposed to subjective factors.

I would say that working as an anthropologist outside academia can be very lonely unless you are in a consulting firm that has a special focus on ethnographic methods. At both the civil engineering firm and think tank, I was the only one with my skillset and missed having others to learn directly from. That said, I have enjoyed becoming friendly with economists, civil and environmental engineers, environmental scientists, public health specialists and others. The field attracts nice people with the practical skills to implement things, which I prefer to academic anthropology.

Interview by Bryce Peake

PARTICIPATORY MEDIA AND MEDIA ACTIVISM IN ANTHROPOLOGY

The resurgence of media anthropology in the 1980s and 1990s was heralded by experiments, research, and debates in visual anthropology and ethnographic film surrounding **indigenous media,** media produced by and for indigenous communities often outside of the mainstream commercial market. Portable recording technologies, televisual production, and copy-making technologies made it possible for local communities to use media for cultural expression. People like Eric Michaels (1987), Faye Ginsburg (1991), and Terry Turner (Crocker 1991) used new technologies to help indigenous commu-

Figure 6: Maltese film makers make a short film celebrating the history of their village. Where indigenous media projects were initially crucial to introducing new technologies to cultural communities, today many communities have robust media infrastructure and channels. Media anthropologists frequently ask how these outlets influence and are influenced by global media industries. Photo by Bryce Peake.

nities produce media about their local cultures, and the various environmental, legislative, social, and cultural threats they faced. In the Kayapo Video Project, anthropologist Terence Turner understood his role as empowering local Kayapo leaders, who then compiled a comprehensive video archive of Kayapo culture, including ceremonies, oral history, ecological knowledge, and mythology, recounted by older members of the community whose knowledge would disappear with their death. As Turner wrote, "in addition to the uses of video self-documentation for education and as a repository of cultural knowledge against losses from death and acculturation, many Kayapo see video as a means of reaching out to non-Kayapo, presenting their culture and way of life in a form that others can understand, respect, and support. They see this as an essential part of their struggle to sustain and defend their society and environment."[13]

For anthropologists, projects like the Kayapo video sparked a debate: do Western inventions like the movie camera endanger or replace indigenous forms of storytelling, or do they empower new forms of cultural creativity and experimentation? How, anthropologists on one side of the debate argued, could technologies used to create the Disney film Fantasia, the American television show Dallas, and other Western televisual and cinematic stories possibly create the complex narrative forms traditionally used for storytelling in other cultures? On the other side of the debate, media anthropologists asked why one would assume that these technologies could not be used in new ways?

Figure 7: A student in the Off the Beaten Track fieldschool videotapes her edits of an audio ethnography she made with café workers at a local Gozitan cafe. Photo by Bryce Peake.

Faye Ginsburg is more identified with this debate than any other media anthropologist. Ginsburg described her position in the 1990s: "I am concerned less with the usual focus on the formal qualities of film as text and more with the cultural mediations that occur through film and video works."[14] For Ginsburg, indigenous media constitutes a means for "reproducing and transforming cultural identity among people who have experienced massive political, geographic, and economic disruption," and her work among Australian aboriginal and indigenous media-makers and documentary collaborators is focused on exactly those goals.[15] Ginsburg works with her research subjects on media projects, using media-making as a form of fieldwork. The result is an ethnography of the process of media creation and collaboration. Rather than asking how indigenous peoples interpret representations, Ginsburg's work examines how indigenous media producers *create* representations of their and other cultures. Her fieldwork addresses the debate about the limits of Western media technologies, while also pushing video-based media in new directions. Both Ginsburg and Turner's work can be seen as an argument *against* anthropologists who suggest that the use of new technologies to capture indigenous stories or concerns constitutes a form of imperialism. These anthropologists, Turner suggested, hold an outdated and static perception of indigenous groups. Rather than assuming that maintaining traditional modes of communication or storytelling is the only way to safeguard cultural traditions, he suggested that new media technologies can aid indigenous activists in transmitting cultural beliefs into the future.

In addition to documenting traditional cultural beliefs, media technologies can be absorbed into communities in ways that strengthen them. Zeinabu Davis' videowork on Yoruba trance rituals, for example, demonstrates the way in which the meaning of media is not set by the technologies used to create it. For the Yoruba ritual actors who were the subjects of the film, and who watched the film following its production, portable video technologies increased the *ache* (Yoruba for "power of realization") of both trance states and Yoruba communities. According to Yoruba spiritual ideas, images have a presence and can bringing things closer together. The actors believed the video would help grow and sustain the Yoruba community by bringing viewers closer to the spiritual dimensions of the ritual. Meaning, in other words, was not the only source of *meaningfulness* for Davis and her Yoruba partners.

Practicing Anthropologist: Kyle Jones

Kyle Jones is an anthropologist who completed his fieldwork with hip-hop artists in Peru and now works in human-centered design. Below, Kyle talks about applied anthropology and experimental methods:

Your ethnographic fieldwork on hip hop in Peru was supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropology, with some funds dedicated to the *applied* dimensions of your project. What is applied anthropology, and how did it figure into your project?

To me, applied anthropology is about taking the next step in the research process to translate what you've learned into other domains of practice, often toward some kind of solution to a problem someone faces. The Wenner-Gren Foundation's Osmundsen Initiative urges anthropologists to think about the broader social concerns and contributions of their research projects. For my project, I had learned that one of the most important activities for the young people I was working with was putting on various kinds of events, such as concerts or workshops. Despite their obvious passion for hip-hop and motivation to produce events, a lack of funds (among other factors) nearly always proved a significant barrier to their efforts. So what I did was try to support those efforts by facilitating the production of events among each of the three groups I was researching. Led by these different groups in different cities, these events took many different forms, from a series of relatively small concerts, workshops, and competitions spread out over two weeks to large all-day festivals in city plazas. Methodologically, these events dovetailed with the other collaborative and participant-driven methods I was using, and also led to new opportunities for exploring my research topics.

In your ethnographic work, you use some very different methods: photovoice and participatory photography. What are these, and how do you relate them to applied anthropology?

Photovoice is a method used across scholarly, policy, and many other types of research that puts cameras into people's hands so they can make their own representations of their lives and the activities related to your research questions. I similarly engaged in collaborative media production, which included such things as helping to film video clips, playing and recording music, taking promotional photos, promoting and producing events, and designing and circulating imagery. In these things, I played a supporting role, using what resources I had to facilitate the projects of the groups I was researching. These methods are participatory in the sense that they encourage collaborators to get involved

in the research process and help bring questions about power in research interactions to the fore. From an epistemological standpoint, these methods might be better termed participant-driven because of how they enable individuals to actively shape the direction of the research through the conscious creation of media (i.e. the research data itself). These methods were also particularly useful in doing research across locales because they can be done remotely via the internet; I could keep up conversations and data creation-collection even when I wasn't in the same city as my interlocutors, including when I was back home in the U.S.

While I did not view them as applied at first because of how they developed in the context of my graduate training, I now see them as a valuable part of my applied/practicing toolkit. Using the media that my collaborators themselves created is a powerful way to tell a story no matter the context of the work. They also entail that element of pushing your work into new domains of practice and problem-solving, while also prompting you to think reflexively. These kinds of methods help in recognizing the power and privileges that you bring as a researcher, but then also entail thinking through how you can translate the resources those things confer (expertise, time, technology, social connections, etc.) to support the efforts of your interlocutors on their own terms.

Research on indigenous media has primarily focused on cultural information and entertainment, but anthropologists have also explored the capacity of indigenous media to contribute to the production of localized science. The Nura Gili Indigenous Programs Unit at the University of New South Wales, for example, has designed software that allows indigenous and Aboriginal communities in Australia to share culture knowledge about astronomy.[16] For many of these groups, astronomic knowledge includes using the sun, moon, and stars for predictive purposes in navigation, time-keeping, seasonal calendars, and food practices. The stars in particular inform sacred law, customs and social structure, such as totem and kinship status and marriage. This knowledge was traditionally passed down through artistic and poetic practices that have since disappeared from some communities. The researchers in the Nura Gili Indigenous Programs Unit are harnessing the power of Microsoft's WorldWide telescope and Rich Interactive Narrative technology to help new generations "reclaim" forms of indigenous knowledge production from archival records and contemporary astronomical data in collaboration with community elders. For these scholars, the project is not simply one of "giving back" to the community; rather, they recognize that indigenous astronomical traditions are underpinned by a philosophy of knowledge that enables a different understanding of how humans relate to the natural world. This knowledge can produce new forms of intercultural understandings about climate and environmental change.

For many of these participatory media projects, the stakes are highly politicized. For those anthropologists working in Australia, Africa, and South America, legacies of colonial violence are still omnipresent. How can anthropologists use their research to not only understand culture, but to also mitigate some of the violent residue of inequality that came from colonialism? This is a key question that undergirds much of this participatory media research. Along with research that addresses that question comes a host of ethical considerations: how should media recordings be stored, who should control the intellectual property developed through media technologies, and who defines the project and how it will be developed. These may seem as though they are only practical questions, but for many media anthropologists engaged in participatory methods they are also research questions. They are also questions about power and fairness. By posing and answering these questions in their proj-

ects, media anthropologists doing participatory media methods have contributed to the development of new approaches to ethnography.

Digital media poses several additional ethical issues particularly in terms of protecting the anonymity of research subjects. In her work on the hackers and trolls turned political collective Anonymous, Gabriella Coleman (2014) wrote about the fact that much of her research depended on the anonymity of the hackers with whom she worked. How, she asked, should an anthropologist balance the hacker collective's need for anonymity while still confirming the validity or real identities of research subjects. In the process of researching groups like Anonymous, how should anthropologists try to balance the positive impact of the privacy activism this group engages in with the misogynist, anti-political antics of some members of the group? In other words, what does it mean for a researcher to "call out" Anonymous on its shortcomings while still protecting the true identities of its members? Similarly, in her ethnography of online dating in Australia, Susan Frohlick found herself needing to "dis-identify" daters who had written particularly offensive or poorly constructed dating profiles. So poorly built, or "uniquely horrible," were these profiles that to describe them as her interviewees did would violate the authors' right to anonymity.[17] Frohlick argued that exploring themes of masculinity and dating were more important to the research than personally identifying individuals with bad dating profiles.

Ethnographers working with digital and social media in particular, have devised multiple strategies for anonymizing participatory media subjects. Annette Markham (2012), for example, has developed the strategy of **fabrication**. Writing ethnographic work about child sexuality and queer bloggers, Markham urges ethnographers to take the essence of what is being said by people, to combine or rearrange it, and fabricate an ethnographic account that demonstrates the points most relevant for the research. Doing so, she argues, is not new; it is common practice to use direct quotes from research subjects in ethnography even though the quote may be off by a few words because it was heard while spinning pots or cooking or participating in some other activity. Such a practice poses many other ethical questions, and it is this ethical conundrum that Markham says is most important for thinking through methodological and ethical issues in media anthropology.[18] While this fabrication approach is by no means perfect, and is open to criticism, it demonstrates the necessity of ethical considerations when conducting methodological experimentation in media anthropology.

Figure 8: A Gozitan man shoots video and photos inside his village church to send to his parents who now live in Toronto. Media anthropologists are increasingly interested in how the mediation of spirituality is requiring new forms of theological thinking in religious communities. Photo by Bryce Peake.

CONCLUSION

Media anthropologists are concerned with many of the classic subjects of cultural anthropology: kinship, religion, mythology, identity, and the transmission of cultural meaning. How, for instance, does media allow people create and maintain kinship ties across large geographical distances? How are religious beliefs transformed as they are communicated through platforms like television and the Internet? How does media contribute to the development of a sense of self or group identities? On the Mediterranean island of

Gozo, for example, cellular phones have allowed distant relatives in North America to remain part of the community by participating in the yearly celebrations of village saints. Local Catholic priests in Greece have been forced to consider the spiritual force of religious icons as they are transformed from a statue honored in-person during religious ceremonies into mediated images people see from afar.[19] If the Virgin Mary appears to be weeping in a video, but the statue shows no effect, does it count as a miracle? Rather than answer this question, media anthropologists are interested in why people are concerned with it in the first place.

While class anthropological subjects remain important, media anthropologists are also engaging with new problems and debates while interacting with other academic disciplines such as Media and Communication Studies, Digital Sociology, and New Media Art. For instance, media anthropologists question the assumption that there is a universal media psychology that predicts the ways that people will interpret media. They have pointed out that the impact social media has on individuals is a function of culture, not just political economic conditions.[20] Media anthropologists have even engaged with questions about how basic human ideas about beauty or the passage of time translate into mediums like film and radio.[21]

While grappling with a range of old and new themes, one thing continues to separate media anthropologists from other media scholars: a commitment to long-term, participant-observation based fieldwork. Media anthropologists push the boundaries of what counts as ethnographic research and academic writing, but they continue to rely on deep relationships with people and holistic consideration of the full range of media practices found around the world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between interpreting and producing media? How have anthropologists studied these processes differently?
2. How do anthropologists study media consumption, media production, and infrastructure? What different types of approaches did the anthropologists in this chapter use? What sets media anthropologists apart from other types of media scholars?
3. Where do media anthropologists work? What types of topics do they focus on?

GLOSSARY

Cultural infrastructure: the values and beliefs of communities, states, and/or societies that make the imagining of a particular type of network possible

Fabrication: a technique for reporting on research data that involves mixing information provided by various people into a narrative account that demonstrates the point of focus for researchers.

Indigenous media: media produced by and for indigenous communities often outside of the commercial mainstream.

Mass communication: one-to-many communication that privileges the sender and/or owner of the technology that transmits the media

Media: a word that used to describe a set of technologies that connect multiple people at one time to shared content.

Media practices: the habits or behaviors of the people who produce media, the audiences who interact with media, and everyone in between.

Mechanical infrastructure is the apparatuses that bring networks of technology into existence.

Photovoice: a research method that puts cameras into people's hands so they can make their own representations of their lives and the activities.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bryce Peake is an assistant professor of Media & Communication Studies and an affiliate faculty member in Gender + Women's Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. His current research focuses on masculinity, media, and science in the post-World War II British Mediterranean spaces of Gibraltar and Gozo. He has also published multimodal projects on race in the United States, and been recognized by the American Anthropological Association for his ethnographic photography. Bryce currently runs the *Anthropology, Mediated* workshop on the island of Gozo, a 15 day ethnographic media fieldschool for undergraduates. Prior to arriving at UMBC, Bryce was a Julie & Rocky Dixon Fellow in Graduate Innovation, and worked with anthropologists at Intel Labs to develop a data-tracking application for users living with Tinnitus.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Europe*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Auslander, Mark. "Objects of Kinship." *Transition* 122 (2017): 206–216.

Bird, Elizabeth, ed. *The Anthropology of News and Journalism: Global Perspectives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

Boellstorff, Tom. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

Coleman, Gabriella. *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous*. (New York: Verso, 2014).

Constable, Nicole. *Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography, and "Mail Order" Marriages*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

Crocker, William H. "Review of The Kayapo; The Kayapo: Out of the Forest." *American Anthropologist* 93 no. 2 (1991): 514–516.

Dirks, Nicholas. "Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History." In *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures*. Edited by Brian Keith Axel, 47–65. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

Frohlick, Susan. "Fluid Exchanges: The Negotiation of Intimacy between Tourist Women and Local Men in a Transnational Town in Caribbean Costa Rica." *City & Society* 19 no. 1(2007): 139–168.

———"I'm More Sexy Here: Erotic Subjectivities of Female Tourists in the Sexual Paradise of the Costa Rican Caribbean." In *Gendered Mobilities*. Edited by Tanu Priya Uteng and Tim Cresswell, 199–223. (New York: Ashgate, 2008).

Gershon, Ilana. *The Breakup 2.0: Disconnecting over New Media*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

Ginsburg, Faye. "Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village?" *Cultural Anthropology* 6 no. 1 (1991): 92–112.

Graham, Steve, and Simon Marvin. *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition*. (New York: Routledge, 2001).

Gray, Mary L. *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*. (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

Hirschkind, Charles. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

Juris, Jeffrey S. "Performing Politics Image, Embodiment, and Affective Solidarity during Anti-Corporate Globalization Protests." *Ethnography* 9 no. 1(2008): 61–97.

Kemper, Steven. *Buying and Believing: Sri Lankan Advertising and Consumers in a Transnational World*. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2001).
Larkin, Brian. *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*. Duke University Press Books, 2008).
Lombardi, Gerald S. *Computer Networks, Social Networks and the Future of Brazil*. (New York University, Graduate School of Arts and Science, 1999).
Markham, Annette. "Fabrication as Ethical Practice." *Information, Communication & Society* 15 no. 3 (2012): 334–353.
Michaels, E. *For a Cultural Future: Francis Jupurrurla Makes TV at Yuendumu*. (Australia: Art and Culture Monographs, 1987).
Osorio, Francisco. "Proposal for Anthropology of Mass Media." In *Media Anthropology*. Edited by Eric Rothenbuhler and Mihai Coman, 36–45. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005.
Peake, Bryce. "Gozo, Mediated." Forthcoming in *OmerTaa: A Journal of Applied Anthropology* (2018): 670–675.
Pidduck, Julianne. "Queer Kinship and Ambivalence: Video Autoethnographies by Jean Carlomusto and Richard Fung." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15 no. 3 (2009): 441–468.
Powdermaker, Hortense. Hollywood: The Dream Factory. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1950).
Sandvig, Christian. "Connection at Ewiiaapaayp Mountain: Indigenous Internet Infrastructure." In *Race after the Internet*. Edited by Lisa Nakamura, 168–200. (New York: Routledge, 2012).
Stephen, Lynn. "Community and Indigenous Radio in Oaxaca: Testimony and Participatory Democracy." In *Radio Fields: Anthropology and Wireless Sound in the 21st Century*. Edited by Lucas Bessire (New York: NYU Press, 2012).
Turner, Terence. *The Kayapo Video Project: A Progress Report*. Unpublished Manuscript, 1990.
Wyatt, Geoffrey. "Dreamtime Astronomy: Development of a New Indigenous Program at Sydney Observatory." *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage* 17 no. 2 (2014): 195–204.

NOTES

1. The *Variety* headline is cited in Robert Bierstedt, "A Review of Hollywood-The Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers," *American Sociological Review* 17 (1951): 124-125.
2. Ibid.
3. Jon Mitchell, *Ambivalent Europeans: Ritual, Memory and the Public Sphere in Malta* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 5.
4. Steven Kemper, *Buying and Believing: Sri Lankan Advertising and Consumers in a Transnational World* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2001), 27.
5. Dominic Boyer, "From Media Anthropology to the Anthropology of Mediation," in the *SAGE Handbook of Social Anthropology*, ed. Jon Mitchell et al., 411–422 (London: Sage, 2012).
6. Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 2.
7. Iain Edgar, *A Guide to Imagework: Imagination-Based Research Methods* (London: Routledge, 2004).
8. Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*.
9. Julianne Pidduck, "Queer Kinship and Ambivalence: Video Autoethnographies by Jean Carlomusto and Richard Fung," GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies 15 no. 3 (2009): 441–468.
10. Lynn Stephen, "Community and Indigenous Radio in Oaxaca: Testimony and Participatory Democracy," in *Radio Fields: Anthropology and Wireless Sound in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lucas Bessire (New York: New York University Press, 2012).
11. See Dawn Nafus, "Patches Don"t Have Gender:' What Is Not Open in Open Source Software," *New Media & Society* 14 no. 4 (2012): 669–683; and Dawn Nafus and Jamie Sherman, "Big Data, Big Questions| This One Does Not Go Up To 11: The Quantified Self Movement as an Alternative Big Data Practice," *International Journal of Communicatio*n 8(2014): 11.
12. Gerald S. Lombardi, *Computer Networks, Social Networks and the Future of Brazil*. PhD dissertation, New York University, 1999), 21.
13. Terence Turner, The Kayapo Video Project: A Progress Report. Unpublished Manuscript (Turner 1990), 1.
14. Faye Ginsburg, "Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village?" *Cultural Anthropology* 6(1): 94.
15. Ibid.
16. Geoffrey Wyatt, "Dreamtime Astronomy: Development of a New Indigenous Program at Sydney Observatory," *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage* 17 no. 2 (2014): 195–204.

17. See Susan Frohlick, "Fluid Exchanges: The Negotiation of Intimacy between Tourist Women and Local Men in a Transnational Town in Caribbean Costa Rica." *City & Society* 19 no. 1(2007): 139–168 and Susan Frohlick "I'm More Sexy Here: Erotic Subjectivities of Female Toursits in the Sexual Paradise of the Costa Rican Caribbean," in *Gendered Mobilities*, ed. Tanu Priya Uteng and Tim Cresswell, 199–223 (New York: Ashgate, 2008).
18. Annette Markham, "Fabrication as Ethical Practice," *Information, Communication & Society* 15 no. 3 (2012): 334–353.
19. See the forthcoming 2018 article by Bryce Peake, "Gozo, Mediated" *Omertaa: A Journal of Applied Anthropology*: 670–675.
20. Ilana Gershon, *The Breakup 2.0: Disconnecting over New Media* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).
21. Mark Auslander, "Objects of Kinship," *Transition* 122 (2017): 206–216.