

From: jpostill at usa.net (John Postill, Sheffield Hallam)

Date: Thu, 28 Sep 2006 09:27:31 +0100

Subject: [Mediantthro] Media practices discussion starts today

Dear all

As previously announced, from today until Thursday 3 October at 9 pm GMT (in a week's time) we'll be having on this mailing list a follow-up discussion to our recent network workshop in Bristol on "Understanding Media Practices". You will find the abstracts at:

http://www.nomadit.co.uk/easa/easa06/easa06_panels.php?PanelID=27

And some of the full papers (in PDF) at:

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

I'd now like to invite our two discussants, Mark Hobart (SOAS) and Ursula Rao (Halle) to post their brief reflections on the workshop. Because Mark is caught up in registration at this very moment, he may not be able to post until Friday, so you're all welcome to enter this informal dialogue at any point after Ursula has posted her comments later today. This includes, of course, Bristol presenters as well as the majority of you on this list who were not at the workshop. To post, all you need to do is write directly to medianthro at easaonline.org, that is NOT to me.

Best wishes

John

From: jpostill at usa.net (John Postill, Sheffield Hallam)

Date: Thu, 28 Sep 2006 10:15:38 +0100

Subject: [Mediantthro] 5 October!

Correction: our media practices discussion will end on Thursday 5 October (not 3 October). Sorry about that!

John

From: rao at ethnologie.uni-halle.de (Ursula Rao, Halle)

Date: Thu, 28 Sep 2006 16:00:56 +0200

Subject: [Mediantthro] undestanding media practices as a network of connatinated practices

Dear All,

John asked me to communicate some of the comments I made during the workshop as discussant of the last session. It is difficult to recreate this situation on the internet. Thus, I want to move on and offer a thought that stuck on after the workshop. I will try to understand media practices as a network of concatenated practices.

Already during the first session it became clear that we were are not only taking about media practices, but about media related practices. I thought this difference was (as an analytical distinction only!!) extremely significant since looking at the way people use media / produce media leads us to investigate a range of contexts, that may stand in quite distinct relation to the actual media product.

Let me refere to Sanja Pulja's argument to explain what I mean. Sanja introduced us to the way people talk about the program "Who wants to be a millionaire?" Taking about the program seemed to constitute a common practice among many people in Italy as well as Serbia (?) (as well as maybe in most

other places of the world). Interestingly such discussions did not focus on the actual content of the program. Rather, the program became a trigger for reflecting on the social order and for producing a critique of this order.

This finding echoes many other people's findings that television viewing often triggers the related practice of commenting. Common viewing thus establishes a forum for reflecting the social order. What became apparent during Sanja's paper was that such comments are not necessarily tied to viewing practices. Theoretically one could imagine a person commenting on "Who wants to be a millionaire" without ever having seen the program, s/he could draw her/his information solely from the social discourse. Thus, do we really talk about a media practice? Or is this a media related practice?

I ask these questions not to suggest that we should introduce a dichotomy between media practices and media related practice. I rather use this formulation to point out that when we investigate media practices we are confronted with a set of concatenated practices, or maybe also a hierarchy of practices that need to be characterized also with reference to their closeness and distance to the actual consumption (or production) of media products. I think we should draw attention to this aspect and focus our investigation not only on how people use, understand, relate to media, but also look at the relation of various media (related) practices, their connections, how they refer to each other, how media practice get transformed into something else, etc.

Ursula

From: jpostill at usa.net (John Postill, Sheffield Hallam)

Date: Thu, 28 Sep 2006 15:11:07 +0100

Subject: [Mediantro] Discussion open to all

Many thanks for those opening comments, Ursula, the discussion is now open to all on this list!

John

ps please make sure that if you reply to a previous posting it goes to medianthro at easaonline.org not only to the poster.

From: ebird at cas.usf.edu (Elisabeth Bird, University of South Florida)

Date: Thu, 28 Sep 2006 10:59:50 -0400

Subject: [Mediantro] undestanding media practices as a network of connatinated practices

Ursula's comments fit quite squarely into the larger debate about media audiences, which has largely moved away from direct text-response studies and into ethnographic work about "media-related practices," as she puts it.

An example from my own work: In one of my projects, I studied an on-line fan group focused around a TV show (reported as one chapter in my book, *The Audience in Everyday Life*). I found that a large amount of the on-line discussion was not directly about the show, but about the issues it raised, and how those intersect with daily life. The fan group still exists, several years after the show was cancelled. So are the group's current activities media practices? Probably not, but they are certainly media-related, or inspired. Similarly, I argued in another chapter about news reception that news "stories" don't really become active narratives until they become part of everyday discourse -- and it's that discourse that is interesting to me, rather than the texts themselves. I think it's all part of moving away from the premise that media act upon culture, and toward a view of contemporary culture as constituted through media.

Liz

From: elisemc at rice.edu (Elise McCarthy, Rice University)

Date: Thu, 28 Sep 2006 16:17:09 -0500

Subject: [Mediantro] understanding media practices as a network of connatinated practices

Dear all,

I haven't posted before nor introduced myself but I hope what follows amends both!

I was interested to see the idea of understanding media practices as a network come up because since my undergrad, I've been trying to think of ways to conceptualize media outside what I see as a fundamental reliance on 'cause and effect' - whether that be the medium on the reader or the corporation on the reporter & on the reader and so on. Even with 'feedback' loops wedded in, such models seemed unsatisfactory on some level, especially having worked in public relations in Ireland for ten years. [I'm now in grad school at Rice University (Texas, USA) and trying to understanding just such experiences.]

The problem with cause and effect models for me is that they immediately set me thinking about subjects and objects (thus precluding the potential of considering a wider complexity of exchanges and exchangers) and invariably I found myself tending to focus on issues of power distribution.

Which brings me to the idea of 'network'. This past year, I wrote a paper on mapping the methodology of Bruno Latour's 'Science in Action' onto public relations ('PR-in-action if you will) and it does allow more freedom to think about the sheer circulation of ideas, a wider number of 'players', the systematicity at work. As regards concerns about power, the model made it much harder to locate power specifically. Rather, it was contingent on a wide range of competing factors where the struggle is ongoing. Interestingly, the outcome 'felt' comparable to my experiences in the PR world.

Well, that's as far as I've gotten but I have wondered from time to time if a similar 'thought-experiment' could be done with other media practices and what it might yield.

For the record, my dissertation research is focused on Corporate Social Responsibility in Ireland. For anyone who hasn't come across it, CSR - as described from the corporation's point of view - is where companies adapt their processes to address the concerns of various stakeholders with the goal of being a better 'corporate citizen' (Lots of terminology to unpack for a start.) As I first encountered it, CSR looked like a corporate rhetorical device, managed by the PR team. However in theorizing PR-in-action as mentioned above, I have been freed up to consider corporate social responsibility in a range of ways - as indeed a corporate rhetorical device and more.

Well, that's where I'm at. It's just another thought for the collective "hopper".

Thanks for organizing this network and for the opportunity to participate.

Elise

From: mark.hobart at gmail.com (Mark Hobart, SOAS)

Date: Thu, 28 Sep 2006 22:45:23 +0100

Subject: [Mediantro] What do we mean by 'media practices'?

Sorry to be slightly late posting some thoughts. It is registration week here and I am head of department. Enough said.

John asked me if I could pose some questions as a way of stimulating discussion. This makes good sense because, at this stage, questions abound. Apologies for the long list. Here goes:

1. Before we turn specifically to the issue of media practices, perhaps we should frame what it is we hope to achieve by such an exercise foray.

a. Who is anthropologists' intended audience/readership? It makes a great deal of difference if anthropologists are engaged in an internal debate as against aiming to explain the relevance of anthropological approaches to media to others, presumably first and foremost media scholars.

b. What is the contribution that broadly an anthropological study of media, and more narrowly a study of media practices can make to understanding of the workings of the mass media? Until anthropologists are clear what exactly it is they are trying to achieve, they are unlikely to be successful in so doing.

c. What is the role assigned to anthropologists by other disciplines, here notably media studies? If anthropological intervention is to be effective, it is likely to need to address the question not of how anthropologists would like their work to be regarded, but how are anthropological or ethnographic findings likely to be used? The default mode is exotic tidbits. What grounds do we have for thinking the reception of anthropological ventures into media will be received any differently?

d. As anthropologists are coming from a highly specific Euro-American, indeed hegemonic, academic discourse, to what extent have anthropologists - individually and collectively - addressed the risks that they are reiterating Eurocentrism in applying such specific analytical categories to quite different discourses?

e. Anthropologists' contribution to such wider debates is conventionally:

- i. the detailed findings from ethnography and their consequent broader implications
- ii. the detailed study of social practice

Are these the main contributions anthropologists can make?

2. What do anthropologists mean by 'media practices'? To what extent is there a serious risk of reifying an object of study by trying to identify media practices, as distinct from exploring the contexts in which media are implicated? In other words, as I have been suggesting for some years, should we think instead of 'media-related practices' as a way of avoiding falling from one essentialism into another? Let me summarize some of the more obvious risks of concentrating on media practices as a coherent object of study.

a. Is invoking 'practice' simply a euphemism for getting on with 'normal science'? If not, how does the study of media practice differ from any routine anthropological inquiry?

b. If anthropologists wish to focus on practice, what exactly is their object of study? Is it media practices, which would tend to stress relations of production and distribution? Or is it media-related practices, which allows for the highly diverse ways in which people engage with mass media in different situations?

c. How are anthropologists proposing to deal with the fact that many of the most interesting practices consist of exclusions of people (disarticulation), absences, silencing and refusal?

d. An example of the problems is the long-running debate about what we can know about what audiences make of what they watch on television. For a start, it is not self-evident in what sense watching TV constitutes a practice in most senses. That pushes us in turn to other questions.

3. What do anthropologists mean, in this context, by 'practice'?
- a. Are practices supplementary to structure, merely an updated version of Firth's 'social organization'?
- b. What ontological presuppositions are involved in the notions of practice proposed?
- c. What are the epistemological implications? Notably, what is the relationship between the knower and the known?
- d. Willy-nilly Bourdieu's account of practice, habitus etc. tends to be the default approach. To what extent is this satisfactory and adequate, especially in view of the extensive criticism of Bourdieu's account from a range of quarters?
- e. What would be the implications of a stronger (philosophically pragmatist) account of practice as constitutive?
- f. Whatever their account of practice, are anthropologists interested in media ready and able to justify their assumptions?

I hope that will do for a start.

Best wishes

Mark

From: jpostill at usa.net (John Postill, Sheffield Hallam)

Date: Fri, 29 Sep 2006 16:35:22 +0100

Subject: [Mediantro] Media-near and media-distant spectrum?

Ursula Rao wrote:

> ...when we investigate media practices we are confronted with a set of
> concatenated practices, or maybe also a hierarchy of practices that need to
> be characterized also with reference to their closeness and distance to the
> actual consumption (or production) of media products.

I agree this is one interesting possible way ahead, namely to study empirically (and diachronically) how some social practices are more closely bound up with specific media technologies than others *at certain points in time*. In any given locale, we are likely to find media-related practices (to use Mark's term) that are 'media-near' and, at the other end of the spectrum, practices that are 'media-distant' (with fluctuations along the spectrum over time being possible). I also think we need to be clear about the actual media technologies that are part of any practical bundle, and about their specificities.

For example, in my own ethnography on residential politics in suburban Kuala Lumpur, I have analysed a set of social practices that I am labelling 'surveillance practices'. These practices are led not by the state's security forces but rather by middle-income residents concerned about crime and the state's *lack* of surveillance! They include patrolling the streets, sending SMS texts to fellow residents, posting alerts through mailing lists, etc.

Is patrolling the streets a media-near or a media-distant practice? It depends on the technology we focus on. It is internet-distant in that the patrolling idea (or schema/script) originated in Anglo-Saxon websites yet the internet is not used as part of the patrolling. On the other hand, it is media-near in that patrollers carry mobile phones with them.

Mmm, this is getting complicated - help!!

From: danieltaghioff at yahoo.com (Daniel Taghioff, SOAS)

Date: Fri, 29 Sep 2006 09:09:53 -0700 (PDT)

Subject: [Mediantro] Anthropologists, Media and debates on Democracy

Hello

I feel the need to respond to some of Mark's list of very searching questions.

My paper at the conference addressed these kinds of questions, perhaps unsurprisingly since he was once my supervisor.

I'm throwing in my responses hopefully as an opening gambit.

1. It seems to me like what we are trying to achieve as media anthropologists is tied to a wider project in academia that follows what seems like a democratising discourse.

I see this in terms of an ethical stand that seems to be implied in Anthropology, development debates about participation, debates of democracy and public spaces / spheres in media studies, as well as in theories of practice, that we are concerned with people as ends in themselves, that we are concerned with what they have to say, and that the social order should somehow reflect people's wishes and opinions.

What exactly are practice approaches trying to achieve? Well it seems to me that there is a certain attempt to de-reify communication, to study it as something substantive and lived, in order to address some of the problems of the formalisation of "democratic" practices away from people's lives, for instance by seeing the public as an arena of 'transparency' rather than 'participation'.

These are quite trite sounding observations, but there are theoretical reasons to suspect that these two approaches to public arenas don't fit together very easily, I go into it in my paper.

a) Who are Media Anthropologists speaking to?

Well as a young proto-academic hoping to both put bread on the table, and hopefully influence how things are done, it is not just other anthropologists I am hoping to reach.

My particular slant is communications in development. There is a community of development communications practitioners out there who need in-depth perspectives on how communication operates in practice. Slater and Tacci, for instance were asked by UNESCO to evaluate (ethnographically) Kotmale Radio station in Sri Lanka.

Since Anthropology has become a net exporter of both academics and methodology, I think we should consider how we might influence a wider academic community. Qualitative research methods are going through a bit of a peak time right now, with focus groups and ethnography gaining popularity in the devil's playground of Market Research, as well as in evaluation, particularly of development projects, but also of public services in general.

In short there are a lot of potential audiences out there for anthropological approaches, we need not be insular.

b) As for the mass media. The papers at the conference workshop were really strong in revealing that what goes on in practice within media organisations bears almost zero resemblance to the ways in which the media tends to be theorised in media studies. This might be treated as marginal by Media Studies at the moment (according to Mark), but there is little chance of this remaining so forever.

If we as anthropologists can devise methodological approaches that allow us to look at the broader-scale implications of these insights, we have a serious prospect of shaking up Media Studies as a discipline, which is probably why we are currently being marginalised.

I have seen a lot of well-established media studies academics demolished by first year phd students with backgrounds in media/practice approaches (there was blood on the floor of quite a few of the SOAS media seminars), so this is not a fantasy, at least not in the longer run.

This relates to the earlier concerns of democratising etc... If 'media' are treated as things separate from other forms of practice, that implicitly treats them as if they are cut off from people's lifeworlds.

This seems to me to be complicit with a trend in Media Studies to treat Media as something that acts on populations, as a means for elite groups to 'guide' the masses, and thus maintain social order in the face of the potential chaos of democracy (you can see Edward Bernay's book on propaganda for more on this.) This is not a trend that fits well with participative conceptions of what democratic practice might be.

Anyway, since this is already too long a contribution, I'll stop there.

Daniel

From: dressler at tugamail.com (Angela Dressler, Bremen)

Date: Sat, 30 Sep 2006 01:35:22 +0200

Subject: [Medianthro] e-seminar, friday

Actually my mailing system is quite fucked up at the moment not delivering emails as it should. Anyway I am struggling my way thru those postings finally I got and would like to comment on some.

So one of the initial stimuli Mark Hobart posted was the question what may be the anthropologist's contribution in media studies.

I for one am not too sure if we should only focus on media and communication studies as anthropology itself could have a strong interest in media for its own sake. Still there is or should at least be a profitable linking for both sides.

When I had to undergo training in media studies and anthropology, I always had to face the very same gap every time a new: it is the -ing thing that anthropologists focus on while people in media studies don't appreciate this creative science and instead focus on those so called hard data.

So let me give you this small anecdote: There was this one Austrian guy at CRESC who would literally laugh his ass off, cause the faculty for theatre and social studies in Vienna had their name changed into institute for theatre- social and media studies. Wouldn't students be irritated wanting to study media and then being faced with theories on performance?

For an anthropologist this question is pretty ridiculous. Still a cultural or performative turn is feasible is communication studies as well. Sometimes including old methods in a new surrounding. So I found - and Cathy Baldwin may remember - pretty empty faces when at the same venue, I guess it was Michael Skey of LSE, proposed having a look at the ethnographic method to really enter the field aside of ramshackle statistics and mere textanalysis.

At the same time in my own work, trying to get the picture, I very soon missed all the research made on news, media production and so on in media studies. I missed technical terms and underlying theories. So I started spending time in the other library, finding many of these researches using different scientific language, sometimes lacking aspects, but very helpful in the end.

Is patrolling the streets a media-near or a media-distant practice? It depends on the technology we focus on. It is internet-distant in that the patrolling idea (or schema/script) originated in Anglo-Saxon websites yet the internet is not used as part of the patrolling. On the other hand, it is media-near in that patrollers carry mobile phones with them.

As it is indicated, this might be a question of context and this leads to the task of researching the importance of the specific value people themselves apply to their doings. Whatever sense this may make. Following this, the question of appropriation as both, Elisendas and Alexanders papers have shown, comes into sight. Actually I think this is where media studies do certainly win using ethnographic methods (and anthropological background perhaps).

So getting back to the -ing thing. I guess anthropologies advantage is its very own researching practice, focusing on the doing thing, using induction, to keep up with these terms, rather than deduction. To justify assumptions - dunno, but shouldn't it be worthwhile to turn things around and ask for those justifications regular media studies have, using statistics and heuristics that anthropology learned to reflect and criticize? I don't have the Skey paper I referred to, and I guess it was meant in a more effective way than the scrutinizing and analyzing of common sense anthropology is into. Nevertheless, this, hm, anarchistic manner may be anthropologies benefit in using its methods and linking media to social practice.

Probably I am na?ve putting it like this sometime at night when my server finally started working again. I know I am awkwardly leaving theoretical questions aside and therefore not really hitting this point.

Only one thing left ? as I noticed, without knowing the other peoples research most of the presenters in Bristol came to common grounds in their conclusions. Probably this is kind of a (pragmatist) justification of not being lost in what we already do.

Ok, should be enough of my simple-minded thoughts and superficial way to talk things over.

Angela

From: jpostill at usa.net (John Postill, Sheffield Hallam)

Date: Sat, 30 Sep 2006 15:48:10 +0100

Subject: [Mediantro] Media processes and media practices

Many thanks to all posters for that first round of contributions to our follow-up Understanding Media Practices discussion! As always, the lines are open over the weekend so please feel free to throw in a comment or two. This session ends on Thursday 5 Oct at 9 pm GMT.

One question that occurred to me after reading Mark Hobart's posting was the problem of research opportunity costs. By concentrating on media (-related) practices, what else, in addition to structures, are we not discussing, what avenues of thinking are we closing off?

For instance, we don't seem to have talked much about media processes, either in Bristol or on this list, and their conceptual interrelations to media practices. Are all media-related practices inherently processual? One of the few media examples of processual analysis I can think of is Silverstone et al's (1994) model of domestic media consumption mentioned before on this list. One often hears in contemporary anthropology about processes being perpetually open-ended and 'emergent', which I think is an unsatisfactory description. Shouldn't we be devoting some attention to the processual aspects of media

practices? Moreover, is appropriating a new domestic technology more aptly described as a process than as a practice, given that it's a one-off, irreversible series of actions?

John

Reference

Silverstone, R., Hirsch, E. and Morley, D. 1994. Information and communication technologies and the moral economy of the household. In: Silverstone, R. and Hirsch, E. (eds.), *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*, London: Routledge.

From: danieltaghioff at yahoo.com (Daniel Taghioff, SOAS)
Date: Sat, 30 Sep 2006 11:17:43 -0700 (PDT)
Subject: [Mediantthro] Media processes and media practices

What is at stake when we distinguish between media practices and media processes?

I remember a discussion where we struggled over the balance of emphasis between the repetitive and transformative aspects of practice.

John went for an emphasis on the repetitive aspects of practice, whereas here he seems to see processes as transformative.

I was looking at practices as transformative, involving agency, and see processes as more or less stable in some respect, as having some invariant principles, or symmetry by which they are defined as processes.

Processualism has been criticised in philosophy in terms of ignoring how the contingencies of people's practices make the sense of overarching sweeps in history, and processes operating in their own terms, hard to hold onto as ideas.

So what are we trying to get at in talking about media processes?

From: jpostill at usa.net (John Postill, Sheffield Hallam)
Date: Sun, 01 Oct 2006 22:55:30 +0100
Subject: [Mediantthro] Media processes and media practices

Daniel Taghioff asks:

> What is at stake when we distinguish between media practices and media
> processes? [...] what are we trying to get at in talking about media
> processes?

Well, I was thinking for example of Alexander Knorr's Bristol presentation on the 'online nomads of cyberia', see

http://www.nomadit.co.uk/easa/easa06/easa06_panels.php?PanelID=27

Alexander talked about 'technoludic' groups of people from various countries who interact online and have a shared interest in

'modifying commercial computer game software. That means making playable additions to existing games, up to making completely new games out of them, plus a vast range of secondary and derivative artefacts'.

This to me is a good example of transformative media practices; the whole point of these exchanges with their peers is not to play computer games but rather to create new games or game modifications. These modifications can be analysed, I should imagine, processually, as creative processes involving

collaborations across a range of media.

But not all media practices are transformative. For instance, Don Slater researched the internet trade in pornographic pictures ('sexpics') in the late 90s. Whilst some traders enjoyed chatting with fellow traders on IRC while viewing the pics, others were far more interested in the technical side of things, including finding technical fixes that would maintain the trade networks free from the immoral activities of 'leechers'; i.e. people who take pics from others without giving any in exchange. These dedicated tecchies were helping to maintain, not to transform, the existing moral order through highly skilled media practices.

Reference

Slater, Don (1998) Trading sexpics on IRC : embodiment and authenticity on the internet. *Body & society*, 4 (4). pp. 91-117. ISSN 1357-034X

From: c.greenhalgh at lcc.arts.ac.uk (Catherine Greenhalgh, London College of Communication)

Date: Mon, 02 Oct 2006 01:33:28 +0100

Subject: [Mediantro] Media processes and media practices

John

If a practice is doing/being/a type of happening and if a process is a way of happening, procedure would describe its operations. So if I am digitally editing a film and want to achieve a painterly fluid look on top of my original captured image, I add, then render, several layers of effects. If I don't like these, I can undo each layer (in this case distinct procedure) back to my starting point in a way I cannot with actual paint. This is an example of a process which is both repetitive and transformative. In fact repetition in an artform like this, as in choreography, reveals processuality (back and forth) by revelation of moment. I understand that it's maybe easier to grasp a material place and form and identify a process within in a series of cognitive and corporeal actions in fabricating an artefact, but are social activities and collaborations any different?

As a media practitioner and educator (a cinematographer and writing ethnography on cinematographers and creative collaboration in film practice education), it's essential to distinguish between practice and process, whether there seems a philosophical conundrum here or not. The practice (for the student) is "anything that can be done", including anything that cannot be theorised. The process is " the state of going on", and is often a kinetic type of description. The procedure attempts to identify stages which help the practitioner to understand the "know-how" of the process. Makers /agencies are often vague about the process, but can describe procedures. There's no duality here necessarily. The processual incorporation re-informs the apparently habitual practice. Understanding of the process may only come through practicing. One may not know one is practicing until discovery of action repeating procedures. The interrelation of each may develop at different speeds according to how a series of practicing events occurs.

I'm not putting this very lucidly, but my feeling is that the temporality (and spatiality and scale) and presence, or mapping point of practice, process, and procedure are qualitatively quite different, though they are often spoken about as interchangeable.

Yours, fascinated and often interestingly bewildered by this group!

Cathy Greenhalgh

From: Alexander.Knorr at vka.fak12.uni-muenchen.de (Alexander Knorr, Munich)

Date: Mon, 02 Oct 2006 12:26:54 +0200

Subject: [Mediantro] Media processes and media practices

John Postill wrote:

> Daniel Taghioff asks:

>>What is at stake when we distinguish between media practices and media
>>processes? [...] what are we trying to get at in talking about media
>>processes?

>

> Well, I was thinking for example of Alexander Knorr's Bristol presentation on
> the 'online nomads of cyberia', see

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> 'modifying commercial computergame-software. That means making playable
> additions to existing games, up to making completely new games out of them,
> plus a vast range of secondary and derivative artefacts'.

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> This to me is a good example of transformative media practices; the whole
> point of these exchanges with their peers is not to play computer games but
> rather to create new games or game modifications. These modifications can be
> analysed, I should imagine, processually, as creative processes involving
> collaborations across a range of media.

I may well miss the finer points of distinction and the struggle for clearcut definitions Mark Hobart and Daniel Taghioff are pushing forward. Nevertheless I'll throw in my two cents by trying to describe my working definitions, which are quite pragmatic, of the concepts in question.

To me a media practice is what people are doing with a given medium, their handling of it, which is no more random, but patterned and repetitive. My own practice of doing online fieldwork may serve for illustration:

http://xirdal.lmu.de/cgi-bin/blosxom.cgi/2005/12/09#daily_routine_thick_participation_online

This of course is an individual set of practices, because as the "local ethnographer" I am a singularity among the community I am doing research within. But to a certain degree my set of practices, which leads to successful interaction in technological and social terms, reflects the practices of "my tribe" (sorry, I just had to write this ;-). As I put it in the above linked-to blog-entry: "The anthropologer shall strive to adopt the habitus [I beg your pardon, Mark, for indirectly referring to Bourdieu, that was not intended] of 'his people' to a certain degree. To absorb practices enables to make alike experiences, and ultimately to approach the emic perspective." Which leads us to what I wanted to say: The media practices an anthropological approach aims at do not only show patterns and are repetitive, but are collectively shared by a group of people.

I very much dig the transformation bit John threw in. Just as it is the case with the concepts "practice" and "process", follow-up questions are unavoidable: What is transformed, for whom, and on what level? It is obvious that by the set of practices constituting gamemodding the artefacts, that is the computergame software, is transformed. But does transformation already happen before the reworking? As far as I can recollect I mentioned at the workshop the particular stance gamemodders have towards computergames and illustrated it by quoting one of my main informants and closest friends in the community. He once said: "I hardly play those games, I immediately start to mod them." Gamemodders have attached another meaning to computergames, it's no more something to play, but to disassemble, modify, and reassemble. But is reinterpretation and rededication already transformation? On a cognitive level for sure, as the artefact or medium is perceived differently--but

does this lead us any further? I am not sure about this, but am tending towards staying with reinterpretation and rededication in this case, and leave "transformation" for changes made which are clearly perceptible for individuals outside the practicing community in question.

But true is, I guess, that transformation is a process, in our case fueled by transformative practices.

--alex

From: jpostill at usa.net (John Postill, Sheffield Hallam)

Date: Tue, 03 Oct 2006 10:05:27 +0100

Subject: [Mediantthro] Fixed digitality

I find Cathy's comments about practice, process and procedure very interesting indeed and look forward to what others working on media practices from a more theoretical and/or ethnographic perspective have to say about these conceptual distinctions.

I also found very helpful her description of creative digital practice and its back-and-forth processual nature, as opposed to the more severe constraints of working with paint. This points to an important contrast, as many media scholars have argued, between digital and analogic media. However much we may want to stress as ethnographers the social embeddedness of technology and the creative agency of users, these fundamental contrasts are too important to leave out of our analyses of media practice, I would suggest.

As always, though, there are exceptions worthy of further investigation and comparison. For example, the Malaysian web forum threads I have studied (and I suppose most web forums are the same everywhere) don't allow posters to change their posts. Once they're out there, in their allocated slots, they stay there, as part of a permanent linear string of discourse. Posters can of course add hyperlinks to their texts but the thread posts remain as fixed as if they'd been cast in stone.

John

From: jo.helle-valle at sifo.no (Jo Helle-Valle)

Date: Tue, 3 Oct 2006 13:37:50 +0200

Subject: [Mediantthro] Media processes and media practices

A response triggered by Postill's encouragement earlier today:

It might very well (but not necessarily) be argued that practice is qualitatively different from process; 'practice' should(?) point not to anything that can be done (cf. Cathy below) but to everything actually done - i.e. it is a term that captures that essential but yet evasive field of actual social practices. Like Bourdieu has argued in his article "From a scholastic point of view" (I think) academics trying to say sensible things about social reality tend to focus on models, structures, etc. but therefore overlook the mundane, actual, everyday doings, the stuff that in sum is people's lives. In my view this adds up to 'practice' being ontologically different from 'process' - the latter being a term that onlookers (including academia) use in order to reveal chains of events that add up to something meaningful. In this sense 'process' is not pointing to ontological actuality but to abstracted chains of events. By placing 'practice' and 'process' on the same ontological level we stand in danger of forgetting the crucial importance of taking practices as the rock-bottom of what we are working with.

From a slightly different angle: 'procedure' and 'process' are linked conceptually and logically to the issue of rule and rulefollowing, and a theme that Wittgenstein uses as a kind of leverage for arguing for the centrality of practice. The fundamentals in his arguments are taken up in various ways and

publications by Bourdieu and the main point is that rule, model, scheme ... (whatever term one wants to use) are about practice but not practice in themselves and Wittgenstein (and Bourdieu) shows the logical and analytical impossibility of explaining practice by way of rules (i.e. processes and procedures); "... no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule ... And hence also 'obeying a rule' is a practice" (Wittgenstein PI ?? 201-2). My point again being that there might be important ontological (and hence academic) reasons for distinguishing between 'practice' and the other terms used in this connection.

On the other hand, 'practice' is out there, used in many different ways and who am I to tell how it should be used? And I definitely see the usefulness of how Cathy uses these terms. But again - the danger is that we move away from that which I think is (or rather should be) a core purpose of 'practice'; namely to be a term that reminds us of the fundamental importance of doing - not vs. saying but vs abstracting or modelling.

Jo

From: danieltaghioff at yahoo.com (Daniel Taghioff, SOAS)
Date: Tue, 3 Oct 2006 11:32:21 -0700 (PDT)
Subject: [Mediantro] Media processes and media practices

This debate on practices and processes seems to be getting at something.

If we take practice as a ground or rock bottom, we have a problem of chasing our tails. "Practice" becomes an everything word, as everything can be construed as a form of doing.

I would instead take practice to be a way of indicating the messiness between ideals, wishes and intentions, and outcomes. It is like a principle of entropy, that action (energy) tends towards complexity (entropy) rather than the neatness of ordered ideals, but this is just a metaphor for my own reflections.

Practice can be defined in terms of activities that are recognised as being of a certain kind, and has having a certain type of purpose, and thus that can form a backdrop to attributing intention and agency.(Hobart)

A process is even more so, in that it has a more definite outcome in the minds of those engaging in it, and also in the minds of those attributing "processualness" to it, as one of its qualities.

This leads me towards one of my favourite, if half-expressed debates, that on productivism. One of the tensions between theorists and practitioners is around the issue of what practices enable.

Practitioners often point out that practice is so much more than "ideology" because it is also a skill, and a set of co-ordinated activities that make something possible. In a sense they might be emphasising the processual aspects of practices.

However there is a resistance to a perceived 'productivism' in this amongst many theorists, especially those inspired by the work of Baudrillard. The problem outlined is that one cannot assume any one-to-one relationship between what is attributed to a practice or process, and the "reality" of the practice or process, as can perhaps be approached by looking at outcomes, triangulating different views, participant observation, and all sorts of other methodological tricks that we struggle with.

However, the point remains that people often engage in practices with outcomes in mind, and many outcomes are unthinkable without the co-ordination that the mutual (if only partially so) recognitions that practice entails (some degree of mutual recognition of what is going on is a necessary condition of any degree of intersubjectivity, which is required for any social co-ordination in

practice.)

However, is a practice such as medicine possible because of its inherent underlying link to reality? Not necessarily, when you talk to Doctors they often do not know why what they do works, with many medical terms being very descriptive names for things (in Latin, to hide how much they state the obvious) with little explanation attached to them. This is not to do Doctors down, they seem to get results, but part of this is guess work, trial and error, and part of this is that they are socially recognised as being able to do these things, whether they know what they are doing or not.

Going to the doctors and being treated is a practice, it is a socially recognised set of activities requiring skill from some or both of the parties (I have certainly got better at describing my symptoms, as I get used to going to the doctors) and it is also a process in the sense that all those involved are oriented towards an outcome i.e. treating the disease, "producing" healthy patients. But I know full well that my doctor does not necessarily have a solid one-to-one truth claim about my condition, and is often happy to admit this.

What does this mean for media practices? Well in the age of computers, media more obviously both represent and enact, so these issues are becoming more acute. This points us towards a philosophically pragmatic approach to both practice and process, although that's where I run out of steam for now.

Hope this is useful.

Daniel

From: sphughes37 at hotmail.com (Stephen Hughes)

Date: Tue, 03 Oct 2006 21:29:26 +0000

Subject: [Medianthro] Introduction and Media related practices

Greetings,

I would like to add a few comments into this conversation. But first let me introduce myself - I am Stephen Putnam Hughes. I completed both MA and PhD in Social and Cultural Anthropology at The University of Chicago, where I specialized in media history and visual anthropology with special reference to cinema in south India. I am currently teaching in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, where I am also the Director of Studies for the an MA programme in the Anthropology of Media. We have been running this MA programme, which as far as I know is the first and only of its kind, since 1998.

My own specific research interest is focused in Tamil speaking south India where I have lived and worked on and off over the course of the last twenty years. My current research interests are primarily historical and cover four broad areas: 1. a historical ethnography of film-going and cinema exhibition; 2. a study on the introduction sound media- gramophone, radio, cinema and loudspeakers during the interwar period; 3. research on the changing politics of Hindu religious films over the 20th century; and 4. a history of picture postcards of south India.

Due to my institutional circumstances, I have recently had to think a great deal about what anthropology of media is, what it should be and what it might contribute- precisely some of the questions raised in this conversation. As this conversation has unfolded over the last week I have followed with great interest. I should have weighed in earlier (and the beginning of the academic term this week did not help) and now I realize that there much more than I can possibly comment on. Here are some random thoughts.

First of all in response to Mark, I do not think that anthropologists with media related interests need to worry to greatly about how those in media

studies use, confuse or abuse their work. Our work is always provisional, dialogic and open to question. We cannot possibly anticipate who will read our work, what they will make of it or how it will be used. I, for one, am not engaged in some kind of popularity contest with media studies. If someone from media studies wants to dismiss my work as being marginal or exotic, that is more a reflection upon their own intellectual limitations (dare I add euro-centrism?) than upon me or my work. Certainly media studies do not own the media any more than anthropologists own the concepts of society or culture. I entirely agree with Angela that there can be a profitable linking of anthropology and media studies and certainly there is no point in playing territorial wars over who can authoritatively study media-related matters.

The question of what constitutes an adequate approach to studying the media/media related practices ultimately cannot be postulated in the abstract, but it is an ongoing and open-ended problem that must be specified and addressed within each research project. That is why one must first figure out why you want to study media and what you hope to accomplish, before you can hope to work out how to go about doing it. Anthropologists do not study media-related issues because they want to impress those in media studies. As far as I can tell they do so because those with whom they study feel that media are important in their lives. For example, I got interested in cinema in south India not because I was a film buff, but because the cinema is such an important referent in the lives of south Indians. This, I believe, corresponds to what Daniel has referred to as democratising discourse. One's research agenda should take its starting point as a political and ethical relationship with those one is studying with. The first commitment of my scholarship is to be useful for those with whom I study and then latterly to anyone else who might be interested.

In reflecting on some of the discussion of media practice over the last week, I feel that there has been a tendency to slip back into a kind of dualist separation of theory and practice. I think that we must insist upon seeing theory and practice (and their friends- thought and action, philosophy and history, mind and body) as a continuous processes. As Collingwood maintained they are two sides of the same coin, where thought is the inside of action and action is the outside of thought. Theory is not a prelude to practice, nor is practice the ground from which theory is elaborated. Rather theory and practice are always mutually constitutive (as in Foucault's notion of discursive practice). Thought is analyzed in every manner of speaking, doing or behaving. All experience is a way of thinking constituted through its own specific historical conditions.

With this in mind, I am supportive using media related practices as a starting point for an anthropology of media. Insofar as those in media studies study "media" they risk reifying and essentializing their object of study. I certainly agree with Mark's suggestion, which more or less was followed by all presenters in Bristol anyway, to focus on media-related practices as a way around the problem of essentializing media as a kind of transcendental object. The emphasis on media related practices forces a shift away from apriori and deterministic models of how media work. To study media-related practices one cannot in principle or in advance know how some media technology, power, text, political economy, communication circuit or cultural industry determines what people do with media (when I say "do" I construe this broadly to include the old favourites production, distribution and consumption as well as commentary, appropriation and/or indifference). The emphasis on media-related practices (like Foucault's notion of discursive practice) is a methodological and analytical tool to break up a totalizing notion of media. The media cannot be taken as a given, but are historically contingent and constitutive activities, social actions, practices. Thus, what I aim to do when I say that I study media-related practices is investigate how people actually argue, construct and contest the media worlds in which they live and why they do or do not matter. Methodologically the task starts with an empirical problem about the historical contingency of media practices (that is, how some specific state of affairs is historically constituted). But at the same time one must also deal with an analytical problem of how to evaluate the claims (and their presuppositions) that people make about the media and how they relate to the world.

In some ways all this seems overly abstract to me. In order for any of this to stand up we need to see detailed research, which could flesh out our arguments. The point of this exercise needs to be more than programmatic statements and critical acrobatics. We do not need a new theory of media practice, so much as an approach that will help us address our own research problematic more proficiently- to help us address why media matter to those with whom we study.

From: [jdeger at scmp.mq.edu.au](mailto:jdeger@scmp.mq.edu.au) (Jennifer Deger, Macquarie University)

Date: Wed, 4 Oct 2006 13:16:31 +1000

Subject: [Mediantro] introduction

Hello all,

I'd like to jump in at this point to introduce myself and my work on indigenous media in Northern Australia. My name is Jennifer Deger, I'm a Research Fellow in the Department of Anthropology, Macquarie University working on collaborative media production in Northeast Arnhem Land. My current project is primarily concerned with using non-narrative video forms to explore ways of evoking the sensuous and affective dimensions of Yolngu relations to country.

I'm still trying to get my head around the distinctions that are being argued about process and practice, so this is really just an introduction to my work.

Coming to anthropology from a professional background as a television and radio producer, I began a PhD at Macquarie University in the mid 1990s with the aim of researching BRACS (Broadcasting in Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme) a federally funded programme to enable indigenous peoples in remote communities to make and broadcast their own radio and television in the name of "strengthening culture". I ended up working as a trainer/co-producer with Yolngu in a small community in Northeast Arnhem Land for a period of about three years. During that time I had the tremendous good fortune of working with a Yolngu man who was interested in - extremely skilled at - using media in ways that reflected and reproduced local ontological and epistemological concerns and potentialities. In short, his version of using media to "strengthen culture" entailed using video to reproduce the effects of revelatory ritual in a public context, using the mimetic power of the camera to both presence the Ancestral and connect the audience without making visible actual sacred sites and objects.

Not only was this form of 'culture strengthening' completely beyond the imaginative horizons of the bureaucrats who had funded the program - it was also very difficult for them (and indeed, myself at first) to immediately recognise the depth of its significance and meaning for Yolngu.

In order to understand the way that Yolngu produced, appreciated, valued, talked about and experienced such media required that I not only return to the classic ethnographies of the region in order to locate this new form of cultural production within a broader array of local practices, aesthetics and politics - but that I rethink my own assumptions about the nature of media and the representational theories that have framed 'indigenous media' within the academy and elsewhere. In order to understand Yolngu video on its own terms, I had to consider the ontology of the image within a cultural context in which mimesis is a form of cultural labour that intensifies Ancestral presence making (at least in the view of some Yolngu) a photograph/video image not only "the same" as its subject, but also, potentially, the same as the sacra associated with that person. In this ethnographic context the senses are understood to mediate a direct and constitutive relationship to the world of the visible and the invisible; "to see is to know" and to become-in-relation in a deeply somatic and affective sense - with attendant ethical responsibilities. Indeed, this context to see certain sights on television can be deemed 'better, stronger, than actually being there' but equally can be seen to be depleting and or dangerous of the Ancestral presence that enlivens country and the relationships that are given form and meaning through it. Consequently, the increasing proliferation of media technologies

raise all kinds of difficulties and dangers - as well as the potential for innovation and new forms of cultural production - for Yolngu.

This long introduction (and very condensed version of some quite complex arguments) is by way of saying that, at least as it relates to my own experience, it has always been the ethnographic material that has compelled me in particular theoretical directions - and thence to the position of adopting, adapting or 'speaking back' to certain media theory. Like Stephen, it seems to me that (as I'm sure that we would all agree) the strength of media ethnography is that our work can begin with an intellectual and imaginative openness (as well as an ethical and political commitment to the people with whom we work) in order to be able to best appreciate and respond to the various media forms and practices we encounter.

Having said that, I'm finding these discussions fascinating and productive. I certainly need to think more about the arguments offered over the past week. It seems to me that I've studied an array of mutually constitutive Yolngu media-related practices, processes and procedures (although I'm not convinced that Yolngu would approve of/recognise/epistemologically prioritise these distinctions) - which, in turn, have influenced my own processes and practices as ethnographer and media-maker.

Thanks for the opportunity to participate in your group.

Jennifer

From: guido.ipsen at uni-dortmund.de (Guido Ipsen, Dortmund)

Date: Wed, 04 Oct 2006 11:40:44 +0200

Subject: [Medianthro] Media processes and media practices

Sorry, I'm late reading this mailing and therefore may be behind the discussion line...

I think we should be quite careful about making distinctions between aspects of processes and practices. Ultimately, this will lead into a structuralist trap: Suddenly media become INSTANCES in their own right, only being modified by processes, and being made us of in practices. (Or, if you prefer another definition of the two "p" words, then the instances will enter them differently)

However, if anthropology really wants to make a difference to media studies, which are hopelessly technocentrist in my opinion, it should abandon the idea of media as institutions, instances, or even established artefacts. Maybe some of you will perceive my approach as too philosophical, but I suggest to perceive media AS processes AND practices. What a medium means is only becoming real within the practice, and this is from which processes emerge. There are no media beyond human use (at least, if we stick to the cultural aspect of media). Therefore, the process is where the practice changes so that our perception of the medium will be different.

I suggest that we agree that the medium is least in this hierarchy, in which the practice is first. In this definition, process is an inevitable fact of human practice, as it is set in time, which will not allow for absolutely identical repetition. The term "media process" is therefore misleading in the first place, as it suggests that there are processes within the media which are in some way or another independent from the human agent, which of course is absolute nonsense.

Is see only one solution for anthropologists, namely to focus on the absolute dictate of centering the discussion on the human agency. Everything else should be defined, and if terms come from other disciplines, redefined according to this dictate. Otherwise, it's not media anthropology, but media studies again.

Cheers,

Guido

From: guido.ipsen at uni-dortmund.de (Guido Ipsen, Dortmund)

Date: Wed, 04 Oct 2006 12:48:19 +0200

Subject: [Mediantthro] Media processes and media practices

Another thought....

There was a question whether "practice" is becoming too general. The same of course goes for "process"

Naturally, both practice and process, as well as procedure, are very fundamental terms in many disciplines.

We have already done the first step in delimiting them to "media", which of course renders the question imminent as where media practice, e.g., is different from social practice and other areas of practicing.

One fundamental aspect of not overgeneralising the (meanwhile) three "p" words in our discussion is to phrase out what is NOT conceptualised by them.

Obviously, there is the static which is neither process nor procedure. Then, there is the circumstantial, matter-of-fact circumstances which are not practice. The body functions, psychological fundamentals of how to use media and other circumstantial fundamentals are before or beyond practice. Practice is what is set inside the cultural phase of the human agency.

Then, procedure and process is something which needs to be set apart quite distinctively. Every procedure is a process, but there are processes which are clearly not procedures.

A procedure, and I refer here to the information scientific perception of the term which we might well adopt, is a set of actions which are manifest as a habit. Meaning, that a procedure can be repeated. Processes then may also comprise sets of actions or occurrences which will not be repeatable.

I suggest that for empirical reasons we need to establish a framework which can be studied in real life contexts; a philosophical avantgarde definition of the three "p"'s won't help at all.

Hence,

media practice: The human agency's actions, unique and/or habitual, which define the meaning of media for an individual, a group, or the society at large.

media procedures: Sets of actions which may reoccur in a given period of time, or in different epochs, and which establish a transcultural, transchronical meaning of the media. Especially the coming into being and the dissolution of media procedures would be interesting to study.

media processes: Those short time and long time processes in which, step by step, the meaning of the media changes within the action phase of the human agency. media procedures may create loops in the processes, or they may create a stasis in which change does not occur; but process does not mean change in itself, it means a phase in which change may and eventually will occur. It is therefore set at the end of my short exploration of the three "p" words. However, in a thorough understanding of the cosmos, process is also something fundamental. I still suggest that by centering on the human agency, the big picture must be placed at the end of reasoning.

These are my thoughts on the terminology. I think that the three definitions also create a field of practical study for empirical research.

Cheers,
Guido

From: jpostill at usa.net (John Postill, Sheffield Hallam)
Date: Wed, 04 Oct 2006 14:46:53 +0100
Subject: [Mediantro] Final thoughts

Dear all

Just a quick reminder that our current discussion "Understanding media practices" closes tomorrow (Thursday) at 9 pm GMT. It'd be good to have a final round of thoughts on this question before we close the session.

Best

John

From: mark.hobart at gmail.com (Mark Hobart, SOAS)
Date: Thu, 5 Oct 2006 15:52:45 +0100
Subject: [Mediantro] A few random thoughts

John has asked me to write a few final thoughts. Sorry, as this is the first week of term, they are of necessity rather rushed.

What I found interesting about the discussion both online and in Bristol was how widespread the appreciation was that the study of practice should not try to confine itself to that rather elusive object 'the media', but instead to examine practices in their different possible social contexts and situations of use. This in itself is potentially an important contribution to broader debates in media studies. Quite how we are going to frame this as a coherent approach is another matter.

As to the issue of what is practice, I am not sure how much mileage there is in trying to decide whether some particular set of activities or events is essentially a practice, a process, or whatever. It might be more useful to think in terms of what are the advantages and disadvantages of thinking of something as a set of practices. I take it, following Nelson Goodman, that recourse to practice is a frame of reference, a particular way of talking about the world, among a range of possible ways. It links therefore with a particular genealogy of thinking. In this instance post-Peircean pragmati(ci)sm is presumably the best thought-through. The point of referring to such philosophical writings is simply that it saves us reinventing the wheel, even if we need, as we presumably shall, to adapt it to new uses.

Apart from that, I would just like to comment on two points that Steve Hughes made. The first is to agree about the risk of dichotomizing theory and practice. As he says, Collingwood and Foucault have shown how you can bypass the opposition in interesting ways. I would sound a slight note of caution though about Steve's argument that we need not worry too much about how those in media studies use, confuse or abuse our work. Presumably anthropologists with an interest in media do want to be a small sect of believers - however beautiful our internal *communitas* - but wish to engage scholars in the discipline which thinks (with some reason) that it owns the study of media and communication. If so, approaches from dialogue suggest it is not a bad idea to have some idea of how your interlocutor is interpreting what you are saying. Were anthropology the dominant discipline, like other imperial powers, it might ignore what lesser beings think and get on blissfully or arrogantly blinkered. More provocatively, if it is correct that, in many countries, enrolment in anthropology is declining year on year, then maybe we should start to consider how others imagine us. If the discipline in question is the one that expanding, in part at the expense of anthropology, then maybe self-preservation says it might worth sticking our heads outside our shells to see what is going on.

Best

Mark

From: eardevol at gmail.com (Elisenda Ardevol, UOC Catalonia)

Date: Thu, 5 Oct 2006 18:06:11 +0200

Subject: [Mediantro] beyond reception theories...

Some final thoughts about our subject of discussion...

For me, what is on stage in media practice theories is that they allow us to think further of theories of reception, so our questions are about practices, not only signifying practices, interpretations or readings.

As Lana Rakow states, although research on media uses has to be considered a giant leap forward in the history of media studies, asking questions related to what people do with media as an act of 'reading' can't take us "beyond a model of communication in which institutions speak while citizens listen". So the problem is the kind of research questions that practice theories open. Another example: the problem from a practice theory is not how audiences make sense of the narratives they consume, but what are audiences doing with mass media narratives... I think that this perspective is well suited for understanding broader media practices such as that of the gaming community Alexander Knorr is studying.

Thanks to all participants for such a great discussion, I always learn a lot through our list interventions!

Elisenda

References

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<http://nms.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/1/1/74>

From: c.greenhalgh at lcc.arts.ac.uk (Catherine Greenhalgh, London College of Communication)

Date: Thu, 05 Oct 2006 20:47:15 +0100

Subject: [Mediantro] Cathy - last notes on practice

Reply to Media Anth - just a few thought before the deadline. It's been a busy first week back at college and I haven't time to contribute more to what's been a really interesting discussion. Thanks.

Cathy Greenhalgh

Jo Helle-Valle:

> From a slightly different angle: 'procedure' and 'process' are linked
 > conceptually and logically to the issue of rule and rulefollowing, and a
 > theme that Wittgenstein uses as a kind of leverage for arguing for the
 > centrality of practice. The fundamentals in his arguments are taken up in
 > various ways and publications by Bourdieu and the main point is that rule,
 > model, scheme ... (whatever term one wants to use) are about practice but
 > not practice in themselves and Wittgenstein (and Bourdieu) shows the logical
 > and analytical impossibility of explaining practice by way of rules (i.e.
 > processes and procedures)

Bourdieu's 'rules of the game' idea goes with his notion that most procedures and processes are tacit and never reach the level of being described as operations verbally. This doesn't mean they are not there. Much of the teaching of film practice I do has no verbal description, it is bodily learning. 'Cheating', the act of moving bodies around lens points of view in the space of a film set is a good example. Yet in the practice it's what educationalists

call a 'threshold concept' (Meyer and Land, 2003 and 2006), once learned one can never go back, so processual forwards. The physical situation seems so unlikely, that students find it hard to incorporate? it's 'troublesome knowledge'(Perkins, 1999). For me, Bourdieu's game analogy is only partially helpful, like habitus for looking at practices. De Certeau's spatial strategies and temporal tactics (Practice of Everyday Life, 1984) allow more kinetic movement agency between practice/process/procedure as they are happening.

Guido Ipsen:

> I think we should be quite careful about making distinctions between aspects
> of processes and practices. Ultimately, this will lead into a structuralist
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> There are no media beyond human use (at least, if we stick to the cultural
> aspect of media). Therefore, the process is where the practice changes so
> that our perception of the medium will be different.

True. However for me I came from the Instance of particularities of my own cinematography professional practices towards Anthropology, precisely because there were inadequate descriptions of experiences clearly delineated by practitioners as practice. Process and procedure as part of the professional rhetoric. So I am not saying these are right, only that they exist to the extent of assumption by professional practitioners??. Personally I am exhausted by technocentrist media studies. Another paper on games, digital versus film?etc implying all is new and ruled by technological change. I'm in the midst of it on a practical level, and it's slow like treacle on the ground as learning is slow, and feature films can't afford fast experimentation.

Guido 2:

> Obviously, there is the static which is neither process nor procedure. Then,
> there is the circumstantial, matter-of-fact circumstances which are not
> practice. The body functions, psychological fundamentals of how to use media and
> other circumstantial fundamentals are before or beyond practice. Practice is
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> therefore set at the end of my short exploration of the three "p" words.
 > However, in a thorough understanding of the cosmos, process is also something
 > fundamental. I still suggest that by centering on the human agency, the big
 > picture must be placed at the end of reasoning. These are my thoughts on the
 > terminology. I think that the three definitions also create a field of
 > practical study for empirical research.

Thanks Guido as this is very helpful! I think I've been operating with these distinctions more or less over the last few years, and I suppose the scientific version is adopted by cinematography for example as it is very technical and involves a lot of health and safety aspects ? so procedure (and another p word protocol and practice protocols) are frequently used. I need to think about this more than I have time to do now. However I'm not sure of the wide to close nature of the prac/proc/proc here. I can think of moments when the procedure has changed, malfunctioned or something in such a way as to question process and ultimately practice definition ? and there are many cinematographic conventions that have been re-invented by accident. I think there's more mileage in looking at the temporal and spatial qualities of these terms as I intimated in my first statement.

Jennifer Deger:

> In order to understand Yolngu video on its own terms, I
 > had to consider the ontology of the image within a cultural context
 > in which mimesis is a form of cultural labour that intensifies
 > Ancestral presence making (at least in the view of some Yolngu) a
 > photograph/video image not only "the same" as its subject, but also,
 > potentially, the same as the sacra associated with that person. In
 > this ethnographic context the senses are understood to mediate a
 > direct and constitutive relationship to the world of the visible and
 > the invisible; "to see is to know" and to become-in-relation in a
 > deeply somatic and affective sense - with attendant ethical
 > responsibilities.

There is much work that can be done to get at somatic nature of practices in media. Presencing at the moment of manufacture as well as in the artifact is another factor determining agency during action at practice/process/procedural levels ? obviously these terms are in question too and I intend to go back to my material and think about how these terms are rhetorically used more carefully. Thanks and I really look forward to reading your book SHIMMERING SCREENS out later in 2006.

John and all

Thanks for a very stimulating discussion

Cathy

From: jpostill at usa.net (John Postill, Sheffield Hallam)

Date: Thu, 05 Oct 2006 21:39:11 +0100

Subject: [Mediantro] Session closed; book; volunteer

Dear All

On that final note from Cathy Greenhalgh I'd like to close this session on "Understanding Media Practices" by thanking our discussants, Mark Hobart and Ursula Rao, as well as all other participants for a very lively and thought-provoking discussion!

As some of you already know, Birgit Bruchler and I are planning an edited book on this theme. We shall be putting out a call for book chapter proposals through this list in due course and welcome all proposals. The publishers Berghahn have shown a keen interest in the idea so we'll be submitting a proposal to them soon.

Please get in touch with Birgit (birgitbraeuchler at gmx.net) and myself

(jpostill at usa.net) if you have any queries on this.

Best wishes

John

PS We'd like to upload a transcript of this session onto the website as a PDF. Because we're a bit busy here at the admin end of things, we'd be very grateful for a volunteer who could turn this mailing list exchange into a word document following our usual e-seminar format. Please drop me a line off-list if you could spare 20-30 min -- many thanks!