

## ANTHROPOLOGY OF MEDIA

**John Postill**

*RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia*

**Mark Allen Peterson**

*Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, USA*

**Keywords:** media, ethnography, anthropology, history, global flows, mediation, change, practice

### Contents

1. Introduction
    - 1.1. Definition
    - 1.2. Contributions
  2. History of Media Anthropology
  3. Theory and Methods in Media Anthropology
  4. Media and Sociocultural Change
  5. Media and Global Flows
  6. Conclusion
- Glossary  
Bibliography  
Biographical Sketches

### Summary

Simultaneous with the rise of agriculture and the development of cities came human efforts to use technology to fix, extend and elaborate on human communication. From impressing cuneiform signs into clay tablets to the acoustical designs of structures to aid speaking, humans developed a vast array of mediational spaces, artifacts and practices. These tools and the practices associated with them entered into every aspect of human life and transformed those lives. Each new technology for symbolic communication led to new social institutions and new ways of sharing cultural models of the social and cosmological orders. Media are, therefore, a fundamental aspect of human life and a necessary subject for anthropological inquiry. However, only since the establishment of the printing press, and the subsequent invention of broadcast, then digital communications technologies, have cultural and social anthropologists begun to seriously study processes of mediation.

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Definition

The anthropology of media is the study of human use of technologies to generate, extend and transform—that is, to mediate - modes of human communication. While the study of media anthropology should thus extend from the earliest systems of writing, in practice media anthropology tends to focus on technologies such as print, film,

broadcast and digital media that extend human communication from dyads and small groups to mass audiences. Media anthropology has strong links to and overlaps with linguistic anthropology, visual anthropology and symbolic anthropology, as well as to such disciplines as media studies, film studies, cultural studies and science and technology studies.

But media anthropology should be seen not simply as an inquiry into communication technologies and their contents but as the study of the broader processes of mediation. Mediation refers to the material frameworks (including human bodies) humans use to enable and constrain communicative action within and across multiple social orders.

## 1.2. Contributions

Although a relative latecomer to the study of mass media among social sciences, the anthropology of media offers a number of interesting and important contributions to the study of media:

**Ethnographic sensibility.** Anthropologists of media usually conduct relatively extended, open-ended fieldwork which focuses not on media content or media technologies, as do many other disciplines, but on the everyday practices of people, and the ways media production, distribution and consumption are parts of larger institutional systems.

**Holistic perspective.** Media anthropologists focus on media practices, technologies and artifacts not as a separate social domain but as one part of a broader range of social worlds under study.

**Global breadth.** Media anthropologists are as likely to work in remote corners of the global South as they are in metropolitan areas of Europe or North America. This wide geographical scope allows them to broaden the media research agenda from its traditional North Atlantic heartland and to avoid the common trap of taking European or American media practices as normative or predictive of media uses elsewhere.

**Theoretical complexity.** Because they focus primarily on human users of media rather than technologies or media content, media anthropologists bring to the study of media a long disciplinary history of grappling with sociocultural complexity through interconnected theories of exchange, social formation and cultural representations. This allows anthropology to move beyond simple models of communication and textual analysis that dominated many other approaches to media studies.

**Evolutionary perspective.** While they tend to be extremely skeptical of theories that ascribe particular social transformative capacities to specific technologies, anthropologists are increasingly interested in understanding the roles media plays in sociocultural change.

## 2. History of Media Anthropology

Anecdotal interest in media by anthropologists dates back at least to Franz Boas's remarks on Native American newspapers in the *Handbook of American Indian Languages*. Serious interest in the topic came in the 1930s with ethnographic approaches to contemporary US cities, such as Robert and Helen Lynd's Middletown studies (Lynd & Lynd, 1929; Lynd, 1937) and William Lloyd Warner's Yankee City project (Warner & Lunt, 1941; Warner & Lunt, 1942; Warner & Srole, 1945; Warner & Low, 1947; Warner, 1959). Although important, and influential at the time they were produced, these works began what became an unfortunate trend in anthropology for nearly fifty years: print, film, and electronic media were included in most studies of Western European and North American societies but ignored among non-Western societies (for an important exception, see Powdermaker's *Coppertown*).

Written within the structural-functionalist paradigm that dominated social theory at the time, most early works by anthropologists on media were concerned with how media enabled and constrained the flow of information within a social structure, how media content expressed (and shaped) cultural norms and values, and how people incorporated ideas and practices from media into their lives. Perhaps the most widely read of these early works was Hortense Powdermaker's *Hollywood: The Dream Factory* (1950), which remains the only substantive anthropological study of the US film industry.

During the Second World War anthropologists in the U.S. were cut off from their field areas by the conflict. Drawing on the Boasian notion that culture could be conceptualized as a coherently patterned and bounded social unit, anthropologists sought to perform 'culture at a distance' (Mead and Metraux 1954) by analyzing literature, films, music and other types of expressive culture as what Malinowski (1922) had called 'documents of native mentality' and Geertz (1973) would later describe as 'stories we tell ourselves about ourselves'. Analysis of media was often contextualized by interviews with migrants and refugees from the places being studied. Institutionalized first by the US Office of Naval Intelligence, and after the war at the Center for Research in Contemporary Cultures, the goal was to elicit high-order "themes" that recur in multiple cultural expressions across a range of materials and which could be clustered to offer broad assessments of "national cultures." While always subject to criticism within anthropology (even by its practitioners), it produced some highly regarded work, most notably Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*.

Another important trend in the anthropology of media was the emergence of development media. This had its roots in the "modernization" studies that emerged in American anthropology just prior to the Second World War and became increasingly prominent in the post-war period. The global trend in urbanization did not escape anthropologists, and the cultural relationships and potential for innovation created by movements of people between cities and "traditional" villages became an increasingly interesting project of study. In a series of influential works, Robert Redfield and Milton Singer proposed an "urban-folk" continuum, arguing that urban intellectuals—including media professionals but also religious leaders, political propagandists, educators and many others—drew on "folk" symbols, which were appropriated, rationalized and

incorporated into “Great Traditions”— cultural systems at a national level. In turn, new ideas, cosmologies and social practices from these national cultures made their way back into local communities and were incorporated into everyday life. Local communities thus served as sources of authenticity, creativity and innovation, while urban centers served to fuse local traditions into a shared civilizational culture that could serve as a basis for national identity without seeming too alien (Redfield & Singer, 1954; Singer, 1960).

This notion of fusing authentic local traditions with innovation to make them palatable served as one of several theoretical bases for the creation of development communication. During the Cold War between the US and USSR, US anthropologists were often enlisted in efforts to “develop” non-Western societies. Many development theories were rooted in a teleological model of social evolution that assumed all societies passed through a series of stages from “primitive” (indicated by kin-based social organization and dominated by non-market systems of exchange) to “advanced” (marked by industrialization and market economies). Traditional cultures become, in this model, impediments to advancement. Development theorists advocated using print, radio, film, television and other media to promote new values and norms that would assist societies in adapting to industrialization, wage labor, market exchange, commodification, bureaucratic systems of government, and other forms of modernity. Anthropologists were often employed not only to develop culturally appropriate forms of symbolic content for such media, but also to assist in creating culturally appropriate modes of media communication (for example, should men and women watch films together? Were separate screenings necessary for different age sets? And so forth). Ultimately, efforts to harness media as a “magic bullet” to transform societies failed to yield the kinds of results development projects sought, and many development theories came under severe criticism by anthropologists.

In the 1960s, media anthropology began to increasingly focus on media content as forms of expressive culture in industrialized, technological societies. This approach to media as expressive culture was strongly influenced by the structural anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss, and the symbolic and interpretive anthropological approaches advanced by Mary Douglas, Victor and Edith Turner, and Clifford Geertz. These anthropologists sought to make broad generalizations about the cultural messages encoded in media, especially value systems, moral codes and cosmological order (Claus, 1976; Karp, 1976).

Interpretive and symbolic approaches received a significant boost with the advent of the field of cultural studies in the UK during the 1970s. To the study of symbolic expression, cultural studies added an important focus on power. Instead of dealing with broadly conceived cultural orders, cultural studies dealt with such traditional anthropological foci as class structures, national formations, ethnicity, age race, gender and other forms of social classification, asking how popular media might express, reinforce or contest ideologies that support inequalities within these social forms. Cultural studies drew attention to the ways social forms and identities were represented in popular culture forms—primarily media texts—and asked how consuming such media created opportunities for media consumers to reinforce, negotiate or resist their own identities and social formations. Several anthropologists published nuanced

readings of American films in mainstream anthropology journals, and many anthropologists studying media found ideas in the cultural studies literature far more useful than theory generated in mainstream anthropology. Elizabeth Traube's *Dreaming Identities* (1992) is perhaps the most notable example.

Although strongly influenced by cultural studies, most media anthropologists did not fully embrace the cultural studies movement for a number of reasons. First, cultural studies was primarily focused on analyzing the social positions inscribed in texts rather than ethnographically engaging with the actual text consumers occupying those social positions. Second, although much of the theory in cultural studies was predicated on a critical stance toward capitalist culture industries, there was little or no direct interest in ethnographic research into the workings of media production institutions and practices. Third, the strong emphasis in cultural studies on how media consumption is inflected by race, gender and class, produced what was for many anthropologists an ethnocentric bias toward North American and European cultural categories, as opposed to categories like caste, religious community, language community, age set, or other identity distinctions that may be equally or more salient in non-Western settings. Works like Purnima Mankekar's *Screening Culture* (1999) demonstrate the power of ethnographic engagement with text consumers within an approach influenced by cultural studies, while Barry Dornfeld's *Producing Public Television, Producing Public Culture* (1998) and William Mazzarella's *Shoveling Smoke* (2003) demonstrate the necessity of more nuanced approaches to cultural production both in North America and elsewhere in the world.

Beginning in the mid-1980s anthropology experienced an upsurge in media anthropology, driven largely by a recognition that media were globally ubiquitous and anthropology could no longer ignore their presence as part of the everyday lives of the peoples they studied. Anthropological studies of media practices proliferated, initially focusing on broadcast and distributed media like film, television, news and magazines. The emergence of digital media, and of convergent technologies like personal computers, cell phones and tablets, significantly expanded interest in, and breadth and intensity of, media anthropology.

While many anthropologists of media initially found themselves on the margins of the discipline, with few venues in which to teach and publish their research, this has significantly changed. The launch of the journal *Public Culture* in 1985, the Media Anthropology workshop at the University of Hamburg in 1999, the founding of the Media Anthropology Network within the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) in 2003, and the establishment of media anthropology degree programs at universities such as the Free University of Berlin, Harvard, New York University, and SOAS, University of London, as well as the inclusion of media topics in many cultural anthropology textbooks, attest to the growing institutionalization of media anthropology within the broader discipline.

-  
-

TO ACCESS ALL THE 27 PAGES OF THIS CHAPTER,  
Visit: <http://www.eolss.net/Eolss-sampleAllChapter.aspx>

## Bibliography

Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. [A classic text that offers a framework for the cultural study of globalization rooted in an understanding of global flows and imagination as a social force.]

Armbrust, W. (2012). A History of New Media in the Arab Middle East. *Journal for Cultural Research* 16(2-3), 155-174. [Article describing the historical appropriation by Middle Eastern countries of media technologies from the West, and shifting cultural understandings of “newness.”]

Augé, M. (1986) Telecultural Heroes, or A Night at the Embassy. *Cultural Anthropology* 27(2): 184-188. [A brief article offering examples of how media texts produced in one place are understood very differently elsewhere, and how this undermines some influential political economic approaches to modernity.]

Augé, M. (2008). *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe. London and New York: Verso. [Introduces the concept of “nonspaces” (such as supermarkets, airports, hotels, motorways and bank teller machines) and argues that they have subtle but profound effects on global society.]

Beeman, W. O. (1982). *Culture, performance and communication in Iran*. Tokyo, Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia & Africa. [A collection of essays on links between Iranian popular culture and linguistic performance.]

Beeman, W. O. (1984). The cultural role of the media in Iran: The revolution of 1978–1979 and after. *The news media and national and international conflict*, Arno, A. & Dissanayake, W., eds., Boulder, Westview, 147-165. [Traces shifts in media practices before, during and after the Iranian revolution of 1979.]

Benedict, Ruth (1946). *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. [Classic study that seeks to offer an overarching “national character” description of Japanese culture.]

Bird, S. E. ed. (2010). *The Anthropology of News and Journalism: Global perspectives*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. [An anthropological study of news and journalism in the contemporary world]

Boas, F. (1911) *Handbook of American Indian Languages*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute. [Foundational text in the anthropology of Native North American peoples.]

Boellstorff (2008). *Coming of Age in Second Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. [A pioneering work being one of the first anthropologies of a virtual, digital community]

Bonilla, Y., & Rosa, J. (2015). #Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States. *American Ethnologist*, 42(1), 4-17. [Draws from linguistic anthropology and social movements research to investigate the study of ‘hashtag ethnography’.]

Booth, G. D. (1995). Traditional content and narrative structure in the Hindi commercial cinema. *Asian Folklore Studies* 54(2), 169-190. [Compares common elements of Indian films to structural elements of traditional Indian storytelling and theater.]

Born, G. (2004). *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the reinvention of The BBC*. London, Secker and Warburg [An ethnographic study of the BBC]

Boyer, D. (2011). News agency and news mediation. *Social Anthropology* 19(1):6-22. [The everyday practices of editors in a German news agency.]

Boyer, D. (2012). From media anthropology to the anthropology of mediation. R. Fardon e J. Gledhill. *The SAGE Handbook of Social Anthropology*. London: Sage, 383-392. [Argues for a shift from media anthropology to the anthropology of mediation, given how inseparable communicational media are from ‘broader social-political processes of circulation, exchange, imagination and knowing’.]

Bräuchler and Postill eds. (2010). *Theorising Media and Practice*. Oxford and New York: Berghahn. [A collection of papers intended as a theoretical analysis on media]

Briggs, A., & Burke, P. (2009). *A social history of the media: from Gutenberg to the Internet*. Polity. [Despite its title, the authors steer clear of technological determinism to draw a rich genealogy of modern communication media.]

Claus, Peter. (1976). A structuralist appreciation of 'Star Trek'. *The American Dimension*, Arens, W. & Montague, S.P., eds., Port Washington, NY: Alfred, 15-31. [Application of the structural analysis of myth to a popular television series.]

Coleman, E. G. (2010). Ethnographic approaches to digital media. *Annual review of anthropology*, 39, 487-505. [A survey of existing ethnographic studies of digital media through three main categories: 'the cultural politics of digital media, the vernacular cultures of digital media, and the prosaics of digital media'.]

Couldry, N., & Hepp, A. (2013). Conceptualizing mediatization: Contexts, traditions, arguments. *Communication Theory*, 23(3), 191-202. [An introduction to a special issue on the concept of mediatization.]

De Witte, M. (2003). Altar media's living word: televised charismatic Christianity in Ghana. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 33(2), 172-202. [This article is an ethnographic account of a popular charismatic church in Ghana and its media ministry.]

Desai, J. (2004). *Beyond Bollywood: The cultural politics of South Asian diasporic film*. Routledge. [Examines the relationship between the Indian diaspora and the globalization of Indian commercial cinema.]

Doostdar, A. (2004). "The vulgar spirit of blogging": on language, culture, and power in Persian weblogistan. *American Anthropologist*, 106(4), 651-662. [Focuses on a controversy in Iran triggered by a blogger who ridiculed the idea that Islam was compatible with human rights.]

Dornfeld, B. E. (1998) *Producing Public Television, Producing Public Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. [An ethnographic account of the production of an American public television documentary series.]

Eickelman, D.F. and J.W. Anderson (2003), eds., *New Media and the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, 2nd ed. (Indiana University Press). [Examines the relationship between the proliferation of 'new media' and the seeming emergence of a public sphere in the Muslim world.]

Eisenlohr P. 2006. As Makkah is sweet and beloved, so is Madina: Islam, devotional genres and electronic mediation in Mauritius. *American Ethnologist* 33(2): 230-45. [In Mauritius, media practices have become an integral part of transmitting genealogical forms of Islamic knowledge.]

Eriksen, T. H. (2001). *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology*. London: Pluto Press. [A widely used undergraduate textbook.]

Estalella, A. (2011). Ensamblajes de esperanza: Un estudio antropológico del bloguear apasionado. Unpublished PhD thesis, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona. [On the mundane, everyday nature of 'passionate blogging'.]

Fox, Richard. (1996). Communalism and modernity. *Contesting the nation: Religion, community, and the politics of democracy in India*. Ludden, D. (Ed.), Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 235-249. [Account of the rise of the Indian *Hindutva* social movement as a reactionary response to selected aspects of modernity.]

Ganti, T. (2012). *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry*, Durham: Duke University Press. [An ethnography of Indian cinema production over a decade, which links efforts by Hindi filmmakers to accrue social and economic capital while managing the risks of film production to the globalization of Bollywood film industry.]

Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books. [Classic introduction to interpretive cultural anthropology.]

Gershon (2010). *The Breakup 2.0: Disconnecting over New Media*. Ithaca, Cornell UP. [An anthropology of the use of Facebook, mobile phones and IM among young American people]

Ginsburg, F. D., Abu-Lughod, L., & Larkin, B. (2002). *Media worlds: Anthropology on new terrain*. Univ of California Press. [Seminal reader in media anthropology.]

Ginsburg, F. (2008). Rethinking the digital age. *The Media and Social Theory*. New York: Routledge, 127-144. [An anthropological critique of widespread assumptions about the impact of digital media.]

Gómez Cruz, E., & Ardèvol, E. (2013a). Ethnography and the field in media(ted) studies: A practice theory approach. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 9(3). [The uses of practice theory in media and digital ethnography.]

Gómez Cruz, E., & Ardèvol, E. (2013b). Some ethnographic notes on a Flickr group. *Photographies*, 6(1), 35-44. [Different photographic practices 'enable and enhance mediations that are material, visual and digital at the same time'.]

Govil, N. (2007) Bollywood and the Frictions of Global Modernity. In *Media on the Move: Global Flow and Contra-Flow*. Daya Kishan Thussu, ed. Pp. 76-88. Routledge. [This book chapter uses the concept of *friction* to explain the globalization of Hindi cinema.]

Gray, P.A. (2016) Memory, body, and the online researcher: following Russian street demonstrations via social media, *American Ethnologist* 43 (3): 500-510. [A discussion of the implications of studying a field site remotely.]

Hackett, R. I. (1998). Charismatic/Pentecostal appropriation of media technologies in Nigeria and Ghana. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 258-277. [Article describing the role Pentecostal Christianity played in the rise of the Nigerian and Ghanaian video film industry.]

Hamilton, A. (1993) Video Crackdown, or the Sacrificial Pirate. *Public Culture* 5, 515-532. [Discussion of practices of remediation of international films in Thailand.]

Hepp, A., Hjarvard, S., & Lundby, K. (2015). Mediatization: theorizing the interplay between media, culture and society. *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(2), 314-324. [A defense of mediatization as the study of the interrelationship between changes in societal fields and in communication media.]

Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (2010). *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*. Random House. [A much cited, and critiqued, account of the mainstream media as institutions that further the interests of the powerful.]

Hobart, M. (2000). The end of the world news: television and a problem of articulation in Bali. *International journal of cultural studies*, 3 (1). 79-102. [A study on the relationship between power and the media (especially tv) starting from an ethnology of the analysis on the same topic from dwellers of a Bali village]

Hobart, M. (2010). What do we mean by media practices?. In: Bräuchler B. & Postill, J. Eds. *Theorising media and practice*. Oxford, Berg, 55-75. [A deep and well-documented analysis and theorization of the ways and implications of defining media practices]

Hobart, M. (Ed.). (2002). *An Anthropological Critique of Development: The growth of ignorance*. London: Routledge. [How development projects turn active, knowledgeable participants into supposedly ignorant recipients of 'expertise'.]

Hogan, P.C. (2003). Rasa theory and dharma theory: from *Home and the World* to *The Bandit Queen*. *Quarterly Review of Film* 20(1), 37-52. [Explores the use of classical India theories of aesthetics to understand Indian commercial films.]

Holmes, T. (2016). Reframing the Favela, Remapping the City: Territorial Embeddedness and (Trans) Locality in 'Framing Content' on Brazilian Favela Blogs. *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 25(2), 297-319. [Digital culture as a key arena of contested representations of Rio de Janeiro's shanty towns.]

Hopkins (2012). *The monetisation of personal blogging: assembling the self and markets in Malaysia*. Unpublished Phd thesis, Monash University, Melbourne. [A PhD thesis, based on case studies, investigating the commercial and sociological aspects of personal blogging in Malaysia]

Horst H. & Miller, D. (2006). *The Cell Phone: an Anthropology of Communication*. Oxford: Berg [An Anthropology of the use of mobile phones in the early 2000s]



Jensen (2007). The Digital Provide: Information (Technology), Market Performance, and Welfare in the South Indian Fisheries Sector, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122 (3), 879-924. [A study of the use of information tools in a South Indian fisherman community]

Johnson-Hanks, J. (2007) Women on the market: marriage, consumption, and the internet in urban Cameroon, *American Ethnologist* 34:4 pp 642-58. [An ethnographic study of how Cameroonian women seek foreign husbands online.]

Juris, J. S. (2012). Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: Social media, public space, and emerging logics of aggregation. *American Ethnologist*, 39(2), 259-279. [Argues that social media have fostered the assembling of crowds of individuals in public spaces, a phenomenon the author describes as 'aggregation'.]

Jurkiewicz S. (2011). Blogging as Counterpublic? The Lebanese and Egyptian Blogosphere in Comparison. In *Social Dynamics 2.0: Researching Change in Times of Media Convergence*, ed. N.C. Schneider and B. Graf, 27– 48. Berlin: Frank & Timme. [This chapter applies the notion of 'counterpublic' to the comparative study of political blogging.]

Karp, Ivan (1976). *Good Marx for the Anthropologist: Structure and Antistructure in Duck Soup. The American Dimension*, Arens, W. & Montague, S.P., eds., Port Washington, NY: Alfred, 37-50. [Application of ritual analysis to an early 20<sup>th</sup> century American comedy film series.]

Katsuno, H., & Maret, J. (2004). Localizing the Pokémon TV series for the American market. *Pikachu's Global Adventure*, Tobin, J., ed., Durham: Duke University Press, 80-107. [Describes how the Japanese anime series *Pokémon* was successfully localized to be more attractive to North American audiences.]

Kelty, C. M. (2008). *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press [A history and cultural critic of Free Software].

Kjaerulff, J. (2010a). *Internet and Change: An Anthropology of Knowledge and Flexible Work*. Højbjerg: Intervention Press. [An ethnographic study and a sociological analysis of telework and of its reflection in the Internet]

Kjaerulff, J. (2010b). A Barthian approach to practice and media: internet engagements among teleworkers in rural Denmark. In: Bräuchler, B. and J. Postill (eds), *Theorising Media and Practice*. Oxford and New York: Berghahn. [An ethnographic study and a sociological analysis of telework and of its reflection in the Internet]

Kulick, D., & Willson, M. (1994). Rambo's wife saves the day: Subjugating the gaze and subverting the narrative in a Papua New Guinean swamp. *Visual Anthropology Review* 10 (2), 1-13. [Fascinating exploration of the ways an audience in New Guinea views, interprets and localizes a viewing of a Western film.]

Larkin, B. (1997). Indian films and Nigerian lovers: Media and the creation of parallel modernities. *Africa*, 67(3), 406-440. [This article describes the rise of new genres of African popular art inspired by Bollywood films.]

Lynd, R. & Lynd, H.M. (1929) *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture*. New York: Harcourt Brace. [Early attempt to apply the methods of anthropology to study a Western urban community.]

Lynd, R. (1937) *Middletown Revisited*. New York: Harcourt Brace. [Sequel to *Middletown* looking at the community a decade later.]

Madianou & Miller (2012). *Migration and New Media: Transnational Families and Polymedia*. London: Routledge. [A socio-anthropological analysis, based on a rich and years-long ethnographic study on the use of the new media and means of communication in families whose members have been separated by migration]

Malaby, T. (2009). *Making Virtual Worlds: Linden Lab and Second Life*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. [A socio-anthropological study of two virtual worlds and their digital communities]

Malinowski, B. (1922) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, London: Routledge and Sons. [A classic anthropological text in which Malinowski argues for the centrality of 'the native's point of view' to the ethnographic endeavor.]

Mankekar, P. (1999) *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press. [Demonstrates the power of ethnographic engagement with text consumers within an approach influenced by cultural studies.]

Mazzarella, W. (2003). *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and Globalization in Contemporary India*. Durham, NC, Duke University Press. [An ethnographic study of India's advertising industry.]

Mazzarella, W. (2004). Culture, globalization, mediation. *Annual review of anthropology*, 345-367. [Takes issue with globalisation arguments that posit media as 'impacting' on a locality from without, when in fact 'local worlds' are already intersected by 'social technologies of mediation'.]

Mead, M. and Metraux, R. (eds.) (1954) *The Study of Culture at a Distance*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Text advocating the study of popular culture and interviewing of migrants as a pragmatic alternative to ethnography when ethnographic research is not practicable.]

Meyer, B. (2011). Mediation and immediacy: sensational forms, semiotic ideologies and the question of the medium. *Social Anthropology*, 19(1), 23-39. [Draws from fieldwork on Pentecostal practices in Ghana to reject the common opposition between media(tion) and immediacy, which she sees as being inextricably linked.]

Millar, D. & Slater, D. (2000). *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*. Oxford: Berg. [A pioneering ethnography of the Internet]

Miller, D., Costa, E., Haynes, N., McDonald, T., Nicolescu, R., Sinanan, J., & Wang, X. (2016). *How the World Changed Social Media*. London: UCL Press. [A comparative analysis that summarizes the main findings of an ethnographic study of social media in different countries around the world.]

Moeran, B. (2013). *A Japanese advertising agency: An anthropology of media and markets*. London: Routledge. [A study of a major advertising agency in Tokyo based on twelve months of fieldwork.]

O'Barr, W. (1994). *Culture and the ad: Exploring otherness in the world of advertising*. Boulder: Westview. [Analysis of ideological meanings in US and Japanese advertisements that incorporate exotic "others."]

Ong, A. (1999). *Flexible citizenship: The cultural logics of transnationality*. Duke University Press. [Influential text on globalization that argues that the concept of "assemblage" better captures the ways diverse groups in motion construct identities than notions of national and states.]

Ong, A., & Collier, S. J. (Eds.). (2008). *Global assemblages: technology, politics, and ethics as anthropological problems*. John Wiley & Sons. [Collection of essays exploring the usefulness of the concept of "assemblages" in describing global modernity.]

Ortner, S. B. (1984). Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26(1), 126-166. [A history of anthropological theorization since the 1960s]

Peterson, M.A. (2003). *Anthropology and mass communication: media and myth in the new millennium*. Berghahn. [Offer a historical overview of anthropological approaches to media.]

Peterson, M.A. (2011a). *Connected in Cairo: Growing Up Cosmopolitan in the Modern Middle East*. Indiana University Press. [This ethnography of popular culture, consumption and globalization in Egypt argues that a theory of indexicality is essential for cultural analysis of globalization.]

Peterson, M.A. (2011b). "Egypt's media ecology in a time of revolution" *Arab Media and Society* 13 [http://www.anthropologiesproject.org/2011/12/toward-ethnography-of-contingency-in.html] Accessed Aug. 29, 2016. [Media play key roles in revolutionary processes such as the Egyptian uprising of 2011.]

Pink, S., & Mackley, K. L. (2013). Saturated and situated: expanding the meaning of media in the routines of everyday life. *Media, Culture & Society*, 35(6), 677-691. [A rare critique of practice-theoretical approaches to the study of media in daily life.]

Pink, S., Horst, H., Postill, J., Hjorth, L., Lewis, T., & Tacchi, J. (2016). *Digital ethnography: principles and practice*. Sage. [An introduction to the emerging field of digital ethnography, that is, to the ethnographic study of people's engagement with digital technologies and the conduct of ethnography using digital media.]

Postill, J. (2006). *Media and Nation Building: How the Iban Became Malaysian*. Oxford and New York: Berghahn. [This is a study, based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork, about the adoption, the diffusion

and the use of social media among the Iban of Sarawak, focusing on their employ in nation building and in the diffusion of national myths]

Postill, J. (2009). 'What is the point of media anthropology?' *Social Anthropology* 17(3), 334-337, 340-342. [One side of the debate between John Postill and Mark A. Peterson on the strengths and limitations of the anthropology of media.]

Postill, J. (2010). Researching the Internet, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 16 (3), 646–650. [This is a paper focused on methodologies of studying the Internet]

Postill, J. (2011). *Localizing the Internet: An Anthropological Account*. Oxford and New York: Berghahn. [This study focuses on the many aspects and changes of the Internet that seem to point to an ongoing 'localization' of the Internet]

Postill, J. (2012). Digital politics and political engagement. In H. Horst and D. Miller (eds) *Digital Anthropology*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 165-184. [This chapter broaches the question of what anthropology can contribute to the study of digital politics.]

Postill, J. (2013). Democracy in an age of viral reality: A media epidemiography of Spain's indignados movement. *Ethnography*, 15 (1): 50-68. [This article explores the possibility of an ethnographic study of media virals through the case study of a protest movement.]

Postill, J. (2017a). The diachronic ethnography of media: from social changing to actual social changes. *Moment, Journal of Cultural Studies* 4(1): 19-43. [How to study concrete social changes – rather than unspecified 'social change' – ethnographically.]

Postill, J. (2017b). Doing remote ethnography. In *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*. Eds. Larissa Hjorth, Heather Horst, Anne Galloway and Genevieve Bell. London: Routledge, pp. 61-69. [The chapter discusses a growing trend in ethnographic research: the study of social and cultural realities 'at a distance', through digital technologies such as livestreaming, webcams and microblogs.]

Postill, J. and S. Pink (2012). Social media ethnography: the digital researcher in a messy web. *Media International Australia* 145: 123-134. [Argues for an approach to the ethnographic study of social media that goes beyond the common reliance in the field on notions of community and network.]

Powdermaker, H. (1950) *Hollywood: The Dream Factory; an Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-makers*. New York: Little, Brown & Co. [Classic early ethnography of the US film industry.]

Powdermaker, H. (1962) *Coppertown: Changing Africa*. New York: Harper & Row. [Early ethnographic effort to analyze the roles media play in social transformation.]

Pype, K. (2012). *The Making of the Pentecostal Melodrama: religion, media and gender in Kinshasa*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Rajagopalan, S. (2008). *Indian films in Soviet cinemas: The culture of movie-going after Stalin*. Indiana University Press. [Historical account of the popularity of Indian films in the USSR.]

Rao, U. (2010) *News as Culture. Journalistic Practices and the Remaking of Indian Leadership Traditions*. Oxford: Berghahn. [A socio-anthropological study of the news in India, with particular attention to political and identitarian narratives]

Rasmussen, S. (2003) "Gendered discourses and mediated modernities: urban and rural performances of Tuareg smith women" *Journal of anthropological research* 59(4): 487-509. [A study showing how Tuareg smith women's roles and discourses were changing as elite feminist organizations deployed radio and other media to advance modernist agendas.]

Redfield, R. & Singer, M. (1954). The Cultural Role of Cities. *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 3(1), 53-73. [Early influential essay on urbanization and social change.]

Reed, A. (2005). 'My blog is me': Texts and persons in UK online journal culture (and anthropology). *Ethnos*, 70(2), 220-242. [A discussion of the reception of anthropological and other blogs.]

Schulz, D. 2006. "Promises of (im)mediate salvation: Islam, broadcast media, and the remaking of religious experience in Mali" *American Ethnologist*, 33(2): 210–229. [After the establishment in 1991 of parliamentary democracy in Mali, local radio stations mushroomed across the country, with new charismatic Islamic preachers gaining a strong foothold.]

Singer, M. (1960). The great tradition of Hinduism in the city of Madras. In *Anthropology of Folk Religion*. C. Leslie, ed. New York, Vintage Books, 105-166. [Early influential account of urbanization and social change that incorporates the circulation of popular culture as part of the process.]

Skuse, Andrew, Marie Gillespie & Gerry Power (eds) 2011. *Drama for development: cultural translation and social change*. xxiii, 324 pp., tables, bibliogr. New Delhi: Sage Publications India. [An anthropological study of the BBC World Service Trust's (WST) radio drama production and its consequences for development.]

Slater, D. R. & Tacchi, J. (2004) *Research: ICT Innovations for Poverty Reduction*. New Delhi: UNESCO [A report and analysis on comparative research findings on local initiatives using of Information and communication technologies (ICTs) to reduce poverty, in various country of South East Asia]

Slater, D. (2014). *New media, development and globalization: making connections in the global South*. John Wiley & Sons. [Most development media projects sustain affluent North narratives divorced from the daily lives of people living in the global South.]

Sreberny-Mohammadi, A. & Mohammadi, A. (1994) *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Change and the Iranian Revolution*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press. [Describes the use of "small media"—cassettes tapes, fax machines—in the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979.]

Stammler, F. M. (2009). Mobile Phone Revolution in the Tundra? Technological change among Russian reindeer nomads. *Folklore (Tartu)* 41, 47-78. [A paper on the socio-cultural changes accompanying the use of mobile phones among communities of reindeer nomads in Russia]

Stein, L., Kidd, D. & Rodríguez A. eds. (2009). *Making Our Media: Global Initiatives Toward a Democratic Public Sphere, Volume Two: National and Global Movements for Democratic Communication*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press. Collection of essays on community media and social movements.

Takhteyev, Y. (2012). *Coding Places: Software practice in a South American city*. MIT Press. [An ethnographic study of the sustained labor that software practitioners in a city of the global South must undertake to give software its 'seeming universality'.]

Tenhunen, S. (2008). Mobile technology in the village: ICTs, culture, and social logistics in India. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (n.s.) 14, 515-534. [A paper based on field-research on the use and implications of mobile technologies across some communities in India]

Toft-Nielsen, C., & Krogager, S. G. S. (2015). Gaming practices in everyday life. An analytical operationalization of field theory by means of practice theory. *MedieKultur: Journal of media and communication research*, 31(58), 68-84. [Bourdieu's field theory's stress on conflict jars with the experience of non-competitive gaming practices, hence the need for a practice theoretical approach to gaming.]

Traube, E. G. (1992). *Dreaming Identities Class, Gender, and Generation in 1980s Hollywood Movies*. Boulder, Westview. [An anthropologist constructs situated readings of the ideologies in popular American films of the 1980s.]

Tsing, A. L. (2011). *Friction: An ethnography of global connection*. Princeton University Press. [Based on relatively short-term ethnography in Indonesia, this book introduced the term friction to capture "the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" in global flows.]

Vidali, D. S. (2016). Multisensorial Anthropology: A Retrofit Cracking Open of the Field. *American Anthropologist* 118(2), 395-400. [A call for a multisensorial anthropological practice that captures humans' multiple ways of being in the world.]

Vidali, D. S., & Peterson, M. A. (2012). Ethnography as theory and method in the study of political communication. *The SAGE Handbook of Political Communication*, 264. [Taking media production as their focus, these authors argue for a methodological rethinking of political communication.]

Wallerstein, I. (1974). *The modern world-system: Capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century*. Academic Press. [Offers a framework for analyzing globalization as an economic system linking diverse actors around the world in ways that benefit some and exploit others.]

Wallis, C. (2011). Mobile Phones without Guarantees: The Promises of Technology and the Contingencies of Culture. *New Media & Society* 13 (3), 471- 485. [The paper focuses on novelties generated, in developing countries, by the mobile phone's global diffusion, as for instance the ability to enable individuals to increase their income]

Warde (2004). La normalità del mangiare fuori [The normality of eating out]. *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, 45 (4), 493-518. [A sociology of eating out]

Warner, W.L. & Low, J.O. (1947) *The Social System of a Modern Factory*. New Haven: Yale University Press. [Fourth volume of an extensive ethnographic study of an American city.]

Warner, W.L. (1959) *The Living and the Dead: A Study in the Symbolic Life of Americans*. New Haven: Yale University Press. [Analysis of ritual, media, popular culture and political action in an American city.]

Warner, W. L. & Lunt, P. S. (1941) *The Social Life of a Modern Community*. New Haven: Yale University Press. [First volume of an extensive ethnographic study of an American city.]

Warner, W.L. & Lunt, P.S. (1942) *The Status System of a Modern Community*. New Haven: Yale University Press. [Second volume of an extensive ethnographic study of an American city.]

Warner, W.L. & Srole, L. (1945) *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups*. New Haven: Yale University Press. [Third volume of an extensive ethnographic study of an American city.]

Werner, J. F. (2006). How women are using television to domesticate globalization: a case study on the reception and consumption of telenovelas in Senegal. *Visual anthropology*, 19(5), 443-472. [Latin American telenovelas were popular among women in Senegal because they dealt with everyday issues and social problems of general concern.]

Wilk, R. R. (1993). "It's destroying a whole generation": Television and moral discourse in Belize. *Visual Anthropology*, 5(3-4), 229-244. [An account of public discourse about the dangers of television in Belize.]

Yano, C. (2004). Panic attacks: anti-Pokémon voices in global markets. *Pikachu's Global Adventure*, Tobin, J., ed., Durham: Duke University Press, 108-140. [Describes "moral panics" that occurred as the Pokémon phenomena became perceived by some in the United States as a danger to American cultural values.]

### Biographical Sketches

**John Postill** holds an MA in Social Anthropology from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, and a PhD in Anthropology from University College London (UCL). He is currently a Senior Lecturer in Communication at RMIT University, in Melbourne. Formerly he was a Vice-Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow at RMIT and a Digital Anthropology Fellow at UCL. His publications include *Localizing the Internet* (2011), *Media and Nation Building* (2006) and the co-edited volume *Theorising Media and Practice* (2010, with Birgit Bräuchler). Presently he is completing a book titled *The Rise of Nerd Politics* (London: Pluto), and the co-edited volume *Theorising Media and Conflict* (with Philipp Budka and Birgit Bräuchler). From 2018 he will be working on an anthropological history of modern media and communication provisionally titled *The Cultural Effects of Media*. He blogs at [media/anthropology](http://media/anthropology).

**Mark Allen Peterson** is Professor of Anthropology and International Studies at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, USA. He holds a PhD in Anthropology from Brown University in Providence, RI, USA. He has also taught at the American University in Cairo, Gettysburg College and Georgetown University. From 2012-2017 he served as Chair of the Department of Anthropology at Miami University. He is the author of *Anthropology and Mass Communications: Media and Myth in the New Millennium* (2003) and *Connected in Cairo: Growing up Cosmopolitan in the Modern Middle East* (2011), and co-author of *Introduction to International Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Global Issues* (2017, with Sheldon Anderson and Stanley W. Toops). He is the author of more than thirty scholarly articles and book chapters. He blogs at [connectedincairo.com](http://connectedincairo.com).