

070.309: ANTHROPOLOGY OF MEDIA

Johns Hopkins University, Fall 2011, TuTh 10:30-11:45

www.jhu.edu/anthmedia/

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Media Lab Collaborators: Digital Media Center (DMC – Mattin 226)

Life throughout much of the globe today is saturated by various kinds of media: films, television, newspapers, magazines, radio, cell phones, iPods, advertisements, photos, websites, fantasy games, medical images of the body, and so on. This course will examine this profound mediation of contemporary life from an anthropological standpoint, focusing on the social worlds fashioned and inhabited through the production, circulation, and consumption of media artifacts. Drawing on case studies from around the world, and engaging as well in the production of our own, we will explore some of the politics of media representation; how visual media reconfigure modern experiences of the body; and the social and virtual worlds fashioned by diverse contemporary media.

REQUIREMENTS

There is one required book for the course: Daniel Miller, *Tales from Facebook* (Polity, 2011), which will be available at the campus bookstore. All other readings will be available on library online reserve. To access them, you will have to enter the course password: PAN309. We expect you to complete all assigned readings prior to each week's lectures and discussions. Ours will be a laptop-tablet-smartphone-free classroom, so be prepared to use pen and paper as media. Lastly, there is a \$30 lab fee that will be automatically deducted from the accounts of enrolled students after September 12.

EXPECTATIONS

Your work will assume several forms: class participation, online blog entries, an individual ethnographic video on a media artifact of your choice, and a final paper that reflects on the anthropological stakes of your video project (% of total grade in parentheses that follow):

1. *Class participation* (10%). Class discussions will take place in weekly section meetings and regularly during lecture sessions. We expect each of you to come prepared for these discussions, and to participate actively and regularly. In addition, each of you will be responsible for summing up section discussion once over the course of the semester. Be forewarned: if it's obvious that you have not done the reading for a given week, your class participation grade for that week will be 0.

2. *Course blog discussion* (20%). You will find a link to the blog on the course website. Each of you will be responsible for leading the blog discussion for your section once over the course of the semester, with a few paragraphs (no more than 500 words total) that compare all the readings and suggest questions and themes for discussion (10%). Each of the other weeks, you will be expected to post a brief paragraph response to the lead blog post for your section, with your own thoughts on the post in relation to the readings (10% total). The lead posts must be made no later than 12:00 AM two nights before section meetings, and responses no later than 12:00 AM the next night. We are looking for *thoughtful* and *comparative* reactions: in relation to different readings for the week, what we and your peers have said, and what you've experienced yourself. Please make sure to read all of what your section peers have written, and feel free to include audiovisual content as part of your post.

3. *Video project* (70%). This will be your major project for the semester. Each of you will choose some kind of media artifact—a film or video; a television series; a radio show; an advertising

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campaign; an album or genre of music; a website; a mobile or medical technology; a video game; a newspaper column or blog—to introduce, analyze, and explore. You will be responsible for making a short ethnographic video concerning the production, circulation, or consumption of this media artifact, working ethnographically with a population of its producers, distributors, or consumers. You will be expected to conduct background research on this media artifact, engage in participant-observation and ethnographic interviews with its users, and shoot and edit a video that documents the anthropological significance of this medium. We will arrange for you to work with the Digital Media Center (DMC) for technical assistance on the project. At the end of the semester, you will have the option of posting your edited video online, linked to the course website as an instance of contemporary media anthropology. These web-searchable ethnographic video projects will constitute a publicly accessible archive of media anthropology knowledge. Your work on this project will be divided into a series of stages (due dates for uploading in parentheses):

- I. Proposal (9/22, 10%): a project title, an introductory paragraph concerning what you choose to focus upon and why, and one image file to “introduce” this medium
- II. Resources (10/18, 10%): an annotated bibliography of at least 5 scholarly textual references (beyond the course) concerning the topic of your video project
- III. Ethnographic material (11/8, 10%): excerpts, examples, and summary from your ethnographic work and interviews with producers or consumers of this artifact
- IV. Final video (12/1, 20%): a complete, edited video (<10 minutes in length) that engages clearly and carefully with the proposed topic and questions of your research
- V. Reflective paper (12/8, 20%): a discussion of the anthropological significance of your video project, based on ethnographic and scholarly evidence (5 pp double-spaced)

RESOURCES

Please consult the “Resources” section of the course website for key journals, online bibliographies of readings, other useful links, and books and collected volumes on library reserve.

ETHICS

Please consult <http://www.jhu.edu/ethics/> for guidance concerning plagiarism and academic honesty. These are matters that require extra care and vigilance with respect to video production and online circulation, as we will discuss at the outset of the semester. Each of you will also be required to complete an online CITI training module on human subjects research ethics, prior to beginning your ethnographic video projects (i.e. by 9/22/11). See www.citiprogram.org to enroll.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Aug 30 / Sep 1: **Introduction**
[Thurs 1st: ethnographic videos, research ethics, and “fair use”]

I. POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

September 6 / 8: **Mediation**
Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological
Reproducibility,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, 2002 [1936]
Thomas de Zengotita, “The Numbing of the American Mind: Culture as
Anesthetic,” in *Harper’s Magazine*, 2002
Anand Pandian, “Cinema in the Countryside: Popular Tamil Film and the
Remaking of Rural Life,” in *Tamil Cinema: The Cultural Politics of India’s
Other Film Industry*, 2008
[Thurs 8th: section discussions]

- September 13 / 15: **Newspapers**
 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 1-46
 Mark Allen Peterson, "Getting the News in New Delhi," in *Anthropology of News and Journalism*, 2009
 [Thurs 15th: workshop on ethnographic problems and methods]
- September 20 / 22: **Radio**
 David Bathrick, "Making a National Family with the Radio: The Nazi *Wunschkonzert*," *Modernism/Modernity* 4(1), 1997
 Jo Tacchi, "Radio Texture: Between Self and Others," in *The Anthropology of Media: A Reader*, 2002
 Danny Kaplan, "Songs of the Siren: Engineering National Time on Israeli Radio," *Cultural Anthropology* 24(2), 2010
 [Thurs 22nd: section discussions]
- September 27 / 29: **Video**
 Alexandra Juhasz, "Learning the 5 Lessons of YouTube,"
<http://ijlm.net/node/12807>, and *Learning from YouTube*,
<http://vectors.usc.edu/projects/learningfromyoutube/>
 [Thurs 29th: in-class workshop on video shooting and editing]

II. MODERNITY, VISUALITY, AND THE BODY

- October 4 / 6: **Photography**
 Jonathan Crary, "Modernizing Vision," in *Vision and Visuality*, 1988
 Stephen Sprague: "Yoruba Photography: How the Yoruba See Themselves,"
 in *Photography's Other Histories*, 2003
 Christopher Pinney, "Photographic Portraiture in Central India in the 1980s and 1990s," in *The Material Culture Reader*, 2002
 [Thurs 6th: section discussions]
- October 13 / 18: **Cinema**
 Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, 1997 [1960], 157-172
 Anne Rutherford, "Nowhere to Hide: Tumultuous Materialism of Lee Myung-se," in *Seoul Searching: Culture & Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema*, 2007
 Anand Pandian "Landscapes of Expression: Affective Encounters in South Indian Cinema," *Cinema Journal*, forthcoming in 2011
 [Tues 18th: section discussions]
- October 20 / 25: **Television**
 Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Objects of Soap Opera: Egyptian Television and the Cultural Politics of Modernity," in *Anthropology of Media: A Reader*, 2002
 Vicki Mayer, "Producers as Creatives" and "Sponsoring Selves" from *Below the Line: Producers and Production Studies in the New Television Economy*, 2011
 [Tues 25th: section 1 video workshop @ DMC / section 2 discussion]
- Oct 27 / Nov 1: **Medicine**

Shigehisa Kuriyama, "Between Mind and Eye: Japanese Anatomy in the Eighteenth Century," in *Paths to Asian Medical Knowledge*, 1992
Joseph Dumit, "Is It Me or My Brain? Depression and Neuroscientific Facts," *Journal of Medical Humanities* 24(1/2), 2003
Tine Gammeltoft, "Sonography and Sociality: Obstetrical Ultrasound Imaging in Urban Vietnam," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 21(2), 2007
[Tues 1st: section 1 discussion / section 2 video workshop @ DMC]

III. SOCIAL AND VIRTUAL WORLDS

- November 3 / 8: **Telephones**
Robert MacDougall, "Wire Devils: Pulp Thrillers, the Telephone, and Action at a Distance in the Wiring of a Nation," *American Quarterly* 58(3), 2006
Bart Barendregt, "Sex, Cannibals, and the Language of Cool: Indonesian Tales of the Phone and Modernity," *Information Society* 24(3), 2008
Janet McIntosh, "Mobile Phones and Mipoho's Prophecy: The Powers and Dangers of Flying Language," *American Ethnologist* 37(2), 2010
[Tues 8th: section discussions]
- November 10 / 15: **iPods**
Michael Bull, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience*, 2007, 1-11, 24-65, 87-107, 158-60
[Tues 15th: section discussions]
- November 17 / 22: **Internet**
Daniel Miller, *Tales from Facebook*, selections
[Tues 22nd: section discussions]
- Nov 29 / Dec 1: **Virtual Life**
Tom Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, 2008, 3-31, 89-150
[Thurs 1st: section discussions]

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

1. **The DMC.** We have arranged to work closely with professional technical staff at the Digital Media Center (Mattin 226) in the organization and execution of the video projects, a collaboration financed by your collective payment of lab fees. DMC staff will offer dedicated sessions for our class in planning and shooting documentary video, as well as sound and video editing in iMovie. In addition, we have arranged for dedicated hours of one-on-one lab coaching at the DMC for students in the course. We urge you to take advantage of their resources and assistance in doing your project.

2. **Course blog.** The blog address is www.anthofmedia.blogspot.com. It is also accessible through the course website. Login with the username **anthofmedia** and the password **jhuanthro**. To make your own lead post, click on "New Post." The dashboard allows you to add images, links, and so on. IMPORTANT: you must title your post to identify yourself as author. Use the following format: [last name topic section] i.e. "Pandian Mediation 1." When you are commenting, make sure to "comment" only on your section post(s); don't forget add your name at the end of your comment.

3. **Video projects.** We will be working with the DMC to familiarize you with iMovie as a common production platform for your individual projects. Keep in mind that your video can be as simple or as complex in form as you wish; you will be graded primarily for the quality of your ethnographic work, rather than for the aesthetic charms of the video itself. Here are some more specific notes on the various stages of the video project and our expectations for them:

Proposal. When you write your paragraph proposal, keep in mind that we need to know not only *what* you will be investigating, but also *how* you will be addressing or analyzing it. That is, what are the questions, concerns, or issues that you want to explore with this project? And what kind of ethnographic work do you think you might be doing with producers or consumers of this media artifact? Your thoughts at this point will of course be speculative, which is fine. Use the course readings as a tool-kit to imagine different ways you might think about and explore contemporary media through this project. We will be looking for three things as we grade these proposals: whether you have specified a media object to examine, whether you have specified questions you would explore, and whether you have specified research methods you could use to pursue those questions.

Resources. You will be expected to identify at least five additional academic sources (books, scholarly journal articles, or chapters in edited academic books) beyond the course readings that will help you explore and analyze the topic of your focus. These must be drawn from anthropology, history, or media studies, and must be presented in proper bibliographic format.

Ethnographic material. At this stage, you will be expected to provide written and audiovisual excerpts and examples from your ethnographic work and interviews with producers or consumers of this artifact. As this may be the first time that many of you have explored anthropological fieldwork practice, we will talk about basic concerns, issues, and approaches in cultural anthropological research at several points over the course of the semester. The ethnographic material that you provide will be expected to give a concrete sense of the kinds of findings you have made thus far. We will look for evidence that you have sought to grasp what your media artifact means to some particular group of people, what it does for them, and what they do practically with it. You are expected to respect and maintain the confidentiality and wellbeing of these individuals at all times.

Final video. Throughout the semester, your videos will evolve as works in progress, stage by individual stage. At the end of this process, however, we will consider the form and content of the video as a whole, taking into account its clarity and effectiveness of presentation. We will be looking to assess whether the project can indeed be taken as an anthropological exercise. This assessment will concern its architecture as well as its textual claims: does the narrative and organizational form of the video, in other words, support the exposition of your ethnographic research?

Reflective paper. With this paper, you will be expected to discuss the anthropological significance of your ethnographic video project, based on both ethnographic evidence from your own study as well as scholarly background reference material. We are looking for you to engage in an exercise of interpretation with respect to your own video projects, and with respect to the questions and concerns that have motivated their production. Your work here will be graded with respect to the clarity of the written argument and the effectiveness with which it is supported by your material.

A final note. Please keep in mind that these videos will be publicly accessible works of research. We would encourage you to obtain a copyright license to protect your work through Creative Commons (creativecommons.org/about/licenses) at the end of the semester. If you would rather not have your work publicly searchable and available, this is of course fine. We will discuss various options for rendering the works publicly available over the course of the semester.