38ᵗʰ E-Seminar of the EASA Media Anthropology Network

Working Paper
"From Cyber to Digital Anthropology to an Anthropology of the Contemporary?"
by Philipp Budka (University of Vienna)

Discussant
Alexander Knorr (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich)

22 November – 6 December 2011

Stephen Lyon (S.M.Lyon@durham.ac.uk)

Dear All,

This is it, the much anticipated first e-seminar of 2011-2012 is beginning. You'll find the comments from our discussant, Alexandar Knorr, below. Shortly after this email Philpp Budka will respond to these comments and then we'll open the discussion up to the list. For those who haven't yet had a chance to download and read Philpp's paper, here's the link again:
http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars

Best,
Steve

Alexander Knorr (alexander.knorr@vka.fak12.uni-muenchen.de)

This e-seminar, and the invitation to serve as discussant—thank you, Steve—comes timely and untimely at, well, the same time. On the one hand tasks and issues at the university are pressing and choking me. As always during the semester. On the other hand Philipp's paper deals exactly with my core interests, and is not just an interesting, but even an inspiring read.

Above that the e-seminar coincides with a recent review of my book 'Cyberanthropology' (Knorr 2011). Said review (Kohl 2011) was published last Wednesday in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and headlined 'Völkerkunde war gestern, Cyberanthropology ist heute,' meaning: [Old-fashioned] Social/Cultural Anthropology was yesterday, Cyberanthropology is today. That's some tall tale, granted, but here we have it all, the cyber-, the anthropology, and the contemporary. And indeed, all that I tried to crunch into the book.

Have no fear, this won't develop into a shameless self-advertising fest (the book's in German anyway), but now and then I'll cite the book, 'cause it contains points seconding Philipp's, some points contrasting, some maybe complementing. If you deem that to be shameless self-advertisement, blame Steve for having invited my humble self.

In the abstract to his paper Philipp makes it perfectly clear what central question he's aiming at: What's more fruitful for anthropology? To steer into the direction of an 'anthropology of the

1

contemporary' (Rabinow & Marcus 2008)? Or, as it seems to be reigning fashion, to create ever new subdomains or even subdisciplines concerned with very specific phenomena?

To tackle these questions Philipp first discusses 'anthropologies' which throw their gaze upon technologies mainly developed as recent as about the last half century. Namely the 'anthropology of cyberculture' as sketched out and proposed by Escobar (1994), and 'digital anthropology,' since recently institutionalized and taught in London. After having provided an overview of an ethnographic example he himself is working on (not mentioned in the abstract), Philipp then procedes to the 'anthropology of the contemporary,' followed by a short conclusion.

For openers Philipp recounts the etymology of 'cyberanthropology' (which he under- stands as to be synonymous to the 'anthropology of cyberculture'), naming 'cyberspace' and 'cyberpunk' as two example sharing the same hip prefix. [Nitpick: It wasn't in Gibson's 'Neuromancer' (1984) that the term 'cyberspace' for the first time saw print, but in the short story 'Burning Chrome' (Gibson 1982). Nevertheless it's true that in the novel Gibson for the first time defined, what he meant by 'cyberspace,' and that with 'Neuromancer' the term spread in an unforeseen way on a grand scale.]

Then he leads over to the source of the prefix, the neologism 'cybernetics' coined by mathematician Norbert Wiener. In the following short sketch of cybernetics its entanglement with anthropology is highlighted. As proponents are mentioned Mead and Bateson, Lévi-Strauss, and, rightfully so (compare Knorr 2010, 2011: 55), Clifford Geertz. Allow me to add Roy Rappaport. Parts of his work (1967, 1971) are shining examples of a full-fledged cyberneticized anthropology.

Bateson is not only mentioned by Philipp, but also cited and discussed a bit (may I additionally recommend Bale 1995). Bateson is the perfect choice, because he was not just someone who read and absorbed cybernetics, but was himself at the core of the ongoings. He and Mead were regulars at the Macy-Conferences, where cybernetics have been shaped and honed. In contrast Clyde Kluckhohn, to my knowledge, only appeared once there.

After quoting Bateson ardently preaching the gospel of cybernetics as the redeeming paradigm, Philipp gets ready to lead over to a discussion of Escobar's, in my eye seminal, article of 1994: "How this [cybernetics, Bateson] developed into cyberanthropology will be discussed in the following."

I'm afraid, but I didn't get where in the paper this is achieved. Don't get me wrong, I second nearly ever word Philipp has to say on Escobar 1994 within the following pages—I'll come back to some instances where I do not agree later. Plus, I fully endorse Philipp's bringing in of Pfaffenberger 1988 and 1992a (and would like to add Pfaffenberger 1992b) and his stressing of the notion of technology as a Mauss'ean total social phenomenon.

But how did cyberanthropology develop out of cybernetics, and where is the connection between cybernetics and Escobar's 'anthropology of cyberculture?'

In Escobar 1994 the etymology of 'cyber-' and the mentioning of cybernetics remains nice-to-know historical background. Philipp went a step further and discusses Bateson, but then the rupture comes. Allow me to try to make the loose ends meet.

Escobar bid us 'welcome to Cyberia' and hinted at a path towards an 'anthropology of cyberculture.' But astoundingly enough Escobar takes words as 'cyberspace' and the like to be misnomers—he only uses the term 'cyberculture' as an element of analysis due to the widespread acceptance of the

prefix 'cyber-.' (1994: 211, fn. I.) Just having complied to fashion while formulating new concepts is not quite an academic justification—a weak one at best. I do not at all share the opinion that 'cyber-' is misleading. Quite to the contrary, it directly hints towards the core of where Escobar wants us to lead. In said paper Escobar himself delivers the starting points for my argument.

In Escobar's view '"Cyberculture" specifically refers to new technologies in two areas: artificial intelligence (particularly computer and information technologies) [that is a misnomer] and biotechnology. It would be possible to separate out these two sets of technologies for analytical purposes, although it is no coincidence that they have achieved prominence simultaneously.' (1994: 214)

Still according to Escobar, computer and information technologies bring forth 'technosociality', biotechnology brings forth 'biosociality,' 'a new order for the production of life, nature, and the body through biologically based technological interventions.' (1994: 214)

When tracking the fashion Escobar claims to have followed, when searching for the semantic meanings popular culture, the industry's advertisement departments, and academic discussions have ascribed to 'cyber-,' one discovers a fabric consisting of ICTs and science fiction, but very seldom biotechnology—with the exception of artistical production falling into the cyberpunk genre (Knorr 2011: 64-102).

Now, what is the missing link between the two sets? The answer lies in the mistrusted prefix itself. Respectively in its root, in Norbert Wiener's neologism 'cybernetics,' in the academic discourse hiding behind the concept, and in everything which has arisen from that discourse. ('Discourse' in the sense of Foucault's 'Archaeology of Knowledge' (1969), and how the concept was operationalised by Saïd in his 'Orientalism' (1978))

For recapitulation: first of all a cybernetic approach means to exemplarily envision observed phenomena as systems. That means as entities which consist of elements, whereby the latter are interrelated and interact by rules.

Cyberneticians are not so much interested in what systems consist of, but how they function as a whole. The subject of cybernetics are the abstract principles of organisation, coordination, regulation, and control in complex systems—no matter of what kind, technical, physical, biologic, social, or whatyouhave.

In the process of marking itself off from mechanistic visions, cybernetics quite early emphasised a whole array of concepts: networks, complexity, self-organisation, reproduction, adaptation, cognition, aiming at and maintaining goal-states, purposeful behaviour—or action?, and autonomy. This line-up implicitly leads towards a vision of cybernetic systems as independent actors, maybe even gifted with 'free will.' Therefore it is not astounding that a hypothetical analogy emerged early on: 'mind to body' is like 'information to machine.'

Because cybernetics—as they were formed as a transdisciplinary project immediately after World War II—had crucial influence on the engineering sciences, on the emergence of disciplines like e.g. computer science and the science of cognition, cybernetics are via technosociality crucial for the shape of contemporary culture and society as well.

There's even more to it. During the 1960s immense spill-over effects took place. The majority of academic disciplines already was deeply infested with cybernetics, and now the political and social

3

administrations of the highly industrialized nation-states and the industry fell prey to it.

To put it drastically, cybernetics and its heritage to a large degree shaped our contemporary world. And our contemporary thinking—the instances of cybernetics' influence on anthropology which Philipp has named, are symptoms of that.

Despite all the fascination cybernetics may have, I am not at all aiming at re-introducing cybernetics into anthropology à la Gregory Bateson. I am aiming at recognising cybernetics as a hidden cultural paradigm. Human actions are culturally informed and cybernetics have become a tacit cultural discourse—disguised as common sense.

In other words: Me personally, I am convinced that the shape of our contemporary world owes a lot to cybernetics. Hence we anthropologists have to pay attention to it. A first argument for why 'Cyberanthropology' may well be a fitting name for an anthropology of the contemporary.

That said I'd like to return, as promised, to some points I do not agree with.

Right after his discussion of Pfaffenberger's anthropology of technology Philipp writes: 'How should anthropology deal with, for instance, the emerging digital information and communication technologies (ICTs)?'

Here I do sense a rhetorical manoeuvre.

Remember: Escobar deals with computer- and biotechnology, Pfaffenberger with technology in general. Directly adjacent Philipp writes 'for instance' ICTs, but from the next page on, after he has cited Hakken, it's exclusively about ICTs. Like ICTs were a proxy for all kinds of contemporary technology—that's what the 'for instance' insinuates. [Are we still friends, Philipp? ;-]

This narrowing of the focus on ICTs is furtherly narrowed by Axel's 'linguistic turn in the anthropological discussion about ICTs,' which Philipp relates before he comes to 'digital anthropology.' It's not just communication which is mediated by the Internet infrastructure, but also interaction. There are things beyond the direct reach of language 'on the Net,' like tacit and bodily knowledge. (Knorr 2009) Especially in respect to the latter think of the scenes of the computer gamers.

As, not an alternative, but a kind of complementary suggestion to an absolute focus on ICTs, here's my idea of 'cyberanthropology:' I do not envision an anthropology of technology, rather an anthropology which takes the interrelationships between human beings and technology as its starting point, as the privileged vehicle of principle access. Analogous to Danny Miller's provocative argumentation (1995): Kinship was yesterday, consumption and commodities are today.

Once our vehicle has granted us access, we again are aiming at the ideal of the 'research imaginary Holism,' fully conscious that we can never reach it. But it serves as a navigational aid. Like when we point our vessel towards the polar star, fully conscious that we'll never reach the star, but it tremendously helps staying on course.

Of course digital electronics (in all its manifestations, not just ICTs) play a decisive if not dominant role. But it's not only digital media technologies which are ubiquitous. There are things way beyond Facebook around. The article 'Satellite culture' by Claudio Aporta and Eric Higgs (2005) I deem to be a wonderful example of a true anthropology of the contemporary—of cyberanthropology.

4

References

APORTA, CLAUDIO AND ERIC HIGGS. 2005. Satellite culture: Global positioning systems, Inuit wayfinding, and the need for a new account of technology. Current Anthropology 46: 729-753.

BALE, LAWRENCE S. 1995. Gregory Bateson, cybernetics, and the social/behavioral sciences. Cybernetics & Human Knowing 3(1): 27-45.

ESCOBAR, ARTURO. 1994. Welcome to Cyberia: Notes on the anthropology of cyberculture. Current An- thropology 35(3): 211-231.

FOUCAULT, MICHEL. 1969. L'archéologie du savoir. Paris: Gallimard.

GIBSON, WILLIAM FORD. 1982. Burning Chrome. Omni, July 1982: 72-107.

GIBSON, WILLIAM FORD. 1984. Neuromancer. New York: Penguin.

KNORR, ALEXANDER. 2009. "Die kulturelle Aneignung des Spielraums: Vom virtuosen Spielen zum Modifizieren und zurück," in Shooter: Eine multidisziplinäre Einführung edited by Matthias Bopp, Rolf F. Nohr und Serjoscha Wiemer, pp. 217-246. Münster et al.: LIT Verlag.

KNORR, ALEXANDER. 2010. Review: Living on Cybermind: Categories, communication, and control by Jonathan Paul Marshall. 2007. New York et al.: Peter Lang. Anthropos 105(2): 662-663.

KNORR, ALEXANDER. Cyberanthropology. Wuppertal: Peter Hammer.

KOHL, KARL-HEINZ. 2011. Völkerkunde war gestern, Cybranthropology ist heute. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 2011(267): 30.

MILLER, DANIEL. 1995. Consumption and commodities. Annual Review of Anthropology 24: 141-161. PFAFFENBERGER, BRYAN. 1988. Fetishised objects and humanised nature: Towards an anthropology of technology. Man 23(2): 236-252.

PFAFFENBERGER, BRYAN. 1992a. Social Anthropology of technology. Annual Review of Anthropology 21: 491-516.

PFAFFENBERGER, BRYAN. 1992b. Technological dramas. Science, Technology & Human Values 17(3): 282-313.

RABINOW, PAUL AND GEORGE E. MARCUS. 2008. Designs for an anthropology of the contemporary. Durham, London: Duke University Press.

RAPPAPORT, ROY A. 1967. Ritual regulation of environmental relations among a New Guinea People. Ethnology 6(1): 17-30.

RAPPAPORT, ROY A. 1971. Ritual, sanctity, and cybernetics. American Anthropologist, New Series 73(1): 59-76.

SAÏD, EDWARD WADIE. 1978. Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient. London:

Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Philipp Budka (ph.budka@philbu.net)

Dear List,

First let me thank Alex for commenting on my working paper in such a profound and constructive way. As one can easily recognize he is a leading expert on "cyberanthropology" and in particular cybernetics and I should definitely have taken another, deeper, look at his book (Knorr 2011).

One of the goals of this paper – and Alex is right that there are still some missing links, which I tried to cover (of course we are still friends – is to reconstruct and discuss
a) where the anthropology of cyberculture is coming from and
b) by concentrating on digital informations and communication technologies (ICTs), where it is heading.

In this respect, while I consider cybernetics and its anthropological appropriation of it through scholars such as Bateson and more recently Ingold (2000), as kind of historic and epistemic roots of what has been termed "cyberanthropology", I understand "digital anthropology" as some kind of further development of cyberanthropology in respect of its research topics and fields.

The questions to discuss of course are: Is this development of and in branches of anthropology fruitful? Or should we come up with a kind of meta-anthropology project, like an "anthropology of the contemporary"?

Alex might be right that my discussion of Escobar's "Welcome to Cyberia" (1994) is missing a clear linkage to cybernetics. There and in his 1995 text, he is only briefly mentioning the Macy Conference on Cybernetics in a footnote. One reason why Escobar is neglecting cybernetics focusing instead on recent literature, which hyped particularly the concept or misnomer of "cyberspace", may also be found in this footnote when he writes: "It should be pointed out that the Macy conference took place in the context of the Cold War, the first wave of computer technology, and the development of general systems theory. Today's historical and epistemological context is quite different." (Escobar 1994: 215-216). Maybe he is not considering cybernetics a contemporary project? Particularly in contrast to the then relatively new research on social interaction in and through cyberspace, e.g. Benedikt (1991).

I of course also thank Alex for "making the loose ends meet" with his brief historical discussion of Escobar's anthropology of cyberculture in relation to cybernetics as an endeavour of understanding systems' functionalities of different kind. I agree with him here that anthropology in understanding media technologies should in particular focus on the relations humans develop as social and communicating being also with technological phenomena (agents).

I also must agree with Alex that concentrating only on communication technologies is again limiting the anthropology of cyberculture to only one of its two basic interests leaving beside biotechnologies. In my defence, this limitation should in some way open a critical discussion to the appropriation of "digital anthropology", which focuses, at least to my knowledge, very much on digital media technologies and internet applications.

Hopefully, the following discussions can again open and question the boundaries and limitations of

cyber and digital anthropology and their projects.

Thanks again to Alex for his very useful comments!

All the best,

Philipp

Daniel Miller (daniel.miller1132@gmail.com)

First I wanted to thank Philipp for his most stimulating paper. For me the first section brought up quite nostalgic memories. I was trained originally in archaeology by David Clarke whose key contribution was bringing systems theory into archaeological studies. I have always been hugely respectful of Bateson and the way he employed these ideas in social science, and I think this is a trajectory of thought to be treasured. Budka is quite right that the natural home for such a perspective has come through the development of studies of technology, for example, Pfaffenberger for material culture and Escobar more generally. Budka is also right in that this is not the route I have taken in my own studies, since I have preferred to take an approach from within anthropology that of material culture studies, which I think has developed its reputation partly because of a quite conservative emphasis on the widest ethnographic context for understanding any given technology, its context of use and its consequences. In a way Budka's example makes this point of relativism that much stronger in that this is not a localisation of Facebook but rather the creation of a specific social network around the issues faced by this particular community.

The final third of his paper addresses the issue of the relationship between such internet studies and the anthropology of the contemporary, and this is the section I would like to address in a bit more detail. But I feel that just as Budka has used his paper to present the trajectory that had led to his engagement with this idea I need first to backtrack and explain my own recent engagement. For the general area of debate there seem to be three potential terminologies, the virtual, the cyber and my own preference which would be for the digital. Having used the term cyber Budka gives us the history of its usage and current significance. Similarly having recently established a programme at UCL specifically called Digital Anthropology we need to take responsibility for delineating the terrain. As a contribution to this Heather Horst and myself have recently submitted an edited collection of papers called Digital Anthropology (Miller and Horst Eds. 2012)

The book opens with a paper called The Digital and the Human that is intended to lay out the field. In this we present six principles for digital anthropology. Some of these are concerned more with issues that pertain to anthropology more generally such as holism, which for us must include both on and offline worlds, and relativism, which for us establishes how digital technologies create new heterogeneity and not just help establish homogeneity. This latter was and Budka notes one of the main arguments in my recent book Tales from Facebook (Miller 2011). But others of these principles are more specific and relate to this choice of the word digital. The first principle is that of the dialectic. This is saying much more than my earlier argument that all culture is dialectic. The digital represents a genuine shift in the nature of this dialectic. We define digital simply as all that which can be reduced to binary code and all that has been produced as a result of binary code. But the point is that in dialectical terms binary is still more universal than its predecessors and the results are still more particular. To illustrate this we compare the digital with the anthropology of money. Money is in effect a reduction to base line 10 that then allowed far more developments of specificity and particularity through the proliferation of commodities. While the digital reduces to

7

base line 2, the on or off, and in a very short time has proliferated even more diverse cultural possibilities as it facilitates information construction, dissemination and replication. So there is a very specific linkage between the digital and the dialectical. In this respect our arguments falls happily within the emphasis on a necessary new flexibility towards the unprecedented aspects of the contemporary as discussed by Rabinow and Marcus. But while our first principle does this, our final sixth principle does more or less the diametric opposite.

Budka is absolutely right that we need to explicitly address the relationship of this cyber/vritual/digital world with the anthropology of the contemporary. But in as much as the authors he discusses have separated that off from the modern then it would seem to me vital that we address both. The speed of social transformation associated with rapid technological innovation and the way that ideologically as he notes the cyber stands for the imagination of this hurtling towards the future means that this question of temporality is an integral aspect of our concern. One of the traits of cyberstudies has always been its futuristic elements with asides to techno utopias and of course if think of the cybermen of Dr Who techno dystopias.

So while there is also an argument that there is something about the contemporary that transcends our usual view of temporality itself, this should not detract from our need to contribute equally to the anthropology of the modern. Indeed some anthropologists such as Bart Barendregt and Peter Pels in the Netherlands, have taken this still further by putting the emphasis on the emergence of an anthropology of the future. So what would be the specific contribution of a Digital Anthrology to these various anthropologies of temporality? Above all we would argue the discipline of anthropology is dedicated to the understanding of the normative. I have looked at the history of anthropology's engagment with this term in my other work on blue jeans Miller 2012). The problem for anthropology is that the normative was traditionally linked to the customary. For example Bourdieu uses material culture analysis to show how peoples were socialised into normative expectations through their practical engagement with the taxonomies embedded in the things around them. But this supposed a rather different temporality that seemed threatened by rapid change.

To me the single most important lesson of digital anthropology and indeed its contribution to the anthropology of the contemporary lies in a realisation that this rapid change does not confront or disrupt the normative in the ways that traditional anthropology might have anticipated. Quite the contrary there are many examples in our digital anthropology volume and the many excellent papers by our contributors which show how within a very short time indeed new technologies become as taken for granted as old ones. We can hardly recall how we lived without them and we constantly judge peoples behaviour as moral or appropriate according to the way they use them. Indeed in another recently completed project Mirca Madianou and myself use the term polymedia to understand how with this proliferation of technologies people make moral judgments as to which particular media has been chosen for any particular act of communication.

From which I would conclude that as Budka has argued the anthropology of the digital the cyber and the virtual have many contributions, one of these is to finesse the anthropology of the contemporary. But a critical conclusion is the contemporary digital world is very different that that which we might have predicted but different in a way that brings it much more in accord with this fundamental theoretical premise of anthropology itself, that of the normative.

I will finish with a coda. Budka has shown how important these issues are and how they cry out for further research. I am very happy to note that I have just been awarded a large European grant for the next five years to develop a team of post-doctoral and post-graduate students to study the impact of social networking in seven countries. These posts are now full except for a four year fully

funded PhD project to study social networking in Turkey, so if anyone knows someone eligible for home fees in the UK and interested in the anthropology of social networking in Turkey please put them in contact with me at d.miller@ucl.ac.uk. In this new project the emphasis will be on ethnography and digital anthropology and I would like to thank Budka and the other contributors to Media Anthropology for continuing the debates that make this prospect of further research so enticing.

References

Horst, H. and Miller, D. Eds. 2012 **Digital Anthropology** (Berg)

Madianou, M. and Miller, D. 2011 *Migration and New Media: Transnational families and Polymedia* (Routledge)

Miller, D. and Woodward, S. 2012 *Blue Jeans: the art of the ordinary*(University of California Press)

Elisanda Ardevol (eardevol@gmail.com)

Dear Philip

Thanks for sharing your paper. I think it is a useful review about the history and evolution of a field of study that is at the crossroads of many key issues in Anthropology today, as far as, nowadays digital technologies and biotechnologies are at the core of cultural innovation processes in our contemporary societies.Concretely, contemporary cultural and social practices are deeply mediated by networked infrastructures that combine different digital media like mobile devices, text-based, voice and visual artifacts and different Internet technologies. They are nowadays so deeply implicated in people's everyday lives that it is difficult not to face them when studying any subject of study, as we have arguing in a forthcoming article about digital ethnography in Europe. That's why I understand that Anthropology today has to take into account mediation technologies in almost any subject of study, but also it is more and more useful as research methods and for knowledge sharing, so "digital anthropology" will cover that needs.

But you point out that the questions to discuss is if this development of and in branches of anthropology is fruitful? Or should we come up with a kind of meta-anthropology project, like an "anthropology of the contemporary"?

These questions promoted my current insecurities about how to define my current and incipient fieldwork about cultural production and creative practices in new media. Recently, I have been in an event of the Free Culture Forum in Barcelona, the Oxcars Festival. The show began with the manifesto of cyberspace "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace" from John Perry Barlow. An old text of 1996 that, at first seemed to me a given up to nostalgia; an old conception of the Internet as an outer, parallel world, where new communities, new identities and two-bit personae were living a world apart full of expectations and possibilities, a world where everyone could be who they wanted to be. Nowadays, I thought, we understand Internet as part of our everyday life. If virtual community was the key issue of the 90's, today's epitome is social media.

But as I was listening the old manifesto through the loudspeakers in a crowed space, I realized that part of that dreams, expectations and utopias were still alive and kicking. People still fight for an

9

Internet where other things -beyond Facebook- are possible. People there were clapping, dancing and singing for a conception of a living culture, not reduced to cultural production industries and markets. It was an ecstatic moment of communitas. That experience makes me think about the tags we use to delimit the scope of our objects of study. What was I doing there? What was my fieldwork about? Was I doing Cyberanthropology? Digital Anthropology? Media Anthropology? Anthropology of the contemporary? All of the four? Or an ethnography of rituals? I would like to think that I was doing some kind of anthropological research. Nowadays, my research interests crossover all that denominations you pose (and more issues like visuality, senses, space and materiality...). Choosing one "branch" or another depends on my variable emphasis in the construction of my object of study, still exploring the path my current fieldwork will take... I think that, if needed, I will situate my meta-level project in Anthropology at large. On the other hand, I must say that these different and related perspectives help me to situate and make sense of my concrete research interests and issues.

Going back to Philip questions, I think that these different approaches to the Internet and related digital technologies are historically situated, as he explains so well in his paper, and provides us with different and alternative insights for delimiting questions of field construction, objects of study, specific methods and theoretical frameworks. But at the end, what we are trying to do is anthropology, no more, no less. The "branches" (I would rather use something like "thematic scopes") I think, are fruitful only if the dialogue between them is fruitful. While they will prove to be useful, they will co-exist; when not, they will be "naturally" abandoned for other promised more challenging moves.

Thanks again for sharing your work and put it into discussion, Thanks to the list for making this possible,

Elisenda

Philipp Budka (ph.budka@philbu.net)

Dear List,

I would like to thank Danny Miller and Elisenda Ardevol for their comments on my paper. And I am very much looking forward to read their upcoming contributions in this field of study. Now let me briefly address some of the aspects in their comments.

I find it very useful that Miller et al. in their upcoming volume discuss the basic principles for digital anthropology to define the key issues of such an anthropological project, such as (the) dialectic. Miller writes that "the digital represents a genuine shift in this dialectic", because the binary is more universal and the results are more particular. I think this is highly interesting and would love to find out more about that approach, maybe already in this e-seminar.

In respect to an anthropology of the contemporary, or, in a more general term, of "temporalities" it is vital for Miller to address also "the modern". As I understand Rabinow & Marcus (2008), they prefer using the concept of "the contemporary" also to avoid using "the modern" and its pitfalls, such as defining it against "the traditional" or "the un-modern". Of course there is plenty of room for discussion here.

Here, it might also be useful to get back to Escobar's understanding of the anthropology of

cyberculture also as a cultural paradigm. Escobar (1994) writes that the anthropology of cyberculture or cyberanthropology as a project holds the chance for anthropology to renew itself by overcoming the dichotomy of the "primitive other" and the "modern self". In a similar vein cyberanthropological projects – like cybernetical projects – are questioning the dualism of nature/culture, man/machine, organic/artificial systems, etc.

I agree with Miller that digital anthropology can decisively contribute to anthropologies of different temporalities, like to an "anthropology of the contemporary". According to him digital anthropology projects show that the normative is still at the heart of anthropological research even in times of rapid sociotechnical change. And we might all agree that it is high time to conduct more digital / cyber / media anthropology projects to understand contemporary phenomena.

Elisenda mentions, in her comment, another crucial aspect: the growing importance of digital media technologies as methodological instruments in doing ethnographic fieldwork. I think that even though there is currently a global trend to study "big data" generated by "social media" like twitter and facebook through new methodological approaches, the intensive ethnographic project provides insights into people's daily practices that are crucial for the understanding of societal and cultural developments. Funding agencies must always be reminded of that, obviously.

And I of course agree with Elisenda that in the end we all do anthropology, no matter if we call it cyber / digital / media anthropology.

Thank you again for your comments and for sharing your thoughts. I hope that there will be more interesting contributions to discuss.

All the best,

Philipp

Escobar, A. 1994. Welcome to Cyberia. Notes on the anthropology of cyberculture. Current Anthropology, 35(3): 211-231.

Rabinow, P., Marcus, G. E. (with Faubion, J. D., Rees, T.) 2008. Designs for an anthropology of the contemporary. Durham: Duke University Press.

Daniel Taghioff (danieltaghioff@yahoo.com)

Hi Phillip and list.

Thanks for the interesting paper, which has kicked off some promising discussions.

I think that a key question in any exploration of "cyber", that is referencing Cybernetics and Systems theory needs to get to grips with questions of Teleology.

The big revolution in Systems theory came from the are of non-linear dynamics and demonstrated that fully modeled systems could also be deeply unpredictable. Meaning that the rule-bound quality associated with a systems approach did not under-write predictability.

This places in question the construction "dialectic", because it implies that two factors interacting

can generate a future trajectory, something that contradicts the more open-ended character of contemporary systems thinking, that multiple factors can interact, albeit with the mutually constitutive character revealed by the dialectical thought process. In other words systems thinking implies a "multi-lectic".

It is important to note that a sense of Teleology in systems has been a hegemonic construction from Colonial through neo-Colonial times. It under-wrote, in implicit form, the kind of whole-ist "climax ecology" view of nature which fitted well with the sense of a natural hierarchy of races within a static natural order. The form of that teleology in natural systems approach was modified by the interaction of emerging senses of the invisible hand of the market, which in turn interacted with a sense of "cybernetics" allowing a self-organising society. This was based on a particular take on non-linear dynamics, which filtered out the "self organising" objects, and discarded the finding that most non-linear system iteration spaces tended to chaotic behavior (the behavior of the system is dependent on it's initial parameters, so you need to think in terms of "iteration spaces" or historicity as we like to call it).

As soon as we see the "digital" (an interesting term, advisably used it seems) as implying a teleology, or even as a determining "meta-reality" we buy into a sense of the teleology of technological progress. Where the "market" and "technology" overcomes contingency and thus colonises the final frontier, the future. This grounded in a false sense of natural or evolutionary teleology.

I would say that work on the embedded character of new media overcomes this sense of teleology nicely, but I think analytically we also need to be wary of what is at stake when employing the term "Cyber".

Daniel

On Ideas of Nature:
Ecology Without Nature - Timothy Morton
On Colonial Science:
Civilising Natures - Kavita Phillip
On Non-Linear Dynamcis:
Chaos: Making a New Science: James Gleick
Loose Overview, to be taken with pinch of Salt:
All watched over by Machines of Loving Grace (Popular Documentary by Adam Curtis)
World Savannas: Ecology and Human Use Jayalaxshmi Mistry
On Dialectics:
Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left, by Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek

---

Sally Applin (saa26@kent.ac.uk)

Hello all,

I'm still working through that great paper and my comments- but I would like to chime in here on the usage of "Cyber".

Anthropology seems behind enough on technology without sealing the deal by using "Cyber". Only

my opinion.

I'm with the SF writers on this one.

Comments follow-

Sally

No one that is at the edge of things seems to be using the term "cyber". The science fiction writers seem to be giving it up and there is some commentary about how it is perceived.

Both Bruce Sterling and WIlliam Gibson are highly respected in their fields and though they've used the term, they seem to be retiring it.

Bruce Sterling recently wrote in his piece "Twenty Years Fore & Aft"

"There is no 'cyber-' anything in 2031. The term is hopelessly backward, like 'electro-' or 'jet-propelled'."
(http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/twenty-years-fore-aft/)

His peer, William Gibson (@greatdismal) answers a query on Twitter from @scottdot

GreatDismal William Gibson

GreatDismal William Gibson
RT @scottdot Who the hell says "cyber"-anything anymore? Sorry@GreatDismal :/ [I have said that myself, many times]   (<<<---- comment by william gibson there at end of retweet)
14 hours ago Favorite Retweet Reply

@scottdot "Cyberspace" being still the exception, perhaps, though for how long?
14 hours ago

@scottdot It's like "electro-" in the 1900s. Suddenly, everything is...
14 hours ago Favorite Retweet Reply

The rest of the exchange with others:

scottdot Scott Knauer
"Cyber Monday" sounds so lame. Last I checked, it was 2011, not 1997.
14 hours ago

scottdot Scott Knauer
Who the hell says "cyber"-anything anymore? Sorry @GreatDismal:/
14 hours ago

scottdot Scott Knauer @GreatDismal Makes me wonder if we'll someday have the same feeling with "web" or even "social."
14 hours ago

scottdot Scott Knauer @chrisfeyrer @greatdismal That's what I mean. I was surprised they still use

13

the term "Cyber Monday." Sounds so dated.
14 hours ago

@eliterrell You mean to tell me that still happens? Makes me think of old chatrooms. Now we have Skype/Facetime. Better tools! haha
14 hours ago

@GreatDismal "Cyberspace" perhaps has more longevity. It's hard not to think of it when looking at things like MMO's, Minecraft, etc.
14 hours ago

@GreatDismal @scottdot It's cyber-archaic.
14 hours ago

@gigerpunk @GreatDismal @scottdot [jacks out of cyberspace, smashes ono-sendai deck against plascrete wall in fit of anger]
14 hours ago
Retweeted by scottdot

scottdot Scott Knauer @ GreatDismal Like I said. "Social." heh "New social network, social app, social social hour…"
14 hours ago

scottdot Scott Knauer @PnubK1 I'm going to keep my ears open this coming week for any non-Cyber Monday mention of "cyber."
14 hours ago

@eliterrell It is funny how that is one of the first terms that comes to mind, esp. when talking to those of us who grew up online.
14 hours ago

scottdot Scott Knauer @ealvarezgibson @greatdismal Totally! haha
14 hours ago

@shroudknights @greatdismal Not to be confused with those of us who like the show "Quantum Leap" I hope.
14 hours ago

Onosendai7 Stephen Richmond @GreatDismal @scottdot Unfortunately morons in my staff meetings continue to say "cyber security" and "cyber assets". Cringe....shudder...
14 hours ago
Retweeted by scottdot

Sally Applin (saa26@kent.ac.uk)

and one more!

harrymccracken Harry McCracken
"Cyber Monday?" Sorrry, it's the 21st century. I don't do anything with "Cyber" in the name.

14

Philipp Budka (ph.budka@philbu.net)

Dear List,

Thank you Daniel, thank you Sally for your comments. You are both right that there is plenty of room for discussion here in deploying "cyber" or "digital" (anthropology).

First I would like to stress that "cyber" from my point of view is nothing more than an instrument or tool to understand and analyze ICT (including digital media technologies) and biotechnologies. It is thus a very inclusive concept that has its roots in cybernetics and system theory and therefore, as Daniel rightfully mentions, brings a kind of teleological aspect with it. "Cyber" has also a connection to the science fiction culture / popular culture of the 1990s and therefore is dated (for details see e.g. Knorr 2011). But it is also useless? I would suggest: no.

Following Escobar (1994) an anthropology of cyberculture – and Alex in his introductory comments wonderfully connected cybernetics with cyberanthropology as an anthropology of the contemporary – holds the potential to question and maybe even destroy hegemonic and hierarchic strategies and structures implying for instance the domination of "the modern" over "the traditional". He also wrote some interesting pieces about environment, development, social movements and hegemonic structures (e.g. Escobar 2008).

Anthropologists together with other social scientists have been very careful in putting technology in our research focus. That I think is not necessarily because we are "slow", but we try to avoid technological and social determinism while analyzing ethnographically the sociocultural relevance or consequences of technologies. In times of "social media" – a term I find disturbing since all communication media are social – and ubiquitous internet technologies anthropological and ethnographic projects are needed more than ever.

All the best,

Philipp

Collected references of my last replies:

Benedikt, M. 1991. (Ed.) Cyberspace: First steps. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Escobar, A. 1994. Welcome to Cyberia. Notes on the anthropology of cyberculture. Current Anthropology, 35(3): 211-231.
Escobar, A. 1995. Anthropology and the future: new technologies and the reinvention of culture. Futures, 27(4): 409-421.
Escobar, A. 2008. Territories of difference: place, movements, life, redes. Durham: Duke University Press.
Ingold, T. 2000. The perception of the environment: essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill. London : Routledge.
Knorr, A. 2011. Cyberanthropology. Wuppertal: Peter Hammer.
Rabinow, P., Marcus, G. E. (with Faubion, J. D., Rees, T.) 2008. Designs for an anthropology of the contemporary. Durham: Duke University Press.

15

Salina Christmas (salina.christmas.09@ucl.ac.uk)

Hello all,

I wish I had come across Jonathan Marshall's paper on the mailing list sooner.

I didn't do the more popular social media applications, but instead focused on the email, which is not visually rich, lacking in social cues, with a user interface that has hardly progressed since the ARPANET days of the 70s.

Philipp Budka did ask me to share my experience being trained as a digital anthropologist. I suppose I can respond to Mark's question, and Philipp's request, as I don't have to discuss 'theories' that much.

The project, which went on for almost two years, was on a community in Brixton and the Lambeth police, who wanted to get rid of crack dealers who colonised this one street. The problem was, both didn't have a good relationship with each other, and neither wanted to suggest 'stop and search'. Face-to-face meetings could lead to more arguments, with no solutions reached. But they could, however, planned neighbourhood watch strategies together though email interactions, at the same time being careful not to broach the issue of 'ethnicity' and 'police contact'.

So I had two major challenges: First, I had to 'find out what is not said, and then turn that into data' (Freeman, 2011) that I can use for analysis, and turn that into an anthropological study of 'concealment'.

Second, the chosen digital application for my study, the email, offers no audiovisual cues that can illustrate users' identities or patterns of sociality, save the email addresses. The address is the only proxy of identity that I could go by. 'Presence' of recipients is indicated by 'cc' - that is, you are allowed 'in' on the conversation. Unlike this medianthro mailing list, the email 'conferencing' happened by having up to 121 recipients 'cc-ed' in one message. There was no archive to document previous conversations, so you had to keep everything in the inbox, and search the messages, which were grouped in threads, one by one. It was not easy with Gmail and even less of a pleasure with Outlook.

Online interactions are done mainly via speech acts because the email is basically a text messaging application. It is a text editor optimised for task efficiency, not for 'virtual hanging out'. Nobody hung out, everyone was irate, and that was all I got to work with.

The obvious, initial choice was to fall back on sociolinguistics and borrow Grice's theory that what is said between a speaker and a listener hinges on the "cooperative principle": not everything goes into a conversation. Things won't get done if that is the case. I also had to look at acts such as polite speech, complaints, gripes and gossips from a sociolinguistical perspective.

But by doing this, I was in danger of ending up with a very bad linguistics paper, not a decent digital anthropology paper. But yeah, it's a new thing.

Thankfully, I had Goffman and Geertz to fall back on for their thoughts on deference, social

embarrassments and social distancing. Like Bloch says, linguists don't have a monopoly over the study of languages. Why get put off by text? I also fell back on Kelty and Leonardi to make sure that the study remained within the context of material culture. Kelty was very helpful and let me use his paper.

When you are faced with the most unhelpful, visually challenging digital applications such the email, you have to rely on the offline works for data gathering. I did not have the luxury that a YouTube or Facebook researcher has in terms of the richness of information. I couldn't even photograph the field site or anybody on it. At times you found yourself in situations where the attitude towards Class A substances was so 'casual'. I was told that to do good anthropology, you should at least spent more than six months on the field site to observe your informants. Anything less is 'rapid ethnography'. I am not sure if that is necessary for the study of some mode of digital communications - it depends - but for the email and also because of the nature of the research, yes, I needed a longer time.

While the paper was being written, the riots kicked off in August. There was that problem, too: having to rewrite a chapter in order to update your data. It was a pain, but after those incidents, even the most reluctant of informant wanted to talk - three weeks before the submission deadline.

It was the offline work that saved the paper, I would say. Can't do the online without the offline, at least in my case.

REFERENCES

Bloch, M. 1991. "Language, Anthropology and Cognitive Science", Man, New Series 26 (2): 183-198

Boxer, D. 1993. 'Social distance and speech behavior: The case of indirect complaints', Journal of Pragmatics 19: 103-125.

Freeman, L. 8 June 2011. "Silence about highland slavery in Madagascar". Research Seminars in Social Anthropology, Material and Digital Culture. University College London.

Fish, Adam, Luis Murillo, Lilly Nguyen, Aaron Panofsky, and Christopher Kelty. 2011. "Birds of the internet". Journal of Cultural Economy (4): 157-187.

Geertz, C. 1972. "Deep play: notes on the Balinese cockfight". Daedalus 101 (1): 1-37.

Goffman, E. 1964. 'The neglected situation', American Anthropologist, New Series 66 (6), Part 2: The Ethnography of Communication: 133-136.

Goffman, E. 1956. "Embarrassment and social organization", The American Journal of Sociology 62 (3): 264-271.

Goffman, E. 1956. "The nature of deference and demeanor". American Anthropologist, New Series 58 (3), pp. 473-502.

Grice. H. P. 1975. Cole, P & Morgan, J. (eds). "Logic and conversation", Syntax and semantics. New York: Academic Press.

Leonardi, P. M. 2010. "Digital materiality? How artifacts without matter, matter", First Monday 15 (6). http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3036/2567

Stephen Lyon (S.M.Lyon@durham.ac.uk)

Hi,
Thanks very much to everyone on the list who has commented so far, and of course to Philipp for his prompt and thoughtful responses.

We are now just shy of one week into this e-seminar so everyone it would be a good time to fire off another round of questions and comments to Philipp so he'll actually have time to think about them and respond. So in that spirit, I will now ask the question which has been lurking in my mind since I read Philipp's very interesting and informative paper.

My comment/question is about an anthropology of the contemporary. Your example of MyKnet.org will serve as a useful illustration. What you describe, at first glance, sounds like a set of social relations which neatly illustrate the importance of the interactive (or cybernetic) relationship between technologies and social relations. It is not a question of one assuming primacy over the other (though of course as an anthropologist, I have to admit to a pre-occupation with the social relations).

This then does indeed suggest that it would be helpful to have a theoretical and methodological framework for dealing with these phenomena - but I wonder to what extent it is actually necessary for anthropologists to get at the kind of emergence you mention from such social networking sites.

Clearly, individuals are using these sites for social reasons and the technologies have been integrated within the channels for those social relations. But in the same way as Miller's Trinidad example (with both internet and mobile phones), I'm not sure that what anthropologists do need necessarily be particularly different. We follow the idioms of the people with whom we work and if they use ICT as an integral part of their communication then of course we use that. Elevating this to something called the anthropology of the contemporary strikes me as a bit grandiose. Isn't this more or less what Malinowski and Boas said we had to do by living with people? To frame it as an anthropology of the contemporary, seems like it might risk fetishising newness, in particular ICT, which it sounds like you DON'T want to do. I'm not trying to dismiss anyone's ideas here, but I think I have probably failed to see why anthropological field research, complete with intense personal relationships and a commitment to trying to make sense of how other people articulate and negotiate their situations, wouldn't be exactly what is called for.

Best,
Steve

Sally Applin (saa26@kent.ac.uk)

Dear Philipp,

Thank you for your kind reply.

My intent in sending tiny samples from the Twitter feed is to give a snapshot of how people are talking about "cyber" and what it means for them. Particularly edge users and thinkers such as Bruce Sterling and William Gibson.

I suppose I consider the consequences of "cyber" as applied to the broader spectrum of "PR for anthropology" as well as in general academic usage.

So my logic, is ...that if we have a hard time getting anthropology understood, accepted, used, practiced, embraced, advocated for, etc… in places outside of anthropology, and anthropology is currently struggling for understanding and acceptance in the broader technical/computer

community, embracing a term like "cyber" for whatever good legacy reasons one might have, seems to reinforce the stereotype that creates the difficulty that anthropology has outside of anthropology in the first place.

Which, to be fair, may not be a concern at all for the argument, but I see the argument plugging into a larger system and I see the consequences of that choice played out in an industry that I have spent nearly 25 years exploring. (I'm not status auctioning, or trying to, more just pointing out that that problem has been going on for a really long time.)

But, that isn't the topic of your paper. (I'm more of a pragmatic connector, I suppose.)

Maybe there will be those who embrace "cyber" as a nostalgic term in a hipster sense, but for the most part, things are moving along, dipping back into history a bit, then lurching forward.

I'd argue that we need descriptive words that work in anthropology and can be transferred to industry as well. "Digital" might not be it, either.

I'm not sure if this is a "modern" vs "traditional" pivot, or if it's indicative of something larger--that names are transitory for their time and new ones assimilate their properties as they explain the same set of issues in a gradually shifting context.

> ubiquitous internet technologies anthropological and ethnographic
> projects are needed more than ever.

I agree. But if we keep using words like "cyber" to describe things, people in technology (unless they are older government systems, or systems that are more institutionalized in computer science in an older way) aren't going to pay much attention - no matter how much data we have in our own discipline to rationalize the choice. Contextually, the contemporary technical community (outside of the aforementioned types) has all but given up on the term "cyber." Granted, they aren't into "social media" either.

We need a new word.

Sally

Daniel Thagioff (danieltaghioff@yahoo.com)

Hi all

Just a quick thought. One can find a new analytical word, and then watch it accumulate analytical baggage, which is fine, there is a place for renewal.

One could also say that the critical baggage with the word "Cyber" is also useful, a debate to carry with us.

Daniel

Philipp Budka (ph.budka@philbu.net)

19

Dear List,

Thank you Salina for your report and for sharing your empirical experience as a digital anthropologist with us. Thank you Steve for your comment.

In the context of an anthropology of the contemporary, Steve asks if it is actually necessary "to get at the kind of emergence" from networking sites such as MyKnet.org. And if anthropologists need to be "particularly different" in working e.g. on people's communication patterns in/with/through new media technologies.

I agree that today in times of poly- and ubiquitous media technologies (cf. Miller et al.) so central to human and social life, it seems a bit odd not to include them in an anthropological project. But if we take a closer look at recent anthropological and ethnographic literature/projects/initiatives/etc. there still seems to be a need for more research on media technologies in contemporary societies. And thus contextualized and critical research on particular media technologies, as I have tried to do with MyKnet.org. In my project, MyKnet.org has been actually analysed in relation to indigenous media technology production in northern Ontario (e.g. Budka 2009) and in considering its sociocultural role for the region's people, e.g. in school, workplace, homes, etc. (e.g. Budka et al. 2009).

The "anthropology of the contemporary", as I understand Rabinow and Marcus (2008), is not "fetishising" the new or newness. Instead it aims to identify, trace and name changes to the present, which is understood in this context as a historical, open moment. But I agree with Steve that it is necessary to be careful and critical, particularly in respect to ICT that promise so many things. Again, anthropology and ethnography are perfectly equipped to critically analyse the sociocultural consequences of the introduction of those new communication technologies and therefore also the changes to the present. A very good example is Green et al.'s (2005) account on the "imperative to connect" in contemporary Britain.

Thank you and all the best,

Philipp

Reference

Budka, P. 2009. Indigenous media technology production in Northern Ontario, Canada. In K.-D. Ertler & H. Lutz (Eds.), Canada in Grainau / Le Canada à Grainau: A multidisciplinary survey of Canadian Studies after 30 years (pp. 63-74). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Budka, P., Bell, B., & Fiser, A. 2009. MyKnet.org: How Northern Ontario's First Nation communities made themselves at home on the World Wide Web. The Journal of Community Informatics, 5(2), Online: http://ci-journal.net/index.php/ciej/article/view/568/450

Green, S. Harvey, P. & Knox, M. 2005. Scales of place and networks: an ethnography of the imperative to connect through information and communications technologies. Current Anthropology 46(5): 805-826.

Rabinow, P., Marcus, G. E. (with Faubion, J. D., Rees, T.) 2008. Designs for an anthropology of the contemporary. Durham: Duke University Press.

Alexander Knorr (alexander.knorr@vka.fak12.uni-muenchen.de)

Am 30.11.2011 um 09:15 schrieb sally:
> My intent in sending tiny samples from the Twitter feed is to give a snapshot of how people are talking about "cyber" and what it means for them. Particularly edge users and thinkers such as Bruce Sterling and William Gibson.
> I suppose I consider the consequences of "cyber" as applied to the broader spectrum of "PR for anthropology" as well as in general academic usage. [snip]

As I wrote in my discussion paper at the beginning of this e-seminar, Escobar conceded that he had chosen the prefix 'cyber-' out of fashion. (1994: 211, fn. I.). I also commented that following fashion is at best a very weak justification when christening academic concepts (like 'cyberculture' in Escobar's case). Equally, still in the context of giving names to concepts, it's not quite academic to shove terms into the dumpster merely because they are fashionable no more.

A theoretical concept's identifier should, if not explain something, then at least point towards something which makes things understandable. The identifier has to make sense in the context of the concept or model it represents. This seldomly can be achieved when just sticking to the supposedly latest fad.

It is absolutely correct that the prefix 'cyber-' during the last three decades experienced a tremendous inflation. Until today it flies into every direction within marketing- and management-speak, and within parts of the traditional mass media's news coverage. In that respect I absolutely agree with the opinions voiced in the conversation with William Gibson, Sally quoted. The 'Cyber Monday' thing made me grin, too, when it hit my e-mail inbox. Apart from that especially Bruce Sterling doesn't shy away from 'cyber-' since just recently, but was suspicious of, and uneasy with the genre-label 'cyberpunk' from early on (see Sterling 1986). But we are not talking literary-genre labels here, I know.

The Sterling-quote: 'There is no "cyber-" anything in 2031. The term is hopelessly backward, like "electro-" or "jet-propelled".' (Sterling 2011) isn't a valid argument either, because it has been ripped out of context. In the article Sterling sketches extreme contrasts between the conditions in 1991 and his vision of the year 2031. Because '1991 was the heyday of cyber-counterculture,' there is 'no "cyber-" anything in 2031.' The text is an intentionally provocative speculation by which Sterling of course is targeting the here and now. If anyone doubts the deliberate over-the-top manner of Sterling 2011, here's another quote: "Was anybody really surprised to see Pakistan nuked? Be honest. "Film" is long gone, because there is no plastic "film".' Allow me to pick up the last aphorism.

Yes, celluloid et al. as material carriers largely have gone already today, but film as a concept, as a form of art and a mass medium is more than going strong. The term 'cybernetics' largely is gone since the 1970s, and the literary sub-genre of 'cyberpunk' has been pronounced dead multiple times, even immediately after its inception. But what has become of cybernetics and cyberpunk – discourses in the Foucaultian sense – are major aspects of our contemporary world. (Knorr 2011: 31-102)

One last detour to literary genre labels. In 1998 science fiction writer Paul di Filippo, using the format of a manifesto, explained why he rejects the label 'cyberpunk' and instead had christened a short story collection of his 'Ribofunk' (1996):

'Cybernetics was a dead science when cyberpunk SF was born, a cul-de-sac without living

practitioners. Furthermore, the "cyber" prefix has been irreparably debased by overuse, in vehicles ranging from comic books to bad movies. The tag now stands for nothing in the public mind but computer hacking and fanciful cyborgs such as Robocop. And Weiner's [sic!] actual texts do not provide enough fruitful metaphors for constructing a systematic worldview.' (di Filippo 1998)

It is correct that cybernetics as a science, even, during the 1970s vanished from visibility. During the 1960s it was around everywhere, was the great hope of reconciling and uniting all academic endeavours, and the great hope of solving all the economical, political, and social problems the nation states and the industry faced. All that didn't work out and cybernetics fell from grace. Suddenly the word vanished, but cybernetics didn't vanish – it got cloaked and invisible, went underground. The glitz was gone, it left the limelights, transformed into a discourse from now on taking effect out of the shadows.

Apart from the fact that cybernetics can't be reduced to the writings of Norbert Wiener only, the discourse cybernetics encompasses a world-view, a very dominant one. German historian of science and technology Philipp Aumann nicely brought it to the point: 'Cybernetics was first of all, both in its manifestations in academia and the wider public, a mode of thinking – mathematizing thinking in terms of systems.' (Aumann 2009: 449 [my translation, put the blame on me] This mode of thinking prevails. (compare e.g. Aumann 2009, Bowker 1993, Gerovitch 2002, Hagner & Hörl 2008, Kline 2006, Medina 2006, Seppänen 1998)

Because of this I am at ease with terms like 'cyberanthropology' and 'cyberculture' as donominators of anthropological concepts. But I won't cling to them stubbornly, or defend them to the last, because on the other hand I do second Sally's argument of potentially doing harm to the PR for anthropology when adopting terms which are deemed to be passé. In that respect I deem the middle passage from the di Filippo quote above to be spot on. And, yes Sally, maybe we do need a new word. But then again, isn't there the danger of indeed succumbing to the fetishism of the new, if we now set out to find that word?

alex

AUMANN, PHILIPP. 2009. Mode und Methode: Die Kybernetik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. München: Wallstein, Deutsches Museum.
BOWKER, GEOFF. 1993. How to be universal: Some cybernetic strategies, 1943-1970. Social Studies of Science 23: 107-127.
DI FILIPPO, PAUL. 1998. Ribofunk: The manifesto. Available online:
http://www.streettech.com/bcp/BCPtext/Manifestos/Ribofunk.html
ESCOBAR, ARTURO. 1994. Welcome to Cyberia: Notes on the anthropology of cyberculture. Current Anthropology 35(3): 211-231.
GEROVITCH, SLAVA. 2002. From newspeak to cyberspeak: A history of soviet cybernetics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
HAGNER, MICHAEL AND ERICH HÖRL (Eds.). 2008. Die Transformation des Humanen: Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte der Kybernetik. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
KLINE, RONALD R. 2006. Cybernetics, management science, and technology policy: The emergence of 'information technology' as a keyword, 1948-1985. Technology and Culture 47: 513-535.
KNORR, ALEXANDER. 2011. Cyberanthropology. Wuppertal: Peter Hammer.
MEDINA, EDEN. 2006. Designing freedom, regulating a nation: Socialist cybernetics in Allende's Chile. Journal of Latin American Studies 38: 571-606.
SEPPÄNEN, Jouko. 1989. "Systems ideology in human and social sciences: History and

philosophy of systems and model thinking, information theory and cybernetics," in Systems: New paradigms for the human sciences edited by Gabriel Altmann and Walter A. Koch, pp. 180-302. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter.
STERLING, BRUCE. 1986. "Preface," in Mirrorshades: The cyberpunk anthology edited by Bruce Sterling, pp. vii-xiv. New York: Arbor House.
STERLING, BRUCE. 2011. Twenty years fore & aft. Frieze Magazine 141. Available online: http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/twenty-years-fore-aft/

Mark Pedelty (pedeltmh@umn.edu)

Dear Philipp and List,

Thanks for sharing your informative and thought provoking paper, Philipp. I would like to use it in my next media ethnography seminar. Very useful synthesis and historical overview.

As with Escobar's "post-development" theory, I find his work useful as macro-critique of disciplinary tendencies. Good place to start.

As for current discussion concerning theories of the "present," we once again seem to be transfixed by semantics (in a good way), in this case for naming and conceptualizing the present/change/ICTs/cyber, etc.. As we engage in that productive discussion, however, it is important to draw on all of the tools at our disposal, semiotic, political economic, empirical fieldwork, etc. Such integrative theory is one of the value-added aspects of anthropology as we enjoin an already robust discussion in media studies, computer science, cultural studies, virtual ethnography, and so on. That is the main idea developed in the following paragraphs. Feel free to stop reading here if not interested in the elaboration.

Everything that I have read in the current discussion adds to our understanding of new communication and cultural realities. However, the discussion closely parallels those in sister disciplines concerning ICT's, raising again the question brought up several messages back: What does Anthro add to that already robust conversation? As an anthropologist who has been mainly working among media studies faculty, I would argue that the comparative, holistic, integrative, and multi-field dimensions of Anthropology - elements that makes this a distinct discipline - should also be brought to bear. Are the changes that we experience in and as the present purely semiotic/ideological shifts or, are they also patterned changes? In addition to new language and technologies, certain long term trends continue, each of which helps inform our understanding of the present. For example, as Earle and Johnson (2000) illustrated, higher population density has accompanied increased power and information hierarchies, technological integration (networks), and technological "innovation." In one-sentence form that seems a bit banal, but I have found it useful for thinking about ICT's, whether digital, analog, in the present, or ancient past. Looking back at that book and other past works in the discipline, it seems that one of the values of anthropology has been to bring not only ideological/symbolic/metaphoric structures into consideration, but also, dare I say, empirically identifiable, material patterns as well.

By dealing with technology, Philipp's work inevitably brings the age-old idealist/materialist dialectic into play. We keep thinking that we have buried it, but it seems to be subtext for much of this discussion. Out of fear of positivist reductionism, it seems that we sometimes avoid such considerations, leading to the danger of betraying the promise of poststructural theory as we become just as reductionistic (as if everything were purely a question of interpretive definition - a

23

position that ultimately takes us to solipsism). I am pointing the finger at myself as I took the discussion concerning labeling and ran with it (e.g., the present is whatever we call it).

Nevertheless, I raise this question because that is the tendency in parallel media and cultural studies, especially in the "Cultural Studies" of technology: to simply wish away political economy, history, and other domains that threaten our cultural monopoly. Let's face it, is a great way for each new generation of theorists to get jobs and make a name as well. There is an Oedipal element to our "post" erasures of past disciplinary work. If as a group we likewise fail to bring in anthropology writ large, including a long history of theoretical work, we might not be adding as much to the broader discussion of the techno-cultural present as we'd like to.

I don't say this out of nostalgia; I would have no problem eliminating the discipline and word "anthropology" altogether given the baggage that comes with it. However, there is a great deal of theory and methodology in anthropology that might inform our understanding of the present in ways that poststructural theories might not, at least to the extent that they emphasize radical ideological disjuncture - the "present" as so radically different that the past's only utility is as broad contrast (tradition vs modernity, and so on). As theorists of the "new" we can become like religious millennials, certain our time is the most important historical break, rather than recognizing both the newness of the present and the ways in which ongoing patterns continue apace, leading to both quantitative (difference of degree, scale, etc.) and quality.

In most other fields, the newness of digital technology has been emphasized to the exclusion of other considerations. As anthropologists, with a wealth of cultural theory to draw on, we can also demonstrate continuities, patterns of change, comparative analysis, and empirical fieldwork that lead to both interesting synthesis (e.g., diachronic patterns) as well as analysis. We are much better at the latter, because to a certain extent it is easier to breaks things into parts than understand them more holistically. At the same time, we continue to enact Marcus and Fischer's "Defamiliarization via cross-cultural juxtaposition" (1986:138-141) destabilizing overly simplistic theoretical frameworks by bringing in a diversity of information from empirical fieldwork. We have become much better at the latter, and perhaps that is the main contribution anthropologists can offer to the larger discussion concerning the present, digital co-presence, and ICT's.

Thanks, Philipp, for the engaging paper, and everyone, for the productive discussion.

Regards,

Mark Pedelty

References

Johnson, Allen W., and Timothy K. Earle. 2000. The Evolution of Human Societies: From Foraging Group to Agrarian State. 2nd ed. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Marcus, George E., and Michael M. J. Fischer. 1986. Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sally Applin (saa26@kent.ac.uk)

Thank you Alexander and others for a most productive, informative and helpful response.

I'm not suggesting following fashion. I'm more trying to figure out how to balance the process of using essentially the historically correct legacy term (which has been and likely still is "Cyber/Cybernetics") with the message that the term is sending to those outside of anthropology- about anthropology. (That it's a retro 1950's term that is "out of date.")

Again, this is not fully the issue of the paper and it never was or is my intent to hijack the paper discussion.

The problem for poor dear old "Cyber" isn't that it's not a good descriptive term for what is going on. They problem for poor dear old "Cyber" is that many people seem to be losing the ability to relate to the term and find it dated. (For some reason, which I do not understand, "Cyborg" is still fashionably permissive.)

It wasn't my intent to use the 2031 Sterling quote as evidence. It is merely yet another thing that when projecting the future, Sterling mentions as not being there. Omission is as interesting as is inclusion, right?

The new word may be an old one - but if it's not relatable, then messages don't make it through.

Do we care about relating? Or do we care about upholding traditional terms at the expense of education and acceptance of anthropology's contribution to understanding technology and culture?

Sally

Sally Applin (saa26@kent.ac.uk)

By the way, I didn't mean to sound "snarky" either. I'm just trying to wrestle with this in my own writing. Cyber just….seems….so…

David Hakken (dhakken@indiana.edu)

With the crowded end-of-semester schedule of an American University, I have not been able to keep up with the comments on Phillip Budka's working paper. In addition to thanking him for referencing my work in his paper, I would like to make a few comments on it.

One concerns his choice of the Arturo Escobar's publication as a beginning point. Work in the area had begun at lest a decade before, my own first publication in 1977 and serious work dating from the early 1980s. I was from this time involved in organizing symposia for the AAA, through the Committee on Computing as a Cultural Process, a predecessor of what in 1991 became the Committee on the Anthropology of Science, Technology, and Computing, and in diverse other venues. I could not present a list of others interested in these topic through this period without fear of leaving out important names. It is certainly true that Escobar's essay contributed a great deal to the higher level of recognition of this work. His failure, by and large, to refer to our preceding work it is indicative of the diverse backgrounds of the pioneers, and the difficulties we all faced of being told that is was interesting, but not really anthropology.

In the interest of specifying the discussion of the roots of this interest, I add that in my own case it

was the section of Braverman's Labor and Monopoly Capital addressing computing is office work which first piqued my interest. This fit with the interest in work and new technology arising in Sheffield, the site of my dissertation research, and especially with the emerging Scandinavian School of systems development that I learned about there. Teaching in a technology branch of the State University of New York, I was prompted to identify with the emerging field of Science, Technology, and Society. Like the other pioneers, the relative hostility in anthropology to what we were interested in led us to speak and write for diverse venues. It is only within the last few years that I learned of the early anthropological interest in cybernetics that Budka writes about.

Finally, I was one of the early scholars who like Escobar, cast his work in a "cyber-" register. I argued for recognition of an emerging notion of a new way of life, for which "cyberspace" was a common moniker. I tried to figure out what this might be, framing it as a possible new stage in social evolution, while also trying to use ethnography to study it. I hit on the idea that one would use ethnography to study those social practices, like systems development, which were commonly cited as early forms of the new way of life. These framings helped me get to a point where I thought I could, as in Cyborgs@Cyberspace?. outline a more general problematique around the study of whether or not such a new way of life is emerging, and how we would know if this was the case. This issue had immediate importance from a policy point of view, since so much of the discourse at the time took this emergence as a given premise of both public and private policy. I tried to problematize this premise.

The general work continues, although I agree with Budka that it is not usually framed in the way I did. I take this partly as confirmation of my cyber-skepticism. Nonetheless, I am still regularly assaulted by assertions of the transformativity of digital technologies and thus remain committed to trying to study the social correlates of their use.

David Hakken

Zeynep Gürsel (zgursel@umich.edu)

Dear List,

Thank you Philipp Budka for an interesting paper and all the contributors so far for provocative comments. I just want to add a few things to the table: two references and some thoughts

1. Dominic Boyer's "Digital Expertise in Online Journalism (and Anthropology) has a very useful section in which he outlines anthropology's engagement with "the digital age" (his term) beginning with the Macy Foundation conferences from 1946 - 1953

2. Gabrielle Coleman's recent work on the Anonymous group is to my mind a great illustration of what Salina also brought to our attention: that you need the offline as well as the online.

Now for some thoughts inspired by Budka's paper: Thank you for including the section of the paper on MyKnet.org. I am curious to know if any information is shared via MyKnet.org that people deliberately don't put on Facebook. I'd be fascinated to know how the use of these two sites is different or more about why people think it is important to not rely solely on Facebook. In other words, is there an argument (explicit or implicit) made for an alternative to Facebook (as there is in a project such as diaspora*) or is it merely that people enjoy MyKnet.org's flexible features. In other words is the reason for the continued popularity of MyKnet.org technological (more ability to

26

design homepage) or social (dedicated First Nation service) or both and how is this expressed?

I very much appreciated Mark Pedelty's comments about the importance of emphasizing continuities in discussions of and research about technologies rather than embracing the paradigm of radical disjunctures. I agree as I think many who have already commented do as well. In fact just as I was reading the responses to Budka's paper, literally the very day someone invoke Miller's 1995 provocation,"Kinship was yesterday, consumption and commodities are today" and Alexande Knorr shared the title of the review of his latest book, "Social/Cultural Anthropology was yesterday, Cyberanthropology is today", a young woman came to me for advice on a topic that felt so bizarrely appropriate that I'll briefly share it here. For those not indulgent of anecdotes, stop here.

This young woman came to me frustrated that she had wanted to make a documentary and it was not going as planned at all. "I found out I had a half brother I never knew about and so I wanted to make a documentary about finding him. I even made my mother wait to tell me about him until I could go visit and record it." So already this was a search for kinship influenced by similar documentaries she had seen in the past and the brother was in part being sought out as a media object. I inquired whether she had found the brother. "Well, yes that turned out to be really easy, he's on Facebook. So I wrote him and he friended me. But we don't really have any contact. We don't talk and I guess I want to get to know him."

I then spent the next half hour trying to convince her that I thought her frustration might actually make for a far more interesting documentary thinking about her affective expectations from various media. Digital kinship. When the story of finding the long lost relative begins with him friending you. Then what? When "friends" don't feel like family...

Bruno Latour's description of a late-model car comes to mind: "It is a disparate aggregate of scientific and technical solutions dating from different periods…The ensemble is only contemporary by assemblage." (Latour is a key influence on the "anthropology of the contemporary" ala Rabinow and Marcus) It seems to me that anthropology has much to contribute to the research of the contemporary assemblages online, particularly if it tends not only to the novel but also to the cultural, economic, social, etc factors that date from different periods of which the assemblage is composed.

Thanks again for an interesting conversation.

Zeynep Devrim Gürsel

Philipp Budka (ph.budka@philbu.net)

Dear List,

Thanks to all the last contributors to the discussion, which is getting more interesting every day. To keep it rolling, I am only responding/commenting very briefly to some of the problems raised.

Sally and Alex, thank you both for your ideas on the use of "cyber-" and it's background in cybernetics as "a mode of thinking". I don't think we need a new word to describe what anthropologists are doing in relation to the human uses/practices/etc. of/with (new) media technologies. People inside and outside the discipline should rather judge anthropologists by their work, their projects, their activities and not necessarily by the names they use to describe those. A

most widely agreed signifier certainly eases interdisciplinary and outer-disciplinary communication, but maybe makes it also less interesting.

Mark, thank you for your comment and for sharing your thoughts. I agree that it is important to concentrate on the specifics anthropology as a discipline has to offer to the interdisciplinary discussion of ICT/new media related phenomena. Particularly by considering what has already been said and written before new digital media. Again, I don't think that working on "contemporary" phenomena can be done by ignoring their history or their historical development.

In the case of MyKnet.org, for instance, this would be the development of communication media in the region before and with the first introduction of digital technologies from the 1970s to the 1990s. I find that such an account is necessary to understand many of MyKnet.org's using practices and its sociocultural integration. So I agree with Mark that the past has much more to offer than functioning only "as broad contrast (tradition vs modernity, and so on)".

I also thank David Hakken for his personal insights on the cyber- digital- media technology topic in anthropology as one of the early anthropologists working in this area of research. I think his work is a very good example how anthropology through ethnographic fieldwork can critically contribute to the discussions on new communication technologies and their sociocultural consequences, such as at the workplace.

Finally, I like to thank Zeynep Gürsel for her comments and the references, particularly the hint on Latour's work in respect to "the contemporary". She also wants to know if there is information shared on MyKnet.org that people don't put on Facebook. Actually, I am currently writing a short report on the uses of MyKnet.org in relation to Facebook following an online survey that started this summer.

In considering the results of this survey and also in respect to my fieldwork in the region of northwestern Ontario, I can tell you that MyKnet.org and Facebook are used pretty much in the same way: keeping in touch with family and friends, sharing pictures and stories, etc. When it comes to cultural activities related to the local communities, such as organising or reporting on a fishing or hunting trip or a drumming contest or a hockey tournament, people tend to communicate that via MyKnet.org. The main reason I see for that is that MyKnet.org is a dedicated First Nation service. It was set up, has been controlled and is developed by people of the region. So many people have a strong feeling of belonging to MyKnet.org.

All the best,

Philipp

Adolfo Estalella (jestalellaf@uoc.edu)

Dear all,

thank you Philipp for sharing your paper in the seminar, and following the debate I would like to open a new topic.

I would like to make a first reflection on what seems to be the changing nature of this empirical object that we call first cyberculture, the virtual and later the digital. In less than 15-20 years a

disciplinary project of cyberanthropology is followed by the digital anthropology and now Philipp poses us the question of rethinking it under the heading of anthropology of the contemporary of Rabinow and Marcus. This is perhaps an index of the elusive nature and fuzzy boundaries of this empirical object.

Philipp's paper could be read as an account of a work of boundary making in anthropology where two kinds of limits are enacted. First, the boundaries around an empirical object (cyberculture/the virtual/the digital). Second, the boundaries that demarcate a disciplinary project inside anthropology. Having said that I would like to pose my argument in relation to this instance (of boundary making) adding up to previous contributions in the debate.

However elusive, it seems that this fuzziness is a productive instance that has led anthropologists to look for very diverse sources of inspiration when trying to grasp the cyber/virtual/digital: material culture analysis, Science and Technology Studies or even media anthropology. Sometimes the boundaries are so fuzzy that anthropologists working in domains deeply imbricate with the digital don't identify themselves as digital/cyber-anthropologist. I am thinking, for instance, in many works on biotechnologies (from in vitro fertilization to cloning) that would fit in the heading of cyberanthropology (as Escobar put it). Some of these works on reproductive technologies, for instance, have completely revitalized the traditional field of kinship studies. So, it seems that the digital overcomes many times our efforts to discipline it under a sub-disciplinary field.

In other occasions, this fuzziness poses a methodological challenge that has forced anthropologists to rethink their methods and epistemic practices. In these cases, the analysis of the cyber/digital has led to methodological innovations that open up and renovate the methodological approach of the discipline. Digital anthropology in this case is not only the anthropological study of the digital but a digitalized anthropology.

In all this cases we could think in the digital as a boundary object that destabilizes the boundaries of methods, traditional theoretical objects (kinship, for instance), and the organization of the discipline itself. And the fuzziness nature of the digital seems in all these cases a productive instance that invites us to both think in our contemporary and rethink our discipline.

I would then elevate an argument in favor of this fuzziness rising two final questions:

How could we elaborate a disciplinary project focused on the digital without dissolving the productive dimension of its fuzzy boundaries?

How could we turn this fuzziness in a productive instance for the discipline, for reformulating our methods, our research objects and our disciplinary organization, without making it unrecognizable?

Best
Adolfo

Sally Applin (saa26@kent.ac.uk)

Dear Philipp,

> Sally and Alex, thank you both for your ideas on the use of "cyber-" and
> it's background in cybernetics as "a mode of thinking". I don't think we

need a new word to describe what anthropologists are doing in relation
to the human uses/practices/etc. of/with (new) media technologies.

People inside and outside the discipline should rather judge
anthropologists by their work, their projects, their activities and not
necessarily by the names they use to describe those.

What people ***should*** do isn't what they seem to be doing.

If the terms anthropology uses to discuss this area creates a barrier for others to even begin to learn what anthropologists are doing, I'd say it's a problem.

Maybe not for you, if your career is in academia. But certainly for practitioners wanting to work in industry outside of large institutions and governments.

The term becomes a barrier.

A most widely
agreed signifier certainly eases interdisciplinary and
outer-disciplinary communication, but maybe makes it also less interesting.

But "less interesting" for whom? If keeping legacy in academia is the goal, I agree with you and that is an important concern.

However, if evolution of the term is required as a bridge to reach people outside those aforementioned areas, then I respectfully disagree.

-Sally

Philipp Budka (ph.budka@philbu.net)

Hi List, thanks Adolfo and Sally for your contributions. I think Adolfo is right in drawing our attention to questions of boundary making and fuzziness that evolves when dealing with cyber/digital/media/etc. anthropology. Here it might be once again helpful to look at the theoretical and epistemological histories of this area of research. I did that very briefly in my working paper and there remains much space for elaboration: cyberanthropology has been influenced by science and technology studies and developed particularly in the US tradition of anthropology while digital anthropology has important roots in material culture and its British representatives. This is of course a very simplified view, but may be helpful to rethink and even deconstruct these boundaries. Maybe the "anthropology of the contemporary" has such a (hidden) agenda.

I also agree with Adolfo that fuzziness in this field of studies and in respect to drawing on multiple disciplinary accounts is productive. At the same time I see the problem Sally has with this kind of fuzziness or lack of clear cut domains and definitions. But would we have this e-seminar if there is a single descriptive term or analytical concepts all can agree on, within anthropology and outside? For me, it would be less interesting and challenging for sure.

So I am still convinced that the strength of anthropology is to critically work with a diversity and multitude of concepts and approaches that are tested against empirical evidence. There are plenty of

good reasons for anthropologists to be confident when working with other disciplines, the industry, governmental and non-governmental organsations; from theory building to methodological issues.

Thanks and all the best,

Philipp

Stephen Lyon (S.M.Lyon@durham.ac.uk)

Dear List,
It's kind of hard to believe it's been two weeks already, but today is the last day of our e-seminar. Philipp is still champing at the bit to respond to comments or questions, so if any of you have some unasked questions or comments you've been sitting on, then now is the time. We will wrap things up by close of business today (at the fringes of western European time, rather than out in California, I'm afraid).

Thanks again to everyone who has contributed to the discussions. I've learned a great deal about some of these issues and now understand some of the contentious aspects of them a little better as well.

Best,
Steve

Meltem Acartürk (meltem_acartuerk@yahoo.de)

Dear All,

thank you all for the very interesting information and e-seminar discussions on this list!

I just came across this forthcoming publication (2012) and thought it might be of interest for some of you:

http://researchingsocialmedia.org/2011/12/04/book-overview/
http://researchingsocialmedia.org/2011/12/04/reading-the-riots/

All the best,

Meltem Acartürk

Philipp Budka (ph.budka@philbu.net)

Dear List

I would like to thank all who participated to this e-seminar, for their interesting comments, their thoughts and their personal stories. I think that no matter how we call what we do, it is important that we as anthropologists continue to do it. Particularly in times of global media and technology hypes.

31

Thanks and all the best from rainy Vienna,

Philipp

Stephen Lyon (S.M.Lyon@durham.ac.uk)

Dear List,

Many, many thanks again to Philipp Budka, Alex Knorr and everyone who contributed to such a lively and informative e-seminar. Sadly, I think it's time to bring it to a formal close, though no doubt some of the issues raised over the past two weeks will creep back into some of our discussions both on and off this list.

The next e-seminar will take place in February and I'll be giving a little more information about this early in 2012.

Finally, I'd also like to thank Nina Grønlykke Mollerup, who has been a critical partner in making this e-seminar run smoothly.

All the best for the remainder of 2011,

Steve

Matthew Bernius (mbernius@gmail.com)

Apologies for joining the conversation late and thank you to Philipp for such an intriguing paper. Let me begin by saying I think that the goal of the paper is both novel and very valuable, and the working paper, as it stands has already been a useful thought-tool for me.

Due to travel and lack of an internet connection, I only was able to read the essay and the subsequent discussion today, so please excuse the roughness of my thoughts...

I think the trajectory of the paper is great, in particular it's eventual move to the concept of an "anthropology of the contemporary." What I feel is missing in the construction of your argument is a sense of why this turn is necessary or helpful. My sense is that you see this as a better theoretical grounding/attention than either cyber or digital anthropology - that attending to the contemporary prevents us from missing the forest for the trees. However, I think this argument would be greatly strengthened if you took a more critical (though from a position of care) perspective on both cyber and digital anthropology, presenting some of the potential limitations of each attention (apologies if those critical components were in the essay and I missed them).

Beyond that, one thread I would like to see a deeper exploration of cyborg theory within the "cyber" section. In the current paper, cyborg anthropology is briefly presented as a subsection of the larger "cyber" project. While one might argue about the overall influence of the cyborg anthropology project as proposed by Downey et al, I think a strong argument can be made that cyborg and feminist theory had a significant effect on the larger field of cyber anthro.

32

Also, following up on the discussion of boundary work and language that has already taken place...
I'm be interested in a bit more discussion about why "cyber" and "digital" (versus say "cyborg" and "online") came to be the terms that demarcate these different approaches. As other commentators have already pointed out, both terms have an interesting history of fetishization both within and outside of the academy - for example the large number of business researchers who self gloss themselves as "digital anthropologists" despite having little to no actual anthropological/ethnographic training.

I look very forward to seeing how this paper develops.

Matt

Philipp Budka (ph.budka@philbu.net)

Dear List,

I thank Meltem for the references and Matt for his comments. I will respond very briefly.
The paper was really meant as a discussion (working) paper that should open a conversation about what we call cyber/digital/contemporary/insert-new-term-here anthropology. For situating recent research projects in digital anthropology in a better way, I found it useful to take a look in the not so distant past when an anthropology of cyberculture developed. At the same time the paper asks – and this is an open question – if we could/should subsume those sub-fields or domains under a kind of meta-project, e.g. an anthropology of the contemporary.

Matt is right that there is plenty of room for improvement, in discussing the limitations and potentials of those branches of anthropology for instance. I am certainly going to rework this paper and integrate some of the very helpful comments and critical aspects of this e-seminar. And as Steve mentioned earlier, we can always keep on discussing some of the aspects and problems raised in the seminar on- and off-list.

So thank you all for participating and all the best,

Philipp