Media Anthropology Network
European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA)
E-Seminar Series

http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars

E-Seminar 64
Mobile Technology, Mediation and Social Change in Rural India
by
Sirpa Tenhunen
(University of Helsinki)

Discussant
Mirjam de Brujin
(Leiden University)

29 January-21 February 2019

Veronica Vivi Barassi v.barassi@gold.ac.uk   30 January 2019

Dear all,

Our 64th E-Seminar is now Open!!

You can find the paper Mobile Technology, mediation and social change in rural India by Prof. Tenhunen (University of Helsinki) online at:

http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars

As you may know already, our E- Seminars run for a period of 2 weeks and they are vibrant spaces for discussion and confrontation on a specific paper. You are all invited to contribute.

Our discussant Prof. Mirjam de Brujin (Leiden University) will be posting her comments shortly. After that I will give Prof Tenhunen a couple of days to answer the comments, and will open the discussion to all.

Really looking forward to the discussion

Veronica

Mobile Technology, mediation and social change in rural India
Drawing from my long-term fieldwork in rural India, my paper will develop the understanding of new media and social change. My focus will be on how I theorize mobile phone use in my recent book (A village goes mobile: telephony, mediation and social change in rural India, Oxford University Press, 2018). I present two main arguments about mobile-telephony-mediated social change: First, I argue that mobile phone use contributes to changes in social logistics, which impacts practices in culturally specific ways. I maintain that economic liberalization and market operations have conditioned the ways mobile telephony has been designed and used to increase the logistical efficiency of economy and social relationships. In turn, these relationships influence culture in specific ways and serve to create novel speech contexts. Second, I maintain that mobile phone use strengthens the heterogeneity of discourses by mediating the discourse and social interaction. I analyze how phones help connect speech contexts, give callers new possibilities to choose the context for their speech, and allow them to engage in critical and unconventional discourses and actions. I relate mobile communication to diverse social contexts

and ongoing social changes, analyzing the relationship between mobile-phone-mediated conversations and other speech contexts and media.

Mirjam de Brujin m.e.de.bruijn@hum.leidenuniv.nl   30 January 2019

Dear all, below you find my reaction to the paper of Prof. Sirpa Tenhunen.
Looking forward to the reactions.
Mirjam

Reaction to the paper of Prof. Tenhunen, Mobile technology, Mediation and Social Change in Rural India, 2019
Prof. Mirjam de Bruijn (University of Leiden)

This paper is a summary of the recently published book of Prof. Tenhunen 'A village goes mobile' (2018). With its extensive literature review and the empirical examples it reveals that the study of mobile telephony has become an established field of study in Anthropology. The paper reads as an agenda for future research for such anthropology, with different chapters: 1. Gendered contexts; 2. Politics, political agency and media; 3. Smart phones, leisure and hierarchies; set in a frame of social change and development; and with as methodology ethnography in cultural and socio-political context.

The research for this paper is based in India, but it does resonate with my own observations and research in West and Central Africa (e.g. de Bruijn 2014, de Bruijn & Brinkman 2018). In this short review I will suggest a few different themes/topics based on my reading of the paper to guide a comparative ethnography of mobile telephony-studies.

A long connection between the author and a village in India (West Bengal) is the basis of the observations that are shared in the book and summarized in the article (1999 till 2013). It is nice to read this itinerary of a researcher in the field encountering a rapid change that cannot be overlooked. I had a similar experience during my regular fieldwork periods in West and Central Africa. I started fieldwork at an historical time when mobile telephony was starting to become more and more pervasive and I came to the conclusion that this was indeed a historical moment of change. I did the same as Prof. Tenhunen and started studying mobile telephony, society and socio-political change. Similarly to Prof. Tenhunen I do fully embrace the understanding that these kinds of innovations and developments of media technologies in society need to be studied diachronically, in cultural and socio-political context and with an ethnographic eye.

Methodology

Unfortunately the paper has no section on methodology, which will probably be part of the book. We do learn that Prof. Tenhunen has lived in the village, stayed with the family and observed the participants over a period of 15 years. I will have to read her book (and I will do) to understand better how she did this research. My own experience in this field has raised many questions also with regard to the practice of ethnography. Indeed the book of Horst & Miller (2006) coins the term 'ethnography of communication'. The technology has changed enormously since then and we have entered the era of digital humanities, with all its new possibilities to do research (See for instance Pink 2012, Berry 2017). But next to the techniques of research also our own relationality in the field changes, just like the relationality of the people with whom we work. If we want to develop a field of comparative mobile telephony study the exploration of methodology/ies is important. In this line of thought I would like to ask Prof. Tenhunen how she envisages her own methodological choices with reference to the broader question of how do we study mobile technologies?

The fast changing technology and social change

The last section of the article delves a little into the use of smart phones and what it means for society and the individual. It is clear that the arrival of the smart phone is again another development of the technology. In the past 20 years the changes have been huge. Every return to the 'field' showed new developments. This rapid change of the technology turns our studies soon into historical narratives. The films I made in 2010 are not longer really representative for the practices of today. I am still searching for the concepts and theories to give enough consideration to this aspect of the speed of change.

Prof. Tenhunen remarks on change in the village: the main change is in the (re)organization of agriculture. However at the same time she observes that because of this change people start to search via mobiles new employment elsewhere. What then is the link between this agricultural change and the fast development of communication technology?

The speed and layeredness of socio-political change will or will not be the same in different regions, and comparison may help us to understand this better.

Information 'work'

One unifying topic in the three empirical examples of the paper is that people get access to more information, either by calling, or through the use of social media and accessing Internet (Facebook). And hence illiterate, non-educated, educated, etc. people get access to information

and 'use' this information. As Prof. Tenhunen shows this leads to new relationalities and also different interpretations of self/identity, position in society, etc. We should question what kind of information is sent around? And how can people shift fake from real, or do they need to do so? This Information 'work' is an important topic to discuss. (Cf. Fabian 2003, where he explains the concept memory 'work', Cf. de Bruijn 2018).

Hierarchies and inequalities
In the ICT4D and M4D theories there is a firm 'belief' in the democratizing possibilities of new Communication technologies. The paper is also a response to this 'theory' or if you wish 'belief'. As is clearly shown in the examples in this article Mobile Phones and their use cannot change existing power relationships and hierarchies, probably a little, but in many instances it is either a work in progress, or it exacerbates existing hierarchies. However, there are few glimpses of change that are also presented in this article, i.e. in gender relations, although mainly for the better off, the higher classes; and in the political agency of the population, are processes of social change that do blur power relations gradually.

In the development of a comparative approach to mobile technology we need to challenge over-optimistic interpretations of the democratic power of technological change, we also need to be careful to jump to conclusion about the inability of technologies to change existing hierarchies. A more diachronic comparison with other moments of ICT-'revolutions' can enable us to understand this better.

Creation of novel communication contexts
Prof. Tenhunen concludes after her review of various concepts in the study of media that the changes observed are also at work in the 'creation of novel communication contexts', in which the mobile phone plays an important role. Hence the cultural and social context, related to communication, is changing while the appropriation of mobile telephony in all its forms is transforming the individual, the relationality, etc. Hence we are back at the agency-structure debates, that we need to revisit to add more complexity and give room to cultural and social dynamics and contexts in order to understand the creation of communication contexts and the role of mobile telephony 'uses'.

Hence I would like to propose an agenda for comparative research based on the themes that I have read in this paper: 1. Methodology, 2. The speed of change, 3. Information 'work', 4. De-hierarchization, 5. Creation of novel communication contexts. Although Prof. Tenhunen's paper

demonstrates the uniqueness of every setting and development, I would challenge her to start thinking how we could develop a comparative ethnography of mobile telephony.

I would like to end this discussion with a bit of a provocative thought and question. Most of the themes discussed by Prof. Tenhunen are pretty classical in anthropology (gender, change, hierarchies etc.). From an anthropological point of view they are 'expected' whereas the study of this new technology also leads to new interpretations of the social and the political. There are really new dynamics and using the same anthropological concepts might suggest that we are looking at the repetition, in a different jacket, of the same patterns. Yet the world would be very dull if that is how (non) social change works. I am wondering thus if, in the development of a comparative study of mobile technologies, wouldn't it better to push beyond 'traditional' frames of anthropological thought, and seek new meanings and concepts.

References

Berry, Marsha (2017) Creating with mobile media. Zwitserland: Springer International Publishing

de Bruijn, Mirjam (2018, forthcoming) Digitalization and the field of African Studies. Carl Schlettwein Lecture 11, Basler Afrika Bibliographien

de Bruijn, Mirjam (2014) Connecting in Mobile Communities: an African case study. Media Culture and Society, vol. 36 no. 3, p. 319-335.

de Bruijn, Mirjam & Inge Brinkman (2018) Mobile phones in mobile margins: communication, mobility and social hierarchies in/from Africa. In: Palgrave Handbook for Media and Communications Research in Africa / ed. by B. Mutsvairo – UK : Palgrave Macmillan / Springer.

Fabian, J. (2003). Forgetful remembering: A colonial life in the Congo. Africa 73(4), 489—504.
Horst, Heather & Daniel Miller (2006) The Cell Phone: an Anthropology of Communication. Oslo: Berg Publisher

Pink, Sara (2012) Advances in visual methodology, London: Sage

Sirpa Tenhunen sirpa.l.tenhunen@jyu.fi   1 February 2019

Dear all,

I thank Veronica and the other members of the EASA Media Anthropology Network for the opportunity to present my paper. I also thank professor de Bruijn for her insightful comments. It was intriguing to read how her observations of the appropriation of mobile telephony in Africa bear similarities to my observations in India. I welcome her idea for the comparative research on mobile telephony and for the quest to develop new concepts in the course of this endeavor. In fact, in the concluding chapter of my book, I express the hope that my approach could help generate comparative studies in other contexts. So I agree about the need to do comparative research on the appropriation of everchanging technologies in order to develop new concepts to understand the evolving new socialities.

How do we study mobile technologies?
I began my research on mobile telephony in 2005 by interviewing the first ten phone owners of the village but I was not successful in eliciting long conversations about mobile telephony. I consider these difficulties as somewhat typical for ethnographic fieldwork and interviews in general—ethnographers usually increase their understanding of the cultural universe under study gradually discovering the key questions, themes and their meanings in the course of the research process. These initial hurdles also had to do with the newness of phones—the ten persons I interviewed in 2005 had purchased their phones just one or two months before the interviews; consequently, they had not yet gained much experience on mobile phone use. Moreover, both phone ownership and use were still rare—and not part of everyday life I could easily observe. In order to start to gain some understanding of phone use, I filmed 100 phone calls from communal phones in the village shops and discussed these calls with the callers. Within a reasonably short period, I was able to collect rich research material which provided the ground for almost all the key conclusions of this extended research project. I used filming during my subsequent research trips, too. Unlike interviews and quantitative information (I also carried out a survey and personally conducted semi-structured interviews) about the nature of calls, filming captured phone use as part of complex ongoing social situations. At the same time, films helped me grasp unspoken routines and practices. Moreover, discussions with the phone users on filmed phone calls helped me understand the broader context of calls. Throughout my research, I gained some of the greatest insights into the role of mobile phone use by interacting and chatting with the villagers and by writing down these observations in my fieldwork diary. Calling became gradually a taken for granted practice and, as such, harder to talk about than when phones were still considered as novelties. Phone use turning into a tacit part of everyday life underlined the importance of observation as a research method. I did not merely observe phone conversations

but also discussed these calls with the callers. Often I was able to listen both parties of the phone calls as people commonly used the speakers of their phones so that they could share their calls with those present. My long-term research enabled me to observe changes in every-day life, and I describe many changes based more on my observations than on people's recollections of past events. In general, it was not easy for people to reflect on changes in their everyday life except for the latest transformations they had experienced and witnessed. Had I not noted down my observations in my fieldwork diary, I would have forgotten many details of changing practices I encountered in the village.

Agricultural change and the fast development of communication technology
Since mobile phones became available, agricultural produce could be sold by phone. Whereas deals were previously closed by signing a written contract well in advance of the products' delivery, sellers can now continue haggling with various buyers until it is time to deliver the products. Thanks to phones, the prices could be settled by phone at the very last moment, which has decreased the middlemen's profit and benefited the farmers. There is, however, a great variation in how farmers have benefitted from phones. Middle-size and large farmers regularly ascertain the vegetable prices in the market towns of the region. Nevertheless, it is unprofitable to transport large crops, such as paddy and potatoes, far. Most people, therefore, prefer to sell them in the nearby markets. Even middle and large farmers often rely on a dealer who has provided them with credit to invest in farming, as many such dealers also act as moneylenders. Small-scale farmers do not benefit from comparing prices between different markets by phone because they do not have much to sell. A farmer may travel daily to sell just a few pieces of vegetable at the Vishnupur open market and to use the day's income to buy groceries there. Phones have, however, helped all farmers with work arrangements, because the men can now call from the field if they urgently require equipment or pesticides—fields can be located several kilometers from the farmers' houses. A few men mentioned that they use phones to discuss farming options and tips with their relatives. In India, the central government and states have reduced their investments in developing the farming sector by means of research and public education. Phones could be used to educate farmers about improved techniques; however, this has no happened in Janta or for that matter in the rest of India in large scale.

Information work
I find professor de Bruijn's idea of information work interesting. Based on my research in rural India, I would view information work as being crucially about power relationships. The introduction of mobile phones increased the circulation of news even to the degree that people sometimes commented it has become increasingly difficult to conceal things they would not like

to share. People characterized the kind of news they exchanged over the phones as small, that is personal news. The people who used Facebook at the time of my research in the village did not perceive Facebook as being about conveying news—they perceived Facebook as being about exchanging pictures. People were not interested in using Facebook to provide their contacts with news indiscriminately; instead, they use the call function to deliver news as calling gives them better control of whom to tell what. Information work is crucially about power to control what gets circulated, and different media constrain users' power and agency differently.

Classical themes

It would be challenging to convey what is going on in rural India without the reference to gender, kinship and caste. These hierarchies may appear and sound traditional but in rural India they are part of everyday life. However, I hope to have been able to convey in my book how these aspects of local identity are gaining new meanings thanks to the ubiquity of mobile telephony. I agree with professor Bruijn that we should aim to push beyond traditional frames of anthropological thought but at the same time one should remain firmly grounded in ethnographic data which the concepts should illuminate.

Best,

Sirpa

Philipp Budka ph.budka@philbu.net   7 February 2019

Dear Sirpa, Dear All,

Thank you very much Sirpa for this interesting paper! And thank you Mirjam for a first reaction!

Just a quick note on the discussion of mediatization and/vs mediation in your text: As you point out there has been an ongoing debate on the pros and cons of each concept. And I agree with you that "mediatization scholars discuss social changes through Western-based concepts, such as individualization, secularization, and modernization" (p. 5). However, during the course of preparing an edited volume, me and my fellow editors learned that mediatization can also be a quite useful conceptual means in describing and investigating, for instance, the relationship between media, ritual and performative practices and processes in Non-Western contexts, on a micro-level and by building on ethnographic data (Luger et al. in press). I have to add, though, that the book is in German and that the term "mediatization" ("Mediatisierung") in this language

is - as far as I can tell - not in such a (seemingly) stark contrast to other terms related to media interaction and communication or mediality. Particularly its inherent connection to sociocultural change and continuity, which enables us to look beyond "media effects", "media impact" etc., I find quite helpful. So I suggest that mediatization can become a potentially useful concept in an anthropological/ethnographic research context and that anthropologists should not shy away from appropriating it.

Looking forward to more discussion!

All the best,

Philipp

Reference
Luger, M., Graf, F., & Budka, P. (Eds.). (in press). Ritualisierung - Mediatisierung - Performance. Göttingen: V&R Unipress/Vienna University Press.

Sirpa Tenhunen sirpa.l.tenhunen@jyu.fi   7 February 2019

Dear Philip, Dear All,

Thank you for your comment! Although I decided to opt for the concept of mediation instead of mediatization, I do agree that one could develop the concept of mediatization, and in fact, one already has. The critical debate on the notion of media logic and the institutional theory of mediatization has led to the emergence of a cultural perspective on mediatization, which emphasizes flexibility. However, I found very little anthropological and ethnographic research which avails the newer ideas of mediatization, but the work by Luger, Graf, and Budka sounds very promising.

Regards,

Sirpa

Daniel Miller d.miller@ucl.ac.uk   7 February 2019

Dear Sirpa and all,

Just to say thanks for the paper and even more for the monograph itself, which I feel everyone interested in the anthropology of mobile phones should read in full. I found it very useful that you have conducted this more long term, as it were vertical study (in the spirit of one of my heroines Scarlett Epstein, perhaps), while I am currently involved in a more horizontal study a ten fieldsite comparison of the use and impact of smartphones
-https://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/assa/

There are many issues that are raised by this paper, but let me just select one. The phone is integral to all aspects of life and I would not want to separate it out as in virtual v real, or online v offline. Nevertheless there is an important issue here of how far things that develop within the domain constituted by these media also follow through into other domains. In our previous project on social media, if you read Costa's (2016) work in Turkey or Venkatraman (2017) in South India, the problem becomes clear. Boyfriends and girlfriends enjoy constant communication which was completely impossible previous to these phones and social media. This is one of the reasons we lay stress on the growth in privacy, in contrast to the newspapers which only ever discuss the threat to privacy. But our evidence was that even these intense and intimate phone based relationships did not lead to any changes in what was acceptable behaviour between young men and young women in the public domain. Indeed both Costa and Venkatraman suggest that social media may also strengthen traditional ties such as kinship and caste.

I remember from my PhD research in India observing the terrible isolation of new brides. They were often sourced from as far as possible from the village in order to ensure that the in-laws could not intervene on their behalf. Being able to phone one's natal family must make a huge difference to this experience and that comes over clearly in your work. But in this paper you then go on to suggests that this allowed the new bride to refuse certain tasks in their new home. I found this more surprising, though obviously it does happen. So I guess my question is how to focus on this issue of whether what happens on phones also engineers changes in other fields of life. It is hard also because other shifts away from certain traditions are happening in any case, so it makes it difficult to know how much causation to ascribe to the phone. I feel it's important to be cautious about assuming such consequences while accepting evidence for the degree that it clearly can play a causative role.. One of the real advantages of an anthropological approach is we try and steer clear of regarding these developments, that follow he adoption of mobile phones, as good or bad, and focus instead on the almost inevitable contradictions in their consequences. The other problem that follows from my question is that if we want to avoid

dualisms such as virtual v real and accept that phones are integral to everything, what is the right language for talking about changes that occur within the realm of phone use but not outside of that realm?

References

Costa E. 2016 Social Media in Southeast Turkey. UCL Press

Venkatraman. S. 2017 Social Media in South India UCL Press

Regards
Danny

Sirpa Tenhunen sirpa.l.tenhunen@jyu.fi   7 February 2019

Dear Danny and all,

Thank you for your comments!

There are many ongoing processes of change, and it is impossible to determine precisely to which degree mobile phones contribute to changes. However, there are instances when one can ascertain that phones play a role. I never expected that phone use could help change young wives' position, actually quite drastically. Thanks to phones, they were suddenly able to stay in touch with their natal families right after their wedding and even engage in subversive conversations over the phone. Women, of course, had agency even before the phones but mobile phones simply made regular communication between young wives and their parents possible. People's greatest motivation to use the phones was to communicate with kin so one can say that phones strengthened kinship. However, the meaning of certain kin also changed as, for instance, communication between in-laws became more casual. My observations about the use of social media in the village are quite similar to Venkatraman's (2017) findings from South India, and I do cite him in the book. People were building cosmopolitan identities with the help of Facebook; however, one could not see any direct impact of these new identities in people's everyday lives. In this sense, Facebook use remained virtual, a separate context from other spheres of life. The ability to make phone calls and post in Facebook played different roles for people's actual social lives. However, only a small minority of villagers used Facebook during my fieldwork period, so situation might change if Facebook use becomes more prevalent.

Regards,

Sirpa

Elisenda Ardèvol eardevol@uoc.edu   7 February 2019

Thanks, Sirpa, for sharing with us your brilliant and ethnographically detailed paper. I really enjoyed reading it, more even I was at the same time, reminding our once-upon-a-time discussions with John Postill about social change and digital technologies, and how shall we understand not only the relationship between them but the terms themselves.

We try to keep a position of a non-deterministic view on such relation, as Dani Miller said and Sirpa emphasises in her text. But the fact is that it is difficult for all us to maintain it, if we have separated already the two terms and then we are challenged to explain their mutual influences. As it is clearly posited in your paper, things are no so easy, and there is a mutual influence in the different examples she gave us. Social change is then a result of an interplay between the affordances that people "discover" in the new technology and their cultural appropriation in an ongoing social order and cultural values, using the domestication approach.

"My observations do not support technological determinism; yet, villagers told me that they had experienced their ability to use mobile phones as a major change". It seems mobile phones have improved their lives and indeed help just-married women to cope with social isolation and give new opportunities to the Bagdis for entertainment and comfort in front of the upper classes. However, it seems not a disruptive change, but a change that encompass other social and cultural changes as well as cultural and social continuities.

The relationship between some social changes and cultural values transformation is not clear, still. As Dani noticed, cultural values are not so easy to change because of a new gadget. And the direction of the social change is not always clear. Look for example at the industry of entertainment: digital technologies produced a disruptive change in the way people consume cultural products and in the way that cultural products are produced and circulated; some companies broke down while other flourish, but the capitalist model persist. And cultural values related to privacy, morality and so on, are almost the same. The promises of a more democratic, wise and informed society seems to have vanished. For a while it seemed that it was true that the networked collective intelligence was producing the destabilisation of the old local hierarchies, when a powerful new medium is appropriated by the people, but... what seems to appear is a

panorama of extreme control of individuals and population by a few that control information and data.

Thus, I am a little bit sceptical about the correlation between social changes and changes in the cultural model and cultural values, and much more about technology fostering social change for the better. What I see is the re-organisation of power relations, the emergence of new inequalities and the reproduction of the hegemonic cultural models, let's name it late capitalism, creative capitalism, cognitive capitalism and so on... Let's say homophobia, racism, women discrimination, poverty, etc. Let's say old social inequalities in terms of casts or classes.

As Sirpa points out, "instead of homogenizing cultures, mobile technology helps to reinforce those cultural patterns and processes that can be reconciled with improved efficiency in social interaction and business transactions. (...) mobile phone use contributes to changes in social logistics, which impacts practices in culturally specific ways". (...) [For example] The lower classes' ability to reach new levels of consumption is accompanied by the new emphasis by the elites on the idea that upper classes are distinct from lower classes due to their moral superiority."

And here comes the old discussion we had about social change and "social changing"; as "social change" seems to imply a radical change in the social order, while "social changing" refers to the way that assemblages of people, ideas, values and things evolve, clash and adapt in the everyday life.

However, the last section off the paper pops up an (for me) intriguing issue: Internet access promotes processes of informal learning and information circulation that also may challenge traditional sources of information and knowledge. Thus, again I am turning to the old idea of literacy as a drive for social change and the role that smartphones can play in knowledge production and circulation. And again, I am making a causal connection between information and communication technologies and cultural and social change. It is difficult for me to stand up in the Latour's position: there is a new entity in the landscape: the smart-human: an entanglement of a human plus a device that can connect her or him to the "outside world" and that means re-organisation of things and people in many expected and unexpected ways. Sirpa shows us some of these new entanglements in a very lucid way, not only from her solid pace of arguing, but also in her vivid ethnographic descriptions.

Reference:

Postill, J. The diachronic ethnography of media: from social changing to actual social changes (June 2017). https://johnpostill.com/2017/06/21/the-diachronic-ethnography-of-media-from-social-changing-to-actual-social-changes/

Sirpa Tenhunen sirpa.l.tenhunen@jyu.fi   8 February 2019

Dear Elisenda and all,

Thank you for your comments!

I agree that the relationship between social change and cultural values transformation is elusive, but a long-term ethnography can help identify some transformations. Changes I came across were by no means drastic transformations for instance in gendered economic power relationships; instead, the positive impacts of women's phone use appear subtle and ambiguous. However, rather than trying to detect changes in cultural values, I looked at how mobile phones helped people to create new speech contexts which offered opportunities to voice issues which were earlier not discussed. Change in cultural values may take place slowly thanks to new discourses. One of my explicit aims was to look at the power relationships, and I found that mobile phones helped challenge them in some limited ways. That fact that the elites criticized low-caste ways of smartphone use showed that the low-caste ability to access advanced technological gadgets was perceived as a threat to local hierarchies.

It is important to pay attention to the specificity of smartphone use in different communities and locations. Indian villagers I met had not turned into heavy social media users; hence, they did not have any experience of the many of the ills of social media and internet. Recently, mobile internet use has grown fast in India thanks to the new service provider Jio which has slashed the rates. Yet, low-income people and people with little education I met in Kolkata just recently had not started to use their smartphones for browsing the internet. Calling function of the phones remains the most important benefit of phones for the working-class Indians whose educational level is low.

Regards,

Sirpa

Sahana Udupa sahana.udupa@lmu.de   9 February 2019

Dear Sirpa

Thanks for sharing your fascinating research.

I really liked your formulation, "social logistics", and the suggestion that "logistics is inevitably socially mediated and not only confined to economic life as separate from other domains of culture and society". Your argument that mobile technology reinforces cultural patterns and processes is convincing. Your paper (and the book) is full of brilliant analytical insights: how mobile media contribute to the "merging of different contexts", "choosing a speech context", and "enabling new social contexts", to name a few.

Great discussion so far. I would add a couple more related questions.

Mediation theory: How do we account for specific cultural practices and social habits that media affordances engender if we were to embrace an all-encompassing idea such as "mediation"? The argument that media formats can have specific logics might well have been demonstrated by the "critical and unconventional discourses" that you have documented in the case of mobile technology. No doubt media technologies undergo various cultural translations, but do media forms force habits that are beyond negotiation? On p 6, you observe that mobile technology was "powerful" (p 6). In chapter six, "mobile media in politics", you note a similar "powerful" effect in terms of speed of mobilization. What do these tell us about the medium itself?

Postcolonial media studies: How do you engage postcolonial media scholarship that has highlighted structures of sociality (caste, language based affective networks, gender hierarchies, political patronage, activism writ in kindred publics) that cannot be fully explained by media theories rooted in Western experiences? While you acknowledge the limitations, it would help to see how you have found critical postcolonial studies useful in this regard, including those that have documented recent digital disruptions in political and cultural worlds.

My two last questions are empirical. Did you notice cases of vigilantism in the village (stalking, taking photos without knowledge, and more organized forms of gender based religious vigilantism)?

On p. 9, you note, "In addition to local leader, patronage is now increasingly sought from other sources." What other sources?

Best wishes
Sahana

Sirpa Tenhunen sirpa.l.tenhunen@jyu.fi   11 February 2019

Dear Sahana, Dear All,

Thank you for your comments!

I am hesitant to talk about media logic although I want to take the technological affordances of mobile telephony into consideration. The problem of media logic is that the same affordances of mobile phones do not materialize everywhere. People in West Bengal use the phones' affordances to engage in subversive discussions but, for instance, in Finland people had access to private space and landline phones through which they could participate in subversive discourse even before mobile telephony; consequently, mobile telephony did not make such a big difference in enabling subversive discourses. Within the sphere of politics, mobile phones are not always used the way they were used in rural West Bengal.

To clarify my use of the term mediation, I employ the mediation concept to understand how mobile telephony increases the number of communicative contexts. Defined broadly, the mediation concept refers to how a given medium reconciles the various forces of history, culture, and the material world, as well as constraining and enabling social actors' use of this medium. This flexible notion has been put to many uses to understand the role of new media in communication and social interaction, as well as in social and cultural changes related to the media intensification. The term mediation has been interchangeably used with mediatization. I build on the view—endorsed by anthropologists—that mediation need not only be assigned to media technologies because it can be regarded as a general condition of social life (Mazzarella 2004, Boellstroft 2008, Horst and Miller 2012). I view all interactions as mediated in the sense that their contexts always influence interaction and speech. The question is therefore not how new media mediate unmediated culture, but how different forms of mediations interact when a powerful new medium is appropriated. I analyze how phones help connect speech contexts and give callers new possibilities to choose the context for their speech and to engage in critical and unconventional discourses and action. I relate mobile communication to diverse social contexts,

analyzing the relationship of mobile-phone-mediated conversations with other speech contexts and media—in this sense, my book is not a study of a single medium.

Post-colonial media studies

My book supports post-colonial media studies in that it questions western-centric views about media use. However, I did not make the explicit point by referring to post-colonial media scholarship nor did I engage in this scholarship which I admit I should have done. I will try to incorporate this useful debate in my forthcoming work, so thanks for your tip on postcolonial media scholarship!

Phone use for stalking

I have been told how a mob (consisting of men) attacked—and killed—the former ruling party leader (a man) in the village, and they used mobile phone to arrange this attack. In terms of gender-based violence, my field site was not among the worst in India. Violence towards women was not generally tolerated, and I, for instance, observed villagers (both women and men) going to great lengths in order to save one woman from his husband who was violent. None of the women I talked to mentioned having been stalked or harassed with the help of mobile phones. Instead, they emphasized how phones gave them a sense of security when they moved outside home. However, as a woman I was not in a good position to observe young men's phone use—a male researcher would probably have found out more about phone use for harassment. I also did not witness any gender-based religious vigilantism—Hindu Nationalist party did not have any supporters in this region at the time of my fieldwork. However, BJP has now made inroads into West Bengal so things might have changed.

New sources of patronage

First, rising standards of living lessen local political parties' power to increase their influence through patronage. Many households now have one or more member who has migrated to work and live in urban areas who are able to send money for their family in the village. So households are less dependent on local political patronage. Second, people were using their phones to contact regional political leaders and the panchayat secretary who lives outside village.

Regards,

Sirpa

Thanks, Sirpa for your accurate answers, they make clear your position.

However, I think that there has been many threads of debate that could be opened to the floor.

For example, what do we understand by "social change"? Are there other ways to tackle with mobile phones in everyday life that go in other directions than looking for social change related to mobile phone use as its cause?

Dani Miller did a reflective move, and I think it can be further explored: "The other problem that follows from my question is that if we want to avoid dualisms such as virtual v real and accept that phones are integral to everything, what is the right language for talking about changes that occur within the realm of phone use but not outside of that realm?"

Another question has to do with Sahana inquiry about decolonization, in the sense that other conceptual tools rather than these of western thought about what a medium is can be explored.

For example, what would Amazonian prespectivism tell us about mobile phones? What if we apply the theoretical insights of Marilyn Strathern "dividuals" or "distributed objects" to conceptualise media use? Are there some Indian ontologies that make sense to understand what do mobile phones or how mobile phones are understood and used?

These kind of foolish thoughts came to me as I was re-reading Elizabeth Edwards about social practice as a theory for photography. The text is in Spanish, but it illuminates how our intelectual ways of understanding media may obscure other possible approaches to the photographic objects and photographic practices (photography is a media form, too and an important feature of mobile phones). The ethnographies about photography in Gambia, Melanesia, Papua New Guinea, etc.helped me to understand the use of photographs in Social Media in the cases of Brazilian and Catalan political practices. The political practice I was analysing consisted on to a political campaign in both countries encouraging to write letters to their respective "political prisoners" (Lula in Brazil and the social activists pro-independence in Catalonia) and most people do not only write to the prisoners and get answers, but also share the photography of the letter sent, rejected or answered in their social media networks. The phenomenon is complex to explain here, but it resulted that non-western ethnographies were very useful to understand the photographed object as a significant part of this political action in Brazil and Catalonia.

Just to share a couple of thoughts!
Elisenda

References:

Edwards, E. (2009). "Las prácticas sociales como una teoría de la fotografía", en Vicente, Pedro (ed.): Instantáneas de la teoría de la fotografía. Arola. Tarragona.

Edwards, E. (2012). Objects of affect: Photography beyond the image. *Annual review of anthropology, 41*, 221-234.

Smith, B. R. (2003). Images, selves, and the visual record. *Social Analysis, 47*(3), 8-26.

Strathern, M. (1990). *The gender of the gift: problems with women and problems with society in Melanesia* (No. 6). Univ of California Press.

de Castro, E. B. V. (2012). *Cosmological perspectivism in Amazonia and elsewhere*. HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory.

Veronica Vivi Barassi v.barassi@gold.ac.uk   13 February 2019

Dear All,

I just wanted to let you know that we decided to extend the seminar for another week.

all best

Veronica

Sirpa Tenhunen sirpa.l.tenhunen@jyu.fi   13 February 2019

Dear Elisenda and all,

Thanks, Elisenda, for asking these questions which help me to clarify my approach. In this short paper, I could not elaborate much on these key issues. Maybe my paper did not make it so clear, but my intention has not been to look at social change as deriving solely from the use of mobile

phones. Indeed, in rural West Bengal phones were not adopted by a stagnant society, but by a changing rural society and culture influenced by broad processes, such as political reforms, the introduction of new agricultural methods, economic liberalization policies, and the women's movement. All of these are processes that are not limited to the village but are nevertheless locally articulated. Throughout the book, I relate mobile phone use to these changes. I think of change as something that can be revealed through historical analysis or long-term ethnography and my focus has been on pre-existing and newly emerging cultural contexts and their interrelationships as well as agency and power relationships.

I hope I have been able to illustrate how people use phones differently in rural India in comparison to new media use in Europa and North America. However, it is problematic to think that one could make a neat division into Western and Indian thought. In fact, throughout history there have been many interconnections. It is interesting that you bring up the concept of dividual because it was originally coined by Marriot and Inden (1977) to analyze Indian notions of personhood. They saw persons as engaging in the transfer of bodily substance-codes through parentage, marriage, services, and other kinds of interpersonal contacts. They perceived the Indian personhood as fluid and malleable in contrast to a stable bounded—and Western-individual. This approach has been criticized on a number of counts, for example, for its lack of attention to distortions, contradictions, and variations in ideas and beliefs. Most importantly, the concept of the dividual creates a false juxtapositioning between the Western and the Indian concepts of personhood. I suspect that using the notion of Indian ontologies as a starting point could suffer from similar problems. So instead I have looked at the meanings of a myriad of contexts and concepts of personhood—one could call these ontologies but I would leave out the world Indian because it is debatable whether there are overarching Indian ontologies.

I completely agree that we have to be open for others' understandings of media and I hope that my book could demonstrate that point. Since I already commented on the issue of social media forming a separate virtual arena by explaining it as one instance of people's ability to create new contexts with the help of new media, I leave it for others to comment now. Perhaps others can also elaborate on the tools offered by postcolonial media studies.

Regards,

Sirpa

Thank you Sirpa for your brilliant paper, and thank you all for the fascinating conversation.

I would like to share few thoughts on the topic of social change.

Sirpa gives a fascinating contribution to the study of social change brought by communication technologies by focusing on "the relationship between mobile-phone-mediated conversations and other speech contexts and media". She focuses on how mediated practices move from one context to another, e.g. from the mobile phone to the offline and the other way around. Then Danny raised the following question: "if we want to avoid dualisms such as virtual v real and accept that phones are integral to everything, what is the right language for talking about changes that occur within the realm of phone use but not outside of that realm?"

The focus on practice has been so important in the study of technologically mediated social changes, but perhaps we could also pay attention to what the category of practice partially overlooks. How can we study what happens outside the realm of practice, or what is not visible through the analytical lens of practice? When changes occurs in the realm of mobile phones or in the realm of social media, but do not move into other contexts/settings, they are still transforming people's self and people's personal experiences in these other settings, but not their practices. If I think about my research on social media in southeast Turkey, conversations and interactions occurring online did not lead to any visible change in offline practices (Costa 2016). Yet, they did change the ways young women experienced relationships in the offline world. There is no transformation of practices, but there is transformation of self/subjectivity. Shall we adopt a language that enables us to shed light on internal contradictions and conflicts? Is the emergence of new internal conflicts a form of "social changing" that will likely lead to "social change" in the long term?

Then, I don't want to sound provocative, but I don't understand the value of "mediatization" theory. Our goal, as anthropologists, is to understand how media and communication technologies contribute to different forms of situated social changes in different spheres of social life. Why do we have to use an umbrella concept to name all these different forms of social transformations? I understand how this term has emerged and become relevant in media studies, but I don't see the utility within anthropology. We would rather need concepts that help us grasp the multiplicity of nonlinear transformations. Why "mediatization"? Related to this, I agree with

Sirpa's concerns on the concept of media logic. I would rather use the concept of "affordances" (see Costa 2018)

References:
Costa E. 2016 Social Media in Southeast Turkey. UCL Press

Costa, E. (2018). Affordances-in-practice: An ethnographic critique of social media logic and context collapse. New Media & Society, 20(10), 3641–3656.

Thank you all again for the interesting conversation!

All the best,

Elisabetta

Philipp Budka ph.budka@philbu.net   13 February 2019

Dear Elisabetta, Dear All,

Since I was the only one in the discussion so far who kind of supported the appropriation of the concept of "mediatization" in anthropological/ethnographic contexts, let me answer very briefly to Elisabetta's last point:

I absolutely agree with Elisabetta that we do not need "to use an umbrella concept to name all these different forms of social transformations". But why not test, evaluate and/or modify a concept that clearly emphasises the interconnection between media-technological, communicative and societal change? As I noted in my first e-mail, my co-editors and I found it quite useful in describing and interpreting not only collective transformation processes but also individual ones, in ritual as well as in performative settings. But this is certainly up for debate.

As I also mentioned before, the term "mediatization" in German - the language the book I was talking about was written - seems to have a slightly different meaning and is on a conceptual level not necessarily connected to the institutional "media logic" that was mentioned in Sirpa's paper and the discussion (e.g. Hepp 2014). The term "mediation", on the other hand, which roughly translates to "Vermittlung", is less used in German media studies, media sociology and media anthropology jargon (instead of "Medialisierung" ["medialization"?], "Medialität"

23

["mediality"], etc.). So we might encounter here a translational problem. Maybe other German practitioners can add to that.

Thank you and all the best,

Philipp

Reference:

Hepp, A. (2014). Mediatisierung | Medialisierung. In J. Schröter (Ed.), Handbuch Medienwissenschaft. Stuttgart, Weimar: Metzler Verlag.

Sirpa Tenhunen sirpa.l.tenhunen@jyu.fi   14 February 2019

Dear Elisabetta and all,

Thanks for your comments, Elisabetta. I think you are right in acknowledging that there is a possibility of change even though overt practices haven't shown signs of changes. In my field sites in India people would often keep their subversive views a secret until suddenly they could express them in public as, for instance, happened with people who joined the political opposition in Janta. In Kolkata I could recently observe how women in a slum neighborhood no longer tried to keep their labor participation as a secret as the women I interviewed there in the 1990s commonly did. It would be interesting if Elisabetta could do a follow-up study in her field site at some point.

I also find the concept of affordance helpful—it helps to focus on material affordances without assuming that certain medium entails the same media logic everywhere. However, I found the notion of mediation helpful for thinking how the material affordances of the medium emerge from contexts and relate to other contexts. Mediatization or mediation perspective helps to grasp changing media as part of social and cultural processes.

Regards,

Sirpa

Kerstin B Andersson tinni.andersson@telia.com   15 February 2019

Hi,

I sent this a couple of days ago, but it seems to have fallen out, so I give it a new try!
Kerstin

Dear Sirpa and everyone!

Excuses for late entrance into the discussion, I've had a pile deadlines to pass by before being able to focus on this, however, I've had it in my mind. First of all, it should be no need for me to let you know that I find this paper and discussion very interesting, having done a lot of fieldwork on the use new media in elite groups in the mega city Kolkata, just about 200 km away from Janta. I recognize a lot, but also there are big differences. Much of the things that I had in mind to take up have already been dealt with, but I will include a couple of my reflections:

A couple of points on the notions of mediation, mediatization, re-mediation and change, where I think that many of the points made in the discussion of the paper converge. You elaborate the discussion on "mediatization" on pp 4-5 in the paper and conclude by stating

" despite the development towards greater flexibility to take the multiplicity of cultural and social contexts into account, mediatization scholars discuss social changes through Western-based concepts, such as individualization, secularization, and modernization"

It would be very illuminating to get some kind of reference on this statement, and to know which empirical studies that you are referring to. I made a quick search on studies using the concept of mediatization a couple of weeks ago, and I didn't find many, but the ones that I found reflected a quite broad spectrum of topics, not only delimited to the western context.

I was considering if your statements are based on a delimitation of the notion of mediatization to one of the traditions outlined by Couldry and Hepp (2013) in discussions on the development of the concept, the institutionalist tradition, leaving out the social-constructivist line, including a more open process than the approaches referring to "media logic". Couldry and Hepp (2013) goes on to giving a shared understanding of the term, which I find quite compelling:

"mediatization is a concept used to analyze critically the interrelation between changes in media and communications on the one hand, and changes in culture and society on the other…

Mediatization reflects how the overall consequences of multiple processes of mediation have changed with the emergence of different kinds of media"

I also reflected over your statements on "speech contexts", it brought Thompson's (2005) notion of mediation to my mind. Based in an 'interactional theory' of media, he proposes three different stages of mediation, interactions by people sharing time–space contexts of co-presence, mediated interactions across differing spatial-temporal frameworks and quasi-mediated interactions, based in global media and produced for an indefinite range of potential recipients.

I have a lot more reflections on this study that I find highly interesting, however I will leave it for later on and conclude with a more empirical comment. What about negative implications and transformations? Yesterday I met one of my diaspora friends, coming from a small village close to Bardhaman. He has long talked about trying to initiate some kind of support program for education in the village. Recently back from a visit, he expressed that he found the situation difficult. People had got mobiles. They preferred to spend 50 rs/day on their phones instead of buying a notebook and pen for school. The main use was for entertainment. They did not know how, and were not very interested in, using it for e.g. information seeking in teaching and education. As I interpreted it, restrictions for being able to take part of education had transformed. Earlier, lack of resources (poverty) were the obstacles, now the small resources that were available were used on the phone.

I include a reference to an article that I find interesting and that I could not locate in your bibliography:

Smyth, Kumar, Medhi and Toyama: Where There's a Will There's a Way: Mobile Media Sharing in Urban India, CHI 2010, April 10–15, 2010, Atlanta, Georgia, USA

All the best

Kerstin

References:
Couldry, N., & Hepp, A. (2013). Conceptualizing mediatization: Contexts, traditions, arguments. Communication Theory, 23(3), 191–202.

Thompson J. B. (2005). The New Visibility. Theory, Culture & Society 22(6) 31-51.

Sirpa Tenhunen sirpa.l.tenhunen@jyu.fi   15 February 2019

Dear Kerstin and all,

Thank you, Kerstin, for your perceptive comment on how I referred to mediatization scholars. In this paper, I had indeed made the mistake of leaving out the works I was citing but in my book I mention them, and here is the extract from the book (p. 30):

"When empirical examples are used to demonstrate mediatization, the choice of concepts often reflects that it has mainly been discussed in terms of cases from Western countries (Hepp and Krotz 2014; Hepp 2013; Hjarvard 2013; Hjarvard and Lundby 2010; Lundby 2014 and Hepp and Krotz 2014). Despite the development towards greater flexibility to take the multiplicity of cultural and social contexts into account, mediatization scholars discuss social changes through Western-based concepts, such as individualization, secularization, and modernization."

So my comment referred to these key works on mediatization, and my intention was not to claim that no one has applied the concept of mediatization outside western contexts. However, when I searched for mediatization scholarship, it was not easy to find ethnographic works which availed the concept of mediatization or were not focused on western research locations. I saw few which were not limited to western sites but these were not ethnographic. However, I did my search a couple of years ago so the situation might have changed by now. I would be most interested to read the articles you found. In my book, I cite the same definition of mediatization you presented in your comment.

In the e-seminar paper I have not cited much research literature on mobile telephony, but in my book I have tried to cite as extensively as possible. So in that sense the book aims to be comparative. Unfortunately, there must be many great works which I should have cited but have failed to find .

I am often asked this question about the negative impacts of mobile telephony. During the time I did my fieldwork, people were not perceiving mobile phones as harmful except for the rural elites who would often criticize the lower class and caste people for how they waste their time and money by using the mobile phones for the wrong purposes.

Regards,

Sirpa

John Postill john.postill@rmit.edu.au   17 February 2019

Many thanks, Sirpa, for the paper. Having followed your mobile phone work for many years, I really look forward to reading the book.

In your response to Danny's post you wrote:

> There are many ongoing processes of change, and it is impossible to
> determine precisely to which degree mobile phones contribute to changes.
> However, there are instances when one can ascertain that phones play a
> role. I never expected that phone use could help change young wives'
> position, actually quite drastically. Thanks to phones, they were
> suddenly able to stay in touch with their natal families right after
> their wedding and even engage in subversive conversations over the
> phone.

I'm interested in the epistemological challenges and rewards that go with trying to discern the stages, or phases, of a specific social change -- in this case, the newly found ability of young women in rural West Bengal to stay in touch with their families after their weddings.

I've argued elsewhere (Postill 2017) that this is challenging for a number of reasons, including because in anthropology and related disciplines we seem to favour ongoing, unfinished processes of change over completed changes. Indeed, we find the very idea of a phase-by-phase, analytically isolatable change with a beginning, a middle and an end too tidy, too 'linear'. I believe we should overcome this old poststructuralist aversion, which we picked up in the 1980s, and happily produce ethnographically rich 'collective biographies' of specific social changes.

You say that young brides were 'suddenly' able to do keep in touch with home. But if this new state of affairs is a discernible, social *process* of change, presumably it unfurled over a period of time. If so, how can we go about identifying the approximate duration and phases of such a social (logistics) process of change from an original State A (no communication with home) to a subsequent State B (communication with home)? Would it make sense to speak of phases in this specific mobile-related change? Do your empirical materials suggest any such phases?

Best

John

Reference:
Postill, J. 2017. The diachronic ethnography of media: from social changing to actual social changes. Moment, Journal of Cultural Studies 4(1): 19-43.
https://johnpostill.com/2017/06/21/the-diachronic-ethnography-of-media-from-social-changing-to-actual-social-changes/

Nelson H. Graburn graburn@berkeley.edu	18 February 2019

I agree with you John, though the fieldwork is difficult. I have been following the on-going and partly unpublished work of anthropologist tour organizer Nancy Frey on the Camino de Santiago for 20+ years. She has accompanied camino pedestrians (serious religious tourists) over 200 times to Santiago. She has noticed the shocking change individuals from no phone - to cell phones - to IPad to Smart phones, observing and interviewing hundreds of individuals (and keeping in touch with many after they go home). The experience goes through three generations: from those with no cell phone experience at all, to those who have them or smart phones at home but not on the Camino to those who have never lived without them at home or on "tour" and are almost psychotic without them. There is a MINOR movement to leave ones phone behind on purpose, paralleling an interesting phenomenon of school leavers taking the college entrance exam in China (高考 Gaokao)

Nancy Frey summarizes that there used to be the Outer Journey (the body, travel) and the Inner Journey (the mind going to the past, the future, the spiritual world etc). Now there is the Cyber Camino (shared with the outside world) and the Inner (slimmer) and outer (same roughly) Journeys!

Nelson Graburn, Co-Chair TSWG (www.tourismstudies.org)

Sirpa Tenhunen sirpa.l.tenhunen@jyu.fi	19 February 2019

Dear John and all,

Thank you for your thought-provoking question. Many of the change processes I found were too elusive or messy to be conceptualized through clear phases: the change was not gradual or there was great multiplicity. For instance, women's ability to communicate frequently with their natal families changed quite drastically thanks to phones, and there were no phases to identify. Moreover, women's identities and phone use are intersectional which makes it difficult to talk about changes in women's lives in general. Women in wealthy households are able to call more frequently than the low-income people. Upper class and caste women who have office jobs and go to college have been able to acquire personal phones whereas most women share the mobile phones purchased by their sons or husbands. On the other hand, political processes were more straight-forward in the sense that the opposition emerged as the ruling party; and one could describe this process through certain stages in relation to political structure and the system. Perhaps, analyzing stages requires doing it in relation to some structure. In other words, it requires making some analytical choices, and opting for a certain perspective. This kind of classification would help grasp the process but would not alone help to understand the nature of the changes.

Regards,

Sirpa

Jon W. Anderson jwa@acm.org   20 February 2019

Dear All,

This has been an interesting discussion for at least recognizing ways to get beyond before/after or nobody/everybody comparisons and the macroscopic perspectives they imply. Clearly, new users develop/adopt ranges of uses beyond those idealized/projected by designers (such as the anonymous MIT Media Lab's favorite, ag extension agent gaining access to all the world's crop and marketing research); and certainly observers have been surprised (or discovered something not anticipated from 'affordances'). Perhaps a slightly different approach than foregrounding functions, the 'what' question, might be to focus on 'who', and particularly the sequence of 'who'? Comparison would be important, for while early observers of the spread of the Internet into the (largely US) public tended to seen young males as a vanguard, what I saw in Middle East countries was, instead, engineers in the public sector and 'tech adepts' outside it variously projecting design features that Internet engineers projected to garner support for their project (e.g., distributed administration as 'democratic') as desirable changes (modernizing, not just

automating existing practices), followed by various culture managers who tended to latch onto the Internet as media, partly for information but quickly for self-expression. So, loosely, an initial phase of IT experts and geeks phased into one of culture managers focused on shaping (expanding, censoring, exploring, restraining) it as media. 'Who' proved a useful heuristic because it was an empirical question and, by mapping a social field helped identify certain feedback effects, such as from commentators (from Nicholas Negroponte to local newspaper columnists) that helped establish some familiarity with the Internet in advance of much, or any, practical experience with it. In the mobile phone arena, a counterpart might be manufacturers' marketing. Does anyone remember "Reach out and touch someone"?

'Who' uses, of course, can fade into 'what' uses; but functions aren't identities, except in a very limited sense, and don't stratify as well as identities. Identities arguably come first in, for example, peer effects, which could range from keeping up with kin and neighbors (or the seductions of marketing) to joining a particular group or network of actors. Some research I have seen on mobiles seems to show both, with a bias toward the latter, as careful ethnography of social media, such as Cotta's from Turkey or Jurkiewicz's from Lebanon show in the region I know best (and broadly in line with initial studies of social media among US youth, such as boyd's).

As an ethnographer I want finer description than sociological concepts generally provide; but it helps to proceed from ones that discriminate more than ones that aggregate too soon. So, to get the purchase of thinking in terms of phases, at least about the Internet, I've found it useful – and argued that it's an empirical fact - to understand how the Internet uptake proceeds as phases of actor-types and network extension over phases of uses (which tend to reduce to a limited sociology of technologies' 'affordances', admittedly useful for market research but nevertheless a concept rooted in industrial design). It also scales better and lets structures emerge from that.

Jon W. Anderson

John Postill john.postill@rmit.edu.au   20 February 2019

Thanks Sirpa. I suppose what I'm getting at is that for something to qualify as a significant *social* change - as opposed to, say, an individual or life-historical change - we'd have to be able to diachronically reconstruct a process whereby a new state of affairs comes to be the taken-for-granted norm, the 'new normal', within a given social group or segment of the population, e.g. low-income women in village X.

Yes, someone's ability to communicate at a distance can change overnight on acquiring their first mobile device, but presumably the social-material process whereby people honed this practice/routine and normalised across their social group took both time, e.g. several weeks or months, and some degree of communicative experimentation?

I'm thinking of the original ICT domestication studies - which I believe were mentioned earlier in the seminar - where the first-time adoption of personal computers and other new techs by UK households was analytically broken down into overlapping phases such as acquisition (as a commodity), objectification (in space), incorporation (in time), and conversion (into social currency). (The empirical findings were more untidy than that, of course, but this heuristic gave the analysts a productive way of unpacking some of the complexities involved). (Silverstone and Hirsch 1992).

I'm not suggesting that this particular scheme would work here. My point is that even an abrupt social change must, by logical necessity, have a 'processual form' (as Manchester School members would call it) amenable to phase-by-phase analysis, even when each phase is a chaotic bundle of contradictions.

John

Reference:
Silverstone, R. and Hirsch, E. (eds) (1992), Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in domestic spaces. London: Routledge.

Sirpa Tenhunen sirpa.l.tenhunen@jyu.fi   20 February 2019

Dear John and all,

Thank you, John, for the clarification of your question. I do share with the domestication paradigm an interest in exploring how technology is adapted to everyday life and how it contributes to changes in everyday life through negotiation and social interaction. By taking into account how users position technology in their homes and make it useful and meaningful as part of a sequential process, the domestication paradigm pertinently demonstrates that technology use needs to be studied in relation to the contexts of use. Nevertheless, I found the domestication

approach including the idea of stages of the sequential process of limited use for analyzing the multiplicity and fluidity of the mobile phone uses I encountered in the village. Portable devices, like smartphones, can be used in various contexts to extend social networks across diverse social spheres, whereas the domestication paradigm tends to highlight one medium within one context of use–even when it is applied to study contexts outside the home. So to sum up, the multiplicity of contexts where mobile phones are used made it difficult to detect clearly discernible stages of the appropriation of mobile phones but offered chances to analyze how mobile phones helped create new contexts. This does not mean that analyzing the processual form of change could not be useful. Discerning and labeling the sequences would greatly depend on the time-scale of the research.

Regards,

Sirpa

John Postill john.postill@rmit.edu.au   21 February 2019

I think our approaches are compatible and could produce a powerful synthesis provided, as you suggest, the research timescale allows for it.

An (ethno)history of the multiplication of social contexts enabled by mobiles in a given locale over a period of months or years could be a very interesting exercise. My guess is that there'd be an ebbing and flowing of contexts over time, sometimes in a seasonal fashion, eg in connection to religious festivities.

Just to clarify, I'm not advocating the need to draw clear-cut stages but rather the usefulness of non-teleological periodisation when studying a phenomenon diachronically.

John

Veronica Vivi Barassi v.barassi@gold.ac.uk   21 February 2019

Dear All,

After three weeks of engaging discussions, the E-seminar is now closed. I would like to thank Sirpa for the fantastic paper and Mirjam for her comments, and of course all of those who contributed.

all best

Veronica

Scott MacLeod sgkmacleod@worlduniversityandschool.org   21 February 2019

Thanks, Veronica, Sirpa, and Media Anthropology,

Best wishes,

Scott