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Disclaimer
I am aware that this is not a traditional response in the Media Anthropologies mailing list's fashion, and I don't want people to perceive this as a lack of respect for academic conventions. Dr. Postill's paper invites us to engage with the academic discussion without renouncing to the more informal and casual side of academia.

I'm a communication scholar (please read this both as an apology and as a warning). Well, I have a degree in communication studies, but I am, as Jonathan Sterne has said, an antidisciplinar scholar. Today, nevertheless, reading John's piece, I will align myself with media and communication scholarship to meet his ideas by coming from the other side of the bridge. Us, communication scholars, had our first epistemic shock when, in "Communication Theory 101" we are told that the first theories of communication studied media effects; the role and impact of media in society and people. Just to discover, later in the term, as John rightly pointed out, that we could not use the "e-word" anymore because things were more complex, nuanced and difficult to grasp. While John's colleague may be right when she claims that "the notion of effects is crude and causally linear and cannot capture people's lived experience" (p. 1). At the same time, more and more experiences lived by people are indeed effects of their media practices, John opens a path to discuss them as such.

Part of the problem has to do with the fact that effects seemed so definite, so clearly demarcated and measurable, too binary and overwhelming. The chosen metaphors, including bullets and needles (both with interesting meanings in the era of Covid and misinformation), didn't help the case of effects even if communication theories such as the agenda setting, or the cultivation theory already stated that media effects were more a matter of accumulation or steering rather than a direct behavioural change. And yet, Zuboff (2019) makes the case precisely

that digital media are causing direct behavioural change. Perhaps it is time for us to talk seriously about effects and bring them back to the table, I'm glad John opened the gate and invited us in. While the contribution made by Anthropology is undeniable, we also need more bridges with communication and media theories, more interdisciplinary work, particularly in the digital age (see Pertierra, 2018).

Knowing John as I do (and I do know him very well), he practices his scholarship following Pierre's Bourdieu approach to sociology: as a "contact sport". His statements are bold and unapologetic. They are not always the tea for all the cups. They are, nevertheless, always forcing us to confront our own ideas, meten el dedo en la llaga, as we would say, religiously, in Spanish. But he is into something. If there is a time to revisit the idea of media effects perhaps this is it and that is why we need a better and stronger bridge between scholarship in media and anthropological inquiry.

As John, and many of the people reading this, I consider myself an ethnographer and therefore I have borrowed a lot of stories. Let me share a few in order to make a point. Many (many) years ago, in Mexico, I was part of a National research project on TV audiences funded by Televisa (the main media conglomerate). We carried out a gigantic fieldwork in the three main cities in the country. We did a telephonic survey, representative of the entire population, we organised 24 focus groups and carried out 64 in-depth interviews in each city.
As part of this project, once I was interviewing an upper-class woman in her late thirties. Halfway through the interview she asked me: "could you please turn off the recorder?". I did it and she told me: "Television has saved my life". She explained, almost in tears, how her marriage was a disaster and how "the only good thing in her life" was the TV. She kept the television on from morning to night and it was "her companion, her connection to the world, her way to still feel alive". If making you feel alive is not an effect, a lived experience, I don't know what it is. Reading John's account of media use in Sarawak, I remembered the multiple projects of indigenous and community radio I knew and was part during my undergraduate studies. All of these projects were convinced of the positive effects they could have in the community. It was a little paradox, on the one hand we believed in people's agency to "resist" mainstream media and, at the same time, we were convinced that communities needed to develop their own media in order to have precisely an effect on people.

John describes the "effects of media-related practices in people's social worlds" arguing that "these come in three main varieties –mediatising effects, worlding effects and derivative effects". These need to be discussed and perhaps refined (I'm sure more than one person will contest them). Nevertheless, the worlding effects that John describes became painfully clear with the pandemic. During lockdown media not only mediated, in some cases they became the whole world and this will certainly have some derivations (for example, academic conferences will change).

John talks about how these worlding effects open "an arduous, but exciting, practice-theoretical task ahead of us: to trace the emergence of new social worlds driven by media practices" (p. 8). And I just realised that two of my previous studies could perfectly fit with this agenda: my study about cybersex and my work on selfies. While I will not develop them in full, it is

enough to say that a collective and coherent agenda about worlding-building media practices could also bring exciting comparative paths because, as John clearly states: "we know far more about this question (of the effects) than we think, although we have yet to synthesise our collective findings". An idea that some successful projects have already demonstrated (Miller et. al. 2016)

I have only one caveat to this, we also need another and complementary path, to account for how media practices were shaped by the world (for lack of a better word) in the first place. John invites us to "rethink our obsession with the latest digital or datafication trend and adopt a more media historical outlook" (p. 10) an idea that I fully support. While it is clear that the world has become mediatised (and datafied and algorithmicfied), media practices had also been heavily influenced by historical, cultural and economic settings (something that we ethnographers are perfectly positioned to describe). And not all places are New York and Stockholm, there are others like Puno or San Juan Chamula. For an anthropological example of this point see González (2020).

In terms of mediatisation, even before the internet, we already had a richly mediated world, and many people were experiencing already a sort of "virtual space". We simply cannot deny that media had effects and perhaps the sum of them could be considered a process of mediatisation. Jesús Martín Barbero, a Latin American scholar (not always as visible as he should be in the canon) was the first to coin the concept of mediations. His main point was that we should not focus on media texts or the reception of media but on mediations, a very similar approach to what John calls media-related practices. In fact, aren't certain practices with media already media effects?

John is bringing back the game of effects, we should take his invitation seriously and perhaps, think about algorithmic governance and misinformation as bullets and needles to see where does that take us.

References

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