Media Anthropology

Introduction

Tilo Grätz,
Institute for Social & Cultural Anthropology
FU Berlin
Introduction to Media Anthropology
22. & 23.10.10.2015

Agenda:

First Day 22.10.15

• General Introduction
• Film & Discussion
• Central concepts (lecture):
  – Media appropriation
  – Small alternative media
I General Introduction

Methods:

• Lectures & Discussions
• Discussion of media samples, cases
• Reading at home-> Texts by Boyer, Englert

http://blogs.fu-berlin.de/mediaanthro/
I General Introduction

Outline of the Course:

• General introduction into a sub-field of our discipline -
  
  anthropological approach to media:  
  - significance of media in daily life  
  - media as Cultural Expression  
  - media, globalisation & social change  

• Contemporary research fields

• (Main) concepts (media, mediation, public sphere, medialisation ..)

• (Selected) contemporary debates

Note: The case studies exemplify fields of study, concepts, debates, method; These are not „representative“ for media anthropology nor stand for regionally reduced approaches
Anthropology in general:

- studying *anthropos*, mankind, in its unity & diversity

- consequence: “western” societies & cultures - part of global diversity
- mankind – unity of the social, cultural & biological

**Aspects**
- no unilateral theories; holism
- local case studies - in comparative perspective
- looking beyond simple facts - patterns
- emic perspectives
- ethnography – method & representation

**What does this mean for the study of media?**
Two definitions:

A) Medium /pl. media:
A means of mass communication, such as newspapers, magazines, radio, or television.
Two definitions:

A) large definition /a means or feature of communication, transmission

B) more narrow definition / media technologies, mass media (newspapers, magazines, radio, film or television).

Medium—everything that is helping to transmit & exchange meaning

—“An intervening substance through which something else is transmitted or carried on, for transmitting or producing an effect”

—“An agency by which something is accomplished, conveyed, or transferred”

Media Anthropology:

• A wider definition of media, including small media )-
• Processes of local media appropriation: political & cultural power vs. emancipation
• Media in everydaylife - interpretation & comparative analysis
• The Social life of media - production/circulation/cultural effects
• Global mediascapes – local dimensions & transnational connections
• cultural & social change through media

-> Prezi-Presentation
Defining and Researching Media & Mediation – Anthropological Approaches

Text discussion

Dominic Boyer


-> Contemporary challenges of Media Anthropology
-> new focus on mediation
Media & Mediation

• Mediation as a process

• Connections between actors, material objects, ideas, infrastructures.. (→ANT)

• Mediation, translation & transformation
Sources:
  overviews, media samples

Library:
- **Online : Primo**
- A) OSI-HA 49 Grätz (main reading room, Ihnestr.21)
- Introductory readers
- Selected monographs
- B) Library Garystr.55:
  - Communication studies section- shelves reading room (signed „LA-LB-LC.“
    *oder “AP“ *)

Further Q & A
Introduction to Media Anthropology

Film & Discussion:

„This is Nollywood“->

- Particular modes of media production
- Aesthetics and Meanings
- Significance of media in everyday life:
  – Between public & private consumption
  – Imagination
  – Moral debates
Media Anthropology

Public sphere(s), small alternative media & popular culture
Public sphere(s), small alternative media & popular culture
Historico-normative approach (Habermas)

Jürgen Habermas the public sphere:

- From - 19th century: connected to aspiring bourgeois classes
- New spaces of communication, enabling liberal exchange of best arguments
- Particular sphere in society detached from the state, with sub-spheres
- Tendency towards domination by media industries
Functionalist approach (Sociology, media sciences)

public sphere:

• A particular realm of society, as differing from other realms (economy etc.)

• Related to modes of communication & reflexivity

• Consists of various sub-spheres -> according to people & media involved

Merten (2000):

• Individual encounters (“Begegnungsöffentlichkeit”)
• Public Events (“Veranstaltungsoffentlichkeit”)
• Mass-mediated (Massen-Mediale Öffentlichkeit)
• (with increasing cross-links)
Public sphere(s)- Debates:

- Problem of normative approaches (liberal expression)
- historical developments-> Western societies;

- technological determinism

Applicability to other regions?

importance of
a) communication in semi-public spaces: rumor mills, non-official exchange of information, (->> “radio trottoir”, Ellis 1989)

2) interrelated, semi-anonymous spaces of communication (pubs, radio talk-in shows)

3) multiple spaces with their own logics<-> interrelations
Public sphere(s)- Debates:

Perspective:

- -> Plural Use
- -> Indefinite Boundaries
- -> Avoiding determinism
- -> Power relations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8.1</th>
<th>Media Typologies and Their Properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mass Media</strong></td>
<td><strong>Small Media</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>mass scale - production - distribution - consumption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>“modern” electronic and mechanized technologies and communication formats established and stable innovative within bounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction</td>
<td>non-face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>primarily one-way flow vertical communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Structure and Participant Structure</td>
<td>Producers are distinct from consumers Receivers may act as distributors Minimal participation Centralized sites of production and distribution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8.2</th>
<th>Alternative Media and Their Properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of conventional media technologies</td>
<td>Limited or no use of media technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visible, public</strong></td>
<td>Take over of state broadcasting institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In dialogue with agents of the state</strong></td>
<td>Independent press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>private-run radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community Radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community newsletters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Web pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Independent videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less direct dialogue with agents of the state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pirate (clandestine radio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘Underground’ newspapers and magazines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less visible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Small Alternative Media (Debra Spitulnik 2002)

- limited scope
- mediating role between
  - spheres of public mass media & interpersonal communication,
  - individual & society
- includes also
  - indirect modes of communication & their effects;
  - Symbolic & Encoded Meanings
- Users most often also Producers
- wider definition of media, including various media forms, popular culture
- Today mainly use of ICT
Small Alternative Media:

Examples:
- K7, DVD pirated copies;
- Posters
- Popular paintings
- Graffiti
- Posters->>calendar posters/Nigeria
- >>>popular culture :

http://de.padlet.com/wall/13lhfbI6vbjf
Small Alternative Media:

Further Examples:

- SMS, weglogs, twitter, facebook, mailign lists, newsforum

But also
- popular proverbs, stories, etc.
Potential: to create new communicative spaces and transnational connections

(appropriation & translation fo global images)
Small Alternative Media:

- Everyday Creativity, easy access
- Importance above all in restrictive media systems
- backstage discourse
- Subversive potential & and limits („Arab Spring“)

- >> social media: no longer small, no longer alternative
Sources:
