

# ANTHROPOLOGY AND MASS MEDIA

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## INTRODUCTION

There is as yet no “anthropology of mass media.” Even the intersection of anthropology and mass media appears rather small considering the published literature to date. Within the last five or so years, however, as anthropologists have increasingly struggled to define what falls within the legitimate realm of the study of “a culture” and within the privileged purview of “a discipline” (48, 51, 75, 107, 164), there has been a dramatic rise in interest in the study of mass media. Indeed, mass media themselves have been a contributing force in these processes of cultural and disciplinary deterritorialization.

Mass media—defined in the conventional sense as the electronic media of radio, television, film, and recorded music, and the print media of newspapers, magazines, and popular literature—are at once artifacts, experiences, practices, and processes. They are economically and politically driven, linked to developments in science and technology, and like most domains of human life, their existence is inextricably bound up with the use of language. Given these various modalities and spheres of operation, there are numerous angles for approaching mass media anthropologically: as institutions, as workplaces, as communicative practices, as cultural products, as social activities, as aesthetic forms, and as historical developments.

But beyond approaching specific facets of mass media anthropologically, it seems that the greater challenge lies in integrating the study of mass media into our analyses of the “total social fact” of modern life. How, for example, do mass media represent and shape cultural values within a given society?

What is their place in the formation of social relations and social identities? How might they structure people's senses of space and time? What are their roles in the construction of communities ranging from subcultures to nation-states, and in global processes of socioeconomic and cultural change?

Such questions are applicable to virtually every field research site, as mass media in some form or another have touched most societies, and indeed pervade the entire fabric of many. Although it is beyond the scope of this review, an inquiry into just why and how anthropologists have managed to neglect the centrality of mass media in twentieth century life would be not only of historical interest, but also of potential use in illuminating certain conceptual gaps in contemporary anthropological theory (cf 1a, 107, 246).

Meanwhile, the relations between mass media, society, and culture have been a major subject of inquiry for several decades within sociology, communication studies, British cultural studies, literary criticism, and political science. Numerous overviews of the different disciplinary perspectives are available (3, 27, 30, 53, 81, 99, 100, 116, 139, 152, 168, 198, 204, 231), and in the first section of this essay, I offer a limited review and critique of recent theoretical developments concerning the nature of media power, the mass communication process, media language, and the ethnography of media audiences. In the second section, I then consider some emerging topics that anthropologists concerned with mass media have begun to grapple with, e.g. media constructions of difference, indigenous media, and the mass mediation of national identity. In both sections I attempt to sketch out new directions for continued cross-disciplinary work.

## MASS MEDIA THEORIZED

The arena of media studies is a hotly contested and fragmented terrain, one that has been highly sensitive both to wider developments within contemporary social theory and to the particularities of changing media technologies and media uses. If there is any point of general consensus, it lies more in an acceptance of a common set of focal issues than in the theoretical frameworks or methodological techniques themselves.

One enduring concern is "the power" of mass media, and in particular their roles as vehicles of culture. For example, in some approaches, mass media are analyzed as forces that provide audiences with ways of seeing and interpreting the world, ways that ultimately shape their very existence and participation within a given society. The contributions of British cultural studies (cf 70, 100, 152, 231) best exemplify this perspective, as encapsulated in the following formulation by Hall:

[The mass media] have progressively *colonized* the cultural and ideological sphere. As social groups and classes live...increasingly fragmented and sectionally differentiated lives, the mass media are more and more responsible (a) for providing the basis on which groups construct an 'image' of the lives, meanings, practices, and values of *other* groups and classes; (b) for providing the images, representations and ideas around which the social totality, composed of all these separate and fragmented pieces, can be coherently grasped as a 'whole' (98:340).

This is a compelling argument for anthropologists, especially in its strong resonance with Anderson's (5) notion of the imagined community as a mass mediated collectivity where members may not all know each other, but where each shares the idea of a common belonging. Unfortunately, this conceptualization of mass media as vehicles of culture, and as modes of imagining and imaging communities, has had limited empirical application to date.

Until recently most studies of the ideological functions of mass media and the mass mediation of culture have focused primarily on media texts, with the common assumption that media's meanings are to be found in media's messages.<sup>1</sup> Such textual analysis is important for establishing the possibility that mass media are sites of collective representations (and collective mediations) in modern societies, but a growing number of writers have argued that this picture is incomplete without an analysis of the culture of media production (13, 14, 176, 217–221), the political economy and social history of media institutions (7, 56, 60, 202, 208, 244), and the various practices of media consumption that exist in any given society (4, 31, 37, 39, 112, 113, 149, 151, 169, 180, 193–195).

Central to this theoretical reformulation of media power is the crucial problem of where to locate the production of meaning and ideology in the mass communication process, and how to characterize processes of agency and interpretation. The most pervasive paradigm of the mass communication process (and the dominant paradigm through the 1980s) has been the linear model consisting of three discrete stages: message production, message transmission, and message reception. Quintessentially, "the message" is taken as the key unit of cultural meaning, and for some theorists, a powerful refraction or reproduction of a society's dominant ideologies.

For example, in Marxist and critical theory, the question of media power has been formulated in terms of how mass media serve the interests of a ruling class, e.g. in legitimizing the authority of state institutions, building political and cultural consensus, and impeding the development of working class consciousness (53, 98, 99, 139, 243, 245). As Bennett (27) discusses in detail,

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This vast literature, emanating mainly from literary criticism and film studies, cannot be reviewed here but see 3, 129a, 170, 230 for overviews and examples.

these approaches have been informed greatly by earlier theories of “mass society” (particularly as refined by Frankfurt School theorists, e.g. 117, 165), in which mass media are responsible for the emergence of a homogenized mass culture, the fragmentation of communities, and the erosion of cultural values and standards of artistic expression (25; see also 125).

Within functionalist approaches—also called “positivist” and “liberal-pluralist” traditions (27, 53, 99, 168)—the dominant issue for studies of media power has been their role in reinforcing or changing the attitudes, values, and behaviors of media audiences (81, 116, 131–133, 138, 168). Most prominent in this vein of analysis is Gerbner and colleagues’ Cultural Indicators Project, which measures media “effects” in the statistical correlations between media exposure and people’s perceptions of the world (79, 80). Media exposure is quantified as hours of television viewing time, and particularly exposure to certain kinds of media content units, e.g. violent scenes, while viewers’ perceptions are assessed from scaled responses to formal questionnaires.

Historically, this preoccupation with the political and cultural power of mass media and the drive to quantify media’s effects on audiences has perpetuated the focus on isolatable media messages, and the related armchair analyses of media texts. For the positivists, content units allow for easy quantification, and for the critical theorists, the function of mass media as a monolithic, and ultimately alienating, “culture industry” (117) is best served if messages are understood to be unproblematically transmitted and absorbed.

Media scholars have increasingly rejected these top-down, “hypodermic,” or “magic bullet” models of media effects and media power, and have turned their attention to the interpretive practices of media audiences (43, 64, 71, 115, 142, 145, 149, 178, 193, 195, 207), the diversity of media audiences and media uses (4, 146, 178, 194), and the multivocality and indeterminacy of media texts (19, 20, 35, 72, 73). Especially in recent work stemming from British cultural studies, and in response to developments within critical theory, mass media are examined not so much as definers of “reality,” but as dynamic sites of struggle over representation, and complex spaces in which subjectivities are constructed and identities are contested (26, 50, 72, 88, 99, 101, 112, 113, 115, 169; see 99, 100, 137, 231 for overviews of these theoretical shifts).

Most of these authors acknowledge the inseparability of the study of mass media from the study of popular culture and modern consumer culture (65, 127, 140), and many contend that these phenomena cannot be understood outside of the broader historical developments of capitalism and the proliferation of mass produced objects and images in contemporary society (19, 20, 111, 117, 124, 165, 229). For example, a number of researchers have examined the centrality of media stars, popular music, and magazines in youth cultures (17, 46, 76, 110, 112, 113, 129, 169), and several have explored how relations with media figures form interpretive frameworks for personal decisions and

entire lifestyles (10, 44, 126, 144, 228). Other major topics include the critical place of mass media in constructing gender relations (6, 10, 93, 115, 169, 171, 180, 181, 193, 208), and in transforming definitions of communal and domestic space (93, 171, 172, 181, 216). A related line of research has begun to document the integration of media use into the rhythms of daily life (128, 151, 180, 188), the mass mediation of concepts of time (5, 38, 219), and the more general, but more elusive, experiential dimensions of media reception (23, 29, 95, 135, 185).

Paradoxically, for all their concern with the communication process, these widely differing approaches to audience reception and media texts (see 39, 43 for excellent reviews of the various nuances) tend to share a common inattention to linguistic form. The language of mass media, with its diverse textual structures (91, 109, 183, 203, 238), its relations with verbal art and other culturally-specific communication forms (57), and its claims to authoritatively represent social reality (74, 114, 197), is a vast topic that has been examined primarily through discourse analysis; most media researchers have yet to tap into recent developments within linguistic anthropology and the ethnography of communication (21, 22, 92, 104, 105, 118, 209–213). Especially in examining the interpretive practices of media audiences, research would benefit from more critical analysis of how structures of reception and evaluation are established over the course of the communication event (90, 105, 106, 150, 210).

Significantly, in some corners, the gradual erosion of the linear communication model began with an attempt to incorporate linguistic and semiotic approaches in the analysis of message transmission. In Hall's early encoding-decoding model (97), audiences are seen as active decoders (instead of passive recipients) of media messages, who accept, reject, or resist what is conveyed based on their own class position within society. Later amendments to the model grant even more active roles to audiences, recognizing that they also negotiate, modify, and interpret media messages (178). While class positions may indeed structure people's responses to different media—e.g. Bourdieu (31) has demonstrated that class distinctions in France are partly constructed and understood in such differential media use—the nature of what is reacted to, i.e. the so-called "message" remains underanalyzed in the encoding-decoding model. In short, it borrows from semiotics the general notion of a code as a conventional meaning system, but at the same time assumes that language operates in a strictly referential function as a transparent means of conveying content (cf 118, 123, 209).

If the form-substance dualism is absolute, the encoding-decoding model misses a major insight of contemporary linguistics (and semiotics)—that linguistic forms both presuppose and create the contexts for their interpretation, as well as the relationships of participants to the event of communication (209). Applying this functional linguistic approach to mass communication

would illuminate not just the propositional level of encoding and decoding ideologically loaded messages, but the semiotic construction of sender-receiver relations and evaluative frameworks for reception (11, 12, 90, 106, 118, 123, 145, 209, 224). Particularly in light of the recent debates over the problems of context and contextualization (21, 92, 105, 106, 212, 213), this approach would also move analysis beyond the individual communication event and the sender-receiver dyad, to consider how media forms are situated within broader social processes and in relation to specific understandings of the communication genres that they instantiate. Morley's (179) and Hall's (99) later modifications of the encoding-decoding model hint at this direction. They both draw on Vološinov's (239) insights into the sociohistorical dimensions of textual production and reception, and argue that cultural competencies to interpret particular media genres are distributed differentially, but they still essentially bypass questions of linguistic form and usage.

Since the early 1980s, one intriguing component of this move toward the "interpretive" audience has been the embracing of anthropology and the ethnographic method as empirical antidotes to the prevailing theoretical overload (6, 35, 41, 115, 141, 146, 151, 180, 193). As anthropologists have largely ignored mass media until recently (but see 190, 191, 240), "the anthropological approach" to mass media has been rendered mainly through British cultural studies. Most of this work is based on interviewing audiences in their homes, and critics have argued that the label "ethnography" is misleading because detailed participant-observation is minimal, and actual immersion in the daily practices and social worlds of the people studied is almost nonexistent (64, 137, 231). In addition, with a few exceptions (42, 73), this ethnographic turn seems to be occurring with little of the reflexivity that recent anthropologists (49, 163, 164) have introduced into the understanding of ethnographic practice. For example, people's self-report about their media practices and attitudes tends to be taken at face value, without examining how this discourse emerges and is structured, or how it relates to observable practices. Also, the position of the ethnographer is rarely factored into the analysis.

Although not entirely ethnographic (though some would argue that no one can rightly lay claim to the word), these efforts have greatly enhanced our knowledge of the diversity of media practices, and they raise significant challenges for theorizing mass media's relations to "reality" and the construction of social meaning. In supplanting the simple picture of media message transmission as a one-way communication from sender to receiver, one might say that these authors have moved into a "post-content" or "post-text" era, and toward a rethinking of the usefulness of the production-consumption dichotomy itself (see 45, 54, 112, 113, 137 on the more general argument that modes of consumption are modes of cultural production).

Within media studies, these recent developments have been criticized for being still too theory-driven, biased by populist agendas, and merely unknowing rediscoveries of earlier approaches in communication research (36, 43, 64, 68, 142, 206). Evans (64), for example, argues that the ethnographic turn is nothing new considering the substantial body of research since the 1940s on what people do with (and think about) mass media. Significantly, the early practitioners of “on-the-ground” media studies (240), which later became the uses and gratifications approach to mass media (131, 198), were part of a developing ethnographic tradition in the Chicago school of urban sociology/anthropology. In fact, it could be argued that the recent discovery of ethnography is actually predicated on the displacement of this early work. As literary theorists came to appropriate more of media studies, the disembodied text gained ascendancy as the main site of media’s social and cultural significance. Now there is a return of the repressed (i.e. context and use) when the whole notion of the text has come under siege in that very discipline. Outside of literary criticism and film studies, the socially situated nature of people’s engagements with and interpretations of mass media was not forgotten. The problem is, however, with the dominance of quantitative research methods throughout the social sciences, and especially as American media research became increasingly underwritten by commercial and political marketing interests, much of the pioneering ethnographic work of the 1940s and 1950s was replaced by audience measurement studies and statistical content analysis (cf 81). As Ang (7) demonstrates, such quantitative research has had profound implications for media industries, for example in fueling the ratings wars and the marketing of audiences as commodities (see also 36).

A final point to make about these trends is that the focus on ethnography and interpretive practices is applied mainly to media audiences, especially to television audiences in Western contexts. Anthropologists and “cross-over” communication scholars are beginning to fill this gap with studies of the use of newspapers, novels, television, video, radio, and recorded music in diverse societies (18, 37, 39, 110, 132, 133, 147, 148, 150a, 160, 161, 174, 176, 191, 219, 225, 226, 232–234). Also, the ethnographic study of media institutions and practitioners is relatively recent<sup>2</sup> (13, 14, 59, 187, 190, 217–219, 221), and the emerging work on the recruitment of spectators and the imagining of audiences in media practice (7, 55, 60, 108, 217–220, 223) suggests new ways to understand how media consumption is embedded in the culture of media production.

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But see 52, 63, 77, 78, 87, 89, 168, 205 for examples and reviews of the extensive literature on the sociology of media industries and journalistic practice.

## MEDIA ANTHROPOLOGY

### *Sightings in Western Media*

To date, the most extensive attention to mass media within anthropology has been in the fields of visual anthropology and ethnographic film (see 82, 149a, 158, 199, 247 for more comprehensive reviews of these fields). There also has been a long standing concern with media coverage of anthropological activities and scholarship, including the publication of articles by anthropologists written for nonspecialist audiences [62, 143; see also the "Media Monitor" column in the *Anthropology Newsletter* of the American Anthropological Association (AAA)].<sup>3</sup> Such anthropological interest in the popularization of anthropology has focused primarily on the fact that anthropology occasionally enters into the public eye, i.e. the eye of mainstream American media. This is useful and encouraging for anthropology practitioners because it highlights the wider application of anthropological research within American society, and assists with issues of publicity and scientific clarification. However, except perhaps with the Mead-Freeman and Tasaday controversies, there has been little anthropological reflection on precisely what these popular renderings and appropriations of anthropology outside the discipline reveal about our own culture and the politics of mass media more generally. What indeed are the overall patterns of use and abuse (and omission) of anthropological findings and perspectives in mainstream mass media? For example, how do American media represent other societies and cultures, and does anthropology have any effect on this?

Certainly mainstream media patterns of cultural representation have implications for, and intersect with, wider debates in contemporary American society concerning multicultural curricula, the understanding of cultural difference, and the politics of media access. Inquiring into these processes would not only illuminate the meaning and positive potential of "anthropology" in the American public domain, but would also be a logical extension of recent work within critical anthropology. For example, analyses of orientalism and the "objectifying gaze" in colonial photography, travel literature, tourism, world fairs, and museums (see 48, 61, 130, 157, 192 for recent examples), apply equally well to the construction of "otherness," "the primitive," and "the exotic" in news reporting, photojournalism, comics, science fiction, and popular film (9, 214, 215, 250). Moreover, because many of these representational

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The AAA Press Officer issues press releases to media representatives and recently has begun to distribute press kits about the AAA annual meetings. The Center for Anthropology and Journalism (University of South Florida) also promotes interchanges between anthropologists and media professionals, with periodic workshops, and the Anthropology News Network magazine *World Focus*.

forms explicitly portray a gazing explorer amidst the gazed upon, this also allows a critical eye to be cast upon popular images of the anthropologist, including such notables as the archaeologist Indiana Jones from the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* film trilogy (189) and the transgalactic ethnographers of the *Star Trek* television series and films (94).

Unfortunately, a great deal of this recent work on such “objectifying discourses” is still limited by an overdependence on textual analysis and a presumption that the anthropologist as literary critic is qualified to single-handedly “read” the significance of films, museum displays, and popular novels. Less is known, for example, about the “everyday life” of such media representations, their contexts of production and circulation, and the practices and discourses of reception that envelop them (but see 59, 102, 201). One might say that this work is only just beginning to move into the “post-content” era, and would thus benefit immensely from a close look at the recent developments within media studies discussed earlier.

A first step in this direction is represented in a fascinating collection of papers stemming from a recent AAA annual meeting panel on the mass mediation of ethnographic knowledge in British television (85). All the authors in this collection have served as either anthropological consultants or film directors in the Granada-TV *Disappearing World* series, and their contributions explore some of the differing institutional and professional constraints that affect such collaborative work. Interestingly, the anthropologists in the volume are more concerned with “representation” (both imagistic and political) than are the filmmakers. For example, Weiner discusses how the real challenge in making ethnographic films for television lies in constructing multiple points of view within a single production, especially those that help to transcend any simple opposition between an “us” and a “them” (242:103). Turton (236) emphasizes that such productions should strive to empower a diversity of “native voices” (see also 136, 200), while Ginsburg (84) suggests that the series title *Disappearing World* itself is in need of radical rethinking. Rather than focusing on cultural loss or the ahistorical “primitive,” Ginsburg asserts that the series should explore the more positive fact that such people are actively drawing “upon their own cultures and social institutions as powerful resources in an increasingly interdependent world” (84:101).

Indeed, the differing visions of who and what is disappearing form the crux of the collaboration conflicts described by Turner (235). For example, Turner relates one editing room disaster where he found a carefully edited master version lying in pieces on the cutting room floor (with no copy made). The work had examined the complexities of hierarchical social organization among the Kayapó, but this analysis unfortunately conflicted with the director’s own preconception of the Kayapó as egalitarian. In another case, battles ensued over the inclusion of material that the director viewed as “culturally in-

authentic” because it did not depict a timeless, isolated tribe, but rather an indigenous people actively engaged in political struggles with the Brazilian state.

While the collection is a stimulating behind-the-scenes look into the politics of ethnotelevision team work, it leaves wider issues about the significance of the Granada-TV series relatively unexamined. For example, one might ask: Who watches *Disappearing World* and what “cultural authenticities” do they key into? How does the series fit into the larger context of television programming in Great Britain? How do ideologies of educational and public service broadcasting (cf 168a, 202) themselves create certain possibilities for anthropological media collaboration while discouraging others (81a)? These questions seem crucial for probing the complexities of anthropology’s appropriation in mainstream media and for re-engaging the dynamic circuits of media production, representation, and reception that are so often isolated both topically and theoretically in media studies (cf 162, 176, 194, 219 on the need for “holistic” research frameworks).

Lutz & Collins’ recent study of *National Geographic* magazine (153) moves toward this, by attempting to integrate a semiotic analysis of the magazine’s photographic conventions with a cultural analysis of the practices of its editors and readers. These levels are a bit disjointed, however, because even though the rhetorical stress is on the active media audience, Lutz & Collins’ extended discussion (and indeed the core of the book) on the cultural logics of photo-textual representation derives more from their own reading, than from the particular themes that emerge in informants’ commentary. The authors’ analytic categories are used to code readers’ responses to isolated photographs, and the active processes of media use and interpretation become muted (cf 146 for another example of how adherence to a rigid coding scheme interferes with a more ethnographic or emic attempt to investigate audience reception). Still, the similarities between the *Disappearing World* series and *National Geographic* magazine are striking—for example, in their tendencies to portray non-Western peoples as representatives of earlier stages of human development, and in their attentiveness to selected “culture traits” such as curiosities in gender relations—and these parallels suggest several interesting directions for future research. One would suspect that not only are there extensive intertextual (and historical) relations between these forms of imaging the “exotic other,” but there are also significant commonalities across the audiences and producers of such media. What in fact is the connection between glossy coffee table renderings of other cultures and the emergence of ethnographic television programs? And how might these Western practices of mass mediated armchair exploration relate to other activities such as museum attendance? One also wonders about the differences in political potential across these genres. Is it necessarily the case, for example, that the unique

narrative potentialities of televisual genres present more possibilities for subverting Western voyeurism and inserting non-Western voices (136, 200, 236, 242) than still photography might allow?

Finally, the various appearances of anthropology in the public eye also present rich opportunities for investigating more general questions about media authority and legitimacy (cf 78, 98, 205). One major facet of this is the construction of truth and objectivity through specific linguistic forms, in established media genres (24, 28, 74, 114, 134, 182, 197, 203, 238, 251). For example, in conjunction with analyzing the semiotics of visual display and the politics of editorial decisions, it is also possible to interrogate the ideological implications of specific linguistic practices such as the use of “the ethnographic present” (49), sentences that lack explicit agents or “voices” (11, 212), and the lexical and syntactic choices that structure discourses of scientific discovery and “live” narration (67, 74, 91, 251). The widespread use of “expert commentators” across a vast range of media genres (e.g. talk shows and regular columns) is often a major component of this linguistic construction of media authority, and represents still another aspect of the role anthropologists play as contributors in various media enterprises.

As anthropologists, we have yet to really scrutinize our own linguistic conventions of authority and authorization, and what kinds of signs of “expertise” become salient for our interlocutors (33, 90). For example, in the case of the *Disappearing World* collaborators, one wonders about the position and perception of the anthropologists in the contexts of media production. The authors cited above do comment on their own motives for entering the world of television film making, but we hear little about their place in the social organization of media production, and their classification as particular kinds of specialists, e.g. as cultural insiders, analysts, translators, or navigators (cf 81a). These dynamics seem particularly in need of critical attention, and their study would enhance our understanding of how media meanings are negotiated and constructed before they reach wider audiences.

### *The Emergence of Indigenous Media*

One of the most exciting, extensive, and relatively unified anthropological approaches to mass media is represented by a newly emerging body of research on indigenous media (82, 83, 86, 173–176, 225, 232–234, 241) that builds on Worth & Adair’s pioneering work (248). The most general contribution of these recent studies is their sustained attention to the fact that mass media are at once cultural products and social processes, as well as extremely potent arenas of political struggle. This work has also begun to engage wider anthropological issues regarding race, ethnicity, symbolic processes, and the politics of the nation-state, and has been, for the most part, rooted in a strong interest in the possibilities of media advocacy and a politicized anthropology.

In this literature, the phrase "indigenous media" is a cover term for a broad spectrum of media phenomena, ranging from community owned and operated radio, television, and video operations to locally produced programs that appear on national television. The precise definition of the term "indigenous" is a bit problematic, however, in both its scope of application and its political import, and this deserves some consideration. Ginsburg introduced the phrase "indigenous media" to designate the various media-related activities of minority indigenous peoples, particularly those understanding themselves as "First Nations" or "Fourth World People" dominated by encompassing states (82, 86). The Aboriginal societies in Australia and the diverse Native American communities throughout North and South America are the most widely known representatives of indigenous people. The recent explosion of media use in some of these communities has come about largely because of the availability of inexpensive handycams and VCRs, and the installation of communication satellite down-links in areas previously untouched by large-scale media. In many situations, anthropologists and journalists have been the key mediators in the introduction of new media technology (174, 175, 232).

Ginsburg (82) stresses that indigenous media should be distinguished from the national and independent media productions of Third World nations, as they have developed under distinct historical and political conditions. In terms of their politics, institutional structures, and types of intended audiences, Aboriginal community video productions are quite different from media such as Indian national television and Senegalese cinema. But numerous difficulties arise in the application of the label "indigenous media," and its isolation as a distinct area of study blurs its important connections with issues of media use across widely divergent social settings.

In the first instance, one finds that the adjective "indigenous" refers quite flexibly to the producers, owners, subjects, locales, and/or audiences of these various mass media. For example, in the case of the Aboriginally owned private television station, *Imparja* (which means "tracks" or "footprint" in the Arrernte language), roughly 90% of the staff is European and only 4% of the programming is produced locally (82, 175). Nearly all of *Imparja*'s program material is obtained through its down-link from the national communications satellite AUSSAT, a large proportion of which is imported from the United States and is in the English language. In this case, the owners and audiences, but not the producers and products, are indigenous.

The recent activities of Kayapó filmmakers, who look beyond domestic audiences (Kayapó and Brazilian) to international markets, further illustrates the diversity of indigenous media forms (232–234). In covering their political confrontations with the Brazilian state, Kayapó filmmakers often attempt to frame their shooting of video footage as part of the media event. When foreign journalists are present, Kayapó make sure that Kayapó camerapersons are

documented as an important component of the political protest, and thus in a sense, play guerrilla theater with the concept of Indians dressing up as Indians (234:10). In this case, the producers and subjects are indigenous (“indigenes as media experts”), but they are oriented toward a later stage of the mass communication process in which the producers and audiences are not indigenous.

Other examples of the difficulty in specifying what is indigenous about indigenous media are found in ethnographic films and documentaries that are produced by and for Westerners, but that rely heavily on indigenous assistance in scriptwriting and set design (69, 200). In such cases, indigenous people are collaborators, but often have little editorial control. Their inclusion in the production process and their subsequent use of the final product may, however, have significant implications for the negotiation of their own identity, as Fienup-Riordan (69) shows in a study of how Yup’ik traditions are recreated in response to a Western screenplay based on their historical narratives.

These scenarios illustrate the substantial hybridity of indigenous media, and the multiple places within the mass communication circuit where a social group may be involved or indexed. In each case, the complex struggle over defining an authentic and politically correct version of indigenosity is foregrounded. This leads Michaels, positioned as a cultural analyst, to see the fundamental task as tracking these very debates over authenticity and the Aboriginality of Aboriginal media. Declining to pinpoint it himself, he winds up with the tongue-in-cheek “Aboriginal content, who’s got it—who needs it?” (175). Ginsburg, on the other hand, grapples with analytic rather than culturally-specific definitions. She introduces the phrase “ethnographic media” (82:104) to encompass both ethnographic film and indigenous media as they exhibit a common self-conscious engagement with topics of cultural identity and cultural dislocation. Unfortunately, this obscures the fact that all forms of mass media are potentially “ethnographic” in that they in various subtle ways negotiate and represent cultural identity. Some media genres explicitly signal a documentary or *cinéma vérité* mode more than others, and one critical issue is to investigate the cultural specificities of such evaluative frames (e.g. realism, factuality, historical truth) and their cross-cultural translatability (37, 39, 74, 174, 176, 177, 182, 248).

Finally, the isolation of indigenous media as a separate area of study misses their vital connections with the more widespread phenomena of independent, alternative, or decentralized media production and consumption. Fundamental to all such alternative media forms and practices is the fact that their existence is intricately determined in relation to the dominant, “legitimate” media in the societies where they occur. There is thus a broad spectrum of different media and social settings where issues of control over self-representation and expression arise: pirate radio in Western Europe (166, 237), “guerrilla television” in the United States (32), community-based presses and radios operated by local

labor unions in Latin America (58, 186), small-scale private music cassette industries in India (162), mass mediated religious propaganda (69a, 162, 222a), and the newly emerging independent media throughout Eastern Europe (222). Indicative of these connections, Sullivan (226) uses the phrase “indigenous dramatic productions” to refer to independent films made by Papua New Guineans; this label does not indicate a “First Nation” people as much as an alternative to government produced or imported media products. Hamilton’s (103) study of pirated video cassettes in Thailand raises the related intriguing question of independent re-production (rather than production), and one might expand this even further to encompass alternative media uses as well. For example, researchers have documented oppositional forms of radio listening and film viewing in repressive media environments (159, 249), as well as the creative appropriations and recyclings of various media forms within different subcultures (17, 69a, 112, 113, 162, 219). The crucial challenge in studying these alternative media forms (indigenous included) is to situate their production, use, interpretation, and circulation within the larger contexts of available media forms.

### *New Directions*

In addition to the growing body of research on indigenous and alternative media, a number of new studies have begun to explore the sociocultural dynamics of national media (2, 13–16, 39, 40, 119–121, 160, 161, 187, 196, 217–221, 225, 226). One pervasive concern in this work is to establish exactly how mass media assist in constructing an imagined community of the nation-state (5), and whether this imagined community is homogenous and equally participated in, or heterogeneous and hierarchical. For example, some studies have focused on the projection or invention of a relatively homogeneous national culture in national music, novels, film, posters, and television (13, 15, 47, 69a, 119, 187). Others have demonstrated that national media are complex arenas for articulating (or masking) national diversity, e.g. differences of regional identity (2), ethnolinguistic identity (218, 237), gender (147, 160, 161), and religion (2, 39, 160, 161).

This research also indicates new directions for reconceptualizing mass media’s relations to (or entanglements with) “culture” and “society,” and their particular role in providing common arenas for constructing social relations, concepts of the person, and moral evaluations (15, 18, 39, 40, 120, 132, 147, 154–156, 161, 196, 219). A significant part of this involves the intricate connection of media production and consumption with the wider processes of commoditization and transnational culture (8). Several authors have explored media’s place in the cultural construction of leisure, affluence, and modernity (1, 13, 121, 147, 148, 187, 219–221, 227, 230), and researchers are just beginning to examine how media professionals situate themselves and their

work in relation to more global media trends (13, 14, 217, 219–221, 225, 226, 232–234).

In line with the recent developments in British cultural studies discussed earlier, some of this new work also provides a richer picture of the complex interpretive practices at both ends of the mass communication process (2, 13, 14, 37, 39, 160, 161, 219, 225, 226). A major contribution these endeavors share with work on indigenous media is their insight into the culturally-specific dimensions of media production and reception, including culturally-based aesthetic evaluations (34, 37, 39, 174, 177, 234), innovative production styles (174–176, 225, 226, 232–234), and the linkages with other forms of cultural knowledge and linguistic expression (82, 86, 173, 174, 177, 219, 234). In fact, although anthropologists have just begun to look at the various political, social, cultural, and linguistic dimensions of mass media, they have in some way already bypassed many of the debates within media studies. Perhaps this is because they implicitly theorize media processes, products, and uses as complex parts of social reality (26), and expect to locate media power and value in more a diffuse, rather than direct and causal, sense. Certainly there is much more ground to traverse, and hopefully future work will contribute more directly to theoretical developments across these different disciplines and to a fuller understanding of modern life as we enter the twenty-first century.

## CONCLUSION

This brief review has left many critical issues untouched, while at the same time attempting to crystallize some emerging issues and directions for future research. Where does media anthropology go from here? Probably the most general—and most difficult—question about the place of mass media in modern societies is their implications for fundamental and irreversible social and cultural change. The introduction of new media forms has been addressed, for example, in work on indigenous media (82, 83, 86, 174, 175, 232–234, 241) and print history (5, 62a); it has also figured centrally in analyses of global culture, media imperialism, and technological determinism (66, 167, 229, 244). In our own society, the technologies of the future are here today: interactive television, virtual reality, electronic town halls, digital compression, direct satellite broadcasting, and the fax. Significantly, many of these new developments supplant the “mass” of mass media, making them more individual and interpersonal. One wonders how they will affect our ways of relating to one another, and our ways of understanding ourselves. Meanwhile, what remains for anthropological study are the broader cultural conditions that enable the emergence of these new media processes and products, and the wider political economies that impel their circulation in diverse societies across the globe.

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