Altermodern: journeys, global cultures, fragmentations
ARDBC
Anthropology Reviews: Dissent and Cultural Politics
ISSN 2041-1405

Aim

The purpose of ARDAC is to produce an open access anthropology research-based review aimed at the academic community at large that analyses responses to cultural politics with reflective, incisive articles in textual and non-textual formats.

Anthropology Reviews: Dissent and Cultural Politics is published two times a year in February and October by Open Access and supported by iCES, Institute of Contemporary European Studies, Regent’s College London. The first issue will be published in May 2010. The journal is organized through submissions to the editor and an editorial board and it is available freely online as an open access anthropology publication.

Description

Dissent and Cultural Politics is an European and international, open access anthropology journal that analyses how cultural innovation, transnational and political issues underpin the character of relationality of global issues. In the analysis of cultural politics, the journal is interested in social responses to the future of culture in the public domain in the age of globalization -and within the alternmoden period that is emerging after postmodernity. The reviews aim to look at the political intersections between culture and globalization, and specifically, the way in which human relations are mediated through political voice and cultural innovation.

The journal encourages broad, critical, speculative and experimental interventions in discussions concerning anthropology and cultural politics with a particular emphasis on political voices and dissent, in any fields, from communication technologies to social media, political to popular movements, and from engagement and intervention in society to any broad topics on technologies and experiences of social engagement and relatedness.

The journal is inclusive of all types of submissions, working papers, research papers, pre-peer-reviewed and reviewed publications, multimedia (including audio, video) and internet based data. The journal will be part of open access anthropology journals structured within a mediated website and forums.

Guidelines

We welcome submissions on any topic within anthropology that considers the remit of the journal and it is inclusive of the academic community at large.

Editorial Board and Reviewers

Dr Àngels Trias i Valls, iCES, Regent’s College
Dr Katherine Smith, University of Essex
Dr David O’Kane, University of Auckland
Dr Ingvill Kristiansen, University of Tromsø
Ms Roula Pipyrou, University of Durham
Mr Daniel Knight, University of Durham
Ms Clare Perkins, University of Wales

Submission of articles

Articles should be submitted electronically to the editor.

Submissions may include photographs, audio files, blogs, video files and other data. Please contact the editor about appropriate formats.

Articles in other than English will be considered.

Maximum word limit: 7,000 words
Maximum non-textual limit: 2 minutes per piece (several files may accompany an article)

Keywords and Abstracts

All articles should be accompanied by a 250 word abstract (in English) and up to 5 keywords. All articles should follow the Harvard referencing system for texts, broadcast, videos and electronic sources
ARDAC
Anthropology Reviews:
Dissent and Cultural Politics

An Open Access Anthropology Journal

Issue 1
Altermodern: journeys, global cultures, fragmentations

Edited by Àngels Trias i Valls

Published May 2010 by ARDAC: Anthropology Reviews, Dissent and Cultural Politics
Open Access Journals
Institute of Contemporary European Studies (iCES), Regent's College London
ISSN 2041-1465
May 2010

www.ebslondon.ac.uk/ices/research/publications/anthropology_journal.aspx
http://ardac-anthropologyjournal.ning.com/
http://www.anthropology-projects.co.uk/ardac
Editorial Cloud
Editorial

1st May 2009 saw the first Open Access Anthropology Day. The journal that we have here is the outcome of a proposal made on that day that aimed to commemorate the event and to add to the growing pool of independent open access journals, and in particular, open access anthropology journals.

Journeys in a global domain

The editorial piece here is done in the practice of blogging and cloud tagging. It is a shorter version of the editorial ideas located in a much longer editorial piece, elsewhere in the journal. It follows an experimental altermodern style of publishing for our new online media. At this intersection I must explain that the longer editorial piece of this first journal explores Bourriaud’s (2009) definition of the altermodern and uses it in the context of anthropology. I (re)use the altermodern idea that anthropology, like art, ideas, media, and any form of social and cultural production in our contemporary times, 'transverses' many cultural landscapes, a vast electronic ocean that is ‘saturated with signs’ and one that moves toward creating new and multiple formats of expression (Bourriaud 2009) in contested and dissented public ‘global’ domains. This volume aims to reproduce this journey through its content, strategies and authors.

Critical, Experimental, Interventions

AIRDAC, the journal, encourages broad, critical, speculative and experimental interventions in discussions concerning anthropology and cultural politics with a particular emphasis on political voices and dissent, in any fields, from communication technologies to social media, political to popular movements, and from engagement and intervention in society to any broad topics on technologies and experiences of social engagement and relatedness.

Issues of Content

The authors in this volume have in common a sense of radical positioning towards their own research, which for me, as the editor of this first issue, allows for mixing and experimenting with something that exemplifies the altermodern position whilst leaving each one of the author's work independently framed from it. Veronica Barassi narrates complex understandings of dissent through the analyses of discursive technologies and political action. Nicholas White looks at the cultural politics of 'copy' and illegality in music filesharing on the Internet. Hagai van der Horst produces a fascinating and critical review of the film Avatar, mirroring some of the ways in which film mythologies correspond to and mystify political realities. The two opinion articles from Claire Perkins and Stavrulia Pipyrrou point at the possibility of 're-directing the ethnographic lens' (in Claire's case of using anthropology to think about genetically modified products), and re-testing the social appropriation of violence (in Stavrulia's critique of the Calabrian Mafia). Maria Paulina de Assis and Maria Elizabeth Bianconcini de Almeida look at the relationship between education and digital exclusion in global educational contexts consolidated through the Internet and collaborative learning. The editorial position article elaborates on how these authors and this first journal came together and to the vision underlying this editor’s preoccupation with the theme of the volume: ‘a crossroad’ in the editorial journey. On the one hand, the context of open access as a kind of altermodern art/academic form; and on the other, to the role of open access and internet mediated social media for social sciences, education and anthropology. Each article has a word cloud, an electronically generated re-ordering of all the words in the article, a re-told visual story preceding their narratives.

Sharing Access

In concluding I must thank for their help and support all the people who participated in the creation of this journal, Anna Carliile for being one of the first members of the board and for our joint altermodern venture in trying to answer the question ‘what next after postmodernity?, what do we call, this our ‘now’?’. To Keith Hart and the anthropology co-operative and the anthropologists in the co-op that discussed the possibilities of the altermodern with me; and Nicholas Bourriaud who coined and theorised the inspirational idea of the altermodern; Michael Scriven, Director of iCES at Regent’s College and C-SAP for supporting this anthropological project and hosting it; most thankfully to nensè for designing the electronic passport and front cover of this issue; and to all the members of the current editorial board and external board for agreeing to commit to a venture like this one, knowing in advance that the life of open access anthropology journals, like that of many types of journals, is made of many meetings (electronic ones for us), dedication to ethical, creative reviewing and peer-reviewing, and a sense of being immersed in a fleeting, always precarious, fairly unacknowledged, electronically mediated, professionally felt, experimental, shared publication, open accessed, networked life.

Àngels Trias i Valls - 1st May 2010
Leading Article
Possibilities and Ambivalences: the Discursive Power of Online Technologies and their impact on Political Action in Britain

Veronica Barassi
Goldsmiths College
University of London
v.barassi@gold.ac.uk

Abstract
Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork amongst international solidarity campaigning organisations in the Trade Union movement in Britain, this paper will discuss some of the beliefs and experiences that people encounter in their use of internet technologies for political action. It will be shown that the belief in the opportunities and possibilities brought about by the World Wide Web has profoundly altered the everyday experience of political activism, and changed political priorities and strategies. At the same time, however, the frustrations and anxieties attached to internet technologies have transformed people’s relationship with printed media, as well as affected the internal politics of oppositional groups.

In considering these transformations, the paper will draw upon Latour’s actor network theory (2005) and uncover the role of technologies as agents. In contrast to Latour, however, the paper will argue that if we are to perceive technologies as agents, we must bear in mind that they have become such due to human agency. This is because technologies are embedded within human discourses and imaginations, which - by being naturalised in the technology itself - profoundly affect the everyday layers of social experience. It is by looking at this dialectical relationship between the technical and the social, this paper will argue, that we can better appreciate the techno-historical transformations of the last two decades, and their impact on political action.

Introduction
Counter-information practices and the mediation of political action have been part of the personal histories of those involved in social and political struggles long before the advent of the World Wide Web. However, by enhancing the possibilities for communication and networking amongst political movements, the technological developments of the last two decades and the advent of the Internet have deeply affected people’s understanding of political and media action. Today online networks, connections, media-spaces and practices have re-defined people’s everyday experience of politics and political opposition. But, how are we to conceptualise activists’ relationship to internet technologies? How are we to understand the beliefs and fears that they trigger in the people involved? In which way are new technologies transforming political action?

The aim of this paper is to address some of these questions, by looking at the data collected in a year-long ethnographic fieldwork amongst international solidarity campaigns and the Trade Unions in Britain. In investigating the relationship between political action and new technologies, my approach is inspired by the understanding that research on the social dimension of electronic technologies has often been constrained by assumptions of novelty, pervasiveness and agency (Woolgar, 2002, p.7). In contrast to techno-deterministic assumptions on the empowering effects of the internet, therefore, this paper highlights the human experiences and beliefs that are embedded in mediated political action and sheds some light on the social complexities involved in the transformations of the last fifteen years.

Trade Unions and International Campaigns Organisation: the Social World of this Research
Crossing Oxford Street on a Saturday, I felt surprised to find it completely deserted. The early morning and its emptiness conferred a surreal atmosphere to one of London’s busiest streets. It was early June, and before I realised it, I found myself once again in front of Trade Union Congress House. With its 1960s architecture and the sculpture by Jacob Epstein in the courtyard - dedicated to the dead trade unionists of the two world wars -, Congress House has been one of the overlapping spaces of my multi-sited ethnographic research2 (Marcus, 1998). As happens in familiar spaces, that morning I knew exactly where to go. Thus I walked down the metal...

---

1 Counter-information practices are here understood as those practices, usually linked to the political realities of social movements, which are aimed at the dissemination of information that opposes the hegemonic content transmitted through dominant and corporate media.

2 According to Marcus (1998), in the global context, the classical understanding of anthropological fieldwork (as being confined to a particular place or culture) has been challenged by the need to study culture by looking at connections and associations between different sites. Therefore, he coined the term ‘multi-sited fieldwork’. Marcus suggests that there are a variety of ways in which one can do multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork, such as following the thing, the story, the people or the metaphor (1998:19). For my research I decided to follow the people involved in a networked social movement, and the media they produced.
staircase, looked at the TV screens - which were announcing the SERTUC (South Eastern Region Trade Union Congress) Conference on Global Solidarity - and found my way to the plenary hall.

The conference hall was half-full; most of delegates had already made their way to the workshop sessions. The chairs in the middle of the room overlooked the main stage, with the SERTUC logo flashing on a screen. On the right hand side of the main hall, I could see the stalls of the international solidarity campaign organisations. At first sight the different stalls of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, the Venezuelan Information Centre, Justice for Colombia, Banana Link or Palestine Solidarity Campaign looked all quite similar. All of them had fairly plain table covers, similarly designed leaflets, books and T-shirts for sale, and the latest copies of the magazine they produced. Within these different international campaign organisations the Cuba Solidarity Campaign was my central field of research.

I had chosen CSC as my main site of research for its long history and media involvement. The organisation - previously known as British-Cuba Resource Centre - was born in 1978 out of a grassroots movement of individuals who were mostly members of the Labour Party and were interested in the political situation in Cuba. At the very beginning of the Thatcher years, they gathered in a room of the Casa Latina in North London to discuss Cuba's achievements in terms of public health and education, and compare these with the political and economic situation in Britain. At the time, the group produced a newsletter which later became the CubaS! magazine.

The fall of the Soviet block in 1989/1990 had a profound impact on the BCRC; all members of the executive committee almost disappeared, and resources for producing the magazine were no longer available. Despite struggling the organisation managed to survive, and in 1992 it was transformed from a resource centre into the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. At the time, the group started to bind effective political and economic networks with the major Trade Unions in Britain, and largely increased its membership size and political influence. Consisting of 4000 individual members, 450 Trade Union branches affiliates, 28 local groups on national territory and two sister organisations in Northern Ireland and Scotland, CSC has become today the leading campaigning organisation in Britain with a focus on Cuba and Latin America.

The headquarters of CSC are based in a small office in North London. However, since the very beginning of fieldwork it became evident that the reality of the organisation developed on a variety of different levels and was constructed by the juxtaposition of many networked spaces. As mentioned, Marcus (1998, p.19) suggests that there are a variety of ways in which one can do multi-sided ethnographic fieldwork, such as following the thing, the story, the people or the metaphor. For my research I decided to follow the people, and the media they produced. During fieldwork I thus spent an entire year working at CSC's national office on a daily basis; I followed its organisers around Trade Union conferences; I spent days in Parliament, and evenings at social gatherings and events; I interviewed members of networked campaigning organisations and key figures in the Trade Union movement; I also travelled to Cuba, to participate to their work brigade at the Julio Antonio Mella International Camp, 40kms from Havana.

It was within these networked realities of fieldwork that I realised that CSC was embedded in a complex social world. This is a world which encompasses all those multilayered social relations that bring together Trade Unions, international solidarity campaigning organisations, the Labour Party, the Communist Party, the Morning Star and numerous other factions in Britain, which are commonly identified as British Left. In using the concept of 'social world', however, I do not intend here to embrace categories such as the notion of 'British Left', because these frameworks of analysis often imply a constructed unity to describe extremely fragmented realities. When referring to my context of study as the expression of a 'social world', my approach draws heavily from the debates within anthropology that challenge essentialist understandings of the notion of community and identity (Amit and Rapport, 2002), and from the work of Latour (1988, 2005) who sees the social as being created by alliances and associations. 'Social world' is thus intended here more as a movement, as something that it is constantly in the process of being constructed rather than a structured reality.

To map the complex reality of this social world, it is important to consider the personal experiences, beliefs and understandings that bring these people together in collective forms of political action. This is a world where, internationalism, solidarity, progressive policies, activism, workers rights, collectivism, and participatory democracy constitute the means for the construction of shared meanings. It is a world that is a profoundly British, white, middle aged, middle class reality, where people have
fought against the Thatcher government and have seen the rise of New Labour ‘hoping and praying that what Tony Blair was doing was just talk to get the conservatives out of power’. Shaken by disbelief in front of the New Labour Government and the continuous decline in Trade Union Membership and power, this world has been affected by a profound sense of disillusion in British politics.

This sense of disillusion is often counteracted by practices of international solidarity and identification. In this framework, Latin America represents a strong personal and political motif. Amongst international campaigns and the Trade Unions, Latin America is an image: an image that it is highly evocative and has much more to say about people’s relationship to British politics than their relationship to countries such as Cuba or Venezuela. For the people involved, Latin America is principally an imagined space, one that is constructed in comparison to Britain through a powerful game of mirrors. Within CSC, for instance, the image of Cuba is constantly constructed in radical opposition to Britain through a set of ideologically powerful dichotomies, such as collectivism vs. individualism, public interest vs. private interest, humanitarian policies vs. market led policies. The game of mirrors between Cuba and Britain is sustained by the shared idea amongst members and organisers that Cuba represents an example, an alternative reality which helps to highlight the contradictions of the political system in Britain, and possibly transform them.

In order to construct these images, combat the negative representations of Latin America, and persuade the British public that countries such as Cuba or Venezuela represent a viable alternative in the current neo-liberal global economy, international solidarity campaign organisations focus their actions largely on counter-information strategies and the production of ‘alternative news’. In order to do so they rely on the mediated political spaces of their media productions. These mediated spaces have been part of the everyday life of most campaigning organisations and the Trade Unions long before the advent of the Internet. The Cuba Solidarity Campaign, for instance, has been publishing the Cubadé magazine for over 24 years. The Morning Star daily was founded as the organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the 1930s, and today has become a key co-ordinator of the social world of Trade Unions and single issue campaigns in Britain.

The long history of media productions within the Labour movement is not surprising. Historically political movements have often relied on media technologies to diffuse their ideologies, create feelings of association and belonging, harmonise internal conflicts and promote their political causes.

Tarrow (1998) who is a well known theorist of social movements, suggested that the rise of the popular press in Britain and France at the end of the 18th century triggered the creation of new associations that developed around the production and exchange of printed materials. According to him, therefore, print and association were complementary channels in the development of social movements (Tarrow, 1998, pp.45-50). A similar understanding was shared also by Downing (1995) – who, by looking at the history of movements in the United States, has shown that media activism has been a central form of political action from the nineteenth-century women’s press and the suffragette movement to the civil rights movements of the 1960s (1995, pp.180-191).

However, as many scholars have shown following the Zapatista insurgency in 1994 and the creation of the networked movements for global justice, media activism and online action has become a privileged repertoire of political opposition (Atton, 2002, 2004; Ribeiro, 1998; Slater, 1998; Castells, 1997; Kowal, 2002; Kidd, 2003; McCaughey and Ayers 2003). This is because, following the Zapatista example, different political groups started to believe that the World Wide Web was a fundamental tool for political action, because it enabled them to transmit their messages to a global scale (Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Melucci, 1996; Ribeiro, 1998; Slater, 1998). As the next part of the paper will show, the beliefs in the possibilities brought about by new technologies have profoundly influenced activists’ relationship to media technologies and their understanding of political action. As it will be argued, these transformations are giving rise to a series of frustrations, anxieties and ambivalences which are affecting the internal politics of oppositional groups.

Online Technologies and the Transformation of Political Action

The social world of CSC has first become engaged with internet technologies through the creation and extension of the internet service Poptel. Poptel was an internet and on-line service provider that was run by an employee cooperative (worker cooperative). It became known as provider of Internet services to the Labour Party, and launched the successful bid to create a top level Internet6

The internet organises upon a Domain Naming System (DNS) which is hierarchically structured. The Top Level Internet Domain is one of the domains at the highest level of the hierarchical domain system. Well known top level internet domains are “.com”, “.net”, or “.org”. For the international labour movement and cooperative organisations the creation of a top-level internet domain was a major success.
domain for use exclusively by cooperatives and communities. The project was born out of a belief that new technologies were fundamental tools in the strengthening of the International Trade Union Movement, and in the facilitation of networks of communication and action between different organisations (Agar et al., 2002).

In the years between the advent of new technologies and the time of my fieldwork the political strategies of CSC have undergone a profound transformation, and media action has become a privileged campaigning strategy. When the campaign was founded, solidarity was largely expressed through the collection and the shipping of aid material to Cuba, to the point that an article on Cubadí reports that in 1995 CSC raised £20,000 worth of aid material. In the late nineties, the situation radically changed. Today, the campaign's involvement with material aid has decreased to the point that it is limited to the shipping of musical instruments or ballet shoes through the Music Fund for Cuba.5 This transformation has a clear political basis, which is grounded in the trans-national relations of the organisation. Indeed, in the late nineties ICAP (The Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples)6, which co-ordinates the global solidarity movement from Cuba, explicitly asked CSC to stop sending material aid and to focus instead on countering the negative representations of the island and its government in global media.

According to ICAP's representatives, which I had the pleasure to interview during my trip to Cuba, such a request needs to be contextualised in the belief that many within Cuba are convinced that in an internet connected world where information flows freely from one country to another and the message of political movements reaches a global scale, paradoxically the 'wall of silence' between Cuba and the rest of the world seems to be stronger than ever. In the majority of cases Cuba is not a matter of focus for global broadcasting companies and newspapers. It is not news; it is an old, outdated issue. When issues on Cuba are covered, these merely focus either on Fidel Castro or on negative representations of the socialist government.

Influenced by ICAP, therefore, media action has been changed with a new and fundamental importance and has come to dominate the agenda of the campaign. A proof of this can be found in the fact that, in the 2007 Annual General Meeting, media action was discussed as top priority and placed before parliamentary action, which in 1993's AGM was not even mentioned. This "focus on media" has not only become one of the first priorities of CSC, but has also re-shaped people's understanding of solidarity in a fascinating way. Today, people seem to link their understanding of political solidarity primarily to processes which focus on counter-information strategies. These processes have become a matter of great importance for them; one that shapes their understanding of political action and defines "what they do".

Here, it is important to contextualise this increased "focus on media" in the larger framework of internet-related beliefs and the effect they have on people's understanding of oppositional politics. When talking about the Net and everyday practices people often claimed that new technologies had improved their political action and media activism. The internet has certainly enhanced activists' confidence in their own networking and media strategies. By doing so it has 'empowered' media action and re-defined activists' political priorities and strategies.

The possibility of constructing and consolidating networks of communication and action is not the only reason for which people believe that the internet is an empowering tool. As emerged during conversations with other members and organisers in the social world of CSC, people also believe that the internet has granted them easier access to both governmental and non-governmental organisations. Furthermore, people are convinced the internet has made the construction and dissemination of 'alternative news' much easier. Indeed, according to them the advent of internet technologies has multiplied the spaces for the production of news and information within the campaign. In the last 10 years, the messages produced by the campaign have reached a level of distribution and circulation which cannot be compared to the early nineties. Therefore, by enhancing people's confidence in their own networking and media strategies, internet technologies seem to have 'empowered' media action and amplified the emphasis on the political priorities of CSC, ICAP represents an important political network for the organisation.

5 The Music Fund for Cuba was first established in memory of the singer Kirsty MacColl who before dying in Mexico had been involved with the CSC. The Music Fund for Cuba was set up as a charity with the political intention of reaching those people who would want to get culturally engaged, but not politically engaged, with Cuba.

6 The Cuba Institute of Friendship with the People was founded in 1966, following the wave of enthusiasm in the Cuban Revolution that affected different political groups across the world, and since 1967 organises solidarity work brigades to Cuba. The work brigade involves a 3 week programme where members of international solidarity organisations can travel to Cuba and work in the fields as a gesture of solidarity to the Island. The brigade is also seen as an opportunity to achieve a first hand experience of Cuba and learn important aspects of Cuba's culture, politics and ideology. The role of ICAP in the international solidarity movement is to keep in contact with more than 2050 Cuba solidarity organisations across the world. Since the early days of CSC, ICAP represents an important political network for the organisation.
importance of strategies centred upon media technologies. In this framework, they are transforming the way in which political action is being imagined, experienced and organised.

The Discursive Power of the World Wide Web: Re-Thinking Latour’s Actor-Network Theory

In the social world of CSC, the internet has affected activists’ political practices and strategies in substantial ways. People within CSC today prioritise media action over other more traditional forms of political solidarity, such as demonstrations or sending aid material. In this context, therefore, it seems that new technologies have acted as agents in the transformation of political action. The understanding of technologies as agents draws heavily upon Latour’s (2005) Actor Network Theory (ANT). Latour (1993, 2005) criticised sociology for ignoring the natural and technical actors which affect social experience and discourses. According to him, the social as a ‘realm’ or a ‘thing’ does not exist, what exists is a type of networked movement, which is defined by the multiple interconnections of different human and non-human agents. In this framework, he introduces the idea of actants. The recognition of media technologies as actants is of central importance, because it enables us to better understand the way in which new information and communication technologies are transforming priorities, social relations, and understandings of contemporary forms of political action in significant ways. Despite being central to the general approach of this research, there are some limitations present within Latour’s theory that need to be addressed.

As Edwards et al. (2007, p.6) suggested, when ANT was established as a theoretical approach in the eighties, its claims shared many lines of similarity with anthropological theories, and this is specifically true if we consider the work of Appadurai (1986) on the social life of things or if we look at Gell’s anthropology of art and his analysis of things as social agents (1998). Yet, there was a difference between the work of the science, technology and society scholars (STS) and that of anthropologists. This is because, STS scholars were interested in showing how networks of human and non-human agents created social discourses, and they were especially concerned with the construction of science and scientific facts. Anthropologists, on the contrary, were interested in the human relations that made networks and connections possible, and they sought to uncover the meaning of these relations (Edwards et al. 2007, pp. 5-7). In this framework, as Knox et al. (2006) contended, the problem with much of the work of STS scholars is that it maintains a distance from the lives of the people it is focused on, in such a way that people become abstractions in the description of a scientific process (Knox et al. 2006, pp.127).

Furthermore, by exploring the networked movement between human and non-human agents, ANT seems to neglect the actual escalation within which non-human agents have become powerful, and the power relations between the human and the non-human. Hence, by emphasising space, and space of networks, ANT suffers what early ethnographies within anthropology used to suffer from, namely ahistoricity. Indeed, as Coudry suggested, the spatial virtue of ANT is connected with a limitation: the relative neglect of time (2008, p. 163-165). It is for this reason that we need to remember the fact that ANT is not well equipped to understand the consequences of the representations that technologies embed, and the effects of these representations on everyday life (2008, p. 165).

Interestingly enough, in his ethnography of Laboratory Life (1986) - when Latour had already started working on a rudimentary version of actor-network-theory (Callon and Latour, 1981) - the dimension of time was present. Indeed, with their work, Latour and Woolgar (1986) show not only that scientific facts are socially constructed, but that the process of construction is extremely important to analyse because it involves the use of certain devices (networks of scientists, language, the deletion of phases of the process) whereby all traces of production are made extremely difficult to detect (1986, p.176). By looking at the processes of construction of the non-human, Latour and Woolgar seem to ascribe them with an historical and hierarchical dimension that is missing from Latour’s latest work (Latour, 2005).

Drawing from these critical observations, my understanding is that technologies are actants, and thus transform social processes, but have become such because they are embedded with human values and beliefs that are naturalised within the technology itself. Therefore they become actants in the moment in which the ideologies, which are attached to them, are presented as the ‘natural’
characteristics of the technology itself. In the understanding of technologies as social agents, hence, it is important to analyse the human social relationships and narratives which have produced them and placed them into contexts. This is because, as Agar, Green and Harvey (2002) suggested, technology is never separated from the social conditions in which it exists; ICTs do not simply ‘appear’ in a place; they are made to appear, and much work has to go into accomplishing this impression. This entails that:

“How they appear will be associated with the motivations and perceptions of those who work to put them into place, which also means they will be located and perceived as being connected with specific people, organisations, interests and so on” (2002, p. 272).

When CERN laboratories in 1990 announced the creation of a hypertext system, named the World Wide Web (www), they relied on systems of networks which were already in place (http, html, uri etc.). These networks were born at the unlikely intersection between military research (ARPANET) big science (Bell Laboratories which released UNIX) and grassroots libertarian movements9 (e.g. MODEM or LINUX). From the intersection of these opposite networks a technology emerged, which was presented by CERN laboratories as the technology of openness and freedom (Castells, 2001, pp. 10-33). In this framework, therefore, as Castells has shown, the internet was not merely a new technology but was an ideological construct that was based on ideas of openness, sharing and exchange.

Looking at the discursive power of technologies enables us to better contextualise technologies as agents by exploring the beliefs that are embedded within them, and considering the impacts of these beliefs on political action and imaginaries. As has been argued, the possibilities and beliefs attached to the structure of the World Wide Web have deeply affected the way in which people understand political action and opposition. By improving the possibility of networking and ‘getting the message across’, Internet technologies have empowered activists’ understanding of media action and have transformed this into a privileged repertoire of oppositional politics.

As the next part of this paper will show, far from perceiving the internet as an unproblematic and empowering force for social change, however, activists’ relationship to new technologies is defined by everyday frustrations, anxieties and questions on what media action really means. This is not surprising. Indeed, as Castells (2001) has noticed, the internet – as the technology of openness and freedom’ - is an ambivalent construct which offers as many opportunities as challenges. Whose freedom are we talking about? How am I to understand the contradictions between the democratic potential of new technologies and the commercial one? (Castells, 2001, p. 275). Within the social movements’ literature or the alternative media one, however, there is little exploration of the challenges and frustrations people encounter in the everyday use of internet technologies for political action. When there is, it is not ethnographic (Atton, 2004; Meikle, 2002). But what are the challenges, the fears and frustrations embedded in activists’ relationship to internet technologies? If the internet related beliefs have redefined the terrain for political action, what are the effects of internet-related anxieties?

Internet Technologies and Political Action: Contradictions and Anxieties in Everyday Practice

For their discursive power internet technologies are re-defining the terrain for political action. In doing so, however, they are giving rise to a series of questions, contradictions and conflicts amongst the people involved. This is better expressed in the following conversation between a young couple in their early twenties. Matt and Sian have long been politically involved with Labour politics. Coming form families which were active in the Labour Party, they have been engaging with political issues since their early teenage years. They met at university, while they were undertaking a BA in International Relations, and were both involved with the 2003 anti war movement. When they left University they decided to transform their political activism into a profession, Sian became a researcher for the trade union AMICUS, which was then merged with TGWU to form UNITE. Matt worked for a couple of years for CSC, and then left to become the only employee of the Venezuelan Information Centre (VIC). Their work and social lives at the time of fieldwork were organised around trade union conferences and events.

9 Particularly interesting in this regard is the work of Turner (2006), which traces the history of a highly influential group of San Francisco Bay area entrepreneurs: Stewart Brand and the Whole Earth network. Between 1968 and 1998, the group profoundly influenced counter-culturalists and technologists in the understanding of computers as tools for personal liberation, the building of virtual and decidedly alternative communities, and the exploration of bold new social frontiers.

S: I think it is noticeable in the last years, amongst the different campaigns and the Trade Unions, things have changed. Today people think that having a Facebook group is a level of political activity, and they concentrate on online media action a lot. But then things are deteriorating. Members start to think that merely joining a Facebook group shows that you are committed. But...
actually it doesn’t mean anything …it doesn’t change things. There is too much information around, to be effective.

M: You are right, but I think it’s also useful...

S: I mean it’s useful in terms of advertising and promoting what we do. But you also want lobbying, you want demonstrations, you want protests. Facebook and other online spaces are useful in terms of promoting these activities, but cannot be perceived as a substitute. But that’s what’s happening now...

M: That is a problem. I think it’s a matter of balance. You know blogs are important, and they are important in society, but then people end up working just on blogs. And that’s so individual. Since there’s lots of negative things on Cuba and Venezuela in the press, it is obvious that for us the blogosphere and online action in general becomes more important. But if people concentrate only on the information side of things, they don’t really get involved in lobbying, demonstrating, getting engaged or actively changing people’s minds.

The discussion between Matt and Sian shows some of the conflicts and tensions that the use of internet technologies for political action is creating. The excessive focus on media action, according to them, is detrimental for political activism, because it enables people to abandon other forms of political action such as lobbying or demonstrations that are still perceived to be important. During fieldwork, for instance, I witnessed a conflict between the national office of CSC and the CSC North London Local Group because the latter insisted on the importance of organising demonstrations. The national office on the contrary emphasised lobbying and media practices as privileged modes of political action.

The conversation between Matt and Sian does not only highlight the problem of priorities, and the fact that by focusing on media action many organisations are neglecting other important political activities. It also raises the problem of information overload. In fact, according to Sian, ‘there is too much information around to be effective’. During fieldwork, I found that such an understanding was quite common within CSC and other organisations. Due to the technological developments of the last fifteen years, the messages exchanged amongst networked organisations on a daily basis have reached an unprecedented and almost uncontrollable level. One day, Rob – the director of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign - complained about the amount of emails he receives and about the fact that with an increased workload he is no longer able to properly follow-up the news and events of the other organisations, even though he would be interested.

This everyday experience of information overload – typified by the amount of emails that pass unnoticed and/or the number of messages that are stored into separate folders without being read – is triggering questions on the worth of their own communication strategies, and thus the very nature of their own political choices and activities. A similar line of reasoning can be found in the work of Lebert (2003) who looked at the social context of Amnesty International and argued that although internet technologies became a privileged mode of political action people questioned the effectiveness of online action (Lebert, 2003, pp. 209-213).

In the above conversation another important aspect emerges, when Matt mentioned that the internet is too ‘individually based’. During fieldwork this was a common frustration that I have encountered over and over again. Across different organisations, people feel profoundly frustrated by the too often individualistic logic of the Internet. According to some, in an era of blogs, individual websites and social networking sites, individual messages are often given the same importance as the messages that have arisen out of the tensions and negotiations of a collective of people. In this context - suffocated by the information overload of the online space - the messages produced by oppositional groups, which are the product of negotiations and conflicts, get lost. This situation is making them question the idea that internet technologies create a space in which their voice can be heard. One day, for instance, the director of CSC told me: ‘We try our best. But what should we do when the message of a single eleven year old can achieve a greater importance than our own?’

This reflection challenges understandings that see the Internet merely as a politically empowering medium. As communication tool and network constructor, the Internet seems to be fundamental, but when referring to the construction and transmission of political ideologies (and especially marginal collective voices) the Internet should be understood for its emphasis on individualism and individual meanings. In fact as Natasha – the communication officer of CSC - once told me:

N: ‘You know it’s so difficult out there [in the online space]! You have some websites on which more money was spent that look more polished, more serious, and people might give them more credibility, and that is probably a danger, it will be a danger. You know some of them can have an amazing online presence and actually be only three people.’

The Internet-related frustration created by the information overload and the individualistic logic of the online world seems to be transforming people’s relationship with their printed media, and affecting the connection between media practices and belonging. The relationship between media practices and political belonging has been explored by Anderson (1991) in his book Imagined Communities. According to Anderson, newspapers and novels were the ‘technical means’ for
representing the kind of imagined community that the nation was (1991:25). Anderson contended that newspapers conferred a sense of simultaneity, and this sense of simultaneity created a feeling of collective participation. Drawing heavily from his work, therefore, when I first started fieldwork I was not surprised to notice that there was a strong connection between political belonging and media.

Interviews and informal chats with my informants all highlighted this strong connection, where different activists contended that printed media enabled them to strengthen the feeling of belonging to the group. As I have discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Barassi, 2009) - within the social world of CSC - whilst printed media are usually seen as the main constructor of membership and belonging within the campaign, online media are perceived overall as more flexible and as not directly related to collective feelings of political participation. During fieldwork and interviews I almost reached a stage of data saturation where a great majority of informants claimed that they would never replace the CubaSí with an online version. What emerged from the interviews collected, and especially within the ones of younger members of the campaign, was that in contrast to the online newsletter, the printed magazine conveyed people with a greater emotional attachment and a "feeling of affinity". Throughout my fieldwork, and through informal conversation with my informants the idea of 'a feeling of affinity' often emerged in order to express a sense of participation and belonging to the organisation, and the way in which this sense was linked to media practices and forms. According to many the online did not convey them with the same feeling of affinity that was provided by the printed media.

The fascinating aspect that emerged through my research was that in explaining why printed media conveyed them with a deeper feeling of affinity my informants, emphasised on the idea of materiality in addressing the importance of printed media. Most importantly they related understandings of materiality with notions of ownership, and belonging. In fact according to them the feeling of belonging is given by the material nature of their printed publication, by the fact that it provides them with something that they can own, archive, feel and smell.

Although there is not the space here to discuss it, in anthropology the relationship between materiality, ownership and identity is widely explored (Appadurai, 1986; Miller, 1998, Gosden and Marshall, 1999; Edwards and Hart, 2001). Throughout my fieldwork it emerged that my informants made an explicit link between the three, and stressed the continuing importance of printed media in their lives because they were material objects. The emphasis on materiality, needs to be understood in the larger framework of the ambivalent relationship between activists and the Internet. This emerged particularly well in an interview with CSC's director:

V: do you think that people really engage with online publications as they do with CubaSí magazine?

R: what? In general? I think certain people would rather look things up online. But the problem is that the online is so hard to associate with a particular 'product'. You just read it because it's online, but you can't really associate it with something. You can't really have an affinity with anything really. You got your websites and your newsletters but than you easily can read something else. You don't stick with it. No one owns the online.

At the moment it [the online] it's not a really good project for us. I mean we are trying to improve our website but we wouldn't give up the magazine. That's for our membership. You know people join and they need to get something in return, something that they can touch and own. You know it means something to them when they get that and it's quite important for them, they look forward to it.

As Rob suggests, in contrast to the online which no one owns or feels a real affinity to, the printed media create a sense of ownership within the organisation. It is by looking at ownership that we can better appreciate why people seem not to have the same emotional involvement with their online media as they have for their printed ones. This understanding sheds some light on the continuing role of printed media in the everyday construction of political action. It also suggests that new media/digital media are not replacing old/material ones but - as the emphasis on materiality and belonging has shown - they may be transforming their meaning.

Internet related frustrations can have a variety of different connotations (at times very personal) and different scales of intensity; depending on personal and individual situations or on the history of a particular organisation. However, exploring and describing some of the impacts they are causing is a matter of central importance for anthropologists. Especially in relation to social movements, the pervasive use of the internet technologies is modifying political action. Yet the transformations brought about by the 'technology of freedom' (Castells, 2001) are not always empowering or progressive. Within CSC, the Net is not seen merely as a space where the messages of collectives get lost, the 'online world' is seen also as a space where thanks to Google - messages are easily tracked, de-contextualised, and appropriated by other media or political organisations for counter-progressive purposes. The anxiety of the lack of control over the messages produced is a strong one and has affected people's relationship to
alternative media production in counter-progressive ways.

Ten years ago the CubaSí magazine, represented - similarly to Downing’s (1998) or Atton’s (2002) descriptions of radical and alternative media - a ‘collective space’ for debate, where members contributed freely and discussed controversial topics concerning the island. In the last ten years, however, alternative media production has changed dramatically and has seen an ‘ideological’ turn. Today, CSC’s national office has reduced people’s participation in the production of the magazine and other media forms. Furthermore, editors and contributors concentrate merely on the dissemination of ‘uncritical and positive news’ about Cuba.

The ‘ideological turn’ and focus on positive news is giving rise to discontent amongst members and local group leaders, who at times criticize the CubaSí for being too ideological. Despite discontent, however, people seem to understand why the national office needs to focus on such strategies. Indeed, people understand the fact that today, the CubaSí magazine is interconnected to the CubaUpdate newsletter and the website in a fascinating and networked process of news production for which all media texts enter the online domain. In this context, debate is no longer possible, because – as the communication officer of CSC explained - any critical stance can be appropriated from people of other media organisations who would use CSC criticism for their own agendas and claim that ‘even the Cuban Solidarity Campaign says that...’

Considering the ‘ideological turn’ - that has affected alternative media production within CSC - with reference to internet related anxieties, raises important questions on a paradox embedded in the relationship between activists and new technologies. In fact, it seems interesting that ‘technology of freedom and openness’ (Castells, 2001) is actually provoking counter-progressive processes that affect the internal politics of the people involved.

Conclusion

New technologies always bring about social transformations. This is because they transform the way in which people communicate, organise their daily routines, re-define their practices and choices. Yet, as this paper has shown with reference to the context of political action in Britain, often it is not the technology itself that brings about social transformations, but it is the human discourses and imaginations embedded in the technology, which have a profound effect on the everyday layers of social experience. This understanding enables us to map not only the core beliefs and possibilities that come with new technologies, but also the anxieties, frustrations and ambivalences that are attached to them. In this framework, therefore, it is important to understand that if internet technologies are transforming social experience, they are doing so not in a homogenising or disruptive way, but through complex and multiple processes of human negotiation. Highlighting these conflicts and negotiations, I believe, is of central importance in order to shed light on the social complexities involved in the techno-historical transformations of the last decades, and uncover the dual, contradictory character embedded in new information technologies.

I have argued that the possibilities and beliefs attached to the structure of the World Wide Web have deeply affected the way in which people understand political action and opposition. By improving the possibility of networking and ‘getting the message across’, Internet technologies have empowered activists’ understanding of media action and have transformed this into a privileged mode of oppositional politics. However, it has been shown that far from perceiving the Internet as an unproblematic and empowering force for social change, activists’ relationship to new technologies is defined by everyday frustrations, anxieties and questions on what media action really means.

This ambivalence is not surprising. Indeed, ambivalence is always present within ideological constructions, especially when they influence everyday practices and dynamics. Real life experiences always clash with ideal understandings. As argued, internet related anxieties and frustrations are challenging people’s understanding of the effectiveness of their online media action and transforming their relationship towards printed media. Furthermore, as I have discussed with reference to ‘information overload’ and the ‘lack of control over the messages produced’, internet related anxieties are transforming alternative media practices in many different ways. In this framework, if we want to address the question of whether political action has been empowered by the advent of new technologies, we must find the answer somewhere in between. It needs to be found at the interface between possibility and ambivalence; at the border between transformation and continuity.

References:


Knox, H., et al., 2006. 'Social Networks and the Study of Relations: Networks as Method, Metaphor and Form', in *Economy and Society*, 35(1) pp. 113-140


This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by‐sa/3.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.
Copy Me: Technological Change and the Consumption of Music

Nicholas White

May 7, 2009 Version 1.0

For those who worry about the cultural, economic and political power of the global media companies, the dreamed-of revolution is at hand. The industry may right now be making a joyful noise unto the Lord, but it is we, not they, who are about to enter the promised land. (Moglen 2001)

Introduction

Technological changes have political implications. Changing the way we interact with things encourages a reconsideration of the rules and institutions that have governed previous interactions with them.

The current debate about copies of recorded music using the Internet is an excellent example of this, and by examining it one may better understand the relations between people and recorded music, and between listeners and the traditional publishers of music.

While undoubtedly a great deal may be usefully said and examined in other technological changes in music recordings, I will here focus primarily on file-sharing, as it is something I have been somewhat involved in myself and hence I have significantly more knowledge 'from the inside.'

I will begin by discussing traditional definitions of 'commodity,' and then move on to a very brief overview of historical trends in copying and music recording. I will also touch upon the printing press in order to discuss the creation and rationale behind copyright laws, which form a major part the present file-sharing debate. I will then go into greater depth into the current practices of people who share music on filesharing networks, and the response by the recording industry, before embarking on an analysis of the meaning and significance of some of these new practises and dialogues.

It should be noted that I’m speaking primarily of England and the United States of America, and the situation will be somewhat different in other parts of the world.

The Meaning of ‘Commodity’

The word ‘commodity’ has been used variously to talk about items of exchange. In the capitalist market a ‘commodity’ is defined as having several key features, from which are derived appropriate rules of trade.

Commodities are also generally assumed to be rival and exclusive; that is in trading an item one loses access to it.

The most important feature of a commodity is that it be comparable to another commodity, in order that their relative values may be judged so that one may establish an exchange value for the item. Indeed Kopytoff (1986) goes so far as to claim that wherever exchange technology is introduced which allows a greater range of things to be compared (such as for example money in newly colonised regions), more objects are commodified.

Two commonly identified means of deciding on the relative value of a commodity are use value and exchange value. Use value is based upon the utility of the commodity, whereas exchange value is based upon the amount of labour that went in to creating it. (Sterne 2006:830) Different systems of exchange weigh the relative merits of utility versus production labour to value commodities differently.

Assigning value to works of art is of course a very difficult and personal task, revealing a great deal about the valuer as well as what is being valued. Several commentators have argued—Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) perhaps most strongly—that to assign an artwork an agreed-upon value in order to facilitate its exchange undermines both the personal and the transcendent nature of art, and inevitably devalues and debases it.

The History of Recorded Music

While such concepts of commodity appear to map quite easily onto most physical objects, using such terms to talk about recordings of one sort or another is generally less straightforward.

Indeed the technology of the printing press, by dramatically reducing the production cost of creating copies of written works, was an early example of the difficulty of reconciling ideas of commodity with the new properties of exchange enabled. To be more specific, by enabling near-
perfect copies of a work to be made, the qualities of rivalry and exclusivity which were assumed of a commodity were altered. While the initial creation costs of a work remained high, the cost of subsequent copies dropped dramatically, making it economically feasible to make and sell copies of works in a far less centralised manner.

In the free market the cost to produce something is the means of determining its exchange value, which becomes more problematic when means of mechanical reproduction become available. This is as the production cost differs very significantly between the item produced and its copy. Whereas the first work costs perhaps one year’s salary for an author, plus the amount for the set up of the book in the press, plus the materials needed, plus the working of the press, a great many subsequent copies may be made for only the cost of additional materials and working the press again. The exchange-value of all subsequent copies is extremely low, but does not take into account the author’s salary.

Publishers chose to create a business model in which the initial production costs of a work could be compensated by subsequent printings, which would be priced a little over the exchange value which the free market would assign. However such a model was undermined if a competitor took a work which the majorities of the market operated.

This way of business worked reasonably well, and artifically mirrored the model of scarcity under which which the majority of the market operated.

In so doing publishers legally repressed the new economic qualities printing presses bestowed on the written word—less exclusivity—and instead artificially mirrored the model of scarcity under which which the majority of the market operated.

However this model was threatened somewhat by the introduction of new technologies which dramatically decreased the expense, size and difficulty of copying music to the point that many private individuals could do so themselves. Whereas previously making unauthorised copies had been limited to large operations, new technology now enabled a much larger group of people to copy and share recorded music, independent of any external organisation. While such home-copied music was generally of noticeably poorer quality than an officially sanctioned copy, widespread use made clear that for many the virtue of sharing music was worth some degradation in quality.

Publishers were unsurprisingly hostile towards home copying of the work which they had particularly quickly, invoking the fact that such activity was technically breaking copyright laws (though these laws had been drafted with rival businesses in mind), and arguing that home copying was causing a reduction in their sales of music which would result in a smaller number of musicians able to be supported by them 1. Over time however the publishers found that there was no realistic way to stop home-copying, and resigned themselves to a position of quiet grumbling. People evidently still bought copies of music produced by publishers, due to factors such as increased sound quality and included cover artwork, and the belief that by doing so one was ensuring the continuance and success of the musician.

With the new technologies of music compression, filesharing software and cheap internet access came a far more significant threat to the business model of music publishers.

Computers on an electronically are primarily copying machines of anything digitisable—almost any task performed on a computer requires the copying of digital information across various parts of the computer. The measure of how fast information can be copied between different parts is a significant measure of how fast a computer is said to be. And so it is when networking computers together, and as such a primary focus of network engineering is ensuring copying between computers is as fast and efficient as possible. Computer networks at their core are no more than geographically insensitive copying systems.

By allowing anybody with an internet connection to share music with anyone else with an internet connection with no more effort than setting up a filesharing program, a global network of available music was created. Now anybody with internet access had free access to almost any piece of recorded music at near-or identical quality to the products of the publishers’ copies. Moreover the process of acquiring music copies using internet filesharing was faster and more convenient than the traditional vehicles offered by publishers.
The structure of the computer networks which make up the internet are by design decentralised and fault-tolerant, and as such top-down control or restriction of internet activities is very difficult. This is further compounded by its transnational nature, which renders national legislation on acceptable uses largely ineffective, as one may simply access the desired material on a computer in a country which has no such legal restrictions. Thus we get the well-known quote by John Gilmore: "The net interprets censorship as damage and routes around it." While early filesharing networks such as Napster were centralised and hence could be easily shut down by stopping a few computers, most are now designed to take advantage of the decentralised nature of the internet, and thus remain active regardless of the status of any particular computer in the network.

**Filesharing: Individuals**

The first point to note regarding the practices of individuals is the enormous popularity of filesharing as a means of acquiring recordings of music. Despite appeals and threats from music publishers the usage of filesharing networks is commonplace among those comfortable with technology. Included among these are many artists signed to record labels, though many others reject filesharing citing reliance on a business model which would be undermined by their doing so.

The importance within filesharing networks of making newly downloaded music available for at least a few days is very frequently emphasised, though technically it’s very rarely enforced (not least because it’s very difficult technically to do - as the networks have been engineered from the ground-up to facilitate the free copying of data). The process of only keeping a downloaded file available until one’s own download is complete and then immediately removing access to others is strongly frowned upon, and referred to as ‘leeching’.

Some commentators have suggested that such emphases can lead one to fruitfully consider treating filesharing as a gift economy (Barbrook 1998), but as Zervas (2008: 16) points out, the typically very diffuse, vague and anonymous social connections between exchange partners renders such a frame of analysis inappropriate.

That copyright law is being broken is very widely known by participants, but evidently is not regarded as a valid reason to change their habits. Indeed many who are more deeply involved in the filesharing community have vocally opposed (with varying degrees of sophistication) current copyright regimes as inappropriate and inapplicable in the era of the internet.

**Filesharing: The Publishing Industry**

Probably the largest and best organised of such opposition groups call themselves the ‘free culture’ movement. Inspired heavily by the ‘free software’ movement before them, at the centre of their beliefs are that it is an ethical imperative to allow the sharing of digital work, and in many cases also explicitly allow others to use one’s work in their own creations. This is accomplished through a series of copyright licences, the most popular of which are produced by the Creative Commons foundation, and allow several choices as to how one’s work may be used. Some of these licenses, referred to as ‘share-alike’ licenses by creative commons, and more broadly as ‘copyleft’ licenses, actively encourage the sharing of a work, by allowing one to modify or incorporate the work into their own work however they choose, providing that the resultant work is also released under the same sharable licence.

The response from the music publishers was unsurprisingly less enthusiastic. After cutting the head off Napster only to find a hundred new networks spring up, the publishers started an aggressive campaign to sell the idea that music recordings ought to be treated as any physical commodity, and moreover that copying a recording was no different to stealing from a shop. Indeed the rhetoric of ‘stealing’ and ‘theft’ was employed in a great deal by the industry, in an attempt to ensure that any discussion of filesharing would be framed in terms implying that recordings were no different from physical items.

When it became clear that a significant number of people were not swayed by their advertisements, and filesharing networks were technically nigh-impossible to dismantle, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), soon followed by the British Phonographic Industry (BPI), started the highly controversial practice of suing individuals who made their copies available on filesharing networks for copyright infringement. With estimates of numbers of people sharing copyrighted material reaching the millions it was clear that the lawsuits were not intended to directly target each individual offender, but rather scare enough people into stopping to make the filesharing networks less attractive and useful. Indeed it appears that industry hoped that by targeting prolific ‘seeders’ (that is people who share a large amount of content) they

---

1 This is an innovation first used in the free software movement, by which one allows redistribution of a work providing certain conditions are met.
2 This effectively turns copyright law on its head, and has hence been described as “a form of intellectual jujitsu.” (Williams 2002)
would change the economic situation to one in which the best path for the individual (according to classical game-theory) would be to only download what they needed and share as little as possible, hence initiating the conditions for a tragedy of the commons type scenario. Thus far however such tactics have primarily served to provoke resentment towards the industry, thus for many adding the motivation of fighting a system seen as destructive.

Industry groups have also lobbied for and won significantly more stringent copyright laws, such as the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) in the USA and the European Union Copyright Directive (EUCD) in the European Union. One of the major fears of such laws is to make the breaking of copy-protection measures on digital copies illegal. Copy-protection is as mentioned above a very difficult thing to institute on computers, whose basic design is to copy data. As such the recording industry found that any copy protection scheme they added to their copies was quickly dismantled, so they turned instead to the courts in an attempt to dissuade people from breaking the protection measures. These too appear to have done little to stop the breaking of copy protection, but have further incensed and solidified many against the recording industry and their lobbyists.

In their public statements recording industry bodies have repeatedly appealed to the need to buy copies only from publishers, as otherwise musicians can not be paid. Leaving aside debates about the percentage of profits which major record publishers pass on to their musicians, in repeatedly justifying their position as enabling musicians to be paid they strongly implied that no other business model was possible. Therefore, the argument went, if one wanted a society with full-time musicians there was no choice but to treat recorded music as a commodity and reject filesharing.

Such lack of imagination from the record publishers is not very surprising, as conservatism towards new technologies is entirely natural, and of course they have a vested interest in the system as it existed before (Mohy 2002: 220). However a large variety of alternative business models have been suggested by others which attempt to work with the new features of recorded music on the computer network, rather than against them, and as such become more profitable the more music is shared (at zero cost). Suggestions include various donation / microdonation schemes, embedded advertising, and using recordings as a loss-leader for live performances and merchandise.

Analysis

Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) argued that the ‘culture industry’ represented a major homogenizing and pacifying force to culture, thus for the first time in history neutralising the power of art to “protest against the petrified relations under which people lived” (Adorno 1991: 2) and thus ensuring the continuance of the existing system of inequality. Moreover, they claimed, the power of the industry was inescapable, as it tended to subsume and pacify elements of protest and define the frame of cultural discussion, as well as by more direct means such as wielding massive top-down power over the processes of production and distribution.

The argument follows that the primary role of the culture industry is to keep all members of society accepting of the political and economic systems of inequality—or at least too apathetic to do anything about them. Its role then was largely to facilitate the smooth running of other major areas of repression, with which its leaders are intimately connected (Adorno & Horkheimer 1972: 4).

However if this were the case one would have expected the ‘culture industry’ to respond very positively to the phenomenon of filesharing, as it allowed for the far wider and easier dissemination of the normative ideologies embedded within their recordings. After all, while such technology makes it easy for any copy of music to be widely distributed regardless of source, in practise a significant majority of copies available were originally produced by the ‘culture industry.’ (Sterne 2006: 831)

One must therefore conclude that while the wellbeing of the wider systems of power may well be an agenda of the culture industry, of higher priority is its own profitability.

A point that should be emphasised is the political power which the music industry still wields. In being the source for the majority of music in a culture, with its inevitable ideological payload, the influence the industry has on the minds of listeners is still enormously significant, regardless of whether they continue to enjoy a monopoly over distribution.

Kopytoff (1986) defines commodity in opposition to the singular. Copies of music on a filesharing network could then be considered perfect commodities. However using the calculation of exchange value based upon the level of sacrifice necessary to acquire a copy one sees the exchange value drop to zero, (Zerva 2008: 14) in which case copies could be considered to fall well outside of the realm of commodities, which at their core are tradeable.
What such definitional confusion flags up is the inappropriateness of trying to fit music copying into categories of commodity, which were created for items with quite different economic properties. In particular, the meaning of exchange—of voluntarily losing access to one thing in order to gain access to another—has changed, as in the world of the computer network one need not lose access to anything in order to gain access to another.

So if exchange value drops to zero for recorded music in the age of filesharing, how may one determine relative value? An easy answer is to turn instead to use value, that is the value derived by each individual of actually listening to the music recording. Obviously then values will differ for each listener, which is no problem as value-judgements are no longer necessary for successful exchange.

One could then argue, as Sterne suggests (2006: 831), that music before recording technologies were available was valued according to the effect on an individual upon listening, that is to say on use value. As recorded music became easily available, tied up in physical items tied to the wider market, music was valued more in terms of exchange. And now as filesharing once more removes music from the realm of the market by virtue of changing the rules of its exchange, focus again is on use value. A somewhat analogous process is claimed by proponents of free software, where the process of commoditisation is seen as "more about clearing away a temporary confusion, than it is about some strange and amazing departure that's suddenly occurred." (Moglen 2007)

One should take care not to overstate the ephemeral nature of digital copies of recorded music. Sterne points to the continuance of collecting and stokpiling more music than one is able to listen to as evidence of a sense of ownership and possession of one's music files, in the same way that one does in the case of physical objects. (2006: 831–832)

Determining the extent to which the new technology associated with file-sharing is a factor behind new political ideas is of course impossible, but one may usefully discuss the political tendencies embedded in the technologies.

Earlier distribution technologies had quite different qualities. For example the limited bandwidth available to over-the-air transmissions (eg. radio and television) made the establishment of a governing body to decide who could broadcast on which frequency (if at all) quite necessary and natural. Decisions about how to make such choices often involved money, and as such large entrenched interests had another advantage over smaller organisations in doing business and spreading their particular viewpoints over the airwaves. The decentralisation and allowance for modular growth offered by the internet has significantly reduced the need for such a governing body. Of course many argue that stronger governance of the internet is important, the absence being that it is not necessary to the successful functioning of the network as a whole.4

Central to general computing, compression technology and computer networking has long been the striving for faster copying of anything digital, utterly regardless of concepts such as property rights over certain digital data. As Sterne puts it "The primary, illegal uses of the mp3 are not aberrant uses or an error in the technology; they are its highest moral calling . . . These are the instructions encoded into the very form of the mp3." (2006: 839) However one needs to be careful with such statements, as they tend to carry an air of technological determinism which denies individuals agency and ignores instances of difference.

When disembodied from their physical forms and instead made to take digital forms, ideas of copyright and commodity have often been questioned. The first industry to be exposed to the power of computer networks as a distribution and indeed creation channel was computer programming, which was the sphere in which the radical take of copyright 'copyleft' (see above) was envisoned. The place of software was reconsidered and concluded not to lie in the commodity realm, but somewhere quite different: "The technological information about the terms on which we and the 'digital brains' exist; that's not a product. That's a culture." (Moglen 2007)

In many quarters the same is now being said about music, and the place of the record publishing industry is being recast by those engaged in file-sharing, from the purveyors of culture to an entity which seeks to profit by restricting access to a shared culture.

"Recent discussion of laws regarding 'network neutrality' however illustrate the limits of such a view, as most people connect to the internet via an internet service provider, who could artificially alter the operation of parts of the network to their customers."

References


Sterne, J., 2006. ‘The mp3 as cultural artifact’, New Media & Society, California: Sage


This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by‐sa/3.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.
Collaborative Learning in the Digital Learning Environment – People, Technology and Pedagogical Practices

Maria Paulina de Assis
paulina.assis@uol.com.br
Programa de Educação: Currículo
Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo – PUCSP
São Paulo, Brasil

Maria Elizabeth Bianconcini de Almeida
bbalmeida@uol.com.br
Programa de Educação: Currículo
Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo – PUCSP
São Paulo, Brazil

Abstract
This study outlines a three-dimensional approach to collaborative learning which embraces professionals undergoing training, digital technology and pedagogical practices in the Digital Learning Environment within educational contexts for adult education, (in either formal or informal education). It shows the results of an exploratory study carried out in a Master’s and Doctoral course in education and the curriculum, with the support of the open virtual learning environment. It also recommends undertaking a further study, to analyze the standard of the contributions to on-line discussions, by means of the Critical Inquiry model devised by Garrison (2008): It argues that stress should be laid on the theoretical constructivist approach (adopted by CSCL–Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning) to underpin the pedagogical practices involved in the preparation, planning and implementation of educational activities, whether in the academic or professional environment, or other kinds of professionalized activities of a less formal nature.

Introduction
An undertaking of a national and international scope involves a concern with education at every level and stresses factors regarding quality standards, and digital and social inclusion. In 2000, on an international level, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) expressed a commitment to Education for all by 2015, during the World Conference on Education in Dakar. The goals which were to be fulfilled by countries (among them Brazil) included improving every aspect of quality in education (UNESCO, 2007) with a view to allowing the development of the kind of skills required for citizens in the 21st Century (Cradler et al., 2002). In the national sphere, a wide range of initiatives have been put into effect since 2000, in particular, the launching of a project in 2008 which sought to connect all the public urban schools in Brazil to Internet broadband by 2010 (Ministry of Communications, 2008). Another important Federal Government educational scheme is UCA (“One Computer for each Student – an ongoing process”) (MEC-SEED, 2008).

“If the current plans for education are put into effect, the 21st Century will become the century in which we have radically changed the standards and value of education” (Laurillard, 2008, p. 319). In the view of this author, so far we have failed to find out how to achieve the most effective kind of education either for the excluded or those dissatisfied with the present system. In seeking a response to the educational needs of the country and meeting the targets set by UNESCO and its plans for implementing them in Brazil, one must be aware of the importance of preparing educationalists for the new circumstances in which they find themselves. Researchers from the Center for Curriculum and Training in the Post-Graduate Educational Program at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, Brazil have carried out a number of extension activities, principally with a view to training teachers in the use of digital information and communication technology. These activities can also be applied to digital environments concerned with research into methodology and new pedagogical approaches (Valente & Almeida, 2007). There are several problems involved in introducing the plans, one of which is ensuring “the development of practices that are based on a particular kind of technology which is defined as the starting-point for pedagogical aims” (Almeida, 2009a, p. 276). However, attempts have been made with regard to training educational personnel, and making use of virtual learning environments, and these have been undertaken for the public education network (Almeida & Prado, 2008).

In the business environment, the digital Information and Communication Technology supports the success of modern companies and supplies governments with an efficient infrastructure. At the same time, they enhance the value of learning and the administration efficiency of teaching institutions. There is a need for professionals to cater for the new requirements, to people who have a
reasonable knowledge and experience of this new technology, without being involved in computer platforms and the world of software (UNESCO Division of Higher Education, 2002). As Brown points out: “the world is becoming a much more complex and interconnected place and moving at a much faster rate” requiring people to have a different kind of literacy: “all the issues require a public that has the skills to employ the new systematic kind of literacy and not just the traditional kind.” This author also states that it is likely that the current methods of teaching and learning “will not be sufficient to prepare them for the lives they will lead in the 21st Century” (Brown, 2008, p. xvi). There is no doubt that new skills are needed to handle these new kinds of technology and as a result, incorporating new kinds of literacy poses new educational challenges since students and educationalists must be familiar with the new digital resources available. In other words, the educational community must make increasing use of digital technology and learn to express itself by means of this new kind of language (Valente, 2008).

CSCL-Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning, Constructing Knowledge and Learning

The Digital Learning Environments arose from the use of computers and the Internet and their aim was both to attain educational goals in formal education and enable students to acquire professional qualifications in business, as well as in organizations that currently offer every kind of training course for a wide range of activities. These environments are based on software systems that have been adapted to educational activities and generally provide resources for interaction between those involved in teaching and learning, together with other resources for assessing and monitoring groups of students. Owing to its wide range of applications, these environments are not always able to offer the tools that can enable collaborative work among the participants to be carried out. In a situation where teachers, students and practices are fully integrated, one must create the conditions for a wide array of learning opportunities to bring together teachers, students and practices even though a great extent, these elements either influence or are influenced by each other. Thus, when addressing the issue of the use of technology in education, it should not be regarded in an isolated way and as only being concerned with the latest or most sophisticated educational software system. Rather, it requires studying a theory of education that underpins the pedagogical approach that is adopted.

In response to the pedagogical need to use technology in the 1990s, software systems began to emerge that were designed for group learning and which had features that could allow learning to take place through collaborative work or computer-supported collaborative learning – CSCL (Stahl et al., 2006). These systems were closely tied to the concept of constructing a kind of knowledge which can mediate between individual and group learning and this makes it a more definite term than “learning” (ibid.). Learning is “an internal unobservable process that results in changes of belief, attitude or skills” and constructing knowledge “results in the creation or modification of public knowledge... available to be worked on and used by other people.” (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2003, p. 3). Educational software systems have been used in the same way in Brazilian university teaching and corporate education, as a means of carrying out teaching and learning activities. These activities can now be enhanced by the opportunities for greater interactivity provided by the arrival of the so-called Web 2.0 (Almeida & Assis, 2008; Cress & Kimmerle, 2008; Rhode, 2009). Owing to intrinsic features that can enable collaborative work to be done, these kinds of technology can allow good educational practices to be put into effect. Education through experience (Merriam & Cafarella, 1999) is lent support by Dewey, for whom there is a strong emphasis on the subjective quality of a student’s experience, which explains why teachers have to understand the students’ past experiences in learning (Dewey, 1997). Dewey argues that educationalists must first understand the nature of human experience. He seeks to combine two tenets – continuity and interaction. The personal learning experience is a function of how past experience interacts with the present situation. For example, the way that we experience learning a particular subject will depend on how the teacher organizes and facilitates the teaching activities, as well as past experiences of other learning situations (Dewey, 1997). At the same time, it is not a question of any kind of experience: educational experiences associated with reflective thinking will be more meaningful when applied to subsequent learning situations. (Almeida, 2009b).

Like Dewey, other theorists have underlined the importance of the student’s active role in the teaching/learning process and stressed that it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that the right learning conditions are established to enable this to be carried out. Knowledge is constructed and not simply conveyed and construction results from a learner being engaged in an activity, which means that knowledge must be embedded in a context.
Thus, the process of acquiring meaning, which is an inherent part of learning, "requires the articulation and representation of what is learnt". (Jonassen, 1999, pp. 2-6). Meaning is conceived and indexed by experience (Brown et al. 1989, p. 8). Moreover, Freire points out that in genuine education, one learns with someone else and thus teaching is a form of communal learning that allows knowledge to be constructed. (Freire, 2004).

**Pedagogical Practices and CSCL**

Learning is an inner and private process, but it is influenced by pedagogical practices and the environment in which it occurs or, put in other terms, the prevailing learning conditions. "The conditions are what can exert control and effect changes, regardless of the characteristics and needs of the students." (Pozo, 2002, p. 90). From this perspective, teaching activities should provide contexts and support that will help people to find meaning in the learning environment, hence it is necessary to ensure that teaching can give rise to a "meaningful experience that must be constructed, tested and revised". (Dufy & Jonassen, 1992, p.5).

One should be aware that the different features of Digital Learning Environments – depending on how they are used – can either benefit or impede the learning process among people with different degrees of proficiency in mastering the technology, and can also affect the teaching methods employed in the classroom (Almeida & Assis, 2008). Thus it should be recognized that the characteristics of the students, as well as the activities employed for pedagogical practices, (among which one must include their choice of strategies and technological resources), can affect the teaching/learning process. This set of variables takes account of learning conditions in the following three areas:

- the professional being trained, with regard to his/her condition as a student and the preferred teaching strategies, technological, linguistic and communicative skills and learning strategies that are carried out in everyday pedagogical activities with the aid of these environments;
- the pedagogical practices, (including teaching strategies) employed by the teacher, together with the teacher’s means of communicating with the students and structuring a defined program;
- digital technology, which includes the equipment, media, took connections, and software systems used in the educational activities. Although collaborative learning does not depend on the back-up support of digital technology environments to allow it to occur, it can be assisted by these environments, in particular when they have the means to bring about active involvement. As an example of collaborative learning, Cress & Kimmerle provide the results of some work that was carried out with wiki. Their analysis is based on the theoretical constructs, assimilation and accommodation of Piaget with regard to three factors: the social which is facilitated by wiki, the cognitive which applies to the users and the way these processes are influenced by each other. The authors claim that: "accommodation and assimilation do not only take place internally (in people’s cognitive systems), but also externally (in the social system wiki)" (Cress & Kimmerle, 2008).

The term collaborative learning has also been associated with communities of practice which, in a broad approach, can be regarded as groups that are involved in attaining particular objectives within a specific undertaking: the interactions enable collective learning to be carried out within the groups and their practices reflect their social relations and the extent to which they achieve their objectives (Cousin & Deepwell, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Although they can bring about the construction of knowledge in communities of practice, they are not concerned with formal education. However, in formal education, there must be a commitment to results and this should lead to a stress on planning teaching activities. Furthermore, this planning should take account of the characteristics of the learners - their socio-cultural background, their previous experience with technology and their preferred teaching and learning strategies. (Laurillard, 2009).

Digital technology that is usually associated with collaborative learning and the construction of collective knowledge can provide resources that can assist their organization and interaction, while not being neutral. They are endowed with the features of the socio-cultural and historical contexts in which they were created: "ICTs do not have any meaning in isolation - they have meaning only in relation to an implicit or explicit purpose". (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2005). A particular kind of technology that is capable of being applied in useful and creative ways must first be adapted to the needs of the group so that they become aware of its potential use; knowing how to handle the technology is not enough to use it properly. (Damasin, 2006). The influence of technology on human behavior is not a stable factor: "form and meaning arise during social interaction from a mutual influence between the technology and the users" (Overdijk & van Diggelen, 2008, p. 3). "Instructional methods are deliberate and planned goal-oriented pedagogical activities where learning outcomes and the teacher's and students' roles and activities are clearly defined and described." (Kanuka et al., 2007, p. 261).
In the same way as the chosen technology, the pedagogical practices will influence the standards attained by those involved in the group activities which, in their turn will influence the outcome of the learning. Kanuka et al. (2007) examined the influence of the communication activities of five groups on the standard of the contributions made to the on-line discussion. This was done by employing the Critical Inquiry model devised by Garrison (2000) which outlines 4 stages of cognitive presence in which a participant can be engaged: 1. Triggering event – the stage in which the students become acquainted with a problem; 2. Exploration – where the most striking features are explored; 3. Integration – the interpretations of colleagues are combined; 4. Resolution – the stage in which the problem is solved. (Garrison et al., 2000). In their study, the authors examined the influence of the five groups on the following activities: group techniques, debates, invited experts, Webquest and reflective deliberation. The results showed that the highest percentages of contributions were found in the Webquest and debates activities, the reasons being as follows: they are well structured; they establish clearly defined roles and responsibilities; and they stimulate the students to share their ideas with each other. Garrison described the performance of the students as cognitive presence - that is "the extent to which the participants in any particular configuration of a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication". (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 89).

**Exploratory studies**

In the first academic semester of 2008, an exploratory study was carried out in which LabSpace¹ was employed as a means of teaching and learning in the area of Digital Technology and the Curriculum, in a program involving 14 Masters and Doctoral students at PUC, São Paulo. The subject which was classroom-based, was followed by integrated on-line activities, with the aid of LabSpace. There were conventional classroom lessons, both classroom and virtual seminars (which combined individual and pair work and was based on Discussion Forums), FlashMeeting (a webconference tool) and a wiki. As well as this, the students made use of an e-mail group to send messages and give information about the program. The learning activity that concerned how to cope with the technology was carried out in an integrated way and this helped the students undertake the other activities involved in the subject. During the experience, it was apparent that some students had difficulties in handling the tools. The way of addressing this problem was to employ three kinds of activities:

1) setting up workshops at the beginning of the course in which LabSpace was shown to the students and everybody had the chance to test their tools;

2) while the course was being conducted, the students were supported by one of the students who acted as a monitor and supervised their way of coping with the various tools that were employed for the pedagogical practices;

3) the colleagues offered mutual support whenever any problem arose.

The results of this study showed there was a need for research into the question of how to integrate the technology with the curriculum and the way this might affect teaching and learning. It also showed that what determines the pedagogical potential of a particular kind of technology is "a set of elements that are linked to the character of the group regarding the way they make use of the technology, the features of pedagogical practices and the kind of conditions that allow them access to the technology". (Assis & Almeida, 2008). Carrying out pedagogical practices could be a key feature in teaching and learning situations that are mediated by digital technology: the way that the question of preferences and the difficulties students and teachers have with the technology is dealt with, can determine the success or failure of an educational program.

There will be a further study (which will be undertaken from August to December, 2009), the aim of which is to find out about the construction of knowledge as it is reflected in on-line discussions. This will be conducted by analyzing the collaborative interactions that can be carried out in different kinds of pedagogical practices in another classroom subject in the same program, with the aid of LabSpace. The Communities of Inquiry model devised by Garrison et al. (2000, op.cit.) will be adopted for this study and the contributions will be classified in categories in accordance with the cognitive presence construct that is divided into four levels: 1) Triggering event, 2) Exploration, 3) Integration and 4) Resolution.

**Higher Education and Adult Learning**

In view of the fact that this study concerns higher education and adult learning, the outcome of individual learning must have a practical value either for conducting academic research, fulfilling teaching responsibilities, carrying out investigative

---

¹ LabSpace is a virtual laboratory of open learning, a project of KMI-Knowledge Media Laboratory, of Open University. The experiment quoted may be seen at LabSpace website, at the link: [http://labspace.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=3310]
research (or other kinds of work), or for constructing collective knowledge. It is important to set up suitable on-line environments for pedagogical practices that can be accessed and managed easily in a way that can encourage the involvement of students and teachers.

Pedagogical practices are essential in formal education – unlike the case of informal learning, they can take place in communities that exist in settings far removed from the school environment – because in this area learning must be possessed as a kind of product, where it is expressed in terms of results and through the student’s public display of knowledge. In this way, the purpose of schools is to teach and its main responsibility is to educate.

Encouragement should be given to educational experiments in the use of educational software systems and other kinds of digital technology, but it is essential for this undertaking to have an underlying theoretical basis. Laurillard argues "in order to challenge digital technologies to deliver a genuinely enhanced learning experience, it is possible to use the educational theories already developed about what it takes to learn". (Laurillard, 2009, pp. 5-6). This writer offers a frame of reference that includes conventional teaching and learning methods, as well as those prepared for the digital environments, and supports the idea of adopting a conversational model for collaborative learning based on social constructionism (Vygotsky, 1978, in Laurillard, 2009). She suggests that the complexity of the learning process is a "continual iteration between teachers and learners and between the levels of theory and practice". (Ibid, p.10). This kind of approach is suitable for integrated methods and types of technology in the teacher/learning process which can support pedagogical practices with the aid of CSCL.

Conclusion

This article outlines a three-dimensional approach to define the kind of pedagogical practices that are suited to the Digital Learning Environment within a particular educational context that involves adult education, in either the formal or informal learning environment. In view of the fact that people relate to technology in different ways, the definition of pedagogical practices for certain educational activities must recognize the value of mediating between people and technology in these kinds of contexts. Hence, the crucial role of an approach of a theoretical kind is that it is able to support pedagogical practices that can be chosen by the teacher when preparing, planning and carrying out educational activities, whether they be courses or subjects in the academic field, or professional training in companies, or even other kinds of professionalized activities of a less formal character.

References


ARDAC – Anthropology Reviews: Dissent and Cultural Politics


ttp://commons.ucalgary.ca.


http://orgwis.gmd.de/gerry.


This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.
Film Review
Avatar and the Racism of Virtue
The Na'vi are Americans (in a reverse mirror image)

Hagai van der Horst

PhD student, The Centre for Media and Film Studies, the School or Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London
hagaiivdh@gmail.com

James Cameron's film, Avatar, offers its viewers one of the most morally kiltilling journeys; an empathy of seeing the world through someone else's eyes, or indeed, very body. However, Avatar's ideology can be at times puzzling and unsettling. Put simply, the film invokes colonial and imperial tropes under a cloak of ambiguity, with the wrongdoers appearing overtly virtuous and those wronged seeming implicitly lacking in moral sense. Through such moral inconsistency, the Na’vi (the oppressed indigenous population in the film) feature as an empty parable to Nature, outside of History, unproductive (they merely exist), incapable of organisation or unity, pure (like the flora and fauna), animalistic, chauvinistic and potentially murderous (like Nature itself: beautiful yet dangerous). In stark contrast, Americans/Westerners (the Na’vi’s oppressors), appear as sole moral agents in a universe of rigidly moral creatures (that is, acting teleologically, not out of free choice or reason). It is Americans alone who are capable of realizing both salvation or damnation for Pandora, of initiating both great harm and great good, of both granting or denying rights as they see fit.

The Na’vi then, are not a metaphor for Iraq's 2003 occupation, First Nations Americans since 1492 or current day dispossessed indigenous populations. Rather, they are merely the embodiment of Western nostalgic yearning to its own benevolent, pre-sin self (remember the opening narration of the film “I was dreaming of flying... I was free”). The Na’vi are a dream realized only to its dreamer, a metaphor whose goal is its own source. Furthermore, the Na’vi are Americans, only in a reverse mirror image. The more rational, technological, calculative and materialist the Americans/Westerners are, the more irrational, spontaneous, mystical and backward the Na’vi are (see for example, Baumann, 2004: 20). Those who transcend space and time for mere adventure – yet are uprooted and estranged to their environment – yawn to become authentic and unified with God and nature, even if ‘un-evolved’, rooted and geo graphically and socially fixed. Think of the paraplegic protagonist played by Sam Worthington, Jake Sully (or perhaps ‘sullied’, or ‘corrupted’). Unable to feel the warm sand with his own legs he embodies such figures of speech as ‘uprooted’ or not having one’s ‘feet on the ground’.

Thus, Camron’s Na’vi are reduced and stigmatised (along with their metaphor’s suggested key sources; First Nation Americans, Iraqis or displaced indigenous populations) through regimes of representations comparable to those which prompted white Europeans to occupy such places as Pandora in the first place. Although aiming to highlight the plight of the Na’vis of this world, Avatar manages to standardize some of the ignorance and stereotypes which 'white Europeans' have about the 'New World'.

The evidence is plentiful:

- The Na’vi society is clanliness and based on nepotism and monarchy, not meritocracy or democracy. Throughout the film, a centralist, heritable authority appears intrinsic to the Na’vi’s nature.
- The Na’vi’s matrimonial rites resemble a stereotypical, tabloidic, Eurocentric views of non-Westerners. The Na’vi hold arranged, not free, marriages and consider copulation as an act of matrimony (as in unpractised Jewish law). Choice, if exists, seem to be the prerogative of males alone.

---

1 See Matthew Fike's analysis (2005) of Jung's idea of the "primitive psychology.”
2 To paraphrase Thomas Paine from the Rights of Man. Paine writes;"Toleration is not the opposite of intolerance, but is the counterpart of it. Both are despotisms. The one assumes to itself the right of withholding liberty of Conscience and the other of granting it“ (1791/1914:85). This theme will be further examined below.
3 To use George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s schema for a metaphor as source-path-goal (1980).
4 On Otherness incarnated into a reduced sameness see Robert Young (2004: 161). See also Barthes (1972: 151). Homi Bhabha’s notion of colonial mimicry (1996) also seems relevant to such discussion of an undifferentiated, still subjugated, ‘equal’ Other.
5 Gerd Baumanns write "Orientalism is thus not a simple binary opposition of ‘us = good’ and ‘them = bad’, but a very shrewd mirrored reversal of what is good in us [still] bad in them, but what got twisted in us [still] remains straight in them.”
6 For example, see Michael Douc on Liberal imperialism (International Security 32, no. 3, Winter 2007/08).
The Na'vi move in groups, and at times in complete unison and uniformity, like herd animals or ant swarms (think of the tribal chanting circle around Grace at the Tree of Souls). Individual inclinations appear to be rare as the Na'vi take their elders and handed down traditions unquestionably and uncritically. The Na'vi appear to merely exist (like life itself or daylight), that is, outside of time, History, polity or societal structures. In some scenes the camera moves into the village and finds the Na'vi simply standing, huddling, as they mostly have no place to go to, at no particular time and for no particular reason. Indeed, Western anthropologists also used to think of Arabs as existing inseparably to their desert surroundings, as if an indivisible part of their ecological and wildlife systems (see for example, Steet, 2000: 51).

As opposed to the technocratic and greedy 'Westerns' who control their environment to excess, the Na'vi create very little. Congenitally passive, illiterate and un-adaptive ('lazy', yet with an 'aura of childlike happiness'), they are incapable of generating or inventing anything beyond random decorations. The Na'vi female heroine in the film, Neytiri (played by Zoe Saldana), shows no interest to learn about her lover's world or culture, and years of violent clashes did not stop the Na'vi from using arrows against metal shields. The obsession with warriors and poisoned arrows, in the light of their historic disunity, naturalises the Na'vi as inherently warlike and impenetrable. Such totalising views resonate with 19th century anthropology which saw its object of study, namely other cultures, as finite and part inhuman, subjected to spurious classifications and observations.

The film's messianic ending crystallises that the Na'vi people indeed exist for the redemption of a few Americans, not vice versa. The more savage the aggressor ('Bad America I') the more the need for a saviour ('Good America II'). The Na'vi are a mere therapeutic prop caught in this internal dialogue of the West with itself. Hence the duality of Dr. Grace Augustine (played by Sigourney Weaver). On the one hand, she is the scientist who invented the Avatars' technology used by the occupiers. On the other hand, "Grace," meaning the Christian belief in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings (Grace's last name, Augustine, alludes to the foundational Christian theologian St. Augustine of Hippo). Christianity, then, is used both as a subliminal virtue narrating the film as well as being, incidentally, one of the key motifs of European cultural imperialism. Think of the Avatar-run Augustine School, named after Grace. On the one hand, the image of Grace surrounded Na'vi children, staring at her in awe, is reminiscent to similar pious imagery of Christ. On the other hand, it is reminiscent to the horrific church-run, forced boarding schools for native populations (the Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, noted in his 2008 formal apology that such so called residential schools indeed were meant to "kill the Indian in the child").

It is only after the planet of Pandora "samples" Grace (using Grace's own term), that it answers the prayer of its "chosen" one, Jake Sully, the all-American 'stupid' (of the "jarhead clan") salvationist Messiah. Indeed, Jake's first encounters on Pandora include a form of baptism and standing illuminated in a near crucified position. Only a white American, so it seems, can unite the Na'vi tribes who are incapable of doing so on their own, even in the face of great peril.

Indeed, part of the draw and uplifting message of the film is that you, the (male) viewer, too can be a saviour. This is clear from the environmental message of the film. Apparently, the polluters of the earth, those who cause the razing of rainforest communities, are not you, one of the million viewers of the film (since you were already invited to experience being a mythological leader of "the people." As their saviour, you cannot be at the same time that which they need saving from). Rather, it is the unexplained, impenetrable evil of a maddening general and a few mercenaries. Yet, for the cinematic fantasy to work, all stories, places and circumstances must be interchangeable. The Na'vi appear as the 'universal-prototype' oppressed indigenous population. Being a generalised template of one-size-fits-all victimhood – accurate for all times and places, not any one time or place – no particular culprits need to be addressed (apart from the usual generalised templates of corporate greed, chauvinism, small mindedness, 'few bad apples', and of course, pure evil itself). In contrast, the virtue in the film appears unlimited and specific: a complete salvation by the all-American, white Christian hero. The Na'vi may connote First Nation Americans (bows and arrows, body decorations, names such as "Last Shadow"), or Iraq's 2003 occupation (through wording such as

8 See Mutua Makau's model of the "Savages, Victims and Aggressors" (2001).
“hearts and minds”; fighting “terror with terror”; “martyrdom”; the soldiers who, back at home, “fight for freedom”; or Pandora’s lucrative minerals resembling Middle Eastern oil). However, these metaphors are a mere rhetoric, a play between symbols, not between symbols and a specific people, reality or history. Such poetics tell us that suffering, either in 1492 or 2003, in Southern Iraq or in the North, in Burma or Sri-Lanka, can be lumped under a general application of the ‘human condition’ (that is, the American “human condition”): eternalised, de-contextualised and de-historicised, ready for mass consumption.

For example, think of the heartrending scene with Neytiri’s mother, Mo’at, wailing at the destruction of the Hometree. Is it not exactly the point that to mourn such mythical image – the ‘home maker’ next to the ruins of her home – is exactly to re-enact the violence: of turning someone’s actual biography into an amalgamated, ephemeral, universal icon. Is it not critical to know whether the person whose tragedy is addressed is a rainforest Amerindian, Sunni, Shia or Kurd? Is it not ignorance which lumps all distinctiveness and specificities together which got the US and Britain into Iraq in the first place? If the image of the wailing mother is interchangeable: Sunni or Shia, Hutu or Tutsi, Southern Sudanese or Northern Sudanese, so can be Americans/Westerner’s attitudes. Humanitarianism and political intervention too can be arbitrary and interchangeable (using both aid and development or self-serving diplomacy or military intervention), both and at the same time savours and destroyers.

Avatar the film goes a long way to popularise an important message within a very confined format. However, in the final analysis, it seems that the virtue presented in the film is too often an Avatar (that is, an incarnation or embodiment) for the vices it sets to confront.

Bibliography

* One asks: What are the politics of recognition which allow pity for this wailing mother as an individual yet which mask the structural factors which constitute her tragedy. For example, that, conceivably, 20 per cent of Iraqi casualties are children under 18? This guesstimate was shared with me by Richard Garfield, a leading writer of the Lancet report on Iraqi casualties (personal email correspondence, 27 September 2007). The 2006 Lancet report estimated that between March 2003 and June 2006 there were 454,965 excess deaths related to the war.
Opinion Articles

ARDAC – Anthropology Reviews: Dissent and Cultural Politics

ALTERMODERN > Journeys, Global Cultures, Fragmentations
Narrative of a fine day: 
Calabrian mafia and 
the appropriation of 
violence in south Italy

Stavroula Pipyrou

Department of Anthropology
Durham University
stavroula.pipyrou@durham.ac.uk

It was dawn, and the city was asleep when the picciotti (emissaries) decided to act: a sign that they wanted to avoid any massacre. Their intention was rather to provoke damage and to launch an unmistakable and devastating message. How else could the device triggered in front of the offices of the General Attorney of Reggio Calabria be explained? A simple device, assembled though by professional hands. A device which could have the potential, in the case that it fully exploded, to destroy the exteriors of all the offices in Cimino Street.

This is how the article featured on La Repubblica introduces the bomb explosion at the offices of the General Attorney of Reggio Calabria on the 4th of January 2010. Behind the bombing is suspected to be the 'Ndrangheta; the Calabrian mafia. The first article that covers the event is carefully articulated. Before any description of the facts some powerful statements are offered. The city was asleep... a sign that they did not want to kill anyone... professionals assembled the bomb but it did not fully explode... the 'Ndrangheta communicates rather than violates human lives. Ambivalence then as to the interpretation of the event sets a particular mood from the beginning of a string of articles that cover the facts that follow.

In the articles of the same day (04/01/2010) we read that the 'Ndrangheta raises the bar against the magistrates of the city... especially against the work of judges who have seized large assets from local criminals... the political world and the Quirinale (Presidential Palace) immediately expressed their solidarity with the judges.

On the 07/01/2010, the story continues that fear is spread in Reggio Calabria after the discovery of the explosive device... which however may be a remnant of the New Year celebration... but the case needs further investigation.

On 08/01/2010 we read that the one ('Ndrangheta) who was considered the 'perfect' amongst the mafias is starting to get scared... those who ruled in silence now need the bombs... those who up until now have reigned unchallenged now no longer seem so cool in controlling Calabria. The prelude continues with rhetorical proclamations of the type: with this attack the 'Ndrangheta tests the water... the bomb at the Attorney's offices has the smell of negotiation, the 'Ndrangheta now discovers how far the war against her will go... this is a clear reaction to the hardest blows that the state has dealt them in recent months.

Despite the high publicity of the attack everyday people of Reggio Calabria appear very sceptical. It has been suggested that the apparent novice of the attack, as is featured in the relevant video also published on La Repubblica, makes the involvement of the 'Ndrangheta even less probable. This is not only due to the apparent amateurism of the perpetrators, but also the simple fact that the 'Ndrangheta possesses an arsenal enough to destroy the whole of the city in a blink of an eye. Being unlikely that the 'Ndrangheta was actually involved with the bomb, it suggests that the answer lies elsewhere. People suspect that due to the imminent regional elections in March 2010, the act is destined to disperse the real political focus away from the political targets and towards violence. These types of diversion are not perceived by the citizens of Reggio Calabria as peculiar or casual events since the state is usually portrayed by the mainstream Calabrian subject as a suspicious agent. Whatever the truth may be, and only a few people may know it, the event had the opposite effect. To be sure, a considerable part of the intelligencia of Reggio Calabria expressed their discomfort with acts like this. Paradoxically, the violence that ought to be communicated from the event does not seem to be directed at the 'Ndrangheta. On the contrary, the violence is perceived to be from the state's side in the sense that the 'common sense' of the mainstream people of Reggio is violated.

Communicating violence – as the portrayal of the attack in the media suggests – and perceiving violence – as the event is interpreted by the everyday person – are then two different things which highlight the relative nature of violence. As Robert Layton (2006:173) has convincingly argued, ‘violence is not inevitable, not an uncontrollable genetically programmed trait inherited from the common ancestor of humans and chimpanzees, but a response to particular conditions of the ecology of society’. Socially disruptive actions then are not treated as lacking rationality, since any judgments are directed to their justification and not the actions per-se (Lukes 1982).
Gavin Weston (2008), in his study on ‘Lynchings in Todos Santos Cuchumatán’ in rural Guatemala maintained that the genealogy of violence requires a layered exegesis that touches upon local as well as international levels. In the Calabrian case a consistent anti-partisan narrative of oppression and victimisation is positively cultivated amongst the consistent anti-partisan narrative of oppression and international levels. In the Calabrian case a layered exegesis that touches upon local as well as maintained that the genealogy of violence requires a would add, even less understanding of the Italian published by authors with little knowledge and, I bitterly implying that perhaps the colonised enjoys more privileges and recognition than the coloniser. The narrative of opposition is played out on many levels; the intellectual for one, where irreversible bleak images have perpetually located Calabrians in a kind of bio-socio-economic twilight zone. Since the unification of Italy in 1860 south Italian societies have been trifled with and at the same time left out of any considerable developments – especially economic ones – that have taken place within the Italian state. Calabrian intellectuals attempted to shift the tension away from the portrayal of a malformed south Italian society by offering historical, ethnological and political accounts from within the south. These accounts, especially after 1980, have offered fresh conceptualisations as to why anti-partisan opposition is so strong in these societies. Nevertheless, and on this point I agree with Mauro Francesco Minervino (2008), more recent accounts published by authors with little knowledge and, I would add, even less understanding of the Italian south, try to persuade their readers that mafia in south Italy is eradicated and thus these lands are ‘safe’ for other Europeans to visit. Anyone who has a minimum amount of knowledge on the issue knows very well that this is not the case. By pointing out the ‘absence’ of mafia one is perplexed as to why that should be necessary in the first place. In simple terms, why should the author go to such pains to argue that something does not exist if indeed it does not? In my fieldwork experience in Reggio Calabria, ‘Ndrangheta is a kinship mode of social organisation which poses relatedness at the core of its conceptualisation. It is further to be understood as a sovereignty similarly to the Italian state and the Church. The fact that ‘Ndrangheta is a successful – though not conventional – mode of social organisation makes its appropriation in cases of blame very handy. However, a contradiction is apparent. If the ‘Ndrangheta is at once represented as a distraction technique at pre-election time and as an ‘eradicated’ group – as some Italian scholars would have it – then the blame cannot be simply cast towards the one direction (‘Ndrangheta) or the other (state). The issue of violence, contrary to assumptions that propagate it, escapes the mafia. In his influential paper ‘Banditry, Myth and Terror in Cyprus and Other Mediterranean Societies’, Paul Sant Cassia (1993) has argued that particular myths that adorn actions of violence are necessary in order to legitimise and naturalise the acts themselves. The seeds of this legitimisation are usually to be found at the grassroots which up to a point explain why these myths are significant in building national or regional rhetorics. In the case of Reggio Calabria I would like to invert the analogy. I would like to point out that ‘Ndrangheta has become a polysemic symbol perpetuated equally in both pro-state and anti-state discourses. Violence then is a more complex issue whose production and appropriation involves a variety of actors (state, people, ‘Ndrangheta) and their creative entanglements in various historical, political and economic levels.

I will argue then that the Italian state appropriates the symbol/‘Ndrangheta in order to show its ‘pro-people’ action and care. The citizens of Reggio Calabria, on their part, are appropriating the symbol/‘Ndrangheta in order to articulate their – historically explained – discomfort with governmental decision making processes. News statements like the ones reported at the beginning of this paper where the state is going to strongly oppose the ‘Ndrangheta are considered at least comical in Reggio Calabria. Since the roots of the ‘embracement’ between governmental representatives, local politicians, clerics and the ‘Ndrangheta is well documented (see in particular Stajano 1979, Williams 2003, Walston 1988) and for the citizens themselves well testified, it is futile to cast the notion of violence in either direction for all the implicated actors are well acquainted with any long-standing narratives of violence. I would like then to close this short article by noting that whilst the notion of violence should require a careful and ever contextual approach, its appropriation, by a variety of actors (the state and the mainstream people included) is ever more liberal and, in Italy at least, transcends any local or national level.

References


Minervino, M. F., 2008. La Calabria Brucia. Roma:


Websites Visited


http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2010/01/06/reggio-gli-007-lanciarono-allarme-sui.html


This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by‐sa/3.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.
The Husbandry of Technology: Outlining an ethnographic approach to farm family (neo-) productions of genetic modification

Clare Perkins
University of Worcester
clare.perkins@worc.ac.uk

Abstract

Genetic modification is shrouded in heated, passionate and polarised debate. This has resulted in a neglect of farmers, on-farm contexts and, ultimately, the conceptualisation and potential success of GM. Despite academic attempts to unpack the relationship between farmers and GM, there remains potential to forge ‘new’ theoretical and methodological approaches. This article considers the interrelationships between UK farm families and technology (including associated policy and debate). Exploring ‘re-directed’ ethnography (Kraidy, 2002: 192), it outlines inter-disciplinary anthropological-geographical efforts to understanding a changing, ‘neo-productivist’ (Ilbery & Maye, 2010) agricultural landscape.

Problems surrounding food security, environmental degradation and a growing world population have recently attracted significant attention amongst the media and policy analysts. As one way of alleviating these problems, there have been calls to (re-) invigorate research and investment in technologies. For example, recent influential recommendations (Chatham House Report, 2009) suggest that genetic modification (GM) might satisfy, sustainably, a growing demand for food. According to Ilbery and Maye (2010), these calls constitute a ‘neo-productivist’ phase of agriculture.

Within the UK, GM is surrounded by vociferous, heated and polarised debate. Herrick (2004: 286) argues that GM has become a ‘complex, fractal and overlapping set of discursive practices’ framed by ‘risk’. Concerned with exploring these practices, my ‘anthropological eye’ (Strathern, 2005: 126) has considered a range of sources including media publications, policy documents, charitable organisations and scientific literature. While insightful, the ‘public’ relevance of GM has meant that ‘personal communications’ have revealed exactly how discursive these practices are. I have found myself frantically scribbling notes at parties, using facebook (a social networking site) as a source of information and references, and participating in public debates. Akin to Cunningham (1999: 585), the line between ‘cultural production’ and ‘theoretical analysis’ has blurred.

As an example, on the 21st January 2010, I attended the ‘Talk Science’ debate ‘GM crops and food security: curing the world’s growing pains?’ at the British Library, London, UK. A city centre location, reasonable ticket fee (£5.00) and substantial (mainly online) publicity ensured a large, mixed audience. Arguing for a more ‘holistic approach’ to understanding the relationship between GM crops and biodiversity, Prof. Rosie Hails (2010) outlined the need for informed, ‘sensible’, non-polarised debate. Providing the foundation for discussion, Hails’ (2010) introduction was followed by a structured question session. Quickly moving to the broad subject of ‘GM’, audience members constructed a heated, passionate and exciting debate. Issues of particular interest included the relationship between GM and geographical context; the ‘gap’ between GM research and on-farm application; and the ‘loss’ of economic benefits associated with GM for family farmers who rely on ‘free’ farm labour. Concerned with how members of the farming community might have contributed to these issues, their absence at the debate was striking. Moreover, it echoed the lacking voice of farmers within much of GM discourse. However, when asked by a fellow audience member, ‘what do you think then, yes or no?’ I was reminded that despite the efforts of the debate, polarisation is persuasive. Leading to the reification above and beyond an inevitable ‘on-farm’ context, uncertainty surrounds the ‘co-produced’ (Holloway & Morris, 2008) meaning, practice and ultimate significance of GM.
Academic research has begun to address this potential and unpack the relationship between GM and the agricultural sector. However, a focus on farmer ‘attitudes’ on economically successful, lowland, productivist farms fails to address the breadth, diversity or heterogeneity of the sector (eg. Lane, Oreszczyn, Carr, 2005). It is unknown how GM might impact the day-to-day activities, routines and practices of ‘family farm businesses’ (Errington & Gasson, 1994), and vice versa. Significant in terms of UK land ownership, these farms will process, engage and live the potential commercial viability of GM. In so doing, they will contribute to a changing, globally aware, neo-productivist agricultural landscape.

Seeking to fulfil this potential, the research on which this article is based considers the manifestation of GM in the ‘co-produced’, knowledge-practice networks of family farmers (Holloway & Morris, 2008; Tsouvalis et al., 2000). These networks are constituted by the everyday practices, relationships and pluri-activities of the family farm (cf. Gray, 1998). Technologies fit within these networks in creative, imaginative and contingent ways. For example, computers have re-configured the ways in which farmers communicate, sell and purchase, and complete paperwork (Warren, 2000). While it is likely that GM will contribute to ‘new’ knowledge-practice networks, existing networks will establish how these are created. This research is therefore dependent upon the subjective, experimental and ethnographic engagement with on-farm knowledge-practice networks (cf. Mol, 2000: 83-85). Methods will include participant observation, focused discussions and keeping a fieldwork diary. Recording and interpreting my own creation of knowledge through my fieldwork diary, I will reflexively engage with the processes observed and discussed.

As a result of processes associated with neo-productivism (such as globalisation), the ethnographic lens has been ‘re-directed’ to understand the processes between the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ (Kraidy, 2002: 192). This research seeks to grasp the relationship between the knowledge-practice networks within family farms and the broad, globally aware, context of neo-productivism. Consequently, it is concerned with creating ‘perspective’ through a grounded, multi-sited and comparative ‘re-directed’ ethnographic approach (cf. Juris, 2008).

Undertaking fieldwork on three family farms, for approximately four months on each, I seek to uncover shared, geographically constituted notions of ‘marginality’. Fulfilling potential to study the potential impacts of GM in different geographical contexts, ‘marginality’ may encompass contrasting regulatory frameworks, relative distance from stakeholders in GM or economic standing. Building on the work of Cohen (1996, 1999) on ‘peripherality’, the research will draw upon notions of ‘marginality’ to construct a perspectival ‘frame’ on difference (Thomas, 1991: 317). This will promote understandings of how farm families constitute neo-productivism (specifically technology and policy), and vice versa. Currently, with the help of gatekeepers (including veterinary practitioners, initiatives such as ‘Targeted Inputs for a Better Rural Environment’ (THIRE) and the farming media), I am pursuing interest in the broad regions of South Wales, North-West Scotland and the Welsh Marches.

Following Thomas’ (1991: 307) argument that ethnographic fieldwork may be separated from ethnographic writing (i.e. ‘ethnography’), the research will be represented through case studies. This representation will enable the researcher to create strategic interpretations of farm families and the neo-productivist agricultural sector, and, ultimately, the changing relationships between them.

An ethnographic approach to the husbandry of technology on family farms bridges the ‘gap’ between farmers and GM highlighted by ‘popular’ debate and academic literature. Conceptualising ethnography alongside interdisciplinary geographical-anthropological efforts, this research considers a changing, neo-productivist, ‘agricultural landscape (Morris & Evans, 2004).

Acknowledgements

This research is a PhD Studentship funded by the University of Worcester. I am thankful to my supervisors Dr. Nick Evans (University of Nottingham) and Dr. Carol Morris (University of Worcester) without whom this research would not be possible.

References


This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.
Editorial Re-Mix

Altermodern
Editorial Remix: Open Access Anthropology 2.0 as a type of altermodern experimentation

Àngels Trias i Valls

Institute of Contemporary European Studies
Regent's College, London
triasiva@regents.ac.uk

1.0 Beta

1st May 2009 was the first Open Access Anthropology Day. Organised by Sarah Touts, anthropologist and blogger, the Open Access Anthropology Day was soon supported by the Open Access Anthropology blog, had an entry in BlogUnited, and it was followed by many anthropologist in the microblogging, twitter, web 2.0 and internet communities. I was one of the people that joined that movement. As a mark of the first open access anthropology day I proposed the creation of a new open access anthropology journal. Here is the editorial of the first issue of that realisation. The editorial remix is an experimental article, in an altermodern sense, a mixture of pieces and articles, hyperlinks, re-mixed anew, treated as a creative journey that looks at open access, web-mediated and networked anthropology.

Going Viral

In 2009 I approached the Open Access Anthropology Day with enthusiasm and worry about where it was going to lead us. I felt encouraged by the small group of twitters and bloggers that surrounded me and kept me grounded to the electronic media as to see this project through. I blogged, I joined the forums, got a badge, tweeted.. Weeks later the initiative started taking a momentum of its own. It wasn’t only the open access anthropology that was reaching momentum; the whole picture of electronic mediated anthropology was changing at the fabulous pace that internet communication technologies spin our lives into. The excellent a Norwegian anthropologi.info (Khazaleh, L [Ed. 2010], a multilingual anthropology portal with news blog compiled lists and articles, Karim (P. K. Gerim Friedman) set the anthropology twitter (twibes) creating a viral moment of shared idea, Keith Hart’s open anthropology co-operative was born too. The co-op had the largest social impact for anthropology in decades, stream of names joined in to support the new alternative to academic associations. Max Forte’s Zero Anthropology, John Postill’s Press and his organization of the MediaAnthro mailing lists (EASA) consolidated anthropology blogging with new distinctive network voices; a storm of blog sites by anthropologists worldwide, from the group blog of Savage Minds to Wesci’s (2007) Anthropology of youtube (2008) defined the anthropology online scene. Further afield Goldsmiths anthropology department research papers, the Durham anthropology journals (DAJ) and the ASA (Association of Social Anthropologists) journal ‘anthropology matters’, among others in the UK, were harvesting their earlier seeds in the field of online postgraduate and research publications freely available (albeit not as within the Open Access movement when they started they were genuine forms of open access; Anthropology Matters Journal introduced open access publishing in 2010). In early 2010, Anthropology Today, started its own network as a forum for their readers and its editors introduced blogging to the printed topics and network discussions. I was self-archiving the first e-learning anthropology degree in the UK, and many more academic wikis and student groups were being created. New visual systems mushroomed under a new weather of excitement, experimentation and under user-mediated productions of internet pages, wikis and networks. The excitement on the net was palpable, we were indeed witnessing inventing and creating new networks of relatedness amongst anthropologist in a way it was not possible through conventional academic practice. Shortly after, [around that viral time’ would be appropriate], formal anthropological associations across the globe started paying attention to the way in which they presented themselves and communicated with the rest of us. 2009 and 2010 saw a ‘re-vamp’ of academic websites, with the AAA (American Anthropological Association) gradually making its appearance into the twiverse (twitter universe) and the British Royal Anthropological Institute and other associations transforming their websites and points of contact to much higher standards. This also saw the gradual phasing of the home-made looking, unpaid,
voluntarily made websites and forums for the new, paid, designed-to-impress ones. The whole image of anthropology as a discipline, the visual systems that had been used from the late 90s’ through the labour-intensive individual websites, eventually started to give in and leave room to new types of online visual systems and to new ways of defining new visualisations of anthropological networks and connections. Along these changes, what was happening I would argue was a reconfiguration on the power and dynamics between producers of online image and online content and users of these online sites and online/personal networks.

Open Access

In parallel to all of this, supporters of Open Access, building on the pioneer work of Peter Suber, Stevan Hamad, Hitchcock and others started to see a reward of the many years of dedication to the open access cause (see also Davies 2010). Suddenly, between 2004 and 2008 the number of electronic open archives, self-archiving, OA repositories, and OA journals grew exponentially. The Directory of Open Access journals, developed by Lund University Libraries since 2003 hosted more than 4000 journals, in more than 1000 countries (DOAJ 2010). Behind these were two critical years, 2002 to 2004, that saw the declaration of Open Access principles by the Budapest, the Bethesda and Berlin Open Access Initiatives (Suber 2003). These three stand for the forums for the international declaration of Open Access to knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities, signed by worldwide scientific and academic organizations, with a statement that commits to the implementation of a definition of open access on publications that meet two conditions:

1. “The author(s) and copyright holder(s) grant(s) to all users a free, irrevocable, worldwide, perpetual right of access to, and a license to copy, use, distribute, transmit and display the work publicly and to make and distribute derivative works, in any digital medium for any responsible purpose, subject to proper attribution of authorship[2], as well as the right to make small numbers of printed copies for their personal use.

2. A complete version of the work and all supplemental materials, including a copy of the permission as stated above, in a suitable standard electronic format is deposited immediately upon initial publication in at least one online repository that is supported by an academic institution, scholarly society, government agency, or other well-established organization that seeks to enable open access, unrestricted distribution, interoperability, and long-term archiving (for the biomedical sciences, PubMed Central is such a repository)” (Suber, 2003)

Whilst I have discussed elsewhere the impact of this definition and conditions of open access publication, here I want to point out that this journal, shares with OA others the fundamental principles of the declaration in that we acknowledge the complexity derived of implementing changes to the conventional structures of authorial practice and academic publishing through a different type of approach to publishing. This journal aims at re-considering publishing not only at the light of the implementation of this declaration but also the role of anthropology as a discipline in the promotion of open access in research and teaching.

The OA declaration had a gradual but fundamental impact in changing the landscape of what is perceived as ‘academic publishing’ and to who is to hold the rights of adscription to such label; to the extent to which we agree on the transparency of peer-reviewed processes; and how changing these parameters may have an impact on research, funding and traditional academic practice.

Academic Publishing: access and gate-keeping

Along with the OA declarations and the increased volume of OA publications there have also been attempts by the larger publishing and academic institutions to assess their potential as gatekeepers of this new situation. The critics of OA argue (Worklock 2004, Pouyer 2006) that the increased volume of free, unrestricted publication has had the effect that there are now very long lists of myriads of publications, articles upon articles deposited freely on the wide expanding internet ether, a new universe of distant galaxies that we may never access, read or only make very specialized use of (see Gye 2010 on being lost and found online). However, regardless of the often commented feel that one does not know of the actual impact of OA (something that could be said of nearly all paid or free publications, in either hard copy or on the Internet) I would argue that the impact of OA is one and very specific: it questions the nature of academic publishing, its relation to a number of pivotal elements of academic practice: reviewing, ranking, academic promotion, funding, research, academic versus non academic relations, the role of academic conferences, self-archiving, teaching online, interdisciplinarity. It help us question the disparity of inequality in the access to the production (sharing and practice) of academic knowledge across cultures, and other divisions of inequality surrounding learning teaching and the validation of certain kinds of knowledge in favor of others.
The virality of internet communication brought about these and other realizations at the time it also brought a simultaneous need to engage users and producers of the Internet at different levels of power than the kinds of engagements we had (or didn't have) at our disposal was when the Internet was first created. The Massachusetts Institute (MIT) consolidated its presence online as one of the largest repositories of open access teaching materials. Intute, JSTOR, Athens, JISC and many others gradually came to occupy a complex presence in the gatekeeping and accessing of what should be free, unrestricted electronic distribution and sharing of academic publications. Open Access, with a new emphasis on peer-review for open access, incorporated new guidelines and agreement forms between open access publishers, libraries and open access users; many repositories were formalized, and creative commons licensing became a way to the gradual empowerment of authors in self-archiving, re-mix, sharing of academic resources and the visualisation of these [see the repositories of JRC, MERLOT, Open Humanity Press, Lockes, and Creative Commons to name a few]. The institutional discourses on Open Access, however, are still surrounded by a large debate on how authors and institutions are meant to collaborate with each other.

Lagging behind this vertigo of changes, unsure on what to do, unsure of how long to wait to do something about it were academic, paid, publishers and their academic libraries and universities. They were caught in a storm, a double helix one. The electronic world was transforming the world of publishing. It was transforming the academic world. It was also transforming the relationship and interdependence between the two and between academic work and academic recognition. Publishers were committed to producing new websites, new searchable indexes and new strategies for customer engagement. They had a new market to invent, reach to and sell to. Whilst this was possible, it was unclear what to think or do about the growing number of free, unrestricted publishing academic materials on the internet. It was also hard to know what to do with the many competing non-internet based publishing market too. For the case of the relationship between conventional publishing (including academic authors, reviewers and universities) and the new OA people, it wasn’t just an issue of competition, or one of lost of market shares, it was one of boundaries of who controlled the new production (including peer-reviewing and localisation) of academically published work online.

The AAA meets the OA
An example of this tension came in 2006 with the American Anthropological Association (AAA). In a year when OA (Open Access) had gained great momentum and started to displace traditional gatekeepers of knowledge, the Anthropological American Association (see antropolgie.info archives) was publically reluctant and opposing of Open Access (Lorenz 2006). The AAA chair’s letter in regards to OA was written in a tone nearly condemning OA as the quasi-evil that was going to eradicate peer-review and bring down the whole academic establishment (see also Kamrani 2006, Golub 2006) and undermine ‘the business model of revenue generation’:

1 would [further] undermine the value-added investments made by publishers in the peer review process;

2 would duplicate existing mechanisms that enable the public to access scientific journals by requiring the government to establish and maintain costly digital repositories

3 would position the government as a competitor to independent publishers, posing a disincentive for them to sustain investment and innovation in disseminating authoritative research

Indeed, OA threatens to break down the relationship between research, publications, funding and academic viability of anthropology departments, and so the legitimacy of any academic association. It undermines the neo-liberal ‘business model’ of academic financing. The battle, however, is not about conventional peer-reviewed publications versus free, unrestricted peer-reviewed publications as the AAA and the critiques to the AAA would make us believe. Harmand (2010) criticism of the AAA ‘fussing’ about copyright reforms, peer review reforms argues for an institutional and collaborative adoption of open access mandates rather than one of opposition.

Ultimately, as I have argued elsewhere, the battle is not one of simple opposition between models of financing but about understanding internet mediated media as something people transform into new types of academic knowledge, and how, who acquires political power and how this political field of contestation, opposition and defiance is dealt through what I call “dispositional” (displaced positional) narratives. I was thus very keen to publish Baras’s article that illustrates an example of oppositional narratives from an ethnographic perspective.

In the episode of the AAA meets the OA the AAA reacted somehow defensively on critiques against the AAA’s initial opposition. The AAA attempted to re-addresses the debate by giving ‘green light’ to
Open Access and conceded, with a narrative of some sort of simultaneous defeat-but-resistance to the OA wave (Lorenz 2006, Hamard 2010). The AAA ‘opened’ up provisionally-and-with_restrictions some of its conventionally ‘paid’ and ‘kept within walls’ publications, for two months.

The AAA debate was, on the one hand, good in bringing institutions to discuss taken-for-granted boundaries, albeit only moderately: it was not successful, on the other, in addressing the core issues of the implementation of open access (see Hamard 2010 for a critique). However, by late 2009 and early 2010 several British academic departments started re-thinking their position vis-à-vis Open Access, and academic publishing. The Oxford Journals were converted to open access and anthropological associations widened user’s access to online libraries. It is unclear, however, how these institutions related to the ‘green’ and collaborative mandates on open access, but it meant a larger move towards some integration of practice.

In addition to publishing, new network sites were created, these put people in contact with each other, generate exchange of ideas, create its own group of discussants. These were indeed, the forums for the discussion on open access. This produced new types of encounters, and more importantly I’d argue, what was created were new ways to govern individual and group relationships generated within this gradually generalised academic internet use. In other words, networks of groups of anthropologists appeared online and aimed at finding new types of governance (of each other and of our relationships online) for their own groups.

The next stage of mixed virality(ies) soon reached the academic community with several colleges, departments and associations re-thinking the way in which they published and made anthropological knowledge available to new audiences. Similar parallels exist in nearly all disciplines. This included projects like the large C-SAP open educational resources that set up the creation of toolkits and educational wiki for the universal sharing of anthropological, sociology and politics teaching materials. We owe to Strathern the theoretical possibility of thinking of such relations as these academic ‘virtuosity’ and as partial and multiple ontogenic relations and realities (Strathern 2004).

Perhaps, we could argue, these processes we see in open access and networked anthropology groups are, to borrow Strathern’s term, process of academic ‘virtualism’ as well as realizations of academic ‘responsabilities’ and of the promotion of different accounts (what I call, mixed virality(ies), divergent dimensions of the realization of such responsibilities (Strathern 2000).

The journal that we have here is the outcome of those mixed virality(ies), the original proposal to contribute to open access specifically for anthropology from an online (not just textually) based perspective. as such, the journal is released this month to commemorate the young history of open access anthropology and to join the many new publications under the practice of open access. It works towards institutional, author and shared agreements of open access mandates. Like many others ARDAC has its own network, its own types of governance, and its own type of resistance and defiance to conventional publishing, as well as, the same need other open access journals have in trying to explore a new context of relationships, and above all trying to explore new types of creativity and new types of producing academic knowledge within different types of boundaries. The journal, however, does not sit in any specific boundary as such, it is created specifically to travel between different boundaries and it focus in the nature of journeying itself. I believe this is something that defines many OA journals as well, what I call its altermodern ‘journeying’ condition.

ARDAC, Open Access Anthropology 2.0

Dealing with the creation of a distinctive open access anthropology publication within the background of web 2.0 technologies meant we had to re-consider what open access meant for anthropology as well as for us in particular. The aim of ARDAC is to produce an open access anthropology research based review aimed at the academic community at large. Its purpose is to produce responses to cultural politics from an anthropological perspective, with reflexive articles, commentaries and reviews produced in textual and non-textual formats. As its first editor, back in may 2009 I was keen to create not only a publication in the textual sense of the word, but a space that would incorporate web 2.0 technologies, photography, video, internet-based content as well as traditional text. We didn’t want to transform existing published (paid) sources into open sources (this was an initiative later taken by the Oxford papers, for example) but to create a new journal from within the new context of internet communication technologies.

As a result, the journal was developed from within a web 2.0 platform called Ning, linked to and following the success of the open anthropology co-operative of which I was also one of its early members; the co-operative used the same platform. The journal you have in your hands was born within the ARDAC forum at Ning and developed through
various communication technologies. It will inevitably migrate from Ning, as this platform announces that it is becoming a ‘fee’ paying service. We will then move out of Ning and adopt a new free home. This will inevitably pose some challenges to our visual system, and will change our relationships. Most likely, it will change the journals internal composition too.

ARDAC will inhabit, as it did from its conception, different repositories simultaneously: it is located in a recognized institutional site. It inhabits creative commons through its license. In time it will re-apply for a position in the OER repositories, and hopefully it will embed some aspect of networked relationships in other non-paying sites, open access repositories. These are also many of the aspects of ‘journeying’ that an OA anthropology journal takes on.

Open Access (Anthropology) and the cultural politics of dissent

As I have argued above, Open Access is by no means a new event in the academic and publishing world or to anthropology, for anthropologists, however, open access anthropology was, and still is, I believe, a politically minded strategy (albeit a tangential one). It is perhaps fair to say that the history of publishing anthropology has had a strong current of non-traditional publishing in publications such as Hart’s early 90s Prickly Pear pamphlets, the first Jay Rub’s articles on visual anthropology in early years of the Internet, and more recently the initiatives of the Goldsmiths online research papers, the DAJ (Durham Anthropology Journal) to name a few (many more exist across the world, see anthropolog.info open access anthropology journal list).

I think of it as an anthropology of online networks, or an ‘anthropology of the network age’, (Anthropology 2.0) none of it very permanent, ‘creolised’ (in the Altermodern use of the word), and very susceptible to change. This ‘anthropology of/in online networks’ may present us with the possibilities of creating new critiques on locating and dislocating power.

What I mean here is that the ‘anthropology of the network age’, what I call the ‘altermodern anthropology’ (I don’t limit it altermodern anthropology to the online network context at all, the network context is one of the several many altermodern times and directions, journeys we have), may help us to think through non-postmodern ideas. I believe that postmodernity, as a counter dominance critique to post-colonialism had its moment. I believe it enlarged itself towards its ages of liquidity (Bowman 2000, 2006) and it went from being a reasonable counter-critique to becoming another type of dominant critique (see also Lee 2006) (this is why I feel attracted by the altermodern prepositions by Bourriaud, altermodernity being the period that follows the death of post-modernity. I comment below on altermodernity).

Nothing I am saying here about ‘anthropology of the network age’ however, is new. Anthropology of the 2.0 network age, altermodern anthropology, is just another anthropological perspective, another positioning, equally engaged, politicised and aiming at contesting social and academic boundaries. Marylyn Strathern has, for many generation now, brought us to the attention of anthropological knowledge situated in relationships rather than in the opposing us-other (Strathern 2006). Furthermore, Strathern’s work on academic relations as well as virtual relations is relevant here because in treating academic as well as virtual relations as Strathern does, as embedded in ‘multiplications and divisions’ these become prone to, as the case of open access reveals, making it difficult for us to conceptualise relations (2004:53). Strathern reveals one of the difficulties for an anthropology of the network age to give shape to relations, in particular, I would argue, relations of production as those debated in the case of anthropological online publications.

I am using Strathern here to argue the case that one of the underlying issues on the debates on the creation of a virtual academic publishing and practice, as exemplified in OA and online networks, and one of the reasons for the inconclusive nature of the AAA debate with its critics, owes to the fact that both academically and virtually we live in a world that struggles at making sense of relationships: “certainty itself appears partial, information intermittent” (2004:xxv). We could argue that perhaps, the virality, the exponential nature of
online relations is an index of such struggle and attempt to re-address it such partiality in connections.

**Anthropology of the Network Age: academic relatedness online**

The anthropology of the network age, this altermodern anthropology is predicated, I argue, in sets of relationships, in appropriating the direction of global journeys, rather than being constructed as an opposition to the traditional academic discipline that is underpinned through the paid, walled, and restricted within academic circles and their publications.

At a superficial level, web 2.0 networked anthropology, Open Access, are presented as if they were in opposition to traditional discipline locations. Altermodern anthropologies such as the OA anthropology movement, the co-ops, the twitter groups, like some of the ethnographic cases in this issue, are not just about dissenting to a more dominant view of the world. Whilst they dissent, their cultural politics are about the fact their relationships are constructed different. In other words, the anthropologist that publishes on a conventional publisher that sells through Amazon, and the same anthropologist that self-archives her own articles online are not an anthropologist divided (it may feel so from within), but an anthropologist that construct different types of anthropologies through the self, an anthropologist that holds different sets of relationships about anthropology, that holds different 'anthropologies' (see Wright and Rabo 2010 for a beautiful contextualization of the tensions and dilemmas of academic practice under university reform).

Other boundaries affected by open access, are, not surprisingly, the redefinition of scholarly practice, community engagement and applied practice. I believe Open Access has a point in saying to us that the way in which we teach and fund research— their precarious relationship of value— needs to be reassessed from another perspective, from another set of 'partial connections' (the problem being on how to translate connections and partialities across perspectives). The way in which we rate and rank academic departments, academic production, and academic value of such production (within the gated precints of university paid degrees) are narrated as being under threat of Open Access. However, as Wright (2009) has argued for university reforms, if we extend the argument to say that is not OA that poses any kind of threat to ranking, academic value and so on (in the AAA cautionary approach). One could argue that OA is reformative in the sense it offers what Wright and Rabo call 'a suitable language for protest' (2009, p.8). It is the academic managerial structure and the way it addresses 'the economy' and markets that refuses to acknowledge the power of dissent and relationality that is a threat to all genuine academic endeavors. Here by genuine I mean academic actions, whatever form these take in themselves or in relation to non-academic contexts, that express what Wright and Rabo call 'effective resistance' (ibid., p.8).

‘Effective Resistance’: OA and Anthropology 2.0 as ‘languages of academic protest’

Imagine for a second that the open anthropology co-operative, and other anthropology 2.0 networks were to become recognized as what they are, ways of academic association. Imagine these supported by all anthropological publications to be freely available online, at any time, with no restriction of access. Imagine then how to re-conceptualise how we conduct academic practice anew, starting with how peer-reviewed is done; we ought to ask, who is to make meaningful sense of the discontinuities in practice and understanding in publishing anthropology?; and also who would be the new gatekeepers (I believe there are already few) of the process by which we produce knowledge through open access?

In a period of academic reform and crisis, it would be really exciting to be able to reconceptualise academic practice anew. This is, however, unlikely to happen soon because whilst anthropologist, as well described by Wright and Rabo (2009, p.5) are left to fight from within those managerial structures in universities (with an arm and a leg tied up at the back—call it the many competing obligations from within), people in open access are gradually encountering the menace of a largely ‘paid’ internet

---

12 A way I understand these possibilities (or rather sustainable possibilities of academic engagement) is through Kondo’s (1992) theory of ‘craftful and multiple selves’ in Japan. In Kondo’s description of Japanese artisans use of multiple and contradictory social positions, she presents how individuals are able to craft different multiple social selves in different social realities. Japanese artisans in her article hold different selves as all the whole (not a global unity) of many positions one can be (Kondo 1992:63), ‘deeply felt’ selves. I find Kondo’s descriptions useful in that they mirror the kind of contemporary academic ‘deeply felt’ selves, contradictory and fractioned. Our academic picture, however, moves beyond the world of artisan and skilled labour, into one that Wright and Rabo (2010:57) describe as the grim place academicians occupy in our present of university reforms, the new proletarian academic. The parallels with Kondo, tangential as they may be, reflect for me a transformation of the kinds of ‘artisan’ knowledge (the crafted ethnography by a skilled ethnographer in a hierarchical workplace) into partial kinds of dep-fenomonalization of academic practice under current reforms. Open Access is one of these many attempts to craft the academic self.
service provision and institutionally ‘closed’ provision to academic access and lack of institutional support for open access mandates (ibid Harnad). We are still unable to assess if academics have a chance to change the managerialization of universities and the current commoditization of degrees but I know that Open Access ha a chance as a social movement for change, as a social movement for academics -until internet providers stops being free, that is.

Open Access is not an easy option, it is impossible to assure the continuity of its existence without specific institutions, its impact on an exponentially growing cloud of internet exchanges; OA is easily appropriated by institutions and people who only pay lip service to the genuine idea of ‘open access’. Open access accentuates the fragmented and partiality of connections of relationships online. However, each open access journal that it is published today is an effort in helping us re-think the boundaries of our existing academic practice, and in that, small as all these ventures are, fragile as they are in the vast electronic oceans of information, dissenting as they are to the conventional, paid, forms of academic publishing, hold an important approach to how knowledge is created in our contemporary altermodern times and our future ones as well.

**Activism and Sharedness as political categories**

Open access practices, self-archiving, Open Access Anthropology 2.0 are interested in creating a context of access (by this it is meant electronic, internet based, unpaid, un-restricted access) to both publications and relationships, in the promotion of new open access anthropology journals, the transformation of previously edited electronic, restricted, free or subscription paying into open sources, and in the promotion of self-archiving among everyone in the academic community. I don’t believe it is a particular utopia.

From my point of view, OA is more of a movement of displacement form one place to another rather than a situated ‘place’ that can be enacted or imagined as such. There is a tendency to imagine acts of resistance and languages of protest, as well as online networks that do so as situated in a place, in the ‘online’ or in the networks in parallel to these. Here I conceptualize these acts of resistance (effective, ambivalent, partial, unsuccessful alike) as movements of displacement instead.

Online practices are situated in HTML pages (and similar formats), electronic formats that fundamentally support all electronic exchange. These include the new types of email exchange and large websites and 2.0 networks. Here I argue, whatever it is we imagine ‘online’ to be -and there are many examples of different types of cultural imaginations about the Net (see Miller 2000)- here, I argue, looking at the case of OA, and the imagined online spaces it inhabits, online categories of existence (network, OA publishing, networked anthropology) are a movement of dis-placement. What I mean by this is that the production of online materials is a movement of ‘placing’ things online. A page, a flash, a music file is placed and stored somewhere, and then exchanged, shared or simply put elsewhere (see Nick White in this volume). In this sense, the use of ‘things’ online is often one action of re-placing ‘things’ and relationships elsewhere (in another computer or server so to speak), whilst simultaneously this re-placing putting things out of place, and thus susceptible to be re-imagined, re-told in their journey.

Because displacement is a predominant feature of all online interactions, political action (such as OA publishing or anthropology networks) through the medium of the Internet is a different type of political action and must be theorized differently, as illustrated in three papers in this volume. If I read Barassi correctly, she proposes a very original argument in that the ways in which people believe about what they refer as ‘the internet’ affects ‘the way in which people understand political action and opposition’ (Barassi 2010). I agree with her that internet technologies, what I see as the possibility of creating the internet –creating, making, producing content for the internet, not just using the content created by others- is a means of what she calls ‘empowering activism’. I take it further to argue that OA is a possible form of what Wright and Rabo define as ‘effective resistance’ (ibid. p8). If we take Open Access as a form of activism, in Wright’s sense of a ‘pressure point’, I would argue that Open Access members’ use of networking and posting on the Internet, make possible, in Barassi’s terms ‘a privileged mode of oppositional politics’ (ibid.). I leave to her article to outline the problematic and ‘ambivalent’ positions of these politics to a much finer detail. I find Wright and Rabo illuminating in that I feel, they are able to address how to articulate what they call ‘pressure points of transformation’ in academic contexts (ibid. p11) as to how academics and students organize themselves (either be it, as I suggest, through open access anthropology, web 2.0, online co-operatives, or a mixture of all these) for, in Wright and Rabo’s term the possibilities of ‘alternative futures’ (ibid. p.11).
'Pressure Points'

My interest in OA and Anthropology 2.0 came about my belief that Open Access and online networks had to be able to transcend the mere predication of a reproduction of the 'safe' quarters of peer-review in conventional publishing and academic association. Reflecting on my past work e-learning I am bias in my views that things produced for the internet can not be mere transpositions of something else that happens elsewhere (Trias i Valls 2002). An example at hand is e-learning in this issue. E-learning represents a new type of learning context, it explores new types of access to learning. Whilst e-learning is a challenge to inequality in access, it is often appropriated by institutions that reproduce similar issues of inequalities (fees, international access of the internet, Eurocentric use of the Internet, institutional, privatised use of the Internet and so on). Producing a learning context in an e-electronic place can not be produced by reproducing what happens at residential, inside the walls of a departmental room, level (see also OER project). The same is true for OA journals and anthropological online associations.

Following the argument above, this journal and network aims at not reproducing the ways in which traditional journals operate. We had a particular vision that the journal had to be inclusive all types of submissions, opinion articles, working papers, research papers, non peer-reviewed and reviewed publications, multimedia (including audio, video) and internet based data. This remains one of its objectives. We also argue many people who publish in English are not English speakers, and that the assertion of English and how English is edited is often taken for granted. The journal takes submissions in other languages, as well as, it makes an effort in accommodating non-native uses of English. By this I mean that non-English speakers are allowed to express themselves in the kind of English that they feel familiar with rather than the kind of edited English that is standard in publications. Needless to say it accommodates submissions from areas that share interests with anthropology, like educational practice, media, cultural studies, gay and lesbian studies, sociology, criminology and many others.

In addition to changing the ways of reproducing the journal I also meant for the journal to incorporate the work of individuals at early stages of their academic career as well as more senior academics and inclusive of the academic community at large. For this purpose a review process was set up through an editorial board that consisted of different individuals at different stages of their careers, individuals from different anthropological backgrounds from applied anthropologists to anthropologists that worked outside anthropology departments and from people that were working within anthropology departments to individuals who had a background in anthropology but had moved into new academic directions and non-anthropologists. They all had in common a sense of adventure, willingness to submit to the rigors of peer-reviewing workloads and a sense of experimentation of new media. In this sense the journal encourages a broad, critical, speculative and experimental interventions in discussions concerning anthropology and cultural politics with a particular emphasis on political voices in communication technologies, social media, political, popular and social cultures, research and teaching engagement and intervention in society and any broad topics on technologies and experiences of social engagement and relatedness.

**Altermodern at last**

We wanted an anthropological journal that opened up to current analysis of cultural and political issues as underpinning the character of relationality of global issues. In the analysis of cultural politics, the journal is interested in social responses to the future of culture in the public domain in the age of globalisation. In our initial statement, I remember calling the journal (of the ‘age of globalisation’) an altermodern journal.

Altermodern is a concept created by Nicolas Bourriaud in 2009 as a result of his many years of critical work on the world of contemporary global art and ‘relational aesthetics’ (2002). In his work altermodernity is broadly defined as the period (our current period) that followed the death of postmodernity. Altermodern and altermodernity are two ideas that came to suggest a way of defining a contemporaneity of thought and experimentation in the creation of art (and by extension other types of social and cultural creations) and social practice. Based on examinations of art in today’s global context, the altermodern was a form of dissent or rather, in Bourriaud’s term a ‘reaction against’ imagined standards and commercialism. It emerged from a series of theoretical and art discussions and served as the epistemological background to a series of art exhibitions (later web 2.0 mediated) curated by Bourriaud himself. Altermodernism as a term was first coined by Bourriaud in 2005 as a ‘new modernity based on translation, a way in which cultural values are translated as forms of connection to world networks. Bourriaud called this a ‘reloading process’ of modernism (ibid). The movement attached to the altermodern is underpinned by ideas and practices such as creolisation, re-telling, heteroncronia, docu-fictions...
(all of these can be explored further in the Tate Triennial website 2009). In their art context the altermodern artist is working in a hypermodern world or with supermodern themes (ibid.) The original altermodern context is the world of contemporary global non-western art and it is a useful concept much beyond the remit of art as it plays with the relationship that discussions in art (modernism, surrealism) have had with discussions elsewhere in society and culture. Whilst I have always been cautious of the altermodern manifesto, in particular their 'invocation of play' of the term modernity, I feel it 'does well in that it takes the death of postmodernity towards new reasons for political reaction and protest against oppressive regimes of production. It does so, however, from within new narratives, new forms of art, new types of visualising and re-telling lives, arts and cultural stories.

I believe ARDAC (and many open source publications) can be defined through the tenets of altermodernity. These include the ideas of a consideration for a new emerging modernity, 'reconfigured to an age of globalisation'. Other principles, that I felt, put ARDAC in the context of altermodernity is the way in which open access produces knowledge itself and it is, as I have argued, created as a challenge to the classic peer-reviewed publications that are confined to academic circles and controlled within the auditing and managerial processes that define current University life. Thus, the challenge of altermodernity is one that aims at exposing the increased communication between fields of thought, a migration of ways of thinking, a complexity of journeys that embrace an element of chaos and mixture of universalisms in translation. I feel OA and the anthropology of network age, shares these identifications and can be defined by them.

In an altermodern sense, the editorial direction of these first numbers propose a journal that could explore bonds between ideas, representation, text, image (in their postmodern sense), but also a mesh and remix of authorship and appropriation (in their Altermodern sense) (see Tofts’ and MacRea excellent What Now?: The Imprecise and Disagreeable Aesthetics of Remix 2009). And like Altermodern attempts at re-mixing, an open access anthropology journal feels ‘imprecise and disagreeable’, it is felt sometimes, like a kind of ‘ugly’ form with resonances of anger, unsettled at the point of creating pressure. If we take altermodern as a possibility through which to explore academic uses of web 2.0, OA anthropology may direct us to explore the colliding existence of finalised, un-finalised, reviewed, un-reviewed knowledge, re-mixed authorship, author-edited, externally assessed, mixed, appropriated, re-mixed, contested, dissenting views, in the way like an altermodern artist does, by ‘transverse a cultural landscape saturated with signs and create new pathways between multiple formats of expression’ (Bourriaud 2009).

ARDAC is at stage of meeting pathways, it is not completely there yet, but it is journeying, and in doing so it aims at re-narrating our contemporary lives by looking at the political intersections between culture and globalisation, production and appropriation, and specifically, the way in which human relations are mediated through political voice and cultural innovation.

**Replica, Dissent and Electronic Sheeps**

It is this ‘political’ voice, I allude above, that brought about the term ‘dissent’ to the title of the journal. My initial thinking was to use the term ‘replica’, in the double meaning of the practice of ancient Greek theatre and the postmodern use of it. The idea of replica in ancient Greek theatre is one where a group of actors respond, often in a chorus, to the main performing voices, sometimes the same word is repeated, echo like, others the replica answers back, dissent from the main voice, adds tone, reiteration, memory, contradicts it. I understood replica then, in a postmodern sense, as a copy (a generated repetition) and an ‘answer back’, an emotional response, a way of contesting the production of meaning. One can think of contemporary use of this dual meaning of replica found in science-fiction/literature films about humans and cyborgs. Ridley Scott’s 1982 early postmodern Blade Runner (based on ‘Do the androids dream of electric sheep’ by Philip K Dick in 1968) exemplifies the duality of the term replica in the characters of the ‘repllicants’ which also echo the complex relations to cloning, copy, original, authentic, appropriated, dissenting in contemporary thinking.

The term replica, however, embodied many elements I liked about postmodern thinking about humanity, otherwise, and time but there was a sense of nostalgia, lament and utopia that didn’t fit into the altermodern idea at the core of ARDAC. Bourriaud argues that the modernist idea of time is that of advancing in a linear fashion, with the postmodern idea of time advancing in loops (Bourriaud 2009). Following him, I wanted to find a more altermodern preposition for the journal/review, a term that in Bourriaud’s altermodern use of time ‘captured the chaining, clustering together of signs from contemporary and historical periods which allows an exploration of what is now’.
I felt dissent was a better term for this clustering of signs and this exploration of the now. I felt the term dissent was one that could allow for the possibility of taking those postmodern echoes, clones and copies and be mashed and re-used with the original ones to the point of dissolution of those postmodern dichotomies and loops and thus, open up to the examination of new possibilities, in altermodern dichotomies and loops and thus, open up to the point of dissolution of those postmodern copies and be mashed and re-used with the original of taking those postmodern echoes, clones and dissent was one that could allow for the possibility I felt dissent was a better term for this clustering of contexts that have now consolidated the through p e r s p e c t i v e a n d o n t h e p o s s i b i l i t i e s o f m u l t i ‐ and Maria Elizabeth Bianconcini de Almeida brought At the closing of this number Maria Paulina de Assis practice in larger communities of knowledge. position ourselves theoretically and in research of the possibility of using anthropology to re ‐ appropriation of violence (in Stavroula’s Calabrian directing the ethnographic lense’ (in Claire’s case of Perkins and Stavroula Pipyrou, because they made distinctive points about the possibility of “re‐ directing the ethnographic lens” (in Claire’s case of using anthropology to think about genetically modified products) and re‐telling the social appropriation of violence (in Stavroula’s Calabrian Mafia) in a way in which both articles convinced me of the possibility of using anthropology to reposition ourselves theoretically and in research practice in larger communities of knowledge. At the closing of this number Maria Paulina de Assis and Maria Elis zabeth Bianconcini de Almeida brought an article that looked at the relationship between education and digital exclusion from an educational perspective and on the possibilities of multi‐educational strategies for global educational contexts that have now consolidated through the Internet. I broke the editorial into pieces and mashed and mixed the different ‘journeys’ and ideas that made this first edition into a different narrative, placed differently in the journal, with the full editorial narrative coming last. I felt, each author created a distinctive voice that was elliptic of that condition of altermodernity I wanted to discuss. Whilst the authors here do not define themselves as altermodern, the journal is defined itself as such, as it travels through different journeys of modernity, globalization, cultural critiques, and dissent. The editorial in this volume builds up a picture of the ways in which ‘altermodern’ discourses can be created and felt present. The articles presented here are larger than the scope of the journal. They are a mixture of levels of interaction with formally peer‐reviewed articles, postgraduate articles in progress, research papers, film reviews and opinion articles, all the articles bring different levels and different moments of appreciation on how knowledge is created and shared. They also illustrate how different anthropological and educational styles may become less visible an enunciated than others, depending on their research process and their own journey. In doing so, all the contributions make this edition an example of how anthropology (and related disciplines like educational studies, music, geography in this volume) in its critical review processes, can make a contribution to understanding the dissenting voices and to larger anthropological reviews of cultural politics in this our altermodern times.

References


http://zeroanthropology.net/

Friedman, K., 2004 Open Source Anthropology: Are anthropologists serious about sharing knowledge? in Antropologi.info


GARP., 2010. Goldsmiths Anthropology Research Papers

Department of Anthropology Goldsmiths, University of London. http://www.gold.ac.uk/anthropology/garp/

Gye, L., 2010. ‘How can you be found when no‐one knows that you are missing?’ In What now?: the imprecise and disagreeable aesthetics of remix. Fibreculture. ISSN 1449‐1443

http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue15/issue15_gye.html


Open Access Declarations and DOAJ: http://oa.mpg.de/openaccess‐berlin/berlindeclaration.html

http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/bethesda.htm

http://www.doi.org/doi?func=loadTemp&templ=longTermArchiving


http://poynder.blogspot.com/2006/10/open‐access‐death‐knell‐for‐peer‐html

Rex, 2006. The American Anthropological Association lobbying against open access is so, so misguided, Savage Minds. http://savageminds.org/2006/06/12/the‐american‐anthropological‐association‐lobbying‐against‐open‐access‐is‐really‐really‐wrong/


Tate 2009 Tate Triennial: Altermodern http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/altermodern/explore.shtml


All sites accessed in May 09

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by‐sa/3.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.
Contributors to this issue

Dr Veronica Barassi BA and MRes (Gold) PhD (Gold)
Veronica Barassi completed a doctorate in media and anthropology at Goldsmiths College. She is a Visiting Tutor in the Anthropology Department and in the Media and Communications Department and a research associate at the Institute of Contemporary European Studies (ICES). Her research and doctoral thesis is on the theme of social movements and alternative discourses; oppositional media and internet technologies.

Nicholas White BA (UWales)
Nicholas White studied anthropology at the University of Wales. He is a postgraduate candidate at the University of Sussex. His current research interests are on free software, open access and the politics of files sharing.

Maria Paulina de Assiss (PUC Sao Paulo Brazil)
Maria Paulina de Assiss was an associate at the University of London. She is an educationalist and works for the Educational Program at the Pontificia Universidade Católica de São Paulo in Brasil. She is a member of the European distance and e-learning network. Her research interest are in the area of the pedagogy of distance and e-learning.

Dr Maria Elizabeth Bianconcini de Almeida PhD (UMinho), PhD (PUC, Sao Paulo)
Maria Elizabeth Bianconcini de Almeida is an associate lecturer at the Educational Program at the Pontificia Universidade Católica de São Paulo in Brasil. Her research is on the field of curriculum development in the areas of distance learning, technology and education, technology and the professional development of teachers and digital inclusion.

Hagai van der Host BA (SOAS)
Hagai van der Host is completing a PhD at the Centre for Media and Film Studies, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London. His research interests are on media representations of anti-Semitism.

Stavroula Pipyrou MA (UWL)
Stavroula Pipyrou is a PhD candidate in the department of Anthropology, Durham University. Her research interest are on the theme of Greek linguistic minority of Reggio Calabria, South Italy and is primarily concerned with political networks of power and governance in the city of Reggio and surrounding villages and on refugee identities in Greece.

Clare Perkins MA Social Anthropology (UW)
Clare Perkins is a PhD research candidate at the Centre for Rural Research in the Department of Geography at the University of Worcester. Her research interest are in the area of anthropology of technologies of food production and the interplay between farming, globalization and legislative schemes with specific emphasis on GM (genetically modified) technologies in UK farming.

Dr Àngels Trias i Valls BA (UBC) PhD (QUB)
Àngels Trias i Valles studied anthropology at the University of Barcelona and at the Queen’s University of Belfast. She is a Senior Research assistant at the Institute of Contemporary European Studies, and a Lecturer in Anthropology at Regent’s College. Her research interests are in the area of economic anthropology and its intersection with the politics of cultural consent and gendered identities within globalization processes, cosmopolitanism and citizenship rights with special emphasis on new communication and virtual technologies.
Editorial Cloud

Leading Article

4 Veronica Barassi
Possibilities and Ambivalences: the Discursive Power of Online Technologies and their impact on Political Action in Britain

Papers, Reports & Articles

16 Nicholas White
Copy Me: Technological Change and the Consumption of Music

22 Maria Paulina de Assis and Maria Elizabeth Bianconcini de Almeida
Collaborative Learning in the Digital Learning Environment - People, Technology and Pedagogical Practices

Film Review

29 Hagai van der Host
Avatar and the Racism of Virtue

Opinion Articles

33 Stavroula Piprou
Narrative of a fine day: on the social appropriation of violence

36 Clare Perkins
The Husbandry of Technology: Outlining an ethnographic approach to farm family (neo-) productions of genetic modification

Remix

40 Àngels Trias i Valls
Open Access Anthropology 2.0 as a type of altermodern experimentation

Cover Art & Design: nenée - http://www.nenee.eu/
Cover work licensed under creative commons license