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Turner's Anthropology of Media and Its Legacies

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Abstract ■ In the 1990s, Terry Turner produced some of the most conceptually and ethnographically important research anywhere in the anthropology of media, apparently without having intended to do so. This article reviews the impact of his collaboration on the Kayapo Video Project both in terms of its effects in Kayapo communities and in terms of the debates it catalyzed in anthropology over the relationship of human productive powers with representation and social mediation in its broadest sense. Turner's anthropology of media (and indeed his anthropology more generally) emphasizes that human production always contains a historical excess within itself, which is the potential to transcend and to transform fundamentally the dominant social relations of production and reproduction in a given time and place. As such, Turner's work challenges what I describe as more 'Hegelian' theories of media that emphasize the inaccessibility of social mediation to human agency. In conclusion, I celebrate Turner's own historical excess and his vehement rejection of the pure/applied split in anthropological knowledge and praxis.

Keywords ■ agency ■ Kayapo ■ mediation ■ praxis ■ representation ■ technology

This article engages Terry Turner's pathbreaking research and activism in the anthropology of media. A longer article would convey a richer portrait of the various projects and discussions that contributed to the anthropology of media over the past 25 years and, no doubt, offer a more thorough situation of Turner's media work within the scope of his Kayapo ethnography. For spatial and thematic reasons, I concentrate here on Turner's participation in what has come to be known as the 'Kayapo Video Project', the scholarly debates it generated and the Project's legacies both for the Kayapo and for anthropology.

Since so much of Turner's work takes its inspiration from the social theory of Karl Marx, I will do likewise. Although Marx practiced journalism for most of his life and although he clearly counted on the efficacy of print media to help galvanize proletariat consciousness and to inspire revolutionary action, Marx never produced a 'theory' of media either within his early philosophy of praxis or within his later political economy. But Marx was concerned throughout his life and work with what we might term social 'mediation' in the sense of human relations of production, exchange and needs-satisfaction. And the problem of social media, particularly of exchange-media like money, was never far behind. Marx consistently drew

oppositions between the soul of human activity and its objective media; he focused his critical and analytical attention on what he understood to be an ontological tension between a human capacity to produce and to self-produce, and the tendency of social systems of reproduction and exchange to demand that human beings sacrifice their productive energies in the service of the social system as a whole. Capitalism, in Marx's vision, was simply the most fully realized example of this condition of alienation. And capital was nothing other than alienated human labor power in its historically most liquid, transactable form. Throughout human history, the tension between human productive energies and their alienable, solvent forms remained constant. 'The real not-capital is labor', he wrote in the *Grundrisse* (1973). The foil to social mediation for Marx was always the historically and socially situated productivity of human beings.

This core opposition ripples everywhere in Marx's social theory. It structures his critique of capital and validates his interpretation of the winnowing, dehumanizing dynamics of capitalism. At the limits of Marx's social imagination, it offers the horizon of a future form of human society – communism – in which social mediation no longer demands the sacrifice of soul to system. In an evocative passage in *The German Ideology* (1975: 36), Marx and Engels define the historical threshold of communism as the moment when each of us no longer is committed to a single *ausschließlichen Kreis der Tätigkeit* (exclusive circle of activity) in order to guarantee *die Mittel zum Leben* (the means for life). For the narrow focusing of life activity was itself a condition of estrangement, a division of subject from subject and subject from object that ultimately allowed the illusion of autonomous agentive objects to captivate human consciousness as capitalism's 'commodity fetishism'. One of the certainties we have about Marx's otherwise often mysterious future communism is that it would free human beings from the estranging effects of specialized system-oriented production, a freedom that would allow them to realize (again) their own self-production, to recognize their subjective social interdependence beyond the mediation of objects, and to know (for the first time) their unity as species being. If Marx's critique of capital centered on a tension between (self-) production and mediation, then communism represented the horizon of the abolition of this tension in favor of humanity once and for all.

Kayapo video

I offer this framing by way of introducing Terry Turner's work with the Kayapo in the medium of video as truly Marxian in both its activist and theoretical dimensions. While working as an anthropological consultant on a documentary for Granada TV's *Disappearing Worlds* series in 1987, Turner discovered that some Kayapo were already quite familiar with video technology (see Turner, 2002: 79–81). Indeed, Turner found defunct video

cameras at the villages of Mentuktire and Gorotire that were linked to a 1985 visit from a small group of Brazilian anthropologists and video documentarians headed by Monica Frota Feitosa and Renato Pereira, who had traveled to three western Kayapo villages and taught a few Kayapo how to use video cameras. Frota and Pereira had been inspired by Brazilian television coverage of the long-standing struggle between Kayapo and the Brazilian government over land and travel rights in Kayapo territory. In 1985, the dramatic kidnapping by Kayapo of a team of investigators from the Brazilian Indian Agency, FUNAI, captured public attention and not a little sympathy from some Brazilians. Frota and Pereira brought video cameras to Kayapo communities in part to draw their attention to how video could be used to publicize their cause in Brazil. In addition to training several Kayapo men and one Kayapo woman in the use of the camera, Frota also experimented with delivering videotaped messages from one Kayapo community to another and managed to enroll one young Kayapo man, Kinhiabieti, on a video-making course at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio.

When Turner returned to Kayapo territory in 1987 he met several Kayapo (among them Nhakaykep and Kuben'i from Gorotire, Kinhiabieti and Waiwai from Mentuktire and Payakan and Mokuka from A'ukre) who had learned to operate the video camera either from Frota and Pereira or from one another. In addition, Turner reported, Kayapo leaders expressed to him a great deal of interest in gaining greater access to video technology in order to document their ongoing relations and confrontations with the Brazilian government, to record agreements reached with Brazilians, to record most of their traditional ceremonies and to communicate between villages. Yet the political goals were paramount and, indeed, over the next few years, Kayapo put video to use in dramatic ways. Kinhiabieti filmed debates within the Brazilian Constitutional Convention on the subject of indigenous rights in 1988. In 1989, Mokuka made video documentation a central feature of the (ultimately successful) Kayapo protest at the town of Altamira against the World Bank's and Brazilian government's plan to build hydroelectric dams in the Xingu river valley that would have flooded Kayapo lands. Kayapo video-makers made a point of filming themselves filming the Brazilians, demonstrating at once their command over Western technologies of representation and the significance of video-making in Kayapo terms as a ritual practice that did not simply reflect social reality but rather that also constituted, in part, that social reality.

In order to help Kayapo expand their access to video, Turner submitted a grant proposal to the Spencer Foundation to supply video cameras, editing studios and storage space for original videos to Kayapo from several communities. The project was funded in 1990 and organized by Turner in conjunction with Vincent Carelli of the Centro de Trabalho Indigenista's 'Video in the Villages' Project in São Paulo. During its most active phase, from 1990 to 1992, the Project assisted in the expansion of Kayapo

video-making with Kayapo video-makers filming and editing several dozen videos whose filmic content ranged from communications between different villages to the recording of traditional rituals and performances, to documentation of Kayapo political developments, both within Kayapo communities and in their relations with the Brazilian government. In keeping with a Kayapo understanding of video as productive as well as mimetic of social reality, Kayapo video-makers became adept at staging scenes depicting various aspects of their social reality. In one case, the establishment and daily life of a new village was staged for video in detail. In another case, Kayapo arranged a rather visceral re-enactment of the kidnapping and interrogation of illegal miners, much to the surprise of the legal miners they had persuaded to act in this video. Although little has been written on Kayapo practices of video viewing, Turner informed me in a recent interview that Kayapo tended to watch their own videos collectively with great enthusiasm and brio.

In his first progress report to the Spencer Foundation, Turner reflected:

The point of [video] demonstration for the Kayapo is clearly not the reproduction of Kayapo culture as it was before the inception of contact with Brazilian society. Rather, the activity of recording and displaying tapes of 'Kayapo culture' becomes for the Kayapo an icon of the sort of hybrid culture they are struggling to construct. In this new synthesis, which may be understood as the ideological expression of the situation of 'inter-ethnic friction' between the Kayapo and Brazilians, a body of knowledge, ritual practice, and social institutions conceived under the distinctly un-Kayapo category of 'Kayapo culture' becomes objectified and hypostatized as the center of a new socio-cultural cosmos framed in Kayapo versions of Brazilian cultural, technological, and political-economic terms. . . . The technical objectification of their own 'culture' through their use of the Western technology of video has become one of the more important means by which the Kayapo are constructing this new consciousness of their 'traditional' culture and ethnic identity. (1990: 3)

Turner centered his analysis on the ambivalent effects of new modes of mediation. On the one hand, video technology had proved an important instrument at Altamira and elsewhere in challenging encroaching foreign mining and logging interests, in enabling Kayapo self-representation and in cultivating a hitherto unknown publicity for Kayapo-Brazilian relations on a global stage, a stage on which Kayapo were rapidly becoming active players (mediated in turn by outside agencies like the Rainforest Foundation and other environmentalist and human rights organizations). On the other hand, in the global self-presentation of their cause Turner noted how the Kayapo came to objectify their contemporary social relations in a Western idiom of 'culture'. This observation helped fuel later suspicion (Faris, 1992; Weiner, 1997) of the underlying transformation or compromise of Kayapo social consciousness involved in the adoption of video technology.

Yet Turner stressed in his report that Kayapo were themselves quite aware that a transformation in their social relations was inevitable whether or not they used video cameras. Their traditional way of life, their 'culture', as Kayapo objectified it, had changed through contact and 'friction' with the non-Kayapo world, a friction that had heated up considerably since large gold reserves were discovered on their lands in the early 1980s. Kayapo were not so much concerned with defending 'pristine' pre-contact social relations, Turner wrote, as they were concerned with gaining greater agency in the guidance of their present and future social transformations. Although Kayapo certainly prized their 'culture' in the sense of a repertoire of particular ritual, representational and symbolic forms of the kinds equally prized by anthropologists as defining the uniqueness of human societies, Turner noted that a far more pressing concern for Kayapo than 'cultural conservation' was maintaining maximal sovereignty over their cultural productivity and social reproduction. A Kayapo analogy for video (offered by Chief Pombo in one of Mokuka's videos entitled *Peace between Chiefs*) was to think of tapes as 'seed corn', as a resource for social reproduction that could be stored, planted and harvested as needed.

Turner's interpretation of Kayapo video thus builds upon the Kayapo's own (see also Turner, 1991, 1995). Both are concerned with video-making as a political project to help leverage greater agency over the dynamics of Kayapo-non-Kayapo exchange. To be sure, video-making had other lateral effects in Kayapo society. Video-making was a high-status (and, with one exception, a masculine) affair from its early stages and became involved in the generational politics of chieftainship in some Kayapo communities. It also opened some Kayapo video-makers and political leaders to an unprecedented global scale of communication. But what is particularly striking (in light of later concerns about the Westernizing effects of video on Kayapo consciousness) is the lessening significance video retained in Kayapo communities after the most intense period of political activism and video-making that culminated in the demarcation of the Xingu reserve in 1993. Turner confirmed to me recently that neither video-making nor video viewing has come to displace other Kayapo performative practices. Nor have Kayapo ever expressed to him the opinion that video has endangered Kayapo culture.

Critics respond

The Kayapo Video Project generated considerable enthusiasm among Kayapo, and in academic and activist circles across the world. Together with the work of other anthropologists and activists like Faye Ginsburg (1991, 1993) and Eric Michaels (1986, 1994), Turner drew a great deal of attention to indigenous media projects and, within anthropology, this research attracted mainstream attention to the anthropology of media. But

indigenous media had its detractors as well, interestingly including anthropologists who challenged the relatively optimistic reading of indigenous media offered by Turner and others with analyses of the Western ontology frozen into instruments like video technology, an ontology that, it was argued, would inevitably define the character of indigenous representation from without.

In an opening salvo in this debate, James Faris accused anthropologists like Turner and Ginsburg of being naïvely complicit with the spread of subaltern consumerism across the globe: 'Video has not, however, been used before by subalterns and marginals to the West, and using it to address the West may be derived from the classical motivation of subjects: that of want, of consumption . . .'. (1992: 176). Faris was quick to note that he had nothing against Kayapo video-making in principle:

There is, as noted, obviously nothing wrong with Kayapo, or any other people, videotaping whatever they may like. But as I have tried to stress, the means of realizing both the power of the technology *and* its influence are not available to Kayapo, nor are the motivations of cultural presentation for non-Kayapo consumption. I find their use of video, as described by Turner, rather forlorn. It is almost as if, now, they are equal partners with news photographers and photojournalists. (1992: 176)

Faris noted, as other critics did as well, that Kayapo had not themselves produced video cameras. Thus Faris suspected that their engagement with video and other 'scopic technologies' was something less than willing and empowering (cf. Weiner, 1997: 197, 202–3). Rather it incorporated Kayapo within a modern Western economy of visualism as subaltern consumers who at best were capable of feeble imitation:

The Kayapo and others of the Third World do not join the global village as equal participants, as just more folks with their video cameras. They enter it already situated by the West, which gives them little room to be anything more than what the West will allow. Technology notwithstanding, they will enter only on our terms, unless they forcibly exclude us, prohibit our entry into their lives, eliminate our visits, our technologies and our help, refuse to allow us to view their videotapes, and show them only to themselves. (1992: 176)

Faris's story has a curious inevitability to it. One wonders: why do anything as Kayapo other than pitch a last-ditch life-or-death effort to eliminate 'us' from their lives? The only situation of social representation that Faris deems authentic and culturally validating appears to be one entirely sealed to the outside world (a situation that Kayapo were well aware was fantastic in the face of continuous incursions from miners and loggers, and government plans to build dams near their villages). Faris seems at once aware and anxious that his interpretation of indigenous media will be taken as a sentimental nostalgia for the social isolation of a 'natural people' in the Herderian sense (1992: 174, 176), but one of the certainties in Faris's article is that Kayapo video must *somehow* corrupt them. The Kayapo, Faris

declares, cannot simply be people with cameras (1992: 176, as we of the West presumably can be), and so the gift of technology must be exacting a reciprocal sacrifice.

Always at his best engaging an opponent, Turner replied to Faris in an essay that has since deservedly become one of the truly classic texts in the anthropology of media, 'Defiant Images: The Kayapo Appropriation of Video' (1992). In the first half of 'Defiant Images', Turner explains how Kayapo have made video as Kayapo as 'manioc meat pie' by adapting video to their own social, moral and aesthetic principles of the beauty of concerted social action (for example, by structuring repetitive patterns in video representation and by treating the action of video-making as itself integral to the social production of truth, particularly in their relationship to Brazilian society at large). On the one hand, Turner describes how video has been integrated into long-standing Kayapo principles and practices of representation. On the other, Turner argues how, far from making Kayapo into passive viewer-consumers, video-making has become an integrated ritual form, a strategy in Kayapo self-realization that has extended their capacities of action rather than dulling and restricting them. Turner's key point is that Kayapo video is not simply mimetic, that is, representative of pre-existing social reality, but rather that Kayapo treat video-making as another kind of cultural performance that is *productive* of social reality.

In the second half of the article, Turner turns his attention directly to Faris's critique, writing that 'One of the most disconcerting things about free-ranging "Others" to some current Western champions of cultural "difference" is how little concerned they tend to be with the "authenticity" or cultural purity of their lifestyles' (1992: 12). Turner points out that the concern with policing the boundaries of pristine pluralistic cultures is probably as Western as any scopic technology. More importantly, he argues that Kayapo and other indigenous peoples have turned to video and other communications technologies not in any conscious or unconscious imitation of Western society but rather to seek new technical schemes that are more suitable to managing their transforming historical circumstances as Kayapo. For Kayapo, video is simply not intrinsically non-Kayapo.

The Kayapo are so interested in video and its representational possibilities because they are keenly aware that the social circumstances affecting their presentation of themselves to one another are changing in ways that strain the capacity of their traditional modes of representation either to represent or to reproduce. *They* are therefore interested in new media of representation, and are in turn using these new media in ways that affect and transform their culture and their conception of themselves. (1992: 14)

In the end, Turner reads Faris not as the Marxist his language of capital, exploitation and consumption would suggest but rather as a Hegelian:

... [whose] misplacement of politics in the de-materialized realm of logical and cultural categories results in a program of practical political disempowerment of material social actors; what [begins] as a liberating critique becomes, albeit unwittingly, a conservative brief for the hegemonic status quo. It also results in a passive quietism. There remains nothing to be done, save to criticize the political and theoretical aporias of what already has been done. (1992: 15)

Turner offered a similar response to a later, much more theoretically elaborate commentary on the anthropology of indigenous media by James Weiner (1997). Weiner had developed an essentially Heideggerian interrogation (see Heidegger, 1977) of the faith in the possibilities of cultural representation he ascribed to the major anthropological analysts of indigenous media. He accused them of failing to 'distinguish between *the representation of relations* and *a relation to representative praxis*' by which he meant a '*differential social/existential relation to the camera and its technology*' (1997: 202, original emphasis) that divided the 'epiphinal' and non-representational social consciousness of pre-modern societies from the 'specularized as well as spectacularized society' of late 20th-century Westerners (1997: 199). Although Weiner distinguished his existential-phenomenological concerns from Faris's critique of consumption, the difficulties each author has with the 'authenticity' of non-Western use of Western technologies remains largely parallel. For Weiner, the 'social constructionism' with which Ginsburg and others approached indigenous media betrayed the technical relationship that Westerners had developed to cameras as tools *zu handen* in the Heideggerian sense. In other words, the instrumental character of camera use could not be assumed for non-Western peoples. Cameras belonged to a certain Western representationalist epistemic configuration that diverged radically from the non-representationalist epistemic configuration into which he grouped New Guinean, Aboriginal Australian and Amazonian peoples. As such, following Heidegger, cameras could only inhibit the authentic realization of self in a non-representationalist society. Conversely, the anthropological embrace of representationalism could be interpreted as a covert recruitment of indigenous subjects to the Western representationalist enterprise embedded in anthropology's documentation of cultural totalities.

The promoters of indigenous video insist that such people should have the power to produce their own images of their society and culture. The implication, of course, is that this culture and society already exist as knowable entities, and the people themselves have to be assumed to possess the rationalizing and expressive urges so bound up with our own notions of the individual and its autonomy. (1997: 210–11)

Turner concluded his response to Weiner's article by challenging Weiner's own knowable entities:

[I]t is Weiner, not I or Ginsburg, who persistently does what he accuses us of, presenting whole 'cultural traditions' as *expressive totalities* embodying a single

esthetic principle, mode of representation, or form of subjectivity. Thus we have Weiner's postanthropological contrast between the 'West', a culture supposedly expressing its 'productive' type of selfhood through totalizing visual representation epitomized by Renaissance perspective painting, on the one hand, and contemporary television on the other, and most if not all 'non-Western' societies, for which the self, the body, and reality in general are experienced nonrepresentationally as 'unarticulated grounds' of 'being' which 'unfold,' in Heideggerian fashion, through 'epiphanies.' . . . Epiphanies are indexes, indexes are signs, and signs are representations, so even the Papua New Guinean societies which are Weiner's preferred examples of supposed non-Western representationalism are not so. The ethnographic fact that such societies may believe that features of the landscape are epiphanies of ancestors or supernatural power and remain unaware that they have socially constructed this belief does not entitle one to take their beliefs at face value, as Weiner does, as tokens [representations?] of their essential, nonrepresentationalist cultural reality. (1997: 229)

The stakes of debating indigenous media for anthropology

Re-reading these articles, one immediately gets the sense from their affective intensity that the anthropological stakes of the debate exceed the interpretation of indigenous media. Part of this may arise from the kind of analytical and methodological factionalism that accompanies most debates in the social sciences. At one level, the debate I have just outlined performs the opposition of two kinds of analytical attention (codified by participants as 'Marxian' or 'constructionist' on the one hand and as 'Heideggerian' or 'dialectical' on the other) where the Marxian anthropology tends to hone in on the ratio between human (self-)production and social-systemic reproduction and where the Heideggerian anthropology is methodologically individualistic and tends to treat social forms as exterior and compromising to true being. One could argue that both anthropologies are phenomenological in their own way; but they begin with different sets of attentions and concerns and tend to be relatively ungenerous in appreciating the attentions and concerns of the other. As I have written elsewhere, the multiple potential epistemological foundations for social-scientific analysis produce tensions in social-scientific knowledge that easily become full-blown analytical incommensurabilities in the crucible of institutional and professional practice (Boyer, 2005a). In this sense, the Marxian-Heideggerian debate captures both a moment in contemporary anthropology as it grapples with historically novel communications technologies and representational practices, and also reiterates both in manner and in content the fracture lines of analytical and methodological incommensurability from which the social sciences have never been free.

At another level, however, the debate surfaces deep uncertainties as to how we anthropologists should think about, represent and enable social mediation generally. Here I think that indigenous media debates expose

another foundational tension in anthropology as in the other social sciences between what I would describe as 'Marxian' and 'Hegelian' (rather than 'Heideggerian') understandings of mediation. It is worth our time to think carefully about this tension because what is at stake is how we understand the place of human agency in processes of social mediation. The Marxian position outlined above holds that any system of social mediation, however austere and totalizing, is nevertheless at some level subject to the agency of human beings, creating their history, if nonetheless never as they please. Human production always contains a historical excess within itself which is the potential to transcend and to transform fundamentally the dominant social relations of production and reproduction in a given time and place.

The Hegelian position meanwhile requires a bit more exposition. Hegel was concerned with mediation in his philosophy of history, especially in understanding human beings and natural materials as *die Mittel* (means, instruments, media) of the *Weltgeist's* process of self-realization. Indeed, one could say that Hegel's world was saturated with media in the sense that humanity, its history and its environment were all equivalently the media of a divine logic of formation, extrinsic to human agency and virtually exclusive of human recognition beyond (conveniently enough) the philosophy of history. The inaccessibility of social mediation to human agency is a position that has been stated more or less strongly since Hegel but it is remarkable how many of the major strands of 20th-century media theory tend to center this dimension of mediation analytically.

Reiterations and elaborations of the Hegelian position have been diverse. One can think, for example, of Marshall McLuhan's work on media (1962, 1964), which defined media as extensions of human senses and capacities that, in their technical forms, became prosthetics that fundamentally reshaped and rescaled human senses and capacities. Mankind began, McLuhan argued, in tribal societies typified by relatively unmediated and multi-sensory modes of communication. But first the phonetic alphabet and later print technology, according to McLuhan, extended and focused the sensory hegemony of the eye, resulting in a broad cultural visualism, that made principles of abstraction, classification, 'uniformity, continuity, and lineality' (1964: 14) into the institutions of Western culture. But new electric media like television, McLuhan wrote, were challenging Western visualism with a multi-sensory interconnectedness that pointed toward a new, global mode of tribalism. What is most striking about McLuhan's model is that his media-driven modes of culture are in no way susceptible to human agency. Visualism cannot be amplified without print technology, nor can it be dampened without a media technological revolution like the invention of television.

In his centering of the extrinsic, technical power of mediation over human agency McLuhan elaborates a Hegelian analytics that currently intersects in an unexpected way with the legacies of other influential

Hegelian media theorists like the Frankfurt school. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's book *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, for example, embeds a critique of *Massenkultur* (mass culture) within a chilling narrative of the hypostatization of reason in human culture and of the incremental subjugation of the authentic inner *poiesis* of the human intellect to reason's 'distancing' and 'abstracting' rationality (1994: 11, 13). Horkheimer and Adorno identify the dialectic as the key modality of *Aufklärung* (enlightenment) responsible for reifying distinctions of subject and object and for extending the abstraction and distanciation between them since it is through 'dialectical thinking in which everything is always that which it is, only because it becomes that which it is not' (1994: 15). This dialectical process of differentiation and identification is further codified by the formalism and 'universal interchangeability' of mathematical and scientific reasoning (1994: 12) and culminates, in conjuncture with capitalism, in the exposure of all society to the interchangeable technical logic of rationality (1994: 13). All objects, all the creative powers and delicate capacities of humanity, are, for Horkheimer and Adorno, 'liquidated' by the 'triumph of repressive equality' in modern bourgeois society.

I could easily multiply these examples. In each case, media are extrinsic to human productive agency and tend to determine it, as it were, from without to within. Hegelian theories of media and mediation continue to exert a powerful influence over social-scientific research on media ranging from Ben Anderson's work on nationalism (1983) to Friedrich Kittler's study of information processing in literature (1990) and Niklas Luhmann's (2000) systems-theoretical approach to media and knowledge. One may well wonder why Hegelian approaches to mediation are so attractive and I think it is because a term like 'mediation' is itself quite Hegelian in its level of abstraction and in its lexical and conceptual resistance to human efforts of meaningful specification and subdistinction. In other words, the subject of mediation is paralyzing enough in its scope to invite theoretical knowledge that emphasizes the extrinsic powers of mediation over human agency.

One could certainly extend this point to the Heideggerian readings of media offered by Weiner and Faris. Their 'visions' (forgive my unfortunate choice of words) are Hegelian insofar as they read video technology as being something ontologically exterior to, and disjoined from, the social phenomenology of non-Western societies. The principal difference of the Marxian phenomenology of technology pursued by Turner and others is that this disjuncture between form and capacity is recognized as a historical problem, not as an ontological one.

The unsettling implications of Turnerian anthropology

As I noted at the outset of this article, Terry Turner has gone further than any of his contemporaries in codifying an alternative Marxian analytics for

the anthropology of media. The key to Turner's alternative is his caution that we focus not on extrinsic media or mediation in the Hegelian sense, for this move already fetishizes the instruments and forms of social representation. Rather, Turner advises we focus fundamentally and principally on the historically and socially specific human energies, capacities and relations from which both mediation and knowledge of mediation are composed. For Turner, an anthropology of media that did not begin with a rich appreciation for the self-realizing capacities of concrete human actors would, in the end, constitute a perversion of its intention.

In this sense, Turner's anthropology of media epitomizes Turner's anthropology more generally in its critique of 'pure' formalism and culturalism as the basis for anthropological knowledge. In his interest in the self-productive, self-realizing capacities of historically and socially embedded human beings, Turner has sought to avoid reifying 'culture', 'technology', 'nature' or any of the other schemata of human life that somehow always manage to hypostatize 'form' as the essence of human experience. Turner's anthropology always risks form against productivity, against relation, against intention. It is not surprising to me that a dialectical Marxian anthropology of his kind would inevitably become an activist anthropology, for once one gives up the conceit of form as the essence of human life, what barrier is there to seeking to actively transform the world through the action of experiencing it?

The intervention of an activist anthropology like Turner's clearly produces an unsettling and disorienting situation for many anthropologists, despite the fact that it has been proposed often enough in one form or another since the Boasians. The vehement and seemingly incommensurable character of the debates over indigenous media underlines nothing if not our restless concern with the normative profile of 'the anthropologist'. Should s/he pursue a pure science whether through the technical instrumentaria of scientific rationality or through a world-rejecting intellectual avant-gardism? Or should s/he embrace instead his/her possibilities of action outside the circuits of academe? Yet these alternatives cannot simply be presented as a matter of freely chosen alternatives exemplifying moral character. There is also our own social reality with which to contend. Everything about our professional training and practice emphasizes and rewards the academic over the extra-academic orientation of our research. In this environment, to paraphrase Marx, one cannot blame mushrooms for populating a rotten log. The distinction between pure and applied science is a social fact of professional hierarchies of expertise (I have sought to explain the reasons for this elsewhere: 2005b), one that is supported by the insular orientation of universities and academic departments. It should therefore not surprise us in the least that pure scientists (whether avant-gardes or technicians) maintain a dominant voice in academic debates over the most fruitful modes for anthropological research.

And yet Turner has distinguished himself in academic anthropology by

categorically denying the legitimacy of the pure/applied split. At times, he has done this with admirable finesse and at other times with a certain measure of brute force. What is certain is that his position has made him a liminal figure for anthropology in his embodiment of seemingly contradictory dimensions of anthropological enterprise, and, one might add, unapologetically so. He has never wavered from the position that anthropology should foremost concern itself with the praxical and self-productive dimension of human experience, and that this concern must realize itself heterogeneously if anthropology is to remain something more than a narrow academic pursuit (and a caricature of the excessive abundance of humanity over which it lays claim to expertise). For his own excess and abundance, we should celebrate Turner's career. He has relentlessly demonstrated what it is possible for anthropologists to do, both as scholars and as human beings, when we no longer think of these two dimensions of our being as limiting conditions upon the other. As such, he has given us a particular, if not always welcome, gift by reminding us of what we are essentially capable.

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