

to non-anthropologists. Thus it offers anthropologists little conceptual development. Unfortunately this also means that despite a few disparate passages on culture, the book gives little attention to the parallel lives of cultural production and cultural politics of a more sinister kind. Race-based essentialism is not a marginal concern in today's Finland, and if its links to cultural production are not clear, they should be examined. Yet ultimately, the debate about cultural production and the concept of culture, in all its slipperiness, offers a natural and probably rewarding domain where anthropologists and scholars in cognate fields have much to learn from and to offer one another.

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JOHANNA SUMIALA. *Median rituaalit: Johdatus media-antropologiaan*. Tampere: Vastapaino, 2010. Pp. 174. ISBN 978-951-768-307-4.

Anthropology of the media is a subfield that began to evolve in the 1980s, and has so far remained a largely under-theorized terrain. Johanna Sumiala's book *Median rituaalit* (Rituals of the Media) is a welcome contribution that promises to offer a comprehensive introduction to the area. Although the book has its merits, this promise remains partly unfulfilled. The book is divided into two parts. The first part, titled 'Anthropology of the Media', discusses rituals, communication and community; the latter part, 'Rituals of the Media', offers a detailed analysis of different media.

Sumiala describes media anthropology, not as a clear discipline, but rather as a way of approaching research questions that cross over between media research and anthropology. In this line of scholarship the media and its users are studied by various ethnographic methods. Media is understood as a shared system that constructs the social reality around us: a site of imagined communities. Media rituals, on the other hand, are seen as comprising a repeated and schematic appearance of symbolic communication.

Sumiala connects the development of media anthropology to the 1980–90s trend towards an anthropology of the present, a trend generating a continuously growing number of 'communication theory'-oriented scholars. She does good work in describing the multidisciplinary background of the field. Durkheim gets a lot of attention, as do many scholars such as Benedict Anderson, Erving Goffman, and those belonging to the Chicago School of Pragmatism. She also points out that a division exists between 'media anthropology' and 'anthropology of the media'. Looked at from a historical perspective, anthropological media research has been closely connected with ethnographic cinema. Yet in other parts of the book Sumiala treats the two as synonyms, which is confusing to a reader.

Rituals are at the centre of the book, although more generally they are only one of the main concepts in media anthropology; also significant are the concepts of culture, religion, myth, narrative, performance, representation and symbol. In discussing how media

anthropology has approached the study of rituals, Sumiala finds the field to be strongly influenced by the social sciences in general. However she criticises these disciplines for seeing ritual as just a part of primitive culture. By contrast, anthropology has been the one science keeping the term ‘ritual’ alive also in ‘modern’ contexts.

In Sumiala’s approach the defining attribute of media rituals is that they create a sense of commonality for their participants—people throughout the world share an experience despite being located in different time zones and geographic settings. According to Sumiala, the power of the media originates in its ability to tie people together with symbols. In other words, the media communicates with us through schemata familiar to us from other situations or other media; the more global and timeless these situations are, the longer they last. Sumiala gives us examples of recent media ‘spectacles’: the murder of Anna Lindh in Sweden, Mohammed caricatures in Denmark, 9/11 in New York and the recent school shootings in Finland.

The book also examines media rituals from three perspectives: first, the recipients; second, production; and third, media performance. Of these, I found the first aspect the most interesting. In it Sumiala discusses how in ‘pilgrimage rituals’, instead of an actual pilgrimage to the grave stone of a dead singer, participants engage in online pilgrimage, for example by entering the web pages of their favourite artist on YouTube to look up a song. She also discusses how new media technologies have transformed the roles of the media recipients into those of active participants. Examples from recent disaster spectacles like the Tsunami catastrophe or 9/11 in New York, illustrate this further: important information was delivered via cell phones and via the internet by people who would have formerly been mere recipients of media descriptions before journalists arrived at the scene.

One of the merits of the book is its style in which Sumiala as the text’s narrator ties global phenomena, like the mass media interest in Michael Jackson’s death, to her own personal memories, bringing the reader closer to the writer. That is an interesting approach rarely used in Finnish scholarly writings, and reminds me of similar style utilized in the book *Katseen voima* by Janne Seppänen (Seppänen 2001). The book is well-structured, and most of the questions generated by the text are answered within a few pages. It is also significant as the first account on media anthropology published in Finnish, ensuring that it will end up on the book lists of Finnish universities. The discussion on rituals is likewise rewarding in many ways. Yet this introduction is not an inclusive view of the whole field of media anthropology and often leaves the reader wishing for further detail. It functions as a good conversation opener, leaving the reader to anticipate further Finnish contributions.

REFERENCES

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