

PERTIERRA, ANNA CHRISTINA 2018. *Media Anthropology for the Digital Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 200 p. ISBN: 978-1-5095-0843-3 (hardcover), 978-1-5095-0844-0 (paperback).

**D**r Anna Christina Pertierra's book *Media Anthropology for the Digital Age* makes a substantial promise in its title. The book offers to shed light on the current trends and challenges in media anthropology in the age of global and digital communication. In addition, it wishes to bring both anthropology and media and communication studies into a closer, ethnographically informed dialogue with each other.

Pertierra formulates the scope of her book (p. 2) as follows: 'While media technologies and infrastructures may be global in reach, they are understood by consumers through a filter of local experience. This book will show how the theories and methods of anthropology offer valuable ways to study media from this ground-level perspective and thus to understand the human experience of media in the digital age.' Pertierra contextualises this argument by outlining both the history of media anthropology ('how we got here') and its current developments (what is being done and what needs to be done now).

The book provides a concise history of media anthropology and how anthropology on one hand, and media and communication studies on the other hand, have dealt with the issue of the mediation of culture. This outline, which introduces many of the key actors and their most influential publications in the field, offers useful material for teachers. It will do a great service in engaging students and increasing their knowledge of historical and modern-day media anthropology and its main trends.

Pertierra aptly notes that media anthropology has become an established research orientation in the age of mass media, during which focus has been directed to the ways in which television, radio, and film influence people's everyday lives and to related practices around emerging (mass) cultures of mediation. The reader appreciates the clarity of Pertierra's voice and her expertise in the intellectual history of the field.

The narrative of the chapter on the history of media anthropology, interpreted mainly from the perspective of anthropology, is structured around questions such as, Why did it take so long for anthropologists find interest in studying media? In this chapter, many significant themes emerge that are related to, for example, the contested relationship between modernity and anthropology and what may be called the global media industry. The path that Pertierra follows with regard to media and communication studies addresses the lack of interest on the part of media and communication studies in grasping more culturally sensitive perspectives—including those of their audiences—in their analyses. The book is structured around a critique of a media-centric approach to the study of contemporary cultures of mediation, and media and communication studies is primarily blamed for this fault.

In Pertierra's book special focus is given to ethnography and its potential to bring together anthropologists and media and communication studies scholars to better explore practices and digital cultures of mediation. The book provides

a lengthy discussion on the different ways in which ethnography is defined and used in neighbouring disciplines. The subtext of this section not only describes recent methodological developments, but also reflects the difficulties and uneasiness that anthropology as a discipline faces when it has to negotiate its primogeniture to this methodology.

Pertierra's book maintains that the challenge of media anthropology today is to interpret and explain the present-day mediated lives of people profoundly influenced by digitalisation and the globalisation of communication. The author writes (p. 117–118) that 'digitally mediated activities have penetrated so many aspects of everyday life for many people around the world. These frameworks expand the scope of digital ethnography beyond simply observing what media devices people are using.'

One could not agree more with Pertierra.

The book does well in raising the issue at the centre of media anthropology. There is definitely an urge to expand the scope of today's media anthropology and look beyond studies that focus on the use of media in everyday life to investigate how people live with and in it as well as how social worlds are created in this condition.

That said, more needs to be done. If we truly want to begin to understand the 'social worlds in which digital mediation is so fundamentally constitutive' (p. 158), we have to go beyond the safe haven of locality and the humans that inhabit it. We have to develop conceptual and ethnographic tools to better understand how social worlds are simultaneously created in multiple locations and by diverse actors. This means extending the horizon for media anthropology research and starting to seriously consider the interactions between human and non-human actors, such as algorithms. To call this media centrism is too easy an answer.

In short, Pertierra's book makes this point explicitly: in the future we will need media anthropology that has the intellectual nerve to challenge the present 'anthropocentric' paradigm in media anthropology—only then can we truly develop media anthropology for the digital age.

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