

## CHAPTER 1

### MEDIATING PUBLICS AND ANTHROPOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION

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*Media, Anthropology and Public Engagement* looks at how changing public media and arts practices are enabling the emergence of a new public anthropology. In doing so, we address a set of key questions about anthropology's public role. Each of the key terms in this phrase - public, anthropology, media, engagement - needs to be considered, since each has multiple referents and contested meanings. In this introduction, we set out the premises for understanding what an engaged anthropology can be and how new media can be put to work to broad effect. The chapters in this collection demonstrate which questions must be asked, and how they can be addressed in practical terms as well as through intellectual argument, and illustrate how initiatives by a range of anthropologists in different (largely anglophone) countries have adopted media into their practices.

New media, and new ways of employing media, are developing all the time. In a book on the subject, we are necessarily committing ourselves to a discussion with longevity, in contrast to more ephemeral media. This brings with it the advantages of gathering together a set of chapters that mark a line in the sand about where we are today, to take stock of a number of innovative and rapidly changing scenarios, and to put them in a broader temporal and theoretical perspective. Behind the rapid change in the use of some media, in other words, there are issues that remain relatively constant, central debates about the discipline that require repeated assertion, and tensions and dilemmas that always need to be addressed. In a book on media, publics and anthropological engagement, we wish to remind our readers

that there is a very wide range of media that do not necessarily replace one another, but offer different forms of communication, and create different kinds of public.

A challenge that we address in this volume is to bring together insights from media anthropology with questions about public engagement, and ask how or even whether these are compatible. What new opportunities arise from changing technologies to address long standing problems for an engaged anthropology? While new technologies can open doors into new environments, and gather new audiences for anthropological communication, they also prompt us to question some basic assumptions about what anthropology is, what can and should be communicated, and what we actually mean by a public anthropology. The latter question has been increasingly debated in recent years, impelled by initiatives such as Robert Borofsky's public anthropology programme (see Borofsky 2000, 2011, Vine 2011), and a revived *Anthropology in Action* journal<sup>1</sup> as well as the series that this book contributes to, and other initiatives. One reason to shift the nomenclature from applied anthropology to public anthropology has been to break down the implied split between applied and 'pure' academic anthropology, and urge scholars also to engage in urgent and political issues faced by people subject to power imbalances around the world. It is interesting to note that all the contributors to this volume have scholarly appointments, as well as being engaged in various kinds of public activities. New forms of media might enable kinds of public engagement that were not previously available, but they require the time and effort in the same way as any other form of public engagement. Hence, in this book we address questions that integrate questions about engagement, media and publics. We address these in this introduction by way of four questions, as follows:

- What is anthropological engagement?
- What are the publics of anthropology?
- What kinds of media are being used and how do they affect the above?

- What kind of anthropology is implied by these questions?

### **What anthropological engagement?**

Various anthropologists bemoan the invisibility of the discipline in the public domain, including several contributors to this book. Thomas Hylland Eriksen is among those who claim that anthropology should have changed the world, yet remains almost invisible outside academia (2012). In common with Peter Hervik (chapter 3), he argues that anthropologists should have been at the forefront of public debate ‘about multiculturalism and nationalism, the human aspects of information technology, poverty and economic globalisation, human rights issues and questions of collective and individual identification in the Western world’ and yet they fail to get their message across (2012: 1).

Questions about anthropological engagement tend to fall into easy dichotomies. Despite contrary evidence, the idea persists that there is a pure, academic anthropology, which is a discussion between anthropologists, in contrast to an applied anthropology that is a discussion with people ‘out there’ beyond University departments of anthropology. The entrenchment of the idea of pure versus applied and the exclusion of active-anthropology from academic departments is happily largely behind us, but the dichotomy tends to raise its head at regular intervals. But even within debates about engaged public or applied anthropology, there is a spread of approaches to consider. Fassin (2013) distinguishes between popularization and politicization, for example, and in a landmark volume ‘Exotic No More’, MacClancy points out that throughout the history of the discipline, anthropologists have been engaged in both activities despite the unevenness of attention given to scholarly, popularising and immediately politicised anthropological endeavours (2002). It is this unevenness between what anthropologists do, and what is reported about that, that fuel a

perception of disengaged academics, with no public profile, while, in fact, it is mainstream popular and broadcast media in anglophone Western countries that pay scant – or worse, sensationalist – attention to anthropological engagement in current issues.

This is not helped by an institutional entrenchment found in various countries. Barone and Hart's chapter points to debates about the AAA in the USA during a period when some of its members felt it was largely being run for the benefit of its employees rather than its membership, reinforcing a sense of an internal clique who disregarded the concerns of anthropologists and their research partners. Anthropological conferences, and sometimes departmental seminars, can also be alienating experiences for those not already steeped in their cultural practices, and the editors of this volume are hardly alone in bemoaning the tendency of anthropologists – and other academics - to wrap their work up in unintelligible jargon and dense texts, rather than communicating clear arguments about the real and exciting work of ethnography and anthropology to eager and fascinated audiences<sup>2</sup>. Conference presentations often reveal the way that anthropologists can be nervously wedded to text, and this remains a core challenge for the different kinds of communication that we discuss in this volume. While this book addresses questions about new media, the unappealing presentation that is so often to be found in anthropological conferences has no place in popular communication (we would argue it has no place at conferences either). Unfortunately, such practices also create an obstacle to communication in offering some kind of precedent for the style of published work, but at the same time they become a model against which many anthropologists seek to rebel.

On the other hand, there is a long and venerable history of public engagement by anthropologists, both in public debates, political campaigns, media worlds and local social movements. Beck points out that anthropological ethical codes have long included terms that require anthropologists to work in the interests of the people they study (2009). Indeed,

against the notion that public anthropology represents a response to anthropologists talking only to one another, Merrill Singer has argued that the impression of an insular anthropology itself chooses to ignore the wide array of applied anthropology practiced within and outside university academic departments around the world (2000). In terms of presence in public consciousness, Eriksen reminds us that anthropologists like Ruth Benedict were best-selling authors, as were Margaret Mead, Anzia Yezierska and Claude Levi-Strauss, while Edmund Leach, Bronislaw Malinowski and others wrote frequently for popular publications, and Leach was among UK scholars who gave televised lectures for national broadcast. Even earlier, Tyler's *Golden Bough* was a thoroughly genre-crossing publication, widely read and referred to despite its multi-volume weight.

It is unfortunate that the public profile of earlier anthropologists is often recounted in parallel with the rejection of their work by academics who may have been unable to respect the work of public communication or have felt resentful of the attention that it garnered. Contributors to this book reject the notion that speaking outside academia, or translating ones arguments and messages for non-academic audiences, constitutes a betrayal of academic rigour. On the contrary, we hold that it is often academics who are secure in their knowledge and confident of their field who are able to speak in plain terms and communicate their message despite the compromises that engagement in public debates requires. Perhaps it is a lack of confidence that has prevented more anthropological scholars from putting themselves forward as public spokespersons in Western media debates.

In the 1950s Vogt was reporting that anthropology enjoyed an improving profile in the 'public consciousness', but by the 1970s, Susan Allen was identifying 1969 as the height of anthropologists' isolation and remarking that anthropologists failed to communicate what was a subject of wide general interest, and one in which there was a demonstrable interest among newspaper readers (1975). Since then, the difficulty of crossing over between

academia and journalism has become a persistent ache in anthropological debate. William Divale complained in 1976 that anthropologists failed to understand the working context of journalists, and that this explained their often hostile response to the idea of publishing their findings in newspapers, local or national. Despite Divale's patient outline of the everyday life of print and news journalists, and his clear suggestions as to how anthropologist and journalists could work together, William Beema (1987) indicated that little had improved in the 1980s, and Bird repeated the call for engagement as recently as 2010 (Bird 2010). In response to the ongoing saga of the absence of anthropology in mainstream media, Witteveen joked that the problem might lie in the discipline's overly long name compared to history or economics (2000).

Despite this, we have occasional accounts of anthropologists' brushes with news media. McDonald (1987) provided what has become a classic horror story of finding her work publicised as a scandal despite her best intentions, a scenario that arises when journalists seize on and sometimes seek to sensationalise a topic that suddenly becomes a story, whether by dint of current affairs or journalistic imagination. Thomas Hylland Eriksen has drawn attention to how the speed of news media creates difficulties for scholars more used to leisurely reflection (2004) and Marianne Gullestad has eloquently detailed the difficult position this creates for a situated author who needs time to consider his or her response to journalistic challenge, confer with colleagues in order to speak as a representative of their institution and for the discipline (2002). Her critique is implied in Hervik's chapter, when he distinguishes between anthropologists presenting themselves as individual commentators, resting on the legitimacy that a position in a university and a record of publication offers them, and scholars who attempt to mediate anthropological scholarship rather than personal (if informed) opinion. Status or position is an issue, in other words, for news and other broadcast media, being used often as shorthand for authority and legitimacy.

Dider Fassin's recent article recounting his experience of being in the media spotlight as the attention of ministers and national news media focused upon him is a similar kind of story of sudden entry into a media debate (2013), but Fassin had sought specifically to address an issue of public concern - the role of state police in the lives of residents of French housing estates - and had earlier been somewhat disappointed in the lack of policy response. Fassin was in a strong enough position to address journalists and ministers as an intellectual equal, not an option for post-graduate students, such as McDonald was at the time of her encounter. Speaking, like Leach or more recently Adam Kuper, as a senior university professor is an entirely different experience to attempting to engage journalists as a junior scholar on an insecure contract. There are intermediate positions, however. Simone Abram hosted a BBC radio presenter at her home and fieldsite for a summer-special edition of an ongoing weekly social science magazine programme, 'Thinking Allowed', that various anthropologists have appeared on over the years. A magazine style presentation offers a less sensational and more reflective opportunity to discuss research methods and findings, away from the hurly burly of newsrooms, but still within the short-article, wide-audience format that broadcast media offer.

Even this diverse engagement in broadcast media debates is only one form of engaged anthropology, and a term like 'public debate' has many meanings. While most anthropologists focus on text media, significant attention has been paid to the role of anthropologists in ethnographic film and indigenous media and to the role of these forms for anthropology. Much attention was focused early on, on the potential for television as a medium of communication between and among indigenous people and minority groups (e.g. Eiselein and Marshal 1971), and ground-breaking projects such as Video in the Villages became, or facilitated, significant social movements across Latin America particularly (see Aufderheide 1993). A tradition of collaborative media has developed in which

anthropologists have stepped back from the attempt to direct audio-visual production, instead participating in joint projects with professional directors and indigenous artists and producers (e.g. Deger 2013). In chapter 6, Juan Salazar traces the ongoing history of engagement by media anthropologists in indigenous media practices, showing how various indigenous and workers' groups quickly took up the potential of video and audio-visual recording from well-intentioned anthropologists, and began to run with the technology according to their own priorities. In the process, anthropologists have had to learn how to decolonise indigenous media spaces, just as indigenous media have decolonised the methodologies of ethnographic film.

While early pioneers argued strongly for the use of audio-visual media to communicate anthropological research and ethnographic detail, other debates have been concerned with the apparent disappearance of an anthropological presence from mainstream television altogether (Henley 2005, Singer 2008). The imperative of finding a mass audience for anthropology remains an issue, but the focus often slips over towards calls for an anthropology of media, including mass media (e.g. Osorio 2005, Coman 2005, Bird 2005). This is not a criticism of media anthropology by any means, but an indication of the slipperiness of anthropological commitment to public engagement and to broadcast and news media in particular, that receives the force of Barone and Hart's criticism in Chapter 9. Instead, however, new media channels mean that film with an ethnographic focus, and anthropological commentary can now appear through networked websites such as vimeo or youtube, as well as embedded in blogs or research websites. These further imply the creation of new audiences, new 'publics' for public engagement. In this book, we expand the focus from earlier discussions of news media and tv to consider new digital media, and media mostly new (or persistently marginalised) to anthropology, such as verbatim theatre, art exhibitions and public-sector consultancy. In each of these, we ask not only what the medium



offers in terms of collaboration and engagement, but what kinds of public they have the potential to create for discussions that build on anthropological knowledge.

If the public for this kind of public anthropology is users of media-communications, there is another equally important public for anthropological research and practice in government and policy fields. Ironically, while Merrill Singer argues that public anthropology ignores applied anthropology, he is comfortable in arguing that anthropologists are ineffective in influencing public policy (2011) while ignoring the rich and plentiful evidence of policy influence from development anthropology – more invisible anthropology, in other words. Similar principles apply to the debate around publicising anthropology, in that anthropologists have increasingly documented the worlds of public policy (Dyck and Waldrum 1993, Shore and Wright 1997, Murdoch and Abram 2002) while being slower to document their own activities in engaging with policy practices (Stewart and Strathern 2004, Pink 2005). According to Shirley Fiske, there has indeed been some effect from anthropology, but policy processes take some time, and effects are variable (2011). More importantly, she points out that anthropologists are not alone in their engagements with policy, but work most effectively in collaboration with communities of activists and advocates, for whom anthropological methods and ideas can be inspiring, but whose support is needed to convince the dispersed actors in policy processes to admit insights that may be unfamiliar.

In this volume, Bullen sets out the practicalities of conducting policy-consultancy, tying in with the earlier discussion by relating how the consultancy work used news media coverage to raise public engagement in the issues at stake. Bullen is hardly alone in this kind of work; anthropology.info lists a dozen anthropological consultancies in Norway and Denmark alone and prior to 2010<sup>3</sup>. Consultancies such as the Oslo-based ‘Kulturell Dialog’ were started up in the 1990s by enterprising masters students, some of whom have gone on to have long and very successful careers in anthropological consultancy. This point also

highlights how widely debates vary internationally. The role of anthropologists in public policy is not the same in Norway, Spain and the USA, for instance, and although this volume by necessity addresses only selected countries, we remain alert to the particularities of anglophone debates, and to the effects of translation from other languages to the English of this volume.

### **What public for anthropology?**

Arguments about going public such as those discussed above are challenged in this volume by Alex Golub and Kerim Friedman (chapter 8). They see ‘public anthropology’ as only one of many ways of practicing a publicly engaged anthropology, quite distinct from ‘doing anthropology in public’, which has been the aim of the well-respected blog Savage Minds. According to Golub and Friedman, proponents of a public anthropology (ie anthropologists communicating in public spheres) tend to imagine that anthropologists know something that the public would benefit from knowing and should thus convey it accessibly. They see this as a misplaced self-confidence based on an idea of anthropologists as experts, and on the notion that publics are ‘out there’ as pre-existing audiences for the communications of anthropologists – as if to say, if only we could find the right language, we should reach that audience. In this, they build on the work of Gal and Woolard who apply a linguistic analysis to the notion of ‘the public’ to demonstrate that it operates rather like the term ‘the field’, to which a similar critique has been applied (Amit 2000, Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

In discussing public audiences for anthropology, we are seeking in each context to define an audience for our work that goes beyond academic debate, to share anthropological ideas and analysis across disciplinary boundaries, beyond the universities, and/or in local, regional or national contexts, or indeed internationally (see also Beck 2009). The public we seek for our

ideas may also be defined through the medium of communication – students and audiences at lectures, television viewers, or newspaper readers - or as we highlight here, social-media users, blog-readers, or networked social acquaintances of various sorts. A public anthropology, in other words, may be anthropology addressed to, created with, learning from and/or involving quite different constituencies, for whom the label ‘public’ merely indicates that they are not already our academic peers or graduates of studies in anthropology. Recent developments in media technology thus open up new potential publics. These developments obviously leave the potential audience wide open, and raise questions for every person seeking to achieve wider awareness of anthropological ideas about who they imagine their public to be (see also Abram 2012).

Golub and Friedman’s criticism places the debates about anthropology and journalism into perspective as just one part of the debate about anthropological engagement, and one that is increasingly eclipsed by the new forms of mediation available to anthropologists. For bloggers, the internet provides a new means to create audiences, to gather new publics with shared interests that overlap with the anthropologist-author. Blogging remains a one-to-many form of communication that allows a greater freedom of expression than journalism, with the latter’s hierarchies of owners and editors. It also competes for attention with other kinds of media as well as with other blogs. This gives the blog a particular role. If anthropologists are to improve their public engagement, then it is valuable to have a forum where routes to engagement can be discussed, ideas played with, and possibilities explored. Blogs are equally open and accessible as other news media, that is within the limitations of internet access, language and time. Thus far, there is a lack of detailed information about the readers of anthropological blogs (however defined), and little to match Divale’s 1976 survey of newspaper readership. Of the blogs discussed in this book and others, most attempt to open

the subject to non-specialists, but all seem to attract audiences made up largely of anthropology students and scholars, even the avowedly open OAC (see Chapter 9).

The OAC is an important example of how point-to-point and mass-to-mass media (and combinations thereof) can be harnessed to create new forums for public debate. New media do not necessarily resolve old problems, though, and as Barone and Hart relay; in attempting to stage a revolution in anthropology OAC faced the difficulties that any revolutionary movement must face. In proposing an anarchic space, they soon had to consider how that anarchy should be organised, since media platforms are subject to organisational configurations that both enable and constrain communications. Freedom, as Mouffe has pointed out, cannot be complete if equality is also to be prized (2000). The revolution may not have been televised, but it was compromised and remains partial, as Barone and Hart recount.

### **Which media?**

In creating diverse publics, anthropologists can now employ more interactive web-based media to engage particular interlocutors, as John Postill (Chapter 8) and others have demonstrated. The technologies that offer both autonomy and massification allow subversive, or unofficial debates to spread rapidly beyond particular localities. Where once resistance to policy or development was fought through direct action, personal contacts and private channels of organisations, contemporary revolutions work around the increasingly penetrative surveillance of states into organisations and employ social media to rapidly summon and organise crowds and communicate ideas and plans. Social media thus both enable state surveillance and resistance to it, and there are anthropologists who have not been slow to exploit the opportunities this offers.

Durrington and Collins (in Chapter 7) employed the interactivity of web2.0 technology directly to challenge the dominant fictional representation of Baltimore that is broadcast on mainstream television around the world. Their audience is much smaller than that of 'The Wire', one of the most successful tv shows produced, but they have the crucial task of offering alternative representations that can feed into the self-esteem of residents in neighbourhoods poorly portrayed, and, in turn, into neighbourhood relations and local development policy. To do that, they engaged students in a kind of action-research, to make anthropological methodologies and ideas relevant to communities and institutions. Such work builds on a solid history of anthropological engagement in social conditions, and in hastening to chastise anthropologists for hiding in their academic offices, we should not deny that there have been many anthropologists, inside Academia and outside, who have been thoroughly engaged in day to day struggles for the rights of repressed people. Some, including Nancy Sheper-Hughes have combined political action with a public media presence and representation in anthropological blogs and science media (see Scheper-Hughes 1993, 2004, Scheper-Hughes and Wacquant 2002, Bartoszko 2006, Watters 2014).

Where engagement through fieldwork, and through the methodologies of visual anthropology are now well recorded, perhaps less has been documented about the use of performance methodologies. Political theatre is world renowned, but there are relatively few anthropologists who have written about using it (even if some have used it in teaching research methods, such as Abram, pers. comm.). Deborah Vidali describes backing into political theatre through re-invention, attempting to address the same problems of articulating popular experience in a world dominated by unfair representations. Fed up of hearing reports blaming young people for political apathy, she used the methods of verbatim theatre to give voice to young people and their experience. With this in place, she went on to film the work, present it at conferences and other gatherings, and also distribute the work online.

Vidali confronts the prejudice about different forms of anthropological work that she encountered, occasionally explicitly, from scholars who object to academics working outside Academia. Her theatrical work does not replace her scholarly work, she argues, but pushes conventional academic boundaries and concepts, blurring the line that others attempt to impose between public scholarship and social science scholarship, in the face of those who imagine those to be incompatible rather than complementary. Much of the pressure to produce strictly scholarly textual items comes from the institutional constraints that are tightening around academics today, referred to also by Barone and Hart in their chapter<sup>4</sup>. Yet such pressures can be resisted wherever it is possible to choose disciplinary solidarity over institutional solidarity, as long as university hiring policy remains under some degree of local departmental control, that is<sup>5</sup>. In encouraging respect for public scholarship as well as conventional academic production, Vidali pushes for experimentation in ethnographic methodologies, but she pushes the conventions of theatre too, and her theatre production challenged both sets of norms in order to build community with her audience, the people who participated in the production, the people who attended performances and joined discussions about it, and those who have seen film versions of the performance too. In each case, Vidali worked with different orders of knowledge production, negotiating participation, authorship and the established powers of media.

Paolo Favero (chapter 4) has also used established media in new ways to provoke audiences into rethinking their common prejudices. Favero's work with middle-class Indian men generated images that explicitly play with clichés about India, and parody colonial imageries still circulating today. He used photography in contexts that are unusual for an anthropologist, creating exhibition spaces that confront Swedish and Italian audiences with their own presuppositions by combining conventional tropes with unexpected content. In an attempt to expand his audience beyond the visitors to an exhibition, he transposed the

imagery into a audio-video installation that was played at nightclubs and bars, using aesthetic techniques to draw viewers into a visual world that challenged the preconceptions common in other media.

New media technologies thus also offer new ways to use old technologies, such as photography or theatre. But the ‘newness’ of new media is itself called into question by Deger, who notes that the category ‘new’ tends to place everything before it into the category ‘old’ (2013). Deger’s work with Yolngu artists and professional media producers brought to her attention the shallowness of novelty in Australian modernity. In what she calls an ‘ethnographic experiment’ in digitally driven art, Yolngu collaborators worked with digital media and ritual aesthetics to adapt technologies to their own politics and aesthetics. Through their adherence to ancestral law, Yolngu participants incorporated digital video, photography and display into what Deger calls patterns laid down by ancestors, creating work that produced interplay between the old and the new, for recognition by an emerging Yolngu audience. Although Deger argues that this Yolngu ‘ontological investment’ in newness is different from that recorded by other anthropologists (Ibid: 356), particularly in their use of new media technologies to mediate between generations, it is perhaps less unusual that new media should be as likely to reproduce existing relations as to generate new ones. Despite the revolutionary hopes of Barone and Hart, for example, about the potential for a new balance of power for anthropology, the OAC seems to have become another, rather than a replacement association for anthropology (Chapter 10).

Several of the chapters in this book point to the particular things that recent technological inventions enable. John Postill notes that email lists remain a mainstay of academic life, and that the EASA Media network, although open to non-members, is largely received by people with anthropological training or links. On the other hand, through social media posts, the discussions on the e-list are sometimes shared to diverse other networks,

particularly by ‘lurkers’ who listen in to the e-seminars without making comments. Social media are becoming a medium by which anthropologists and ethnographers try to publicise their research, but also a site for fieldwork. Postill refers to the twitter storms around Spanish political activism in recent years, distinguishing between the relatively free flowing and ephemeral trends and twitter-games, and the more personal networks of social media such as facebook. Such nuances are essential both to the ethnography that is emerging from social media, and its interaction with face-to-face (or ‘F2F’) relations. Of note is a recent volume that attends to an uneven global networking form that specifically melds online and offline encounters, through ‘couchsurfing’, a form of hospitality heavily used by postgraduate students, offering them both accommodation and field-sites (Picard and Buchberger 2013). Contributors to that volume are very much aware of the partiality of such networks, particularly in terms of the inequalities of gender accessibility and presence – an alarmingly stubborn issue that Golub and Friedman have struggled with over several years, and are concerned to address in their chapter (Chapter 9).

### **What kind of anthropology?**

Each of these issues has implications for anthropology as a discipline and as a set of research practices. Firstly, we have yet to resolve – or some would argue even adequately address – what it means to talk of a public anthropology. Is it enough to publicise the results of our work, should we be doing anthropology in public that opens anthropological research to participants and brings less formal discussion to any audience that chooses to listen (or, more commonly, read)? Or is a public anthropology one that addresses issues of public concern, applying ethnographic methods and anthropological ideas and analyses to pressing social questions? And does this mean working with public authorities (ie state authorities) to help them improve their policies and their ways of serving citizens and clients, or facilitating



protest and social movements by sharing extant knowledge and co-producing new knowledge? Clearly, these are not really alternatives, but facets of a more publicly engaged anthropology, one that builds on work from applied anthropology, from the eminent scholars of earlier generations who did much to bring their ideas to broadcast media, and from the very many anthropologists working outside traditional anthropology departments around the world, be that in government offices, aid agencies, interdisciplinary research departments, private businesses, community groups, or simply working in university departments that are not called ‘Anthropology’.

One danger inherent in the talk of making a difference or improving the lives of others is always the potential for thinking one knows better, a danger that has been played out through many state projects and well documented by anthropologists. Hence the discussion of co-production of knowledge and action is key to all the discussions in this book, following Ingold’s emphasis on anthropology as not simply a description practice but ‘an inquisitive mode of inhabiting the world, of being *with*’ (Ingold 2008: 88) and ‘a practice of *correspondence*’ (Ingold 2008: 88), one which, like art is a way of knowing ‘that proceed[s] along the observational paths of being *with*’ and explores ‘the unfamiliar in the close at hand’ (Ibid: 87).

Another danger lies in presuming that all anthropologists share a political standpoint or a commitment to a particular kind of ‘public good’, a hotly disputed concept in its own right. We do not wish to enter into a discussion about infiltration into anthropology, but the debates played out in *Anthropology Today* (see Gonzalez 2007, 2012, Price 2005, 2007, 2012, Gusterson 2003, Moos, Fardon and Gusterson 2005) indicate quite clearly that the politics of actually existing anthropologists may not meet the expectations of the more idealistic claims for the discipline. Anthropologists are criticised for not being more aware of, or part of social movements, but should anthropology be imagined as a social movement

itself with a shared political purpose? Certainly diversity is increasingly recognised as characteristic of the discipline, with Field and Fox agreeing that ‘there is no singular, dominant anthropology that allows us to determine when and how to “engage” with “the public”’ (2007: 6).

Even so, it seems there are anthropologists who clamour for a sense of community, an idea that ‘Anthropology’ exists in some coherent form as a discipline, a political project, and a distinct academic space. And it is also clear that being able to call oneself ‘an Anthropologist’ is highly prized by many people, even if others consider it a false identity. In this book, we discuss the many ways in which ‘Anthropology’ can give meaning to scholarly work, through effecting change in everyday life. The sport of defining anthropology remains popular, and the definition of the discipline has recently been discussed precisely with reference to applied (Pink 2005, 2007, Field and Fox 2007, Sillitoe 2007), public (Borofsky 2007, Eriksen 2006, Beck 2009) and interdisciplinary contexts of anthropology (Strathern 2006). The texts that generated these definitions might be defined as pertaining to a body of literature that was quite prolific during the first decade of the twenty first century. Taken together these texts and their arguments constitute a set of commentaries that are concerned with the subject matter of anthropology, its boundaries, its claims to expertise and the unique characteristics of its practice. However, they do so with little reference to the audiovisual, digital or mediated element of public anthropology. For some, the expansion of anthropology as an increasingly applied and public discipline, suggests it defies any singular or universal definition. This is encapsulated by Keith Hart’s argument that anthropology now has no common purpose and has thus lost its public profile. In making this point he is also tracing the progress of anthropology as an intellectual enquiry: its rejection of normative and colonial consensus about its purpose (or lack of purpose). Hart acknowledges that in outgrowing the narrow confines of anthropology’s beginnings and escaping the old imperial centres,

anthropology becomes eclectic. He has consistently called for an accessible kind of anthropology, championing the ‘amateur anthropologist’ (a title cheekily taken up by Gillian Tett, one of his former students), and one with the broadest of aims – ‘the making of world society’ (Hart 2013:3).

### **The book**

In brief, then, the book sits at the intersection between three contemporary trends in anthropology: the shift towards a public anthropology; the increasing use of digital and social media in anthropological practice; and the growing interest in media practice amongst anthropologists. In the context of existing publications in the area of public, applied and engaged anthropology it advances the focus through its attention to and recognition of this (changing) media(ted) context which is an inevitable part of the way anthropology is done in public. It invites anthropologists to consider not only the possibility of doing Public Anthropology/anthropology in public, but also the dynamics of their potential engagements with different old and new media technologies, with media professionals, and with varied web platforms.

The book is organized into two sections; the first includes chapters exploring different ways that anthropologists are engaging new publics through journalistic, audiovisual and performative practices. The second section looks at how social media platforms are forming part of a new digital public anthropology, with chapters offered by anthropologists who are leading the way in the use of social and collaborative on-line media. Through discussions about different projects, the chapters explore how different web platforms can become part of the practice of public anthropology.

In Chapter 2 Maggie Bullen discusses her experiences of ‘doing anthropology in public’ in the Basque Country. This chapter is set in a traditional media context, in that her work involved a series of press conferences and interviews with journalists, and included print and broadcast media. Moreover, like other anthropological studies that include engaging with media (e.g. Pink 1997, for an example also set in Spain) it is not only the ways in which broadcast media engage with research that is relevant, but also the ways in which existing and ongoing media content shape the very research questions and public environment in which the anthropologist is researching. Bullen’s account makes clear that alongside the contemporary emphasis on digital participation and citizen journalism, a conventional broadcast media context can still frame anthropologists’ modes of public engagement, and that anthropologists still need to be aware of how this contributes to the contexts in which they work and are represented. As Bullen puts it ‘[p]ublic anthropology most certainly exposes us to the public eye, mediated by the journalists who are interested in our work and who ultimately represent us’ (this volume). Revealing how her own projects have got caught up in the (mediated) local politics of the public sphere, Bullen shows how ‘[w]orking with institutions means that not only do we have to decode the context of our object of study but also be aware of certain hidden keys in the political discourse which belong to another context altogether’ (this volume).

In Chapter 3 Peter Hervik calls for an ‘offensive’ approach to public anthropology. Engaging with the work of Marianne Gullestad and drawing on his own experiences of media and public anthropology in relation to ethnic and religious issues in Denmark, Hervik makes a powerful but controversial argument about role of anthropologists in a mediated public sphere, detailing how anthropologists have been implicated in the Scandinavian press media. While this is a context where anthropology and anthropologists certainly enjoy a privileged position in the public sphere, Hervik shows that there a number of perils to such involvement.

For Hervik, '[t]he issue of public anthropology involves difficult, broader questions about the self-understandings of institutional anthropology, the ability to do research when historical events take place, and perhaps more important the ideas and practices of anthropologists as citizens and publicly engaged intellectuals'. His chapter raises the question of the viability of taking a 'safe' approach to relating to the media as an anthropologist, and invites us to ask ourselves some very fundamental questions about the personal and institutional implications of bringing together anthropology, media and public engagement.

Chapter 4, by Paolo Favero echoes Bullen's and Hervik's concerns about how anthropologists need to situate themselves in relation to the politics and priorities of representation through a reflection of how lens-based media might be engaged in the practice of public anthropology. Favero recounts how in his collaborative photographic practice with young men in Delhi in India he sought to contest existing mediated representations of India in Europe. By bringing to the fore 'metropolitan middle class life' through his photography he responded to the ways in which images of tradition, rurality and beggars had become key visual symbols for India in the popular press in Italy and Sweden. Through his subsequent photographic exhibition 'India does not exist' and a large screen video installation, Favero sought to break through conventional ways of representing India, inviting his audience to construct new meanings. As Favero's chapter shows, in a rather different way to Bullen and Hervik, a photographic anthropology has a role in making public alternative mediated routes to knowing and understanding. Importantly it pulls visual anthropological and lens-based media practices out of the environments of ethnographic film festivals and the like, into a public domain where they might be engaged to contest the dominant representational strategies of broadcast media.

In chapter 5 Debra Spitulnik Vidali outlines an ongoing collaborative, performative and activist project called 're-generation'. She reiterates the questions over the division

between ‘applied’ and ‘pure’ research and argues also that a clean division between public and non-public scholarship is neither always tenable nor desirable. Beyond these now familiar critiques, Vidali shows how her theatrical project demonstrates that fundamental dualities are adopted in academic contexts, and rely on ideas of unitary selves, predetermined meanings and authorial authority, each of which is challenged by the project she relates. Vidali challenges the notion that research comes first and turning it into audience-fodder comes after. At the same time, she highlights the difficulties of being innovative in the increasingly rigid and narrow frames of media-marketing. Books, plays or music, for that matter, that do not fit into a recognized shelf-mark prove impossible to market. Where once the problem was where to put things in the bookshop, now the issue is that consumers apparently avoid cross-category products. Similarly, theatre professionals have conventional criteria to evaluate productions, and may be unenthusiastic about contrary approaches. Crossing boundaries (disciplinary, artistic, market) has never been more fêted, and rarely more difficult to achieve, but Vidali demonstrates that through careful audience feedback, the staging of ethnographic material is both possible, effective and powerful, and opens anthropological insights up for new kinds of publics using a mix of digital and direct media.

The chapters in the first part of this book therefore reveal the complexities, opportunities, problems and perils of anthropological engagement with the conventional media of newspapers, television, exhibitions and theatre. They show what happens when anthropologists become embedded in the face-to-face and increasingly digital materialities of public media, and impress on us the need to remain engaged with, or at least to acknowledge the relevance of this domain of public mediated activity for anthropological research, representation and potential intervention. In the second part of the book the contributors reflect on increasingly online dimensions of anthropologist engagements with public media,

and with doing anthropology in public. In some ways these contributors talk back to the concerns that have been raised about representation and participation in the chapters in the first part of the book. They do not necessarily offer ‘solutions’ (which is of course quite typical of anthropologists), but alternative ways of doing anthropology in public, with publics and for publics.

Part 2 of this book is opened in Chapter 6 by Matthew Durington and Samuel Collins, through a discussion of their Anthropology by the Wire project, in which they ‘are attempting to retool pedagogy toward an applied ethos and develop novel media based research methods while expanding the theoretical boundaries of a public anthropology’ (this volume). Durington and Collins’ project nicely bridges the concerns of the first and second parts of the book, since they discuss using media anthropology methodologies to enable students to work alongside anthropologists and community residents in collaborative empirical research. In a context where public media are saturated with aberrant perceptions of the community, Anthropology By The Wire uses web2.0 and participatory research processes to enable residents to disseminate their own versions of place not only to each other, but to ‘other social actors in positions to help them: non-profit organizations, community organizers, city and state government’ (this volume).

The next three chapters all address the ways in which anthropologists can engage more specifically with social media and different web platforms as ways of doing public anthropology. In Chapter 7 John Postill, like other contributors, calls for an ‘updated understanding of public anthropology’ that will ‘transcend the mass media channels of a previous era’ (this volume). Postill discusses his own experiences of doing anthropology in public online. He reflects on the possibilities for engaging with the non-academic public sphere and for constituting ‘new forms of public engagement and democratic reform’ (this volume). This includes a fruitful comparative discussion of the ways that different web

platforms and social media (including blogging, facebook and twitter) activities have enabled him to participate in different ways and to different extents online, with multiple publics, including research participants and fellow anthropologists. Whereas Postill focuses on his work as an anthropologist who is actively engaged in online (as well as face-to-face) research that forms part of his own online activity, in the following two chapters contributors discuss their work in developing collaborative online public anthropology sites/projects.

In Chapter 8 Alex Golub and Kerim Friedman discuss the highly successful anthropology blog *Savage Minds*, which they situate as part of the growing anthropological blogosphere. Focusing on the blog as a medium for public anthropology they ‘argue that the goal of public anthropology is best served by the blog when it takes the form of “doing anthropology in public”—embodying the professional imaginary on a public platform’ (this volume). In common with other contributors to this book Golub and Friedman also call for a rethinking of public anthropology that moves away from the idea that ‘that anthropologists know something that the public would benefit from knowing, if only anthropology were written in a style that suited the taste of the public’ (this volume), and overturns the privileging of the anthropologist as expert by highlighting how their audiences have defined them.

Chapter 9, by Francine Barone and Keith Hart, focuses on what has perhaps been one of the biggest online anthropology projects – the Open Anthropology Co-operative. Barone and Hart offer us a comprehensive report and analysis of the challenges and opportunities they were confronted with in developing this web-based collaborative project, hosted on a ning platform. Their project rapidly became massive as huge numbers of anthropologists signed up, giving the team leading it a complex and demanding set of responsibilities and tasks. Barone and Hart’s account offers a genuinely useful commentary for other anthropologists seeking ways to develop collective online forms of public anthropology. At



the same time, in engaging reflexively and analytically with their own experiences, they provide us with an anthropological account of the processes and challenges that they confronted in their search for a ‘genuine democracy’ through online public anthropology.

### **Media, Anthropology and Public engagement: looking ahead**

Together the contributors to this book all convey to us something of disquiet about the project of a public anthropology as it has evolved to date. Within the individual chapters there are frequent calls for a re-thinking of public anthropology. Given the critical agenda of our discipline, this is not in itself surprising, yet in common the contributors here are calling for a re-thinking of public anthropology in relation to media and the mediated environment of which it is a part. Indeed, with them, we would argue that any moves towards doing or re-thinking public anthropology need to account for the mediated nature of anthropological work and public engagement.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> see <http://journals.berghahnbooks.com/aia/>

<sup>2</sup> Noting Ingold's distinction between anthropology and ethnography (2008).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.antropologi.info/linker/konsulenter.html> accessed 23 July 2014.

<sup>4</sup> See also Smart, Hockey and James 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Debates on Savage Minds indicate how far the power of some academic departments to choose their own staff has been compromised, such that disciplinary solidarity is weakened by appointing people more loyal to the institution.