Lieblingsmedien in der Lehre

Wir fragten Medizinethnolog*innen nach Texten, Büchern, Filmen oder anderen Medien, die sie in der medizinanthropologischen Lehre immer wieder gerne einsetzen. Uns interessiert: Warum eignet sich der Text bzw. das Medium besonders gut für die medizinanthropologische Lehre? Was kann an ihm gut aufgezeigt oder diskutiert werden? Zu welchen Einsichten führt dies bei Studierenden? Und inwiefern lässt sich mit den diskutierten Texten bzw. Medien gut weiterdenken?

Wir freuen uns, dass wir mit diesem Anliegen auf so positive Resonanz gestoßen sind und präsentieren hier den ersten Teil einer als lose Folge geplanten Serie, der kurze essayistische Texte, theoretische Review-Artikel und persönliche Rückblicke auf langjährige Lehrerfahrung einschliesst. Wir hoffen, dass die Beiträge den Anfang eines längerfristigen Austausches und gegenseitiger Inspiration bezüglich medizinanthropologischer Lehre darstellen werden. Wer Interesse hat, für eines der folgenden Curare-Hefte einen Text auf Deutsch oder Englisch zu schreiben, ist herzlich eingeladen, sich bei der Redaktion zu melden: curare@agem.de

Favourite Media in Teaching

We asked medical anthropologists about the texts, books, films or other media that they like to use in teaching. We were interested in the following questions: Why is a specific text or medium especially suitable for teaching medical anthropology? What can be demonstrated or discussed particularly well using the text or medium in question?

We are pleased to have received such positive responses and present here the first part of a series, which includes short essayistic texts, theoretical review articles and personal reviews of many years of teaching experience. We hope that the contributions will be the beginning of long-term exchange and mutual inspiration regarding medical anthropology teaching. Anyone interested in writing a text in German or English for a forthcoming Curare issue is welcome to contact the editorial board at curare@agem.de

Thinking-with favorite reads in the anthropology of global health and environmental health

SUNG-JOON PARK

In general, I use those articles and books for teaching courses in medical anthropology that make a point students have to know in order to understand the history of the subject. But these readings are not necessarily the most exciting reads. An exciting read – at least for me – is one that puzzles me, makes me disagree, gives me the feeling that it is worth to have that disagreement, and eventually motivates me to digest huge amounts of information. This excitement kept me reading during my own undergraduate studies in anthropology. Still, when a new subject overwhelms me with questions and debates, which I fail to grasp, I always think that the exciting read has not yet happened. When I have this Aha-moment, I try to share my excitement with my students. It may not yield the same effect on them. I guess, everyone has to have her or his own Aha-moment and once this happens an exciting discussion might arise.

Merrill Singer and the anthropology of environmental health

Let me begin with Merrill Singer's introduction to the edited volume *A companion to the anthropology of environmental health* (Singer 2016), which I use frequently for teaching medical anthropology courses. The exciting thing happens on page 17, where he states that one of the questions addressed by the contributors to the edited volume is "why do humans pollute and degrade their environment?" Merrill Singer has his own theory to answer this question, which I do not agree with. Nonetheless, I am puzzled by the prospect that someone can tell me why humans pollute their environment. This question is more intriguing than asking whether climate change is real or whether the concept of the Anthropocene is true. It is posed in a straightforward manner that it is understood by everyone. It demands more than a yes/no response. Rather, we are unavoidably confronted with an anthropological account of what we humans are. Naturally, this question is going to produce a multitude of anthropological and non-anthropological perspectives on how to study humans and the world they inhabit. Consequently, I hope that students will enthusiastically disagree about the question why we pollute our environment. We might disagree on the question whether humans actually "pollute" the environment. Here, we could reject the generalizing undertone and say that not all humans are by definition environmental polluters. We could disagree about the possibilities to know empirically why humans degrade the environment. Or, we could ask why anthropologists should be predestined to answer this question? And, can we expect an answer other than the notorious "it is complex" response from anthropologists?

Perhaps we could say that it is a philosophical question. Indeed, I belief it is very philosophical to ask why humans do what they do regardless of the consequences of their doings. We need to make explicit our conceptual take on the relationship between free will, agency, and responsibility in order to reflect on possible answers to Singer's question. When we reach this point my students usually retort: "this is deep shit."

Mary Douglas on dirt and pollution and the mess we produce

I could name more exciting readings including Merrill Singer's work to get out of this shit – through ethnographic, analytic, and critical work. Let me stay with pollution and shit and how it inspires anthropological knowledge production on matters of public concern. Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* remains a crucial reminder that cultural

analysis is still an up-to-date source of inspiration to foster public anthropology. Her graphic definition of dirt as "matter out of place" (DOUGLAS 1984: 36) is exemplary for how an anthropological perspective can change the way we approach humans and nonhumans and the world they inhabit. It doesn't say that dirt is unhygienic or that people are forced to live under the most unhygienic conditions. Nor is this definition tracing dirt back to the regime of power and knowledge formed around modernist ideas of hygiene. Instead it shows how anthropological reasoning becomes productive by enabling comparisons across regions and across different subjects like post-colonialism, gender, infrastructure, and activism (e.g. CHALFIN 2014, ROBINS 2014, REDFIELD & ROBINS 2016). It cultivates a mode of critique which liberates us from the traps laid out by our attempt to find an objective scientific language to define problems (what is dirt and what shall we do with dirt). Instead it directs our attention to the practices through which humans produce a reality (place and matter). Where there is dirt, there is a system, as Douglas puts it. Public anthropologists can argue about that system in a more useful way, than trying to position themselves in a field of competing definitions of pollution, pathogenicity, or migration, for which societies have invented systems to keep them out of their sight.

Hannah Arendt and Donna Haraway on thoughtlessness in the Anthropocene

Let me now return to Singer's initial question 'why humans pollute and degrade their environment.' Donna Haraway's simple answer in *Staying with the trouble: making kin in the Chthulucen* to this question is that human action is characterized by thoughtlessness (HARAWAY 2016: 36). The notion of thoughtlessness brings me to a set of more exciting reads. In her discussion of the Anthropocene, Donna Haraway draws on Hannah Arendt's critique of thoughtlessness with the aim to alert us to the disastrous consequences of our refusal to think.

Arendt originally used the term in her work on the Eichmann trial. In the postscript to her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she stresses that Adolf Eichmann, who oversaw the deportation of the Jewish people in Nazi Germany, was not stupid. What Arendt witnessed at Eichmann's trial was "sheer thoughtlessness that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period" (ARENDT 1963: 285). Haraway elaborates Arendt's observations on thoughtlessness to give a more disquieting response to the question why humans degrade and pollute their environment. She writes, "in that surrender of thinking lay the 'banality of evil' of the particular sort that could make the disaster of the Anthropocene, with its ramped-up genocides and *speciescides*, come true. This outcome is still at stake" (HARAWAY 2016: 36).

Haraway's extension of the term genocide toward nonhuman lives assumes a polemic and controversial analogy between the holocaust and current environmental destruction. However, the crucial point about such analogies is, as the philosopher Richard Bernstein clarifies, that the "idea of the banality of evil is still relevant today because we need to face up to the fact that one doesn't have to be a monster to commit horrendous evil deeds" (BERNSTEIN 2018). Moralizing and scandalizing judgments about perpetrators like Eichmann or anyone else obscure the much more disquieting observation that the absence of thinking, that is the inability to see and evaluate the consequences of one's doing from another person's point of view, can make the most horrifying crimes possible.

This notion of thoughtlessness is often misread as a reminder that Eichmann or any other perpetrator of brutal crimes against humanity could be anyone. I belief a similar imprint is likely to be left by Haraway's remark that anyone is capable of inflicting great environmental violence upon human and nonhuman lives; and, in fact, is doing so daily because he or she is not using his or her brains.

This reading, however, simplifies the critique of thoughtlessness provided by Arendt and elaborated later on as a *thinking-with* by Haraway (HARAWAY 2016: 126ff). The crucial point made by Arendt is the following. She rejects the idea that few are privileged to enjoy the faculty of thinking, most notably philosophers who by the very definition of thinking as philosophizing, cannot go wrong and hence cannot do evil. In my reading, Arendt refuses to raise any explicit ethical claims based on her analysis of thoughtlessness and thinking. Instead her suggestion that everyone has the capacity to think with others is considered as a

precondition for inhabiting a world that is irreducibly plural, contingent, and hence unpredictable (Arendt 1958).

Thinking-with others essentially means to live by the human condition. Often the human condition is collapsed with misery, despair, and hopelessness. Authors like Arendt understood the human condition in a quite postmodern sense. The human condition circumscribes that human actions are irreducibly plural and unpredictable, which ultimately demands a critical revision of conventional moral theories and ethics. In this respect the idiom of thinking-with others is necessary to keep in mind that one's doings has consequences for others without knowing precisely who these others are and who they will be. Thinking is in this sense a necessary response to the human condition because it stresses that we cannot escape the need to think if we want to inhabit this planet, because we cannot predict all consequences of our actions.

We must turn Singer's question about human motives for environmental pollution around. Once we recognize that contingent and pluralistic lifeworlds require thinking as an activity, the question to be asked is: How can actors in the plural assume collective responsibility for environmental degradations without being able to predict the contingent outcomes of their manifold actions? The idiom of thinking with others rejects the idea that few are thinking for others about the kind of social organization necessary to provide care for the planet (see also Douglas 1992: 259). Otherwise, critical thinking would be limited to intellectuals and their task of thinking *for* others, knowing their wants, and hence give an essentializing explanation of human action (Rottenburg 2013).

Thinking-with in anthropology

Before we can elaborate on the implications of thoughtlessness, we need to understand what thinking means. Arendt does not suggest that we should think all the time or that people who cannot afford to think and act accordingly are guilty for being thoughtless. The intellectual conversation unfolding between Arendt's writings and Haraway on this subject is illuminating. According to Haraway, Arendt's inspiring insights into the problem of thoughtlessness have to be stripped off her problematic assumption that thinking is means and ends to *withdraw* from the world (Haraway 2016: 177). Indeed, Arendt considers thinking as a quiet activity and as a withdrawal from reality. Nonetheless, she insists that the quietness of thinking is exactly the opposite of being passive. As she clarifies, thinking means to withdraw from the world of *appearances*. That is, "every mental act rests on the mind's faculty of having present to itself what is absent from the senses" (Arendt 1978: 75-76). This does not mean that thinking is superior to our senses in our approach to the world. Quite the opposite is the case. Arendt rather assumes that the capacity of thinking is to

> mak[e] present what is absent [such that] we [can] say "no more" and constitute a past for ourselves, or say "not yet" and get ready for a future. But this is possible for the mind only after it has withdrawn from the present and the urgencies of everyday life (ibid.).

This dense phrase requires some explication. In my view, Arendt's use of the term withdrawal does not propose a disengagement from the world, which according to Arendt precisely happens when thinking is absent. When thinking is absent, we fail to imagine and see the world from a different perspective. We thereby eschew the possibilities to allow other perspectives to work on us and how we act upon the world.

Johannes Fabian's *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa* offers an anthropological version of this withdrawal in his historical ethnography of colonial travelers. He argues that explorers changed their conception of reality, when they "permitted themselves to be touched by the lived experience" of the other (Fabian 2000: 8). These lived experiences were fraught with dilemmas and puzzles, which travelers overcame by stepping outside or by being "outside oneself," which Fabian terms the "ecstatic" (ibid.). For Fabian, ecstasis is essentially an epistemological concept that goes beyond the frequently mentioned term "empathy" (ibid.). Stepping outside the world of experiences is not an impediment but a requirement for anthropological knowledge production, as he asserts. Anthropologists often delimit their attention to empathy assuming that listening to one's feelings about others'

feelings is more important than abstract reasoning. Yet this dichotomy between empathy (emotions) and thinking (reason) reduces ethnographic reflections to our sensual, emotional, and bodily experiences as the ground of shared knowledge production. This perspective ignores the possibility that what is shared in any human encounter is the sort of lived experience, which to varying degrees is unexpected, puzzling, contradictory, and thereby transforms the conceptualization of the world. These experiences are registered by the body, making it an important instrument for anthropological thinking, not quite unlike the brain, which is another instrument to reflect on these experiences. Withdrawing or stepping out of the world of appearances essentially means that we can imagine, speak, and think about certain things without relying on our immediate sense experiences in a particular moment of thinking. Thinking as a form of withdrawing is like dreaming or remembering. We are elsewhere when we dream or remember.

It is crucial that we are mindful about conflating thinking—in the sense of a withdrawal from the world of appearances—with passivity or indifference toward the world, as Stacey Leigh Pigg's recent article *On sitting and doing: Ethnography as action in global health* explicates (PIGG 2013). Pigg notes that the field of global health is preoccupied with the idea of 'doing something' in the face of extraordinary amount of distress encountered in the field. This sense of urgency contrasts with the idea of conducting ethnographic field research by "sitting, being, noticing, and *reflecting*," which come to be dismissed by global health activists as being "unproductive" (ibid.: 1-2; my emphasis). As a consequence, global health researchers and activists, surrendering to the urgency of doing something, settle quickly on solutions that are cheap, efficient, and have a measurable impact, but in the end fail to be relevant. This is what Arendt had in mind with her critique of thoughtlessness, which does not refer to stupidity but to the inability to see a matter from a different perspective. To paraphrase Pigg, actors in the field of global health are not acting out of stupidity or malice. Instead they might not be able, or something incapacitates them, to evaluate the consequences of their actions from another person's point of view. When we conceive thinking as an activity through which we withdraw from immediate urgencies, it inserts the possibility to reflect on how a problem got defined as being urgent and who determines what needs are to be prioritized. Furthermore, it enables anthropologists to find out together with their interlocutors what constitutes relevant questions opposed to what global health activists consider to be the most urgent ones. That is, understanding thinking as a withdrawal decenters our notion of 'doing something,' which is increasingly charged with neoliberal ideas of efficiency and speed, as Pigg notes (PIGG 2013).

What can be inferred from the critique of thoughtlessness? How does thinking as an activity relate to the world? From the above description we might think of recent discussions about slow research as a form of withdrawing from the relentless pressure to respond to urgencies quickly (ADAMS, BURKE & WHITMARSH 2014). Ideas like slow research argue not per se against speed and against technological innovations through which speed is achieved. They precisely remind us that neoliberal ideas of speed undermine the possibilities to gain insight. Here thinking as a withdrawing from the world has a temporal aspect. It suggests that we need to recast the ethics of collaboration in the field of global health interventions, in which meaningful collaborations is increasingly made impossible by the relentless demand to be faster and more productive than others. To elaborate the ethics of collaboration I suggest that it is also helpful to follow Haraway's insightful elaboration of the idiom thinking-with-others. Both, Arendt and Haraway invite us to consider thinking as action in the plural. Moreover, Arendt's insistence that thinking means to withdraw from present urgencies proffers an alternative understanding of anticipating a future that is inherently uncertain. Drawing on Arendt's discussion, I suggest that thinking is a precondition for an ethics of anticipation, which goes beyond scientific and technological predictions of the future. Anthropologists cast ethics and the role ethics plays for the history of the discipline as a form of anthropological sensibility, which often remains implicit to our knowledge claims (ENGELKE 2018, STOCKING 1989). Maybe practices of thinking-with-others are useful to underline that this anthropological sensibility is more than a sentiment but a crucial capacity for critical thinking that prepares

us for the future. An anthropology seminar, where such readings can be discussed, is the best site to explore this.

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