
BOOK REVIEW BY
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Cosmopolitanism and the Media has been for me a most helpful companion to work through the many difficult puzzles that emerge from ethnographic research of everyday media practice. Carrying Miyase Christensen and André Jansson’s book in my bag in a recent trip to a typhoon-ravaged area of the Philippines felt heavier than the weight of its actual pages on my shoulders. The book after all imposes a burden and responsibility for media researchers to account for diversity and specificity in how attachments, solidarities, and moral orientations toward the Other are shaped by media—especially in relation to the everyday lives of vulnerable groups. At the same time, Christensen and Jansson boldly call into question the work of our field and how urgent it is that we develop a “cosmopolitan media studies” whose critique of power is always-already “haunted by feelings of insecurity, ambiguity and estrangement” (p. 47). In my fieldwork then in the “tent cities” where disaster-affected communities have come to dwell, the book guided me to challenge as it did the binary of “cosmopolitans” and “locals” in thinking through the new sociabilities and relationships that have developed among global humanitarians, local employees and affected communities. And by developing an analytics of mediated cosmopolitanism that is firmly rooted in a politics of place and time, arguing that “no one is born cosmopolitan” (p. 27), the book inspires us to seek out in unlikely situations the life biographies that may become the “ethnographic surprises” (Strathern 1999: 9) from which we can better understand trajectories of cosmopolitan living. Conceptually driven and rich with empirical material drawing from six different projects carried out over five years, the book simultaneously builds new frameworks and consolidates evidence that invigorate our field’s exploration of mediated cosmopolitanism.

Christensen and Jansson begin with a very expansive approach to cosmopolitanism in their attentiveness to “spatial attachments, moral orientations, cultural reflexivities and what roles various media play” (p. 17) in the cultivation of an other-centered ethos. This move allows them to expand on the significance of cosmopolitanism as a concept for key areas in media research including on transnational communication (Hepp 2012; Madianou & Miller 2012), urban communication (Georgiou 2013), and media ethics (Chouliaraki 2013; Silverstone 2007). This expansiveness is brought into focus however with their insistence on a “grounded approach that pay[s] sufficient attention to the ritualized nature of everyday media practices, and their dual capacity for connecting individuals to the ‘cosmos’, on the one hand, and bringing them closer to the ‘hearth’, on the other” (p. 16)–a methodology achieved “preferably [through] ethnographic work” (ibid.). This means that cosmopolitanism here is examined for the most part as everyday dispositions and competencies (Ong 2015) rather than as a political project of institution-building, legislation or deliberation (Vertovec & Cohen 2003). To illustrate, Chapter 2 develops a framework for understanding cosmopolitanism as a form of capital accumulation and conversion, involving both an other-oriented “state of mind” but also a “state of the body” (p. 32), inspired by Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, doxa, and field. Christenssen and Jansson apply their framework to make sense of interview data with elite Scandinavian expats to Nicaragua (pp. 39-42). This move certainly makes their framework of cosmopolitanism immediately useful to media ethnographers and audience researchers, while scholars whose media analysis is more macro, systemic, or normative might take a bit more convincing. For instance, I would have been particularly curious whether Christensen and Jansson judge specific representational styles of institutional media (e.g., aestheticization, sublimation, etc.) or particular affordances of
digital technologies (e.g., quantification, soft-touch participation) as *a priori* cosmopolitanizing or not.

Their approach to media is equally expansive in arguing for a non-media-centric analysis that involves a sensitive examination of the “manifold integration of media within differential spacetimes” (p. 51). This to me is most provocative, as they find a way to relate cosmopolitanism as an outcome of the ever-increasing mediatization of social life while highlighting time and space as crucial concepts for situated analyses of cosmopolitan identities. Chapter 3 foregrounds how heightened mediatization of interpersonal communication, which creates forms of complicit surveillance and interveillance, have dual outcomes of cosmopolitanization but also capsularization (p. 74). Their analysis of social media rituals such as location check-ins and Facebook status updates prompt reflection how global social networking may expand cosmopolitan imagination in the same manner they can be used to reaffirm local community relationships. Chapter 4 engages with the rich literature on diasporas as the exemplar of “discrepant” (Clifford 1992) and “working-class” cosmopolitanisms (Werbner 1999), highlighting contradictory movements of universalism versus particularism in relation to the Swedish and broader Scandinavian contexts. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 develop time and space, respectively, as central concepts in studying cosmopolitanism, showing how longitudinal research or research of life cycles highlight particular strategies of belonging (p. 115) in the same way that graffiti as a form of urban communication build or burn bridges between neighbors and strangers (pp. 140-144). This holistic analysis of media practice is inspiring and exciting in challenging us to draw interrelationships across various actors and affordances of media platforms, but the bar they set is also difficult and expensive! I recall here Ien Ang’s caution of “radical contextualism” in media ethnographies, where at one point it becomes “difficult to imagine where to begin and where to end the analysis” (Ang 1996: 253). I was also left curious as to whether they found—especially in their study of diasporas—non-Eurocentric forms of cosmopolitanisms and to what extent they thought cosmopolitanism in itself needs some “provincializing” (Chakrabarty 2007).

Be that as it may, what Christensen and Jansson do in this book is not to prescribe a singular approach but to develop a set of conceptual tools and apply them across multiple sites. This suggests to me that their aim is ultimately not to limit the field into adopting a uniform approach but to creatively choose and combine conceptual lenses into exploring and empathizing with an ever-expanding array of life situations and mediated experiences. The book thus suitably concludes in an open-ended note, as the authors find that “mediatization is partly resisted as a potentially encapsulating, dehumanizing force, while partly largely embraced as an indispensable resource for linking the here-and-now to other places and to the greater world” (p. 161).

For me, *Cosmopolitanism and the Media* succeeds in developing an intricate and ultimately generous and open-ended conceptual apparatus to understand the centrality of media in orienting ordinary people to communities, nations, and the cosmos at large. Nuanced and sensitive, exhaustive and challenging, it asks us to rethink who and where the contemporary cosmopolitan might be. Indeed it is a most valuable companion and inspiration for field research and ethnographic writing.

**References**


