



### **Resource Review**

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<b>Author(s) / Editor(s):</b>	Robert Hassan and Julian Thomas
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#### **Review:**

In McKenzie Wark's contribution to *The New Media Theory Reader* he describes the hacker, who is busily searching through "any production of knowledge where data can be gathered, where information can be extracted from it, and where in that information new possibilities for the world produced, there are hackers hacking the new out of the old." (p.212) Like Wark's hacker, the editors of this publication are trying to further define the new out of the old by extracting and gathering discourse around the topic of new media.

In *The New Media Theory Reader*, editors Robert Hassan and Julian Thomas have collected key readings to help contextualise new media, specifically investigating "what it is, where it came from, how it affects our lives, and how it is managed" (Hassan & Thomas 2006, back cover). With work from a variety of writers covering a wide range of subjects and areas related to new media this book attempts to create a theoretical entry point that establishes new media as a subject matter in its own right while also illuminating its connections to more established academic areas like cultural studies, economics, politics, history and law.

The book begins with a general introduction that locates new media in larger frameworks – historical, technological and cultural. Specifically the editors focus attention, through their own writings and their selection of texts, on the 'new' in new media and how different writers use this as a focal point for their investigations into new media. The book is arranged into five thematic sections: Media transitions; Governing new media; Properties and commons; Politics of new media technologies; and Time and space in the age of information. Each of the sections are introduced by the editors helping to frame the discourse and locating the contributions firmly within each section.

This book presents a variety of interesting and useful writings in relation to new media. S.D. Noam Cook's contribution ('Technological revolutions and the Gutenberg Myth' from *Internet Dreams*) is a fascinating piece exploring not only how new technologies and media can revolutionize society but also how our conventional histories can misrepresent these revolutions. Specifically he looks at our accepted knowledge of Gutenberg's invention of moveable type and the role it played in introducing mass media to the world and increasing the literacy rate. (p.11) Cass Sunstein's chapter ('Citizens' from *Republic.com*) explores how new media affects the roles and responsibilities of citizens and consumers, examining the benefits but also the detriments that new media brings to the table (p.203). In 'Abstraction/class', McKenzie Wark (from his book *A Hacker Manifesto*) investigates the changing definition of property and how our understanding of this has moved from the traditional example of land to also now include the ownership of information. He explains how this changing definition has limited opportunity for some yet has allowed the rise of a new class, that of the hacker. (p.212)

One of the key strengths of this book is the variety of views, thoughts and experiences that it codifies. This plethora of views means that the work contained is presented in a variety of different styles and voices, some are straightforward and descriptive, others are complex and challenging presenting one small component of a larger thesis. This variety of styles, while creating a scenario with a range of voices, also helps to create a somewhat discordant effect, disrupting the cohesiveness of the book.

Another strength of the book is that it looks at new media through a variety of lenses. It investigates new media from a technological viewpoint by specifically looking at the history and development of new technologies and advances, importantly it also investigates the effect that new media has had upon society and culture. Additionally it looks at other examples, traditionally not defined as new media, as models to help us further understand the phenomena of new media.

This book is relevant for people studying new media or media studies, especially those approaching it from a theoretical or academic viewpoint. Due to the range of work and the subject areas covered this book would work well as a reader for a new media practice or theory course, where there is a greater opportunity for framing the individual works and ensuring that they are weaved together into a larger context allowing entry points for further readings. As the editors note, the extracts included "function as introductions to larger arguments." (Hassan & Thomas, 2006, p.xxvi)

Additionally the variety of topics and views ensure that, at a minimum, specific chapters will be useful to most anyone exploring the subject area of new media. As a collection of essays it is valuable, but I also found myself noting specific chapters to recommend to colleagues and students.

On the whole, *The New Media Theory Reader* opens up the discussion of what new media is as well as creating a framework for understanding what it could be. The book is a welcome addition to the academic subject of new media collecting a variety of sources, ideas and writings to help bring discussion and clarity to the subject area.