



## Resource Review

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### Review:

Intellect is rapidly establishing itself as a key player in the fields of media, communication and cultural studies through publishing innovative books and producing an increasingly wide range of quality journal titles. *Interactions: Studies in Communication and Culture* is one of the more recent additions to the Intellect journal catalogue but its origins lie in the Ph.D. programme offered at the University of Westminster's Communication and Media Research Institute and its in-house journal Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture. The editorial policy of *Interactions* is to recognise the interdisciplinary nature of media, communication and cultural studies and the journal aims to publish theoretical, empirical and historical research on communications and culture that will be both international in scope and wide-ranging in terms of subject matter.

The first edition of *Interactions* reviewed here is centred on the theme of the Media Studies 2.0 (MS2.0) debate and comprises of contributions from both advocates and critics of Media Studies 2.0 which provides for some lively and engaging reading. Guest editor Paul Taylor's excellent introduction sets the scene for the debate that takes place in the following pages in that it manages to neatly encapsulate within nine pages the parameters of the debate, what is at stake and where some of the key points of contention reside.

Will Merrin follows Taylor's introduction with an essay which takes the form of a more developed argument for MS2.0 based on the ideas raised initially in his original blog (first written in 2006) and the full length essay version of that blog posted on the web in 2008. Merrin, for the most part, makes some very interesting and valuable points in his call for upgrading and open-sourcing media studies in order to bring it in-line with the post-broadcast digital environment but his account of media studies 1.0 (MS1.0)

is both partial and selective. Furthermore, it is difficult not to feel slightly uneasy when, on occasions, Merrin all too easily slips into the rhetoric of new media hype when he uses terms such as me-dia, my-casting and me-casting. One can't help but think that these are precisely the sorts of terms and activities (with their promise of emancipation and democratic participation) that media studies' has to be critically engaging with. It is also interesting to note that Merrin's paper owes a significant debt to two theorists whose work was first published in the 1960s - McLuhan and Kuhn.

Andrejevic's paper offers some thought provoking correctives for both media studies 1.0 and media studies 2.0 in stating the case for a 'critical media studies 2.0'. For Andrejevic, the key challenge now is the critical project of explaining how and why amidst the technological transformations taking place it is the case that unequal power and social relations remain largely unaltered. In this respect, it is argued that it is flawed to simply equate interactivity with democratic empowerment and political critique because interactivity is not automatically 'political' - it needs to be 'made' political. Andrejevic calls for a rethink on this fundamental issue and advocates an updating of theories of exploitation within a political economy framework appropriate for the digital era. The following two chapters by Gunkel and Brabazon offer some scope for thinking through the issues raised by Merrin and Andrejevic in the previous chapters. Gunkel's paper draws on Heidegger's work and uses the Heideggerian distinction between a true and correct analysis of technology in order to frame his argument that the notion of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is both outdated and inadequate for understanding computing technology in the twenty-first century. Brabazon on the other hand takes issue with Merrin's claim that students may know more about interactive media technologies than their tutors do through a discussion of the role and place of new media technologies in education. Brabazon also reminds us that interactive media do not exist in a social or political vacuum and that robust mechanisms for assessment and quality assurance need to be in place when integrating new technologies into curriculum design and planning.

Taylor enters the debate with a paper entitled 'critical theory 2.0 and im/materiality: the bug in the machinic flows'. This paper offers some very insightful points that makes explicit connections with critical theory 1.0 and critical theory 2.0 in order to not only counter some of the mistakes and blind spots of Media Studies 1.0 but also to compensate for what Taylor terms the 'the worst excesses of MS2.0'. Following this, an article by Hermes usefully approaches MS2.0 through the lens of audience research proposing that Media 2.0's claims concerning interactivity offer a potentially fruitful framework for evaluating the theory, politics and method(s) of qualitative audience research. In particular, the extent to which interactive media has transformed audiences into co-creators and producers warrants what she terms a 'recalibration' of audience studies. Dovey and Lister's contribution is partly grounded in their own (fairly extensive) experiences of teaching and research. They argue for a continuity of concerns across MS1.0 and MS2.0 claiming that media studies is a broad interdisciplinary area that is well equipped to deal with contemporary developments in digital media culture. Whilst recognising that recent configurations represent transitions and transformations in patterns of media production and consumption the authors argue it is not necessary to initiate a radical break with traditional modes of inquiry. They accuse both Merrin and Gauntlett of 'constructing a straw man of media studies which they can then attack'. The emphasis in this paper would be appear to be on maintaining a sense of continuity as well as a (healthy) scepticism in media studies wherein new media cultures, technologies and practices should be approached with cautious optimism. The final chapter is given over to David Gauntlett wherein he responds to the ideas raised in the previous chapters as well as carefully restating his own position on MS2.0. Gauntlett draws on and uses Illich's notion of 'conviviality' and 'convivial tools' and makes some interesting comparisons with developments in interactive media. In this respect, his paper does offer some inspirational and intriguing contributions to the 2.0 debate. However,

whilst Gauntlett appears to take on board some of the criticisms levelled at his claims concerning a paradigm shift in media studies he also comes across as being dismissive of what appear to be some valuable counter arguments raised by Andrejevic, Taylor, Dovey and Lister.

On the whole, I found this particular edition of *Interactions* to be an exhilarating read and I probably haven't done the journal justice in the space of this short review. The decision to focus the first edition on what is arguably set to be *the* major debate to shape the future direction(s) of media studies was an informed one. The quality of argumentation from all the contributors involved in the writing of this edition provides for some thoughtful and insightful reading in terms of the challenges now confronting media studies. None of the articles published here manage to successfully resolve the issues or overcome the tensions involved in this debate but they do open the door to further dialogue as Taylor's editorial comments indicate:

...this task remains unfinished. Key departure points between optimistic and pessimistic interpretations still exist, particularly in relation to issues of empowerment and the neutral / non-neutral essence of technology. The various contributors may disagree over the extent to which optimism is justified, or the degree to which media scholars have an obligation to provide answers rather than just identify the most pressing problems, but intellectual engagements such as this are at least a step in the right direction. (2009, p.15)

On a final note, it is both fascinating and perhaps a little ironic that the media 2.0 debate began in the electronic spaces of the web (naturally) and ends up sandwiched between the covers of a good old-fashioned, conventional peer-reviewed (print-based) academic journal. However, for the new generation of 'media savvy 2.0 lecturers' out there an electronic version of this edition of *Interactions* can be accessed (free-to-view) via the Intellect website.