



Resource Review

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Name of reviewed item:	New Media: A Critical Introduction, 2 nd edition
Author(s) / Editor(s):	Lister, J; Dovey, J; Giddings, S; Grant, I and Kelly, K.
Publisher:	Routledge
Publication / release date:	December 2008
ISBN number (if applicable):	978-0-415-43161-3
Price:	£21.99

Review:

This second edition attempts the seemingly difficult task of assessing and illustrating a range of debates around 'new media' in a very 'old media' context – a textbook. Whilst the book, like many publications in these times, pays lip service to what it observes through the provision of a 'companion website' it is clear that this is a very scholarly, conventional and authoritative text and there is no need for it to shy away from that despite the appearance of a 'disconnect' on one level.

The content is divided into large sections, each with its own bibliography, and these are thematic – change and continuity, virtual images / images of the virtual, new media and identity, theories of cyberculture. Each of these is broken down into a large range of sub-themes and each of these in turn is overflowing with references so we really get the sense of a 'completist' approach to the subject but at the same time the tone of a thrown together 'A-Z' or a cursory 'key concepts' is always avoided. The obligatory case studies (always a hostage to fortune in such a rapidly changing arena) illustrate the key points and I have used a couple of these with students – *Kate Modern* and the Xbox and its 'social shaping', but many are from too narrow a time frame so they are neither contemporary nor sufficiently diverse in historical contexts.

I approached this book with reservations, expecting something of a defensive tone, given the authors' publicly articulated scepticism about 'Media 2.0' but have since made it essential reading for some undergraduate modules. This is for three reasons. Firstly, the book does very well what it defines as its purpose – to introduce, critically, its area of concern. To this end it is certainly comprehensive. Very little is left uncovered in the careful negotiation of the issue of what we mean by 'new'. Secondly, it takes its subject matter very seriously and manages to offer readers a

clear, engaging journey through such areas as 'economics and networked media culture' and 'the technological shaping of everyday life' in a way that avoids the hyperbole of 'we media' and 'the long tail' but equally grounds its formative material in research and sufficiently theoretical contexts – for example, Dovey's work on game culture is developed further here with respect to technicities. And thirdly, it strikes the right balance between detail and moving on so a lot is covered but there is enough depth for students to get enough from this as a 'core text' without needing to endlessly chase references to get to the heart of each area.

The weaknesses are inevitable for a book with this title – the case studies will date quickly, even with the option of visiting the updated online resource and students (and academics) may be turned off by the mere aesthetic of the weighty text book with its black and white illustrations. But for me, the pleasure of this text has arisen from an unexpected sense of nostalgia and the ability of the authors to connect the old and the new with fluency and through a consistently theoretical lens. On many occasions I was helped by the authors to 'map' my own interests in contemporary media 'shifts' to what I would (under erasure) call 'classic' theories of media audiences. So one major contribution the book makes is contextual – it offers us a 'connect' between, for example, Morley's Nationwide study, political economy and the rise of google. Elsewhere, a case study on 'bullet time' (made famous by *The Matrix*) is neatly linked to Muybridge's 1880s experimentation with still cameras. So the book has this 'panoptical' effect in relation to both theoretical 'ways of seeing' new media and the technological innovations themselves at a more 'micro' level. This prolific 'tapestry-weaving' of theories with case studies over time has helped me with my current research into the meaning people give to *The Wire*.

A real challenge for the Media lecturer currently is how to deal with students' (understandable) over-connectedness to the object of study. How do we help them know the 'history of the present' without reducing this merely to timelines or to polarised 'old and new' discussions. Equally, if we accept the 'generation Y' idea, how do we make their familiar suitably unfamiliar so they can see these changes as we do (assuming a stereotypical age gap between lecturer and Media student and leaving aside mature students here)? This second edition certainly addresses these challenges head on with critical precision and balance.