Book Review

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Helena Bilandzic, Geoffroy Patriarche & Paul J. Traudt (Eds.): *The Social Use of Media: Cultural and social scientific perspectives on audience research.* Bristol: Intellect. 2012.

Audience research has been gaining relevance over the last years in the scope of media studies, owing both to the tradition of cultural studies and of the social sciences. *The Social Use of Media: Cultural and social scientific perspectives on audience research* gives an overview of the current research on the social aspects of the media use, which is diverse and not always engaging in debate. The collection of essays comes mostly from Europe-based scholars, as it is part of the ECREA (European Communication Research and Education Association) book series, and has been produced in the scope of the COST Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies Action. This book therefore offers an up-to-date portray of the diversity of audience research in Europe.

To address the social use of the media, the authors establish a dialogue with the different strands in audience research, usually discussed in separate fora. The editors – Bilandzic, Patriarche and Traudt – organize the book in three different parts: in the first one, authors deal mostly with the issue of conceptualizing the audience activity and interactivity in the face of the growingly convergent media; in the second, the dimension of social and cultural practice constituted by the media is addressed in five different chapters; and, lastly, in the third part the authors pay attention to the relationships between the media, audiences and participation, in cultural, political and technological terms. In each part, editors bring together studies with different perspectives, outlining each the paradigm used, and providing an exemplary study of the approach to audience studies.

Seija Ridell opens the first part with an action theory perspective, to discuss the specificity of acting as an online audience. Using the involvement of audiences with the YouTube and Wikipedia, Ridell argues that the term 'produser' is problematic, as audiencing the internet and producing content are distinct modes of action. Audience, therefore, is a specific mode of action that should not be conflated with other activities around the engagement with the internet. Pavlíčková's chapter, on the other hand, echoes the hermeneutics tradition in audience and reception studies. Gadamer's theory is useful to understand that media use is always active, as it originates in the users' social and cultural contexts and prior knowledge. However, the encounter with the particular medium reshapes the user's knowledge and horizons. Hermeneutics is also the point of departure of Nyre and O'Brien's chapter in the third part, understanding audience participation as an interpretative activity.

Ruddock's and Soto-Sanfiel's contributions focus practices that tend to be discussed in effects theory: binge drinking and violent gaming. Ruddock's discussion of binge drinking among young women and the media use suggests that bans on alcohol advertising ignore the fact that images of drinking circulate in other sources of popular culture, including social networking sites, where drinking is normalized; and that media literacy is often incorporated in marketing. The debate on media violence also tends to follow a media effects perspective that has been defied. Soto-Sanfiel implements the combination of the Uses and Gratifications approach with ethnography, arguing that this reveals latent patterns of the relationship of the users with the media.

Ethnography has a strong tradition in audience research and this is reflected in several contributions. Dhoest opens the second part with a study on national and ethnic minority audiences, using the concept of imagined audiences. The author uses in-depth interviews and focus groups, as well as ethnographic participant observation, to complement macro-accounts of community and identity formation around television viewing. Media ethnography, in particular, is the method used by Caroline Dover to understand the role of popular and media culture in young people's lives. Moving beyond ethnographic reception studies, Dover understands media consumption ethnographies to be the best way to capture the embedment of media culture in everyday life and in the construction of identities and social relations, a topic that has been dear to audience and reception studies.

Other types of media and audience are addressed in the collection. Meers and Biltereyst look at how film audiences have entered gradually in film studies. Philippe Meers and Daniel Biltereyst argue for the integration of different paradigms on film audiences, both from cultural studies and political economy on audience formation. They present an ethnographic case study on historical cinema-going audiences in two Belgian cities to demonstrate how cinema going is a social routine that is better understood with different theoretical and methodological strands, capturing the ways in which cinema audiences construct communities, and social identities.

Media psychology is also reflected in the book, with Döveling and Sommer's perspective on interpersonal communication on media content and David Giles' analysis of para-

social relationships. Katrin Döveling and Denise Sommer present "an integrative model of socio-emotional meta-appraisal", integrating psychological theories of emotion and approaches to interpersonal communication. They pay particular attention to the level of cognitions, emotions and conversational turns that occur when audience members talk about media content. Giles, on the other hand, inscribes the relevance of keeping the attention to parasocial interaction literature, which has reached its heyday in the 1980s. Looking at the audiences relationship with fictional and media figures, David Giles found that parasocial relations are stronger with real people (celebrities) than with characters, but the latter inspire more complex and intimate relationships from the audience members.

In the third part, Kim C. Schrøder presents an historical view of reception research, from the early 1970s until 2010, focusing on the underlying perspective concerning citizenship. Schrøder identifies five historical stages of reception research on citizenship, inaugurated by Stuart Hall's seminal article on Encoding and Decoding, and takes the reader till today, when a 'ubiquitous citizenship' stage poses challenges for how reception research is enacted. Through a multimethod study on Danes' news media consumption, the author tests methodologies to tackle the challenge of understanding how mediated dormant citizenship may turn into an engaged and interventionist citizenship.

As mentioned before, Lars Nyre and Brian O'Neill offer a view on the motivations for audience participation in the media, drawing on hermeneutics as well as on symbolic interactionism. In an international study, Nyre and O'Neill compare motivations of people in Norway and Ireland to participate in the media. The following chapter, by Peil and Röser, from Austria and Germany, demonstrates the relevance of studying the internet diffusion and new media participation processes resorting to the domestication approach. Especially interested in the new media, the authors look at the diffusion of the internet in Germany from 1997 to 2007, arguing that domestication theory can help to understand how participation in new digital technologies is favoured or not. The home is, the authors argue, still an important unit to understand more complex communicative processes with outer world. The participation in new media, in the form of fandom-related activities, is the focus of Bourdaa and Hong-Mercier's piece. Here, through cyber-ethnography, the horizon of cultural and global citizenship is discussed, in line with present developments of fan studies.

The conclusion of the book is offered by Sonia Livingstone, who sees how audience research has evolved by pressure of the changes in the media and communication environment, but also by interaction with other scientific fields. Livingstone acknowledges the increasing participatory possibilities of the digital media and argues therefore for a need to investigate the 'participation frameworks', using Goffman's concept, to characterize people's relationship with the media. If audience researchers move beyond the binaries of technology/user, and look instead to the genres of participation, audience studies would reach the 'participation paradigm'. This is by nature interdisciplinary and integrative, so as to capture people's uses of the media and the mediated social participation they engage in.

The Social Use of Media is, in conclusion, useful not just for establishing literature reviews on a range of different areas of media, but also for proposing ways to advance and consolidate the field. The book covers a diversity of media objects and products, reclaiming some conceptual clarifications, arguing for the articulation between theories and perspectives and ultimately proving the vitality of audience research in Europe and beyond. It is sure that the collection makes a significant contribution to the development of interdisciplinary approaches to audience studies.

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