

Media Studies 3.0

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I invited the contributors to this special issue of *TVNM* to write a thousand words each on "My Media Studies." Here are mine!

Media studies have been dominated by three topics: ownership and control, content, and audiences. Approaches to ownership and control vary between neoliberal endorsements of limited regulation by the state to facilitate market entry by new competitors, and Marxist critiques of the bourgeois media for controlling the sociopolitical agenda. Approaches to content vary between hermeneutics, which unearths the meaning of individual texts and links them to broader social formations and problems, and content analysis, which establishes patterns across significant numbers of similar texts, rather than close readings of individual ones. And approaches to audiences vary between social-psychological attempts to correlate audiovisual consumption and social conduct, and critiques of imported audiovisual material threatening national and regional autonomy. These three components fractured by politics, nation, discipline, theory, and method are embodied in what I call Media Studies 1.0 and Media Studies 2.0 (these terms are also used at <http://theory.org.uk>).

Media Studies 1.0 derived from the spread of new media technologies over the past two centuries into the lives of urbanizing populations, and the policing questions that posed to both state and capital: What would be the effects of these developments and how would they vary between those with a stake in society versus those seeking to transform it? By the early 20th century, academic experts had decreed media audiences to be passive consumers, thanks to the missions of literary criticism (distinguishing the aesthetically cultivated from others) and psychology (distinguishing the socially competent from others). Decades of social science have emphasized audience reactions to audiovisual entertainment: where they came from, how many there were, and what they did as a consequence of being present. When cultural technologies emerge, young people are identified as both pioneers and victims, simultaneously endowed by manufacturers and critics with power and vulnerability—the first to know and the last to understand cheap novels during the 1900s; silent then sound film during the teens and 1920s; radio in the 1930s; comic books of the 1940s; 1950s, pop music and television from the 1950s and 1960s; satanic rock in the 1970s and 1980s; videocassette recorders in the 1980s; and rap music, video games, and the internet since the 1990s. Media Studies 1.0 also covers political economy, which focuses on ownership and control rather than audience response, but also works from the *nostrum* that the media are all powerful. The audiovisual sector is said to represent a turn away from precious artistic and social traces of authentic intersubjectivity and toward control of individual consciousness. Because demand is dispersed and supply

centralized, the media allegedly become one more industrial process subordinated to dominant economic forces within a society seeking standardization.

For Media Studies 2.0, by contrast, popular culture represents the apex of modernity, the first moment in history when central political and commercial organs and agendas became receptive to the popular classes. This perspective has offered a way into research of media audiences that differs from Media Studies 1.0 and its faith in the all-powerful agency of the media. For in Media Studies 2.0, the all-powerful agent is the audience. Media Studies 2.0 claims that the public is so clever and able that it makes its own meanings, outwitting institutions of the state, academia, and capitalism that seek to measure and control it. In the case of children and the media, anxieties from Media Studies 1.0 about turning Edenic innocents into rabid monsters or capitalist dupes are dismissed. Contemporary communications and cultural technologies supposedly obliterate geography, sovereignty, and hierarchy in an alchemy of truth and beauty. A deregulated, individuated media world allegedly makes consumers into producers, frees the disabled from confinement, encourages new subjectivities, rewards intellect and competitiveness, links people across cultures, and allows billions of flowers to bloom in a postpolitical cornucopia. It's a kind of Marxist/Godardian wet dream, where people fish, film, fuck, frolic, and fund from morning to midnight. Sometimes, faith in the active audience reaches cosmic proportions. It has been a *donnée* of Media Studies 2.0 that the media are not responsible for—well, anything. Consumption is the key to Media Studies 2.0—with production discounted, labor forgotten, and consumers sovereign.

How might we transcend these rather graceless antinomies? Media Studies 3.0 must blend ethnographic, political-economic, and aesthetic analyses in a global and local way, establishing links between the key areas of cultural production around the world (Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East) and diasporic/dispossessed communities engaged in their own cultural production (Native peoples, African and Asian diasporas, Latin@s, and Middle Eastern peoples). Media Studies 3.0 needs to be a media-centered, politically revised version of area studies, with diasporas as important as regions. It must be animated by collective identity and power, by how human subjects are formed, and how they experience cultural and social space. Taking its agenda from social movements as well as intellectual ones and its methods from economics, politics, communications, sociology, literature, law, science, medicine, anthropology, history, and art, it should feature a particular focus on gender, race, class, and sexuality in everyday life across national lines. And never privilege pessimism, optimism, audiences, owners, states, or labor—but rather, stress their mutual imbrication.

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