Book Reviews

Children, Adolescence, and the Media, 3rd Edition [date], London: Sage Publications
Starsburger, V. C., Wislon, B. J., and Jordan A. B., Eds.

After the well-received second edition (Strasburger and Wilson, 2002), Sage Publications brings us another edition of this cross-disciplinary and research-orientated book which draws upon a media-effects tradition. The core question of this 3rd edition is how media impact cognitive, social and emotional development of children and adolescence, and vice versa; how developmental differences influence the ways in which they process and make sense of media. Even though the discourse is predominantly centred around cause-and-effect studies of TV from the 1970s and social and media statistics from the 1990s and the early 21st century, the actuality and relevance of the literature is demonstrated through the real world examples of current media narratives and children's and youth media practices. The authors build on the idea that media are good or bad depending on 'the type and frequency of their use' (p. 438), which sets the nature of one's reading. Among the negative effects of entertainment media, the focus is on violence, sexualisation, drug use, gender and racial stereotypes, materialism, unhealthy lifestyles, emotional distractions, and antisocial behaviour. In contrast, prosocial and educational media are discussed as a pleasurable and effective learning environment and a stimulus for active citizenship and prosocial behaviour. While being US-focused, international differences and similarities are occasionally explored in order to widen the target audience. This review highlights summaries, novel or interesting ideas from each chapter with the aim of exploring the potential value for a variety of readers.

To begin with, the first chapter tasks the reader to acknowledge that children and adolescents are different from adults and from each other when they use and interact with media. However, they do share an eagerness to learn and a lack of real world experience, which makes them more vulnerable than adults to media messages. This vulnerability, which marketers can potentially take advantage of, is further discussed in the second chapter on advertising. The 'Educational and Prosocial Media' section is inspired by Joan Cooney's (*Sesame Street*) statement, 'it is not whether children learn from television, it is what they learn' (p. 104). The writers state the possible effects of a TV viewing peak at the age of seven and subsequent rapid fall (Mares and Woodard, 2005, 2012), and suggest that digital media and Web 2.0 have a great potential to become a platform for personal and social change among older children and adolescents. The following emphasis is on the relationship between media violence and aggression as a learnt behaviour, which

'can be acquired, reinforced, and primed by media messages' (p. 179). One particularly valuable and interesting recommendation says, 'if a parent is concerned about a child learning aggressive behaviours from the media, then programs that feature heroes or good characters engaging in justified violence that is not punished and results in minimal consequences should be avoided… [whereas] portrayals that feature less attractive perpetrators who are punished in the plot and whose violence results in serious negative consequences can actually teach youth that aggression is not necessarily a good way to solve problems' (p. 157).

'Sex, Sexuality and the Media' provides a number of compelling examples from a number of media genres (e.g. push-up bra advertising for 7 year olds), which represents increasingly suggestive and explicit sexual content. In contrast, the amount of responsible sexual narratives, recognised for their positive influence on attitudes toward intimacy and adolescents' sexual behaviour, is considerably lower. 'Drugs and the Media' shows the associations between exposure to alcohol consumption and smoking in media and the subsequent use of these two drugs among adolescents (e.g. Smith and Foxcroft, 2009; Anderson et al., 2009). 'Obesity, Eating Disorders and the Media' warns people about the real dangers of obesity and eating disorders instead of 'showing them impossibly thin role models seems an ideal solution', but claim this approach is 'impractical in today's society' (p. 369).

With a balanced focus on TV, chapters 8 to 10 are written by guest contributors who discuss 'new media'. Firstly, the aim of Edward Donnestrein's input, titled simply 'The Internet', is to decrease parents' fear of knowing less about this medium than their kids. Secondly, Jeanne Brockmyer talks about video games as natural teachers, because according to her 'the gaming environment is a powerful combination of carefully graded challenges and immediate feedback and reward, [which makes it an] ideal learning environment' about behavioural patterns (p. 474). Lastly, Megan Moreno and Rajitha Kota ascribe the uniqueness of social networks users' vulnerability to peer relationships, influences and pressures, because it is where adolescents are provided with overly glamorised videos, pictures and comments portraying their peers' irresponsible behaviours stripped of the consequences. Although each chapter includes sections for parents and policy makers, Chapter 11 is specifically devoted to 'The Family and Media' and Chapter 13 to 'Children's Media Policy'. For parents, the key is a higher awareness of media effects, increased control and interest in their children's media habits, and empowerment of their role as monitors, supervisors and participators in children's media consumption. Government bodies' future steps should be to develop consistency in ratings, enforce existing rules, and provide greater funding for beneficial media and for parent education.

From the media education point of view, a number of chapters propose increased media literacy among children and adolescents as one of the key solutions to the issues previously highlighted. For instance, decoding and analysing media images could support dealing with eating disorders and the increasing self-esteem. Likewise, the authors advise incorporating media education principles into schools' sex education and drug prevention programmes and to teach advertising literacy toward critical and responsible consumerism. This makes the negative core of the twelfth chapter, 'Media Literacy/Media Education', surprising and in some way disappointing. The guest author Robert McCannon's main emphasis is on the underdeveloped measurement of media literacy's impact on changing students' behaviours. According to him this makes it difficult to prove the value of media education. Probably the only uncritical acknowledgment McCannon gives are to his own media education practice and to Austin and his colleagues' (1993 – 2006) media literacy research and theories. Trying to cover an extensive number of topics, the analysis becomes inconsistent, difficult to follow, and the recommendations inadequately grounded in the literature. Yet the chapter might have a certain value for those interested in measurement systems, or for already experienced media literacy schoolteachers, who will be able to make an informed judgement of his practical advice.

In general, it is a comprehensive textbook for university students and lecturers exploring different methodologies, especially correlational research and literature and projects on media effects, as well as for the theories embedded at the end of the chapters' exercises. Another well-established topic is children's media policy in the USA, which is contextually strong and therefore understandable to an international audience. The media industry can be inspired to enforce self-regulation and 'rather than being part of the problem, [to] become part of the solution' (p. 374). Non-profit organisations might find the proposed prosocial and educational cross-platform campaigns that were evaluated effective and useful not only for the target audience of children and youth, but also for those nurturing them. The literature can be stimulating and reflective for both teachers and parents, although the practical parts may be challenging to apply in different cultural, social, political and educational environments. Without doubt though, the reading experience can significantly increase teachers' and parents' awareness, knowledge and understanding of 'growing up with media' issues, as long as they keep a cool head and do not start blaming entertainment media for all children's and adolescences' personal, social, physical, mental and emotional problems. As the writers claim, rather than causing these problems, media have a certain power to contribute to them and this book's ultimate goal is to encourage diverse agents to weaken the negative and strengthen the positive effects.

Reviewer – Marketa Zezulkova – PhD student at CEMP, Bournemouth University

To Save Everything, Click Here: Technology, solutionism and the urge to fix problems that don't exist by Evgeny Morozov (2013, London: Allen Lane)

Recently on Kickstarter a user named FAKEGRIMLOCK raised £45,000 of capital to self-publish a volume of inspirational management screeds illustrated in his own idiosyncratic, DIY style. FAKEGRIMLOCK is the anonymous face of a certain kind of Internet guru that has gained a reputation by rejecting received wisdom while offering slightly register-shifted advice of his own. His advice has the familiar ring of the Silicon Valley entrepreneur: 'Startup you!' he exclaims, 'No one can have vision staring at someone's back!' His message is seductively self-evident and devoid of self-doubt, but these are precisely the aspects of Silicon Valley culture that make it so ripe for critique. Both the manner in which FAKEGRIMLOCK has reached an audience, and the voracity of the appetite for 'grimlockian' solutions are the subject of Evgeny Morozov's recent book.

The central argument, one that Morozov makes repeatedly throughout 350 pages, is that our society has become carried away with notion that 'Internet values' can be applied to problems outside of computer networks. Examples include iPhone Apps that use motion sensors to track and quantify our sleep patterns, GPS units that track our driving and report back to the insurance company, digital cameras that take pictures of the trash we throw away and rate us based on our recycling habits. These 'innovations' are catching on, Morozov contends, but the results might have unintended consequences. By reifying the Internet as a powerful and autonomous agent with its own logics and desires, we run the risk of abdicating human moral responsibility for political and social life. The more intractable the problem, the more seductive the technological solutions and the more caution is needed. It is a broadly pessimistic account, since moderation is in short supply in many of the domains that he scrutinises: politics, media, urban governance, crime control and education.

These arguments will be immediately familiar to any scholar working in technology studies since the 1990s. This is an odd book – a popular critique of technological culture that might be new to a mass audience but is well-worn terrain for academics. Even though Morozov is somewhat late to the party, his ideas remain politically salient. In the 17 years since Barbrook and Cameron published their incisive critique of the 'Californian ideology', Silicon Valley has become a movable feast – although Morozov doesn't explicitly state it, the admixture of neoliberal economic reform and consumer technology has found enthusiastic political adherents here in Europe and around the world. When David Cameron seeks to

'reward UK innovation' by offering tax cuts, or when Ian Livingstone calls to overhaul the IT curriculum to respond to the global labour market, we observe the continuing strength of the Californian ideology.

But unlike other scholarly accounts, Morozov spends less time discussing neoliberalism and more time describing various widgets, gadgets and the companies that make them. The book lacks a clear structure, with Morozov opting to meander through a series of domains of social life where the effects of his argument are most acutely observed. Of interest to readers of this journal will be the brief accounts he gives of the effect of technological solutionism on education. The lessons to be gleaned by media educators are twofold: First, Morozov makes the indirect but compelling case that media literacy has never been more important than at present. Much of the risk in technological solutionism arises because Internet services are far from transparent. The public may not realise, for example, that Google preferentially ranks search results based on an algorithm that predicts one's political beliefs, or that one's geographical coordinates are sold by mobile phone companies to local police. We need a new kind of digital literacy for an algorithmic, 'smart' world. Secondly, and related to the first point, educators should resist in the strongest possible terms the ideological influence of technocrats and free market supporters in the provision of education. Learning is not like buying a new hairdryer on Amazon, with star ratings and customer reviews – learning is hard work. If we reduce our education system to an online store front, we could structure learning in a way that promotes popular ideas at the expense of unpopular ones – the antithesis of principles that inform democratic citizenship.

The book's usefulness to media literacy scholarship will be limited by the sporadic attention given to education and its lack of engagement with academic literature. It makes overuse of buzzwords like 'datasexual', 'double-click' and 'RyanAir-ation'. The most puzzling choice is Morozov's use of the term 'solutionism'. There is no widespread acceptance of the term's meaning in political science or technology studies, the two main disciplines that Morozov evidently hopes to engage. He takes the term to mean the tendency to offer simple, technological solutions to complex problems. But the looseness of the idea is frustrating, and it is unclear why he didn't select more precise language with clearer academic parentage. It could be because calling it a 'technocratic impulse' or a form of 'cybernetic totalism' or even good old-fashioned 'scientific positivism' would have alienated Morozov's imagined audience. However as a consequence of these and other stylistic choices, the book vacillates between serious academic critique and populist manifesto.

For the airport departure lounge reader, the book is somewhat too sprawling and lacks the soundbite quality of other successes (such as Andrew Keen's *The Cult of the Amateur*

or Jaron Lanier's *Who Owns the Future?*). For the critical academic audience, the book frustrates in its unwillingness to locate itself in any of the intellectual trajectories that underpin other, better work. Readers seeking more robust theoretical discussions of the tensions between technological innovation and governance are advised to read Armand Mattelart's excellent *The information Society*, Matthew Hindman's *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, or Rob Shields' *The Virtual*, all of which deliver more nuanced and portable analytics for understanding other cases. Bonus: Shields engages with Proust far more meaningfully that Morozov does here.

A writer of considerable insight, it is probably not lost on Morozov that his book occupies an uneasy perch between technological mass consumption and academic critique. While he admonishes his techno-utopian contemporaries for engaging in 'soundbite-friendly futurism', he might likewise be accused of offering only a more critical version of his own.

Reviewer – Kris Erickson – Research Fellow in Intellectual Property and the Digital Economy, University of Glasgow

Textual Poachers by Henry Jenkins 1992

Laughey's Canon

Editor's note: This review is part of our series in which a current media teacher re-examines a 'classic' text in honour of *MERJ* editorial board member Dan Laughey and his provocative 'Back to Basics' article in *MERJ* 2:2.

At about the same time as Henry Jenkins was researching and writing *Textual Poachers*, Tim Berners-Lee was busy inventing the World Wide Web. This was, of course, coincidence; but there is a connection, since the web was the medium that brought the fan fiction Jenkins describes to a much wider audience. Often people talk as if fan production began with YouTube in 2006, but Jenkins showed in this book just how much was going on decades before that, even if its distribution was much more haphazard than that available via social media today.

Jenkins has, of course, developed the ideas from *Textual Poachers* into a whole theory in his 2006 book, *Convergence Culture* and written extensively on the topic in his blog

'*Confessions of an Aca fan*', but essentially the position he outlined in 1992 stands up well more than 20 years on, in spite of the very different media ecology we have today. As a fan himself, Jenkins recognises the mocking tone of much previous work on fans and the mainstream media convention of representing the fan as fanatic (i.e. mad). More significantly, he recognises the right of the reader to become a writer of meaning, appropriating from mainstream texts to re-purpose them. Though the texts he references have in many cases declined in significance *(The Professionals*, *Blake's 7*, *Beauty and the Beast*, arguably even *Star Trek*), the activities he describes (drawing, story-writing, music making, video production) still exist and indeed have been extended due to the possibilities of cheaper media technology and web distribution.

His categories are interesting – 'filking' (fan music making), 'slash' (fan stories which posit homo-erotic relationships between central characters from fictions) and 'poaching' (taking elements of mainstream media and re-working them). All undoubtedly still exist and have grown in an online environment, with a younger audience increasingly involved in their production (e.g. Harry Potter fiction). Indeed, such work is taken even further than Jenkins might have envisaged, with the use of Photoshop allowing the highly sophisticated manipulation of existing texts both for clever political statements but also for the production of huge quantities of pornographic celebrity 'fakes', where celebrity faces are added to the bodies of porn actors.

Video is the area which has exploded the most since *Textual Poachers* was written, with a whole slew of sub-categories of animation such as Machinima, and Lego frame-by-frame re-makes of title sequences, adverts, video games and film sequences, live action copies of dance routines from music videos and endless mash-ups from anime to TV series where fans either pay homage to their favourite media or offer up new juxtapositions of meaning. On one level, this material in itself may do no more than justify a view of the fan as a 'sad' figure, working for free on unoriginal material for an audience of 'sad' peers; but on another level it acts, just as Jenkins argues in *Textual Poachers*, as a starting point for a sense of community to begin to be enacted as part of a 'Participatory Culture'.

So *Textual Poachers* deserves its place in Laughey's Canon – a groundbreaking book, prescient of a fan culture to come.

Reviewer – Pete Fraser – Chair of the Media Education Association and PhD student at CEMP, Bournemouth University