

# MERJ

## Media Education Research Journal

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Themed Issue – Media Studies 2.0: A Retrospective

Editors

Richard Berger & Julian McDougall



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## **MERJ 3.1**

### **Call for papers – MERJ 3.1**

The Media Education Research Journal invites submissions for issue 03:01 by the deadline of March 9th 2012.

MERJ offers a forum for the exchange of academic research into media education and pedagogy conducted by academics, practitioners and teachers situated in all sectors and contexts for media education. The journal aims to encourage dialogue between the sectors and between media educators from different countries, with the aim to facilitate the transfer of critical, empirical, action and discursive research into the complexity of media education as social practice.

We invite papers and reports that present the outcomes of media education research related to any aspect of this discussion. See the MERJ pages on the Auteur web site for guidelines for submission: <http://tinyurl.com/yzbbygn> or visit the new MERJ website, [www.merj.info](http://www.merj.info)

### **New! MERJ website**

[www.merj.info](http://www.merj.info) features information about the current issue of the MERJ, including abstracts for every article, which will then build into an online archive. Every editorial will also be available to read online, together with **exclusive**, web-only content. Visit [www.merj.info](http://www.merj.info) for contributor guidelines, deadlines for submissions and advance information about future issues.

# **Editorial**

## **Media Studies 2.0: A Retrospective**

Richard Berger, The Centre for Excellence in Media Practice, Bournemouth University & Julian McDougall, Centre for Developmental and Applied Research in Education, University of Wolverhampton, Editors of the Media Education Research Journal

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Welcome to this fourth issue of the *Media Education Research Journal*. It is three years since the journal was conceived at the Media Education Association's conference in 2008, and nearly two years since we've been in print. We started the journal because we felt we needed a critical space where media education (specifically) could be discussed. We also felt that media educators – and those who use media in some way in their teaching – in schools and colleges did not have a place where they could publish applied research about their professional practice, and receive academic peer review in the spirit of critical friendship. Other communities of practice (English and Art being notable examples) have had such a forum for many years. In the past two years we have published work from media teachers, at all levels, from all over the world, worked with the Media Education Association and convened seminars at the annual Media Education Summit.

Our first editorial was concerned with the status of media education today, where we briefly touched upon 'Media Studies 2.0' – predicated on the notion of Web 2.0. We argued that 'Web 2.0 practices mean that students are perhaps more proficient producers of Media than they are analysts and researchers of Media' (Berger & McDougall, 2010). In this issue we return to Media Studies 2.0 and re-examine the debate begun in 2006 by Will Merrin and developed further by David Gauntlett the following year. Recently, the very idea of Media Studies 2.0 has come under attack, from David Buckingham (2010), Dan Laughey (2011) and notable others.

As media educators, we are used to attacks on our subject area. Recently the commentator Toby Young announced during interviews regarding his new 'Free School' that he would never employ a Media Studies graduate, perhaps unaware of the fact that Drama and Performing Arts graduate Simon Pegg, who played Young in the adaptation of his memoir *How to Lose Friends and Alienate People*, wrote his undergraduate thesis on Marxism and cinema. Janet Street-Porter concurred – which came as a surprise to the editors of MERJ, one of whom was employed by Street-Porter in the mid-1990s. We're somewhat acclimatised to this now, but our subject is under renewed attack from the

largest cuts ever imposed on Higher Education, and the Russell Group universities are now actively dissuading prospective applicants not to take ‘soft’ A-Level subjects and instead encouraging students to study ‘facilitating’ subjects such as mathematics, languages and history. Most worrying of all, perhaps, is the Education Secretary (and former deputy editor of *The Times*), Michael Gove’s long-standing and vocal hostility to what we do in all of its forms – indeed the very *idea* of Media Studies. With the disbanding of subject centres, and the ineffective response of other bodies that claim to represent us thrown into the mix as well, these are indeed ‘difficult times’.

This is the context, then, for the debate about the future of our subject area. Is Media Studies 2.0 a mere distraction and should we be mounting a more robust defence of our position in the face of cuts and critics of our area? Or is Media Studies 2.0 the way out of the medium specific myopia and outmoded pedagogy that has persistently hindered our development over the last decade? Is it time to embrace media education ‘after the media’ (Kendall & McDougall, 2011)? Have we been our own worst enemies? Or are we in serious danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, dispensing with our critical obligations in favour of a ‘cyber utopian’ and profoundly uncritical celebration of technology and its apparent ‘affordances’? Ultimately, you decide. But this issue of our journal is devoted to a ‘retrospective’ discussion of how these arguments have unfolded at both the ‘macro’ (big claims and counter-claims) and the ‘micro’ (real-life pedagogy ‘on the ground’) levels since Merrin’s intervention.

The phrase ‘Web 2.0’ has been in existence since 2004, but it has its origins in the ‘dot-com’ bust of 2001. Since then, writers and scholars have tried to articulate a position that takes more account of the users of the web, and what they do with content, rather than the corporate makers of content. Advocates of Web 2.0, such as Tim O'Reilly, express the idea that networks are now platforms and users can add value to Web 2.0 tools. The idea is that the experience of the desktop is now incorporated into internet browsers and that Web 2.0 applications expose their own functionality so that other applications can leverage and integrate this functionality; the result being a much richer set of applications. Web 2.0 is allied to the idea of a ‘social web’ where Web 2.0 tools, such as YouTube and Flickr interact more with the user (who is now much more of a participant). As we've discussed elsewhere (McDougall & Sanders, 2011), whether *Second Life* and other virtual worlds are included in all things ‘2.0’ depends on who is representing the idea (personal preferences play a part).

As the web (and its attendant hardware) became more sophisticated, so called ‘ordinary people’ started to create their own work online, and put them onto sites like YouTube and Flickr. Many argued that a great deal of this was of poor quality – and not everyone was online – but it was still quite clear that something interesting was occurring. We were all

starting to see a new generation of children growing up who had always been users of the web and new media. So, rather than a technological change, Web 2.0 describes changes in the practices of individuals online, particularly through social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter.

Recent reviews of Media Studies 2.0 from/within its own 'language game' are provided by Gauntlett's (2011b) kindlebook (<http://www.theory.org.uk/david/kindle.htm>) and our own video summary (McDougall, 2011), which follows Lyotard's '*Le Postmoderne Explique Aux Enfants*' in summing up the debate from the mouths of children (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzkiRIDsj3s>).

Some media academics, such as David Gauntlett, had already been alert to the nuances of shifts in online behaviour since the late 1990s, and Will Merrin used the emergent Web 2.0 as the opportunity to coin his own malapropism, 'Media Studies 2.0', and to suggest that Media Studies needed to be updated to respond to a new era of participation:

Media studies was a product of and reflection of the broadcast era, historically focusing upon a limited range of forms (print, cinema, radio, television), studied using a limited range of theories and methods, employing categories reflecting broadcast era patterns of production and consumption. [Media Studies] needs to be upgraded for a post-broadcast era. An entire revision of the field – its organisation, key topics, theoretical sources, understanding of history and technology and relationship to other fields -- is now required... Time to change the discipline. Time to catch up with the present. (Merrin, 2006, <http://mediastudies2pointo.blogspot.com>)

David Gauntlett, who for the best part of a decade had been interested in the everyday creativity afforded by the web, developed Merrin's idea still further. He used the metaphor of an allotment to articulate the differences between Media Studies 1.0 and Media Studies 2.0. He describes Web 1.0 as the first decade of the web – people made their own websites, following quite a traditional 'broadcasting' model. Web 2.0 on the other hand is described as a huge communal garden, with everyone joining in and adding to it; there's now no need to actually 'own' the site in this model (see Gauntlett, 2011 and online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWNXg7Vt-ig>).

Critics of this idea, including MERJ editorial board members David Buckingham and Dan Laughey, point out that this pre-supposes that everybody is connected when very clearly they're not. In the last issue of MERJ, Buckingham and Cary Bazalgette, ex-Chair of the Media Education Association, suggested that not enough people are participating

in Web 2.0 activities for it to constitute a significant change in behaviour. These critics of Media Studies 2.0 argue further that the web is still controlled and dominated by large corporations – even Apple now imposes strict restrictions on those developing applications for its platforms. Buckingham goes further to deride much of the activity that *can* be observed in ‘Web 2.0’ spaces as ‘loser generated content’. Laughey adds (in this issue) “Who really cares if joeblogga94 posts his ‘Hey Dude’ movie – at the same time several thousand other nobodies do likewise? Is anybody watching?”

In a follow-up article published in *Interactions*, Gauntlett responded to accusations of unequal participation and he countered the view that Web 2.0 is overly concerned with a white, middle-class and Eurocentrist view of the media. The problem for Laughey is that Media Studies 2.0 rejects some of the theoretical models and tools that have served us so well for decades. In his book, *Key Themes in Media Theory* (2007) he calls Media Studies 2.0 ‘lightweight’ and in *Three-D / MERJ*, he argues that Web 2.0 has not brought about the kinds of paradigm shifts other media technologies have, such as the printing press, the telegraph and television. Going further, in calling for a ‘back-to-basics’ approach, he suggests we adopt the kind of Leavisite critical canon which would favour Hitchcock over Hammer horror films, for example. As an academic concerned with how Media Studies is perceived in the wider world, he suggests that Media Studies 2.0 has rightly ‘incurred the wrath of journalists’ and by implication has damaged our subject. A further response from Gauntlett came in the form of his kindlebook, in which he counters:

The elements of critical media studies that Laughey says he supports – such as the importance of methodologies, an international perspective, and the application of established or neglected theorists to the changed media landscape to see where they have insights to offer – are typically also supported by the proponents of a ‘Media Studies 2.0’, so his remarks generally miss their targets, and seem merely nostalgic for the good old days when it was easier to tell what the ‘media’ in media studies meant. (Gauntlett, 2011b)

This first themed issue of MERJ is an opportunity to look again at these debates, four years on from their inception, and to evaluate their influence on the further development, and growth, of media education. Steve Dixon and Richard Sanders analyse their own practice in and about Media 2.0 and in so doing engage with some of the myths and assumptions about ‘digital natives’ (see our MERJ 02:01 editorial exchange, ‘Apologies for Cross Posting’) but at the same time the important shifts in student engagement that do need to be understood and harnessed in pedagogy. Anna Feigenbaum takes an associated

idea from Charles Leadbeater – ‘we think’ - and puts it into her own practice as an action research intervention. Reporting on his research in progress, Pete Fraser offers some early (and sobering) findings from a mixed methods exploration of Media Studies 2.0 in ‘real life’ practice – in and beyond the UK A Level classroom.

In this issue we also publish ‘write-up’ reports from the MERJ seminar strand at September 2011’s Media Education Summit. Again, these offer a combination of broad ‘position papers’ and more specific research outcomes. Dan Laughey’s aforementioned ‘Back to Basics’ is reprinted here, following his presentation of the argument and our debates in response to it at the Summit. Becky Parry and Mandy Powell share findings from one strand of a media literacy research project and put this data in the context of Media Studies 2.0 and its implications for teaching with key concepts in the primary sector. Dave Harte and Vanessa Williams report on their research into social media, enterprise and employability in the ‘2.0’ landscape.

We’d like to conclude this editorial with tributes to two excellent practitioners in our community who have both passed away this year.

David Clews was a good friend to *MERJ* and supported us as Co-Director of the Art, Design and Media subject centre of the Higher Education Academy. As manager of the Centre, he founded *Networks* magazine in 2007, which was an inspiration for our journal. David was a passionate advocate of, and spokesman for, art, design and media teaching, and he will be greatly missed.

Julie Courage-Goodwin taught Media Studies in colleges in Birmingham and the Black Country and was a senior coursework moderator with the OCR awarding body. Julie was an outstanding teacher of creative media production, an inspirational, funny and modest colleague and a passionate champion of widening participation in further education.

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