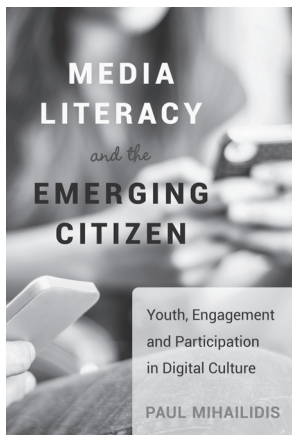


Reviews

Media Literacy and the Emerging Citizen: Youth, Engagement and Participation in Digital Culture, by Paul Mihailidis (2014). Peter Lang Publishing, ISBN 1433121794



In 2014, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to its youngest winner, Malala Yousafzai. In this context, the work of Paul Mihailidis helps us understand how young people are changing their environments and societies, empowered by technology and digital media.

The emerging citizen concept proposed here gives us a new perspective about the positive use of the tools provided by digital culture and a commitment to civic participation.

In this new communication context and social landscape, media literacy is the element of articulation. Any network user is potentially a producer of information: what varies is the degree of participation, through the level of media literacy achieved.

This book highlights the lack of unity in definitions of media literacy, from the emergence of the concept in the thirties in the United States to more recent paradigms. According to Mihailidis, media literacy education is concerned with both participation and positive social change. Only an educated society can cope with the challenges of democracy increasingly mediated by digital technology. Today, the development of the individual in virtual environments demands ‘more intelligent, sophisticated and expressive citizens’ who can contribute to their community and solve their problems, as well as harness the power of social networks to learn, share, explore and revolutionize, and are in turn critical consumers (p. 158). He sees media literacy enabling people to become effective citizens, media and content creators (p. 42). He proposes a typology of citizen, the ‘good citizen’ and ‘good citizenship’, the latter fostering the capability to become an agent of social change. Although elsewhere, in the same way as Earl and Kimport suggest (2011: 24-25), Mihailidis has a different view of the phenomenon that links social change intervention in digital spaces. Despite his argument focusing specifically on political activism in the network as well as how the Internet promotes the mobilization which has given rise to the ‘E-movements’, his position is firm: the technology itself does not change societies or social processes by its very existence, it is instead the creative ways in which people use the digital culture that can contribute to the social change.

The volume is divided in three main parts and seven chapters in which we find different proposals. Part one deals with the capacity for using the technology in the most efficient manner by citizens, especially on the social platforms and networks that allow to organize people with the same interests around the world, and this phenomenon is presented as a new mode of social participation. In this framework the figure of the young citizen who participates by giving voice to their peer group arises by promoting the causes that unite them while making use of digital activism for change. Interestingly, at this point, the digital culture and the online participation break with the idea of the traditional vote as the only way to change things. The Internet, social networks and other media and communication channels begin to constitute an alternative. In this sense Mihailidis agrees with the idea of Crovi (2012, p. 226) that grants the power to young people who contradict the leitmotiv of technology industries and media designed for them only as entertainment, while they have turned it into a weapon of expression and opposition.

On the other hand, results a priori seem faster and are more visible. The digital culture magnifies and viralizes everything that is on the network. It also fosters new social structures that grow vertiginously, and relationships are more immediate. Similarly, messages circulate at an unreachable speed. Amidst all these new facilities for civic participation and easy access to technology and media, emerges the need to consider media literacy as a guarantor of responsible participation and for the protection of the rights of citizens. 'Media literacy education is the movement that can help empower young citizens to use these newfound opportunities for greater engagement, dialog, and inclusiveness in everyday life' (p. 47).

Finally, the first piece concludes with the potential of media literacy and collective crowd intelligence for social mobilization. Mihailidis distinguishes between the use of media to share, cooperate and act. However, the most important thing is the competence to create original, critical, transparent and collective narratives, messages or information to be shared. It is a clarion call to lead the processes of democratization as members, users and beneficiaries of the digital culture where the more literate people are, the more engaged in their destiny.

Part two explains how the socialization of young people has moved to a new area – cyberspace - where much of their life is being connected particularly through social networks. In this new territory, to find new forms of building relationships and debate, criticism and reflections are propitiated. Given this reality, the author chooses to interview a group of young people to understand their behavior in the media and the use they make of it. The responses highlight five major conclusions: 1. The need for the youth to be informed. 2 The importance of sharing what they consume or create particularly in

social networks. 3. The importance that is being gained by the social platforms on the development of youth. 4. The gap that is found in education when the teachers and the system are not 2.0 thinkers or digital natives. 5. A little attention to our online identity being constantly on display.

Finally, part three presents three relevant ideas: (1) the concept of motivation as a crucial component in digital participation and civic engagement closely linked to the use of technology to improve the social environment. (2) The concept of mindfulness as one of the media literacy connectors, which consists on assuming the impact of our actions online, as well as being responsible when we are on line, becoming aware of the time spent there in order to make the most of it. (3) A model for the emerging citizen based on the 5A'S of media literacy: 'Access to media; Awareness of how media portrays events and issues; Assessment on how media portrays events and issues; Appreciation of the diversity of information, dialog, collaboration, and online voices; Action to become part of the dialog' (p. 128).

The last point is the primary contribution of the author. The design of a 5A's framework for digital users and people involved in media literacy education responds to a need of an inclusive guide for every kind of communicating participant. This model contains essential elements of media literacy such as values, ideologies, expression, diversity, voices, purposes, digital divides and culture.

Overall, this book is a brave study resulting in a new paradigm of media literacy for citizen empowerment through technology and the role of youth in this scenario. Ultimately, the book invites teachers, parents, policy makers, and public officials to collaborate on the development of a digital community in the best interests of citizens. In this way, it also opens up new possibilities for modifying the labour structure and development of digital skills and training to meet emerging professions millennials to occupy. The empowerment of citizens by the provision of analytical and creative resources for people to participate in the public sphere is, for Mihalidis, a collective responsibility.

Discussion

Paula (PH-D): What issues do digital culture / technology raise for how we define a citizen?

Paul (PM): There is a host of scholarship that has explored the evolving notion of what it means to be a citizen. The Most popular works, in the context of the US, are by scholars like John Dewey, Robert Putnam, Michael Schudson, and Benjamin Barber. Definitions of citizenship have historically been related to duties, like voting, volunteering, paying taxes,

and so on. These are still strong metrics for us to consider, but they paint an incomplete picture. For one, they are duties that don't complement the full range of functioning democracy today. Second, they are limiting to a national context, i.e. they are situated with borders and boundaries in mind. This is in contrast to the ways that citizens understand the world and their role in it. Rather, today citizens are embedded in digital culture. The long held civic duties that people must adhere to still exist and are vibrant, but there is another half to the story. In my book, I detailed the work on engagement or actualized citizenship, which has been developed as a way to explore how we understand participation in society as more dynamic and inclusive than voting and other complimentary duties. I believe that the citizen of today has less barriers to participation than ever before, more access to follow ideas and issue, and to express, share, create and join in civic dialog of local, national and global interest. Citizens today have more influence in peer-based, connective platforms than they ever did with a single vote. They can engage in rich dialog with diverse communities, they can monitor a far greater breadth of information than before, and they can share and repurpose information to help others see more opinions, share more ideas, or be more included in public dialog today.

At the end of the day, citizens have more voice, and more agency. They are not bound by borders for information or networks to disseminate news at a certain time and place. Digital culture has subverted how citizens debate, engage, and participate. However, how we teach and learning about citizenship is still grounded in civic structures and duties, and not in networks, connectivity, agency and participation. My book sets out, in essence, to show this disconnect and then argue for media literacy as the mandate for civic inclusion and democratic thought in digital culture. It's clear that we have the capacity and networks in place, we just don't have the learning and engagement contexts to match.

Julian (JMCD): Can I follow up with the (perhaps) obvious question, given your work with the Salzburg Global Seminar and the relationship with the United Nations Development Programme, how do you propose we work across the two competing imperatives of these more nuanced and complex questions of converting everyday digital life into civic engagement on the one hand, and on the other just getting people who are excluded from the conversation, for economic reasons or due to political restrictions on their freedom, connected in the first place? In more simplistic terms, do we need to focus on ACCESS first, and then move on?

PM: Sure, and here's my obvious answer (I think). I think no matter what the capacity of work is, Access is the first and foremost competency to focus on. The question presumes

that access simply means having access to information vs. not. I think that's a fundamental human right, as important as voting, expression, participating, etc. etc. because without information all of those human rights become abstractions of sorts. But I think access also means knowing how to access credible, reliable, diverse, independent information, and how to access the groups that any citizen needs and wants to engage with for social, political, cultural, economic or personal reasons. Access is a much more complicated and nuanced term for media literacy these days. If you are advocating for women's rights, for example, there are dynamic communities, groups, and resources that are connective and collaborating consistently. Younger generations need to have access to these groups through technologies, but also access to the myriad of participatory ways that contribution facilitates. My work with the Salzburg Global Seminar, and the UNDP, is predicated on the competency of access at the foundation of all media literacy work. From giving a voice to the voiceless, and give more dynamic voice to those who are in positions to make change, advocate for human rights, and engage in work that helps the common good. I feel very strongly that without access, there is no freedom to do anything else.

PH-D: Could we talk about an 'autonomous' or 'premature' media literacy? As the author explains, technology is a step ahead of education and teachers have to make a huge effort to assume digital innovation and possibilities to offer a good media literacy learning. Sometimes the education system is not ready to handle the actual requirements and young people have much more knowledge that those responsible of their media literacy education. How can we manage this paradox? I have the perception that we are always running late in this sense.

PM: I think this question gets to the heart of what we are trying to accomplish with media education in general. Howard Rheingold, in *Net Smart*, notes right up front that educational systems, often burdened by bureaucratic decision making policies, will never be able to respond to the rapid advancements in technological innovation. But I contend that even trying to catch up is anathema to what media education is all about. In fact, one of the hardest things to watch in the United States is the sheer amount over broken budgets resulting from K-12 (primary & secondary) schools becoming obsessive with technology for their students. A recent New York Times op-ed <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/30/opinion/can-students-have-too-much-tech.html?smid=tw-share> > highlighted research that shows how faulty this investment is. In my book, I argue for creating spaces for critical thought, application and expression that are embedded in our situated experiences in daily life. These are technologically agnostic. If media literacy is to

be responsive, agile, and dynamic, it has to embrace that young people sometimes have a greater familiarity with tools and technologies than educators, but rarely a more nuanced critical dispositions towards these tools, and a basic critical disposition to approach their application in daily life. The paradox is that chasing tech as a way to enhance and embrace media literacy has resulted in more wasteful computer labs and tablets that collect dust, or that students hack for their own purposes. Students need tech, of course, but we should be a) enabling hacking, and b) allowing the tools to be compliments of a larger set of core dispositions, competencies, and constructs that guide our relationship with media, learning, and civic life today.

JMcD: Can you cite a particular example of media education enabling civic engagement – preferably one you talk about in the book, where there was a particular pedagogic approach that worked? I’m thinking about how difficult it is to strike the balance between ‘giving voice’ and making all kinds of dubious assumptions about the terms and conditions for engagement. So could you point to one case where the blend of technology, content and the old fashioned ‘craft of teaching’ was conducive to civic action?

PM: I think this question hits on one of the big issues we have in the media education world as it relates to civic life and engagement: it’s hard to impossible to quantify what someone learns leading directly to a form of civic engagement. Especially tying it back to a ‘craft of teaching.’ That scares me as somewhat predictive in a sense, and that we can reduce some type of education to correlate to civic engagement. Overall, I think tying a specific pedagogy to a specific civic engagement is difficult, because that’s a hard connection to prove. Some media education scholars, myself included, have been able to quantify that students can learn skills and dispositions to be more critically engaged with media, but I’m not sure that moves the dial in a civic way. At least that’s hard to prove. My approach in the book is to set the foundation for acts of civic engagement, and then work backwards to show how media education can work to facilitate this type of action, instead of just critical deconstructions of text. I start off the book by talking about an informal point of engagement, where a community used its collective voice. Molly Catchpole, a 22 year old recent graduate, started a change.org campaign against Bank of America’s arbitrary fee raise in the wake of the US housing collapse in 2008. She used her networks, and media savvy to engage the crowd and they ended up forcing Bank of America to reverse their fee hike. It’s a story like this that I use to trace backwards and explore what type of learning models could support this type of civic behavior as a situated part of daily life. That’s where the 5As come from, and where I hope this book takes people’s minds from time to time.

PH-D: Related to the last answer, I would like to add two more examples of civic engagement and ask another question.

Marshall Reid was ten years old when he changed eating habits in USA through his YouTube profile. Martha Payne was nine when she changed eating habits at public school in Scotland through her blog. Also, she raised money for help a non-profit organization.

They have inspired other young people like them on Internet. One report in Spain says that we are trusting in our peers, friends and family as an authoritative source above all media. Paul, do you think that we can talk about a new model of civic engagement through media literacy where peers are the most reliable instructors?

PM: I think these are wonderful examples, and the type that exist through my book. I think peer, and community based, dynamics are at the heart of media literacy for engagement in civic life. It's been well documented for some time now that we trust in our peers and communities far more than we do in media industries. This idea has prevailed in digital spaces as well. We need to find a way to develop that, and to cultivate models for what the engagement looks like. Media literacy education is one way to get there. It needs to happen through more applied and dynamic mechanisms than simply teaching about critical inquiry. Of course media education is a continuum, and it should make spaces for individual and social formalization, where at some levels of education the basic concepts are required, but as young people move towards more direct civic responsibility, media literacy needs to move from a form of critical and cultural inquiry, to one of applied and active engagement. That's my hope, and it's the argument my book makes.

Reviewer – Paula Herrero-Diz, Loyola Andalucía University

Discussion – Julian McDougall, Paula Herrero-Diz, Paul Mihailidis

Cultural work and higher education, edited by Daniel Ashton and Caitriona Noonan (2013). Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN 9781137013934

This is an important and timely collection that aims to set an agenda for critically considering developments within Higher Education, most notably how issues such as employability have translated, through applied arts subjects, into the cultural industries. Across four sections and eleven chapters the book moves from the individual experience, through the institutional environment, to the policies shaping cultural work and Higher Education. The result is, at times, awkward and grim reading, particularly for those who seek an economic future in the immaterial products of culture and creativity.

This review will not attempt to summarise all eleven chapters, which range from overviews of policy frameworks (Oakley) and ideas of the flexible cultural worker and their classroom (Luckman) through to reflexive considerations of the work of cultural practitioners in HE (Ashton) and the inequalities of class, race and gender (Lee, Saha and Allen's chapters respectively) that mark access and success in cultural work. Moreover the book has useful empirically grounded chapters, ranging from those based on large scale, longitudinal, surveys of creative graduates (Pollard) to qualitative work employing discursive psychology (Taylor and Littleton).

Rather than reiterating each chapter's core point (a task much better served by reading the book itself), this review will consider three themes that mark important discussion points for HE and cultural work in the UK and may provide fruitful further research for which this book can claim to be the inspiration. The themes are: 1) the role of policy and regulation; 2) the disciplinary basis for a discussion of higher education and cultural work; and 3) the internationalisation agenda.

The thrust of the book is clear, whereby the role of the university must be defended against becoming/being a mere adjunct to the demands or needs of industry and business. These demands are, in themselves, amorphous and shifting, filtered through a range of policy lenses discussed by several chapters in the book. It is vital that the 'needs' of the economy are subject to much greater and much more detailed scrutiny, asking where and how these 'needs' have come about; and why, despite the wealth of evidence presented around inequality by this book, cultural work is seen as the solution to the crisis of post-industrial economies in the aftermath of the financial crash. Berger *et al's* chapter, for instance, attempts to capture the pedagogical value of work placements, crucial as these are to the employment practices of Bournemouth's cultural graduates. By making visible the route between seminar and studio, this work invites researchers to provide further work that will lay bare the political economy that underpins these educational practices. This is a task well met by the range of other chapters in the book and would be an excellent line of thought for future volumes. This task will, therefore, be one that confronts questions of regulation, an issue at the heart of the inequalities of the labour market identified in the final section of the book.

The second point, around disciplines, addresses both the structure of how knowledge is produced in the UK and the associated structures of dissemination. The edited collection is currently much maligned, given the low status afforded to individual chapters in judgements of research quality. This can limit the capacity for academia to have cross- and inter-disciplinary discussions, particularly those that require reflexivity. Indeed, the very idea of cultural work has emerged from across differing intellectual traditions and has

resulted in fruitful dialogues between cultural and media studies, geography, sociology, politics and management, to give just a few examples. This suggests the value of the edited collection, as a space that is not concerned with inching the individual disciplinary glacier forward, but rather addressing, from a range of perspectives, the reality confronting many research and teaching staff in the British university. However, it is disappointing that Palgrave have not published the book in paperback, ensuring that the most important discussions of academics' labour will remain out of the hands of all but the most well remunerated of the professorial class.

The final area for future work is around the internationalisation agenda. An obvious criticism of this volume would be to bemoan its focus on the UK. It would be a standard gasp of whataboutery to raise this as a failure with the choice of authors and the focus of the text. However, this is actually an unacknowledged strength of the text. By giving a detailed exploration of British higher education it provides the basis for comparative work, in particular building on the more internationally inclined chapters, such as Luckman's.

Moreover, what is needed when considering issues such as those raised on the book is not the aping of the rush to internationalisation occurring across British HE, with its willingness to charge large amounts of money with little or no thought given to the need to reshape curricula to reflect the global makeup of the contemporary classroom. Rather future research must reassess national specificity, albeit at the cost of limiting the ability of important theoretical interventions to travel light. Thus a book with a clear national focus is welcome, albeit with the caveat that the text needed to further differentiate what might be common to higher education institutions and cultural work in the UK as against what might be unique and *sui generis*.

Reviewer – Dave O'Brien, Goldsmiths, University of London

Laughey's Canon



Editor's note: For this issue of *MERJ*, we asked editorial board member Dan Laughey to cast his eye back over the period since we published his 'Back to Basics' essay in *MERJ*, under the heading 'Laughey's Canon'.

Whether we agree with Dan's position is another matter, but we are interested in his provocation – that there should, or can, be, a 'canon' for a discipline that has perhaps been viewed by its practitioners as more of a 'horizontal discourse', to use Bernstein's term, or one more resistant to a grand narrative of (with the exception of Stuart Hall, who doesn't make the list but is credited) white male thinking and writing. On the other hand, Dan's assertion that criticism is threatened by neo-liberal discourses of employability and enterprise that pervade in writing about media education today is both pertinent and politically vital.

So we asked Dan to go further this time, to flesh-out the canon as he sees it, and in return we will commission further reviews by current media educators of the titles he recommends that we haven't included as yet in the series. As before, the reviewers will be asked to re-appraise the significance of the text specifically for its 'use value' in media teaching. And we will offer *MERJ* readers the opportunity to comment on the list online.

Laughey's Canon: Where next for media theory?

When I was first asked by the editors of *MERJ* to come up with a shortlist of seminal works in the broad field of media, communications and cultural studies – for the newly titled 'Laughey's Canon' section of the journal – it was with a pleasant sense of surprise that a small handful of names and titles immediately sprang to mind: *Understanding Media* by Marshall McLuhan, *Television* by Raymond Williams, and *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes to name but three. These seminal examinations of media and popular culture, regardless of how long ago they were written, demand respect and attention, stand out from the rest and stand the test of time.

Barthes, McLuhan and Williams should form the cornerstone of all theoretical endeavours in media literacy, just as Durkheim, Weber, Mills and Simmel do for sociology; Freud, Skinner and Jung for psychology; Marx, Keynes and Smith for economics. That is not to say that other great thinkers should be excluded or side-lined, but if anything approaching a 'discipline' is expected of media education, then certain founding fathers

must be placed at the top of the list of what today's students are reading and learning from.

Perhaps the best analogy is not with sociology or psychology or economics, but with literature. Literary criticism of the twentieth century, after all, is where much 'classic' contemporary theory emerged from and migrated, by various leaps and bounds, to critical theory, cultural theory, film theory, and more recent still, media theory. Barthes, McLuhan and Williams were all literary critics to begin with, only later developing their modes of thought and analysis beyond literature to the realms of popular entertainment and mass communications.

The term 'criticism' is often framed negatively, as a biased viewpoint, a threat to creativity, a challenge to authority, something to be avoided or deflected elsewhere. Critics these days, of all descriptions, get something of a rough-ride in a culture obsessed with respectability, crisis management and image enhancement.

But the word 'criticism' – from the original Greek *kritikos* – has the more neutral meaning 'to discern or judge'. Only in modern times has a secondary meaning – 'to judge harshly and in a hostile manner' – evolved, and it is precisely those political regimes and politically correct do-gooders keen to belittle their critics by casting aspersions in the good name of criticism who foreground that secondary meaning, at the same time threatening the basic human right to free speech and free opinion.

Being able to make judgements, develop a thesis, sustain an argument, express an informed opinion, are core values at the heart of all literacy and all pedagogy. Criticism is what teachers, students and practitioners should be engaged in on a daily basis, regardless of conformist voices who preach 'the right way to do things' as they cling to the status quo.

Criticism should be encouraged, under all circumstances and without exceptions, but media criticism, much like literary criticism, requires a select range of canonical works as a focal point for debate and discussion. As I have argued before, this canon need not be static or set-in-stone, though for it to change, any emerging thinker must stand the test of time, his or her body of work being collectively embraced by generations of scholars and practitioners within the discipline of media education, and given the relative youthfulness of our discipline, the present canon is a merely fledgling to what it will become.

The question still unanswered is why these seminal theoretical accounts of media and communications should be given such importance in media syllabuses of one kind or another. As well as offering the best of all possible examples of media criticism – and if we learn by example, we may assume some of that impeccable thinking will rub off on us eventually, making us key thinkers and opinion leaders of the future – it is also true to say that the legacy of these accounts lie in their value judgement; in how they discriminated between the most important cultural phenomena of our times, and all the pitiful rest.

Literary critics of the past like T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis and I. A. Richards have set the agenda for what students of literature read today, and media theorists steeped in critical thinking likewise hold the key to value judgements about what matters in the world of cultural production. The films, TV and radio shows, journalism, comedians, musicians, computer games and apps that matter, that stand tall as products of their time, that deserve to be preserved for generations to come, that have what Eliot called ‘a sense not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence’, can only receive proper critical evaluation from those thinkers disciplined enough to interpret their greatness in the grander scheme of things – what Leavis called ‘the Great Tradition’ in relation to the English novel, and what we might call, more colloquially, the best of media and cultural practice.

Reviewer – Dan Laughey

Laughey’s Canon, June 2015

Understanding Media by Marshall McLuhan,

Television by Raymond Williams

Mythologies by Roland Barthes

Simulacra and Simulation by Jean Baudrillard

The Image by Daniel Boorstin

Amusing Ourselves to Death by Neil Postman

Dialectic of Enlightenment by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno

Manufacturing Consent by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky

No Sense of Place by Joshua Meyrowitz

Television Culture by John Fiske

NB - The notable name missing here is Stuart Hall, who sadly never authored a ‘text’ as such (only edited them), but who clearly warrants a place in a list of important media thinkers.