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BOOK REVIEWS

Eoin Devereux, *Understanding the Media* (Second Edition)

London: Sage Publications, 2007. 259pp, €29.15 (pbk.) ISBN: 1412929911 ISBN13: 9781412929912

Anthony Quinn

University of Limerick-based sociologist Dr. Eoin Devereux has updated and expanded his popular media studies text book. This new edition, currently on a second reprint, sets out to familiarise students with the types of questions that are asked in the field of media studies.

The underlying framework that Devereux uses gives ‘equal recognition’ to the production, content and audience reception of media texts (p. 33). This is a useful structure in this instance as it ensures that students are presented with a comprehensive sketch of the field of media studies. Devereux draws on disparate case studies which were researched by the author himself, including television series *The Royle Family*, Alan Parker’s film *Angela’s Ashes*, newspaper coverage of poverty in the *Irish Times* and highly original research about Morrissey fans. Although some of these cultural references are slightly outdated and may not be recognised by younger students, the use of well-described examples should easily draw students into engaging with the text.

Devereux skillfully uses these examples as mini ‘strategic research sites’ through which he outlines deeper theoretical concerns (Merton, 1979: 373). For example, the interplay between structure and agency, the use of ideology as a concept and the debates surrounding the ‘glocalisation’ and commercialisation of media are all adequately covered. Additionally, Devereux uses open publishing network *Indymedia* as an interesting example of relatively new topic. This inclusion of *Indymedia* demonstrates how emerging alternatives are challenging commercially-driven media outlets. It is in this example-driven manner that Devereux usefully animates important theoretical debates.

As well as providing original examples, *Understanding the Media* also engages with important studies and texts. The references at the end of each chapter are a good starting point for further reading. So too are the extracts from key texts provided at the end of each of the seven chapters. These were not a feature of the first edition, published in 2003. A comprehensive glossary also provides an easily-accessible reference for common terms that students might come across. The book also gives a decent overview of qualitative tools that are commonly used within the discipline of media studies. It is a valuable introductory text which would be continuously used by media students.

From a pedagogical perspective, the practical exercises at the end of each chapter are strategically designed and would help to encourage reflexive thinking about media. A companion website for the book features hyperlinks to important Sage-pub-

lished journal articles that expand on issues raised in each chapter that might not normally be available to students. However, I would question Devereux's suggestion to students on page 139 to use openly edited Wikipedia as a starting point for scholarly research.

In his introduction, Devereux argues that mass media play a 'central role' in the 'social construction of reality' (p. 14). He succeeds in buttressing this argument in his well-written book. Early media scholar James D. Halloran draws our attention to the importance of asking the 'right questions' (1998: para. 12). This book will help students of media learn this art as they come across television programmes, films, newspapers and on-line content that they consume on a daily basis. This is one for students to own rather than borrow.

Eoin Devereux (ed.), *Media studies: Key issues and debates*

London: Sage Publications 2007. 391pp., €29.15 (pbk.) ISBN: 1412929830 ISBN13: 9781412929837

Anthony Quinn

Eoin Devereux has edited an engaging collection of 16 chapters by a geographically diverse group of authors. In a similar manner to the book reviewed above, the aim here is to cover the three bases of media production, content and reception equally.

Eminent scholar Denis Mc Quail has penned a useful foreword to the book. He writes of the progress made within the field of media studies and says that a 'stage of maturity' has been reached (p. xvii). Nevertheless, he notes a vulnerability to certain developments such as changing technologies and shift of focus that he perceives away from 'communication' as a central concern of inquiry (p. xxii). He also underlines the importance of drawing on other perspectives of knowledge and inquiry, and notes that 'there is no reason to waste time on boundary disputes and none is wasted in the collection that follows'.

Natalie Fenton's contribution succeeds in bridging what she calls the 'mythical divide' between the political economic and cultural studies approaches to the study of media. Her central argument, which sets the tone for the collection, is that both broad methodologies in fact compliment each other. She argues that one-sided treatments of traditional social science dichotomies such as structure and agency and micro and macro approaches are not an adequate way of approaching media studies. Although this in itself is not a new argument, she skillfully analyses reality television format *Big Brother* in this holistic manner.

Amid continued audience segmentation, David Croteau and William Hoynes note in their chapter that the increased ownership of the means of production by audiences and the emergence of the internet as a new medium challenge older claims about the impact of the concentration of ownership. They make a salient conclusion: the importance of small independent producers should not be overestimated. The

slow but sure adaptability of major players to co-opt emerging trends to their own advantage is clear, argue the authors. They combine this observation with points about the realities of the economics of scale and the synergetic strategies used by media conglomerations to sell their products. The result definitely questions some of the technological hype of late.

Greg Philo, of the now fabled Glasgow University Media Group, focuses his chapter on textual approaches to media studies. He makes an important argument about the limited value of text-based analyses that take the production or reception of mass media messages into account. This is principally done via a case study about the news media coverage of the shooting dead of Palestinian boy Mohammed al-Durrah by Israeli soldiers. He concludes by maintaining that we can 'only come to terms adequately with the generation and reproduction of social meanings' through the simultaneous and complex analysis of the processes of production, content and reception (p. 129).

From a media reception perspective, Sonia Livingstone's excellent chapter on young people's use of media draws our attention to the spaces in which content is enjoyed. She argues that a privatised and media-saturated bedroom culture among young people is the result of their increased exclusion from public spaces and the emergence of Beck's risk society. In some cases, this is by controversial technological means such as the 'ultra-sonic youth crowd dispersal system' called the Mosquito. The retreat to the bedroom is conceptualised by Livingstone as a half-way house between control and autonomy. It is a place where the 'rules of engagement' are decided by children rather than adults (p. 315). The media-rich bedrooms of today, replete with Ipod's, DVDs and Xboxes, might be considered to be spaces for the commercialisation of childhood. However, Livingstone finds them to be also places in which separate identities are created, partially through the consumption of media. The chapter is reliably informed by Livingstone's own empirical research on children's and young people's media uses in the form of drawings and extracts from their media use diaries.

Media Studies sets out to equally treat the foci of production, consumption and reception. However, there is a cogent argument being made by scholars that an equal emphasis should no longer be given to this tripartite. The nitty gritty of production may be the place to look. This is a key debate absent from the book. For example, Born makes a strong case for the 'ontological priority of production over consumption' within television studies (2000: 416). More recently, Toynbee makes a strong case for the general primacy of production over content and reception (2008: 269). This is contained in the Hesmondhalgh & Toynbee edited collection that challenges those researching the field to draw on more diverse intellectual resources. While the tripartite approach works in the previous book reviewed, it becomes a weakness in this more in-depth treatment of the media studies field. Indeed, this argument itself seems not to be mentioned.

For newer researchers, the key concepts are clearly outlined at the beginning of each chapter. This should aid students in the process of using these concepts elsewhere. The 'going further' sections reference some useful texts which develop on important themes contained in the chapters. The activities sections should ensure that students genuinely reflect on their own uses of media. This should no doubt provoke analysis and debate in academics. This book develops on important aspects of the field raised in Devereux's own text book. The two works sit well together.

The global appeal of this important collection is reflected in the fact that it will be published later this year in Cantonese.

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REVIEWER

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Mark O'Brien, *The Irish Times: A History*

Dublin: Four Courts Press 2008. 320pp, €35.00 (hbk) ISBN: 978-1-84682-123-3

Harry Browne

Near the end of Mark O'Brien's rich and valuable history of Ireland's 'newspaper of record', there is an unfortunately telling line. Having just detailed some of the financial pressures and management shenanigans that characterised the life of this venerable institution between 1994 and 2007, the author writes: 'But the paper still continued on with its main function – exposing the underbelly of Irish political life to public scrutiny.' (p. 271)

This sentence, in all its benign naivety, can certainly be defended as a harmless literary device, in place to make a transition from discussing the Irish Times as a company to discussing the *Irish Times* as a newspaper, introducing a new section on editorial matters. However, the fact that an excellent media scholar (O'Brien is undoubtedly nothing short of that) can write so confidently and complementarily about the 'main function' of any complex media institution is indicative of a certain analytical laxness that the author has allowed to creep into his work here. (His fine 2001 history of the *Irish Press* was not so hampered.) It is as though O'Brien is compensating, too, for the previous 20 pages of material likely to make an *Irish Times* manager squirm and skip ahead to this reassuring verbal gesture of comfort. ('Look, our main function is not to sell our audience to advertisers, nor even to provide ideological sustenance to a sometimes-uncertain postcolonial Establishment – it's to expose the underbelly etc.')

O'Brien is forced, in fairness, to employ the broad brush often in the interest of approaching his impossible task: to tell the story of 150 years of an important organ-

isation with a complicated internal life, a complex and changing relationship with other loci of power and influence in society, and a daily printed public record of what it considered to be significant locally, nationally and globally, all in fewer than 300 pages. If anything, the author seems too undaunted, skipping easily and rapidly between changes in editor and European wars, boardroom battles and the X Case, circulation worries and literary contributors. (One would happily have read more of James Joyce's 1903 interview with motor-racing driver Henri Fournier, published by the newspaper.) The 19th century gets very short shrift, and with it the subtleties of Irish-British identity in that formative period for the paper: just 17 pages into the book's chronological narrative we have already reached the Boer War, four decades along from the founding of the *Irish Times* (which of course enthusiastically supported the troops).

In the context of this review I should acknowledge that O'Brien also gives short shrift to the criticisms of the paper's political direction (rightward, allegedly) raised by myself and others in recent years: there is one sentence, answered by a long quote from editor Geraldine Kennedy, implicitly endorsed by the author, stating that (1) times have changed and that (2) 'if you're getting it from both sides, you must be doing something right' (p275). It is quite probably not a subject that could or should have been more extensively considered in a book of this nature and length; however, here as elsewhere, the author not only leaves out any deeper analysis, he writes nothing to indicate awareness that there might be anything deeper to analyse.

There is much to praise about this book, of course, including 16 pages of well reproduced black-and-white illustrations – though four Martyn Turner cartoons may qualify as slight overkill on that front. Its real attraction is the level of factual detail O'Brien packs in about the paper's personal, commercial and technical history. The details are not always reliable, however. He writes, for example, that, in order to keep the industrial peace, '[t]he switch from manual to electronic publishing was a slow process and involved journalists using computers to type their content before handing it over to printers who retyped it to arrange the layout and make up the pages'. (p233) In fact, as I recall from my own experience in the early 1990s, the scenario was (somewhat) less absurd: in-house journalists had to use often-ancient manual typewriters to produce copy – management calculating that we would be more likely to accept a transition to high-tech if it meant getting away from the (literal) old bangers. The transition went on to embody further absurdities, but never quite the one O'Brien describes.

O'Brien also mistakenly asserts (p. 232) that the Working & Living supplement appeared on Tuesdays; actually it was Fridays. This is a non-trivial detail if you're paying close attention to the shifting intersection of advertising and editorial concerns: in 1990 it was determined that the best sort of supplement in which to enclose the Friday jobs-advertisements was one devoted to training, education and workplace issues, i.e. Working & Living. Only a little later in the evolution of neoliberalism and of business journalism did the *Irish Times* decide that a business supplement was a more suitable home for the increasingly lucrative recruitment ads. Business took over on Fridays and Working & Living was rebranded as Education & Living on Tuesdays.

Even those not immersed in relatively recent history are likely to find this a slightly frustrating book, one that too rarely pauses for breath. For all its sweep, it also never really paints a coherent 'big picture'. O'Brien asserts at the beginning of

the volume that the *Irish Times* 'is, today, the country's authoritative newspaper of choice' (p. 13), a phrase from which I can derive no useful meaning. And at the end, he asserts still more baldly: 'The *Irish Times* has helped open up and transform Irish society and will continue to do so for many decades to come.' (p. 276) The first half of that sentence is at least debatable, the second half (to the extent that it is more than a piety) is as yet untestable, with both the paper's transformative powers and its indefinitely continued existence in some doubt. The sentence was written, to be sure, before the depth of the crisis engulfing the national and global economies was apparent, but the crisis in newspapers and journalism has been clear for years. One hopes it doesn't prove to be a scholar's unwise hostage to fortune.

REVIEWER

Harry Browne, lecturer in journalism, School of Media, Dublin Institute of Technology

Walsh, Maurice (2008) *The News from Ireland: Foreign Correspondents and the Irish Revolution*

London: I.B. Taurus, 2008. 250pp, €26.00 (hbk) ISBN: 978-1-84511-714-6.

Nora French

This book is a welcome addition to the small number of scholarly books on the press in Ireland. Walsh gives a critical account of reporting in the foreign press on the Irish War of Independence (1919 to 1921), concentrating on the work of British and American journalists. That the war was determined not by physical means but by the negative press reporting of the British reactions to the Irish revolution is generally accepted; however, prior to this book there was no analysis of the actual reporting. The book examines the day to day practice of journalists at that crucial period in Ireland, relating this analysis to wider issues such colonialism and nationalism on the one hand and to the then emerging theoretical study of journalism on the other.

The historical context in Ireland is sketched, as is the background to the work of the journalists. They had been marked by their experience during the first World War, when they were seen as collaborating with government which had added to earlier doubts about their generally uncritical reporting of colonial issues. The events in Ireland provided them with an opportunity to re-establish their professional independence and their role as neutral, disinterested observers.

The book refers to the worldwide press interest and coverage of the events in Ireland and the consequent bad press for the British government. The detailed analysis, however, concentrates on the work of reporters from Britain and from the US, as well as offering an interesting account of the 'literary tourists' – again from Britain – G.K Chesterton, Wilfred Ewart and V.S.Pritchett.

The analysis of the British reporting of the war shows that the reporters found Ireland strange and different, yet strictly speaking it was home news for them given

that Ireland was then part of the United Kingdom, not a 'foreign' country as the sub-title of the book implies. Walsh describes their puzzlement at events such as the opening of Dáil Éireann in 1919, the funeral of Terence McSwiney, and the mourning and respect shown by the public at the funerals of the 11 British officers killed in Dublin. He demonstrates the unrelenting criticism that characterised the coverage of the Black and Tans and how it discredited British tactics.

Contrast is drawn between Sinn Féin and Dublin Castle's handling of the press, with Sinn Féin's unlikely activists, Desmond Fitzgerald and Erskine Childers, skillfully making press contacts and providing well judged information for journalists. Dublin Castle's early communications with the press were ineffectual, consisting of comment and propaganda rather than accurate facts and figures. By the time the British got their act together, it was too late and they were unsuccessful in countering or rebutting the Sinn Féin version of events.

Walsh demonstrates how the press reports not only helped form British and international public opinion but were influential within the House of Commons, being quoted in parliamentary debate. He argues that divisions within Parliament on how to respond to the Irish revolution gave great power to the press and it was thus instrumental in determining the government to bring the war to an end.

The chapter on the American journalists is particularly interesting in linking reporting of the war in Ireland to the debates then raging about the nature and practice of journalism. Walsh juxtaposes the portraits of two prominent but highly contrasting journalists, Francis Hackett and Carl Ackerman. Concern at standards in the 'yellow press' in the late nineteenth century had led to attempts to professionalise journalism. In the US, this led to the establishment of university programmes which were to train journalists to act as detached observers, to concentrate on the reporting of facts, to follow a set of defined procedures. Ackerman personified the new breed of professional journalist: he was a graduate of the first year of the journalism programme at Columbia University and an experienced foreign correspondent. Later in his career he was to return to Columbia as first Dean of Journalism, a post he retained for over twenty years. Hackett on the other hand represented the older style of journalism. With no formal training, and with prior experience that included editing a muckraking magazine, he had become a well-established literary journalist. In his view, the role of journalism was not only to investigate facts but to interpret them. Irish by birth and an avowed nationalist, he saw the situation in Ireland in essentially moral terms.

The reports of the two men from Ireland were very different in style, Hackett emotionally involved on the nationalist side, writing literary accounts of the lives of the people and the functioning of Sinn Féin on the ground; Ackerman treating the conflict as similar to those he had reported on elsewhere; seemingly personally detached from events himself, using influential figures as news sources. And yet, it is interesting that through getting close to those in power as recommended in the new style of journalism, he ended up as an actor in the war by adopting the role of mediator between the British and Sinn Féin.

These events were taking place at the time when Walter Lippman was very prominent in American journalism. His ground-breaking book *Public Opinion* was published in 1920, in which his avocation that journalists should model themselves on scientists echoed Ackerman's journalistic creed. Hackett and Lippmann both

worked on the *New Republic* during this time and it is no surprise to learn from Walsh that they clashed repeatedly. It must be said that Walsh seems more critical of Ackerman's new style of journalism with its tendency to arid conformity compared with the more romantic, opinionated and literary style of Hackett. This is borne out by his inclusion in the following chapter of the Irish experiences of the three 'literary tourists' who were not reporting day to day events but linking their observations on the Irish situation to wider themes relevant to themselves and to world-wide changes after the Great War.

With journalism under-researched in Ireland, it is very good to see a study such as this. Walsh's experience as a foreign correspondent provided him with a strong professional basis for analysing the practice of journalists during the War of Independence and he situates the research in the wider international context of politics, colonialism and journalism theory.

REVIEWER

Dr Nora French, Centre for Media Research, School of Media, Dublin Institute of Technology

Alan Grossman & Áine O'Brien (eds), *Projecting Migration: Transcultural Documentary Practice*

London: Wallflower Press, 2008. 256pp., £29.95 (Pbk + DVD) ISBN 978-1-905674-04-6.

Gavan Titley

In the short story by Marc Matthews which loops through Roshini Kempadoo's multimedia restoration of the disavowed Caribbean to the story of western modernity, the opening tells of how

Was bout two week befoe Nennan Tooky mek wan hundred and twenty five year when double great grandson Benjamin Parsons, wha ah teach university is, he bring a white man, an one set a tape recorder, camera and ting, say how they want ole time story.

Projecting Migration unites contributors adept at setting up *tings* in search of stories, yet they are stories shaped by a rejection of such proprietary ethnographies. Grossman and O'Brien's excellent volume provides a platform for studies that range expansively across modalities and contexts of migrant experience by challenging conventional understandings of how 'documentary' can navigate the burden of representing subaltern experiences. This expansiveness is anchored in recurring questions concerning the politics and possibilities of representations, the ethics and unintended consequences of intimate involvement in the lives and complex networks of people who migrate, and unsettling power geometries of mobility and immobility.

The eleven chapters feature theoretical and personal reflections on the production of 'media practice interventions' (p. 4) accompanied by a DVD of audio-visual references. As Hamid Naficy rightly points out in the foreword, the inclusion of the DVD "...solves the problematic of quotation; but goes beyond that" (p. xiii) by compelling a reading experience where the featured material cannot be restricted to the supporting role of quotations. Almost as a variation on one of the volume's sub-themes – the spatio-temporal contingencies of knowledge – the varying multimedia references invite different modes of reading, and thus different ways of moving through the 'book'.

From the title onwards, the editors take a welcome scalpel to the disciplinary preciousness which often separates the study of 'migration' from considerations of transnationalism, multiculturalism and the situated politics of difference. The contributors respond in kind – the practice-based studies encompass lives lived negotiating the multi-layered socio-political space of borders; movement, dislocation and trauma; identity, legitimacy and belonging; families, family networks and the particular experiences of children as mediators and translators.

The multivalent experiences of migrants imply a concomitant expansiveness in documentary practice, stemming, as Gordon Quinn contests in the interview-based chapter on *The New Americans*, from an '... appreciation of immigrants as complicated and contradictory human beings' (p. 91). For the editors there are key affinities between the critical possibilities of documentary projection and the political imperatives of projecting migration's human complexities:

... the research application of still, moving image and sound technologies can adequately frame the material conditions and contingencies, motivations and transnational affiliations shaping the everyday lived reality of migrants, their families and extended communities (p. 3).

Technologies, of course, are never just applied, and the constant tension the editors identify between 'seeing' and 'constructing' primes a hugely interesting series of struggles with what constitutes 'adequate framing'. An important dimension of adequacy flagged in the introduction is the ability of documentary practice to integrate micro and macro analyses of 'everyday life' – an integration of fundamental political importance in considerations of migration, yet one frequently undercut in mainstream documentary by generic attraction and ideological reduction to the individualised narrative. In this post-Benjamin Parsons formation there are no individualised narratives; the narrators are always present and implicated, often troubled by their constitutiveness.

As Lawrence Taylor points out in his essay 'Picturing the Tunnel Kids', knowledge of 'the other' is always mediated, and the challenge for a committed documentary practice is to make manifest the implications of mediation, and to find ways of representing the voice of others with fidelity in an unequal relationship of symbolic and material power. These tensions between the creative, the structural and the political are engaged with keen ethical intent in many of the pieces, from discussions of the limits of reflexivity to often neglected reflections on the sublimated genealogy of archives. Rodgers and Spitz's reflection on their video messaging project at the Mozambique/South Africa border is possibly the most illuminating in this

regard, perhaps because it carries the heaviest baggage. The frank acceptance that their anti-colonial practice remains inescapably colonial in practice (p. 32) contrasts with the occasional willingness in a minority of contributions to engage in cultural studies heroics about the transformational possibilities of 'my practice'.

A degree of unity often lacking in edited volumes is provided by the interplay between the claims made for documentary practice in the introduction, and their situated negotiation in the studies. Several studies highlight the impact of commodification on 'adequate framing'; in two rounds of circulating video messages, the footage shot by Rodgers and Spitz shifts from family communiques/research data to family communiques/ funded broadcast material, a shift which subsequently risks transposing the Big Brother confessional onto the heartworn dramas of family relationships frayed by the not so hidden injuries of the border regime. Similarly Browne and Onyejelem's book/radio project *Home from Home*, where the desire to mediate the life stories of migrants - and their heuristic insights into hegemonic social relations - must reckon with the publisher's vision of what they signify 'about Ireland' (by all means give them voices, as long as they are saying something about 'us').

Yet the exigencies imposed on critical practice by commodification are not straightforward, and for producers of the epic series *The New Americans*, it is precisely by not conceding aesthetic and narrative possibilities to fiction film that the potential of documentary practice to engage experiences of migration is enhanced. For other contributors the process of 'thinking through and with sounds and images' (p. 3) means eliding the generic constraints of realism in favour of modes of representation capable of disturbing conventional arrangements of the real and the historical. Thus in Kempadoo's *Back Routes* it is only by including the fictional voices quoted in opening that the constitutive disavowal of the Caribbean can return to disconcert Europe's ahistorical self-love.

There is a reluctance to theorise race in some studies otherwise committed to intervening in hegemonic discourses of representation, an omission striking precisely because the shifting discursive properties of racialisation probe the possibilities of critical practice. Nevertheless this challenging and painstakingly assembled project is required reading for anyone interested in its richly elaborated themes.

REVIEWER

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