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'Editorial Opinion Piece'

Particip@tions Volume 4, Issue 1 (May 2007)

Editorial Opinion Piece

It is with real pleasure that we launch the eighth edition of *Participations* – another rich issue, with seven significant contributions to the broad field of audience and reception research and debate. Among web Journals *Participations* now counts as one of the longer-established. This is important. Although audience and reception studies remains, compared to other kinds of media and cultural work, still a 'minority sport – even perhaps an extreme sport, because it can be very demanding – I see no evidence for the assertion of some commentators that it is fading out. On the contrary, my sense from contacts and conferences is that its value is increasingly widely recognised, and that a new generation of researchers may be emerging who are testing the waters in different ways. I certainly cannot, and I doubt if anyone right now could, estimate the size of the 'pool' of committed researchers. But if it is any indication, the fact that at least four conferences this summer have a singular or a substantial interest in audience and reception matters is surely a hopeful sign.

One of the features that strikes me, not so much from contributions to this issue but more broadly from hearing and reading recent work, is the steady rise of the use of the Web as a site of and a means to research. It is certainly the case that the study of online reviews, debates and controversies simplifies access to certain kinds of audience responses – with advantages of cost, speed, and liveness. The growth and spread of searchable databases and archives (for instance of press materials) adds to these greatly. These make possible kinds of undergraduate student work which before were complicated, and limiting. I am also aware that in fields other than our own many critical researchers are examining the limitations and weaknesses of these kinds of resource. I look forward to researchers in our field tackling head-on the relationships between web discussions and other public and private fora for sharing and developing audience responses.

At *Participations* we continue to follow the principle – as this issue confirms – of trying to publish all kinds of work that demonstrate to our referees that they are making a significant potential contribution to our shared knowledge and understanding. We don't much care what theoretical orientation, or methodological preferences, are followed as long as they are followed carefully and productively. We also certainly do not care what field of media or culture is being examined – although we have to note the still predominant attention to certain 'mainstream' media. What about performances, music, sport, public events, spectacles, poetry, art, galleries, museums, etc, etc? A curious marker of the uneven attention came in a recent review I read of the first-ever book on research methods for Literature students. The review noted that this was the result of the increasing pressure on English departments to address issues of method. Sadly, in the

listing of chapter-topics, it was evident that there was no attention at all to reader reception, or other kinds of audience research. I would argue that this short-changes literature students, and continues a narrow interest. Yet the excellent Journal *Book History* at least shows strong and continuing interest in the history of uses of the book.

Two of my pleasures as an Editor of *Participations* are these. To go to conferences and meet people who know, and have perhaps contributed to our Journal. Or to go to conferences and hear a worthwhile presentation, and from talking to the presenter to afterwards receive the written version as a submission. Long may such pleasures continue.

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