

Editorial Introduction

Martin Barker, Aberystwyth University, UK

Volume 6, Issue 1 (May 2009)

Participations enters its sixth year of publication – thereby clearly making it among the longer-lasting among the online Journals. It is also a point at which we begin to make some small but significant changes to our look, structure, and operations.

Visitors to the Journal will have noticed that a number of changes are occurring to its look, and presentation. We invite your comments on any of these, but in particular on our decision to offer PDF versions of essays. We have become aware how many people are using materials from the Journal within teaching, and we hope that this facility will help. The Editorial Board is currently considering a number of other changes and developments – not least in the hope that the long-hoped-for “Sources and Resources” section will become a reality. Watch that space.

One other invitation. Again following discussion in the Editorial Board, we have taken a decision in principle to invite reviews not only of books, but also of essays and articles (for instance in other Journals) and of research reports. Why should reviews sections function only as unpaid publicity for publishers? We need to tell each other about valuable – or problematic – work wherever it is published. Reviews of such materials can be short notices, or longer critical evaluations. If you have an idea for something you think could valuably be drawn to others’ attention in this way, please contact either of our Reviews Editors, Milly Williamson or Clarissa Smith.

This issue carries six essays. There is a considerable emphasis among these on the associated issues of conceptualisation and methods of research. Daniel Ashton makes an argument for a concept not yet much deployed within audience studies, that of ‘communities of practice’. Deriving from the work of Etienne Wenger and his colleagues who first formulated the concept, Ashton argues that it is an idea of particular value in the field of game studies, in particular because of the way it invites us to examine distributed and hierarchically-organised knowledges and roles.

Mark Jancovich, using methods and approaches from reception studies, unfolds a paradox in the history of the reputation of film actor and director Orson Welles. Contrary to recurrent emphases within film studies which insist on the centrality of films such as *Citizen Kane*, in the 1940s Welles' reputation (both positive and negative) was forged much more by his roles within films like *Touch of Evil*.

Tuuli Lahdesmaki steps into the political arena to explore the changing cult associated with the former Finnish President Urho Kekkonen. He shows the ways in which the conscious mythologisation of Kekkonen has been increasingly challenged by comedy, and camp responses.

David Mathieu presents the findings of an empirical study of how people comprehend news. Mathieu draws upon interviews with samples of Canadian and Danish respondents, to explore responses to two stories. He argues that people have available to them a range of distinct 'problematics' which filter and guide their interpretations. This concept, he argues, permits a combination of the two dominant traditions in this field; cognitive psychology and cultural studies interpretive approaches.

Michael Meadows reflects on the outcomes of studies of Indigenous media in Australia, which drew heavily upon anthropological understandings of kinship and community relations, but using a tactical mix of methods, in order to explore aboriginal peoples' engagements with the media. Meadows' central thesis is to increase the attention we give to concepts of 'community' in our audience research.

Finally, Carolyn Michelle reviews a wide range of studies of audiences for Reality TV, and proposes a new model for understanding their modes of engagement with these programmes, which she calls a 'Composite Multi-dimensional Model'. She illustrates how this model can help understand online audience responses to a dramatic event associated with the gameshow *Rockstar* in 2006.

Biographical Note

Contact Martin: mib@aber.ac.uk