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Macnamara, Jim - *The 21st Century Media (R)evolution: Emergent Media Practices*, NY: Peter Lang., 2014, ISBN 978-1-4331-2351-1

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The 21st Century Media (R)evolution: Emergent Media Practices is an excellent resource for teachers and students for, as one online reviewer puts it, it seems Macnamara has read every media study every written and does well to mention a huge amount in this work. Macnamara's aim is to chart 'emergent media practices' — which refers to 'forms of media, genre, content and communication practices' that are not only converging but 'mutating, becoming self-organising, and evolving into wholly new forms' (8). In other words, he sets out to cover off the areas in media that are undergoing transformation, but this transformation isn't just a change but a mutation. The breadth of Macnamara's analysis makes it practically useful for scholars needing a broad feel for new theoretical terrain. Macnamara doesn't shy away from this approach either, for he is quite clear that his method is to sketch the theoretical context of each area of emergent media; after that he aims to produce an 'integrated synthesized perspective' — which is his 'dialectical' approach (7). It seems at first glance that he is not so much offering a theory of the media, but a synthesized overview of the media. Yet at key moments he does in fact explicitly suggest his preference for an encompassing theory of the media, and this is in terms of his argument that it is most fruitful to analyse media from the perspective of a theoretical 'middle ground.' This is an engaging approach, which in many ways is emblematic of media itself, and it is a discussion worthy of teasing out in more detail.

The forms of media and communication practices that Macnamara covers include journalism, PR, advertising, politics and business. Each section is ostensibly a detailed literature review of major research on each topic. Take for example the chapter 'The Future of Journalism.' Macnamara effectively charts the key changes in journalism, including the effect on the media of a decline in traditional advertising revenue, a reduction in the number of journalists for traditional mass media and the effect of these reductions on journalist's time. Similar to the rigor of other chapters, Macnamara dedicates time to terminological nuances. For example, he clarifies that:

Citizen *journalism* refers to content submitted by citizens to professional media organisations, as well as writing that is self-published or self-broadcast (or narrowcast), whereas citizen *media* primarily refers to a range of media directly produced and distributed by non-journalists (emphasis added, 270).

And as per his dialectical method, Macnamara is adept at acknowledging a range of key criticisms and offering singular solutions in response. For example he notes the importance for today's journalists of:

... developing new types of news and information products' in an attempt to keep up with the emergent context, much like the way accountants, when faced with the ubiquity of lower cost tax return specialists, 're-engineered their services (268).

Macnamara is also quick to couch his call for 're-engineering' in an acknowledgement of the need for journalists not only to adjust their approach to digital journalism (or 'multimedia storytelling') but consider some re-training — echoing the sentiments at The Walkley Foundation's Storyology festival in Sydney in late 2014 as well as the work of other journalism scholars such as Cindy Royal in the US.

Macnamara's chapters contain a strong historical focus. Take, for example, his analysis of PR. This offers insights for the scholar seeking a high level summary of the evolution of the field broadly defined as 'public relations'. But the historical focus, and Macnamara's dialectical approach (in relation to the breadth of his research), is not without its sacrifices. A huge area of advertising and marketing that overlaps with PR is content marketing – which Macnamara does not acknowledge. Part advertising, part spin and part journalism, the aim of content marketing is to use 'content' to insert brands into people's conversations. The end result is to encourage engagement with the brand, spreadability, a boost in brand equity and ultimately, profitable return. Content marketing is such a huge industry that in 2013 'content marketing, as a term, surpassed every other industry phrase as a percentage of Google searches' (Pulizzi, 2014, p. 2). Granted, the breadth of Macnamara's study as a whole is extensive, and not everything can be covered, but content marketing seems a particularly pertinent example of an emergent media practice.

Of particular interest is Macnamara's dialectical approach to media analysis, which he also describes in terms of a particular theoretical paradigm of media analysis that prioritises the value of a middle-ground perspective. The approach:

... draws together a wide range of research findings from various disciplines and fields, and [...] attempts to move beyond polarised views [...] towards an integrated synthesized perspective (7).

In the 'less travelled' theoretical 'middle ground', where things are 'rarely black or white', Macnamara claims a more 'fruitful' analysis can take place than is allowed by polarized perspectives such as structuralism and poststructuralism (121). Yet while Macnamara says he is employing such a dialectical method and exploring the middle ground, he does not prioritise much discussion of his approach as an actual theoretical perspective. And so the reader yearns for a little more insight into this theory, as well as more orientation of each chapter towards this perspective, for it is provocative and emblematic of emergent media itself – in so far as media today is mobile and decentred.

Emily Keightley and Anna Reading are two theorists not mentioned in Macnamara's work that also acknowledge the importance of *middles*, and this is in terms of their proposed methodological approach to media. In their essay 'Mediated Mobilities' (2014), which Reading was also instrumental in developing into a first year unit of the same name in the Bachelor of Communication at UWS, the authors describe the relevance in media analysis of a theoretical paradigm, developed out of the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, based on theories of the 'assemblage' (296). Given their argument that mediation today is a social and cultural process structured by mobility (293) in which the mobile media ecology involves the intersection of different temporalities (296), Keightley and Reading set out to address the problem of how to produce empirical research 'sensitive to the mobile nature of media and communication' (293). They propose 'theories of the assemblage' as a useful methodological perspective since Deleuze and Guattari's proposed structure captures 'the way in which mobilities are polylogical, multi-directional and changeable across space and time' (296). In very basic terms, an analysis using theories of the assemblage focuses on flow, process and connection, not biunivocal relations, and as such is not dissimilar to Macnamara's theory of the 'middle-ground'. Mediated mobilities is a growing field of research – in fact Keightley and Reading's essay heads-up a special issue of *Media, Culture & Society* – and would make for an illuminating discussion in Macnamara's work.

Realistically, however, asking Macnamara to add more to his book is wishful thinking as this is something that could only be achieved with more space given that nothing could really be cut from the current edition. Yet at 400+ pages, *The 21st Century Media Revolution* is probably long enough. But it would have been great to read further insights, for example, into the importance in digital communication of the Web 2.0 era of problem-solving content and 'shareability'. And it would be fascinating for Macnamara to have dedicated more space to enfolding issues from other chapters and analysing the wrinkles formed when some emergent media issues face-off; for example, if, as many theorists claim, the internet is making us stupid (112), then how do you market to 'stupid' internet users (Buzzfeed surely has an answer to this ...)?

One solution to the problem of space in Macnamara's study is to put the book online. Of course, an online version of Macnamara's book is not without its disadvantages, but it could allow for easier updating, slowing the speed at which examples date. Digital media gets old fast, and this is already a very minor problem for the second edition of Macnamara's text – for example, some 'recent' research cited on the topics of 'community and social capital' is 15 years old (106), and while perhaps still relevant, it's not entirely convincing. Also, Macnamara needs to avoid citing organisations that exist in a different capacity than they originally did, such as Technorati, which is no longer a blog monitoring authority (383) but an advertising platform. Granted this isn't always possible but it remains an issue.

Perhaps too, a digital/online version of Macnamara's text could promote a different reading method, one better suited to his dialectical approach, and perfectly suited to digital media texts. A digital version would allow readers to follow hyperlinked transversals, dipping in and out of the book's case studies, essentially maintaining their own theoretical middle-ground. Readers could move more easily between arguments, staging their own

theoretical face-offs, making reading less 'reading' and more engaging. (But would critics of the internet, as noted by Macnamara, be disparaging, re-stating so-called 'engagement' as superficial 'skim reading?')

Every media scholar needs a copy of *The 21st Century Media (R)evolution: Emergent Media Practices* as a useful reference for key media research in the areas of journalism, PR, advertising, politics and business. A valuable research aid it is, but a detailed theoretical approach it isn't. Yet this isn't a shortfall of Macnamara's work for he doesn't quite set out to provide a theoretical approach, even though he skirts around the edge of one.

References

Keightley, E. & Reading A. (2014). Mediated mobilities. *Media, Culture & Society*. 36(3), 285-301. doi: 10.1177/0163443713517731

Pulizzi, J. (2014). *Epic Content Marketing*.

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