

# LEGS IN LUKÁCS

---

*Katie Terezakis*

Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall (eds), *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence: Aesthetics, Politics, Literature*, London, Continuum, 2011, 239 pp; £60 hardback

As one thinker put it, the significance of past movements in thought is established only when the present requires them for understanding its own, defining upheavals.<sup>1</sup> With the work of Fredric Jameson, Martin Jay, and Lukács's Budapest School inheritors, Georg Lukács never entirely disappeared from notice. But now from within the crisis not of waning capitalism, but of capitalism's relentless ascendance, theorists are re-establishing our need for Lukács, and his claim on us. This past year (2011), Continuum released two self-contained edited volumes on Lukács: Michael J. Thompson's *Georg Lukács Reconsidered: Critical Essays in Politics, Philosophy and Aesthetics*, and the collection under review here, Timothy Bewes' and Timothy Hall's *Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence*. Although three contributors have chapters in both volumes, each book is comprised of new and differently oriented essays. In addition to an introduction and twelve chapters, this volume also contains translations of two pithy and - especially in light of their application in several of these essays - extremely valuable works by Lukács: 'Art for Art's Sake and Proletarian Writing' (1926) and 'An Entire Epoch of Inhumanity' (1964).

In their Introduction, the editors appropriate an Adornian design to ask what the present might mean 'in the face of Lukács'. They sketch compellingly the character of a contemporary situation in need of Lukácsian analysis, but which demands, too, that Lukács be rendered operational: rethought, critically revised, and perhaps most helpfully, read against himself. The Lukácsian principle of totality is presented as crucial to our judgment of current challenges, precisely insofar as Lukácsian totality interacts with the disunity or dissonance upon which it is established. At the level of interpretation, Bewes and Hall also show that the notion of totality develops out of Lukács's earliest consideration of aesthetic form, for which contingency is constitutive. I find these to be fine points; I expand upon them in the Afterword to the 2010 edition of Lukács's *Soul and Form*.<sup>2</sup>

A short review cannot do justice to any single essay, let alone a multifaceted collection of them, so here I will only mention several connected, axial points from which much of the collection drives forward. There are productive interpretative divergences, for example, between Neil Larson's magnificent analysis of labour and class struggle as fetish categories, David Cunningham's argument that capital, rather than the proletariat, is the subject of history

1. John William Miller makes this point in several places, including in *In Defense of the Psychological*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1981, pp148-150, and in his Afterword to José Ortega y Gasset's *History as System and Other Essays: Toward a Philosophy of History*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1961, p243.

2. György Lukács, *Soul and Form*, John T. Sanders and Katie Terezakis (eds), Columbia University Press, 2010. See especially pp215-223; 233-234.

given expressive form by the novel, and Patrick Eiden-Offe's fresh portrayal of the way that class functions as a matrix of imputed, revolutionary consciousness. Yet these essays and others share an essentially Lukácsian insight about the task of the critic, and thus about the critical authority that roots the whole book: for given the long reach of reifying and ideological practices, the responsibility to define existing contradictions and to help engender alternative ways of life is a necessary intellectual condition of any non-reactionary rejection of the status-quo.

Andrew Feenberg's rethinking of reification, the cornerstone of Lukács's legacy, embodies a related theme embedded throughout the collection. Feenberg confronts the economic, administrative, and technological faces of reification, cogently responding to Axel Honneth's recent appropriation. Feenberg deploys reification together with the equally Lukácsian notion of mediation to outline a philosophy of technology sensitive to the underdetermination of technological systems, and thus to their potential for organizing collective action. Feenberg's discussion of the way technical networks construct social collectives and may yet advance their shared interests is invigorating. Feenberg is also aware of the way that the (false) mantle of scientific expertise can be donned to impede grassroots action, though one could hope for a clearer delineation between science and corporate-funded bunk. In an argument that commends Honneth for making the validation of personal feelings a political task, Feenberg flirts with a false dichotomy between private experience and scientific evidence. Allowing this dichotomy to remain latent needlessly hobbles the critic now facing new forms of denialism, rising scientific illiteracy, and the right-wing crusade against science - all of which trump scientific expertise with an appeal to personal feelings.

In any event, the importance of tackling one fundamental difficulty is patent in Feenberg's essay and throughout: how to evaluate a totality from inside of it? More specifically, how to evaluate with a faculty of reason that our own criticism has shown to be compromised by the reified structures that frame reasoning? Much ink has been spilled on the matter, but this collection regroups the question, beginning with the editors' potent reminder of Lukács's rejection of the bearing of individual experience on the form of totality. Gail Day's tremendous approach to social transitivity sharpens the problem; her interpretation of works by Sekula, the Radek Community, and Chto Delat charts a course to a creatively replenished critical realism. Likewise, John Marx's superb treatment of the historical novel as a site of transnational interconnection harnesses Lukács's practice of amplifying political challenges through aesthetic investigations, in this case by demonstrating how the novel affords a politics of cosmopolitanism. The reader will find further, striking points of connection between Marx's description of the aesthetic authority of the historical novel, Feenberg's account of technological underdetermination, and Eiden-Offe's application of both Lukácsian and Biblical typology.

Hall's contribution, too, while overtly concerned with uncovering a

Lukácsian model of justice and human flourishing, returns to aesthetic reason as the model for creating new discursive and political forms (though Hall's attempt to better dissociate Lukácsian totality and the Kantian regulative idea falls a bit flat). Further pressing the centrality of aesthetic insights for Lukács's system, both Bewes and Cunningham reclaim 'absolute sinfulness' as a technical concept. Bewes' positioning of cinema and of fields of (in) visibility provocatively recalls Lyotard's celebration of a postmodern form that enables us to see by making it impossible to see - but makes its own intriguing ontological turn. And Michael Löwy's recovery of Lukács's evolving relationship to Kafka - about which I am painfully aware of how much more ought to be said - will prove requisite for all subsequent studies of Lukácsian realism and literary criticism. Löwy's essay beautifully does what Lukács does at his best, and what this collection as a whole does as well: it challenges deadening constructions and shows how diminished relationships - within a tradition, among works, between people and the natural and social world - can be returned to the realm of dynamic engagement.

# MEDIUM JAM

---

*Martha McCaughey*

Leah A. Lievrouw, *Alternative and Activist New Media*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2011, 294pp; £55 hardback, £14.99 paperback

Leah Lievrouw's *Alternative and Activist New Media* is an excellent introduction to innovative, often non-commercial uses of new information and communication technologies. This is the kind of text I longed to have when I began teaching courses in new media activism, and am so glad to have it now. It serves as a useful guide for students, academic professionals, and activists alike. The book is grounded in communication theory as well as social movement theory and history. Moreover, Lievrouw situates new media activism within the broader history of activists' uses of art prior to the digital era. Lievrouw makes a point of including in her discussions new media such as YouTube because she defines alternative/activist new media as 'employ[ing] or modify[ing] the communication artifacts, practices, and social arrangements of new information and communication technologies to challenge or alter dominant, expected, or accepted ways of doing society, culture, and politics' (p19). Indeed, the book adeptly combines discussions of alternative and activist new media, and usefully situates these in an historical and theoretical framework.

In the first chapter, Lievrouw introduces the topic by contrasting the industrial system of mass production and delivery of information to the current proliferation of networked media and information technologies made possible in the past 30 years. Now media consumers can also be producers, users can also be designers, and the technologies shape what we express and how we express it. This book explores the cutting edges of new media culture by examining different genres of new media projects.

The second chapter covers the creative and political roots of contemporary forms of alternative and activist uses of new media. The Dada and Situationist art movements championed the ability to re-mix cultural elements to question taken-for-granted meanings in mass consumer culture. Such art harnessed media technologies to re-imagine both art and the media and technologies that dominated the period. Merging forms such as painting and sculpture with photography and mass-produced objects, artists created fragmented collage and parodic sculptures, such as Marcel Duchamp's well known 'Fountain', which was a mass-produced urinal the artist had turned upside down and signed. As those artists used new technologies to force people into new ways of seeing and engaging culture and politics, new media activists today champion creativity in everyday life and the merger of art and politics. This chapter

moves on to discuss social movement theories and the key characteristics of actors and actions in new social movements, and the extensive use of information and communication technologies as both a method of mobilizing people and as an actual field of action. Both new social movements and the activist art that preceded them have ‘a *subcultural quality*’ (p65).

In the third chapter, Lievrouw offers an excellent discussion of culture jamming as a communication genre. Here, too, Lievrouw acknowledges the pre-digital-era forms of culture jamming, including spray painting over offensive billboards, ‘guerrilla postering’ projects, *Adbusters* magazine, the work of the Barbie Liberation Organization, and the counter-surveillance projects that creatively responded to the use of surveillance cameras by performing, for instance, *Waiting for Godot* for ‘audiences’ on the other end of the cameras. The chapter covers many important moments in online culture jamming history, such as Jonah Peretti’s Nike email adventure - a culture jam that began with Peretti’s attempt to customize his NIKEiD shoes with the word ‘sweatshop’ and culminated in the emails to Peretti from Nike, who refused to do so, going viral and Peretti’s story being told in multiple news outlets. Lievrouw discusses @™ark as emblematic of culture jamming, showing how the group established itself in 1991 as a corporation so that artists and investors enjoy the protections of anonymity and displaced liability, explaining the group’s use of play, irony, and humour to critique corporate power, and relating many of the legal battles in which @™ark has become embroiled. This chapter includes thoughtful discussions of the tension between culture jamming and ‘reverse jamming’ (where corporations and mainstream media cross-appropriate or co-opt the very culture jams that radical groups created to question mainstream/corporate values in the first place) as well as the tension between the informational and representation politics of culture jamming and the collective-action agenda of the Old Left. While both chapters 2 and 3 mention cases where individuals or groups moved their political tactics from one communications medium to another, newer one (@™ark, for example, grew out of the Barbie Liberation Organization), it would have been nice to read about more such cases. How did artistic and culture-jamming groups, such as *Adbusters* or the *Guerrilla Girls*, move into Web 2.0, and did this change their style or increase their effectiveness?

The fourth chapter goes on to examine another set of cultural pranksters: hackers. While hacking originally began as a set of pranks or ‘hacks’ devised by MIT engineering students in the Tech Model Railroad Club in the 1960s, hacking became known as a way to stretch software’s capacities, share code, and playfully question authority. While some hacking is associated with criminal or terroristic activity, Lievrouw focuses on hacking in the alternative computing culture, which encompasses a shared commitment to information access, open systems, control over one’s personal information and communications, and equitable social participation (p99). In alternative computing, the technological infrastructure itself is the site of social and

political struggle. By discussing manifestos of alternative computing leaders and some major legal and economic struggles over copyright (including P2P file sharing and the DeCSS code), Lievrouw demonstrates that alternative computing is a primary genre of alternative and activist new media projects.

Chapter 5 examines citizen, grassroots, and open-source journalism projects in the context of the crisis in the news industry. Alternative and activist forms of reporting, editing, and consuming news and information challenge traditional journalism in a number of ways, for better or worse. 'Participatory journalism' describes the ongoing, joint participation by readers, writers, and editors in news production and circulation made possible through new social media. Lievrouw provides a helpful discussion of the limits of participatory journalism; for instance, a blogger might have an economic incentive for including specific content on her blog, while a professional journalist is protected from the priorities of advertisers. Lievrouw focuses on the Independent Media Center and its wildly successful expansion as a primary example of the participatory journalism genre, whilst situating IMCs in a longer history of pirate radio stations and alternative newspapers.

There has long been a debate as to whether new media technologies will enable democratic participation or lull people into a distracted, isolated, and dumbed-down state of being entertained. And so in Chapter 6 Lievrouw covers the genre of mediated mobilization - the ways in which new media are used for mobilizing people toward collective action for social change. Using the global justice movement as a primary example, Lievrouw shows how new communications technologies were harnessed by activists to create effective protests, both on the streets and in virtual reality, beginning in 1999 during the World Trade Organization's meetings in Seattle and continuing at every major multilateral economic summit for the next ten years. The global scale of this movement was based on its networked capacity: coordinating the logistics of bringing diverse and dispersed groups of activists together; advertising the movement's activities and concerns to wider audiences (where the Indymedia network was crucial); and using the technological infrastructure itself for protest (for example, electronic civil disobedience, ping storm attacks, and creating alternative, spoof websites such as [www.gatt.org](http://www.gatt.org)).

The seventh chapter, 'Challenging the Experts', emphasizes the power of personal involvement and collaboration in information posting, retrieval, and organizing among people and ideas connected through technological networks. Commons knowledge has strengths and weaknesses, which Lievrouw adeptly covers before moving on to discuss the Wikipedia project as a prime example of the commons knowledge genre. Since the mid-2000s, Wikipedia has been known widely to be a reputable source of information with a low number of serious errors, showing that it has successfully managed the tension between creative participation and formal policies and safeguards, such as automated content-checking programs. The genre of commons knowledge is large-scale and, with its peer production and capacity for self-repair, becomes

more reliable and valuable to users the larger it becomes.

Ultimately, Lievrouw argues for the mediation perspective in communication, challenging the communication discipline's traditional ways of understanding interpersonal and mass communication. Mediation conveys the mutual shaping of people's uses of communication technology and their communicative action, which together produce social and technological change. As Lievrouw puts it, 'The key point is that people's expressions and interactions are inseparable from the devices and methods they use to create, sustain, or change them. This relationship is a moving target, or more accurately a moving window, for viewing communication as the fundamental mechanism of social change' (p234).

*Alternative and Activist New Media* covers no right-wing uses of new media - even though such efforts meet the criteria of producing and sharing 'DIY' information to 'intervene in social, cultural, economic, and political conditions' (p19). Without this balance between left- and right-wing uses of new media, readers new to the subject might be left with the mistaken impression that only left-wing activists and computer professionals have used new media for political and cultural change, or that the only thing scholars are willing to call 'activist' or 'alternative' are efforts with which they largely agree. It is also surprising and ironic that a book like this - emphasizing, for example, the hyperlink as a key feature of new media - has no digital version or accompanying website with hyperlinks to the many sites and issues Lievrouw covers in the book. Still, *Alternative and Activist New Media* is a most useful, well organized text for those studying new media activism, art and social issues, and the significance of artists' and activists' work in new media for challenging current assumptions about art, activism, and technological design and innovation themselves.

# FEMINISM UNTOLD

---

*Lynne Pearce*

Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2011, 272pp; £15.99 paperback

Clare Hemmings's astute analysis of 'the stories that feminists tell about the past four decades of feminist theory' (dust-jacket) is a timely wake-up call for all those of us teaching and researching in the field of feminist theory and women's / gender studies. Indeed, anyone who has the responsibility for teaching or convening lectures and courses which introduce undergraduate students to feminism is likely to cringe more than once in their reading of *Why Stories Matter*; will almost certainly be obliged to hold her hand up (as Hemmings does herself) and confess that, yes, 'that is the story I tell!'. Albeit from variable standpoints (themselves the subject of the first part of Hemmings's book), this 'story' of feminism's recent past is disturbingly reproducible: a story about how it all kicked off (with great passion but some serious blindspots) in the 1970s, gave way to new complexification (notably an assault on 'essentialism' and white/'first-world' bias) in the 1980s, before achieving vibrant pluralism in the 1990s - and, of course, the messianic arrival of Judith Butler. The 'endpoint' that Butler represents in this narrative is certainly one of the most interesting, and arguably one of the most urgent, tendencies that Hemmings investigates in the course of her critique, reminding all those of us guilty of ending (in the sense of either 'completing' and / or 'destroying') the story of feminism with the arrival of Queer Theory, that *Gender Trouble* was published over 20 years ago. What, asks Hemmings, has caused the feminist story to become so banal, so reproducible, so reductive? And why do we keep on telling it when we really should know better?

Hemmings's analysis of this Ur-narrative takes as its texts both her own paraphrases of the stories/discourses that many of us will recognise from our own teaching and the articles and editorials featured in a selection of feminist journals from the period 1998-2007. Hemmings's research of the latter focused on 'gloss paragraphs, introductions or segues in articles that told a story about feminist theory's development, whether or not the article otherwise centred on that development' (p18) in order that she didn't restrict herself too narrowly to texts that were self-consciously *about* the history of the movement; this, she hoped, would enable her to argue both for the *implicit* and ubiquitous nature of the stories in question. Although this is a perfectly acceptable methodology, there were several occasions when I thought that Hemmings could have gone further in her rhetorical analysis of these texts



which tended to focus on their ostensible, as opposed to latent, content. An exception to this, which is also indicative of how the analysis could have been developed elsewhere, is her discussion of how 'materiality' has become an ironically substance-less 'floating signifier' in many 'narratives of return': 'certainly one effect of this repetition is to make materiality a trope' (p114). Possibly because the journal-texts are, for the most part, brought in to support or illustrate an already-established Ur-narrative, their own 'subtexts' and / or ironies (as here) are not as much a feature of Hemmings's analysis as one might expect. This said, I think Hemmings's thesis is perfectly credible when based upon her paraphrases alone. Indeed, as I have already suggested, it is the alarming familiarity of these story-lines (their vocabulary as well as their substance) that is liable to send a shiver down the spine of every self-respecting feminist: how, and when, did we mindlessly agree to 'tell it this way'? Here's one short example from the first chapter of Part One on 'Progress Narratives':

First, it is clearly a positive account, one told with excitement and even relish. It is a narrative of success and accomplishment and positions feminist theory and its subjects as attentive and dynamic. Second, it is a narrative with a clear chronology: we are taken from the past - via key shifts in politics, theory and feminism's subject, and towards a complex feminist present. The shifts represented are from singularity of purpose and perspective to understandings that emphasize multiplicity, instability and difference (p35).

Section One of Hemmings's study, then, comprises analysis and reflection upon what she has identified as the three pre-dominant narratives of feminist theory's recent past: narratives centred on *progress* (as summarized above), *loss* (the same teleology, but with a focus on what the feminist movement has lost rather than what it has gained) and *return* (whereby the most recent generation of noughties' academics have called for a new materialism - either social or 'biomaterial' [i.e., a renewed focus on 'the body'] in the common belief that the 'cultural turn', whilst crucial in ridding feminism of its essentialist naivety, has now gone too far). As well as detailing, as we've seen, the stories' constituent parts, Hemmings also pays attention to their dependence (or not) on the *citation* of key figures (like Butler) and *affect*. These ancillary narratological features also become the means by which Hemmings explores possible ways of 'telling the stories differently' in Part Two of her book *via* techniques she has dubbed *recitation* (adding forgotten or erased names/references to the stories and valuing their contributions differently) and *affective mobilization* (disturbing the 'regulation' emotional standpoint of the story-teller and her audience). I nevertheless believe that the critique Hemmings performs in Part I of the book is an urgently-needed intervention into contemporary feminism's unwitting slide towards orthodoxy in its own right, especially *vis-à-vis* her brave attempts to answer the 'how' and 'why' questions I posed earlier.

First and foremost amongst Hemmings's attempts to explain why both the 'progress' and 'loss' camps have been happy to subscribe to an evolutionary model of feminist theorizing has been the groundswell of anxiety about the movement's perceived failure to recognise ethnic diversity in its 1970s incarnation. Legitimate as this concern surely is, what Hemmings delicately uncovers is a concomitant tendency to equate 'essentialism' with 'radical feminism' (read, 'lesbianism') in the reforming 1980s and effectively erase the uncomfortable figure of the lesbian to the margins of 'the story' until she is reborn, feminized and sanitized, in the context of Butler et al's Queer paradigm ('the rejection of lesbian identity in favour of strategic mobilization of sexual alterity', p57). Here, and throughout Part Two of the book, Hemmings is at pains to reveal the homophobia lurking in this move as well as the unhelpful positioning of feminism and the Queer movement in binary opposition to one another (pp90-1). A related point - and one that Hemmings develops in the first chapter of Part II (pp146-51) - is the way in which noughties' feminist theorists and teachers have bought-into a divisive generational politics that dismisses numerous early exponents of feminist theory for the simple reason that they are passé or, as Hemmings styles it, 'anachronistic'. This is partly because these texts are no longer *closely* read (certainly not in undergraduate teaching contexts) but merely cited as stepping stones en route to a present which has increasingly come to be defined by a *bona fide* object of study (e.g., postcolonialism) rather than a rigorously practised theoretical / methodological textual practice.

Although the bipartite structure of *Why Stories Matter* might lead readers to expect some alternate stories of Hemmings's own in Part II, the author makes clear that this is not her intention since we inevitably end up replacing one 'grand narrative' with another. Instead, she embarks on the more modest project of 'experimenting with alternative *ways* of telling feminist stories' (p158) and, in the two final chapters, skilfully combines further critique of contemporary feminism's account of its recent past with reflection upon her own, subtle narrative interventions. As already noted, these focus on citation tactics (Chapter 4) and the management of affect (Chapter 6) and, together, provide scholars and teachers with some practical examples of how they might expose and challenge habituated rhetorical schemas. With respect to citation practices, for example, she suggests resisting the canonization / fetishization of certain 'names' (typically, Butler, Haraway, Spivak) by the *de-authoring* citation tactic she deploys in Part I: namely, identifying extracts and sources by 'journal location and date, rather than by author' (p164). Further, and with particular reference to Butler (pp165-189), she advocates, and practises, combining a *critique* of heteronormative citation practices (for example, the repeated yoking of Butler with Foucault) with proactive *recitation* of erstwhile marginalized precursors (e.g., replacing Foucault with Monique Wittig). By (literally) substituting Foucault's name with Wittig's in a selection of secondary sources, Hemmings vividly demonstrates how a different story

emerges when the emphasis is shifted in this way.

The final chapter on 'Affective Subjects', meanwhile, asks us to reconsider the political effectiveness of conceptual/textual tactics like empathy for feminist practice and suggests that other, less comfortable emotions such as *horror* might facilitate a more radical engagement between the feminist subject and the 'object' of her concern. This chapter reflects upon, rather than demonstrates, these rather less 'predictable' (p226) affective engagements but, once again, represents a salutary warning to feminist academics - of whatever generation - to *think* before they speak and write: namely, is this really the story I want to (re)tell or could I tell it otherwise and - with a silence here, a recitation there, gently tweak the plot?

## BEYOND AL-JAZEERA

---

*Anastasia Valassopoulos*

Noha Mellor, Muhammad Ayish, Nabil Dajani, and Khalil Rinnawi, *Arab Media: Globalisation and Emerging Media Industries*, Cambridge, Polity, 2010, 206pp; £16.99 paperback

*Arab Media: Globalisation and Emerging Media Industries* raises prescient questions on the subject of *how* to look at the rise and expansion of various media in the Arab world alongside some long held maxims about the *role* of those same media outlets. Mellor et al are keen to historicize and contextualize the proliferation of media, quantifying usage and critiquing content. What comes across quite swiftly in the book is the potency of the existing argumentative framework against which new ways of understanding the production of media meaning must be measured. Tarik Sabry, in his book *Cultural Encounters in the Arab World* writes that,

Due to the external threats from Imperialism and Zionism, it was, and still is, much more fashionable for Arab intellectuals to contextualise their work on ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ within frames of nationalistic, pan-Arab and pan-Islamist discourses (p48).

Thus, the assumed and comfortable endpoint for the consumption of media, the strengthening of community discourses alongside local nationalist variations of Islamic and pan-Arab fraternity, is understood by the authors of *Arab Media* as an obstacle to complex socio-cultural research that would instead seek to understand media production and consumption across a wide spectrum of variants: literacy levels, income, gender, sexual orientation, ideologies of modernization, and so on. *Arab Media* deals with the above limitations by setting itself the challenge of reading the growth and changes in Arab media ‘as a direct result of the acceleration of the globalization process’ (p8). The book attempts and to some extent succeeds in overcoming the limitations posed by the ‘Arab intellectuals’ that Sabry speaks of and to tackle openly the ideological and theoretical impasses that face the scholar of Arab media. This makes it a very useful introduction for those new to the field as it historicizes Arab media studies whilst revealing the ways in which it has developed.

*Arab Media* certainly casts the net wide and seeks to engage with a variety of media outlets - publishing and print; the press; radio; television; cinema and the internet. The section on the humble radio is crucial to the context of wide coverage in the Arab world across class and economic divides. With

many books hailing the satellite channel Al-Jazeera as enabling a more open view of the intricacies of Arab regimes and allowing the Arab world to participate in cosmopolitanism and global debates, it is significant that the authors of *Arab Media* have chosen to look at more rudimentary and older forms of media that serve to highlight the long history and discursive power of the dissemination of public discourse, opinion and ideology. The addition of cinema is also very welcome as it introduces an element of creative media working at the level of representation and allows for a much broader look at how a variety of media forms negotiate socio-political circumstances *alongside* each other.

An unavoidable overarching theme of the book relates to how media is viewed and utilized by individual Arab states and how media is, in turn, conceptualized as either a welcome modernizing force propelled by local needs and articulated through indigenous routes or vilified as a force of involuntary modernization imposed by a Western hegemony (the details of which, the authors argue, are often vague). In this context, the *hierarchy* of media outlets is constantly renegotiated, depending on cultural and political priorities within Arab culture. So, for example, burgeoning on-line access is used to, on the one hand, celebrate the business-oriented free market qualities that the Arab world wants to be seen to be participating in. On the other hand, the internet is criticized for accelerating the erosion of nationalist solidarity and encouraging an unbridled individualism.

Structurally, *Arab Media* is divided into chapters, each dealing with a separate media outlet. The first pages contain a map, a discussion surrounding language and a general socio-cultural history justifying the authors' decision to look at the region as a whole. That most of the countries now designated as Arab 'share a history of being subordinated to first Ottoman and then European colonial powers' permits for certain cultural and ideological similarities (p2). The theme of *Arabisation*, a slow but effective philosophy that was promoted by Arab states to the exclusion of other identities in order to counteract the perceived effects of colonization, makes for a fascinating starting point into how differences between states were initially consolidated in the 1950s and '60s. The use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in the press and publications throughout the region has facilitated this sense of a shared culture, as problematic as this might be. Other socioeconomic reasons that trouble the examination of the region as a cohesive entity range from crude questions of size to the often quite fundamental differences in political and governing systems. Pan-Islamism has also recently emerged as a competing model of engagement with the socio-political reality of the Arab world. *Arab Media* is however careful to show how different media react to and inform the understanding of a variety of contextual situations. This opens the way for the study of Arab media to be vibrant and alive - seeking new ways to interact with new material and information.

The role, freedom and capacity of the press, and its ability to diversify

and adapt to the different needs of geo-political changes is the subject of the first chapter. Whilst *Arab Media* seeks to understand the press within the context of a global economy, it is clear that the mechanisms that guide and shape media outlets in the Arab world, including the press, are largely still ideologically safeguarding an 'Arab' identity. 'Arab newspapers [...] registered and published in European countries [have recently been able to] avoid local Arab government controls' and are thus freer to express political dissidence and a variety of opinions (p61). Overall though, *Arab Media* accuses the press of not being interested enough in the *human* element and for prioritizing politics and business above all else. Hence, it is not always possible or indeed accurate to lay blame on censorship laws. 'The success of the press can only be achieved by truly serving the public and the society, and not merely the politicians' (p66). This critique resounds across the subsequent chapters and emerges as the single most significant limitation to the available framework for studying Arab media in general. Though scholars are working on radical paradigm shifts for the study of Arab media and culture,<sup>1</sup> politics and the economy dominate the critical framework through which the consumption and production of media is viewed.

The long-established popularity of radio listening and its role as promoter of 'national culture and heritage' through programming centred around 'social values and traditions, crafts, traditional sports, literary (especially poetic) works, folkloric arts, and more' makes for some very interesting reading (p81). Studied alongside the arrival of television, which seemed to have taken longer to cement its role due to its being 'overshadowed by long-operational radio services that gained extensive popularity in orally oriented Arabian communities' (p89), we see the beginning of a competitive media vying for public recognition. At present, there are more than 400 new channels across the region. Usefully, the chapter also charts the impact of satellite television on other state-run channels, showing them to be struggling to compete on both financial and content levels. A charter set up in 2008 by Arab information ministers (though not binding) revealed 'a growing uneasiness among governments in the region [about] potential effects of satellite television on Arabian societies in the age of globalization' (p96). This chapter suffers perhaps from too little attention to actual programmes however. Some more detail on programmes enjoyed across the Arab world and diaspora would have made it possible for readers to get a real sense of what issues are deemed acceptable for the television industries: reality shows; Ramadan tv; dramas, and so on. Often, the thematic contents of television programmes can tell us much about this 'human' element discussed above, as can the framework and ideology of programming which is often above and beyond the reach of the average viewer. The new dimension of participatory television, through phones and the web, is also a potential topic that raises new questions - ones that can challenge the way that television or media has been conceptualised so far - as ideology administered from above. What makes

1. See Armbrust, W. 'A History of New Media in the Arab Middle East', in spec. issue 'Arab Cultural Studies', Anastasia Valassopoulos (ed), *Journal for Cultural Research*, 16, 2&3, (2012).

*Arab Media* a particularly engaging book is the fact that it does not shy away from placing Arab social and cultural politics at the heart of discussions on technology and its uses. This allows for a more complex view to emerge as regards the intersections between the state and media outlets.

The recent proliferation of film festivals in places like Dubai has once again internationalized the role of the Arab film industry. The history of cinema and some noted movements within it, such as the Association of New Cinema in the late 60s, serves to complicate the variety of cinematic projects occurring across the Arab region either in response to internal political changes or as a gesture towards participating on the global scene. Chapter 6 focuses mainly on the Egyptian film industry, which is the oldest and most prolific. This lends the chapter a certain continuity of perspective and gives a strong sense of an established genre. In striving for cohesion, what is perhaps understated here is the impact of international cinema on the Arab world. The reception of European, American and South Asian films (very popular indeed in the Gulf region) all point to a diverse viewing audience, consuming cinema at all levels, both public and private. Globalisation can surely work both ways? Where *Arab Media* is perhaps reticent is in making clear the ways in which foreign media has impacted on the content and form of local variants. This would have allowed for a more 'global' perspective to emerge.

The penultimate chapter addresses the internet. Arab governments, we are told, 'deal with the internet in an ambivalent way. At the same time that they are aware of its importance to their economic development and its vitality in attracting foreign investments, they perceive it as a factor that affects the political and social stability of their countries' (p123). The charge of 'Western cultural imperialism' is still a very potent rhetorical tool, both socially and politically. Interestingly, internet usage stands at around 10 per cent of the general population (p124) apart from the Arab Gulf countries where it stands at around 30 per cent (largely due to the relative affluence of the Gulf). *Arab Media* stresses that it is nevertheless important to look closely at how internet usage 'shapes the collective identity and community solidarity - and also because of its potential as a social and political power, both for religious fundamentalist and human rights groups, which may indeed push for changes in the Arab world' (p124).<sup>2</sup> However, other aspects of social life that the internet has enabled do not readily fit this viewpoint. The internet has surely also facilitated a number of non-public enterprises, namely criminal and 'terrorist' activity. Freedoms associated with cyberspace were soon 'eclipsed after September 11, 2001, when the governments took measures to restrict this freedom. Most of these efforts came in response to pressure from the United States to crack down on terrorism (or terrorist communication) within the Arab world' (p147).

*Arab Media* is ultimately keen to stress the 'role media industries play in enforcing a new pan-Arab identity' refracted through an international perspective (p149). Though it remains important for us to know and

2. This was written before the uprisings that are now termed 'The Arab Spring'.

understand the institutional structures that frame the availability and consumption of media, it is equally crucial to understand how these media work together and interact at the level of the everyday and how they might intersect with international media.<sup>3</sup> *Arab Media* provides a very clear introduction to the general field of media studies in the Arab speaking countries of the Middle East. It is accessible, focused and presents engaging arguments on a range of crucial topics. The arguments that reveal the limits on media posed by political structures are the most interesting and engaging as they reveal how the media has been harnessed and co-opted in the Arab world and to what ends. Preliminary investigations into the global ramifications of an ever expanding Arab media do however remain quite narrow as fundamental debates surrounding internationalism and the influence of the Arab diaspora are hinted at rather than fully explored.

3. See Tarik Sabry, *Cultural Encounters in the Arab World: On Media, the Modern and the Everyday*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2010, p48.



## BOOKNOTES

---

Zygmunt Bauman, *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2011, 121 pp; £12.99 paperback

In *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*, Zygmunt Bauman describes a shift in the self-designated role of 'Culture', from its Enlightenment mission of educating the masses in the name of progress to making itself available in a market like any other commodity. He sees the quality of 'omnivorousness' in cultural elites as symptomatic of this change: that they admit no difference between high and low culture and will confess to enjoying darts as well as Wagner (2). So far, so liquid modern, as Bauman takes this phenomenon as exemplifying life in post-modernity whereby the old boundaries and forms that demarcated social life in an age of solid modernity have dissolved, and with it art's special role. Passion yields to dispassion, though not to disinterestedness, as artists orient their product towards the market: 'the culture of liquid modernity has no "populace" to enlighten and ennoble; it does, however, have clients to seduce' (16). Fashion, therefore, is for Bauman exemplary as a field in which this process plays out and is observable. The measure of 'progress' shifts from participation in a shared project to the ability of individuals to keep up with trends and sustain consumer markets (24). Bauman pays no attention to what makes this possible: sweated labour in countries producing the commodities that enable the working class in Britain to participate in 'fast fashion'. Primark as well as Prada is necessary if Bauman is correct in his thesis that consumption is where it's at for late capitalism, though recognising this exposes the central problem of his thesis. Capital has relocated production geographically and this fact forms no part of his understanding of culture as a commodity; 'culture' is decontextualised from its material conditions and conceived of wholly as a European concern.

This focus on the West, specifically Europe, is a glaring preoccupation of the book and leads to some curious conclusions and recommendations. For Bauman, the European Union offers a chance for the rediscovery of 'our shared values, ideals and intentions', but this is hindered by the proliferation of languages within the EU. A 'pressing question', therefore, is 'How much wisdom would we all have gained, how much would our coexistence have benefitted, if part of the Union's funds had been devoted to the translation of its inhabitants' writings in say, a jointly edited and published "Library of European Culture"?' (86-87). We are to take inspiration from 'the forefathers of Europe', the ancient Greeks, in putting into practice their concept of 'friendship': 'not by sacrificing what is dear to our hearts, but by offering it to neighbours near and far, just as they offer to us, as generously, what is dear to their hearts' (85). This might sound rather hollow to modern Greeks

who are told by more prosperous countries in the EU that they have been fiscally imprudent, partly due to cultural difference, which Bauman would have as the site of reconciliation. Bauman's ultimate recommendation is that the 'cultural state' replaces the state that facilitates consumerism if the arts are to resume a position of importance, and that grass-roots projects require subsidisation. How this state of affairs is to be brought about, and by whom, remains unsaid.

*Jen Morgan*