



**Mediated Society: A Critical Sociology of Media.** By John D. Jackson, Greg M. Nielsen, & Yon Hsu. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press Canada, 2011. 296 pp. ISBN 9780195431407.

In *Mediated Society: A Critical Sociology of Media*, by John D. Jackson, Greg M. Nielsen, & Yon Hsu, the authors provide a comprehensive account of media, which they take up, in a variety of ways, as an issue of sociological importance. In particular, *Mediated Society* aims to examine the categories of “democracy, citizenship, class, gender, and cultural diversity” (p. ix) with respect to how media, in its diverse manifestations, impacts, shapes, and sometimes even determines our experiences of these phenomena.

This book does an exceptional job of introducing key thinkers and significant concepts in critical sociological theory, which it then applies to the study of media and its role in our increasingly mediated social world. The authors should be lauded for their seamless incorporation of the basic ideas of such complex thinkers as Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, and Michel de Certeau on subjects as diverse as French seriocomedies and newspapers such as *La Presse*. In particular, the authors’ overview of Jean Baudrillard’s ideas, including the discussion of how advertising delivers “communication warmth” and security to the consumer through materially detached images and signs that seduce and confuse, is both clear and instructive. The example of water—the advertising of which the authors contend “further add[s] signs of social status and prestige to the consumer” (p. 94)—serves as an additional illustration of how even mundane objects can be taken up by advertising and transformed into “sign-objects.”

Another area of the book that I found both salient and cleverly presented was the authors’ discussion of new media use and the copyright controversies new media has caused. The struggle over copyright, which pits users of media against creators, in addition to involving “judicial and enforcement institutions” (p. 198), is treated as a distinctly *social* problem. Therefore, negotiating the line between the rights of the creator and those of the user is presented as *the* central tension of copyright in a new media world, which the authors argue necessitates careful consideration both legally and politically. The insight that users are often ignored in Canadian media coverage of copyright issues, since journalists tend to “frame stories on copyright according to their sources—courts, lawyers and media coverage” (p. 200), is also important. As such, I feel that further elaboration on the latter highly significant point would have been helpful.

Overall, in the classroom, and particularly for first- and second-year communication and sociology students, I am convinced that this text will provide an indispensable introduction to some of the key issues, themes, controversies, and thinkers in the realm of media studies. Moreover, by concretizing complex theory using global, national, and regional case studies, this text ensures that students of communication and sociology will obtain a deeper understanding of how theory works in practice. As well, the use of Canadian cases in particular will prove essential to educators in Canada, many of whom, in attempting to teach students complex theory, have had to use texts

that are too complex or lack grounded case studies, or whose examples are decidedly American or Euro-centric.

This much-needed focus on the Canadian context, using distinctly Canadian television shows and radio programs such as *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* and *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, which are then analyzed through the lens of a sociological approach to media studies, fills a gap in this field. However, I do think there are three distinct areas or subjects, plus a minor point of note, which if elaborated upon or unpacked further could have provided an additional layer of depth and insight to this text. It is important to note, however, the level of difficulty involved in writing an introductory text to a complex topic that attempts to include a representative array of thinkers and examples in an accessible way. As such, in texts like this, choices have to be made with respect to what is addressed and what is not. Keeping this in mind, I believe these three gaps do fall into the category of “important and relevant” with respect to the subjects of media and society.

First, I was struck by the fact that the majority of the case studies and examples drawn on, even with respect to newspapers, focus on Ontario and Québec (specifically Toronto and Montréal) and ignore both Western and Atlantic Canada to a large degree. While Western, Maritime, and Atlantic alienation and regionalism are discussed in the context of comedy as a way to address and unpack social problems, for example the relocation of *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, the book does not address how deep these fissures are or their connection to inadequate media representation.

As well, the text fails to consider the implications of the lack of media representation of Western and Atlantic issues and concerns, particularly with respect to national identity. The intersection of regionalism, multiculturalism, and economic difference in this context might also have contributed to the issues examined in this book. This might include work done by Ian McKay on the fluidity of regional identities in Canada, which he argues vary along the axes of province, region, and nation.

Second, while the authors take up the subject of gender in a variety of ways (e.g., through their introductory section titled “Undoing Gender Norms” (p. 25), in which gender norms are interrogated through the lens of poststructuralism; as a fundamental category of social life that simultaneously constitutes a pivotal “axis of exclusion” (p. 45); as a significant factor in the practice of advertising, particularly with respect to fashion, aesthetics, and agency; and through changes in how women’s roles have been depicted in the media—using the play *Mother Is Watching* as an example), I think that an even more thorough and focused discussion of feminist approaches to media studies would have contributed much to this text.

For example, discussion of issues of “positionality” as it relates to the need for media that articulates the experience of women from specific sociocultural locations would have been useful, as would examination of how gender intersects with differences in class, race, and ethnicity in various media environments. An interesting way to address these issues is by interrogating how the depiction of gendered spaces on television shows and in film has changed. A discussion of the depiction of migrant women in the Canadian media or the changing depiction of women’s bodies would have added another layer of depth to this text. In the same vein, a discussion of sexual

politics and queer identity (LGBTQ) as they relate to media would have also made a significant contribution to this book. This is particularly important since *Mediated Society*, as I understand its audience, will more than likely serve as the first introduction students get to these subjects, concepts, and themes.

While I acknowledge that the inclusion of such issues might have been difficult, since they might lead controversies outside the scope of the text, I feel that they are worth considering, as they constitute critical axes pertinent to several of the themes and theses of this book as well as to the fields of communication, sociology, and media.

Finally, turning to the comparatively minor point of concern mentioned above, I was surprised by the abrupt way in which the book ends. In opposition, at the end of each individual chapter, the authors present a short and concise summary, thoughtful enhanced-learning activities, further reading recommendations, and a list of media sources, which will prove helpful to both students and educators. However, at the end of the text there was no summary chapter or final thoughts to tie everything together. Rather, following a discussion of how immigration is taken up as a social problem in *The New York Times*, the book ends. It might have been useful to have a few pages summarizing the key findings of the book, areas of further concern, or even possible solutions to the problems, tensions, and controversies identified in the text.

In general, however, and taken as a whole, I am certain this text will provide an authoritative and engaging first introduction to sociology and communication studies for students. As such, I will certainly be using it in the near future.

Tina Sikka, Simon Fraser University

Mediated society: A critical sociology of media . Don Mills: Oxford University Press. Google Scholar. Jacobs, R. N. (2009). Culture, the public sphere, and media sociology: a search for a classical founder in the work of Robert Park. *The American Sociologist*, 40 (3), 149-166. Article Google Scholar. The production of culture perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 30 (1), 311-334. Article Google Scholar. Pooley, J., & Katz, E. (2008). Jackson, John D. Publication date. 2011. Topics. Mass media -- Social aspects -- Textbooks, Mass media -- Social aspects -- Canada -- Textbooks. Publisher. Don Mills, Ont. Associated-names. Nielsen, Greg M; Hsu, Yon, 1972-. Boxid. IA1231322. Camera. Sony Alpha-A6300 (Control). Collection\_set. trent. There are no reviews yet. Be the first one to write a review. 12 Previews. Purchase options. "[Mediated Society] will fill a huge gap in a field that has become dominated by humanities and journalistic perspectives. At a time in which there is a developing consensus that interdisciplinary communication studies needs to embrace social theory more seriously, it is likely to be welcomed by those in communication studies programs as well as those in sociology and other social science departments." - James Pettit, Marianopolis College. About the Author. Greg M. Nielsen is professor of sociology and director of the Centre for Broadcasting Studies at Concordia University in Montreal. Yon Hsu received her PhD in Communication studies from Concordia University in Montreal in 2003. *Mediated Society; A Critical Sociology of Media* examines how various forms of media influence individuals and society from a sociological perspective. From this unique standpoint the authors provide a fresh, sophisticated, in-depth analysis surrounding the role of media as it shapes social issues. The text discusses media and communication in urban, national, and global set *Mediated Society; A Critical Sociology of Media* examines how various forms of media influence individuals and society from a sociological perspective. From this unique standpoint the authors provide a fresh, sophisticated, in