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Rezensionen aus den Bereichen Kommunikation und Medien

Joshua D. Atkinson: *Alternative Media and Politics of Resistance*

Redaktion · Montag den 11. April 2011

Rezensiert von James F. Hamilton



Alternative media pose great challenges for scholars as well as for practitioners and activists. While their ubiquity and visibility encourage their use and study, their ambiguity causes no end of debate. This book seeks to address both their importance and their vagueness. Its contribution to an understanding of alternative media comes from placing the topic and phenomenon within the field of performance studies, thus encompassing either a technical and/or a media-effects emphasis within a much larger context of cultural practice. The book is divided into seven short chapters, the first two of which set up the later chapters. The first chapter reviews various authors and approaches, making the argument that is what is lacking in the literature is a more integrative view that synthesizes concepts of new social movements, networks, and alternative media. The second chapter proposes the author's attempt at doing this. It develops what the author calls a "Resistance Paradigm", which conceives of "activists, organizations and networks associated with new social movements as 'theaters' in which networked activists perform resistance for the gaze of outsiders, as well as for their compatriot activists" (37).

The later chapters explore discrete facets, or "quadrants" as the author calls them, of this paradigm. Different kinds of activists are categorized in terms of political view (radical vs. reformist) and in media engagement (participatory vs. lay) as radical-participatory, reformist-participatory, radical-lay, and reformist-lay. Actions of each in turn are set in relation to militant or "adjustive" communicative tactics. After developing and explaining these matrix of ideal types, the book uses it to explore different key themes in relation to alternative-media performance: interactivity, reformist quadrants, radical quadrants, and their embodiment in what the author calls "alternative media worlds". The book concludes by suggesting the relevance of the paradigm developed here and possible future directions for research.

Seeing alternative media not so much as a technology or a content, but as a performance suggests new dimensions of practice and avenues for research. In doing so, it seeks to distance the study of alternative media from claims about great technologies, great websites, or great individuals, while

emphasizing the intersubjectivity, constructedness, and interpretive basis of not only alternative media but resistance itself.

While used in the laudable attempt at achieving clarity and specificity, the elaborate set of categories, matrices and types that construct a Resistance Paradigm for the study of alternative media tends to be overly paradigmatic and functionalist. The analytic sharpness in the abstract understates fluidity, hybridity, innovation and regeneration of the very topic and practice, treating it instead as a fixed, stable and almost institutionalized phenomenon. Had the author consulted works such as Reed 2005, he would have found other perspectives which emphasize very similar points regarding performance, but that do so in more flexible ways. Its tendency toward rigidity is indicated when measuring it up with the recent emergence of user-generated content and social media.

Readers interested in new approaches to the study of alternative media will benefit by engaging this book. Yet, they'll be well served by delving even more deeply into relevant literatures and more flexible ways of explaining and exploring alternative media practice.

Literatur:

- Reed, T.V.: *The Art of Protest. Culture and Activism from the Civil Rights Movement to the Streets of Seattle*. Minneapolis [University of Minnesota Press] 2005.

Links:

- [Verlagsinformationen zum Buch](#)
- Webpräsenz von Joshua D. Atkinson am Media Research Hub des Social Science Research Council, USA
- Webpräsenz von James F. Hamilton an der University of Georgia, USA

Dieser Beitrag wurde publiziert am Montag den 11. April 2011 um 11:30
in der Kategorie: [Einzelrezension](#).
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