

protect their political and economic interests, from pulling ad expenditures to dictating editorials.

Although *Censorship Inc.* builds on many of the themes raised in Schiller's *Culture Inc.*, it is not on par as a theoretical work because Soley fails to link his arguments to a more radical critique of capitalism, or to the larger field of media scholarship. The numerous copy-editing errors are also distracting. However, this book still would make a good supplemental text in a broad range of mass communication courses and provides a good read for everyone else interested in media and democracy. *Censorship Inc.* is not just a history of corporate censorship but also a history of and guide for struggle. Soley points out that the state can be a site for affirming freedom of expression, such as the right won by workers in the late 19th century to criticize one's employer or organize a union. Struggles such as these are worth documenting and supporting.

#### References

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#### **Canon Texts in Media Research: Are There Any? Should There Be? How About These?**

Edited by Elihu Katz, John Durham Peters, Tamar Liebes, & Avril Orloff. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003. 280 pp. \$64.95 (hard), \$28.95 (soft).

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Elihu Katz and his coeditors acknowledge the perils of canonization on the very first page: “Even without the double ‘n’, canons are explosive.” When Katz floated the idea for this book at the 2000 ICA conference in Acapulco, colleagues grouched about capricious selection criteria, religious overtones, the deterrent to original thinking. Hadn't communication studies taken the canon-undermining side in the culture wars?

The editors concede all this, but maintain that scholars nevertheless collect around themselves a set of beautified texts. Delivered in Katz's trademark style—well-written irreverence—the editors' introduction amounts to a single rejoinder: Why not share these?

*Canon Texts* consists of 13 nomination essays (“How About These?”), written by an international team of scholars, many from Katz's Hebrew University. The only stipulations were that nominees for canonization exceed 50 years of age, and—for reasons unclear—that they be essays themselves. Both rules, though, were breached at least once, in part to accommodate the volume's unfortunate insistence on assigning each text to one of five “schools”: Columbia, Frankfurt, Chicago, Toronto, and “British Cultural Studies.”

For all the alarm in Acapulco over petrified texts and ancestor worship, the

irony is that the book's contributors are often sacrilegious about their canonic candidate. (Here's Eva Illouz on Leo Lowenthal's "The Triumph of Mass Idols": "Lowenthal was, in my opinion, wrong on most counts.") Indeed, most of the authors are too busy correcting the field's flawed memory of their nominee to make the case for its enduring virtues. The critics will search in vain for Harold Bloom-style hagiography.

The book's other, less felicitous irony is that it often ends up obscuring more than it reveals of the field's history, despite the contributors' insistently revisionist ambitions. For every dismantled strawman, a fresh injury to the field's past is inflicted.

This is too bad, because communication studies is in desperate need of a thorough rethinking of its history. Our field's story of its past is notably unreflective—built atop invented traditions and pleasing illusions. Self-conscious historical reflection, as opposed to textbook boilerplate, has been rare, and the history that *has* been written is often airbrushed and Whiggish, especially measured against the muscular historiography of the other social sciences. (What accounts for this historiographical poverty? My guess is that communication studies, jerrybuilt from professional schools and suffering from a legitimacy deficit, needs the glue that an origin myth provides—and not just selective memory: Forgetting, as Ernst Renan has famously observed about nations, is just as crucial for group cohesion.)

So the contributors' revisionist spirit—the aim to "clear away the underbrush of received wisdom," to quote one—is most welcome, but many of the essays merely substitute new errors for the old. Part of the problem, I think, derives from

the volume's schizophrenic mission, itself the product of a well-intentioned editorial freedom. Each contributor was invited to reflect on the purpose of a scholarly canon, with the result that the book advances as many definitions of "canon" as there are essays. This is all for the good—indeed, these reflections, taken collectively, are a convincing riposte to the Acapulco critics. As a result, though, the essays' mandate is left ambiguous. Are contributors responsible for placing their nominees in historical context? Or should they mine these texts for still-relevant nuggets of insight? As to the former question, most of the volume's authors answer with a tepid "yes," but take up the latter with especial zeal.

One of the volume's honorees, Robert K. Merton, famously distinguished between "history" and "systematics": put crudely, between a given field's actual, messy history and its trove of still-useful knowledge. The *Canonic Texts* contributors try to do both history *and* systematics, so that their professed revisionism competes with their agenda for the present field.

Tamar Liebes, in her write-up of Herta Herzog's "On Borrowed Experience," disputes the remembered genealogy of populist audience research, which accords Herzog's 1948 essay founding status. This is all wrong, argues Liebes: Herzog's study treats its female, soap opera-watching subjects with disdain; the bona fide audience populist, by contrast, strains to "bring out 'authentic' voices enriched by genuine experiences and folk wisdom." Here Liebes is surely right to correct our stubbornly mistaken memory of the Herzog essay, but this gain for history is more than offset by outright error and the more subtle distortions of presentism. Throughout, she

uses “gratifications research” as a proxy for audience research in general. Though it is true that the “uses and gratifications” tradition shares with much postmodern audience studies an emphasis on audience autonomy and freedom—hence James Curran’s apt label, “reheated pluralism,” for the latter—it is deeply misleading to conflate the two, with their wholly different theoretical underpinnings. Liebes, likewise, suggests that Herzog may “belong in the Frankfurt School” because she doesn’t treat the audience with sufficient respect. This, though, is silly: Horkheimer and Adorno, as an example, are not metonyms for the entire “critical” tradition of media scholarship—and disrespect for audiences, anyway, has nothing to do with “membership” in the complex, diverse, and misunderstood “Frankfurt School.” In Liebes’s hands, the history of media research is cast in triumphalist, dichotomous terms, with outdated adherents to “mass society” theory superceded by our own era’s enlightened reverence for the audience: “Given the chance to express themselves, Herzog’s interviewees were heard louder by posterity than Herzog herself.”

Illouz’s essay on Lowenthal is, on its own terms, brilliant: She has a rare sensitivity to the underlying, antinomian dynamics of our capitalist culture. But where’s Lowenthal? He’s used here mainly as an old-paradigm whipping boy with which to contrast her own upbeat, libertarian take on the freedoms generated by the market culture. Like Liebes, Illouz grossly oversimplifies the historical and ideological context of Lowenthal’s essay, preoccupied as she is with her cheerleading for the consumer culture. Like Liebes, she ends up relegating her subject to the dustbin of history: Lowenthal’s essay is a grumpy

lament for “nineteenth-century models of community ... a prophecy of doom.” Illouz doesn’t have time to distinguish between right-wing, antimodern elitism and the complex cultural politics of mid-century leftist critics like Lowenthal.

Don Handelman doesn’t so much distort as ignore. His essay on Donald Horton and Richard Wohl’s 1956 analysis of celebrity fandom, “Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction,” foregoes even a basic paraphrase in favor of a jargon-heavy argument for his own theory of the plural self. His passing references to the Horton and Wohl piece mischaracterize it as hostile to “para-social” interaction—they are, in fact, quite cheerful about the phenomenon—presumably to contrast with his own upbeat take.

Yosefa Loshitzky’s essay on Laura Mulvey’s 1975 “Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema” also neglects her ostensible subject, Mulvey’s essay—but Loshitzky’s write-up remains fascinating for the larger shift in film studies that it traces. Katz has observed that God gave film to the humanities and television to the social science—and it is striking how segregated communication and film studies are. Loshitzky details the rise and (partial) fall of psychoanalytic and, in particular, Lacanian theory in 1970s film studies in Britain and America, challenged in the 1980s by the importation of more contextualist cultural studies approaches.

Katz’s own contribution, with *Media Events* coauthor Daniel Dayan, is delightfully written and far more attentive to the text under scrutiny, Kurt and Gladys Lang’s “MacArthur Day in Chicago” study (1953). Again, though, the nominated text is framed in terms of present concerns: whether or not Katz and Dayan owe the Langs credit for developing the

“media events” concept *avant la lettre*. Their answer is, basically, “no,” and to justify this stance Katz and Dayan resort to classifying the Langs in terms eerily reminiscent of the influential but deeply misleading first chapter of Katz’s (and Paul Lazarsfeld’s) *Personal Influence* (1955): The Langs conceive of their audience as atomized and vulnerable, “the essence of mass society.” Setting aside whether or not the “mass society” label has ever fit any of its recipients, it is certainly unfair here: The Langs’s roots in, and obvious sympathy for, the much more complex Chicago collective behavior tradition are, with that label, largely occluded.

Paddy Scannel, of all the authors, is most determined to furnish context for his canonic candidate, Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” For the most part, he follows through deftly, particularly as to the defining conflict between Benjamin’s two friends, Brecht and Adorno. He seems, however, to entirely miss Benjamin’s plaintive tone—his genuine nostalgia for the lost “aura” that, yes, also opens the door to a “politicization of art.”

Three essays stand out: Peter Simonson and Gabriel Weimann’s rescue of Lazarsfeld and Merton’s “Mass Communication, Popular Taste, and Organized Social Action”; John Durham Peters’s close read of Adorno and Horkheimer’s “The Culture Industry”; and Menahem Blondheim’s bold rereading of Harold Innis’s “Bias of Communication.”

Simonson and Weimann set out to rehabilitate Lazarsfeld—to dispute the field’s lopsided memory of “administrative research” and “the dominant paradigm.” The authors acknowledge that Lazarsfeld himself is partly to blame: His

own misleading accounts in the 1950s projected the Bureau’s “limited effects” conclusions back onto its earlier, 1940s research; later critics like Todd Gitlin accepted this warped self-description. Texts like the 1948 Lazarsfeld/Merton collaboration, though, give the lie to the received memory: This cited-but-rarely-read essay is not only full of evergreen insight but also reads—and here’s the revisionist twist—like a left-wing critique of “capitalist hegemony.” It turns out that much 1940s media scholarship has been unfairly maligned, so Gitlin and other leftist critics are guilty of fratricide. The decade nurtured creative and ecumenical work, before succumbing to the rigidities of 1950s research norms.

Simonson and Weimann supply a much-needed corrective to an enduring caricature. If anything, they are too preoccupied with salvaging Lazarsfeld’s reputation, and as a result downplay the Merton wildcard: The elegant writing, the bits that sound Marxist, the learned tone—all this is almost certainly Merton’s. Admitting as much undercuts the paper’s thesis—that Lazarsfeld was a closet member of the Frankfurt School. The authors are so intent on establishing Lazarsfeld’s leftist credentials that they force genuinely critical passages (“narcotizing dysfunction”) into ill-fitting Marxist language (“capitalist hegemony”).

If Simonson and Weimann pull Lazarsfeld left, Peters pushes Adorno and Horkheimer right. Peters’s detailed exegesis of the “culture industry” essay succeeds in cutting through their notoriously treacherous prose style. Few communication scholars could place the Frankfurt scholars in appropriate context; Peters’s rare, broad-based intellectual literacy means that the exiles’ scabrous take on culture is here cast in

terms of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'s radical critique of instrumental reason. Peters wants to tweak their reputation for "hotel grand abyss" pessimism, and by extension their status as default villain to populist audience researchers. In this he overplays their optimism, I think, and certainly exaggerates (in a common misperception) their importance to "critical media studies," since both the British and American political economy traditions, as well as British cultural studies, emerged almost entirely independent of the Frankfurt School.

The best essay in the collection, by far, is Blondheim's nuanced, Talmudic take on Harold Innis. Richly footnoted and unrelentingly intelligent, his is probably the finest short commentary on Innis around. One overlooked criterion of canonization, Blondheim observes, is "hermeneutic liberty": Those texts that are especially *open* lend themselves to the interpretive plasticity that sustains a secondary literature. Innis, of course, is anything if not readerly, and famously prone to self-contradiction. Blondheim dismisses the prevailing explanations, and offers up instead a novel take on Innis's incoherency problem that he labels "inverted determinism." Blondheim cuts through the "watered down synthesis" that we all absorbed from textbook capsules, with startling, masterful readings of Innis's work. And he situates these readings in an unusually thick account of his intellectual context.

*Canonic Texts in Media Research* works because it doesn't treat its nominees as canonic. Perhaps giants did roam the earth once, but we have only begun to trace their footsteps.