

# MEDIÁLNÍ STUDIA

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## APPLIED MEDIA STUDIES

DARREN INGRAM

Ostherr, K. (Ed.) (2018). *Applied Media Studies*. Routledge.

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‘What are media studies?’, Currently, it is a question that lacks a simple answer. Unlike today, the media was once comprised of stratified organisations with established production, defined by output or medium. With the digital media revolution, media have rapidly become multidisciplinary, boundaries between theory and practice dissolved, with low barriers to entry where creativity can take a central role.

The study of media has followed suit and has been flourishing due to its ever-broader disciplinary impact. Media scholars are inventing new ways of media research and teaching to benefit from new opportunities and challenges that emerge especially with practical applied media projects. Just as some media companies have failed to keep up with changes, the same can be said about some educators. Editor Kirsten Ostherr, professor of English at Rice University in Houston, USA, firmly believes that the media studies field will transform or expand from primarily an analytical and research-focused discipline to a more relational field with an active role that can ‘intervene in the practices of media production and consumption that characterize our always-on, always-connected, screen-oriented lives’ (p. 3). This will be achieved, Ostherr says, through the ‘collaboration and translation across

diverse modes of practice and fields of expertise [...requiring] inventing new strategies for conducting research, for presenting scholarly work, and for engaging with stakeholders beyond the academy.’ (ibid.) This is how applied media studies are born and defined.

What it means to do applied media studies can be quite challenging to describe. It cannot be easily categorized, being rather a collection of different values, experiences and beliefs connected to the idea of practical media studies, revolving around several important concepts, and characterized by participant self-reflection, anecdote, and expertise. In the book, a range of media-active academics, educators and content creators – Anne Balsamo, Heidi Rae Cooley, Jason Farman, Lindsay Graham, Daniel Grinberg, Eric Hoyt, Elizabeth Losh, Tara McPherson, Lindsay Palmer, Lisa Parks, Bo Reimer, and Patrick Vonderau – discuss both individually and collectively, at times anecdotally yet always with expertise, common themes. These practitioners are at the metaphorical coalface of the academic sphere, working and seeking to bridge the gap between academia and the real world, charged with educating future media professionals and learning from today’s media practices, without any clear roadmap that would guide them.

This is not a typical edited book. Some of the chapters are individually authored, while others are a collective work with responses prompted by a series of questions based on themes. Ostherr justifies the cooperative approach as it ‘gathers the expertise gained through the contributors’ experience in hands-on,

collaborative media projects in order to preserve and share that knowledge and construct a foundation for future applied and theoretical work in this field,' (p. 15) noting that 'the work of doing applied media studies is inherently collaborative, and the writing [of the book] reflects that quality through an approach to scholarly writing that de-emphasizes the single-authored monograph.' (ibid.) This is a reasonable argument, but the results would have been even more potent if these individual voices had been more balanced and given a more focused platform to get their message out unimpeded.

There are seventeen chapters split between seven parts of the book that argue for, advocate and demonstrate the applied media studies concept. The introduction explains the authors' thoughts and direction, followed by a multi-faceted consideration of how applied media studies and digital humanities help to contextualise the findings of media research. This leads to a consideration of the foundations and challenges of applied media studies, as well as their translation for and intervention within the real-world, i.e. their societal applications. The book is then rounded off with a discussion of necessary infrastructure and support, before the authors come up with final concluding thoughts.

There are several notable and recurring themes, including 'the unpredictability of developing and integrating new forms of creative praxis into scholarly work, and the need to move outside of the physical spaces of the university' that provide 'intangible but meaningful benefits they gain from making their

work "useful" to others, sometimes in unforeseeable ways, especially as participants from a broader public become involved.' (pp. 81-82) This is worthy, but as I will argue, it seems that the book slightly suffers from some of the same challenges it notes exist within the discipline-at-large.

One of the critical themes, despite only being represented by three chapters, is translation -- 'the core challenges of collaborating across academic divisions such as humanities and science, bridging academic and community practices, and translating between the diverse stakeholders involved in these projects' (p. 129). Making use of research in a real-world situation is highly valuable: research data can contribute to the ongoing improvement of media practice and further development of the industry. Within this broad topic, the contributors consider interdisciplinary collaboration, translating when necessary 'between fields with radically different training, terminology, and theories of knowledge' while developing a shared vocabulary, motivation and even goal (p. 129). For me, these shared views were perhaps the most relevant and inspirational, such as Bo Reimer's discussion of being part of creating an engaged, multidisciplinary-focussed School of Arts and Communication at Malmö University (p. 135), or Lisa Parks valuing and appreciating the miscommunication and knowledge gaps that come from working across fields (p. 136).

This dovetails perfectly with the intervention theme: 'the complex, sometimes unintended—but also potentially very rewarding—consequences of

intervening into practices that are more commonly studied from a distance, and the political and ethical implications of this work.' (p. 181) The provided case studies look at the role and impact media scholars may have and how entirely unexpected results can occur with lessons to be learned and roadblocks routed around. As the contributors noted, emphasizing the great impact and insights that applied research can bring about despite its risks and challenges (p. 182), media researchers may experience limited public exposure, so such real-world interactions are valuable in yet another sense.

Where there is no business-first imperative and funding, how are these academic-led research projects supported? The authors consider the so-called infrastructure, which is interesting in itself, but may have less direct interest to the broader public. But the intricate positioning of the research, its implication and dissimilarities to traditional applied science is thought-provoking and may give a more general hint of future changes within society that need to be addressed (p. 219). The case study by Eric Hoyt concerning developing digital projects and their trials and tribulations (pp. 238-250) could, for those lacking an IT operations background, give a good, jargon-free look at this digital environment. Readers can appreciate that 'plain sailing' is not a phrase frequently used within the text.

You can sense the contributors' interest in and excitement by the potential that may lie within reach for many media researchers and educators as they describe how and why they started

doing applied media studies. Such as Bo Reimer stating 'I do this kind of work because I believe it can aid in transforming situations and places. It is a kind of work which can have an immediate impact on a surrounding society. Thus, the interventionist part of applied media studies, as we do it, is crucial.' (p. 84), or Lisa Parks saying 'my favourite part of doing applied media studies is engaging with and learning from people and communities beyond academic contexts and re-thinking media technologies and materialities from diverse perspectives. The biggest headache is trying to communicate across academic disciplines in collaborative projects.' (p. 82) Considering the raw emotion and comments from the contributors particularly helps engage, contextualise and inspire, as well as helping identify some of the perceived problems or issues that occur, meaning that you are not necessarily alone or doing things incorrectly.

There were a couple of weaknesses, which were perhaps magnified by the strengths of the book. The collaborative chapters based around responses to guiding questions employed an exciting approach, giving a plurality of views and groundings that are valuable. On the other hand, they did seem somewhat isolated and disjointed in places, as some responses are either very short or non-existent, making it difficult to form a total impression of a respondent and then view their responses in context. It would have been good to have had each question listed as a sub-section in the table of contents, allowing the reader to drill for a given perspective within a theme.

The conclusion seems to be a bit of a repository for ‘everything else’, rather than a restatement of the subject under discussion, functioning as a container for ‘annotated compilation, gathering the contributors’ favourite resources for helping them, their colleagues, and their students do applied media studies work’, along with other ancillary questions and recommendations (p. 253). The discussions around future research areas are highly relevant: the authors propose to study phenomena such as cultural memory, preservation, large-scale collaboration, and archival reuse. The short but powerful section could (and should) inspire future projects.

In many ways, I think that this book could be particularly of interest for the ‘do-ers’ out there, rather than just critical ‘thinkers’. But how to attract the former group to the book may be a challenge, since it might not be their typical cup of tea.

## DIVAČKAMI DALLASU: POTĚŠENÍ Z TRAGICKÉ STRUKTURY POCITU

IVETA JANSOVÁ

Ang, I. (2019). *Divákem Dallasu: Soap opera a melodramatická imaginace*. Praha: Akropolis. ISBN 978-80-7470-228-0, 192 stran

Nedlouho po českém vydání jednoho ze základních textů ke conceptualizaci populární kultury *Jak rozumět populární*

*kultuře* Johna Fiska vyšel v edici #POPs nakladatelství Akropolis překlad další z významných knih, jež společně přispěly k pozvolné proměně prizmatu výzkumů publika v osmdesátých a devadesátých letech dvacátého století. Jedná se o knihu nizozemské badatelky Ien Ang *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* v českém překladu Lucie Kořínkové *Divákem Dallasu: Soap opera a melodramatická imaginace*. Můžeme se pouze dohadovat, proč byl zvolen maskulinní tvar „divákem Dallasu“, nikoli vzhledem k obsahu knihy logičtější „divačkou Dallasu“ nebo neutrální „sledování Dallasu“, tedy doslovný překlad anglické verze.

Hned z počátku je nutno podotknout, že český překlad je přesto zdařilý a precizní. Text byl původně vydán v Nizozemsku v roce 1982, z nizozemštiny do anglického jazyka byl přeložen v roce 1985. Právě z anglické verze textu vychází český překlad. Jak (anglický) název knihy napovídá, Ien Ang v ní refletovala výzkum nizozemských divaček a diváků americké soap opery Dallas; svým výzkumem tak reagovala na bezprecedentní a mezinárodní popularitu pořadu, který byl v té době přijímán ambivalentně. Přestože byla jeho popularita, manifestovaná zejména vysokou sledovaností v různých národních kontextech, nepopíratelná, kritická a akademická obec vnímaly pořad zejména jako symbol amerického masověkulturního konzumerismu, nezadržitelně se šířícího do celého světa. Hovořili-li se o masové kultuře, implicitně se předpokládá existence masového publika, o němž se v době realizace výzkumu předpokládalo, že je pasivní a málo