Book Reviews

Livingstone, S. (2002). Young people and new media. Childhood and the changing media environment. London: Sage. ISBN 0-7619-6467-3 (277 pp.)

This book reports on the *Young People and New Media Project* (YPNM), which was initiated in the United Kingdom in the mid 1990s. A research team at the London School of Economics was invited to conduct a wide-ranging empirical project aimed at exploring the place of new forms of media in the lives of young people, aged 6–17. The general idea behind this project – originally titled *Children, young people and the changing media environment* – was to update the Himmelweit, Oppenheim and Vince's (1958) study of the introduction of television into British families some forty years earlier. More specifically, the *Young people and new media project* (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999) had the following objectives:

- to chart current access and use for new media at home (and, in less detail, at school),
- to provide a comprehensive account of domestic leisure and media activities,
- to understand the meaning of the changing media environment for children and parents,
- to map access to and uses of media in relation to social inequalities and social exclusion,
- to provide a baseline for media use against which to measure future changes. (252)

The YPNM project resulted in a shared effort of communication researchers from Israel and 12 European countries (i. e., Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom; cf. Livingstone and Bovill, 2001). These participating countries each administered a parallel study in their own countries. This cross-sectional study adopted a (cross-national) comparative approach, thus enabling the researchers to compare media, children, households, cultures and time. This was regarded as an essential element in the complement studies of particular media, used by particular (sub)groups stemming from different cultures. The national studies also relied on a common conceptual framework and methodology, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research

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methods. The quantitative method included a number of large-scale surveys, involving some 15,000 children and young people, aged 6 to 16.

The British YPNM project, where the empirical fieldwork was carried out in 1997 and 1998, was divided in three research phases:

(1) preparatory phase (including a variety of pilot interviews with children in families and school, and surveys of parents and children using the broadcasting industry's Television Opinion Panel),
(2) qualitative phase (including group interviews in 13 schools, totaling some 160 children; individual interviews with children; interviews with their parents in 32 families; interviews of Heads of IT teaching in 13 schools; and a booster sample of internet users for qualitative interviews),
(3) quantitative phase (including first of all, a detailed survey questionnaire administered by the British Market Research [BMRB] in a face-to-face, in-home interview of a national 'random location' quota sample of n = 1303 young people aged 6−17 years across the UK. Secondly, this phase included a detailed self-completion questionnaire for the parents [achieved sample size n = 987] of the young people surveyed, and thirdly, a time budget diary for one week from 334 of the young people in the survey, aged 9−10, 12−13 and 15−16).

Sonia Livingstone, Professor of Social Psychology and member of the interdepartmental program in media and communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science, was director and − apparently − *spiritus rector* of the *Himmelweit Revisited Study.* In her present book she draws primarily on the British part of the project. However, her book is more than a mere descriptive report on this part of an empirical research project, which in fact was first reported on in 1999 (cf. Livingstone and Bovill, 1999). That is why earlier versions and earlier interpretations of the material published in the present book can also be found elsewhere (e. g., Livingstone, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000; Livingstone and Bovill, 2001). Here, the author takes a somewhat different approach, as she introduces the research philosophy and the conceptual framework of the project in a detailed manner, thus developing some of the prerequisites needed for a more grounded and general interpretation of the empirical data and the research evidence of this project.

In Chapter 1, *Childhood, youth and the changing media environment* she sketches the development of the research perspective for the project. According to Livingstone, the YPNM project's perspective was meant to "… go beyond the child-centred and media-centred approaches" (16), as the first is assumed to be too idealistic and the latter is assumed to suffer not only from technological determinism but also from a tendency "… to neglect the social contexts of use for media, including the ways

in which media use is contextualized in relation to other media" (15). Livingstone therefore chooses for a different starting point for researching young people's use of new media by introducing "… the broad conceptual framework of late modernity as a means of holding together the child-centred and media-centred approaches so as to benefit from the strength of each while overcoming their limitations …" (17). Although this notion may remain somewhat unclear to the reader, the main perspective on children, i. e., the YPNM project's main view of its subjects is clear: "rather than … objects of media effects, (children)... are instead seen as actors in the household and community, co-constructors of the meanings and practices of their everyday lives" (25). Equally lucid is the design of the research project as a whole. Livingstone characterizes the design in the following way: "… the project matched the theoretical commitment to contextualization with a commitment to a multi-method design triangulating qualitative and quantitative data sources" (25).

In Chapter 2, *The diffusion and appropriation of new media,* the diffusion of diverse media into the households of the UK is mapped and the media-equipment of British children's bedrooms is described and discussed. The diffusion of domestic media in Britain (such as Telephone, TV, VCR, CD and PC), in the 1964−1996 period, followed the typical, S-shaped diffusion curves Rogers used in his diffusion-of-innovation studies. The process of ICT diffusion in Britain is not only characterized by individual predispositions, such as Rogers' 'innovators', 'early adopters', and so forth, may have, but also by socio-economic status and social class membership: "Social class strongly affects media in the home" (38). The same holds true for the distribution of media in the bedrooms of the 6−17 year olds: "Social inequalities in access to ICT are very evident. Children from middle-class families are much more likely than those from working-class backgrounds to have access to the computer (seven in ten compared with only four in ten), twice as likely to have a multimedia computer at home, and seven times as likely to have the Internet at home" (38). The household income turns out to be of crucial importance for the distribution of media in British children's direct environment, whereas children's age and/or gender make much less difference to media provision and access. Since the relation between ownership, access and use of the media is far from obvious, i. e., not all children do use all the available media in a similar, time-consuming manner, it is sensible to empirically explore match (and mismatch) between access and use. This has been done, delivering some expected (television, music media and computer games are popular, newspapers, magazines and books are not) and some unexpected findings as well: " … it is particularly for the new media (computer and Internet) that access underdetermines use, with these being both the media relatively underused

when available and also those most sought out at friends' or relatives' houses when desired but unavailable at home" (59). From the empirical data gathered it becomes apparent how different media appeal to different children, and how children and young people actively select from the set of available media in order to construct their own 'media menus'. Most of the UK-data presented in Chapter 2 are discussed only in the UK context, while a few are discussed in comparison to data from the US and/or some of the participating European countries.

Having thus set the stage for a contemporary account of children's meanings and contexts of media use within their daily lives in the first two chapters, Livingstone further pursues this 'contextualization' in the chapters 3−5. Here, three key terms of context are used to discuss young people's media use: leisure (cf. Chapter 3: *Media, leisure and lifestyle*), home (cf. Chapter 4: *The media-rich home: balancing public and private lives*), and family (cf. Chapter 5: *Living together separately: the family context of media use*). Due to the underlying processes of social change in late modernity, all of these contexts have changed considerably in the past fifty years. Leisure has become individualized, the privatization of everyday life has become common, even within the home, and within the family the democratization of cross-generational relationships arose. Chapter 6 (*Changing media, changing literacies*) is devoted to tracing some of the consequences that the changes in these contexts have on young people's media use.

Livingstone has undoubtedly written an inspiring book about an ambitious European communication research project, delivering new and stimulating fresh insights into how young people manage to deal with 'new' (and 'old') media. The book's aims, as well as the project's objectives, have been met in regard to the UK, especially insofar as new, relevant questions for further debates and research projects were developed. Some of the questions that this project raises are: what are we losing as we rush towards an 'information society'? How is (media) literacy changing and what critical skills should be taught? From what, exactly, do children need to be protected? However, and this is not withstanding the merits of the present book, one of the probably central findings of this study on *Young people and new media* published 2002 reads as follows: "Despite all the hype about new media displacing old media, for most children *television* remains far and away the most popular medium …" (60). Unfortunately, Himmelweit et al. cannot comment on this finding.

References

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Cottle, S. (2003). *Media Organization and Production*. London: Sage. ISBN 0-7619-7494-6 (203 pp.)

The aim of this book, as part of the *Media in Focus* series edited by Simon Cottle, is to provide an understanding of today's media. The volume sets out to achieve this aim by studying media organization and production as a middle ground between the fields of political economy which relies on the media as industries only, and cultural studies, focusing on media texts primarily.

The scope of the book's five chapters − each chapter comprises on average two articles − is certainly broad in that its exercise of 'mapping the field' includes transnational corporations such as AOL-Time Warner, CNN, Disney, Sony and Bertelsmann, media giants whose commercial operations traverse the globe (e. g., Robert McChesney's contribution on corporate media and global capitalism). It also examines alternative forms of media production which, out of political hunger or commercial aversion, want to make a difference in civil society (e. g., Chris Atton's article on organization and production in alternative media).

The four articles in Part 2 and 3 approach media organization and production from a business perspective, since media industries are sites of investment and sources of employment. But at the same time they are different, or as stated by the editor in the introduction: "Media industries