

Book Reviews

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Mads Møller T. Andersen

Researching Creativity in Media Industries

LEXINGTON BOOKS, 2022, 109 PP.

What specific meanings do we attach to “creative” and “creativity”, two terms that have been both “abused and over-used”, according to Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011: 2)? Additionally, what is the value of focusing on these contested terms, and can creativity as a phenomenon be untangled from specific media production contexts? In *Researching Creativity in Media Industries*, Mads Møller T. Andersen tackles such questions, and in doing so, both demystifies and operationalises the term “creativity” for media industry research. Throughout the book, he casts light on creativity from multiple disciplinary angles, each of which brings a different component of the phenomenon into view. As such, the book is a cross-disciplinary pursuit which places creativity research firmly at the intersection between the humanities and social sciences. The core argument is that we need to bridge disparate strands of research to advance our understanding of creativity in specific media contexts.

While a significant body of media industry research engages with creative processes, creative labour, and the creative industries more broadly, explicit definitions of “creativity” and “creative” in such studies are few and far between. As Andersen notes in the introduction, this definitional haziness sometimes indicates that researchers rely on an “everyday definition” of creativity, often regarding it as “someone or something influenced by a positive (and somewhat mysterious) force when creating something” (p. 1). This tendency is especially prevalent in the Global West, which has historically viewed creativity through

a lens shaped by two myths: “(A) An *inspirationist* myth where an external force gives the individual divine inspiration and (B) a *romantic* myth where an internal force subconsciously gives the talented genius the inexplicable talent from within” (p. 10). The book presents a compelling case for why researchers need to challenge such everyday myths, assumptions, and misconceptions about the mechanics of creativity.

To this end, Andersen stitches together a conceptual framework that comprises five main traditions: individualistic, sociocultural, pragmatic, social constructivist, and artistic. Chapter 2 is dedicated to an overview of this five-part framework, which provides an excellent starting point for students or researchers who are new to the study of creativity in media industries. This categorisation leans on the work of R. Keith Sawyer (2012), but Andersen’s approach differs in the way it encourages researchers to mix and match ideas across the five traditions. As the chapter lays out, research within each of these categories is united by distinct analytical motivations and (sometimes implicit) understandings of creativity: The individualist tradition has been especially popular in psychology where researchers have sought to map and quantify the cognitive abilities, talents, and personality traits of exceptionally gifted individuals. While the sociocultural tradition also recognises the importance of individuals, its scope is much broader. Here, Andersen highlights the work of psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1988) whose “Systems Model of Creativity” conceptualises creativity as the interaction between an individual creator, a domain, and a field. Andersen details how this context-oriented approach has aided the study of media industries, but he also argues that it fails to recognise the importance of the final product arising from a specific creative process. The pragmatic tradition, on the other hand, emphasises both group processes, tools, and products, and Andersen points out how some scholars within this group accentuate the value of constraints in creative processes. However, because it zeroes in on collaboration, this approach tends to overlook the experiences and perspectives of individuals.

In other words, striking the right balance between a focus on individuals and contextual factors is a difficult task for researchers studying creativity in media industries. The emphasis on context is taken to an extreme in the social constructivist tradition. Scholars in this group regard creativity as a social construct that acquires a wide array of meanings, ultimately suggesting that we cannot pin down creativity as a distinct “entity” or phenomenon. Andersen frames this tradition as an invitation to explore participants’ narratives and perceptions of creativity.

Throughout the book, Andersen critiques all five traditions and identifies their strengths and limitations. This is especially the case in his discussion of the artistic tradition, where Andersen highlights empirical studies carried out by Angela McRobbie, Mark Banks, and David Hesmondhalgh. These and other scholars have examined the ways creative labour is fraught with precarious short-term contracts, poor working conditions, and little (or no) pay. They also consider how these characteristics map onto a broader policy agenda designed to instrumentalise and capitalise on “creative industries”, particularly in a British

context. While Andersen recognises the value of exposing the volatile features of creative labour, he also takes issue with the way this research disregards the importance of defining creativity as a phenomenon and how to go about studying it. He puts it the following way:

Since the works here rarely discuss how we should study or define creativity, we must assume that they generally use the everyday definition of the concept as someone influenced by a positive force when creating something. This is why they often still maintain the romantic and naïve notion that creativity should just be “set free,” which is in direct opposition to the insights from the pragmatic tradition about, for example, self-imposing constraints to further a creative process. (p. 26)

Andersen points out how scholars in this field sometimes fail to address exactly how *they* understand creativity. However, it is worth mentioning that many studies within this cluster recognise the plastic meanings of words like “creative” and “creativity”, especially as these terms have been hijacked by neoliberal politicians. I would argue that these studies also take an explicit interest in *workers’* understandings of creativity, which often intertwine with what Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) call “good work” and “bad work”. That being said, Andersen makes a convincing argument for why researchers need to define and demarcate creativity as a concept, especially because of its widespread everyday use. As such, Andersen’s insistence on definitional clarity throughout all chapters remains a key strength and contribution to media industry studies.

At the same time, Andersen usefully identifies the connections between “creativity” and adjacent concepts used in media industry studies and the subfield production studies. These include authorship, autonomy, “nobody knows” (and Andersen’s related term “nobody dares”), idea development, and gatekeeping. Andersen makes the case that creativity theory can boost the study of these related concepts, once again underlining the appeal of a cross-disciplinary approach.

With this theoretical overview in place, the remainder of the book proceeds with more “hands-on” methods chapters that consider what a production study may look like in practice, including a detailed case example in Chapter 7. Andersen also covers the challenges that can occur when examining creativity, as well as specific research designs that correspond to the five traditions outlined in Chapter 2. Andersen consistently stresses the value of an eclectic methodological approach to studying creativity and encourages readers to make use of all five traditions. One thing that would be interesting to explore in future research is the potential tensions that arise from combining traditions that differ in whether they consider creativity as something that can be separated from their social context. What are the limitations of fusing tools from the individualistic tradition with, say, ideas that fall in the social constructivist category? If there are any such issues, how can researchers mitigate them? Andersen hints at potential frictions throughout the book, but it would be interesting to spell out more explicitly what this fusion entails in practice.

In these chapters, Andersen addresses the reader directly, prompting them to read through his suggestions with a specific project in mind. Parts of these chapters are presented in the form of a practical toolkit, such as when Andersen offers a list of “*helpful questions* that you can use as a possible inspiration when you design your study” (p. 73). This pedagogical tactic makes production studies and creativity theory accessible to students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, which constitutes another important contribution of this book. In many ways, the book offers an incredibly useful toolkit for students and researchers wanting to examine creativity on a theoretical, methodological, and practical level. It also makes a compelling case for why we need a cross-disciplinary approach to decode the complexities of creativity as it plays out in different media industries.

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Göran Bolin & Per Ståhlberg

Managing Meaning in Ukraine: Information, Communication, and Narration Since the Euromaidan Revolution

MIT PRESS, 2023, 184 PP.

In their book *Managing Meaning in Ukraine: Information, Communication, and Narration Since the Euromaidan Revolution*, Göran Bolin and Per Ståhlberg from Södertörn University in Sweden have selected Ukraine as the focal point of their specific communicative analysis. The centre of the study is the exploration of the meanings that have influenced Ukraine's information policies and public communications strategies in recent years. Bolin and Ståhlberg examine various actors, including ordinary individuals, media and celebrities, business groups, the government, and others involved in shaping public narratives, and they delve into the power struggles that have emerged among these entities due to diverse intensions, methods, cultures, and value traditions.

The “communicatively anthropological” approach applied here adds a particularly intriguing dimension and is captivating due to the focused attention and examination of political and communicative details of the analysed context. The approach sheds light on specific situations, including those of the most detrimental nature, such as the Russian invasion and war, that have emerged in the most recent political history of the state of Ukraine.

As the authors argue, within such a socially and geopolitically dynamic setting, the convergence of political tensions, commercial dynamics, and new communication technologies gives rise to novel forms of social thinking, feeling, and information management. The selected stylistic strategy of writing empowers the authors to develop conceptual clarity, as evident in varied clarifications linked to concepts of propaganda, soft power, public diplomacy, and related terminologies, contingent on the communicator's intentionality. This strategy also aids the reader in identifying the necessary linguistic and epistemic nuances.

The book eloquently connects a significant number of thematic strands or trends, weaving them together to construct a structurally cohesive line of communication analysis. This is a remarkable achievement by the authors, considering that the object of their study – information policies of Ukraine – is inherently complex and dynamic, and also a “wicked” topic. Three of the thematic threads deserve closer attention, specifically the aspects of human-centredness, cultural and contextual sensitivity, and temporal landmarks.

The first thematic thread is linked to human agency. As argued, stories and narrations essentially serve as a binding communicative structure that ties individuals and communities together. To comprehend such connectivity and dynamics of the narration process, it is crucial to explore how stories develop, who the core narrators are, and how they formulate their messages. Briefly, communication and especially the words applied in narrations reflect how citizens think both about society and themselves as part of society. Thus, delving

into human-centred matters – including their intensions and motivations – is particularly intriguing and, in many ways, eye-opening, as it reveals hopes, worries, and tensions.

Furthermore, the management of meaning is an activity carried out by agents using media technologies to construct narratives, discourses, and images within the frameworks of different communicative forms. Hence, intentionality must come into the forefront of analysis as a crucially significant feature when discussing the formation of meanings. It varies among different agents, who might have similar yet slightly different motives for their communication efforts. These various motives and associated meanings are then negotiated in the texts that result from these efforts, similar to how the meaning is negotiated in the reception process.

The thematic thread of sensitivity to contextual and cultural details is another asset of the book. The way in which people approach life and make choices is essentially shaped by their “culture” – their intentions rooted in values and traditions. Treated in such a manner, culture provides the background from which people or groups of people construct strategies of action. Although a broad and abstract concept, societal culture is closely related to specificities of national context, encompassing both material and immaterial aspects of the surrounding reality (Carey, 1989). All of these cultural and contextual nuances of the surrounding context are implicitly embedded in the style of language, rooted in historic detail, and deeply engrained in local traditions. Delving into cultural analysis can be a refreshing moment for the design of communicative messages, and policies as well.

Lastly, given the many ongoing societal changes in Europe, the book offers insightful readings that contribute to advancing communication analyses as well as transitology studies. The authors consider the timing of events as a significant factor determining the content of actions. In today’s Europe, all democratic nations are facing disruptions and challenges that encompass both local and global dimensions in the way of life. In such a climate of growing uncertainty, digitalisation also is seen as a catalyst for various transformations. These transformations put yet another stress on structural and epistemic changes in information production and processing of meanings. So, the third thematic thread is associated with the particularities of time. Hence, the *longue durée* approach, emblematic in this analysis, places specific credit on the categories of time and space. These aspects are crucial in identifying “chasms”, representing outstanding periods in time and offering emblematic opportunities for change, both for individuals and the state.

In essence, understanding complex phenomena as in this case – focusing on the exploration of information strategies in turbulent times – demands the application of combined approaches. As illustrated in this book, the “communicative anthropological” analysis proves highly empowering. The multidimensional sensitivity, rooted in awareness of individual, cultural, and temporal features, forms a lens that enables perceptive and profound insights into the lives and needs of people. Indeed, both culture and context influence action not by providing

the ultimate values toward which action is oriented, but by shaping a repertoire or “tool kit” of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct their communicative intentions and “strategies of action”.

Following Ann Swidler (1986), two kinds of contextual influence and cultural impact must be considered: that of settled and that of unsettled periods. During stable social periods, “culture” independently influences action, but only by providing resources from which people can construct diverse lines of intentionality and behaviour. Likewise, in an unsettled period, which is emblematic in accelerated developments of events, speedy transformations, and a heightened sense of uncertainty, explicit ideologies – such as strategic communications and propaganda – tend to be mobilised to directly govern action. This dual perspective on culture provides yet another powerful method for analysing social sensitivities and modes of action in particular political and historic conditions. Some of these feelings are discerned in the story narrated in this book.

All in all, the central message of the book is that in highly uncertain social environments and communication conditions, where different actors and interests compete for attention, not only are the forms of meaning-making and public participation transformed, but the process of informed opinion-making is also challenged, resulting in a transformation of the systems of belief.

By taking the example of Ukraine, Bolin and Ståhlberg have succeeded in exploring how these structures of meaning-making are mobilised to build mutual understanding and trust, highlighting how these can be used to foster public engagement and collaboration in the development of societal resilience. The book proposes that an approach of communications management and collaborative partnerships between different stakeholders – policymakers, journalists, researchers, educators – must be further explored to foster social change through epistemic agency and resilience capacity development.

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