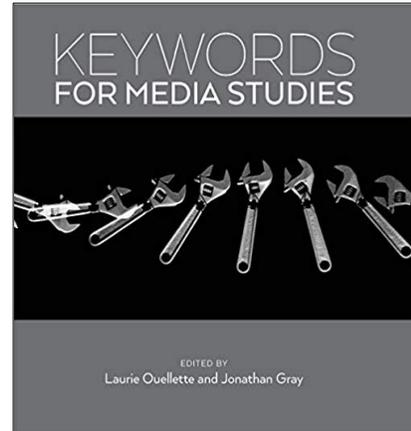


Laurie Ouellette and Jonathan Gray (Eds.), *Keywords for Media Studies*, New York, NY: New York University Press, 2017, 229 pp., \$27.00 (paperback), \$89.00 (hardcover).

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What is the discipline of media studies? This is a common question that many students and emerging scholars encounter when they first step into the multitude of works done within the field; it is also a tough question, because media studies has evolved to cover theories and topics originating in so many distinct disciplines, ranging from communication theory to film theory, queer theory, gender studies, ethnography, sociology, technology history, and so on. In *Keywords for Media Studies*, editors Laurie Ouellette and Jonathan Gray join forces with many established media scholars to provide a manageable answer to this big question. Part of the New York University (NYU) Press *Keywords* series (which has published eight titles for different subjects), this book bears the legacy of Raymond Williams' *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1985), and aims to draw an updated mind map of media studies for students and emerging scholars (p. 1).



Structurally, *Keywords for Media Studies*, the book at hand, covers 65 keywords in critical media studies, with an introduction by the editors. Each keyword has a different author, and is explained in an article about three to four pages long, on average. Each article examines the historical and sometimes etymological backgrounds of the keyword, introduces its current state, and lays out influential works and figures that have contributed to its varied understandings. Following such discussion, many articles further look at the future of their respective topics, pointing to research questions that are yet to be answered.

These brief yet informative articles thus allow a reader to quickly grasp the most important moments in the long history of a keyword, and understand the most relative discussions that are still going on today. For students and scholars who are new to the field and have just encountered an unfamiliar concept, these articles will answer their most urgent questions in short; those who already know the basics of some topics may also use the book as a quick reference, or a guide to those less familiar topics; for a general reader who is just curious about media studies, the articles are short enough for leisure readings, but long enough for a quality learning experience. The bottom line is, as a quick-start manual for media studies, Ouellette and Gray's *Keywords* neatly answers the question, "What are those people talking about?"

Among "Keywords"

Keywords for Media Studies is not alone among keywords books. Since the first publishing of Williams' *Keywords* in 1973, more than a dozen "keywords" books have emerged. Ouellette and Gray named two in their introduction: *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Bennett, Grossberg,

Morris, & Williams, 2005) and *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies: The Key Concepts* (Hartley, 2011). There is also Benjamin Peters' 2016 *Digital Keywords: A Vocabulary of Information Society and Culture*, which covers in more detail a shorter list of keywords specifically related to digital culture. Other subject fields that media studies sometimes crosses over also have their own genealogy of "keywords." Just within the NYU Press series, seven other titles have been published for subjects including African American studies, American culture studies, and disability studies. Wiley has also published a *Keywords in Literature and Culture* series mainly for literary studies.

Besides keywords books, subject-specific dictionaries also provide more comprehensive yet less detailed mind maps for students and scholars. Recent works in this category include *Dictionary of Media and Communication* by Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday (2011; one of Oxford University Press's subject dictionaries), and *Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies* by James Watson and Anne Hill (2016; among other subject dictionaries from Bloomsbury). While being less readable as a book, subject dictionaries provide "material" information related to the media industry, prominent media companies, media text formats, etc. Another tool that is similarly useful is the encyclopedia. Although professors often discourage students from using encyclopedias, especially online ones like Wikipedia, many students new to the field still find encyclopedia entries for scholarly concepts useful for learning. Particularly, the multilingual, online collaborative nature of Wikipedia makes it much more versatile and accessible than printed books written by a small subset of U.S.- or UK-based scholars.

Thus different reference tools and their contributors tend to focus on different use values and different sets of concepts, based on format, subject, time period, school of thought, and so on. Therefore, in practice, it is really the reader who decides which tool to use, depending on the reader's own need or interest. Still, for current media students and researchers, Ouellette and Gray's *Keywords* is no doubt among the most updated and relevant reference books. On the one hand, it covers emerging keywords in digital media studies such as *access*, *data*, and *surveillance*, calling attention to these new frontiers of scholarship; on the other, it also refreshes long-standing concepts like *aesthetics*, *discourse*, *labor*, and *race*, bringing them into the conversation with the postcolonial, postracial landscape today. As a reference book in this time of globalized media studies, it does have a problem in that the vast majority of its contributors are scholars from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, thus having a limited scope in today's diversified scholarship. Nevertheless, as transnational media flows, social networks, and discourses of modernity rise in many formerly "peripheral" parts of the world, most of the keywords in this book have now become increasingly common concerns.

Online Tools for Scholarly Works

Like many books that now have complementary websites and online materials, Ouellette and Gray's *Keywords* and the NYU Press series also maintain an online counterpart that host postpublication updates, open access chapters, teaching resources, and a collaborative learning platform (for *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, Burgett & Hendler, 2014). For now, the online contents of Ouellette and Gray's *Keywords for Media Studies* is still quite limited, with only several keyword articles, a sample syllabus for teaching, and some meta information of the book. The blog-style website is more like a "trial version" of the full

printed book, rather than a fully functional digital work in its own right. This lack of functionality is also a problem that many other academic book websites now face.

In fact, digital reference tools have long proven powerful, and researchers have been routinely using databases and online catalogues for their works. Given the nature of reference books that need constant revision to keep up with academic works, both writers and readers of these books can benefit from having them online. For editors, online books are easier to revise, without the burden of going through print houses; for readers, online versions mean more affordable prices, more up-to-date contents, and more flexible access. As reputed dictionaries and encyclopedias start to turn into online services, online keywords lists—or, going one step further, online collaborative references for humanities and social sciences—now seem to be a promising option. The subject of *Keywords for Media Studies* is by its nature elective and fast updating, attracting emerging researchers from around the world, so bringing the book online would be an advantageous step for both its contributors and its readers.

Last Thoughts

One thing that was missing in Ouellette and Gray's *Keywords for Media Studies* but particularly helpful in Williams' *Keywords* is cross-reference. Pointing to other related keywords both within texts and at the end of articles, cross-reference helps the reader connect concepts into a larger framework; the lack of cross-reference rids *Keywords for Media Studies* of this structure. Admittedly, providing cross-reference might be relatively easy for Williams, as he was writing on his own and knew his entire work, while doing the same with so many individual authors can be difficult. Nevertheless, having a structure at hand allows the reader to easily navigate through the keywords, and Ouellette and Gray also try to make up for this lack of structure with the sample syllabus posted on the book's website. The structure shown in the sample syllabus helps in drawing out the shape of its subject matter.

Concerning the field's shape, Ouellette and Gray's *Keywords for Media Studies* does not try to define media studies, but it does sketch a certain shape for the field, and this shape is not unbiased—this is a problem that persists in all reference tools. In *Keywords for Media Studies*, this editing choice is promptly recognized at the very beginning (p. 5); providing questions at the end of articles, the authors of the book also invite readers to question the current states of the keywords. For readers, remembering these “meta” reminders means to always reflect on what factors define media studies now, have defined it before, and will define it in the future, factors such as economy, politics, technology, and the state of academia. Over time, fields of scholarly studies will always pick up fresh words and revise or drop stale ones, thus growing and becoming current again. Ouellette and Gray's *Keywords for Media Studies* refreshes the printed map of media studies for the digital now, and readers can bring it further forward by constantly questioning it with new findings and understandings in the future.

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