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Chris Atton. *An Alternative Internet.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. xvi + 176 pp. $128.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7486-1769-2; $38.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7486-1770-8.

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Atton's Alternative Internet: Well Defined, But Not So Well Described?

For Chris Atton, the "alternative Internet" of his title is meant to "invite us to consider the Internet as existing in a complex of features and pressures which are at once technological, historical, social, cultural, economic, and political" (p. x). Specifically, Atton seeks to study the benefits of alternative or radical media on the Internet, or media "produced outside the forces of market economics and the state" that seek to democratize power relations between producers and consumers of media (pp. 3, 5). He is careful to point out, however, that these alternative media as localized sites of resistance can only be understood in relation to "the macro-economic and social dimensions of the Internet as a mass medium" (p. 7).

Atton is particularly interested in how these media "offer possibilities for individuals and groups to create their own media 'from the periphery,' " and how "such media formations, through their very practice, will tend to critique notions of truth, reality and objectivity that we find at the heart of mainstream media practices" through their borrowing and reformulation of these practices (p. 9). In this way, he notes that "producers of alternative media can be thought of as re-positioning themselves from a more or less passive audience (pace [John] Fiske), consuming the output of mainstream media, to become media producers themselves. Further, the highly democratising practices embedded and developed in alternative media can continually re-create such repositionings, encouraging more and more people to become media producers, and developing existing producers in different ways" (p. 9). Ultimately, then, Atton is interested in studying these media from a "hegemonic approach." He argues that "hegemonic analysis presents these two media formations [mainstream and alternative] not as independent, but as articulated in terms of their cultural practices. That is, media practices may be viewed as movable; they may articulate to bourgeois (mainstream) values in one instance, but become joined with radical values in another. A hegemonic approach suggests a complexity of relations between radical and mainstream that previous binary models have not been able to identify" (p. 10).

Atton then proceeds to analyze a series of case stud-

ies using this approach, which consist of examinations of various alternative media Web sites, ranging from Indymedia to a far right political Web site from the United Kingdom. In analyzing the cultural practices of each case study, he attempts to flesh out various aspects of them. For example, in his chapter on radical online journalism, Atton examines the extent to which The Indymedia Network uses a style of reporting he refers to as "native reporting" in order to transform the objects of the mainstream media, such as the transformation of left-wing political activists into correspondents who report on their own protests (p. 42). In his chapter on a British National Party (BNP) Web site (the far right Web site mentioned above), he focuses on the "double movement of discourse," or the ways in which discourse "comprises an interplay between the 'established' aspect of discourse and a 'genealogical' or constitutive aspect" (p. 67). He uses this approach to show how the official, ultraconservative, discourse of the BNP is contested by the ways that actual users of the Web site interact. Atton provides similar analyses of the P2P movement online, alternative radio on the Internet, and fanzines.

Overall, Atton's methodology seems by far the most interesting aspect of this book, whether the reader comes from a sociology, media studies, literary studies, or rhetoric and composition background. His case studies add little to his methodology, besides demonstrating that it can be used to analyze text on the Internet. There is little evidence presented of power relations between producers and consumers of media or the borrowing of practices between mainstream and alternative media, with the exception of what can be divined by looking at Web pages. It would have been much more supportive of his methodological argument (that Internet media culture is ultimately transgressive of boundaries and constituted through the interplay of various divergent practices) had he attempted to better connect his case studies, or to have simply investigated one site and how it forms an ecology with a few others.

For example, the data for Atton's chapter on Indymedia is basically collected from the site itself. Though he attempts to make connections between the mainstream media's and Indymedia's coverage of 9/11, his analysis consists of reading and critiquing coverage under this heading on Indymedia's main site. Had he really wished to support his claim of the borrowing of practices, he would have had to track specific practices (such as ways of covering certain stories, types of language or sources used, etc.) engaged in by the mainstream media and how these specific practices were reformulated by Indymedia. Though Atton attempts to do this, without really engaging the mainstream media, his argument ends up seeming solipsistic, based on what is an assumed knowledge of the mainstream media (everyone knows how they covered 9/11) and a close investigation of the Web pages of Indymedia only. As is, Atton ends up arguing for a great new methodology for studying media online without really demonstrating its full potential through his case studies. It is my feeling, however, that most readers of this book will end up utilizing his methodology on case studies of their own making.

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