Building the Brand Jenkins AKA *Convergence Culture*

This is a book review of a book review. Jenkins builds upon his personal brand by revamping Ithiel de Sola Pool's *Technologies of Freedom* with theories from French cybertheorist Pierre Levy, and with a pinch of his own *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins's *Convergence Culture* has become a canonical read for media industry studies and new media studies. Brand Jenkins has carefully constructed a worthwhile read as this book amalgamates the power of converging media with participatory culture.

Henry Jenkins introduces this book through a series of anecdotal forays that nicely foreshadow the topics discussed in his subsequent chapters. Beginning with a high school student's photoshopped image of *Sesame Street's* Bert and Osama Bin Laden, Jenkins introduces his readers to convergence culture as the site "where old and new media collide" insisting that convergence manifests itself through relationships with people, industry, technology, media, and social networks. Media convergence represents a paradigm shift within the public sphere that encourages the manipulation and interactivity of knowledge by engaging a participatory audience.

Jenkins builds his analysis on the ideas of convergence and collective intelligence. The author utilizes his introduction to expand upon his operational meaning(s) of convergence, and, at times, it seems as though Jenkins has too many definitions for this key term (thank goodness Jenkins has included a glossary to get the concrete definition!). Using Pierre Lévy's idea of collective intelligence, Jenkins enforces the notion that nobody knows everything, but everybody knows something to illustrate the power behind collective intelligence. The idea that everyone can add to a global conversation through a collective pooling of intellect allows for "an alternative source of media power" (4).

Jenkins argues this force is in a developmental stage used mostly as a recreational tool, but he predicts that soon the collective intellect will be employed for more serious uses (4). I believe, however, it is dangerous to make predictions about the future, and ironically, Jenkins eludes to the problems behind utopian speculation in the following section of the introduction critiquing Nicholas Negroponte's lofty predictions in *Being Digital* (I was stunned by this oversight).

Chapter one emphasizes Lévy's idea of collective intelligence as Jenkins uses the sixth season of *Survivor* to illustrate the effectiveness of grassroots convergence. Using the message boards of the spoiler site, survivorsucks.com, Jenkins explores the consequences of having one person know too much and the effects that knowledge has on the convergence experience. Jenkins frames this case study as an analysis of the "ethics of shared problem-solving in an online community," but it functions better as a cautionary tale of the hierarchy of democratic collective intellect as the main character in this chapter, ChillOne, dishevels the spoiler experience for many *Survivor* fans. Jenkins justifies the use of *Survivor* for his case study by explaining that *Survivor* is "television for the Internet age -- designed to be discussed, dissected, predicted, and critiqued" (25) (Thinking far, far back to *The Twilight Zone,* I can't help but wonder which television programs are not, by Jenkins's definition, "for the Internet age?").

Interlaced within the chapters of this book are sidebars, some relating Jenkins's past experience and others citing further case studies. In this chapter Jenkins's own experience with online message boards coupled with additional blips of quasi related case studies fuel the digressions. He recalls his first experience with an online fan community in 1991 with *Twin Peaks*. In another sidebar, Jenkins highlights the use of fan fiction

within the *Survivor* community while another sidebar credits *Big Brother* fans for their ability to decipher large amounts of content to expose the show's secrets. Perhaps some readers will find these digressions insightful, however, I thought they were distracting and superfluous. The goal of this chapter is to express the power of knowledge within "knowledge communities" and the effects of this power on the convergence experience. In my opinion, Jenkins's case study would have read tighter sans sidebars. In fact, as anyone in new media design knows, too much text is a bad thing, and I think the book should have converged new media design with traditional publishing using more pictures and less text.

In "Buying into American Idol," Jenkins carefully illustrates the "crisis" in television programming between broadcast and cable networks and the problems posed by shifts in audience numbers to advertisers. He examines advertisers' plight with the metamorphosis of television audiences inserting his term "affective economics" as a proposed way of dealing with the flux in television audiences. Affective economics quantifies consumers' desire as a way to drive marketing campaigns. Jenkins argues that advertisers and networks should pay close attention to the level of engagement with which viewers watch, monitoring this engagement through varied levels of participation ranging from online discussion to purchasing show paraphernalia to texting results (as is the case with *American Idol*). Another term for this engagement is "expression," as Jenkins shamelessly plugs MIT's Comparative Media Studies Program for coining the term (68).

The focus of this chapter, however, is not so much on *American Idol*, but rather Coca-Cola's pioneering efforts to redirect attention to its brand via its "convergence

strategy" (68). Coca-Cola's method is simple: build upon the brand through consumers'

emotional attachments with the brand. Through product placement, sponsoring

entertainment events such as sports games, movies, and concerts, as well as traditional

print and web ads, Coca-Cola invades the lives of its consumers on a deeper level. Its

strategy is to become a part of its consumers lives, building lasting relationships which

result in fond memories. The Coca-Cola brand is "no longer just intellectual property,

they're emotional capital" (69). These instances of emotional bonds with brands, or

"lovemarks" (which, in my opinion is synonymous with "affective economics" - so why

do you need both terms?), are imperative to driving advertising in the age of

convergence. Lovemarks have the greatest potential of cultivating "inspirational

consumers," consumers which are slated to become the holy grail for marketers. Jenkins

continues his analysis with a discussion of *American Idol's* ability to craft "inspirational

consumers" from "lovemarks," concluding that these specific types of consumers carry an

immense amount of clout with the networks, power that has the potentiality of reaching

and influencing producers' actions. Through the "Vote for the Worst Campaign" on the

fifth season of *American Idol,* Jenkins's central argument is flushed out: viewers,

cultivated in large part to "lovemarks," are experiencing a level of control through

relationships with shows' producers, and these relationships are a direct result of

convergence culture.

Chapter three focuses on transmedia citing *The Matrix* franchise as the

"entertainment for the age of media convergence.... *The Matrix* is also entertainment for

the era of collective intelligence" (97). Borrowing terms like "cultural attractor" and

"circuit of expression" from Lévy, Jenkins uses *The Matrix* to describe the phenomenon

of transmedia storytelling, however, this chapter reads more like the Warchowski

Brothers' recipe for world building, and instead of an industry analysis, this chapter reads

more like a textual analysis, littered with examples of hidden clues from one *Matrix*

product to another. I can now boast that I know where to find the hidden codes for a

Matrix video game I will never play.

The most important feature of this chapter, for me, came with the introduction of

"additive comprehension" in which creators try to shape the interpretations of the text

through the addition of small, but potent morsels added to the franchise which contains

the potentiality to critically alter meaning while encouraging fans to interrogate their

knowledge of a constructed franchise world. The consequences of additive

comprehension could have been discussed further especially since Jenkins's meta-

argument insists that the power behind convergence culture rests in its participants.

Chapter four has all of the potential of chapter three but falls just as flat. "Quentin

Tarantino's *Star Wars*" reads like a chapter lifted from *Textual Poachers* (seriously, after

finishing the chapter I checked my copy of *TP* just to make sure I had not skipped it the

first time around). Brand Jenkins is definitely hard at work in this chapter using *Star*

Wars as the premiere text for participatory culture through converging media. Though I

agree *Star Wars* is the best example for Jenkins's argument, it is also the most analyzed

and discussed text available for this topic which makes the new ideas he discusses seem

tired and outdated.

The following chapter discusses the Harry Potter franchise and the impact of its

readers within traditional education systems. For me, this is the freshest and most

insightful chapter of the book. For thirty-nine glorious pages Brand Jenkins dissolves into

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a clear argument highlighting the true power behind media industries and fan culture. Top-down modes of media-making truly collide with bottom-up grassroots empowerment as Jenkins discusses the battle between old and new definitions of intellectual property and its impact on convergence culture. Appropriately, the grassroots movement analyzed in this chapter is mostly comprised of kids. Young people enraged by the control of media giants (Warner Brothers namely) and armed with the power and the potential of new media to enact change within old systems. This is the definitive chapter in the book and, if Jenkins could have found a way to include advertising within its pages, it could stand alone, in my very earnest opinion.

The payout of this book rests in its final chapter, "Photoshop for Democracy." Jenkins's argument and terms congeal into an uplifting (if not utopian) recipe for revolution which echo the words of Benjamin's Work of Art... essay nicely. His argument relies on the fruition of digital democracy and its ability to incite the masses to revolt against the regimes of traditional media. Inspiring the public to join in the "serious fun," Jenkins has alluded to in the textual examples of his previous chapters, grassroots empowerment could grow and develop into what Jenkins predicts will be a new force for political awareness.

Using the 2004 American Presidential election and the misguided Joe Trippi's *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, Jenkins crafts his argument for the politics of convergence. However, the use of Trippi's book, in which Trippi declares, "While TV was a medium that rendered us dumb, disengaged, and disconnected, the Internet makes us smarter, more involved, and better informed" (221) (Yes, this is an actual quote from Trippi's book that Jenkins deemed valuable enough to use in *Convergence Culture*),

weakens Jenkins ideas so intensely that I had a hard time taking his views seriously after this gross inclusion. To make matters worse, Jenkins implies television is a passive medium while internet is an active one, relying on ideas of push versus pull media (224), yet, celebrates *The Daily Show's* audience for its ability to actively sift through and interrogate the show's hard news messages from its playful jokes (237).

Furthermore, Jenkins invites Michael Schudson's concept of monitorial citizens into the mix explaining that audiences of shows like *The Daily Show* and *Saturday Night Live* engage in "environmental surveillance" (that doesn't sound passive to me) as a means of filtering the exorbitant amount of information readily available in the wake of media convergence. Schudson's ideas should have been introduced earlier in the book, but I believe Jenkins was trying to weight Lévy's views on "knowledge cultures" to strengthen the legitimacy of his arguments' dependence on the Lévy's theories. Also, the first half of this chapter reads like a conclusion while new material is suddenly introduced in the latter pages, and unfortunately, this oversight makes the conclusion seem dull and tired instead of a coherent wrap-up of the books key arguments.

Henry Jenkins's *Convergence Culture* was first published in 2006 and though his ideas may not necessarily be awe inspiring, Jenkins does an exquisite job of encapsulating key ideas and theories of media convergence and applying those ideas to reception studies and participatory culture. For all of his shortcomings, Jenkins has honed a careful method of writing which transposes complicated theories and ideas into lay speak (though, I believe this is Brand Jenkins at work ensuring his book reaches beyond academics and industry execs). His ability to craft coherent arguments through textual analysis is trademark Jenkins and *Convergence Culture* lives up to its promise of

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showcasing the consequences, effects, and speculation surrounding a world where old

and new media collide.