Megan Boler (ed.), *Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 464 pp., 21 illustrations, ISBN 978-0-262-02642-0 (hbk), $43.00/£31.95.

It would be an understatement to note that relatively recent developments in computing and communication technologies have kept many traditional social scientists and scholars of the humanities virtually awash in challenging and important lines of research. In part, this edited volume joins many others in a burgeoning field of books on the implications of new media forms for democratic processes. Its distinctive value, however, lies in Boler's effort to balance traditional scholarly issues with more practical, activist concerns. To be sure, there are a multitude of empirical studies and theoretical essays in the existing literature that focus on the use of new media by issue-oriented groups and social movements as an object domain. However, to my mind, this volume offers a rare engagement with decidedly practical political concerns, addressed it seems, as much to activists as to academics.

Through this collection of essays and interviews with well-known figures such as Robert McChesney and Amy Goodman, Boler attempts to identify both central theoretical insights about digital media and politics as well as what these may mean for tangible efforts to affect social change through newly enabled processes of digital dissent. In theoretical terms, the volume sets up a variation on the familiar theme of optimism versus pessimism about new technologies, but with a distinctly activist tint. In doing so, this volume opens up a number of useful and interesting lines of potential conversation between researchers of different disciplines, and between researchers and activists. Consistent with the overall theme of the book, Boler organizes the many essays and interviews within it into three distinct sections. Ostensibly the first section offers general assessments and theoretical perspectives, while the second contains a set of reflections on distinct patterns of change in the new media environment, and the third focuses explicitly on so-called 'media interventions'. However, discussions of practical interventions and opportunities for new kinds of political activism enabled by new media are a recurrent feature of the all of the interviews and essays found in the collection.

At its best, this unique collection of essays and interviews creates spaces and occasions for a number of otherwise unlikely exchanges between researchers, journalists, and activists on central areas of concern within the broader literature on digital media and politics. In this sense, new media scholars interested in a variety of topics may view the book as a useful collection of insights concerning the range of notable political activities and discourse enabled by digital media. For example new media scholars interested in studying online political communication from the perspective of social network analysis will undoubtedly find useful insights in the interview with Geert Lovink (pp. 123–136), which includes a fascinating discussion of network properties from the perspective of a practical actor, seeking to affect and operate within digital networks for

maximum political effect. Those interested in the increasing popularity of political satire and comedy in the contemporary media environment may also be pleasantly surprised to see this issue considered in a number of places throughout the volume. Whether in the interview with Robert McChesney (pp. 53– 700), or Boler's own contribution to the volume (with Stephen Turpin, pp. 383–404), the discussion of political satire from the distinctly activist perspective that defines this book offers a unique contribution to the growing body of research on political comedy. More than many other comparable volumes, *Digital Media and Democracy* foregrounds the voices and concerns of individuals actually engaged in using all kinds of digital media for practical political uses in a way that may be particularly stimulating for many researchers in this field.

At the same time, there are some ways in which the volume appears to compromise its stated commitment to fostering interdisciplinary approaches to questions of new media and politics. For instance, in the volume's introduction, Boler rather harshly dismisses scholarship concerned with empirical studies of the effects of political uses of new media, declaring herself 'increasingly convinced that tracing effects is part of a deceptive science usually conflated with the pseudoscience of public polls' (p. 28). Additionally, while there are a number of places in which the topic of political humour is engaged, it is typically unaccompanied by discussion or recognition of a growing body of work on this subject by rhetoricians, cultural studies scholars, and others, as well as those interested in studying the impact of such programming on viewers. Given the potential interest such audiences may have in the essays and interviews collected here, these features of the volume seem to create unnecessary limitations on its potential for stimulating more broadly diverse interdisciplinary discussion surrounding these issues.

On the whole, however, this volume clearly makes important contributions to the field of new media scholarship concerned with matters of political practice and democratic processes. It would also make an excellent text or supplement to advanced undergraduate or even graduate courses on new media and politics. Indeed, anyone interested in exploring distinct practices of political activism, journalism, or artistic expression potentiated by our contemporary environment of digital media will find these essays and interviews useful and insightful.

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