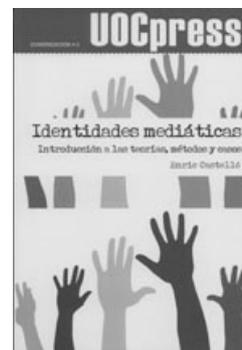CASTELLÓ, E. *Identidades mediáticas. Introducción a las teorías, métodos y casos.* Barcelona: Editorial UOC, 2008, 295 pàg. ISBN: 978-84-9788-738-0.

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For research into the media and identities

Castelló, E. *Identidades mediáticas. Introducción a las teorías, métodos y casos.* Barcelona: Editorial UOC, 2008, 295 pp. ISBN: 978-84-9788-738-0.

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All text is *text within context*, hence if an analysis dispenses with this evidence, it runs the risk of missing the points whence flows a good part of what the text contains: style, strategies, intentions, etc., in short, a good part of what gives it meaning. This idea runs through Enric Castelló's work, modulated in forms on different objects: when he supports symbolic representation as a result of socially anchored discursive practices, when he defends culturalist theses on meaning as a textual proposal that has just been updated or constructed in the diverse circumstances of its reading and interpretation, and even when he warns us against every essentialist consideration of the social, changing, movable and constantly transforming identities in the multiple situations in which they are created, expressed and circulated. All text is text within context and so is Castelló's.

Identidades mediáticas is based on work the author conducted to prepare his doctoral thesis on national identity in TV fiction series, in which he studied Catalonia's case. An undoubtedly forceful choice, since it compelled him to consider a concept – identity – which is complex in its theoretical formulation (What is identity?), methodological management (Where and how we can understand it in its empirical form?) and practical consequences (Why should identities be studied?). As Miquel Rodrigo points out in the book's introduction, identity is a key concept in social sciences at the turn of this century, revitalised now by the advent of a second modernity whose progress is driven by seemingly contradictory forces and ideas (globalisation and localism, cosmopolitism and communitarianism, connectivity and fragmentation), in which every effort at comprehension comes up against the controversial issue of identities, no matter what.

Orienting oneself in this prolix stage is not a simple task and even less so for those who are about to take their first steps in social research. When Castelló was starting out on his thesis, he lamented the lack of a roadmap to guide him, to point out milestones and reference points, known territories and zones to be explored. Since no such roadmap existed, he proposed to draw one himself and the result is this work, the book "I wish I'd encountered during the research process" (p. 21). Hence, *Identidades mediáticas* is postulated as a roadmap, a tour guide for those venturing forth to get to know the media and social identities; this is the context in which we should appraise the interest in and benefits of what Castelló proposes.

Although the subtitle delimits something like three fields of play (theories, methods and cases), the text is more like a two-part structure: first, the current status of the issues involved in the different theoretical proposals on social identities is defined and afterwards the themes of media and identities are addressed in order to identify theories, propose methods and exemplify via cases. The first part ("Entendre les identitats socials") is resolved plainly and thoroughly. Here, the author uses excellent criteria to delineate what he considers to be the four major theoretical perspectives for tackling the study of identities (historicism, constructionism, technologism – inevitably - and postmodernism) and is careful, with even better criteria, not to present them as opposing schools but rather as complementary viewpoints of a multifaceted object to the effects of these viewpoints: identities are created during historical processes, constructed in social interaction, transformed by communication technologies and are now acquiring a fragmentary character. All of these theses are compatible with one another and the researcher, guided by this roadmap's author, would do well to follow the recommendation of integrating diverse ideas to grasp such a complex phenomenon.

In part two, Castelló's mapping goes from sketching the terrain of theories and methods to analysing the relationship between the media and social identities and refers to several available studies on specific objects in this theme (migrations and information; national identity and television fiction; gender and advertising and young people and mobile phones). To make order out of the current status of scientific knowledge on the media and identities, the author proposes a tour of the different schools of thought or paradigms of communicative research - structural-functionalism, critical theory, symbolic interactionism and cultural studies - in order to demonstrate the progressive advent of an "identity-based shift" (p. 167) in communication studies. In fact, this involves a kind of reinterpretation or revision of those paradigms from an identity standpoint, a suggestive thesis yet one teeming with risks, because history explained with a teleological vocation (things happen in a certain way until there is a shift in their evolution) must necessarily mark a point of rupture that can only be at the expense of having skilfully removed any affiliation with what preceded it.

According to Castelló, this point of rupture in the issue of media and identities comes about with the maturity of the interpretativist and constructionist perspectives (symbolic interactionism, cultural studies), graphically illustrated as one step from the idea of a society of masses to one of communities, precisely to reinforce the thesis that the issue of identity is taking centre stage. This approach deserves at least two comments. In the first place, it is not necessary to wait for constructionism in this conceptual transition, since the best contribution of mass communication research (structural-functionalism, to summarise), with Lazarsfeld in the lead, would probably be the rediscovery of this community (and therefore identity-based, if you will) factor in mass communication processes. Secondly, if the debate is made to revolve around this conceptual transition of mass to community, the realm of reflection on and study of the media and identity would apparently be reduced to the specific area of audiences and their relationships (use, interpretation, appropriation...) with media discourses.

Aside from these considerations, I believe that the roadmap Castelló sketches on the theoretical perspectives that converge in the study of the media and identity would have been richer if the criteria applied in the first part of the work had also been applied here to put the diversity of the theoretical proposals he tackles in order The first part is a very effective explanatory strategy in pedagogical terms: Castelló identifies a series of particular issues related to the general theme of social identities and then proceeds to gloss the different theories and conceptual corpora related to each issue (the historical conformation of identity, the impact of technology, today's fragmentation, national identity, etc.). Applying these issue-based criteria would have allowed particular fields or realms of research within this diverse theme of the media and social identity to be identified; then the current status of the question could have been based on each of these areas, e.g. the depiction of identity in different media discourses (information, fiction, advertising, etc); the reception, interpretation and use of media representation as an ordinary cognitive resource; the social effects of these discourses; their production mechanisms or, finally, the influence exercised by media ownership or the circulation of cultural products, thoroughly addressed by the political communication economy.

All this is present in Castelló's work, but with a certain dispersion that reduces the pedagogical efficiency of the second part of the book, in my opinion. And pedagogical efficiency, its usefulness "to new researchers in the field of identity" (p. 233) and as a guide to this "labyrinthine debate" (p. 270) is what justifies this work. From now on, anyone who ventures forth into this prolix, controversial question of the media and identities will not be able to lament, as the author did, the lack of an extremely valuable guide with which to strike out down the road.