

# Introduction

SUSANNA PAASONEN

Culture and media technology is perhaps the broadest of titles for a conference panel or a cluster of essays. More specifically, the following texts by Terje Rasmussen and Malin Sveningsson Elm – like the 2007 NordMedia panel titled Culture and Media Technology with Lisbeth Klastrup, Terje Rasmussen and Malin Sveningsson Elm – address the meanings of so-called new media, their cultures of production and usage, in and for media and communication studies. The focus is largely on conceptual, contextual and methodological issues related to the demarcation of and the flux between research topics and traditions.

During the past decade or so, new labels and definitions such as Internet Research, Game Studies, Cyberculture Studies, studies of Digital Culture and New Media have challenged traditional disciplinary and departmental divisions within media and communication studies. These definitions have to do with novel research topics (from gaming to mobile communications or online networking), as well as with the formation of interdisciplinary identifications and networks. More than labels, studies focusing on the social and cultural meanings of new media technologies have posed methodological and conceptual challenges to the ways of understanding media production, distribution and use in cinema, media and communication studies. As familiar models and theories developed in the context of print media and mass communication no longer seem to fully apply, scholars have found themselves stranded between different research traditions and disciplines, looking for new alliances and points of departure while still remaining grounded in their disciplinary histories, methodologies and forms of conceptualization.

Novel interdisciplinary identifications, such as “Internet research” or “Internet studies” bring people together across disciplinary boundaries while, perhaps paradoxically, performing a new kind of boxing in. Understood literally, the term “Internet research” implies media specificity in a situation where the Internet is not so much a specific as a heterogeneous and multimodal medium that both builds on previous forms of communication and gives rise to new ones. In fact, one of the central questions related to “new” or “digital” media concerns media specificity. On the one hand, media culture is increasingly conceptualized as intermedial, multimodal, remediated and converging (cf. Bolter and Grusin 1999; Jenkins 2006; Lehtonen 2001; Herkman 2005). Novel media build on previous and parallel ones while these in return draw on the newer applications: media production, distribution and ownership are networked while aesthetics and texts travel from one platform to another for the purposes of commercial promotion and irreverent appropriation alike. On the other hand, new applications involve specific forms of distribution, participation and experience that transform ways of conceptualizing media production, usage and the role of individual media texts. Technologies create horizons of possibility for that which can be done with a medium: they are both specific and in

constant motion with updating and upgrading, research and development. In this sense, these horizons are in a continuous state of becoming.

All this brings forth obvious dilemmas for media and communication studies – an umbrella term already involving diverse research traditions and disciplinary identifications. Broadly put, the dilemma can be seen as twofold: How to account for the specificity of new technological formations and practices without building them into a fetish in ways that obscure intermedial connections, questions of convergence and historicity? Or, on the other hand, how to make use of research traditions in media and communication studies in ways that do not merely involve projecting methods and theorizations developed in studies of print media, broadcasting or cinema on a range of recent developments? The first position – the fetishization of new media in their novelty – means turning a blind eye towards the historicity of media technologies, a constant “shock of the new” that leads to isolating and, consequently, decontextualizing the media studied. The second position – namely projecting familiar models and structures on new examples – works the other way by turning a blind eye toward that which may no longer remain the same. Here a different kind of decontextualization takes place.

As any media historian is likely to point out, the question is one of both continuity and change. The question is, what this might mean exactly in terms of contemporary media and communication studies: what kind of position do “new media” and their research traditions have in curricula and departmental research profiles and how, if at all, do they influence ways of conceptualizing the objects of study within media and communication studies. Like Malin Sveningsson Elm in her essay, I am not inclined to think that the solution lies in creating specific disciplines, or fractions thereof, for studies of new media. Media-specific definitions divide the field of study into a series of more or less arbitrarily labeled boxes (be these cinema, radio, television, print media, Internet or game studies). While these categorizations enable specificity, they also work to draw artificial boundaries around the object of study. This, again, hinders analysis of contemporary media culture and the constant transformations taking place within it. The task, then, is to critically think through the legacies of research paradigms, to remain sensitive to their specificities and limitations but equally to the possibilities they offer for understanding the cultures of media.

## References

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