

New Media, New Options, New Communities?

Towards A Convergent Media and ICT Research

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It is both pertinent and precise to have Iceland host a conference with the theme "new media, new options, new communities" which is also the daunting rubric under which I speak. For, as is well known Icelandic culture in many ways condenses processes of tradition and innovation. In terms of tradition, the sagas, of course, are the foundation of Norse mythology. And like Hollywood genre films and popular tv series, the sagas demonstrate a perfection of basic narrative conflicts and themes. So, the sagas also tackle essential aspects of the media, believe it or not. In saga times, runes, of course, were the primary media.

The god Odin, we are told, holds the power to chisel runes and control their uses. He acquires this power by sacrificing himself to himself, as it says: for nine days and nights he hangs, head down in a tree, without food or water, and thus he collects his strength inward and downward. Through this power he may decipher the runes so that he may quench fire, calm the sea and turn the wind as he pleases.

The myth addresses a fundamental aspect of media culture, namely the connection between print, knowledge and power, a connection that is still seminal to cultural discourses of contemporary societies. But, as we all know, the power of print has long been contested. And again, Iceland makes a good example in a Nordic context. For, in terms of innovation Iceland is one of the first of our Nordic countries to be heavily and continuously influenced by American popular music, television and film thanks to the military base at Keflavik. This complex constellation of old and new media, of transnational, or indeed global, and very local forms of mediated expression are the two main issues that I want to address in this opening lecture.

Big Brother: A Composite Format

As a preamble, allow me to take what some of you may deem an all too well-known example, namely *Big Brother*. The programme format was developed by the Dutch tv network Veronica in 1999 and soon overtaken by the network Endemol (four million out

of 15 million Dutch people saw final episode on 30th December 1999). The format has since been sold to most European countries and also to Argentine, Australia, South Africa and the USA. In all countries, it has been adapted to local cultural norms and production codes – with varying degrees of success.

In all these countries, *Big Brother* is developed as a composite media text that is constituted through an application of the entire range of media and ICTs: tv, the internet (official and unofficial love and hate sites), comments, interviews and rumours circulating in print media, on radio programmes and in other tv shows. Much of its content is used on several platforms – particular scenes, often the most juicy ones, are shown on tv (and with multiple repeats) and put on the internet. Moreover, producers seek to nurture audience loyalty and engagement through simple forms of interactivity via the phone-in popularity polls, just as they promote a transformation of at least some of the audience into a physical public in and outside the *Big-Brother* house/the studio location.

In many ways, *Big Brother* is an example of seminal trends in the emerging media culture. Few will dispute that media culture has become increasingly complex over the last two decades with the advent of a plethora of new media technologies and a concomitant reshuffling of media institutions, forms of expression and range of uses.

In such a complex field, it is by nature a hazardous experiment to attempt singling out empirical trends and theoretical issues of particular relevance. Yet, this is what I will attempt to do – and, as I hope to demonstrate, this endeavour to find what may be termed “unity in diversity” is one of the basic challenges facing media and ICT studies today and, by implication, tomorrow. Hence, my lecture is in itself a demonstration of the possibilities and pitfalls bestowed upon academics.

What are the Seminal Trends that Big Brother Illustrates?

First, we are witnessing a growing convergence of media technology and services, a gradual merging of our television and radio, our print media, computers and the internet. This is a process that serves to blur existing boundaries between what is often named new and old media. In tandem with convergence, we are witnessing a globalization of media distribution, formats and applications. This is a process that serves to question received notions of what we consider to be national media and local identities. Taken together, these processes enhance and enforce an intensified professional and practical preoccupation with media contents and with media uses. Based on these observations, I have two main contentions to make that are substantiated in the following:

- In empirical terms, media contents and uses offer dimensions of innovation that are as seminal to convergence and globalization as they are underresearched
- In theoretical and organisational terms, convergence and globalization are decisive catalysts in creating a media culture whose complexity is inversely proportional to our academic acumen: the more complex our media culture becomes, the less are we, as academics, currently prepared to meet the challenge of complexity.

Convergence: Hits and Misses

In recent years, most Nordic countries have published white papers on the prospects offered by convergence between media, telecommunication and ICTs (e.g. NOU 1999, SOU 1999, Nielsen & Weiss 2001). In these reports, convergence is defined in four ways:

- *A convergence of services*: the same content is formed to suit several platforms – e.g. news may be distributed both via "ordinary" newspapers or radio slots and streamed via the internet
- *A convergence of networks*: the same platform may contain several types of content – e.g. telephone cables are used both for internet and telecommunication
- *A convergence of terminals*: terminals (e.g. computer, tv) are all multifunctional, although some are more feasible for certain types of services than others – e.g. we prefer to send mail or sms via our mobile phone rather than via our tv, while films are watched on the big tv or cinema screen rather than via the small display on the mobile phone
- *A convergence of markets*: we see transborder mergers and acquisitions between the media, telecommunications and ICT industries – e.g. the large-scale merger in 2000 between Time Warner and the internet provider AOL (America Online).

It is an issue of debate whether convergence is driven by technological innovation or by commercial market mergers (overview in Rolland 2001). But irrespective of the driving forces, the current debate and professional interest share a common top-down perspective focusing on technology and economy (Baldwin et al. 1996) At the same time there is a widely shared consensus that in the longer perspective, convergence will bring about developments that reach beyond such a perspective. These long-term developments include:

- A move towards content as providing perhaps the most important competitive element ("content is king"). Endemol's copyright to *Big Brother* is a moneymaker far beyond the actual broadcasting of it in the Netherlands. Other examples are back lists of film archives and copyright on particular characters, all of which are primarily in the hands of "old" media producers in print media, film and tv.
- A move towards increasing differentiation, even divergence, of media uses, a differentiation that is routinely, but wrongly (Livingstone & Bovill 2001), conflated with increased individualisation as we get tv on demand, electronic programme guides to help scan, select and store our individual media menus
- A blurring of boundaries between processes of production and processes reception, as virtually all types of media will facilitate varying degrees and forms of interactivity. If it was always a contentious division to make a clear distinction between passive reception of mass media and active interaction with computer media, then the development towards convergence will make such dichotomies untenable.

A simple comparison between immediate and long-term priorities in convergence discourses easily illustrate that in both a political, an industrial and a scientific sense, the black boxes of convergence are what may be termed a bottom-up perspective focusing upon the media content and form (what is to be carried on these many platforms and how?) and media uses (who will use what services? What competences are developed? And how will convergent mediation impact on the experience of communication?).

Globalization: Hits and Misses

Studies of mediated globalization share a similar top-down perspective as we seen in studies of convergence, and, I would contend, harbour a similar need to intensify their interest in bottom-up perspectives on content and form and particularly on diversity of uses.

It is commonly agreed that today media are constitutive to cultural globalization: the accelerated global flows of signs and cultural commodities by communication technologies serve to increase what John Tomlinson calls "complex connectivity" (Tomlinson 1999: 2) – that is global, or transnational, media accentuate the interconnectedness of distinct cultures and modes of existence. Even so, within media studies a top-down perspective on globalization prevails, a perspective that focuses upon the economic, technological, political and legal aspects of this complex connectivity. This focus is both aided and abetted by Giddens' much-touted, and very generalised, definition of globalization as implying "time-space distanciation" and "time-space compression" (Giddens 1990, see also Williams 1975/1990: 14-21, Harvey 1989).

In theoretical terms, a bottom-up perspective on processes of globalization, focusing on contents and uses, may serve to substantiate and nuance the often very generalised top-down theories about cultural globalization, theories that also tend to be formulated as dichotomies (either more homogenisation, or more heterogenization), overstating or underrating the breadth and depth of globalization.

In empirical terms, we need comparative studies on media globalization that go beyond comparisons of single genres (especially news) or of particular media (especially tv) (e.g. Jensen 1998, Buonanno 1998, 1999, Agger 2001). Moreover, because globalization is so intimately bound up with processes of convergence where specific applications, formats and figures may traverse several media and forms of expression we need to make comparative studies that traverse geographical and temporal boundaries as well as encompassing a range of genres and media.

Pitfalls and Possibilities of Comparative Research

In order to illustrate both the possibilities and possible pitfalls of such a bottom-up perspective informed by the combined developments of convergence and globalization, let me briefly highlight some main results from a major study along these lines (*European Journal of Communication* 1998, *Reseaux* 1999, Livingstone & Bovill, 2001, Drotner 2001a). It is the first theory-driven empirical study of the emerging media landscape in Europe as seen from a bottom-up perspective (children aged 6-16). 12 countries were involved, the interactions between uses of new and old media were studied, and both domestic and public domains were included (fig. 1).

Throughout, our analytical focus has been to chart similarities and commonalities across national and regional boundaries as well as across the entire media landscape. Based on data from the survey database of the study, one may draw a map of "media Europe" as it emerges when including all major media (fig. 2).

Issues of Convergence and Globalization

Seen from a media perspective, the focus in the study on all major media and their interrelations allow us to address issues of convergence – when media and genres interact. What we find is that access does not equal use. The closest fit between the two are seen with tv and music while the greatest gap between access and use is seen with the

Figure 1. Children and Their Changing Media Environment: A European Comparative Project

<p>Countries involved Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Israel (Jewish population only), Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom</p> <p>Research design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encompasses all major media - Qualitative methodologies (interviews, observation, diaries) and quantitative methodologies (N = c. 11.000) - Four age bands: 6-7, 9-10, 12-13, 15-16 years of age - Data collection 1997-98 and formation of joint database (survey data) - Traverses different locations (home, school) - User-centred and media-centred perspectives - Thematic comparisons across countries - Analytical focus on similarities and commonalities

Figure 2. A Typology of "Media Europe"

<p>ICT countries: Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Sweden</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wide access to and use of new, transnational media technologies (cable and satellite tv, pc, internet) - Relative wide access to and use of multi-channel tv - Relative wide access to and use of print media <p>Tv countries: France, Italy and Spain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wide access to and use of national tv channels - Relative low access to and use of new, transnational media technologies (cable and satellite tv, pc, internet) <p>Multimedia countries: Belgium (Flanders only), Israel, Switzerland, Germany</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wide access to and use of multi-channel tv - Moderate access to and use of new, transnational media technologies (cable and satellite tv, pc, internet) - Diverging use of print media <p>Screen country: Great Britain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wide access to and use of tv, particularly national tv - Moderate access to and use of new, transnational media technologies (cable and satellite tv, pc, internet) - Moderate use of print media
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Adapted from S. Livingstone et al. (2001) *Childhood in Europe: Contexts for Comparison*, pp. 20-27 in S. Livingstone & M. Bovill (Eds.) *Children and their Changing Media Environment: A European Comparative Study*.

internet and the computer. For example, in Denmark of the 6-16-year-olds with internet access at home only 44% make use of this option (Drotner 2001a).

Seen from a user perspective, what stands out is that most European children apply a variety of media, they are not a computer generation or a net generation – in the words of American Don Tapscott an "n-gen" (Tapscott 1998: 3). In terms of time use, tv is still the primary medium, it has a close fit between access and use, as noted, and as such tv may be termed the most democratic medium. New media are integrated into an already pretty

full media menu. Young users already tackle the beginnings of convergence through their mundane day-to-day combinations of and interactions with a multimedia environment of new and old media, an environment in which choices and combinations are made on the basis of social and textual relevance, not the media applied.

Turning from issues of convergence to issues of globalization, the study demonstrates that through the juxtaposition of cultural difference, global media constantly evoke for users what Giddens describes as "absent others" (Giddens 1990: 18-21). At a very basic level, media globalization both enforces and facilitates our encounters with symbolic expressions of otherness. In so doing, media globalization serves to accentuate users' recognition of and reflection on local differences precisely because it is identified in relation to an understanding of the world as a "single place" (cp. Robertson 1992: 6). Through these encounters, media globalization is a catalyst for highlighting a central aspect of all sensemaking processes, namely our intuitive and continuous comparisons between what we know and what we learn, our mundane negotiations between the familiar and the foreign (e.g. Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Johnson 1987).

Informants in our study, generally recognise and remark on visual signs of difference (e.g. different street signs, decor and dress, labels on food cans). But one thing is that children recognise traits of difference, another matter is what they make of these traits. Our results demonstrate that European children do not necessarily consider that domestic media products belong to the domain of the known while foreign media products belong to domains of the unknown.

For many youngsters, hugely popular tv series such as *Ally McBeal* or *Friends*, may be readily incorporated into a known everyday world: their genre concepts are so conventional as to be perceived as generic. And their conflicts are immediately recognisable. What Ien Ang has termed the emotional realism of soaps (Ang 1985) makes the seemingly exotic world of Australian beaches and American suburbs into a domestic norm. Conversely, domestically produced narratives demonstrating unusual formal traits or focusing upon characters and narrative modes not normally depicted in the media may seem more outlandish and strange to young audiences than a soap opera produced abroad.

Results such as these should caution against making simple analogies between domestic culture as a homogeneous and known domain of experience that may be neatly contrasted to foreign culture as an equally homogeneous unknown whose exoticism is defined and delimited through its complete difference from the domestic. The comparative, European study shows that mediated globalization may be as much about exotising the seemingly well-known as about acculturation to the seemingly foreign.

So far, theories of otherness in media and cultural studies have focused primarily upon what is termed diaspora cultures, that is distinct, immigrant cultures and their symbolic and material collisions and collusions of the cultures they encounter. In the words of British media ethnographer Marie Gillespie these encounters of subaltern cultures nurture "the strategy of familiarising one's 'otherness' in terms of other 'others'" (Gillespie 1995: 5). The results of the European comparative study endorses such strategies. But it equally highlights the necessity to complement the notion of diaspora with conceptualisations of what, for want of a better term, I will call *mundane othernesses*, that is the often imperceptible processes of negotiating signs of otherness within seemingly homogeneous cultures.

In general, children, like many adults, favour fiction over fact. This has implications for users' associations of media globalization. Remembering that tv is the dominant

medium in terms of time use, let us take a closer look on the origins of informants' favourite tv programs (fig. 3):

Figure 3. Origin of 6-16-Year-Old Europeans' Favourite Tv Programmes (per cent)

		CH	DE	DK	ES	FI	GB	IL	SE
6-7 years	National	43	54	46	29	46	14	*	52
	International	NA	58	54	46	71	54	86	48
9-10 years	National	10	55	42	66	29	57	59	63
	International	90	45	58	35	72	43	41	37
12-13 years	National	7	66	27	72	25	61	30	52
	International	94	34	73	28	75	39	70	48
15-16 years	National	7	69	30	75	22	59	19	46
	International	93	31	70	25	78	41	81	54
Av.	National	8	60	36	68	26	57	29	53
	International	92	40	64	32	74	43	71	47

Source: K. Drotner (2001b) *Global Media Through Youthful Eyes*, p. 290 in S. Livingstone & M. Bovill. (Eds.) *Children and their Changing Media Environment: A European Comparative Study*.

In Denmark, Finland, Israel and Switzerland a solid majority of informants prefer tv programmes of foreign origin. These are all small countries and two of them – Israel and Switzerland – comprise quite separate language communities. And in small countries it is difficult to allow for, or prioritize, a varied domestic output of programs that appeal to the young of various ages and both genders. Unlike popular discourses of users' "dumbing down" (to Hollywood), the European study demonstrates that young informants prefer foreign fiction, not because it is foreign, but because it appeals in style and content.

Foreign fiction is also commercial fiction. Conversely, factual genres such as news and documentaries are still a mainstay of national, public-service media. Thus, young European media users tend to develop a chain of associations in which the concept of media globalization is linked to fiction, which is fun, entertainment, while the concept of public-service media is linked to the nation – boring, but necessary facts. Naturally, such trains of association have wide-ranging policy implications that I will merely point to on this occasion (see e.g. Drotner 2001b).

While popular globalization discourses on old media such as tv often focus upon fears of Americanization, similar discourses on new media routinely focus on fears of identity fragmentation, of losing touch with real life in a maze of virtual realities (e.g. Turkle 1995). In theoretical terms, such distinction between offline and online existences are often based on an untenable distinction between direct, unmediated experience of situated experience vs symbolically mediated experience. We may heed Manuel Castells remark here that "all realities are communicated through symbols (...) In a sense, all reality is virtually perceived" (Castells 1996: 373). In empirical terms, the European study documents that identity play is mainly a question of netiquette, of not giving away one's real name, age (and telephone number); it is a conventional part of flirting on URLs where it is applied as a strategy to control intimacy; and it is integral to role playing. But

when it comes to contents, what children chat about, what they relate to and engage in, virtual and real identities are one and the same.

The ubiquitous presence of global and increasingly convergent media in everyday life does not imply a dissolution or radical upheaval of social relations. Rather, two other interesting trends stand out: one is that media are catalysts in the formation of social networks and interaction. In Denmark, for example, media account for 40% of youngsters' (9-16 years old) interaction with friends: videos top the list closely followed by computer games (Drotner 2001a: 164). The other trend is that, in the Nordic countries, the contexts of media use tend to bifurcate: they become at once more individualised and more ritualised. During weekdays, media use is often an individual pastime (this is particularly true for children who have a tv set in their room). And during weekends, media are pivots of social encounters and engagements.

The Future of Media Studies

Media research, by being defined through its object of study, has always found itself at the crossroads of several disciplines and traditions of research. At times and depending on local traditions, only few streets have seemed safe, while at other times and in different locales, byroads and sidetracks have seemed plentiful. As the international academic communities face the joint challenges of media convergence and globalization, few doubt that we need theories, concept-building and empirical studies geared towards analysing and seeking to understand developments of increasing complexity. To meet these needs, we do not merely have to form interdisciplinary research, since this was always an option. But, as I will argue, we face a challenge of practicing interdisciplinary research in qualitatively different ways.

From Interdisciplinary to Integrative Research

In the international scientific community of the 1980s and 1990s, there was much debate on the possible fusion of social-science and arts perspectives, on the relative benefits of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and on top-down and bottom-up epistemologies. I would wish on this occasion to remember the late Kjell Nowak, professor of communication and media studies at Stockholm University. At an intervention at Nordicom's anniversary conference in Trondheim in 1993 Nowak stressed the need for an intensified interaction between the arts and social-science traditions in media studies; and in his own research and professional work, not least with students and young scholars, he, himself, epitomised that endeavour. But in Trondheim Nowak also had foresight enough to project that in times "when crowding magnify around the fleshpots" as he said (Nowak 1994: 41), that dialogue would remain superficial and short-lived. Others, including myself, have argued for a kaleidoscopic or dialogic research perspective in media studies – open to different views – as a way to retain and develop scientific diversity and nurture scientific milieus that are enabling for young scholars (e.g. Ganetz 1994, Drotner 2000).

These are laudable aims, and some interdisciplinary research centres over the years have succeeded in turning aims into exciting, scientific practices. But the lofty aims are rarely attained under the day-to-day pressures and nitty-gritty work conditions most of us live with and help shape. Under these conditions, scientific interaction between traditions and paradigms all too easily materialises as what may be termed additive science: I do my thing, you do yours, and scientific consensus is maintained through processes

of non-interference, willed neglect or simple oblivion. The easy answer in the face of increasing theoretical and empirical complexity is relativism and retrenchment.

Today the debates on a scientific fusion between different disciplines within media studies are overshadowed by a more radical challenge. This challenge is often conceived as the challenge posed by the ICTs – the information and communications technologies (see e.g. Rogers 1986). As I see it, the fundamental challenge that we face today are not the ICTs as such. Rather it is the convergence between traditional mass media and more or less interactive ICT's, between new and old media. The empirical moves towards convergence (and the concomitant developments of divergences, as witnessed by the examples from the European study) calls not only for a quantitative extension of the issues to be considered (media *and* ICTs), nor for a mere extension of interdisciplinary research as it is. What we need is a shift in the order of magnitude: increasing empirical complexity should be matched by increasing acumen in the academic community to tackle this complexity.

More specifically, we need to develop what I will call *a convergent media research*. Let me list what could be some of its important ramifications: it is certainly more than mere additive research (I do my thing, you do yours, and at best we meet in neutral talks over coffee). It is also more than interdisciplinary dialogue at intermittent research seminars whose discussions have no repercussions on members' continuous concept-building or day-to-day research activities. Conversely, it is less than attempts at forming a master discourse, or a single canon, where only one truth holds sway. That strategy, as most of us know, is as excellent for power-building as it is poor for innovative science.

Between the extremes of relativism and essentialism, a more promising route may be opened by considering Wittgenstein's notion that coherence in conceptual use need not be due to a unitary essence, but can come about through semantic overlap between one usage and the next. Wittgenstein called a semantic structure of this type 'family resemblance' (see Welsch 1997), and, perhaps somewhat dauntingly, one may speak of conceptual convergence. What I suggest, then, is that complex concepts are developed and defined through a continuous process of defining overlapping uses – it is crucial to clarify when overlaps are found and applied.

In reference to Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance, or conceptual convergence, one may define the challenges facing current and, indeed, future media science, as the challenges to enhance our efforts at defining and developing such joint sets of discursive convergencies.

Ramifications of a Convergent Media Studies

What, then, does convergent media studies imply? First and foremost, it implies a fusion of "old" and "new" media research, or media and ICT studies. ICT-studies have traditionally focused upon the computer as a specific medium (or, a meta-medium, cp. Kay 1999) and studied screen-based human-computer interaction within often rather specific contexts of use. This approach is clearly challenged by ubiquitous and mobile media and ICTs. Similarly, media studies have traditionally focused upon investigating single mass media or single genres and have done so by applying either a material or symbolic perspective (Williams 1975/1990, Carey 1989/1992). Such approaches are clearly challenged by intermedia crossovers, by media that focus upon point-to-point communication and by media that allow various degrees of interactivity turning receivers into (potential) producers.

For both ICT studies and media studies, the move towards convergence, the immediacy of media globalization and the mobility of communication together demand new ways of approaching the temporal and spatial dimensions of communication.

Methodological Challenges: Processual Approaches

Centrally, a convergent media and ICT research implies an integration of deductive approaches and methodologies, traditionally nurtured by the natural and parts of the social sciences, and inductive approaches and methodologies, traditionally favoured by the humanities and (other) parts of the social sciences. Concepts may be developed inductively from case studies, but cases are also part of larger patterns that it needs deduction to perceive and explain. An integration of deductive and inductive approaches is more than a methodological integration, it also and just as importantly, involves healing very basic theoretical and, indeed, epistemological divergences between ideographic and nomothetical perspectives that it would be unwise to overlook.

More specifically, the increase in online and mobile forms of communication necessitates an intensified focus upon the development of what may be termed more "processual methodologies". These methodologies allow us to study often ephemeral forms of communication as they evolve – e.g. the intricate interplay between different discourse levels or "universes" in chat communication, or the exchanges made between physical and virtual interlocutors in mobile phone communication. It is evident that, in a methodological sense, ICT and media scholars may draw on the long tradition established within ethnography in studying processes rather than structures (Hine 2000, Mann & Stewart 2000).

Organizational Challenges: Beyond Professional Boundaries

Last but by no means least, the Challenges brought about by the complexities of convergence, make it important that we reach beyond professional boundaries both within the academe and between academic and more applied forms of research. Drawing on an analogy from biology where one speaks about biological diversity as a resource for survival, one may speak of the necessity of *professional diversity* as a resource, if not for survival, then at least for our continued ability to make proactive research by which we may not only sustain the development of a convergent media culture but through which we may also retain impartial study and critique as a necessary base to make political, educational and aesthetic distinctions and informed choices.

More specifically, professional diversity involves intensified cooperation between scholars from the arts (including history, design, linguistics, literary studies), the social sciences (including anthropology and economy) and the natural sciences (including soft engineering and interaction design). All of these hold decisive stakes in the development of media convergence but none of them hold the key to a full understanding of its implications. In order for such a cooperation to succeed, a lot of bridge-building is needed. Drawing on my own recent experiences at the University of Southern Denmark of creating a new centre of convergent media studies, I can testify that it takes time, interest and energy from all parties involved – from the technical and administrative staff to teachers, students and university directors – to move beyond established administrative, intellectual and practical cultures.

Based partly on these experiences, let me just list a few of the organizational "pillars" that we need to establish and strengthen. In immediate terms, there are already good

examples of successful cooperation between academics and media and ICT partners, but so far, with a bias towards either a technical, a social or, less often, a cultural/symbolic perspective and with rather few examples of an integration of the ICT and media perspectives in continuous forms of theoretical and empirical cooperation. Here, we need more longterm projects and partnerships that integrate the ICT and media perspectives and do so by involving researchers and developers from a diversity of professional backgrounds. Allow me to stress that successful cooperation need not be a question of size. Also very small groups, even individual scholars with a solid research network, may develop convergent research. It is the nature of the scientific object at hand that should guide our organizational frameworks, not the other way round.

In the longer term, new forms of training are needed in universities, colleges and high-schools in which the technical, symbolic and social dimensions of communication and ICT are integrated, and such a development involves new forms of cooperation between faculties that today often stand divided within the academic community in an attempt to gain critical advantages in an increasingly competitive academic culture. In my own experience and counter-intuitively, convergent curriculum development is a more profound challenge to the scholars involved than is convergent research, because it involves questioning the very basis of established paradigms and discipline traditions: which professional skills and competencies do we really think students need to navigate successfully in tomorrow's media culture? To answer questions such as these strike at the core of every discipline and hence demands more openness and reflexive dialogue in the formation of new platforms.

Beyond Big Brother in the Academe

By way of conclusion, I would like to make the conjecture that, given our objects of research, media and ICT scholars will never want new challenges and new chances. I would also like to express the wish that we may be able to meet these challenges and chances so as to facilitate the formation of new options and communities such as the title of this conference suggests.

As we all know, the programme *Big Brother* has its name from George Orwell's novel *1984* in which all inhabitants are surveyed electronically by "big brother". Luckily, such a panoptic perspective is neither feasible nor possible as a research perspective on our complex media culture in the years to come. A modest step towards forming professional options and communities, I would suggest, is for us to generate theoretical and methodological tools so that we may teach our students why it is possible today to form a global concept such as *Big Brother* without holding the stakes to fulfill the original implications of the title.

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