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Plenary Addresses

17th Nordic Conference on
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NORDICOM invites media researchers to contribute scientific articles, reviews, and debates. Submission of original articles is open to all researchers in the field of media and communication in the Nordic countries, irrespective of discipline and institutional allocation. All articles are refereed.

Aims and Scope

Nordicom Review (ISSN 1403-1108) provides a major forum for media and communication researchers in the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The semi-annual journal is addressed to the international scholarly community. It publishes the best of media and communication research in the region, as well as theoretical works in all its diversity; it seeks to reflect the great variety of intellectual traditions in the field and to facilitate a dialogue between them. As an interdisciplinary journal, *Nordicom Review* welcomes contributions from the best of the Nordic scholarship in relevant areas, and encourages contributions from senior researchers as well as younger scholars.

Nordicom Review offers reviews of Nordic publications, and publishes notes on a wide range of literature, thus enabling scholars all over the world to keep abreast of Nordic contributions in the field. Special thematic issues of interest are also published from time to time.

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Plenary Addresses

The 17th Nordic Conference on Media and Communication Research

Supplement

The 17th Nordic Conference on Media and Communication Research

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Foreword

The 17th Nordic Conference for Media and Communication Research was held in Aalborg, Denmark, 11th-14th August 2005. Arrangers and hosts for the conference were the Association of Media Researchers in Denmark (SMID) and the Department of Communication in the Faculty for the Humanities at Aalborg University. More than 320 scholars from Denmark (66), Finland (22), Iceland (2), Norway (77) and Sweden (65) gathered to discuss current research and findings. In addition, some participants came from further afield, for example, from Austria, the Baltic States, Germany and Great Britain in Europe, and from Ethiopia, Canada and the USA.

The conference proceedings included plenaries and thematic seminars in 28 different working groups, where about 240 research papers were presented. In addition participants enjoyed a number of social gatherings and cultural events. The Nordic conferences, held every second year, and particularly the working groups, have contributed greatly to the development of media and communication research in the Nordic countries. The working groups have the following headings:

| | |
|--|--|
| Media and Global Culture | Language and Rhetoric in the Media |
| Media Structure and Economics | The Media's Construction of Gender |
| Medialization of Religion and Culture | Public Relations/Planned Communication |
| Media History | Mediated Risk, Crisis and War Communication |
| Film History | Digital Text: Genre, Form and Process |
| Television: Institution, Production and Text | Digital Culture: New Forms of Social Interaction and Communication |
| Radio and other Sound Media | Media and the Multiethnic Society |
| Political Communication | Media and Communication Theory: Research and Disciplines |
| Journalism Research | Intimidation Communication |
| The Sociology and Aesthetics of News Reporting | Marketing Communication and Aesthetics |
| Media Use. Perspectives, Methods and Theory | Media Development |
| Children, Youth and Media | Computer Games |
| Media Education | Interactive Television |
| Fiction in Film and TV | |
| Visual Culture | |

A number of the papers presented at the conference have been revised and edited to become articles that were then submitted for review for publication in English. Together, the articles presented in this special issue of *Nordicom Review* give the reader some idea of the breadth and depth of Nordic scholarship in the area.

A supplement contains the lectures held in plenary sessions and a list of the papers presented in English.

Responsibility for arranging the conferences is divided into two parts. More comprehensive questions, such as the theme, keynote speakers, working groups and fees are the responsibility of a Nordic Planning Committee, whose members are appointed by the national media and communication research associations. Members of the Committee that planned the conference in Aalborg were Anne Jerslev, SMID (Denmark), Chair; Leif-Ove Larsen, NML (Norway); Thorbjörn Broddason, University of Iceland; Inka Salovaara-Moring, TOY (Finland), Mats Ekström, FSMK (Sweden); and Ulla Carlsson, Nordicom.

A Local Planning Committee, consisting of Gunhild Agger (Chair), Peter Allingham, Janne Bang, Christian Jantzen, Ole Prehn, Tove Arendt-Rasmussen, Henrik Sand and Jørgen Stigel, all at Aalborg University, were responsible for the arrangements and details of the conference. Henrik Sand served as coordinator for the conference as a whole.

The next Nordic conference is to be held in Helsinki, Finland, 16th-19th August 2007.

Göteborg in October 2006

Ulla Carlsson

Editor

Challenges of the New Symbolic Order

The 17th Nordic Conference on Media and Communication Research

GUNHILD AGGER

Good afternoon. On behalf of SMID, the Danish Association of Media Researchers, I'd like to welcome you all to Aalborg University. The occasion is pleasant. The conference of media researchers from the Nordic countries has become a meeting place we would have to invent, if we didn't have it. Generally, media research in our countries is carried out on a high level. Media research as well as the societies and cultures it refers to have a lot in common. But it also implies a sufficient number of striking and eye opening dissimilarities. This is why comparison between the Nordic countries is always an inspiring undertaking.

The list of participants displays a lot of veterans – and quite a few newcomers. Welcome to both categories. Fortunately, it is not so simple, that the vets only serve the noble purpose of continuity and the newcomers the purpose of renewal. If I can rely on the clues in the abstracts, tradition and innovation are mixed among the participants and cross the generations.

What a summer! Suicide bombers in London in July, reminding us of Madrid last year in March. Thanks to surveillance cameras, the bombers didn't remain anonymous, but the first team remained dead – just as the team in Madrid killed themselves before they were arrested. An efficient way of stopping dialogue. Unwilling to state their aim, reluctant to claim any kind of responsibility for their actions, death becomes the only message. This message was repeated in Sharm-el-Sheik. And indeed in Musayyib, Iraq. Only, the last mentioned attack didn't receive much attention in the media. What's new? This suicide bombing resembled so many others in Iraq, only it was worse.

Following the line from 9/11, action has replaced reasoning, violence has substituted arguments. Suddenly, we are forced to acknowledge that the days when hi-jacking and threats were accompanied by messages in words are over. Words are not met with appreciation by these groups. How very odd! However savage and inexcusable the actions of the Baader-Meinhof-group were during the 1970es, they were easier to understand than this language of sudden violence in the tube, a railway station, a holiday resort or a market place. The message, of course, is clear – even if it is not expressed in words: the war in Afghanistan or Iraq will spread to the rest of the world. Destruction, consequently, will be conducted anywhere. Don't feel safe – ever! The new symbolic order of sudden death-bringing action is both cruel and real.

In this situation, it is a challenge to keep up circumstantial, scientific analysis – of the news, of the images and representations of events, the rhetoric, the victims, of the criminals and their possible motives, backgrounds and contexts. This challenge has been met

by participants of the conference, e.g. in research on ‘War and consequence’ (in connection with the war in Iraq), ‘the Politics of fear’, ‘Reporting the Crusade’ and the representation of ethnical otherness in the media.

Does this mean that priority should be given to analysis of facts? Of course not. Shortly, even the events of 9/11 will be represented on film. It will be split up in hundreds of dramas, and it will influence people’s perception of 9/11 and its context worldwide. Negotiations will be carried out, introducing various perspectives and alternative interpretations.

Besides, everyday life continues as it always did, and so do all the genres connected to it – from *Extreme Makeover* to *Changing Rooms*, *The Weakest Link* and all sorts of drama and reality shows conveyed on television, discussed in everyday conversation and a major source of comments in the printed media. Such genres even seem to thrive. What does this express about the popular culture and the divides in our societies? Which limits between public and private life are still to be respected? The ethical questions arising from all sorts of reality programmes are evident.

Another recent object of research is the experience economy, a much hyped phenomenon that may have positive effects on the economy of the humanities. To know more about the consequences, we direct our attention to this phenomenon. Obviously, this demands an interdisciplinary approach.

This leads me to a few comments on the theoretical context of this conference and its connections to the last conference. According to Arild Fetweit, one of the key concepts behind the conference programme in Kristiansand two years ago aimed at ‘rectifying’ some of the ‘in-balances’ between scholars from the humanities and the sociologists. This ambition, one could argue, had already begun in Reykjavik. In the reflections on both media history and the media of the future, a combination of research traditions played a dominant part. The Kristiansand conference however, succeeded in drawing more attention to research areas essential to the humanities such as rhetorics in media studies, the globalisation of language, and the questions of digital aesthetics.

This left the planning committee in Aalborg with a problem. Which challenges should we build into the conference programme? On one hand, we wanted to continue what had begun in Kristiansand. On the other hand, we would also like to contribute to the further development of common critical reflection. The result was the theme *Media Research – Demarcations and Interfaces*. We have often disagreed on the relevance of themes, theories and methods. We have even disagreed on the subject whether such a thing as *media research* existed, whether it contained a common kernel, or whether the concept of media research just should be understood as an umbrella! Instead of focusing on the disagreements, we invite you to discuss all the options inherent in the concepts of demarcations and interfaces.

The programme aims at highlighting some of these demarcations and interfaces, such as the role of information in contemporary society, questions of method in constructing the digital object, design as an approach to media research, the impact of sound and silence in the media, the new conditions of public service and TV entertainment – and the reality of media research.

We have provided a frame. It is up to you to fill it in. You are the conference.

Socio-Digital Formations

Constructing an Object of Study

SASKIA SASSEN

One of the distinctive capabilities of computer-centered technologies is the rescaling of social relations and domains. What has tended to operate or be nested at local scales can now move to global scales, and global relations and domains can now, in turn, become directly articulated with local settings. As a result of the growing presence and use of these technologies, an increasing range of social relations and domains have become, *de facto*, transboundary. Understanding the place of these new computer-centered technologies and the ways in which they are transforming social relationships is the focus of an initiative launched by the Social Science Research Council in 2000 to contribute to the development of a social science of information technology (IT). The SSRC initiative aims at a specific component of this broad agenda for research on and conceptualization of IT, one that focuses on the work of constructing the object of research that speaks to social scientists as opposed to, for instance, computer engineers.¹

This task presents several challenges for social scientists. We – SSRC’s Committee on Information Technology and International Cooperation – decided to address two of these. One involves avoiding technological determinism or limiting research to the “impacts” of information technology on existing social arrangements. In a nutshell our concern with respect to this issue was to recognize that these technologies have contributed to construct whole new domains of interaction. To gain some closure on the effort, we confined our focus to computer-centered interactive technology and to interactive electronic information and communication structures. A second challenge is to go beyond what is one of the most evident and powerful capabilities that these technologies bring to interactive domains: decentralized access. In practical terms this has meant the possibility of reaching far more people – as consumers, as students, as activists – and firms and institutions. But these technologies evince at least two other basic capabilities that we need to factor into social science research. One is interconnectivity (i.e., each point of access can interact directly with all other such points) and the other, simultaneity (same-time transacting). In combination with the first, these two capabilities have it in them to produce significant qualitative transformations in communication and information structures.

Qualitative Transformations: Two Examples

In my own research, I find electronic financial markets to be a good illustration of such a qualitative transformation that comes about when all three capabilities – decentralized access, interconnectivity, and simultaneity – are in play. One of the key and most significant outcomes of digital technology in finance has been the jump in orders of magnitude and the extent of worldwide interconnectedness. There are basically three ways in which digitization has contributed to this outcome. One is the use of sophisticated software, a key feature of the global financial markets today and a condition that in turn has made possible an enormous amount of innovation. Second, the distinctive features of digital networks can maximize the implications of global market integration by producing the possibility of simultaneous interconnected flows and transactions, as well as decentralized access for investors and for exchanges in a growing number of countries. The key background factor here is that since the late 1980s, the trend has been for more and more countries to de- and re-regulate their economies according to a particular set of criteria that has ensured cross-border convergence, the linking of different markets, and the global integration of their financial centers. Third, because finance is particularly about transactions rather than simple flows of money, the technical properties of digital networks assume added meaning. Interconnectivity, simultaneity, decentralized access, and software instruments all contribute to multiply the number of transactions, the length of transaction chains (i.e., distance between instrument and underlying asset), and thereby the number of participants. The overall outcome is a complex architecture of transactions. These three features of today's global market for capital are inextricably related to the new technologies.

As this example makes clear, new technologies are partly embedded in institutional environments that have the power to inscribe such technology. As a result the outcome does not reflect exclusively the features of the particular technology at work. One focus of the work of the SSRC's efforts to develop a social science of information technology (IT) has been to capture the interactions between the technical and social logics at work in producing distinctive outcomes across different social contexts in which information technologies are used. These new technologies have had a deeply transformative effect but they do not dislodge the fact that a substantive agenda organizes market actors. Today's global capital market is a complex formation markedly different from earlier global financial markets partly because of its extensive digitization. But digitization does not replace the financial, as different from digitization, logic driving actors even as it changes the composition of their options. Finance remains embedded in a larger set of economic institutions. The global capital market is a particularly helpful case for examining these dynamics of transformation and embeddedness.

Electronic activist networks provide a contrasting example of the transformative potential of information technologies, illustrating how the local can become embedded in the non-local, specifically global networks and global agendas. Through their practices, these local but globally connected activists are developing a particular type of global politics, one that runs through localities and is not predicated on the existence of global institutions. Simultaneous decentralized access can help local actors have a sense of participation in struggles that are not necessarily global, but are globally distributed in that they occur in locality after locality. Computer-centered interactive technologies facilitate multi-scalar transactions and simultaneous interconnectivity among those confined largely to a locality.²

Both of these instances are examples of scaling that incorporate all three capabilities of computer interactive technologies. They suggest that the scale-up of such technologies is not simply a matter of reaching larger numbers of people, but has the potential to transform social structures and relationships. The SSRC's effort to construct a different type of object for research from those that are typical in the social sciences might also be of interest to researchers in other fields pursuing innovative ways of using these technologies. For example, "grid technology" that makes possible scientific collaboration discussed by Foster and Kesselman would seem to factor in all three capabilities of IT.

The SSRC Project: Specifying the Problem

SSRC's project on information technology is designed to capture the distinctiveness and variable weight of computer-centered interactive technologies in a broad range of electronic communication and information structures.³ A key objective is the development of analytic categories that would allow the researcher to factor in this variability.⁴ Models centered on technology as the explanatory variable – a common choice – can capture intensity of impact (weak, strong) but cannot adequately capture other features of this variability (e.g., the formation of new interactive domains). Understanding the place of these new computer-centered technologies and their capabilities from a social science perspective requires avoiding a purely technological interpretation and recognizing the embeddedness and the variable outcomes of these technologies for different economic, political, and social orders. They can indeed be constitutive of new social dynamics, but they can also be derivative or merely reproduce older conditions. Further, while some of their capabilities are distinct and exclusive to these technologies, others simply amplify the effects of older technologies.

Methodologically, this concern required us to go beyond the notion that understanding these technologies can be reduced to the question of impacts. There is a growing literature that examines the impacts of these technologies on specific domains long constructed as objects of study by the various social sciences.⁵ But impacts are only one of several forms of intersection of society and technology. Others have to do with the constitution of whole new socio-technical interactive domains – what we call digital formations – which in turn need to be constructed as objects of study. This means examining the specific ways in which these technologies are embedded in (often very specialized) distinct contexts. And it requires examining the mediating cultures that organize the relation between these technologies and users – among which we might include matters as diverse as gendering or the utility logics that organize use. These mediating cultures can be quite diverse and particular; for example, when the objective is control and surveillance, the practices and dispositions involved are likely to be different from those involved in using electronic markets or engaging in large-scale computer based conversations.

If these technologies can transform existing, and even constitute whole new interactive domains, we cannot confine the analytic development of this field of inquiry to framing analyses in terms of independent and dependent variables, by far the most common approach in the social sciences. We also need to develop analytic categories able to capture formations that incorporate into one entity what would be conceived of as mutually exclusive conditions or attributes in the independent-dependent variable framing, a subject I return to later.

How We Went about Specifying Computer-Centered Interactive Settings

We established what we might call disciplining conditions for executing the second step of our project: specifying the properties of actual interactive settings. First, we confined our project to electronically structured interactive domains.⁶ Second, we selected actually operating domains, rather than simulated environments, since we were not interested in game-theoretic models but wanted to understand the properties of actual interactive settings, including their possibly erratic character. Finally, we narrowed the choice of researchers and foci for analysis to a specific substantive field: interactive domains that are or are becoming part of the world of transnational and international relations.

Proceeding inductively seemed the most effective option given our aim of understanding key features of actual working domains in order to develop an analytic category or model that could then be used for examining other such electronic interactive domains. Since one of our key concerns is to get at the properties of new interactive domains made possible by these technologies, we decided to focus on multiple and very diverse empirical instances of such interactive domains. To that end we selected researchers (both social scientists and computer scientists) working on, among other topics, large-scale Internet-based conversations; global communication systems of major multinational corporations; early conflict warning systems; electronic financial markets; electronic activist networks; knowledge spaces; and open source software development communities. These are all interactive domains structured electronically, and they are all actual empirical cases.

One way of addressing our concerns in the project was to emphasize the variable interaction between the diverse capabilities (technical and social) involved. First, we defined as technical capabilities those endogenous to electronic information and communication structures. Insofar as these interactive electronic structures involve people (there are those that do not), we defined them as containing endogenized social logics directly affecting the transactions – for example, rationales and utility functions of users, whether traders, open source software developers, or the other actors the project focuses on. Each of the domains we selected contains a specific type of interaction between endogenous technical capabilities and endogenized social logics. Second, we recognized that the weight of each the technical or the social will vary according to the domain and according to the cumulative causation or path dependence (i.e., closing out the full range of possibilities that may have existed at time one) set in motion with each of these combinations.⁷ The particular techniques and methods to be deployed to capture this variability will depend partly on the particular digital formation under study. The key is that they should accommodate variability of interaction between technical and social factors (as defined in our project), and tendencies towards path dependence in the development of these interactions.

Let me elaborate briefly on the above. An important issue for us was, as I indicated earlier, to avoid technological determinism yet at the same time to recognize the specific capabilities of computer-centered interactive technologies. One reason for this was, again, that these technologies can constitute whole new domains for social interaction and cannot be confined to the status of an independent variable as is so often the case. In their digitized form, these domains exhibit properties of their own that derive from technical capabilities enabling specific patterns of interaction. These properties are then endogenous to these digitized structures rather than the product of an exogenous con-

text – i.e., financial system, educational system, the interstate system – even though the technologies themselves tend to result from nontechnical rationales (e.g., much of the development in electronic interactive domains has been driven by finance and its objectives). Among these endogenous properties are the simultaneity of information exchange, distributive outcomes, capacity for electronic storage and memory, in combination with the new possibilities for access and dissemination that characterize the Internet and other computer-centered information systems.

But insofar as these are interactive social domains they are also characterized by an endogenizing of social logics. By social logics we intend to refer to a broad range of conditions, actors, and projects, including specific utility logics of users as well as the substantive rationalities of institutional and ideational orders. These endogenized social logics will (a) vary from one domain to another (e.g., electronic financial markets and electronic activist networks both use the three technical capabilities described earlier, but they do so for very different purposes), and (b) will variously alter the straightforward technical effect – that is, they may reduce, enhance, or distort the technical capabilities.⁸ Further, social logics can also produce whole new possibilities and push technical advances, as has clearly been the case in electronic financial markets, for example.

This way of approaching our problem allows us to conceive of these electronic information and communication structures as resulting from various mixes of computer-centered technical capabilities and the broad range of social contexts that provide the utility logics, substantive rationalities, and cultural meanings for the particular types of digital interaction involved. In this regard then the digital spaces that concern us in this project are socio-digital.

Digital formation is the construct we settled on in the project to designate these specific types of information and communication structures. Digital formations are then to be distinguished from digital technology *tout court*. Further, not all digital networks are digital formations. The latter are mixed outcomes in that they result from endogenous technical properties and endogenized social logics. They are digitized structures but are partly shaped and given meaning by social, political, economic, ideational, and often visual, conditions that exist typically outside of or, at the minimum, transcend the technology as such.

Digital formations can assume a variety of forms. Among those familiar to the social sciences are networks, markets, and communities. But there are other ways of typifying these formations both within and outside the conceptual framing of the social sciences. We can also expect new types of forms to emerge as the use of these technologies widens. The multiplication of digital formations over the last decade means that these can in turn begin to function as social, albeit digitized, conditionings for new technical developments. From a social science perspective, as compared to a purely engineering one, such digitized information and communication structures and dynamics are mixed domains in that they filter, and are given meaning by, social logics.

The presence of social logics in the structuring of these formations means, from a social science perspective, that the technical capabilities of these new technologies are characterized by both variability and specificity. Technical capabilities are deployed or used in ways that are uneven and contradictory within diverse digital formations. They unfold in particular contexts – that is, they do not exist as purely technological events. This in turn makes it difficult to generalize their transformative effects. Variability and specificity are crucial dimensions emerging from the diverse foci of analysis in our pro-

ject. The choice of researchers in the project sought to address this as each focuses in great detail on a different subject. While variability and specificity make generalization difficult, detailed study can illuminate patterns and structures helpful in hypothesizing future trends and in developing agendas for research as IT continues to evolve.⁹

Beginning the Work of Locating Digital Formations

A key issue in the project is the construction of digital formations as an object for study. There are several analytic vocabularies that can be used to do this. Identifying and also developing such vocabularies is part of the conceptual mapping of this field of inquiry and the effort to generate research agendas on the subject. Each of the researchers in the project worked in a specialized discipline and hence used a distinct analytic vocabulary and focused on a distinct puzzle or theme.¹⁰ Here I will simply discuss some strategies for beginning the work of locating a digital formation in a conceptual field that allows us to capture both endogenous technical properties and “external” social logics. Which ones of these external social logics become endogenized will depend on the particular domain under study.

We identify analytic operations that allow us to factor in the intersection of technologies and social logics. These analytic operations should hold whether these technologies are derivative, transformative, or constitutive. And they should hold for a broad range of specific types of digital formations. Such analytic operations can assume multiple forms. We have opted for three such operations, sufficiently complex as to accommodate a broad range of outcomes. We specify these as a first approximation for locating digital formations by understanding the broader field within which they emerge and eventually get constituted as electronic information and communication structures.

At the most general level we want to emphasize the importance of analytic categories and frames that allow us to capture the complex imbrications between the computer capabilities that concern us here and the contexts within which they are deployed or used. A second set of analytic operations concerns the mediating practices and cultures that organize the relation between these technologies and users in order to understand more precisely the social logics at work. (This would seem to be a crucial issue for the implementation of computer-centered interactive initiatives in the educational system.) Until quite recently there was no critical elaboration of these mediations because it was assumed that questions of access, competence, and interface design fully captured mediating experience. A third set of analytic operations is aimed at recognizing questions of scaling, an area where these particular technologies have evinced enormous transformative and constitutive capabilities. In the social sciences, scale (not to be confused with scale-up) has largely been conceived of as a given or as context and has, in that regard, not been a critical category. The new technologies have brought scale to the fore precisely through their destabilizing of existing hierarchies of scale and notions of nested hierarchies. Thereby they have contributed to launch a whole new heuristic, which, interestingly, also resonates with developments in the natural sciences where questions of scaling have surfaced in novel ways. The next three sections develop these issues very briefly.

Digital/Social Imbrications

Using the term imbrication is a way of specifying an interaction that is not characterized by hybridity or blurring: the technical and the social can shape and condition each other but each is and remains specific and distinct.¹¹ And such interactions can occur in often short or long chains, where one outcome (social) contributes to a new technical element which can contribute to a new social condition that in turn behaves like a conditioning for the technical. Throughout these interactions the specificity is maintained even as each is transformed, and in that sense this process can be described as one of imbrications.

As a first approximation we can identify three features of this process of imbrication. To illustrate, we can use one of the key capabilities of these technologies, that of raising the mobility of capital and thereby changing the relationship between mobile firms and territorial nation-states. This is further accentuated by the “de-materialization” brought about by the digitization of much economic activity. Digitization raises the mobility of what we have customarily thought of as not mobile, or barely mobile. Once digitized, an economic activity or good gains hypermobility – instantaneous circulation through digital networks with global span. Both mobility and digitization are usually seen as mere effects or at best functions of the new technologies. Such conceptions erase the fact that achieving this outcome requires multiple conditions, including such diverse ones as infrastructure and legal changes.

The first feature, then, is that the production of both capital mobility and dematerialization takes capital fixity – state of the art built-environments, a talented professional workforce on the ground at least some of the time, legal systems, and conventional infrastructure from highways to airports and railways. These are all partly place-bound conditions. Once we recognize that the hypermobility of the instrument had to be *produced*, we introduce non-digital variables in our analysis of the digital. Such an interpretation carries implications for theory and practice. For instance, simply having access to these technologies does not necessarily alter the position of resource-poor countries or organizations in an international system with enormous inequality in resources.¹²

A second feature that needs to be recovered here is that the capital fixity needed for hypermobility and dematerialization is itself transformed in this process. The real estate industry illustrates some of these issues. Financial services firms have invented instruments that liquefy real estate, thereby facilitating investment and circulation of these instruments in global markets. Yet, part of what constitutes real estate remains very physical. At the same time, however, that which remains physical has been transformed by the fact that it is represented by highly liquid instruments that can circulate in global markets. One way of capturing the difference would be to call it a form of extreme landlord absenteeism. It may look the same, it may involve the same bricks and mortar, it may be new or old, but it is a transformed entity.

The nature of place-boundedness here differs from what it may have been one hundred years ago when it was far more likely to be a form of immobility. Today it is a place-boundedness that is in turn inflected or inscribed by the hypermobility of some of its components, products, and outcomes. Both capital fixity and mobility are located in a temporal frame where speed is ascendant and consequential. This type of capital fixity cannot be fully captured through a description confined to its material and locational features.

A third feature in this process of imbrication can be captured through the notion of the social logics organizing the process. Many of the digital components of financial markets are inflected by the agendas that drive global finance, and these are not technological per se. The same technical properties can produce outcomes that differ from those of electronic financial markets. Much of our interacting in digital space would lack any meaning or referents if we were to exclude the non-digital world. It is deeply inflected by the cultures, the material practices, the legal systems, the imaginaries, that take place outside digital space. It is necessary then to distinguish between the technologies and the digital formations they contribute to make possible. The types of digital spaces of concern to our project are not exclusively technical conditions that stand outside the social. They are embedded in the larger societal, cultural, subjective, economic, imaginary structurations of lived experience and the systems within which we exist and operate.

In this regard then digitization is multivalent. It brings with it an amplification of both mobile and fixed capacities. It inscribes the non-digital but is itself also inscribed by the non-digital. The specific content, implications, and consequences of each of these variants are empirical questions – objects for study. So what is conditioning the outcome when digital technologies are at work and what is conditioned by the outcome? We have difficulty capturing this multi-valence through our conventional categories which tend to dualize and posit mutual exclusivity: if it is immobile, it *is* immobile, and if it is mobile, it *is* mobile (a type of endogeneity problem). Using the example of real estate signals that the partial representation of real estate through liquid financial instruments produces a complex imbrication of the material and the de-materialized moments of that which we continue to call real estate. And so does the partial endogeneity of physical infrastructure in electronic financial markets.

Mediating Practices and Cultures

One consequence of the above is that the articulations between digital space and users – whether social, political, or economic actors – are constituted in terms of mediating cultures and/or practices. They result partly from the values, cultures, power systems, and institutional orders within which users are embedded. Use is not simply a question of access and understanding how to use the hardware and the software.

There is a strong tendency in the literature to assume use to be an unmediated event and hence to make it unproblematic (once access and competence are given). There is in fact much more of a critical literature when it comes to questions of access. At best, recognition of a mediating culture has been confined to that of the “techie”, one that has become naturalized rather than recognized as one particular type of mediating culture. Beyond this thick computer-centered use culture, there is a tendency to flatten the practices of users to questions of competence and utility.

From the perspective of the social sciences, use of the technology should be problematized rather than simply seen as shaped by technical requirements and the necessary knowledge, even though this might be the perspective of the computer scientist and engineer who designed it. For instance, in his research on use of the Internet by different types of Arab groups, Jon Anderson (2003) found that the young “westernized” Arabs in his study made the same use as many youths in our societies: cruising, chat

clubs, shopping. In contrast, scholars of the Koran, the most traditional group in his study, made a far more sophisticated use of the technology as they hyperlinked their way through the text and prior text annotations. Being scholars of the text, they had a complex mediating culture that allowed them to use the technology (no matter how “traditional” the activity) far more intensely and to derive a far greater utility. These mediating cultures also can produce a subject and a subjectivity that become part of the mediation. For instance, in open source networks much meaning is derived from the fact that these practitioners contest a dominant economic-legal system centered in private property protections; participants become active subjects in a process that extends beyond their individual work and produces a culture. There are multiple ways of examining the mediating cultures organizing use. Among others, these can conceivably range from small-scale ethnographies to macro-level surveys, from descriptive to highly theorized accounts, from a focus on ideational forms to one on structural conditions.

Scaling: The Transformative and Constitutive Capabilities of New Digital Technologies

Narrowing the discussion of scaling to the formation of transboundary domains (e.g., transnational civil society, transnational corporate networks, regional integration) – the overall focus in our project – we can identify four types of scaling dynamics in the constitution of global digital formations. These four dynamics are not mutually exclusive, as becomes clear when we use the example of what is probably one of the most globalized and advanced instances of a digital formation, electronic financial markets. A first type of scaling dynamic is the formation of global domains that function at the self-evident global scale, for example, some types of very large scale conversations (see, e.g., the chapter by Sack in Latham and Sassen, eds., 2005).

A second type of scaling can be identified in the local practices and conditions that become directly articulated with global dynamics, not having to move through the traditional hierarchy of jurisdictions. Electronic financial markets also can be used as an illustration here. The starting point is floor- or screen-based trading in exchanges and firms that are part of a worldwide network of financial centers. These localized transactions link up directly to a global electronic market. What begins as local gets rescaled at the global level.

A third type of scaling dynamic results from the fact that interconnectivity and decentralized simultaneous access multiplies the cross-border connections among various localities. This produces a very particular type of global formation, one which is a kind of distributed outcome: it resides in the multiplication of lateral and horizontal transactions, or in the recurrence of a process in a network of local sites, without the aggregation that leads to an actual globally scaled digital formation as is the case with electronic markets. Instances are open source software development, certain types of early conflict-warning systems, and worldwide activist networks (see, e.g., chapters by Weber, Alker, and Sassen in Latham and Sassen, eds., 2005).

A fourth type of scaling dynamic results from the fact that global formations can actually be partly embedded in sub-national sites and move between these differently scaled practices and organizational forms in a continuous two-way flow. For instance, the global electronic financial market is constituted both through electronic markets with global span, and through locally embedded conditions – that is, financial centers and all

they entail, from infrastructure to systems of trust. So are the global communication flagships of multinational corporations (see chapter by Ernst in Latham and Sassen, eds. 2005).

The new digital technologies have not caused these developments, but they have in variable yet specific ways facilitated them and shaped them. The overall effect is to reposition the meaning of local and global (when internetworked) in that each of these will tend to be multi-scalar. For example, much of what we might still experience as the “local” (an office building or a house or an institution right there in our neighborhood or downtown) actually is a microenvironment with global span insofar as it is internetworked. Such a microenvironment is in many senses a localized entity, but it is also part of global digital networks which give it immediate far-flung span. To continue to think of this as simply local is not very useful. It is a multiscalar condition. Part of the work of constructing electronic information and communication structures as an object for socio-scientific study entails locating these structures against the scalar complexity that the new technologies have made possible rather than taking scales as givens and self-contained.

Notes

1. The results of this initiative can be found in Latham and Sassen (eds.), *Digital Formations: Information Technologies and New Architectures in the Global Realm* (Princeton University Press 2005). Details about the various components of the initiative can be found on the Committee on Information Technology and International Cooperation’s website at ssrc.org. See also *Items* (the official publication of the SSRC), Spring 2004. We thank The Ford Foundation for its generous support.
2. Both of these examples are developed in detail in my chapter “Electronic Markets and Activist Networks: The Weight of Social Logics in Digital Formations”, in Latham and Sassen (eds.), *Digital Formations: Information Technologies and New Architectures in the Global Realm* (Princeton University Press 2005).
3. We do not assume that technology and society are actually separate entities, and accept many of the propositions in the critical social science literature that posit technology is one particular instantiation of society – society frozen; that is to say, one moment in a trajectory that once might have been experienced as simply social. Without losing this critical stance we want, nonetheless, to isolate the variable we will refer to as technology.
4. We are, to some extent, working against a profuse scholarship centered on the technical properties of the new interactive computer technologies and their capacities for producing change. These technologies increasingly dominate explanations of contemporary change and development, with technology seen as the impetus for the most fundamental social trends and transformations. Such explanations also tend to understand these technologies exclusively in terms of their technical properties and to construct the relation to the social world as one of applications and impacts.
5. For critical examinations that reveal particular shortcomings of technology-driven explanations, see, e.g., Wajcman 2002; Loader 1998; Nettime 1997; Hargittai 1998; and more generally Latour 1991; Munker and Roesler 1997; MacKenzie 1999; MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999; and World Information Order 2002.
6. There are important types of capabilities inherent to these technologies that fall outside the focus of this project, notably robotics, data processing, and the design of virtual environments.
7. Just to recapitulate, by the technical we mean here the digital technologies in play, and by the social, the logics or utility functions that drive users – whether individuals or organizations.
8. Factoring in endogenized social logics and capturing their effect on technical properties is a crucial methodological element in the project. I have examined some of these issues in “Electronic Markets and Activist Networks: The Weight of Social Logics” referred to in note 2. This type of understanding also would contest the still common assumption that a new technology will *ipso facto* replace all older technologies that are less efficient, or slower at executing the tasks the new technology is best at.

9. The uneven and often contradictory character of these technologies and their associated information and communication structures also leads us to posit that these technologies should not be viewed simply as factor endowments. This type of view is present in much of the literature, often implicitly, and represents these technologies as a function of the attributes of a region or an actor – ranging from regions and actors fully endowed, or with full access, to those without access.
10. It is clearly impossible to summarize this material here, and summaries would be of little use. We can only refer the interested reader to the forthcoming volume (see note 1). Each chapter in the volume that resulted from the project is concerned with a distinct digital formation and illustrates a particular research strategy and theoretico-empirical specification.
11. Please refer to the qualifications in note 4.
12. Much of my work on global cities has been an effort to conceptualize and document the fact that the global digital economy requires massive concentrations of material and social resources in order to be what it is (see e.g., Sassen 2001). Finance is an important intermediary in this regard: it represents a capability for liquefying various forms of non-liquid wealth and for raising the mobility (i.e., hypermobility) of that which is already liquid. But to do so, even finance needs significant concentrations of material resources.

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Designing Sound and Silence

ARNT MAASØ

Designing sound for various aesthetic or experiential purposes is not a new idea in architecture, acoustics, or various forms of mediated art. Since Walter Murch coined the term ‘sound designer’ to describe his work on *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola, 1979), it has also become more common to think of sound as designed in fiction film as well as in television drama. To consider mediated sound in non-fictional genres (such as news, sports, reality television etc.) as results of intentional design processes is less common. One may argue that the same applies to ‘live’ television in general, where one may not expect sounds to be ‘produced’ and designed as in post-produced fiction film. Thinking about *silence* as designed seems perhaps even less intuitive. This article will discuss how sound and silence is indeed designed in ‘live’, non-fictional genres too, using sound in sports as the main case in point.¹ The mediated character of sound and silence will furthermore be interpreted a signs of important changes in the communicative functions of sound and silence in broadcast media.

Taming ‘Wild Sound’

Large-scale sporting events, such as The Olympics, or world championships in various sports, appear on regular basis. Viewers are thus likely to be familiar with the spectacular camera work and imagery of recent major sports events. It seems that such events showcase an ever-increasing number of cameras give us multiple views and shots, instant replays and highlights in ‘super-slow-mo’. Such obvious signs of mediation bring Gary Whannel (1992) to claim that the audience watching televised sport is well aware of fact of the *mediated* character of such events, where the production team clearly makes aesthetic choices concerning the visual representation of events.

Elsewhere I have argued that diegetic sound in factual genres in film and television often appear less susceptible to sound design than the diegetic sounds in fictional genres (Maasø 1995). Furthermore, compared to a voice addressing us as listeners, or a musical sound being composed, performed and edited to a sequence of moving images, other ‘natural’ location sounds, such as of an audience cheering, an athlete panting, or the crisp sound of skis running down a slope, seem less obviously the results of a design process. This is, as mentioned, especially true for ‘live’ television, where one does

not expect designers to have the same control over the sound scape as in a movie sound track more or less built up from scratch in the post-production process.

Danish media scholars Raunsbjerg and Sand (1998) are among those who claim that diegetic sounds² are not only less designed than other sounds or images; they even assert that this sound lacks an intentional mediation, and functions as a ‘stamp of authenticity’ or as ‘fingerprints’ of the event we are witnessing. They maintain that:

[...] wild sound [...] is the sound of the event itself. [...] [T]he sound viewers hear sounds like the sound which spectators who are physically present in the room are experiencing [...]. The ambient, spatial and, in some sense, less-than-perfect wild sound is a sign that the sender/producer level does not control the actor level. Consequently, viewers experience the televised events as an event that has a life of its own, above and beyond the intervention of the medium. One might say that wild sound is the fingerprint of the event on the media event, or a stamp of authenticity. (Raunsbjerg & Sand, 1998:168)

If one wants to challenge the claims of Raunsbjerg and Sand on the basis of concrete practices and examples – as I do – one is faced with certain challenges, as examples of ‘live’ sports are not readily available for readers to compare with a written account. Trying to represent and translate dynamic and shifting aural phenomena, into fixed, visual words on a page is hence no simple task. Somehow it seems easier describing the shape, texture and color of visual objects in writing, than the shifting shapes and textures of sound. And while one might insert a still image as an illustration in a paper based journal, this cannot be done with sound.

Elvis Costello partly addressed this problem in an amusing way in the much-cited phrase: “Writing about music is like dancing about architecture”.³ While this is certainly a challenge when addressing popular music, it is even *more* difficult when writing about other sounds from genres, where a writer cannot rely on the reader being able to consult a common available aural source, such as a recorded popular song. In order to address these basic problems I will follow two strategies below. First, I will provide a ‘general’ description of the aural examples. Secondly, I will refer the reader to four short sound samples available online.⁴

Samples of Sport Sounds

The first two examples are recorded from a cross-country and biathlon competition broadcasted on the NRK (Norwegian Broadcasting Company) in 1983.⁵ The first clip is dominated by the voice-over commentary of two sports anchors, speaking in a relaxed voice with moderate loudness, nevertheless drowning out most of the other sounds, which are much weaker in volume. In the background one can hear the muffled and reverberant sound of an emcee over a speaker system at the sports arena where the shooting range for the biathlon competitors is located. The distance one may also hear soft ‘ticking’ sounds that a television viewer understands is the sound of rifles being fired.

The second clip is from a cross-country competition, showing a skier passing two camera positions in the woods nearby the stadium area. The commentators’ voices sound roughly the same as in the first clip, as does the muffled emcee on the PA-system in the distance. In addition far away cheering can be heard from a few spectators, as well as the soft, yet characteristic, sharp sound of skis gliding over snow (roughly 4-8 and 14-18 seconds into the clip).



Biathlon skier in example 1 at the shooting range (NRK)

While the images accompanying these clips show the skiers in close-up and medium close-up perspectives shooting (in example 1) or skiing (in example 2), the main visual events in these clips are not central aurally at all. Instead, the sound track is almost totally dominated by the voice-over of the two sports reporters. From listening alone, one cannot guess that the first example is showing an athlete firing his rifle, as the shots fired in the background are very tinny sounding and low in volume.

In example 2 one can (with previous knowledge of how cross-country skis may sound) hear the skier as he passes close by the two camera positions following him (cf. 4-8 and 14-18 seconds into the clip). Apart from the few off-screen sounds mentioned here, no other sounds are audible from the location of the recording, as was typically the case before the early 1990s.

If one considers similar examples from the mid and late 1990s, the sound track sounds very different, as can be heard in examples 3 and 4. While the voice-over commentary is still central, the on-screen visual events have become equally important aurally, such as the clearly defined, medium loud shots fired in the biathlon case (example 3). Both the rifle shot and the immediately following hit on target are represented aurally – even with a stereo effect separating the two sound events in space.



Biathlon skier in example 3 at the shooting range (NRK1 1994).

Also, a wealth of other off-screen sounds within the diegesis – such as the audience cheering – is very clearly audible in the cross-country example from 1997 (cf. example 4). Put shortly, there are more and louder 'wild sounds' in sport events in the 1990s than before. The diegetic soundscape is also vastly expanded, as it condenses many 'spaces' into one rich and multi-layered soundscape spread out in two-channel stereo, compared to the mono track in 1980s television.⁶ Importantly, the condensed sound space of 1990s television also manages to represent soft close-up sounds (such as the athlete coughing, roughly 5 seconds into example 4) simultaneously with the loud 'deep space' sounds of the audience in the same example. Through the use of multi-microphone technique and multi-track mixing, the sound track of large sporting events in Nordic television thus changed within a few years during the late 1980s and early 1990s, into a rich, spatially expanded and condensed sound track, where both close-up and far-away events, on-screen as well as off-screen, were given equal aural presence.

Intentionality of Design

Interviews with sound technicians and producers in television show that these changes did not happen by mere chance, or simply as a result of the implementation of new technology, but rather were a result of institutional strategies and intentional acts of design concerning both sports and other TV genres. Veteran producer Trygve Sollien, responsible for many of the main productions during the 1994 Lillehammer Olympics, comments on some of these changes, saying:

I believe we have developed the sound track in sports a great deal. Earlier on, you might say that we 'registered' a sports event from afar, but today we try to come much closer on the athletes. The images are closer, and the same goes for the sound. So we try to come up close and, for instance, catch the athletes breathing and panting, or a coach giving instructions, and – of course – try to give a close up view of the audience itself. (Sollien, cited in Maasø 2002a, my translation)

The head of the sound unit for multi-camera and OB productions at the NRK comments the change in sound design in a similar way:

We try to create an *experience* for the audience, as we also do in other types of entertainment shows. We present a sense of 'being there'; in some sense we want you to feel that you are present at the event, even though you're sitting in your arm chair. [...] This means much more weight on the sound effects today than previously, both the artificial and natural ones. (Straumsheim, cited in Maasø 2002a, my translation)

The statement 'artificial and natural ones' may need a further explanation. Here Straumsheim is alluding to the practice of *sampling* introduced in sports in the early 1990s, i.e., playing back a previously digitized recording – a sample – as part of the sound scape the TV viewer is hearing as a 'live' representation of the soundscape at the location of the event. This was first used in sports production by two sound technicians from Finnish television (YLE) responsible for producing some of the ski events at the 1992 Olympics in Albertville. As producer Sollien explains:

In Les Saisies [at the 92 Olympics] we were producing biathlon for the French, while the Finns were doing cross-country. I think this was the first time I heard sampling done really well. The Finns had a sound guy who was devilishly skillful at sampling, and they used it for all it was worth. Everybody was complementing them for the great sounds of skis and ski poles and so on – everything sounded really nice. (Sollien, cited in Maasø 2002a, my translation)

The practice of sampling made it possible to design a sound track with close-up sounds of far-away events that were difficult or even impossible to catch by a microphone (as there is no equivalent in sound to the visual zoom lens, and because loud sounds of an audience would typically mask out the softer sounds made by the athletes). Many sound technicians after 1992 hence started using samples of a variety of typical sporting sounds, such as the sound of skis and ski sticks, shots fired in biathlon, the hit of a ball, the skis leaving the jump and the rush of air following a skier mid-air during a ski jump, the thump of the landing etc.⁷ Sampling thus provided sounds to on-screen events where silence was the alternative in earlier broadcasting. Furthermore, sampling was often faded in other situations when location recording became impossible during live location recording, such as when sounds of an aircraft or traffic suddenly ‘polluted’ the soundscape. A veteran sound technician in the NRK explains:

I remember an instance in the Albertville Olympics when Vegard Ulvang – I believe – was crossing the goal line at the same time as a big truck with snowbelts came driving in. I could hear how Jukka, who was doing the sound for YLE, pulled down the mikes from the arena while fading in sampled audience sounds masking the engine noise, and though that *that* was clever. (Henningesen, cited in Maasø 2002a, my translation)

A variety of sampled audience sounds were also often mixed in together with the ‘live’ audience sound to create a more exciting soundscape, or to achieve what Straumsheim described as a sense of *‘being there’*. Thus, during the mid 1990s, sampling became a common way of controlling the uncontrollable aspects of the sound events in ‘live’ sports in Nordic television; in other words taming ‘wild sound’.

This highly designed soundscape is certainly far from the naïve indexical ‘fingerprint’ of sound claimed by Raunsbjerg and Sand above. Quite contrary, sound in sports, as in many other genres, became increasingly pre-planned and designed during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The *sound* of sports sounds can therefore be no positive proof of the authenticity of the events we experience, since deciphering which sounds are the result of sampling or live recording can rather be quite difficult, often impossible. Had I not witnessed the practice of sampling during TV production myself, I would, for instance, not have believed it possible to achieve the minute timing needed to perform the shots fired during a ‘live’ production of biathlon, such as in the example from the Lillehammer Olympics discussed above (cf. example 3).

The radical change from a ‘passive registration’ of aural events to an ‘active design’ of sound in sports, were intended to produce a spectacular, visceral or almost tactile viewing experience – letting viewers and listeners ‘touch at a distance’, to paraphrase Murray Schafer (1980). In my view these changes may be related to general aesthetic and cultural trends, such as the spectacular aesthetics of the neo-classical Hollywood cinema, the visual collage in television after MTV, as well as the multi-track aesthetics of popular music production after *Sgt. Pepper*. These changes are also clearly related to

general changes in televisual mode of address sparked by the deregulation of broadcasting monopoly during the 1980s and the increased weight on competition for viewers' attention, as many have addressed in previous research on public service broadcasting. Similar views are also stated clearly in interviews by key people involved in the changes in design, such as the following statement by Straumsheim:

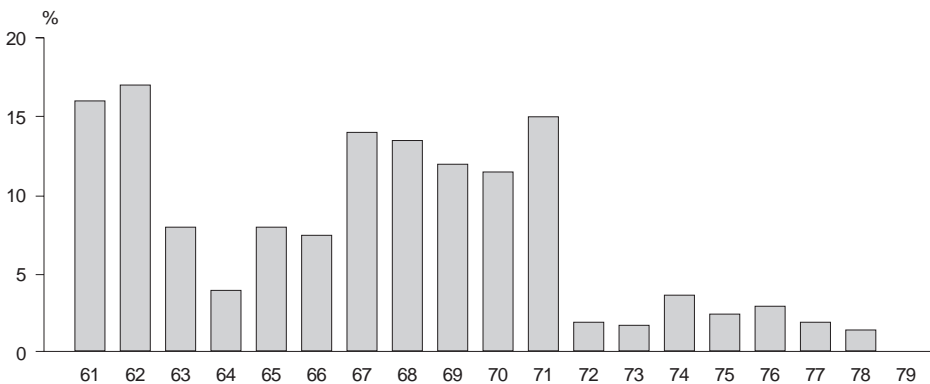
I believe the future lies in becoming even better at illuding *presence*. I do not mean that you actually *are* present, of course, but that you get a sensation of what it is like being there. At the same time this means designing a soundscape that is not always real. As TV becomes more like radio is today, a medium you go to and from, we need ways of catching viewers' attention, providing engagement and experience – not only registering an event. And this is, of course, nothing less than the general trend of our time. (Straumsheim, cited in Maasø 2002a, my translation)

Silencing Silence

As I hope to have showed so far, sound in television is as much a result of a designed mediation as the television image – even in genres with 'live', 'wild sounds', which some have taken as indexical traces of an uncontrollable acoustic event. Furthermore, the way sounds are designed may be used in attempting to read general cultural and aesthetic trends of our time. So may silence. In a similar way as sound, silence (here simply taken as the absence of sound) may be telling. In the following I will therefore first look at broad changes in silence on a 'macro level', showing to analyses of prime time schedules in Norwegian TV-schedules from the 1960s to the late 1980s. Then, I will analyze silence on a 'micro-level', looking at what silence in a popular song may say about design and mediation itself.

Although there are no continuous schedules preserved from Norwegian television broadcasts before 1983, there are other clear indications that silence was abundant the first couple of decades after television was introduced in Norway in 1960. A look at the schedules published in the TV times and newspapers, shows a large amount of planned intervals and pauses throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as may be seen in figure 1.

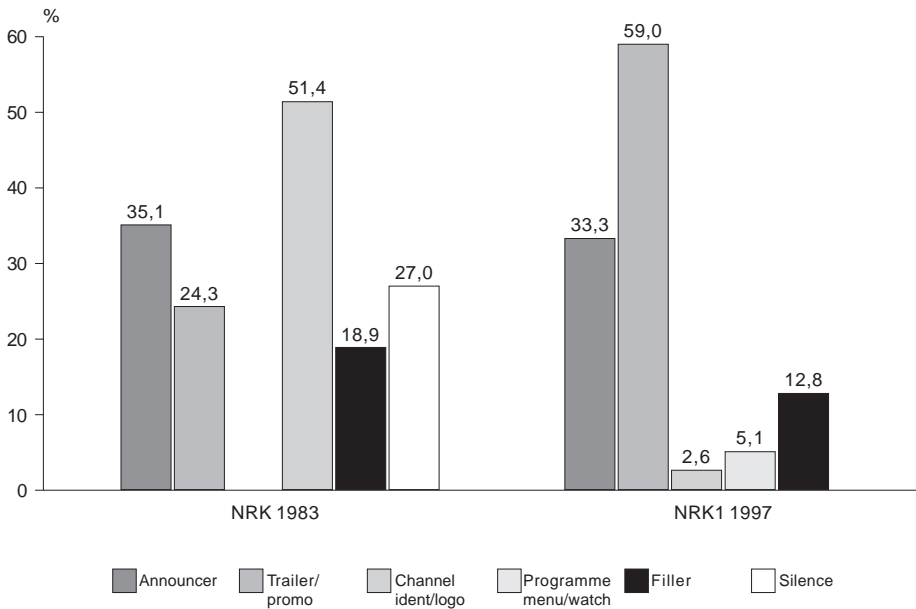
Figure 1. Planned Pauses, NRK, 6-10 pm, week 11, 1961-1979 (percent of prime time)



Source: *Programbladet* week 11 (March) from 1961-1979

Some of these pauses were, however, not silent, as gramophone music to some degree was played. However, both interviews and the statistics on music use published in the NRK yearbooks, indicate that many, perhaps most, pauses were silent (cf. Maasø 2002a). Since whole schedules are only available in archives from 1983 on, one is nevertheless left with speculations here. Analysis of prime time schedules from March 1983 and later during the 1980s, at least establishes beyond doubt that silence was indeed very much present in the prime time schedules in Norwegian TV throughout most of the 1980s, although no *announced* pauses can be found after 1979.

Figure 2. *Silence in Prime Time (percent of 'between programming')*



Between programming totals 3,7% (1983) and 3,9% (1997) of the evening schedules during one week between 6-10 PM, week 11 (March). Cf. Maasø (2002a) for a fuller account of the different types of 'between programming'.

As figure 2 shows, 27% of all 'between programming' during prime time were completely silent in 1983, while there was no silence whatsoever in 1997 schedules analyzed (with the exception of a few 2-3 second long silent intervals between scenes and segments). A handful of instances of up to 10-12 seconds of very *weak* sound may be found (cf. Maasø 2002a: 318), but the overall impression is nevertheless that the schedules here have the character of a seamless sonic flow. In my ears, the single most noticeable change in the sound of television from the early and mid 1980s and to post-1988 television is hence the large amounts of silent intervals in the prior case, and the complete absence of silence in contemporary television.⁸

This change is even more interesting when taking into account that silence has been a taboo for sound designers in TV since the beginning of broadcasting in Norway, as well as in other TV cultures, because it makes images seem 'dead', 'slows down time', and so on, as Mary Ann Doane (1985) and others have discussed more fully (cf. Maasø

2002a for a comprehensive account). With this in mind, the explanation for this radical change in the presence of silence is *not* that the conventions and role of silence changed. Rather, I would argue that this is related to a change in the hierarchy of textual units in television in Norway in the late 1980s, mainly due to changes in competitive environment, with the introduction of commercial competitors. In 1983 the intervals between programs were simply not considered part of television proper, but simply taken as intervals between the real programs; hence the usual conventions and rules of sound design did not apply. After 1987/88 the televisual text was not simply individual programs in succession, but the whole and continuous schedule. Hence, silence changed from having a role similar to in pantomime – a normal condition without any communicative importance – to a situation like in the theater, where silence is telling. Silence in the latter case is clearly a communicative activity to be interpreted in relation to what precedes and follows the silent pauses (cf. Jaworski 1993, Maasø 2002a). When the main unit of television became the ‘evening schedule’, silence thus became ‘dead air’ to be avoided in order not to loose viewers to the other channels.

As we have seen, the shift from marked presence to absence of silence on a ‘macro level’ may be interpreted as a meaningful sign of more general changes in television. Similarly, silence on a ‘micro level’ – small burst of silence, so to speak – may also be *designed* to create meaning in juxtaposition to events or discourse preceding and following. To illustrate this, I will in the following explore an example from a popular music song, where a few very small silent pauses are extremely important, and very well designed in relation to the music preceding and following. As I hope to show, silence here is pivotal for the understanding of this particular work as well as the act of *mediation* and *design* of this work. But in order to make this argument, I will have to take a short detour around some recent claims relating to mediation and materiality in the age of digital design.

Materiality in a Digital Age

In this age of digitization, one increasingly hears claims of *convergence* along talk of a ‘*post-medium*’ condition, reducing the role of individual media. In the following I will take as point of departure claims of convergence – more particularly assumptions that digitization erases ‘material aspects’ of sound recording.⁹

Writing in the mid 1980s, Friedrich Kittler is one of many contemporary scholars forecasting convergence. His claim is straightforward, and related to digitization:

The general digitization of channels and information erases the differences among individual media. Sound and image, voice and text are reduced to surface effects, known to consumers as interface. [...] Inside the computers themselves everything becomes a number: quantity without image, sound or voice. And once optical fiber networks turn formerly distinct data flows into a standardized series of digitized numbers, any medium can be translated into any other. (Kittler, 1999: 1-2)

Thus, not only will media converge, but also the very concept of a medium will disappear, according to Kittler and fellow critics. An assertion related to such claims, is that digitized media loose the ‘material qualities’ associated with the process of mediation in analog media. In their eulogy to phonography, Eric Rothenbuhler and John Durham Pe-

ters are among those who draw a sharp distinction between analog and digital media, raising interesting claims about the semiotic status of analog and digital sound:

In terms of the logic of the sign-referent relation, the difference between analog recording and digital recording is the difference between indexes and symbols in Peirce's scheme. The analog recording is an index of music because it is physically caused by it. The digital recording is a symbol of music because the relation is one of convention. (Rothenbuhler & Peters, 1997: 249).

Digital recording not only lacks an indexical relation to a physical aural event, in Rothenbuhler's and Peters' view, but the digital *record* – the CD in this case – bears no indexical trace of use. Digital sound can be reproduced without any generation loss and played back without any signs of time passed, hence digital sound shows no indexical signs of wear and tear of use. In contrast to digital sound, the playback of analog records:

[...] audibilizes two histories: one of the recording and one of the record. [...] The data encoded on the CD do not mix with the history of the disk; they can be obscured by dirt and scratches, but dirt and scratches cannot sound from a CD player. As the history of records speaks while they are being played, they thus invite us to think about the passage of time; by contrast, CDs obscure it. (Rothenbuhler & Peters, 1997: 255).

In order to discuss the assertions of convergence and loss of materiality of mediation in digitized recordings, I would like to use an example from Madonna's album *Music* (2000) as point of departure, before coming back to some general points at the end of the article.

Mediating *Music*

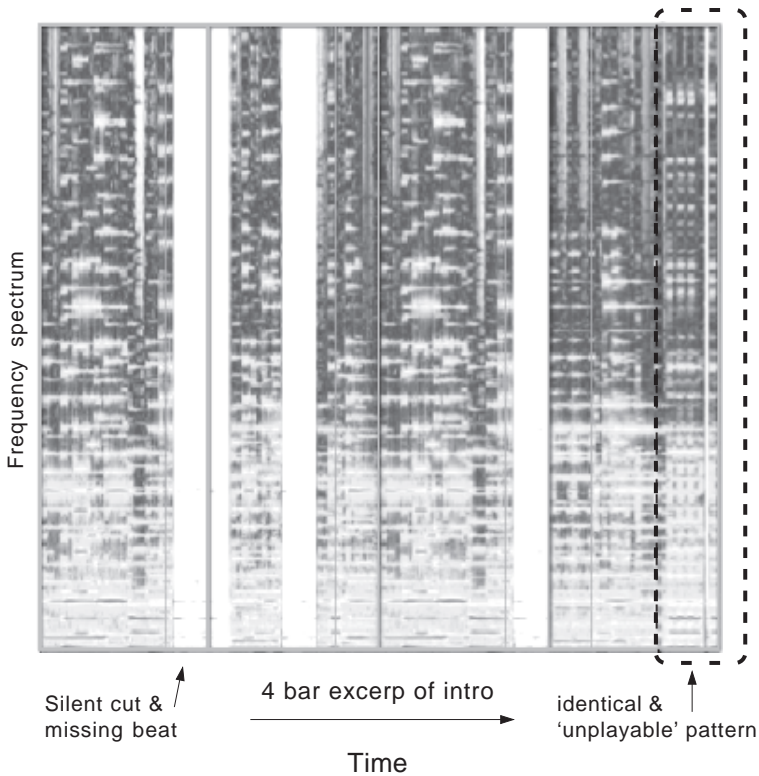
Madonna's *Don't tell me* from the album *Music* (2000)¹⁰ makes use of a format well known to a pop and rock audience. The instrumentation is in one sense modeled over the traditional lead vocal with band; the form of the song is binary with verse and chorus, etc. Along these lines, one might argue that contrary to the sound and texture of much contemporary dance music, which is almost unthinkable apart from recent technological developments, *Don't tell me* could in fact have been realized by means of analog tape recording techniques or in a live performance.

Even though the song begins with a familiar sounding acoustic guitar riff, the sense of familiarity soon ends when short bursts of silence and very short excerpts of the music are repeated out of synch with any familiar rhythmical pattern, creating the effect of what one may call a *digital 'jump-cut'*. The effect resembles a CD player having problems in reading the information on the disc. As we know this might happen when a record has become dirty. It may also be a sign of a 'worn-out' laser. In both cases, the effect is caused by various forms of wear and tear, and the sound may, thus, be understood as an index of use – in the sense that Rothenbuhler & Peters discussed analog playback above.

While it is reported that this effect caused confusion among many listeners who returned the CD¹¹, I would argue that most listeners would probably understand after but a few seconds of the first run-through of the tune, that the presence of digital jump-cuts here is not a sign of poor mediation. Rather, the effect is used as an artistic means. The following sonogram gives a visual representation of the digital jump-cut introduced in

the first few bars of the song, showing how the silent cuts (represented as white fields in the flow of the sound in figure 3) makes the music skip the first beat of the second bar, and how the last beat of the fourth bar has a very small sound bite repeated in a way which is impossible to achieve by a musician in live performances (both regarding the rhythm and identical sound), but which is easy to create with the practice of copy & paste.

Figure 3. Sonogram of the first four bars of Madonna's "Don't Tell Me" (Music 2000) analyzed by the Amadeus II software (www.hairersoft.com). Grids for bars and 4/4 beats are added by the author



Silence may – as mentioned – serve different functions in different media and communicative situations, such as in pantomime vs. the theater. One may, perhaps, even talk about a ‘*medium silence*’, such as the digital jump-cuts on a CD-player or ‘dead air’ in radio and television when the medium seizes to function. As shown in the sonogram, an extreme kind of such medium silence is what is generally known as ‘digital silence’ or ‘digital black’ – where all signals drop out, not even leaving the slightest hint of sound from the record itself, as would be the case with a cassette or LP. In the case of *Don't tell me*, the generic expectations raised by the acoustic riff during the first bar, drive us to expect a repeated – or developed – rhythmical figure in the following bar. When *silence* is introduced during the fourth beat, one may on the one side interpret this as an ‘active’ silence – in the sense as in theater above – raising tension and expectations for a return-

ing phrase or riff. On the other side, if heard as a complete silence (depending somewhat on the listening conditions and noise of the reproduction apparatus), this is clearly *not* part of such generic conventions, and thus appear strange, if not inappropriate altogether. When the riff then re-appears ‘mid air’ – so to speak – after the first beat of the second bar, it confirms this silent pause is as a missed downbeat and a cut-off phrase. One may therefore argue that the silence here is clearly marked as a ‘medium silence’, or digital ‘drop out’, and hence *not* part of the text or of the communication. Silence is in other words marked as a technical error, which drains the pause of the potential communicative force that might still have been there if the riff reappeared *on* the downbeat. Only when the *subsequent* silent pauses form a rhythmical pattern, does the frame change (yet again?), and we hear the seemingly random digital dropouts as highly meaningful, both rhythmically and otherwise.

As mentioned, it soon becomes clear that the presence of digital jump-cuts on this track is not a sign of a worn-out medium. In the beginning of the song, however, the effect still plays on the indexical meaning outlined above, signifying a form of digital ‘weariness’. Put differently, the presence of digital jump-cuts displays, by way of imitating a common malfunction of a certain medium, the function and presence of the very same medium, and – importantly – the presence of a digital medium, since such an effect could not have been realized in the same way, at least not to such an extent, by way of analog media.

If produced differently, for example in accordance with an ideal of reproducing a live performance, *Don’t tell me* could perhaps have been used to support the claim that medium in the age of digital reproduction leaves no mark on the content. In this track, however, it becomes obvious that what could have been left to transparency is rather made audible. And more than this, it forms a crucial part of the overall artistic outcome. Not only may the use of the jump-cut effect on Madonna’s *Don’t tell me*, be interpreted as a play on the presence of a certain medium. It may in fact be argued that it has become an indispensable part of the song, since the audible interplay between the traditional format of a song and the new means of production comes forward as a crucial aspect of the meaning of the song, as regards both the domains of aesthetics and semantics.

In fact the dialogue between tradition and contemporary music technology links up with what might be understood as an overarching theme of the album *Music*, and, one might say, of Madonna’s oeuvre in general, namely the play, re-invention and co-optation of stereotypical identities and forms. Much in parallel to how Sean Albiez (2004) describes her visual image as “a hyperreal urban/rural cowgirl ... a club version of the Western look”, the musical solutions of *Don’t tell me* point toward a similar artistic strategy in the field of music: *Don’t tell me* is the club version of country-pop.

The traces of the process of mediation, whether that be the play on the presence of a digital medium or the iconography of Western values, transforms country & western – a style connoting authenticity and traditional American values – into its own hyper real travesty.

Media Matters

Convergence is often used as a ‘totalizing term’, covering everything from black (or white) boxes to markets, networks and rhetorics. The fact that music is *distributed* digitally, and that this form of distribution is shared with other digitized types of informa-

tion – pictures, text whatever – does *not* mean that music is no longer different from graphics, or that radio listening is no longer different from using the iPod.

The first time I heard *Don't tell me* was on the radio, and for the first couple of seconds I was convinced that the silent pauses – appearing 'out-of-time' with the strong, driving rhythmical guitar figure – was a sure sign of a 'bad disc'. Soon, however, I burst out laughing at yet another of Madonna's clever tricks. For fellow radio listeners, there was no way of knowing for sure *listening* to the musical text alone if the song was played back from an LP, CD, or a hard disc, for that matter. This points to the well-known problem of making judgments about the material traces of technology and mediation solely from listening. As Umberto Eco wrote three decades ago, it is a fundamental characteristic of *any* sign that it can be used to tell a lie (1976: 58f). Any act of mediation thus introduces something 'between' the original sound (if such exists) and the listening to this sound. The hiss of history often heard on CDs, may thus be a sign of a digitized version of a vintage recording – as well as a post-80s pop-production parasitically sucking authenticity, grandeur, and historicity from the scratches of an old record.

Moreover, when it comes to TV or radio listening, whether or not *Don't tell me* is produced and transmitted by analog or digital means, is in some ways subordinate to the role of television and radio *as media* for the shaping of the sound of the song. For example, institutional and economic factors such as casting and signing of artists to fit TV and radio play, as well as generic constraints of radio formatting (cf. Maasø 2002b), have no doubt played pivotal roles in the shaping of popular music sound in the past, and there is little evidence to suggest that such structural and economic factors in the cultural industries will cease in importance in a digital future.¹²

Mediation and Communication

The analysis of sound and silence in this article tells but a small part of the story of mediated sound design, heard from a small corner of the world. Other television cultures and genres sound and design sound differently. Yet, at least one point is common to all: all mediated sound is just that – mediated – and therefore in some sense always designed. Sound and silence in the media therefore have no direct, indexical relation to an acoustic event, but always involve the possibility of elaborate design, and lies; digital or not. The use of sampled shots in sports and Madonna's clever silences thus highlight the need for close textual analysis, as well as bring out the potential problems of taking texts at face value. In both cases we may be (or have been?) tricked by our ears – as we in other cases may have been by our eyes. Interviewing and observing sound designers at work, is therefore an important source for triangulation, and should, I believe, be used more often in tandem with other forms of analysis.

As this article has showed, much have changed in the way sounds are mediated. In the 1980s sports was mainly a visual genre. Sound technicians put up a couple of mikes (a handful at the most), and did relatively little to design sounds for particular purposes, save 'registering' the event. Since the early 1990s, much more effort is put into the design process, from days of preplanning where to put up scores of mikes – to pre-producing sounds used in live broadcasts through sampling. Sound design in sports is hence an excellent sign of our times. For during the last couple of decades, sound design in television, film, computer games etc. has clearly taken on a more *tactile* role, standing in for the lack of touch, letting listeners and viewers have an increased sense of 'touching

at a distance' – or being *there, here*. More than before, sound design is also designed to be *heard as designed*. Even *silence* is meant to be heard as designed, i.e., as part of the overall sound design. Sound design has thus perhaps increasingly become a sign of an *act of communication*; of being wanted to be heard, to be recognized. Perhaps both designers, musicians and scholars, then, are basically alike: In the end, we just want to be loved.

Notes

1. With the exception of the Madonna example analyzed later in the article, this article is based on the material gathered for a larger study on sound in television (cf. Maasø 2002a). This study analyzed programs broadcasted during one week in March in 1983 and 1997, with some supplementary material between 1983 and 1997 (totaling 80 program hours). Furthermore, 24 interviews with program makers, producers and sound designers were performed, as well as analyses of internal documents in the two main Norwegian broadcasters NRK and TV 2.
2. Diegetic sounds refers sounds which can be heard on the location where a television program is shot, such as a sports stadium, or by other characters within a fiction film's story world. In television, diegetic sound is often called 'location sound' or 'wild sound'.
3. Cf. "A Man out of Time Beats the Clock" in *Musician magazine* no. 60 (October 1983: 52).
4. The first sound clips are also available on the CD-ROM accompanying Maasø 2002a, and may be ordered by contacting the author at arnt@maaso.no.
5. The programs analyzed here are selected from sports broadcasts during week 11 in 1983 and 1997, and the 1994 Olympics at Lillehammer. The excerpts are available as audio files at www.maaso.no/biathlon83.mp3 (clip 1), www.maaso.no/crosscountry83.mp3 (clip 2), www.maaso.no/biathlon94.mp3 (clip 3), www.maaso.no/crosscountry97.mp3 (clip 4).
6. NICAM stereo was introduced in Nordic television around 1990.
7. Sampling was sometimes also used to *save time* setting up the (often) hundreds of mikes needed to fit the new ideals of sound design (cf. interview with Straumsheim in Maasø 2002a).
8. The change around 1987-1988 is discussed more fully in Maasø 2002a, and related to general changes the competitive situation as well as concrete executive decisions by the new director of the NRK television, Tor Strand, who announced as his first main program mission to 'get rid of the TV clock' (Maasø 2002a: 92); in other words the silent intervals which stopped the 'flow'.
9. The following section on Madonna's *Don't tell me* is part of research performed by Anne Danielsen and Arnt Maasø in cooperation, first presented as a paper at the IASPM conference in Rome, July 2005 (cf. Danielsen & Maasø 2005).
10. Mirwais Ahmadzai and Madonna are credited with the song, though the song was originally written by Joe Henry, Madonna's brother-in-law. Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don%27t_Tell_Me_%28Madonna_song%29
11. Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don%27t_Tell_Me_%28Madonna_song%29
12. Also important in considering claims of convergence, listening practices will likely not converge, but rather diverge, as we are provided with even more possibilities for mobile and private listening on a presumably increasing number of different listening devices.

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Two Solitudes

*Design as an Approach to Media Research**

ILPO KOSKINEN

In this speech, my aim is to explore how design and media research relate and to point out ways in which these disciplines could benefit from closer contact than what they seem to have today. The paper is primarily written for researchers in communication by a sociologist who has grown increasingly familiar with design over the past decade through his work at a design school.

Whenever we discuss design, it is a good idea to start with a few conceptual remarks. “Design,” of course, is an ambiguous word. Its meaning in German, as well as in the Nordic languages (and Finnish), is far more restricted than in English. The German word *Formgebung* (in East Germany, of course, the semantics were different: they spoke about *Formgestaltung*) refers to giving form to something, as is the case with the Swedish *formgivning* and its counterparts in Norwegian and Danish. The Finnish word *muotoilu* follows the Scandinavian practice. In contrast to German and Nordic usage, the English term “design” is ambiguous, referring to what others call “planning” rather than “form giving.” Thus, when one reads English-language literature on, say, industrial design, one usually encounters stories of engineers (for example, Hargadon and Sutton 1997; Henderson 1999) rather than of people who have training in the arts. It goes without saying that the English usage has crept into other languages, which usually not only borrow the English term, but also follow the English practice when using older, often more accurate terms. The advertising industry in particular is turning the term into a sign – usually a sign of sophistication, as in “hair design,” the high end of hairdressing or barbering, but often also into something ironic, as in a Finnish ad that sold rye bread as “Finnish design.”

The shift in meaning of the term is not just semantic, but is rooted in social change. In its present form, design is a 20th Century creation, though its roots go back several centuries in architecture, crafts, and luxury goods production. However, in the modern sense in which “design” denotes the application of artistic skills in industry, the term primarily refers to glass and ceramics, furniture, interior design (previously called interior decoration or architecture), textiles and fashion design, and graphic design. More hi-tech areas of design are even more recent creations, including industrial design immediately after the war, and new media design, which is the creation of the PC, multimedia, and the

Web. The origins of the marriage of industry and art lie in Germany and the US. Perhaps the best-known early industrial designer was the architect and artist Peter Behrens, who was hired by AEG in Berlin in 1907 to give a face-lift to its products, production facilities, and the private homes of its management (Rogge 1984). With international exhibitions like World's Fairs and the Milan Art Biennale, artist-designers increasingly captured the public and, later, the industrial imagination after the war. (See Woodham 1997; Julier 2000).

Industrial design, in turn, has its origins in the United States, where designers were anonymous, building on technical training, leaving their mark on cars and other types of consumer goods from the 1930s onwards (Heskett 1997). However, similar developments were taking place in Europe as well. In many ways, Italian industrial design has its origins in Adriano Olivetti's staunch belief that it pays to invest in architecture and design (Kicherer 1990). Wally Olins, the grand old man of design management, even compares him to Lorenzo di Medici in terms of his patronage to the design culture of Italy (Olins 1978: 153). Meanwhile, Philips had built a flourishing design culture in the Netherlands well before the war (Heskett 1989), and Nordic design grew in prominence, first through architecture with names like Arne Jacobsen, Finn Juhl, Alvar Aalto, and Eliel Saarinen. Later, Nordic design continued to enjoy international success mainly with the Italians through glass, ceramics, textile design, furniture, and interiors, while French, Italian and, to a degree, British and American design dominated fashion.

Through these developments, industry has changed our material world, giving, metaphorically speaking, designers a canvas on which they have been able to paint their visions of a *vackrare vardagsvaror* [more beautiful ordinary goods], as Swedish industry put the matter in the 1930s (Kalin 1992). The terminology reflects the multitude of these industrial and design orientations; if one finds the terminology confusing, the problem lies in a lack of historical perspective rather than in the concepts as such. Unlike law or medicine, the design professions have never been strong enough to impose their conceptual schemes on society.

In addition to understanding these terminological and conceptual issues, it is also important to realize that "media" has several meanings for designers. When one talks about media research with designers, they spontaneously get images of interactive media consisting of the personal computer, the Web, mobile phones, digital TV, and computer games, and design professions based on these technologies, including new media design and interaction design. Although they are becoming more mature, these fields are still searching for an identity between technology, art and business. Mainly through these disciplines, cultural studies have gained a degree of theoretical presence in design. However, cultural studies ought to be taken in its American rather than European meaning: it is mainly theories of literary studies that have been applied to new media rather than sociology and anthropology, not to mention critical studies. In consequence, these theories have gained far less prominence in design disciplines that work on material realities. In these disciplines, professional practice is still based on materials and on industrial and artistic processes rather than on, say, semiotics. As this sketch suggests, key things in communication research, including journalism, mass media, and organizational communication, have had a small presence in the design world.

Two Solitudes

As I showed above, for a variety of reasons, design and media have lived parallel lives rather than mingled seriously. Explicit links between these disciplines are primarily based on some theoretical strains in new media (interactive media), which have had far less success in traditional design disciplines and industrial design. In universities, there are a few attempts to create overlaps, such as the Scandinavian attempt to build the discipline of *humanistisk informatik*, which combines some technology (mostly in new media) and design with a strong theoretical background in the humanities. Also, there are a very few programs in interaction design. Examples can be found from the University of Limerick in Ireland, and The Royal College of Art in London (previously termed Computer Related Design, RCA, n.d.).

Most design schools have literary scholars, philosophers, and art historians on the payroll, and they have increasingly hired a few drifters from the social sciences, mainly sociology and anthropology. Typically, these staff act as teachers and, sometimes, as researchers, but training is nevertheless in the designers' hands. A similar movement is taking place in industrial research, with major corporations such as Nokia and Intel building user research units in which the social sciences have gained a footing. Together, these small groups are pushing their own vision of science onto the design fields, from which this vision is slowly filtering into design training. No doubt there are people with a background in communication working in design, but with the major exception of Klaus Krippendorff, who was trained in design in Ulm, few have become prominent. To my knowledge the only theory from communication research that has been brought forcefully to design is product semantics, propounded mainly by Krippendorff with his designer colleague Reinhardt Butter. This tradition takes as an axiom that all design communicates, and accordingly can be studied as communication (see Vihma 1995).

With these exceptions, the relationship of the two disciplines can be formulated metaphorically as "two solitudes," borrowing the name of Canadian writer Hugh McLennan's book that described how the French- and the English-speaking Canadians related to each other in the middle of the 20th Century. Like French- and English-speaking Canadians in the 1950s, these two disciplines are aware of each other, sometimes working well together and sometimes competing. However, in general, they maintain enough barriers to keep them separate. It goes without saying that, in this metaphor, the role of the dominant majority clearly belongs to the communication disciplines.

If this state of affairs is the *explicandum*, what, then, are the reasons behind it?

Some reasons are obvious. The job markets for designers and media scholars are separate, almost regardless of the particular persuasions of the latter. Designers typically work in technological environments dominated by technical and commercial interests, while graduates from media disciplines work in a whole gamut of communications, including mass media, teaching, consulting, organizational communication, and advertising. They also have a far easier path to management than do designers, who tend to either work as independent consultants or serve as, in Andrew Abbott's (1988) telling term, a subordinate profession to engineering.

This division starts already in education. The design disciplines are a fairly recent addition to the university structure, in which their position is weak compared to more established sciences, including communications and media. While in traditional university systems, media and communication disciplines have a secure position among the social sciences, always close to business, administrative, and political elites, design is

typically located in art and design schools, schools of architecture, and sometimes in technical universities away from the mainstream university system. This divide makes it easy for the design disciplines to maintain their autonomy in the face of more theoretically versatile disciplines, but it also has several negative effects on design.

For example, theory has a different status in these disciplines. Of course, there are always students in the social sciences who loathe theory – just as there are trial lawyers who, after 20 years of practice, say that they can learn nothing from research. However, the very basis of the social sciences is typically found in theoretical debate, or at least in awareness of such debate. Anyone who studies communication learns something about how the mass media work, what information is and how one can think about it, and how power relationships are seamlessly interwoven with communication. With few exceptions, such as Krippendorff's product semantics, the design disciplines work with technology and materials rather than with words, ideas, concepts, and theories. In fact, a common complaint among engineers, managers, and other academics is that designers lack a "language" through which they can explain their intentions, work methods, and skills (Korvenmaa 1998). In consequence, trust in the abilities of designers remains low in wider academia, and at the top echelons of business and government.

I take this state as evidence of designers' reluctance to learn the theoretical basis and thus the syntax of academic language. The design world largely remains "silent": its workings can be learned by participating in it, by observing it, and by getting into its gossip, but not by reading about it. Non-theoretical disciplines do not do well in the university system – in Abbott's (1988) terms, their claim to jurisdiction remains weak, making design a less attractive partner in universities. It may also be that the "linguistic turn" that has taken place in the social and human sciences over the past four decades has made the gap even more difficult to close. The theoretical basis of much of media research has drifted away from the interests of designers, as the metaphors of language and text have gained prominence. The main exceptions are new media and, to a degree, graphic design. These two disciplines by and large work on two-dimensional surfaces (or metaphors that are two-dimensional), and benefit from theory developed in disciplines like semiotics, movie studies, and narratology. However, it is far harder to apply these theories to three-dimensional objects, machinery, services, or other objects of interest to the traditional design disciplines and to industrial design.

Of course, although it is certainly a legitimate question whether chairs can be understood merely as expressions in language – there are many other useful and perfectly justifiable ways to make sense of chairs – understanding design might not require going beyond the linguistic turn's key metaphors of "text" and "language." However, designers have opted to do otherwise. Designers' symbolic claim to respectability is based not on theory, but on art, which, again, keeps them marginal in universities in which notions like "intuition" and "gut feeling" do not fare well. Thus, it may even be that while the linguistic turn has made social scientists far more sensitive to what Clifford Geertz has called the webs of meaning (Geertz 1973), this turn has had an adverse effect on design and its position in the university system.

Evolving Boundary Objects

Of course, this is not the whole story. Several developments are constantly creating new boundary objects – in the sense proposed by Star (1995) – that bring media and design into contact. For example, at the very least, the following are constantly creating new boundary objects between design and media: technology, the economy, changes in cityscapes, the increased role of design in media, and design research. Obviously, this list is not exhaustive. Rather, I just aim to show that the same forces driving design and media and communication research not only keep them separate, but also create common areas of interest and perhaps even possibilities for cooperation.

Technology. Perhaps the most obvious thing to start with is communications technology, which has changed over the past 20 years, reshaping both fields in many ways. Beginning with the introduction of personal computers in the early 1980s, the Internet and later the Web about ten years later, and interactive – or “smart” – products, epitomized by the mobile phone, later in the 1990s, these technologies have changed our minds and societies (Katz and Aakhus 2002), prompting an area of research in which communications researchers and designers have been able to publish together (Katz and Aakhus 2002; Koskinen et al. 2002; Harper et al. 2005). Another perhaps more significant development has been the birth of a new design specialty, interaction design, which may be evolving into a new design profession. Apparently coined in the mid-1980s by Bill Moggridge of the design agency IDEO in Palo Alto, this term denotes design that combines skills in software design, electronic engineering, industrial design, and the human sciences (typically, cognitive psychology, but the disciplinary basis has been expanding into sociology and anthropology). The first academic programs in this area were developed in the 1990s, and although only a few programs exist, there are already globally used textbooks in this area (by Jenny Preece and Ben Schneiderman). Whether they are successful and stabilize a new discipline remains to be seen; in many ways, these books have reintroduced old cognitive psychology under a new name, which probably leads to similar fallacies as the early efforts to apply cognitive psychology to human-computer interaction.

The third technological development undeniably of interest to media researchers and designers alike is electronic entertainment, a roughly 7 billion USD industry worldwide. As the numbers show, its significance for the future of the economy is typically overestimated in the press, which hails game design as a major new design industry. However, for a communications scholar and someone well versed in literature, a world largely based on simple adventure narratives dramatized to an extreme (anyone who plays a computer game saves *the* world every 15 minutes or so, or is slain) provides an intriguing window on the commercial significance of mythology, not just design.

What more futuristic developments in technology – like the notions of virtual reality, and ubiquitous, ambient, embodied, and proactive technologies – will do for the relationship remains to be seen. They may pose intriguing theoretical challenges not just for designers, but also for people in communications and media. However, it is far from clear whether these technologies will ever become significant in society. It may well be that they only find relevance in research laboratories and universities.

Economy. Another area that may create boundary objects for these disciplines relates to several developments in the economy. How design works in the economy is a colossal question, well beyond the scope of this essay. However, for the sake of example, I

will analyze two developments. The first relates to what one can call the “semiotization of the economy,” more commonly known as “branding.” As the sociologist Harvey Molotch has noted in *Where Stuff Comes From* (2003), a study of industrial designers, as business leaders have learned to “outsource” production, often to the same few manufacturers typically located in the third world, this has led to a necessity to create brands that people can use to make distinctions between things and products. While twenty years ago in most industries, it was possible to make distinguishable products with signs, logos, and packaging, today branding is taken further into the very products and their functions as well. The “look and feel” of products provides “semiotic handles” with which consumers and other people can make sense of products and thus make decisions on consumption. As Molotch maintains, it is sometimes more important to think about the value of a company in terms of brand value rather than stocks, not to mention tangible resources such as factories or workforce.

This line of reasoning has convinced even *Business Week*, a major business weekly, which recently published a special edition on design. Of course, *Business Week* tells a story that is only partially true, but many people buy it, including the journalists and the editorial staff who put together this highly respected weekly:

Design is fast becoming a must-have competency for corporations. It has evolved from a simple way of giving form and color to products into a powerful tool... Design methods get managers close to their customers, design research helps top execs visualize the future, and design strategies help companies innovate. (*Business Week*, July 4, 05, p. 54).

In response to the branding challenge, designers have created new design practices and forms of organization, whether internal design organization as in Philips (Heskett 1989), or on a consultant basis, which is the more typical model (Kristensen and Lojonoco 2002).

Of interest to people in communications is that new economic challenges make communication increasingly important for design. The largest design agencies are bigger and more complex in form than 30 years ago. As the design historian Anna Valtonen writes in her upcoming doctoral thesis in University of Arts and Design, the question of how to organize design has become an issue in corporations. As design practice has increasingly come into contact with management, designers face in their work many problems communication researchers have been studying in other contexts for decades. How do formal organizations – such as government and corporations – function? How do organizations communicate? How is communication organized in formal organizations? How do people in different (organizational) cultures make sense of objects, things, ideas, and concepts?

These questions are the bread and butter of many researchers in organizational communication, but designers are learning them the hard way.

In turn, designers face these problems on a practical level, which is something most students of communications can only dream of. There are certainly opportunities for theoretical elaboration, practical cooperation, and perhaps even cross-fertilization of ideas and practices.

Design and Urban Experience. Some ways in which design provides boundary objects for media and communications is through its important role in the creation of “signed” goodscapes and places we face in cities today. Designers create spaces not only through their plans and interiors, but also indirectly. A good example is Helsinki, which provides a suitable laboratory case of how design is transforming cities today.

Because Helsinki has never had a court or significant nobility (which historically lived in Stockholm or St. Petersburg), its present cultural production scene reflects the changing tastes of just those people who buy design anyway: wealthy city dwellers from students to the upper middle classes. In 2000, I calculated that, in some parts of South Helsinki, one encounters an art or design-related shop every 75 meters, and would encounter some kind of cultural business every 15 meters, if not just shops but also producers were counted (Koskinen 2005).

Several towns have noticed the existence of similar districts. For example, Helsinki advertises a “Design District,” while in Stockholm, an area in Söder, “SoFo” (South of Folkungagatan), functions similarly. World cities have had similar neighborhoods for a longer time; in fact, people who only occasionally visit Manhattan may get the feeling that they encounter a new neighborhood somewhere on that island every time they go there. In terms of its size, “the Chelsea art district” must be unique globally. The astonishing concentration of art galleries in that neighborhood colors the way in which it appears in a by-passer’s experience. The largest area of this kind probably exists in Tokyo’s southwestern Yamanote line, extending from Ebisu in the south to Shinjuku in the north. Even when design is understood narrowly, it has become a part of urban experience, creating specific “semiotic neighborhoods” in central areas of cities. As the design historian Viviana Narotzky has noted, these areas teach people about good design and taste (Narotzky 2000), attracting sophisticated urban people to stroll around them and spend time in them (Picture 1).



Picture 1. From the Danish Design Centre in Copenhagen. This picture shows just how skilled designers are in creating objects and spaces for certain kinds of people. It is easy to do a small thought experiment to see these skills. Imagine the response of a middle-aged car mechanic to this place to see how clearly it is designed for an urban, highly educated elite. *Picture:* Ilpo Koskinen, February 2002.

Design in Media. Design is big not just in cities, but also *in* media, as anyone can notice by simply visiting any kiosk. There are about as many design weeklies and monthlies on their shelves as there are comics and women's magazines. During the past few years, there has been an increasing number of interior decoration programs on television, and stories of design appear regularly in newspapers, sometimes even in separate, periodically appearing sections. Designers have long been celebrities (Kalha 2000), but this is true today more than ever, as the following excerpt, taken from an upscale Finnish interior magazine, witnesses. The story is about design objects in the home of a designer couple. The tone of the story, extreme as it is, conceptualizes the home primarily in terms of designers, rather than in terms of functions, price, availability, or aesthetic judgments, which have traditionally dominated writing in this vein.

When a constantly moving pair of architects set up a home in Milan, THE MAIN ROLE WENT TO DESIGN. In the apartment, there is not a single piece of furniture whose designer is unknown. The Hanahana-flowerholder is designed by Kazuyo Sejima for Driade. The blue-toned carpet is from the hands of Linda Burkhardt. The flexible Boalum-lamp was designed by Livio Castiglioni and Gianfranco Frattini in 1970. The lamp is manufactured by Artemide. Jasper Morrison's blue sofa is manufactured by Cappellini. The chair made of grass is by... (*Glorian koti*, January 2004, p. 43, capitals in original).

In brief, design and designers have become signs themselves. These signs are largely visual, and based on a cult of the creative artist. It is banal when compared to the complexities of design in the economy and culture, not to mention modern production technology, but it is alive and well in the press and electronic media.

Designers and design promotion organizations, for their part, eagerly play this game. For example, "Design Weeks" seem to pop up everywhere. Just in the fall of 2005, I learned about five such weeks without any attempt to look for them. I saw a design week in Helsinki, Copenhagen, Eindhoven, Tokyo, and heard about one in Paris. I did not bother to go to London or to New York to see their weeks, and did not even think about going to fashion weeks in Paris, Milan, London, New York, among other cities.

However, although the world of design writing may be based on romantic notions of creativity, this culture is not banal in its consequences. For one, as I pointed out above, the media are constantly shaping the design world by giving people and businesses convenient "semiotic handles," as Molotch (2003) calls them, for making sense of stuff (also Molotch), as well as for making purchasing decisions. Also, such celebrity culture works against the self-image of the profession, pushing it into a conservative, artistic direction at the expense of technology and social concerns. For example, "design for all" (or "universal design," as Americans call it) almost never enters this picture, and ecological design becomes an artistic exercise instead of becoming the joint effort of designers, ecologists and engineers.

Research in Design. Pushed by the pressures described above, the design community in some countries has started to turn to research in order to understand where the profession is going, and how to respond to changes in society. Of the Nordic countries, Denmark and Finland have been particularly in the forefront. An ability to synthesize what is going on in technology and actual design work requires higher-level conceptual thinking than what the traditional Bauhaus training model has been able to provide. To give just one example of this research, an extensive research field has developed around



Picture 2. Design districts and design weeks are changing the face of several cities.

the notion of “user research.” The first attempts in this area took place in the 1980s under the heading of “human-computer interaction,” a field led by cognitive psychologists like Don Norman (1988), but soon after, the field took a more industrial turn, as industry became disappointed in the promises made by psychologists. Following Jacob Nielsen’s influential book *Usability Engineering* (1993), “usability” became the new buzzword, giving rise to a widespread industrial practice, and later attempts to introduce usability methods into idea creation, not just into testing products and user interfaces. However, studying people in situ has been the traditional lot of the social sciences rather than psychology, which is increasingly reflected in the choices made not just in the academic design community, but also in the world’s most advanced companies, which have begun to hire social scientists to work in their user research departments.

I have little doubts about the future of this effort in the Nordic countries. Powerful forces are at work, pushing the top end of design schools into research. For instance, all Nordic countries – save Iceland – had a design policy at work in the early years of the

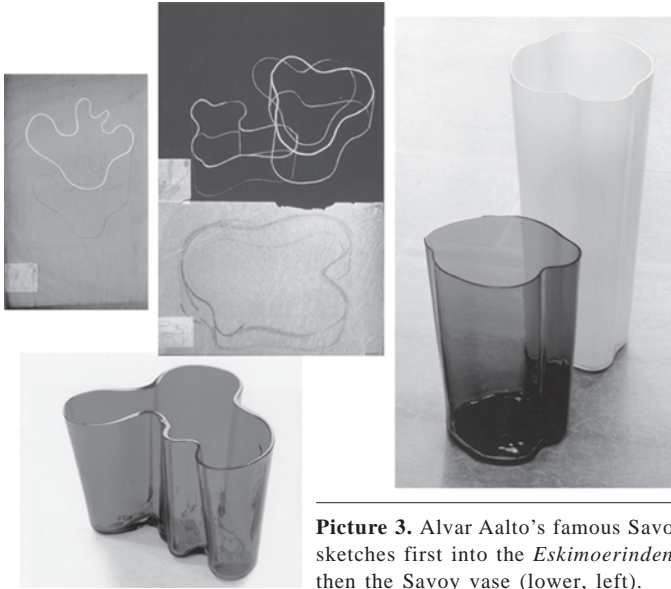
millennium (see Korvenmaa 2001). Also, all four major countries had a design year in 2005. A key component in these efforts was to strengthen research particularly in industrial design. Similar programs exist, or are being created, in several countries, including the United Kingdom, most small English-speaking nations, and the Baltic countries in Europe, and countries like Korea in Asia. Chinese efforts are regional.

Design as Agency

Above, I have tried to outline how media and design relate today, and presented some reasons for that relationship. The main argument has been that, although powerful institutional forces keep these disciplines largely separate, there are things in society that are constantly creating boundary objects, common areas of interest, for these disciplines. Now I want to argue that design is not just an innocent party in changing goodscapes (this notion is taken from an ongoing doctoral study at UIAH by Paula Bello, who builds on Arjun Appadurai's anthropology in an attempt to study crafts in Mexico's countryside). Designers participate actively in society, and bring about changes in our environment through their work. They make interpretations of not only objects and technology, but also of human beings and society, and fuse these interpretations in their work. However, unlike people trained in the social sciences, their statements do not usually appear in books and articles, but in shops, exhibitions, and interiors. The point is that for someone interested in how the material world is shaped in modern societies, design provides a perspicuous, observable setting for trying to understand just how human ideas – sometimes artistic, often plainly commercial – find an expression in physical things. What happens when design is understood as reflexive agency, a part of Lash and Urry's (1994) "economy of signs" rather than just something that is driven by economic, technological or social forces?

Picture 1 visualizes the story of one of the great design icons of the 20th Century, Alvar Aalto's Savoy vase (see Alvar Aalto Foundation and Alvar Aalto Museum 2002: 145-150). The Finnish organizers for the Paris World Fair in 1937 invited a submission from the glass company Karhula-Iittala. The company sponsored a competition for tableware and glass, and invited a number of well-known young architects to participate in the competition. The first sketches by Aalto were submitted to the competition with the (admittedly odd) name of *Eskimoerindens skinnbuxa* (The Eskimo Woman's Leather Breeches). Four sketches by Aalto survive, showing that Aalto's design was heavily influenced by Jean Arp, the French artist. The final vases were exhibited at the Paris World Fair in 1937. When Aalto designed the interior for the upscale Savoy Restaurant in Helsinki, his vases were also placed there. One version of these vases had a curvier, more dramatic shape than the original series; it became particularly popular, and came to be known as the Savoy vase, which still finds its way surprisingly often onto the covers of books exhibiting the best of 20th Century design.

What this snapshot shows is that designers' work is embedded in society in many ways. Aalto created an idea for a vase, finding the original form from modern art. As his work progressed, he took this idea and sketched several variants of it, until he found a form that rung true for him. Next this form was realized by master glass-blowers in Karhula-Iittala's studios and factory. However, this was just the beginning. When the vase was taken to the Savoy restaurant, one variant was singled out, and renamed with a catchy, sophisticated name that stuck and that has dominated the perception of the vase



Picture 3. Alvar Aalto's famous Savoy vase developed out of early sketches first into the *Eskimoerindens skinnbuxa* vase (right), and then the Savoy vase (lower, left).

Source: Alvar Aalto Foundation and Alvar Aalto Museum 2002.

ever since. Few people today know the history of the Savoy vase, which has become a major classic of modern glass design. As it has this classic status, it shapes the design community's understanding of glass vases. Through museums and art history, it also shapes the public's understanding of glass as applied art. For Iittala, the vase is still a major seller.

When one thinks about design in reflexive rather than causal terms, one begins to understand how the design world could be used as a window for studying how physical things are made meaningful. Things around us are interpretations and statements made by humans, rather than just technical creations. Of course, there are many types of reflexive processes in design. The Savoy vase represents the high end, while toy design represents the most market-driven design in which producing more variation is the key business driver. Similarly, designers work differently. Aalto's inspiration was artistic; indeed, many designers do follow the art world closely, and think of their work as art. However, many designers distance themselves from art and artistic imagery, and consciously orient to technology or the market instead.

Of course, there is nothing specific in these processes. Technology works like this. The sciences work like this. Society works like this. What is specific to design is the playful combination of art and culture and technology, and the way in which designers' self-understanding works. They see themselves typically as mediators between technology and people, engineering and taste, science and art. In this, they differ significantly from engineering, which, as Louis Bucciarelli (1994), an engineer-turned-ethnographer notes, tends to have a mathematical cosmology in that when engineers account for their activities, they rely on the natural sciences and mathematics instead of art and the social sciences. For anyone interested in how these artistic and "soft" values get built into objects, things, and events (the face of the Olympics in Beijing is being designed by a professor who was trained in Helsinki), design provides an interesting site. For a media

and communications researcher, it gives an opportunity to study the material world as a meaningful activity.

Naturally, if a communications scholar follows my point, and starts to study design, she may have to develop research skills that are somewhat outside the ordinary baggage of a social scientist. One has to be able to pay due attention to visual thinking, materials, and to how the human body interacts with materials. Also, it might be useful to think in terms of creation of meaning instead of seeing design as “information transfer,” even though designing information flows is undeniably a part of design, and media design in particular. Furthermore, it pays to develop skills in observation. It takes time and patience to see how society evolves materially. Design has proved to be a difficult thing to study ethnographically from the designers’ “emic” perspective rather than using the researchers’ “etic” concepts and theories.

Design as an Approach to Media Research

The section on design as agency, of course, presented some theoretical intricacies that, if followed, would take research beyond causal thinking. I believe that it is productive to understand design in agentic terms, as an activity that participates in modern world-making. Designers are active people, who scan their environment to discover potential design problems. When they spot one, they construe a design that tries to provide a solution to it. In this work, they use professional methods of design, but also imagination. As I tried to argue in the final section of this paper, designers do not use their imaginations in a void: rather, they are in dialogue with art, technology, culture and – naturally enough – previous designs. Still, design is not a purely self-reflexive process. The solution produced by a designer is typically a mixture of not just design concerns, but also business planning, analysis of technological opportunities and constraints, and a host of other things too many to be listed here. It is for these reasons that I suggest that it might be better to talk about design in terms of reflexivity and agency rather than in terms of causality.

If one accepts the notion of “two solitudes” as a description of the current relationship between design and media research, this paper can in the final instance be thought of as a call for bilingualism. For media researchers, design illuminates many theoretical issues like *semiosis*, myth, metaphor, and aesthetics, providing an observable site for studying these processes in action. At a slightly more complex level, design may provide an opportunity for studying material objects and space as communication processes. The reason why these objects are more complex to study is conceptual and theoretical: few vocabularies exist that can help us to understand three-dimensional objects. For example, semiotics provides good tools for studying narrative, language, and visual objects like packages and textiles, but it fares far worse when it comes to the semiotics of space or chairs. At an even more complex level, design provides people in communications with an opportunity to “denaturalize” technology and the material world in concrete terms. In the human world, precious few natural things exist. Herbert Simon (1980) once observed that most of our environment is artificial, and that in consequence, we need a science of the artificial. For designers, a bilingual relationship might provide the promise of a more up-to-date theory and better tools for understanding communication, which is a key aspect of designers’ work. It would also provide the understanding and vocabularies needed to develop professional practice. Moreover, it would provide new areas for research, and perhaps even lead to new kinds of design practice.

For me, bilingualism refers to a deeper coexistence than two solitudes, but still shows that the two worlds can maintain their separate identities. Living bilingualism would be beneficial for both disciplines. Is it time to start learning new languages?

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Public Service Faces a Change of Climate

HENRIK SØNDERGAARD

The discussion of public service broadcasting in Denmark has changed character in recent years, and we see clear indications that new interpretations of the purpose and proper roles of public service broadcasting are in the offing. Where those in power in the 1990s saw it as their duty to defend and promote public service institutions – Danmarks Radio (DR) and TV 2 – in competition with commercial channels, the present Government’s media policies aim to limit and reduce the public channels’ sphere of activity. When public service broadcasters were alone on the air waves and in early years after the monopoly was broken, it was commonly held that public service broadcasting channels were important, but not particularly robust; they could not be expected to survive in free competition. Consequently, they needed protection so they would not become marginalized. Today, both DR and TV 2 have attained such strong market positions that fears of marginalization have lost all relevance. Whereas public service channels are still considered important elements in the media system, there is growing concern that the two channels may have become too dominant. As there is nothing to suggest that the market itself will change this state of affairs, the balance between public service and commercial channels will have to be righted through political measures, namely, by altering the terms that apply to public service media.

Clearly, the question of the proper role and character of public service channels has become more directly political, and the favor that public service broadcasters once enjoyed among national policy-makers is no longer. This change of climate coincides with what has been termed a major ideological shift in Danish politics, when a Social Democrat-led government was succeeded by a center-right coalition that campaigned (among other things) on reform of the media sector. The prime objective in this area is the privatization of TV 2 – which has meant that the character of public service channels has been in focus from the start.

As we shall see, the pressure currently being brought to bear on public service television is not solely a consequence of the change of government in Denmark. Nor is it necessarily an expression of neo-liberal skepticism vis-à-vis public sector institutions, albeit such skepticism does play in. Even so, the pressures have their roots in some fundamental issues relating to the role of public service broadcasting in an increasingly

complex and diverse media system, in which market conditions have come to play a greater role, and cultural policy objectives, traditionally a mainstay of public service media, have receded into the background (Syvertsen 2004). Commercial television is relatively new in Denmark, but over time demands have been raised that public regulation of public service channels take account of the publicly financed media's impact on the market. This sentiment has come to the fore in recent years in a European context, where powerful media interests have filed numerous complaints with the European Commission that seriously challenge the legality of public service service broadcasting as practiced today (Jakubowicz 2004). As a consequence of EU policy, member states have been compelled to specify their definitions of 'public service' more closely than was previously deemed necessary, which in turn leads to more comprehensive and more detailed regulation. Regardless of which parties are in power in the respective member states, the political system now has both more, and more direct influence over the public service institutions (Bardoel 2005). In Denmark, this development is even more disturbing inasmuch as it coincides with a strongly ideologically motivated disavowal of media and cultural policies of the Social Democrats in the 1990s and a desire on the part of the new Government to boost the commercial media sector.

Taking my point of departure in the Danish media landscape I shall try to explain the factors behind the change in political climate for public service broadcasting and discuss some of the principal strategic challenges these media now face in a situation where technological developments, e.g., digitization and media convergence, already have put the media system under pressure. I shall argue that the public service media have contracted a new form of *political vulnerability* that, paradoxically, arises out of the market dominance they have achieved.

New Media Policies

Media policy in Denmark since the new Government took office in 2001 has mainly focused on DR and TV 2, both of which companies have long been objects of controversy. Shortly after the center-right coalition assumed power, they announced a reform program for the media sector: "Quality, clarity and competition" (Kulturministeriet 2002a). The program contains a long list of proposals designed to alter the balance between public and private media. One central point is that the program not only emphasizes competition as the high road to quality, but it features liberalization of the rules applying to commercial channels' operations by removing a number of policy-motivated restrictions.

The rules pertaining to commercial messages on television have been relaxed (channels may now advertise alcoholic beverages and over-the-counter pharmaceuticals; they need no longer observe restraint in advertisements directed to children); the concession fee for network television (TvDanmark) has been abolished; and the minimum quota of news and public affairs programming has been halved (from 60 to 30 minutes a day). In addition, DR is now required to commission 20 per cent of its production from independent producers, in itself a sizable subsidy to the private media sector (DKK 170 million in 2006). Furthermore, the Government cancelled a planned rise in the receiver license fee totalling DKK 100 million. The biggest reform on the list – not yet enacted – is the conversion of TV 2 into a privately owned company, a move that would change the balance between public and private media quite drastically.

The other side of the government's media policy relates more directly to the proper roles of public service media in the media system and seeks to delimit and define what public service broadcasting consists of. As stated in the agreement on the media, "DR's and TV 2's public service obligations will be simplified, but at the same time be specified more clearly so that viewers and listeners can better see what they are getting for their money" (Kulturministeriet 2002b:1). This goal has been achieved through the introduction of so-called 'public service contracts' that in detail set out goals and criteria that the institutions shall fulfill. In relation to earlier practices, where the public service mandate was regulated via rather broadly phrased paragraphs in laws and statutes, steering of the companies by contract has, as we shall see, a more binding character, while it also gives politicians and bureaucrats more influence. As a step in the reform process, the composition of DR's Board of Governors was altered in a way that reduced the influence of the political parties, while the Board's authority in questions of program policy is emphasized in the law: "The Board of Governors bears ultimate responsibility for programming" (Lov om radio- og fjernsynsvirksomhed 2002).

Taken together, these reforms amount to a veritable attack on the public service media, as their consequences (1) represent a limitation of their autonomy regarding program policy, (2) call for closer steering and policing of the companies activities on the part of the state, and (3) benefit the companies' competitors. It is important, nonetheless, to recognize that the amendments to the law in themselves do not constitute any 'attack' on the idea of public service broadcasting, but they aim to redefine public service broadcasting in a new context, in which free and fair competition is as important as traditional cultural policy objectives.

When we examine some of the recent controversies about DR and TV 2, it becomes apparent that the issue of the proper status and function of public service is more than a question of regulation, but is animated by an ideological repudiation of public media's program output as well as their autonomy. This is particular apparent in the case of the turbulence around both companies' top management, which in both cases led changes at the top. TV 2's CEO, Cristina Lage was fired in 2003 when she took a stand against the idea of privatizing TV 2, and in 2005 DR's Director-General Christian Nissen was let go due to friction between the Director-General's office and the Board of Governors. It should be noted that the Chairman of the Board was also forced to leave the chair as a direct consequence of the conflict with the Director-General. A more principle-based conflict over the media's autonomy took place in 2001, when the legal foundation for DR was amended to confer ultimate authority over program policy on the Governors. The amendment gave the newly appointed board a *carte blanche* to intervene in programming, which they promptly used to castigate the DR news department for its coverage of the war in Iraq, specifying individual journalists. In the same vein a violent conflict occurred again in 2003 between top management and the Board of Governors over a proposal to reorganize the news department. As part of its strategy to facilitate multimedia production, DR had integrated the news staff for radio, television and the web. The Governors opposed the move on the grounds that it reduced diversity and forced the company to de-integrate.

The substance of these interventions in editorial policy-making is hardly earth-shaking; nonetheless, they clearly demonstrate how vulnerable to political pressuring the public service institutions have become. Their ability to maintain their editorial integrity and credibility has been impaired. The interventions also demonstrate a desire on the

part of at least some politicians to exert their influence over the public media according to the principle that public financing implies a right to (detailed) political control. A factor that surely has some part in this development is a successive thinning out of the informal channels that politicians once could use to influence editorial policy due to an overall professionalization of journalism. Journalists nowadays follow professional criteria of newsworthiness and guard their independence. They are not as receptive to politicians, even those of their own persuasion, as once was the case.

The Dilemma of Adapting to the Market

As indicated above, the change of political course toward a more critical and restrictive attitude toward public service media in Denmark has its roots in a political struggle, but it also has to do with how the public service media have adapted to competition. DR's development since the mid-1990s may serve as an illustration of some of the problems that increasing adaptation to the market gives rise to. The problems mainly relate to DR's legitimacy and reflect a growing need to defend public service media as the political pressure on the media increases, and they increasingly find themselves having to justify their existence.

When DR was alone on the airwaves, the company's political legitimacy was conferred by politicians, who felt duty-bound to defend the institutions vis-à-vis the public. But, in a competition-based television system, the situation changes. In competition, DR has to seek its legitimacy directly from the viewing audience, whose satisfaction with programming has become crucial; the company's legitimacy in politicians' eyes is now secondary. At the same time, the need for legitimacy has broadened inasmuch as it has become necessary for the public service channels also to legitimize themselves vis-à-vis their competitors, the privately owned commercial channels. Legitimacy in this case is essentially economic, a proof that the value of public service media to society is greater than the market distortions that they entail.

DR has taken steps in several areas to adapt to the new competitive situation. Most important is a revision of program policy in 1996 and the establishment of a two-channel system (DR 1 and DR 2). Next-most important are organizational changes, whereby production is now separate from program scheduling, and the introduction of a new internal resource allocation scheme based on the principle of a customer-provider relationship. On the one hand, the changes have resulted in more efficient use of resources which, in turn, has increased productivity; on the other hand, procedures have been developed that enable the company to steer its program schedule more effectively, which, in turn, has greatly enhanced the company's capacity to set and fulfill strategic objectives (Søndergaard 2003:7ff).

These developments should be seen in their historical context. In the years immediately following the break-up of the monopoly, DR's market shares fell sharply. In the mid-1990s the situation had deteriorated to the point that the company's *raison d'être* as a public institution could be called into question. The principal problem was not so much that viewers to an ever-lesser degree watched DR's programs, but that DR was losing touch with some audience segments, so that it looked as though the channels might end up as niche channels with little social significance to speak of. The main challenge for DR was to re-establish contact with the audience, which in technical terms meant formulating and following a strategy to maintain and expand the channels' *weekly reach*, i.e.,

the share of the population who in the course of the week watch one or more DR programs. Whenever reach becomes the principal strategic objective, the focus of program policy necessarily shifts from the composition of program output to the programs, which in turn implies a greater emphasis on the marketing and distribution aspects of programming.

The goal of maintaining a high level of reach is, in itself, hardly controversial. Clearly, a public service channel's programs have to be watched. But, in practice, high reach can only be obtained if the channel can maintain a sizable *market share*, which from the point of view of public service ideology, is less easily defended.

It has been demonstrated that a channel's market share is closely related to its reach. If the market share is around 25 per cent, reach is more or less constant at about 80 per cent, and it rises only slightly if market shares rise. But, if market shares should fall to around 20 per cent, weekly reach falls rather sharply (to around 50 per cent). Thus, if a channel wishes to maintain a high level of reach, there are limits to how low its market share can be allowed to fall. In practice, though, reach cannot be operationalized in program policy, but market shares can; consequently, sheer market goals are the principal steering parameters used in programming. Thus, whereas DR's strategic planning specifies objectives in terms of reach, the parameters applied to steer programming are purely commercial. At the same time, the strategy presumes that the program schedule features enough popular programs to jack ratings up. This hardly means that specialty programs will disappear from the program schedule, but it does mean that programs of broad appeal assume a key role in the company's strivings to fulfill overall strategic objectives regarding weekly reach.

The strategy has been a recipe for success for DR, but it has at the same time caused problems regarding political legitimacy. The company has come under fire for having "too commercial" a program profile, with its most popular programs drawing the most heated criticism. The criticism springs out of the fact that it is difficult in a multichannel system to justify license-financed channels' airing the same kinds of programs as commercial competitors offer. The agreement on media policy from 2002 makes it clear that the parties to the agreement wish to make the public service channels' programming more distinct; it outlines a number of areas in which the public service media should be market leaders: "The goal is that public service channels shall be best in the areas of news, public affairs, education, Danish Arts and cultural expression, including drama and film" (Kulturministeriet 2002b). Newspapers most closely affiliated with the Government were more forthright. *Berlingske Tidende* (Copenhagen) commented, for example: "It is high time the Folketing summoned the courage to deal with the version of public service broadcasting that includes mandatory payment for all the marzipan and sugar plums that Danmarks Radio serves up" (*Berlingske Tidende*, 8 Sep 2004).

When criticized for having too many entertaining programs in its tableaux, DR faces a dilemma. Present program policy largely corresponds to viewers' wishes; any change in the direction of more informative/educational programs will therefore cause some dissatisfaction among viewers. An analysis of popular attitudes toward DR and TV 2's public service programming from 1999 led to the conclusion that "the people want to be informed and feel that public service television largely lives up to this," but that "particularly DR1 and DR2 should be more entertaining than they are today" (ACNielsen-AIM 2000:17). Although the analysis is not entirely new, nothing suggests that viewers' preferences have changed. Thus, DR faces a true dilemma, forced as it is to choose

between two mutually exclusive alternatives: satisfying popular demand or accommodating politicians' desires for a more distinct program profile.

Of course, there is more to DR's program policy than the proportion of information to entertainment, but nonetheless, this is the main theme in public discussion of public service broadcasting, and it is closely bound up with ideas about quality and how public service broadcasting should be defined. As Meijer, among others, has pointed out, it is in many ways both fruitless and misleading to contrast quality with commercial success (Meijer 2004), but in media policy contexts it has long been the custom; consequently, the polarization is almost unavoidable in the discussion of public service, where the degree of 'public service' is generally reduced to a question of the assortment of programs the company offers.

Thus, in Denmark political discussion of DR has largely focused on whether DR shall continue to offer programs of all categories, i.e., a *full-scale public service model*, or concentrate on the kinds of programs that commercial television cannot deliver, i.e., a *complementary model*. The discussion of these alternative versions of the public service concept is largely confined to programming and the kinds of demands that are made of the public service companies, whereas the societal functions and influences of public service broadcasting are seldom mentioned. The current political ambitions to distinguish more clearly between public service and commercial television mainly revolve around the principle that the public service channels should be more *distinct*, and that their distinction is mainly a consequence of the extent and character of the programming tasks they are required to fulfill. From the regulator's point of view this makes sense, as it makes it possible to define public service more precisely; at the same time, however, it complicates the situation regarding some of the other goals public service broadcasting is expected to achieve, particularly the goal of maintaining regular contact with the Danish people on a broad front, for the simple reason that programming that distinctly differs from commercial programming is not likely to reach the great majority of the public.

The central importance of 'reach' in DR's program strategy is a motor force behind the company's program policy, but is also part of the reason for DR's initiatives in the realm of multimedia, since the new media platforms help to augment the company's total reach. These initiatives are particularly important with regard to regular contact with the demographic groups that DR has had trouble reaching with its two television channels. Young people, whose use of television has declined overall in recent years, are a particularly elusive group; consequently, DR has developed a rich assortment of on-line services for young users as a means of maintaining contact.

For the Good of Society

The question of how distinct DR's profile should be stretches beyond purely market considerations, however, as it clearly has bearing on the company's political legitimacy. DR management has expressed growing concern in the last couple of years that an institutional focus on competitive strength might blot out the company's public service identity. In 2004, the Board of Governors instituted a so-called "public service review" with a view to putting greater emphasis on DR's cultural political mission, a move that in part responds to current sentiment within the European Union which is expected to result in demands for more precise definitions of public service. Another motive is to be found in the findings of survey research regarding DR's image, which indicate that

viewers steadily less and less perceive a difference between DR 1 and the other channels. In a newspaper interview (*Berlingske Tidende* 11 May 2005), Acting Director-General Lars Vesterlørkke: “Whereas we have worked hard to be more media business-oriented – that is, more customer-oriented – we are now shifting our weight from having stood on one foot to standing on the other foot, as well, namely, that we exist for the good of society.” In terms of program policy, the adjustment means, among other things, a more complex definition of quality, which besides stressing that programs must uphold a professional standard of production and quality in the eyes of the individual viewer, also emphasizes the programs’ value to society.

It should be noted that DR’s reflections on public service as a societal concern comes at a point when the institution occupies a strong market position, but experiences an ebb in political support. Whatever the case, the move is recognition of the nature of public service broadcasting as a political project that requires legitimacy based on other principles than those that apply on the market and a need to make DR’s status as a cultural institution more apparent to viewers. The latter need has inspired a comprehensive campaign based on the above-mentioned ‘public service review’ and otherwise serves as an exhibit to be used in the coming negotiations on a new charter (for a four-year period starting in 2007). The main slogan in the campaign, “DR, not like the others” spells out the nature of public service broadcasting and why it is important to society. According to DR’s campaign brochure (DR 2005b), the company strives “to create value for society, cultural life and the individual”; a larger publication, entitled “DR for everyone: A magazine about public service” (2005a) develops the reasoning more fully.

DR’s new approach echoes the arguments put forward by the BBC in connection with its charter renewal process, viz. the strategy document, *Building Public Value: Renewing the BBC for a Digital World* (2004), which focuses directly on the value of the institution to society. The BBC, too, has recognized that public service broadcasting’s *raison d’être* cannot be understood sheerly in terms of the institution’s program output, even if it is a salutary complement to the programming provided by commercial actors. It has to be made clear that it is a question of a composite structure, defined by a specific social purpose and mandate. Whereas previously the BBC stressed the importance of providing a greater diversity of programs than the market can deliver – the argument the company puts forward in, for example, *Extending Choice in the Digital Age* from 1996 – the new strategy is based on a different source of legitimacy. In a mature digital environment that “contains the potential for limitless individual consumer choice” (BBC 2004:3) the company’s purpose cannot consist of filling the gaps in the market-based menu on offer, but is instead to maintain vital functions in society that commercial media cannot, or can to but a limited degree, fulfill. These functions, which include helping to maintain a well-informed, well-educated and tolerant society, are expressed in the concept of “public value”, i.e., value to society as a whole: “While commercial broadcasters aim to return value to their shareholders or owners, the BBC exists to create *public value*. In other words, it aims to serve its audience not just as consumers, but as members of a wider society” (BBC 2004:7). The interesting point in the present context is not how the BBC specifies the ways in which it creates public value, but that the company seeks legitimacy by referring to societal functions.

The policy statements of both DR and the BBC may be seen as attempts to shift the focus from market considerations, which have been a source of criticism, toward less

controversial social and cultural mandates. The extent to which the policy documents actually affect the companies' program policy, their programming, remains to be seen.

On the other hand, it is fairly clearly a case of political opportunism, and there is little doubt that it might have very far-reaching consequences, should the public service broadcasters, in their strivings for legitimacy, find themselves bound to adjust their programming in ways that deviate from audience preferences. What appears to be a return to traditional virtues – more “public” and less “service” – may well lead to commercial marginalization, which would be most unfortunate when the companies face a redefinition of their role in digital multichannel systems.

Steering by Contract

If there is reason for worry about how Danish public service broadcasting may develop as a consequence of changes in the political climate, one reason is a de facto increase in political influence over the companies' program policy, which has been fairly substantial over the past few years. Direct political influence of the kind that politicians, acting via the Radio Board, exerted over DR in the monopoly era ended when the Board was dissolved and replaced by a Board of Governors, but in 2001 a system of regularly renegotiated contracts was instituted, which has given politicians new opportunities to bring their power to bear.

The system involves contracts between the Ministry of Culture and the public service broadcasters that specify the responsibilities the contracting broadcaster shall undertake during the period of the contract. The introduction of the contracts is an extension of a general tendency toward *more detailed regulation of the public service media* that started in the 1990s with complementary specifications in DR's and TV 2's statutes concerning their public service duties. In 1996, both institutions were required to draw up annual ‘balance sheets’ that showed their performance in relation to what was expected of them, and in 2000, they were required to draw up ‘public service budgets’ against which the subsequent accounting reports would be measured.

Compared to the system of detailed statutes, budgets and balance sheets, the introduction of contracts per se does not represent any major change, nor does it in principle exert any greater influence over program policy. In practice, however, the situation has changed, but not so much due to the contracts as to new agents of control that were introduced at the same time. What is new is a much tighter control of the companies' compliance with the terms of their contracts¹, first through Public Service Council, until the body was dissolved in 2001, and subsequently through Radio and Television Council, the regulatory agency for all Danish broadcasting (Banke et al. 2004:141ff).

In part, the trend toward more detailed steering of public service media has to do with so-called ‘new public management’, according to which public agencies are regulated through periodic contracts specifying what they are expected to achieve. Such contracts have, for example, been introduced in the Danish university system. But the trend also has to do with changed conditions for public service broadcasters operating in market-based media systems, where the need to document the value of public service channels assumes importance. This need is also a consequence of a growing interest in the broadcasting sector on the part of the EU Commission, which polices market competition, with a special eye to illicit forms of state support. The public service contracts and the control of the companies' compliance enables Denmark to live up to the the criteria the Com-

mission applies regarding legitimate state support, namely, that it be proportional to the extent of the duties required of public service broadcasters and, secondly, that the duties are so well defined as to permit independent assessments of compliance (cf. the Commission Communication on the application of state aid rules to public service broadcasting, EU Commission, 2001).

Thus, the new form of regulation of public service broadcasting in Denmark may be seen as a measure ‘in defense of’ public service, a safeguard against possible intervention on the part of the Commission and against criticism of publicly owned media per se. In these senses, the contract system boosts the legitimacy of the public service media, as it does for other public institutions that are subject to similar contracts. On the other hand, it represents a more detailed specification of the requirements public service broadcasters must live up to and a reduction of the media’s autonomy², which is a function not only of the detailed nature of the contracts, but of the magnitude of the requirements and the character of the control, as well. extensive and detailed requirements will reduce the public service media’s freedom of maneuver and ultimately may mean that its total program output is dedicated to satisfying the terms of the contract.

When it comes to control, one of the most important aspects is which ‘performance indicators’ are applied in the evaluation of the media’s performance and whether measuring instruments that measure more than sheer quantity can be developed. The present contracts contain quite many qualitative dimensions that are difficult to ‘measure’, but it is not unlikely that increasing emphasis may be put on more objectively quantifiable dimensions as the pressure on public service media’s legitimacy increases. There is a risk that the contracts may degenerate into rigid quotas that will undermine the idea of public service while placing the broadcasters in a program political straitjacket that seriously hampers their further development. The British regulator, Ofcom, appears to have recognized the problem and advises against program quotas in favor of regulation on the basis of the aims of public service broadcasting: “PSB should in future be defined in terms of its purposes and its characteristics rather than by specific genres (programme types). ... It must be free to respond to the challenge of providing accessible and popular programming. This suggests that regulation should break away from narrow obligations specifying hours of certain types of programming across the schedule” (Ofcom 2004:10).

As Ofcom points out, one of the purposes of public service broadcasting is to make available programming that the market cannot deliver on its own. But behind that purpose looms a much higher ambition, namely, *to steer the public’s media consumption*³ in a direction that benefits society, that is, the public service broadcaster has reason to make an ‘impact’. In this context detailed quotas will not suffice, and there is therefore a need to continue to try to find ways whereby some of the more overarching societal goals can be expressed in contractual terms. It is no easy task inasmuch as programming requirements and the goal of making an impact ultimately boil down to the same dilemma as DR’s strategists have to wrestle with today: a distinct profile is not easily reconcilable with a big ‘impact’. Nor is the problem solved by introducing ‘public value’ as a criterion, because, among other things, the public or societal value of any given program output will depend on the number of viewers who watch it, even more so since at least some measure of the value of public service media to society, according to the BBC’s definitions, lies in creating “shared experiences” – i.e., in delivering programs that are able to attract large audiences (BBC 2004). Further development of the contract system may have a positive effect if the contracts include more of the various parameters. This would

call attention, more than is the case today, to some of the mutually contradictory requirements and expectations that public service broadcasters currently face. At best, it might help to improve people's understanding of what public service broadcasting is all about.

One risk factor that should be mentioned is the opportunity for political pressures when contracts are negotiated and are up for renewal. Clearly, it is the task of politicians to stake out the overall framework for public service broadcasting, but politicians who are involved in negotiating the contracts are tempted to go a bit further and to set out more detailed guidelines that are not always beneficial to public service broadcasting or to the individual companies. This tendency has been apparent for a number of years in Denmark, where politicians have earmarked portions of the license fee revenue for specific purposes, first and foremost for film subsidies, which, despite their good intentions, make it difficult for the public service media to fulfill their obligations. The same may be said of requiring DR to commission a good share of their own production from independent producers so as to stimulate the private production sector. It would be worrying indeed were the contract system to become a 'front' for subsidies to industry that have nothing to do with the public service mandate.

One cannot say with any certainty whether or not contract steering of public service media makes them any more vulnerable to political pressures than they have been under previous forms of regulation; it all depends on the substance of the contracts.⁴ What is clear, however, is that the stricter control that the contract system has introduced will mean that the *consequences* of inappropriate contracts will be much greater than would otherwise be the case. To put it differently: the damage that politicians are able to inflict on public service broadcasting has grown considerably, a circumstance that should inspire the greatest caution among media policy-makers. A crucial prerequisite for such a precautionary approach is the presence in the political system of not only a general benevolence toward public service media, but also an understanding of where the boundary line runs between political influence and editorial integrity.

The regulatory logic that imbues the steering of DR by contract, which EU's proactive policy on competition reinforces, clearly indicates the central role politicians will play in deciding the form public service broadcasting will assume. In Denmark, as in other European countries, politicians are under pressure to define the public service mandate narrowly enough to allow the commercial media sector to grow, and there is a real risk that such considerations may weigh heavier than thoughts about the developmental potential of public service media. As Jakubowicz points out, there are numerous indications that this may already be the case: "Just at the time when public service broadcasting needs to redefine its mission, it may be forced into a Procrustean bed of an ideologically motivated concept of public service broadcasting that has the major virtue of not competing with commercial broadcasters, but does nothing to help public broadcasters adjust to new realities" (Jakubowicz 2003:59).

Challenges

Public discussion of public service broadcasting in Denmark, including the debate on its regulation, has contributed rather little to solving the problems these media face in the transition from a relatively comprehensible analogue television system to a vast digital multimedia system. To some extent this may be put down to the fact that the discussion,

presumably for ideological reasons, has narrowmindedly focused on issues like political bias in DR newscasts, the amount of entertainment in Friday-evening tableaux, and the proper composition of a public media's Boards of Governors. Together with the present Government's cool, if not frankly antagonistic, attitude to public service media, the debate has instead obstructed the kind of innovative thinking that is needed if the public service media are to continue to have a role in the Danish media landscape.

DR's request for a rise in the receiver license fee and permission to establish new digital theme channels was denied out of hand, and for the time being there is little that suggests that DR will have any opportunity for expansion, despite the fact that such expansion is crucial to the company's future in a digital media system. It is hard to find any explanation to the Government's position other than spite, or ideological antipathy toward DR.

Although the conditions applying to DR are important, they are hardly the greatest challenge facing Danish media policy today. Far more important is the question of how to maintain the quality of the public service programming TV 2 delivers today. TV 2 is not yet privatized, to be sure, but when it is, a situation will arise where a good share of public service programming is subject to the market. The quality and volume of this "public service for private money" will depend entirely on the ability of the government to grant TV 2 sufficiently attractive terms so that TV 2 can maintain its standards and yet stay in business. In the analogue television system, where TV 2 has had the privilege of being the sole channel to be able to transmit nationwide advertising, the government can make fairly far-reaching demands concerning the nature and quality of programming, but in a digital system, in which TV 2 no longer is privileged, it is far from certain that such demands can be made. There is clearly a risk that TV 2's contribution to public service programming will be diluted – at worst, disappear entirely. This would leave DR to shoulder the public service mandate alone. This scenario is totally in line with prognoses that Ofcom has made for the British public service system. Ofcom warns not only of marginalization of public service programming, but that the absence of present competition between public service channels will lead to a decline in program quality. Ofcom's idea of establishing a Public Service Publisher to compensate for the reduction in public service programming may become relevant in Denmark, as well. Be that as it may, it is high time that we began to consider what can be done.

Translation: *Charly Hultén*

Notes

1. Only DR's two nationwide channels and TV 2's regional services are steered by contract today. Since its conversion to a share company in 2003, TV 2 is regulated by charter, compliance with which is controlled by the Radio and Television Council.
2. Georgina Born (2004) shows how a proliferation of performance measures and 'balance sheets' created internal problems in the BBC in the 1990s. Among other things, management's focus was distracted from the creative aspects of program production.
3. A quantitative analysis undertaken by Media Secretariat in 2005 in conjunction with its statement on DR's and TV 2's public service accounts clearly documents the effects the two public service channels have on Danish viewing habits (cf. www.mediesekretariatet.dk).

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4. There is not room here to describe the background of contract steering. The literature offers several views on the advantages and disadvantages of the contract approach (cf. Jakubowicz 2005, Svendsen 2004, Bardoel 2005).

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Times Have Changed

On the Relationship Between Swedish Public Service Television and the Viewing Public

ANNA EDIN

There was a time when a shortage of broadcasting frequencies gave public service media more or less natural monopolies in the countries where they operated, albeit not without political power struggles. Publicly owned European broadcasting monopolies were founded not solely on the basis of socio-political ideals, but also because of what has been called “a technical failure” (Collins & Murroni 1997:7). At the same time, the existence of a broadcasting monopoly is what made it logical and reasonable in institutional and communicative perspectives, to conceive of the viewing audience as the public and – by extension – of the viewer as a citizen. Broadcasting fare was a broadly shared experience, and what was offered on the air was widely discussed. Radio and television were in many ways the center of attention.

The technological changes that started in the 1980s mean not only that public service channels are forced to compete for viewers with privately owned media in emerging multichannel systems, but also that the spatial category that the previous system helped to construct, which is deeply rooted in the public service model, is increasingly challenged: that is, the notion of the audience as a national public. Furthermore, overall political and cultural trends have for some time problematized the notion of the public as a homogeneous and rational entity. Although the concept of public service that long has defined the publicly owned media institutions allows numerous interpretations and is thus highly adaptable, in essence it presumes the existence of a (national) public that can be – and wishes to be – served.

The Audience and the Institution

The relationship between the television institution and the viewing audience may be seen as a discursive system consisting of distinct, but interlinked levels. For one, there is the level at which institutional conceptions of the audience and the communicative relationship are produced and reproduced, which includes official rhetoric and what has been called the “invisible fictions” of the television institution (Hartley 1987:127). Sec-

only, there is a level comprised of concrete expressions and modes of address that characterize actual programming, which in turn range from a comprehensive and serial level down to the level of segments of the programme output. The audience plays its roles in the communication process in great part by means of discursive constructions that originate in other sectors of the media system. These constructions help to bring “the audience” and the media system and its prime players together, but they do not necessarily coincide with viewers’ actual desires or intentions – although it is, of course, entirely possible that they do (cf. Ang 1991, Blumler 1997, i.a.). On the other hand, it is ever the task of the media to find modes of address that reach out to viewers. Unless they succeed in this, their efforts are quite literally meaningless.

Some have argued that the gap between the audience and the institution is so wide and so deep that the history of European public service media is best described as an enduring struggle for power, the driving force of which is the audience’s resistance to being objectified in the name of noble notions of the nation and of culture (cf. Ang 1991, i.a.). Others see it rather as a process of successive adaptation, whereby conceptions of the audience and modes of address have gradually approached the communicative context – a process that also has been credited with exerting a decisive, positive influence on the development of cultural and political public spheres (cf. Scannell 1989, i.a.).

Whichever interpretation one prefers, there is no guarantee that institutional demands and communicative practices are in alignment, and it is clear that this is not only a problem in theoretical terms, but that it time and again has given rise to a dilemma, particularly for the public service media.

The Public Service Mandate

What, then, is the official rationale behind Swedish public service broadcasting (SVT) today? A precise and unequivocal answer is not readily at hand, since any number of motives is/are put forward, all said to be equally important. Not even the government, the source of the mandate, have/has formulated a statement of purpose. Instead, the mandate is so broad and varied that public service television has been assigned a virtually universal responsibility for democracy on all levels, from the health and vitality of democracy per se to the personal fulfilment and satisfaction of the individual citizen/viewer. If we then turn to the requirements programming should fulfill, the complexity is hardly less. The demands are many, vaguely formulated and often contradictory. Programming should be so multifaceted and varied that it ranges from the broadly popular to the eccentric; it should give viewers what they want, but at the same time give them new, unfamiliar and unexpected sensations. Diversity, breadth, independence, orientation (in public affairs), quality, multiculturalism, participation, integrity, deference, public interest, knowledge, innovation, experimentation are some of the most frequently mentioned values. These encompass a wide array of elements including “Swedish” and “foreign”, “newcomers” and “indigenous people,” “the majority” and “minorities”, “entertainment” and “education”, “viewing audience” and “citizens”.

In other words, we have here an extremely inclusive programme policy – a jumble of references to the public interest and special interests, to the broad and the narrow, to what distinguishes viewers and what they have in common. At first sight, the terms give the impression of being based on empirical reality, but on closer examination we find that

they define one another in what might fairly be described as an intertextual system, where one value or quality is defined by another, which is defined by another, etc., in a long chain of definitions (Edin & Widestedt 2002:32).

The best?

This exceedingly complex and complicated mission is accomplished year after year, however, down to the last dot on the “i” – judging, that is, from the “public service audits” that SVT undertakes each year. There are apparently no shortcomings, at least none worthy of mention, in the company’s program policy documents.

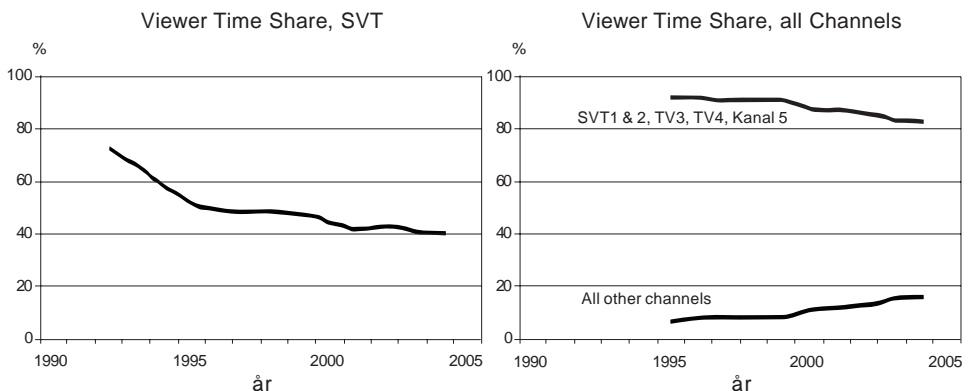
Clearly, Sveriges Television (SVT) is a good public service broadcaster; the company produces and airs many programs of good quality. Each year SVT rakes in numerous international awards, commendations and nominations. Audience statistics support the company’s self-esteem: 84 of the 100 most widely viewed single programs in 2004 were aired on SVT channels. Regularly conducted opinion surveys show that the Swedish people express great confidence in public service television, and commonly applied measures indicate that SVT offers a greater breadth and diversity of programming than its competitors do (see further SVT’s public service audits for 2001-2004). “Irrespective of the measure applied, SVT ranks among the top internationally comparable public service companies.” (SVT. Public Service Audit, 2001:8).

This, together with the fact that public service broadcasting so seldom is brought up in public fora, might be taken as a sign that public service television – finally, after a half-century – has found its proper role and place in society.

A more critical eye and ear might interpret the situation differently, as something approaching ideological hegemony, that is to say, that the dominant political and cultural actors in Sweden (SVT included) are agreed that the Swedish public service media are the best in Sweden – and perhaps the world?

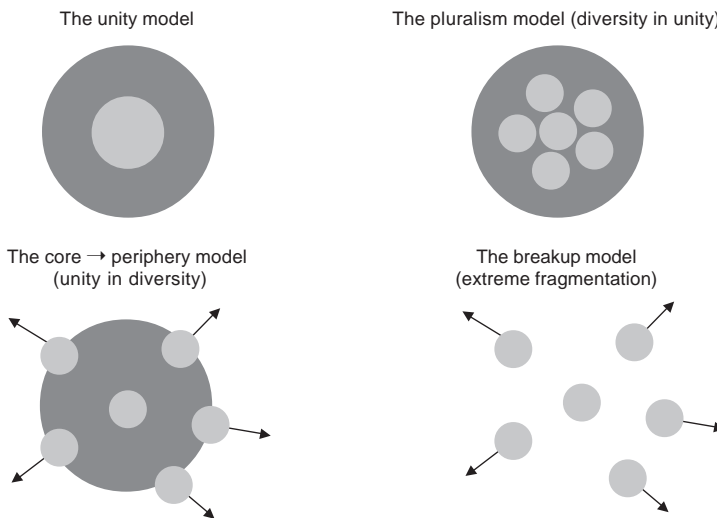
Viewing

Since the era of monopoly total viewing time has slowly but surely increased; in the same time span SVT channels’ share of viewing time has slowly but surely shrunk. In recent years viewing time has stabilized, and the changes nowadays are mainly shifts in the distribution between individual channels.



Television today offers viewers interactivity and unprecedented freedom of choice. The television environment is becoming increasingly differentiated, the viewing experience less social and more individual. A segmentation of the audience, whereby audiences become smaller and more homogeneous, is taking place in response to greater specialization of program output and greater freedom of choice, increasingly attuned to lifestyle and taste. This segmentation is largely propelled by the media themselves in order to create new markets and to be able to deliver well defined and attractive target groups to advertisers. Secondly, we note a fragmentation of viewing, whereby a relatively constant amount of viewing/attention has come to be distributed over a growing number of media. This latter trend is more technology-driven, the prime motor being digitization. These processes of segmentation and fragmentation may be described in terms of four stages, which together make up a longitudinal trend.¹

Four stages of fragmentation



(From a model in McQuail 1997: 138)

1. *The unitary model.* Applied to Swedish television, this model is typical of the 1950s and 1960s and is characterized by limited freedom of choice in the framework of monopoly. The broadcast media serve the public in a dual sense: they serve their listeners and viewers, and they serve the society. However, if ever a conflict between the two arose, the priorities were clear: the media's first loyalty was to the society. The prime tasks of television were to explain and "in the best sense of the word, to popularize" the political issues of the day, and to ensure that artistic *oeuvres*, traditionally the pleasures of an elite, reached out to every home (Edin 2000:62f). In its fundamentals, the unitary model presumes the existence of a single, homogeneous audience that more or less coincides with the citizenry.
2. *The pluralism model* – a model that might also be termed diversity in unity. In Sweden it is typified by the two-channel system that was introduced at the end of the 1960s within the framework of monopoly. The two channels were to engage in

“stimulating competition” according to the principle of contrast, whereby viewers at any given juncture could choose between different program categories. At the same time a highly normative program policy prevailed, according to which viewers’ freedom of choice was subordinated to explicit pedagogical and cultural political objectives. The overall aim of the two-channel system, official rhetoric notwithstanding, was not to provide freedom of choice, but rather to cultivate a selective and serious viewership that preferred to watch the best and most important fare, according to a priori definitions. A “protective philosophy” was developed within the public service companies to ensure that certain priority programs, such as news and current affairs, were not threatened by broad entertainment on the opposite channel (Edin 2000:102). A typical choice between the two channels in this era might be a Norwegian documentary on Polish folk dance on the one channel, and an Italian TV-drama on the other (cf. the program schedule for 17th January 1973). Developments in Swedish society and cultural life as well as in the media sector made it increasingly difficult to maintain a strict, normative program policy, even under monopoly conditions.

3. *The core-periphery model.* This post-monopoly model might be characterized as unity in diversity. External multichannel competition has been established. In the early 1990s we see the launching of hybrid channels offering all-round programming and being committed to fulfilling certain public service requirements, e.g., Swedish TV4. It becomes increasingly difficult to maintain a normative program policy, and viewers, for their part, are now able to compose their own menus, which may well deviate from the majority’s. At the same time, there is still a recognizable majority audience with mainstream preferences. This is also the golden age of demographic targeting: channels commit considerable effort to identifying relatively large, homogeneous subgroups among the viewing audience. Starting in the 1990s and emerging successively, the core-periphery model is still the dominant model, even if there is a noticeable overall trend away from the center – in Sweden “the Big Five”: SVT1, SVT2, and the commercial channels TV3, TV4 and Kanal 5.
4. *The breakup model.* The ultimate stage of development is one of extreme fragmentization. The center has disintegrated, and viewing is spread thinly over myriad channels. There are no discernible collective viewing patterns in either time or space. Only sporadically do viewers share their viewing experiences socially. This is the model that will apply when digitization is fully implemented and the digital multichannel system is operative *and used*. The majority audience is a thing of the past. The breakup model still lies in the future, but the trend toward increasing fragmentization is already well under way.

Public Service Broadcasters’ Response

These developments may, in the case of public service channels, be seen to coincide with a more pronounced audience orientation, a development that several Nordic researchers have discussed (cf. Syvertsen 1992, Søndergaard 1994, i.a.). This audience orientation may in turn be discussed in terms of an increasing focus on personality and individuality. When SVT rearranged its two channels in 2000, an explicit objective was to give each of the channels a personality, identity and attitude that would be recognizable in all aspects of the channels’ programming – both in individual programs and, overall, in

how the channels address their audiences. The one channel was to be “for everyone, always” and have a broad appeal; the other was to be “for you, now and then” and address individuals with specific tastes and interests (Edin 2002:53).

Younger Adults, Individuals – and Traditional Ideals

When it comes to target audiences, typical of the third stage of audience fragmentation, there is – alongside socio-politically identified minorities, children and adolescents – primarily one group that SVT mentions in their policy documents, viz., “younger adults”. One of SVT’s most explicitly expressed ambitions in recent years has been to “reach more viewers and produce more programs that are attractive to younger adults (25-39 years).” (SVT Public Service Audit 2001:96).

Digitization and web services, which in time will multiply the options available to the viewing public, are embraced as improvements of public service broadcasters’ services to the public. From the point of view of the audience, greater freedom of choice is digitization’s main selling point. Digital TV will “give viewers more public service” in the form of greater freedom of choice and more service to the individual viewer. On New Year’s Eve 2004/2005, for the fourth year in a row, SVT’s General Director announced the company’s “New Year’s resolutions”. Here, too, it is clear that the company increasingly conceives of its audience as individuals with personal interests and tastes. Here is a selection of recent promises:

SVT will be coming closer: We promise to be better at reflecting your part of the country.

SVT will offer helpful advice: We promise you personal service on our website and will help you get into shape.

SVT will tell your story: At SVT the viewer is king.

SVT will recharge your batteries: We promise new programs that will get you – especially you young people – on your feet.

Of this we may conclude that SVT, even as the multichannel system comes into being, continues to maintain its traditional ideals of providing opportunities for enlightenment and personal betterment, while at the same time investing in new ways to better reach broad segments of the viewing audience, who are now addressed as individuals. On the one hand, this is a logical step in view of what is happening in the television landscape. The most attractive demographic group for commercial channels is precisely younger adults; consequently, commercial channels tailor their program output for these viewers. SVT, having lost market shares in this age group, has decided to try to win them back. As SVT puts it: “Everyone, young and old alike, should find something of interest at SVT.” But the objective is somewhat problematic. For one thing, the rationale represents the essence of commercial thinking, and is perhaps not precisely the way SVT should be thinking. Secondly, rival commercial channels are already serving this group quite satisfactorily, so that there is no real reason for SVT to do the same thing. “Copy-cattin” commercial competitors, but doing what they do not quite as well is a sure path to self-destruction. Granted, public service television needs the support of broad sectors of the audience in order to be able to say they are in the service of the public, and the mass audience is a guarantor of narrower audience segments, but there is still a non sequitur in relation to public service ideals.

The Logic of Digitization

Even the focus on the individual viewer may be said to be a double-edged sword for public service broadcasters – in terms of program policy as well as in theory. It may be claimed that digital television and web services of various kinds mean greater accessibility, while the smaller scale of operations enable SVT, in the company's words, to "come closer". A non-commercial emphasis on news and the ambition to make digital 'round-the-clock news channel, SVT24, the biggest news channel for Swedish-speaking viewers may be seen to strengthen viewers' identity as citizens. On the whole, the notion of "public service-service" that imbues SVTs digital visions may well mean that public service broadcasters' output and the accessibility of that output increases. The underlying logic is that "more of everything is more public service" (cf. Severson 2004:129).

But a focus on the individual viewer and his or her personal freedom of choice also implies a paradox. In theory at least, individual media use in a digital media system can result in such a high degree of differentiation and individualization that the audience as a collective entity ceases to exist – if all choices become personal and discrete, i.e., independent of one another in time and space, there is no longer any basis for common experiences and the kind of social participation that is held forth as a fundament of the public service ideology. Members of "the audience" have as little in common as consumers of any other product. The unreflected manner in which both politicians and public service broadcasters argue that SVTs move toward digitization gives the public more public service is dangerously close to a circular argument: Inasmuch as SVT is a public service broadcaster, what SVT does defines public service television. There is also a risk that public service television is eroding its very *raison d'être*.

Viewed from a different perspective, the potential of the digital multichannel system to splinter the majority audience and the centrally defined conception of the public may open the door to a more authentic television public: like Phoenix, various subgroups and partial public spheres – which may exist on micro as well as macro levels – may arise from the "rubble" of fragmentization. In contemporary, late-Modern multimedia societies public service broadcasters may be seen as having outlived its role as a cornerstone of the public sphere, and its claim to representativeness is in fact "a defense of virtual representation of a fictive whole" (Keane 1995:6). Perhaps it is only when the hallowed idea of the television audience as a national, collective entity has lost all credibility that new claims of public service can arise?

Or, may digitization instead lead to even wider information gaps in society, so that social groups that today are well-endowed become even more sophisticated, whereas the rest fall away even further from media content that offers critical perspectives and in-depth analysis? Is it now that mass communication truly metamorphoses into class communication?

Discursive Construction of the Public

Thus, exactly what implications digitization will have for public service broadcasting remain to be seen. There are still more questions than answers, even if official program policy documents describe the situation as *sans souci*. But what is the nature of the discursively constituted conception of the public today? Does in fact public service television make any effort to reconcile its viewer orientation with a conception of the audience as a public?

“Everyone”

Government policy documents describe television audiences, the public/citizenry and their elected representatives in an unreflected manner as logically related, despite the fact that the logical links between the respective entities are hardly self-evident. The public, hypothetically, includes “everyone”. On the other hand, an implicit rank-order both sets limits for who is to be counted among everyone and constitutes an implicit norm upon which definitions of the Swedish public interest are based.

One approach to this problem complex is to examine the responsibility for minorities that is, and has always been, central in public service contexts. Politicians define and assign this responsibility on the basis of Sweden’s officially recognized linguistic, ethnic and other minorities – Samí, Tornedalings,² speakers of Yiddish, Romani, Chib and Finnish, and functionally challenged groups (sight and hearing impaired) – are defined in, whereas others are excluded from the responsibilities of the public service broadcasters. Laws and regulations also indicate which groups are to be accorded priority or “preferred” status (cf. Government Bill 2000/01:94:43ff). But, if we instead consider the list from the point of view of excluded groups, we find at the very bottom the unmentioned and undifferentiated multicultural Sweden, i.e., linguistic and immigrant ethnic groups who are ranked after/below those explicitly mentioned – miscellaneous pieces in the cultural mosaic that otherwise are assumed to make a positive contribution to contemporary Swedish society. All other minorities, those outside the pale of the rank-order, remain anonymous.

Social and Moral Responsibility

SVT, for its part, makes no explicit mention of the public and thus avoids these complications. The company’s responsibility for linguistic and ethnic minorities is discussed, but not at length – might it be because SVT is more interested in the core audience than in officially recognized, preferred minorities? The only minority, in SVT’s view, that might interest Swedish audiences is the Samí, referred to as “our indigenous people” (SVT Public Service Audit 2001:36).

In the new competitive situation we see a revival of the traditional emphasis on responsibility, parallel to the new focus on differentiated tastes and viewers’ individual orientations. Today, however, the social responsibility ideology is less political; it is not about reforming society or “parenting” the public. As the competition from commercial media grows keener, the social responsibility ideology has more and more assumed the character of implicit media critique, with a special emphasis on moral qualities. That is, the public service channels’ claim to superiority is based on their claim to moral and ethical superiority. In a media landscape characterized by strong commercial interests, public service television is said to be the company that viewers always can rely on. The more important and well-integrated place the media occupy in people’s lives, the more important reliable media – media that assume a social (but not political) responsibility and literally serve the public.

A central issue for researchers with an interest in public service broadcasting is the ability of public service media to combine a strong viewer orientation with the notion of the audience as the public. Many have stressed that program policy pronouncements on a rhetorical level are not enough. In what way can public service media formulate a new claim to authority in the context of current program policy and programs (cf. Ytreberg 1999, i.a.)?

From a perspective that conceives of the relation between broadcaster and audience as a discursive system consisting of different levels of expression and modes of address,

one may argue that it is precisely through an updated social responsibility ideology that the audience and public paradigms can be reconciled. The social responsibility ideology gives public service media a competitive edge in television, rendering them a sort of certified organic window on the world. Only on public service channels will viewers find an abundance of transparent, reliable/accurate communication with serious intent. This applies not only to news and public affairs programming, but also to newer type of material such as the broad genre reality-tv. Whereas the ultimate purpose of reality shows on commercial channels is to turn a profit, public service television invests its authority and reliability in similar programs of its own. The value added in the SVT adaptation of *Survival (Expedition: Robinson)* consisted of lessons in loyalty, honesty and perseverance. In one of the company's most recent reality shows, *Rivet* ("The Realm"), it was knowledge of history and class-consciousness, and in *Wild Kids*, a reality program for children, the lessons were anti-mobbing and the meaning of friendship.

Is this theme, this communicative value added not typical of present-day public service television? As several scholars have already shown, definitions of the public service mandate or mission have shifted with changes in the conditions that prevail in the media landscape (cf. Syvertsen 1990, Søndergaard 1995). These different definitions have not, however, succeeded and displaced each other. Instead, they have been added as layers, one on top of the other, which explains why the public service concept contains not only confusingly many different principles, but also a number of chameleon-like concepts, the meaning of which changes. The new emphasis on social responsibility and its communicative value added in relation to other media may be only the most recent layer.

On all levels of address, from the least details in program output to overall official rhetoric, public service media would appear to be imbued with all the qualities of a good friend: the mortar that holds a complex and barely coherent program policy together is the perception of responsibility, security, reliability and stability on the part of the broadcaster. This is the television company you can rely on (between the lines: unlike commercial media). A company that keeps its promises. An unflagging witness for truth and probity, totally independent of party politics and economic interests – or, in short: Public service simply cannot tell a lie. Everything we see on the screen is true, unless someone has made a mistake. And if public service television should err, viewers can always file complaints with the Broadcasting Council³, whereupon the public service company can confess its sins before the viewing public and receive absolution from the powers that be, and the audience.

By introducing this special concept of social and moral responsibility, the company is seeking to win not only viewers' confidence, but their hearts, as well. The channels gain viewers, but not only that. At best they will win viewers' *loyalty* – the hardest-won prize in the game. But, to a critical observer a question presents itself: Is there not a risk that a company's efforts to win the hearts and minds of an entire viewing audience may lead to self-censorship, to decisions to avoid provocations and distressing content? In short, to an opportunistic representation of what the great majority are believed to approve of and enjoy – a sort of ideological populism.

"Free Television"

There has been very little public discussion of public service media – i.e., the mandate, principles and broadcasting practices, programming – in Sweden, but in early 2005 some controversy was aroused by a series of self-advertising spots that SVT produced and

aired. The controversy was sparked when Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi complained of how he was portrayed in one of the spots. In the film, a written banner text was accompanied by pictures of Berlusconi in various public contexts. The text read:

Silvio Berlusconi controls 90 per cent of domestic television in Italy. In 2001 he was elected prime minister after an intensive television campaign. After the election, a court ruled that he divest himself of one of his channels. The law was amended.

Then, a concluding text without picture: “Sveriges Television – free television”.

The combination of sound and picture gave an impression of Berlusconi as a self-interested and manipulative political leader. The Swedish ambassador to Italy was called to the Italian foreign ministry. Berlusconi demanded that the spot be taken off the air. Even the Italian Opposition complained that SVT had intervened in Italy’s internal affairs. The controversy sparked a brief, but intense debate in Sweden, as well.

With what must be described as catastrophic timing, the “Free television” campaign coincided with a change of Chairman of the Board of Governors of SVT. Just as the debate on SVT’s independence was reaching a crescendo, the Government appointed a life-long Social-Democratic politician, Cabinet member (up to only a half year earlier), and personal friend of the Prime Minister, Lars Engqvist, Chairman. The appointment immediately provoked still more debate in the media. Critical voices within SVT, too, termed the appointment “a travesty” of the company’s ambition to exercise its independence.

The storm subsided, but the epithet “state television” was again on people’s lips. The debate continued on the SVT website. Clearly, the debate interested members of the public as well as journalists and commentators. One can in a sense see the debate as counter-evidence vis-à-vis the statistical data, presented in official program policy documents, convincing but abstract: Figures, for example, to the effect that 87 per cent of the population have confidence in the public service media. The “free television” debate was lively, critical, and many expressed the view that Swedish public service broadcasting should be questioned more freely, more often and called for the broadcasters to engage more humbly in a dialogue about their performance. As one debater on the website put it: “It’s lucky that free television is financed via a compulsory fee. It would never survive in free competition, because its self-image is far cry from how others perceive it” (www.svt.se/fri_televison, 16th May 2005).

A Critical Reflection

The term “state television” is generally dismissed as a vulgar epithet sometimes used in bourgeois propaganda, but the notion may deserve to be taken a bit more seriously. In a macro perspective, focusing on public service broadcasting as a democratic institution, there are obviously strong government and institutional interests invested in SVT. These pose no hindrance to a good measure of independence in matters of program policy and budget allocations. A number of central aspects of broadcasting have been deregulated over the past few decades, and today, there is no serious political force in Sweden that would try to steer SVT or to disband it. Any self-respecting democratic country with democratic traditions looks upon a strong public service broadcasting as a valuable asset. Especially in Europe, public service media have come to symbolize the vitality of democracy and national stability.

It is not on the macro level, but on the micro level – when we focus on the communicative relation between the media and their audiences – that the discussion of state television assumes a cutting edge. It is here that the very strength, independence and authority of public service media become problematic. In order for the value added that the social responsibility ideology confers on SVT – the qualities of reliability, stability, credibility, etc. – to be understood “correctly”, is it not necessary for SVT itself to assume a position tantamount to state television, or at least national television? Something that would probably not be possible without widespread consensus around (1) the values associated with public service broadcasting, and (2) the company’s ability to translate these values into practice. This consensus – or belief, if you prefer – is intrinsically bound up with a suspicion of commercial television, the eternal “Brand X” – the dark side of the medium, the source of poor and even harmful programs, guided by sheer avarice. Commercial television has always been depicted as a negative contrast to public service, but the question is if the stereotype has not become the prime mainstay of the public service ideology: without it, the virtues claimed by public service television would probably not be considered quite as indisputable as they are today.

Translation: *Charly Hultén*

Notes

1. After a typology proposed by McQuail, 1997.
2. Tornedalen, a river valley north of the Gulf of Bothnia, marks the land frontier between Sweden and Finland. The natives of the Swedish side of the valley, who speak a distinct dialect of Finnish, are an officially recognized minority.
3. A government-appointed board that reviews broadcast programs on Swedish public service channels and checks their compliance with pertinent legislation (the Radio and TV Act, the Law on Freedom of Expression, etc.) and the terms of the channels’ charters. The Council responds to complaints from members of the public, but may also initiate investigations of its own. The Council may not censor or otherwise inhibit content prior to transmission. See more at www.grn.se.

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TV Entertainment

What It Is that Unites and Standardises Society?

Media – Communication – Culture

BARBARA SICHTERMANN

Of all the different types of media, it is television that is able to create a kind of community. The German TV preacher Jürgen Fliege puts it in a fairly blunt way: if he wants to be amongst the people and form a community, the best opportunity for this is on television, not in a church. Television has therefore the power to unite the nation in front of the screen and to create a standardised audience. It also has the ability to split the audience into target groups, playing the old off against the young, women against men, people with jobs against the unemployed, the rich against the poor and so on. Television creates an interplay between many variables – division and unity, separation and reintegration, the catering for special interests and the creation of a television nation. It doesn't actually create these variables, but rather reflects, strengthens or redirects them. Through this interplay, the medium is thus able to show society its structure, its social strata and its dynamics. Television also reveals the great changes that have taken place in society – whether concerning its system of values, its conflicting sense of self-image or its morals and goals.

By examining various innovations in television entertainment, I would like to show what sort of new TV trends have emerged and how these enable us to view our society from a new point of view.

Firstly, the individual has been rediscovered by television in a completely new way. The importance of taking responsibility for yourself is currently being emphasised in the economic sector, where, under the influence of neo-liberalism, both waning solidarity and various types individual employment and freelance work (that represent a completely individual struggle) are making a comeback. It is thus no surprise that television has also focused its attentions on the individual.

Only twenty years ago, the relationship between television and the individual was associated with a well-behaved viewer, who would politely choose a particular TV programme, switch (somewhat less politely) from one channel to another to find another programme and then watch it politely to the end. A dividing line existed between the medium and the user, the broadcaster and the recipient, as it were. This boundary was respected and accepted in its entirety by mainstream producers and viewers. It was only the avant-garde and experimental artists who dared to challenge its authority. On one side of this boundary were the professionals, who knew how to produce television and simply delivered what they had produced; on the other side were the viewers, who simply wanted to be shown something or be told a story. Over the last two decades, there is one particular change in the relationship between the medium and the user that has aroused great interest: the challenging of this boundary. It is no longer so clearly defined and no longer separates the television people from the people on the couch in such a straightforward manner. Although the boundary is still very much present, it has become porous – especially in one particular direction. The individual, who used to be satisfied with simply switching the TV on and off, is quite willing to cross the boundary and jump into the TV set. “The medium is the message” has thus been replaced with “the user is the medium”. How did this change come about and what does it mean – both for television and for a society where television is the dominant media form?

The rise of the Internet as a new type of medium played a role in this process, making heads of programming and TV producers nervous due to the similar nature of its user interface. This was something new – created for clicking and surfing, but also utilising a screen as its central means of communication. This wasn’t just something that promised interactivity – it actually made it reality. It didn’t seem to make any difference that media experts were warning against exaggerating the comparison between TV and the Internet, to say nothing of the reports forecasting a merger of the two: the heads of programming and producers became more and more nervous anyway. As TV was at a distinct disadvantage concerning its structural potential for interactivity, many feared that it would be ousted from its position. This in turn provided food for thought for all those wanting to add an interactive modem to the box.

The observation that the border between producer and user has become porous represents only one side of this development – the technical/practical communication based side of things. Another aspect concerns the ability of television as a medium to both gather users into a group and to disperse any such groups. Commercial television (i.e. television that is not state funded) was able to split the previously compact audience into so-called *target groups*, which were still heterogeneous in nature. That is, every member of a target group was supposed to feel as if they were being addressed as an individual. It was all about the *advertisers* who had to produce spots on commercial television – in general, the language used in advertising makes a lot of effort to address its customers in a very personal way. This language was supposed to have the effect of making the individual go on to prove his/her participation in the *consumer community* by the act of buying something the very next day. This type of “individualisation” on television – the private wooing of the individual viewer, so to speak – was supposed to prime them to receive an advertising message and opened up a new avenue in the previously restrictive landscape of TV communication. Although this avenue wasn’t necessarily something new, having always been present as a small loophole, it was now to be

expanded and fully exploited. A flood of shows followed: from afternoon talk shows to reality shows, from casting shows to a whole plethora of game shows. The most infamous of these was Big Brother, a show where the professionals (excluding the technical staff) had been completely removed from the equation, with only members of the public actually playing the game. If the expansion of the advertising blocks in the whole programming schedule hadn't occurred, it is likely that the trend for participation TV would not have progressed so smoothly and with such great speed. It is, of course, no coincidence that the vast majority of these "participation" shows are found on the commercial TV channels.

The motto that springs to mind in connection with this theme is a saying attributed to Andy Warhol: in this media age, everybody can have their 15 minutes of fame. In our epoch, everyone is actually now asserting their entitlement to a scrap of fame. Since we've just described the general framework that has accompanied this development, we can now discuss what the implications of all this have been – for the everyday TV viewer, for society and for television as a medium. While considering the consequences of this development, it is likely that additional factors that have contributed to it that will also become apparent.

Let's begin with the medium itself. When Tom, Dick and Harry suddenly appear on television trying to out do each other with their vocal talents, the element of "professionalism" has been completely removed from the situation. Although such an approach is, of course, questionable, for the producers it means a large amount of money can be saved – stars are expensive but no-names come for free. This type of saving measure has also accompanied the rise of the talk show since the beginning. Although such shows were (and are) cheap to produce, they would never have made an impact in the schedules if they hadn't received such an enthusiastic response from audiences. As our Western secular society moves further and further towards that what we today call the "media society" (which can be seen as a consequence of the breakdown of traditional social connections), the more necessary it becomes for the members of this media society to see their reflections on the screen and to become part of the schedules themselves. The afternoon talk shows and their frank content, which caused a real shock when they appeared a decade ago, are a product of this movement towards a media society. They can also be seen as a functionalisation of the media for local communication, self-portrayal and discussion of personal issues in society. In the 1990s, the screen was made accessible to a kind of *local neighbourhood viewer*, much to the indignation of the older critics and television observers. They had hoped to remove the "irrelevant" material from the schedules such as bickering couples or hopeful singles, but their attempts now came to nothing. This type of everyman television is self referential if the medium and the audience are considered to be one system – not just a system formed by accident, but rather an intentionally created and programmatic one. The masses had now conquered television with their everyday worries. They wanted to watch themselves and their closest friends attacking each other in the studio, or making up with each other or simply airing their dirty washing. This development has not only been irreversible, it has also robbed the medium of a certain amount of status, dignity and respect in the course of its stealthy reduction in professionalism and trivialisation. However, there are also several ways in which the negative effects of this trend have been counteracted. Firstly, newly specialised jobs have been created, such as presenting these popular shows. Secondly, the increased dramaturgic or thematic complexity of some formats (such as counselling shows)

has also worked against this trend. Besides this, we also can observe a gradual differentiation process. Although the *local neighbourhood viewers* are a force are developing further, the *national viewers* of television certainly aren't in decline, even though the decline and/or cancellation of classic formats such as the political magazine is hardly something to be welcomed. While the crisis in political journalism isn't our focus here, is nevertheless closely linked to everyman television and its tendency to personalise.

The developments concerning the *local neighbourhood viewers*, television for the layman and the break down of the schedule into special interest formats (from the weather channel to fishing TV) are not without their supporters. They see the popularisation of the medium and its increased accessibility as a form of democratisation. According to them, "TV you can touch" is a good thing, serving equality and promoting a close relationship with the general public. Arguments such as these naturally come from the side of the producers, who have to justify their strategies and usually refer to viewing figures in order to do this. Although they are not entirely wrong, the dissent voiced by media critics (who have positioned themselves against the producers) must also be taken seriously. The idea that you can have fifteen minutes of fame doesn't, of course, work in reality. The concept of fame is, by definition, a scarce resource that loses its very character as soon as you attempt to turn it something universal. The concept of fame for all exists only in the form of a caricature, a joke, an allusion or a game. As long as the players are aware of this and are content to go home with their 15 minutes of fame, this is not a problem. I would say that the majority of participants, whether on afternoon talk shows, docu-soaps about the lives of driving instructors, police officers on the beat or midwives or on quiz shows like "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?" seem to be aware of this: and are playing the game just for the sake of it. The short period of fame is taken on and is quickly forgotten again according to the motto "Sic transit gloria mundi". In this respect, any damage caused by this process is kept to a minimum, despite what alarmist reports might have us believe. Any potential damage is certainly offset by the gain in experience, social contact and fun that this sort of participation television bestows on its protagonists.

So what do these new show formats tell us about the state of society? They tell us that the both consumer willingness, narcissism and the desire for to profile oneself (two areas that are connected anyway) are all things that are taken seriously and served by television. The man who goes to the market not only looks at what's being sold there, but also puts himself up for sale and hopes to be looked at in the same way, flirting with the idea of being for sale and having a price. Television entertainment is very good at satisfying such desires and provides a platform for this process at the same time. The discovery of the individual by the medium in the form of participation/non-professional television can be seen as the equivalent to television advertising within the actual TV programmes. Both of these phenomena are born out of neo-liberalism and the worldwide reorganisation of the capitalist economy that we have all witnessed. Due to the "user is the medium" tendency and the fact that television makes the recipient part of the (broadcasting) medium itself, the medium is able to offer the viewer three things: appropriation, categorisation and the chance to be on to an equal footing with the participants on TV. As consumers and TV viewers we're all the same – we're all characters in the same show. Or, in other words, television is there for everyone and everyone is there for tele-

vision. Television also functions simply as a market place – as an American journalist once said, television is a “machine for selling things”. This machine can also present talents, types and taboos and sell them at the same time. However, the viewers are certainly able to detect the note of contempt in all this. Although they will watch the more extreme forms of participation television (such as the *Jungle Show*, a adventure game show where the contestants have to complete tasks in the middle of the jungle, often involving the more unpleasant forms of wildlife there), they show disgust at the same time. Despite this, it has to be said that while such ego trips on television sometimes damage the reputation of television, the egos themselves seldom sustain any damage.

It’s a different story with the casting shows, a form of participation television tailor-made for young people. On such shows, the fact that fame is a scarce resource is ignored. Everyone (including the candidates) acts as if fame can be achieved through effort alone, just because the attempts to attain it are being shown on television. The rare case of a natural talent without training and experience achieving superstardom and going on to delight the world, are simply presented as normality. In addition to this, ranking fever suddenly grips the nation. Such ranking crazes, which are by no means restricted to television, are one of the most unpleasant phenomena of our media world and are diametrically opposed to the trend towards individualisation in our society (if this trend is indeed something positive). In fact, these casting shows contain a perfidious mechanism which propels unsuspecting young members of the public into a glittering new world and then makes fools of them. Thus it becomes clear that they are simply being exploited by the television folk. This is an accusation that has also been levelled at other television formats. For example, the opponents of talk shows have tried to prove that television producers are responsible for taking advantage of the psychological problems of their fellow citizens and that guests drawn from the general public suffer life-long psychological damage as a result of this. Such charges are exaggerated – there are even studies which directly refute them. However, the 17-year-old singer who sings as a hobby and gives it her best shot in front of an audience of millions is another matter. She is closely related to the inhabitants of another TV format – the nation’s “problem children”, who show us just how badly brought up they are under the watchful eye of the super nanny. Thus we learn that our favourite medium, far from spoiling and dumbing down both children and adults, is actually able to make a valuable contribution to family harmony. It isn’t just that these problem kids have temper tantrums; their tantrums are also presented on television. The fact that this isn’t really in their best interests tends not to be addressed. It makes a huge difference though, whether these non-professionals who appear on television are actually content doing so and are capable of accepting the consequences, or whether they are being forced into the whole thing and are unaware of what lies in store for them. It is obvious that the TV producers are continually trying to redraw this boundary and push it further out. This is not a problem, provided the participants are able to learn something along the way about how to deal with the media. Although this isn’t so much of a problem for adults, it is different matter as far as children and adolescents are concerned, where a certain amount of care needs to be exercised. In the many talks I have given about the media at conferences, I have repeatedly called for the introduction of media studies as a school subject as a way of taking action.

A media studies lesson wouldn’t just teach children how to make films and how to entertain an audience. It would also address the fact that the many of tricks used by the media world are subtly affected or even formed by the demands and necessities of the

world outside it, regardless of any good or bad intentions. There is a tendency in current television entertainment that, as I see it, can be traced back directly from neo-liberal dynamics to the universalisation of the competition principle and which directly shapes the television society. This is something I have mentioned already – ranking fever.

It's like this: normally participation television doesn't just present people plucked from the street who then sing for us or try to guess the right answer – the audience is also very much included in the process. The viewers must rate what they have been shown and are then supposed to rank the performances (which, of course, have been put on by members of the general public) on a scale that not only covers good, very good and excellent but also includes poor and unsatisfactory. The criteria by which they are judged are also vague. This ranking fever could be interpreted as revenge on the part of the viewer, who is seeking revenge on the non-professionalism trend on TV. Moreover, the rating scale is kept continually in flux, so that the participants understand that it isn't about being themselves, but rather about letting themselves be judged by the public. And once the public has realised how much fun it is to rank amateurs, they are quite willing to throw themselves enthusiastically into ranking their celebrities, both past and present. This is how the ranking fever has already spread to Germany's "big names". This development can be illustrated nicely by a rather bizarre show called "Germany's Best", which actually made it possible to compare Goethe, Adenauer and Thomas Gottschalk. In this variation on a British format, the object of the show was to find the most exceptional German of all time. After the viewers were asked to suggest candidates for this title, their lengthy list of suggestions was then reduced to several hundred people, which then formed the basis of many long evenings of TV entertainment. Gutenberg, Beethoven, Luther and Thomas Mann were all on the list, as were colourful showbiz personalities and celebrities from the world of sport and politics. But what is it about casting shows that makes them both so problematic and yet so typical of the current time?

No educated person would relish the prospect of having to compare Beethoven with Thomas Gottschalk and then to have to rank them against each other according to some contrived and highly general set of criteria. Ultimately, it only makes sense to use a common benchmark (according to which different numbers of points would then be awarded) to assess a particular quality if the quality in question has been made clear from the start. However, it soon becomes apparent that this is simply not possible in the case of Beethoven and Gottschalk. Adding Bach, Adenauer and Dieter Bohlen to the equation doesn't make it any easier either. All in all, it would seem as if the only option is to dismiss the whole thing as nonsense. But it is not so easy to adopt this standpoint given the success of such programmes, their broad acceptance and the fact that they are bound to be continued in various different permutations – only recently, a new ranking of the greatest inventions was put together. Instead of shaking our heads in an intellectual, middle class way, we should be considering why this sort of TV silliness is so fascinating and to what extent this fascination both unites and standardises society.

I would say that the crucial element of fun here is ranking in itself. It doesn't matter to either the producers or the viewers that apples are now being compared with oranges. The most important thing is that they can put together a hit list, give points and watch how their favourites move up or down the list. Although such a system is entirely appropriate for football league tables (where the same field of reference is being considered), it becomes completely absurd when used for "Germany's Best". This doesn't seem

to bother most people though – they seem perfectly willing to ignore any such absurdity. They are convinced that it is definitely worth creating a list in which Luther and Rudi Völler compete for the accolade of being the “best” or “greatest” German.

It’s all a very emotional process. It’s just as easy to create feelings of *schadenfreude* as it is to have viewers identify with the winners or feel admiration for them. Simply by calling up and voting, the viewers are able to exert complete control over what happens. We all know the formula, whether from political elections, sport or the stock exchange. Although the rules may differ slightly from setting to setting, the unifying principle remains the same – ranking. The concepts related to it also remain the same: hit lists and charts, bottom, top and middle, winners and losers, competition. The general principle of ranking has even developed an increasing ability to subjugate the people who are involved in it. The word “globalisation”, a term frequently used to describe the current age, refers to nothing more than the universalisation of competition and the worldwide comparison of costs, profits and productivity. When politicians are asked to explain why the gross national product here is barely showing signs of growth, they always bring up the allegedly cheaper locations and cost structures in the Czech Republic or China. Thus, society is expected to accept the fact that it is subject to international competition, in which the usual national standards as well as other external conditions, which we have no control over, come into play. The stock market game also follows the up and down rules, where the investors are actually able to go one step further and influence the trends themselves by anticipating future business developments. The Germans discovered this game fairly late, with many people left less than pleased following the last market crash. In the world of sport however, the viewer is only involved indirectly. The viewer can exert his influence by shouting encouragement or send the market value of particular sporting events up or down simply by choosing to tune in or not, both of which represent a form of power nonetheless. However, all these examples of competitive behaviour and ranking events have a common element which the up and down game is based on – sometimes its called money, sometimes percentage points, sometimes goals. But on the show “Germany’s Best“, it wasn’t just a case of apples being compared with oranges – a veritable basket of fruit was being compared using the same yardstick. The comparison of vocal and dance talents in the casting shows is also something that is problematic and somehow always unjust. As I’ve already said, the audience doesn’t seem to care in the slightest about this and creates ranking after ranking list with a great deal of enthusiasm. Time and time again, they are captivated by the prospect of being able to winnow out the losers, celebrate the winners and see how the national ego is reflected in the winner.

The side of the television ego trip that seeks to unify and create uniformity can therefore be called competition. The individual isn’t just the centre of attention, but rather the focus of a form of attention that measures, rates and in doing so, strives for quantification, ignoring any individual idiosyncrasies in the process. This is the reason why the trend towards a more personal approach in television or the idea that individual should form the focus of interests are both higher contradictory matters. The individual is only put on stage so that he can be purged of everything that is unique about him. I would now like to bring up another current buzzword that didn’t emerge from the world of television, but that is certainly linked to it via the ranking craze: the PISA study. I am convinced that the whole endeavour is flawed to say the least, if not completely pointless. Firstly, the ability to actually compare schools has been greatly overestimated, while the

fact that the determining factors for the study vary widely has been underestimated in a similar way. Secondly, the results actually tell us very little. What do I mean by this? Now, schooling and education actually depend on developing a series of skills such as imagination, creativity, a feeling for connections, intuition, team spirit and resourcefulness. These are all qualities which not easy to measure and very difficult to compare with one another. The recent developments in our education system – from PISA to university and student rankings– remind me of a statement reputedly made by Jack Welsh, former chief of the US conglomerate General Electric, “Saying that there are things you can’t compare is just an excuse. You can measure anything”. This statement describes the recent developments in television equally well. And, of course, if you can measure something, then you can compare it. This sort of attitude has been criticised in a particularly interesting way by Reinhard K. Sprenger, the successful author and business consultant. “For many managers, the only things that count are the things that can be counted. With this attitude, they are ignoring that fact that the numbers didn’t just appear at random – someone was responsible for compiling them” He is also highly critical of companies and, at the same time, our culture (including television). I would like to quote him again with respect to this:

Counting and measuring form the basis for the most original, most rigorous and most exact scientific methods wrote Hermann von Helmholtz in 1879. He couldn’t have known back then the great significance this assumption would end up having. Today measurement is a cultural technique of the first degree. The motto is measure it or forget it. The idea that you can only work with something that can be measured has been taken on nowhere else more than in Germany. We measure everything that can be measured, and even try to measure things that are inherently unmeasurable. Sometimes, it seems that in companies, measurement is a synonym for the general company philosophy.

The all-embracing trend for measuring things is articulating a yearning for trust, objectivity and indisputable authority. Numbers feed into a post-idealistic mood that only wants hard facts. In the meantime, people reach for numbers in order to avoid complexity – anyone who works with numbers doesn’t want to describe things in a differentiated way. The numbers should suffice.

But is this really true?

The problem with this measuring craze cannot be explained simply by considering measurement itself, but rather by looking at how the things being measured are actually dealt with. The theory behind measurement assumes that numbers are neutral. But the very fact that a number with lots of zero can have such an impact shows us that these seemingly neutral symbols also have a normative charge.

There is also the problem that numbers do not reveal the assumptions that have been made about them. The best example of this can be seen in the attempts to measure human intelligence. The pinnacle of absurdity that has been reached with such methods can be summarised in a simple bon mot: intelligence is whatever the respective questionnaire has been drawn up to measure. Economic data provides another good example: a graph showing that consumer confidence is on the wane does not show the questionable assumptions that had to be made in order to plot it. It is obvious that the average person is not in a position to see this. Graphs and diagrams contain a great deal of implicit theory, making it perfectly possible to conjure up causality from errors in measurement, unsuitable models, superficial analogies and false correlations. Does anyone really notice that it’s all just a series of crooked suppositions, a nebula of numbers surrounded by a

torrent of possible meanings? There is always some sort of significance attached to numbers, regardless of the situation they are being used in.”

That’s what Reinhard K. Sprenger has to say on the matter. Albert Einstein, another great thinker who is celebrating his centenary this year, had this to say about the numbers craze, “Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted”. I am convinced that the counting and ranking mania in the field of television entertainment can be seen as a direct consequence of the counting and measurement fever in our “post-idealistic” economy. In both sectors, a new ideology is spreading that revolves around the seeming objectivity of numbers. This is, in turn, a reflection of the universalisation of competition – a trend that seems inescapable. Education, sport, science, politics and (obviously) the commercial economy, are all increasingly subject to it, as is therefore television entertainment.

There’s another show format also worth mentioning, that has also been propelled by ranking fever, a connection that may not be clear at first glance. I’m talking about the so-called “under the knife” shows such as “Beauty Queen”, “The Swan” or “The First Cosmetic Surgery Shown Live on German Television”. I don’t know whether this type of format has hit Denmark yet, but I certainly imagine so. Although these fusions of the current beauty obsession with the world of television have not been particularly successful with German audiences, they have certainly been subject to lively discussions, whether by critics, television observers or audiences. Such shows generate concern, represent an unpleasant trend, create tension in the society, as well as raising a whole series of moral questions. Are we allowed to alter noses, enlarge breasts or reduce the size of thighs? Should we be doing this? Should be inviting an audience of millions to watch these procedures being carried out? Are we actually able to cheat nature? Or wouldn’t it just be better to act as if it were? Surely any individual who receives such voyeuristic attention is being robbed of his or her dignity? Or are we all just hopelessly superficial and addicted to a beauty that may be only skin-deep? Despite the fact that many of these questions are similar to those raised by the jungle show, the viewing figures for these beauty shows were not so great. Maybe tropical vegetation is more visually enticing than the inside of an operating theatre. Aside from all this, where is the element of ranking here? It’s certainly present in these shows, but in an indirect way. This stems from the fact that one particular attribute is being ignored here, if not being completely destroyed – the uniqueness of an individual face. In its place, a mask is produced, which is then supposed to receive the highest possible mark on a scale entirely based on conventional ideas of attractiveness. I don’t think it’s necessary to go into any more detail here. The face that a person has been given by God or nature is no longer of any importance – instead, a ranking list is once again inserted between the person (mainly women in this case) and their self-esteem. They are willing to bleed for nothing more than a better ranking and fifteen minutes of fame.

I’ve mentioned these beauty shows relatively late on because they provide a useful link to a question that is probably long overdue. We’ve already seen that ranking shows represent an abstraction of particular qualities. We’ve also recognized that audiences often disregard the very different nature of the qualities involved in the selection process– the apples and oranges idea. But despite these observations, some sort of common quality still has to be established in order to enable a (quantitative) comparison to be made. What is it that connects Goethe and Alice Schwarzer? And the eleven contestants on a casting show

and the contestants in the Big Brother house? That's right; they've all been on television. It is this very fact that turns them into stars, which then means it is legitimate to compare them. The ability to appear on television either as a "great German" or simply as a celebrity is the common quality that the entire contents of the "fruit basket" mentioned above shares. This is what unites "Germany's Best" and the inhabitants of the Big Brother house and encourages the audience to set up rankings. In the world of sport, this collective quality, as already talked about, is established in advance (the number of goals and the related points). Ranking is entirely appropriate here – it's the whole point. However, the actual achievements of Schiller or Gottschalk are completely unconnected to a list of the greatest Germans shown on television, only having become subject to the requirements of this list subsequently. The TV produces are proud of this for a number of reasons: their attempt at subjugation has been successful; the ability to appear on television (that it is possible become a television celebrity even if you've been dead for decades or even centuries) has attained an inherent value; that television are particular good at helping people and their problems to receive attention. It is this celebrity status, which television confers on even the worst of the Big Brother contestants, that makes casting shows possible. It also explains that when you now ask a five year-old what they want to be when they grow up, the answer is always the same: a pop star.

"I've been on TV, therefore I am." is a message that carries certain implications. As I've already said, the self-referencing reality of television doesn't usually cause any damage, whether to the people who appear on it or the professionals who produce it. But it does damage the medium itself and thus the viewer as well. There is every chance that television will continue to celebrate its own achievements more and more extravagantly and give increasing credence to its own self-referential messages. But this would mean it would be in danger of both losing the power it once had and neglecting its original assignment. Its original power was fuelled by a curiosity for the unknown, the remote or the concealed, which the medium allowed us to witness. Its job was to bring the viewers closer to such new, unknown or distant things, to present them to us and to make them accessible. But the longer the medium persists in navel gazing, the weaker this connection to the outside world will become. For example, when the death of an actress from a long-running TV series is reported on in the news, it is something that should make us sit up and take notice. While it goes without saying that the actress was most likely a lovable and interesting personality (who will undoubtedly be missed by the viewers of that programme), does this justify using the scarce seconds allocated to news to inform the nation of her death? In this case, television has quite clearly confused the nation with the television nation. Cases such as these crop up again and again, particularly, of course, in the entertainment sector. If you are a member of the television family, whether as an actor or presenter, it would seem that you are guaranteed a certain entertainment value. It is a well-known fact that, during the evening peak viewing time, the same TV faces are always being recycled on the various talk shows. The medium seems to have forgotten that it used to have the task of looking for interesting subjects to cover outside of the world of television. But venturing into the unknown and finding entertaining material there is difficult and expensive, and also requires a more traditional artistic and journalistic curiosity. It is, of course, much easier to just get a colleague or a media-savvy politician into the studio and ask them about their childhood. Professionals such as these know how to make the right impression – they don't stammer, they aren't nervous, they know the routine and how it works. Thus, any element of risk is removed from

the proceedings. The viewers are used to the fact that television (particular in the entertainment sector) is now staging a production with itself in the leading role and has apparently learnt to live with this. But caution is advised here – the viewers are always looking for the next surprise. In wanting the familiar and the new at the same time, they make clear how demanding they actually are.

This combination of familiarity and surprise is very much indicative of the current age. Television has to fight on two fronts at the same time, supporting the dominant trends while encouraging the opposing ones. By encouraging the measuring obsession (something that was described by Reinhard Sprenger so aptly as a new ideology of pure facts and figures), television as a medium is contributing to the universalisation of the competition principle. As television seeks (or should seek) to reflect the entire world and accepts (and actually needs) highly individual creative impulses, this is a trend that the medium should really be trying to work against

The medium could use its ability to create a community feeling in order to offer resistance to the omnipresent compulsion for quantification and competition. Although this sort of resistance is already present in dramatic productions, in the field of entertainment, which is my topic here, it is far harder to find. Although competition is a powerful mechanism for both socialisation and qualification, it is not the only one. Recognising and respecting the distinctiveness of a particular quality, the unrepeatable nature of a particular feature or someone's individual character and the need to protect the essence of uniqueness in the individual can have the same effect. That television has discovered the individual only means that the individual is allowed to parade himself on television. It is thus the consumer who is offering himself to the "machine for selling things" as fodder. This is simply not enough. The porous boundary between the producers and the viewers has brought us television based on "the user is the medium" that seemed to be close to the people and to offer interactivity. But this form of television hasn't kept its promise to enhance the status of the individual. These celebrities from the general public (who certainly get their fifteen minutes of "fame") do not need to be individuals, as they are simply to be sacrificed as part of the viewers' ranking games. There is only one single quality that is important here – their status as a camera object, a quality that everyone who has appeared on television demonstrates. In this way, the medium has overreached itself, acting as if it's doing us a favour just by existing. This is clearly ridiculous! If television wants to keep its viewers, to inform them and to shake them, it has to take risks and challenge the zeitgeist. Although this may be difficult in the field of entertainment, it would certainly be worth the effort.

The Reality of Media Research

GUIDO ZURSTIEGE

I The Reality of Media Research

Of course, the title of my speech is ambiguous: On the one hand the reality of media research that is the reality of academic and non-academic institutions which engage in this field of research, the reality of their staffs and students, researchers and scientific communities, their routines, topics, methods – and, sometimes, their ambitions and obsessions. In short, from this perspective we are talking about the status, the current situation of and the challenges for media research. And then, on the other side, the reality of media research that is all that which is produced within this framework. In short, from this perspective we are talking about the sense-making, all that which appears to be real, factual, provisionally true (at least not false) with reference to the media.

Obviously these two realities are closely connected – for the observed reality depends on the reality of the observer. This, of course, is not the exclusive fate of researchers only but of every observer in general. Though it might help, one does not necessarily have to be a constructivist devotee to acknowledge that at least here media research is on common ground with the object of its observations. As Hans Mathias Kepplinger (2001) – who, for sure, is no constructivist proselyte – has recently stated: The represented world in the media is an effect of the representation of the world by the media. Accordingly, I argue, the reality of media research, understood as all that which appears to be real and factual concerning the media is an effect of the current situation of media research. In this speech I will focus on three major “arenas” of the contemporary debate – namely on topics, theories and empirical experience of media research. I will enter into this discussion from the perspective of one major academic discipline in the field of media research: *communication science*.

II Additional Topics and Disintegrated Theories

As Martin Löffelholz and Thorsten Quandt (2003) have pointed out, the situation of communication science in Germany may best be characterized by two complementary developments: Expansion and differentiation. The discipline has grown continuously ever since the tradition was established in the first decade of the 20th century in Leipzig (1916) and in Münster (1919) and then, a couple of years later, in Munich (1924) and in

Berlin (1925). Of course, this early tradition is characterised by a strong focus on newspapers and journalism. Meanwhile media research in general is being offered under many different labels at more than 50 academic institutions in Germany. Growing media markets, especially induced by the commercial television and radio in the 1980s and new information and communication technologies in the 1990s, of course, fostered this development as well as the fact that ‘media’ and ‘communication’ still are buzzwords that fire desires. Irene Neverla (2003: 59) has recently speculated kindly that despite of this breathless dynamic communication science frequently demonstrates its affectionate inclination for self-reflection. After all, she assumes, that’s what makes this discipline so warm and human. “What do we do?” “Who are we?” “Where do we go?” “where do we come from?” – questions like these are somewhat notorious, the answers, however, are changing.

Round about four years ago the German Communication Association (DGPK) (2001) presented a declaration in which it outlined its self-conception. This declaration, the so called “Identity-Paper”, was published under the ambitious title “Media Society and its Science”. I will recurrently return to this paper in order to use it as a reference to mark differences. I would like to put emphasis on the fact, however, that this paper was elaborated by two members of the scientific community (Anna M. Theis-Berglmair and Günter Bentele) collectively and it was published for many, indeed: over 700, members of this scientific community. It is meant as the least common denominator of an expanding discipline, and therefore, you will hardly find any institute in Germany, any approach or school, that can fully subscribe to it.

Almost all areas of social life are penetrated by the media and – thus the declaration goes – communication science has assigned itself to describe and to explore this complex and certainly ongoing process. Obviously, this declaration is ambitious because media research thus assumes responsibility for almost all areas of social life, which triggers a massive proliferation of psychological, sociological, political, economical and many other problems with regard to media and communication. The scope of this challenging engagement is mirrored reliably by the many different labels and makes under which media research is conducted. And, of course, these divergent labels and makes also mirror the fact that the wide range of problems calls for specialisation. Professionals and of media research are highly specialised experts and this, of course, also explains why identity papers and identity commissions are necessary at all. Given the ambitious call for responsibility, of course, a wide variety of new research topics and new problems pour into the field of media research. Digital and interactive media, of course, pose new problems; popular-culture is a challenge to the discipline, just alike youth culture and subculture, fictional media products call for recognition; visual communication, of course, is up-and-coming, organisational communication just alike, research in public relations is doing fine, yet we have to intensify our efforts, and son on – this, indeed, can be called a breathless dynamic!

The argument usually goes thus: Research in the fields of A, B or C is up-and-coming because the discipline cannot credibly assume responsibility for the so called media society and at the same time fail to deal with one of its most present, influential, relevant, compromising, promising symptoms as A, B or C. Without any doubt one of these research fields which are up and coming, yet widely neglected by communication science is advertising research. To illustrate the argument let us have a closer look at this field of research and the respective discussion within the scientific community.

In General the German Communication Association states: “Through the dynamic expansion of the media system a range of additional areas of relevance to society have developed, for which the subject offers a practically orientated competence: for example, problematic media content (e.g. advertisement, or the portrayal of violence in video films or on television)”. This notion precisely mirrors the stand of advertising as a research object within communication science in Germany. Advertising is a *new, additional and problematic* form of media product that, above all, poses *practical* problems – all four notions, of course, are off the mark.

Promotional media offers are at least as old as editorial media offers, they are neither produced nor distributed or received additionally because they are an integral part of the media system, and they are not problematic by themselves. Finally advertising does not pose only practical but also hard theoretical problems. Yet, in the light of communication science advertising belongs to the, so to say, *noisy interferences* which contaminate the premium messages exchanged between transmitters and receivers. No wonder, that we dispose of a wide variety of concepts that explicate why and how people manage to get around advertising: *Switching, Flipping, Channel Hopping, Grazing, Jumping, Arrowing, Leaving* und certainly *Zapping*. Yet there seems to be ample evidence for the fact that advertising serves a *function* within the program: As well as media offers in general structure daily routines; advertising in particular structures reception routines. Advertising invites for comments on the media-program and offers visual distraction. Focussing on radio advertisements Ernest Dichter, one of the most prominent, yet controversial protagonists of the early advertising research who, by the way, collaborated with Paul F. Lazarsfeld in Vienna, coined the term ‘rhythmical complementation’, which is to say, that advertising plays a vital role within the flow of broadcasting. Media research as it is conducted under the roof of communication science has widely neglected these functions of advertising, however, we would be able to acquire a much deeper understanding of how the media work for us, if we accounted for these widely neglected, yet vital functions of supposedly noisy interferences.

To sum up the argument once again: Despite of an ambitious call for responsibility neither all relevant aspects of the media, nor all relevant forms of media products are sufficiently covered by media research as it is conducted under the roof of communication science. This, of course, is due to the fact, that the call for responsibility may rather be understood as a *prospective* call. If, however, we take a closer look at the logic of this prospective call for responsibility, I propose, the word ‘additional’ hits the mark of the problem.

One of the core problems within the discipline, to me, seems to be that, for obvious reasons, the discipline is expanding, yet it proliferates by adding new research fields, whereas, the practice we are concerned with, works on a completely different logic of proliferation. If one considers the topics media research has to deal with this becomes very obvious: Wherever media researches come together the integration of TV, radio, the press, the internet, online, landline and mobile phones is on the agenda. Of course, media research is concerned with international networks and global players within the media industry, with multimedia and cross-media. Wherever media researchers come together they talk and write about these phenomena on the basis of the assumption that no new medium simply adds up to any given media system, nor simply replaces older media but leads to a structural and functional redefinition of the media system (cf unavoidably Riepl 1913). The underlying logic of these processes, of course, is not an additive but an

integrative logic, this is what we are concerned with: integration by difference management. Yet, which efforts do we take in the practice of media research to cope with an integrative media practice? The ambitious call for responsibility, I propose, will avail only if we dispose of theoretical tools that enable us to integrate the proliferating perspectives within our expanding field of research. The Constructivist approach to media research, I propose, has offered some of the respective theoretical tools.

III Reflexivity

On the timeline the point of origin to this approach to media and communication research lies at the end of the 1980s. In that time Klaus Merten, Siegfried J. Schmidt and Siegfried Weischenberg edited a wide variety of contributions to media research in the “Funkkolleg Medien und Kommunikation” which were later published in the anthology *Die Wirklichkeit der Medien (The reality of the media)* (1994). Let us skip through the table of contents: “The reality of the Observer”; “The social Construction of Reality”, “The evolution of communication Media”; “The cultural History of the Media”; “The Effects of Communication”, “Journalism as a social system” and so on – what unites the wide variety of contributions to this anthology comes to a head in a profound doubt towards the traditional stocks of the discipline, and this doubt roots in a more general epistemic doubt concerning our capability of perceiving *the* reality as such.

Let us take a closer look at the roots of these doubts and begin with one of the central concepts of our discipline: communication. Here the German Communication Association, as one of major institutional players within the field of media research states: “Central focus of the subject is the indirect public communication transmitted via mass media. The associated production, distribution and reception processes constitute the key area of interest of the subject. [...] Purely interpersonal communication is only of interest as far as it constitutes a basis for processes of public communication. That means, for example, that no linguistic analys[e]s are produced and no individual talks are being analyzed. Yet, the role of interpersonal communication while watching a television show or during online-communication is definitely of interest and thus being analyzed.” (DGPUK 2001). Even though it appears to be rather difficult to handle all problems of the discipline on the basis of this definition, the production, distribution and reception of mass media offers are for sure core topics of the Constructivist approach to media research, and thus, from this perspective, we could subscribe to the first part of this notion.

However, on the basis of a Constructivist approach to media research we would definitely insist on a more decisive second part of the notion. In short: purely interpersonal communication, is of interest *not only* as far as it *accompanies* mass communication, it serves as a general model, and thus, both modes of communication are based on the same principles. The outset of all communication processes, Klaus Merten (1977) has maintained repeatedly with reference to Erving Goffman and Niklas Luhmann, is the fact that we are observed observers. This notion, of course, has been worked out repeatedly by many scholars, just as an early example I would like to name Georg Simmel’s (1908) well known approach to a sociology of the senses. By first sight it is not that easy to apply these premises on processes of mass communication because one of the points of general agreement in the German community of media research is the way Gerhard Maletzke (1963) has modelled the audience of the mass media: As we all know, the con-

cept of the “mass” is for many reasons fairly problematic. Focusing on mass communication, Maletzke has argued, the term ‘mass’ is problematic because it suggests strong, linear, irrational, however, predictable media-effects. It furthermore suggests the simultaneous presence of one mass, watching, reading, receiving one media offer which is a delicate assumption since we observe a progressive proliferation of media offers as well as a progressive proliferation of audiences. Readers, watchers, listeners, recipients of the mass media in general, dissolve into disperse, broken up, separated, divided clutters of audiences, if not into inorganic moods of reception. Whoever speaks of *the* audience therefore implicitly employs an “operative fiction”. This is to say: *The* audience does not exist, but we need it in order to know, what we are talking and what we are acting about. Given these assumptions: If processes of mass communication are social processes then how do we, in this case, model the observed observer? Klaus Merten’s answer to this question is thus: Whereas interactive communication episodes rely on the reflexivity of perception, mass communication relies on the reflexivity of knowledge. This means: In mass communication we usually do not perceive that others perceive that we perceive, but we know that others know that we know that we and they perceive. This social fiction serves as the basis for all communication processes mediated by the mass media. It is highly virtual, but nonetheless leads to highly relevant and factual results.

Let us behold: one of the crucial concepts in approaching communication processes is the concept of *reflexivity*. Whoever deals with reflexive processes, however, has to be aware of the fact that the object of his observations is constantly changing, because the effects of these processes are fed back into these very processes. On this background Klaus Merten has drawn the conclusion that many treasured stocks of our discipline, especially those in the field of media effects research, are fundamentally doomed to expire, because effects change effects. Closely connected to the above mentioned concept of reflexivity is another crucial concept we have to take into account when we approach communication processes: the concept of *embeddedness*, or *epistemic involvement*. The substance of this crucial concept can be explained on the background of a short, yet decisive anecdote in the evolution of a new Medium: the motion picture.

IV Embeddedness

When the Brothers Max and Emil Skladanowsky patented their film projector in Berlin in 1895, they emphasized that the specific feature of their device is that it would not be heard by the audience. This means: At the outset of the motion picture stands the motion picture that wants to disappear in order to accomplish the illusion. Round about one hundred years later Sybille Krämer (1998) has pointed out that the media are the blind spot in every process of media use. The premises we make in order to use the media *have to be* the blind spot in processes of media use because otherwise the media would not work for us the way they do. The consequences of this notion obviously depend on what one calls the media. Most definitions of the term ‘medium’ have in common that they emphasize the aspects of the linking, joining and connecting function of the media. Following Siegfried J. Schmidt’s (2000) approach to media theory we can put this initial assessment in more concrete terms: All media are used to link and connect different cognitive and/or social systems. This connection, however, does not evolve randomly but is oriented towards the production of system-specific meaning. In other words: We use media in order to generate meaning – whatsoever. The production of system-specific

meaning, however, does not evolve out of the blue but is based on the specific potentials of specific media. These general features are frequently applied to a wide variety of different media. We can distinguish systemically four interrelated levels of those media: On the first and most complex level we analyze media products, articles, spots, advertisements and so on. These media products, of course, result from the specific formation of the respective communication-instruments (for examples: natural languages or pictures), all respective technologies needed to produce, distribute and receive these media products, and finally the social-systemic organization of the production, distribution and reception of media products.

Of course, every observation has its specific blind spot, yet, on the basis of these medium-theoretical premises, the specific problem of media research is, that the blind spot of its observation is the *object* of its observation. Most media researchers “live” in one or two language worlds, most of them produce texts and usually publish them in magazines, books, sometimes in newspapers and thus address a scientific community. No doubt: Through the practice of observing media research is embedded in the practice it observes. On a more abstract level, this of course, is one of the core problems of constructivist research as it has been conducted by Siegfried J. Schmidt in the last years. The autological problems of media research, one can say with reference to Siegfried J. Schmidt (2003), are just but one version of the more general problem that we are always already involved. Every judgement, every estimation, every opinion on the nature or quality of something – Schmidt prefers to say with reference to Hegel: every *positing* – of an observer unavoidably requires an antecedent in logic and fact as a presupposition. If we say *young* we thus presuppose the semantic differentiation between young and old; accordingly if we say *cold* we thus presuppose the multivalent differentiation between ice-cold/cold/luke warm/warm/hot and so on. This, of course, resembles logical figures that have been extensively discussed within the theory of logic, cognitive science or Gestaltpsychology. Yet, the point Schmidt wants to emphasise is quite another. The theoretical operation had become necessary, because even though constructivist thinkers have *tried* to get away from it they have implicitly fostered a dualistic world view: the world of thought, language, description or the media on the one hand, and the real, yet, unreachable world on the other. As it was said above: What united the wide variety of contributions to constructivist media research since the end of the 1980s was a profound epistemic doubt concerning our capability of perceiving the reality *as such*. The problem behind the “as such”, of course, has troubled generations of scholars, for it evokes questions concerning the origin, nature, and limits of human knowledge. Siegfried J. Schmidt, therefore, does not assume the overambitious task to solve this problem, yet he tries to *dissolve* it, and he does so by the help of the cultural adjustment of his constructivist argument. With every judgement, every estimation, every opinion on the nature or quality of something we never begin, as Niklas Luhmann and, of course, George Spencer Brown have maintained, in an “unmarked space” because with our observations we are always already involved in stories and discourses. This is to say: on the basis of the mechanism of positing and presupposing we unavoidably revert to antecedents in logic, *communications* which have been integrated in so called *discourses*, and we unavoidably revert to antecedents in fact, *actions* which have been integrated in so called *stories* (the latter term according to Wilhelm Schapp).

Schmidt refers to the semantic system of the possibilities that, as it were, “nurture” stories and discourses and reversely is nurtured by them as the *reality model* of a soci-

ety. The semantic differentiation between “Realität“ and “Wirklichkeit“, for example, is possible in the German language and in the Danish language (*Realitet / Virkelighed*), though it is not possible in English. The Reality model of a society can be described as the collective knowledge every individual member of a society disposes of and which emerges from acting and communicating with other members of the society. This semantic system of possibilities, of course, needs a practical program that regulates possible relations of categories and differentiations, their relevance in practical life, affective content and moral significance in a socially binding manner – and this program Schmidt refers to as *culture*. The differentiation between good and bad, certainly, belongs to the reality model of almost all societies, however, it is the object of constant cultural negotiations within any given society as well as between different societies.

V Consequences

The short example of the previous paragraph shows two aspects. *First:* Culture, as conceptualized by Schmidt, is stable, while being referred to, yet it learns, develops and evolves with every application. *Second:* Due to this fact, culture is presupposed in every communication process, *and* at the same time every culture fundamentally depends on communication. On the basis of these theoretical manoeuvres, I would finally like to propose, we obtain a tool with which we can work on some of the urging problems of contemporary media research.

Whereas in the constructivist *and* realistic epistemology the reality “as such” is presupposed, even though we might not reach it by the help of our routines and practices, in the light of a non-dualistic approach we presuppose many other routines and practices, which might be just as limited and restricted as the ones at hand, but nonetheless construe a reality “as such”. As to the *subject matters* we are concerned with: operating without an ontological starting point means that we can observe the selectivity of specific communication-processes only in relation to the selectivity of other communication processes. This drives us to acknowledge the fact that the respective media products we focus on make sense only in a competing yet complementary relation to other media products. Practically speaking this means that there is no theory of mass-communication without an embedded theory of face-to-face-communication; there is no theory of journalism without embedded theories of Advertising, Public Relations or literature. There is no theory of the television without an embedded theory of the letterpress, no theory of email without an embedded theory of snail mail and so on. In the practice of our research this change of perspective, of course, drives us to assume the logic of the practice we conduct research on, and this logic spells out: integration by difference management. Finally, as to the *empirical* practice of media research one of the crucial challenges is this: We can – and we have to! – reflect about the experiences we make using the media only to the price of new experiences with other media. Therefore we need to intensify our efforts to improve empirical tools that account for us – unavoidably involved observers in the field of media research. The more earnestly we consider the consequences that follow when we reflect our own practices that virtually go without saying, the better we can live up to the challenges posed by the expanding field of media research.

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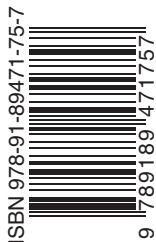
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