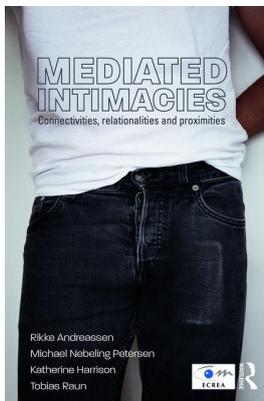
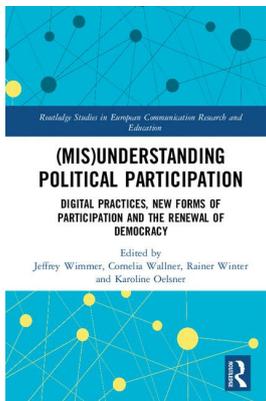
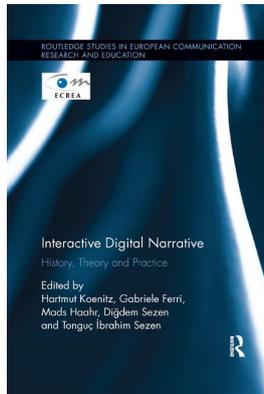
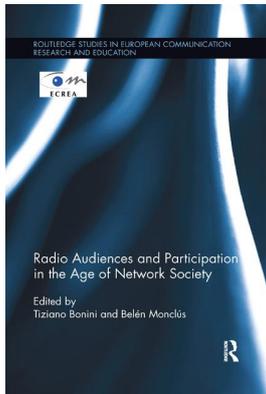


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European Communication  
Research and Education**

*A Chapter Sampler*

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# Introduction

## The Listener as Producer: The Rise of the Networked Listener

*Tiziano Bonini*

“Audiences should be eliminated entirely.”

(Kaprow 1996, 713)

“Every time a new consumer joins this media landscape, a new producer joins as well because the same equipment—phones, computers—lets you consume and produce. It is as if when you bought a book, they threw in the printing press for free.”

(Shirky 2005)

“The people formerly known as the audience are those who were on the receiving end of a media system that run one way, in a broadcasting pattern, with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the population listened in isolation from one another and who today are not in a situation like that at all.”

(Rosen 2008, 163)

“We have three different ways of reaching our audience and interacting with our audience; that’s broadcast, digital and social—and they are equally important.”

(Martin Jönsson, deputy director of Swedish Radio, quoted in Marshall 2013)

This book is divided into two macro-sections: “Interactive Publics” and “Productive Publics.” These two sections do not represent two different worlds of practices but, conversely, describe two different moments of the same process: audience participation mediated by radio. We conceive of audience participation in radio as a process that is articulated along a continuum, moving from interaction (with a low level of activity) to co-creation (Banks and Deuze 2009) and co-production (with a high level of

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participation). Here we will show and analyse different innovative practices of interaction and participation.

In this body of work, interactivity is intended in both its minimal technical meaning, as a sequence of action and reaction, as well as in the wider sense of a social-communicative relationship (listeners that reply to a call by a radio host by either phone, smartphone messaging systems, email or Facebook/Twitter texts; listeners that react to a call by a radio host by doing something, such as downloading content or liking/commenting/sharing social media posts; radio hosts and authors that reply to questions and content coming from listeners).

The boundary between interactive and productive publics is traced according to the ideal model of audience participation, the AIP model—access, interaction, participation (Carpentier 2007), where: “this difference between participation on the one hand, and access and interaction on the other, is located within the key role that is attributed to power, and to equal(ised) power relations in decision-making processes” (Carpentier 2011, 29). According to the AIP model, in the first section, contributors will analyse processes of participation that allow listeners to produce content (Short Message Service [SMS], phone calls, social media messages, etc.) but do not let them take part in the co-creation of radio programmes in any way.

The first section of this work will analyse contemporary forms of interaction between radio and its listeners, using specific case studies to examine all the technological means that are currently involved in these processes: the telephone, short text messages, social network sites (SNSs).

The second section will focus on examples in which the radio public not only reacts to the producers’ requests using the technology at hand, but consciously participates in the production of radio content and has some voice in deciding the content being produced. Some examples in this section will look at the collective production of a playlist used by music programmes: a number of programmes have been built upon listeners’ requests and music choices, by different means.

Further examples of co-creation refer to other genres, such as the documentary. In Sweden, Germany, Italy and Latin America, some radio producers seek to involve the public in one or more steps of the productive process of a radio documentary, by means of crowdfunding as well.

The title of the book, *Radio Audiences and Participation in the Age of Network Society*, highlights the paradigm shift that is transforming the nature of mass media audiences and publics. The rise of the network society (Castells 1996; van Dijck 1999; Wellman 2001), due to the diffusion of information and communication technologies, is also restructuring the topology, the properties and the very nature of media audiences, which have ceased to be understandable only as *diffused* in time and space (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998). Audiences and publics attracted to media such as radio are no longer invisible, silent and disconnected. Listening habits are changing and listeners are increasingly used to both listen to radio and leave

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comments on social media, where their feelings and opinions are public, searchable, accessible and measurable. As Lacey (2013, 155) claims:

Listeners are able to represent their listening to their social networks and track others' online listening in real or archived time. On the one hand, this means that listening is a practise that is increasingly surveilled and increasingly open to measurement and commodification. On the other hand, it is also a sign of persistent desire to create and partake in forms of collective listenings to mediated music, sound and speech, albeit in virtual space.

Radio audiences are a mix of traditional radio broadcasting audiences and networked publics (Boyd 2011; Varnelis 2008). This means not only that new media are changing the nature of listeners/viewers, transforming them into interactive users (Livingstone 2003), but also that radio publics, once organised into networks, now have different properties, different behaviours and different affordances. Networked publics are made up of listeners who are able to not only produce written and audio content for radio and co-create along with the radio producers (even definitively bypassing the central hub of the radio station), but that also produce social data, calling for an alternative rating system, which is less focused on attention and more on other sources, such as engagement, sentiment, affection, reputation and influence. What are the economic and political consequences of this paradigm shift? (see chapter 13). How are radio audiences perceived by radio producers in this new radiospace? (see chapter 2, 3, 4 and 6). What's the true value of radio audiences in this new frame? (see chapter 13). How do radio audiences take part in the radio flow in this age? (see chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12). Are audiences' interactions and co-creations overrated or underrated (see chapter 2) by radio producers? What's the role of community radio in this new context? (see chapter 10, 11 and 12). These are some of the many issues that this present book aims to explore.

## **FROM MASS AUDIENCES TO NETWORKED LISTENERS: THE FOUR AGES OF LISTENER PARTICIPATION**

There have been several attempts to periodise the history of audiences. One of the best known analyses is Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998). They identified three broad periods of audience history: the simple, co-located, face-to-face audience; the mass audience; and the diffused audience, which is "no longer contained in particular places and times, but rather part and parcel of all aspects of daily life" (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, in Livingstone 2005, 26). The diffused audience seems to be the most appropriate category for describing contemporary audiences, but Abercrombie and Longhurst published their work in 1998, at the beginning of the Web 1.0

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era, and their periodisation now needs to be updated, given the great changes in the use of media content caused by the Internet and its further developments (Web 2.0, social media). For this reason, this work aims to propose a different historical periodisation of radio listening, one that is similar to Abercrombie and Longhurst's work, but more suitable to the comprehension of the properties of a media public in the age of the network society. The periodisation developed in the following pages identifies four historical ages corresponding to four different auditory regimes, the last of which is characterised by the hybridisation of broadcasting media with networked media. It remains clear that the emergence of a new regime and a new type of audience does not mean the disappearance of previous ones. As Lacey (2013, 22) maintains, "at any one time there are likely to be multiple 'auditory regimes'" that coexist.

The periodisation proposed here will attempt to portray how audience participation in radio has changed over time and investigate the causes that have determined the emergence of a new relationship between radio and its publics. This work does not want to focus on the progressive increase in the public's participation, corresponding to new technological integrations (telephones, mobile phones, the Internet, social media), but will instead highlight the different potentialities of the public's participation, inscribed in each auditory regime. Regardless of how the radio broadcasting public has often been described, as "disciplined and docile listeners in a space, drastically separate not only from that of the performer but from the fellow public as well" (Hilmes 1997, 186), the historical analysis proposed here shows us how interaction and participation have always been permanent features in the history of the radio audience. Listeners, as Lacey (2013, 113) claimed, "have always been active." Audiences have always longed to participate in radio, but over time this participation has taken on different forms and features.

### **The First Age (1920–1945): An Invisible Medium for an (Almost) Invisible Public**

In this first historical period, radio, the new medium of the early twentieth century, is really, as Brecht maintained in 1934, an outdated device, used for political propaganda, educational purposes and the spread of consumer culture. The speakers are invisible (blindness represents the main feature of radio, according to Arnheim [1972]) and there is only one model: broadcasting, one-to-many communication.

The invention of focus groups (the 1937 Stanton-Lazarsfeld Program Analyzer, as reported by Douglas [2004]) and of the first audience surveys make listening habits measurable, but public sentiment remains undetected. The audience is invisible and inaudible. It is made up of individuals who are not linked to a network and who can only listen, without taking part in the conversation; they cannot publicly manifest their emotions or opinions to the host in real time. On this privatisation of the listening public, Sartre (1990, 271) wrote:

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When I listen to a broadcast, the relation between the broadcaster and myself is not a human one: in effect I am passive in relation to what is being said. . . . This passivity . . . can to some extent be resisted: I can write, protest, approve, congratulate, threaten, etc. But it must be noted that these activities will carry weight only if a majority of listeners who do not know me do likewise.

But we also have to remember that “falling silent to listen is not a sign of passivity, nor an act of submission, but is an active part of the communication process” (Lacey 2013, 47). But when listeners weren’t satisfied with the “sit back and listen” model of communication (Gauntlett 2011), what could they do? If they didn’t like a show, or, on the contrary, wanted to express their love for that show, they could do nothing but switch off the radio. Actually, listeners could do something more than switch off the radio: they could write a letter (Razlogova 2011).

Elihu Katz (1950) studied the letters received by the popular US radio host Ted Malone. During its first year on national US radio in 1935, his programme *Between the Bookends* generated between 4,000 and 20,000 fan letters a month, more than any other unsponsored programme at the time. The famous 1938 drama *The War of the Worlds* by Orson Welles received more than 1,400 letters in the days after the show (Cantril 1940), and the 1939 war drama *They Fly through the Air with the Greatest of Ease* by Norman Corwin received around 1,000 fan letters (Blue 2002). Writing letters to the radio was a widespread practice before the arrival of the telephone (and it has yet to completely disappear). However, as Sayre (1939, 272) claimed in his research on fan letters by the Office of Radio Research:

Fan mail has been one of the curious facts concerning the radio industry. . . . In recent years fan letter writers have been thought to be among the neurotic, the deviates, the abnormal among the listeners. . . . As an answer to this, the theory has been proposed that fan-letter writers were not neurotic in what they thought, but in the fact that they wrote at all. They merely expressed attitudes held by other listeners, but differed from them in their ability to transgress the barrier between themselves and the impersonal broadcasting company.

As Sayre showed, the fans that wrote letters were considered misfits, weird people when compared with the normal and silent ones. If a minority of the public was inclined to dialogue and interaction, this participation was neither encouraged nor understood by radio producers in this first historical phase. Listeners were perceived by the American broadcasters as a mass of passive consumers, by the European public services as a mass of citizens to be culturally lifted up, and by the totalitarian regimes as a mass of opinions to be ideologically moulded. Nevertheless, writing letters to the radio has always been a (forgotten) tradition of audience participation. As

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David Hendy (2013a, 122) remembers, “in 1970 BBC received 227,167 letters and phone calls about its programmes. This figure doesn’t include the much larger number of fan-letters addressed directly to programme-presenters, just those written to the Corporation centrally.”

Even though the dominant auditory regime was that of silent and private listening, Lacey reminds us that in the same period in the US and in Europe, many collective listening groups were created, an aspect that is easily forgotten by the history of broadcasting: “Radio was never only a solitary experience” (Lacey 2013, 135). In the UK at the end of the 1920s, approximately 20,000 listeners had organised listening groups. In the US, there were around 15,000 collective listening groups at the end of the 1930s.

Between 1924 and 1932 in the Weimar Republic, hundreds of collective listening groups were formed, the ‘workers radio clubs.’ One of their main objectives was to encourage a critical ear in their members by organising collective listening. Groups as large as 500 would gather in public halls to listen to the radio and to generate a critical public discussion of the output, not just in the hall but by sending reports of the proceedings to the party press and to the radio authorities (Lacey 2013, 150).

Even in an age characterised by the use of this means of communication by the strongly top-down radio institutions, there were clear attempts by the public to take part in the discussion and to meet in public spaces for collective and connected listening. Even in its first years of life, radio was ready to be used as a ‘social medium,’ able to interact and to connect people.

The first authors to understand the value of radio as a social medium, rather than as a distributor of content, were Brecht and Benjamin. But before Brecht, and even more remarkably, Walter Benjamin realised radio’s radical potential as a ‘social medium.’ Benjamin, having produced ninety programmes for the public radio of the Weimar Republic between 1929 and 1933, had a deeper knowledge of this means of communication and maintained a positive outlook on radio, as it had the ability, in his view, to transform the public’s relation to culture and politics (Baudouin 2009). In *Reflections on Radio* Benjamin (1999a, 543) expresses the most fruitful ideas for our own times:

The crucial failing of [radio] has been to perpetuate the fundamental separation between producers and the public, a separation that is at odds with its technological basis. (. . .) The public has to be turned into the witnesses of interviews and conversations in which now this person and now that one has the opportunity to make himself heard.

The radio that Benjamin is advocating is a medium that closes the gap between broadcaster and receiver, allowing both the author/host and the listener to play the role of producer. The importance that Benjamin attributes to active reception is in stark contrast to the hypnotic effect of Nazi aesthetics (Baudouin 2009) and to the allure of a radio show seen as a product to

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be consumed. Benjamin juxtaposes the aestheticisation of politics and art embodied by Nazism (and more in general by propaganda and consumer culture) with the politicisation of art, something which requires, in his view, a more active and participant role for the listener.

Benjamin (1978) further developed this theme in *The Author as Producer*, a paper in which he pointed out the need for a new intellectual/producer figure (writer, photographer, radio drama author, film director) and the end of the distance between writer and reader due to the advent of new mechanical and electrical reproduction technologies. Benjamin noticed that a growing number of people had started to become ‘collaborators’ in his own time through the rise of the newspaper, as editors created new columns according to the current tastes of their readers. These spaces were meant to make readers feel in touch with their culture, and in this sense the reader became a kind of author (Navas 2005). Benjamin (1999a, 771) saw the reader as redefining the literary text; his example was the Russian press:

For as writing gains in breadth what it loses in depth, the conventional distinction between author and public, which is upheld by the bourgeois press, begins in the Soviet press to disappear. For the reader is at all times ready to become a writer, that is, a describer, but also a prescriber. As an expert even if not on a subject but only on the post he occupies he gains access to authorship.

Focus on the public’s feedback can also be found in another short essay from 1932, *Two Types of Popularity* (Benjamin 1999b), in which he assesses the role of radio as a pedagogical tool. Benjamin is convinced that the public should be respected, rather than being given content in a top-down fashion; it should also perceive that its interests are ‘real’ and are being taken into account by the speaker. Benjamin puts the transmitter and the receiver on the same horizontal level.

Benjamin’s ideas are especially relevant today for their focus on listener feedback. The German philosopher grasped the distinctive quality of a fledgling, electronically mediated society in its potential for public participation/production.

### **The Second Age (1945–1994): An Invisible Medium for an Audible Public**

This second stage is marked by: (1) the appearance of the transistor, which made radio listening mobile; (2) the birth of underground radio (pirate radio and free radio, according to the definitions given by Hendy [2000]); and (3) the introduction of the telephone into radio’s productive practices, which made reaching people’s voices outside the studio easier.

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In Europe during the 1960s and 1970s, the transistor, underground radio and the telephone contributed significantly to blurring the lines between producers and listeners. In Paris, during the first days of May 1968, demonstrators tactically reclaimed radio thanks to transistors in order to communicate and organise protests in the streets (Bonini 2009; Sullerot 1968).

Between 1959 and 1964, the pirate radio stations of baby boomers (listeners who were tired of the public stations in their countries and decided to create their own means of communication) were born in international waters offshore from Holland, Denmark and the UK; independent local radio was established in the UK in 1973 and, as Guy Starkey reminds us in chapter 3, they relied a lot on call-in shows; between 1969 and 1980, thousands of free radio stations (*radio libere*)—unlicensed broadcasting stations—were created in Italy, shifting the balance of communication towards civil society (Downing 1984; Lewis and Booth 1990).

The free radio movement emerged in a social climate full of strong demands. People reclaimed the media for themselves. The monopoly on communication practised by public services could no longer adequately respond to the stimuli of society. The social and cultural climate of this age had a great influence on the public service, which was slowly attempting to self-regenerate and open itself up to the call for participation. All over Europe, public service radio was trying to cope with this demand. In Denmark, for example, public service radio tried to open its microphone to the listener's voice: Mette Simonsen Abildgaard (2014, forthcoming) investigated the radio listeners' and hosts' use of an answering machine in Danish public service radio's popular youth programme *P4 i P1*, which was created in the highly politicised climate of the 1970s. *P4 i P1* thus contained several experiments with emancipatory two-way radio for working-class youth, inspired by critical media theories such as Enzensberger's (1970) *Constituents for a Theory of the Media*.

In Italy, the work of Andrea Camilleri is well known; now a prominent Italian writer of bestsellers, he was once a radio producer for RAI, the Italian public service broadcaster. In 1974, along with Sergio Liberovici, he produced an inspiring and thought-provoking docu-drama, *Outis Topos*. The 50-minute radio show was the result of the editing of 200 hours of inhabitants' recordings in an outlying neighbourhood in Turin. The work is subtitled "Hypothesis of a Future Radio" and considers the issue of 'popular' radio created by citizens, not imposed from the top. Camilleri's description of this radio drama is revealing:

The imbalance between the technical evolution of the means and the systems that manage it is increasingly clear. . . . Nevertheless, one of the possible answers may lie in the radical invention of its traditional functions: not only transmitting but receiving, not only allowing listeners to hear something but also allowing them to speak, not isolating them but connecting them with others, not only 'refueling' them but making

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them become active, producers. . . . An experiment in citizens' self-management of radio, performed by the RAI in the first 25 days of July in a series of working-class neighbourhoods in Turin, provided a mass of information that was stimulating, though not always encouraging: beyond the unpredictability and authenticity of the speakers, what emerged was the conditioning deriving from the sometimes unconscious acquisition of certain expressive stereotypes, evoked by the great means of mass communication.

(Malatini 1981, 127)

But not only did listeners want to participate in communication through the mediation by public services: they wanted to bypass the institutions and take control of these means of communication.

"In 1977, Felix Guattari proudly announced that the Italian free radio stations had succeeded in creating the first electronic agora: the immense permanent meeting of the airwaves. The listeners were now broadcasters" (Barbrook 2007, 283). Guattari (1978, 1979) stressed the radically different function of free radio as opposed to conventional mass media. His notions of transmission, transversal and molecular revolution suggested that, unlike conventional radio, free radio would not impose programmes on a mass audience, but would come across freely to a molecular public, in a way that would change the nature of communication between those who speak and those who listen.

In 1983 in Japan, following the experience of the Italian free radio and autonomist movements, Tetsuo Kogawa founded the Mini-FM movement, a network of hundreds of low-power FM radios (with a radius of 100–500 meters) built up by very small communities of listeners/producers:

We tried to think about radio in a different way, as a means to link people together. To the extent that each community and individual has different thoughts and feelings, we believed there should be different kinds of radio—hundreds of mini-FM stations in a given area. (. . .) Radio could serve as a communication vehicle, not for broadcasting but for the individuals involved. (. . .) One must admit that mini-FM has a powerful therapeutic function: an isolated person who sought companionship through radio happened to hear us and visited the mini-FM station; a shy person started to speak into the microphone; people who never used to be able to share ideas and values found a place for dialogue; an intimate couple discovered otherwise unknown fundamental misunderstandings.

(Kogawa 1992)

The situationist dream of breaking down the boundary between media producers and consumers is (partly) coming true. Free radio stations, as well as giving voice to sectors of society that were previously ignored, introduced

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the significant use of the telephone to communicate with their public. Audience participation by telephone dates back to the mid-1940s for US commercial radio stations (the call-in radio format) and to the mid-1960s for European public radio. These are followed by free radios, which make the ‘talk radio/open microphone’ format the distinctive feature of their communication model, as the *Manifesto of Radio Popolare of Milan* (1975), written by its founder, journalist Piero Scaramucci, clearly highlighted:

The telephone relationship with the public must be possible throughout the broadcasting day. The listener can intervene to give news, to pose a problem, to answer a question asked in the studio, to promote an initiative; the call can be an opportunity for a new, improvised broadcast, it can open up a case.

(Ferrentino, Gattuso and Bonini 2006, 144)

Radio Popolare also used to select new contributors, producers and hosts from among the listeners who participated the most through phone calls: listeners became ‘accomplices,’ as Lewis and Booth (1990) brilliantly defined the audience of the European free radios.

Beyond the emergence of free radio, a great contribution to the diffusion of participatory practices was given by the *MacBride Commission Report* (MacBride 1984). Carpentier (2011, 90) emphasises how the *MacBride Commission Report* “took a strong position on audience participation.” The fundamental features of this participation, according to the *MacBride Report*, were: (a) a broader popular access to the media, (b) the participation of nonprofessionals in producing and broadcasting programmes, and (c) the participation of the community and media users in management and decision making. This report served as a theoretical frame of reference for regulating nonprofit radio all over the world. Between the 1980s and 2000s, also thanks to the contribution of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (founded in 1983), more and more nations have reformed their regulations in the field of communications and have introduced specific licences for community media (Canada and Australia in 1975, Sweden in 1979, Italy in 1990, the UK in 2002).

The public of free, underground and community radio stations is in part a productive one: it participates in a collective conversation, as Benjamin imagined in 1934, and as in community radio (see chapter 10), it even participates in the radio’s management and decision making. Listeners begin to take part in radio production, both by using the telephone and by creating new radio stations. The public is still invisible, but it has become audible. Listeners’ opinions and emotions are becoming increasingly public, but not measurable. The possibility of connecting more than one telephone line to the radio mixer allows the host to speak to several listeners simultaneously, or to make them interact with each other horizontally, so that more people are involved in the radio conversation (Pinseler 2008). However, a large

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part of the public—those not calling the radio, not building a station or not contributing to a pirate radio programme—remains passive, private and not linked together.

### **The Third Age (1994–2004): An Invisible Medium for a Readable Public**

The technological innovations of this third phase are mobile telephones, text messaging, the World Wide Web, audio streaming, emails and, subsequently, blogs and podcasting. Mobile phones further facilitated radio reporting and producing from outside the studio, as well as listener participation in the radio conversation. The possibility of calling the radio station from a public place with a mobile phone transformed the role of the audience: from private citizens to potential reporters, or citizen journalists. The public's contribution to radio content production had a chance to evolve and strengthen. Listeners began producing information streams from the places they were calling from (traffic news, current affairs, local news, etc.). *Caterpillar* is a perfect example of this model: a radio programme born in 1997 and aired by Radio2 RAI—the Italian second national public service radio channel—it transformed listeners living abroad into foreign affairs correspondents.

This third auditory regime is also a readable one: radio producers not only listened to the voice of their public, but also read them through text messages; at the same time, listeners not only listened to the host's voice, but could read his blog and his replies to them by email.

Text messages and emails updated the private relationship between host and listener, which until then was only based on paper letters. The speed at which short digital texts could be transmitted thanks to mobile text messaging services and emails increased audience feedback to radio stations. This increase in textual flow became an invaluable source of information for producers; the information, filtered and re-elaborated, was then transformed into new content, ready to enter the radio flow. Software designed to manage emails and SMS enabled radio stations to organise content received by email or SMS in real time, to choose the most appropriate ones for the programme, and to broadcast them a few seconds or minutes after receiving them. Thus both the spatial and temporal distance between producer and listener were reduced. The readability and real-time access of SMS and email enhanced the publicness of the public's opinions and feelings. The public was not only audible, but easily readable as well (see chapter 3). Its emotions and opinions, however, still remained unmeasured.

The invention of streaming technology (1995) and subsequently of blogs (1999) and podcasting (2004) furthered the move towards public participation in audio communication introduced by free radio in the 1960s and 1970s. Free radio was the first to shift the balance of broadcasting from the institutions towards the individual. The encounter between radio and the

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Internet was another step forward in this direction, bringing this process of the ‘de-institutionalisation of communication’ (Bonini 2006) a step forward: the costs of accessing communication tools lowered, as opening a Web radio cost less than an FM transmitter. The digitisation of cultural products (mp3 and other formats), the diffusion of simple free software for digital audio editing (Audacity) and the progressive increase in speed of Internet connections allowed for many more people to create radio content and broadcast it via streaming than in previous ages.

Streaming happenings were born, in which a number of musicians played together or shared show schedules with programs broadcast from different places in the world (Horizontal Radio in 1995; Net Aid in 1999). The first community of netcasters was composed of many different kinds of people: computer geeks, musicians, music lovers, open source software programmers, political activists and sound artists. Streaming happenings were a reinvention/remix of the pioneering spirit of the first amateur broadcasters, the free radio movement of the seventies and the first Californian phone phreakers of the 1970s (Johns 2009).

In 2004 another audio (and video) distribution technology was born: podcasting. Podcasting represented a step forward in the transformation of listeners into audio content makers. Streaming allowed listeners to find new ways of broadcasting audio content to be listened to in real time; podcasting, ten years later, allowed them to distribute audio content to be listened to on demand.

There is a thin red line that ties together the communities of amateur broadcasters of the 1920s, the radio pirates of the 1960s, free radio activists, the phone phreakers and computer hackers of the 1970s, the netcasters of the 1990s and the bloggers and podcasters of 2000s: they were all both producers and listeners and were all linked together in networks. Most of them could fit into the category of ‘recursive publics’ created by social anthropologist Christopher Kelty (2008, 27–28) for the more recent open source communities:

A recursive public is constituted by a shared concern for maintaining the means of association through which they come together as a public. This kind of public includes the activities of making, maintaining and modifying software and networks and represents the subject of this making, maintaining and modifying.

Amateur broadcasters, radio pirates, free radio activists, phone phreakers, netcasters, podcasters and bloggers all demanded autonomy and free self-expression in media use and communication tools. Free software for streaming and blogging represented the opportunity for the revival of this spirit of creative conviviality (Illich 1973), as opposed to passive reception.

Today, netcasters, bloggers and podcasters do not limit themselves to participating in the radio flow produced by traditional broadcasters, but also create their own sound media. Web radio and podcasting are ‘bypass

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technologies' (Dearman and Galloway 2005), allowing individuals to bypass the entire established radio industry. The radio studio has been outsourced: 'radio' is wherever I can stream or record a podcast. Listeners (at least a small part of them) have become producers of themselves, and online platforms such as Mixcloud, Soundcloud, Audioboo, Spreaker, Broadcast Yourself, Jelli Radio and others perfectly embody this principle. Spotify, Mixcloud, Audioboo and Spreaker are 'making and networking' tools, they enable people not only to discover and listen to new music and radio content but also to create new ones by themselves. The revival of DIY culture is visible also in the radio producing sector.

### **The Fourth Age (2004–?): A Visible Medium for a Networked Public**

The rise of social networking sites (SNSs) is the milestone of this fourth age. SNSs have existed since 1997 (Boyd and Ellison 2007). The social network that has best integrated with radio has been Facebook, created in 2004, followed by Twitter. The fans/friends/followers of a radio station's or host's Facebook or Twitter profile are a public that is very different from the traditional one: this is due to the specific characteristics of the medium, as well as to changes in consumer culture brought about by the rise of the information economy. The traditional public of broadcasting media still fits the definition given by Gabriel Tarde in 1901, as Arvidsson (2013, 374) highlights: "A public is a mediated association amongst strangers who are united by a however momentary affective intensity that is directed towards a common thing." The new public emerging from the hybridisation of broadcasting and information/communication technologies is a networked one. Listeners are no longer just audiences (Rosen 2008). Of all the changes that network culture may bring us, the reconfiguration of the public sphere is likely to be the most significant.

The network society we live in today has produced a new configuration of mediated publics: the networked publics. Networked publics represent the missing link in Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) historical periodisation. It was the first to use the term, in a book published in 2008 and edited by Varnelis:

The term *networked publics* references a linked set of social, cultural and technological developments that have accompanied the growing engagement with digitally networked media. The Internet has not completely changed the media's role in society: mass media, or one-to-many communications, continue to cater to a wide arena of cultural life. What has changed are the ways in which people are networked and mobilized with and through media. The term *networked publics* is an alternative to terms such as *audience* or *consumer*. Rather than assume that everyday media engagement is passive or consumptive, the term

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*publics* foregrounds a more engaged stance. Networked publics take this further; now publics are communicating more and more through complex networks that are bottom-up, top-down, as well as side-to-side. Publics can be reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors, engaging in shared culture and knowledge through discourse and social exchange as well as through acts of media reception.

(Ito 2008, 2)

This concept was further developed by Danah Boyd. Networked publics are “publics that are restructured by networked technologies” (Boyd 2011, 41). What distinguishes networked publics from other types of publics is their underlying structure: “Networked technologies reorganise how information flows and how people interact with information and each other. In essence, the architecture of networked publics differentiates them from more traditional notions of publics” (Boyd 2011, 41). These kinds of publics, according to Danah Boyd, all share four fundamental affordances that make them different from all the previous mediated publics: “Persistence, replicability, scalability and searchability” (Boyd 2011, 46). Persistence means that, on SNSs, the public’s expressions are automatically recorded and archived. This means that feedback (opinions, feelings and comments) from each listener is public and, since this can remain online for a long time, it can also play a role in shaping the radio station’s reputation. Replicability means that the content produced by networked publics is easily replicable. Scalability in networked publics refers to the possibility of tremendous—albeit not guaranteed—visibility. This means that, for example, individual listeners commenting and talking about a radio show on its social network profile can reach a wide audience. Searchability means that content produced by networked publics can be easily accessed.

Networked publics represent the type of public that has emerged from the network society and refer to any type of public that is organised in a network. Here, listeners from this age will be referred to as networked listeners. Networked listeners belong to the vast multitude of *producers* (Bruns 2008). Producership refers to the type of user-led content creation that takes place in a variety of online environments. This concept blurs the boundaries between passive consumption and active production. However, the term *producer* emphasises the productive aspect of the consumers/users, while the definition proposed here highlights the connections among listeners. Not all networked listeners are producers, not all of them produce informational content; many listeners are still silent, but they are still visible nodes in an interconnected network (the network of a radio’s digital community). The auditory regime found in this fourth phase is one of connected listening, listening that may also be defined as augmented listening, because, either simultaneously or at a later time, radio listening is overlapped with discussion, comments and the production of content on the

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social networks connected to the radio. Just as the mix of mobile devices and social network sites represent the second screen of television consumption, they may also represent the second screen of this new augmented radio listening experience.

As pointed out by the Head of the BBC Newsroom, Mary Hockaday, public service broadcasters are “shifting to a new formulation: Inform, Educate and Connect”, which means that they are “no longer just trying to draw people in, but also more confidently reaching out on social networks, and a full range of distribution platforms that work for audiences, and that some of our journalism is done in partnership with the wider world” (Hockaday 2012, 7).

This new media ecosystem, created from a mix of broadcasting (radio) and networking (social media) cultures, has transformed how media content circulates. In this regard, Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013, 2) refer to *spreadable media* as all the media content that is put into circulation according to a hybrid model, which is a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces:

This shift from diffusion to circulation signals a movement toward a more participatory model of culture, one which sees the public not as simply consumers of preconstituted messages, but as people who are shaping, reframing and remixing media content in ways which might not have been previously imagined. And they are doing so not as isolated individuals, but within larger communities and networks, which allow them to spread content well beyond their immediate geographic proximity.

Radio, and more generally, media audiences in the age of the network society are better understood as networks of listeners, rather than groups belonging to specific social and economic clusters. Listeners’ actions (making comments, remixing media items, sharing media objects, producing user-generated or user-circulated content) all happen within networks.

As Rainie and Wellman (2012, 12) claimed, the “triple revolution of social networks, Internet and mobile communication” have made possible “the new social operating system we call ‘networked individualism.’ The hallmark of networked individualism is that people function more as connected individuals and less as embedded group members.” Networked listeners have partial membership in multiple networks and rely less on permanent membership in settled groups. For this reason they should be investigated through the lens of network theory: “In network theory, a node’s relationship to other networks is more important than its own uniqueness. Similarly, today we situate ourselves less as individuals and more as the product of multiple networks composed of both humans and things” (Varnelis 2008, 153).

Rainie and Wellman (2012, 55) believe that “each person has become a communication and information switchboard connecting persons, networks

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and institutions.” Listeners are no longer alone and invisible, but connected with many others in a variety of social circles that provide them with diversified portfolios of social capital. The structure and the properties of the social networks of networked listeners associated with a radio or media company is the new frontier of media research. In network analysis, great importance is attributed to: (1) hubs and super connectors, highly connected nodes of the network able to shorten the distance that information must travel; (2) bridging or weak ties, connections between knots belonging to different social circles; weak ties are great for getting information in and out of a cluster of relationships; and (3) bonding or strong ties, connections within the same cluster that are necessary for internal trust, efficiency and solidarity. These three features could become important for radio (and media) audience research as well, as media companies could be progressively more interested in understanding the architecture and the properties of the networked public they have been able to gather around them. Some networks could prove to be made up of very strong community links, while others may be composed of people with many contacts with other social networks. These three characteristics of networks, and others that we still have to discover, could determine a new value of networked audiences, representing the new assets of new audience rating systems.

Some scholars have already tried to visualise the network structures of the social media crowds: Smith et al. (2014) demonstrated that in Twitter there are at least six distinctive structures of social media crowds which form depending on the subject being discussed, the information sources being cited, the social networks of the people talking about the subject, and the leaders of the conversation. Each has a different social structure and shape: divided, unified, fragmented, clustered and inward and outward hub and spokes.

We have shown how the participatory desire of radio listeners has been immanent throughout the history of radio. Listening to radio is different from hearing radio (Lacey 2013): while hearing “emphasizes *perception* and *sensation* of sound, listening emphasizes *attention* and *giving* to another” (Lacey 2013, 17). Listening to radio has always been a cultural activity, an aural experience augmented by side tools of interaction and participation: from letters to social media, people listening to radio have always tried to connect with the speaker and to each other. Letter writing and the collective public listening of the 1930s are the ancestors of phone calls, SMS, emails and social radio tools (SNSs used as second screens) of the contemporary age. The fourth phase, that of networked publics, is only the latest stage of a historical trajectory starting with the invention of electronic media.

Each of these four historical steps of the relationship between radio and its listeners produces a different kind of public, but at the same time these different publics are composed of the same people.

## **FIVE CHANGES IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RADIO PRODUCERS AND LISTENERS**

The affordances of networked publics have given rise to a series of fundamental changes in how the relationship between radio and its public is conceived. Here, these changes will be identified as the Five Changes:

### **(1) Change in the Publicness of Publics (More Visible, More Audible, More Measurable)**

The listeners connected to a social network site of a radio station have a face, a name, a personal space for discussion (the Facebook Wall, the Twitter Timeline) and a bio-cultural profile (the Info section). Being networked means potentially having more power. As Rainie and Wellman (2012, 13) put it: “Networked individuals have new powers to create media and project their voices to more extended audiences that become part of their social worlds.” This is the end of the public as a mass that is invisible (it cannot be seen by the broadcaster), passive (it cannot take part in the conversation) and insensitive (it cannot express its emotions towards the speaker).

Networked listeners can potentially become extremely popular, through the exposure and the attention gained on digital platforms. According to Alice Marwick (2013), social media are technologies of subjectivity that teach users how to succeed and reach popularity in postmodern consumer societies. Marwick (2013, 16) critically claims that social media educate users to learn marketing techniques such as micro-celebrity, life streaming and self branding—“a strategy of success in which one thinks of oneself as a brand and uses social media to promote it, through creating, presenting and maintaining a strictly edited self.” Borrowing from Foucault, Marwick (2013, 11) argues that “social media have become a way that people govern themselves.”

Listeners take advantage of social media to better present themselves, manage their public image and build their online status, but their potentially increased publicity is often that which benefits technology companies: “A verifiable identity makes it possible to leverage status but it also makes it simple to track people as they move around the web” (Marwick 2013, 17).

The integration of SNSs in radio production routines makes the immaterial capital created by networked listeners become public and tangible. While until recently the audience was invisible to radio and confined to its private sphere, except in the case of phone calls during a programme, today listeners linked to the online profile of a radio programme are no longer invisible or private, and the same goes for their opinions and emotions. And if emotions and opinions are no longer invisible or private, they are measurable (see chapters 4 and 5). For the first time in the history of radio, listeners are not only numbers: their feelings, opinions and reputations are traceable and measurable through netnographic methods (Kozinets 2010) and social network analysis.

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In the broadcasting age audience rating systems (diaries, telephone recalls, meters) measured ‘eyeballs’ and attention. In the age of social media, broadcasters can measure more than just attention. The rising importance of a revision of audience measurement was already underlined by Jenkins (2004, 38) at the dawn of the social media age:

The American television industry is increasingly targeting consumers who have a prolonged relationship and active engagement with media content and who show a willingness to track down that content across the cable spectrum and across a range of other media platforms. This next generation audience research focusses attention on what consumers do with media content, seeing each subsequent interaction as valuable because it reinforces their relationship to the series and, potentially, its sponsors.

Affect is a new common good that media corporations are trying to commodify (see chapter 13). While the capitalists of the Industrial Revolution privatised and commodified common lands, social media capitalists like Zuckerberg fenced public conversations into private social media platforms and commodified them, giving rise to what van Dijck (2013) calls a ‘platformed sociality’: the novelty of social media platforms, according to van Dijck (2012, 168), is not that they allow for making connections but “lead to engineering connections.” To this end, Arvidsson (2011, 41) claims that

The remediation of social relations that has accompanied the rise of consumer culture has effectively managed to transform the nature of affect, from something private or at least located in small interaction systems, to something that acquires an objective existence as a value creating ‘substance’ in the public domain. Social media have taken this process one step further.

Networked platforms grant the private sphere civic and social legitimacy, as they effectively augment its connectivity potential. Online social networks, claims Papacharissi (2010, 139), “allow the individual to connect to local and remote spheres of family members, friends and acquaintances, and strong and weaker social ties.” Online social networks publicise the listeners’ private spheres. A person may post a Facebook comment or a tweet that expresses a personal opinion on public affairs being discussed on a talk radio show while on a short break from work. The private sphere of the networked listeners is, as Papacharissi (2010, 133) argued, a “networked private sphere,” a private sphere augmented by online convergent

technologies. In the case of Facebook and other commercial social networks, this augmented publicity of the listeners occurs within “commercially public spaces” (Papacharissi 2010, 129).

## **(2) Change in the Speaker-to-Listener Relationship**

The new communication model deriving from the mix of radio and social media is a hybrid model, partly still broadcast, partly already networked. Radio is still a one-to-many means of communication. However, the telephone already partly made it a one-to-one (phone interview) and many-to-one medium (open mic, phone talk radio); to this we have to add SNSs, which are at the same time one-to-one (chat and Twitter mentions), one-to-many (tweets, Facebook notes or posts), many-to-many (Facebook Home, Twitter hashtags) and many-to-one (Facebook comments) kinds of media.

The mix between radio and the SNS considerably modifies both the hierarchical/vertical relationship between the speaker/host and the public, and the horizontal relationship between each listener. Both types of relationships are approaching a less hierarchical dynamic typical of peer-to-peer culture. Broadcasting logic—filter then publish—is replaced here by a networking logic, publish then filter: networked listeners do not have to wait to be selected to talk on air, they can publish a post on the Facebook page of the radio programme they like.

Networked listeners and radio hosts can become ‘friends’: when a programme’s presenter and one of his or her listeners become friends on Facebook or follow each other on Twitter—even if their relationship is still asymmetric in terms of power—they establish a bi-directional tie: both can navigate on each other’s profile, both can watch each other’s online performance and, at the same time, be actors in it. Both can enact two types of performances, public and private: they can post comments on each other’s walls or reply to each other’s tweets, send each other private messages or communicate by chat or Skype in real time. For the first time in the history of radio, the speaker and the listener can easily communicate privately, far from the ears of other listeners, ‘off air.’ This gives rise to a ‘backstage’ behaviour (Goffman 1959) between host and listener that was previously unimaginable.

This change is a double-edged sword: it has an emancipatory side and a ‘dark’ side. The emancipatory side is that this change allows the listener and the speaker/producer/host of the radio to ‘tune in’ and listen to each other online, exchanging knowledge and ideas (see chapter 4). As Crawford (2009, 525) claimed, “The metaphor of listening can offer a productive way to analyse the forms of online engagement that have previously been overlooked, while also allowing a deeper consideration of the emerging disciplines of online attention.”

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On the other hand, the dark side allows radio producers to gather information about consumer habits, tastes and opinions. But this monitoring activity of how many people like/comment/talk of/share their content has more to do with surveillance than with paying real attention to listeners. Listeners don't want to be surveilled, they want to listen and to be listened to. Even if there is a very fine line between surveillance and listening—every listening activity is potentially a surveillance activity—there is a major difference between surveillance and listening: the aim of the first is to track listeners/consumers' behaviours in order to commodify them, while the aim of the latter is to tune in to listeners' thoughts/opinions/comments in order to serve them better quality content that is closer to their needs.

### **(3) Change in the Listener-to-Listener Relationship**

At the same time, the relationship between listeners is similarly changing. Fans of a radio programme can establish links among each other online, exchange public comments on the programme's wall, express more or less appreciation for specific content, exchange content on their personal walls, write each other private messages or chat with each other. The radio's public has never been so visible. While before SNSs the concept of the radio public was a purely abstract entity, one that could be understood sociologically and analysed statistically, today this public is no longer only an imagined one (Anderson 1993): it is a visible network of listeners/producers.

For the first time, people who listen to a radio programme and are its fans on social network sites have the opportunity to see and recognise each other, to communicate, to recommend new contents and to create new links while bypassing the centre, this being the radio programme itself. "The gatekeeping function of mass media is challenged as individuals use digital media to spread messages much farther and more widely than was ever historically possible" (Gurak 2001, 13). While a radio public is an invisible group of people who are not linked together, the SNS audience of a radio programme is a visible group of people/nodes in a network, connected by links of varying intensity which, in some cases, can produce strong links that transcend the broadcaster. By exchanging and sharing content on the social network sites of a radio station, they establish new social ties or reinforce the existent ones. As Rushkoff (2000) put it in an article in *The Guardian*, "content is just a medium for interaction between people."

This change has a dark side as well. Listeners can network together and tune in to each other's social media profiles, exchanging content, opinions, ideas and making new valuable connections, while at the same time engaging in practices of 'coveillance' (Mann, Nolan and Wellman 2003), which means that people can observe and monitor each other as if they were in a collective digital panopticon.

#### (4) Change in the Value of Publics (SNS Public: Social Capital = Mass Media Public: Economic Capital)

This visible group of listeners/nodes/links is the most important new feature produced by the hybridisation between radio and SNSs. A radio programme's network of friends/fans on SNSs represent its specific social capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). While the wider (and invisible) radio public, as charted by audience rating companies, still constitutes the programme's economic capital, this work promotes the idea that the public of social media should be considered the real social capital of a programme, a tangible and visible capital, the meaning of which is well explained by Bourdieu and Wacquant when they define social capital as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (1992, 14).

However, there is an ongoing discussion on the strength of links within online social networks, as Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007, 1146) noted:

Researchers have emphasized the importance of Internet-based linkages for the formation of weak ties (Granovetter 1973), which serve as the foundation for *bridging* social capital (Putnam 2000). . . . It is possible that new forms of social capital and relationship building will occur on online social network sites.

Bridging social capital might be augmented by such sites, which support loose social ties, allowing users to create and maintain larger, diffuse networks of relationships from which they could potentially draw resources (Donath and Boyd 2004; Resnick 2001). Donath and Boyd (2004) hypothesise that SNSs could greatly increase the weak ties one could form and maintain, because the technology is well suited to maintaining such ties cheaply and easily. The definition of bridging social capital—a kind of capital better suited for information diffusion (Putnam 2000) and made of weak ties, which are loose connections between individuals who may provide useful information or new perspectives for one another, but typically not emotional support—seems to fit the kinds of ties normally found on SNSs. If we consider the networked public that forms around a radio programme as its bridging social capital, we can expect this listener-based network to produce, if not emotional and substantive support, then at least a certain amount of benefits in terms of news, tastes, information retrieval, cultural trends, comments and reviews. If we observe the SNS of the most popular radio programmes, we find that this is already taking place: on an SNS, listeners anticipate/continue discussions on the themes introduced by the radio show, adding comments, content, links, references, quotations and suggestions.

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Moreover, the personal information and the public wall posts and tweets on the listeners' SNS profiles can help radio producers to better understand who is hiding behind a comment or link, allowing them to assess the reputation of the listeners/producers and consequently decide if they can trust them or not. The reputation (and trustworthiness) of each single listener belonging to the network of a radio programme contributes to the general reputation of that specific networked public and, due to the transitive property, constitutes the reputational capital of that radio programme. This reputational capital is of great value for radio producers, because, as Arvidsson (2013, 380) puts it: "Reputation is the form social capital takes among strangers. The higher a person's reputation, the easier for her to initiate processes, recruit talented co-workers, or start new projects. Finally reputation enhances the enjoyment of participation." On the public stage of the SNSs, reputation is conferred on an actor by the members of a public. Since, on this stage, radio producers and listeners can act both as actors and audience at the same time, their reputations (both the producer's and the listener's) are being continuously evaluated by the networked listeners. As Rainie and Wellman (2012, 19) claimed, "much of the activity by networked individuals is aimed at gaining and building trust, the primary currency of social networks." The social networks' economy is built on reputation.

It is therefore in the radio producer's interest to develop, nurture and care for this reputational capital and to manage the establishment of a high-quality and highly satisfied networked public. Ellison et al. (2011) showed a clear empirical relationship between a wealthy social network and the production of bonding and bridging social capital: the larger the network, the quicker the response from friends; the greater the network, the greater the social capital produced (in terms of benefits received by the network). Ellison et al. (2011, 138–139) clearly demonstrated that Facebook "enables individuals to: maintain a larger set of weak ties; make ephemeral connections persistent; lower the barriers to initial interaction; make it easier to seek information and support from one's social network and to provide these resources to others."

For radio makers, a wide network of friends/fans/followers is highly important for their future. Even if the fans' network does not generate tangible economic value, as the radio audience already does, it nevertheless generates great reputational capital. The message of the SNS public of a radio programme is the network itself, because this network is able to produce value. The value embedded in the networked public is not yet convertible into economic capital, but the crisis of traditional mass advertising will lead to a future increase in—and refining of—tools for the capitalisation of the wealth of networked publics linked to radio programmes and stations. Besides, building networked and productive publics for radio could be of strategic importance for public service media. Public service media are losing audiences and legitimacy, because they are forgoing serving listeners as citizens (Syvertsen 1999). Since making and participating mean 'connecting'

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and creating social relationships, as Gauntlett (2011) has shown, building and nurturing wealthy and productive networked publics for public service media could be an opportunity to legitimise their service as a real public one, a service that provides listeners with tools that let them participate and create new social relationships among each other.

The social capital embedded in the digital audiences of a media company has been well understood by Wolfgang Blau, digital strategist at *The Guardian*, when he claimed in an interview to the Italian magazine *L'Espresso*: “If we could visualize the social relations provided by a newspaper to its listeners, cultural associations, NGOs, clubs, companies, political subjects, cultural institutions, we would realize they look like a huge social network connecting thousands of nodes/people” (Rossano 2013).

In this kind of participatory media environment, the construction of the media company’s reputation is less subject to corporate control and intervention, but it is co-created in a dynamic way along with the audience (Bunting and Lipski 2000; Kozinets 2010).

Although a system for the direct conversion of social capital into economic capital has not yet emerged, a good accumulation of social capital could prove to be fundamental for the success, for example, of a crowdfunding campaign (see chapter 8). The value of networked publics can be understood mostly as social capital, as we suggest here, but other scholars, like Eleanor Baird Stribling (2013), point out that the engagement of fans with a media company could also provide some kind of economic value. Stribling (2013) categorises the “broad spectrum of fan behaviours” into four categories of activity, two which provide direct economic value—“watching, listening or attending” and “purchasing primary or secondary products”—and two which provide indirect economic value, like “endorsing” and “sharing and commenting.”

### **(5) The Change in the Role of the Radio Author (from Producer to Curator)**

Radio is increasingly becoming an aggregator, a filter for the abundance of information, useful especially for the non-prosumer listeners, who do not publish videos and have no time to explore friends’ profiles, which are a true goldmine for discovering new trends. The radio author’s job thus increasingly resembles that of a translator, of someone who connects two worlds—niches and mass culture—by delving into niches and re-emerging with a little treasure trove that can then be used productively. The producer’s function in the age of Facebook is thus to drag content emerging from small islands, small communities and to translate and adapt it to the public of large continents, transforming it into mass culture. Radio authors and producers are becoming more and more similar to the figure of the curator, a cultural shift in the role of all kinds of author’s labour that was already noted by Brian Eno (1991), as Reynolds (2011, 130) reminds us: “Curatorship is

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arguably the big new job of our times: it is the task of re-evaluating, filtering, digesting and connecting together. In an age saturated with new artefacts and information, it is perhaps the curator, the connection maker, who is the new storyteller, the meta-author.”

Today’s radio producers do not look for content in the same way they did in the twentieth century. Their job is no longer to seek and create, but to select and co-create. During research for this book, I met and interviewed an Italian producer of a talk radio programme for a national radio broadcaster. He revealed that his work had completely changed with social media:

Now I know the core of my audience, I talk with them, we exchange comments and thoughts via email, private messages on Facebook and mentions, replies and direct messages on Twitter. They spontaneously suggest to me new music songs, excerpts from novels, links to news and to YouTube videos. One of them spontaneously collects the podcasts of all my programmes on his blog, and he has become the most trustable sound archive of my entire radio work. Another keeps on sending me new music he thinks will fit with my playlist. I also play with them on Twitter: once a week we decide the playlist together, I have launched the hashtag #openplaylist. You might think I do this just to save time, or that it’s audience exploitation. It is not, it’s a lot of work for me, but it’s a lot of fun for everyone, they all feel like part of a community and they have the opportunity to proudly share their expertise with a community of people that they trust. I call them the ‘networked newsroom.’<sup>1</sup>

This is how the value production process in radio works in the era of SNSs: listeners enact their cultural tastes online, the radio author (increasingly a producer, as Benjamin predicted) re-interprets and re-elaborates them, providing the audience with a dramaturgically constructed listening experience in which it finds its contents mixed together. Listeners comment and supply new material to the community of listeners/producers so that the recursive process can start again. But what about this process? To what extent can we call it co-creation and to what extent must we call it exploitation? Andrejevic (2008) studied the productivity of the fan communities of TV shows and interpreted it as a double form of value-enhancing labour for television producers by allowing fans to take on part of the work of making a show interesting for themselves on the one hand, and by providing instant (if not necessarily statistically representative) feedback to producers on the other hand. But is he right?

As Australian scholar, Maura Edmond (2014), pointed out, “creating radio projects that are more social, immersive and engaging fosters a commercially valuable emotional attachment to a story, show, presenter, station and to a community of fellow listeners (what Jenkins 2006, 13) calls ‘affective economics’.” Audience engagement is being considered more and more commercially valuable, but can this engagement be understood under the frame of labour exploitation theories?

**CO-CREATION OR EXPLOITATION?**

“We should thus describe this audience labor as engaged rather than exploited.”

(Jenkins et al. 2013, 60)

Radio makers (authors/presenters/producers) and radio listeners, once they are connected through SNSs, belong to the same horizontal and multipolar network. On the SNS stage everyone, radio makers and listeners alike, is able to perform, to take part, to alternatively play the role of the actor (contributing with content) and of the audience (contributing with comments and liking). As Benjamin hoped, the boundaries between authors and ‘readers’ have potentially been broken down.

The connection that has now been established between radio makers and listeners through social media also allows for new forms of content production to emerge, some of which will be analysed in this book (see chapters 6, 7 and 9).

The extent to which listeners take part in these production processes is still controlled by radio makers, who decide how to give value to user-generated content. Much has been written about the ambivalent status of this content as a source of both intrinsic reward and potential exploitation, as social media corporations’ value, Andrejevic (2013, 162) argues, relies on the “private enclosure of productive resources.” When can we still speak of co-creation, and when does cooperation become free-labour exploitation (Fuchs 2010, 2014; Terranova 2000)? Andrejevic (2013) claims that exploitation in social media not only occurs when audience labour (in terms of user-generated content) is not paid, but also when users lose control over their productive and creative activity. Ippolita, Lovink and Rossiter (2009) maintain that exploitation is embedded in SNSs: however radical they may be, they will always be data mined. They are designed to be exploited and to exploit.

The free labour exploitation theorists have built their propositions on a consolidated criticism of the economic policies of commercial media, which was very popular in the 1970s. To a certain extent, the attention of a passive public required by traditional media was already a form of exploitation and production of economic value: this was the late-1970s approach of Canadian media theorist Dallas Smythe (1978), who claimed that viewers were exploited as their viewing time was appropriated by media companies and sold as an ‘audience commodity.’

From a Marxist perspective, audiences have always been put to work by media corporations, who have made a living on the backs of their audiences. From newspapers and radio to television, commercial media (Hearst’s newspapers of the early twentieth century; NBC and ABC radio in the 1920s; today’s commercial television networks like Fox News, just to name a few) have always sold the ‘work’ (attention paid to media content) of listeners to advertising.

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Marxist researcher Christian Fuchs is one of the best known scholars to have contributed to the revival of Smythe's approach to the political economy of media. In Fuchs' (2010, 187) view, "citizens who engage in everyday politics" and those "radio listeners and television viewers who call in live" are somehow 'unpaid' knowledge workers being exploited by capital. For Fuchs, it seems, any participation by citizens in the public sphere itself is exploited labour, as opposed to the practical contributions to the democratic formation of public opinion that these citizens themselves clearly understand their actions to be. Fuchs goes even further in framing audience 'labour' as exploitation. He claims that digital users are also exploited: in the case of corporate social media, "the audience commodity is an Internet prosumer commodity" (Fuchs 2013, 217). Therefore, according to the free labour theories, the main reason for the exploitation of the audience's work is its appropriation and commodification, operated by both traditional and new commercial media. As Murdock (1978) already noted, Smythe's approach really only applies to advertiser-supported media. In the case of Facebook, it was Zuckerberg himself who, in 2010, publicly admitted the extraction of value from audience engagement in Facebook: "Our focus is just to help you share information and when you do that you are more engaged with our site and there are more ads on the side of the page and the more you do it the more the model works out."<sup>2</sup>

But even if we want to believe in the expropriation of value by commercial media, we would realise that yes, this value exists, but it is derisory. For example, let's take the three Italian public service radio channels (Rai Radio1, Radio2 and Radio3, which are also financed by advertising) and divide their total advertising revenue from 2012 (€35.3 million, according to Rai 2013<sup>3</sup>) by the grand total of their listeners on an average day (9.3 million, according to Eurisko 2012<sup>4</sup>). This gives us the alienated surplus of every single listener, which corresponds to €3.79 per person for an entire year of listening. If we apply the same theory to Facebook's earnings, we obtain similar results: if Facebook made a profit of \$355 million in 2010 (according to its own figures<sup>5</sup>), when the active users were around 500 million, this would mean that each Facebook user was a 'victim of exploitation of surplus value' to the extent of \$0.70 a year. Gauntlett (2011) has made the same calculation for YouTube videos, showing that each video uploaded by users is worth approximately \$1.20.

Smythe's (1978) argument—that audience 'work' can be seen as being exploited in terms of the Marxian labour theory of value—was already controversial at the time of its publication (Hesmondhalgh 2010). This argument by Smythe and his 'sons,' such as Fuchs, has been criticised for two main reasons: (1) what they call audience 'work' cannot simply be called work, because it lacks coercion and (2) their approach doesn't take into account the pleasures of participation (Hesmondhalgh 2010).

Similarly, Arvidsson and Colleoni (2012) claimed that making the simple observation that just because media companies like Facebook or branded

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corporations like Apple live off audience and consumer co-production does not necessarily mean that the value of such co-production can be estimated in terms of the Marxian labour theory of value. They argue, in response to Fuchs (2010), that the labour theory of value does not apply to the activity of online prosumers, because “the value of online advertising is not primarily dependent on the number of users that a site can attract” or on the “time spent [in] online viewing or interacting with a particular site.” Instead, “value is ever more defined according to the ability to mobilize affective attention and engagement” (Arvidsson and Colleoni 2012, 144; see also chapter 13). Jenkins et al. (2013, 116) claim that television (and radio too) is shifting from an attention economy that they call an “appointment based model” towards an “engagement based paradigm.”

Banks and Humphreys (2008) and Banks and Deuze (2009) claimed that users clearly enjoy and benefit from online activities, even if they generate value for commercial media companies. They suggest that user-generated content should be understood in terms of mutual benefit (identity and reputational benefits) rather than of exploitation.

The idea that listener participation in radio’s valuable production (in terms of both attention and actions performed on the social media linked to the radio) can be a source of exploitation is a useful point of view in order to defuse the rhetoric of participation and user-generated content, which new and old commercial media have appropriated. Even so, this work supports the view that the new wave of Marxist criticism of the exploitation of content generated by networked publics, in both traditional and digital media, is unable to comprehend the real value of this participation.

As Jenkins et al. (2013, 58) noted: “We feel it’s crucial to acknowledge the concerns of corporate exploitation of fan labor while still believing that the emerging system places greater power in the hands of the audience when compared to the older broadcast paradigm.”

We believe that many different distinctions can be found between these two extremes of exploitation and co-creation. The AIP model has been proposed by Carpentier (2007, 2011) for the analysis of the public’s participation in the production of media (especially radio) content, which this work finds to be highly capable of considering such distinctions. Carpentier (2011, 24) claims that:

The key defining element of participation is power. The debates on participation in institutionalized politics and in all other societal fields, including media participation, have a lot in common in that they all focus on the distribution of power within society at both the macro-and micro-level. The balance between people’s inclusion in the implicit and explicit decision-making processes within these fields, and their exclusion through the delegation of power (again, implicit or explicit), is central to discussions on participation in all fields.

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Participation is not the same as access or interaction: replying to a radio host's call for action with an SMS is a matter of interaction, not participation; liking, commenting, sharing or retweeting a message published by a radio host on his/her social network doesn't mean participating, but 'only' engaging with radio content. Participation, according to Carpentier (2011, 68), "deals with participation in the production of media output (content-related participation) and in media organisational decision-making (structural participation)." Carpentier asserts that we can only truly call it participation if the listeners are recognised as holding a certain amount of power in the decisions over what content should be broadcast, or even in the broadcaster's editorial and business choices. Even in this case, no single model for participation exists, but there are different forms and degrees. Audience participation is organised in many different forms by media institutions.

Carpentier's model is invaluable for clearly defining the theoretical differences between access, interaction and participation, but the complexity of the participative and cooperative processes generated by the compounding of old and new media in today's context requires a model that is even more complex. One model for the analysis of the forms of networked publics' participation, which complements Carpentier's considerations and goes into even greater detail, is that proposed by Hyde et al. (2010). According to the authors, in order to collaborate, participants must be aware of the fact that they are part of a collaborative project, and they must share its goals. If there is no intentionality, there is no collaboration. This first statement allows us to better respond to criticism coming from the free labour theorists. The aggregation of content produced by others (often unknown to them), which we may read as exploitation, is one thing; passionate and aware participation is another. There is a difference between the free appropriation of user-generated content performed by big newspaper editors (i.e., users' photographs of a particular news event taken from Instagram), which may even occur without the creator knowing anything about it, and the participation of passionate listeners in a radio programme by telephone and through social media.

Hyde et al. (2010) have proposed a series of eleven criteria in order to evaluate the quality of participation, which may be summarised as follows:

### *Questions of Intention*

Must the participant actively intend to contribute?

### *Questions of Goals*

Is participation motivated by the pursuit of goals shared with other participants or individual interests?

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### *Questions of (Self) Governance*

Are the structures and rules of engagement accessible? Can they be contested and renegotiated?

### *Questions of Property*

How is control or ownership organised over the outputs? Who is included/excluded in the division of benefits?

### *Questions of Knowledge Transfer*

Does the collaboration result in knowledge transfer between participants? Is it similar to a community of practice?

### *Questions of Identities*

Does the collaboration process strengthen a more unified group identity?

### *Questions of Scale (size, duration, speed, space, scope)*

How big or small is the number of participants? How long is the time frame of collaboration? Does the collaboration take place over a limited or extended geographic scale? How minimal or complex is the most basic contribution?

### *Questions of Network Topology*

How are individuals connected to each other? Are contributions individually connected to each other or are they all coordinated through a unifying bottleneck mechanism? Is the participation-network model centralised or decentralised?

### *Questions of Accessibility*

Can anyone join the collaboration? Is there a vetting process?

### *Questions of Equality*

Are all contributions largely equal in scope? Does a small group of participants generate a far larger portion of the work?

This series of criteria provides a general guide for the qualitative assessment of the cooperative relationship. This work finds these to be excellent criteria for evaluating a co-creational or collaborative project, in either radio

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or online platforms such as BitTorrent, Slashdot, Wikipedia, Flickr, Vimeo, and open source operating systems, amongst others.

If we adopt the points of view presented by Carpentier (2011) and Hyde et al. (2010), the forms of participation utilised by both traditional and networked listeners can be seen under a new light, equidistant from both the democratising rhetoric of participation and user-generated content and that of the apocalypse of the exploitation of ‘work’ extracted from the public.

## CONCLUSION: THE SOCIAL LIFE OF RADIO CONTENT

In their latest work, *Spreadable Media*, Jenkins et al. (2013) affirm that we are facing a paradigmatic change in the circulation of media texts. A hybrid model of circulation is emerging, a result of the combination of top-down institutional strategies (the media corporations that decide what to produce, when and how to launch a film/album/radio or TV series/bestseller book/event) and grassroots/bottom-up tactics. Control over media-produced content is no longer fully in the hands of the media themselves but is negotiated with the public, the latter being now connected into networks and capable of establishing the popularity or failure of a given content through sharing on its network.

Content produced by the media, and by the radio in particular, has never had such a rich social life. In the past, what one heard on a radio programme could only be discussed with a private circle of friends; today, the opinions of networked listeners generate more noise in the public space of (private) social networks. Audiences are making more ‘noise’ than ever. One can listen to content produced by radio again and again, with a podcast, by sharing it through Soundcloud, Mixcloud, Audioboo, on one’s social network pages or one’s own blog; it can circulate without broadcasters being able to control its movements.

In the ecosystem of spreadable media, content is both user generated and user circulated (Jenkins et al. 2013). Networked listeners are becoming more and more productive, and this productivity consists of both the generation of one’s own content and the circulation of media content. The simple act of posting a link to a radio programme’s podcast on one’s personal Facebook page, along with adding a comment that provides a context for listening, is a highly productive act, which requires time, effort and intelligence.

Listeners have become producers on different levels: they produce comments/likes/retweets; they produce stories about radio content that they then share within their own social networks; they reproduce radio content, share podcasts and contribute to their circulation. Listeners produce content that is picked up by radio producers and included in the radio flow, such as SMS texts, posts and comments on Facebook, tweets, and phone calls, but also audio, photo, video and text contributions that allow them

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to co-produce radio programmes. They also become co-producers of radio programmes by financing their expenses (see chapter 9). Listeners produce feedback that influences the editorial decisions made by radio producers (as in the case of the co-creation of musical playlists; see chapter 10) and produce independent radio and sound content that bypasses radio (amateur podcasters, Spreaker webcasters, Mixcloud and Soundcloud audio content).

If the media companies do not get used to coexisting with this new ecosystem and do not allow it to grow, they risk losing the attention and affect of the networked publics because, as Jenkins et al. (2013) say, if content is not spreadable, it is dead. “Information wants to be free” was a famous slogan by American futurologist Stewart Brand. It is now time to say: “Media content wants to be free.” Adaptation to the new media environment is fundamental. English scholar David Hendy (2013b) offers three examples of this adaptation: (1) the degree to which radio is enabling listeners to create their own schedule, (2) the degree to which it is abandoning a proprietorial attitude towards its own programme material and allowing it to be shared and manipulated in ways it doesn’t control, and (3) the degree to which it ‘crowdsources’ by drawing on the creative efforts of ‘ordinary’ people.

The new intimacy between radio and its public that is emerging with SNSs is reshaping the notion of the public, as well as radio production practices. Whether this new intimacy is potentially liberating and democratic, in the direction indicated by Benjamin (2008) (the ‘politicisation of art’) or a means toward further exploitation is not only a question linked to the new social network platforms, but one that can also be moulded and managed by human factors. Radio producers and listeners can use radio and SNSs to engage in a fruitful exchange of content and build a more democratic and participative model of communication, or, on the contrary, reproduce the old, hypnotic, Pavlovian broadcast communication based on a master-slave (media/radio/SNS-audience/follower) relationship.

In this ecosystem, the traditional media, including radio, are no longer the sole guardians of knowledge and its circulation: they are immersed in a network and connected to each other and with the public, and they are only—for the moment—hubs for sorting larger quantities of information coming from the other nodes of the network that they belong to. But today’s followers could be tomorrow’s producers, and the relationships of power between those who produce and those who listen could be reversed, because, as David Gauntlett (2011, 223) asserts, the broadcasting culture of “sit back and be told” is hopefully, potentially, being replaced by a networking culture of “making and doing.” Radio has always been a product of two players: the makers—who speak on the microphone—and the receivers—who listen and decode the message—but now listeners have more tools than ever before to act as makers too.

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## NOTES

1. Interview with Matteo Caccia, author, producer and host of the storytelling radio programme *Voi siete qui* [You Are Here], broadcast daily on Radio24, a national private news/talk Italian radio station. October 24, 2013.
2. Interview with Mark Zuckerberg, broadcast by CBS on May 27, 2010. Accessed March 14, 2014. <http://audio.cbsnews.com/2010/05/27/audio6522748.mp3>.
3. Rai (2013). *Relazioni e bilanci 2012*. Accessed January 18, 2014. [http://www.rai.it/dl/bilancio2012/ita/dwl/pdf/Bilancio\\_Rai\\_2012.pdf](http://www.rai.it/dl/bilancio2012/ita/dwl/pdf/Bilancio_Rai_2012.pdf).
4. Radio Monitor 2012. Accessed May 25, 2014. <http://danielelepido.blog.ilsole24ore.com/i-bastioni-di-orione/files/radiomonitor2012.pdf>.
5. For data on Facebook's economic performance in 2010, see Guerrero, F. "Facebook Raises Investor Hopes with IPO Hint." *Financial Times*, January 6, 2011. Accessed February 12, 2014. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/a2935290-19dc-11e0-b921-00144feab49a.html#az1ALd5SuI9>. Data on Facebook's economic performance varies significantly (not being a publicly traded company, Facebook has no obligation to publicise details of its accounts). Profit estimates for 2009 have varied between tens of millions and \$200 million. The figure of \$355 million comes from Facebook's own promotional documentation supporting its \$2 billion investment round, so it is likely to be exaggerated.

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# Introduction

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## Participation as a Moving Target

It is commonly accepted that political participation and civic engagement are cornerstones of a vital democratic system. Each generation believes in the singularity of their era and the therein expressed characteristics. Even present times do not constitute an exception to the rule because many authors diagnose immense and accelerating social as well as technological processes of change, which they mainly connect to “the Internet”. However, due to media and cultural change, new forms and possibilities of participating in the formation of society are appearing constantly for every individual. For approximately 25 years, the epistemological interest of a continually growing research area within communication and media studies as well as pedagogy, political science and sociology is in how these new forms of participation are used and how they could be judged in comparison to the traditional forms of civic engagement and participation. The current practices of engagement and participation are characterised by huge ambiguities. Despite the evidence of growing disenchantment with institutional politics, electoral turnouts in some countries are increasing. Despite increased possibilities for participation through online media, these are often dismissed as ‘clicktivism’. Despite celebratory discourses on the uses of social media in the Arab spring, the Occupy movement, the Pussy Riot case, the same-sex marriage debates in France and the UK and in LT+ protests, they were and are often grounded and performed in particular physical spaces. Despite their possibilities for challenging mainstream media, online media technologies are still mostly profit-driven. Going beyond established academic discourses about the decline of citizens’ political participation in institutional politics and the rise of alternative forms of political participation, this book aims to explore the issues, platforms, actions, locations and motivations of politically active citizens today. It discusses the opportunities and challenges that new conditions entail for the ways in which digitally mediated social interactions, practices and environments shape everyday participation, engagement or protest, and analyzes their implications for politics, culture and society.

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## **Participation in Everyday (Media) Life**

The concept of participation has multiple meanings, of which only a few central dimensions from a social-scientific perspective will be mentioned in this introduction (see Carpentier 2011). In general, participation represents a normative concept whose public relevance and scheme is interpreted differently in various approaches (for more details, see Ferree et al. 2002). Starting with participation-centric theories of democracy, the concept of participation is usually related to individual action, which is characterised by gratuitousness, missing personal material purposes and an orientation towards the common good. Participation can therefore be understood as a practice or everyday activity that is exercised by citizens in specific situations. In this context, the term refers to a continuum of different phenomena which can range from false forms or illusions to latent and manifest, implicit and explicit forms of participation, including types of self-government (for more details, see Arnstein 1969; Adler and Goggin 2005; Ekman and Amna 2012; Carpentier 2016; Villi and Matikainen 2016). While the concept of engagement emphasises voluntary commitment for a commonwealth, participation refers to official inclusion of citizens in political decisions through forms of voice, involvement and codetermination. With this broadly defined understanding of participation, a selective distinction between engagement and participation also is rather difficult, which leads to the fact that both expressions are partially used synonymously. Additionally, participation and engagement must not be confined to the political sphere. In media pedagogy, participation represents a guiding principle (Buckingham 2003) that is more important than ever, e.g. in the field of political (youth) education (see Loader 2007). Finally, the concept of (e-)participation is currently used in public discourse as an e-government tool (Sæbø et al. 2008). This refers to the use of information and communication technologies to simplify processes of public administration and government (top-down participation) or a whole variety of bottom-up online participation not initiated by established political actors, such as the government (for a synoptic overview, see Boulianne 2009; Marichal 2013; Boulianne 2015; Skoric et al. 2016).

All conceptual dimensions of participation are similar in that they cannot be understood without media in today's societies. Participation in and through media (Carpentier 2011) refers to the various available options for access, interaction and participation relating to different kinds of public spheres. From this perspective, publics do not represent only the audience of political institutions, moreover, they are actively constructing the political public sphere(s) as well. Based on this, Habermas (1989) argues that while media organisations are the institutional core of political publicity in modern societies, participation should be the fundamental foundation of democracy. Dahlgren (2006, 274) convincingly argues:

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The public sphere does not begin and end when media content reaches an audience; this is but one step in larger communication and cultural chains that include how the media output is received, made sense of and utilized by citizens.

Following this path, participation can be understood as appropriation of public communication, which can take different forms across different levels of organisational complexity and activity. Examples include: the emotional movement of citizens, the public resonance of media offers (so-called “follow-up communication”), or even the interaction between citizens, ranging from interpersonal face-to-face conversations or discussions via forums, micro-blogging, etc. on the micro-level, through larger organisational publics, movements and events on the meso-level, and to the general communicative construction of political public sphere(s) on the macro-level. The possibilities for citizens to produce their own media content, e.g. citizens’ media, or in the form of participatory online communication must also be critically taken into account (e.g. Rodriguez et al. 2014). In the currently unfolding digital media society, the dichotomous distinction between “citizens”, “consumers” and “recipients”, as has often been the norm in democratic theory and political communications research, is no longer sufficient. This is the case today because publics (who is actively involved in communicative relations in both old and new ways) are the (inter-)active audiences of participatory citizenship and vice versa (Couldry 2004).

Public participation always involves questions of power, conflict as well as (in)equality (see Fraser 1992; Warner 1992; Mouffe 1999). Castells (2007) discusses basic power shifts from a sociological point of view, and, until now, the state and established institutions have had privileged access to media and, hence, a noticeable advantage. This is rapidly changing in the so-called network society. The individual’s communicative basis no longer consists of monopolised mass media publics or vertical communication, but of horizontal, social, spatial and interdisciplinary communication networks that are anchored in civil society. This leads to a new form of social communication, which Castells calls “mass self-communication”. From an enthusiastic perspective, being on the Internet, producing, disseminating and receiving information are increasingly self-determined. Research in this area is concerned with the possibilities for access and interaction of citizens, with a focus on both subjectively perceived and structural constraints. While research unanimously identifies a greater variety of opportunities for media participation and engagement, these communication processes and their consequences have been evaluated diametrically for a long time. On the one hand, utopian views include the implication and revitalisation of social and political participation in public communication, and the emergence of so-called produsers (e.g. Bruns 2006), or even

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a fifth estate in the context of transnational Internet communication (Dutton 2009), which slowly, but inevitably, surpasses traditional power institutions (executive, judicial, legislative) in its communicative power. In other studies, the negative effects of new possibilities are put forward, such as increased emergence of idiosyncratic and personal publics (Schmidt 2014) and their highly selective information spheres, also known as “filter bubbles” (e.g. Sunstein 2001; Pariser 2011).

From a more idealistic and optimistic perspective, Jenkins et al. (2009) see the current transformation as the beginning of a period of transmedia and transnational participatory culture. This is due to the fact that technical possibilities of the social web ease political engagement in a simple and playful manner, and hence, political participation becomes part of everyday media habits in the long term: “Welcome to convergence culture, where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (Jenkins 2006, 2). On countless platforms, people with similar private, cultural and political interests get together to share their knowledge, interact with each other and work together. Initially related to the area of popular culture and entertainment communication, Jenkins (2010, s.p.) argues that, under certain circumstances, all digital communication media and media technologies function as “Civic Media” respectively, “any use of any technology for the purposes of increasing civic engagement and public participation, enabling the exchange of meaningful information, fostering social connectivity, constructing critical perspectives, insuring transparency and accountability, or strengthening citizen agency”.

Bruns (2006) is also advocating a similar argument in his approach to produsage – the merging of individual usage and production processes. He postulates that networked communication of the social web, and the resulting self-organised and collaborative production of media content, can be regarded as the beginning of political practices because they open up a mass media compatible and hierarchically structured political sphere. The phenomenon of “political consumerism” illustrates that these new forms of participation can no longer be understood without taking media into account. Digital communication media are used in a variety of ways, such as networking, self-presentation or the knowledge management of new, more or less everyday political practices (see Ward and de Vreese 2011).

Although Jenkins is given credit for being one of the first authors to have impressively and sustainably demonstrated the potential and contexts of participatory media cultures, his strongly subject-centered diagnosis can be criticised as not differentiated enough, and therefore too optimistic, for at least three reasons (for more details, see Hay and Couldry 2011). On the one hand, the economic and political influences on the

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collaborative production of participation communication, for the purpose of exploitation, are dismissed. Authors, such as Fuchs (2013) are arguing that the economic and political motives and contexts of the collaborative production of participatory communication on the social web should be questioned. For example, participation in form of Facebook's fans pages or YouTube channels is largely driven by economic interests that most users are not fully aware of. On the other hand, it is also not concurrent that in the context of increasing privatisation of the media structures, current public structures on the Internet cannot comprehensively guarantee social engagement even in a digital age. Thus, traditional civic media, for example free radio channels, still play a central role in implementing of the fundamental right on free expression in mass media because civic involvement is still not reducible on the Internet and the established mass media still determines public and political agendas. Finally, in contrast to the idealistic perspective, or against the larger communicative power of so-called participator communication, it could be argued that a "power law" applies to the Internet's attention and influence as well (see Barabási 2002; Watts 2003). In theory, it is possible that everyone publishes their opinions online, however, the technical structure of digital platforms and the logic of search engines ensure that only a small amount of online content on the net is actually utilised by a larger number of users (from the perspective of mediatisation theory, see Krotz 2017). The KONY 2012 campaign illustrates a prototypical example that journalistic attention and audience resonance cannot be oversimplified. Many campaigns are waves of viral attention that disappear just as quickly as they appear (see Wimmer 2014, 60ff.). According to critics of the Internet, digital communication leads to a preference for already established actors as well as a fragmentation of public discourse (see Friedland et al. 2006). At the same time, findings in audience research suggest that media change is not necessarily associated with more interactive media reception; there can also be discrepancies in mediated participation. Coleman and Ross (2010, 154) describe this as a "glaring paradox of contemporary democracies". The audience has more communicative and media opportunities to participate: "question their rulers; challenge official information; contribute to mainstream media; produce their own media and speak for themselves". However, their empirical work also finds that due to the increasing lack of political inclusion, a kind of communication and media disinclination is demonstrated: "feeling distant from elites; ignored by the media; unheard by representatives; constrained in public speech and utterly frustrated by the promises of democracy". On a structural level, Schmidt (2015) identifies a new "participation paradox", which describes the growing gap between participation in, with and on the Internet. Hence, social media would allow new forms of participation in the sense of self-centred codetermination due to the commercial interests and self-management of users.

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The current preoccupation in media and communication studies with engagement and participation is characterised by a more analytically differentiated view (e.g. Carpentier and Dahlgren 2011; Curran et al. 2012; Jenkins and Carpentier 2013; Kaun et al. 2016). Therefore, although participation and engagement can be researched as a case sui generis, it sharpens the blurred picture to contextualise political participation in the light of current changes (Dahlgren and Alvares 2013), especially considering the last push of mediatisation through digitalisation (for more details, see Hepp 2013; Hepp and Krotz 2014). In addition to sociopolitical change, the new possibilities and forms of participation that digital media technologies provide are instigators of changing relationships between politics and citizens, between media institutions and their audience, or even between media content and their users. This transformation of participation roles and the possibility of interactive, and hence, mainly horizontal communication processes, does not only affect the media sphere, but it can also be seen in all areas of society (especially in the political system). Digital communication media and technologies in their effective power are no longer, anywhere out there', but right, among us' because audiences are appropriating them into their everyday life quicker and more expansively than ever before. In this way, media and cultural change are accompanied by a complex and ambivalent participation potential, which clearly contradicts notions of technical determinism or symptomism (see groundbreaking Williams 1990). This is because the greatest difference between digital and traditional public spheres cannot be traced back to the technological nature of the Internet, but to its social use (Splichal 2009, 400f., for a current case study, see Lazer 2015). For example, the term "Facebook revolution" is highly inaccurate if it is solely based on the technical potential of certain social web applications. Hepp (2012, s.p.) concurs with this notion:

It is not the social web that leads to something. Rather, it is the people on the streets, who articulate (...) since Seattle and the globalization-critical movement protest that followed Genoa in Germany. But what has changed is that these protests on the streets are comprehensively mediated – permeated for the media as well as by them. Digital media, which is always accessible through mobile phones, is certainly playing a role: people in the streets are organizing their protests via Facebook, tweeting the most important events and communicating continuously through SMS to avoid the police.

It is apparent that mediated political participation – similar to other mediated everyday practices – can still be understood as a local activity (even in times of mediatisation and globalisation), always subject to specific local, regional or national requirements. However, the manner in which political participation is organised, carried out and communicated, and, the context in which it takes place, can change dramatically

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and become segmented according to various related groups. According to Dahlgren (2004, 7), the media revolution did not erase political interest in the majority of individuals, but rather merely shifted their understanding and “[they] developed other modes of political engagement”. Thus, especially among young individuals, a different political awareness and understanding of participation can be observed in their media practice (e.g. Bennett 2008; Olsson and Dahlgren 2010). Through self-criticism, evaluations of current youth surveys conclude that the traditional categories of political interest and political orientation among young people cannot capture parts of their political behavior and political understanding. Indeed, a recent synopsis of online media practices only represent a fraction of the many different forms of digital participation and protest. Still, it clearly points out three further processes of the continuation, transformation and replacement of traditional participatory practices (see Wimmer 2014). On the one hand, this includes the mediatisation of participation and protest such as successful civil society agenda building on the social web through YouTube videos (e.g. the 2012 prominent case of the ACTA debate). On the other hand, entirely new forms of counter-publicity and protest emerge, such as virtual sit-ins in online game worlds (“transformation”) (see Poor and Skoric 2014). These processes contribute to a significant increase of both the sub-political and the subcultural constitution of the public sphere, which has integrative as well as dividing consequences for the political sphere as a whole. From a normative point of view, nevertheless, it is still feared that taking part in several digital protest activities and other forms of participation are not always serious or indicative of mobilisation (slacktivism). An example of how to deal constructively with this phenomenon is provided by the US administration. In response to a seemingly insane online petition to build a functioning replica of the Death Star from Star Wars, the head of the White House’s science and space department published a message laden with Star War references. Perhaps this was done in order to motivate “consumer citizens” of the digital age to more tangible participation:

If you do pursue a career in a science, technology, engineering or math-related field, the Force will be with us! Remember, the Death Star’s power to destroy a planet, or even a whole star system, is insignificant next to the power of the Force.<sup>1</sup>

### **Structure of the Book**

The book consists of three sections, the first entitled *Practices of participation and citizenship*. It deals with the question of how citizens, especially digital natives, engage politically in their everyday

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life, what possibilities they experience and how they realise them. In their chapter *(New) Forms of digital participation? Toward a resource-model of adolescents' digital engagement*, Annika Schreiter, Sven Jöckel and Klaus Kamps present findings from a paper-pencil survey at two German schools with students from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> grade. They develop a model of political online-communication by using three steps: reception, discussion and participation. Thereby, they explain how adolescents' resources, such as political interest, family and school background, predict these steps of political online participation. Veronika Kalmus, Ragne Kõuts-Klemm, Mai Beilmann, Andu Rämmer and Signe Opermann present a long-term empirical research in *Long-lasting shadows of (post)communism? Generational and ethnic divides in political and civic participation in Estonia*. The results of their survey provide a brief overview of the dynamics in general levels of political and civic participation between 2002 and 2014 in Estonia, focusing on generational and ethnic differences in political and civic activism. According to the assumption that the 'political' expands into all spheres of social life and, thereby, new forms of engagement emerge, this section also takes a closer look at everyday practices of mediated participation and citizenship, critically re-assessing traditional definitions of what is considered 'political'. In *Enhanced .-visibility. The experience of civic engagement in social media*, Maria Francesca Murru discusses the question of what is considered as 'political', but focuses on social networking sites. Her arguments are based on an empirical study conducted in Italy. She identifies four ideal types of public visibility of the self on Facebook, each type being an original combination of personal and political publicness. Her findings suggest that the existing relationship between social media and political participation cannot be uniquely grasped at the level of ends-oriented activism or conscious, well-aware acts of civic engagement. As another example for an everyday practice that becomes 'political' is illustrated in Sigrid Kannengießler's study *'I am not a consumer person' – Political participation in repair cafés*, where she deals with the repairing of media technologies both as a form of pro-usage as well as a form of political participation. Her study focuses on the question of why people participate in Repair Cafés, why they want to repair their devices and what they think is the societal significance of these events. The section also deals with new theoretical concepts, such as the concept of 'intimate citizenship', which refers to issues and debates on intimate and sexual politics in society. Sander De Ridder and Sofie Van Bauwel apply this framework in their chapter *Intimate citizenship politics and digital media: Teens' discourses, sexual normativities and popular social media*. They discuss how young people between 14 and 18 years negotiate intimate citizenships and everyday sexually mediated lives on digital platforms. They report on empirical insights from a four-year research project exploring intimate storytelling practices among young people in popular social media websites in Belgium.

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Practices of participation are situated within different contextual constraints. Most notably, representations in media contextualise the way we engage ourselves and vice versa. Our engagement decontextualises the structures and meaning of media and communication, and, over the *longue duree* our culture, society and history. The study on different media contexts which frame participation raises the critical question of how the development of participation and citizenship practices can be characterised through a series of continuities and discontinuities. Beyond the mere praising of new possibilities through social media, the second section *Mediated representations of participation and citizenship* tries to show the wide scope of mediated participation and its inherent complexity by looking at entirely different media contexts, ranging from traditional media as the press to the special case of talk shows or the highly contested public sphere of twitter. Maria Kyriakidou, José Javier Olivas Osuna and Maximillian Hänska Ahy discuss in their chapter the role of the Indignados, a social movement in the European press against the economic crisis in Europe. Enabled by social media, these alternative movements are still subject to the media logic of mainstream press for their public representation and reach. Drawing upon an empirical study of the national press in Spain, Greece and Germany, this chapter discusses the role of media in reporting and framing the movement in Europe. Udo Göttlich and Martin R. Herbers take a closer look at forms of mediatised political participation of television talk show audiences in Germany in their chapter *Speak your mind: Mediatized political participation through second screens*. Based on analyses of television show's websites and their Facebook channels, they present a preliminary case study on the new participatory features of mediated public discourse on second screens. In their study "My body, my decision". *The abortion debate and twitter as a counterpublic sphere for women in Turkey* Perrin Ögün Emre and Gülüm Şener, analyse the role of Twitter in a current abortion law debate that protests the bio-political acts of the Turkish government. Elena Pilipets and Rainer Winter in their chapter *Repeat, remediate, resist? Meme activism in the context of the refugee crisis* show the potential of digital memes for contemporary media activism. Focusing on the resonances between two competing political visions on migration regarding the current refugee debate, they look at proliferating refugee memes in the perspective of the concepts of re- and premediation.

The third section, *(Re-)Framing participation and citizenship*, discusses how the emergence of online media changes the concept of political participation. Information search and information flows online are quite different from offline mechanisms. The media repertoire of citizens is widening and low-threshold forms of participation appear, such as sharing videos. Also, researchers can use new methods and technologies to analyse all these new phenomena of political participation.

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With traditional approaches and methods often not able to capture this changing environment, there is a need for new approaches. Therefore, this section presents productive analytical frameworks to understand the transgression of political participation and citizenship in the digital age, and tests whether traditional models are still applicable. Julie Uldam and Anne Kaun suggest in their chapter *Towards a framework for studying political participation in social media* the contours of an analytical framework for studying political participation in social media. Their approach considers the context of political participation in social media, paying particular attention to (1) affordances, (2) power relations, (3) practices and (4) discourses by drawing on Couldry's model of a socially oriented media theory. This model considers media in the context of other social institutions that shape our sense of reality, and questions media's overemphasised role in constructing social reality. Thereby, they explore the role of online media technologies in facilitating civic resilience and social innovation. In *Protest or collaboration? How perceived opportunities and constraints shape the activities of anti-infrastructure citizen action groups*, Marco Bräuer and Jens Wolling present a conceptual framework for the analysis of the actions applied by citizen action groups against infrastructure projects using two dimensions: protest and collaboration. The framework is based on case studies dealing with anti-infrastructure protests in Germany on a local level. Based on a classification of activities, differences in the repertoires of the protest groups can be identified not only between the groups, but also between different phases in the policy making cycle, and between different national contexts. They suggest the concept of opportunity structures as an appropriate approach to explaining these differences. Two chapters in this section deal with migration. The chapter *Rethinking otherness and cultural citizenship: Cosmopolitanism and new platforms* by Elke Grittmann and Tanja Thomas concentrates on the concept of 'cosmopolitanism'. They develop a systematic framework for identifying different forms of cosmopolitan openness in online communication. In the empirical part of their chapter, they analyse three different online platforms that are used and organised for migrants and refugees. The chapter demonstrates that the concept of critical cosmopolitanism can serve as a starting point to discuss and broaden the concept of Cultural Citizenship, and enables us to introduce questions of mediated self-presentation, visibility, voice and participation. In their chapter *Mapping the 'search agenda': A citizen-centric approach to electoral information flows* Filippo Trevisan, Andrew Hoskins, Sarah Oates and Dounia Mahloulou discuss, how search engines help voters escape the information hegemony of election campaigns and traditional media coverage. They explore key Internet search trends for electoral information in the United Kingdom, the United States and Italy by using an innovative methodology that maps the informational trajectories of key events in each campaign. They do so by combining publicly available

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Google Trends data ([www.google.com/trends](http://www.google.com/trends)) with the analysis of relevant coverage in traditional mass media outlets.

## Note

- 1 Source: <https://www.wired.com/2013/01/white-house-death-star/> (accessed March 1, 2017).

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# Introduction

## Mediated intimacies

*Michael Nebeling Petersen, Katherine Harrison,  
Tobias Raun and Rikke Andreassen*

New media technologies and platforms are increasingly intersecting and intertwining with our daily lives, our bodily and intimate practices and our relationships. People find partners via hook-up and dating apps such as Tinder and Grindr, parents rely on digital media to educate their children, teenagers broadcast their intimate bedroom performances via YouTube, activists organise protests on Facebook and Tumblr facilitates new ways of connecting and shaping subcultural identities and communities. Politics, activism, family life, dating and other forms of intimacy are increasingly facilitated and moulded by digital media technologies and platforms, and it has become almost impossible to separate these forms of living and relating from their diverse forms of mediation.

This book deals with social media and technologies of digital socialities, with a particular emphasis on intimacies. We find that intimacy deserves particular attention with regards to social media because of the overwhelming presence of ‘intimate moments shared for all to see’ (Garde-Hansen and Gorton, 2013, p. 60). One might argue that social media is inherently designed to emphasise and facilitate intimate practices and connections – the nature of which affect the form and content of the media through which these practices are performed. Both the architecture of online spaces and the etiquette of behaving within these spaces tend to favour the dense proliferation of intimacies with others (Payne, 2014, p. 2). Furthermore, the commercialisation of social media sites and applications relies upon and has profited immensely from their ability to facilitate intimacy. As van Dijck states: ‘While the first half decade gave rise to user communities embracing the web’s potential for collaboration and connectedness, after 2006, the word “social” came to mean: technologically manageable and economically exploitable’ (van Dijck, 2013, np.).

Media scholars Kember and Zylinska argue that ‘our relationality and our entanglement with non-human entities continues to intensify with the ever more corporeal, ever more intimate dispersal of media and technologies into our biological and social lives’ (Kember and Zylinska, 2015, p. xv). The chapters of this book illustrate that mediation is a fundamental part of the human condition and always has been; but the intensification identified by

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Kember and Zylinska emphasises the particular importance of intimacy in our contemporary time. We continue to be increasingly related through and connected by media and technologies, which influence a greater part of our social and intimate lives. In light of this, attention to the co-constitution and connection of social media and intimacy seems more relevant and needed than ever before.

### **‘Old’ and ‘new’ media and mediation**

While humans have always been intimately connected with media and technologies, the intensification of media in our intimate lives, combined with the development of online media platforms, has resulted in increased scholarly attention to the distinction between ‘new’ and ‘old’ media. This distinction has long been a trope in media theory, but recent scholarship shows a move away from a clear distinction towards an emphasis on the ‘long standing social needs to account, reflect, communicate, and share with others using media of the times’ (Humphreys et al., 2013, abstract). Instead of interpreting contemporary social media as completely new and different from former kinds of communication, one can argue that engagement with contemporary social media constitutes a continuation of previous uses of media. For example, online activism using hashtagging can be seen as a continuation of the use of media such as stickers and flyers to protest and connect in public spaces. Similarly, microblogging on Twitter or regular blogging can be understood as broadly similar to the practice of writing diaries and letters in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These activities, and many others like them, can be interpreted as constituting a continuous need for and process of communicating about the self (Humphreys et al., 2013; van Dijck, 2007).

There are powerful reasons to investigate media objects as part of a longer process of mediation. Understanding digital media as part of a much bigger trajectory of mediation can facilitate nuanced analysis. Rather than studying media as isolated objects – which risks temporally categorising media as either ‘old’ or ‘new’, and thereby foreclosing the possibility of understanding continuing patterns of mediation – studying media through a historical perspective facilitates better understanding. Thus, in this anthology, we emphasise media uses and networks rather than media objects in and of themselves. We understand media objects to be situated within a broader pattern of human communication and interactions.

By titling this book *Mediated Intimacies*, we draw on the concept of mediation to conceptualise the ongoing entanglement of humans and media technologies. In using ‘mediate’ rather than ‘media’ in the title, we seek to align ourselves with a school of thought that sees mediation as an active process of doing and becoming, in and through media technologies (Deuze, 2012; Hillis et al., 2015; Kember and Zylinska, 2015; McGlotten, 2013; Paasonen, 2011). Indeed, social media ‘are designed by, and entangled in,

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physical world social practices' (Tierney, 2013, p. 77). In other words, social media should not be understood as distinct from our lives or as passive, pre-existing channels through which we transmit ourselves and establish social connections; rather, social media are integrated parts of our lives. To paraphrase Deuze: we live *in* media, rather than *with* media (Deuze, 2011, p. 138). Or, as noted by Jose van Dijck, in the 'culture of connectivity', connections are determined as much by technology (through algorithms or platform architecture) as by users; thus, the meaning of 'social' in social media encompasses both human connectedness and automated connectivity (van Dijck, 2013, pp. 11–12).

In this volume, therefore, we use 'mediation' to conceptualise the process of co-constitution – or the mutual shaping of humans and media technologies – which implies that humans are always already performed through technologies. Elaborating on this, Kember and Zylińska state:

we human users of technology are not entirely distinct from our tools. *They* are not a means to *our* ends; instead, they have become part of us, to an extent that the us/them distinction is no longer tenable. As we modify and extend 'our' technologies and 'our' media, we modify and extend ourselves and our environment.

(2015, p. 13, emphasis in original)

Researching social media through the lens of mediation moves the analysis away from a focus on discrete media objects or media use, towards the ongoing entanglement of media and user as a fundamental part of the human condition. Although apparently stable media objects or coherent bodies of users emerge at particular times and places, they represent only temporary materialisations of this ongoing process of mediation (Kember and Zylińska, 2015, p. 21). Following this, the anthology shows how social media and intimacy function in a 'feedback loop': social media offer new ways to do intimacy, and, in turn, new practices of intimacy shape the development and uses of social media (Schofield, 2009). What is explored in many of the chapters is how practices and understandings of intimacy are both embedded in digitally mediated communication and generate innovative uses of new media.

## Intimacy

Intimacy is a familiar concept. It rings a bell, though most people would find it difficult to define precisely. We instinctively know what intimacy is and feels like. Often connected with close relations between family members, partners and friends, intimacy is commonly considered to involve shared emotions, experiences and/or affective bodily proximities. It is typically viewed as a positive goal for a relationship, just as the 'value' of a relationship can be measured according to the level of intimacy achieved between participants. As noted in our opening paragraphs, it is perhaps no surprise,

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then, that intimacy is deeply interlinked and intertwined with social media, as the characteristics associated with intimacy seem inherent in the structure of social media: both intimacy and social media allow people to express and share what matters to them, and both encourage personalised connection and interactivity. Furthermore, intimacy has traditionally been understood in relation to a distinction between 'private' and 'public': practices of intimacy have been considered to belong within the 'private sphere', as have personal relationships associated with the family and the home (Chambers, 2013, pp. 41–42).

Throughout this anthology, intimacy is theorised and examined in relation to media. In the theorisations of intimacy, contributors are informed by two lines of thought, which are also present in the broader scholarship of intimacy. One strand stems from social science – especially sociology – while the other is connected to cultural studies and the humanities. In this section, we will elaborate on these two related yet different schools of intimacy theory.

The first line of thought, exemplified by Ken Plummer's (2003) work, investigates intimacy historically by examining the way in which relationships associated with intimacy have evolved, developing from traditional intimacies carried out in proximity to local communities and families to modern or late modern intimacies, characterised by relationships of choice (*ibid.*, p. 9). Plummer attributes these changes to the societal developments of industrialisation. These developments were followed by urbanisation, which caused a number of individuals to break with former family traditions in relation to work and place of living, as well as the formation of partnerships, marriage and family. Most importantly, industrialisation led to increasing individualisation, which became mirrored in practices of intimacy and intimacy relations. Within this line of thought, the development of intimate relations is interpreted as a positive progression narrative. Contemporary intimacy is often analysed as an illustration of how an individual negotiates her/his close relations or investigates his/her self-reflection in relation to close relationships and narratives of identity (Plummer, 2003; Weeks, 1998).

The second line of thought, exemplified by the work of Lauren Berlant (1998, 2008), analyses intimacy as a normative and regulatory narrative. Departing from feminist deconstruction of the distinction between 'private' and 'public' (see, e.g., Yuval-Davis, 1997), Berlant argues that intimacy travels from 'public' institutions, ideologies and regulations to 'private' fantasies, desires and life goals, and vice versa (Berlant, 1998, pp. 3–4). To her, the public sphere is characterised by intimacy; that is, genres of intimacy (found in, e.g., self-help books or television talk shows) are consumed by individuals who, through their consumption, experience recognition and a sense of belonging (Berlant, 2008, p. viii). In this way, intimacy can be interpreted as a form of a script – one that does not emerge from the individual but is the result of the private and intimate negotiation of cultural norms and regulations.

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Of the many volumes that examine social media, a handful attempt to think through media and intimacy. These can be loosely divided between those that follow the first line of thought on intimacy and those that follow the second. Amongst the authors who draw on Plummer's work is Deborah Chambers, who specifically addresses 'mediated intimacies'. Following Giddens (and Plummer), Chambers idealistically argues that intimacy has been de-traditionalised and democratised (Chambers, 2013, pp. 43–44). Intimacy is no longer perceived as restricted to heterosexual relationships and blood-related kinship, but has been diversified to include non-conventional partnerships as well as chosen ties and elected affinities (*ibid.*, p. 48). In her reading, social media plays a significant role by offering greater possibilities for intimate contacts based on personal choice and individual control (*ibid.*, p. 165). As she argues: 'The technological affordances of social media match aspirations towards the *pure relationship* by allowing a sense of control over the relationship, uncluttered by power and privilege' (*ibid.*, p. 167). Self-disclosure has, in this regard, become an important marker of intimacy and trust, and hence the engine that drives new relationships (*ibid.*, pp. 46–47). In this vein, Chambers underscores the importance and significance of social media as fora for the disclosure and display of emotions (*ibid.*, p. 47). Intimacy, which has been traditionally based on exclusive access to events and information, has now been reconstructed as 'network intimacy', with friendship serving as both the common label and the privileged form of intimate relations (*ibid.*, pp. 48, 165). Thus, Chambers argues that intimacy has been reframed 'beyond as well as within family and the private sphere to include friendships and the public spheres', thus challenging distinctions between former notions of 'public' and 'private' (*ibid.*, p. 58).

Amongst those who follow the second line of thought, Shaka McGlotten is worth noting, particularly with respect to his 2013 volume, *Virtual Intimacies, Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality*. In line with the work of Berlant, McGlotten describes virtual intimacy as 'contacts and encounters, from the ephemeral to the enduring, made possible by digital and networked means', emphasising intimacy as 'a vast assemblage of ideologies, institutional sites, and diverse sets of material and semiotic practices that exerts normative pressures on large and small bodies, lives, and worlds' (McGlotten, 2013, pp. 7, 1). Hence, intimacy is emphasised (then and now) as scripted, supported by a range of discourses and practices (*ibid.*, p. 9). Social media is here claimed to offer access to new kinds of pleasure and a certain level of freedom in relation to identity and sexuality, while at the same time maintaining some sociocultural norms and restrictions (*ibid.*, p. 2). As McGlotten argues, both virtual intimacy and queer intimacy are often conceived of as failed or unsuccessful versions of 'real' or 'proper' intimacy, with virtual intimacies perceived of as 'failed intimacies that disrupt the flow of a good life lived right, a life that involves coupling and kids, or at least, coupling and consumption' and queer intimacies as 'pale

imitations or ugly corruptions of the real deal – monogamously partnered, procreative, married, straight intimacy’ (ibid., p. 7).

Turning now to this anthology, it is possible to organise some of the chapters according to the above distinction. The chapters that are informed by the first line of thought – that is, the sociological approach that associates contemporary intimacy with individual choice and progress (e.g. Balleys; García-Rapp; Miguel; Wang and Lim; Zhang and Erni) – typically investigate the way in which individuals disclose emotions and personal relations online, or how online self-expressions lead to and negotiate intimacies. In contrast, those chapters that take as inspiration the other line of thought – that is, the humanist approach to intimacy as a regulatory narrative (e.g. Beasley et al.; Ferreday; Kofoed; Møller and Nebeling Petersen; Raun) – analyse the way in which intimacies foster belongings and regulate identities and interactions, as well as how ‘private’ notions of intimacy circulate in and transform publics. Of course, the division between the two lines of thought is to some extent artificial, as exemplified by the chapters that draw on both sets of thinking (e.g. Andreassen; Michielse; Prøitz et al.). Furthermore, a number of chapters (e.g. Brito and Dias; Davies; Paasonen; Yung Nielsen) investigate the way in which users become intimately connected with the technology they use. Here, intimacy becomes a way of understanding the relations between subjectivity and technology; intimacy occurs at the intersection of bodies and technologies, where the subject becomes and takes form.

Traditionally, intimacies have been associated with physical proximity and have involved ‘practices of close association, familiarity and privileged knowledge, strong positive emotional attachments, such as love, and a very particular form of “closeness” and being “special” to another person, associated with high levels of trust’ (Jamieson, 2005, p. 189). This understanding is challenged in several of the chapters, which question the assumption that anonymity and physical distance hinder intimacy; these chapters, in diverse ways, illustrate constructions of intimacy in situations in which individuals who are not familiar with one another, and across distances, create feelings of intimacy and engage in intimate practices with one another. In some situations, it is precisely this distance and anonymity that enable these online practices of intimacy and mediated proximity. Despite the fact that the chapters in many ways rethink and refigure practices of intimacy, it is interesting to note that most of them turn to ‘traditional’ arenas of intimacy, such as dating, family and sex, when examining online intimacies. This suggests that intimacy is still strongly figured in relation to the home and the ‘inner’ self.

## **Contents of the anthology**

This volume stems from a research project titled ‘New Media – New Intimacies’ (2015–2018), which investigates different forms of mediated intimacies, such as online dating sites, online communities, expressions of grief on digital platforms and the mediation of reproductive technologies.

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The project is generously funded by the Danish Council of Independent Research and focuses empirically on Denmark and its mediated intimate global encounters. The anthology is part of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) book series, and the intention of the volume is to gather the most up-to-date European research within the field of mediated intimacy, representing scholars affiliated with institutions in the UK, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Hungary, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands and Finland. Although the volume is published within the framework of a European institution, ECREA, we are pleased to include chapters from an international group of scholars, including those based in Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia and Canada. The contributors also differ in academic representation; they vary from PhD candidates to full professors, and include independent scholars and artists.

Similarly, the anthology represents a variety of methodological approaches and empirical cases.

Methodologically, the chapters employ different analytical tools to assemble and approach the material, such as interviews, online ethnography, visual analysis, text analysis and video analysis. A large number of chapters employ mixed methods, drawing upon more than one method of analysis and questioning a strict division between online and offline. A similarly rich variation can be seen in the diversity of empirical material examined in the chapters, which includes Tumblr, YouTube, dating sites, hook-up sites, Facebook, Snapchat, CouchSurfing, selfies, blogs and photographs, as well as smartphones, tablets and computers.

The anthology is divided into four sections, each devoting special attention to different analytical perspectives and theoretical horizons: 1) ‘Communities and activism’; 2) ‘Relationship-making and maintenance’; 3) ‘Integrating and domesticating’; and 4) ‘Becoming and performing’.

## **Part I: Communities and activism**

In the first section special attention is given to the way in which online media facilitate and enable new communities, counter-discourses and activism. It shows how online activism and communities can provide new intimate belongings and options for alternative voices and narratives.

Chapter 1, “‘Something substantive enough to reach out and touch’: The intimate politics of anti-rape activism”, is written by Debra Ferreday. Departing from a critique of dominant narratives about rape survivors within contemporary rape culture, wherein rape is normalised and seen as a natural consequence of certain victim behaviours, the chapter analyses the way in which stories of sexual violence are told and retold. It shows how speaking out about rape in public is staged within a neoliberal recovery story, wherein the victim is discreetly blamed for the rape and expected to ‘move on’ – a form of cruel optimism. This narrative is contrasted with narratives enabled by the intimate community around Project Unbreakable,

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a Tumblr-based photography project that was founded in 2009. The images and narratives within this project demonstrate the normality of rape and refuse to simply accept it; rather, they ‘embody and make visible the intimate work of survival that survivors must undertake in order to *be* survivors’. These digital counter-narratives thus mobilise the intimate and personal to political effect, forming ‘islands of hope’.

Chapter 2, ‘Intimate communities: Hackerspaces, digital engagement and affective relations’, is written by Sarah R. Davies. The chapter investigates the way in which relational intimacies are carried out in contemporary society by carefully investigating the intimacies of the hackerspace community. Based on fieldwork in hackerspaces across the US as well as interviews with makers and hackers, the chapter shows how hackers form intimate relations within hackerspaces, to both technologies and one another. The spaces use digital tools and social media to connect hackers face-to-face, and although offline meetings are valued and given significance, they merge with online communication and meetings. Thus, the intimate relations seamlessly cross different forms of digitally mediated communication and face-to-face meetings. Though the hackers emphasise real world encounters, these encounters are seamlessly lived out online, and thus form a ‘life-changing experience of local community but simultaneously, provide access to a worldwide “fraternity”’.

Chapter 3, ‘Online community and new family scripts’, is written by Rikke Andreassen. The chapter examines the way in which Scandinavian mothers with donor-conceived children connect with each other digitally through Facebook and form an intimate online community. Andreassen analyses how the mothers, who are single or living in lesbian couples, collectively challenge normative scripts in relation to family formations. The chapter explores how online communication, especially self-disclosure and knowledge-sharing among a closed group of women, can be interpreted as a continuation of women’s consciousness-raising groups. As such, Facebook can be understood as a platform that enables older forms of communication and networks rather than a tool serving solely to create new forms of communities. Furthermore, the chapter illustrates – through its micro perspective on a specific community in which online media have proven important for forming intimacy – how features of social media sites, such as anonymity and distance across time, can dilute both communication and community creation, while simultaneously cultivating and upholding communication and community formation.

Chapter 4, ‘Textures of intimacy: Witnessing embodied mobile loss, affect and heartbreak’ is written by Lin Prøitz, Larissa Hjorth and Amparo Lasén. The chapter focuses on ‘textures’ that form in and around digital intimacy heartbreak, encompassing various forms of heartbreak and sadness, loss and mourning. The authors employ discursive analysis, online ethnography, qualitative interviews and workshops with regular users of visual mobile media to suggest how affective scripts around intimacy may be

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disrupted at moments of grief or mourning. Based on material from South Korea, Spain and Norway, the chapter is organised around two case studies: shame and sadness after a couple's break-up and analysis of selfie video footage of the South Korean ferry disaster of 2014 (the sinking of the *MV Sewol*). Using the notion of choreography, the authors aptly show how the practice of publicly sharing intimate moments of loss or grief using camera phones involves a (re)negotiation of public/private boundaries.

Chapter 5, 'Edge effect: New image formations and identity politics', is written by Marco Bohr and Basia Sliwinska. The chapter investigates visual activism by zooming into 'the formation of a new type of image that is perhaps less concerned with *representing* protest than with forming protest in its own right'. Analysing the case of the visual activism of Pussy Riot, the chapter argues that the band members' visual formations create and enable an intimacy between the digital and the analogue that forms a third shared space – what the chapter conceptualises as an 'edge effect' – which 're-energises images, making them political agents of resistance, and can produce and communicate new forms of identity, generating dialogue through intimate belonging across physical and virtual spheres'.

## Part II: Relationship making and maintenance

The second section focuses on the way in which social media provide and facilitate intimate relations and connections. Importantly, this section investigates how users employ technologies to create, negotiate and maintain relationships.

Chapter 6, 'Innovations in intimacy: Internet dating in an international frame', is written by Christine Beasley, Mary Holmes, Katherine Harrison and Caroline Wamala Larsson. The chapter investigates new modes of developing intimate relationships that have risen from the growing use of internet dating sites across the world. Internet dating is a rapidly expanding and increasingly popular means of forming intimate social connections for a wide range of age groups and sexual preferences (Beasley and Holmes, forthcoming). However, research on internet dating is typically inattentive to its possibilities for social change, and most often geographically localised. The authors use qualitative content analysis to examine potential innovations in embodied intimate gender relations, practices and identities among men and women from four countries – Denmark, the UK, Australia and Uganda. The results of the study suggest that, despite the reproduction of gender norms, some possibilities for innovation appear in these practices of intimacy, such as 'mundane polyamory'. Furthermore, certain affordances of the digital medium, including the opportunity for both men and women to easily browse multiple potential partners, facilitate behaviour that may 'shift or even refuse gendered sexual frames and assumptions about their roles'.

Chapter 7, 'Infrastructures of intimacy', is written by Susanna Paasonen. The chapter analyses the network connectivity that is enabled through

various online applications and devices, such as Tinder, Skype, text messaging and Facebook. Paasonen asked her undergraduate university students in Finland to write essays about their feelings when their phones, computers or other network connections broke down, and she used this empirical material to understand how young people feel about and experience networked connectivities, especially when these connectivities fail to perform as promised or expected. The chapter shows how network connectivity functions as an infrastructure of intimacy – an infrastructure that is important for creating and maintaining relations, such as friendships or sexual encounters. For Paasonen, intimacy does not simply refer to connections between individuals; rather, intimacy should be understood as the networked environments in which individuals' connections and relationships unfold. In other words, networked connections are sociotechnical affordances that modulate intimacy.

Chapter 8, 'Temporal ephemerality, persistent affectivity: Circulation of intimacies on Snapchat', is written by Jette Kofoed. The chapter examines how Snapchat co-forms intimacies among teenagers. Through fieldwork carried out among eighth graders in an ethnically diverse area of Copenhagen, Denmark, Kofoed analyses the ways in which the intimacy of Snapchat exchanges involves both 'feel-good' aspects of intimate belonging as well as the potential for betrayal via exposure of snaps to a wider public (when Snapchats are screenshot). Kofoed argues that a snap can be understood as a comment about how one is feeling; the exchange of pictures leaves affective trails ranging from the comfort of inclusion to the delight of maintaining emojis, to the fear of having unflattering or nude snaps shared with never-ending publics. While the snaps themselves can be seen as ephemeral, as the snaps self-destruct, the affective tenor of the exchanges persists.

Chapter 9, 'Beyond engineered intimacy: Navigating social media platforms to manage intimate relationships', is written by Cristina Miguel. The chapter examines the relationship between the architecture and politics of social media platforms and the emerging practices of intimacy that occur within them. Drawing on interviews of British and Spanish users of the dating and hook-up app Badoo, the hospitality service CouchSurfing, and Facebook, Miguel analyses the way in which these social media platforms function as intimacy mediators. Miguel shows how users adopt and adapt the technical affordances of these platforms to create and develop personal relationships. The chapter focuses particularly on the systems of the platforms' user verification and reputation, private features and privacy settings in order to understand how users apply these features to initiate and manage intimate relationships. Miguel's examination of 'privacy' engages with important questions of trust and safety, which have become central issues relating to mediated intimacy.

Chapter 10, 'In with expectations and out with disappointment: Gay-tailored social media and the redefinition of intimacy', is written by Yin Zhang and John Nguyet Erni. Based on an extensive literature review,

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Zhang and Erni summarise some of the influential sociological roots and media affordances in gay-tailored social media in order to discuss the dilemmas of mediated intimacy. The chapter shows that gay men rely heavily on mediated methods of obtaining and managing relationships and fulfilling sexual needs. Social media is especially well suited for this purpose, as it is inexpensive and instant, and offers frequent and multiple relational targets. Zhang and Erni conclude, however, that many gay men have other notions of and hopes for intimacy than what they experience social media platforms as providing.

**Part III: Integrating and domesticating**

The third section examines the way in which new media are integrated and domesticated into intimate, emotional schemes. This section shows how users navigate and negotiate media and media affordances to practice habitual intimacies.

Chapter 11, ‘Mediating intimacies through mobile communication: Chinese migrant mothers’ digital “bridge of magpies”’, is written by Yang Wang and Sun Sun Lim. The chapter presents the phenomenon of *peidu mama* (literally ‘study mothers’), who accompany their young children as they pursue education abroad, leaving their husbands behind in China. As de facto ‘single parents’ in the host society, these Chinese ‘study mothers’ must overcome acculturation challenges and pave the way for their children to quickly thrive in an alien environment, while on the other hand maintaining affective bonds with their family and friends back home. The chapter presents narratives of three Chinese study mothers in Singapore, showing how they utilise mobile communication to manage their intimate relationships with their children and left-behind family and friends. The authors use an innovative combination of methods, weaving together a ‘content-context diary’ with observations and interviews to produce a ‘transnational culturagram’ model that maps the topographies of the mediated relationships. This approach allows the authors to identify three particular constraints – spatial, temporal and social – that shape the Chinese mothers’ use of mobile technologies in their attempts to maintain and create intimacies.

Chapter 12, ‘Young children and digital media in the intimacy of the home: Perceptions and mediation’, is written by Rita Brito and Patrícia Dias. The chapter explores the relationship of young children to digital media devices. The authors argue that children are increasingly born into ‘digital homes’, where they are exposed to digital media from birth and where these devices play a role in the creation of family intimacies. The chapter presents an in-depth qualitative study of the engagement of children (younger than 8 years old) with digital media in the home. Using a set of interviews (with parents, children and families) and activities (a card game, a digital tour and a chart of digital use), the authors explore the dynamics between children, parents and devices, and also between practices and

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perceptions. Their findings show how rules are co-created, skills are co-developed with interchangeable roles of teacher and apprentice and playful and loving moments are shared around a game or a digital bedtime story. In this study, we see how digital media (particularly the tablet) are protagonists in family life, as they become intimate devices – personal, portable and affective – that, in a way, are extensions of the user.

Chapter 13, ‘Connecting with the dead: Vernacular practices of mourning through photo-sharing on Facebook’, is written by Tobias Raun. The chapter provides a virtual autoethnographic analysis of mourning through Facebook that stems from Raun’s own photo-sharing, as well as his online fieldwork and interviews with grieving others. Raun zooms in on the practice of photographing a grave site and circulating it on Facebook – a practice that many of the users in his study engaged very actively in, and one that, in general, seems quite common on Facebook. The chapter identifies different tropes of representation and unfolds the significance of Facebook as a platform and photography as a performative practice, in relation to mourning. As argued, photography serves as a connecting force that can instantiate and create relational proximity by either gathering loved ones within the same picture or continuously pointing to a deceased loved one. The shared images thereby represent attempts to enfold a deceased relative’s existence into an ongoing, everyday mediated life and to ensure a continued relationship with the deceased.

Chapter 14, ‘Bleeding boundaries: Domesticating gay hook-up apps’, is written by Kristian Møller and Michael Nebeling Petersen. Rooted in domestication theory, the chapter investigates the way in which gay men in non-monogamous relationships domesticate and integrate mobile hook-up apps into their intimate lives. Based on interviews with gay men using hook-up apps, the chapter pays close attention to the way in which intimacy is created by the affective work of keeping emotions *in place*. Intimacy is conceptualised as affective scripts of belonging that are formed in dominant and subcultural intimate publics. Thus, the chapter investigates two scripts of intimacy and demonstrates the way in which gay hook-up apps potentially disrupt ‘old’ senses of intimacy. The analysis shows how the men carefully domesticate the technologies by controlling the affordances of the apps and affectively and rhetorically keeping emotions in place, according to their different scripts of intimacy.

#### **Part IV: Becoming and performing**

The final section investigates the way in which individuals become subjects in, through and with technology. Drawing on various case studies, the section illustrates that technology and the body cannot be separated; rather, technology is necessary for building and creating identities and belonging.

Chapter 15, ‘Teen boys on YouTube: Representations of gender and intimacy’, is written by Claire Balleys. The chapter presents an online

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ethnographic study of amateur videos made by teen boys (aged 12 to 17) living in France, French-speaking Switzerland, Belgium and Québec. Drawing on the work of Judith Butler and Erving Goffman, Balley's analyses the gender performances and gender displays conveyed in these videos, regarding physical and relational intimacy. The analysis shows how the performed masculinity is deeply imprinted with a traditional form of heteronormativity. Humour is used as a genre and a vector of male confidence that enables the boys to talk about intimate matters.

Chapter 16, 'Technical intimacies and Otherkin becomings', is written by Eva Zekany. Framed within posthumanist theory, this chapter analyses the technological aspects of Otherkin becoming. Otherkin identify as partially or completely non-human, and Otherkin communities are often associated with blogging and social media platforms such as Tumblr and Reddit. By examining non-human intimacies and the way in which technological mediation through digital communication tools and internet media are used for making and maintaining Otherkin subjectivities and communities, the chapter discusses the relationship between technology and human becoming. The discussion moves between posthuman theories and the Otherkin case to argue that the human emerges in conjunction with technologies. The chapter argues that 'the human inhabits an ontological space that, at its core, is *non-human*'.

Chapter 17, 'Broadcasting the bedroom: Intimate musical practices and collapsing contexts on YouTube', is written by Maarten Michielse. Based on virtual ethnographic fieldwork in a community of bedroom musicians on YouTube, the chapter investigates how this form of musical practice and performance is staged and negotiated by the performers. The users seek to establish digital intimate relations with audiences and peers, and they seek to place their individual videos within a larger collective body of videos and to engage in a collective process of rehearsing. The chapter argues that individual videos are less important to the participants than the collective process, their experiences and their relations. Viewers outside the community often misunderstand these intentions, thus the videos collapse different contexts. The chapter shows how the participants carefully reflect on, stage and manage the videos to avoid context collapse.

Chapter 18, 'Fashion blogging as a technology of bodily becoming: The fluidity and firmness of digital bodies', is written by Louise Yung Nielsen. The chapter draws on theories of (posthumanist) performativity to analyse two Danish fashion blogs (Sidsel and Lasse; and Gina Jaqueline). The analysis revolves around the way in which clothing, fitness and plastic surgery – much as the blog as its own medium – become intimate technologies that produce new forms of embodiment. However, Yung Nielsen also identifies significant differences between the two bloggers in relation to notions and performances of identity, not least concerning the degree to which the body is staged as intimately connected to and intra-acting with these technologies.

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Chapter 19, “My friend Bubz”: Building intimacy as a YouTube beauty guru’, is written by Florencia García-Rapp. This final chapter investigates YouTube’s beauty communities by examining the widely popular British-born Chinese ‘beauty guru’, Bubz. Drawing on studies of digital fandom and celebrity, García-Rapp argues that in order to nuance and understand the phenomenon of Bubz, one must examine the way in which she forges closeness and intimacy with her audience. The chapter shows how Bubz’s YouTube videos – which differ between genres of information-rich tutorials; personal, humorous and entertaining vlogs; and motivational self-help videos – foster different types of connection and closeness with viewers, by analysing the way in which viewers consume, discuss, criticise and respond to the different styles of video content. Importantly, García-Rapp argues that viewers reciprocate by relating Bubz’s content to their personal lives and engaging in self-disclosing narratives in their comments on Bubz’s videos. Thus, the videos and viewers’ responses to them function to disclose intimate and personal moments; this disclosure leads to the creation of a fan community built on feelings of closeness and connection between the viewers (followers) and the beauty guru.

### Final remarks

When people mourn their dead, set out to find a new partner or friend or disclose their intimate stories of joy, pain and survival, they increasingly use digital and online communication tools. None of these intimacies is new – quite the opposite! Hence, the shift between different media – for example, finding a partner in a shady bar or through personal ads in magazines or online apps and dating sites – does not necessarily change the nature of the intimacies, as such. Rather, the ways in which the intimacies are enabled and performed – the ways in which we connect, relate and become close – change. Whether one wants to hook up at a shady bar or to do so online, one must learn the specific ways of dancing, talking and looking that are appropriate for the space; that is, one must learn how to mediate one’s desires within a specific setting, place and culture. Hence, certain spaces and technologies offer specific affordances; however, these affordances are continually up for renegotiation. The etiquette of these spheres relates to context specificity rather than an all-encompassing change in traditional structures of intimacy.

This book’s interest, therefore, in social and digital media does not assume that the technological developments within media disrupt feelings of intimacy; nor does it imply that digitally mediated intimacies are inherently different from other mediated intimacies. Rather, the book suggests that mediated intimacies can be fruitfully investigated by a close examination of *how* we connect, relate and become close, and particularly of the role of new media objects in connecting, relating and becoming close.

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This focus is reflected in the subtitle of the book: *Connectivities, Relationalities and Proximities*. By highlighting these three associations of intimacy, we do not wish to suggest that intimacy is solely established by close connection to another person. Rather, we seek to suggest that intimacy is and always has been mediated. Practices of intimacy between people that draw on words or cultural signs of closeness or tenderness must be understood as mediations of intimacy, wherein the words or cultural signs mediate whatever feelings one wishes to transfer.

By highlighting the three words in the subtitle, we wish to suggest that mediated intimacy is best understood as a dynamic practice or a choreography. That what we, within the technological development of media, are witnessing is a new form of human-technological entanglement that does not radically change the dance, but rather where and how we move and are moved.

To summarise, this anthology provides a collection of texts that analyse various examples of mediated intimacy. By focusing on this intersection between social media and intimacies, and their continuous co-constitution, the anthology offers new insights into the vast landscape of contemporary media reality. In presenting a broad range of material, the book makes clear that attention to the specific limitations and affordances of apps and sites can contribute to building a rich, nuanced understanding of the intersection of social media and practices of intimacy. We hope that this focus and the many new perspectives and understandings contributed by this anthology will nuance the field of media and communication studies, as well as the field of intimacy studies, both inside Europe and outside the European countries.

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# 1 Introduction

## Perspectives on Interactive Digital Narrative

*Hartmut Koenitz, Gabriele Ferri, Mads Haahr,  
Diğdem Sezen and Tonguç İbrahim Sezen*

### 1. AN OPPORTUNITY AND A CHALLENGE: VISION AND STATE OF THE ART OF IDN

Interactive Digital Narrative (IDN) connects artistic vision with technology. At its core is the age-old dream to make the fourth wall permeable; to enter the narrative, to participate and experience what will unfold. IDN promises to dissolve the division between active creator and passive audience and herald the advent of a new triadic relationship between creator, dynamic narrative artefact and audience-turned-participant. Within this broad vision of fully interactive narrative environments through the use of digital technologies, IDN aggregates different artistic and research directions from malleable, screen-based textual representations to the quest for virtual spaces in which human interactors experience coherent narratives side by side with authored narrative elements and synthetic characters.

The IDN vision is as much about narrative and control as it is about balance. Indeed, the quest for the right artistic measure, for equilibrium between agency and a coherent, satisfying experience, might be the ultimate challenge of the field. Yet, the artistic challenge does not exist in isolation and is joined by technological and analytical challenges. IDN is a truly interdisciplinary field, which includes scholars and practitioners with backgrounds in multiple disciplines: from literary studies to computer science and fine art. While guiding visions have been described, sometimes even heralded, in various forms for quite some time—for example, the image of Alice entering the rabbit hole or Borges' infinite labyrinth in the form of a novel—it is only with the advent of computer technology that its realisation seems possible, and constant developments in computer technologies seem to put them ever closer to our reach. Indeed, digital media has radically changed the way narrative content is being created, shared, experienced and interpreted.

In her seminal work *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1997), Janet Murray notes that digital media is inherently procedural and participatory, referring to the capacity of computers to execute a series of commands and react to user input. While procedurality affords digital creators the expressive power to define initial conditions and rules under which an interactive work executes and reacts to input, IDN bestows cocreative power on its users through

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interaction and therefore reshapes the relation between creator, work and audience in a way that far surpasses aspects of interpretation and reader-response theory, but whose exact extent is a subject of scholarly debate. The complex relation between authorial control and the power of interactive agency is therefore an underlying topic in all three parts of this collection of essays, which focus on history, theory and practice.

While IDN has been an artistic practice and a topic of scholarly inquiry for more than two decades, it is still in its infancy compared to other narrative forms like the stage drama, the printed book or the moving image. As a technical and artistic challenge and opportunity, advances in the IDN field depend on the combined effects of developments in different parts within the greater field. However, progress in these different areas has historically been uneven. For example, graphical representation has seen rapid improvements from the humble beginnings as text on the screen to current cinematic-quality 3D depictions driven by simulations of highly realistic physics. Whilst the progress in graphics and physics is no less than astonishing, the same cannot be said for the larger challenge of creating specific narrative forms to produce compelling and captivating experiences: in this regard, the pace of development has been unsteady and slow. The virtual environments used for many contemporary interactive narratives are realistic, dynamic and feature high fidelity in terms of their visual presentation and physical mechanics. However, the narratives and characters they host remain shallow, static and lacking in believability, dramatic engagement and narrative development in comparison.

Indeed, while clearly eclipsed in visual presentation, the strong narrative of early titles like *Zork* (1982) holds up well even today. Maybe this fact should not surprise us, as resources for work on improving the graphical representation have been more readily available than for the more artistic problem of narrative development, spurred originally by the US Air Force's interest in convincing visuals for flight simulators (Myers, 1998). Research in IDN ideally combines technical development and advances in artistic expression, as well as the expansion of analytical perspectives; and historically, it has been difficult to find resources for such interdisciplinary projects. Funding, however, is only one aspect of the problem. Cinematic visualisation and real-world perceptions provide an ideal to aspire to for graphical representations. A comparable, shared goal on the side of narrative development and resulting form is elusive. Janet Murray's proposal of the 'Holodeck' (Murray 1997), an imaginary future form of entertainment first depicted in the TV series *Star Trek: The Next Generation* that immerses its audience in a dynamic, reactive narrative, has perhaps been rejected more often (Ryan, 2001; Aarseth, 2004; Spector, 2013) than it has been tacitly embraced (Mateas, 2001; Nitsche, 2008). Other visions, like constructive hypertext or interactive drama, share this fate. However, while the absence of a canonical set of narrative structures specific to IDN can be problematic, the lack of a unanimously shared vision also represents an opportunity

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because it provides space for experimentation and creative license to create new forms.

If the defining artistic moment of the book was the advent of the novel in the 17th century<sup>1</sup> and of film was the invention of montage (Eisenstein, 1949), a similar breakthrough is still elusive in IDN, and maybe there never will be a comparable moment in this field. Instead, we might see existing design modes (e.g., third-person versus first-person perspective, modes of audience participation and novel narrative structures) grow into mature artistic conventions applied in a conscious way by a new generation of authors. A possible defining milestone for IDN might even be the emergence of a consistent group of practitioners, IDN auteurs or *cyberbards*, to use Murray's term (1997), who feel more confident with the notion of relinquishing some of their authorial control to users, players and interactors, and see themselves not as the creators of singular visions, but as designers of expressive potential.

Analytical perspectives have developed considerably since the 1980s, when the first scholars with backgrounds in design and the humanities became interested in the topic. Where early treatments of the topic focused on the comparison to older narrative practices, later works have become increasingly more focused on specific aspects like space (Jenkins, 2004; Nitsche, 2008; Ryan, in this Volume), on the particular manifestations (Montfort, 2003), specific theoretical concepts (Koenitz, 2010) and the connections to larger frameworks (Ryan, 2006; Koenitz et al, 2013a) and most recently on particular theoretical aspects (Bruni and Baceviciute, 2013; Mason, 2013; Ferri, 2013). Amongst this much needed focus, scholars in this field are also engaged in a meta-reflection on the defining characteristics of IDN (Murray, 1997; Aarseth, 1997, 2012; Juul, 2011; Eskelinen, 2012; Mateas, 2001; Ryan 2001, 2006; Frasca, 2003b; Crawford, 2004; Koenitz et al., 2013b). A particular example of this discussion emerged in the early 2000s with the advent of computer game studies as a discipline. In that debate, narrative-oriented and game-oriented approaches were framed as a dichotomy, painting games through the simulative aspects as a “radically different alternative to narratives as a cognitive and communicative structure” (Aarseth 2001). A group of game studies scholars (Aarseth, 2001, 2004; Juul, 1999; Eskelinen, 2001; Frasca, 2003a), opposing narrative-centric views, adopted the name of *ludologists*; and thus the discussion is often referred to as the ‘narratology vs. ludology debate.’ The very first ludological perspectives not only opposed the use of narratological concepts to describe video games but, in their early forms, also described interactive narrative as practically impossible: “computer games [are] simply not a narrative medium” (Juul, 1999, p. 1). Jesper Juul's argument conflated two claims; notions derived from narratology—or related disciplines—are not effective to read games, and games cannot convey narratives. The first claim followed from the need to legitimise game studies as an independent academic discipline, thus defining it by contrast with others and establishing

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its own vocabulary. This was a move understood by Stuart Moulthrop (2003) as a necessary “defensive maneuver (sic),” however at the cost of an “alarmingly narrow” point of view, one that carries the danger of creating “conceptual blind spots” (Jenkins, 2004). As game studies became a recognised academic discipline in the following years, a gradual softening of perspectives finally allowed Janet Murray to pronounce the end of the debate (Murray, 2005). The second claim about the constitutive dichotomy between play and narration—although retracted by Juul himself (2001)—today remains influential, especially in the professional practice of game design where gameplay and narrative are often seen as opposing parameters. In this vein, game designer Ralph Coster, for example, defines narrative in contrast to gameplay: “The commonest use of a completely parallel medium that does not actually interact with the game system is narrative” (Koster, 2012). He categorises the narrative parts of a game experience as linear, noninteractive and in the sole function of rewarding players.

Even after years of research and discussion, the coupling of narration and interaction can still spark provocative debates that require our attention. Therefore, the practical and ontological analogies and differences between interactivity and narration warrant further academic inquiry. Likewise, the relationship between static and procedurally generated narratives calls for more attention. In this respect, a more holistic view of IDN, foregrounding how digital means enable interactive forms of narrative, could also contribute to the ludological discussion.

## 2. A DIVERSE AND VIBRANT FIELD

This volume covers a diverse and vibrant field that has continually grown since the late 1970s, from the first text-based Interactive Fiction to such forms as Hypertext Fiction, Interactive Cinema, Interactive Installations, Interactive Drama and Video Game Narrative.

The book is structured in three parts. The first part is historical and addresses how forms of IDN emerged over the years as distinct phenomena and how the transformations of digital media shaped the current forms. Scott Rettberg examines hypertext novels and poems, offering an historical perspective on their technical development and literary fruition, while Chris Hales describes the historical development of interactive cinema with a focus on the impact of digital technology on this form of IDN. Finally, Udi Ben-Arie and Noam Knoller offer a diachronic perspective on the user-facing aspects in IDN, foregrounding the aesthetic, experiential and hermeneutic dimensions.

The book’s second part is theoretical. Theoretical enquiry into IDN started with adaptations of established narratological perspectives, for example neo-Aristotelian poetics (Laurel 1986, 1991; Mateas, 2001), post-classical narratology (Ryan, 1999, 2001), African oral traditions (Jennings, 1996;

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Harrell, 2007) and French post-structuralism (Montfort, 2003). In recent years, scholars have started to look beyond narratology to understand the changes in narrative modalities afforded by IDN. Also, particular aspects, such as spatiality, have come to the forefront of analytical work. The editors introduce this section with an overview of these earlier approaches before the book's second part presents a range of current theoretical perspectives. First, Gabriele Ferri proposes a common ground for narrative theory of IDN by reexamining the similarities and differences with unilinear storytelling. Hartmut Koenitz argues for a theoretical approach that is specific for IDN based on cognitive science and cybernetics, while Marie-Laure Ryan discusses spatial representations as a key topic in interactive narratives. Janet Murray analyses dynamics of relationships in literature and discusses their application as a schema for IDN, before Nicolas Szilas in the final theoretical chapter offers a critical perspective on the role of Artificial Intelligence in developing a future, better form of digital narrations.

The book's third part is concerned with practice. When a new medium appears, early practitioners often engage with it first by extending existing practices. In this way, early film was used to show theatrical performances. Eventually these modes of extension lead to distinct practices. As the written text became more than a collection of printed pages in the form of the novel, and film became more than a theatrical performance through montage, it is no longer adequate to relegate IDN practices to the fringes of a perspective centred on narrative in long-established media forms. The third part of the book is intended to examine the wide range of current practices and the emergence of IDN as a distinct phenomenon. Ulrike Spierling begins this part of the book with a chapter that emphasises the importance of user interface design for the IDN experience, as well as its implementation in practice. Scott Rettberg describes current practices in electronic literature, while Sandy Louchart, John Truesdale, Neil Suttie and Ruth Aylett report on research and implementations of emergent narrative, based on autonomous intelligent virtual characters. Andreea Molnar and Patty Kostkova ask how story-based learning is transformed by the encounter with truly malleable narrative. Mads Haahr analyses examples of location-based games that position digital narrative elements in the real world, and Diğdem Sezen examines video game poetry. Martin Rieser puts the spotlight on distinctly artistic uses of IDN, while Tonguç Sezen's chapter on remakes alerts us to the fact that IDN has already reached a self-reflective state.

In addition to reading the book's three parts in a linear order, the reader can also follow specific trajectories across the whole volume, for example on IDN and the human-computer interface (Knoller and Ben-Arie, Szilas, Spierling, Haahr, Rieser), on literary aspects (Rettberg, Murray, Diğdem Sezen), transformation of existing fields and self-reflective practices (Hales, Rettberg, Molnar and Kostkova, Tonguç Sezen), novel theoretical approaches (Ferri, Koenitz), spatial aspects (Ryan, Haahr, Rieser) and critical/practical perspectives on the role of artificial intelligence (Szilas, Louchart et al.).

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As the development of procedural media progresses, the powers and abilities of readers as interactors and authors as procedural creators are constantly being shifted and rebalanced. Since we are aware of the continuous advances in the IDN field, a companion website at [www.gamesandnarrative.net/idn-book](http://www.gamesandnarrative.net/idn-book) will provide a space for further discussion. IDN enhances the experiential dimensions of human expression, with multimodal manifestations, procedural generation and novel structures. Furthermore, technical and artistic advances in interactive narratives open epistemological questions that require constant theoretical attention. As this volume attests, the development—in every dimension—is continuous and shows no signs of slowing down. And herein might lie the lasting attraction of the field—to further human expression by applying a range of human faculties, from the invention of digital technology to the continuous development of hardware and software to artistic treatment and critical reflection.

## NOTE

1. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605) can be seen as the foundation of the modern novel (Riley, 1962).

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## Introduction

# Revitalising Audience Research: Innovations in European Audience Research

*Frauke Zeller, Cristina Ponte and Brian O'Neill*

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the verb *revitalise* means “[t]o restore to vitality; to put new life or vigour into” (OED Online, 2013). Choosing this term for the title of this edited collection does not imply, however, that the current field of audience research is lacking vitality or activity or that it needed some kind of reanimation. Rather, revitalising is used here in an adjectival sense, describing emergent responses to the changes in audience behaviours, media landscapes and of course its inherent challenges and potential for academic research. *Revitalising Audience Research* therefore captures these dynamic processes, new approaches and affordances in audience research.

The book was inspired by the notion that, ultimately, the revitalisation of audience studies does not only mean developing new approaches and methods; it also requires a Kuhnian debate (Kuhn, 1996) regarding the introduction of new paradigms, methods or conceptual developments into the field of audience research. This entails both the need to cross disciplines (e.g. between the social science tradition and the critical/cultural tradition, or the computational tradition) and the need to bridge long-established boundaries in the field (e.g. between ‘old media’ and ‘new media’; between mass communication and group communication; between content/production and audience/reception). The aim of this edited volume is therefore two-fold: to capture these boundary-crossing processes that have already started to appear in different places such as project collaborations and conference panels, among others, and to promote or foster this process constructively by explicitly inviting contributions with an interdisciplinary background.

### STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Our original call invited contributions to address *revitalisation* and *innovation* in the form of three interrelated questions:

1. What needs to be done in audience research in order to meet the challenges?

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2. What needs to change academically, methodologically and regarding the underlying theories and concepts of audience research?
3. What needs to be kept? In other words, which of the traditional theoretical and methodological approaches in audience research are still valid and should be combined with additional approaches from other disciplines?

These three questions resulted into two broad frameworks of research which are represented within the collection: first, seven chapters relate to revitalisation and innovation in research methodology, whereby new or so far less established solutions in European audience and reception studies are proposed for challenges and affordances of researching audiences across diverse contexts and platforms. Second, new fields of research emerging from new configurations in audience reception and co-creation are discussed in the second part of this book, also comprising seven chapters.

## **PART I: METHODOLOGICAL REVITALISATION AND INNOVATION**

The first part starts with two applications of ethnography which provide an innovative approach throughout their very different study objects and contexts. Starting with virtual world contexts, in which identities of the self are being created and represented through avatars, the second chapter brings the focus back on the very self and introduces autoethnography as a useful tool to enrich media and audience studies.

Katleen Gabriels and Joke Bauwens focus in “Lost in Transition? Conducting a Hybrid Ethnography ‘In’ and ‘Out’ Second Life” on an important emerging area of audience studies—virtual worlds and avatar studies. Offering a critical theoretical introduction to avatar studies as well as an innovative methodological discussion of the challenges and opportunities of virtual ethnography, the authors underscore the importance of the interrelation of actuality and virtuality, that is “the reciprocity between actual and virtual selves”. Gabriels and Bauwens present what they term *hybrid ethnography* as a systematic approach to study these reciprocities but underscore the transitional aspect, which demands meeting participants not in a “one-off actual and one-off virtual situation, but hearing and seeing people recurrently in both realms”. Beside the theoretical and methodological discussion, the chapter also provides practical insights as to how to conduct hybrid ethnographies by depicting a study they conducted with Second Life residents and their understanding of actual and virtual morality. Using the study, they also provide a critical discussion of the challenges of hybrid ethnography, ranging from ethical issues, trust and time management constraints.

Alexander Dhoest introduces autoethnography in his chapter “If You Asked Me . . .” and explores its application as a means to critically assess

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and inform traditional methods in audience research. His starting point is the notion of “how artificial audience research tends to be”, acknowledging that the data we gather are actually “constructed” insofar as they are “created in the research context as a response to a particular stimulus”. Autoethnography thus is seen here as a means to critically assess these stimuli, that is the assumptions and questions underlying audience research. Hence, if researchers conducted autoethnographies on their own media use, the insights gained from such studies would help them to reflect on their traditional method usage in relation to the “complexity and contextual nature of media uses and to indicate possible avenues for future research”.

The third chapter discusses two advanced approaches to the traditional interview method that enable studies and goals that often fall beyond the reach of the interview method. David Mathieu and Maria José Brites take as their point of departure in “Expanding the Reach of the Interview in Audience and Reception Research”. They state that despite the widely acknowledged important role of context in for example media reception studies, context is, however, rarely explicitly mentioned in methodological discussions relating to the interview method. The main reason for this lies in the complexity of the concept. The authors introduce two approaches to this problem—the performative and participatory interview design—illustrated by their use in two different studies. Knowledge about context is produced in the performative interview through its conceptualisation as a cognitive construct created in the online reception of mediated texts by the recipients. The participatory interview, in turn, empowers the study participants by asking them to capture themselves context as their everyday-life experience.

The need to re-conceptualise media engagement in relation to ‘software culture’ and the implications this has for the design of audience research is the subject of Craig Hight’s chapter “Software Studies and the New Audiencehood of the Digital Ecology”. Software culture now structures diverse forms of engagement through factors such as automation, algorithms, templates and interface settings. The challenge for audience researchers is to understand how these are understood and performed by different groups of users. The chapter provides an outline for a software-focused ethnography of user-generated content, centred on the key pieces of software which are integral to the ecology of online video (such as the software on image-gathering devices, the proliferation of video-editing tools, the online video sharing site YouTube, web browsers and media players). Attending to forms of ‘software literacy’, such studies examine the skills and knowledge which each user draws upon thereby empowering and constraining their performance of pieces of software, effectively serving to contextualize their agency within software culture. Audience research, then, Hight argues, needs to reorientate itself around the obvious research questions these assumptions generate.

The next two chapters cross boundaries in terms of their disciplinary outreach, combining traditional audience studies approaches with linguistic

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instruments for the analysis of computer-mediated communication and social interaction online. Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk introduces advanced linguistic analyses of language usage as a means to identify “Emergent Group Identity Construal in Online Discussions”. The author aims to bridge the gap between audience studies and the linguistic analysis of computer-mediated interaction accomplished by the use of a toolset from linguistic and discourse analytic methodologies to analyse the “vague and polysemous concept of identity” in online discussions. More specifically, this innovative approach consists of the application of computer-supported, quantitative empirical tools derived from corpus linguistics, embedded in a multi-method design that aims to examine identity formation and development in online environments. The study aims to capture and process the dynamic nature of online exchanges, interconnectivity schemes and certain online activity values, such as number and type of the interactional exchanges between participants. Furthermore, the multi-method design also applies qualitative analysis of linguistic properties to complement the quantitative analysis results.

A second disciplinary boundary crossing is presented by Joke Beyl and Yuwei Lin in their chapter “Using Linguistic Ethnography to Study Techno Eliteness of Social Media Audiences”. Focusing on the concept of ‘techno elite’ audiences, the chapter provides a methodological framework for in-depth studies on this concept by applying a combination of linguistic and ethnographic approaches. Its linguistic analytic approach complements traditional audience methods to focus on the analysis of the dynamics of power relationships in contemporary audiences in interactive social media environments. By using literary writers’ weblogs, the authors elaborate why and how linguistic ethnography can enrich elite audience studies. They apply language analysis as a means to overcome for example the classic conception of static and categorical social hierarchies and to address elites as being dynamically negotiated through ideology and language in relation to social media.

The last chapter in this first method-oriented Part I of the book closes with a mixed-method study that served as a revitalising approach for a comparative study on news consumption. Cédric Courtois, Kim Christian Schröder and Christian Kobbernagel present a methodological discussion as well as results from a study that uses Q methodology in their chapter “Exploring Landscapes of News Consumption Cross-Nationally”. This chapter addresses two salient but under-researched dimensions of contemporary audiencehood: firstly, the inherent cross-mediality of audience practices and, secondly, the comparative dimension of audience practices in different national cultures. The chapter elaborates a framework that addresses these audience phenomena through the innovative approach to mixed-methods research, exemplified by a comparison of news consumption in two European countries (Denmark and Flanders, a region in Belgium), in a way which transcends the qualitative–quantitative divide and which challenges

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its epistemological, paradigmatic ramifications. Through the resulting news-media user typologies generated in each national context, the study invites renewed reflection about the interface of behavioural and interpretive paradigms, digging deeper into cultural orientations towards news consumption.

## PART II: NEW FIELDS OF RESEARCH, NEW CHALLENGES

The chapter that opens Part II of the book offers a comparative framework for the study of two ends of the audience spectrum: children and older adults. The idea behind the chapter “From the Womb to the Tomb” was shaped through a lively discussion during a “Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies” (TATS) Action workshop in Milano, in 2012. Coming from different backgrounds and fields of research, Dafna Lemish and Galit Nimrod, from the US and Israel, draw on wide research experience on each of these age groups in their relation to the media but so far had not considered the ground between them. Based on their own experience and on a review of literature from childhood studies as well as studies on ageing, the authors identify not only various forms of patronage but also common expressions of active involvement with media. This relational approach allows the authors to argue that these two populations share substantial commonalities, the recognition of which may inform the development of theory as well as empirical research.

The two following chapters focus on the complexity of social experiences lived by children and youth on the internet. In “Grey Zones” moral judgments that children (nine to sixteen years old) make in relation to what is risky online or not were collected through focus groups and individual essays in Norway and Portugal. These two countries represent not only different levels of internet penetration, educational level of parents, patterns of children’s internet use and risk exposure but also different cultures in terms of children’s rights and expected level of autonomy. Adopting a constructivist perspective on the analysis of the collected material from both countries, Ingunn Hagen and Ana Jorge note that children’s norms and moral evaluations are related to the way children position themselves in a particular situation, thus going against generic and abstract evaluations on what is right or wrong. The comparison between the two countries lead the authors to conclude that cultural background seems to matter more than other demographic factors such as gender and age for children’s risk perceptions related to internet use.

Similarly, going against the general trend in studies of youth media practices, the next chapter—“Using and *Not* Using Social Media”—addresses the reasons why some young people actively use certain social web tools and why others do not. Christine Trültzsch-Wijnen and Sascha Trültzsch-Wijnen, from Austria, and Andra Siibak, from Estonia, note the lack of research on non-users within this age group. Besides differences in access and economic

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background, factors such as differing levels of media literacy or the *habitus* of young people also, they argue, need to be taken into account. For an interdisciplinary perspective that focuses on the individual child, the authors articulate contributions from psychology, sociology and media and communication studies, each of which has explored media use by young people. The challenge from the perspective of audience research is to question these theories from the perspective of the non-user. As the authors conclude, the notion of active audience means people who make active and conscious decisions about their use and non-use of media.

A similar issue with a focus on adults is explored by Piermaco Aroldi and Nicoletta Vittadini, both from Italy, addressing the complexity of networked audiences, groups and publics in the connected environment provided by the social media. In “Audiences as Socio-Technical Actors”, the perspective of audiences as ‘socio-technical actors’ exploring different *styles* of interaction transcends the mere differentiation by socio-demographic patterns. Considering the ‘power of agency’ of audiences, the perspective aims to explore and understand audience’s behaviours in these multilayered environments. The discussion is based on a qualitative study on Italian Facebook users that revealed different styles of acting. The authors provide examples that describe how style appears as a form of self-reflexivity, thus highlighting how styles emerge in relation to the imagined self, the individual’s online and offline self-reputation and his or her group affinity and affiliation. The authors conclude that style can cross different social positions and note the interest of a cross-country research on the topic.

Moving to the north, the next chapter analyses and discusses audience orientations in a cross-media environment. The introduction of digital television in Finland, in 2007, provides the context for a study of audience practices and identities in the wake of new changes in the television environment. The authors, Taisto Hujanen and Seppo Kangaspunta, analyse and discuss in “The Intermediality of Cross-Media Audiences” the relevance and nature of specific media identities and the consequent audience orientations through the concept of *intermediality*. Intermediality is defined as a social and cultural relationship in which different media are articulated in relation to and exercise power over one another. The research concludes that digitalisation of television encouraged an intermedial user practice which required audience members to reconsider their medium relationships. Although cross-media audiences can increasingly be characterised in terms of content and modalities such as genre, media use is not only about individual choice. That is why, the authors conclude, the institutional dimensions of audiences remain relevant in future research on media use.

The penultimate chapter refocuses attention on the urgent need for theory to adequately explore the challenges that audience research faces in pervasively software-supported and media-saturated cities. Seija Ridell, from Finland, notes in “Exploring Audience Activities and Their Power-Relatedness in the Digitalised City” that not only do these spaces multiply instances of

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urban mass media audiencehood but that mobile technologies have also diversified people's activities as urban audiences of others while allowing their own performances. Thus, the urban context constitutes a topic for theoretical and empirical attention. Based on an extensive and interdisciplinary review of literature, the author expands on analytical frameworks and key concepts such as domestication, developed by Silverstone. The perspective of exploring an 'urban triple articulation' (presentation, representation, non-representation) in the links between people and technologies is central to the proposal of understanding the mediated audience activities in urban space. Mapping topics of research for urban audience studies, the author also suggests an agenda for further research in "one of the most demanding theoretical and empirical challenges for future media audience studies".

The last chapter in this section also incorporates concluding remarks on currently debated questions regarding audience research. Frauke Zeller takes on one of the most heated and broadly discussed current concepts—big data—and asks critically what this means for audience research. In her chapter on "Big Data in Audience Research" she provides first of all a concise overview of the concept, serving as a boundary-crossing discussion topic on all societal dimensions (academic, political, economic) which can range from critical, controversial to promising and optimistic. The main focus of the chapter is, however, on how big data changes—either positively or negatively—audience research. The author depicts a systematic analysis of big data in terms of its potentials, challenges and practical, methodological affordances when applied in social sciences and audience research. She concludes that while being aware of the potential pitfalls research with large datasets entails, big data approaches can enrich audience studies by providing a different (although not necessarily better or worse) insight into audiences, particularly online audiences, as well as providing a very useful stimulus for much needed discussions within audience studies of concepts of 'data' and audience definitions.

## TRANSFORMING AUDIENCES, TRANSFORMING SOCIETIES

*Revitalising Audience Research* is the third and closing volume of the COST Action IS0906 "Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies" (TATS), which ran from 2010 to 2014. The funding body of TATS—COST—is an intergovernmental framework with a focus on bootstrapping and facilitating collaboration and networking among European academics (COST—European Cooperation in Science and Technology). Its rationale is that "fostering the networking of researchers at and international level [. . .] enables break-through scientific developments leading to new concepts and products [. . .]" (Patriarche, et al., 2014).

TATS was amongst the largest of recent COST Actions by bringing together more than 300 researchers from thirty-three countries. It was initiated with

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the notion of a changing media and communications landscape, and the need to identify those changes and their interrelationships with the social, political and cultural areas of European societies (COST, 2009). Hence, the overall aim was and is to “advance state-of-the-art knowledge of the key transformations of European audiences” (COST, 2009, p. 2). Further objectives of TATS were the following:

1. Revitalising the audience research agenda
2. Developing innovative approaches to audiences
3. Transcending established boundaries in the field
4. Promoting new empirical research on audiences
5. Scoping the new media and communication environment
6. Networking audience researchers and building capacity (TATS website)

*Revitalising Audience Research* concludes the Action’s activities and publications, however it represents more an intermedial standpoint of cutting-edge audience research than the final and closing words. Indeed TATS stimulated its members to form and engage in new research collaborations which last beyond the formal COST Action grant period. These ‘spin-offs’ range from multinational, comparative research projects to newly initiated Temporary Working Groups within the ECREA (European Communication Research and Education Association) network as well as nurturing the development of a consortium (CEDAR—Consortium on Emerging Directions in Audience Research) that aims to foster collaboration between audience researchers in their early career years.

This edited volume therefore offers a concluding afterthought (given that it will be published after the Action has finally ended) in terms of its book publication activities. It thus follows the first edited volume of the Action—*Audience Research Methodologies: Between Innovation and Consolidation*—which represents the results of the Action’s first international networking conference in Zagreb, Croatia, 2011. Taking up societal and audience transformations, the first book focuses on the issues and approaches related to the methodological discourses and practices that come with these transformations. Hence, it discusses in fourteen chapters from different perspectives the “diversification, integration and triangulation of methods for audience research”, ranging from “the gap between the researched and the researchers, to the study of online social networks, and to the opportunities brought about by Web 2.0 technologies as research tools” (Patriarche, et al., 2014).

The second Action book—*Audience Transformations: Shifting Audience Positions in Late Modernity*—promotes the principal research themes of the Action. After a more methodological and instrumental-oriented perspective on the transformations of the first book, the second Action book discusses in fourteen chapters written by TATS Action members “these transformations

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in a societal, cultural, technological, ideological, economic and historical context” and by doing this it offers “a nuanced and careful analysis of the main changes” (Carpentier, Schröder and Hallett, 2014).

This third volume covers fourteen chapters, of which nine chapters were written by teams from different research fields and institutions. Altogether twenty-seven authors (including the editors) in fifteen countries, including Europe, Israel, Canada, the US and New Zealand, developed this collection as a collaborative and boundary-crossing activity from the start. By focusing on the first two objectives of the Action—revitalising the audience research agenda and developing innovative approaches—it explicitly asked in its original contributions call for work that is based on one or more of these boundary-crossing perspectives: academic boundaries (i.e. disciplinary fields), methodological or theoretical boundaries (within one or across different audience research areas) or geographical boundaries (i.e. national or international collaborations). Hence, the editors aimed to both capture the revitalising processes by presenting already ongoing boundary-crossing collaborations as well as initiate new endeavours in this direction. This, in turn, was also meant to provide a platform to discuss innovative approaches in audience research.

There is a clear need for innovative research methods which will not only give access to the ‘what’ of media use but also to the ‘where’, the ‘how’ and the ‘why’—the tensions, the conflicts and the motivations of everyday audience practices. In this sense, an audience-oriented perspective is intended to firmly anchor media engagement in relation to the diversity of contexts and purposes to which people put media in their daily lives, contexts and purposes often unanticipated by industries and professionals.

From the point of view of new fields of research, audience studies has often failed to fully understand how new technologies integrate into a rich and convergent media and communications environment. This volume acknowledges that audiences rarely use just one medium—use is always contextualised in a larger media repertoire in which different media interact with each other. Cross-media and hybridized content also question single-media approaches to reception and use, asking for new comprehensive approaches that fully recognise the many types of media with which people engage every day and help better our understanding of how single medium content (e.g. programmes) have now become pan-media brands (e.g. *Doctor Who*).

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# 1 What Media Crisis? Normative Starting Points

*Josef Trappel, Hannu Nieminen, Werner A. Meier and Barbara Thomass*

## DEBATING THE “C” OF MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

When the Euromedia Research Group, which is the collective author of this book, started its internal debate on the current state of the media, the letter “C” swiftly became of significance. For some – and those are in the good company of academic scholars – the “C” is best interpreted as crisis, if not collapse. Referring, for example, to the results of the interview-based description of the British news media by Andrew Currah (2009), news brands are being “hollowed out” (2009, p. 130) and journalism in digital newsrooms is experiencing “collateral damage.” (ibid., p. 123) Núria Almiron (2010) found a permanent crisis of journalism that has been deepened by the financialisation of corporate media.

For others, however, the “C” stands for change, challenge or even chance. The media – their argument goes – have always been characterised by constant change, probably on a faster and more permanent track than other industries. Exposed to rapid technological innovations in production and susceptible to cutting-edge distribution technologies, the media industry has managed to turn critical developments into chances for future developments. When radio, and later television, was successfully introduced into media markets formerly controlled by the printed press, the latter reinvented itself, adapting to the changing environment by catering for the changing needs and wants of their readers. Seemingly, the media industry lives up to the saying “Never let a good crisis go to waste,” credited to Winston Churchill.

On what both schools of thought – the “C” for crisis and the “C” for chance – might agree upon is another understanding of the “C,” introduced by Robert McChesney (2013). In his analysis of the implications of capitalism on the Internet, he argues media history can be understood as being driven by critical junctures. These are “rare, brief periods in which dramatic changes are debated and enacted. (...) Most of our major institutions in media are the result of such critical junctures.” (ibid., p. 66f) Critical junctures, he continues, occur when revolutionary new communication technologies undermine the existing system, journalistic content is increasingly discredited or seen as illegitimate and when there is a major political crisis in which the dominant institutions are increasingly challenged (ibid., p. 67). All three

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conditions hold, so the time of another critical juncture has come. Being a media activist as much as an academic scholar, McChesney's analysis might contain elements of wishful thinking. Nevertheless, through the meaning of critical juncture the "C" is even more tightly knit into the fabric of contemporary media development.

In this chapter – and actually in the entire book – we intend to contribute to the better understanding of the ongoing media developments that apparently shake up and potentially destroy the existing order. Regardless of whether we call this process change, crisis or critical juncture, some agents and stakeholders profit to the detriment of others, and public communication irrevocably transforms. We are interested in the various forms and the implications of this process. Our joint research question therefore is:

In what way and to what extent are the current processes of media change critical to the pursuit of democratic norms and values in contemporary societies?

This is a highly relevant question as it concerns simultaneously the conditions of access to public communication, the conditions of media fulfilling their part of the social contract within democratic societies, and the conditions of journalistic production and content dissemination. There is a price to be paid when these conditions deteriorate: "Vast areas of public life and government activity will take place in the dark (...)" (Nichols and McChesney, 2010) And this would definitely not be desirable.

In this first chapter of the book we take a closer look at the development of the media from various angles. First, we pay tribute to the notion of crisis in the context of social sciences. Second, we argue that any debate on critical developments is associated with underlying values and norms, as a crisis for one might at the same time be a chance for others. Based on these values, we then observe and discuss drivers of change. We then reflect on the history of crises and their implications on public communication and the media. Finally, we conclude by returning to our research question.

## INSTITUTIONAL MEDIA CRISIS

Crises appear to be long-sellers in social sciences. It is indeed a suitable starting point for reflecting social changes – and social life changes all the time. The term crisis holds an explicit dramatic undertone and it is more persevering than the tedious terms change or transformation.

Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter might be credited for pioneering and introducing crisis (and innovation) into mainstream social science research. He criticized the oversimplified understanding that crises happen whenever something of sufficient importance goes wrong. Rather, he argues, crises are incidents of cyclical processes and cannot be regarded as "isolated

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misfortunes that will happen in consequence of errors, excesses, misconduct” or any other failure (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 41). And he states these cyclical processes “by nature [are] a form or method of economic change and not only never is but never can be stationary.” (ibid., p. 82) Apparently, Schumpeter had economic developments in mind, but his notion of cyclical occurrence of crises became prominent for the analysis of other fields as well.

Scholars interested in public communication have used the term frequently but somewhat inconsistently. During the relatively prosperous 1990s, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch published their book *The Crisis of Public Communication* (1995). They bemoaned the decay of institutions and traditions of public communication. “Institutions that previously organized meaning, identity and authoritative information for many people structured their political preferences and simplified the process of democratic power-seeking – notably political parties, the nuclear family, mainstream religion, neighbourhood and social-class groupings – all have waned in salience and influence.” (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995, p. 2) Furthermore, journalism, in particular its watch-dog role, “is often shunted into channels of personalization, dramatizations, witch-huntery, soap-operatics and sundry trivialities.” (ibid., p. 1) In short, Blumler and Gurevitch stipulate: “It would be no exaggeration to describe this state of affairs as a *crisis of civic communication*.” (ibid., p. 1) emphasis in the original

In the context of the 2009 ECREA summer school, Hannu Nieminen put a question mark on the title of this contribution, *Media in Crisis?* (Nieminen, 2009) He contextualizes the media crisis within a much wider “epistemic turn” (ibid., p. 36) that rearranges the place of the media in society at large. “It seems plausible that the more complex society and people’s everyday life become, and the faster the everyday life choices and decisions have to be made, the less the traditional universal newspaper seen as a department store of information can offer solutions to people’s epistemic needs.” (ibid., p. 39) In this sense, media need to adapt to the changing social life and if they do, they can avoid the crisis.

More recently, Núria Almiron (2010) identified a severe crisis of journalism, following from the financial market crises that started in 2007. In her reading, the culprits are to be found among financial capitalists. “In the media sector, the 2007–2009 crisis had a strong impact. (...) Nevertheless, the financial and economic turbulence that began in 2007 was by no means what made corporate journalism enter a crisis. Nor was it the Internet or ICTs and digital convergence and their new business models waiting to burst. Nor was it the advertising slump or changing consumer patterns. Rather, financialized corporate logics have been demolishing the democratic foundations of journalism throughout the last decade.” (Almiron, 2010, p. 176)

Equally in 2010, a special issue of *Journalism Studies* (Vol. 11, issue 4) was published. In his foreword, Jay Blumler suggests to think of a crisis “with two legs”: “One is a crisis of viability, principally though not exclusively financial, threatening the existence and resources of mainstream journalistic

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organizations. The other is a crisis of civic adequacy, impoverishing the contributions of journalism to citizenship and democracy.” (Blumler, 2010, p. 439) In the same issue, James Curran puts a critical question mark behind the claim of British publishers that there is no crisis and “the future of journalism is safe in their hands.” (2010, p. 465)

In 2012, a group of scholars around Manuel Castells and Gustavo Cardoso published an edited volume, *Aftermath: The Cultures of the Economic Crisis* (Castells et al., 2012). There, John B. Thompson further elaborates on one of Jürgen Habermas’ early works (*Legitimation Crisis*, 1988). Crises occur when systems of some sort break down. Habermas differentiates system crises from identity crises. The former occurs when the self-regulation mechanisms of a system break down, the latter when social integration breaks down: “(...) it arises when members of a society become aware of the major disruption and feel that their own lives or ‘collective identity’ is in some way threatened.” (Thompson, 2012, p. 62) Thompson argues there are overlaps and the distinction is somewhat artificial as system crises may become identity crises and vice versa. Instead, he suggests making a distinction between political crisis, which involves a breakdown of the political system or some serious challenge of the government, and social crisis, “which is a broader social malaise in which people feel that their world is being disrupted in some fundamental way.” (ibid., p. 64)

This comprehensive and by no means exhaustive literature review demonstrates the diversity of scholarly understandings of (media) crisis. Blumler and Gurevitch use the term crisis to describe the malaise of public communication they observe. Nieminen refrains from calling a mid- to long-term transformation process a crisis, while Almiron argues journalism is in a permanent state of crisis. Thompson, again, limits crisis to the possible or expected breakdown of systems, which in its social variation also includes the disruption of people’s lives.

By way of applying Habermas’ and Thompson’s line of thinking to the media field, system or political crises translate into institutional media crises. Such crises consequently occur when media (self-) regulation mechanisms collapse and media institutions are critically challenged. Institutional media crises are likely to carry the characteristics of system or political crises, but they do not – at least not until now – qualify as social crises. Various institutional stakeholders are affected in their core business by the critical changes, thus qualifying as a Habermasian system crisis. Journalists, newspaper publishers, advertising retailers, online media providers are among them. Contrary to these centrally affected stakeholders, people (audiences) are much less concerned about the media crises, as there is a plethora of new ways and means to be entertained and informed through Internet-based channels, far beyond incumbent media organizations. The media crisis is much more the crisis of media institutions than a social crisis of the people. People’s attitudes might be ignorant and inadequate but this understanding as institutional crisis has important repercussions on the range of possible

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remedies to cure the media crisis. Such institutional media crises are likely to occur in (Schumpeterian) cycles when McChesney's conditions apply: revolutionary technologies, discredited journalism and challenged institutions.

To conclude, media crises are understood as cycles of institutional crises, which occur when media order and regulation in significant segments of the media field break down, forcing actors and stakeholders to take disruptive decisions. Institutional media crises may transform into social media crises if the conduct of people's lives is upset by these crises. Media change, in contrast, refers to the constant process of transformation over time.

**VALUES AND NORMS**

Institutions, order and regulation are essential subjects for the understanding of media change and media crisis. All three subjects are closely related to the set of norms and values that are socially agreed upon and enacted in any form of democratic society. Processes of change (and crises), therefore, will impact on this set of norms and values – change and crises are never neutral when it comes to implications and their assessment.

Therefore our analysis of media changes affecting the pursuit of civic virtues needs to make explicit those norms and values that constitute contemporary democracies. Christians et al. (2009, p. 37ff) identify several concepts of values for public communication that are bound to concepts of the order of society. In a corporatist order, which builds strong links inside social groups, truthfulness of public discourse is the prominent value that allows for a peaceful exchange of ideas and decision making. Freedom for those participating in the public sphere is the distinguished normative requirement in a liberal order as no other regulating force than the notorious invisible hand of the market and consequently the marketplace of ideas ensures unrestricted deliberation and decision-making. Deficits in this market-orientated understanding of communication led to the idea of social responsibility in public communication, which is the leading understanding of communication values in pluralist democracy. And civic participation became an important orientation in the postmodern period where individualism and fragmentation of members of society require new forms of exchange and decision-making. A normative perspective of communication thus tries to answer the question: How should public discourse be organized to find solutions (and take decisions) in cases of conflicting interests in society?

Modern pluralist democracies share fundamental values for public communication. Freedom of opinion, of speech and of information, democratic deliberation, protection and promotion of culture, promotion of diversity, universal access and privacy rights are among these values, which are present in all pluralist democratic societies (Babe, 1990; Napoli, 2001). Furthermore, the values of empowerment and participation are highlighted in

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particular in relation to news. “News (...) can empower citizens by informing them about the social, political and economic events and issues that shape their lives. News (...) is the informational fuel considered vital for a democracy to remain healthy.” (Cushion, 2012, p. 43f) Similarly, Blumler and Gurevitch stress the role of the media in activating citizens by providing incentives “to learn, choose and become involved, rather than merely to follow and kibitz over the political process.” (1995, p. 97)

These values are firmly rooted in the era of enlightenment, which established the normative fundamentals for the modern political order with civil and human rights and fundamental principles for public communication. Free citizens should have the right to free speech, which should be performed in a public sphere, where public issues are debated and decided following the better arguments. Civil and human rights, the freedom of assembly, of opinion and of the press and the right to elect the government brought a new balance to power.

Today, the public sphere can be understood as a forum where conflicting interests are mediated and debated, where legitimacy and performance of economic and political actors and their agencies are controlled. Public sphere takes the idea of citizens for granted who are connected by common ground. Thus the functions of public sphere are the answer to the requirements of contemporary pluralist democracies (Calhoun, 2003).

Requirements for a well-functioning public sphere can be transferred onto the media. The principle (and value) of universality stipulates no one and no opinion shall be excluded from the public sphere. In the media field, universality means everyone should have access and should be able to make himself or herself heard. All ideas and expressions of culture should be present. Universality as the inclusion of all individuals, groups, opinions and issues is translated in the media into diversity of opinions, issues and actors. Michael Schudson (2010, p. 104) considers advocacy for various viewpoints as one of the essential functions of the media in democracies.

Objectivity is the principle (and value) that describes the effort to be accurate in facts, sound in argumentation and free of personal or vested interests. This principle applies to the journalistic part of the media. Objectivity can also be read as truthfulness and professionalism.

Balance is reflected in the journalistic norms of fairness and accuracy. Arguments, not emotions, should dominate the discourse and any undue bias should be avoided. Linked to the value of balance is the notion of relevance, referring to efforts to concentrate on issues of common interest and not on partial or marginal topics. These principles, from the perspective of the journalistic professional discourse, usually are summarized under the notion of quality – which, as a catch-all word, is then again spelled out by scholars to different criteria as mentioned above.

Without respect for these principles of forming opinion and control of government and power-holders in society, the understanding of a citizenry is impossible. Respect for these principles is essential for a vital democracy.

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In an attempt to summarize requirements for the public sphere in contemporary pluralist democracies, Karmasin, Rath and Thomass established the following list of norms and values:

- freedom
- diversity
- the enlightened citizen
- participation, integration, reflection, deliberation
- self-determination of individual
- society as a democratic commons
- orientation towards a welfare and participatory idea of society
- integration of individual and social concerns
- sovereign conduct of life with self-determination, participation and responsibility
- peaceful comity of nations

(Karmasin et al., 2013, p. 475)

Given this extensive – but not exhaustive – list of norms and values for a well-functioning public sphere, our research interest asks how processes of change (and crises) might affect their performance. Most of these norms are well established in national constitutions and broadcasting and press legislation. However, legal or even constitutional certificates do not necessarily guarantee delivery by media institutions and organizations. Processes of critical change might disrupt good intentions laid down, for instance, in internal mission statements of broadcasters or newspapers. Internet-based forms of public communication might be even less inclined to adhere to these values from the outset, perhaps beyond Google’s indefinite claim “not to be evil.”

Scholars have observed flaws in fulfilling some (or all) of these values. In their study *Media for Democracy Monitor*, Trappel, Nieminen and Lund (2011) compared the performance of the leading news media in ten countries in fulfilling democratic requirements. Their findings unveil considerable differences, some of them linked to national culture and respect for media freedom, others obviously linked to the financial resources at the disposal of the scrutinized news media. Crises following from disruptive economic downturns are likely to impact negatively on the adherence to democratic norms and values. For Britain, Currah reports the observation that the value of enlightened, well-informed citizenry might suffer from the retreat of hard news: “(...) the underlying civic function of news publishers – to gather information and inform society – is steadily being replaced by a softer, more lightweight model that is dependent on the personal views of a relatively small coterie of heavy-weight commentators and celebrity journalists.” (Currah, 2009, p. 130) This shift is at least partially caused by cost-benefit considerations, as commentators generally cost less than investigative reporting. Again, the economic downturn might have triggered this trend.

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To conclude, research on media change and media crisis is necessarily normative. Contemporary pluralist democracies adhere to a common set of norms and values that has developed over the centuries but needs to be constantly defended. Media change and media crises must therefore be carefully observed with regard to the potential erosion – or indeed re-enforcement – of these norms and values.

## DRIVERS OF CHANGE: THE USUAL SUSPECTS

As change is ubiquitous, drivers of change are abundant. Social settings are forceful drivers of change, such as the increase of relative wealth, of mobility, of the amount of free (leisure) time, the availability of social security and the loosening ties to institutions that organize meanings (schools, parties, churches, labour unions etc.) in (post)modern societies. Another set of usual suspects to drive change is the complex of technology and innovation. Perez provides an extensive overview of technological revolutions that changed society. She distinguishes five periods: first, the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century; second, the Age of Steam and Railways, starting in 1829; third, the Age of Steel, Electricity and Heavy Engineering from 1875 onwards; fourth, the Age of Oil, the Automobile and Mass Production from 1908 onwards; and finally, fifth, the Age of Information and Telecommunication beginning in 1971. (Perez, 2009, p. 9) Another driver of change are the lifestyles and habits of people who modify their preferences of consumption and of past-time, certainly in response to changes in the supply of available goods and services.

Joseph Schumpeter acknowledges the complexity of change and suggests capitalism as such as the main driver of change. What counts, according to Schumpeter, is not competition as such but competition for new commodities and new technologies: “(...) competition which commands a decisive cost or quality advantage and which strikes not at the margins of the profits and the outputs of the existing forms but at their foundations and their very lives.” (ibid., p. 84)

So there are good reasons to look more closely at features of capitalism to better understand media change. We concentrate on three such drivers of change, which are related to the capitalist order and which have been discussed extensively by communication scholars in the past. These are (a) technology; (b) the Internet; and (c) commercialization and advertising. These driving forces are obviously interrelated.

## Technology

Raymond Williams called technological determinism “an immensely powerful and now largely orthodox view of the nature of social change” (1974, p. 13). According to this somewhat ideological position, new technologies and the

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process of research and development are considered to set the conditions for social change and progress. Williams, a great opponent to this view, suggests analysing and understanding the role of technology in the process of change as symptomatic, rather than deterministic. Technology, in his view, becomes an element in the process of change, which is occurring in any case. This view “considers particular technologies, or a complex of technologies, as *symptoms* of change of some other kind. Any particular technology is then as it were a by-product of a social process.” (ibid.) Williams then uses the rise of the press to illustrate this process. The press in Britain was not driven by print technology but by the need of two powerful agents, the political elites and trade representatives. Both had a need to address large audiences with their messages. “Early newspapers were a combination of that kind of messages – political and social information – and the specific messages – classified advertising and general commercial news – of an expanding system of trade.” (ibid., p. 21)

Contemporary scholarly writings elaborate this perspective further. Graham Meikle and Sherman Young conclude their analysis of the rise of the Internet by stating: “But our point is that *the development of media technologies is an ongoing process, not an event.*” (2012, p. 33) In their view, technology needs to be understood as “produced and developed within complex relationships between people, institutions and technical possibilities.” (ibid., p. 21) It is therefore not the technology itself that changes society but specific members of the changing societies, who provide the means and resources to develop technologies. Williams reminds us that technologies that promise to cater for the needs of those who are in power are more likely to succeed: “A need which corresponds with the priorities of the real decision-making groups will, obviously, more quickly attract the investment of resources and the official permission, approval or encouragement (...). We can see this clearly in the major developments of industrial production and, significantly, in military technology.” (Williams, 1974, p. 19)

Lister et al. (2003, p. 81) condensed Williams’ view into a non-deterministic research agenda for technology and change: “Williams’ emphasis called for an examination of (1) the reasons for which technologies are developed, (2) the complex of social, cultural, and economic factors which shape them, and (3) the ways that technologies are mobilised for certain ends (...).”

For these reasons, technology is not an appropriate starting point to study and explain social change. Media and communication technologies are no exception. The technologies that enabled the rise of the press, radio, television and lately the Internet responded to changes in society and the desire of the political and economic elites to keep the Schumpeterian cycle of capitalism in motion.

### **Internet**

Ideas of technological determinism returned in a surprising move when the Internet (or the World Wide Web) was introduced in the early 1990s.

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According to some enthusiastic scholars, the Internet holds the promise not only for social change but for improving democratic agency, participation, empowerment and many more desirable values in contemporary democracies. Almost twenty-five years after the launch of the World Wide Web, some more realistic perceptions of the emancipatory potential of the Internet have prevail. In his bleak analysis of the Internet as being turned against democracy by capitalism, Robert McChesney contends “[t]he Internet and the broader digital revolution are not inexorably determined by technology; they are shaped by how society elects to develop them.” (2013, p. 216) And this society, it seems, elects to use the Internet primarily for commercial reasons.

Media and public communication are affected by the Internet in their core business and in fulfilling their role in society. Colin Sparks (2004) assessed the consequences of the first severe crisis of the then still early Internet on incumbent media. After a pronounced overheating of expectations and a considerable flow of investment money (venture capital) in the late 1990s, the so-called dot.com bubble burst in 2000/2001. While online media had to reduce staff, cut costs and reduce investments, the implications of the Internet on incumbent media easily survived the dot.com crisis. The first in Sparks’ list of impacts of the Internet on media business models is the erosion of previous distinctions of content and delivery technology, “replaced by a single kind of content – digitized information – transmitted along common channels and available through common reception technologies.” (Sparks, 2004, p. 311) Indeed, as a consequence, competition between formerly separated media increases as digital content is available (for the time being) on a non-discriminatory and network-neutral basis. Incumbent media are forced to compete with start-ups and global giants like Google, Facebook and Twitter in addition to their earlier competitors.

Küng et al. (2008) further elaborated the impacts of the Internet on the mass-media industry from an economic perspective. Network effects, price discrimination, customization and personalisation, bundling and unbundling, convergence are just a few of these impacts. Together with uncertainties concerning regulation in this contested field (in particular copyright legislation and network neutrality requirements), the authors draw the conclusion that – in their terminology – an “isoquantic shift” is to be expected, which refers “to a significant technological advancement that dramatically changes the way people do things and completely reorients people’s concepts of how things are done.” (ibid., p. 36) Such an isoquantic shift, following from the various implications the Internet has on incumbent media, is most likely to result in what we defined as institutional crisis of the media.

## **Commercialization and Advertising**

As discussed above, media organizations are centrally affected by the commercialization of the Internet. Incumbent media organizations are confronted with the decay of the link between journalistic content and

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advertising. Sparks explains that the Internet “allows for the disaggregating of editorial and advertising material. (...) It is no longer necessary for the reader to be exposed to the advertising messages in order to gain access to editorial material, nor is it necessary to be exposed to editorial material in order to gain access to advertising.” (Sparks, 2004, p. 314f) Ten years later, this process of disaggregation is far advanced and one of the main concerns of incumbent media organizations and the institution of journalism. “Indeed, what is especially ominous for the future of journalism is that some advertising has shifted not from traditional news media to their satellite news web-sites, but has leapfrogged instead to other parts of the Web, which have nothing to do with journalism.” (Curran, 2010, p. 468) With regard to news production, Currah reports from his interview-based research in Britain that the Internet erodes the economic viability of news production: “The principal conclusion is that increasing commercial pressure, mainly driven by the inherent characteristics of the digital revolution, is undermining the business models that pay for the news (...).” (Currah, 2009, p. 5) Denis McQuail agrees with this conclusion and states: “The steady commodification (monetisation) of the internet displaces early ties of obligation to the public and society (...).” (2013, p. 175), resulting in increasing commercialization and superficiality of content.

To conclude, while neither (digital) technology nor the Internet (World Wide Web) as such can be considered to be drivers of change, their implications for public communication and, in particular, incumbent media organizations are severe. The Internet by and large reflects larger shifts in society and enables new economic actors to introduce new rules to public communication. As the media order, as well as regulation in journalism and news provision, is eroding, if not breaking down, it is well justified to talk about an institutional media crisis. Actors and stakeholders are required to take disruptive decisions.

**LEARNING FROM FORMER CRISES**

How does the current institutional media crisis correspond with earlier times of crisis and change in the media field? Given the commercial character of most media organizations, economic prosperity or deficiency might also serve as apparent predictors for the (economic) success or failure of the media. But this analysis would fail to encompass the complexity of the matter if media were merely counted as economic subjects. Instead, we argue that prosperity and crisis of the media are closely linked to the social role media played – or were expected to play – in different stages of contemporary history. Our argument rests on the assumption that media have been pivotal in the social and cultural construction of modern nation states. Thus media can be compared to other major nation-building institutions, such as education, church, army and civil service. All these institutions can be characterized as being epistemic, creating and reproducing a form of knowledge

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that is centrally constructed around national concepts and symbols. Furthermore, contrary to the above sketched, oversimplified argument, we hold that economic crises are not necessarily bad times for the media.

We start this retrospection with the Second World War. Since then, four distinct socio-political and socio-cultural periods can be distinguished:

### **Post-War Until Late 1960, Early 1970: Media Constructing the Nation**

This period was characterised by the deployment of an extensive mode of reproduction (in contrast to the intensive mode adopted later). The central metaphor was large-scale industrial production: factories, Taylorism, division of labour, etc. For the effective organization of industrial production, a policy of social and political pacification and softening down the class differences was adopted. A large number of social reforms were carried out by the early 1970s. In a number of countries, the left-wing parties, previously excluded from political life, were now invited into national negotiations and consensus building efforts and new ways of workers' participation were experimented in industrial relations, etc. Ralf Dahrendorf's concept of the peaceful settlement of societal conflicts was influential in these processes. (cf. Dahrendorf, 1959) The first oil crisis of 1973 ended the period of continuous economic growth, also called the "long boom."

In order to enhance the values and ethos of national reconstruction, the main epistemic institutions were engaged in this work. This concerned equally education, church, cultural institutions (arts, museums and libraries), universities and sciences, as well as the media. In broadcasting, new innovations took place, both in the form of television and in the improved transmission technology in radio (FM), promoting also new institutional models such as the co-habitation between BBC and ITV in the UK. The newspaper press, experiencing a rapid period of reconstruction and renewal, organized competing interests between different classes and other social forces but situated this competition sternly within national frames – which required a recognition of differing interests sharing, however, a common framework or symbolic reservoir.

### **Late 1960s Until Late 1980s: Media Serving Social Welfare**

By the early 1970s, the Western economy started to suffer from structural problems. Starting from the US, economic growth stagnated, joined with rapidly rising inflation. Social and political stability, long reigned by the fruits of growth, faltered and resulted in increasing signs of mass discontent (France, 1968) and terrorist activities (Germany, Italy, US).

The basic mode of capital accumulation changed from the extensive to the intensive mode, which did not require any more of the same kind of

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integrative social and cultural policies. Instead of the policy that aimed at equalising societal differences, policies promoting social disintegration and segregation were adopted as they promised better economic benefits – at least in the short term. This was the promise of the neoliberal turn, which started to gain a foothold, first in the US and the UK in the late 1970s and later in most European countries.

At the same time, the traditional global system based on a negotiated balance between nation states (of which the UN was an emblematic example) appeared to have run its course. The political and economic sovereignty of nation states now created an obstacle for global capital accumulation. If European countries and companies were willing to compete with the US and Japan in the global market, it required the establishment of a single European market, supported and enhanced by respective social and political structures.

In this period, television (and previously radio) represented a different form of interest organization. Instead of particular interests as presented by newspapers – and the form of external pluralism they represented – radio broadcasting epitomised public interest, in the sense that particular interests were negotiated and organized within one medium. Against the class-based citizenship, this form of internal pluralism promoted the idea of universalist citizenship. The commercialized newspapers, which gradually took over from the party press, offered still another way of organizing national interests based on universalized internal pluralism: a market-based organization (consumer identity).

**Late 1980s Until 2000: Media Marketized**

During this period, economic and political relations consolidated. The European Union accepted new members and the internal market grew accordingly. However, the conditions for the traditional relations of social production, which used to be based on the principles of full employment and national social and cultural integration, no longer existed. Societies segregated according to economic wealth. Impulses for economic growth were sought from several directions: lowering the costs of industrial production; transferring production to low-wage countries; flexibilizing labour contracts (crushing the union power); substituting computerized work processes for human labour (post-Fordism); removing global and regional trade barriers; reconstructing the financial mechanisms to promote growth: expanding the non-productive sector of economy (banking, insurance, taxation); creating global financial markets; inventing new instruments to intensify the circuit of capital (options and other incentives, hedge funds); exposing previously non-market functions of society and culture to market logics; privatisation of public utilities and services; adopting New Public Management principles to public administration; commodification of culture and symbolic production (education, universities, arts and other cultural institutions, the media); re-distribution of wealth: promoting private monopolies through privatising public utilities (windfall

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profits); rewarding the capital owners and other high-income groups by tax redemptions paid for by cuts in public services.

In order to manage and co-ordinate all these different elements of the transformation of capitalism, two basic conditions were needed. Politically, a new elite consensus was required to replace the old one, based on a modelled Keynesian economic ideal. Technologically, the new global economic and financial formation required a constant monitoring and controlling of both the processes of production and trade and the flow of financial transactions. A new global information network (the Internet) with very high capacity was necessary.

The media were supposed to support the new (global and European) order and were expected to contribute as mediators between national and European interests and as economic actors themselves. In particular, the entertainment and cultural industries were becoming increasingly important economic areas. Furthermore, the new political consensus needed popular legitimacy. The media had a major role in constructing public consent to support the new policies – which, in many respects, were undermining the previous achievements on social policy and labour relations. Most importantly, however, the new global economic and financial order required the rapid expansion of the Internet as a computerized information network. In the name of efficiency, all societal institutions and organizations needed to be linked to the network: industry, administration, households. The Internet (or new ICT more generally) promised to fulfill several mutually beneficial economic functions. It provided a necessary conduit for economic and financial information (business-to-business); it created a new business area in itself (Google, Microsoft, Apple, Facebook, mobile connectivity); it opened up new global business opportunities and models for business; and it offered new ways for interaction between public administration and citizens.

## **2000 Until Today (2014): Co-Ordination Challenges**

The period is characterized by an increasing imbalance between the three levels of global media and communication policy: national, regional and global. Because of the decentred nature of the Internet, national governments lack the means for its regulation. As long as the service-providers are located outside the national jurisdiction, there is no legal means to regulate them on a national level. To a different degree, the same problem concerns the EU. Its competence is restricted to the media activities that take place in the territory of its member states. And again, on the global level, there are no such political organs or international organizations that have full competence over the functions of the Internet, although the ITU has certain authority over some of its technical aspects.

As the economic balance in the realm of the media is increasingly tipping from the other industrial branches (print media, television, recorded media) to the Internet, this is met with a simultaneous development in

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the area of global political system from a multi-centred order to a US-led mono-centred regime. One concrete result of this development is the global intelligence operation by the NSA, capable of spying on all Internet and telecommunication traffic. In the sphere of media-content services, the US-run companies Microsoft, Facebook, Google, Netflix and others dominate the Internet-based communication. In the case of conflicts between the jurisdictions, the companies prefer to negotiate directly between the European governments and to strike bilateral compromises, instead of negotiating with the EU about all-European solutions.

Instead of what was wished for in the early 2000s, the developments in Europe are characterized by increasing tendencies of disintegration. The anticipation of a European public sphere, uniting European people and establishing a space for open dialogue and democratic will, has changed to the fragmentation of Europe. The European media, instead of promoting a collective European identity and solidarity, reflects the increasing social and political polarization of European societies.

To conclude this retrospect, we argue that media crises correspond with the role played in different periods of contemporary history and the evidence supports this argument. The media played pivotal roles in accompanying the epistemic turn from the post-War reconstruction period to the current global, neoliberal economic order. Lately, the media are losing relevance as major nation-building institutions, causing a crisis that clearly goes deeper than short-term economic problems.

**CONCLUSIONS**

By returning to our research question, “In what way and to what extent current processes of change might be critical to the pursuit of democratic norms and values?” we conclude the current media change qualifies as an institutional media crisis. Over the last six decades, the media followed the political and economic orders, playing a pivotal role as major nation-building institutions themselves. Lately, however, this institutional role has eroded in parallel to the rise of new channels and distribution technologies that network political elites with citizens and business with consumers. The institutional crisis is therefore deeper rooted than in the more obvious economic turmoil caused by new competitors on the Internet and shifts in advertising budgets from incumbent media organizations to Internet-based businesses. This process of erosion has repercussions on the pursuit of democratic norms and values. In times of crisis – i.e. when significant segments of the media field break down and disruptive decisions need to be taken – media organizations might no longer be in a position (and willing) to adhere to their underlying and inherited norms and values. Media policy, therefore, needs to reflect upon and enact measures to establish framework conditions that ensure the pursuit of democratic norms and values.

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