

Renata Szczepaniak (ed.)

# Media Convergence – Approaches and Experiences



PETER LANG  
EDITION

## **Introduction: Media Convergence – the status quo**

When observing and studying the rapid media evolution that is the hallmark of our time, we are confronted with considerable methodological challenges. The bewildering variety of processes that run synchronously as well as the lack of distance to the object of research cause difficulties in discovering the kinetic laws of these processes and the patterns that guide these phenomena. It is also hard to determine the appropriate criteria for their analysis. Perhaps it is due to these challenges that the term *media convergence* was received with great enthusiasm, promising to provide the key to the understanding of current media development. For several years now, various aspects of media convergence have been the subject of a lively discussion and of research in various parts of the world, and therefore it may be the right time to stop and reflect on what progress has been made in this field and whether the concept has lived up to the high expectations it inspired.

In order to answer this question, it seems necessary to stretch the time horizon a little further, since although the very concept of media convergence is relatively new, the phenomenon itself is much older. Undoubtedly, already in the age of analogue technology, at the time of print media, especially since the appearance of photography, film, phonography and eventually radio and television, a variety of processes of mutual media exchange and influence have been taking place. Scholarly considerations on the effects of media interdependence go back further in time as well: Marshall McLuhan formulated his media theory or, more accurately, his hypotheses concerning the nature of the media, long before the rise of digital media, and those hypotheses have proved surprisingly durable. Nearly everything he said, for example, about the transition from manuscript culture to the culture of the book, or the then most modern medium, television, may also be applied to computer culture and the phenomenon of the World Wide Web. In any case, and this is quite a fundamental statement: for McLuhan media are in constant interaction with each other, similarly as they constantly influence the individual and society, leading to structural convergence of the collective consciousness, that is the psychological structure of the society of the 'global village'. From the time perspective it seems that this positive interaction between the media was McLuhan's main idea, though he did not use the term 'convergence', because in many of his considerations he refers to the effects of 'crossing or hybridization of the media' (*Understanding Media*, 1964), during which, as in a nuclear fusion, new power and energy is released and at the same time the opportunity is created to observe the structural characteristics of individual media.

For the researchers of media convergence, McLuhan's works are still a source of inspiration. However, this most well-known representative of the Toronto School of Communication Theory has been rightly criticized for his penchant for aphorism and vagueness of terminology: for him virtually anything could be understood and described as a 'medium'. The aforementioned ambiguity of concepts and subject matter is still an unsolved problem in the whole field of media research. It should be mentioned that Henry Jenkins, the director of the Comparative Media Studies Program

at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the founder of Media Convergence Consortium, significantly broadened the framework of research on media convergence in his book *Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006). In media convergence, Jenkins sees a cultural phenomenon that affects not only the relationship between media producers and consumers but also the content of the media. Today, a wide range of media convergence is discussed quite in line with Jenkins' idea. Apart from the technical convergence, triggered by universally applicable digitization, there are other forms of convergence: content convergence, institutional convergence and convergence of media markets. The effects of media convergence are currently being discussed by economists, lawyers, literary scholars, teatrologists, film experts, musicologists and, of course, all sorts of media experts; all of them find various starting points for further academic analyses here. In these discussions, the issues of intermediality and transmediality are certainly present, because they are the subjects which – without the reference to the phenomenon of convergence itself – have been quite popular for some time.

In conclusion, therefore, it may be said that there is a tendency to see the subject matter of research on media convergence as widely as possible – with the disadvantage that the image of this phenomenon blurs at the edges, and the very concept of media convergence loses its coherence. How can this problem be resolved? There is no better solution than the organization of conferences, in which theoreticians (i.e. those who act in a deductive way) meet with the practicians (i.e. those who approach specific problems in an inductive way) in order to exchange their findings. Within such a framework, it is possible to experiment with the possibilities of combining theory and empirical experience, as well as to identify questions which should be answered – that is, future tasks for scholars.

\* \* \*

What insights have been documented in this volume, which presents the conference results? Firstly, the concept of media convergence has successfully proven its heuristic value and capabilities. The study of mutual media interaction turns out to be extremely productive: it provokes and generates many research questions and gives the individual projects, in all their diversity, a common denominator. One thing can be emphasized at this point: the purely systematizing approach has, for the time being, failed. At the moment, the theoretically oriented, centralized research approaches seem to be less promising than the attempts to analyze the research area from its periphery. Two approaches appear to be particularly fruitful: firstly, the study of the possible consequences of a collision of old and new media; and, secondly, the analysis of the results which arise from various artistic experiments. The most impressive results are seen where the two research perspectives occur simultaneously.

The medium of the book, and maybe even more the theater, can serve as examples of how we can better acquaint (and reacquaint) ourselves with the essence of a seemingly familiar medium through its confrontation with the newly forming media system. The identity of the primeval medium of the theater, which has always been associated with the human body and its presence on the stage, emerges very distinctly from the background of the virtualized reality which can be regarded as the effect of

mediatization induced by digital technology. For example, the purism of theater projects which are reluctant to use technological innovations shows that progress can also happen dialectically: instead of rapprochement – or even fusion – of different media, a split, strengthening of the profile of a given medium may occur under the competitive pressures. Similarly, in the case of such a medium as the book, we can see the first signs of dichotomy: firstly, we are dealing with the mechanization of reading; secondly, more and more conscious attention is turned to the book as a physical object. At the same time, we should realize that the media process itself certainly does not proceed in a linear way, and sometimes there are even a lot of inconsistencies. It seems, therefore, very important to determine the boundaries of the convergence model, as well as to take note of the circumstances in which media *divergence* takes place.

What is observed here in view of projects of artistic nature can also be applied to other types of media, and even to the mass media: individual media are looking for opportunities to differentiate themselves from other media, they are trying to prove their individuality, to defend themselves against being incorporated into a rapid 'current of media convergence'. Incidentally, some kind of incompatibleness is revealed here as well: for example, digital television has not made the expected progress, the much-heralded convergence of interactive television and personal computers – though not a technical problem – is not moving forward. Why? Television is a traditional transmission medium, a classical *push medium*, which presents consumers a convenient offer, the most extreme kind of activity being channel zapping. The computer – as a *pull medium* – provides the receiver with what has been deliberately selected and requires greater activity on the part of the user. Therefore, various types of media consumption present the process of media convergence with various obstacles, in the first place with practical ones. Another impediment may be the fact that various media are positioned differently on the credibility scale. A certain level of reliability in the news sector can be expected only in certain types of media. The content of a blog will never be received with the same trust as the information conveyed by public radio. Thus, as it can be seen, the specific characteristics of individual media tend to set natural boundaries for media convergence.

Notabene, it was also Marshall McLuhan's idea that artists are always the first to discover how to use a given medium in order to expand the power of another medium. The relevance of this observation is confirmed today, even in this volume. An example of this may be, first of all, artistic installations that engage the viewer through the reference of old media to new media forms and which provoke reflection on the history of media by artistic means. This is the significance of these works of art: they question seemingly obvious issues associated with the use of media. Artistic avant-garde is not only focused on reflection. Today, it is also – more than ever – a creative media lab. A good example may be the recombination of old and new forms of media, which produce new and innovative effects (photocast).

The most demanding of the proposals indicated in this volume are the phenomena referred to as 'Storytelling': the mutually merging forms of experimental narrative, telling a story. These forms, also used in commercial advertising, are tested with the use of interactive, cross-media projects, including specific games of the reality type.

'Media Mix' is a term for the combination and integration of individual media to form something more than the sum of the parts. Some see this as the very 'essence' of media convergence. Examples here again may be theater or film as typical 'fusion media'. Experimental music with the specific logic of visual media can also be mentioned in this context. Of particular interest here is showing contemporary media aesthetics as a continuation of, at least, Wagner's idea of 'Gesamtkunstwerk'. Never before have the technological and media conditions been so favorable for experiencing a kind of 'immersion' through the integration of all the senses. Such total opening up to the media experience, in the sense of a 'second reality', should perhaps be considered the most advanced specification for media convergence and research on this immersion can be expected to achieve interesting results.

Experimental projects, visible in artistic activity, affect other areas of culture and everyday life in a multitude of ways. Elements of media convergence are omnipresent. Social networks shape new developments and movements in society. They are connected with all other media worlds, and as they directly affect media perception of many millions of users they initiate significant convergence effects themselves. The fact that both our private and social life is almost completely integrated into highly mediatized information and communication spaces proves how important the current development of trends in the media sector are for all of us. Presumably, however, thinking in terms of convergence is so popular nowadays because it contains prognostic components, almost taken out of the history of salvation: the concept of convergence refers to the vision of a future, in which the disturbing multitude of media phenomena and media processes finally reaches its end.

While the convergence model is just one of the possible ways to interpret the evolution of the media, it offers very fruitful results. There are currently no signs that this fascinating spectacle of dynamic growth and differentiation of the modern media system will come to a halt in the foreseeable future. As long as this process continues, its observation and analysis will remain the task of scholarly research. This brief introduction has tried to give an impression of the wide range of topics represented at the Krakow Conference on Media Convergence in 2011; the proceedings documented in this volume may serve as an example of the significance of such research efforts.

*Ernst Fischer*

# **History, Concept and Perspectives of Media Convergence**



## A brief look at the history of media convergence

Mateusz Nieć\*

It was in the 1960s that the very idea of "media convergence" appeared for the first time. In his work entitled *The Information Society as Post-Industrial Society*, Yoneji Masuda presented a vision of the new e-economy, by pointing out the fact that not only military infrastructure, but also the public one – including such areas as healthcare, education, economy and urban management – had become increasingly computer-based<sup>1</sup>. This statement became the basis for the model of the information society, in which "the socio-economic system will be a voluntary civil society characterized by the superiority of its infrastructure, as a type of both public capital and knowledge-oriented human capital, and by a fundamental framework that embodies *the principle of synergy and social benefit*"<sup>2</sup>. According to Masuda, the examples of such a society being created were "Project Teresa" carried out in Sweden since 1975 and the "Telidon Programme" implemented in Canada since 1979. Both projects are characterized by the wide use of computer technologies and telecommunication networks, creating a new, network-based socio-economic system. "An information is seen in the transmission of information between a large number of people within an extensive area made possible by the telephone and telegraph networks. This network, combined with a computer, has been developed into a network system that closely resembles information mechanisms as a living body, an organism"<sup>3</sup>. It should be emphasised that Masuda's conception appeared simultaneously with the general framework of the Internet (the 1970s<sup>4</sup>), but before the development of the Web 1.0 and was designed on the basis of the analog electronics and digital computer environment. Personal computers, which in Masuda's theory constitute the distant fourth stage of the information society's creation, did not appear until several years later. The Japanese visionary was well-aware of the change that would result from the spreading of personal computers, and of the consequences that said change would have for the politics, society and economy. He describes it as a "Copernican turn in personal privacy"<sup>5</sup>.

The concept of information society was adopted by the European Union because of political reasons similar to those which stood behind the adoption of the Masuda's

---

\* Mateusz Nieć, historian of politics and communication, in research to use with Toronto School and classical politics, author several books and many articles, recently to publish of handbook "Komunikowanie społeczne i media. Perspektywa politologiczna" and history of political communication (first part) "Komunikowanie polityczne w społeczeństwach przedmasowych" (to 18th); University Professor in the Jesuit University "Ignatianum", faculty "Political System".

1 Y. Masuda, *The Information Society as Post-Industrial Society*, World Future Society, Washington 1983, p. 31-33.

2 Ibidem, p. 32, 87-100.

3 Ibidem, p. 56.

4 M. Castells, *Spółczesność sieci*, trans. K. Pawluś [et al.], PWN, Warszawa 2007 [The Rise of the Network Society].

5 Y. Masuda, *The Information Society as Post-Industrial Society*, op. cit., p. 116.



conception by the Japanese: in order to build unique cultural identity and to maintain world-wide political influence<sup>6</sup>. The first "Green Paper" was published under the auspices of European Economic Community in 1987. It regulated telecommunication services and discussed the development of single market. It can be stated that it was this document that heralded the media convergence to come. In May 1994, the "Europe and the Global Information Society" report – prepared by the Martin Baugemann commission, which called for the immediate creation of the information society, based on the Internet. The report was published three years after the development of the WWW (World-wide Web) sites by Tim Berners-Lee, being the final stage of the creation of Web 1.0. The "Green Paper on the Convergence of the Telecommunications, Media and Information Technology Sectors and the Implications for Regulation. Towards an Information Society Approach", developed by the European Commission was published in December 1997<sup>7</sup>. It was the second "Green Paper" to be published. Its subtitle clearly defined the intentions of the project's initiators: "Digital Technologies underpin convergence". According to its authors "the term convergence eludes precise definition, but it is most commonly expressed as: the ability of different network platforms to carry essentially similar kinds of services, or the coming together of consumer devices such as the telephone, television and personal computer. This latter expression of convergences is one most often cited in the popular press"<sup>8</sup>.

The European Commission's outlook on the media convergence was popularized in Polish literature by Karol Jakubowicz, who emphasized that this term should be defined as the process of integration, concerning four sectors: printed media, electronic media (radio- and television broadcasting), telecommunications and electronic equipment. Each of these sectors was previously based on a different business and technological strategy<sup>9</sup>. Similar view was also held in the Press Research Centre in Cracow – the most distinguished institution in the field of media research. "Leksykon Terminologii Medialnej" (Lexicon of Media Terminology), edited by Walery Pisarek, defines media convergence as "the progressive, mutual interconnection and osmosis between telecommunication, audio-visual and information networks. It is digital technology, which creates the basis for these processes". The author of the entry on media convergence defined it as "the process, in which the programming of commercial and public broadcasters becomes similar"<sup>10</sup>. In my opinion, the former definition, focusing on the

6 I have discussed the political context in my work entitled: *Komunikowanie społeczne i media. Perspektywa politologiczna*. Warszawa: Wolters Kluwer, 2010, p. 206-210.

7 *Green Paper on the Convergence of the Telecommunications, Media and Information Technology Sectors and the Implications for Regulation. Towards an Information Society Approach*, European Commission, December 3rd 1997, from: <http://www.ictregulationtoolkit.org/eu/Publication.1500.html>. Retrieved 8 Juni 2011.

8 Ibidem, p. 1.

9 K. Jakubowicz, *Media publiczne. Początek końca czy nowy początek*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2007, p. 119. Similar view was also stated E. Kindler-Jaworska, in: *O rozwoju technologii cyfrowych*, "Aktualności Telewizyjne", 1998, no. 7, p. 35-41. It should be noted that a large part of that article constitutes a summary of the "Green Paper".

10 L. S. [Lucyna Słupek], *Konwergencja mediów*, in: *Leksykon terminologii medialnej*, (ed.) W. Pisarek, Universitas, Kraków 2006, p. 105.