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Introduction

Media Presence – Mobile Modernities

The 22nd Nordic Conference
on Media and Communication Research

Christa Lykke Christensen & Anne Jerslev

On 13-15 August 2015, the 22nd Nordic conference on media and communication research was held in Denmark. It took place at the Humanities Campus Amager, University of Copenhagen. The Department of Media, Cognition and Communication was the host for the NordMedia conference organised by Associate Professor Christa Lykke Christensen and Professor Anne Jerslev and in collaboration with the Section of Film, Media and Communication.

The conference theme was *Media Presence – Mobile Modernities*. The theme was meant to open up discussions on the changing conditions of human interaction and our changing sense of presence in the modern mediatised world. Ubiquitous media are transforming our cultural and social environments, thus influencing the ways in which we interact both in smaller groups and as participants in the wider society. Digital and mobile media enable people to be virtually co-present in a variety of contexts, irrespective of their physical location. This new media environment is likely to influence both the individual's sense of presence and our common ability to construct and maintain social relationships.

Moreover, the conference theme was meant to bring into focus discussions on how the emerging environment of ubiquitous media has a significant potential for improving democratic participation, for creating new and diverse forms of artistic expressions, and for strengthening social ties across time and space. In order to assess these potentials, however, it remains important to frame and study the present media environment from a historical perspective. From a current perspective, it is further essential to consider the challenges posed by new media, which can fragment public spheres, deepen social divisions, and extend social control. The uses of media for democratic, artistic, and innovative social purposes depend more than ever on the development of appropriate global as well as national regulatory frameworks, on media literacies from cradle to grave, and on the capacity of individuals to manage their own presence in the media.

Keynotes

Two keynote speakers were invited to contribute with their views on the overall conference theme. The first keynote speaker was Associate Professor Lee Humphreys, Department of Communication, Cornell University who gave a speech entitled *The Qualified Self: Mobile media and the accounting of everyday life*. Her point of departure was that many of the ways we use mobile and social media today have longstanding precedents in historical media like letters, diaries, and home movies. She pointed out that what we think of as the social media revolution is part of a much longer story about the use of media for connecting people through documenting and sharing everyday life. In her presentation, she placed mobile and social media into a longer historical context arguing that it helps to reveal what is really new about these contemporary communication technologies, what future services might learn from historical communication practices, and what fundamental aspects of the human experience emerge through a variety of media platforms.

The second keynote speaker was Professor Klaus Bruhn Jensen, Department of Media, Cognition and Communication, University of Copenhagen. The title of his speech was *Been there, done that: Communication, metacommunication, and presence*. In particular, he addressed the term metacommunication. Media constitute points of access to the world, affording their users presence in different local and global contexts. In the case of metamedia or digital media, users leave behind bit trails – re-presentations of what they did while present there and then. In addition to communicating with and through digital media, users metacommunicate, generating metadata that remain present for others to communicate about and to act on. Following a half-century of theorising and modelling communication, Klaus Bruhn Jensen argued the field of media studies should revisit the concept of metacommunication in order to understand and assess what people – system administrators, advertisers, regulators, spies, and other users – are currently doing with media.

Klaus Bruhn Jensen's keynote can be accessed on pages 7-22.

Plenary panels

To further elaborate on the conference theme, two thematically focused parallel plenary panels were organised. All panellists were media and communication researchers from the Nordic countries.

Plenary panel I

The first plenary panel was invited to present short papers under the headline: *Big brothers and little sisters – Surveillance, sousveillance, and coveillance on the internet*. The discussion paper was as follows: To be present on the internet is to be subject to *surveillance*. The bit trails or meta-data that users leave behind lend themselves to more or less legal and legitimate analyses and applications by businesses and governments alike. At the same time, ordinary users may engage in surveillance from below – *sousveillance* – of the powers that be. And, third, individuals as well as institutions constantly monitor the various groups and levels of society of which they are constitutive parts through

coveillance. Increasingly, communication is recorded in and of the use of digital media, and the records are accessible by more than one big brother and many little sisters.

Panel participants were asked to address the political and ethical implications of the capacity of an omnipresent internet to track and document the whereabouts and actions of users across private and public contexts. Particularly, the panellists were requested to consider three main questions: What is the general state of national legislation concerning privacy in online media? What are some of the current issues being debated in the area? And, what normative principles are at stake in attempts to balance the protection of individual rights with a collective interest in an open, internet architecture?

Participants in this panel were:

Professor Liv Hausken, University of Oslo

Professor Jens-Erik Mai, University of Copenhagen

Professor Miyase Christensen, Stockholm University

Moderator: PhD and Researcher Rikke Frank Jørgensen, The Danish Institute for Human Rights

Presentations by Jens-Erik Mai, Miyase Christensen and Rikke Frank Jørgensen can be accessed on pages 165-182.

Plenary panel II

The second plenary panel was titled: *Nordic media systems: Worth defending, worth developing, worth exporting?* The discussion paper was as follows: The media systems in the Nordic countries have been under continuous transformation for several decades due to globalisation, commercialisation, and digitalisation. Today's cross-media, competitive and networked media environment seems light years away from the mid-twentieth century Nordic media system of national broadcasting monopolies and political newspaper dominance. Still, the media in the Nordic countries display certain characteristics, which set them apart from other media systems in the world. Public service media continue to play a vital role, news media still command a high level of readership and exert a role as a fourth estate, and digital media have enriched the population's engagement in public and cultural affairs. Among observers from the outside, the Nordic countries' media systems are often looked upon with envy: they contribute to an informed citizenry, provide cultural productions of high value, and in certain areas Nordic media have become a global brand.

The panellists were asked to consider the state of affairs of the Nordic media systems and to discuss to what extent and in what ways Nordic media systems still exhibit characteristics, which are worth defending, worth developing, and perhaps even worth exporting. The panellists were asked to address the following questions: In what ways have the Nordic media been enriched by recent decades' transformations and to what extent have changes undermined the cultural policies and democratic ideals underpinning Nordic media systems? What role, if any, may media scholars play in the future development of media systems in the Nordic countries and what kind of research may help enable the Nordic societies to sustain media systems that provide rich cultural experiences, enable an informed citizenry, and encourage democratic participation?

Participants in this panel were:

Professor Trine Syvertsen, University of Oslo

Professor Ingela Wadbring, Mid Sweden University

Professor Hannu Nieminen, University of Helsinki

Professor Ib Bondebjerg, University of Copenhagen

Moderator: Professor Stig Hjarvard, University of Copenhagen

Presentations by Ib Bondebjerg and Ingela Wadbring can be accessed on pages 185-197.

Participants and divisions

332 participants registered for the conference, including 60 PhD students. Altogether there were participants from 18 different countries:

- 118 from Denmark
- 49 from Finland
- 63 from Norway
- 74 from Sweden
- 28 from other countries.

285 papers were presented in 11 divisions – of which the Television Studies was a newcomer, and 6 Temporary Working Groups (TWGs) – of which three were continuing from the Oslo conference in 2013 and three were new: Media and celebrity culture; Researching cross-media communication; and Media across the life course.

In this special issue of *Nordicom Review*, papers presented at the Copenhagen conference and recommended for publication by the division heads have been developed into articles. Nine articles can be accessed on pages 25-161.

For the last time in the history of the Nordic media and communication conferences, we wish to thank Ulla Carlsson for her support, especially during the first year of our work with the organisation of the Copenhagen conference. We are also happy to give our thanks to the new director of Nordicom, Ingela Wadbring, who together with the Nordic Planning Committee and Nordicom have supported both the NordMedia conference 2015 and the publication of this special issue. We welcome her as the new director of Nordicom and we are looking forward to fruitfully collaborating with her in the years to come within the framework of Nordic media and communication research.