



## RETHINKING CONVERGENCE/CULTURE

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# James Hay and Nick Couldry

## RETHINKING CONVERGENCE/CULTURE

### An introduction

#### Intervening in the 'over-crowded curriculum' of convergence/culture

Over the first decade of the twenty-first century there has been a growing perception that we live in an era of media 'convergence'. There are at least four ways that the expression 'convergence' has been deployed and its meaning solidified – as a description of new synergy (a 'horizontal' realignment) among media companies and industries, as the multiplication of 'platforms' for news and information, as a technological hybridity that has folded the uses of separate media into one another (e.g. watching a television broadcast on a cell phone), and as a new media aesthetic involving the mixing of documentary and non-documentary forms. This special issue, 'Rethinking Convergence/Culture', acknowledges the usefulness of these accounts of convergence but is skeptical not only about the overuse of the term but also about its limited conceptualization.

This issue is particularly interested in the prominent tendency to describe 'media convergence' as comprising, or at the centre of, a 'culture' – what Henry Jenkins has referred to as a 'convergence culture'. Our issue asks what difference it makes that the present is considered, or best understood, as a moment of 'media convergence' but also what difference it makes that media convergence (as a description of the present) is articulated as 'cultural' or as symptomatic of a historical formation (or less modestly, a new 'era' or 'epoch') best described as a 'convergence culture'. How and why has 'convergence culture' gained traction as a term for making sense of the present? What assumptions in recent accounts of 'convergence culture' have been made about media, convergence and culture – and their supposedly organic connection to one another? To what extent has 'convergence culture' become a buzzword whose meanings and currency have not as yet been fully mapped? We suggest that understanding contemporary media/convergence as constitutive of a 'new media culture' requires more careful reflection and elaboration.<sup>1</sup>

We raise these questions in this journal, *Cultural Studies*, because the predilection for casting media as constitutive of a culture has a history in/as Cultural Studies. Considering the linkage between Media Studies and Cultural

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Studies is relevant to our project because the most prominent accounts of media convergence and convergence culture have been silent about this linkage, either assuming (after all these years) their organic connection to one another, or implying a connection without acknowledging the complicated, discontinuous, and sometimes fraught relation of Cultural Studies to media/communications studies. So in one respect, we are interested in considering whether, and if so how, a discourse about 'convergence culture' – the yoking of 'convergence' and 'culture' – claims or gestures towards a new direction for Cultural Studies, or towards a historical context wherein Cultural Studies no longer matters in the same way as in the past – or no longer matters at all. These questions matter particularly when Cultural Studies is understood as projects and interventions organized from and about historical conjunctures, often with an eye towards developing strategies for analyzing, theorizing and intervening in the present. Proceeding this way does not assume an organic and continuous unity between 'new media' and a 'new culture', or between new directions for Media Studies and Cultural Studies. Instead, proceeding this way underscores that these have been historically and geographically *situated* linkages, and on-going *problematics* for both Media Studies and Cultural Studies. In this sense, the 'convergence' of Media Studies and Cultural Studies, and *that* convergence's assumption of a natural affinity between communication and culture, is a productive point of departure for assessing the current explanations of 'convergence culture' and how 'convergence culture' matters now.

Our point will be to bring out how the historical, and more or less geographically situated, linkage between Cultural Studies and Media Studies should pose certain questions to those who have been invested in the recent discourse of media convergence-particularly media convergence as a *culture*, or (in some accounts) a *new* culture. We say, "should pose", because too often the history of this linkage has been ignored in the emphasis on the new-ness of convergence as a problematic for Media Studies. The most well known efforts that link media convergence to a (media) culture often have developed out of the historical tie between Cultural Studies and Media Studies without reflecting on their implication, and/or have merely *implied* the relation of their project to this history without clarifying whether they see 'convergence studies' as simply a new set of questions for Media Studies and/or a new direction for 'cultural studies'.

## Media studies/Cultural Studies

Although studies and critiques of cultural modernity through references to communication media certainly pre-date the 1960s, the engagements between Media Studies and Cultural Studies (indeed the 'birth' of British Cultural

Studies) developed during the 1960s in Britain through debates over the meaning and history of culture,<sup>2</sup> over the objectives of the study of culture in schools, and over related initiatives about 'media education' (as integral to the study of the 'popular arts'). Although the curricular reforms associated with integrating and studying media as forms of 'popular culture' may not have been directly responsible for having transformed educational institutions in Britain, the initiatives in media education and the study of the Popular Arts were certainly a flashpoint of educational reform, and frequently are mentioned as the historical context for some of the most well known rationales for early Media Studies and Cultural Studies (Goodwin 1992). Contributing to these reform debates were Richard Hoggart's 'Schools of English & Contemporary Society' (1963/2007) which argued for the inclusion and 'critical' study of the 'little known mass and popular arts', Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel's *The Popular Arts* (1964) whose Introduction noted the challenges that the study of 'mass communication media' posed to 'traditional culture' and 'cultural education' and their policing of an already 'overcrowded curriculum', and Raymond Williams' *Communications* whose Acknowledgement cited the National Teachers Union's conference on 'Popular Culture & Personal Responsibility' as an inspiration for his book and whose Preface to the second edition pointed to work at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham as already having 'superseded' his book's ideas about the study of communication in cultural education. Although Williams (1962/1966, p. 12) explains how *Communications* provides 'methods of television education', he also envisaged media education as integral to the idea of 'permanent education' and to 'the educational force ... of our whole social and cultural experience' (pp. 14–15). All of these interventions affirmed Williams' point in *Communications* that 'media education' and 'media studies' in Britain in the 1960s was developing out of converging institutional practices, such as the study of media in the classrooms at all levels of curriculum, the integration of media technologies in the classroom, the reliance on media for distance-education and the changing role of public broadcasting as an educational practice.

Two other developments that were not exclusive to the UK contributed to an emerging relation between media education/studies and Cultural Studies in the UK – and to the pull, which Williams' statement above represents, between the study of a specific medium and of the place of media in 'social and cultural experience'. One of these developments was the currency and influence of Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964), whose title implicitly linked 'media literacy' and 'media education' and whose separation of 'media', pithily summed up in the book's famous expression 'the medium is the message', provided an alternative to the prevailing practice (on the Left and the Right) of describing communication, media, culture and society as 'mass' – of associating these indistinguishable (and undistinguished) media and practices of communication with a cultural and social uniformity.<sup>3</sup> Although

Hoggart's (1957) inaugural lecture makes no reference to McLuhan, it shares McLuhan's emphasis on cultivating a *literacy of individual media*.<sup>4</sup>

The other development shaping the point of intersection between Media Studies and Cultural Studies was the emerging influence of semiotics in 'critical' studies of media. To the extent that media education and McLuhan's increasingly influential writing emphasized the importance of a literacy of individual media, semiotics provided a theoretical framework and analytic for understanding *each* medium as a 'language' – a relatively discrete set of formal codes and conventions through which a medium 'made meaning'. The tendency to study and understand communication and culture in terms of specific 'media' helped legitimate media education in the organizational and reformist rationality of Western educational institutions that had, since the nineteenth century, supported separate areas of study with their own protocols of certification and expertise – evidenced in the modern Liberal Arts and Sciences education which divided cultural from science education (as C.P. Snow famously argued in 1959). And this tendency sanctioned the creation of university departments with titles such as Radio-TV-Film, as a distinctive academic pursuit, albeit one that represented the separation of media as objects of study.

As Stuart Hall noted in his 'Introduction to Media Studies at the Center' (1980a), by the late 1970s Media Studies had become 'one of the longest-running Centre research groups' (p.117). Hall cites four ways that Cultural Studies developed before the 1980s as an alternative to the dominant (US-centric) models of communication/media studies: as a rejection of the media-effects paradigm, as a demonstration that (particularly visual) media were not simply 'transparent bearers of meaning', as an acknowledgment of the agency and productivity of media audiences, and as a study of the role of media in circulating and securing 'dominant ideological definitions and representations' (Hall 1980a, pp. 117–118). In its embrace of Semiotic and Structuralist analysis of ideology (one of the 'two paradigms' through which Hall (1981) traced the early history of work at the Centre), British Cultural Studies shared some of the aims of contemporaneous film criticism as ideological reading and deconstruction. However, British Cultural Studies rejected the ahistoricism of ideological criticism, casting the production and dominance of ideologies as complexly determined and born through historical conflict, contradiction and struggle. And as Charlotte Brunsdon and David Morley (1978) and Morley (1980a) emphasized in their study of the British TV series *Nationwide*, the subject/audience of TV occupied a historically situated, and thus 'unstable, provisional and dynamic' position in an over-determined, 'inter-discursive space' reproduced through TV (Morley 1980b, p.166).

Certainly one of the most influential statements from the late 1970s on British Cultural Studies as media studies was Hall's essay on 'encoding & decoding' media messages (Hall 1980b). That essay explicitly rationalized a theory and analysis of media messages and media power as an alternative to

'mass-communication research', though the essay was not primarily an intervention into that paradigm of research, and the essay's attention to 'decoding' was understood by many as a rejection (rather than a complication) of the view that media power resided mostly in State and commercial media institutions. The essay famously emphasized that media are productive of hegemonic structures and, relying on Semiotics and Gramsci's writing about hegemonic formation, it underscored the complexity and contingency of the network of subject positions and actors comprising the 'production of media'. Following Gramsci, Hall argued that media made meaning and operated hegemonically 'without guarantees', thus reminding Communication and Media Studies that their theory and politics could not run too far out in front of careful analysis of the on-going process through which media re-constitute the codes and rules for producing meaning.

Hall's essay is characteristic of a historical contradiction of British Cultural Studies as a form of media studies. In one respect, Hall's essay (like other media studies that developed from the CCCS) pursued a set of questions that were not preoccupied (as were contemporaneous film studies) with the distinctiveness or distinctions of a specific media's institutions, 'language', or culture. The historical conjuncture for understanding relations and formations of power always were slightly more at stake in the analysis or demonstration. 'That *some* of British Cultural Studies' most widely read work focused on a particular medium, such as television, was relevant to the authors' points about meaning-making and the contemporary conjuncture, but never such a primary point as to warrant explanations about the institutional, formal and cultural (trans)formation of television. A conjuncturalist study about the mattering of television gestured towards the subject position as a point of converging media literacies, but it also seemed relatively uninterested in explaining the historical or geographic mattering of television or other specific media.

Over the 1980s, British Cultural Studies became associated somewhat less for its commitment to 'conjuncturalist' analysis, theory and politics, than for its having laid the groundwork for alternative models of communication and media studies (e.g. Communication's so-called 'qualitative' and 'interpretive' research methods), and for a flurry of interest in Audience Studies and Television Studies. As Lawrence Grossberg has noted, 'in the United States, cultural studies became visible only as something that operated within existing disciplines, even as it claimed to disrupt and challenge the disciplinary structure . . . [And] if, in fact, the specific nature of cultural studies as it developed in England depended on the fact that . . . the question of culture . . . could only have been raised in the field of English literature. . . , in post-war America, the issue of culture . . . was often located in other fields, . . . and during the 1960s, was largely displaced into the field of communication' (Grossberg 1997, pp. 276–279). Some of this uneasy and fraught 'displacement' of Cultural Studies to Communication and Media Studies played out as much through the importation of British Cultural Studies into Communication Studies as it did

around James Carey's (1989) proposal for a 'cultural approach to communication' – the latter of which cast Cultural Studies more directly than in Britain as an alternative to the dominance of scientific positivism in US Communication Studies (Carey 1989). A conjoined interest in Audience Studies and Television Studies developed rapidly within this latter displacement.

The linkage between Audience Studies and Television Studies, and those studies' referencing of Cultural Studies, is worth recalling for several reasons. First, their linkage enacted a historical contradiction. Television Studies was born of an interest in recognizing and demonstrating the *specificity* of a medium's history and effectivity, particularly its specific modes of making meaning and its operation as specific system of representation. Although this reasoning implicitly supported some of the widely used manuals of Television Studies (e.g. Horace Newcomb's (1976) multiple editions of *Television: The Critical View*, Robert Allen's two editions of *Channels of Discourse* (1987, 1992), E. Ann Kaplan's (1983) *Regarding Television*, and Patricia Mellencamp's (1990) *Logics of Television*), it was explicitly drawn out in John Fiske and John Hartley's (1980) *Reading Television*, which described TV as a specific media 'paradigm' and 'unit', and subsequently in Fiske's (1987) *Television Culture* which explains (and delimits) TV's 'culture' in terms of *its* codes, texts, and 'readers'. All of these books sought to make visible and knowable a medium that was so taken for granted, so embedded in daily life, as to require critical strategies for seeing the medium as medium, paradigm and language. However, the growing rejection of the old assumption that 'mass communication' was undifferentiated and productive of a homogenous culture and society – if not a totalitarian political state – required more than simply making visible an otherwise unconsidered, unremarkable medium such as television in studies of power, social relations and popular culture. It required that the critical practice turn its analysis on the *activity* of the viewer/consumer as 'reader' and user of the medium.

Although the impulse to rationalize TV Studies as aware of and interested in 'active viewers' or 'fans' complicated a central assumption in 'mass communication' research and theory, it often made a virtue of the singularity and specificity of a medium. Fiske's and Ien Ang's consideration of TV's 'secondary texts', Morley's attention to the 'inter-discursive subject positions' of TV viewing, and Tony Bennett's and Janet Woollacott's (1987) conception of the 'reading formations' of popular media always potentially directed attention away from the individuation of media towards a *multi-media* economy of 'media making'. But some of these lines of analysis (Fiske 1987, Ang 1985, Morley 1980a, Brunson and Morley 1978) may have left an impression that TV was the 'primary text' and the way into a study of subjects as *points* of converging media. To the extent that convergence never figured prominently into the study of a single medium, or that the authors assumed the centrality of TV in the world, mitigated against an analysis that begins at the intersections of media convergence and (more radical perhaps for Media Studies) with the

problem of media as hybrid technologies and assemblages, or with media subjects as occupying positions within multiple media networks.

In some ways, the 'politics of articulation' and the 'conjuncturalist analysis' proposed by Hall provided a viable starting point as much for Cultural Studies as for Media Studies, even though there clearly was too much working against formulating an alternative analysis of a culture (or cultures) of media convergence that understood 'convergence' in quite the way that Hall was proposing – that examined the practices of a specific medium as implicated in a variety of media practices and institutions, and/or beyond ('outside') media practice. Neither then nor now, can one say that the media-scape was such that one necessarily had to separate media for purposes of analysis. In fact, the ways that Cultural Studies informed or was equated with Media Studies (an emphasis on the 'active' media reader and on the importance of the 'reading formations' of popular media) occurred precisely at a time when the broadcast media-scape was giving way to forms of 'narrow-casting', marketing media products and commodifying media audiences as 'lifestyle clusters', and becoming a motor in an economy of 'mass customization', which by the first decade of the twenty-first century was encouraging or requiring media consumers to operate 'inter-actively'.

There also was an even more basic implication of the linkage between Cultural Studies and Media Studies that sheds light on the present: the way that Media Studies appropriated Cultural Studies' emphasis on the little, everyday and multi-form making and productivity surrounding media (i.e. a robust view of 'media/making') even as it insisted on placing 'media' at the centre of the world (and the structures in dominance) that it was analyzing and theorizing. On one hand, the writing that helped ignite alternative paths for Media Studies (such as Hall's account of 'encoding and decoding' or Brunsdon and Morley's conception of TV audiences) *assumed*, and never felt obligated to demonstrate, the mattering of media in relation to other practices. However, they were not interested either in demonstrating, as were the accounts of specific media such as TV, a media-centric account of a historical conjuncture and the modes of (re)producing social relations and power relations. Especially since the 1960s, media-centrism has been an objective of the institutions of media research, and a way that those institutions have performed their value and virtue within the economies and rationalities for producing knowledge about late- twentieth century cultural production. Now it is important to reflect on why that has been the case, whether the recently ascendant discourse on 'convergence culture', 'trans-media' and creative industries breaks with that past, and, if so or if not, why. 'Rethinking Convergence/Culture' is launched from this journal because Cultural Studies historically has begun its research by trying to figure out how media (and Media Studies) matter within conjunctures of practices, economies, governmental and institutional arrangements, funding streams, etc., and through a reflexivity about the changing contexts that encourage or require that knowledge be produced along certain paths rather than others.



## The 'now' of convergence studies

Where does this leave today's Media Studies, a product and field of intellectual work that developed in a different historical conjuncture? Should we understand a recent project such as Internet Studies as simply a residual (even deeply rooted) disposition for staking out the analytic parameters and limits of 'new media', as did 'TV studies' or 'film studies'? Although there have been new kinds of 'critical' questions posed about the Internet or a 'society of the network', this vein of work also has been dominated by long-standing social scientific and behavioural research paradigms. There certainly are new questions in the current context that would not have been posed in the interaction between Media Studies and Cultural Studies during the 1970s and 1980s, when broadcast media and Mass Communication research were dominant. But that said, how have studies of a convergence culture simply pulled old questions from Media Studies and Cultural Studies into the current context – something that likely occurs when one is not being reflexive about where the questions come from? Should we understand 'convergence studies' or studies of 'creative industries', or even 'trans-media' studies, all of which emphasize productivity across media, as still locked into a media-centric or media-ubiquitous view of the world that prevents them from grappling with how their projects do or do not reproduce the rationalities of the academic disciplinarity and media institutions supporting media research? Just as importantly, what are the disciplinary, political, heuristic and institutional *limits* of these accounts of 'convergence', hybridity and the 'industries' or 'media' of *creative* labor? And how reflexive have these studies been about these limits, and what authorizes them? If a discourse about 'convergence culture' and 'creative industries' acts on or against a history of 'Cultural Studies', how does this recent discourse harness an old, familiar, and perhaps even universalized conception of 'culture', or a conception of culture that was central to Cultural Studies in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s? These questions matter if the primary objective of today's study of 'media' is to represent the present context as organizing all manner of productivity and political agency differently than in the past, and therefore as having called forth particular positions for intellectuals who are 'organically' (in the Gramscian sense) or 'specifically' (in the Foucaultian sense) implicated in a rationality and new materiality of reorganization and advancement.

However, if the latter (i.e. if 'media convergence', 'convergence culture', 'trans-media studies', studies of creative industries, or the coming of 'convergence culture' studies all pose a genuinely new direction for Cultural Studies), then it also is worth asking whether exactly these accounts represent an alternative perspective about media's mattering in relations of power, political practice and agency, and governmental arrangements. Although studies of convergence culture and trans-media have addressed a set of questions regarding the political economy of contemporary media, their path

to these questions remains confined typically to conclusions about the agency of media consumers, rather than about how media institutions and consumption or 'media citizenship' matter within a robust, complex and contradictory sense of the current historical conjuncture. To the extent that the most well-known of these media studies venture into discussions about political activism or citizenship (e.g. Jenkins' *Convergence Culture* (2006), Hartley's *Television Truths* (2008), Burgess and Green's *YouTube* (2009)), they tend to emphasize the virtue of 'interactivity' and to cast the non-professionalism of DIY media, and the 'grassroots' of media mobilization, in terms of a generalized, universalist understanding of democracy rather than in terms of the messy contradictions and contingencies of democratic citizenship in the historical and geographical production of convergence/cultures and, we might add, in wider politics. And if 'convergence culture studies' are about one's implication (as consumer, citizen and/or professional analyst) in these contradictions, then it is incumbent on those who are engaged in a discourse about convergence culture to address directly how and why the political virtues and commercial value of an 'interactive' consumer-citizen have gained traction within contemporaneous ('neoliberal?') political rationalities and governmental arrangements.

In a world supposedly *prior* to 'convergence culture', 'trans-media', and 'creative industries', John Fiske (Allen 1987/1992) suggested that as British Cultural Studies informed TV Studies (partly through mediators such as himself), the connection between Cultural Studies and TV/Media Studies in the US had developed through 'liberal pluralist' and 'anthropological' theories about 'social harmony and stability', rather than through a 'Marxist analysis of social conflict', the latter of which he attributed to the emergence of British Cultural Studies. Fiske's explanation of these key terms, and his distinction between Cultural Studies in the US and the UK, lacked nuance. And despite his criticism of US Media Studies' appropriation of British Cultural Studies, his translation of Cultural Studies in the 1980s (*from* the US) became a prominent lens in the US through which to examine 'TV culture' as replete with ideological resistance which played out not only in TV programs but through a richly intertextual chain of practices performed by TV viewers/consumers. His rationale consequently became the point of debates over whether Cultural Studies was simply about seeing resistance everywhere – not *just* in TV. In important respects, Fiske's rationale about the virtues of not assuming that media consumers are ideological dupes (because they are themselves active producers of media cultures as systems of representations) laid some of the intellectual groundwork for the recently energized studies of convergence culture. Some of the contributors to 'Rethinking Convergence/Culture' remark on how Jenkins, for instance, explains the economy and politics of convergence culture through both Fiske's and his (Jenkins') reasoning about 'fan cultures'. However, Fiske's explanation affirmed the importance of recognizing the multi-form uses of media without accounting for how (even in the late 1980s) the increasingly *individualized*

engagements with media were becoming instrumental to the ‘mass customized’ economies and lifestyle programming of TV and media culture. Arguably, we should be more, not less, alive to that instrumentality two or three decades later, asking whether the economies of individualism (and their relation to new models of liberal citizenship, in the US and elsewhere) make ‘culture’ relevant, or relevant politically in the same way as in the 1970 or 1980s. Unless we do, it is difficult to see how today’s invocation of convergence *culture* can claim anything significant in common with the legacy of Cultural Studies, and specifically with its insistence on endlessly rethinking the changing positions and structures of dominance. There are no good reasons (from within Cultural Studies) to assume that liberal and democratic governmental arrangements and citizenship are geographically or historically uniform or uncomplicated. If anything, it is the complex situatedness and embeddedness of the mediation of liberalism and democracy from which ‘convergence studies’ of media, culture and power should begin.

From that starting-point, we may be better placed to reflect on the undoubtedly important intersection between many waves, not just one wave, of ‘new’ media (transnational satellite TV, mobile phones, the world-wide-web, social media) and the successful *and* failed political mobilizations that have attracted global attention in recent years. Even a crude, if roughly chronological, list – Myanmar, Kenya, Iran, Venezuela, Thailand, Spain, Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Belgium, Italy, Libya – brings immediately to mind the range of complex institutional and cultural contexts within which convergence’s implications for everyday politics and political change must be thought.

### Themes and threads for rethinking convergence/culture

In the articles that follow, an international range of scholars reflect from many (not always convergent!) directions on what is at stake in claims of the sort that many writers recently (not just Henry Jenkins but also in various ways Yochai Benkler (2007), Manuel Castells (2009), Charles Leadbeater (2008), Clay Shirky (2010)) have made about the direction and type of change that something like ‘convergence’ brings to media, culture, society, the economy, politics, and to the more or less organised articulations or disarticulations between all or any of these. Just as the focus of such future-oriented claims varies, so too does the angle of argument in these articles.

Some of the articles *are* general critiques, arguing for a new focus on the specific practices gathered under the term ‘convergence culture’ (Nick Couldry, writing from media sociology) or for a much longer historical time frame within which to assess convergence culture’s continuities with, and differences from, the pasts of media, technology and broader ecology (Toby

Miller and Richard Maxwell, writing from Cultural Studies/political economy). But the insistence on specificity is taken further also by a number of other writers. Some such as Liz Bird (and also Couldry) explicitly, and many other authors implicitly, raise questions about the typical agents of convergence culture and why certain claims about change prioritise particular types of agent, or particular types of evidence of agency, rather than others: who, if any, would be regarded as likely to be typical of something called 'convergence culture'? Extending this question leads to other questions about the agents that are considered significant for understanding the general trends of 'convergence', and an important line of argument in this special issue concerns *gender*. A great deal needs to be learned, as the articles of Laurie Ouellette and Julie Wilson and Melissa Gregg and Catherine Driscoll each argue, from the specific ways in which convergent media use is embedded within, and distributed across, contemporary gender relations in the work and quasi-work spheres which remain, emphatically, unequal. Nico Carpentier pursues specificity by looking more closely at the notion of participation: taking the apparently new participatory cultures that have emerged in the decade, he considers the social processes in which they are embedded, and the roots of those processes in much longer histories of power struggles around media resources which may not have been reconfigured as much as first appears.

Diverging from, or sometimes overlapping with, these directly critical views of the notion of 'convergence culture' are other essays which insist on the need to reframe our assessment of the *discourse* on convergence culture. This is pursued in various directions, some engaging with the details of Henry Jenkins' specific argument more closely than others. Mark Andrejevic and Jack Bratich examine the entanglement of convergence discourse with new discourse about social space generally, including new forms of measuring and managing social and economic action and new modalities of war. Inevitably convergence discourse intersects from many directions with the changing dynamics of capitalism and another major strand in this special issue are articles that seek to adjust our understanding of convergence so as to make it more open to other – possibly sharper *and* more flexible – continuations of the critique of capitalism (Ginette Verstraete and also Driscoll and Gregg, Ouellette and Wilson). Toby Miller and Richard Maxwell offer a more fundamental critique of convergence discourse by problematizing from the outset the notion that we can easily identify what is 'new' and why it matters, without clarifying 'who' the mattering is for, and within what longer trajectory of power reproduction it is formulated. This returns us to issues of agency, but this time conceived not within the ambit of everyday practice, but within the space of wider power-structures. Sarah Banet-Weiser by contrast focuses not so much on the specific logic of convergence discourse, but on the (in effect, political) work that a celebratory close-to-commercial discourse of convergence culture does in deflecting us from the many *other* types of 'converging'

already under way in contemporary media and creative cultures. James Hay discusses the need to rethink 'the popular' as ascribed to media and culture, and he considers how old accounts of 'popular culture' and recent accounts of 'convergence culture' may not help us think about the historical contradictions and crises through which the new political 'populism' in the US (on the Left and the Right) is emerging.

Finally, Graeme Turner addresses how theories and studies of 'media convergence' and 'convergence culture' have been integral to both a reformism and crisis in global higher education, in ways that are materially supportive of new paradigms of 'media education' alongside decreasing financial support of curricula that have accommodated critical and Cultural Studies. As Turner argues, the arrival of a 'convergence culture' and the recent ways of studying it are having a profound impact on Media Studies as Cultural Studies. Turner's essay 'brings home' one of the fundamental questions driving this issue: How are our interventions into the current context of 'convergence' and 'new media' authorized and materially supported through the institutions that we inhabit as workers, citizens and consumers? Perhaps *this* is the underlying question from which future reviews of convergence 'culture' will need to start.

## Notes

- 1 The term 'media culture' itself requires more interrogation, on which see Couldry and Hepp (forthcoming).
- 2 Here we have in mind the polemics that famously developed through and around writing and interventions by Raymond Williams (1958, 1961), E.P. Thompson (1964), Richard Hoggart, and Stuart Hall during the 1950s and 1960s. As much as that body of writing *rethought* the relation of 'culture' and 'society', the historical meanings of 'culture', the dominant histories of Modernity, and a Marxist historiography, theory and politics, it also reinforced a conception of culture that persisted well beyond that context – even as it never ceased being a subject of debate. In part, the objectives of Cultural Studies often have pivoted on the debates about perspectives and meanings of culture that were introduced during that context. The current studies of convergence as *culture* or *cultural* typically build on the history of these debates without acknowledging the history.
- 3 McLuhan occasionally accentuated this point in one of his well-known puns – 'the medium is the mass age'.
- 4 Hall and Whannel's *The Popular Arts* was published the same year as McLuhan's *Understanding Media*, but their book makes frequent reference to McLuhan's earlier *The Mechanical Bride: The Folklore of Industrial Man*.

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