40 Years of Nordic Media Research

Introduction

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1973. The world is affected by the Yom Kippur War in the Middle East and the global oil crisis. Denmark, Britain and Ireland join the EEC. In the US, the Watergate hearings begin and World Trade Center becomes the tallest building in the world. A ceasefire is signed in the Vietnam War. There is a military coup in Chile, and Pinochet takes over. In South Africa, activist Steve Biko is banned by the apartheid government. In the field of popular culture, *The Godfather* wins the Academy Award for Best Picture. Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* is released, and David Bowie ends his Ziggy Stardust tour in London. In the world of information technology, IBM presents the revolutionary Mag Card II Typewriter, with an electronic memory that can hold up to 8,000 characters. In Norway, NORSAR (Norwegian Seismic Array), as the first institution outside the US, connects to the ARPANET, the precursor to what in 1983 will be named the Internet, although most people will not hear about it until the 1990s. The media scene in the Nordic countries is characterized by the recent introduction of colour television, and 'mass communication' is a fairly new concept.

And – for a few bright midsummer days in June, the very first Nordic media research conference is organized in Voksenåsen in Oslo.

NordMedia 2013 in Oslo marked and celebrated the 40 years that have passed since that very first Nordic media conference. Much has changed in these 40 years. For the journalistic media, for instance, the digital revolution has had a profound impact on their development: digitalization of all kinds of media, multiple platforms, a growing number of formats and new media practices, which have facilitated new cultural conditions and altered the possibilities for the direct participation of audiences. Furthermore, the changed conditions of the media, transformed by globalization, increased commercialization and owner concentration, are dramatically changing journalistic work. These changes of course influence what we study, and how we carry out media research.

Also within the field of media research as such, essential changes have taken place since 1973, in terms of a much larger theoretical and methodological plurality now than then. There is much greater acceptance of, yes even a requirement for, multidisciplinary perspectives than there was 40 years ago. The ever growing list of topics that media researchers focus on is reflected in the wide range of thematic divisions at the Nordic conferences.

Nevertheless, there is also a line of continuity between the two Oslo conferences and a permanence can be noted in some of the overall questions and core challenges in

current Nordic media research. At the very first conference communication and social responsibility were the main topics, followed by communication and democracy. Forty years later, the conference was hosted by the oldest journalism education programme in Norway, now a part of Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences. The organizing committee at the Department of Journalism and Media Studies decided on the conference title "Defending Democracy. Nordic and Global Diversities in Media and Journalism".

At a 40-year anniversary, it made sense to have a conference theme that dealt with a large, important and timeless topic. The conference title points to the central role the media play in democracies and processes of democratization. We live in an era in which the media occupy an increasingly important part of both fundamental societal structures and everyday socialization. Few will argue against the potentially democratic role of journalism; however, media and journalism do not automatically promote democracy. Traditional media institutions, and with them professional journalism, are no longer by default the main stewards of freedom of expression and hence democratic principles in a modern society. The ambiguous relationship between journalism and democracy is – in our digital age – further blurred by the proliferation of non-edited and personal media, such as private blogs, Twitter and other social media with their allegedly democratic potential.

Nordic societies and hence the Nordic media are becoming increasingly globalized. The Nordic countries today represent a diversity of different cultures, social groups and ethnicities, and characterized by increased migration and transnational interaction and cooperation. The political economy of the media field and the increasing diversity of the various media practices and media cultures are also more and more influenced by global trends. This makes it essential to view the relation of media and journalism to democracy and free speech from a transnational perspective, which includes not only the Nordic countries but also other parts of the world.

However, this celebratory occasion also reminds us that the context for the Nord-Media conferences is still the Nordic countries. These conferences will continue to be important for regional collaboration in the future. In Oslo, three media researchers emphasized the significance of Nordicom and the NordMedia conference for Nordic media and communication research. All three of them – Kristin Frandsen from Denmark, Kaarle Nordenstreng from Finland, and Rune Ottosen from Norway – point out the importance of Nordicom in providing the region's researchers, politicians and the public with documentation on and knowledge of Nordic media. Their festive tributes make up the introductory section of this conference issue.

The NordMedia 2013 conference focused on the relationship between journalism and other media practices and democracy from a Nordic and global perspective, by asking questions such as:

- What roles do media and journalism play in democratization processes and what role should they play?

- What is the relationship between media practices, journalism and democracy?

- How does the increasingly complex and omnipresent media field affect conditions for freedom of speech?

- How can journalistic institutions and other media institutions best ensure that the media's role as carriers of free speech and democratic ideals is maintained and strengthened?

Such questions are particularly addressed in the three keynote speeches presented in this issue.

In her keynote speech, "Defending Whose Democracy? Media Freedom and Media Power", Natalie Fenton critically discusses neo-liberal notions of an inevitable sequential relationship between "free" media and more news on the one hand and a healthy democracy in our societies on the other. Focusing on the case of the UK, she does see a relationship between news and democracy. However, it is a largely dysfunctional relationship whose breaking points pivot on issues relating to commercialism and the marketization of news, as well as a concentration of ownership and deregulation. Fenton questions the libertarian notion that truth will necessarily emerge in the marketplace of ideas. She argues that journalism can be de-democratizing in a political-economic system that claims that less state interference in the form of regulation stimulates democracy and productivity. In this system, productivity in the market and hence news as commodity takes precedence over the social and political concerns of news as mechanisms of democratic process.

Fenton concludes that it is necessary for media scholars to consider who has power and how power is used if they are to fully interrogate the relationship of media to democracy. By embracing the social dimensions of mediated life and the political consequences of our actions and those of others, we are encouraged to take account of those who hold power and those who seek to claim it, and to critique how each is accountable to the other.

In his keynote speech, "Radical Media Ethics: Responding to a Revolution", Stephen Ward claims that journalism should have an ethical impulse to advance social justice and promote human flourishing and democratic structures worldwide. However, with North American media as his point of departure, he considers media ethics to presently be in turmoil. This is largely due to two macro-trends: 1. the emergence of a mixed media with many types of practitioners, technology and content, and 2. the globalization of media. Ward identifies new forms of journalism developing, such as "brand journalism" and "agenda-driven journalism", forms that seem to threaten the notion of independent journalism in the public interest. However, he considers traditional media ethics, which stresses objectivity and impartiality, to be weak on specifying guidelines and protocols for the different forms of media that are emerging.

According to Ward, we need to re-invent media ethics. It should be unified by an allegiance to general principles of truth and independence. But it will also have to develop an ethics of difference that allows various forms of journalism to follow different protocols and norms, whether these are forms such as satirical journalism, opinion journalism, editorial cartoons or advocacy reporting. In a constructive manner, Ward imagines a media ethics of the future, consisting of, amongst other aspects, an ethics of new media ecologies and an ethics of global, democratic journalism.

With regard to the last aspect, journalists might get valuable inspiration from current practices in the documentary film genre. In his keynote speech, "Cosmopolitan Narratives. Documentary and the Global 'Other'", Ib Bondebjerg points out that although

news, especially on 24-hour news channels, is important in updating us on global is-
sues and themes on a daily basis, documentaries are in one sense more influential in
the forming of global narratives and cosmopolitan imaginaries. Documentaries can tell
stories that bring us closer to the reality of distant others, and create identification and
empathy by displaying human dimensions that are universal, despite cultural differences.
Whereas news from conflict societies such as Afghanistan tends to represent realities
from a military and political perspective in informational stories rather than broader
narratives, documentary filmmakers have at their disposal a wider spectrum of modes
in their representation of reality and themes.

Bondebjerg illustrates this by discussing how different Afghanistan documentaries
have an anthropological approach to reality and may focus intensely on the worlds and
minds of the others, for example by letting them shoot parts of the film. Other large-
scale, multiplatform documentary projects try to establish a global dialogue around
global issues. In the case of the project *Why Democracy,* ten filmmakers around the world
made different films about democracy and what it meant to them. For Bondebjerg, such
projects represent a new form of a mediated, global public sphere.

In this special issue of *Nordicom Review*, the first group of articles developed from
papers presented at the Oslo conference, offers different perspectives on journalism in
Nordic countries.

In "Credibility and the Media as a Political Institution" Mark Blach-Ørsten and Ras-
mus Burkal argue that the credibility of journalism as an institution in Danish society
is found in the daily practices of producing news by following the rules of the news
regime. They define credibility on the one hand as the accuracy and reliability of news
stories in leading Danish news media, and on the other as journalists' knowledge and
understanding of the Danish code of press ethics. A major finding in their survey of news
sources that participated in different news media (national print and online newspapers,
local newspapers and television) is that these sources find relatively few errors in the
news. On a general level, however, many sources display mistrust in the media as they
suspect them of being politically biased. Blach-Ørsten and Burkal consequently express
a need for more transparent practices in the newsroom, something that would make it
possible for sceptical sources to test their scepticism against the work of the journalist.

A different perspective on newsroom practices is provided by Gitte Gravengaard
and Lene Rimestad in "Socializing Journalist Trainees in the Newsroom". Rather than
focusing on the products of newsroom socialization, as is common in this research area,
the authors study how the socialization process actually takes place in the newsroom. In
empirical studies of 12 Danish journalist trainees during their internship, they analyse
interactions between the trainees and their editors concerning ideas for news stories. Their
analyses capture intangible parts of the socialization process and of the construction of
craft ethos and professional vision. The authors argue that their socialization analyses
may offer an opportunity to transform parts of the editors' tacit expert knowledge into
expressed knowledge, so that editors can reflect upon and discuss their routinized practice.

Arne Krumsvik contributes through an updated analysis of the rationale for online
publishing in the Norwegian newspaper industry. His article, "Stability in Times of
Change: Trends in Newspaper Executives' Attitudes towards Digital Media", presents
surveys of Norwegian print newspaper executives' attitudes towards digital media. The

surveys, conducted biennially from 2005 to 2013, suggest a high degree of stability in their attitudes, as they still do not approve of their organizations' online activities. Nevertheless, Krumsvik finds that the rationale for online publishing is changing. Marketing of the print edition has become less important and new sources of revenue more important. There is an increased focus on user payment for online activities, and the rationale for this approach has shifted: whereas it was driven by perceived threats from 2005 to 2011, opportunities for the industry are the strongest predictor in 2013.

The second group of research articles, entitled "Media Influence and Influencing the Media", consists of work that in different ways sheds light on aspects of the complex relations between media, politics and public relations – and the actions of social groups and institutions as well as corporations and industry groups.

In media studies, the concept of mediatization has blossomed in recent years. In "Strong and Weak Forms of Mediatization Theory: A Critical Review", Marko Ampuja, Juha Koivisto and Esa Väliverronen critically discuss the advocacy of mediatization as a key concept in media research. The authors distinguish between a "strong" and "weak" form of mediatization theory. The strong version argues that contemporary societies are permeated by the media: social and cultural institutions and actors increasingly need to accommodate a "media logic". The weak version criticizes the notion of a uniform media logic, but emphasizes the role of the media in social change. Its advocates try to de-centre the media and see mediatization in relation to other major social and cultural processes. Although the weak version seems to avoid overly simplistic assumptions of the power of media in contemporary societies, Ampuja et al. argue that its advocates have not provided theoretically coherent analyses and explanations of social change.

The authors believe that the fascination with the mediatization concept will continue in media studies, but argue that the media centrism of both forms of mediatization theory prevents their advocates from clarifying the role of media as agents vis-à-vis other powerful social, political and economic institutions.

The article "Talking Green in the Public Sphere" gives an overview of common topics and tactics that large Swedish corporations use in their environmentally themed press releases. The authors, Alon Lischinsky and Annika Egan Sjölander, show that corporate voices make substantial use of environmental and ecological arguments in their strategic communication with journalists and newsrooms. However, the corporations do not provide much useful information about their environmental impact and do not foster forms of dialogic stakeholder engagement. These findings feed democratic concerns, not least regarding the general public's limited possibilities to stay well informed about business activities and their environmental impact on the commons.

In their article, "Migration between Politics, Journalism and PR – new conditions for power citizenship and democracy?", Göran Palm and Håkan Sandström argue that to fully understand contemporary politics one needs to comprehend the migrating trend and convergence between elite politicians, elite political reporters and elite communication /PR officers. Through empirical findings, the authors show how the three fields of power holders form the realm of politics and communication, and constitute a strategic communication elite. This communication elite, the authors argue, sets the parameters for the public discourse on politics, at large affecting how ordinary citizens will perceive "the political", but also draws limits for their ability to take action.

In his contribution, "Norwegian Media and the Cold War 1945-1991", Henrik G. Bastiansen discusses how the historical Cold War period influenced the media – but also how the media influenced the Cold War. The main point is that if we want to understand the development of the mass media during these years, we also need to investigate the relations between the media and the Cold War. As a consequence, Bastiansen stresses that it is impossible to understand the Glasnost phenomenon without the media dimension. The influence was not only from events to media, but also the other way around: from media coverage to news events. The article argues that the Norwegian news reporting of these years must have also been deeply influenced by the changes in Soviet media and how they discussed social problems in new ways. It concludes that the Glasnost era in the Soviet media also changed the foreign news journalism in Norwegian media – and thus the public image of the Soviet Union in Norway at the end of the 1980s.

Anne Jerslev's article, "Celebrification, Authenticity, Gossip – the Celebrity Humanitarian", approaches the topic of mediated influence from yet another perspective, through a discussion of the celebrity humanitarian as a media construction. The article shows how celebrities can call immediate attention to important global causes, that they can act as intermediaries between publics and political movements, and that they may be able to translate and communicate complex, global political and economic structures into understandable terms. Simultaneously, through the very same activity, celebrities market themselves as "humanitarian celebrities", creating a sellable brand identity, and may thereby improve their general value in the entertainment business. Jerslev shows how authenticity is a relational and discursive endeavour and therefore that authenticity will always be negotiated in specific contexts. An empirical example of a photograph of Angelina Jolie in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2013 illustrates how the mediation of celebrity humanitarianism is framed by and structured within a "celebrity logic". Through its discussion, the article illuminates what challenges such a celebrity logic as a media practice poses to the activist or goodwill function.

The final section consists of research articles presenting diverse perspectives on media communities and formats. Contributions discuss issues such as the collaborative production of articles in Wikipedia, player experience in digital games, and media memory practices of our time.

Maria Mattus' article, "The Anyone-Can-Edit Syndrome, Intercreation Stories of Three Featured Articles in Wikipedia", as the title indicates, is based on a study of three featured articles from the Swedish version of Wikipedia. Being the world's largest and most popular general reference work, Wikipedia might give the impression that user-generated articles are mostly collaboratively shaped products. Using the slogan "the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit" Wikipedia invites everyone to contribute, but the article hypothesizes that the contributors do not necessarily represent all kinds of individuals or interests. Consequently, the imbalance among the participants might affect the content as well as the perspective conveyed. The three featured articles under scrutiny belong to the *culture* subject field, and the analysis follows their development from their very first versions in 2003/2004 to edits made at the end of 2012. By doing so, it demonstrates what the creation (or intercreation) processes of the Wikipedia articles look like, and how the collaborative production of such articles can be understood.

In "A Quest for *Communitas*: Rethinking Mediated Memory Existentially", Amanda Lagerkvist compares two current memory regimes: the 9/11 anniversary commemoration on Swedish television, and web communities dedicated to lost love ones. There are important differences between these two media memory practices. Televisual commemoration sanctions particular official memories of certain events and certain deaths, whereas digital memories are non-official and spring from individual and collective needs to memorialize, grieve, connect, support and be supported. Lagerkvist argues, however, that both televisual commemorations of anniversaries of trauma and our new multiple media memories compel us to conceive of our hyper-contingent, late-modern digital age as a search for meaning, transcendence and cohesiveness – for existential security. These cultural memory practices echo a basic quest for *communitas*.

Rikke Toft Nørgård's "Talking Tacitly: Activities and Experiences in Highly Interactive Media" merges new methods of researching digital games and game players with new ways of writing and thinking about media. She presents a three-year study of a group of game players' activities and experiences across different digital games and media platforms. Nørgård argues that if one is to grasp the uniqueness of their activities and experiences, it is not sufficient to re-use adapted media theories, concepts, methods and ways of writing. She uses alternative methods, theories and styles of writing in order to allow for the emergence of new formations of studying, thinking and talking about activities and experiences in highly interactive media. The presented findings emerged through the application of a multi-methodology combining a grounded theory approach with phenomenography, remix methods and interpretative ethnography, as well as visual methods.

Claus Toft-Nielsen explores the close connection between fantasy and computer games in "Worlds at Play. Space and Player Experience in Fantasy Computer Games". He argues that the main function of the fantasy genre is world-building. Successful fantasy lies in the creation of a world where laws are established and followed throughout the fiction. On the basis on empirical data from interviews with players of *World of Warcraft,* the most popular Western online role-playing game of all time, the author develops the concepts of "worldness" and the *fantasy genre matrix.* He argues that these concepts can help us frame some of the different experiences players have when engaging with vast online game worlds, and how these intersect with other worlds in a wide array of media.

 Finally, Svein Høier's article, "Surrounded by Ear Candy? – The use of surround sound in Oscar-nominated movies 2000-2012", discusses sound in contemporary cinema. Taking ten Oscar-nominated movies in the categories "sound editing" and "sound mixing" as its empirical starting point, the article analyses their soundtracks and compares the different formats of these movies: the stereo version and the surround version. In doing so, the article discusses practices of sound design and approaches a "best practice" of surround sound today. Central questions include "What kinds of strategies are prominent when sound designers shape voices, music, atmospheric sounds and sound effects in today's surround systems?" and "How do sound designers take advantage of the possibilities that such systems presents, and how do they overcome limitations?" The article clearly illustrates how the use of "directional" listening modes to study how the different channels and speakers are used when presenting sonic elements like voices, music, atmospheres and sound effects may help in analysing and describing the acoustic arrangements in today's surround sound.

This conference issue ends with Elisabeth Eide's "Fortysome Worries", a new take on Bob Dylan's *A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall* as it was sung by the NordMedia organizing committee during the conference dinner at Langøyene in the Oslo Fjord, 10 August 2013.

But before we are introduced to the fortysome worries, Ulla Carlsson herself, Director of Nordicom and a key person in the Nordic media research collaboration, strikes an optimistic note with regard to the prospects for the NordMedia conferences. In her view, in the future the conferences may assume decisive importance, both in the development of media studies in the Nordic countries and in our success in the international arena. We believe that the span and content of the articles presented in this issue of Nordicom Review nurture such future prospects. We want to express our gratitude to Ulla Carlsson for her tireless efforts for the Nordic media and communication research community during the past 40 years, and for making this special conference issue possible.