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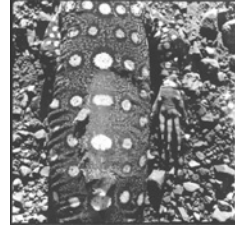
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## Convergence culture in the creative industries

● Mark Deuze

*Indiana University, USA*

**ABSTRACT** ● This article maps the emerging practices in media professions like journalism, advertising, marketing communications and public relations in adapting to a new global environment, characterized by an increasingly participatory media culture. Among creatives and brand managers in ad agencies 'interactive advertising' is at the center of the contemporary buzz. Marketers in the cultural industries brainstorm about the potential of upstream marketing, while in public relations the opportunities of two-way symmetrical communication are explored. Editors of news publications increasingly jump on the 'citizen journalism' bandwagon. All these trends are part of the same phenomenon: a convergence of the cultures of media production and consumption. In this essay, these developments are discussed in terms of their potential impact on consensual assumptions about the nature of media work, seen through the lens of the combination of individual creativity and mass production, also known as creative industries. ●

**KEYWORDS** ● convergence ● creative industries ● creativity ● cultural industries ● cyberculture ● liquid modernity ● new media theory

I am struck by the ending of *The Truman Show* [...] All the film can offer us is a vision of media exploitation, and all its protagonist can imagine is walking away from the media and slamming the door. It never occurs to anyone that Truman might stay on the air, generating his own content and delivering his own message, exploiting the media for his own purposes. (Jenkins, 2004: 36–7)

Indeed, what would happen if Truman Burbank decided to stay? Measured by current trends in ways people use media he most likely would have turned *The Truman Show* into a 24/7 videoblog (or audio-only podcast), offering a running commentary on the global status quo. Truman would most likely have invited viewers to contribute their views and opinions, perhaps even allowing users to upload or submit media materials themselves. Over time, Truman Burbank and a rather select fan community of 'lead users' would be running the show just like the hundreds of media professionals in Atlanta run the 24/7 television channel *CNN Headline News*, or how a team of producers, writers, managers, assistants and contestants run 24/7 reality television shows like *Survivor* or *Big Brother*. The choices of Truman and his more or less informal editorial collective would be based on trial and error, casuistry, routinization, and other similar ways of determining what kind of messages would be welcomed most. It is this difference, yet at the same time similarity, between amateur and professional media production and consumption that is the main concern of this essay.

Journalism, media and communication studies scholars tend to keep certain domains of inquiry apart. Media consumption is predominantly investigated by focusing on the way audiences receive and give meaning to media content. On the other hand, media production tends to be analyzed in terms of the political economy or sociology of the industry (Jenkins, 2004; Schudson, 2003). Such studies tend to generate answers that reinforce people's social identities either as producers or consumers of media content, and frame their responses either as acts of resisting or enforcing power relationships. If we are to consider Jenkins' suggestion for an alternate ending of *The Truman Show* (1998), what happens when the enforcing and resisting of power occurs simultaneously through media participation (Bucy and Gregson, 2001: 358)? It is in this context where one can observe the consumer of media content also becoming a producer. The key question then becomes, how we can adequately explain the process, content and consequences of media consumption and production when our contemporary media praxis seems to include both at the same time? Furthermore – and more pertinent to the topic of this article – the blurring of real or perceived boundaries between makers and users in an increasingly participatory media culture challenges consensual notions of what it means to work in the cultural industries. In this essay I consider possible strategies to understand and explain these issues, considering media work from the perspective of the individual reflective practitioner. The different forces of change impacting on what it is like to work in today's media are mapped in terms of the ways in which the media professional gives meaning to the affordances offered by the convergence of the cultures of production and consumption of media. This convergence must be seen as recombinantly driven by an industry desperate for strong customer relationships, technologies that are increasingly cheap and easy to use, and a media culture that privileges an active audience.

In this article I first identify and model (see figure 1) the different and sometimes paradoxical trends attributed to the changing ways in which people professionally make media. Second, I discuss four cases of media work that exemplify these trends: *Bluffton Today* (journalism), Amazon (marketing), *Counter-Strike* (computer games) and the CPB Group (advertising). These sites of media work can be considered to be concrete examples of an emerging convergence culture in the mediamaking process (Jenkins, 2004), where media work takes place within a context of creative industries – signifying the convergence of mass media production and individual-level creativity (Hartley, 2005). These trends develop within the context of an increasingly participatory media culture as shaping the way media work gets done in, for instance, journalism (Deuze, 2003), advertising (Leckenby and Li, 2000), game development (Jeppesen and Molin, 2003), television and even film. Third, I will discuss these developments and cases in terms of their potential impact on widely shared notions about the nature of media work. My analysis is thus based on acknowledging and observing the emergence of a global participatory media culture, the gradual convergence of the cultures of production and consumption, and the integration of individual creativity and (mass) production in the cultural industries. I start by outlining these three interlocking premises.

## Media participation

People who make media have collaborated with those who use media in the past. Much of the great works of art came into being because rich patrons commissioned painters and sculptors to make specific portraits, decorations and other representations signifying status and prestige in society. Such works were not just created by single art ‘producers’, but often came into being through intense collaboration and exchange by dedicated teams of artists, their apprentices, sponsors and visitors. Participation as a value and expectation in journalism was first established through letters to the editor sections in newspapers, and later expanded to include functions like newspaper ombudsmen and reader representatives that became an accepted part of news organizations worldwide (Van Dalen and Deuze, 2006). In television, news participation gets established through opinion polls, viewer tip hotlines and more recently by soliciting citizens to submit their own eyewitness photos and videos. Online, media participation can be seen as the defining characteristic of the internet in terms of its hyperlinked, interactive and networked infrastructure and digital culture (Deuze, 2005).

None of this is essentially new, nor is it necessarily tied to the internet. Yet it must be argued that continuous blurring of the real or perceived boundaries between making and using media by professionals as well as amateurs (‘pro-ams’) has been supercharged in recent years – particularly in terms of its omnipresence and visibility online. Bucy and Gregson (2001), for example,

suggest how a growing frustration and skepticism among the public regarding the highly staged, professionalized and exclusionary nature of mediated reality in fact has pushed people towards pursuing alternative – include their own – media formats.

The mass media (broadcast) system is gradually giving way to a more interactive, narrowcast or multicast media ecology, dominated by a fascinating blend of large multinational corporations and grassroots initiatives as exemplified by NewsCorp's acquisition (in 2005) of *MySpace*, a company offering its registered users a chance to build a virtual society similar to the successful South Korean network *Cyworld*. Indeed, media participation is a phenomenon at once top-down and bottom-up, involving both elites – such as Dutch politicians operating their own profile pages on social networking site *Hyves* or ubiquitous corporate weblogs operated by ghostwriters – and the masses. In this process of amplified interaction the process of media production and dissemination also becomes more transparent and open to external intervention, giving users increasing powers of access both outside and within corporate industrial contexts.

### Convergence culture

Jenkins typifies the emerging media ecology in terms of a convergence culture, defining the trend as:

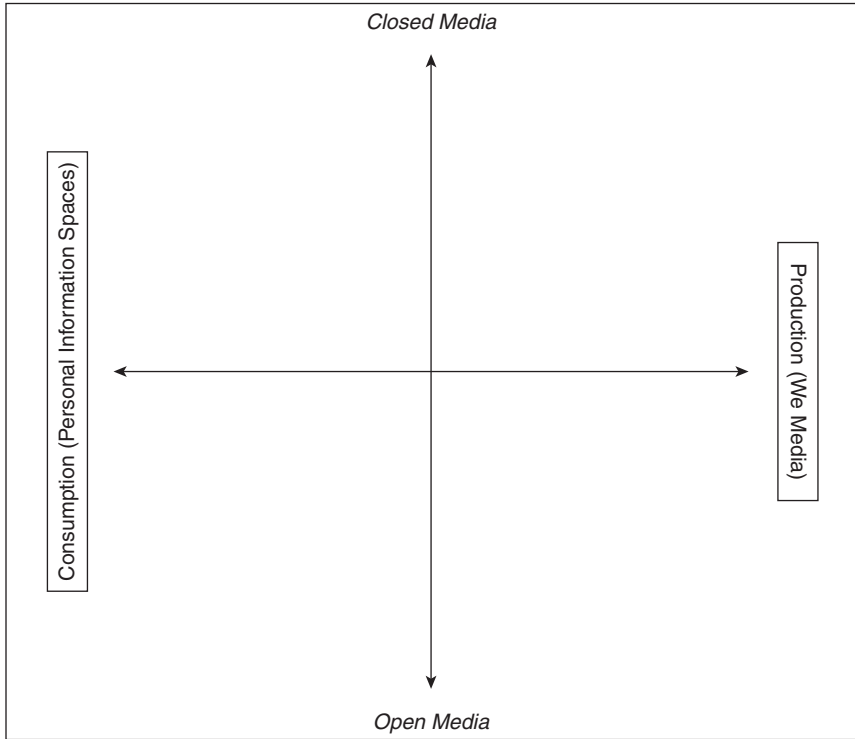
[...] both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottomup consumer-driven process. Media companies are learning how to accelerate the flow of media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets and reinforce viewer commitments. Consumers are learning how to use these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and to interact with other users. (2004: 37)

Jenkins' approach aims to build a bridge between two different but equally important strands of thought regarding the way we respond and give meaning to the role that ubiquitous and pervasive media play in our everyday life. The first approach suggests how (new) media enable or even force us to retreat in a personal information space, where we exercise an unparalleled degree of control over what we watch and what we hear, what we keep, discard or forward (Krishnan and Jones, 2005). Indeed, the emerging new media ecology does give users increasing control over the flow of media – using devices like the remote control, the joystick and the computer mouse, or software like internet portal sites, filtering agents, searchbots and user recommendation systems. In journalism studies Singer (1998) has correspondingly signaled the possible end of the 'gatekeeper' as an appropriate metaphor to coin the professional identity of journalists online – an identity that, according to Bruns (2005), is better described as a 'gatewatcher':

monitoring rather than reporting news, managing rather than filtering information. The second perspective describes the current media environment as one where people are increasingly engaged in the collaborative production of 'we media' (Bowman and Willis, 2003), such as Wikipedia, JanJan or Ohmynews, seemingly for no other motives than peer recognition and reputation.

Participatory media production and individualized media consumption are two different yet co-constituent trends typifying an emerging media ecology – an environment where consuming media increasingly includes some kind of producing media, and where our media behavior always seems to involve some level of participation, co-creation and collaboration, depending on the degree of openness or closedness of the media involved. The concepts of 'open' and 'closed' media in this context refer to the extent to which a given media company shares some or all of its modes of operation with its target audiences. A media organization can, for example, increase the level of transparency of how it works, or can opt to give its customers more control over their user experience. Yet, as McChesney and Schiller (2003) remind us, the same communication technologies that enable interactivity and participation are wielded to foster the entrenchment and growth of a global corporate media system that can be said to be anything but transparent, interactive or participatory. Bagdikian (2000) argues that five corporations – Time Warner, Disney, NewsCorp, Bertelsmann and Viacom – control most of the media industry in the US and, indeed, across the globe. This control must not be exaggerated, however, and Compaine (2005), among others, presents evidence that worldwide media consolidation and increased diversity of choice or genuine competition in the production and distribution of content are not anathema. In the context of the model presented here these trends must be seen as co-existing and symbiotic. Evidence collected for the media industries by Jenkins (2006), the service industries by Flew (2004) and the manufacturing industries by Von Hippel (2005) suggests that much of this consumer co-creation is in fact instigated in corporations. Indeed, such multinational organizations can best be seen as 'inhabited institutions' (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006), where people do things together and in doing so struggle for symbolic power in their respective fields of work. Convergence culture thus serves both as a mechanism to increase revenue and further the agenda of industry, while at the same time enabling people – in terms of their identities as producers and consumers, professionals as well as amateurs – to enact some kind of agency regarding the omnipresent messages and commodities of this industry.

The model in Figure 1 maps these trends in making and using media production on horizontal and vertical axes, within which contemporary media phenomena can be plotted in two-dimensional space. A third dimension to this model would reflect a temporal trajectory, representing shifts and changes among and between different phenomena under investigation.



**Figure 1** Modeling the emerging new media ecology

The work of authors in various fields defines media content in this context interchangeably as: consumer-generated (Jeppesen, 2005: 351), customer-controlled (Shih, 2001) and user-directed (Pryor, 2002). Researchers in different disciplines signal an industry-wide turn towards the consumer as co-creator of the corporate product, particularly where the industry's core commodity is (mediated) information (Benkler, 2006; Hartley, 2005; Jenkins, 2006). As part of the explanation for this one could consider the creative impulse intrinsic to individuals (as suggested by Amabile et al., 1996), amplified by a proliferation of easy-to-use content creation tools. Among creatives and brand managers in advertising the contemporary focus, for example, centers heavily on interactive advertising, defined as 'the paid and unpaid presentation and promotion of products, services and ideas by an identified sponsor through mediated means involving mutual action between consumers and producers' (Leckenby and Li, 2000). Marketers brainstorm about the potential of upstream marketing, which refers to the strategic process of identifying and fulfilling consumer needs early in product development, up to and including end-users in the product innovation cycle. Executives in computer game companies also consider their

consumers as co-developers, where ‘innovation and product development [...] depend upon external online consumer communities’ (Jeppesen and Molin, 2003: 363). Editors of news publications are increasingly expected to develop ‘citizen journalism’ initiatives in order to reconnect to disappearing audiences, following the advice of researchers at institutions such as the American Press Institute, who conclude that ‘to stay afloat, media companies must reimagine storytelling forms to vie for consumer attention [...] and they must react to the consumer’s creation of content with awe and respect’ (2005: 3). Balnaves, Mayrhofer and Shoemith (2004) consider this shift towards a more engaged, emancipatory and participatory relationship between media professionals and their publics an example of a ‘new humanism’ in the domains of public relations, journalism and advertising, constituting ‘an antidote to narrow corporate-centric ways of representing interests in modern society’ (2004:192). It is important to note here how convergence culture signifies increased as well as diminished corporate control over the creative mediamaking process at the same time.

## Creative industries

Media companies operating in fields as diverse and interconnected as public relations, marketing, advertising and journalism traditionally have been considered as cultural industries, representing those companies and professions primarily responsible for the industrial production and circulation of culture (Hesmondhalgh, 2002). In the ongoing academic debate on the definition of culture (or cultural) industries, media production tends to be emphasized as exclusive or particular to the field of action of the companies and corporations involved. In recent years policymakers, industry observers and scholars alike reconceptualized media work as taking place within a broad context of ‘creative industries’. The term was introduced by the British Department of Culture, Media and Sport in 1998, defining ‘creative industries’ as:

those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property. This includes advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film and video, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software and computer games, television and radio.

The concept of creative industries aims to reconcile the emergence of increasingly individual and small-scale, project-based or collaborative notions of commercial and non-commercial media production with institutionalized notions of cultural production as it exclusively takes place within the cultural industries. Hartley (2005) explicitly defines creative industries as an idea that: ‘seeks to describe the conceptual and practical convergence of the creative arts (individual talent) with cultural industries (mass scale), in the context of new media technologies (ICTs) within a new knowledge economy, for the use of



newly interactive citizen-consumers' (2005: 5). Although Hartley's definition suggests an optimistic outcome of the merger between individual creativity and mass cultural production, Neilson and Rossiter (2005) warn against uncritical acceptance of the concept, arguing it consists of

an oxymoronic disingenuousness that wants to suggest that innovation can coexist with or become subordinated to the status quo. In this context, innovation becomes nothing other than a code word for more of the same – the reduction of creativity to the formal indifference of the market. (2005: 8)

A critical perspective is particularly warranted given the emphasis in this article on the increasing precarious nature of media work. The professional identity of media workers has traditionally included some kind of protection of editorial autonomy, which is much more contested in a situation where every savvy internet user can contribute to the creative process, and where each and every contribution is supposed to generate revenue for the industry. It must be noted that the average consumer-turned-producer tends not to enjoy such protections.

Scholars in fields as varied as cultural policy, management and cultural studies have deployed creative industries to challenge established ways of thinking about the role of the individual in the context of mass media organizations.<sup>1</sup> What sets these approaches apart is how creative industries open up ways of thinking about (commercial and non-commercial) cultural production in the media without assuming that the exclusivity of the storytelling experience rests solely in the hands of the professionals involved: journalists, advertising creatives, public relations officers, game developers and so on (Banks, 2002; Deuze, 2003; Jones, 2002; Kent and Taylor, 2002). If the process of telling stories, making meaning and sharing mediated experiences becomes more participatory and collaborative – be it within a multiplayer game, on a newspaper discussion forum, or at a viral marketing site – it becomes crucial to understand the roles of the producer and the consumer as (to some extent) interchangeable and (at the very least) interdependent. The creative industries approach to sites of cultural production also focuses our attention on the seminal role (the management and organization of) that *creativity* plays in any consideration of media work. This pragmatic use of the creative industries approach thus opens up a fertile area for considering a future of media work, where professional identity is increasingly influenced and shaped by the various ways in which professionals interact with and give meaning to their publics as consumers and co-creators (Deuze, 2005).

## Case studies

Using the parameters established in the model (see Figure 1), the four particular case studies of media work can be described and mapped: Bluffton

Today (journalism), Amazon (marketing), Counter-Strike (games), and the Crispin Porter + Bogusky Group (advertising). In each case I map issues related to the intersections of media participation, convergence culture and creative industries in terms of how the media company involved can be considered to be 'open' or 'closed', and how its mode of production interpellates publics as either (individual) consumers or (co-)creators of content. On a personal note, I have to admit that my observation of these cases is rather optimistic. This is not because there is no reason to assume that commercial media organizations like the Morris Publishing Group or Valve Software are not using consumer–producer collaborative practices to generate additional revenue streams, thus co-opting the creative impetus of convergence culture. Yet there is also no reason to assume that user-generated content should necessarily be read as acts of audience resistance to the prefabricated messages of the corporate media. In all honesty, I find (with Jenkins) both of these traditional approaches in media studies uninspiring and inadequate when trying to understand the implications of the trends in today's new media ecology, where, for example, according to a November 2005 survey report by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, almost two-thirds of online teens create content for the internet – as in creating or contributing to a blog or personal webpage, sharing and remixing original content such as artwork, photos, stories, music or video (Lenhart and Madden, 2005). Considering the exploding global popularity of social networks, weblogs, podcasts and other similarly culturally convergent applications, my assumption is that this content creation trend is not particular to teens, nor to US citizens – it can be seen as part and parcel of an emerging global digital culture (Deuze, 2006). Considering the professional identity of culture creators working in the media industry these trends cannot solely be read as putting new pressures to come up with more compelling yet commercially viable cross-media content. Media workers must also be seen as storytellers increasingly having to share the creative spotlight with 'the people formerly known as the audience', giving meaning to what they do through an ongoing dialogue and exchange with the users of their services, all within the context of a fiercely competitive industry.

The following case studies were selected from the professional and trade literature in journalism, games, marketing and advertising, and were selected based on references by critics and practitioners to 'best practices' in these industries. The case studies can thus be seen as symptomatic rather than representative, and I describe their characteristics in terms of how these may contribute to operationalizing the model of a new media ecology introduced in this article.

### Bluffton Today

Bluffton Today is a combination of a free daily newspaper (launched 4 April 2005) and a community news website (which went online on 1 April 2005), both published by the Morris Publishing Group (MPG). MPG was founded

in 2001 and publishes 27 daily, 12 non-daily and numerous free community newspapers in the United States. The tabloid-size newspaper had an initial circulation of 16,500 and is distributed free to every home in the greater Bluffton, South Carolina area in the United States. Bluffton is a fast-growing affluent community with over 10,000 households on the Atlantic coast of South Carolina. What makes the paper and site a much-lauded example of convergence culture is its choice to have user-generated content as its primary source of news and information. According to Morris analyst Steve Yelvington (2005), BlufftonToday.com is an 'experiment in citizen journalism, a complete inversion of the typical online newspaper model', as staffers as well as registered community members get a blog, a photo gallery, read/write access to a shared public community calendar, a community cookbook, and access to an application that supports podcasting. Regarding the paper, readers' online comments on stories that appear in the print edition are edited and printed in the hard copy of next day's newspaper. Discussing his company's choices, Ken Rickard, manager of product strategy for Morris DigitalWorks, explicitly notes how Bluffton Today is an example of cultural rather than technological convergence:

The goals of Bluffton Today are quite simple: to become a part of the daily conversation in Bluffton. The paper needs to build trust, solicit feedback and help develop a sense of shared community. The motto of the Web site, then, is 'It's what people are talking about.' And that's where the convergence comes from. The Web site is entirely created by the residents of Bluffton; those who work for the newspaper and those who do not. (2005)

Rickard ties convergence to the cultural phenomenon of blurring the boundaries between 'producers' and 'users' of content. Writing one month after the launch of the site and paper, he explains the lessons learned by ongoing testing and tweaking of the Bluffton Today publishing model: 'the early results have been very promising. The most notable result has been largely unintended: There exists a level of transparency and dialogue about the creation of the newspaper that engenders a real sense of trust in the community.' For the purposes of this case study, it is important to note here how cultural convergence indeed instills increased levels of transparency in the media system, where producers and consumers of content can 'see' each other at work, as they both play each other's roles. In this context, Yelvington was quoted in an interview at the Online Journalism Review (of 7 September 2005) as saying how he believes people are 'living in this cable TV world of the outside observer instead of acting as participants. We're trying to make people come out of their gates and become players. We want a participative culture to evolve.' Participation seems to be key for understanding the success of both the industry initiative and the community's response – following the creative industries approach of connecting individual creativity with commercial production.

## *Counter-Strike*

The computer game *Counter-Strike* was released on 19 June 1999 as a modification ('mod') for the popular game *Half-Life*. It pits a Counter-Terrorist team and a Terrorist team against each other in a variety of environments and game modes: planting or defusing bombs, rescuing or taking hostages, protecting or assassinating VIPs. *Counter-Strike* is still one of the most popular online action games, claimed to have popularized teamplay in online games. *Counter-Strike* is currently the official game of the Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL), a company that houses two or more US-based LAN competitions for teams (or clans) a year.

What makes *Counter-Strike* an excellent case study for this article is the fact that technically it is not a game on its own – it was developed and released (for free) by two friends who were frustrated with the gameplay and character options offered in *Half-Life*. After downloading the Software Developers' Kit (SDK) for *Half-Life* (providing access to game-building tools is a common practice in the game software developing world), Minh Le (nickname: Gooseman) and Jess Cliff worked together to modify the game. Downloading the mod was free, but it originally required a copy of *Half-Life* to play. The core content of a computer game – like news for a newspaper – is the various maps and scenarios within which players can roam free. In *Counter-Strike*, Minh Le did all of the modeling, animating and coding for the game, but gamers interested in the mod handled the maps, not a dedicated mapping team (as in a game developers company). Interest in the mod was built up by prepublications and discussions on *Counter-Strike*'s website. The history of the game – leading up until its adoption by *Half-Life*'s corporate headquarters Valve Software, part of erstwhile conglomerate Vivendi Universal, and the release for Microsoft's Xbox game console in March 2004 – is one of ongoing beta-versions. Each new installment or upgrade of the game was developed by Minh Le and Jess Cliff, later on adding the professional producers at Valve and including additions and new mods coming out of the gaming fan communities online. Indeed, the game has been in a constantly evolving state. In an interview commenting on the pending release of *Counter-Strike* for Xbox, developer Cliff remarked:

I do think [*Counter-Strike*] has reached its maturity level, where we've been tweaking and experimenting and testing things out for years. We have the core gameplay down that we know we want. What we can do now is just add layers of content, with maps, models, weapons, etc. It's a great balance, I think. (quoted in *CS Nation*, 8 November 2003)

The core appeal of the game has been attributed to many factors, of which two are key to the considerations of this article: the emphasis on collaborative authorship over the game – involving fans, software developers, producers and consumers in constantly evolving and shifting roles – and the

credited element of (online) team play, influencing game developers and 'modders' worldwide to increasingly focus on the participatory aspect of (online) gaming, both in playing the game and co-creating the game. Interestingly, in an 'about' section on the *Counter-Strike* fan community website *csnation.net*, the author remarks: 'It's anyone's guess as to who is actually "in charge"', suggesting a distinct flattening of producer/consumer hierarchies more readily apparent in 'traditional' media systems.

## Amazon

Jeff Bezos started the self-proclaimed largest e-commerce site on the web, Amazon.com in 1994. Amazon started out as an online bookstore, later on adding CDs, videos, DVDs and games to the catalogue. It continued to add new lines of business, including toys, consumer electronics, software, power tools, home improvement products and online auctions, thus competing directly with eBay. Through acquisitions of online stores in the UK, Germany, Japan, France and Canada, Amazon expanded its reach across the globe with country- or region-specific shopping sites. It later on added the option for site users to sell and purchase used goods, taking a share of every item sold while contributing to shipping costs and buying guarantees (for a company history, see Spector, 2000). As of June 2005, the company has more than 9,000 employees and generates billions of dollars in revenues (after losing money for many years).

Amazon.com's website launched in July 1995. Website visitors could sign up for personalized email notifications and access the status of their orders, browse items recommended to them generated by the previous purchases of other customers, as well as browse contextual content such as lists and reviews submitted by loyal site users. Customers and site users have been influential in determining the look and feel of Amazon; for example, by protesting the news in 1999 that Amazon offered promotional packages to publishers who wanted their books to appear on prime spots on certain pages. The company responded by saying that in the future it would indicate what featured promotions had been paid for and offered customers the chance to return any book that Amazon.com had recommended in the past. According to Massanari, this is but one example that shows how customers believe that Amazon.com is not a 'typical' retailer: 'Clearly, consumers had been won over by Bezos' 'customers first' attitude and expected Amazon.com to be more forthright about its marketing tactics and the type of information it was collecting and sharing about them' (2003: 42). As from the very beginnings of the site, Amazon adopted traditional advertising and marketing approaches next to a deliberate orientation on the web's interactive, hierarchy-flattening characteristics.

At the heart of Amazon's success and its relevance to the concepts outlined in this article is the way in which the online retailer combines a fairly straightforward 'industrial' model of commerce with harvesting the individual creativity of its customers (for example, by allowing site users to upload their

own pictures of products next to the images supplied by the manufacturers). One should also note its utilization of participatory media culture by combining straightforward sales techniques with auctions of new and used goods, user reviews and customer-community recommendations.

### The CPB Group

Crispin Porter + Bogusky (CPB) is an advertising agency based in Miami, Florida and Los Angeles, California. The agency started out in the 1960s as a tourism shop, moving into advertising only in the mid-1990s. It is currently considered one of the most talked-about innovative ad agencies to create 'buzz' among its competitors, clients and audiences – as exemplified by winning all the major prizes in the advertising industry, including several Cannes Lions and Clio Awards. In 2002, creative director Alex Bogusky was inducted into the American Advertising Federation's Hall of Achievement.

The agency started in 1997 with nation-wide promotion of TheTruth.com anti-smoking advertisements for the American Legacy Foundation. The web-based campaign contains interactive games, spoofs of television shows, downloadable ringtones for mobile phones, and a question and answer forum – all linked to factual information about the dangers of smoking. A famous example of this agency's work is the 'SubservientChicken.com' campaign for client Burger King: a website featuring someone in a chicken suit you can order around, leading to communities online compiling their own 'subservient chicken request lists'.<sup>2</sup> The agency cultivates a reputation for applying viral marketing techniques to create 'buzz' for a product through email, online user groups and discussion lists. In an interview with *Time*, Alex Bogusky was quoted as arguing that

this kind of buzz, or viral, marketing is advertising's future [...] In the future, Bogusky predicts, viral ads will offer even more participation. The more stuff people can do themselves with these ads, the better, he says. It's more fun, but they also feel like they own it. They feel more empowered as consumers. (Padgett, 2004)

The key to the approach of CPB is its tactic of including the consumer in the production and pay-off of the advertising campaign. For the specific purposes of this article, the work of CPB is relevant in the way the agency for example developed their campaign for the BMW Mini Cooper, starting in 2002. The website of the Mini, Mini.com, allows users to build their own version of the car, play all kinds of games, participate in discussions, and find information (on their own) about all things 'Mini'. CPB also created a second website where it claimed that counterfeit Minis were being made and sold illegally (counterfeitmini.org), including a series of counterfeit Mini television commercials. The creatives at the agency additionally came up with another elaborate hoax called the 'Mini Cooper Autonomous Robot' (at URL: [www.r50rd.co.uk](http://www.r50rd.co.uk)), suggesting a robot, made from the

body of a Mini Cooper r50, was spotted in London and Oxford popping up randomly to stop cars from crashing. These sites created a lot of word-of-mouth marketing through discussion forums, mailing lists, chat rooms and instant messaging networks online – especially when people started to debate the truthfulness of the different campaigns. Regarding his company's willingness to veer away from what can be called 'one-way show-and-tell' advertising (Auletta, 2005), Bogusky argues: 'The future of advertising is that it doesn't exist. The party is coming to an end for everybody' (quoted in Padgett, 2005).

## Discussion

Considering the implications of convergence culture for media work in the creative industries when analyzing these cases, several observations stand out. First, all of these cases are distinctly commercial in character – and hugely successful at that. This is particularly interesting if one considers the fact that the 'product' in these cases is collaboratively constituted out of the interactions between producers and consumers and within consumer communities online. Second, the engagement of consumers and producers occurs in what Castells (2001) calls networked individualism, similar to the communicational bonds signaled by Lash (2002): in a digital culture people interact, collaborate and engage, but tend to do so strictly individually, enacting their own interests – whether it is in a certain type of news, a certain aspect of a game or a certain product for sale online. Through these activities the simultaneous enactment of community and individualization can be observed – although Bauman objects: 'in my view, both Castells and Scott [Lash, MD] fall victims of internet fetishism fallacy. Network is not community and communication not integration – both safely equipped as they are with "disconnection on demand" devices.'<sup>3</sup>

Third, the relationship between media industry and consumer has traditionally been established on the basis of hierarchy, as in 'show-and-tell' advertising or 'telling people what they need to know' journalism. In these case studies a flattening of such hierarchies takes place, which process manifests itself on different levels: at Amazon, user reviews are organized hierarchically through the ratings of other reviewers; at the various websites of the Mini campaign the advertising agency only offers the building blocks of a commercial narrative – the user is autonomous in the decision what to do with the materials on offer; for Bluffton Today, the reporter in effect competes with people in the community to get her news noticed; the gamer can modify the game any which way she chooses within the parameters set by the software development kit (SDK) offered by the game publisher. Fourth, within this context of more or less sharing control over the production of culture, it is striking to see how the roles of the 'consumer' and 'producer' are constantly shifting. The journalist at Bluffton Today is as much a consumer as a co-creator



of the community news agenda, the advertising creative produces all kinds of content, yet can only watch as a consumer to see how the message and pay-off are negotiated and constructed by users. It is exactly this element of role ambiguity that may prompt media professionals to respond with doubt and criticism regarding the shift towards more interactive, participatory and collaborative types of mediamaking. Finally one must note the emphasis the professionals involved in all four enterprises put on a replacement media theory to legitimate their praxis: whatever came or was done before will come to an end.

What the four cases as documented in this article suggest, then, is that even among these 'poster-children' for convergence culture in the creative industries multiple models for open or closed media and content versus connectivity are possible. Most importantly the old and new roles for media producers and users are increasingly interchangeable for these companies. Sure, *Counter-Strike* started out as a fun private project, but quickly turned into a commercial enterprise. Consumer empowerment thus goes hand in hand with the quest for profit – and the sharing of control over the media experience sometimes gets curtailed by the practices of closed media: limiting the range of options in an SDK or in the virtual garage where the user builds her own car, filtering the best user-generated content for possible inclusion in the print newspaper, managing a critical user community to protect it against cheating and 'illegal' hacks in the computer game.

Uricchio (2004: 86) describes the key to understanding the new media ecosystem as based on networked technologies that are P2P ('peer-to-peer') in organization and collaborative in principle. Benkler (2006: 60) coins this emerging decentralized, co-creative and nonproprietary media ecology as grounded in commons-based peer production. Considering this argument in the context of a typical media profession like journalism, it seems that the traditional framing and validation of media workers' professional identity in terms of maintaining the false producer–consumer dichotomy has not allowed much breathing room for peer exchange or collaborative authorship (Zelizer, 2004). Such an operational closure of everyday work has indeed been a key element in the self-organization of complex social systems such as media professions (Luhmann, 1990). Following Luhmann's autopoietic social theory, as for example applied to journalism by Weischenberg and Scholl (1998), any previous challenges or penetrations of the producer–consumer model were managed by the system of professions to evolve without having to (radically) change. In other words: any kind of flattening of the hierarchies between producers and consumers in the media until recently primarily served the function of keeping the professional system's boundaries intact. New media work in general, and the practices of the media companies as profiled in this article in particular, show how heterarchy is gaining ground as an alternative for hierarchy in the dominant mode of operations in the business world – and particularly in the media industries. It is in this context where Twitchell notes that the new ironical 'I'm your pal' persona of advertising since the early 1990s 'collapses the usual voice of advertising, which is the



strict “I’m your doctor, I know what’s best for you” (1996: 231). Balnaves, Mayrhofer and Shoesmith similarly signal ‘the end of the persuader-as-manipulator in the media professions’ (2004: 194). It is therefore perhaps safe to say that the professional identity of media work may be moving towards a more clearly articulated responsive and interactive position vis-à-vis publics.

It must be explicitly noted that this is not a linear, unproblematic or necessarily successful process – as what also comes to mind when considering the histories of the four case studies in the context of an emerging body of literature on new media work (see, for example, Christopherson and Van Jaarsveld, 2005) are elements of distinct disorganization (Leung, 2005) and disequilibrium (Lovink, 2003) embedded in the praxis of the new media ecosystem. Jenkins acknowledges this as well, shrugging off similar concerns by accepting it as a permanent condition: ‘For the foreseeable future, convergence will be a kind of kludge – a jerry-rigged relationship between different media technologies – rather than a fully integrated system’ (2004: 34). However the literature shows how an increasing emphasis on flexibility, creativity, and innovation in new media work creates a precarious paradox. On the one hand, convergence culture makes room for new forms of creative organization, product development and consumer relationships that have the potential to be more diverse and compelling than ever before. On the other hand, the same trends allow for increasing exploitation of media workers and consumers of media under conditions that Sennett (2006) describes as flexible productivity advocated by corporations operating in an increasingly fickle global market. Indeed, the nature of media work has become rather ‘kludgy’, whether seen through the lens of industrial and economical change, or from a perspective of emergent behavior by producers (Bruns, 2005) in an increasingly participatory media culture.

## Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to attempt to answer the question why this convergence is considered so crucially important at this particular point in time, and how the case studies and model presented in this article may contribute to a research agenda on new media work occurring within the context of creative industries. Even to consider building a new program in media production research based on the interchangeability of mediamaking and using requires partly letting go of some well-established, deep-rooted and arguably valid assumptions about the impact that a mass media-centric culture has had on us. To some extent a political economy of media should still emphasize the powerful hold that multinational corporations have over multiple public spheres, shaping popular reality with a deliberate focus to sell audiences as target demographics to advertisers. On the other hand, this one-dimensional view of media power has changed, as the agricultural metaphor of production and consumption is increasingly becoming an untenable assumption on

which to base our understandings of media content, effects and particularly media work. Beyond corporate co-optation and audience resistance lies a new model for understanding the changing nature of media in everyday life. Further research could focus on how professionals and amateurs collaborate, how their roles converge, and what the results of these practices are in the emerging new media ecology, on the level of economy (new and improved returns on investment), technology (development of new hardware and software enabling open media), politics and legislation (creative commons copyright laws, audience encoding rights and open source) and global culture.

Works cited in this article have charted the nature of this new media work as unpredictable, uncertain and constantly changing, which trend can be signified by – paraphrasing Zygmunt Bauman (2000) – a ‘liquid’ media work. The liquidity of contemporary media work is exemplified by the patchwork career (Lutz, 2000) of a portfolio worklife (Handy, 1998 [1989]) or rather work-style (Deuze, 2007), signaling a continuous blurring between the boundaries of work, life and play, as well as between production and consumption. The case studies as mapped on to the model used in this article suggest that media work is something that is increasingly shared with those who one used to work *for*: audiences. The culture of industry therefore can be seen as spilling over on to the creative process of consumption. A product reviewer on Amazon, a modder on *csnation.net* or a blogger on Bluffton Today now also wields the power of the industry’s privileged position of authorship. Further research should shed light on how these ‘liquid’ media professionals give meaning to working in an industry that expects them to treat their publics as consumers as well as co-creators of content, an industry that is struggling to define its ambiguous role as partner as well as profiteer in a participatory media culture, and as the traditional authoritative voice in public discourses (thus excluding any meaningful role for users of its services other than as audiences). I would like to argue that this kind of research agenda serves two specific purposes. First, it makes us aware what it means exactly when we say that the ‘brave new world’ of work (Beck, 2000) is so much different or similar to the past, and thus it will help us to articulate much more precisely how ‘the’ media are what they are – integrating journalism, advertising, marketing, public relations and all other media professions into a critical analysis of media work. Second, it will assist us in preparing students in media and (tele-) communications departments all over the world to enter a world where what they have learned enables them to become ‘prosumers’ (Toffler, 1980). In other words, we have to train people to stay inside *The Truman Show*. And make the best of it.

## Notes

- 1 Journals featuring special issues on the creative industries: *Studies in Cultures, Organisations and Societies* (2000); the *International Journal of Cultural*

- Studies* (2004), *Capital & Class* (2004), and on related issues regarding creative organization and the cultural industries: *Media International Australia* (2004), *Fibre Culture* (2005) and *International Journal of Cultural Policy* (2005).
- 2 One such request list is at URL: [dev.magicosm.net/cgi-bin/public/corvidaewiki/bin/view/Game/SubservientChickenRequestList](http://dev.magicosm.net/cgi-bin/public/corvidaewiki/bin/view/Game/SubservientChickenRequestList). On an interesting sidenote, this site is based on the 'wiki' concept, which means anyone can edit, modify and add information to the list.
  - 3 Personal email from Zygmunt Bauman to the author, Monday 5 June 2006.

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● **MARK DEUZE** is Assistant Professor at Indiana University's Department of Telecommunications in Bloomington and the Journalism and New Media program at Leiden University. His weblog on new media, work and society is at: [deuze.blogspot.com](http://deuze.blogspot.com). Address: Department of Telecommunications, Indiana University, Office RTV319, Bloomington, IN 47405, USA. [email: [mdeuze@indiana.edu](mailto:mdeuze@indiana.edu)] ●