Difference and diversity:
trends in young Danes' media uses

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The relation between young people and the media seems a perfect match. Since the Second World War, young people in Western Europe, North America and Australia have had increasing time and money at hand for personal spending, and not least commercial media have singled out youth as a remunerative niche public – from the film, magazine and music industries of the 1950s through the boosting in the 1980s of teen TV (MTV and soaps) on to today's plethora of computer games and irreverent life-style adverts.

   Based on quantitative and qualitative empirical evidence culled at the Centre for Child and Youth Media Studies, University of Copenhagen, this article seeks to specify the relation between young people and the media, and has three related aims: first, I focus on the theoretical dis-course on media and youth, arguing that the discursive energy is inversely proportional to our actual, empirical knowledge. Second, I attempt to help redress that imbalance by analysing important, recent trends in Danish teenagers' mediated cultures. And third, I discuss which research demands these trends enforce and enhance. Apart from the obvious insights to be gained by sound empirical studies, it seems to me that young people's media uses merit additional attention. Since youthful patterns of media reception are known to colour patterns in later life through the so-called cohort effect (Feilitzen, 1989: 115; see also Rosengren et al., 1994: 136), it is obvious that by investigating young people's media cultures of today we get a glimpse of future forms of media reception and production.

Youth, media and modernity

Youth and media are discursively connected through the metaphor of change which, in itself, is central to our understanding of modernity. Since the Romantic period, youth has been defined as the epitome of transition whether viewed in social, cultural or psychological terms: to be young is to move away from home, gain economic independence, experiment with new cultural forms and transfer sexual and emotional energies away from parents and on to partners (Gillis, 1974, 1993; Mitterauer, 1992). The result of such transitions is change. As Swedish cultural researcher Johan Fornäs cogently remarks: 'Youth is what is young and what belongs to the future' (Fornäs, 1995: 1). Equally, the mass media is premised on notions of change. With seriality as a foundation of mass-mediated production, the concept of change in the form of innovation has become established as an important counterbalance in the contract between producers and receivers as is most evident in the news media where 'yesterday's news is no news' is the unquestioned norm.

   With such parallels, it is no wonder that young people have always featured prominently in the discourse on media. The relation between youth and media has taken two primary forms: one is lodged within what may be termed a discourse of cultural pessimism, the other within a discourse of cultural optimism. Indeed, these two forms may be seen as basic reactions to the contradictory processes of modernity itself, processes which the relations between youth and media at once condense and transpose.

   The negative evaluation of the relation between youth and media is particularly evident in the public debates following the introduction of new media technologies, debates that have often bordered on the verge of media panics (Barker and Petley, 1997; Drotner, 1992). But it is also found in much scholarly work of the effects tradition which has traditionally focused on the assumed negative effects on the young of sex and violence in film or television. As is well known, little unanimous evidence results from this tradition (see overview in Hearold, 1986), but some recent studies have argued that television and VCRs in the longer term do enhance aggressiveness, restlessness and/or anxiety in at least some groups of children and young people (Huesmann and Eron, 1986; Sonesson, 1989). While effects scholars are often diligent to point to psychological differences, it is a problem that few studies make theoretical distinctions between childhood and youth as historically and socially located categories, hence tending to conflate conceptual specificities of age and class.

   Perhaps because of its close affiliation to public concerns over future generations, the effects tradition is still the loudest voice in the international discourse on youth and media – as it is, indeed, in the discourse on children and media (see, for example, *National Television*, 1997; critique of tradition in Buckingham, 1993: 3–19). But of almost similar resonance

today are more optimistic voices stemming from cultural studies oriented media research. Here, young people are described through their media uses as, for example, belonging to 'a culture of instinctive semioticians' (Eco, 1986: 210), as 'discriminating audiences' whose 'scepticism' is 'a great deal more developed than those of older generations' (Nava and Nava, 1990: 180), and as a generation that has 'become highly critical and literate in visual forms, plot conventions and cutting techniques' (Willis et al., 1990: 20) thereby spearheading a 'semiotic democracy' (Fiske, 1986).

A more mixed note of cultural optimism is found in the uses-and-gratifications tradition with its focus on the role played by the media in the individual's socialization process. This is where we find most empirical studies and most studies that have marked a country's media scholarship (Baacke et al., 1990; Feilitzen et al., 1989; Fornäs and Bolin, 1995; Fornäs et al., 1995; Rosengren and Windahl, 1989; Rosengren et al., 1994). Uses-and-gratifications is also the tradition on which many marketing firms base their analyses of youthful media patterns, analyses whose conclusions often come very close to those reached by a good many cultural studies scholars in their emphasis on young people as a selective and highly media literate generation.

When reviewing the literature within the discourse on youth and media, it would seem that adolescents' relations to the media are extensively analysed and thoroughly understood, even if scholars harbour different interests and assessments. But before drawing such conclusions we would do well to heed Swedish ethnologist Orvar Löfgren's distinction between what he terms Sunday culture and everyday culture (Löfgren, 1990: 87–9), by which he implies a distinction between cultural discourse and cultural practices. That the general public voices concern over young people's latest media fads and that media scholars in our routine preoccupation with the most recent media technologies focus on youthful media, does not in and of itself secure or imply an equal amount of empirical knowledge. It is true that the relations of youth and media have been studied since the emergence of mass communication as a scholarly field – Max Weber trainee Emilie Altenloh is perhaps the first with her large-scale investigation of cinema audiences in Germany (Altenloh, 1914) – and the above review of literature does point to active and important scholars in the field. But in only a few countries such as Sweden have empirical studies of young people's media uses become central to the field of media studies at large.

Naturally, the discourse on youth and media is related to actual practices of production and reception: Sunday and everyday cultures do go together. But my point is that discursive attention seems inversely proportional to our actual knowledge. Investigations of children's media uses occupy a pioneering position in the tradition of media scholarship since the Payne Fund Studies in the USA (e.g. Blumer and Hauser, 1933; survey in Jowett et al., 1996) and they continue to have a high profile in the field not least

because of their relation to media education and because of the prominent position in North America of psychology as an academic discipline. Similarly, adults' media uses are often taken to equal audience and reception studies in general. But there seems to be a slip of empirical, professional interest in the years lying in between.

The discursive hyperbole may in part account for the scarcity of empirical evidence: because there is so much talk about music videos, computer games and rock music, we think we know more about these areas than is acually the case. In addition, the relative paucity of empirical investigations can be explained in simple pragmatic terms: as a group, young people are too dispersed to be studied easily, unlike children who can feasibly be reached through school. Moreover, young people's media uses are often dispersed across a wider range of media types than is the case with other age groups, while most scholars focus on particular media or genres. In many smaller countries such as Denmark, which is the empirical focus of what follows, the result of these difficulties is that at present it is often international marketing firms that have sufficient economic and professional acumen to place themselves at the forefront in studying youth and media.

In 1994 a grant from the Danish Research Council for the Humanities made it possible to establish the Centre for Child and Youth Media Studies as a temporary, interdisciplinary enterprise to carry out basic research in the field of youth and media (Drotner, 1995a). The Centre hosts 14 researchers mainly on a part-time basis, and their projects reflect that Danish media scholarship is rooted in an arts tradition: the majority of them are based on a combination of qualitative methodologies – from textual analysis through in-depth interviews to participant observation – thus being in tandem with the turn towards an 'interpretive paradigm' (Lindlof and Meyer, 1987: 4) in much international media scholarship since the early 1980s. In addition, the Centre in 1996 carried out the first ever survey of Danish teenagers' media uses (Fridberg et al., 1997) covering all media and the relations between them (random sample, $N = 2150$ 15–18-year-olds). The following analyses draw on findings from these projects.

Young Danes and their media landscape

In social and ethnic terms Denmark is a fairly homogeneous society with a mere 6.4 percent of the population being of non-Danish extraction (Danmarks Statistik, 1997a). In regional terms, nearly a fifth of all Danes live in the greater Copenhagen area, a fact which, however, has little influence on young people's daily media uses, since both terrestrial and satellite television and local (commercial) radio stations, for example, are

evenly distributed across the country. Danes have access to two public-service channels, one of which gets 80 percent of its revenue from commercials and has eight local TV channels. Among the range of satellite channels one, in particular, is gaining ground with youthful audiences, namely TV3 owned by the Swedish Kinnevik Corporation and distributed from London. It reaches 56 percent of Danish households with a popular fare of subtitled films, series mainly from the USA, and news in Danish. Among the 12–20-year-olds the channel has increased its share from 12 percent in 1992 to 16 percent in 1996 – the highest share in the population (Gallup, 1996: 10). As in most other European countries, young people are a mainstay of the cinemas. Ticket sales have increased in recent years – from 9.6 million in 1990 to 9.9 million in 1996 (Danish Film Institute, 1997: 3) and the closure of cinemas is halted even if, today, half the local communities have no cinemas and only larger towns and cities have more than one (Mortensen, 1997: 303).

The survey of Danish teenagers' media uses (Fridberg et al., 1997) also provides insight into basic conditions of this age band. To be a young Dane today means to be a student of some sort: only 4 percent are in paid employment, another 4 percent are outside employment or education, and the rest go to school. At age 16, which is the statutory school-leaving age, adolescents leave the *folkeskole* (a comprehensive, non-streamed school system for 7–16-year-olds), nearly half to go to an academically inclined *gymnasium* for 3 years, while the rest choose some form of vocational training. More than 4 out of 5 live at home, two-thirds have some sort of part-time job on a more or less regular basis, and the age group pocket an average of 1700 kr (US$245) per month for personal spending (Fridberg et al., 1997: 35–8). Of this money, 7.5 percent goes to buy CDs, computer games, cinema tickets or videos, and magazines, comics or books. Still, these purchases give little indication of the central position occupied by the media in the lives of young Danes.

Innovation

As noted above, youth and media are discursively linked through the metaphor of change. An important empirical basis for this metaphor is that in modern societies, young people may be said to be pioneers of mediated culture: they are in the forefront of exploring new media technologies, they are often innovative in developing new forms of reception, just as today an increasing number of them are involved in the making of media – from the creation of homepages on the personal computer to being disc jockeys at a local radio station. Innovation takes three primary forms in adolescent media cultures, forms that are related to computers, media reception and media production, respectively.

Young people of today are the first generation to grow up with computers – the most important and far-reaching of the new media – and the first to integrate them into their everyday cultures. The computer has hastened a decisive shift of emphasis in the direction of visual over print media. Two-thirds of 15–18-year-old Danes have access to a computer at home (the national average in 1996 is 45 percent of households, in 1997 48 percent), 25 percent have a computer of their own, and 45 percent in that age band either own or have access in the home to a CD-Rom computer (the national average being 21 percent in 1996 and 28 percent in 1997). Three percent own a computer with Internet access and another 13 percent have access to the Internet at home – the national average of domestic Internet access in 1996 being 5 percent and in 1997 10 percent (see Table 2, Danmarks Statistik, 1997b: Table 1). To these figures should be added access to or ownership of games consoles. These figures put young Danes at the international forefront together with Finland in youthful ownership of computer media.

There are still marked gender differences in the use of computers. Young men spend an average of 1.19 hours a day with computers – more than twice as long as young women (Fridberg et al., 1997: 42, 73). Conversely, young women spend twice as long reading for pleasure as do their male counterparts. In general, young women are markedly more interested in print media than are young men (apart from newspaper reading), a result that accords well with studies in other countries and for different ages (e.g. Roe and Muijs, 1995: 43). But while different media may divide the genders, there is no indication that the visual media, including computers, are displacing older media. The displacement theory is among the most recurring and resilient in research on children and television although never proven according to Susan Neuman's recent overview (Neuman, 1991).[1] Certainly, our findings corroborate a positive correlation between television and leisure reading. Thus, the most avid TV consumers are also the most avid readers (see Table 1). These results differ from those found, for example, in a longitudinal media study of Swedish children and adolescents where

TABLE 1
**15–18-year-old Danes' time use on average day for book reading
vs TV-viewing, 1996 (percent)**

TV use	Book reading				
	No reading	0–30 min.	30–60 min.	> 60 min.	Total
0–2 hours	19	47	20	14	100
2–4 hours	21	39	18	22	100
> 4 hours	22	28	20	30	100

Source: Fridberg et al., 1997: 95

a negative correlation was found between book reading and other forms of media use (Johnsson-Smaragdi, 1994: 122). Moreover, the minority of Danish adolescents outside education or paid employment are the most diligent readers of all, in that this group has the highest percentage of respondents spending more than 4 hours per day reading, namely 6 percent, against, for instance, 1 percent of the adolescents attending gymnasium (Fridberg et al., 1997: 139).

For young men, those who spend most time on computers also read the most (Fridberg et al., 1997: 96–8), a result which indicates that this group has its basis with middle-class families that have the strongest consuming power and harbour a tradition for educative betterment with which both books and computers are associated. So, while the computer, as noted above, has accelerated the prominence of visual over print media, we do not see a general displacement of old media for new.

That young people are innovators of media culture is no recent trend, however. Historically, they have often been the first to explore and apply new media forms – notably commercial media – from popular magazines and film to today's computerized infotainment. What is new is that the competences gained and needs served by the media are vital for the future prospects of the young both economically, politically and emotionally. Moreover, it should be noted that to link computer media with innovation as is done in this section is an adult, analytical connection. Few children and young people in Denmark think of the computer as a new medium (Stald, 1997; Livingstone, 1998). They simply make use of the media available and associate innovation with unusual design or alternative uses rather than with a particular technology.

The common-sense definition of the computer as yet another medium in the range available, points to another innovative trend in today's youthful media culture, a trend linked to new forms of reception. For, despite the increasing importance of visual media, it is true to say that in general these teenagers are media innovators in the sense that they are the first generation to make use of what may be termed the entire 'media palette' – they are the group in Danish society that makes the fullest use of the most media. This may be gauged from two sources: their ownership of technological hardware and their time spent using it. Young Danes, and notably men, easily top the list when it comes to media equipment in the home, and it is a fair guess that the industrial investments made in media hardware over the last 15 years are rivalled by similar investments made by families with children at home (see Table 2). Young Danes spend an increasing amount of time on media reception, namely a total of 7.30 hours per day distributed as follows: TV (2.50), radio (1.57 – notably music programmes), video (1.03), computers (0.59), and leisure reading (0.46) (Fridberg et al. 1997: 94). To this should be added cinema-going, and music-listening distributed across a range of media (CD, radio, cassettes)

TABLE 2
Percentage of 15–18-year-old Danes with ownership of or access to media equipment, 1996

	Personal ownership	Access in household		
		All	Young men	Young women
Colour TV	76	98	99	98
Text TV	30	81	82	81
VCR	41	90	91	9
Camcorder	3	21	22	21
Walkman/discman	83	88	88	89
CD-player	90	96	96	96
Radio	93	98	98	98
Games console	25	42	51	34
PC/Mac computer	25	63	69	57
CD-Rom drive	13	32	40	24
Modem	3	13	16	10
Fax	2	16	18	15
Telephone	35	96	95	96
Answering machine	4	27	29	25
Mobile phone	11	43	46	40

Source: Fridberg et al., 1997: 42

and traditionally the most important form of mediated culture for the young (Bjurström, 1997; Roe, 1983).

Thus, it is not feasible to label today's adolescents 'the computer generation' or 'N-gen' (Tapscott, 1998: 3) – rather they could be defined as a 'multi-media generation' in that they apply a wide range of media and often use them together spurring new forms of reception: to spend almost half one's waking hours using media is feasible only because more media are activated at the same time, thus advancing what in many European countries is defined as an 'American' pattern of media reception that few older people adhere to in Denmark. Conversely, the parents of today's adolescents may be defined as a television and possibly a rock music generation in the sense that these media were new during their formative years and still colour their media preferences, while the generation of grandparents belong to a film and radio generation. Indeed, it may be argued that one reason why in media studies television is often defined as the most important medium is precisely that the parental generation, who in western countries belongs to the television generation, is also in the majority among media scholars.

Third, innovation in young Danes' media cultures is seen in their widespread integration of reception and production. They are not only the social group to make the fullest use of the most media in reception terms, they are also the most active in media production – apart from the pro-

fessionals of course. Thus, in Denmark 42 percent of 15–18-year-olds sing or play an instrument (an increase of 15 percent in only 3 years), 25 percent of young men and 12 percent of young women regularly visit a cybercafé, while 10 percent frequent film or video clubs (Fridberg et al., 1997: 103, 107). These figures are way above the rest of the population and support previous findings for other nationalities and ages (e.g. Baacke et al., 1990; Roe and Muijs, 1995: 26; Rosengren et al., 1994) that indicate a positive correlation between frequent media use and high leisure activity rates. While a good many young men played in rock bands in the 1960s and 1970s, today their offspring of both sexes explore a range of media sites, thus widening the convergence of reception and production. The most powerful in the new generation of computers may further this convergence: morphing pictures taken from the Internet, sampling soundscapes from a CD and editing existing film clips are examples of ways in which a reservoir of given formats known from media reception come to serve quite directly as building blocks in personal processes of digital production (Drotner, 1989: 212–13; Fornäs, 1993; Tufte, 1995: 207).

That young people explore new forms of media is no recent phenomenon, of course. As noted, adolescents in modernity are generally linked with innovation both discursively and in their cultural, including mediated, practices (Drotner, 1995b; Gillis, 1974; Wennhall, 1994). Still, innovation today operates within a different context and with different perspectives. While the film or jazz enthusiasm of young machinists, maids or students of the 1930s had little or no implications for their future prospects, the media competences culled from today's wide-ranging and complex media culture are vital for young people's future options in terms of democratic participation, quality of emotional experiences and options of employment.

Interaction

Commercial media – magazines, film, comics and computer games – have always catered to young people as coveted consumers. Thus, more intimate and more irreverent modes of address are often first developed in youthful media forms to find their way later on to the general (i.e. adult) public. That youthful media texts operate as aesthetic training grounds may also be seen today. For example, we see an increasing interaction between genres and between media, in particular within media forms popular with young people. Quentin Tarantino's humorous horror films and popular TV series such as *Real Life* and *The X-Files* mixing narrative conventions of documentary and fiction are examples of genre hybridization that are extremely popular with a wide range of young people in a variety of countries (Lavery et al., 1996; Lemish et al., 1998; Rudberg, 1997). Another recent textual trend are ironic modes of address that cut across different youthful

media from life-style commercials to television series such as *Beverly Hills 90210*, the latter in its later seasons being infused with examples of what the Danish media researcher Karen K. Povlsen labels 'fiction within a fiction' (Povlsen, 1996: 12–13).

The term intertextuality has been coined by Julia Kristeva (1967) as a translation of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of 'dialogism' to denote forms of interaction between different texts within a single medium, notably the book. Today, intertextuality increasingly includes interaction between different genres and different media. In postmodern discourse, it is often claimed that this form of expanded intertextual cross-referencing breeds media reflexivity in that it invites audiences to deconstruct established narrative contracts or points of view. Several empirical studies suggest that such invitations are, indeed, taken up by older and better educated youngsters (e.g. Bjurström, 1997; Povlsen, 1996). But one should be cautious about equating specific forms of textual representation with specific forms of reception, and in the range of qualitative investigations carried out at the Centre for Child and Youth Media Studies we have found no necessary connection between intertextuality, ironic modes of address and reflexive patterns of reception (e.g. Christensen, 1997; Thorup, 1998). In fact, the often assumed ironic modes of interpretation may be more in vogue with the 35-year-old commercial art director who feels akin to Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* (Coupland, 1991) than they are with his or her intended audiences aged 15. Our results highlight the discrepancy, noted in the introduction, between theoretical and empirical studies in the field of youthful media and point to the need for sustained and systematic qualitative analyses of reception.

Integration

The following anecdote is illustrative of the third trend in youthful media cultures today. A 12-year-old girl explains to her 25-year-old hairdresser how she wants her hair cut: 'It should be like Kelly's'. Without further questions the hairdresser goes about her work, intuitively sharing her young client's mediated knowledge of *Beverly Hills* style.

Three important aspects emerge from the above, all of which have to do with the social functions served by the media. First, media are tools for understanding oneself and the social world, and these tools form integrated aspects of everyday life. Naturally, like other signs, mediated forms of representation have always operated in this way for people and not only for the young. What is new is the pervasiveness and the unremarkable 'naturalness' of the media in filling this function. Therefore, within the perspective of reception, it makes little sense to analyse youthful media cultures as part of a secondary socialization that is distinct from inter-

personal forms of communication in primary socialization – and often deemed the worse for that. For the young, the media are part of a range of cultural signs available for processes of interpretation that are situated in time and space and dependent on constraints of production, distribution and resources for reception.

Second, the media in young people's leisure cultures serve a dual function: the media help structure their day and week and thus help unify separate experiences in time and across places (Giddens, 1990). But, following Pierre Bourdieu, the media also act as spatial signs of distinction marking different and changing social networks. While this joint function of unification and distinction is certainly applicable to all signifying practices, the distinctive function is played out differently in a generation with access to and use of a wide range of media: as the Swedish media and youth researcher Erling Bjurström cogently demonstrates in a major empirical study, youthful distinction today is often made through the combination of different media forms, a function that was previously left to different genres of music (Bjurström, 1997). Thus, young people's taste combinations today are often results of an ability to scan a wide range of mediated expressions and select those that 'feel right' for intensive enjoyment. Together, this more complex orientation into and selection of mediated sign registers and the combination of extensive and intensive media use nuance the widespread labeling in public discourse of contemporary adolescents as a zapper generation without ability of concentration or immersion into a single preoccupation.

Third, the media today are not only integrated into the social fabric. They increasingly act also as catalysts in the formation of social networks: youngsters may meet with particular friends only for special video nights and not for other occasions (Jerslev, 1999). Sixteen-year-olds phone up their fathers' colleagues to ask for new versions of computer programs and vice versa: 45-year-old men seek advice from boys 20 years their junior about the latest fad in *Red Alert* or MUDs (Langemark, in progress). As may be seen, this social networking tends to reverse what may be called the 'horizontal patterns of social and cultural socialization' that have been prominent in industrialized countries over the last generations: peers have taken priority over kin in everyday interaction so that today most of the young know relatively few people outside their own cohorts. Now, the multi-media generation approaches a more 'vertical pattern of socialization' prevalent with most children and young people until the late 19th century, when older siblings, cousins or adults of authority operated as foci of everyday interaction. It seems evident that the rapidly increasing importance played by chat groups on the Internet will hasten such modes of vertical communication – even if they may not immediately be known and acknowledged by the participants.

The Danish survey of young people's media uses generally shows very few regional differences while education still plays a major role of differentiation. However, the most marked differences are differences of gender, and here computer use and leisure reading top the list: as mentioned, young women spend twice as much time on leisure reading as do young men and vice versa on computing. Our data paint a picture in which young women, like their mothers, are the caretakers of traditional culture as documented in print media such as novels, poetry and magazines, while their male peers nurture a virtual future in cyberspace if they are not busy training their strategic skills in complex computer games of action and exploration. It is a vital question both in analytical and political terms whether the future development of computer technology will strengthen already marked gender boundaries, or whether these will be crossed by multi-media that speak less to technological exploration. Several studies have noted that girls and women use the computer as a means to an end while boys and men will often treat computing as a goal in itself (Nissen, 1993; Turkle, 1984). Perhaps, girls' exploratory interest will be advanced by future generations of computers with more appealing graphics, user-friendly interfaces and software genres that appeal to girls and women. Conversely, the rapid advancement of micro-computers applied in everyday commodities from toothbrushes to keys and heating systems may sensitize boys to more pragmatic views on computing.

Maybe of more immediate social importance is the regendering of public and private spaces induced by VCRs and home computers. Notably in the middle classes, these media technologies have acted as catalysts in a domestication of boys' and young men's leisure patterns that, at least in Denmark, is reinforced by boys dropping out earlier than girls from sports clubs and social centres frequented after school hours. For male adolescents, a well established interest in visual media meets with their wish to evade adult supervision in an often intensive preoccupation with videos and computer games. For them, domestication, mediatization and informalization of leisure coincide.

Conversely, girls and young women, who for generations have had the bedroom as their physical and mental point of departure, take more and more control over public spaces: they form increasing parts of associations and clubs, and since 1987 they comprise the majority of teenage cinema audiences in Denmark. Thus, in 1996, 15 percent of young women aged 15–18 had been to the cinema within the last week, against 14 percent of young men in that age band, while another 43 percent had visited the cinema within the last month, 5 percent more than their male peers (Fridberg et al., 1997: 59). Several studies indicate that many young women today treat public spaces as arenas of assessing autonomy and exerting their social participation (e.g. Kleven, 1993; Nielsen and Rudberg, 1994). For them, mediatization of leisure goes together with an intensification of public

social life. One may only speculate how in adult life these complex and in some ways contradictory social and symbolic media trajectories will influence gender practices and discourses of power.

Youthful media studies: future demands

Since young people's present media patterns are a guide for their future preferences, the trends in youthful media cultures indicate important demands made on future media scholarship. First, the widespread use of multiple media and the increased exchange between media reception and media production call for what may be termed 'interactive' media research: no single person can track the range of media employed by most youngsters. Investigating the entire media landscape has the added asset of minimizing the risk of overemphasizing the importance of one medium in favour of others. Moreover, the increasingly complex mix of production and reception requires interdisciplinary research comprising a variety of scholars – from sociologists and economists to ethnologists and semiologists. It should be noted that 'interactive' and interdisciplinary research does not necessarily imply major research projects or centres, it may also involve more informal networks between kindred scholars or, at a minimal level, an added awareness on the part of individual scholars of other traditions and fields of research.

Second, the increased interaction between genres and media forms strengthens the necessity for media research to emphasize textual aspects of investigation, performed either from a classical semiological or perhaps a more recent Peirceian semiotic perspective. Furthermore, this interaction lends a strong argument in favour of textual analysis as part of, for example, reception theory and media ethnography – cf. the often heated debates over 'meaning-making' within these analytical traditions (Drotner, 1996; Jensen, 1991: 136–9). For example, in order to test the validity of recurring claims about adolescents' advanced visual literacies and increased media reflexivity we need to combine systematic analyses of, for instance, ironic modes of textual address with sustained analyses of young audiences' actual capabilities of understanding and acting upon these modes.

The combination of the 'seamless' embeddedness of media into everyday culture and the increasingly complex interweaving of programmes, formats, genres and media types is, indeed, a challenging analytical cocktail. Third, this increasingly integrated media culture necessitates media research that emphasizes the social aspects of investigation, either from an ethnographic, a sociological or an economic perspective, or through a combination of these perspectives. While these aspects have, indeed, been highlighted in several traditions of research including recent reception analyses, the

challenge still seems to lie in the empirical integration of these separate social aspects.

Viewed together, the characteristics of youthful media culture – innovation, interaction and integration – call for interdisciplinary media research that integrates textual and social aspects of investigation, and quantitative and qualitative methodologies. At the Centre for Child and Youth Media Studies we have attempted just that sort of structure, not by developing a super theory through which our separate empirical analyses are filtered, but rather by what may be termed a 'dialogical theoretical perspective' based on a broad concept of modernity (Drotner, 1995a). This perspective on the relations between youth and media has been developed for several reasons. First, young people today are, as stated above, a multi-media generation, and this calls for a combination of viewpoints. Second, significant developments in today's media culture often seem to take place in the interaction between media rather than within individual media themselves. Third, often the most fruitful scientific eyeopeners lie at the intersections between different theories.

Last, but not least, a dialogical perspective on the relations between youth and media has been developed in order to facilitate an epistemological approach that transcends the two main discursive traditions of cultural pessimism and optimism developed in addressing this relation. For, in general terms, the cultural pessimists have often spoken from the secure distance of mature adulthood and have focused upon alleged or actual problems with youthful media engagements, while the cultural optimists – often in explicit reaction to the former tradition – have taken the insider's empathic position and addressed the alleged or actual possibilities to be uncovered in young people's media uses. In each case, the result is a partial picture that may be increasingly untenable in today's intricate media landscape of the young. As researchers of youth we may wish to escape each of these positions, but we cannot escape positions of power dependent on age, and our studies will always reveal particular priorities and positions of address. The scientific dialogues that are shaped through actual cooperation or at least committed interest in different research traditions and approaches, by sharpening our professional reflexivity, may help develop what may be termed a 'joint vision' of empathic understanding and distanced evaluation whether speaking about, for or with youth.

In conclusion, the increasingly complex nature of contemporary juvenile media cultures demands that media researchers reach beyond traditional foci of investigation such as the effect of violence, the socializing impact of television or the development in media education. While such foci are still empirically and politically relevant, they get their full illumination within a framework that addresses, understands and seeks to interpret the innovative, interacting and integrating media cultures of 'ordinary' youngsters.

Notes

1. The displacement theory not only encompasses the internal relations between different media. It may also focus on the relations between media and other leisure pursuits: does the media take time away from other activities? Here, too, the survey of young Danes undermines the displacement theory: the fact that young people's total time use of media has increased has meant no decrease in other leisure pursuits, quite the contrary. Thus, in 1996, 72 percent of 16–18-year-olds regularly pursue some form of sport, while in the more meagre media environment of 1964 it was 64 percent of young men and 41 percent of young women (Fridberg et al., 1997: 101).

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