

Creative practices and participation in new media

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Abstract

The digitalisation of audiovisual technologies, along with the popularisation of Internet use and the spread of broadband and mobile devices, have made a revolution in cultural production possible and altered the "circuit of culture" established in a mass communication system in which production and consumption roles were clearly defined and the professional regulation and distribution of media outlets were thoroughly differentiated from domestic and amateur production.

The objective of this article is to contribute to the current discussion on media practices, especially as regards audiovisual content production and consumption by private individuals within the context of the so-called "new media". We specifically wish to examine the way in which cultural creation practices by private individuals enter the circuit of culture, the implications of considering a productive audience or public and how current practices linked to digital information and communication technologies (characterised by self-creation, remixing, sharing and dissemination on the internet) are reshaping the role of the media and the role of the cultural creator itself.

Key words

New media, digital culture, media practices, cultural production, agency.

Resum

La digitalització de les tecnologies audiovisuals, conjuntament amb la popularització d'internet, l'extensió de la banda ampla i de la telefonia mòbil ha suposat una revolució en la producció cultural, alterant el "circuit de la cultura" establert dins d'un sistema de comunicació de masses on els papers de producció i consum cultural estaven delimitats clarament i on la producció professional disposava d'uns circuits de regulació i distribució ben diferenciats de la producció domèstica i amateur.

L'objectiu d'aquest article és contribuir al debat actual sobre pràctiques mediàtiques, en especial pel que fa a la producció de continguts audiovisuals per part de la gent i el seu consum en el context dels anomenats "nous mitjans". Concretament, volem preguntar-nos com les pràctiques de creació cultural per part de la gent entren en el circuit cultural, quines són les implicacions d'una audiència o públic productiu, i com les pràctiques actuals vinculades a les tecnologies digitals —caracteritzades per l'autocreació, remescla, intercanvi i difusió a internet— redefeixen el paper dels mitjans de comunicació i el mateix rol de creador cultural.

Paraules clau

Nous mitjans, cultura digital, pràctiques mediàtiques, producció cultural, participació.

The context of "new media"

If any one particular practice characterises the new popular uses of digital technologies, it is the production and exchange of content on the internet. The development and falling costs of audiovisual digital technologies, in conjunction with the spread of the internet and simplification of its usability, are encouraging many people to produce their own creations (texts, pictures and videos) and share them on the internet in

many different ways, while the products of culture industries, which people are creatively remixing and reusing (often coming into conflict with current intellectual property laws and regulations) are being appropriated on a massive scale. These production practices are also known as "user-generated content", especially in the field of audiovisual production.

It's not hard to see how far the creation of audiovisual content has gone in diversifying and intersecting in different platforms and languages at the same time and how the emergence

of new individual and collective social agents with access to production and dissemination tools are generating new production and exchange patterns that pose a challenge to understanding today's production and consumption of cultural products and redefining the complex relationships between the media, industries and audiences.

Since its inception, the internet has been considered a "new media" that has made changes not only in how people communicate with each other but also within the realm of cultural production by defining a new media environment, together with other information and communication technologies and products. This new environment includes a diverse array of digital objects and technologies that range not only from multimedia products and video games to internet social networks (especially sharing sites such as Flickr, YouTube, Vimeo and MySpace, etc..) but also from digital cameras, mobile phones and podcasts to videogame consoles, which are used interchangeably as a medium, game and tool - new means of social communication, production, distribution and consumption that are within reach of many people. Nonetheless, speaking of "new media" as opposed to "traditional media" (newspapers, radio, television) or ascribing them to "new" technology or "new" formats is problematic. Lievrouw and Livingstone warn us of the limitations of this term, often used as a catchall to refer to certain products from the technology and culture industry, such as multimedia, video games or even e-commerce (Lievrouw and Livingstone 2002, 1). Authors such as Peter Lunenfeld (1999) and Lev Manovich (2001) consider that "new media" cannot be defined solely on the basis of digital technology.¹ It is hard to find an alternative term in this controversy to indicate the ICT-related processes that are transforming the circuit of culture but are much more than a replacement technology and that cannot always be understood in opposition to the "old" media.

In this paper, we choose to speak of "new media"² to refer to a "new" social context of participation, distribution and consumption of textual and audiovisual products based on the concept of the "media landscape" (Appadurai 1998). Furthermore, by using the term "the media" we propose to overcome the unambiguous identification of "medium" with technology, adding to it all the related practices and objects produced. Thus, we understand "the media" as both a series of technologies (productive, for consumption, distribution and exchange), as well as the cultural practices, objects and agents related to the use of these technologies. And we understand new media to be the "new media context" that has arisen from the interrelationships and intersections between the different media ("old" and "new") and different social players.

New media practices collide or mingle with the system defined by the media and culture industries in such a way that, within the unstable new media context, emerging cultural practices and forms interact with the media and established practices, come into conflict complementarily or in symbiosis and reinvent each other. In this volatile and innovative media environment, we must rethink what we mean by cultural produc-

tion and consumption, since not only must we explain how audiences "receive" cultural products but also how these products are transformed, newly recreated and sent into circulation in a way that might be called "playful", since both self-production as well as the mixtures and recreations often have an unmistakably entertaining sense and playful side. One might even say that this is one of their features, together with interactivity, horizontality and participation.³

The possibilities for horizontal participation and interaction that the new media landscape has opened up has made many researchers believe in the emergence of a new mass communication model based on its democratising potential. Obviously, we must note the horizontality of new interactive media, specifically the internet, since computer-mediated communication and the internet's conceptualisation as a public space is relative, especially when websites' visibility is largely organised on the basis of search engine criteria and other hierarchical devices and virtually all the major sites of mass interaction and attraction on the internet are in private hands. However, this is not inconsistent with the assertion that relationships are changing among producers, distributors, regulators and consumers of audiovisual content and that the new configuration is opening up new paths of user empowerment.

The literature in the field contains several theoretical proposals for defining this new mass communication model that explain the empowerment of "audiences" and the current transformations in the relationships between producers and consumers. For example, Henry Jenkins (2004 and 2006) proposes to understand and describe this new context in terms of cultural convergence and the emergence of a participatory culture. Jenkins distances himself from the idea that this is merely a technological change and also from understanding this new media context as convergence of the different media into one single mode of production or consumption. Instead, he sees it as tension between two contrasting yet interrelated trends: the confluence of two modes of cultural production based on different technologies and practices: "Convergence is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer driven process...Consumers are learning how to use different media technologies to be able to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and interact with other users. Consumers are fighting for the right to participate more fully in their culture" (Jenkins 2004: 37). From this perspective, we regard today's media context as the cultural crossroads of two cultural logics that converge on the internet. The first involves commercial concentration and deliberately intertextual product diversification. The second involves the appropriation, modification and re-formulation of these products, in addition to self-production by users who openly distribute their content and create social and sharing networks.

To P. D. Marshall, culture industries are also diversifying by offering models of cultural products in different formats (film, television, DVD, the internet, video games, e-books) in order to retain the audience, spectator or player within a controlled sys-

tem of entertainment options, even while they continue to develop different strategies for incorporating user production into the corporate universe. This intertextual matrix is made up of complex links of intersecting cultural forms that can be considered the industrial response to consumers' growing power (Marshall 2002, 69).

In any case, it seems that this "new" consumer power is linked to its growing production capacity (in the use of digital technologies) and the new distribution channels and peer relations offered by the internet. And it seems that consumers are taking that initiative as part of their entertainment. i.e., they devote part of their spare time to producing, exchanging and sharing audiovisual products, among others, in such a way that consumer culture is increasingly including a productive component. Thus, the current model of cultural consumption clearly cannot be understood solely in terms of reception but also in terms of production and the pleasure that comes from being involved in these creative practices.

Where are the cultural producers?

The audiences' productive relationship with the media breaks the causal, linear and highly regulated conception that goes from the producer to the consumer after passing through the distributor. Within the new media context, we cannot characterise the recipient of cultural products as simply the "audience", "spectator", "public" or "TV viewer". Just as we believe that the processes of receiving a television product or film are not mere passive acts but rather ones in which the observer actively participates, the act of viewing or interpreting an audiovisual text no longer satisfactorily describes what people are doing with the media.

Media theory has led to several different approaches to the study of the relations between producers and audiences; these usually separate political economics from studies on a work's reception. On the one hand is the analysis of market and cultural policies and, on the other, the analysis of the meaning an "audience" gives to a work, i.e. how it interprets a text. Both from the perspective of the cultural economy, as well as an analysis of a work's meaning, the consumer or spectator is seen as a "receptive" subject, a consumer of (cultural) goods or services or a recipient who might have a larger or smaller degree of freedom in interpreting a text. In the production line of goods or meaning, the end recipient was the last link. The audience participation that is possible in art based on the ideas of performance and authorial diminishment, or even based on audience involvement in television programmes, was limited compared with today's situation where, on the one hand, audiences "answer" by producing new products that are circulated or directly intervene and modify the "finished" product to create "new products" and where, on the other hand, the recipient's position as subject changes as well as his or her experience of "receiving" a cultural product, be it a text, film or

television series, not to mention a product such as a videogame or a website; and the receptive context also changes (is watching a series on the internet the same thing as watching TV?).

Thus, Dan Harries proposes a new term, "*viewing*" as "the experiencing of media in a manner that effectively integrates the activities of both 'viewing' and using [...] "*Viewers*' are the new 'connected consumers' who find entertainment pleasure in the multitasking activities being promoted through their pc and TV screens" (Harries 2002, 172). In turn, P. David Marshall recognises the difficulty in finding a useful neologism to describe the subject's new position, since no term is precise enough to identify the wide spectrum of possibilities related to the subject's involvement with new media. While "browser" might be an appropriate term for referring to some of the intensive uses of digital technologies, the term "player" might be particularly apt for indicating the intensity of the emotional experience associated with the subject's deep engagement in his or her different uses of new media (Marshall 2004, 26-27). From another perspective, Alvin Toffler proposed the term "*prosumer*" back in the 1980s to express what he saw as a new trend - the link between producer or professional and consumer - and therefore saw a new relationship between the industry and the consumer defined by product personalisation and the consumer's involvement in its design. However, this new conceptualisation of the consumer as producer can be seen as a form of instrumentalisation of the consumer's role as cheap "cultural manpower" (Maxwell and Miller 2005) and not as a process of entertaining participation and the democratisation of cultural production. Nevertheless, the term has prospered and is now used precisely to indicate the fact that consumer culture can be the producer of content at the same time, since it participates in network sharing on the internet. The *prosumer*, in principle, does not act for profit, nor considers his or her production as "work"; instead it is a freely donated creative act within a collaborative context.

From the perspective of the production and consumption relationships traced by Stuart Hall and Du Gay (1997), the circuit of culture also offers a framework for a critical analysis that explains the social processes it brings together. It starts out by understanding the process of receiving a cultural product as a form of consumption. From a systemic approach, the circuit of culture includes both the production and consumption process as well as regulatory mechanisms, identity processes and representative practices in such a way that the shared objects are accompanied by certain representations that link them to the social processes of difference and identity construction (in terms of class, gender or nationality, for example). From this perspective, consumers would not merely be an economic transaction but would rather play a creative role in the way in which the product is socially signified, used and transformed in everyday life.

In keeping with Bourdieu, the acquisition of a consumer good can be understood as the moment identity is articulated, since its possession or enjoyment refers to a system of values and the

establishment of differences and identification with a social group. "Good taste" or possessing certain objects and consuming them in a certain manner is a sign of social distinction. This social meaning is attributed to objects, yet it does not necessarily have to coincide with the producers' meaning. Between producers and consumers there is room for play, which is why both De Certeau (1984) and Fiske (1989) - the latter when referring specifically to audiovisual products - speak of the "pleasures of consumption" as rebellious and playful pleasures. In fact, Hall and Du Gay incorporate De Certeau's approach in their circuit of culture, in which everyday life is a productive form of consumption; consumption must be understood as creative appropriation that also involves the manipulation and transformation of the product and its meaning. Thus, according to the circuit of culture, consumption is not the end of a process but rather can, in itself, be a productive form.

Hall and Du Gay propose considering cultural products (narrative texts, music, theatre, film, television programmes, videogames, etc.) as objects of consumption and they therefore consider the audience or public to be consumers. Yet, at the same time, they propose considering consumers as active agents and consumption as productive work. However, productive work by consumers is in a different category from that by professionals or producers and the position between consumer and cultural producer remains differentiated. Productive work often consists of merely giving the product a meaning, serving as an agent for the construction of identity, yet it does not involve the sense of "generating a new text". Furthermore, producers are organised into production systems, while consumers are like "textual poachers", according to Henry Jenkins (2002), who started out from De Certeau and conceived the notion of a participatory culture that opposes or feeds back into the market. The media, understood as institutional corporations or private businesses, continue to control cultural production, organise and regulate the market and formulate the meaning that consumers will later reject or appropriate, formulate or transform, either via resistance or hegemony. What we find in today's context is intense interaction between different agents and media practices; the alignment among cultural producers, communication media and culture industries condemns consumers to a subordinate or resistant position and excludes a wide spectrum of media practices and other ways of understanding social agents in cultural creation.

This is not to negate the role of public institutions or the hegemonic power of large multinationals in shaping the current cultural scene, yet the active role of audiences as cultural producers in their own right needs vindicating. And not only that - people are also cultural producers through the media, not only by using or appropriating media-manufactured products. People are increasingly active agents as producers of content, not just meaning in the media system.

The fact that there is an intense innovative impulse in the creation of social content is not because of the juncture or fashion. Success stories with impressive followings through million

of views or downloads, unexpected media attention and sometimes the appropriation of "popular" aesthetic principles (such as home videos) in the established media such as film or television (Roig 2009). Big businesses can act as if they were "active audiences" in their appropriation and reworking of products made by private individuals, e.g. by copying the aesthetics and plot of a hit YouTube video to make an ad.⁴ Private individuals' leading role in their own cultural consumption, whether as agents or "managers" of their leisure time devoted to audiovisual consumption, has made formulating many questions from inside and outside the industry a must and not only with a view to "controlling" this new ecosystem.

Today's media context breaks with the stable roles taken for granted until now. Audiences cannot be made to correspond systematically with individuals, nor corporations with producers; it depends. Cultural production and consumption are different moments, relative positions that may correspond to different agents. The limitations that necessarily involve identifying "production" with "professional production" must be avoided, as must the opposite view that any cultural activity (including the very act of "reading" a text, for example) is an act of "production" (in relation to the different notions of production proposed on the basis of "active" consumption, as seen in Fiske, 1989, or proposed by Hills, 2002, for production by fans). In contrast, in his approach to digital photography practices, Larsen seeks to break with the concept of "consumer" technologies and speaks of individuals not just as consumers but also as producers (Larsen 2008, 146).

It can be argued that, to the audiovisual sector, these privately-created cultural forms are little more than an engaging, fun-filled hobby that has nothing to do with the "real economy". Benkler disagrees; to him, the internet society bestows greater autonomy and improved capacities upon its citizens in three main areas: production capacity per se, the capacity to establish open, community-based relationships with others and the capacity to constitute organisational forms that can operate inside and outside the realm of the market (Benkler 2006, 8). The author claims that this new innovation-based ecosystem involves a radical change in the global economy by concentrating activity across communities of interest. Within the realm of culture, this involves an increased transparency and malleability in the cultural production system, which would result in greater participation and democratisation (ibid. 12-15). Benkler discusses the emergence of the "social producer" as a new player alongside culture industries.

People can be cultural producers individually and collectively since they actively participate, i.e. they are an additional player shaping the current media scene, helping to define new cultural forms and produce textual and audiovisual narratives, etc. People are no longer merely audiences, they have audiences. The antagonism between the power of the "audiovisual media" and the audience's resistance or passivity as differentiated and irreconcilable players must be redefined in the same way that the asymmetrical complementary relationship between produc-

ers and consumers is changing. This redefinition of assigned roles does not mean the collapse or extinction of culture industries nor the disappearance of culture professionals. Neither does it mean the disappearance of differences and inequalities in the distribution of power, as Benkler's optimistic vision hoped, yet it does mean the advent of new social players who introduce significant changes in the circuit of culture, as we have seen. Within the new media context, people are cultural producers in their own right.

Media practices

The debate about the phenomenon of complex forms of audiovisual self-production and participation (from films or web-series to fans of "open" audiovisual projects) tends to reproduce a number of classic dualisms expressed in terms of either revolutionary change or pure marginality in the face of the industry's solid machinery. Hesmondhalgh (2007) proposes to distinguish between social production and industrial activity to analyse emerging practices, hybrid models and incipient forms of collaboration among the players operating inside and outside the traditionally established boundaries of "industry". "Social producer" allows us to speak of the new cultural players that configure the new media scene in the same way that we speak of social media - media made by and for the people - as opposed or complementary to the mass media. However, these classifications do not avoid the problem of the balance of power between 'grassroots' and 'industrial' productions.

Here we propose, on the one hand, to disassociate what people do with and through the media from their specific position in the circuit of culture and relations with the market, and, on the other, to detach a cultural analysis of the media from the centrality of the text. The aim is to highlight the 'agency' of people as producers of culture and understand media practices in a broad sense, to refer to what people do both with media products and technologies and with the media as a system - the Media. To treat individual and industrial production symmetrically, separating the Media and "audiences" must be considered, in itself, a strategy that helps to express the Media's power over "audiences", its legitimacy as society's spokesman, as well as its suspected role as a means of influence and propaganda over it.

To this end, it is helpful to look at the theory behind the practice carried out by Schatzki, in order to get closer to cultural production as a field of intertwined, material and embodied discursive practices organised around shared practical knowledge (Schatzki 2001, 3). This notion of practice, which entails a series of actions involving ways of being and speaking and includes the corporal, material and affective component in practice, should allow us to respond differently to what people do with the media beyond theories about audiences based on the reception of a text, and to distance ourselves from a linear, causal conception of cultural production, albeit without deny-

ing the importance of an audiovisual text or the importance of production and consumption relations in the circuit of culture.

As demanded by a growing number of authors, private individuals' media practices (with information and communication technologies, mass media and cultural or media products) must be understood within the context of everyday life (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998). These practices may often have different but simultaneous objectives: the search for and sharing of information and knowledge, communication, games, aesthetic pleasure, political participation, etc., and these cultural practices are generally related to the production and consumption of narratives - the creation of meaning - that are intertwined with practices related to sociability and the construction of identity and difference that have a certain orientation or affective or emotional charge.

Nick Couldry (2004) approaches media study as a practice, specifically to decentre the text and move away from a structuralist approach, i.e. an overly abstract perspective of the political economics of culture. Couldry proposes seeing media practices as an open series of practices related or oriented to the media. For example, studying televised football as a media practice goes beyond considering the "text" and structural factors (channels and broadcasting conditions) and undertaking an evaluation of the way in which people's everyday lives are structured in connection with this media phenomenon (even including rarely considered aspects such as family and social relationships, emotional/affective expressions and ties, associated forms of performativity or even the decision not to watch a match).

However, Couldry views the media as the media production system, i.e. cultural production that is organised as a production system and, therefore, what people do with the media is reduced to what people do with media products or their ways of consuming commercial products through the cinema, television or the internet. From our point of view, Couldry's contribution to communication studies is extremely valuable and somewhat revolutionary compared with earlier paradigms, yet the problem with this approach is that it does not consider people as cultural producers; it only analyses them on the basis of their position as consumers (active) or audience (creative). To this author, like many others, people are still consumers above all else and, therefore, the practice of production is not considered legitimate but rather subordinate to the practice of consumption. Many of these specific forms of productive appropriation, such as production of fans, videogame modifications and collaborative film production, are practices performed during leisure time, i.e. they fall outside labour regulations and therefore outside the productive system and acquire the tone of a subordinate kind of work (such as housework), submerged work, paralegal economy (competition with the economic model and market prices) or a form of consumption (productive consumer), so that several authors even speak of a fusion between work and leisure time (Neff et al 2005, Christopherson 2008, McRobbie 2002).

Be that as it may, what people are doing with the media also

includes producing media products, contributing to the new media's everyday landscape. In other words, it is not that we live immersed in a world saturated by mass media and media products but rather we are helping to make the world that way. It is not only advertising agencies, large corporations and media institutions who are saturating us; we are also players and contribute to this saturation. It is not only "them". People, individually or collectively, are immersed in media practices that are productive in many ways, ranging from new forms of political activism to personal fame and from the creation of self-productions for fun and pleasure to sharing with friends as a form of sociability or play and putting the media system itself to the test. Media practices (with and through the media) include creative and participatory practices and should be understood within the context of everyday life.

This is a change from media anthropology which proposes, in the first place and in keeping with Mark Hobart (2010), considering all productive practices (regardless of the agent, be it an individual, a corporation or an institution) at the same level of analysis and, in second place, seeing production and consumption cultural products as part of an organised series of social practices and not exclusively in their market relationships. In other words, this involves making a third decentring movement, in this case situating practices with and through the mass media within the context of social and cultural practices. In the above example, watching a televised football match as part of the audience must be understood within the context of everyday activity and should not be treated merely as a practice related or oriented to the media event. Instead, the media event should be treated as part of a broader series of people's social and cultural practices - whether they like football or not, whether they are watching television or not, whether they are sports professionals, or amateurs or fans. To understand the decisions people make to watch or not watch a televised match, film a concert and upload it onto YouTube or download a new series from the internet, we must examine the place occupied by the media in their everyday experience.

The anthropological view of the mass media - or the Media - focuses mainly on studying media practices not as objects of study in themselves but in relation to other cultural practices or to highlight appropriated differently in non-Western cultural contexts (Postill 2010). Anthropologists have tended to reject the trend of separating the media from the rest of social life. Consequently, most ethnographical approaches to the media have tended to point out the interconnections between media practices and cultural frames of reference (Askew 2002, 10). The perspective of ethnographic fieldwork, based on the prolonged study and direct observation of people's activity in order to capture their experiences and the meaning given to their practices, has led them to pay particular attention to what people do and say they do with the media, on the one hand; on the other, their search for a systemic or holistic understanding of a cultural reality has led them to relate such practices to other aspects of the culture being studied.

As Elizabeth Bird stated in *Audience in Everyday Life* (2003), one of the problems in studying the media in relation to cultural production is that audience research has generally been based on studying the reception of a certain medium (press, radio, film, television, internet ...) or certain type of programme (game shows, series ...), yet this isolates the media's role in culture and the media are strongly anchored in internet culture, although this is articulated in widely diverse forms of people's experience (Bird 2003, 3).

Bird proposes not thinking in terms of audiences or publics but to focus our attention on the different points of articulation between the media and individuals. She proposes to study how the media - the media and cultural products - are involved in people's everyday practices. Specific and localised activities with the media should not be viewed as public practices but rather as different interweaving forms of media in cultural performativity. Bird suggests speaking of "media practices" rather than "media-related" or "media-oriented practices" to express all the things people do with and through the media, not only those related to the moment of media consumption.

This interweaving of the media in society can also be understood in terms of intertextuality. In "Performing media" (2005, 130), Mark Allen Peterson proposes shifting the characteristic of intertextuality from the media to social action.⁵ Cultural production's role through the media is not limited to consumption or reception practices; people incorporate them into their lives in a fragmented, idiosyncratic and personal manner; they recall, replicate and transform elements of cultural products to carry out other social actions. For example, they use a snippet of a film to make statements, dress up like a Na'vi (the extra-terrestrial civilization in the film *Avatar*) to protest Israel's partition wall⁶ or comment on articles from the sports press at the office to prove they keep up-to-date on the news.

Mark Allen Peterson's proposal can be extended to the social studies of new media that generally focus on the analysis of a cultural form (videogames, internet, mobile phones) and how they're consumed by young people, without taking into account how videogames, for example, relate to other cultural forms and practices with which they apparently have nothing in common. This is therefore not a study of social interaction on specific platforms such as Flickr or Facebook but rather an analysis of how users articulate new forms of mediation in social interaction and new ways to produce and share culture. Specific cultural practices that cut across the different technologies must be analysed, because the study of media practices in digital culture cannot be reduced to one sole medium or to practices directly related to interaction with one particular technology. This means recognising people's cross-media practices, which as Dena says about producers, is an activity that involves and interrelates different technologies and objects from a film to a mobile phone or a website (Dena 2004).

Understanding the media as a culture means analysing how media presence in many of our everyday activities is not always predictable or homogenous. Bird's definition of media practices

is useful because it examines how media genres and products have been incorporated into our everyday lives, for example how screenplays shape weddings and communion rituals or how people become famous from the sudden success of their online videos. However, Bird's approach continues to use the influence of mass media on culture as a referent and does not take into account the practical materials that, in themselves, constitute a fundamental aspect of cultural creation. Basset in *Cultural Studies and New Media* (2007, 234) criticises the fact that the theoretical approaches to media that focus on people's experience have left out technology's material aspects.

Thus, by expanding Bird's definition, media practices include all practices with the media, including our relationship with technologies and our material practices with and through technologies. Popular and mass culture intersect in media practices, defining not just a new context for relations between the culture industries and their audiences, between private and public spheres, between homemade, amateur and professional productions but also a new media culture that we might call "digital culture".

Participation, digital culture and creative agents

Media anthropology discusses the role of the media (in its broadest sense) in cultural processes, specifically the dialectic between cultural production and media (Grau and Ardévol 2005). According to John Postill and Mark Allen Peterson (2009), anthropology provides three fundamental aspects to media studies: the ethnographic method - an empirical approach to the object of study from a contextual perspective that takes into account the subject's experience, an intercultural, relativistic and comparative view that destabilises the central positions of Europe and the United States and a theoretical orientation that situates the media in the culture.

Contemporary media practices are local (they are anchored and have meaning in people's ordinary lives), transcultural (they extend to diverse, culturally differentiated contexts and interconnect them) and global (they share a common material and technological infrastructure). We can therefore speak of an emerging digital culture based on complex interactions between digital technologies and internet infrastructures that is transforming all fields of human activity. Digital culture can be understood as a broad series of practices, material devices and narratives related to contemporary cultural production on the basis of using digital information and communication technologies.

This loose definition of digital culture explicitly attempts to sidestep the limitations involved in centring on the study of cultural forms or specific technologies from a overly compartmentalised point of view or "media-centric" approaches (the influence of the media), "text-centric" approaches based exclusively on the interpretation of texts and cultural products or

"techno-centric" approaches (based solely on the analysis of new technology) to steer the study of digital culture towards practices based on different branches of the social sciences.

As seen in the tradition developed by writers such as Bourdieu and Certau in sociology or Hall and Du Gay in cultural studies, the notion of media practices is closely linked to the production of meaning. Schatzki's approach to practices allows us to incorporate materiality, corporeality and affectivity and Couldry's contributions to the field of communication studies and Bird's to media anthropology go much further in studying audiences. Finally, work by Latour and others in the social studies of science and technology allow us to incorporate the agency of technologies in the production of culture. In parallel, it can be seen how, in digital creation practices and creative internet practices in their broadest sense (art, photography, video, videogames, social networking), co-creation is used to refer to the different ways people (or "publics") are involved, yet rarely are there references to technology's involvement in these processes.

According to Hand, technologies are inseparable from cultural forms of social organisation; thus, digitalisation can be expected to bring to light innovative alternatives to established practices and conventions (Hand 2008, 6). Therefore, we can recognise that part of the agency in the new media's cultural transformation process lies in developing these technologies and speaking of the emergence of a digital culture. This idea has been worked on by many different authors in various fields of the social sciences and humanities; it may have originated in Lévy's very conception of a cyberculture (2001), later developed by authors such as Gere (2002), Hand himself (2008) and Karagnis (2008) and authors who addressed specific areas such as copyright destabilisation (Gillespie 2007), materiality in everyday life (van den Boom, Lamm, Lehmann Raessens, and Schäfer 2009) and citizen journalism movements (Deuze 2006).

Gere, for example, proposes following Raymond Williams in his concept of digital culture when he asserts that digitality can be thought of as a cultural agent because it refers to both the artefacts as well as the systems of communication and meaning that most clearly characterise our contemporary lifestyle (Gere 2002, 16). This approach is useful because it recognises technologies' creative role in its broadest sense in the cultural process. Just as we wish to return agency to people as cultural producers, when choosing the term digital culture to define the emerging culture of the new media context we also wish to return this agency to technology as well, yet without falling into technological determinism. Rather than in terms of consumption, media practices can also be analysed in terms of agency (Hughes-Freeland 1998, 4-5). People "do things" with technologies, yet technologies also "do things" to people.

Contemporary media practices are closely intertwined and sustained by complex interactions between digital technologies and internet infrastructures. The internet's infrastructure mediates the productive and consumption practices of media

objects, especially audiovisual media - yet, it also participates in many social and cultural practices that seem more remote by transforming the very nature of the object (Ardévol and Estalella, 2009). For example, the incorporation of digital cameras into mobile phones turns any moment in life into a production context; it creates new visual styles and allows for the emergence of new cultural media practices. This means that the same video content and its meaning should be understood in new terms, since often a video's goal is to be distributed and shared on the internet. What's more, videos available on the internet are consumed within a specific context of display and consumption with certain properties derived from software (tags, reviews, rankings, etc.) which also intervene in the subject's position and experience. Technologies have changed not only the meaning of our practices but also the very materiality of the objects we produce. Internet infrastructures and technologies mean the incorporation of an agency in the cultural process (Ardévol, Estalella, Domínguez 2008, 12).

Speaking of audiovisual or media objects allows us to highlight this transformation and the diversity inherent in cultural creation within the new media context and the emergence of new cultural agencies in the design of the programming, interfaces and mechanisms of interaction. In keeping with Latour, it should be recalled that, unlike those who wish to maintain agency either in technology or in society, it is possible to consider an alternative path in which all players co-evolve (Latour 1991, 117). By considering agency shared between people and technology in our analysis and contextualising media objects in relation to broader cultural practices, we can attempt to trace a theoretical framework broad enough to account for the complex processes of digital culture within the new media context.

Notes

- 1 The term "new media" appeared in the 1990s as a label for classifying the emerging cultural forms that depend on computers and digital technologies for their distribution and consumption. See MANOVICH, L. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001.
- 2 The English term "media" refers to both institutions and technologies directly related to the mediated communication (the most usual one), as well as the cultural practices and objects associated with that communication. This is clearly different from the Spanish term "*medios*" (or "*medios de comunicación*"), which only covers technological and institutional meanings and frequently causes problems and confusion, as evidenced by the difficulties involved in translating terms such as "media culture", "media objects", "media fans" or even "new media" itself into Catalan. Therefore, we have chosen to use the term "media" to refer to both the media as well as the communicative practices and products in which technological mediation occurs and the term "mass media" to refer to the stricter meaning related to the technological and/or institutional aspects of the mass communication media.
- 3 This idea is developed more extensively in Ardévol Piera, Elisenda.; Pagès Parra, Ruth.; San Cornelio Esquerdo, Gemma.; Alsina González, Pau David.; Roig Telo, Antoni. 2007. "Cultura lúdica i pràctiques mediàtiques". *Digithum. Les humanitats en l'era digital*, UOC, 2007.
- 4 For example, in the case of *Bus Uncle*, a video shot with a mobile phone camera on a bus in Hong Kong was such a hit that even the media interviewed the author, many parodies were posted on YouTube and a remake was even made as an advert for the Football World Cup in 2006.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Bus_Uncle>
- 5 The notion of intertextuality developed by Bakhtin (1981) refers to the decontextualisation and recontextualisation of symbols or elements of discourse as a central feature of oral or written speech and has been used in communication studies to analyse cultural production as text. See, for example, Genette's definition of intertextuality as the way in which a particular text refers to or evokes other texts (in Marshall 2,002.70).
- 6 See the news article at <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/worldnews/7222508/Palestinians-dressed-as-the-Navi-from-the-film-Avatar-stage-a-protest-against-Israelis-separation-barrier.html>>

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