Norwegian Media Research Conference 2014

20 Years of the World Wide Web – Perspectives and Consequences[1]

Jon Raundalen

The Norwegian community of media studies researchers has arranged a national conference for several decades, and in 2004 the conference found the format which it has today. The conference is hosted by a different university or university college each year, and for the last decade the conference has been arranged bi-annually (even years), alternating with the Nordic Media and Communication Research Conference NORD-MEDIA (odd years). In 2014 the conference was hosted by the Department of Art and Media Studies at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim, Norway.

Workshops

The Norwegian Media Research Conference typically has three plenary sessions with invited keynote lecturers. The remaining part of the conference program is devoted to workshops with presentations and discussions focusing on pre-circulated papers in a variety of group sessions. The themes of these groups are relatively stable, but some have naturally come and gone due to shifting interests in the research community. In 2014 there were nine groups spanning the spectrum of Norwegian media research: Digital media, Journalism and Political Communication, Media Use and Media Experience, Media History, Mass Media Structure and Economy, Fiction, Visual Culture, Multiplatform Media and Computer Games, in addition to an ad-hoc group on reality television which might be established as a proper group in 2016. With this structure the conference is able to capture the breadth of Norwegian media research and accommodate the many different types of research done within Norwegian media studies. A total of 97 participants presented altogether 88 papers during the two days of the conference.

Theme

In addition to this wide variety of workshops every Norwegian Media Research Conference has an overarching theme, which often reflects special research interests at the department hosting the conference. In 2014 the title of the conference was "20 Years of the World Wide Web – Perspectives and Consequences". All three keynote lectures had

the World Wide Web as their point of departure and approached the topic from media archeology, software studies and new media ecology respectively. These perspectives were chosen by the organizers to shed a new and interesting light on an already thoroughly investigated research object.

Keynotes

In his keynote lecture *Streaming Heritage – Towards a Media Archaeology of the Web* professor Pelle Snickars from Umeå University asked what a media archaeology of the web can tell us:

> Well, first of all that we are rapidly losing our ability to reconstruct the digital past – we are indeed living in an era of bit rot. In fact, digital archiving poses fundamental challenges for media studies and the memory sector, especially when it comes to web preservation. Hundreds of years ago archives and libraries where set up in order to foster research and prevent societies from losing their memory. But the digital domain is not an archive, nor is it a library. Vast amounts of data are of course kept online, but there is simply no guarantee that computers of tomorrow will be able to read or understand current data and file formats. As a consequence, web archiving has developed into one preservational strategy to deal with the contemporary loss of digital information. (From Snickar's abstract).

Associate professor Taina Bucher from Copenhagen University gave a lecture entitled *Digital Visions: The Aesthetic and Cultural Significance of Algorithms*. In her talk she demonstrated that the study of algorithms, a field traditionally belonging to mathematics and informatics, is also of great interest for scholars within the humanities and social sciences. Bucher focused on the question of how we can understand the cultural and aesthetic significance of algorithms from the point of view of media aesthetics. With Facebook as her point of departure Bucher discussed the different ways in which algorithms communicate and are communicated.

Professor Richard Maxwell from City University of New York gave a keynote lecture with the title *Media Ecology Recycled*, focusing on how media technologies – from print to cloud computing – are intimately linked to the environment: "Their components are manufactured from natural resources; the chemicals, metals, and gasses used to make them affect the health of workers and ecosystems; their energy consumption is accelerating, with attendant rates of carbon emissions; and highly toxic discarded electronics are the fastest growing part of municipal waste streams. And yet media studies rarely addresses the ecological context of the technologies upon which the field is predicated." (From Maxwell's abstract) Maxwell went on to call on media scholars to face up to the seriousness of the ecological crisis and redirect the discipline toward greener practices.

Panel

The conference ended with a panel discussion chaired by associate professor Jan Frode Haugseth from Sør-Trøndelag University College. Both veterans and newcomers to the field of Norwegian media research on digital media and the World Wide Web were invited to the panel, in order to shed light on both the historical development of the field and pressing concerns in the present situation. One central question in the debate

was whether there are any blank spots on the map in Norwegian research on the World Wide Web which urgently needs to be addressed. The participants in the panel were Taina Bucher, assistant professor Gisle Hannemyr (University of Oslo), Professor Gunnar Liestøl (University of Oslo), Professor Terje Rasmussen (University of Oslo) and associate professor Torill E. Mortensen from the IT University of Copenhagen.

Other Events

The fact that the Norwegian Media Research Conference is attended by around one hundred media scholars each year goes to show that this an arena of exchange, interaction and networking which is regarded as very important and is very popular among Norwegian media scholars. Other regular events during the conference include the general meeting of the Norwegian media researcher's union and a festive conference dinner during which the union presents an award for excellence in disseminating knowledge of media research in society, as well as the union's honorary award.

Notes

1. The report was written by associate professor Jon Raundalen on behalf of the organizing committee for the 2014 conference. http://www.ntnu.no/medieforsk2014

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