

## Introduction

In January 2010, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton delivered a speech on Internet freedom in Washington DC. She spoke of ‘the right of people to freely access information’, and said that ‘access to information helps citizens to hold their governments accountable’. Her government, she said, stood ‘for a single internet where all of humanity has equal access to knowledge and ideas’ (Clinton 2010). The limits of this position were to be both tested and revealed throughout 2010, as the US administration and the world responded to a series of revelations facilitated by the activist whistleblower site WikiLeaks.

In April 2010, WikiLeaks released a video they titled ‘Collateral Murder’, which they claimed showed civilians, including two Reuters journalists, being shot dead by US forces. In July, they provided more than 90,000 classified documents from the Afghan war to the *Guardian*, the *New York Times* and *Der Spiegel*. This was dwarfed on 23 October, when those same three publications, along with Al Jazeera, *Le Monde*, and UK broadcaster Channel 4 published simultaneous stories about the occupation of Iraq. These reports all drew upon a cache of 391,832 classified US military documents obtained by WikiLeaks. And on 29 November, the Cablegate events began, with the publication in five major western newspapers of stories based on 251,287 secret cables sent from more than 250 US embassies.

This time, the WikiLeaks website came under extraordinary political pressure — it lost its access to the domain name Wikileaks.org. Amazon (which provided its web space), Paypal, Visa and Mastercard all withdrew their services from the organization. A loose coalition of supporters using the collective label ‘Anonymous’ engaged in a string of electronic civil disobedience actions against the websites of these companies, coordinating through spaces such as 4Chan, Facebook and Internet Relay Chat channels. The attempts to block access to the WikiLeaks website provided an important demonstration of John Gilmore’s famous observation that ‘the Net interprets censorship as damage and routes around it’ (quoted in *Time*, 6 December

1993). By 10 December 2010, the entire contents of the site were mirrored on more than 1500 other websites.

WikiLeaks shows the contours of the convergent media environment that is the subject of this book. The events WikiLeaks initiated in 2010 played out through networked digital media, as its 'Collateral Murder' video for example circulated through blogs, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Wikipedia. But these events also played out through longer-established industries such as newspapers and magazines, through broadcast television and radio, as WikiLeaks built collaborations with leading newspapers and broadcasters to analyse, distribute and publicize its caches of classified data. This illustrates the complex media environment that we now inhabit, an environment built on both broadcast and broadband. To say we *inhabit* this media environment is not to overstate the case — at least for those of us in the UK, Australia, and North America, which are the parts of the world we focus on in this book. In the UK, for example, the average person spends almost nine hours a day using media — watching TV, reading newspapers, listening to the radio, texting, gaming and using the Internet. More time than we spend asleep, more time than we spend at work. On average, 45% of our waking hours are spent with media (an average of 7 hours and 5 minutes), and by using more than one kind of media at the same time, we cram in an average of 8 hours and 48 minutes media time every day (Ofcom 2010: 24). The media are no longer just what we watch, listen to or read — the media are now what we do.

## **Convergence**

This book is about convergence — the coming together of things that were previously separate. More than that, this book is about media convergence in everyday life. Other books about convergence variously focus on the political economy of contemporary media industries (Dwyer 2010), on establishing a research agenda for digital media scholars (Jensen 2010), or on the activities of specialized groups of media fans (Jenkins 2008). But in this book we emphasize more everyday uses of networked digital media — Facebook and iTunes, Google and Wikipedia, and the BBC iPlayer among them. We use the

term *convergent media* throughout the book to refer to media content, industries, technologies and practices that are both digital and networked. We avoid the term *new media* (cf. Manovich 2001, Lievrouw & Livingstone 2006, Flew 2008, Lister *et al* 2009, Giddings & Lister 2011). All media were new once, and to place an emphasis on the ‘new’ can be misleading. If we emphasize technological novelty, then this can obscure the crucial processes of transition, of both adoption and adaptation, through which a medium comes to seem part of the furniture (Gitelman & Pingree 2003). More than this, there are also some very real problems in deciding what is to count as ‘new’. The World Wide Web is already twenty years old — Tim Berners-Lee activated the first website in December 1990 (Berners-Lee 2010). The Internet which underpins the web is more than forty years old — the first message on the ARPANET was sent in October 1969 (Abbate 1999). The history of the mobile phone might be traced back as far as Marconi or even Morse, or through long trajectories of development in CB radio and pagers (Goggin 2006, Ling & Donner 2009), until the first-generation commercial cellular phones at the end of the 1970s (Green & Haddon 2009). Some of the earliest videogames date to 1958 (*Tennis For Two*) and 1962 (*Spacewar!*) (Newman 2004). Image manipulation application Photoshop has been with us for twenty years; word processors, desktop publishing, and email for longer; and even the iPod for ten. Are any of these media still *new*? DVDs and MP3s once seemed new, but then so did the telegraph, the telephone and electric light (Marvin 1988, Fischer 1992, Standage 1998). At the time of writing, various kinds of cutting-edge might be represented by location-based social media tools (Foursquare), augmented-reality phone apps (Layar) or legal streaming music services (Spotify), but readers in the not-too-distant future are likely to find all of those unexceptional.

We also avoid the term *digital media* in this book, except where we are focusing on specific properties of specific digital forms or in conjunction with the term *networked*. We do not use the term ‘digital media’ as a general label for the convergent media environment. This is because the digitization of media content is now so pervasive and so firmly established that the term is unhelpful as a general label. All media now involve digital technologies in at least some stages of their production, distribution or reception. Even a

centuries-old form like the newspaper, even at its most modest level — the local free-sheet — is written on word processors, laid out on desktop publishing packages, and sent to its printers electronically. Moreover, the significant characteristic of contemporary media is not just that they are digital but that they are also networked, enabling complex relationships of two-way communication. Convergent media for us, then, are *networked digital media*.

And we avoid the term *revolution*, which can be used by even the most incisive analysts of the convergent media environment (such as Castells 2000 or McChesney 2007). ‘The rhetoric of the digital revolution’, as Mark Andrejevic points out, ‘assumes a fundamental discontinuity between the old media and the new’ (2004: 24). Instead, in this book we ground our discussion of convergent media in longer historical trajectories, linking news blogs to established news organizations, creative audiences to decades of audience theory and research, and the increased degree of personal visibility afforded by social network media to older issues.

Convergence, Roger Silverstone once suggested, is ‘a dangerous word’ (1995: 11). Silverstone was concerned that the word had come to mean so many different things to so many people, applied to technological developments, industry structures, changing forms of media texts, and shifts in the relationships between audiences and media. For Silverstone, this was a problem, although we would suggest that being able to explain many different kinds of media phenomena with a single concept is a useful thing. But Silverstone was right that the term ‘convergence’ means different things to different people, and perhaps as a result the term also attracts a certain skepticism — ‘the promise of further wonders’, as Hesmondhalgh assesses convergence (2007: 261). Murdock (2000) made a significant contribution by distinguishing between, first, the convergence of cultural forms (which we discuss in Chapter 4 as textual convergence); second, industrial convergence (to which we turn in Chapter 2); and third, technological convergence, which he termed ‘the convergence of communications systems’ (2000: 37-8). This third form is our focus in Chapter 1.

For Klaus Bruhn Jensen convergence describes ‘a historically open-ended migration of communicative practices across diverse material technologies and social institutions’ (2010: 15). Jensen identifies three broad modes of communication which are affected by this, which he labels ‘the three degrees’. The first involves bodies and tools of interpersonal communication, including both face-to-face conversation and writing. The second degree he identifies is ‘technologies’, a label for the few-to-many media forms of the broadcast paradigm (although it is not clear how writing, as applied to letters, books or email, is free from technological mediation). And Jensen’s third degree is ‘meta-technologies’, or digital media which remediate and recombine the other degrees. Jensen’s analysis is incisive and original, but conflates too many important distinctions into its ‘first degree’ — face-to-face communication is different in crucial ways from mediated one-to-one communication through phones, letters, email or chat, most obviously in that those latter kinds of communication usually occur between people who are not present in the same place at the same time (Thompson 1995).

Where Jensen is concerned with modes of interaction, others take a political economy perspective on convergence. For Tim Dwyer, convergence describes ‘the process whereby new technologies are accommodated by existing media and communication industries and cultures’ (Dwyer 2010: 2). In this analysis, networked digital media appear just as a kind of superstructural phenomenon on top of the established media industries. The limitations of this approach are clear in Dwyer’s case study of MySpace, which sees this network entirely as a broadcast platform (2010: 57-9). MySpace has certain things in common with certain platforms in the broadcast paradigm, but it is better understood as a social media tool which creates a complex environment, mixing one-to-one personal communication with the broadcast model of messages sent to nobody in particular. We will discuss social media in more detail in Chapter 3, which will extend the points raised here about the analyses of both Jensen and Dwyer.

Other authors have also stressed the convergence of computing, communications and content (Pool 1983, Rice 1999, Barr 2000, Flew 2008, Küng, Picard & Towse 2008), generating powerful insights. Bolter and Grusin

describe convergence as *remediation* — ‘the representation of one medium in another’ (1999: 45). For these authors, ‘Convergence is the mutual remediation of at least three important technologies — telephone, television, and computer’ (1999: 224). The importance of their argument is in its insistence that networked digital media do not replace older media but join them in a complex convergent environment: ‘the remediation is mutual: the Internet refashions television even as television refashions the Internet’ (1999: 224). But, in contrast, other scholars miss the point of convergence entirely: ‘That people can listen to their radio over their digital television — so what? That they can make telephone calls on their computers — so what?’ (Winston 2005: 377). However, in recent years, convergence has become firmly identified — even over-identified — with the work of Henry Jenkins (2001, 2004), in particular his 2006 book *Convergence Culture* (references in this book are to the updated paperback edition of 2008).

‘In the world of media convergence,’ writes Jenkins, ‘every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms’ (2008: 3). For Jenkins, convergence can be defined as:

the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want (2008: 2).

The title of his book identifies not only convergence but a convergence *culture* — something different and something bigger than just a set of specialized media practices (see also Jenkins & Deuze 2008, Perryman 2008, Deuze 2010). For some critics, this relies rather too much on generalizing from the practices of very small groups (Couldry 2010a). Jenkins’s case studies largely focus around dedicated fans who have the economic and cultural resources to engage with their favourite media in unusual depth. *Convergence Culture* is best seen as a contribution to the literature on fan studies, with which Jenkins has been associated since the early 1990s (Jenkins 1992, 2006b). Key chapters explore online discussion forums surrounding the reality TV show *Survivor*, amateur contributions to the *Star Wars* canon, and coordinated fan fiction

around the Harry Potter universe. This is both the biggest strength of the book — its detailed and revealing case studies of fan behaviour — and its biggest limitation, because Jenkins generalizes and extrapolates throughout the book from the behaviour of particular groups who may not after all turn out to be harbingers of wider trends that will diffuse throughout society. To devote an enormous amount of time to remaking a *Star Wars* film, or to fully exploring every last nuance of the world of *The Matrix* (across games, virtual worlds and graphic novels as well as the trilogy of films), or to establishing oneself as a leading voice in an online forum for *Survivor* fans — each of these demands resources of money, cultural capital, and above all time that marginalize the potential for many people to join in (Couldry 2011, Gregg & Driscoll 2011). As is true of all literature in fan studies, Jenkins's examples may not, in fact, apply to other, less dedicated groups. We will address the changing roles of media audiences in more detail in Chapter 5.

Both Jenkins (2008: 10-11) and Castells (2009: 58) credit Ithiel de Sola Pool's 1983 book *Technologies of Freedom* as the first to draw attention to convergence, although from this early vantage point he did not have a great deal to say about computers:

A process called the 'convergence of modes' is blurring the lines between media, even between point-to-point communications, such as the post, telephone, and telegraph, and mass communications, such as the press, radio, and television. A single physical means — be it wires, cables, or airwaves — may carry services that in the past were provided in separate ways. Conversely, a service that was provided in the past by any one medium — be it broadcasting, the press, or telephony — can now be provided in several different physical ways. So the one-to-one relationship that used to exist between a medium and its use is eroding. That is what is meant by the convergence of modes (Pool 1983: 23).

And in *The Media Lab*, Stewart Brand described MIT Media Laboratory Director Nicholas Negroponte's 'vision' of convergence: 'all communication technologies are suffering a joint metamorphosis, which can only be understood properly if treated as a single subject, and only advanced properly if treated as a single craft' (1988: 11).

But such technological convergence would have ramifications, which were identifiable some time ago. Pool noted, for example, that legal and regulatory approaches towards print, telephony and broadcasting systems had all evolved separately and distinctly, so their practical convergence would create regulatory dilemmas (a point explored in the greatest depth by Benkler 2006). The possibilities of technological convergence, when combined with increasingly convergent ownership patterns, would effect a blurring of earlier distinctions — print publishing, for example, which was subject to one specific set of legal conventions, would be increasingly drawn into the regulatory domains affecting broadcasting and telecommunications.

## **Contestation and Continuity**

The emergence of WikiLeaks on the political stage was a vivid example of the *transformation* of the media from the broadcast paradigm of the twentieth century into a more complex, twenty-first-century convergent environment. And yet the WikiLeaks events also point to some crucial *continuities*. Viewed from a certain angle, the WikiLeaks story seems to be all about the new — it was a YouTube sensation, a Facebook sensation, a Twitter sensation. But viewed from a different angle, the story is one of long-established media industries and practices. For one thing, WikiLeaks was also a newspaper phenomenon. All the online sharing and argument, all the social networking and collaborative chatter, were catalysed by the publication of material provided by WikiLeaks to the *Guardian*, the *New York Times* and other long-established news organizations. The convergent media environment, then, is characterized by both contestation and continuity.

With the Cablegate developments, WikiLeaks' figurehead Julian Assange became the focus of an international manhunt. Before his arrest in London in December 2010 on charges relating to alleged sexual offences in Sweden, a string of US political figures had issued threats: Sarah Palin called for him to be 'hunted down like Osama Bin Laden'; one senior Canadian political aide called publicly for his assassination. The US government warned university

students that discussing WikiLeaks on Facebook could damage their job prospects. Providing information to news media was shown to be a new kind of thought-crime, whereas story-telling based on that information appeared to remain a protected activity — there were no public calls from elected officials or political aides for the editor of the *Guardian* to be assassinated.

With each of the four key WikiLeaks events in 2010, much attention went to the nature of the publication rather than to the content of the documents, with WikiLeaks itself and Julian Assange in particular the focus of considerable attention (see for example Assange 2010a, 2010b, Greenberg 2010, Khatchadourian 2010). Many details lent these events an air of radical media transformation — the online distribution of such huge quantities of secret data; the exotic name of the site itself; and the intriguing figure of Assange, who until his arrest was said to be in constant transit, hauling encrypted computers in his luggage (some observed that he resembled a hacker protagonist from one of William Gibson's cyberpunk novels). The medium and the messenger were in this case as fascinating as the message, leading to a certain amount of hyperbole. Journalism scholar Jay Rosen, for instance, described WikiLeaks as 'the world's first stateless news organization' (2010).

But WikiLeaks is not a news organization, stateless or otherwise. Placing a quarter of a million raw documents on a website is not the same thing as producing news, which is an industrial process of creating and distributing non-fiction drama, of giving shape and structure to raw information. WikiLeaks does not produce news — rather, it is a source of raw material for news organizations which simultaneously makes that raw material available to anyone through its website. Its role in channeling information to news media has more in common with the communication strategies of powerful sources like the Pentagon or the Metropolitan Police than with journalism (Fishman 1980, Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1989). Where WikiLeaks differs from such established sources is in exemplifying what McNair calls the 'cultural chaos' of a global networked media environment: 'the possibilities allowed [...] for dissent, openness and diversity rather than closure, exclusivity and ideological homogeneity' (2006: vii).

Assange himself wrote that the project illustrated a new form of ‘scientific journalism’:

Scientific journalism allows you to read a news story, then to click online to see the original document it is based on. That way you can judge for yourself: Is the story true? Did the journalist report it accurately? (Assange 2010b).

Benkler has described this as the ‘see for yourself’ culture of the Internet (2006: 218), enhanced by the link-structure of the web, in which trust, reputation and authority do not simply derive from the organization providing the news, but also in the capacity to trace their sources for oneself.

One important conclusion to draw from WikiLeaks and its campaign to enforce radical transparency on powerful institutions is that it highlights how the convergent media environment is characterized by both contestation and continuity — new actors and old industries, contending modes of distribution and visibility, complex assemblages of networked digital media. To see this, ask yourself why WikiLeaks involves established media organizations at all, rather than just posting its caches of data on its own website. Those organizations bring distribution networks that complement rather than replace the WikiLeaks website. They add the credibility and authority of long-established news brands to what could otherwise be dismissed as a niche website with a weird name, and they set the agenda for other news media to follow. As an activist project, WikiLeaks wants to bring attention to the documents it makes available. News organizations can help with this. Most importantly, they bring journalists who — at their best — can analyse and sift the raw material, can test evidence and redact details that may endanger named individuals, can offer context to help the reader interpret the material, and can shape the data into stories, reports and commentaries that make sense of the material for audiences who lack, of course, the time and expertise to process these hundreds of thousands of specialized documents for themselves — although those documents are available online in their raw form for anyone who wishes to try. WikiLeaks, then, illustrates a convergent media environment — networked digital communication — emerging through complex relations of contestation and continuity.

Such tensions and interplay between contestation and continuity are central to the study of media and communication. From one perspective, communication is all about contestation, about transformation, about the exchange of information and meaning. 'Communication,' writes Klaus Bruhn Jensen, 'is the human capacity to consider how things might be different' (2010: 6). Much media use can be understood as the sending of messages across space for the management of complex societies (Beniger 1986). Messages, information, communication itself are 'differences that make a difference' (Jensen 2010: 40). But from another perspective, communication is also about maintaining continuity, about maintaining society and culture through time (Carey 1989), as we share in rituals of simultaneity and storytelling, from watching *X Factor* along with millions of distant others to sharing video clips on Facebook. In this view, communication is not just about bringing about transformation through the dissemination of new information, but also about maintaining relationships, about maintaining the continuity of cultures through time.

The tensions between contestation and continuity have also animated the 'Media Studies 2.0' debate. This was initiated in polemical online posts by William Merrin (2008, 2009) and David Gauntlett (2007, 2009), which argue that the study and teaching of media have not kept pace with developments in either media technology or in users' experiences of a convergent media environment. In particular, it points to the blurring of the line between production and consumption. This debate, in part perhaps because of the polemical nature of its first statements, has been fiercely contested (see for example Andrejevic 2009, Dovey & Lister 2009, Miller 2009, as well as the 2009 special issues of *Television & New Media*, [vol. 10, no. 1] and *Interactions*, [vol. 1, no. 1]) and it is true that it may reify an unreal Media Studies 1.0. But it does crystallize the tensions between continuity and contestation — between the broadcast era in which 'some get to speak and some to listen, some to write and some to read, some to film and some to view' Carey (1989: 87), and the emerging participatory culture which, as Lessig observes, 'could be both read and write' (2004: 37).

This book recognizes and explores the ways in which ‘the people formerly known as the audience’ (Rosen 2006) are developing new ways of interacting with media — creating, editing, organizing, collaborating, sharing — at the same time as the average UK viewer’s hours spent watching broadcast television have increased to almost four per day (Ofcom 2010). The convergent media environment is making possible an enormous redistribution of a certain kind of power — the power to speak, to write, to argue, to define, to persuade — symbolic power (Bourdieu 1991, Thompson 1995, Meikle 2009, Couldry 2010a). For many people, the media are no longer just what they watch, listen to or read — the media are now what people *do*.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter bring together different forms of communication and interaction, blurring the lines between one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communication. They make possible an unprecedented convergence between messages exchanged directly between specific individuals and messages sent randomly to nobody in particular. It is a communication environment that Castells (2009) characterizes as ‘mass self-communication’, although we would distance ourselves from the word ‘mass’ here, which has had a problematic status for many media scholars for some time — the problem with the word ‘mass’ is that it always seems to refer to other people, never ourselves. We all know ourselves to be more complicated, more discriminating, more distinctive than simply a part of an amorphous mass. As Raymond Williams once argued, there are in fact no masses — ‘there are only ways of seeing people as masses’ (1961: 300). Seeing people as masses was very convenient for twentieth-century media industries — but in the twenty-first century, it is proving much harder, as audiences discover their increased capacity to exercise symbolic power.

This book explores that media environment, addressing Facebook and iTunes, Wikipedia and blogging, lolcats and Hitler remixes, *Guitar Hero* and political videogames. But it is also grounded in the research, insights and concerns of earlier approaches to media. The convergent media environment is being shaped not only by such emerging transformations but also by contested continuities. Established media industries struggle to deal with the shock of

the new — a proliferation of competing platforms, a reconfiguration of audiences, and a convergent context in which media products can be shared, copied and remixed by millions, on a global scale and in real-time. But at the same time, assumptions and precedents from the twentieth century persist in the shaping of policy and regulation, in debates about censorship and subsidy, in struggles over intellectual property, copyright and access. So this book also examines examples that speak to continuities — the BBC and Rupert Murdoch, discourses of news and of media policy, understandings of media audiences, ownership and texts that are grounded in decades of research and debate.

## **About This Book**

In this book we first examine four key dimensions of convergence, giving each a chapter in turn — technological, industrial, social and textual. In the second half of the book, we then go on to explore the implications of these forms of convergence for audiences and for governments and regulators. In Chapter 1 we focus on the convergence of content, computers and communications — the technological convergence of digital networked media that enables the computer company Apple to become a dominant force in selling music or to team up with Rupert Murdoch to develop a new kind of ‘newspaper’ for its tablet device the iPad. In Chapter 2 we turn to those organizations that are driving and being driven by this, examining some of the most important and emblematic media institutions of the convergent environment — the BBC, Google and News Corporation. In Chapter 3 we explore the rise of social network media, concentrating on Facebook, a complex space which enables the convergence of one-to-one communication with the broadcast model of messages sent to nobody in particular. In Chapter 4 we discuss three key ways in which media texts converge — the mash-up model in which texts are sampled, remixed and reimagined; the multimedia model in which different textual systems — words, images, sounds — come together in the same space on the same device; and what Jenkins (2008) has labeled the transmedia model, in which stories and texts are dispersed across multiple platforms.

With these four major kinds of convergence mapped, the second half of the book explores some of their most important implications. Chapter 5, 'Creative Audiences', identifies the key ways in which audiences can now interact with media — accessing, organizing, creating, manipulating, collaborating upon and sharing media content in the networked digital environment. Chapter 6 turns to the ways in which convergent media make the invisible visible, enabling new power relationships as users monitor, display and connect. Chapter 7 looks at some key implications of convergent media for our experiences of mediated time and space. Chapter 8 identifies some of the main implications of convergent media for policy-makers and regulators.

To some extent these chapter divisions are artificial, as is true of many books. Certain key themes occur and recur within more than one chapter, unable to be contained within a single discussion, and the book is to be read horizontally across chapters rather than vertically as a series of separate, unconnected topics. For example, questions of visibility are not confined to Chapter 6, which explicitly focuses on these, but also appear in our discussion of social network media in Chapter 3 and in Chapter 7 on convergent media, time and space. Questions of remix, similarly, are addressed in both Chapter 4 on convergent texts and Chapter 5 on creative audiences. This is not a bug but a feature, and the reader is encouraged to see the book not as a collection of connected discussions but as a continuous exploration of networked digital media. And of course, the reader will make their own connections between ideas as they read.