

New media? Re-imagining technology, culture and the social

This special issue of *Cultural Policy, Criticism and Management Research* explores the enduring fascination with the idea of novelty through the lens of new media. The brand names in the discourse are familiar: Twitter, Facebook, Google, Digg, Tumblr, MySpace, to name a few. But these buzzwords reveal more than their commercial application. Critical analyses of these tools reveal ongoing dialogue and tensions between technology, culture and society. As these vectors – with ever-shifting contours, contested meanings and competing claims – overlap, they raise important questions about what can be claimed by ‘new media’ and why and how this term maintains currency and power within the social realm.

Through an interdisciplinary framework, this volume investigates new media by asking just what it is – to borrow from Raymond Carver (1982) – that we talk about, when we talk about the *new*. For, as Roger Silverstone made clear, ‘[i]t is easy to be seduced by the simplicity and the significance of novelty. It is easy to misread the signs. Novelty is, however, at this point, our problem’ (1999: 10). This is to say that the new is never without precedent, nor is it ever completely innocent. The present bears imprints of the past, whether linear or otherwise. History exists in the now; it informs challenges to the present as much as it teases out narratives of a given future. Yet novelty’s conceptual value lies not in its referential relationship to what was. Instead, the problem of the new is the problem of making sense of shifting logics of being – logics that hold out the promise (or the threat) of

reconfiguring structures of knowledge and experience. It is a problem of contextualising and understanding change *within* continuity.

In questioning new media, the articles in this journal resist the urge to fetishise novelty and choose instead to unpack the ‘new’ and demonstrate how it can act as a lever of both transformation and stability. To be clear, new media have not made their predecessors obsolete. They have simply absorbed older media into the fold, and in this sense, the challenge of **New Media? Re-imagining Technology, Culture and the Social** is to reconcile technological innovation with new media’s deep historicism.

Thus, **Richard Wigley** uses systems theory to investigate Twitter’s value to deliberative dialogue; **Judith Townend** documents the impact of social media on news publishing and implications for the law; **Dong-Hyun Song** writes about internet governance and online activism in South Korea; **Jowan Mahmud** explores how youth in the Kurdish diaspora perform identity online; **Jenny Kidd** examines the relationship between new media and democracy; and **Zeena Feldman** locates Georg Simmel’s stranger in the world of social media. With contributions from the humanities and social sciences, this collection of essays contributes to wider discussions about how media platforms and communication tools impact social, spatial and cultural spheres of meaning and practice. It offers a variety of interventions for readers to consider, comment on, and indeed, question.

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REFERENCES

- Carver, R. (1982) *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. London: Collins.
- Silverstone, R. (1999) ‘What’s new about new media?’, *New Media & Society* 1(1): 10-12.