My Space?

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The title that Toby has assigned to this issue allows me to conduct an exercise and demonstration from the “platform” that in these times has been labeled my space. Not literally of course. Television & New Media (T&NM) is a hard-bound academic journal that began at a time not only when television was being reinvented and repurposed through “new media” but also when academic journal publishing was just beginning to compete with online formats. Subsequently T&NM (like other academic publishing) has begun distribution online, acting on the distributive networks, economy, and technical rationality of My Space. So this experiment about “my media space” is about how media studies now operate betwixt and between the technical conventions to which residual and emergent media are put. Writing about media convergence from these intersecting networks, economies, and rationalities—from the legacy of hard-bound journals (and the valuing of what Michel Foucault [1998b] described as the “author-function” for advancing higher education’s “liberal arts” and sciences) as well as from the promise of “file-sharing” and hyperlinking that has brought that legacy to a crisis. What is the value and virtue now of a media study produced by academic actors without some foothold in the economy and managerial rationality of texts in print? And if web sites work against the old author-function, reappraising the value of residual media such as television for their ability to vet and exhibit celebrity and authors from the multitude of contestants who participate and aspire online, how might this issue be seen as a jumping off point for considering the current contradictions of writing about “my media space” within the economy and rationality of academic publishing’s value and virtue of authorship? One variant of this experiment would be to submit (without explanatory notation) a list of links that I use frequently in “my media space,” but that exercise works better online than in hard copy. The practice of citation, and its relation to authority/authorship, works differently online than in hard copies of academic journals.

My TV—

As someone who encountered media studies at a time when “the medium was the message,” when semiotics and structuralism provided a theoretical explanation that
each medium is a relatively discrete “language” or set of formal conventions, and when there were departments with titles representing the most important three media (radio, TV, and film), I now welcome the possibility of hybrid objects of study afforded under the mantra of “media convergence” and “convergence culture.” However, many of the epochalist pronouncements about convergence have not been without hard-to-shake dispositions from the past, such as the ongoing (modern) tendency among some academic researchers to see the internet as a medium with its own history, effects, and properties or to see “television” as an old medium replaced by “new media.” Technological hybridity, assemblage, and convergence are not recent features of the modern/media environment. Recognizing that not only requires “long histories of new media” (particularly ones underscoring how a sense of technological progress has been a history of failure or how emergent and residual practices are at play in the present) but also analytics that are about what Bruno Latour (1993) called the “differentiating machinery” of modern life and knowledge production, of which current media practices (such as My Space’s divisions and categories of personal interest and activity) are part.

Another, related, longstanding problem for media studies is its tendency to see “media” as the beginning and end of every question or as the wedge to open up an understanding of everything else in the world. Charolotte Brunsdon (2008), at the end of her recent effort to answer the question, “Is television studies history?” cites Asa Briggs’s statement that “to write the history of broadcasting is to write the history of everything else.” I tend to agree as long as they do not mean that broadcasting is the way to write the history of everything else. “My TV” has long been assembled out of various “media” but also other “appliances.” For that reason, I like John Hartley’s (1999) thoughts about television and refrigerators, or Mark Andrejevic’s (2007) treatise on “smart clothes,” or Jeremy Packer’s (2008) account of CB radios and trucks. Turning TV inside out, or following its place within actor-networks, should be the starting point (and not a half-hearted acknowledgement) of media studies about the past or the present.

By examining the conversion of most appliances into “smart” technologies, there is an opportunity to extend media studies, though that path risks making these objects and appliances only about communication. What is needed is a television studies that decents TV or that begins with having to locate televisuality within the activity spaces and the technological assemblages and arrangements of life. The “televisual” is both an old and recent ideal—an adjective that gets attached and articulated to nouns, subjects, and objects. The fixed relation of its parts to its whole should never be assumed.

My Mobile—

I still find useful Raymond Williams’s (1993) view that television was not the outcome of an evolution of communication technologies but gained traction historically
and geographically as part of a regime of mobility and privacy—what he referred to as “mobile privatization.” From Williams’s perspective, TV developed and mattered not only through a particular conception and design of house and home (the most private of spaces) but through a home life that assumed and required particular forms of transport—and likewise through forms of transport that required a particular model of domesticity. Williams’s view, alongside the work of James Carey (1989) on telegraphy and rail travel and of Armand Mattelart (1998) on the birth of modern communication through the sciences and maintenance of “freely” circulatory systems, underscores that the long history of new media is just as much a history space, transport, travel, mobility, cars, trains, planes, elevators, and Segway Transporters as it is a history of communication “media.”

Recognizing the link between communication and transportation is particularly important in recognizing that tele-visuality has always been about overcoming the problem of distance through technologies of transport. My advocacy of what I have termed a spatial materialism is inspired by these as well as Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) and Doreen Massey’s (1994) view that spatial practices and mobility “produce” historical possibilities. These perspectives collectively are indispensable (though not exhaustive) for fresh perspectives about the current regime of portable media technologies, which My Space’s expression “my mobile” represents.

One area of media studies that has yet to be adequately addressed involves how the current regime of mobility and privacy pertain to a regime of safety and security. I find useful, and not adequately acknowledged, Lieven de Cauter’s (2004) view that technologies of mobility (including communication media) require technologies of “encapsulation” for maximizing safety. As Jeremy Packer and I (Hay and Packer 2004) have suggested, “new media” (particularly in their portability) operate within an ideal of “auto-mobility” (the fully mobile self, the “mobile me”), which has as much to do with “freeing” as “securing” the self. The technologies automobility, whether communication or transportation, are an objective of the earliest forms of liberal government, though they have acquired a profound value in the current mobile media regime of contemporary liberal governance.

**My Applications—**

For anyone unfamiliar with My Space, the headings that I am using are current labels that the site uses to “help” users organize “their” resources—not simply to represent themselves but to manage their communication and lives. “My Applications” is a category of customizable resources on My Space that vividly exemplifies what Laurie Ouellette and I (Ouellette and Hay 2008) have emphasized about the relation between self-management and the entrepreneurial self encouraged and required in the current stage of liberal government in the United States. The expression “application” suggests not only specific devices but learned techniques for applying oneself.
In that sense, “My Applications” calls attention to the current role of communication media and networks as what Michel Foucault (1998a) termed *technologies of the self*—My Space as a sphere of virtual potentiality through which the many loose ends and demands of daily life can be channeled and organized productively to lead a more well-managed, connected, and thus “healthier” life. “My Media Space” is an archive, a place to record and review my media “favorites” as current and future resources—a form of “self-writing” and “self-recording” for managing daily life as my own. My Space reminds me that My TV is certainly one of My Applications, and as Ouellette and I (Ouellette and Hay 2008) have pointed out, TV’s reinvention in these times has occurred through a growing number of “programs” whose regimen of self-help leads back to web-based resources of self-management. It’s time to rethink the old idea of the TV program not simply because TV is distributed through many personal “applications” but because these applications compose the packaged and value-added regimens (“programs”) of self-actualization and self-maintenance.

**My Group—**

As a technology of self-government, the possessiveness of My Space is productive of membership and citizenship, not only with links to friends but to other resources (such as TV) that maximize self-responsibility in a (“neoliberal”) political rationality that makes a virtue of that form of citizenship. We need our friends, (media) “communities,” and media resources because, given the expectations of what Bush and Cheney refer to as an Ownership Society, that may be all we can rely on.

Citizenship is practiced increasingly through privately and personally managed (customizable) spheres of membership such as My Space. As an active member/citizen, I can organize and manage my friends and media/resources through My Space; My Space operates reciprocally as one of many, proliferating, and interconnected branches of government—a site and network that is technologically and technically (organically) integral to the current regime of participatory TV as tests of membership/citizenship and as games of group government. “Watching ourselves” and keeping records of the data of one’s life through technologies such as My Space involves maximum application of oneself through regimes of self-monitoring and self-government—purveying one’s friends and resources, maximizing self-sufficiency by expanding technical resources, and staying on track within an ethics of productive behavior organized that way.

So after all this, I must confess that I do not subscribe to My Space. It’s available to me. I have the know-how to participate and play. But I seldom have the time or energy to work at it—to do it well. I may be a bad citizen in that sense—someone in need of reform, who could manage his life better. Imagining alternative models of citizenship depends on ad hoc networks like the one to which I am momentarily affiliated: My Media Studies group.
My Favorites—


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