

# Theories of Media and Communication

*– Histories and Relevance*



# **Theories of Media and Communication: Histories and Relevance**

*Niels Brügger*

University of Aarhus, Denmark

[nb@imv.au.dk](mailto:nb@imv.au.dk)

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Theories of Media and Communication — Histories and Relevance

Department of Information and Media Studies

Helsingforsgade 14

DK-8200 Aarhus N

mct\_papers@imv.au.dk

ph.: + 45 8942 9200

fax: + 45 8942 5950

[www.medieteori.dk](http://www.medieteori.dk)

Editorial note

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# Theories of Media and Communication: Histories and Relevance

Niels Brügger

University of Aarhus, Denmark  
nb@imv.au.dk

*This paper is divided into two parts. In the first part the research project "Theories of Media and Communication — Histories and Relevance", which was initiated in 2003, and is supported by the Danish Research Council for the Humanities, is presented, focusing on the motivation for the project, its objectives, approaches and problems, and on how some of the problems are dealt with. In the second part the author reflects upon to what extent one can give a general and precise definition of the field of study of the project, i.e. of 'theories of media and communication'. The conclusion is that the primary field of study of this project can be defined as: a) theories of understanding which as a part of their conceptual structure have a consciously formulated concept of 'media'/'communication', and which suppose that a part of the world can be seen as 'media'/'communication'; b) the mutual influences and developments of these theories, and c) their relations to other theories of understanding.*

*Keywords: theory, media, communication, method, analysis*

## **THEORIES OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION: A RESEARCH PROJECT**

### **Why Theories of Media and Communication?**

In 1999 the Danish Research Council for the Humanities organized a seminar that was to take stock of the history and present state of Danish film and media studies. Here it clearly emerged that media studies in Denmark were not really

constituted until the end of the sixties (cf. Bondebjerg 2000: 6).

If one takes a closer look at what has been published on media research in Denmark since then, it becomes clear that the main emphasis has been partly laid on empirical results, often in the form of analyses of media products, of audiences or of political-economical-institutional aspects, and partly on introductions to and elaborations of international theories (cf. Mortensen 2000, and Bondebjerg 2000). This weighting has been well founded, namely insofar as media studies have had to legitimise and consolidate themselves as a new field of research.

However, the consequence of this has been that reflections on media theory proper have been correspondingly toned down. Of course the analyses have been theoretically well-founded, and theoretical developments and discussions have taken place, but for one thing, the treatment of theories has tended to be what one could call *intentional* (with a few exceptions), i.e. directed towards something 'outside' the theories, namely instant analytical use and not (also) towards the theories 'themselves', and for another, the developments and discussions have often been set in motion by *international theoretical conditions*.

Today, with media research a well-consolidated discipline, one could raise the question of whether more space and time should not be set aside for reflections on media theory proper. The project "Theories of Media and Communication — Histories and Relevance" that was initiated on 1 January 2003, and is supported by the Danish Research Council for the Humanities in 2003 constitutes an effort to create a future forum for discussing media theory.

## Objectives

The two main and related objectives of the project are as follows:

- To prioritise the field of media and communication theory, its histories and relevance, as an *independent* field of research within media and communication studies,
- To contribute to the development of media and communication theories, with particular emphasis on the *newest media* (the Internet and other digital media) and the *interaction* of these with existing media, largely in the light of and through systematic and critical readings of existing theories.

## **Approaches**

To concentrate the focus of the project and to create a basis for further theoretical work, the above objectives will be concretely met through two independent but connected and complementary approaches:

On the one hand, through eight individual books, where a number of Danish media and communication scholars introduce and discuss central theoretical positions and themes of the field.

On the other hand, with a dictionary of concepts from media theory, theoretical movements, important theorists and so forth.

All nine volumes will be both individual and integrated. Each is written as an individual book that can be read independently, but at the same time they are connected: a) The first eight volumes are part of an overall structure, and are all written with the same overall principles as point of departure, b) the dictionary refers to more thorough presentations and reference lists in the other volumes. As a whole, all nine volumes will provide a current and systematic overview and critical analysis of the existing theories and traditions.

## **Problems**

To produce an edited work in nine volumes on theories of media and communication raises at least three types of problems relating to, respectively 1) the specific being of media and communication studies, 2) the question of presenting and 3) of editing the content.

First, media and communication studies constitute a broad, diverse and interdisciplinary complex, involving both the humanities and the social sciences as well as portions of the natural sciences (and within each of these main categories the field is also diverse and interdisciplinary). An introduction to and an overview of the theories used within media and communication studies must therefore appear different, according to what kind of media and communication studies is chosen to be the most important, or to be the point of departure and thereby the guiding principle.

Second, the problems of how to present the theories discussed. We have the general problem of wanting both to introduce and give an overview and to go in depth, as well as the simple fact that everything cannot be covered, and

certainly not at the same time, which makes it necessary to make choices, split up, summarize, thematise, etc.

Third, the problem of editing individual (but connected) books written by different authors who (consciously or unconsciously) each have their own point of view and each write in their own style.

The task, then, is to find an overall frame for the volumes that makes it possible:

- In one and the same manoeuvre both to concentrate and to focus the diverse field of media and communication theories *and* to preserve and present this very diversity and interdisciplinarity as much as possible; and to ensure that there is an overall framework, but that this frame only to some extent 'controls' what is to be discussed (and what is not),
- Both to give an overview and to go in depth; both to present the essence and to create connections,
- To keep many and varied editors and authors together, without forcing them to write the same material in the same way.

### **The Overall Structure of the Books: The Analytical Objects**

In order to meet these demands it has been decided, on the one hand, to focus on the analytical objects towards which the different theories are directed (e.g. by pointing out or discussing their being, their limits, etc.); on the other hand to organize these analytical objects in a 'communication model', thus creating an overall structure.<sup>1</sup>

This has resulted in five volumes, each dealing with the theories of media and communication according to which of the following analytical objects treated by the theory: *Context, Sender, Message, Receiver and Medium*.

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1. Speaking of 'communication model' is a bit misleading. What I have in mind here is a way of structuring and delimiting the fields of media and communication studies, and not how one could reflect the relations that might characterize a certain communication situation. This point is inspired by Brügger 2002.

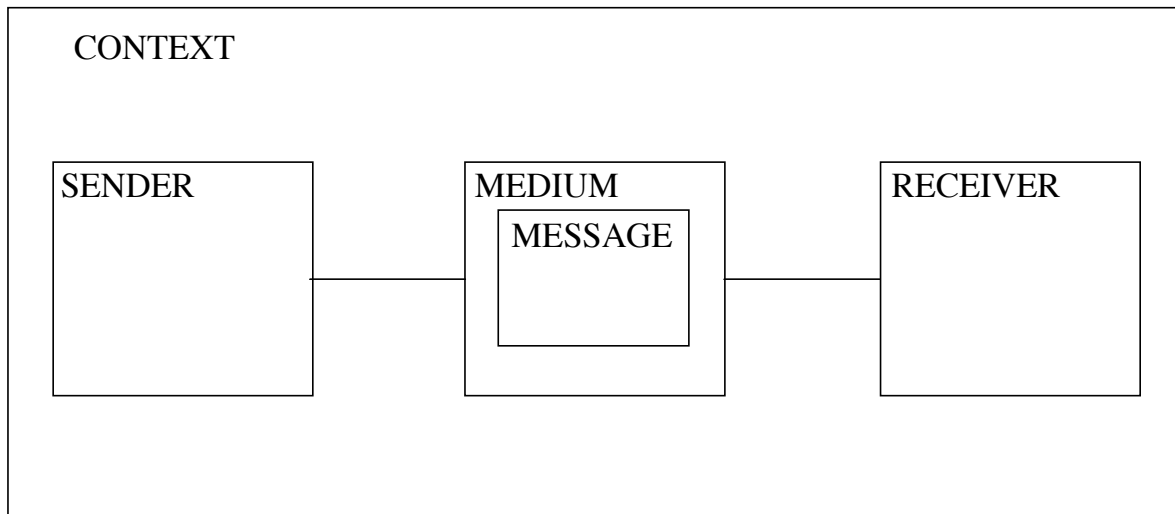


Fig. 1

However (at least) two important analytical objects fall outside this structure, namely *communication* and the *history* of media and communication. Therefore these analytical objects will be dealt with in two additional volumes. And finally, also outside this structure a more general first volume will be written, discussing important fundamental concepts (theory, method, analysis, media, communication, etc.), as well as sketching the relation between the other volumes.

In this way the volumes are not connected by any sort of progression between them, but rather by being part of an overall structure; therefore each of them can be read independently of the others, and they can be read at random.

### **The Overall Structure of the Chapters**

Two types of chapters are considered relevant (in vols. 2-8):

- Chapters focussing on theories about *approaches to or points of view on the analytical object* ("How to understand the 'content' of the field of analysis?")
- Chapters focussing on theories about *the analytical objects proper and the themes that characterize them* ("What themes characterize the analytical objects? How is the object delimited?")

The first type will typically deal with theoretical 'schools' or traditions (structuralism, hermeneutics...), while the others will typically treat of themes that emerge from the being of the analytical objects (narrativity, intertextuality, the visual, etc., e.g. concerning 'the message').

Hereby the overall structure of both books and chapters is given. The next step will then be to propose a common form to what must be found in each of the chapters.

## **Types of Content of the Chapters**

Each chapter should, as far as possible, contain *the same types of content* in order to make the volumes form a whole (there will, of course, be exceptions where this cannot be done).

These types of content should develop along four axes:

- The *axis of the history of theory*, where the presentation moves from the past to the present,
- The *axis of epistemology*, where the presentation moves from general epistemological questions towards questions specific to media and communication studies, and further towards questions specific to each type of media (and possibly to each type of genre),
- The *pedagogical axis*, where the presentation moves from introduction towards critical discussion,
- The *axis of complexity*, where the presentation moves from theories about the 'simple', to theories about the 'complex or integral' with regard to either the limits of the analytical fields<sup>2</sup> or the limits of the concrete media artefacts.

The presence of each of these four axes of content should guarantee:

- That both the history and the present state of the different theoretical traditions are presented,
- That the connection of each theory to media and communication studies is unequivocally put into focus, and that their media specificity (and possible genre specificity) is discussed,
- That the central concepts and insights of the most important positions are introduced as neutrally as possible, and that the different theoretical traditions are discussed,
- That the theories that work on the borders or that are integral are taken into

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2. Again, this does not apply to vols. 6 and 7 (on 'Communication' and 'The history of media and communication').

account; first, the theories that thematise the borders between the analytical objects, and that may have the ambition of questioning these borders (for instance a move from the textual theories that are purely directed towards the texts (the 'simple') to more pragmatic textual theories that are closer to the theories of reception (the 'complex/integral'); or the other way round: from theories of reception proper (the 'simple') to theories of reception that are also directed towards textual theories (the 'complex/integral')); second, theories thematising integral traits within the media they discuss (most clearly seen among theories about media 'integrating' other media (the possible convergence of paper/book/film/radio/TV in the computer/the Internet)).

Finally, each volume (or chapter) should begin with a short overview of the most important theoretical traditions within the field in question.<sup>3</sup>

### **www.medieteori.dk**

A website, [www.medieteori.dk](http://www.medieteori.dk) was established in connection with the research project. Here one can find more in-depth material on the project (continuously updated), a collection of resources (links of academic relevance as well as a list of

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3. For a more extensive presentation of the books, see Brügger 2003, as well as the updates on [www.medieteori.dk](http://www.medieteori.dk). The individual volumes have the following authors/editors: 1) *Media, Communication, Theory*, Niels Brügger, Associate Professor, PhD, Centre for Internet Research, Department of Information and Media Studies, University of Aarhus, 2) *Theories of Media Contexts*, Niels Ole Finnemann, Centre Director, Associate Professor, dr.phil, Centre for Internet Research, Department of Information and Media Studies, University of Aarhus, 3) *Theories of Media Senders*, Kirsten Frandsen, Associate Professor, PhD, Department of Information and Media Studies, University of Aarhus, 4) *Theories of Media Messages*, Finn Frandsen, Centre Director, Associate Professor, MA, Centre for Business Communication, Aarhus School of Business, 5) *Theories of Media Receivers*, Kim Schrøder, Professor, MA, Department of Communication, Journalism and Computer Science, Roskilde University, 6) *Theories of the Medium*, Niels Brügger, 7) *Theories of Communication*, Finn Frandsen, 8) *Theories of the History of Media and Communication*, Niels Kayser Nielsen, Associate Professor, MA, Department of History, University of Aarhus, 9) *Dictionary of Media and Communication Theory*, ed. Niels Brügger and Søren Kolstrup, Associate Professor, MA, Department of Information and Media Studies, University of Aarhus (and about ten sub-editors). The chief editors of the book project are Niels Brügger and Henrik Schjerning of the publishing house *Forlaget Samfundslitteratur*. All the books are published in Danish.

publishers of books on media and communication theory), and finally a database with references to literature in the area of media and communication theory and to theories related to new media (at the moment the database has about 350 references). The database contains not only references but also a copy of the table of contents of each book, as well as a link to the publishers' presentation of the book and the authors' web page. For anyone with an interest in theories of media and communication this database will be extremely relevant when searching for the newest material in the field.

Through the steps described above, this research project aims to create a concrete preliminary platform for future systematic work with media and communication theories, just as the books to be published in the years to come will contribute with introductions to and discussions of the field.

## **THEORIES OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION: THE FIELD OF STUDY**

A first step in the project is to reflect upon the extent to which one can give a general, precise definition of the field of study, i.e. of 'theories of media and communication', and do so without becoming as detailed as each of the volumes examining concrete examples of theories in specific areas and traditions. In other words: What is actually meant by 'theories of media and communication'? The following pages are a preliminary attempt to answer this question — at least with an answer relevant within the framework of this project.

In the light of the following reflections, the primary field of analysis is defined as:

- a) theories of understanding which as a part of their conceptual structure have a consciously formulated concept of 'media'/'communication', and which suppose that a part of the world can be seen as 'media'/'communication'; b) the mutual influences and developments of these theories, and c) their relations to other theories of understanding.<sup>4</sup>

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4. As seen above, a slash is used between the concepts of media and communication, a slash that means both *and* and *or*. And if media and communication are considered a more or less

In the following presentation of the chain of reasoning that has led to this definition, focus will be on respectively: 1) The types of theories and their relations, 2) The genesis and development of theories, and 3) Inter-theories.

As indicated, the aim of these reflections is, at a general level, to 'block out' the field of study of the project (theories of media and communication) as precisely as possible. This means that the aim is not to initiate a general discussion of what is meant by, for instance, theory, method, analysis, etc. Therefore the concepts used in the following will not be subject to extensive conceptual and historical explanations, knowing that such concepts as 'theory', 'the world', 'explain/understand' etc. are all 'weighty' concepts, loaded with several centuries of varying epistemological positions and discussions, all of which could deserve further presentation and discussion. But as indicated above, this is not the objective here.

One could say, then, that the concepts are 'defined' through their use in this context — knowing very well that by doing this 'too much' has already been said; the history of concepts is massive.<sup>5</sup>

### **Theory, Method, Analysis — in a Broad Sense**

In a broad sense one can maintain that *theory* is a coherent set of ideas and concepts of how the world (or parts of it) can be explained or understood ('the world' in the very broadest sense, e.g. 'nature', 'the individual human being', 'groups of human beings', 'man-made artefacts', etc.). A *method* is the way in which one proceeds when attempting to explain/understand the world. And an

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undifferentiated unity, to a great extent 'using' the same theories and dealing with the same phenomena, or if we want to keep the two apart, insisting on their differences. The slash therefore indicates that the important question of 'media and/or communication' has not yet been raised, since this text deals with general considerations concerning both media and communication, no matter how they are related. A discussion of their relationships could then follow this general discussion.

5. According to the terminology used in the rest of the paper the following pages can be considered partly meta-theoretical reflections (What is (scientific and scholarly) theory, method and analysis, how are they created and developed, and how are they institutionalized?), and partly, in continuation of this, reflections on a theory of understanding that tries to delimit the field of analysis for the study of theories of media and communication.

analysis is the process where a given procedure (the method) and a given understanding (the theory) are united and confronted with the world, thus leading to a result of the analysis. This broad conception of theory, method and analysis can be illustrated as shown below.

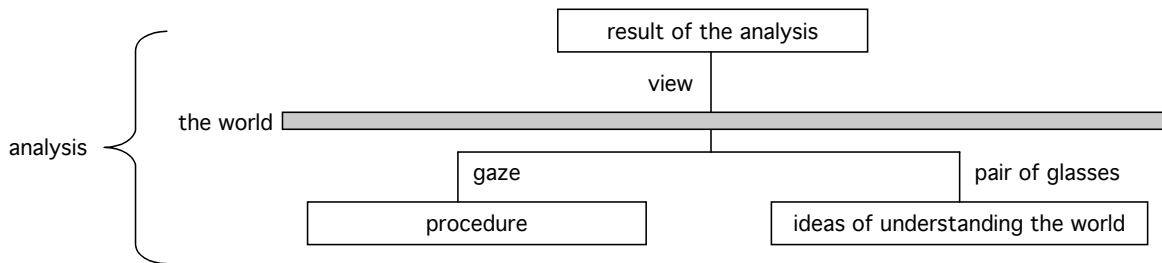


Fig. 2

One could also say that in analysing the world one observes it with a certain gaze (the way the eye scans the world, proceeds towards it) and one looks through certain optics, a certain *pair of glasses* (the form and grinding of spectacle lenses) which give a certain view of the world, which is what one sees.

### **Scientific and Scholarly Theory, Method and Analysis**

This very broad definition of theory (and of method and analysis) leads to the conclusion that much can be seen as 'theory', for instance religions are probably the first theories 'invented' by man, insofar as they are considerations of how the world is organized and how it can be explained and understood, taking some kind of divine principle as a starting point.

Still, in scientific and scholarly studies a theory maintaining that some kind of divinity determined that the world should be like this does not suffice as an explanation. On the contrary, scientific and scholarly study must build upon scientific and scholarly theory. In this way the question of theory becomes displaced towards the question of science and scholarship: What is *scientific or scholarly* theory?

The following four formal traits can be considered the minimal, but necessary conditions for characterising a theory as scientific or scholarly rather than

'religious'. It must be possible to test it, to *discuss* it, it must be *self-reflexive* and it must be possible to *correct* it.

1. A scientific or scholarly theory that wants us to understand a person called Jesus and his time must aim to establish whether at a given time and at a given place a person called 'Jesus' actually lived and did this or that (how this methodologically is (or is not) possible to decide is another and subsequent question). Whether Jesus actually lived in a specific place at a specific time is not the decisive question for a 'religious theory', rather it wants us to understand certain ethical/religious matters, perhaps increasing our faith by informing us about his life and works.
2. A scientific or scholarly theory must be formulated in a relatively 'open' way — did he live here or there? Did he do this or that? — thus making discussion and critique possible (e.g. in the light of a test); in other words, it is fully aware that things could have been seen differently. On the other hand a 'religious theory' has a tendency to consider its understanding of things as something that need not be subject to discussion, more of a closed system that fundamentally need not allow for criticism, but can be believed or not.
3. A scientific or scholarly theory must continuously relate to itself, for instance by being conscious of and reflecting upon what takes place before/while/after it is laid down, i.e. it continuously explicitly sets out and evaluates its own foundation, its own premises and limits ("On what basis do I establish that he lived in this place and that and did this and that?" etc.). A 'religious theory' is not characterised by any such demand.
4. And finally, it must be possible to correct a scientific or scholarly theory, if for instance a test, critical discussion or self-reflection indicates that things should be understood differently ("He probably lived there rather than there"). A 'religious theory' will not need to be corrected to the same extent or for the same reasons.

In this way scientific or scholarly analysis is the process where a scientifically substantiated procedure/a procedure substantiated in a scholarly fashion and a scientifically founded understanding/an understanding founded on a scholarly basis are united and confronted with the world, thus leading to a scientific/scholarly result of the analysis.

## Types of Theories and their Relations

This means that there are at least two types of scientific/scholarly theories, namely the ones upon which the procedure and the understanding, respectively, are directly founded. They could be called *theories of methods* and *theories of understanding*. As well as these two, there are a number of theories that are not correspondingly clearly directed towards the specific, but that treat of general epistemological questions — these theories could be called *meta-theories* and the relations between these three types could be illustrated as shown in fig. 3.

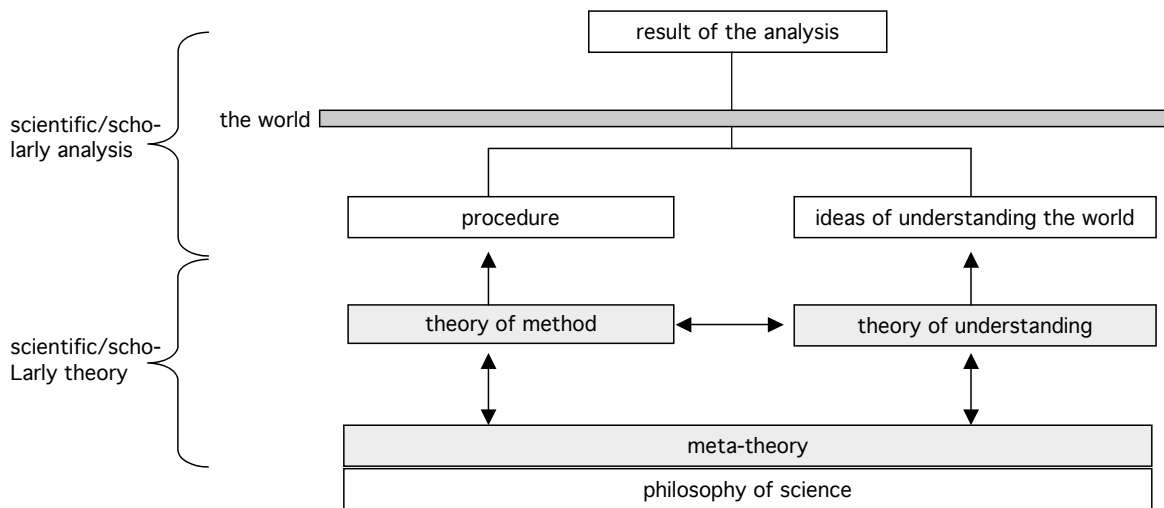


Fig. 3

- A *theory of method* can, for instance, be a theory of how one can interpret, of how an interview should be done, how focus groups can be used, how field observations should be carried out, etc.
- A *theory of understanding* can, for instance, treat of how one should understand society, the individual, modernity, texts, audiences, reading, etc., and it can aim at describing, classifying, interpreting, examining a hypothesis, predicting developments, changing things, pointing out possible actions to take, etc.

Both theories of methods and of understanding will be either predominantly general ('structuralism') or predominantly specific ('structural linguistics', 'structural theory of myths', etc.).

- *Meta-theories* will typically treat of general epistemological questions such as: What is knowledge? What is science/what are scholarly studies? What is the object of science/scholarly studies? What are analysis, theory and method, and how are they related? What is explanation and understanding? What is the relation between science, social sciences and the humanities? What is interdisciplinarity? What is a model? What is a hypothesis? Are the different sciences/studies defined by their object or by their method? What is quantitative/qualitative? What is a fact, what is reliability, representativity, etc.? (in some traditions part of meta-theory is called the philosophy of science and treats of questions such as how it is at all possible to maintain the validity of science/studies; this is marked with the box at the bottom of Fig. 3).

Each of these three types of theories can be studied as individual fields, but they are, of course, also connected. First, the theories of methods and of understanding will include specific transformations of the general questions of the meta-theories, and conversely, the meta-theories are often 'fed' by the theories of methods and of understanding (the object of meta-theories is general questions from the other two types of theories). Second, the theories of methods raise questions to the theories of understanding, and vice versa.

Seen in this light, a theory of media/communication can be characterized as a theory of method or of understanding which as a part of its conceptual structure has a consciously formulated concept of 'media'/'communication', and which supposes that a part of the world can be seen as 'media'/'communication'. These types of theories of method and of understanding will be a possible part of the field of study when studying the theories of media and communication.

## **The Genesis and Development of Theories**

After having defined theories of media and communication on a general level as a certain type of theory, the next step could be to reflect briefly on a historical perspective on the field (since the project also focuses on the *history* of theory, cf. "Theories of Media and Communication: Histories and Relevance"). What can be said on a general level about the possible causes of the creation of theories and about how they develop?

If the lines of thought put forward in the previous pages (cf. Fig. 3) are continued, four causes of the creation of new theories can be shown:

- Existing *results of analysis* can call for new theories,
- *The world* can have changed, for instance new media and new types of communication can have emerged, requiring new methods or understandings,
- An existing *analytical praxis* can give rise to new theories,
- Already existing *theories* (regardless of type) can bring about the development of new theories.

And finally one could add a fifth possible cause, namely the context constituted by the disciplines and institutions within which theories are produced.

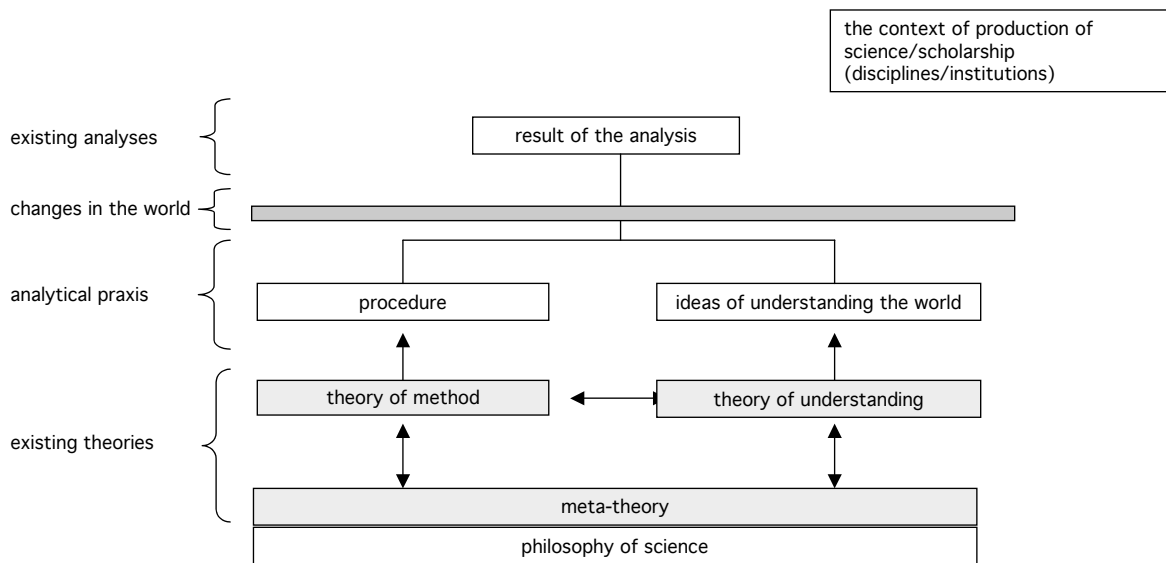


Fig. 4

The continuing development of a theory can be placed somewhere on a continuum stretching from an intuitive understanding of the cause of the theory, and/or of the new theory needed, to a more consistent theory.

If for instance the cause of the creation of a new theory of understanding is that a part of the world has changed — new media have emerged — then one can have an intuitive understanding, partly of this phenomenon, partly of the kind of new theory needed. An intuitive understanding which then, through the

development of the theory, will move towards a more consistent theory.<sup>6</sup> In this process the theory could continuously be connected to that which caused its creation (in casu the changed world); and also the understanding of the cause can move from the intuitive towards a more consistent understanding. Fig. 5 attempts to illustrate this with a change in the world as the cause of a new theory of understanding (but the same can be said with the other possible causes and types of theories mentioned above).

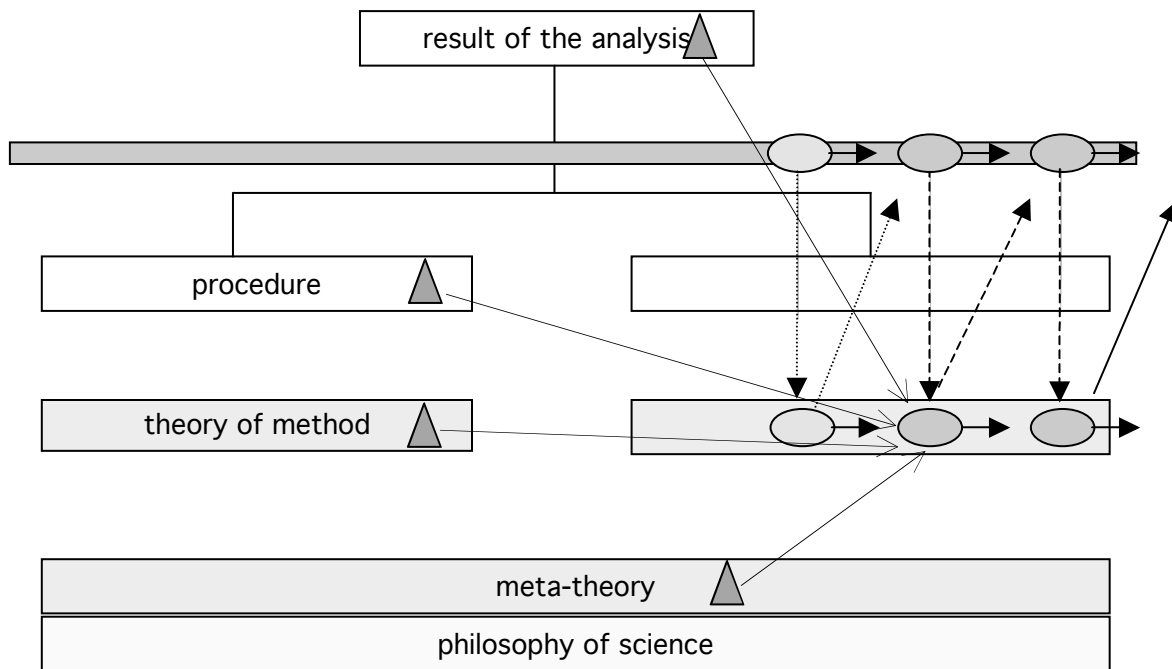


Fig. 5

Moreover, the development of a theory is often influenced by interplay with (parts of) other existing theories of understanding, other theories of methods, meta-theories and result of analysis (cf. the triangles in fig. 5). In other words these are the possible building blocks of the development of new theories.

Speaking of "theories of media and communication — histories and rele-

6. The 'intuitive' need not necessarily be the starting point, one enters the continuum whenever it is appropriate (the changes in the 'world' already appear to be relatively clear and understandable, one can have a relatively clear idea of the theory to be developed, etc.).

vance”, a possible portion of the field of study will therefore be the emergence and development of these theories — what are their causes, and why/how do they develop in an interplay with each other and with other theories?

### ‘Inter-theory’, ‘Inter-disciplinarity’ and ‘Inter-institutionality’

That the theories of media and communication are defined by their having a consciously formulated concept of ‘media’/‘communication’ does not mean that they always *exclusively* have such a concept. The concept of ‘media’/‘communication’ will often be combined with other concepts, such as ‘text’, ‘society’, ‘modernity’, etc. (concepts that are often just as important). But it also means that the disciplines and institutions to which these theories should be connected is not given *in and with* the theory. Theories of media and communication can be found in many different scientific and scholarly disciplines and many different research institutions, and thus not only within, for instance, ‘media studies’ and at a ‘Department of Media Studies’. One could consider this a specific example of a general phenomenon, namely that there is no direct necessity leading from a theory to its being connected to and contextualised by certain disciplines and institutions.

One can distinguish between the following three independent but interposing strata:

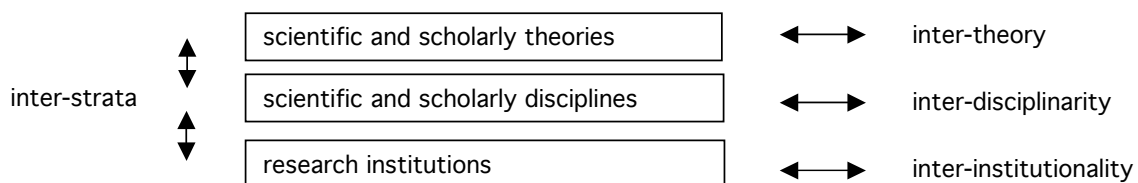


Fig. 6

An ‘inter’ aspect exists in each of these strata as well as between them [‘tvær in Danish].

- On the first stratum one can speak of *inter-theory* [tvær-teori], i.e., the phenomenon that theories borrow and integrate concepts etc. from each other, for instance a given theory that can be both a media theory and a social the-

ory.

- On the second stratum one can speak of *inter-disciplinarity* [tvær-videnskab], i.e., the phenomenon that scientific or scholarly disciplines overlap and transverse each other; for instance the discipline 'media studies' can integrate elements and scholarly praxis from the disciplines 'social sciences' and 'comparative literature'.
- And finally, on the third stratum, one can speak of *inter-institutionality* [tvær-institutionalitet], i.e. the phenomenon that research institutions (universities, faculties, institutes, departments, centres, etc.) transverse each other; a 'Department of Media Studies' can be part of The Faculty of Arts, of The Faculty of Social Sciences, of a Centre for Communication, etc.

As indicated above an 'inter-' aspect also exists vertically, between strata:

- Scientific and scholarly disciplines can use many different theories. For instance, a discipline such as 'media studies' uses theories which to a great extent differ from 'media theory' (e.g. textual theory, social theory, etc.); sociology can use elements of media theory, etc., though obviously there is a tendency for media theory to prevail within the discipline media studies. The only necessary relation is that a discipline, for instance media studies, as a *whole* at some point in its activities must use media theory, typically to point out and delimit its field of study.
- A research institution can be constituted of many different disciplines (and thereby house many theories); a Department of Media Studies can have such disciplines as film studies, Internet studies, cultural studies, etc. Also, the only necessity here will be that it has the discipline media studies.

Basically, not many necessary relations exist in this perspective, neither on each stratum nor between them: Theories, disciplines and institutions can (by and large) be combined in all directions, on their own level as well as between levels. Like any other type of theory, a theory of media/communication is a fluctuating phenomenon whose only minimal demand is the presence of a consciously formulated concept of 'media'/'communication', and in this way it is not, to begin with, deeply rooted in any discipline or institution. However, a 'historical' necessity exists, namely insofar as, for instance, a given theory of media/communication will always already be situated within a certain constellation of elements from all three strata: A given theory of media/communication always

has a certain relation to other theories, and it is always created and developed within a certain disciplinary and institutional context. In this sense the entire concrete and historical constellation of all three strata plays a key role for each of them, for instance the different theories in the stratum of theories will have great difficulty in making contact with each other if not in an 'institutionalised' form, mediated by disciplines and institutions.

One could study the history and the actual status of these three strata, either each stratum in itself or focusing on their interposition; therefore they constitute a possible part of theories of media and communication as a field of study.

### **The Field of Study**

In the light of the above reflections the possible field of study for the study of the theories of media and communication could be constituted of the following dimensions:

- Theories of method or of understanding which as a part of their conceptual structure have a consciously formulated concept of 'media'/'communication', and which suppose that a part of the world can be seen as 'media'/'communication',
- The emergence and development of these theories — what are their causes, and why/how do they develop in an interplay with each other and with other theories?
- The theories of media/communication, their connections to disciplines and institutions, the history and the actual status of these three strata, either each stratum in itself or focusing on their interposition.

However, a study of all these dimensions, when connected to the theories within all the analytical objects mentioned earlier (Context, Sender, etc.), will become very comprehensive. For this reason, and in order to keep a clear focus on the theories — and although such a broad study would be both interesting and relevant — for this project it has been decided to tone down certain parts of each of the three dimensions. Therefore, this project will primarily focus on:

- The *theories of understanding* within the theories of media/communication (and not on the theories of method),

- The development of these theories, their interplay with each other and with other theories (and not on their causes),
- Theories of media/communication as part of a stratum of theories, that is their relations to other theories of understanding (and neither on disciplines/institutions of media and communication in themselves nor on the relation between theories and disciplines/institutions).

Still, this does not mean that theories of method cannot be discussed; they will be if it is relevant for the presentation and discussion of a certain theory of understanding (e.g. if they have had great influence on the theory of understanding in question, if they deal with the same problem, etc.).

And the same goes for the causes of the creation of theories: They can be discussed if they are relevant for a given theory of understanding.

And finally, the relations between the stratum of theories and the strata of disciplines/institutions will not necessarily be omitted; in part, they play a role for the mediation between theories (cf. above), and in part they can be used to substantiate the decision to discuss a given theory of understanding even though its concept of media/communication plays only a small role (thus barely making it possible to characterize it as a theory of media and communication), namely if the theory in question has actually played an important role in the history of the discipline (for instance Habermas' theory of the public sphere, Giddens' theory of late modernity, etc., within the discipline media studies).

But, all in all, the primary focus will not be on the theories of method, the causes of the creation of theories, or the institutionalisations of the theories.

The primary field of study of the project can therefore be summarized as follows:

- a) theories of understanding which as a part of their conceptual structure have a consciously formulated concept of 'media''communication', and which suppose that a part of the world can be seen as 'media''communication';
- b) the mutual influences and developments of these theories, and
- c) their relations to other theories of understanding.

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## Papers on Media and Communication Theories

The series of publications entitled "Papers on Media and Communication Theories" publishes texts written by the participants and others related to the research project entitled "Theories of Media and Communication — Histories and Relevance".

This project has two main and related objectives:

- Prioritize the field of media and communication theory, its histories and relevance, as an independent field of research within media and communication studies,
- Contribute to the development of media and communication theories with particular emphasis on the newest media (the Internet and other digital media) and the interaction of these with existing media, which will largely occur in the light of and through systematic and critical readings of existing theories.

The project was initiated on 1 January 2003 and is supported in 2003 by the Danish Research Council for the Humanities.

More information about the project can be obtained from [www.medieteori.dk](http://www.medieteori.dk). All Papers on Media and Communication Theories can be found on the website [www.medieteori.dk](http://www.medieteori.dk). While in print, copies of the papers may be obtained by contacting [mct\\_papers@imv.au.dk](mailto:mct_papers@imv.au.dk). Please specify complete address (for the purpose of citation please note that the printed and electronic versions are identical).

Theories of Media and Communication — Histories and Relevance  
Department of Information and Media Studies  
Helsingforsgade 14, DK-8200 Aarhus N  
[mct\\_papers@imv.au.dk](mailto:mct_papers@imv.au.dk)  
ph.: + 45 8942 9200  
fax: + 45 8942 5950  
[www.medieteori.dk](http://www.medieteori.dk)