

## The Media Industries and Media Studies – “Convergence: Whose Job is It?”

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The persistence of discrete media industries presents challenges to the cross-market collaboration promised by convergence—and scholarly understanding of it. Within conglomerate organizations, creative and executive responsibilities alike typically concern single markets, permitting few the time, authority, or interest to organize cross-media production. In media corporations broken down into separate television divisions, feature film divisions, home video divisions, et cetera, each with their own media-defined focus, there is often no one specifically responsible for coordinating operations across media and directly managing convergence. In some ways, convergence happens in spite of, not because of, conglomerate structure. Similar observations could be made about media studies, a discipline traditionally broken down into specializations based in specific media: television studies, film studies, and new media studies are divisions that can confound, rather than serve, convergence scholarship. The media-specific structures of “big media” and “big academia” alike resist the inter-industrial, interdisciplinary perspectives best suited to making sense of convergence, concealing exactly who is and who should be responsible for doing so.

Television scholars can only gain a partial understanding of the production of convergence by looking to television production cultures. While nearly every contemporary commercial television series participates in convergence in some way (promoted, streamed, and narratively extended on the Internet, perhaps), and the 2007 writers’ strike demonstrated producers’ investment in emerging markets for *distributing* their work, the day-to-day *production* process continues to revolve around “traditional” notions of television. Showrunners like *Battlestar Galactica*’s Ron Moore, for instance, explain that despite online and DVD distribution, the creative processes of writing and editing remain centered upon the rhythms and structure of broadcast act-breaks. While auteur producers like J.J. Abrams and Joss Whedon play central roles in the viral marketing campaigns for their television series, many other television producers keep their creative focus on the show alone, perceiving the push for webisodes, podcasts, and other online projects as a product of executive edict, not creative impulse. While many producers do participate in these content extensions when asked (prompting negotiation with networks over proper compensation), executives have just as frequently licensed the production of convergence to sites of cheaper labor outside television proper like Big Spaceship and D20 (firms that design alternate reality games for network properties). Convergence becomes someone else’s job.

This does not mean we can more productively uncover convergence at the network level. Executives too occupy specific positions defined by media, and remain interested in the power and status of their divisions within larger corporate hierarchies. Without a Vice President of Convergence and Collaboration (or some other such position invested in inter-division coordination), convergence remains the ad hoc result of distinct executive interests coming into alignment more than a goal in and of itself. The production of convergence exceeds the job description of television executives just as it does television creators.

To grasp the production of convergence, I propose we investigate the smaller, media-flexible consulting firms that have arisen to manage convergence for their corporate clients. Increasingly, conglomerates have relied upon independent companies like the Los Angeles-based Bureau of Film and Games and the New York-based Starlight Runner Entertainment to develop detailed plans for convergent production across media. The latter company, for example, offers a four-tiered service in which it 1) analyzes intellectual properties, 2) designs expandable mythologies and worlds around those properties, 3) writes cross-media treatments to govern implementation across a multiplicity of media markets, and 4) provides ongoing management of the property as that plan is executed. Instead of leaving television-defined creative personnel or executives the responsibility of managing convergence as it moves beyond television, these and similar firms take up the job on a contractual basis. These small players demonstrate that convergence, while serving corporate giants and their media-delineated markets, has often been designed and implemented by labor outside those structures.

Yet the question of convergence—and whose job it is—remains up for grabs. Within the television industry, producers for *Heroes* have recently developed a competing model for convergent production, establishing within television production a “transmedia team” charged with in-house coordination of production across online video, comics, and games (arenas traditionally ignored by the tunnel vision of television production). So as the industry continues to grapple with this question, media studies must similarly interrogate its investment in the boundaries between media. Whose job will the study of convergence be? Will we need a smaller, independent, specialist discipline able to make sense of production that transcends the bounds of a single medium like television? Or can television studies develop new models to study external production processes related to but clearly outside of television? Like the industry, our job is to make sense of culture that is part of television, but exceeds it at the same time.