

The cybercultural moment and the new media field

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Abstract

This article draws on Pierre Bourdieu's field theory to understand the regenerative 'belief in the new' in new media culture and web history. I begin by noting that discursive constructions of the web as disruptive, open and participatory have emerged at various points in the medium's history, and that these discourses are not as neatly tied to economic interests as most new media criticism would suggest. With this in mind, field theory is introduced as a potential framework for understanding this (re)production of a belief in the new as a dynamic of the interplay of cultural and symbolic forms of capital within the new media field. After discussing how Bourdieu's theory might be applied to new media culture in general terms, I turn to a key moment in the emergence of the new media field - the rise of cybercultural magazines *Mondo 2000* and *Wired* in the early 1990s - to illustrate how Bourdieu's theory may be adapted in the study of new media history.

Keywords

web history, field theory, *Mondo 2000*, *Wired*, Web 2.0

Introduction

Why did the World Wide Web seem set to revolutionize the media landscape in the early 1990s, years before it was accessible to mainstream audiences? What led to the belief that the web was an 'exceptional' medium, a belief that it would inevitably provide a more participatory, open and transparent alternative to mass media? To what extent is this belief sustained, and how?

In the mid-1990s, high-profile CEOs and industry commentators argued that an internet-powered 'democratization' was happening whether or not we liked it (Negroponte, 1995; Markoff, 1994). Their visions not only captured the public's imagination but also helped drive the dot.com bubble (Streeter, 2010). A few years after the bubble burst in 2001, this sense of inevitable revolution resurfaced with the concept of Web 2.0. Web 2.0 principles such as 'harnessing collective intelligence' and 'trusting users as co-developers' (O'Reilly, 2005) suggested a power shift in which users gained a greater stake in processes of media production, distribution and consumption. Once again, the web was set to make mass media obsolete (Kelly, 2005), and this vision was tied to a new generation of companies, genres and production practices.

As historians of technology and media archeologists have long argued, technology-centric narratives of the 'essential difference' of the new fall short of explaining a medium's development, as these are ultimately sites of negotiation where neither technical nor social protocols are fixed (Peters, 2009; Gitelman, 2006). Rather, tales of the web's exceptional nature 'plugged in' to a belief in the transformative potential of computing technology that had long been in the making (Turner, 2006), and injected the romanticism necessary to transform relatively mundane technological objects like slow-loading graphics and dial-up modems into

signs of a radically different media future (Streeter, 2010). What stands out now is that the web was not only 'made' exceptional as it emerged in the 1990s, but that it has been made so again and again. From celebrations of the electronic frontier and cyberspace to pronouncements of Web 2.0 and more recently 'the sharing economy,' each new paradigm shift on the web may be conceptualized not just as technological innovation but also a rhetorical move that revitalizes familiar oppositions between the old and the new, thus 'consecrating' a new genre or technology as a true departure from old media. How might the persistence of such discourses be explained?

In this article I argue for closer attention to the social and cultural processes underlying a regenerative 'belief in the new,' and do so by following three lines of argument. First, building on the work of various scholars, I argue that criticisms of 'hype' and 'salesmanship' fall short of explaining the prevalence of discursive constructions of the 'new' throughout web history. From there, I discuss Bourdieu's field theory as a framework for understanding efforts to legitimize technologies, media forms and products as 'new' or 'web-native.' In the third section, I explore how key themes and concepts from Bourdieu's theory can be applied to understand the histories of two cybercultural magazines - *Mondo 2000* and *Wired* - that helped bring into view and shape the new media field as it emerged in the early- and mid-1990s. In the conclusion, I discuss how a field theory approach may offer correctives to existing criticism and how it aligns with key objectives for the growing field of web history.

A regenerative belief in the new

In the mid-2000s, talk of revolution surrounded the web and in particular the concept of Web 2.0.

As many commentators noted, the hype was familiar. It resembled the earlier dot.com bubble not

just because of an influx of venture capital, but also because of how new services and products were being portrayed and 'sold' to investors and users. As Silver (2008) argues, as 'new' as Web 2.0 and its promises seemed, these very much echoed the products and promises of earlier, 'cybercultural' web startups, which also emphasized creativity and community in ways that in fact suggested consumption and commerce (ibid).

For both Web 2.0 and the earlier dot.com bubble, the promise of a more open or participatory media landscape was portrayed as inevitable, a result of the logic or nature of the web. In 2005, O'Reilly wrote off the dot.com bubble as a 'shakeout' and part of the natural progression of new markets; the principles followed by Web 2.0 companies, on the other hand, were about a 'deeper understanding' of the medium (2005). Meanwhile in Wired, Kevin Kelly argued that a new participatory media landscape powered by blogging and other collaborative media was a foregone conclusion (2005). As Streeter (2010) shows, such assertive portrayals of the media future were also a crucial element of the dot.com bubble. Generated in no small part by Wired magazine, this amounted to an effort to 'romanticize' the new technologies as well as the people looking to capitalize on the digital revolution. For example, in a 1994 profile of Mosaic developer and Netscape co-founder Marc Andreessen, Wired author Gary Wolf portrayed Andreessen as a romantic hero pitted against the established power of Microsoft, rhetorically tying the new browser and the web to 'revolutionary change, pleasure, and personal expression' (Streeter; 2010: 131). For Wolf, Mosaic was part of an unfolding media landscape and had 'begun a revolution in the way we experience knowledge' (1994). Importantly, what one sees in both the dot.com bubble and Web 2.0 is that these discourses of the new preceded their respective investment bubbles. As Streeter argues, Mosaic's anointment and Netscape's highly

successful initial public offering (IPO) represented a desire 'provoked' as opposed to one satisfied (2010: 127).

While Web 2.0 is the most prominent example of a regenerative 'belief in the new' ingrained in digital culture, it is only the tip of the iceberg. For example, one of the most common expressions of digital culture is the manifesto. Manifestos typically present the 'rules' of a movement or transformation that is already underway (and perhaps inevitable), and this format appears throughout the short history of the web. Many of these are 'business manifestos' that, through case studies and anecdotes, outline how a technological and cultural shift towards openness and collaboration is also an opportunity to strike it rich (van Dijck and Nieborg, 2009). One of the most notable developments in this respect is the incorporation of manifestos in the documents new media companies send to potential investors in advance of an Initial Public Offering (Dror, 2015).

As important as manifestos and a belief in the new are for the boom and bust cycle of speculation and venture capital, it would be a mistake to see the former existing solely for the latter. Rather, popular expressions of a similar belief in the new are much more widespread in the history of digital culture. Alongside such classics of electronic freedom as John Perry Barlow's (1996) 'Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace,' there are a range of manifestos that do not neatly match - or in some cases are clearly opposed to - the pro-business rhetoric put forward in *Wired* and by O'Reilly. Examples include artistic and political interventions (e.g. Garcia and Lovink, 1997), general proclamations of a new zeitgeist (Czerski, 2012), as well as many that deal with some form of technological ethic (e.g. Beck et. al., 2001) and in particular that of openness (Stallman, 1985).

Sketching the new media field

How might this regenerative belief in the new be explained? To date, beginning with Barbrook and Cameron's (1996) classic 'The Californian Ideology,' most critiques of dot.com and Web 2.0 discourses have centered on political economy. These attribute a false belief in the progressive, transformative potential of new media to the various high-profile CEOs, commentators and journalists whose continued success depends on stirring the excitement of shareholders, venture-capitalists and media audiences. In his high-profile polemics, Evgeny Morozov takes aim at the new media gurus he believes are the cause of 'the enduring emptiness of our technology debates' (2013), from Jeff Jarvis to Clay Shirky and Tim O'Reilly. For Morozov, as for Barbrook and Cameron before, utopian discourses in digital culture are above all surface rhetoric that masks a pro-business, libertarian philosophy.

Despite its virtues, such criticism obscures the prevalence of digital utopianism that does not fit the pro-business mold, and it fails to offer an understanding of how a belief in the new is produced or sustained beyond the fact that it can spark the interest of venture capitalists. In an attempt to understand the broader context in which concepts like Web 2.0 become possible and how they are legitimized, here I want to suggest the application of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory to the study of new media culture and its history.

Field theory is an influential framework for analyzing the operation of power in society through distinctive, specialized domains such as politics, education and cultural production. Fields are sites of struggle, both between fields and within fields. For example, Bourdieu's analysis of literary and artistic production describes these as 'relatively autonomous

universe[s]' (1996: 141), meaning they maintain some independence from the economic and political fields. A field is comprised of a range of actors (for example, artists, galleries, museums and 'cultural intermediaries' such as journalists and critics [on Bourdieu's use of cultural intermediaries, see Hesmondhalgh, 2006: 226]) competing for prestige, as well as the 'rules' that govern their actions, i.e. socially defined and historically contingent agreements about what constitutes quality and legitimacy within the field. This means that changes within a field, such as the establishment of a new artistic movement or the celebration of a new genre, are not seen as the result of creative genius or a disinterested aesthetic appreciation, but rather 'statistically determine[d]' by the field's specific composition and dynamics (Bourdieu, 2005: 30). This structure and competition can be analyzed by identifying and measuring the different forms of power or 'capital' as well as how these are deployed. In addition to economic and political capital, the most important kinds of capital in field theory are 'cultural' and 'symbolic' capital. Cultural capital stands for the skills and knowledge necessary to operate within the field, for example the artistic knowledge and skills that an artist uses to produce work that is lauded by her peers. Symbolic capital, meanwhile, is legitimacy or standing - for example, established critics have a great deal of symbolic capital and can use that to elevate or 'consecrate' a new artist.

For Bourdieu, fields are structured around two 'poles.' First there is the autonomous pole, where agents compete according to their own rules and forms of legitimacy (ibid: 38). Opposite to this is the 'heteronomous' pole, comprised of actors whose work is highly contingent on outside forces, most notably the market. The field may be depicted in a way that positions products, genres, movements and so on in relation to one another according to their relative autonomy from market forces and their accumulated legitimacy, or 'consecration.' For example,

Bourdieu's diagram of the literary field in 19th Century France shows the different positions occupied by literary movements and genres, organized by level of autonomy and level of legitimacy (see figure 1).

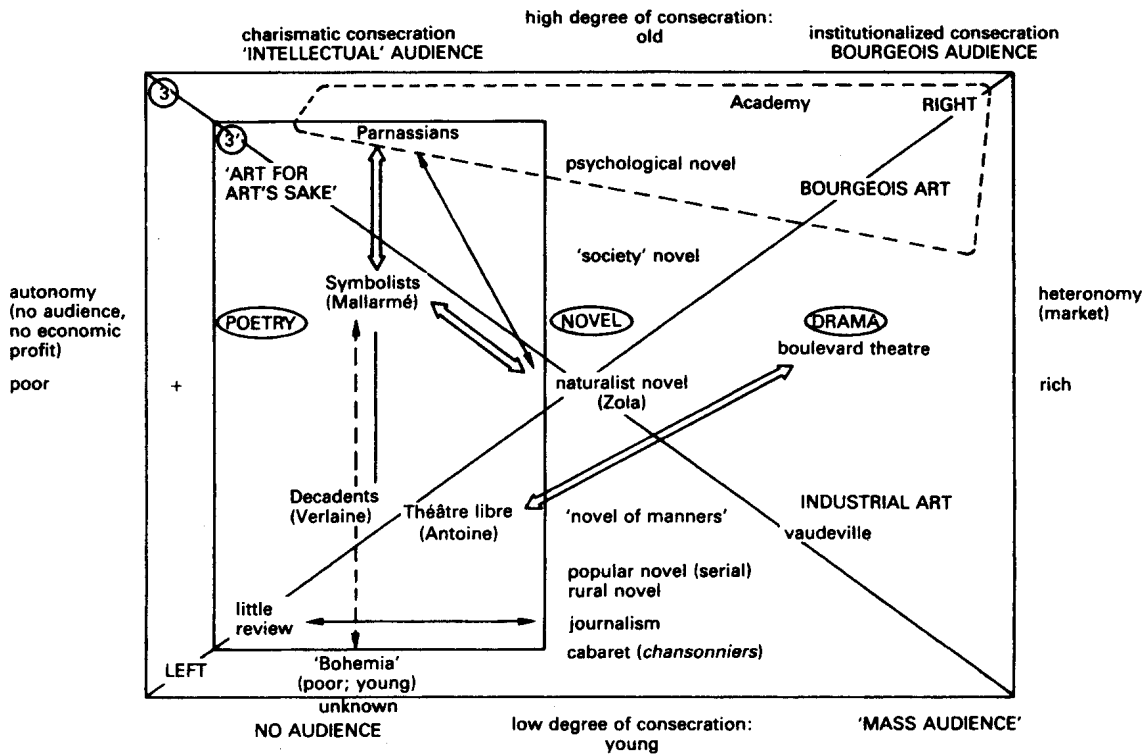


Figure 1: The Literary Field in the second half of the 19th Century (Bourdieu, 1993: 49)

To apply a similar framework to new media, there are at least two critical issues that have to be overcome. First, demarcating a field of new media seemingly invites the definitional problem many new media scholars have faced, where 'new media' sits uneasily between denoting a formal distinction (e.g. the various properties of new media identified by Manovich [2001]) and a temporal one (i.e. emerging or novel media). However, this is tempered by Bourdieu's argument that definitional struggles - questions of inclusion and exclusion - are central processes

that field theory seeks to explain (1993: 48). In this light, 'new media' should be seen as a relational category that is continually defined and redefined by the field, one that still carries symbolic power because it implies an ongoing transformation from one media landscape to another.

Fields are also heterogeneous, and '[t]here is no criterion of membership of a field than the objective fact of producing effects within it' (Bourdieu, 1993: 42). In the case of the new media field, then, it makes as much sense to include magazines like *Wired* and *Fast Company* as it does large search engine companies or a growing crop of 'alternative social media' (Gehl, 2015). What all actors share is an incentive to impose their own visions of what should be credited and discredited as truly 'new.' Similar to Bourdieu's questions about how notions of 'pure' art and literature are socially constructed and defended (1993: 82-86), one could similarly ask what counts as 'real' or 'pure' new media at a given point in time, and what is symbolically excluded. From early on new media culture has been defined with terms like 'web-native,' which like 'art for art's sake' suggests a pure form and disinterestedness in regards to 'outside' pressures such as politics and economics (Stevenson, 2014b). The term was popularized among early bloggers who labeled themselves and their genre as 'native' to the web, thus distinguishing themselves at once from 'dot.com' types and mass media (see e.g. Blood, 2002).ⁱ

Second, as Hesmondhalgh explains, Bourdieu's studies and subsequent applications of field theory lack real engagement with mass cultural production, instead favoring the more autonomous domain of limited production (2006: 221). Hesmondhalgh goes on to argue that field theory is flawed in its inability to account for, say, popular television series that are clearly anointed as 'intellectual' as well (ibid). This would seem to be the case in new media culture too.

For example, it seems non-controversial to argue that, among new media professionals, commentators and the like, Google is perceived to operate with more cultural capital and legitimacy than Microsoft, even though these are among the highest-valued companies in the world and are equally devoted to earning a profit.

What mitigates this second problem is Bourdieu's notion of 'refraction,' or the translation a field's 'specific logic imposes on external influences or commissions' (1996: 220). The field is a 'prism' that is constantly influenced by (and influencing) other fields, and the degree to which a field alters incoming influences is a measure of the field's autonomy. One could hypothesize that in the new media field, the economic field's influence (i.e. the profit motive) is subtly translated into the set of attributes and authorities that more autonomous actors in the field stand opposed to, i.e. those of mass media and traditional software production: institutionalized, top-down, proprietary, closed, opaque, and so on.

If one accepts that the new media field is organized relationally according to a logic in which a socially defined purely 'new' or 'web-native' culture is opposed to 'mass' or 'traditional' media and software production, one conceivably resolves the obvious discrepancies with the artistic and literary fields, and can begin to speculate as to the global shape of the field. The mockup here (see figure 2) portrays the autonomous principle as 'web-native' culture, but both this term and the values it represents would be subject to the particular state of the field at a given historical moment. To state the obvious, there is nothing natural about 'web-native' culture, how it is defined, or the particular position an actor takes in relation to it at a given point in time.

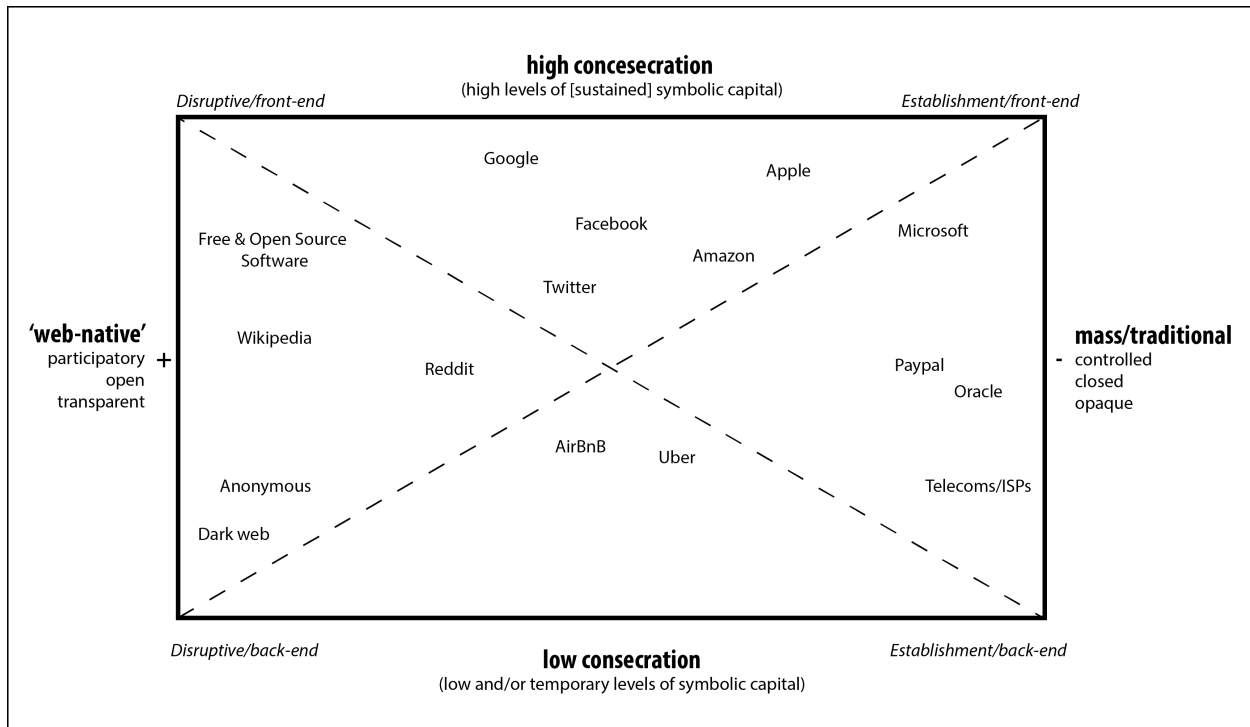


Figure 2: Mockup of the new media field circa 2015

While fields of cultural production are hardly fixed in place, what is crucial is that they are nonetheless conservative in nature. As 'fields of cultural production are universes of belief,' their continued existence relies on sustaining a central belief in the value (beyond the economic value) of the products being created and the legitimacy of the sacred status (or high levels of symbolic capital) granted to some actors over others (Bourdieu, 1993: 82). Because new entrants to the field do not have the symbolic or social capital necessary for establishing their credibility, their only resort is to appeal to the values that 'consecrated' actors appear to uphold. 'Thus,' Bourdieu writes, 'the fundamental law of the field is constantly reasserted by "newcomers," who have most interest in the disavowal of self-interest' (ibid). In this way, new entrants to the new media field

will be likely to emphasize how their activities or products represent the values located on the autonomous pole - e.g. participation, openness and transparency.

While my focus here is largely on the production of a 'belief in the new' and the internal composition of the new media field, adopting Bourdieu's theory raises many other questions, not least of which is how the new media field influences and is influenced by other fields such as journalism and politics (for a relevant discussion of such inter-field relations, see Champagne, 2005). It also raises a number of productive problems in terms of the applicability of Bourdieu's theory to new media as opposed to other fields. One of these surrounds how to account for materiality, since, for example, key products of 'autonomous' production (standards and protocols, free software, encryption, etc.) can directly enable or constrain activities of participants throughout the field. Finally, it is important to stress that Bourdieu's field theory was developed through and for an ambitious empirical sociology, and explicitly situated against approaches that limit the scope of inquiry to discourse (Bourdieu, 1993: 33). Now I turn to the histories of *Mondo 2000* and *Wired* to demonstrate how a field theory approach can help gain an understanding of how they helped shape the new media field.

Revisiting the cybercultural moment: *Mondo 2000* and *Wired*

Mondo 2000 (1989-1998) and *Wired* (1993-present) were the standard-bearers of the 'cybercultural moment,' a period of intense speculation and celebration surrounding the technologies of 'cyberspace.' Where *Wired* quickly established itself as a leading voice in the industry and became a central figure in the dot.com bubble, *Mondo 2000* was a stranger mix of technophilia and seemingly deep insight (Sobchack, 1994). *Mondo* was perhaps 'the coolest thing

in the world for six months' (Neil Gaiman, quoted in Lackerbauer and Sirius, 2012), but failed to turn its cultural credibility into lasting success. Although these magazines were not 'new media' in a formalist sense (e.g. Manovich, 2001), they were important 'cultural intermediaries' in the early 1990s and helped shape perceptions and expectations at a time when the larger public had little experience with the internet.

In addition to helping form public perception, *Mondo's* and *Wired's* influence should be seen in terms of how they shaped the new media field as it emerged in the early 1990s. There are several reasons for this, with the first being that they helped to identify and establish a growing field, or 'society within society' (Bourdieu 1993: 195), of new media producers working in areas like multimedia, computing and graphic design. This influence was extended by the fact that they themselves were often the subjects of mass media coverage of the groups and subcultures they served. Second, as cultural intermediaries they showcased the emerging digital culture and helped 'consecrate' particular actors and products within the field. This capacity was on display in the example, mentioned above, of *Wired's* portrayal of Mosaic as central to an inevitable media future. Third, they *were* new media; at least, they prided themselves on unconventional routines and a range of formal and stylistic techniques meant to signal their inclusion in the 'new media' landscape; moreover, in *Wired's* case, this effort was expanded in an ambitious online project that would realize the media future predicted in the magazine (Stevenson, 2014a). Finally, despite the perception that *Wired* represented a 'commodified' version of *Mondo*, the history and content of both magazines provides evidence of the new media field's specific refraction of the autonomous and heteronomous principles away from the no-profit/for-profit dichotomy. In addition to helping establish and define autonomy within the emerging field, their

history marks an early, important struggle for legitimacy within the field.

The following is a discussion of *Mondo's* and *Wired's* strategies in demarcating the field and competing within it. It is based on qualitative readings of each magazine's first six issues (for *Mondo* this represents the years 1989-1992, for *Wired*, its first year of publication), including how their content (such as subjects and sources) and form (such as tone) articulated a distinctive universe of 'new media' technologies, people, issues and ideas. For contextual information I've drawn on existing histories and publicity from the time, as well as data from qualitative interviews carried out in the context of previous research (Stevenson, 2014a). This account is by no means exhaustive, but rather a brief exploration in order to further illustrate the production of a 'belief in the new' and the applicability of field theory to new media culture.

Cultural and social capital: inevitable unknowns and the digital elite

Bourdieu defines cultural capital as an accumulated knowledge, and in *Mondo* and *Wired* it is clear that the expertise that is most valued is a knowledge of the new - i.e. a grasp of the great transformations underway and the media forms best suited to the new landscape. There are those who 'get it,' the magazines argued, and those who simply don't. What is notable is how the magazines demonstrated their own possession of this cultural capital, how they portrayed its character, as well as how they treated sources they deemed to be the digital elite (i.e. new media producers with large amounts of cultural capital).

Beginning with their first editorials, both *Mondo* and *Wired* cultivated a sense that the effects of digital technology were totalizing and inevitable, and more importantly that knowledge of these changes was scarce. In their manifesto, *Mondo's* Queen Mu (publisher Allison Kennedy)

and R.U. Sirius (editor-in-chief Ken Goffman) wrote that an age of digital abundance and techno-transcendence was certain but 'things are going to get weirder before they get better' (Mu and Sirius, 1989). The magazine's stated purpose was to function as an intermediary that would translate the strange new realities of technologies like virtual reality to a bewildered audience. In *Wired's* premiere issue a few years later, publisher and editor Louis Rossetto (1993) famously wrote that 'the digital Revolution is whipping through our lives like a Bengali Typhoon' and that its effects were 'social changes so profound their only parallel is probably the discovery of fire.'

Similarly, the common theme in *Wired's* editorial and visual identity - from its regular 'Wired vs. Tired' list to its graphic design (the magazine was to appear as an artifact from the future) - was to convey a sense of *Wired's* superior knowledge of the technological rupture being wrought in various domains, not least the media landscape in which it found immediate success (Stevenson, 2014a). *Mondo* likewise gave the elusive range of topics it covered the single heading of 'the New Edge,' a vaguely defined umbrella category of phenomena that were 'both cultural and economic,' and that represented the 'evolution of creative, interactive technology' for the 'active consumers' represented by *Mondo* and its audience (1990: 9). Both magazines were also deliberately hard to read at times and introduced jargon casually. Such techniques 'flattered readers, but [...] also frustrated and challenged them' (Wolf, 2003: 73). Moreover, they had the effect of amplifying the sense that *Mondo* and *Wired* were insiders who held knowledge that readers could only grasp partially.

In terms of its character, the 'knowledge of the new' portrayed and idealized by the magazines is explicitly counter to traditional, institutionalized forms of knowledge. Traditional markers of education are not given nearly the weight of technical knowledge and other

experiential knowledge. This is apparent, for example, in their celebrations of various 'outsiders' who had 'left' (symbolically or otherwise) their respective institutions to busy themselves with questions of technology and culture: above all, this is true of Marshall McLuhan, who was regularly name-checked and featured in *Mondo* while also being anointed the 'patron saint' of *Wired*. Similar 'outsiders' ranging from Timothy Leary and Hakim Bey were celebrated, along with artists, authors, film directors and other cultural icons who distinguished themselves from their mainstream counterparts through a deep engagement with technology. Additionally, in a more direct way, the technical character of this knowledge is visible in the magazine's idealized treatments of hackers (e.g. Levy, 1993) and the various startups and tech industry CEOs profiled by *Wired* (e.g. Wolf, 1994).

Both magazines, meanwhile, are notable for how their relationship with sources was one of mutual gain. The magazines defined and distinguished themselves through their access to what they called the digital elite, while their sources could use the magazine to promote their products and ideas. In other words, both the magazines and their sources were benefiting from their social capital, or their central positions in the network of relations that constituted the emerging field. For example, Rossetto argued that *Wired* was not about technology but about:

THE digital GENERATION. These are the people who not only foresaw how the merger of computers, telecommunications and the media is transforming life at the cusp of the new millennium, they are making it happen (1993).

As Turner argues, this digital generation was a closely-knit network of journalists and technologists that had formed on *The Well* and the *Whole Earth* publications, and *Wired* benefited from their knowledge and credibility (or symbolic capital) in the field while also giving

them an increasingly powerful promotional platform (2006: 217). A similar dynamic could be seen at *Mondo*, which regularly hosted parties that brought together staff, writers, interview subjects and journalists from other publications (Boulware, 1995). This contributed to a self-referential logic: to be at a *Mondo* party signaled one's belonging to a select few who understood the New Edge, while these parties themselves often provided impetus for new interviews and features. As a regular contributor put it: 'The scene built the magazine, and the magazine built the scene' (Zarkov, quoted in Boulware, 1995). This raises the question of how the magazines acquired their own elevated status: if *Mondo* and *Wired* were leading the charge in demarcating a field of 'new media' distinct from existing domains of computing and mass media, where did they turn to establish their credibility?

Symbolic capital and new media autonomy

In addition to the countercultural and subcultural legitimacy they gained from the edgy writers, artists and technologists featured in their pages, what appears to 'consecrate' *Mondo* and *Wired* was the attention and funding they received from the very source they portrayed as illegitimate, i.e. the traditional media industry that (according to them) was not clued in to the digital revolution. For *Mondo*, highlights included being featured in *Time* (Elmer-Dewitt, 1993) and having an anthology published by Harper-Collins (Rucker et al, 1993), while for *Wired* it was winning a national magazine award and receiving funding from the established publishing company Condé Nast (Wolf, 2003: 87-89). Such mainstream success was not celebrated by the magazines, but rather disavowed. For *Mondo*, this was done through self-deprecation and the contention that one could maintain subcultural commitments while flying 'under the radar' in

mainstream culture (a common theme in its profiles of cyberpunk authors and various musicians and other artists [see e.g. Milhon, 1989]). *Wired* similarly sought a balance between legitimizing itself through mainstream media and distancing itself from that attention: in a profile in the *New York Times*, for example, Rossetto stated that the magazine was considering putting a halt to publicity and argued that *Wired* 'never set out to be a hot magazine' (quoted in Markoff, 1994).

At first glance, these disavowals of mainstream success by *Wired* and *Mondo* seem similar to that performed by subcultural figures (writers, musicians, artists, etc.) seeking to maintain authority in spite of popular appeal (see e.g. Brouillette, 2003). However, the problem with this interpretation is that both *Mondo* and *Wired* clearly embraced economic success as evidence of the new media revolution they proclaimed was underway - that is, both saw themselves as leading brands in a transformed media landscape. Instead, their attempts to distance themselves from the mass media should be understood in light of their specific articulation of autonomy within the new media field.

Whereas autonomy in existing fields of cultural production such as art, literature and journalism is generally conceived as a capacity to resist economic and political pressures, *Mondo* and *Wired* explicitly embraced the market as an ally in bringing about a more 'democratic' media landscape (Turner, 2006; Streeter, 2010; Stevenson, 2014a). Both envisioned themselves leading a movement toward a more participatory and open media environment on the 'electronic frontier,' but rather than contrast these values with commercial gain they drew on their countercultural and technological literacies to construct a series of binaries around the distinction between new and old media: bottom-up and top-down, openness and control, networked and institutionalized, interactive and static, transparent and opaque, and so on. To 'sell out' was to bear the markers of

mass media or the Microsofts and IBMs of the world - for example, to sacrifice personality for broad appeal or to support stronger copyright laws - but not necessarily to make money. Autonomy was defined against particular definitions of mass media and 'boring' computing culture, but not against the market, so one could be transgressive and commercial at the same time. As Frank (1997: 32) argues, such a contradictory position is certainly not new, and in some sense these magazines simply reproduced 'the counterculture [...] as enduring commercial myth, the titanic symbolic clash of hip and square that recurs throughout post-sixties culture.' However, what was new was how this contradictory position was tied to and justified within an articulation of the 'rules' of the emerging new media field.

The immediate importance of this particular articulation of autonomy was visible in *Mondo 2000's* fate. Already in 1993, it was clear that *Wired* was the superior magazine, through a combination of *Wired's* leveraging of social capital (for example in securing Media Lab founder Nicholas Negroponte's support and monthly column) and its superior production, for example in terms of minimizing internal conflict (Boulware, 1995). Although *Mondo* was still experiencing success, the editors clearly felt threatened, and attacked by going online to call *Wired* 'the Monkees' and to criticize their competitor's business-friendly approach (ibid). However the effectiveness of such a critique could only go so far, as *Mondo* itself regularly embraced consumerism (e.g. Sirius, 1992) and *Wired's* commercial success could relatively easily be 'defended' by appeals to its knowledge of the 'digital revolution' and its credibility among the digital elite. By defining the autonomous principle as 'new' rather than 'non-commercial,' the new media field vastly reduces the power of attacks based on commercialization. And in this way *Mondo's* attacks fell flat, while *Wired's* success continued to grow along with the dot.com bubble.

The larger significance of how *Mondo* and *Wired* enacted an autonomous position specific to the new media field can be seen in two ways. First, in relation to the new media field that would quickly grow and evolve in subsequent years, their legacy was to provide a powerful format for perceiving and evaluating 'new media' in terms of a dedication to values of digital culture such as participation, openness and, above all, an opposition to the forms and practices of mass and mainstream media. Later entrants to the field could gain legitimacy through appeals to these values while, like *Mondo* and *Wired*, they remained dedicated to commercial gain. Second, this enactment of the 'new media autonomy' mirrors an important shift in the 'field of power' (essentially, Bourdieu's term for the economic and political field of capitalism).ⁱⁱ The 'new spirit of capitalism,' as Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) argue, subsumes the 'artistic critique' of bureaucracy and mass culture largely associated with the counterculture. It embraces the supposedly transgressive values of individual freedom, creativity and flexibility, and these principles have become the basis for justifying and judging specific practices of capital accumulation. In line with this shift, the new media field that formed in part through the efforts of *Mondo* and *Wired* offers a form of transgressive cultural production that does not symbolically exclude market-oriented actors, instead configuring autonomy as an adherence to a set of values considered 'native' to new media culture.

Towards a history of the new media field

Writing in 2004, Nick Couldry noted that 'media research in the Bourdieu tradition [...] has not to date analyzed new media,' and argued that this might be justified given that 'there are good reasons to be sceptical about how fundamentally new media, especially the Internet, are

changing patterns of media consumption' (2004: 169). While Couldry's skepticism of the transformative potential of new technologies is warranted, my argument is that it is indeed useful to apply Bourdieu's framework to new media. The new media field may be seen as a semi-autonomous domain of technological and cultural production, one in which a key product is the very belief Couldry cautions against. The belief produced by the new media field is of new media as exceptional media, often defined in relation to values like participation, openness and transparency, and defined against the forms and practices associated with mass and mainstream media.

As I have aimed to show here, field theory's potential insights in new media culture and web history can be seen in two areas. First, field theory provides a language and analytical framework with which media historians may continue to shed light on the nuances of struggles for legitimacy within the field, from the competition between *Mondo 2000* and *Wired* discussed here to (for example) the 'free software' and 'open source' debates of the late 1990s. In a similar vein, field theory provides an important additional framework for cultural critiques of companies that maintain good standing in terms of their commitment to values of openness and participation while also clearly operating in a way to secure economic capital. Even the most sophisticated political economy critiques suggest the question of autonomy is an all-or-nothing game of choosing a 'free' model (such as Wikipedia's) or an 'exploitative' one (which obeys the logics of advertising and the market), while studies of the cultural values and commitments of new media production cultures are relatively rare (notable exceptions include Kennedy, 2011 and Ankersen, 2015). Field theory can help us gain a nuanced understanding of how autonomy and legitimacy within the field are portrayed, perceived, negotiated and enacted.

Second, field theory is suited to revealing the historical contingency of what is often considered 'natural' technological change. Just as web history has to overcome a medium that resists its own recording (Brügger, 2009), it also must contend with a tendency to imagine the past as outdated and foreign to contemporary concerns. As Ankersen (2010: 174) writes, a concept like Web 1.0 portrays the past as 'buggy' and plays into the technological progressivism at the heart of new media culture. Field theory reminds us that the 'new' and 'web-native' do not just appear but must be legitimized as such within a network of actors, positions and dispositions. This production of a belief in the new has real implications for how new technologies and media forms are perceived and contributes in a significant way to their symbolic and economic success. As in all fields of cultural production, in the new media field there are cultural, symbolic and social economies that must be mapped alongside the effects of venture capital and IPOs.

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Notes

- i. The history of early blogging has previously been conceptualized in terms of a stabilization of the form in the late 1990s (Siles, 2012). I would argue such history runs the risk of ignoring the degree and qualities of the competition that are inherent to such stabilization. For example, as Ammann (2013) shows, what is remarkable about blogging's history is

the inability of the genre's innovators (Jorn Barger and Dave Winer) to align the emergent community along their particular visions of blogging's significance - that is, to accumulate the symbolic and social capital necessary to direct the genre's development and reception.

- ii. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this line of argument.

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