

NYU Press

Chapter Title: Assemblage

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Book Title: Keywords for Media Studies

Book Editor(s): Laurie Ouellette and Jonathan Gray

Published by: NYU Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1gk08zz.8>

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Assemblage

J. Macgregor Wise

“Assemblage” is the common English translation of the French term *agencement*, used by philosopher Gilles Deleuze and radical psychoanalyst Félix Guattari to theorize the arrangement and organization of a variety of heterogeneous elements (1975/1986, 1980/1987). The concept of assemblage has proved generative in media studies in its articulation of both the discursive and material aspects of media, and in its consideration of media as arrangements of humans and nonhumans.

It is important to note that Deleuze and Guattari’s approach to philosophy is one that emphasizes immanence over transcendence, multiplicity over individuality, and becoming over being. Assemblages are not static structures but events and multiplicities; they do not reproduce or represent particular forms but rather forms are expressed and each expression is the emergence of something creative and new.

Assemblages have four dimensions. Along one axis the assemblage stratifies or articulates what Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) call collective assemblages of enunciation with machinic assemblages of bodies. Collective assemblages of enunciation consist of a regime of signs, of “acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations” (88). Machinic assemblages are assemblages of bodies, actions, and passions, “an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another” (88). When thinking about media from this perspective, we need to take into account a series of processes with both human and non-human components. We need to draw the lines between

a myriad of devices and bodies, note their affects, intensities, and speeds, and consider how these material arrangements of bodies are stratified with codes, apps, conversations, tweets, and more as a collective assemblage of enunciation.

Along the second axis of the assemblage are relations of territorialization and deterritorialization, that is, on the one hand, the ways the assemblage is being organized and stabilized and, on the other hand, the ways that it is coming apart, its elements being carried away. Territory becomes especially important in understanding both the contingent and infrastructural aspects of mobile media assemblages.

The idea of assemblage has been important for the “material turn” in media studies (Packer and Wiley 2012; Parikka 2010). Rather than studying the meaning of a text (a tweet or online video), this scholarship looks at its arrangement and circulation among other messages and codes through particular contexts of production and reception as well as networks, software, and hardware, the affordances of which contribute to and shape what the message can do. Materialist media studies understands both humans and nonhumans (such as codes, routers, and mobile screens) as having agency in this assemblage. This uptake of assemblage has utility in recent work theorizing mobile media, new forms of television, media and social movements, and surveillance.

Three final points with regard to the concept of assemblage: First, it is not enough to dissect or map an assemblage’s elements. We must consider its capacities: what an assemblage can do, “what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980/1987, 257). Second, assemblages are not accidental or just contingent but purposeful. “It is not simply a happenstance collocation of people, materials, and actions, but the deliberate realization of a distinctive plan (abstract machine)”

(Buchanan 2015, 385; see also Wise 2011). And, third, to think with the concept of assemblage it is not sufficient to simply add up or combine the elements that media studies usually considers (texts, technologies, individuals) and leave it at that. N. Katherine Hayles reminds us the concept of assemblage is a critique of the idea that a unified subjectivity preexists events: subjectivity is produced by the assemblage and not assumed in its construction (2012, 24).

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Audience

Matt Hills

As Kate Lacey has observed, there is “an inescapable collectivity suggested by the word ‘audience’” (2013, 13–14). Indeed, Raymond Williams’s *Keywords*, despite not including the term, analyzes what might be meant by the audience within an entry on “masses,” conveying the cultural and political ambivalences that have historically surrounded the mass audience. The “masses,” we are told, can be “a term of contempt in much conservative thought, but a positive term in much socialist thought” (Williams 1976/1983, 192). Where the former has often viewed mass audiences as lacking in good taste, rationality, and expertise, the latter has instead thought of the mass as standing in for “the people” and the “popular,” that is, acting as a force for democracy. Sonia Livingstone argues that “in audience research, both meanings of audience retain some purchase” (2005, 23)—sometimes audiences represent a problem to be criticized, and sometimes they are a force to be celebrated. In *New Keywords*, David Morley holds on to the importance of audience as collectivity, contrasting physically copresent audiences with “the mass audience for contemporary forms of broadcasting, which perhaps today supplies us with our primary sense of what an audience is” (2005, 8). However, Morley indicates that the mass audience can no longer be assumed to unify media consumers in space and time. Instead, “cross-border forms of broadcasting often now bring together audiences of people who may be geographically dispersed across