Reformatted writing. Style guides, writing practices, and information infrastructures in Sweden around 1970

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Abstract

Analog and digital media technologies are, from a media historical perspective, intertwined in different and complex ways. This is especially true for the media technologies of the office, where digital media have evolved in dialog with older technologies in the analog-digital information infrastructure, and with a wide array of office practices and ideas of organization. The purpose of this paper is to focus on the intermedial relations between writing tools, paper, office practices, and infrastructure, in an analysis of the history of a document template. Thus, approaching intermedial connections between analog and digital media technologies in early computerized society, from a perspective influenced by theories of grey media (Fuller & Goffey 2012), and media as logistical and infrastructural (Peters 2015), and format theory (Sterne 2012; Jancovic, Volmar & Schneider 2019). The empirical case discussed in the paper is a style guide that was introduced to the departments of the Swedish state in 1968 called "Statsdepartementens skrivregler". The style guide aimed at reformatting all different documents that the state relied on for its communication, but as I argue in my paper also tried to reformat office practices and the information infrastructure as such. The introduction this style template also coincided in time with the early attempts of using word processors, datafication and computerization of information management in the Swedish state (Fredrikzon 2021). The style guide—and other alike introduced in the same period in other areas of Swedish society—was based on a standard called "systematic typewriting", developed in the 1950s to better match paper forms to the typewriter (Järpvall 2016). This standard, and the implementation in the style guides, defined a structure and design of office documents that came to persist the gradual switch from typewriters to computers in the 1980s and 90s, and in many ways still is with us.

Keywords
Infrastucture, Writing practices, Formatting, Media technologies of bureaucracy

Bio

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