Has amnesia been a consistent aspect of media studies? This talk argues this may be so drawing upon the insight of Peters and Kleis Nielson (2013: 257) that new media are things we don’t know what to do with and ‘media we do not know how to talk about’. A sense of crisis always accompanies this sense of the newness of the media. Key moments have shaped this history: the sociology of mass communication (associated with Columbia University, NY); the moment of Media Studies and Cultural Studies 1 (associated with the UK and the Universities of Birmingham and Westminster) and Media Studies 2 (connected to Web 2.0) dating from the beginning of the millennium. At each of these moments (new) media embodied both promise and danger as an object of study against a backdrop of global crisis.

This contribution asks whether media studies has been trapped by a ‘presentism’ that fails to engage with earlier traditions of communication theory and should undertake some unforgetting.

Keywords: New media; communication studies; history; amnesia
Competing Interests
The author has no competing interests to declare.

Author Information
Paddy Scannell is Emeritus Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Michigan. A founding editor of the journal Media, Culture and Society he was also one of the early pioneers of media studies with colleagues at the University of Westminster. His publications include Television and the Meaning of Live (2013), Media and Communication (2007) and Radio Television and Modern Life (1996). ‘An Interview with Professor Paddy Scannell’ concerning his career was conducted by Tarik Sabry and published in Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture, vol: 4(2). DOI: https://doi.org/10.16997/wpcc.80

References