

Conditions of Mediation

Phenomenological Approaches to Media, Technology and Communication

2013 International Communication Association (ICA) Preconference
ICA Theory, Philosophy and Critique Division
17 June 2013, Birkbeck, University of London

Organizers: Dr Scott Rodgers s.rodgers@bbk.ac.uk and Dr Tim Markham t.markham@bbk.ac.uk

Confirmed keynote speakers:

- Dr David Berry, Swansea University
- Professor Nick Couldry, Goldsmiths, University of London
- Professor Graham Harman, American University of Cairo
- Professor Lisa Parks, UC Santa Barbara
- Professor Paddy Scannell, University of Michigan

Conference Outline:

Media theory seems to have reached a moment in which it is effectively orthodox to presume we must pay attention first and foremost to the intricacies of everyday experience. Ethnographic audience studies, for example, have attacked assumptions that there is a discrete relationship between media content and audiences, arguing that media forms, content and technologies have indeterminate and multifaceted significance within the daily rhythms and spaces of their everyday lives. Studies of digital and networked media, meanwhile, have put into question the very notion of 'audiences' as the starting point for understanding mediated experience.

For some, accounting for the intricacies of everyday mediated experience has implied asking people what they actually do with media. But for others this is not enough: instead, the question is what constitutes the conditions of media experience in the first place. How do political configurations of discourses and inherited dispositions prefigure mediated action? How do material arrangements themselves constitute environments for mediated experience? How might we account for nonhuman agency, for example the ways in which software objects interact not only with human perceptions but also each other? Such questions point to a renewed confidence in explaining not just how but also why media, technology and communication are experienced as they are – all the while resisting a reversion to functionalism.

These interests in the very conditions of mediation suggest, if sometimes only implicitly, an emerging interest in a phenomenology of media. Indeed, phenomenology – broadly the structuring of perception – has seemingly obvious relevance for recent academic interests in media experience. Yet its use or invocation in media studies has been scattered. While this might simply reflect the

considerable diversity of phenomenological philosophies and their applications, there have also been concerted efforts recently to rethink phenomenology across the social sciences and humanities. Paired with recent interests in mediated experience, the time seems apt to reassess what it might mean to theorize media phenomenologically.

Conditions of Mediation seeks to bring together scholars from a very wide range of perspectives – such as media history, media archaeology, audience studies, political theory, metaphysics, software studies, science and technology studies, digital aesthetics, cultural geography and urban studies – to reflect explicitly on the phenomenological groundings of their work on media. The phenomenological thinking to which participants might connect will be broad-based, ranging from core thinkers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre to those with looser affiliations to phenomenology per se, for example Arendt, Bergson, Bourdieu, Deleuze, Garfinkel, Ingold, Latour, Whitehead and Harman.

In short, the overall aim is that this preconference goes beyond a mere congregation of media phenomenologists. Instead, it will encourage critical reflection on what various readings of phenomenology might offer media and technology studies that other approaches cannot. Conversely, it will also welcome reflections on the limits of phenomenological approaches in philosophical, theoretical, political and empirical terms.

Format:

The pre-conference will feature two plenaries of keynote speakers, as well as four-six panels of paper presentations selected from submissions of abstracts.

Paper submission process:

Please send an abstract (max 200 words) of your paper to both Scott Rodgers (s.rodgers@bbk.ac.uk) and Tim Markham (t.markham@bbk.ac.uk) by 20 November 2012. Authors will be informed regarding acceptance / rejection for the preconference no later than December 20, 2012.

Venue:

The preconference will be hosted at Birkbeck, University of London WC1E 7HX. Based in Bloomsbury, the intellectual heart of London and home to several of the University of London's constituent colleges, the Birkbeck campus is just three tube stops away from the Hilton London Metropole (the ICA conference hotel). The event will be held in the Clore Management Centre, which offers an excellent lecture theatre, rooms for parallel streams and break-out discussions as well as space for catering and informal networking.

For further information:

<http://conditionsofmediation.wordpress.com> (conference website)