

Call for Papers:**Digital Media Technologies Revisited:****Theorising social relations, interactions and communication**

A two-day conference co-organised by the

ECREA Digital Culture & Communication (DCC) section,

the *DGPuK Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)* section and

the *DGPuK Media Sociology (MS)* section

with support from the *Centre for Material Digital Culture (DMDC)*, University of Sussex,
UK

and the *COST 298: Participation in the Broadband Society* network

Place: University of the Arts, Berlin, Germany

Dates: Nov. 20-21, 2009

Topic:

This two-day conference on 'Digital Technologies Revisited' aims to look backwards as well as forward. It does so to explore an in-between time: a time, when much of the hype concerning digital media has died down, much research material has been gathered and analyzed and quite a bit about the possibilities and limitations of digital media (especially in comparison to older media forms) has been understood.

Far from a communication revolution, the media landscape has nonetheless changed substantially in recent years. In fact, we have undergone a process of diffusion and appropriation: digital media have become an important and ever-increasing part of our everyday lives. They suffuse our communication, information and entertainment spheres. Not surprisingly, the perceived connection between the internet and many areas of social life, from work to play, has steadily increased in recent years. However, even as digital media become pervasive, ubiquitous, common and mundane, innovation continues to become an integral characteristic of digital media forms, the proliferation of which is challenging to map.

We would therefore like to return to earlier models and theories that attempted to explain new (digital) media in its 'first wave' forms. Additionally, we would like to address the question of what kind of alterations and additions can be used to adapt existing models and theories for current purposes (e.g. mediated person-to-person communication; para-social interactions with virtual agents; pseudo-social interactions with intelligent machines, etc.).

The range of models and theories that can be used, re-visited, or adapted is wide (i.e. traditional communication studies models, cultural studies theories, sociology and others). We want to encourage papers that explore tensions between older and new approaches and older and newer 'new media' formations. Where has there been movement, where not, and are there in fact new theories emerging?

The social world sits at the heart of these diverse concerns. Social relations, interactions and communication are at the heart of our questions. Within this focus, the possible range of theories and methods used, is wide. The following provides the range of angles that we propose:

- HCI revisited:

Human-computer-interaction was an early forerunner concerning questions of the relation between humans and computers (as well as, eventually, humans via computers). What do we know of these relationships by now? How do they differ from other human-object relationships? And how do developments in these fields continue to inform, intersect and diverge from the social life of digital media forms?

- Virtual reality and AI re-thought:

Virtual reality and AI frameworks are another reference point that dominated earlier cybercultural theory, and design. What was specific about these moments and intersections? Why have these frameworks become less used by technocultural theory (at least for more popular theorizations)? What has survived in terms of virtual reality and AI concepts in contemporary formations such as Web 2.0, Facebook and Second Life?

- Disappearance of the machine – ubiquity, ambience and similar approaches

A more recent development has been around the merging of machines, and computational architecture with our environments. Thinking about pervasive computing, sense perception and intimate technologies are increasingly being used as frameworks for analysis. Where are they at in terms of the current state of development? And what consequences would these have for existing theoretical approaches (e.g. of appropriation of media technologies) and questions of power? What happens to ethical and political issues, such as privacy, monitoring, etc.? What does pervasive computing mean for our relationships with machines?

- Identities 4.0?

Identity was a much discussed topic in early web discourses. It is one that keeps returning in new disguises. Identity, it seems, has survived the 'post' in identity politics.

However, the valences of identity are now much more negative than the more utopic versions that proliferated in early digital media cultures. Identity categories have proliferated, and the intersections of race, nation, class, gender, sexuality and belief play a part in generating insecurity and a lack of trust between citizens, denizens and racialized others, the adult world and 'youth', or children and potential 'paedophiles'. Can early theorizations of identity and digital media be brought to bear on contemporary experiences and what would these look like?

- Bodies

Community, identity and the body were the tripartite features of digital media theory in the 1990s. Whilst community has been reformulated as SL and social networking, and identity continues to return, the body has also become an increasingly urgent site of enquiry as convergences of informational and biotechnological practices of body knowledge become materialized through digital media practices. These intersections offer up questions about the precise contours of current biodigital identity in the form of intersecting DNA databases, personal genomes, and biometrics. What approaches and questions can address these informatic corporealizations and their intersection with everyday life worlds?

- Mass media, journalism and public communication

Since the mid-1990s, a broad corpus of theories on the production, dissemination, reception, and the public and/or personal impact of online mass media has evolved in the social sciences. How do journalists' routines change in online media? Does the public relevance of journalistic mass media decrease or increase in present and future times? How can the (societal) diffusion or (individual) appropriation of new media developments be described or analyzed? What do mass media mean to the audience, and what are the present and future economic perspectives of online mass media?

- COST 298

Additionally, COST 298 members are invited to send separate abstracts for a COST panel. COST 298 is an Action within the intergovernmental framework for European Co-operation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research. In COST 298 European scientists from telecommunication research departments, universities and operators together with independent consultants collaborate in cross-disciplinary groups to analyze the social dimensions of people's relationships to information and communication technologies. In the COST 298 panel, the same questions of older models and newer developments that guide the overall conference are asked more specifically concerning the broadband society. What have we learned in the last four years of the COST 298 network? Only COST 298 members will be eligible to apply for this panel.

Please submit an extended abstract (700 words max.) by the 31st of May 2009 (and clearly stating which topic section you would like to submit this to) to:

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