

CONVERGENCE ENGAGEMENT & POWER

6th Annual PhD
Conference @ The Institute
of Communications Studies

www.ics-phd-conference.leeds.ac.uk

Digital Convergence
& the Challenge
to Global Hegemony

May
24
2012

*Clothworkers' Building North
Philip Taylor Cinema
09.00 - 18.00*

Keynote Speakers

Natalie Fenton
Goldsmiths College

Stephen Coleman
University of Leeds



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Conference Contacts:

Stuart Shaw +44(0)75 5120 4909

Toussaint Nothias +44(0)78 5394 5131

Convergence, Engagement and Power

Digital convergence and the challenge to global hegemony

6th annual ICS Postgraduate Conference – May 24, 2012, University of Leeds

Dear conference participants,

A warm welcome to the University and to the Institute of Communications Studies (ICS). The annual ICS PhD conference is something of which we are very proud. This is a PhD student-led initiative. ICS academic staff offer advice and support where called upon to do so. Otherwise, the theme and content of the conference are in the hands of PhD students. The result has been a fascinating mixture of speakers and topics over the years. Six generations of PhD students have now learnt how to manage the challenges of organising an academic event. I hope that you enjoy the day, and your visit to Leeds.

Prof. **David Hesmondhalgh**

Head of the Institute of Communications Studies
Director of the Media Industries Research Centre

The Institute of Communications Studies is an internationally renowned centre for teaching and research in communications, media and culture. Our research is multidisciplinary and we have particular strengths in the areas of cultural industries, international communication and political communication.

Formed in 1988, ICS combines strengths in communications and media research with the teaching of communications history, theory and practical skills. In September 2010, ICS moved into a specially refurbished building at the heart of the Leeds campus ('Clothworkers' Building North'). Our excellent new facilities include a cinema, a new media lab and a television studio. As well as being able to use these bespoke provisions, student who study at ICS have the opportunity to benefit from some of the best media opportunities at any university in the country. For more information on the possibilities that the University of Leeds can offer media and communications students, visit the website.

<http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/>

Conference Description

From Iran to China, Cairo to Oakland, Chechnya to Tunisia, bold claims are being made about the role that new technologies are playing in the emergence, sustenance, and viability of populist political movements. Empowered by the prosthesis of technical devices, the '99%' appear to have bypassed the monopoly of the mass media through the creation and sustenance of alternative media channels, disseminating information, ideas and political expression unhindered. As such, a question must be asked; how is the authority, legitimacy, and hegemony of the ruling elite being threatened by convergent media?

Focusing deeper on the role of technology, these events are often mediated by popular social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook. These interactive platforms have permeated every aspect of day-to-day life, but questions remain as to the role they play in building and sustaining a true democratic discourse. The innovation of these technologies originates in a global hegemonic system which retains their ultimate ownership through existing corporate and financial systems. On the world stage, Western governments pour praise on so-called technologically mediated movements like the 'Arab Spring', yet domestically the same leaders oppress similar political collectives such as the Occupy movement.

In addition to the political and technological dimensions, there is a multifaceted and multi-layered convergence at play which is influencing the ways existing media forms are produced. Consumers simultaneously become producers, and traditional cultural industries now share space with user-created digital domains of production. Has the notion of convergence reinvigorated the cultural industries by making the production process more democratic, or is it undermining their hegemony over the media we consume?

Optimistic expectations and pessimistic disdain are polarizing the debate within academia, hence these issues beg for critical questioning; to what extent are publics, through their engagement with new technology and convergent media, influencing or challenging political, corporate, and social power structures within society? Once the issues are laid bare to analysis, is the global hegemonic landscape really changing in the digital age?

In light of these technological, cultural, social and political events, we cordially invite you to the 6th annual Institute of Communications Studies PhD Conference, University of Leeds.

This student-led initiative aims at fostering debate among future academics by bringing together those researching areas related to media convergence in a formal conference environment, to critically engage with this exciting topic while also gaining the chance to hear from leading keynote speakers in the field of political communication.

Program

9:00 – 9:30	Registration (Coffee)	1.17
9:30 – 9:40	Opening Remarks & Welcome Simon Poppo , Director of Research, ICS, University of Leeds Christiaan De Beukelaer , Conference Chair, ICS, University of Leeds	G.12
9:40 – 10:15	Keynote 1: <i>Speaking Out Of Turn</i> <i>The Internet As A Space For People Who Don't Know Their Place</i> Prof. Stephen Coleman , Prof. Political Communication, University of Leeds	G.12
10:20 – 11:45	Panel 1: <i>New Media, New Players?</i> <i>Hegemony & Counter-hegemony in the Age of Convergence</i> Chair: Simon Poppo , University of Leeds	G.12
11:45 – 12:15	Coffee Break	1.17
12:15 – 13:20	Panel 2: <i>Critical Approaches to Convergence, Engagement & Power</i> Chair: Dr. Paul Taylor , University of Leeds	G.12
13:20 – 14:20	Lunch Break	1.17
14:20 – 15:45	Panel 3: <i>Convergence, Engagement & Power – Local Perspectives</i> Chair: Prof. Gary Rawnsley , University of Leeds	G.12
15:45 – 16:05	Coffee Break	1.17
16:05 – 17:10	Panel 4: <i>Engagement Redefined?</i> <i>Technological Interactions with Convergence</i> Chair: Prof. Em. Sylvia Harvey , University of Leeds (TBC)	G.12
17:15 – 18:00	Keynote 2: <i>Social Media, Political Citizenship and Democracy</i> Prof. Natalie Fenton , Goldsmiths College – University of London	G.12
18:00 – 18:05	Closing Remarks Prof. David Hesmondhalgh , Head of Department, ICS, University of Leeds	G.12
18:05 – 19:15	Wine Reception	1.17
20.00 – Close	Conference Dinner (Tampopo, 15 South Parade, LS1 5QS) We will walk there together after the wine reception. Call Toussaint Nothias if you get lost: +44(0)78 5394 5131	

Invited Keynote Speakers

Prof. Natalie Fenton

Natalie Fenton is a Professor in Media and Communications and joint Head of Department in the Department of Media and Communication, Goldsmiths, University of London. She is Co-Director of the Goldsmiths Leverhulme Media Research Centre (where she is part of a team researching issues relating to the news) and Co-Director of Goldsmiths Centre for the Study of Global Media and Democracy. She has published widely on issues relating to news, journalism, civil society, radical politics and new media and is particularly interested in rethinking understandings of public culture, the public sphere and democracy. Her most recent books are, (2010) *New Media, Old News: Journalism and Democracy in the Digital Age* (ed.) Sage; and (2012) *Misunderstanding the Internet* (with James Curran and Des Freedman) Routledge. Her next book *New Media and Radical Politics* will be published by Polity.

<http://www.gold.ac.uk/media-communications/staff/n-fenton/>

Prof. Stephen Coleman

Stephen Coleman is Professor of Political Communication at the University of Leeds, Honorary Professor in Political Science at the University of Copenhagen and Research Associate at the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford.

His main research interests are i) methods of political engagement; ii) uses of digital media in representative democracies; iii) intersections between popular culture and formal politics; iv) political efficacy; v) citizenship education; vi) political aesthetics, performance and rhetoric; viii) literary and dramatic representations of politics; and ix) forms of deliberation and decision-making.

<http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/people/stephen-coleman/>

Detailed Academic Program

9:40 – 10:15 **Keynote 1: Speaking Out Of Turn** G.12

The Internet As A Space For People Who Don't Know Their Place

Stephen Coleman, Prof. Political Communication, University of Leeds

10:20 – 11:45 **Panel 1: New Media, New Players?** G.12

Hegemony & Counter-hegemony in the Age of Convergence

Chair: **Simon Popple**, University of Leeds

10:20-10:35 **Christina Neumayer**, IT University, Copenhagen, Denmark

A Critical analysis of Online Media in Anti-Fascist Movements

This article is based on the results of three qualitative case studies about marches planned by neo-Nazis in East Germany, accompanied by counter-protests of anti-fascist groups, NGOs and civil society. The data-set includes coverage of the events in alternative online media of both sides of the political spectrum, institutionalized online media, and public comments. The question asked within this framework is: How are power and ideology in these protest events reproduced and constructed in textual representations in alternative and mass media online? The identification of the different social realities constructed in different online media questions the applicability of concepts of counter public in radical politics.

10:35-11:50 **Nukte Ogun**, University of Western Sydney, Australia

Mediator or Arbitrator? The Role of Social Media in Labeling the Ottoman-Armenian "Genocide"

Convergence across media environments is not simply changing the platforms via which information is disseminated and viewed, but also the manner in which individuals view themselves and their cultural identity. Social media networks have allowed the development of communication practices, but at what cost? This study questions whether such networks are portals for democratic discourse, or arbitrators handing down verdicts.

Technological advancements in the new millennium, particularly the development of Web 2.0 platforms, support the dissemination of emotive exchanges that ignore empirical evidence and have the potential to create an "other" – an enemy. Arguably, such naive and ill-informed discourses can spread to parliamentary debates, which often mirror constituent concerns.

The struggle to label the deaths of Ottoman-Armenians in the early twentieth century as "genocide" is merely one example. The label "genocide" has emerged even in geographically distant Australian parliamentary discussions. The struggle to use and refuse such terms is deeply felt by Armenian and Turkish migrant communities, for each of which the reframing is a question of cultural identity and a source of tension.

Ironically, the opening of communication channels may become what stifles freedom of expression. French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, motivated by constituents' communications, made 2012 the year denying an "Armenian genocide" became a criminal offence. This bill was passed in the name of human rights, in ignorance of a simple fact; freedom of speech is one of the most basic rights. This restrictiveness, however, was not long lived; the French

Constitutional Court quashed the bill within 37 days. Yet the ripples of this bill spread around the globe.

This study analyses interactions across four online platforms – Australian mainstream press, Australian-Armenian and Australian-Turkish local ethnic press, and blogs – in the lead up to and following the “Armenian genocide denial bill”. It considers how the contentious debate spread across the globe, from parliament to parliament, and how it created stigmatised “others”, with a decreased sense of belonging.

10:50-11:05 **Kruakae Pothong**, University of Leeds, United Kingdom

Net Neutrality: A challenge to the hegemonic pro-market approaches to provision of information services or social welfare?

The convergence of telecommunication and computing has sparked a multitude of information distribution platforms while enabling corporate convergence, which is as economically induced as politically enabled (Lax, 2009: 170). The new bandwidth-intensive online multimedia products and services, such as Internet TV, video on demand (VOD) as well as similar user-generated content, are the results of such convergence: ones that put increasing pressure on the ‘best effort’ approach to the existing IP Network, and thus spur an intensifying debate on net neutrality across different countries. Therefore, convergence has not only highlighted the increasing importance of network upgrade investment, but also regulatory issues regarding content providers’ access to Internet end-users and potential discrimination in that access (Marsden, 2010: 29, Noam, 2010: 4). This may undermine the fundamental human right of free speech to the speakers, the audience, the public and their interests in exchanging not only the information and views of their choice, but also information that carries important public good or value that enables individuals to perform their duty as responsible citizens in a democratic society (Barendt, 2005: 25 - 30).

Against the backdrop of convergence and the subsequent increase of information platforms and services, this paper seeks to critique, review and analyse the net-neutrality debate. It argues that the pro-market approach to provision of products and services has been used to justify both sides of the debate. However, there are other values that the market cannot optimally provide, yet which need to be recognised and accommodated. The key points for further consideration should therefore be, as Marsden (2010: 59) stated, the extent of the discrimination following deviation from net-neutrality, its justification and implications for the vested interests in the debate.

11:05-11:20 **Stephanie Janes**, Royal Holloway – University of London, United Kingdom

Players and Puppetmasters – Alternate Reality Games and Consumer Power

Power relations between fans communities and media companies have always been key to debates within Fan Studies. The extent to which fan communities ‘resist’ or remain in thrall to the power of media producers has moved from a resistant/incorporated dichotomy to the suggestion that fandom has become a normative mode of mainstream media consumption. Either way, the relationship has always been a delicate and complex one. As fan communities moved online, notions of digital convergence and collective intelligence were mobilised to argue for fans as empowered consumer collectives, increasing their ability to control decisions around their favoured media products.

This paper uses promotional alternate reality games to problematise notions of consumer/producer power in the age of digital convergence. ARGs have been used to promote films such as A.I.: Artificial Intelligence (2001), The Dark Knight (2008) and Super 8 (2010). Although difficult to define, ARGs may be described as:

‘A cohesive narrative revealed through a series of websites, e-mails, phone calls, IM, live and in-person events. Players often earn new information to further the plot by cracking puzzles... players... typically organize themselves into communities to share information and speculate on what it all means and where it’s all going.

ARGs are unique in that they are explicitly commercial entities, but encourage, and arguably require a mode of engagement which replicates that of a ‘grassroots’ fan community. Feelings of player agency are created via interactivity, but are arguably illusory since puppetmasters always control the strings of the games they have designed. In this almost paradoxical situation, where an apparently organic fan community can be created by a corporation, who really holds the power? Furthermore, how relevant is the issue of power to such media consumers, if they are willing to collude with producers for the illusion of inclusion?

11:20-11:45 **Q&A**

12:15 – 13:20 Panel 2: Critical Approaches to Convergence, Engagement & Power G.12

Chair: Dr. **Paul Taylor**, University of Leeds

12:15 - 12:30 **Heidi Herzogenrath-Amelung**, University of Leeds, United Kingdom

Critiquing Convergence: The Formal Bias of ICTs

The recent series of political upheavals referred to as the *Arab Spring* have refreshed the idea that digital Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), specifically social media, can play a vital role in giving political agency to the people and fostering a culture of true democratic engagement. While in no way seeking to downplay this potential, this paper seeks to call attention to the inherent risks resulting from convergence, with potentially anti-democratic consequences. It is argued that these result from the formal bias of such technologies, resulting in a situation where “rationalized systems or institutions favor [...] a particular social group” (Feenberg 2002). However, where Feenberg (2008) argues that this bias is the result of a “*relatively neutral system... produc[ing] effects of inequality through its relation to its context*” (emphasis added), this paper argues from the position of Critical Theory of Technology that the question of technological neutrality remains unresolved.

To this end, this paper draws on Martin Heidegger’s philosophy of technology and Friedrich Kittler’s medium theory to address the question “is technology neutral” in a specific application to ICTs. It is argued that philosophy is needed to shift the locus of the debate around the place of technology in society to an earlier stage in the process. It produces a reflective mechanism that can operate prior to “policies and regulations that minimize [technologies] risks and their misuse” (Kompridis 2009).

12:30 - 13:45 **Kathleen E. McCollough**, Rutgers University, Brunswick, NJ, USA

Symbolic/Industrial Convergence, the Self-Brand, and the Search for a Loop Stimulus

Particular concepts form in relation to particular problems (Patton, 2000). Top down/bottom up power reflects the problem of limited participation within an asymmetrical media system in which a powerful sender projects out onto a faceless mass of receivers. In this conception, bottom-up power remains a reactive mass, a constituted vs. constituent power (Bratich, 2008). Misconceptions arise when dominant power appears to operate causally, impacting the weaker power rather than looking at power as a relation (Cruikshank, 1999).

Beyond a sender/receiver model, convergence shifts relations and opens up new problems. In particular, this paper focuses on the problematic convergence of self and brand for craft designers within the U.S. scrapbook industry. Sarah Banet-Weiser (2011a) argues that the process of branding has created a “new set of relationships” that “circumscribe and shape” our conceptions of “participation” and “identity” (p. 280). Banet-Weiser (2011b) also asserts the importance of looking at these “new set of relationships” as a set of cross determinations through the “concept of relay” and “feedback.” Bernard Steigler (2010) extends this notion through a discussion of Bergson’s “loop stimulus.” A “loop stimulus” is not response but, rather, a form of participation achieved through an emotional engagement that allows for an exchange at the level of feeling and the chance for both parties to exit.

Nonetheless, Stiegler points back to the original problematic of a mass-mediated top-down system as he asserts that mass media has created the development of a new “organology” in which the “production of the symbolic becomes industrial,” a convergence that short-circuits the process of “transindividuation.” At the center of this “new organology” is the convergence between self/brand/industry and the symbolic inherent in the process of self-branding. What possibilities for emotional exchange (or mutations) remain in the self-brand convergence? An exploration of this question becomes critical to those seeking an exit out of a short-circuiting symbolic/industrial convergence.

12:45-13:00 **Danielle Child**, University of Leeds, United Kingdom

Art-Activism & Technology: Re-Examining The ‘Neutrality Of Machines’ Under Neoliberalism

Within Italian Autonomist thought, the role of technology in the capitalist workplace is considered to be one of oppression. In his ‘Fragment on Machines’, Karl Marx warned that the social brain would become inherently tied to the production process and ‘crystallised in machinery’ under capitalism. This notion has been taken up by Italian Autonomist thinkers such as Raniero Panzieri, who proposes that the use of technology has increasingly facilitated capital’s control of the worker in each stage of capitalism’s development since the cooperative phase. With the advent of ‘immaterial labour’, Panzieri further argues that informational techniques tend to ‘restore the charm of work’ under late capitalism. Machinery under capitalism is thus inherently tied to the class-based divisions within society. However, new informational technologies mask the oppressive role that machinery has traditionally held. How, therefore, can we understand these new technologies within neoliberalism when the work tool comes into our homes and everyday lives – namely, the internet, the PC and the mobile phone? Do the social and the work brain become one and the same? And what are the alternative possibilities?

Since the incarnation of neoliberalism, there has been a proliferation of art-activist practices associated with the contemporary art world. Communication technologies are often central to the work of the art-activists, exemplified in practices such as 'electronic civil disobedience', 'identity correction' through to 'tactical media' and 'hacktivism'. This paper examines the work of the art-activists who utilise informational technologies (and tropes associated with these, such as the network) in their quest to critique capital. How can we understand the use of these technologies for anti-capitalist activity in relation to the apparently inescapable capitalist nature of technologies used for work under neoliberalism? Do these practices, in fact, demonstrate an alternative (and even radical) potential for new technologies, severing the oppressive ties with capitalism?

13:00-13:20 **Q&A**

14:20 – 15:45 Panel 3: Convergence, Engagement & Power – Local Perspectives G.12

Chair: Prof. **Gary Rawnsley**, University of Leeds

14:20 - 14:35 **Motilola Olufenwa Akinfemisoye**, University of Central Lancashire, United Kingdom

Challenging hegemonic media practices: of 'alternative' media and Nigeria's democracy

This paper interrogates the extent to which the collaboration between professional journalists and the 'people-formerly-known-as-the-audience' is influencing journalistic institutional practices in Nigeria. Using the *Occupy Nigeria* protests as a conceptual anchor, this paper questions whether other forms of 'alternative' journalism, as advocated by populist narratives on new media, are creating a shift in the balance of power between professional journalists and the audience on the one hand, and facilitating discourse about Nigeria's democratisation project on the other.

Hinged on the developing body of theories and literature around ambient journalism, network journalism and networked journalism, this paper employs an ethnographic approach. Using semi-structured interviews with professional journalists working for newspaper organisations in Nigeria alongside newsroom observations, it critically examines the extent to which 'alternative' journalism made possible by new media technologies are impacting on the media agenda and negotiating spaces within Nigeria's mainstream media.

Studies on the new media and journalists in Nigeria have broadly been based on what journalists do or should do with new media technologies. There is however a gap in scholarship on the Nigerian media as to whether or not 'alternative' media are influencing and challenging power structures within mainstream media for instance with reference to the media agenda and whose voice(s) are heard in the news. Some scholars have suggested that journalists have lost their identities as gatekeepers and should now be referred to as 'gatewatchers'. Have the gates indeed been opened? To what extent have hierarchies in the news production process been broken? Are 'alternative' media in Nigeria encouraging counter-hegemony on news discourse that will be useful for the country's democratisation project? These are some of the issues this paper seeks to critically examine.

14:35 - 14:50 **Modestus Fosu and Ufuoma Akpojivi**, University of Leeds, United Kingdom

Convergence, citizens engagement and democratic sustainability in emerging democracies: the case of Ghana and Nigeria

In this era of globalisation, information accessibility is becoming more and more crucial to empower citizens in their political, economic and socio-cultural engagements. However, in emerging democracies there are certain factors, that is, economic, cultural and political, which are still hindering the vast majority of the population from being included in the media and democratic discourse.

Nevertheless, a new phenomenon of communication convergence is evolving in emerging democracies like Ghana and Nigeria, which is providing platforms for wide citizen engagements in the political and social discourse in societies. Communication convergence here involves the interaction of radio, television, newspapers, mobile phones and audiences as participants at the same forum in the media sphere. This phenomenon, according to Boafo (2009) and Kafewo (2006), has radically enhanced citizens' participation in the democratic processes in Ghana and Nigeria respectively.

Proceeding from a phenomenological perspective, this paper shall discuss the media convergence practices in Ghana and Nigeria in relation to political engagements as well as citizens engagements using case studies of a regular radio programme (*Kokrokoo* on Peace FM) in Ghana and a regular TV programme (*Sunrise Daily* on Channel TV) in Nigeria. The paper will argue that citizens' engagements as a result of the convergence of the mass media are central to the survival of democracy in both countries if properly harnessed.

14:50 - 15:05 **Billur Aslan**, Royal Holloway – University of London, United Kingdom

The Power of The Internet in the Rising Protests: The Case of the Iranian Green Movemen

This research aims to illuminate and evaluate assumptions about the political impacts of the Internet by taking into account the relation of online social networks and political protests. For evaluating the influence of those novel technologies, this research offers two case studies from Iran, where members of the Green Movement have organised spontaneous protests via social networks. Although in the first case study, the movement members succeeded in overcoming state barriers and spreading their movement via social networks, in the latter these social networks did not succeed in resisting state restriction. By exploring the filtrations and censorship attempts of the Iranian government, this research draws attention to the novel capacities of governments in their attempts to restrict the media. These Iran cases show that despite the existence of social networks, the Internet alone cannot bring liberty. On the contrary, governments can utilise it for monitoring their citizens or for spreading their manufactured 'facts'. Thereby, although the current protests in Egypt, Tunisia or Libya have fortified the power of social networks on protests, claims about their transformative effects require careful and comparative scrutiny. In order to understand the real impact of the Internet, today, one should analyse diverse factors that affect the outcomes of the movements. For this reason, alongside its cases studies, this research revises the theories of social movement scholars. It offers a theoretical framework to help explain the elements that affect the emergence, mobilisation and outcome of collective actions with a particular focus on how the Internet influences these processes.

15:05 - 15:20 **Larenda Twigg**, University of Bradford, United Kingdom

Beyond the Zapatistas: Questioning Information and Communication Technology use by Indigenous Social Movements

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have impacted multiple spheres of society and created fluid boundaries between politics, cultural values, identity and collective self-reliance. For groups on the margins these new forms of participation and alternative public spheres have been seen to offer an empowering potential to bring about social change, highlighted most strongly by the use of the emerging technology in the 1990s by the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico and their supporters. As ICTs grow it is important to re-examine the possibilities and significance of this technology for indigenous social movements beyond the Zapatistas. Questioning assumptions made by proponents and detractors of new forms of ICT, including social media, will get us beyond the what and how of the tools to the very value of these technologies for indigenous movements. Taking full advantage of online organizing requires defined goals and focus as social media alone cannot transform desire for social change into a movement. Therefore the questions to be explored are: whether hype surrounding the revolutionary potential of ICTs distracts from needed social change efforts and analyzes? And what is the meaning of a global indigenous movement for local activists?

15:20-15:45 **Q&A**

16:05 – 17:10 Panel 4: Engagement Redefined? G.12

Technological Interactions with Convergence

Chair: Prof. Em. **Sylvia Harvey**, University of Leeds

16:05 - 16:20 **James Dennis**, Royal Holloway – University of London, United Kingdom

“It’s Better to Light a Candle Than to Fantasise About a Sun”: Exploring Slacktivism and the Utopian / Dystopian Divide 2.0

This paper offers a critique of the artificial utopian / dystopian dichotomy that has re-emerged within academic literature examining the effect of social-networking sites on political engagement, and sets out an alternative approach aiming to capture the nuance of mediated citizenship at varying scales. The prevalence of unsubstantiated generalisations, anecdotal case studies, and a lack of empirical testing is exemplified through the scholarly debate surrounding ‘Slacktivism’; that low-threshold forms of political engagement online are inauthentic, narcissistically motivated, and a distraction replacing more meaningful forms of offline mobilisation (The Substitution Thesis).

This paper proposes a number of deficiencies within this approach. Firstly, the problematic emphasis on the medium itself leads to an arbitrary distinction between online and offline, and subsequently lacks appreciation for the complexity of engagement repertoires and organisational structures. Secondly, conceptual clarity is required in regards to what encompasses participation in relation to social-networking site. Slacktivism offers a narrow perspective of what engagement entails, notably end-product, ‘revolutionary’ activism without an appreciation of the informational and discursive stimulants that form part of this process (Carpentier 2011). The utopian / dystopian dichotomy and Slacktivist approach fundamentally miss the key function of social-networking sites as a commercial and entertainment-based medium, i.e. their role as a facilitator for conversations and networking. Finally, a collection of revisions are proposed to re-frame the Slacktivist critique

to construct a viable research agenda aiming to systematically examine the effect of routine social-networking usage on political engagement.

16:20 - 16:35 **Luke Robert Mason**, Director of Virtual Futures, United Kingdom

Infomorphology: The Dominance of Non-Human Agents on the Social Web

From the stock-market's algo trading to the emergence of the filter bubble, the amorphous algorithm has led to the rise of information being allowed to flow through our machines, independent of human intent creating new ontologies based on speed, complexity and the changing perceptions of the importance of the rhizomatic network and its role in our societies.

It is commonly believed that Web 2.0 technologies are social and are designed with the abilities, inabilities, interests and needs of the human user in mind. Thus, when they exhibit behavior that is irritating, intrusive or even inappropriate it is considered the fault of the owner or designer. But as information becomes the dominant metaphor for power and attention becomes the new economy, both are increasingly controlled by non-human agents that work behind the web 2.0 interfaces.

These have taken various iterations from Facebook's EdgeRank algorithm to sockpuppets (online identities created for the purpose of deception.) Thus, it is important to understand the algorithmic processes that govern the infosphere before we ask, not who holds power but what?

More than simulations of humans, social web bots (infomorphs) create a new ontology through which we, as inforgs (informational organisms), interact with and understand the increasingly robotic infosphere.

16:35 - 16:50 **Michelle Lewis-King**, Anglia Ruskin University, United Kingdom

Creative Futures: A Critical Survey of Contemporary 'Interfaces' and the Construction of Ubiquitous Marketing.

As I am beginning my doctoral study, this paper is a work in progress exploring material intersections between art, science and cultural consciousness via a critical survey of contemporary aesthetics in relation to interactive and augmented reality technologies and the implications for the future of art practice as a 'social' medium.

This paper provides a critical evaluation of materialism via interactive media, with particular focus on 'transparency'. The 'transparent', for the purposes of this paper, pertains to invisible and embedded material within interactive artworks and events, i.e, programming codes, touch interfaces, sensors, tracking technologies, etc.

In our new 'Digital Economy', computer interfaces (as materialisation of 'human' experience in contemporary culture - our bodies 'identified' and transposed into digital informational flows via tracking technologies) manifest our critical cultural juncture with the post-futuristic, a terminal socio-economic impersonal dictatorship defining and regulating our 'being' in the world. (Berardi, 2011)

Interfaces as an artistic transparent medium will be explored through discussing work of selected contemporary artists in order to map out the social contract fast emerging between information technologies and ourselves as 'users' (individually and collectively), making transparent the critical shift within contemporary aesthetics as cultural emphasis moves increasingly towards information and its social implications (ethics).

In posing the question, 'Is contemporary human-computer interfaces (hci) a positive source for social development or the fabrication of a Foucaultian Panopticon machine par excellence, privileging information over 'being' and excluding all social and sexual differences outside of its indexical lexicon of measured control?', my discussion will attempt to determine whether the convergence of interface technologies with artistic practice are truly opening us up to transformative social interactions as media enthusiasts claim; or as Frank Berardi says - we are actually subjects of an impersonal dictatorship. (2011)

16:50-17:10 **Q&A**

17:15 – 18:00 Keynote Presentation 2

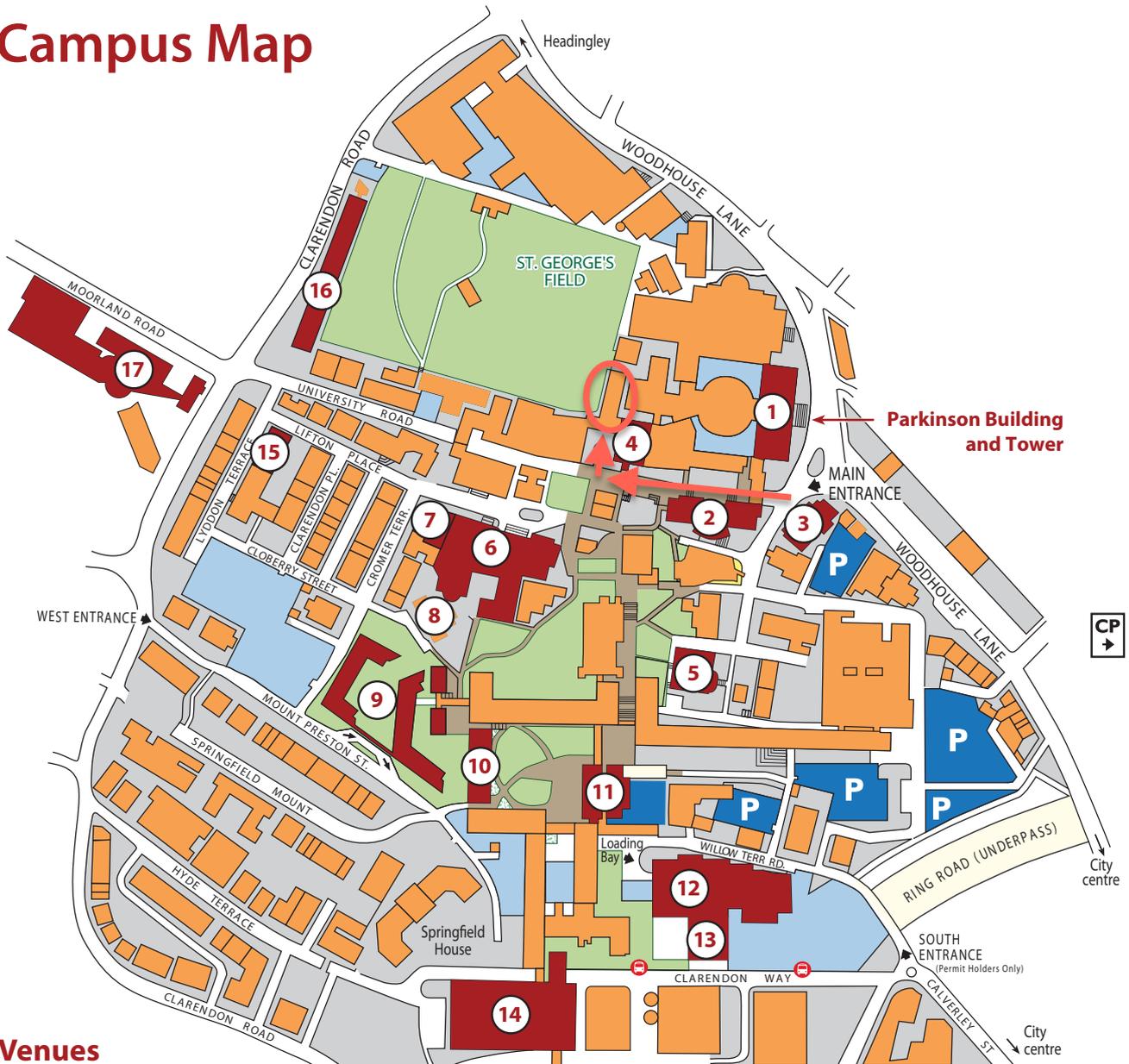
G.12

Natalie Fenton, Goldsmiths College, University of London

Social Media, Political Citizenship and Democracy

The interactive and participative capability of the internet to speed up and increase the circulation of struggle is argued to endow social media with the capacity to mobilize counter politics, launch revolutions and overthrow oppressive regimes. Implicit in these accounts is an understanding of democracy that is characterized by technological form. The internet is decentralized thereby providing a short-cut to political participation by everyone. The internet is information-abundant giving everyone equal opportunity to engage in the public sphere. The internet brings creative autonomy that eschews hierarchy and established structures of power and is seen to side-step and frequently outwit the state. All of these assertions have been challenged yet it is hard to escape the fact that the internet feels democratic because it feels dynamic and organic, a process that appears to be led by the participants who in turn feel linked in and part of something bigger raising the potential at least, of doing democracy differently. This paper will argue that the seduction of an internet-logic distracts from a deeper political economic analysis and overlooks the critical contextual and contingent factors of state boundaries, prevalent political infrastructures and ever-dominant economic constraints. At the same time however, the affective dimensions of counter-political networked communication that enable empathy and care, expand cooperation and inspire hope may provide a key to collaborative working that will unlock democratic alternatives.

Campus Map



Venues

1. Parkinson Building
2. Michael Sadler Building
3. Emmanuel Centre
4. Great Hall
5. School of Music
6. Leeds University Union/Refectory
7. University House
8. Lyddon Hall
9. Charles Morris Hall
(incl. Storm Jameson Court, Dobree & Whetton)
10. Staff Centre
11. Roger Stevens Lecture Theatres
12. Sports Hall, Swimming Pool (The Edge) & Exhibition Centre
13. Conference Auditorium
14. Worsley Building
15. Eilerslie Hall
16. Henry Price Building
17. Leeds University Business School

Car Parks

- University visitors' car parks (limited access) 
- Other university car parks 
- Public multi-storey car park 

- Free City Bus Stop 
- Pedestrian Only Area 
- Lawns 