

Call for Papers

3. Medienwissenschaftliches Symposium der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft/
German Research Foundation

Connect and Divide: The Practice Turn in Media Studies

Fraueninsel im Chiemsee, 19. August – 22. August 2015

Media divide and connect simultaneously: they act as intermediaries between otherwise disconnected entities, and as a »middle« that mediates, but also shields different entities from each other. This ambiguity gives rise to conflicting interpretations, and it evokes all those figures that give a first clue about this janus-faced relationship of »connect and divide«: gate-keeper, parasite, amongst others. And if we give accounts of media before and after their mediated action, we refer to persons and organizations, automatisms and artifacts, signals and inscriptions, and we seem to find it easy to refer to their distinct potentials and dis/abilities. But within the interaction - the »middle« of media itself seems to be distributed right across the mix of material, semiotic and personal entities involved, and the location of agency is hard to pin down. In case of breakdown we have to disentangle the mix; in case of smooth operations action becomes all the more distributed and potentially untraceable – which makes its attribution a matter of the simultaneously occurring distribution of (official and unofficial) knowledge, labour and power. The empirical and historical investigation of this two-faced relationship of »connect and divide« has thus resulted in what may be called a veritable »practice turn in media studies«. The conference will discuss four aspects of the practice turn in media studies:

Section 1: **Media History from a Praxeological Perspective**, Moderation: Monika Dommann

Since its origins in Toronto or Freiburg Media studies have developed what might be called strong narratives of history, identifying causes and origins and often bordering on teleological narratives, and sometimes even making quite specific media both the telos and cause of fundamental historical changes. The challenge of these sometimes mythical narratives has inspired a host of corrections, revisions and reservations from professional historians, who are devoted to a cult of the archives (Lorraine Daston) and used to make accountable which evidence they can use or not use: »How can I know what I want to propose?« (in Marc Bloch's famous words). This skeptical question leads historians - and media historians alike - to a double focus on media practices: their own and those they have to study. Historians developed media studies »avant la lettre« by making the medium the message in their »Quellenkritik«, by making the production, distribution and reception of texts and artifacts both the topic and resource of historical work. How do we reconstruct and deconstruct the media practices of the past? Which practice theories are helpful for historians, who are used to go against the grain of their sources and their contemporaries alike? Which new questions might arise when a traditional discipline like history and undisciplined fields like Science and Technology Studies and media studies exchange their theories and tools?

Section 2: **Religion is as Religion Does: The Practice Turn in Religion and Media Studies**, Moderation: Jeremy Stolow

In recent years, the study of religion has expanded dramatically, commensurate with the rising public visibility of diverse organizations, movements, and events that constitute the

religious field. Scholars have begun to challenge the longstanding theoretical framework in which religions were defined as systems of ideas to which believers assented, and in which religious meaning and action was understood to reside primarily in (relatively fixed) sacred texts, symbols, and ritual dramas. »Religion and media« as a field of study has attended instead to religious affiliations, sensibilities, and ways of knowing and doing as they are found in medias res: in other words, as they are embedded within existing social solidarities, power relations, and embodied practices of mediation, encompassing the material affordances, disciplinary techniques, rules of exchange, and logistical orderings of space and time that make diverse forms of religious communication and experience possible in the first place. However, within this field of study, the agency ascribed to »media« remains a matter of considerable confusion. For some, media are understood simply as instruments at the disposal of religious actors in the service of diverse spiritual and/or theological goals; for others, media operate according their own, independent logic, imposing new constraints and demands on religious actors who struggle for recognition and legitimacy. As a contribution to the larger aims of this conference to shed new light on the concept of »practice« within media studies, we seek papers that will confront this terminological ambiguity.

Section 3: Connecting and Dividing Media Theories: Gender, Post_Colonial, and Other Agencies, Moderation: Ulrike Bergermann

Mediated practices of connecting and dividing resonate with senses of belonging and desire, negotiating hegemonies, exclusions, subaltern people and their im/possible agencies, in moving constellations. Taking into account networks and subjects, Cultural, Gender and Postcolonial Studies consider the constitutive role of certain ›Others‹ which shape our concepts of representation, authenticity, or translation, and look at the agencies and performativities of those and those things that were said to be non-agents. ›Doing media‹, then, comprises diasporas, post_colonies, gendered and racialized subjectivities as places of knowledge production. "Situated knowledge" (Haraway) holds true for "the knowledge of media" as well, while technologies elicit new temporal conceptualizations of precedence and antecedence, including both humans and non-humans. The respective connections and divisions will be discussed in this section, focusing on the uses of mass media, art, and popular culture, and their Kulturtechniken – and the ways they incite media theory.

Section 4: The Current Relationship (After a Longer Non-Relationship) of Media Theory and Practice Theory, Moderation: Erhard Schüttpelz

Not long ago, it seems, media theory and practice theory went their separate ways. The original ›practice turn‹ in the social sciences didn't seem to concern media studies, though it partly originated from STS (Schatzki/Knorr Cetina/von Savigny). And some of the seminal topics of STS were media topics from the start, like the technological ›systems building‹ and in the less obvious guise of laboratory instruments, two topics that German media research has continued to investigate. But the practice turn in the social sciences originated from questions of »social agency« and its socio-technical entanglements – with controversial consequences, especially in the ›posthumanist‹ versions of practice theory, where the agency of humans and cyborgs is being discussed. It took some time for media theory to join this discussion. Classical media theory tended to see ›the state of the media‹ as the independent variable to be established first, and to treat media practices as »messages«. Research on the ›use‹ of media first appeared to be one of the manifestations of this

asymmetrical distinction, until such research slowly transformed into an all-pervading exercise in symmetry: How to derive media from their practices, and how to characterize social practices in their contingency on media? And the challenge is here to stay: If media theory and practice theory started with their backs to one another, how will they proceed in the future? And if we re-assess the ›posthumanist‹ trajectory in which social theory and media technology first met, does the practice turn itself have a specific media historical setting?

We welcome proposals of two pages for all four sections. Your proposal should be submitted by December 31, 2014 to Prof Dr. Erhard Schüttpelz at schuettpelz@medienwissenschaft.uni-siegen.de. In case you are invited to the conference, you will be asked to submit a publishable essay (12 pages) for discussion at the conference by May 31, 2015. This paper should meet two demands: Please characterize at least one media practice in all the details necessary for your argument, and please propose a theoretical and/or historical question and its possible answers.

Symposium - Committee:

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Prof. Dr. Monika Dommann (Universität Zürich)
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