

Technological Conditions of Interventions

History, Epistemology, Dramaturgy

Symposium · May 19, 2015 to May 21, 2015

- Venues:** Centre for Digital Cultures (Post; Sülztorstraße 21–35 · 21335 Lüneburg)
Stadtarchiv (Wallstraße 4 · 21335 Lüneburg)
- Team:** Timon Beyes · Irina Kaldrack · Martina Leeker · Nina Wakeford
- With:** Ulrike Bergermann (D) · David Berry (GB) · Howard Caygill (GB) · Hervé Fischer (CA) · Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan (D) · Marcell Mars (D) · Alexandre Monnin (F) · Imanuel Schipper (CH/D) · Fred Turner (USA) · Nina Wakeford (GB)
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- Online:** <http://projects.digital-cultures.net/dcrl-experiments-interventions/>
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Context

Since the 1990s so-called artistic interventions arise in such different social areas as e.g. urban space, organisations, digital networks or protest movements. Although these interventions are constituted of diverse artistic forms and build a heterogeneous field of political practices, they show a similarity in their intention to develop methods of interfering in concrete, questionable social and political situations and to interrupt and change them for more democratic and reflexive conditions. In this perspective the displacement of sense and the sensual is taken as a political act against exclusion and the power of representation. The political dimension of interventions is described in addition as the act of performing, as this corresponds to continuous transformation.

The proposition of the symposium is to re-visit the history, epistemology and dramaturgies of these interventions, regarding their relation to the technological conditions of digital cultures. These are seen from their constitution by technical infrastructures, which are involving human actors only as one element in a larger network of agents. The central question is, if and how interventions could have become a new technique to create frames and formats of agency, of the political sphere, of participation

and of critique in this techno-logic of digital cultures. In this perspective it becomes eye-catching that acting in technical applications and in interventions oscillates between potentialisation and im-/potentialisation, whereas the political becomes an escalation of dissent, out of subjective control. This raises the question which epistemology is generated by interventions under technological conditions, concerning knowledge, subjectivity and governmentality. The second question is which dramaturgies, understood as an aesthetic setting of instructions for acting and perceiving, could be detected in technological constellations and in interventions.

With this assumption the symposium aims to bring together scholars from media studies, political science, social science and practitioners in order to study forms and effects of interventions, especially their political agenda and dramaturgies, explicitly under their technological conditions.

The aim is to develop a critical approach to interventions as a cultural technique that creates power and scopes of action and participation, of politics and critique under technological conditions in order to find models, practices and dramaturgies that help to not be governed in the ways we are now.

Questions

- What are interventions, and which relevance do they have for the generation of capacities for acting, participation, critique and the political?
- Can interventions be seen as a new hype? Why? Is there a connection to technological conditions?
- How to understand and analyze interventions as part of technological conditions?
- What are interventions for?
- Which dramaturgies of interventions go with the techno-logical and which can reflect them?

Program

Tuesday, May 19, 2015

18.00–20.00 **Keynote (Venue: Stadtarchiv)**
Moderation: Martina Leeker (Lüneburg)

Fred Turner (Stanford): "The Democratic Surround and the Forgotten History of Multimedia."

Today we find ourselves surrounded by screens—on our iPhones, our tablets, our desktop computers. Little do we know that we are living out the multimedia dreams of several dozen Cold War social scientists and propagandists, a handful of Bauhaus artists, and the musician John Cage. Fred Turner tracks those dreams from World War II to the psychedelic sixties and lays bare the long-buried cultural roots of an American media revolution.

Dinner

Wednesday, May 20, 2015

10.00–10.30 **Introduction (Venue: Centre for Digital Cultures: Post)**

Moderation: Nina Wakeford (London), Martina Leeker

10.30–12.30 **Panel: Interventions/resistance—politics—technological conditions.**

Howard Caygill (London): "Cryptography and the Digital Capacity to Resist."

The general aim of the talk will be to introduce the Clauswitzian concept of the 'capacity to resist' as the key for understanding and formulating strategies of digital resistance. It will show how the Neo-Clauswitzian invention of networked communications during the Cold War was guided by a strategic interest in openness and transparency that since the 1990s was no longer a feasible strategic posture for digital resistance. I will ask whether encryption offers a viable alternative or whether other strategies are currently to enhance the 'digital capacity to resist'.

David Berry (Sussex): "Interventions Under the Technological Conditions of Computation."

In this paper I explore conceptual notion of interventions in light of recent developments in computation in terms of potential theoretical and methodological insights. The aim will be to explore how interventions can be informed by the technological conditions of computation, digital methods and debates in digital humanities (and digital history). Additionally, I will reflect on how the specifically media historical approaches investigating media, mediation and media technologies, particularly through media archaeology and a focus on materiality, can also strengthen and expand the possibility for intervention as a cultural technique.

Fred Turner: Discussion

Lunch at Post

13.30–15.30 **Panel: Areas. Interventions in organisations under technological conditions.**

Nina Wakeford: "Interventions at Intel Corporation."

This paper describes an experiment with video that was carried out as part of a research project on mobility and temporality in urban settings with fellow sociologist and artist Britt Hatzius. I discuss how a project on cycling cultures in London involved the creation of several video pieces that ended up in an installation in the offices of a high technology company in the United States. Unlike geographers, sociologists have not begun to develop a body of knowledge in the area of site-specificity of research outputs. I begin the presentation by looking to ideas of installation and in particular its promise to hold together multiple elements. I then describe the ways in which time-based material was

created as part of a series of trials that tried to capture the experience of flows and unfolding sensory engagements with the city. The challenge in creating the installation which resulted was not only simply showing empirical data analysis, but finding ways to intervene and *create an atmosphere* or environment within which conversations about empirical research and sociological representation could take place.

Immanuel Schipper (Hamburg): "Whose intervention?"

Who is doing what intervention in what system? This question appears immediately, watching a scene of a recent chapter of the last season of "House of cards". The Russian punk rock activists Pussy Riot can be seen playing themselves on a dinner for the Russian president in the White House of Frank Underwood. Of course they do not behave and "make an intervention". But how can that TV-production itself be considered as an intervention? In what system? Many artistic interventions nowadays ask for a complex understanding of the context they are staged in order to understand more than the actual "aesthetic noise" of the moment of their appearance. In my paper I will present some of the recent works of (performative) artists like "Pussy Riot", "Mediengruppe Bitnik", "Center for Political Beauty" and "Peng!", discussing their use of the technological spheres and/or that of the mass media.

David Berry: Discussion

Coffee break

16.00–18.00 **Panel: Areas. Performing/dramaturgies—political sphere—digital age.**

Kat Jungnickel (London): "Socio-technical mobile devices of resistance: Victorian inventors, women cyclists and convertible cycle wear patents."

Many middle and upper class Victorian women designed and lodged patents for 'convertible' cycle wear to address the twin problem of needing a safe and comfortable mobility costume and minimise potential social violence—verbal and physical assault—that often accompanied radically clothed mobile women in 1890s Britain. These material interventions, equipped with deliberately concealed engineering in the form of weights, pulleys, tucks and folds built into their dress, enabled women to adapt clothing on the move. Drawing on STS, archival data and patents I critically explore these heterogeneous human and non-human devices as strategies of creative socio-technical resistance.

Ulrike Bergermann (Braunschweig): "Conditioning the Human Microphone."

When cut off from electricity and in need of amplifying their voices to communicate, the protesters of Occupy Wall Street re-activated a tactics from the 1970s and used the form of the "Human Microphone" in their assemblies.

Whoever spoke, had to pause after some words, so that the people standing close enough to hear would repeat together what had been said. Many voices amplified one and could be repeated again for those standing in some distance. Response, of course, had to be slow, and managed through a system of hand gestures, and lists of speakers. The Human Microphone was a tool of the desired real democracy, where everybody should have a voice, but there should not be one voice heard as one representative of the many (*no nos representan*). Like most of the strategies used in the public events that followed the 'Arab spring', the protests in Athens, Madrid, or Istanbul, the Occupy camps in New York, Oakland and many other places, the modes of organizing the gatherings have been widely discussed in terms of the role of (social) media, possible emergence of multitudes, embodiment, public space, and critique of representation. The Human microphone is part of this ensemble, but at the same time hosts a group of uncanny roots and effects: The repetition allows for no alterations, the body becomes a mere membrane of doubling, with the voice on the shaky side of im/materiality, and reminds not only of the formation of the subject through Althusser's Anrufung, but also of the Call and Response-schemes so widely inherited from the African slave cultures within Blues, Soul, Jazz, or rhetorics from church to presidential speeches, moving from Black history to mainly white spaces. I want to discuss the possible settings of one and the many and their collective speech acts in cross-reading Nancy's "Being Singular Plural": self and other need each other to be/with, which may be heard in the sound of the Human Mic.

Howard Caygill: Discussion

18.00–19.00 **Discussion of the day**
Introduction: Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan (Berlin)

Dinner

Thursday, May 21, 2015

10.00–13.00 **Panel: Areas. Intervening in the WWW. (Venue: Centre for Digital Cultures: Post)**

Alexandre Monnin (Paris): "Making and caring: Philosophical engineering and the philosophy of the Web."

We would like to discuss intervention from a pragmatist point of view by contrasting two kind of activities. The first relates to what Tim Berners-Lee dubbed "philosophical engineering", in other words the activity of Web architects who as much built the Web as they progressively discovered and re-engineered its design properties. According to Berners-Lee, Web architects "are not analyzing a world, [they] are building it. We are not experimental philosophers", he says, "we are philosophical engineers. We declare 'this is the protocol'." But what kind of intervention is that? What kind of innovation does it

lead to? We would argue that this innovation despite its apparent hubris is in fact an ontological one, quite delicate and fragile, a way of framing issues of objectivity, reference and the likes. Such an architecture and its characteristic innovations are not very well understood and for a good reason as the assemblages created by actors like Google tend to obfuscate it. For that reason, the role of the philosophy of the Web, unlike Berners-Lee's philosophical engineering, is to understand its own way of intervening as a way of singling out, and caring for some assemblages instead of others. Philosophy, then, with all its arcane intricacies, becomes a way to "instaurate" such objects (or assemblages) and prevent them from falling into oblivion, answering what Etienne Souriau dubs "the call of the world". An attitude which could be summed up using Brian Cantwell Smith's dictum: *Being unto the world*.

Hervé Fischer (Montreal): "Sociological Art Public Practice: From Mass Media to Digital Appropriation with Postal and Tweet Art."

With sociological art, I developed a participative and interrogative practice using a variety of mass media, such as urban and road traffic signs, daily newspapers, large advertising posters, pills, rubber stamps, etc. from 1971 up to 1983. Since 2011 I use digital technologies with on line postal art and what I called *tweet art* and *tweet philosophy*. The media have changed for good and bad, as digital arts are very powerful, interactive and even participative self media, but mainly game and entertainment minded, rarely critical. On the contrary, the fundamentals of sociological art practice keep the same, even more necessary than before in our mass societies: questioning provocatively the meaning, the values, and the myths of our societies.

Marcell Mars (Lüneburg)

Martin Warnke (Lüneburg): Discussion

Lunch

14.00–15.00 **Sum up with Fred Turner**
Moderation: Team

CV's

Ulrike Bergermann is a professor of Media Studies at the University of the Arts Braunschweig. Her research interests include the history of knowledge (as well as the histories of cybernetics and Media Studies), Postcolonial Theory, and Gender Studies. After a PhD thesis about notational systems for the sign languages of the deaf at the University of Hamburg, she taught at the universities of Paderborn, Bochum, the Media Research Cluster Cologne, and other places. Ulrike Bergermann co-founded the

journal “Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft” and has been a member of its editorial board since. Recent publications: *total. Universalismus und Partikularismus in post_kolonialer Medientheorie*, co-edited with Nanna Heidenreich, Bielefeld (transcript) 2015; *Disability trouble. Ästhetik und Bildpolitik bei Helen Keller* (ed.), Berlin (b_books) 2013; most recently the essay on ANT and the colonial: *Kettenagenturen. Latours Fotografien, Brasilien 1991*. In: Ilka Becker et al. (eds.), *Fotografisches Handeln*, Marburg (Jonas), forthcoming. – <http://www.ulrikebergermann.de>

David M. Berry is Reader in the School of Media, Film and Music at the University of Sussex. He writes widely on computation and the digital and is the author of *Critical Theory and the Digital*, *The Philosophy of Software: Code and Mediation in the Digital Age*, *Copy, Rip, Burn: The Politics of Copyleft and Open Source*, the editor of *Understanding Digital Humanities*, and co-editor of *Postdigital Aesthetics: Art, Computation and Design*.

Howard Caygill is Professor of Modern European Philosophy at Kingston University, London and an Associate of the Institute for Humanities at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. He was previously Professor of Cultural History at Goldsmiths College, University of London. His most recent book was *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance* (2013) and his next book *Kafka: In the Light of the Accident* will be published later this year.

Hervé Fischer, Multimedia artist-philosopher, graduated from the École Normale Supérieure (Paris). For many years he taught sociology of communication and culture at the Sorbonne. 1985 he founded the Montreal Center for art and new technology. 2000 he was elected director of the Digital Fine Arts Chair at Concordia University (Montréal). He is director-founder of the International Digital Observatory, Canada. His sociological art practice has been widely shown in many National Museums, at the Venice Biennale, 1976, Documenta 7, Kassel, 1982, etc. He was honored with the NCGA music video 1st prize (1989), the first Leonardo Award (1989). His archive is now housed at the Centre Pompidou MNAM and Bibliothèque Kandinsky.

He has published widely on art, communications and mythanalysis, notably in English: *The Digital Shock*, McGill and Queen's University Press, 2006, *The Decline of the Hollywood Empire*, Talon Books, Vancouver, 2006. – <http://www.hervefischer.net> & [.com](http://www.hervefischer.com)

Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan is a media theorist, historian of technology, and co-curator on the multi-year Technosphere project at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt. He is spending the winter semester 2014-2015 as a visiting fellow at the Internationale Kolleg für Kulturtechnik-Forschung und Medienphilosophie and the spring 2015 semester as a visiting fellow at the Digital Cultures Research Lab in Lüneburg. In 2012 he received a binational Ph.D. (cotutelle) degree from the Fakultät Medien of Bauhaus-Universität Weimar and the Screen Cultures program of Northwestern University. His research interests include digital media, visual culture studies, software studies, and theotechnics. Bernard has held posts and fellowships at the American University of Paris, Harvard University, MIT, the Pompidou Center, Northwestern University, and the Children's Media Project. His essays appear in journals including *Critical Inquiry*, *The IEEE Annals on the History of Computing, Theory, Culture & Society*, and *Interaction Studies*. – <http://bernardg.com/>

Kat Jungnickel is a researcher and lecturer in the Sociology Department, Goldsmiths College, University of London. Her research explores mobilities, digital technology cultures, DiY/DiT (Doing-it-Together) making communities and inventive methods. Her recent book *DiY WiFi: Re-imagining Connectivity* (2014) ethnographically examines the hands-on, object-oriented and collective practices of grassroots wireless digital communities who build their own version of the internet using found, adapted

and easily purchased objects and improvised methods. She is currently working on an ESRC funded project about the history of inventive women's cycle wear in which she interweaves STS and archival research with the making of Victorian 'convertible' costumes from 1890s patents. – <http://www.katjungnickel.com>

Alexandre Monnin is Researcher at Inria (Wimmics team) where he previously initiated the French DBpedia project between 2011 and 2013 with the Ministry of Culture and Wikimedia France. He holds a PhD in Philosophy from Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne (*summa cum laude*). Since May 2013, he's also senior expert for Etalab, the Prime Minister Open Data agency of the French government. He also co-founded the W3C "PhiloWeb" Community Group in 2012. His thesis (defended in April 2013) was dedicated to the Philosophy of the Web. He was previously Senior Consultant for UNESCO (IIEP, Paris), Fellow at IKKM (*Bauhaus Universität*) and Head of Web Research at the *Institut de Recherche et d'Innovation* of the Centre Pompidou.

He is also the co-editor of a special issue of the international journal *Metaphilosophy* in 2012 ("PhiloWeb: Toward a philosophy of the Web"), republished in an extended version by Wiley-Blackwell in 2013 under the title *Philosophical engineering: Toward a philosophy of the Web*. In 2014, he published a special issue of the journal *Intellectica* entitled *Philosophy of the Web and Knowledge Engineering*. He organizes the PhiloWeb conferences since 2010 and was one of the organizers of the ACM WebScience 2013 conference in Paris.

Immanuel Schipper is a Dramaturg and Curator in the field where theatre and performance meet the real life and the public space. He studied acting and holds a MA in Theatre and Dance Studies. He has been Reader and Researcher at the Zurich University of the Arts and most recently he has been appointed as Research Fellow at Art and Civic Media at the Inkubator at Leuphana University Lüneburg. In his artistic career he has been working with artists like Rimini Protokoll, William Forsythe and Jérôme Bel. Most currently he is working on the concept of *Relational Dramaturgy*. He is on the board of Performance Studies International.

Fred Turner is Associate Professor of Communication at Stanford University. His books include the widely acclaimed *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and The Rise of Digital Utopianism*; and most recently, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties*. His essays have tackled topics from the rise of reality TV to the role of the Burning Man festival at Google. They can be found online at <http://fredturner.stanford.edu>

Nina Wakeford is Reader in Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London and established Studio INCITE (Incubator for Critical Inquiry into Technology and Ethnography) in 2001. She is currently a Fellow at DCRL.

Along with colleagues at INCITE she is interested in the ways in which collaborations can be forged between ethnographers and those from other disciplines, such as engineering, design, visual arts and computer science. Her publications include studies of feminist and queer internet communities, internet cafés and mobile devices as well as the use of powerpoint and theories of atmosphere. She is currently exploring how sociology might work with the openness and ambiguity of inventive methods. Drawing on her training in fine art she has also produced installations and interventions in academic conferences using film and performance. Alongside Celia Lury she edited "Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social" (Routledge, 2012).