Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI) Research Seminars

Autumn 2014


Location:
Communication and Media Research Institute
School of Media, Arts and Design
University of Westminster
Watford Road, Northwick Park
Middlesex, HA1 3TP
Room A7.01

Public Transport
Metropolitan line, stop: Northwick Park

If you want to attend one or several of the events, please contact Christian Fuchs christian.fuchs@uti.at (registration deadlines for events is on Sundays – three days in advance)
No registration is required for the University of Westminster’s faculty and students.

Programme:

Jenny Chan: Dying for an iPhone: The Labour Struggle of China’s New Working Class
Wednesday, October 1, 2014. 14:00-16:00. Room A7.01

Jim McGuigan: The Work of Raymond Williams
Wednesday, October 15, 2014. 14:00-16:00. Room A7.01

Christian Garland: Framing the Poor: Media Illiteracy, Stereotyping and Contextual Fallacy to Spin the Crisis
Wednesday, October 22, 2014. 14:00-16:00. Room A7.01

Jaeho Kang: Phantasmagoria of Urban Spectacle: Walter Benjamin and Media Theory Today
Wednesday, October 29, 2014. 14:00-16:00. Room A7.01

Dhiraj Murthy: Social Media and Disasters: the Case of Hurricane Sandy and Twitter
Wednesday, November 12, 2014. 14:00-16:00. Room A7.01

Victor Pickard: America’s Battle for Media Democracy: The Triumph of Corporate Libertarianism and the Future of Media Reform
Wednesday, November 19, 2014. 14:00-16:00. Room A7.01

Michael Wayne: Kant’s Aesthetics and Marxism
Wednesday, November 26, 2014. 14:00-16:00. Room A7.01
Vincent Miller: The Crisis of Presence in Contemporary Culture
Wednesday, December 10, 2014. 14:00-16:00. Room A7.01
Jenny Chan  
**Dying for an iPhone: The Labour Struggle of China’s New Working Class**  
October 1, 2014  
14-16h  
University of Westminster  
Harrow Campus  
Room A7.01

**Abstract**

This sociological research analyzes the ways in which the integration of the electronics manufacturing industry in global supply chains has intensified labour conflicts and class antagonism. The Taiwanese transnational corporation Foxconn Technology Group holds more than 50 percent of market share in global electronics manufacturing. Its 1.4 million employees in China far exceed its combined workforce in 28 other countries that comprise its global empire.

I assess the conditions of a new generation of Chinese workers on the basis of the intertwined policies and practices of Foxconn, international brands (notably Apple), and the local government, as well as the diverse forms of collective actions workers deploy to defend their rights and interests. Within the tight delivery deadlines, some Foxconn workers leveraged their power to disrupt production to demand higher pay and better conditions. While all of these labor struggles were short-lived and limited in scope to a single factory, protestors exposed the injustice of “iSlavery,” garnering wide media attention and civil society support. Contradictions of state-labor-capital relations, however, remain sharp. In the authoritarian regime, notwithstanding the resilience of the Chinese state in the face of sustained popular unrest over the last two decades, my ethnographic study highlights the unstable nature of precarious labor in its hundreds of millions.

**Biography**

Jenny Chan was Chief Coordinator of SACOM (Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior) between 2006 and 2009. Educated at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Hong Kong, she went on to pursue her doctorate in sociology and labour studies as a Reid Research Scholar at University of London. She was awarded the Great Britain-China Educational Trust for dissertation writing (PhD diss. 2014). From 1 September 2014 she joins the University of Oxford as Departmental Lecturer in Contemporary Chinese Studies, the School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies. Her recent articles have appeared in *Current Sociology, Modern China, The Asia-Pacific Journal, The South Atlantic Quarterly, Global Labour Journal, New Labor Forum, Labor Notes, New Internationalist* and *New Technology, Work and Employment.*
Jim McGuigan  
The Work of Raymond Williams  
October 15, 2014  
14-16h  
University of Westminster  
Harrow Campus  
Room A7.01

In this session, Jim McGuigan will survey Williams’s work and its enduring relevance to media and cultural analysis and why Williams’ 1983 book was mistakenly entitled Towards 2000 since it is as fresh and relevant to understanding the world now as it was when originally published.

Jim has recently edited a collection of writings for Sage selected from the whole of Raymond Williams’s career, Raymond Williams on Culture and Society. He has also edited and added to Williams’s Towards 2000, originally published in 1983, to be republished this year with the new title, A Short Counter-Revolution – Towards 2000 Revisited, also by Sage. Jim has also written several critical appreciations of Williams’s work, some of which have appeared in recent issues of Keywords, the journal of the Raymond Williams Society, and The Sociological Review.


Until recently, Jim sold his labour power to Loughborough University. He is now a freelance scholar, writer and artist.
Christian Garland
Framing the Poor: Media Illiteracy, Stereotyping and Contextual Fallacy to Spin the Crisis
October 22, 2014
14-16h
University of Westminster
Harrow Campus
Room A7.01

The title of this talk is of course a play-on-words: the media’s deliberate stereotypical framing of the poorest section of society, many of whom are claimants of one kind or another, as being the internal social ‘other’ - ‘not like us’, but also literally attributing - usually indirectly - substantial blame for the ongoing crisis of capitalism to this same group, since it requires very minimal social entitlements for material survival and does not apparently create value. The media framing of this ‘common sense’ simplified account of complex social problems and apportioning of blame, depends on thoroughgoing media illiteracy on the part of the readership and/or audience, more or less willfully ignorant of the highly selective presentation of information and the use of contextual fallacy that is cynically at work. Indeed, the war on what is actually a very significant percentage of the general population that can be seen enacted in policy and legislative form, finds a (post-political) ideological expression in text and image to ‘explain’ the everyday ‘reality’ of one unlikely to be immediately recognizable to those it spins this account for. Such an account individualizes what is a social, societal problem, using the ‘personalization’ of stereotypes and victimology to ‘give a human face’ to the Department for Work and Pension (DWP)’s own very misleading selective use of statistics.

Whilst media manipulation of a passive and inert readership and/or audience has plenty of critics, this talk will contend that a Marxist understanding that also uses aspects of Chomsky’s original propaganda model, provides the best resources available for making sense of the mass media’s disingenuous framing and spin of social and political issues such as this in the contemporary UK.

Christian Garland writes and publishes – broadly speaking – in the tradition of Critical Theory, the Frankfurt School kind, but has interests beyond that, including protest and social movements informed by autonomist Marxism and anarchism. Having the degrees BA Philosophy and Politics (UEA), and MA Social and Political Thought (Sussex), he will return to a PhD in September, subject to funding. He has taught at the Universities of Edinburgh formerly ECA - Warwick, Bedfordshire, and most recently, at Middlesex.
Jaeho Kang  
Phantasmagoria of Urban Spectacle: Walter Benjamin and Media Theory Today  
October 29, 2014  
14-16h  
University of Westminster  
Harrow Campus  
Room A7.01

Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) is one of the most original and perceptive German literary and cultural critics, but his unique insight into the profound impact of the media on modernity has received a good deal less attention. Based on my book, *Walter Benjamin and the Media: The Spectacle of Modernity* (2014), I will talk about Benjamin’s critical and provocative writings on the intersection between media and modern experience with particular reference to phantasmagoria, aesthetic public space, and urban spectacle. In so doing, I will clarify Benjamin’s distinctive and enduring contribution to contemporary media studies.

Before joining SOAS in 2012, Jae taught as Assistant Professor in the Department of Media Studies and Film at the New School in New York (2005-2012) and was the Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellow in the Institut für Sozialforschung at the University of Frankfurt (2004-2005). He received his PhD in sociology from the University of Cambridge (2003). Jae has tried to bring theoretical contributions of critical theory to the development of East Asian media and cultural studies and published a number of articles on critical theory of media and political communication in English, Korean, German, and Portuguese. His research has recently focused more attention on the East Asian context of media culture with particular reference to media spectacle, urban space and screen culture. Jae’s book, *Walter Benjamin and the Media: The Spectacle of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014) came out in summer 2014. He is currently co-editing an anthology, *Siegfried Kracauer: Selected Writings on Media, Propaganda and Political Communication* (New York: Columbia University Press), the collection which consists of unpublished manuscripts and the hitherto overlooked essay of Kracauer.
Sociological understandings of social media and disasters remain an emergent field. Despite major disasters in which victims and others have engaged over social media, we have limited understandings of the function of social media during disasters as well as the ad-hoc communities formed. This paper seeks to extend current scholarship on Twitter use during natural disasters through the exploration of tweets related to Hurricane Sandy. The storm caused over $65 billion in damage, making it the second costliest storm in U.S. history. We examine the behaviour of Twitter users over from October 22, 2012 to November 3, 2012, using mentions, links and hashtags for data analysis. All tweets relating to the storm during this period were collected. Our paper finds that certain Twitter functionalities rose to prominence depending on the stage of the storm. For instance, in the days following Hurricane Sandy’s initial landfall, users became more interested in relief efforts. This paper concludes that behaviour in an anticipated natural disaster can be distilled into a framework of micro-events that take place within the larger context of the disaster and can be studied using comparative temporal methods.

Dhiraj Murthy is a Senior Lecturer of Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London (http://www.gold.ac.uk/). Dhiraj Murthy’s current research explores social media, virtual organizations, and big data quantitative analysis. His work on social networking technologies in virtual breeding grounds was funded by the National Science Foundation, Office of CyberInfrastructure. Dhiraj also has a book about Twitter (http://www.amazon.com/Twitter-Social-Communication-Digital-Society/dp/0745652395/ref=la_B00DDX90CA_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1381233829&sr=1-1), the first on the subject, is published by Polity Press (http://www.polity.co.uk/book.asp?ref=9780745652382). His work on innovative digital research methods has been cited widely. Dhiraj founded and directed the Social Network Innovation Lab (http://socialnetworks.bowdoin.edu/), an interdisciplinary research group investigating social networks and virtual organizations. For further information, visit his faculty webpage (http://www.gold.ac.uk/sociology/staff/academicstaff/murthydhiraj).
Victor Pickard: America’s Battle for Media Democracy: The Triumph of Corporate Libertarianism and the Future of Media Reform
November 19, 2014.
14:00-16:00.
University of Westminster
Harrow Campus
Room A7.01

Why do American media have so few public interest regulations? How did the American media system become dominated by a few corporations, and why are structural problems like market failures routinely avoided in media policy discourse? By tracing the answers to many of these questions back to media policy battles in the 1940s, this book explains how this happened and why it matters today. Drawing from extensive archival research, the book uncovers the American media system’s historical roots and normative foundations. It charts the rise and fall of a forgotten media reform movement to recover alternatives and paths not taken. As much about the present and future as it is about the past, the book proposes policies for remaking media based on democratic values for the digital age.

Victor Pickard is an assistant professor at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. Previously he taught media studies at NYU and the University of Virginia, and he worked on media policy in Washington, D.C. as a Senior Research Fellow at the media reform organization Free Press, the public policy think tank the New America Foundation, and Congresswoman Diane Watson’s office. He has published numerous journal articles and book chapters on the history and political economy of media institutions and media reform activism. His op-eds on media policy debates and the future of journalism have appeared in news outlets like The Guardian, The Seattle Times, The Huffington Post, and The Philadelphia Inquirer. He is the editor (with Robert McChesney) of Will the Last Reporter Please Turn out the Lights, and the author of America’s Battle for Media Democracy. He tweets at @VWPickard.
The contest between a sociology of culture and a philosophy of the aesthetic often resolves itself into an unsatisfactory antinomy between a reduction of the aesthetic to its conditions of production or a transcendence of the aesthetic from those selfsame social conditions. Suspicion of the ideology of the aesthetic has led materialists of various stripes to embrace the former, while an idealist celebration of transcendence has often drawn on Kant’s aesthetic philosophy. In this talk on the subject of his new book *Red Kant: Aesthetics, Marxism and the Third Critique* (Bloomsbury 2014) Michael Wayne argues that Kant’s aesthetic turn represents a break from the problems which his philosophy encountered in the first and second *Critiques*. Through the aesthetic Kant begins to develop ideas that will be important to Marxist philosophy, but more importantly can help us think about the specificity and significance of the aesthetic today as a special kind of cognition, with the potential to re-wire our affective responses to the world, expand our imaginations, articulate utopian desires and retain a special connection to our materialist conditions of existence.

In this paper, I problematise the notion of presence within a contemporary culture in which social life is increasingly lived and experienced through networked digital communication technologies alongside the physical presence of co-present bodies. Using the work of Heidegger, Levinas, Bauman, Rotman (and others), I suggest that the increasing use of these technologies and our increasing presence in online environments challenges our tendencies to ground moral and ethical behaviours in face-to-face or materially co-present contexts. Instead, the mediated presences we can achieve amplify our cultural tendency to objectify the social world and weaken our sense of moral and ethical responsibility to others. Such a disjuncture manifests itself in a number of popular contemporary concerns over privacy, ‘anti-social’ behaviour, and the problems of free speech and inappropriate disclosure. I will suggest that the solution of overcoming such problems lies not in increasing regulation, but in more scrutiny paid to the software architecture of social media as the medium by which humans are ‘made present’ online, as well as an expansion of the notion of being/presence to include virtual data/presences, so that these may gain ‘ethical weight’.

Vincent Miller is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Cultural Studies at the University of Kent, where he has research interests in digital culture and urban sociology. He is author of ‘Understanding Digital Culture’ (Sage) and is currently writing ‘The Crisis of Presence in Contemporary Culture: Ethics, Privacy and Disclosure in Mediated Social Life’, also for Sage.