Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI) Research Seminars

Spring 2015

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

Time: 14:00-16:00

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
No registration is required for the University of Westminster’s faculty and students.

Programme:

Peter Goodwin
Media, Art and Politics: The Centenary of the First World War in Britain
January 21, 2015

Clint Burnham
The Subject Supposed to LOL: Slavoj Žižek and the Event of the Internet
January 28, 2015

Marisol Sandoval
From Corporate to Social Media: Critical Perspectives on Corporate Social Responsibility in Media and Communication Industries
February 4, 2015

Beyond Consumer Capitalism: A Movie Screening and Q&A with Justin Lewis
February 11, 2015

Anastasia Kavada
Communicating Protest Movements: The Case of Occupy
February 25, 2015

Des Freedman
Media Policy Fetishism
March 11, 2015

Richard Hall
Against Educational Technology in the Neoliberal University
March 25, 2015
Peter Goodwin takes a critical look at how the media and arts in Britain have responded to the centenary of the First World War. He asks what this tells us about popular consciousness and the mechanisms of bourgeois ideology in Britain in the second decade of the 21st century.

Peter Goodwin is Faculty Research Director of the Faculty of Media, Arts and Design at the University of Westminster.
Is the Internet an Event? Does it constitute, as Žižek argues an Event should, a reframing of our experience, a retroactive re-ordering of everything we thought we knew about the social but were afraid to ask Facebook? In this talk Clint Burnham will engage with Žižek’s recent work (*Less than Nothing, Event, Absolute Recoil*) as a way to argue, first, that in order to understand the Internet, we need Žižek’s “immaterial materialism,” and, in turn, to understand Žižek’s thought and how it circulates today, we need to think through digital culture and social media.

As regards the Internet, then, no cynical disavowal, no Facebook cleanses, no shutting off the wifi: *les non-dupes errent*, or those who distance themselves from social media and the like are the most deceived. Next: the Internet’s two bodies: digital culture is both the material world of servers, clouds, stacks and devices and the virtual or affective world of liking, networking, and the mirror stage of the selfie. And here we must confront the “obscene underside” of digital culture: not only the trolls, 4chan porn, and gamergate bro’s, but also the old fashioned exploitation of labour, be it iPhone assembly-line workers at Foxconn, super-exploited “blood coltan” miners in the Congo, “like farmers” in India, or social media scrubbers in the Phillipines, who ensure your feeds are “clean” of porn, beheadings, and other #NSFW matter. These last concerns, then, mean we also have to think about what Žižek calls the “undoing of the Event” of the Internet, the betrayal of the Internet, its diseventionalization.
Clint Burnham teaches in the department of English at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada. He is the author of more than a dozen books of criticism, poetry, and fiction, including *The Jamesonian Unconscious: The Aesthetics of Marxist Theory* (1995), *The Only Poetry that Matters: Reading the Kootenay School of Writing* (2011), editor (with Lorna Brown) of the public art catalogue *Digital Natives* (2011), and editor (with Paul Budra) of *From Text to Txing: New Media in the Classroom* (2012). His essay “Slavoj Žižek as Internet Philosopher” is in the recent Palgrave collection *Žižek and Media Studies* (eds. Matthew Flisfeder and Louis-Paul Willis), and he is currently writing a book on Žižek and digital culture called *Does the Internet have an Unconscious?* In the winter of 2014-15 he is living and working in Vienna as part of a residency with the *Urban Subjects* collective.
In this talk, Marisol Sandoval presents her recent book “From Corporate to Social Media: Critical Perspectives on Corporate Social Responsibility in Media and Communication Industries” (Routledge 2014, http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415722568/).

The corporate and the social are crucial themes of our times. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, both individual lives and society were shaped by capitalist crisis and the rise of social media. But what marks the distinctively social character of "social media"? And how does it relate to the wider social and economic context of contemporary capitalism? The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is based on the idea that a socially responsible capitalism is possible; this suggests that capitalist media corporations can not only enable social interaction and cooperation but also be socially responsible.

This presentation provides a critical and provocative perspective on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in media and communication industries. It examines both the academic discourse on CSR and actual corporate practices in the media sector, offering a double critique that reveals contradictions between corporate interests and social responsibilities. Marisol Sandoval’s political economic analysis of Apple, AT&T, Google, HP, Microsoft, News Corp, The Walt Disney Company and Vivendi shows that media and communication in the twenty-first century are confronted with fundamental social responsibility challenges.

From software patents and intellectual property rights to privacy on the Internet, from working conditions in electronics manufacturing to hidden flows of eWaste – Marisol Sandoval’s book encourages the reader to explore the multifaceted social (ir)responsibilities
that shape commercial media landscapes today. It makes a compelling argument for thinking beyond the corporate in order to envision and bring about truly social media.

Beyond Consumer Capitalism: A Movie Screening and Q&A with Justin Lewis

February 11, 2015
14:00-16:00
University of Westminster, Harrow Campus
Room A7.01


Accompanying the book, the Media Education Foundation has released the film (http://www.mediaed.org/cgi-bin/commerce.cgi?preadd=action&key=177) “Consumerism & the Limits to Imagination”. In this event, Justin Lewis will introduce the book and the film, and there will be a screening of the movie, followed by a Q&A session.

What are consumer capitalism’s problems? What is the role of the media in consumer capitalism? What are alternatives to consumer capitalism’s negative impacts on social life, the environment, the quality of life, the economy, culture, and democracy? How can we organise media and communications so that they foster a cultural environment that encourages rather than impedes human imagination? What are alternatives to consumer capitalism and capitalist media? Can we envision a different world and a different media landscape beyond consumer capitalism?

This event will focus on the discussion of and new insights into such questions, which is crucial for the future of communications and humanity.

Professor Justin Lewis is Dean of Research in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and Head of the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University.

He has written many books about communication, the cultural industries, news and politics, including Constructing Public Opinion and Citizens or Consumers: The Media and the
Decline of Political Participation. He is in the editorial board of nine journals and his latest book, *Beyond Consumer Capitalism: Media and the Limits to Imagination* was published in 2013. He has led a number of research projects for the BBC, the BBC Trust, Channel 4, the Office of Science and Innovation, the AHRC, the ESRC and Rowntree. He is a panel-member for the 2014 REF (as he was for the 2008 RAE) and the Welsh First Minister’s Broadcasting Advisory Panel.
Anastasia Kavada: Communicating Protest Movements: The Case of Occupy
February 25, 2015
14:00-16:00
University of Westminster, Harrow Campus
Room A7.01

How do you communicate a protest movement? And how do communication practices shape its character and power relations? Based on a view of communication as constitutive of protest movements, this presentation considers these questions as two sides of the same coin. The focus lies on the Occupy movement and particularly on its use of digital media. Characterized by a belief in direct participation and a rejection of central leadership, Occupy emerged through a bottom-up process of organizing that spanned different platforms and physical places, from Facebook pages to public squares. The process of constructing the collective involved the creation of communication sites and foundational texts, and their interlinking. This process was influenced by the rules, affordances and proprietary character of media platforms and physical spaces, as well as the diverse cultures and strategies of the activists using them. A closer look at this process sheds light on the power relations within the movement and particularly on five sources of communication power. These range from the power to create communication sites and texts to the power to access or link them together. The picture that emerges is complex, revealing a movement with both centralizing and decentralizing dynamics. Ultimately, it was the balance between these opposing dynamics that determined both the emergence of the movement and its decline.

Anastasia Kavada is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Journalism & Mass Communication at the University of Westminster. Her research focuses on the links between online tools and decentralized organizing practices, democratic decision-making, and the
development of solidarity among participants in collective action. Anastasia’s case studies include, among others, the Global Justice Movement, Avaaz, and the Occupy movement. Her work has appeared in a variety of edited books and academic journals, including Media, Culture & Society and Information, Communication & Society.
Des Freedman: Media Policy Fetishism
March 11, 2015
14:00-16:00
University of Westminster, Harrow Campus
Room A7.01

Why do ordinary users have so little input into or interest in the formal decisionmaking processes that shape our media systems? This presentation suggests that we focus on the fetishism of the media policy process, understood as the loss of control over the decisionmaking arena and as the outsourcing of political agency to external forces. It focuses on both the dimensions of ‘everyday fetishism’ (its capacity to naturalize commodification processes and to reify social life) as well as its relevance to media policy in particular. It reflects on how a fetishistic policy distorts key policy principles, restricts access to policymaking arenas and mystifies the process as a whole so that it becomes a ‘spectral’ activity from which ordinary citizens are largely excluded. Des Freedman invites us to consider ways in which publics can re-connect themselves to the policy process and, in doing so, to invigorate and democratize the struggles for media justice we face today.

**Des Freedman** is professor of media and communications at Goldsmiths, University of London and chair of the Media Reform Coalition. He is the author of *The Contradictions of Media Power* (2014) and *The Politics of Media Policy* (2008).
In the *Grundrisse*, Marx argued that the circulation of productive capital was “a process of transformation, a qualitative process of value”. As capitalists sought to overcome the barriers to this transformatory process, they worked to revolutionise both the means of production via organisational and technological change, and circulation time via transportation and communication changes. Reducing friction in the production and circulation of capital is critical to the extraction of surplus value, and Marx argued that in this transformation “Capital by its nature drives beyond every spatial barrier [and]… the annihilation of space by time - becomes an extraordinary necessity for it.”

Higher education is increasingly a space which is being recalibrated so as to increase the mobility or fluidity of intellectual production and circulation. Thus, technology, technical services and techniques are deployed to collapse the interfaces between space and time, and to subsume academic labour inside processes for valorisation.

However, this collapse also reveals the stresses and strains of antagonisms, as the friction of neoliberal higher education reform deforms existing cultures and histories. Through such a deformation, it also reminds us of alternative historical and material re-imaginings and alternatives like the Chilean CyberSyn project, the Ecuadorian National Plan for Good Living, the Hornsey Experiment, and so on.

This presentation argues that inside the University, the deployment of technologies, technical services and techniques enables education and academic labour to be co-opted for value-production. As a result, academics and students are defined as entrepreneurial subjects with limited power-to produce a world beyond value. A question is the extent to which
pedagogical and transitional alternatives might be described, and whether in the process it is possible to uncover ways in which education might be used for co-operation rather than competition, as a form of resistance.

Richard Hall is Professor of Education and Technology at De Montfort University, Leicester, UK. At DMU he is Head of Enhancing Learning through Technology and leads the Centre for Pedagogic Research. Richard is a National Teaching Fellow and a co-operator at the Social Science Centre in Lincoln, UK. He writes about life in higher education at: http://richard-hall.org.
Image sources:

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/eb/Kitchener-leete.jpg, public domain

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Slavoj_%C5%BDi%C5%BEek#mediaviewer/File:Slavoj_Zizek_in_Liverpool.jpg, Creative Commons


http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Anti-consumerism_graffiti?uselang=en-gb#mediaviewer/File:Stencil_shopping_cart.jpg, Creative Commons

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Occupy_London_-_Media_Tent.jpg?uselang=en-gb, Creative Commons, By Neil Cummings (Flickr: Media Tent) [CC-BY-SA-2.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0)], via Wikimedia Commons

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Occupy_Portland,_October_26.jpg?uselang=en-gb, Creative Commons, By K. Kendall (Flickr: Organized Labor Supports Occupy Portland) [CC-BY-2.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0)], via Wikimedia Commons

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Parkplatzzufahrthinweisschild_MLP_AG_Corporate_University.JPG?uselang=en-gb, Creative Commons, By 4028mdk09 (Own work) [CC-BY-SA-3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0)], via Wikimedia Commons