Infrastructures of Publics and Publics of Infrastructures

Veranstalter: SFB 1187 Media of Cooperation (Medien der Kooperation)
Datum, Ort: 08.12.2016–10.12.2016, Siegen
Bericht von: Christoph Lange, Research lab „Transformations of Life", a.r.t.e.s. Graduate School for the Humanities, University of Cologne

Under the title „Infrastructures of Publics and Publics of Infrastructures," the CRC 1187 Media of Cooperation held its first annual conference, so the discussion concentrated on the outline and future perspectives of the CRC's research projects in dialogue with external experts mostly from media and communication studies, anthropology and sociology rather than presenting its findings. The panels addressed key subjects and issues (e.g. *In/Transparency – Work/Place – Motilities – Standardization – Academia*) that are of central relevance to the CRC's research agenda and sub-projects. Overall, the conference program was clearly characterized by the way Siegen's media studies have established a widened and sociological concept of media informed by practice theory.

The first keynote speaker, NOORTJE MARRES (University of Warwick) in her lecture on „Infrastructuring Publics or Societies: Street Trials as Experiments in Interpretation" presented her on-going research project on CAVs (connected autonomous vehicles). In raising questions of accountability and controversies about how the public and society became involved in world-wide street trials of autonomous cars, Marres showed that not only do governments and the automobile industry perform continuous „labor of interpretation" to define and implement technological innovations into publics, but also that drivers, citizens and activists „in the streets" already play a central role in shaping the reality of e.g. the development of CAV technology. After having transposed John Dewey's concept of the public from the 1920s to digital publics[1] and having researched on everyday material publics[2] she now argued for the Public to have already become a semi-field of society and technology, and an in-between of the artificial environments of laboratory testing and social reality. Her suggestion to design participatory laboratory trials seemed a fitting impulse for the CRC studying media of cooperation.

CRC-speaker ERHARD SCHÜTTPELZ (University of Siegen) reacted with his talk on „Infrastructure - Keeping the Binocular in Focus." He presented a provocative long durée perspective of media and media theory and their relation to infrastructure. Starting with shortcomings of classical media theories mainly influenced by Vilém Flusser and Marshall McLuhan, which not only proved to be ethnocentric, asymmetric and promising a holistic media history, he argued that these theories also are not fitting to describe and analyze digital media. As Schüttpelz put it, the main dilemma in theorizing digital media is that „after living before the computer, we woke up living after the computer." Introducing what Schüttpelz calls 'infrastructural media', he boldly presented „the three media revolutions in five minutes," which he easily linked to the economic theory of the structural and civilizing transformations of the primary, secondary and tertiary sector, developed by Fisher, Clark and Fourastié. Schüttpelz radically re-formulated and widened classical media theory and accounts of media history, defining media as the infrastructural product of human history as preceding practice.

The first set of the following panels can mainly be summarized as sociologically and historically inspired approaches towards media, mediation, and transformational challenges. Unfortunately, contemporary challenges and changes of a dispersed and fractured or decentralized system of mediation and its actors including, for example, social networks or the Blogosphere remained widely untouched. Political scientist HAGEN SCHÖLZEL (University of Erfurt) took the conference's title very seriously, he focused on widening the understanding of 'infrastructures' as conceptual rather than merely material and technical. He came to the conclusion

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[1] Noortje Marres, No Issue, No Public: Democratic Deficits after the Displacement of Politics, Doctoral dissertation, University of Amsterdam 2005.

[2] Noortje Marres Material Participation: Technology, Environment and Everyday Publics. Basingstoke 2012 (revised paperback published in 2015).

that a model of „communication controlling“ is actually a conceptual infrastructure and can be understood as the managing and control of circular relationships which forms and re-assembles publics.

The Work/Places panel mixed non-academic and interdisciplinary (informatics and sociology) academic presentations; covering a range from labor activist's rating platform for Amazon's Mechanical Turk services to the development of a mobile app-based visual information system for patients and staff in a Siegen hospital, where during the discussion the enthusiastic and futuristic dimension appeared a bit overstretched and at the same time, immanent ethical questions about patient confidentiality were simply postponed by one of the project's PI to the second phase as only research limiting normative concerns.

Historian KATHERINA KREUDER-SONNEN (University of Siegen) with „How do Large Construction Sites Work? Constructing Infrastructures and Infrastructuring Construction,“ brought the discussion back to the main theme of the conference. In a very Latourian fashion, Kreuder-Sonnen presented her research on a planned large-scale construction of an industrial area in the Central South of Poland during the 1930s. The most fascinating and – for a historian – most frustrating point was that the Polish National Archives contained nearly no records, maps and materials on this massive project. „Drawing things together,“ Kreuder-Sonnen compellingly reconstructed the plan of the historical construction site by showing how different groups of actors – military representatives, local administrators, and hobby geologists – tried to combine interests and forces to create a national development plan from below and scaling it up by themselves. She pointed to methodological challenges and the problem of the sources needed for an innovative infrastructural history.

Social anthropologist MARTIN ZILLINGER (University of Cologne/ CRC University of Siegen) in his talk on „Graduated Publics. Scaling Common Situations Through Artful Mediations,“ gave a short genealogical ride through the genealogy of the concept from Habermas to Koselleck, Warner and Hirschkind. In best anthropological manner, Zillinger turned to his long-term research and ethnographic field in Morocco and Moroccan trance movements to propose a praxeological and minimalistic concept of the public sphere. For Zillinger, scaling is a form of media practice, and therefore making things public is an achievement of the actors themselves. This leads to a skillful and infra-structured concept of publics – more of a heuristic tool than a theory.

The second key note speaker linguistic and social anthropologist PAUL KOKELMAN (Yale university), gave an impressively thick presentation on 'Witchful Thinking: Experimental Publics, Cooperative Thought, and Mediated Renderings of the Real', which just exceeded my comprehension by playfully framing the CRC's research agenda in the context of classical semiotics and linguistic cognition.

The open panel discussion on „Making Infrastructure - Dependencies – Publics“ assembled by computer engineers and scientists, focused more on the technical, soft- and hardware dimensions of 'infrastructures'. One important aspect the group was discussing, was the role of trust and distrust or the 'social element' necessary for the cooperation of digital infrastructures and computer engineering. An important outcome, has been the shift to the notion of infrastructural maintenance often invisible and forgotten until infrastructures break.

The session on Mobilities remained mostly in the technical sphere of mobile apps, internet platforms, programmability, and application program interfaces. GABRIELE SCHABACHER (University of Weimar) turned her focus to a rather bizarre but very enlightening historical case of implementing new infrastructures for a wider public. Schabacher presented the late 19th century phenomenon in the US of deliberately crashing locomotives into each other – often piled up with dynamite to enhance the effect – as a major amusement at public events. Her analysis and interpretation showed how these public spectacles could be seen as duel between man and machine, a taming practice, and kind of domestication of a new and unknown technology and its specific threats which produced not only a

psychological relief but also an improvement and stabilization of locomotion technology itself. She also stressed the role of maintenance work.[3]

TOBIAS RÖHL, one of the organizers, talked about: „Making Failure Public – Communicating Breakdowns in Public Transport." He also underlined the importance and invisibility of maintaining infrastructures which remain in the state of transparency as long as they are functioning flawlessly. CHRISTOPH LE DANTEC (Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia, USA) gave a very clear presentation of his research and development of a cycling app in Atlanta. Le Dantec showed how the relatedness of data (collection) and citizens' participation determined the successful implementation of the urban project. 'Infrastructures of participation,' like the app posed a set of particular challenges, ranging from app use and resistance, data literacy and tech skills to questions of surveillance.

In the Standardizations panel, Historian CHRISTIAN HENRICH-FRANKE (CRC Siegen) talked about „Standardizing Telecommunication Infrastructures: Standardization in the Monopoly Era." The project traces these developments back into the second half of the 19th century and to the International Telegraph Conference of Paris in 1965. Henrich-Franke, who has been working on the history of European infrastructures for years[4] made convincingly clear that the history of telecommunication infrastructures and their standardization is also a political history of the rise of international technocrats' and engineers' rule in the so called tele-communities.

SEBASTIAN GIESSMANN's (CRC Siegen) paper on „Net Neutrality. Autonomy of a Controversy" took a strong position on the controversy of net neutrality: „There is no neutrality when it comes to net neutrality." Gießmann presented the theme and debate on net neutrality as a 'well invented tradition' understood as an ongoing process of accomplishment where on one side, actors try to safeguard, certify, and black box an infrastructure that was never neutral. In doing so, they mask an enormous economic and political value/resource as a common good. On the other side, media practices reach out to ne-

gotiate a 'networked utopia' of contemporary society.

WOLFGANG REIßMANN (Organizer CRC Siegen) talked about „Sorting Things into Infrastructure: Fan Fiction and Classifying Practices". This can be seen as yet another example of an infrastructural language that translates different publics and orders, defines genre classifications, and sets the boundaries for the different online fan fiction communities and platforms.

In the panel Academia, STS-sociologist TANJA BOGUSZ (Kassel University) talked about „Public Concerns in Sustainability Research. An Experimental Approach" based on her STS-ethnography of the French-led international maritime biology expedition, „Our Planet revisited: Papua New Guinea" in 2012. She demonstrated how diverse and heterogeneous ways of cooperation and collaboration during the expedition are informed by infrastructures of scientific expedition and rooted in colonialism.

The Archeologist JÜRGEN RICHTER (University of Cologne), took a similar self-reflexive perspective on his own discipline's scientific practices. In „Paleo-Cabinetology, The Cabinet Maker´s Impact on Infrastructures of Archaeological Reasoning" he gave a fascinating and surprising talk on the practices and dynamics of the archeological collections and cabinets: how these cabinets are the material expressions of the archeologist's subjectivity and aesthetics. Richter's presentation translated the stereotype of the archeologist's materialistic object fixation in a playful and implicit manner and turned it into a theory of displaying practices, making the archeological cabinet the contested institutional locale of archeology itself, which seems to be a pioneer approach in archaeology and conceptualizing the history of archaeology.

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[3] She had already been stressing the intertwining of the fields of traffic history and cultural studies, Christoph Neubert / Gabriele Schabacher (eds.): Verkehrsgeschichte und Kulturwissenschaft, Analysen an der Schnittstelle von Technik, Kultur und Medien, Bielefeld 2012; and together with Stefan Krebs / Heike Weber (eds.), Kulturen des Reparierens, Dinge – Wissen – Praktiken, upcoming in Bielefeld 2018.

[4] For example: Christian Henrich-Franke / Gerald Ambrosius, (eds.), Integration of Infrastructures in Europe in Comparison, Berlin 2016.

The following final round table discussion on „Was tun? Herausforderungen an Infrastrukturen und Öffentlichkeiten" opened with a provocative statement by moderator and organizer DAVID SITTLER (Siegen University) but was not really taking up the challenges and topics he pointed to – from digital labor exploitation, infrastructural breakdowns, and neo-liberal appropriation of the internet to daily life-changing technologies and the role of academic research in all of it – which could also have been discussed on the local level of Siegen.

This first public demonstration of the CRC's research program and conceptual framework was a really balanced and promising one; connecting the multilayered and entangled areas and approaches of media studies and media history, informatics, the social sciences and humanities especially when it comes to research on publics and infrastructures that often have been studied separately.

Conference overview:

Opening Keynote:

Noortje Marres (Warwick): Infrastructuring Publics or Societies? On Street Trials as Experiments in Interpretation

Erhard Schüttpelz (Siegen): Infrastructural Media and Public Media: Keeping the Binocular in Focus

Panel 1 In/Transparency
Chair: David Waldecker (Siegen)

Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz (Bremen): Still a „Public Sphere"? A Systematic-Historical View on Transparency and Responsibility as Communication Values

Mundo Yang (Siegen): Civic Engagement Projects for Social Ecological Transformation and the Question of Publicity

Hagen Schölzel (Erfurt): Modes of Establishing Publics. The Cases of the GuttenPlag-Wiki Activism and the Communication Controlling Concept

Panel 2 Work/Places
Chair: Matthias Korn (Siegen)

Ann-Sophie Lehmann (Groningen) "...their artworks". Cooperative Making in Contem-

porary Art Production (could not come)

M. Six Silberman (IG Metall, Frankfurt): Infrastructures for Platform-based Workers: Lessons from Turkopticon and IG Metall

Julia Moos / Julia Kurz (Siegen) Making Cooperation Visible

Katharina Kreuder-Sonnen (Siegen) How do Large Construction Sites Work? Constructing Infrastructures and Infrastructuring Construction

Martin Zillinger (Köln): Graduated Publics. Scaling Common Situations through Artful Mediation

Second Keynote:

Paul Kockelman (Yale): Witchful Thinking: Experimental Publics, Cooperative Thought, and Mediated Renderings of the Real

Panel 3 Discussion Infrastructuring Publics
Moderator: Volkmar Pipek

Christopher Le Dantec (Georgia Tech), David Redmiles (UC Irvine), Joanna Saad-Sulonen (Oulu), M. Six Silberman (IG Metall, Frankfurt)

Panel 4 Mobilities
Chair: David Sittler (Siegen)

Carolin Gerlitz (Siegen) / Fernando Van Der Vlist (Siegen): Moving Data – On the Dis/Continuity of Form and Value in App Ecologies

Gabriele Schabacher (Weimar) Staged Wrecks. The Railroad Crash between Infrastructural Lesson and Amusement

Tobias Röhl (Siegen) Making Failure Public – Communicating Breakdowns in Public Transport

Christopher Le Dantec (Georgia Tech): Infrastructures of Digital Civics: Transportation, Advocacy, and Mobile Computing

Panel 5 Standardizations
Chair: Axel Volmar

Christian Henrich-Franke (Siegen): Standardizing Telecommunication Infrastructures: Culture(s) of Standardization in the Monopoly Era

Elke Wagner (Würzburg): Disorderly Lists and Disorderly Publics 2.0

Sebastian Gießmann (Siegen): Net Neutrality. Anatomy of a Controversy

Wolfgang Reißmann (Siegen): Sorting Things into Infrastructures: Fan Fiction and Practices of Classifying

Panel 6 Academia
Chair: Nacim Ghanbari (Siegen)

Tanja Bogusz (Kassel): Public Concerns in Sustainability Research. An Experimental Approach

Jürgen Richter (Köln): Paleo-Cabinetology, The Cabinet Maker´s Impact on Infrastructures of Archaeological Reasoning

Rob Procter (Warwick): What Is Social Data Science and What Are its Methodological and Practical Challenges?

Christian Erbacher (Siegen): Making Wittgenstein Available: Infrastructures and Publics in the History of Editing Wittgenstein

Final Round-table Discussion: Was tun? Herausforderungen an Infrastrukturen und Öffentlichkeiten

Moderator: David Sittler, Podium: Volker Wulf (Siegen), Sigrid Baringhorst (Siegen), Wolf-D. Bukow (FoKoS, Siegen)

Tagungsbericht *Infrastructures of Publics and Publics of Infrastructures.* 08.12.2016–10.12.2016, Siegen, in: H-Soz-Kult 07.06.2018.