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RESEARCH CONFERENCES

ESF-LiU Conference

Paying Attention: Digital Media Cultures and Generational Responsibility

6-10 September 2010

Scandic Linköping Vast, Linköping, Sweden

Chaired by:
-Jonathan Dovey, Digital Cultures Research Centre, University of the West of England, UK
-Patrick Crogan, Department of Culture, Media and Drama, University of the West of England, UK

Rapporteur:
- Kostas Gouliamos, European University Cyprus, CY

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Conference Highlights

Please provide a brief summary of the conference and its highlights in non-specialist terms (especially for highly technical subjects) for communication and publicity purposes. (ca. 400-500 words)

'Paying Attention: Digital Media Cultures and Generational Responsibility' explored today's emerging digital media cultures by addressing the theme of 'attention'. The conference set out to examine the conditions, methods, and implications of the ever expanding industrial design of attention-capture in the globalised digital milieu of realtime, mobile devices, online communications and networks. It sought to explore critical, creative as well as cultural and political economic perspectives on the social milieu of today's 'web-native' generation. Its broader motive was to develop insights into what a responsible engagement with the formation of tomorrow's digital cultures might need in order to avoid what is too often an uncritical, passive adoption of the latest digital innovation delivered by commercially motivated global media and communications enterprises.

The major approaches to this topic were introduced by the invited speakers and developed in panels, posters and open discussion. Tiziana Terranova (Università di Napoli L'Orientale) and Bernard Stiegler (Institut de Recherche et d'Innovation, Centre Pompidou) brought philosopical and sociological perspectives to bear on the predominant economic discourse governing the commercial competition for the individual's attention today. They argued for a redefinition of the social and cultural dimensions of digital mediated communication that would bring to light their critical importance in addressing the political, environmental, cultural and economic challenges facing contemporary societies. Papers on the economics of search engines and the attention economy of scholarship all contributed to discussion around this redefinition of attention.

Michel Bauwens (Peer-to-Peer Foundation) and Aphra Kerr (National University of Ireland) proposed interventions in the economic and technoscientific design of digital media. Kerr analysed the design of trust and security systems in European planning for the Internet of the Future. Bauwens promoted the potential of an open source reinvention of design and development in the digital media industries. Contributions following on in this vein included papers on digital media applications to distance education, the social dynamics of online distributed networks, and activist networking in the context of official promotions of global digital identity in Turkey.

Digital media artists and researchers Stanza, Ruth Catlow and Simon Poulter (conference image) provided insights into experimental and community-based appropriations of digital media technologies. They provided insights into the other possibilities for digital cultural communication, expression and community formation not offered in the way digital innovations are marketed commercially. Papers and posters on such topics as cooperative hardware development, Youtube use by adolescents, digital media use in underpriviledged regions of Brazil, and experiments in identity definition by Serbian children extended these explorations.

The conference co-chairs are negotiating publication options with book and scholarly journal venues and hope to be able to include many of the contributions in these outcomes. They have in development plans for two research projects and will be seeking collaborations with some of the participants to build on the networks formed out of Paying Attention. The DCRC's conference blog stimulated substantial discussion between participants and a wider community of researchers concerned with these themes. Several participants blogged the conference on their own sites and extended the dialogue beyond the meeting in Sweden.

Scientific Report

Executive Summary

(2 pages max)

Paying Attention: Digital Media Cultures and Generational Responsibility took place as scheduled from 6 – 10 September, 2010. The venue was the Linköping Scandic Vast Hotel. The total participants at the conference numbered 36. This included the conference co-chair, Patrick Crogan, and the ESF Rapporteur, Kostas Gouliamos. Anne Blondeel-Oman was the ESF conference officer supporting the conference.

One of the conference co-chairs, Professor Jon Dovey, was unable to attend due to the death of his father just prior to the conference. The conference was delivered with the support of a technical assistant, Mr Sy Taffel, from the co-chair's organisation, the Digital Cultures Research Centre of the University of the West of England (DCRC). Sy was responsible for the technical requirements of speaker presentations, and made some video, image and sound recordings to aid in the online and subsequent documentation of the conference by the DCRC.

Dr Sam Kinsley, Research Fellow of the DCRC also attended the conference to manage the production of the conference blog. Dr Kinsley also performed an assisting role in the chairing of sessions and co-convening of the Forward Look plenary session in the absence of the co-chair, Prof. Dovey. Prior to the conference, Dr Kinsley designed a DCRC website for the conference that linked with the ESF's website and contained more information about speakers and their presentations. This was the site of the conference blog. The DCRC webiste address is: http://payingattention.org/
Twitter was also used by participants at the conference to disseminate information about and respond to conference sessions.

Subsequent to the conference there were also several reflections, reviews and commentaries on the conference generated by participants on their blogs, and interactions between these and the Paying Attention blog.

The conference was organised for 3 days of sessions. On the evening prior to commencement of the program a drinks reception was held. A conference dinner was held on the evening of the final day of sessions. The second day of sessions included an evening poster session. The poster presenters were invited to post their presentation online before the conference so that it could be shared with participants beforehand. Interactive and audiovisual media forms of poster were encouraged. The poster session then discussed the projects and presentations and allowed posters to gain feedback and respond to people's reactions to their work.

7 speakers were invited. 3 of these were sheduled as keyote presenters (one each day), and the remaining 4 were paired in two 90 minute sessions. There were additionally 6 panels of 3 short paper presentations before the concluding Forward Look plenary.

There were originally 8 poster presentations posted online. Due to some very late cancellations by short paper presenters, 3 of these presenters were invited to fill short paper slots in the panel sessions which were then redesigned to account for the different material being contributed.

We also scheduled some additional time in the afternoon each day (approximately 30 minutes) for some less structured discussion about the progress of themes and debates developing during the conference. In these 'Scoping and Review' periods people could take stock, make connections between sessions, and return to questions or issues raised earlier in the conference.

The late cancellations by several accepted presenters and funded participants reduced to an extent the international diversity of the conference participants. Chinese, Indian and African participants were lost in the last 10 days before its commencement. Nonetheless, the conference included a diverse range of contributions from the ESF countries and outside, including from Iran, Brazil and Serbia.

The conference developed discussion around the proposed themes and promoted lively and rigorous interchanges between participants. The conference set out to include digital media practice-based forms as part of this process of consideration of digital cultures. This was realised in the presentations by invited presenters Stanza, Ruth Catlow and Simon Poulter, media practitioners and digital arts network organisers, and in contributions by some of the poster presenters. These provided an innovative, if somewhat unconventional dimension to the scientific amibtiions of the conference that several participants commented upon as a highly valuable and relevant to the conference topic.

Scientific Content of the Conference

(1 page min.)

▪ *Summary of the conference sessions focusing on the scientific highlights*
▪ *Assessment of the results and their potential impact on future research or applications*

Paying Attention had the ambitious goal of encouraging wide-ranging interdisciplinary discussion concerning digital media and its impact on culture and society today across its globalised dissemination. Moreover, it sought traditional scholarly as well creative media practitioner contributions to the discussion. In order to summarise the key scientific content developed and explored in the conference we have presented short commentaries on papers and presentations across six broad themes.

1. Attention Economy and the Commodification of Attention

Following late 20th century work by conference participant Georg Franck and Michael Goldhaber, we can understand attention as a key tenet to the discourse that encompasses the 'digital economy' of new media. Because: 'the sum total of human attention is necessarily limited and therefore scarce' (Goldhaber "The Value of Openness in an Attention Economy"), the economic problem encapsulated in this 'new' economics was that if information is so abundant that that it becomes basically worthless as a tradeable commodity, where is value to be created? The provisional answer has come in the form of participatory and social media, or 'web 2.0'. In this way, and following Franck, attention has become something like 'the new currency of business' (Franck, 'The Economy of Attention').

Elizabeth Van Couvering discussed the nature of search engines as a mechanism for tracking and trapping the economic value of how we reach the information we 'consume' online. Internet traffic has accordingly become a commodity. Van Couvering argues that, in the wake of the consolidation of social media sites and services, there is a new kind of media logic developing online, due to the abundance of information and a scarcity of attention, which consists as follows: produce the platform not the content, allow access to pools of content, create the method to allow the content

pool to access the platform. The principal outcome of this logic is that the metadata about the producers and the users is the most saleable asset.

In a similar line of argument, Martin Thayne suggested that social media coordinate the means by which personal data are co-opted as consumer-users are continously pressurised into producing information that is valuable ot the growing market for personal data. Thayne argues that the algorithms which underpin these technologies give rise to 'architectures of control' and the 'reterritorialisation' of global capitalism.

Franck argued in his presentation that this commodification of attention has much earlier origins; that, in fact, the enterprise of science has always been a continuing production of knowledge value. Thus the attention economy is a further development of the industrialisation of a 'knowledge society'. Presenter Jörgen Skågeby argued that this is particularly figured in the peculiar, not quite reciprocal, relationship of the 'gift', whereby 'gifting technologies' offer 'the concurrent management of technology-mediated social relations and digital media objects'. The gift and the economics of metadata structure a key 'tension' of the digital economy.

2. Redefining Attention as Biological, Social and Political Phenomenon

Tiziana Terranova laid out in her keynote paper the means by which the attention economy, and its updated *Homo Economicus* – the 'subject of interest' that is always assessing and calculating the worth and value of information – finds a corollary in recent neuro-scientific research on the plasticity of the human brain. New forms of technics are emerging as biological affordances, which tie together neuro-science and economics. Terranova argued that attention does not simply indicate the effort by which the individual brain works – as neuroscience seems to suggest – neither can it be reduced to a tradeable commodity. Instead attention is the process by which the production of value is inseparable from the production of subjectivity. These are produced from the invention and diffusion of common desires, beliefs and affects. Taina Bucher reinforced these points using specific examples from social media technologies. Bucher argued that attention is multiple, that is it manifests in different forms and entails different rhythms and mediations.

All of these points were underpinned by Bernard Stiegler's conceptualisation of attention as both psychic and social, constituting a form of interface for what Gilbert Simondon called *individuation*. An individual is not a stable entity, it is instead a process of unceasing transformation. Precisely because to be human is to use technologies, the individual is always and already held in relation to a changing variety of technologies. Individuation is therefore the negotiation of certain forms of incompatibilities between different collective and technical developmental trajectories. The individual is thus 'trans-individuated' in their technically mediated interactions with others. Critical approaches to contemporary cultural and political issues must take account of this.

From this perspective, metadata is a poltical issue. Metadata first appeared in Mesopotamia (in the form of written recordings of transactions) and, Stiegler argued, the production of metadata has been the principal activity of those in power from the time of the proto-historical empires right up to today. The powers that attempt to take control of the mechanisms of trans-individuation do so through the hegemonic production of this metadata. The problem here, for Stiegler, is that today the exploitation of collaborative metadata is not itself collaborative. It is not made the object of a critical scrutiny through which collaboratively trans-individuated knowledges would become critical knowledges empowering the wider community.

Stiegler argued that the instruments and methods of the contemporary social web of digital

mediations are constructed to smooth out the derivations and singularities of psychic individuals in order to aggregate them as consumers through relational technologies. The aim of this is to unilaterally control the products of the collaborative production of metadata to order them for the needs of the industrial capitalist system. But this situation is absolutely contingent. It can and, Stiegler argued, must be transformed by an invention that puts into motion critical collaborative instruments. In particular, Stiegler concluded, these should permit the formation of collaborative spaces of discussion which produce conflicts and critical debates that are made formally explicit. The maintenance of a viable and productive milieu for human social trans-individuation depends on it.

3. The Governance of 'attention'

A number of papers addressed emerging forms of governance for an attention economy in terms of state actors. Other papers extended this theme by investigating the general principals of codifying attention. In particular, both Imren Borsuk and Rolien Hoyng addressed the ways in which the attempted governance of attention has been practiced in Turkey.

Aphra Kerr gave a wide-ranging paper concerning the various ways in which 'trust' is both conceptualised and codified, particularly in relation to computer security systems. Kerr argued that in traditional inter-personal economic relations the face-to-face nature of trust negotiation is fairly simple. However this is problematised when identity becomes ambiguous. This problem has of course always already been present in our social relations but this is exacerbated in digitally mediated relations. Within the context of large-scale governmental framings of these issues in Europe (as elsewhere), there is a constellation of particular actors that are shaping an agenda and discourse, which in turn is shaping the next round of ICT policies within the EU governmental discourses. Kerr calls for a much more inclusive discussion to extend the design of trust and security beyond computer scientists, engineers and ICT experts.

Francesca Odella highlighted the shifting understanding of privacy. Privacy awareness amongst the adolescents studied by Odella was largely tied to 'threat awareness', that is. violation of privacy vs. punishment for infringement. The means by which social norms are being arrvied at is shifting away from the family towards peer groups. For Odella, the socialisation to rules and societal norms is fundamentally changing. In both educational and domestic contexts this has implications for the governmental regulation and protection of 'privacy' today.

Marco Fioretti argued in his paper that digital media cultures are rich and powerful, but are also terribly fragile. They inherently contain the mechanisms for encoding the data of our lives, but we do not attend to this fragility. When it comes to 'public' data collected by governments, the issue of file formats becomes political. Fioretti argues the need for open source file formatting of public databases to ensure transparency and continued availability of this essential archive of societies.

4. Global and Local scales and interactions

Throughout the conference there were presentations which addressed both the global and local operation of economic practices for/of attention. Michel Bauwens, in his wide-ranging keynote paper, articulated a range of ways that models for 'open infrastructures' (in the vein of open software) offer alternatives to the aggressively globalised, market-based economic models that tend towards monopolies. Bauwens argued that the present form of cognitive capitalism, which expropriates the wealth of social cooperation through financial mechanisms, and does not have a feedback loop to reward the value creators, is not sustainable. Thus, for Bauwens, a system that

exponentially increases use value, but can only linearly monetize exchange value, creates a crisis of accumulation for capital, as well as a crisis of precarity for distributed labour. Bauwens argued that a radical alternative economy will arise based on the commons, which protects vital resources while 'renting' out their usage to market based entities. In this model, cooperation is no longer secondary to competition, but competition becomes secondary to cooperation. Globalism, for Bauwens, can be channelled for positive ends.

Two other speakers explicitly addressed the global effects of an attention economy at local scales. Rolien Hoyng addressed the issue of the internationalisation and commodification of the identity of Istanbul, in the context of the European Capital of Culture 2010 competition. Hoyng highlighted the ways in which a particular 'globalised' form of spatial imagination has been applied top-down as a means of controlling the representation of the city of Istanbul. This demonstrates, for Hoyng, the broader issues of power and resistance in 'media-ecological milieus'. Hoyng argued that by studying how migrants adopt the values of technocapitalism, residing in speed, mobility and networking potential, to their own circumstances, she could analyze cultural and political processes of intermediation: the adaptation of older technologies to newer ones and vice versa.

Fatemeh Javaheri gave a broad overview of the socio-cultural effects of access to the internet amongst Iranian youth in the early 21st century. Commissioned by the Iranian government, and based in empirical work conducted in the early 2000s, Javaheri made observations about the effects of internet use on traditional social structures amongst the young. For example, while internet use has propagated some changes in the expression of cultural values amongst Iranian youth, strong family ties prevent an intergenerational gap forming. The pattern of formation of social relationships amongst Iranian youth has been significantly effected by use of the Internet, insofar as it has broadened horizons and allowed more time for connections, but it has not distinctively changed everyday social practices or values. The most significant effect on youth identity in Iran has been an exposure to the expression of globalised cultural values and a broader cultural literacy.

5. Experiments and Appropriations of Digital Attention

Both Ruth Catlow and Stanza illustrated the ways in which the performance of attention can be questioned and challenged through digital art practice. Catlow argued that it is important to keep a space open for recognising what exists outside of the economic mindset. As human beings, Catlow asserted, we are more than simply economic entities. Experimentation with digital platforms for developing thought, activity and experience outside of commecial contexts, and for 'hacks' of the established digital mediations of experience are vital for cultural renewal.

Stanza is interested in the creative potential of the city as a productive space, present for manipulation and (re)mediation. This understanding of the city opens out, for Stanza, a means of critically reflecting upon the ways and means we are compelled to 'pay attention' in everyday life. His open access web-based works encourage people to contribute and modify his manipulations of urban media and surveillance networks.

Simon Poulter gave a performance addressing the ways and means by which we are digitally observed and in turn observe. In a performance involving a variety of social media, a video produced in transit to the conference, and the participation of members of the audience, he questioned the various ways in which the apparent mundanity of everyday life demands our attention.

Papers by Nadia Arancio and Gunnar Liestøl provided particular empirical case studies for understanding how the economics of attention are performed by users of social media and mobile technologies. Nadia Arancio's paper was a video-essay which illustrated the means by which young people garner attention for their YouTube videos. Young participants in these forms of social networking and production become hybrid consumer-users of media, with fairly sophisticated understandings of marketing and self-promotion.

Gunnar Liestøl presented a pragmatic rationale for designing and testing media experiences for mobile devices (such as the iPhone). For Liestøl, this is the production of 'meaningware' – the experience crafted from the conjunction of software, hardware and communications infrastructure. Liestøl argued that this method is a means of addressing the relations between 'meaning' and 'context' in contemporary digital culture.

6. Ethics, Surveillance and Trust

The attention economy provokes significant questions about the ways in which consumers/users can understand information about them, how it is used, commodified and valued, where it is kept, who has access to it, and why the others within those relations can/cannot or should/should not be trusted.

As described above, Aphra Kerr unpacked in her presentation the various instrumental and technical ways in which the idea of trust has been figured. Similarly, Constance Fleuriot addressed the need to make ethical issues central to the design and development of new media technologies. In her paper, Fleuriot laid out a methodology for drawing together a shared language for pervasive media system development as an integral step to agreeing shared values.

Tim Kindberg explored the trade in personal data in his talk. As a theoretical provocation, he offered the idea of invoicing Facebook for the use of his data. Kindberg avanced some other proposals for interventions that could raise awareness around these issues, for example a "Google Home View" stunt in which the photographic auditing of the insides of people's houses would be documented as though it were to be used as part of Google Maps.

Dan Dixon took the issue of surveillance in a more playful direction in his paper, focussing on the use of surveillance techniques and the aesthetics of surveillance in pervasive games. Dixon observed that pervasive games employ both tools and practices that carry cultural significances. One of the most interesting things for Dixon is a switching from paranoia to 'pronoia', that is, the flip from surveillance being 'evil' to it being helpful or fun. There is a sense in which a 'trust in the system' is encouraged through pervasive games which Dixon argues mirrors the ways in which we 'trust' companies such as Google with personal data. For Dixon, these games sit in a strange position between art, experience and experiment.

Educationalist Huey Li Li addressed alternative ways of valuing silence in pedagogical learning systems. Li offered a 'critical pedagogy for understanding ambiguity'. Her central argument was that teachers should reclaim the pedagogical value of silence, which encourages students to engage in reflection. Li argued that to compel people to engage in speech in situations of unequal power (like teacher and student) can be a means of control. Silent resistance can thus be powerful. In designing the resources for online learning and encouraging students, and people more broadly, to join virtual learning communities, Li argued that we should facilitate engagement, however the user may wish to do so, rather than mandate it through designed protocols.

Conclusion

The scientific content of the conference has potential impacts across a range of academic disciplines, according to the possibilities for further research projects developed by participants in their various fields on inquiry. Some potential collaborations of conference participants are noted below in the 'Forward Look' report. Through the DCRC, the co-chairs are developing plans for a symposium on the 'dark side' of the digital attention economy to explore illicit, and ethically questionable circuits of attention-capture (online gambling, pornographic sites, exploitative digital labour practices, etc.). In addition they are composing an application to the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council to support a collaborative network of researcers in media and science and technology studies to move forward with research on the critical and media practice implications of the redefining of attention in social and cultural terms described above.

Forward Look

(1 page min.)

▪ *Assessment of the results*
▪ *Contribution to the future direction of the field – identification of issues in the 5-10 years & timeframe*
▪ *Identification of emerging topics*

The forward look plenary commenced with the conference rapporteur detailing some ESF funding opportunities that the participants may consider. He expressed his belief that the theme and scope of the conference discussions would merit further development and would have considerable potential to attract further funding from the ESF in a well designed project application. The co-chairs plan to consider possible partners and project specifics for such an application for a research networking scheme (when and if the ESF recommences the funding process).

The session was structured as a roundtable review of the conference, led by Dr Crogan and Dr Kinsley. They introduced the review by summarising the conference's content in terms of the six thematic engagements described above in the scientific content. Discussion developed around these and concerning the connections between them. This led to considerations about future directions for inquiry and collaboration.

One thread of these reflections concerned the status and future of scholarly research in the current technocultural context. Transformations in the university and higher educations systems associated with the new attention economy emerged as part of the 'problem' of developing critically aware and responsible citizens. The radical reshaping of tertiary education underway in the UK, abandoning the public funding of humanities and social science disciplines, is a recent indication (and herald) of the dynamics effecting the nature of the provision of education today. Bernard Stiegler's association, Ars Industrialis, is embarking on an ambitious experiment in local and digitally connected teaching in philosophy. The DCRC is looking at potential collaborations to support or extend this experiment.

Regina Cunha reminded us that the issues of the new globalised digital culture extend well beyond the academy, to places like the poorer regions of Brazil where she works with local schools and communities to try to benefit from the digital 'revolution'. She called for future support and collaboration so that she could build on the platform of knowledges and contacts she was able to gain from attending and sharing her poster. The co-chairs remain in contact with her and will look to include her in the publication activity and possible future collaborations.

In a similar vein Michel Bauwens invited conference participants to continue collaboration via his Peer-to-Peer Foundation, which is co-convening a conference next year in Berlin on the 'International Commons'. This theme of the promotion of what Stiegler called an 'economy of contribution' linked several presenters at the conference. Stiegler and Bauwens appear to have

plans for some collaboration in the future.

This area of the promotion of models for social and economic refiguring of exchange, economic and cultural values and production and dissemination of knowledge is one whose development of the next 5-10 years will be significant. The theme of attention and 'relational technologies' developed in the conference should play an important part in shaping the discussion. It is through this perspective that the DCRC is planning to develop projects and grant applications to extend the work of Paying Attention.

Another potential area of development identified as a theme during the conference was that of the the design of trust and security underway in planning for the internet to come. In the conference the thematic of attention was able to link considerations of privacy, data collection as well as communication, cooperation and digital community. Aphra Kerr's work on engineering trust in information systems, and other presentations on data profiling and production revolved around how attention was being envisaged, managed and exchanged between users, enterprises and technical systems. There is potential for linkages between projects like Kerr's engagement in the planning and policy spheres of digital society and cultural and community involvements and investments in the necessarily digital cultural future.

Conclusion
The conference was something of an experiment in its effort to bring different regional, disciplinary and media practice perspectives to bear on digital culture and its future(s) through the theme of 'attention'. The goal was to see what kinds of resonating, complementary or contasting positions were in circulation, and how these might interact to better frame the important questions about a responsible, informed and critical engagement with the rapidly changing digital landscape. There remains considerable interest from participants in the aftermath of the conference. The co-chairs and Dr Kinsley remain in touch with them as we seek to crystallize publication plans for work arising from the conference program. The DCRC is committed to building on the platform provided by Paying Attention by seeking research funds from the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the UK, and elsewhere, to carry out further projects exploring the attention economy and the future of digital cultures in these challenging times. Future collaborations with Paying Attention participants are likely to be included in these projects.
▪ Is there a need for a foresight-type initiative?

Atmosphere and Infrastructure
▪ *The reaction of the participants to the location and the organization, including networking, and any other relevant comments*
The conference was well organised and administered by the ESF officer, Ms Blondeel-Oman. The conference co-chairs found the working relationship with the ESF effective, given some of the inevitable structural challenges of a split administration of tasks.

The interface with the hotel staff in making the venue for presentations work well was successful. The venue was very satisfactory. With some advance planning our technical officer was able to successfully provide for the needs of all speakers and poster presenters. The hotel staff were friendly and the food provision was very good, offering a range for items for different dietary needs. Morning and afternoon refreshments were particularly popular with the conference participants.

At the conclusion of the conference a large group of participants went for their first excursion

outside on a walk to the 'old town' situated on the other side of the University of Linkoping. Some delegates wished we had programmed a little more free time for an excursion or for some more social activities. It is very difficult, however, to balance the need to provide time for paper and poster presentations, upon which most applicants depend in order to obtain the leave and funding to attend, with the desire to have a more leisurely timetable, especially over 3 days.

Date & Author:

Patrick Crogan and Jonathan Dovey, Dec 9, 2010