



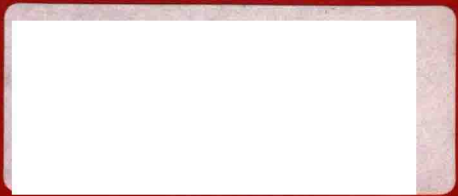
Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies

MEDIA PRACTICES, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, AND PERFORMATIVITY

TRANSDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

Edited by
Susanne Foellmer, Margreth Lünenborg and
Christoph Raetzsch





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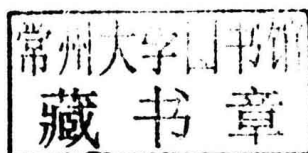
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Media Practices, Social Movements, and Performativity

As individuals incorporate new forms of media into their daily routines, these media transform individuals' engagement with networks of heterogeneous actors. Using the concept of media practices, this volume looks at processes of social and political transformation in diverse regions of the world to argue that media change and social change converge on a redefinition of the relations of individuals to larger collective bodies. To this end, contributors examine new collective actors emerging in the public arena through digital media or established actors adjusting to a diversified communication environment. The book offers an important contribution to a vibrant, transdisciplinary, and international field of research at the intersections of communication, performance and social movement studies.

Susanne Foellmer holds a position as Reader of Dance at Coventry University/Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE), UK. Her main research areas embrace aesthetic theory and concepts of the body in contemporary dance, performance, and in the Weimar Era, relationships between dance and 'other' media as well as temporality, historicity and politicality of performance. Since 2014 she has been directing the DFG research project "On Remnants and Vestiges: Strategies of Remaining in the Performing Arts." She also has been working as a dramaturge and artistic councillor for Isabelle Schäd, Meg Stuart, and Jeremy Wade, among others.

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Introduction

Media Practices, Social Movements and Performativity: Transdisciplinary Approaches

*Susanne Foellmer, Margreth Lünenborg,
and Christoph Raetzsch*

A growing body of research in the humanities and social sciences addresses the societal transformations associated with the widespread use of networked, digital and mobile media of communication. Whether we think about artistic interventions in public space such as flash mobs, traditional forms like demonstrations or online activism in social networks, the ways these articulations and protests are nowadays prepared, facilitated and distributed are often reliant on individual and collective competences to act with digital media. The modalities of networked media contribute to the emergence of new constellation of actors; they create new forms of articulation and performance that often resist and question the long-held power of institutions, parties or other bodies of (civil) society. Such fluid, fragile and temporarily limited public articulations and interventions rely on a variety of quotidian practices among dispersed individuals, in which digital media are increasingly embedded in wider arrays of other social practices. The individual capacities of citizens to communicate, network and interact with others via social media networks, blogs, chats and mobile media contribute to the emergence of publics and social movements which are simultaneously embodied *and* mediated, locally embedded *and* translocally perceived. Such publics and movements do not necessarily need an organisational structure but exist in extensive, simultaneous and translocal communication spaces that allow for the formation of momentary, issue-focused or event-based associations of diverse actors as publics.

In this edited volume, we conceive of such publics and movements through a theoretical framing of media practice. Bringing together perspectives from media and communication studies and theatre and dance studies, we offer a range of international case studies on collective actors in contentious political and social spaces. Through the concept of *media practice*, the volume seeks to present different dynamics of how the relations between quotidian usage of networked, digital media and social change can be understood. As media are appropriated individually and become embedded in quotidian routines, they reconfigure and

diversify the possibilities of individuals to observe, engage with and connect to networks of heterogeneous actors. Conversely, the very constitution of collective bodies of public and political articulation in society shifts from institutions to issue-focused, lateral associations of different individuals and groups. What unites the contributions to this volume is the rejection of normative claims for analysing these developments. We do not perceive of social change as only liberating, emancipating or democratising. The contributors to this volume seek to differentiate, *how and in what ways* social change may be associated with such ends, but readily acknowledge that the forces of resistance and reaction against change remain equally powerful.

Through a focus on the performativity of publics and public interventions, the volume ties in with a number of recent approaches in the humanities and social sciences, that address the changing forms of social movements, of public and political participation and of the intersections between technologies, gender identities and artistic practices. Given that individual users now possess and employ a diversified array of resources for public and semi-public communication, a range of scholars in social movement studies have pointed out that digital media allow (political) activists and their supporters to create alternative media outlets and establish new practices of protest communication (Boler 2008; Atkinson 2010; Lievrouw 2011; Earl 2011). This diversified array of resources for communication also sustains or fosters new kinds of social movements and “connective action” (Seegerberg and Bennett 2013 see also Cammaerts, Mattoni, and McCurdy 2013; Mattoni 2012; Milan 2013). The second field of research concerns the varied ways in which the public sphere is transforming through emerging new practices of public communication (Askanius and Ostergaard 2014; Tierney 2013), especially against the background of the growing importance of mobile media (Cumiskey and Hjorth 2013). The rapid diversification of media and the pluralisation of communicative practices is associated by scholars to changing forms of citizenship in general, highlighting the social implications of media change for political participation (Bessant 2014; Dahlgren 2013; Isin and Ruppert 2015; Scullion et al. 2013). The third field of research looks at the intersections of performativity, media technologies and the construction of social identities, especially gender identities. Often conceived as artistic interventions, experimental practices or as spatial choreographies of actors, collectives and technologies, this research addresses the performative and spatial dimension of social hierarchies, both in and outside of media (Glass and Rose-Redwood 2014), as well as transgressive gender practices and gendered performativity of media (Corneliussen 2011; Krijnen, Alvares, and Bauwel 2010; Timeto 2015). Although these studies represent very different analytic and disciplinary approaches, they exhibit a common methodological and theoretical shift from the macro level of social structures to the politics and practices of individual

actors negotiating an increasingly unpredictable and contradictory social and political environment. In this volume, we put forward the argument that performativity as an interdisciplinary theoretical principle allows us to interrogate how social norms, power hierarchies and gender relations become challenged and rearticulated through media practices.

Following Nick Couldry's work on how audiences act upon, interpret and adopt media in everyday life, the notion of "media as practice" (2004, 2012) offers a starting point to rethink social change and changes in media appropriation without assigning either of both causal agency. Through a common ground in theories of social and artistic practice the contributions to this volume seek to understand the relations between ongoing daily routines of individuals and larger social changes: How are quotidian uses of (digital) media conducive to new forms of commonality? How do such media reconfigure and extend the stage of performance to translocal spaces and volatile associations of actors and spectators? In a recent programmatic outline, Shove, Pantzar and Watson argue that "theories of practice have as yet untapped potential for understanding change" (2012: 1). The authors regard the level of practice as that domain of social life, where incremental changes in routines over short terms create larger effects in the long run. Practice is where social structure and individual agency confront each other, challenge each other and in more than one way also depend on each other. What is necessary to understand is that this level of practice is not merely a synonym for "what is characteristically simply done" (Giddens 1984: 7) but represents a constantly shifting site of negotiation between enablement and constraint, between emancipation and reaction.

Shove et al. propose to differentiate 'elements' of practices on the level of meaning, competence and materiality. Practices are stabilised as routines when links are recurrently made between these elements. When links are ruptured or individual elements are no longer available, a practice may cease to exist or new practices can emerge from previously unconnected ... elements (Shove et al. 2012: 22f.). This analytic approach allows identifying dynamics of change when looking at the level of individual media practices and some contributors to this volume take this approach: How does the production of selfies become related to meaning-making in the context of Mexican *narco cultures* (see Orozco/Zapata)? How do the materialities of media infrastructure in Egypt influence the process of networking during and after the 'Arab spring' (see Richter)? How do forms of 'banal mobilisation' expose and subvert the contradictions of social mobility and spatial politics in urban spaces (see Hartmann)? By differentiating the ways in which elements of practices are linked, broken and recursively stabilised we can understand how forms of media practice enable or restrain social change in emancipatory or reactionary ways.

The case studies collected here not only deal with current (digital) media practice but are interested in long-term change in practices as

well. Thus, it becomes visible how the historical development of social movements is also related to specific types of media practices. Traditionally, the use of media in social movements has been mostly understood in terms of strategic forms of communication acted out by legitimate spokespersons of a movement to mobilise supporters and influence political decision-making. Movements have traditionally used media to communicate their aims to 'the public' (Rucht et al. 2004), often with the aid of journalists (see Lee in this volume). Newer movements have abandoned such general approaches and adopted strategies of involvement, inclusion and outreach that target specific stakeholders or individuals directly, coining symbolic repertoires that can be easily circulated and emulated by supporters in online and offline contexts (see Richter in this volume). The concept of media practice allows understanding how individual competences of actors, technological materialities of media and cultural dimensions of meaning-making are linked together to understand the specific type of agency that emerges from practice.

The historical significance of 'the public' has been associated with institutions of public discourse, such as the press or political parties (see Lünenborg and Raetzsch in this volume). Against this disciplinary and theoretical legacy, the new dynamics of what we call "performative publics" have so far often been displaced to audience-centric or ancillary activities of little importance for the constitution of publics. By focusing on the emergence of publics through a perspective of individual social practices we are enabled to acknowledge the reflexivity of actors and structure as constitutive for processes of public articulation. Shifting to such a bottom-up perspective involves using an extended analytic repertoire to understand the materiality of media in different disciplinary contexts, the politics of space and space-making, temporalities of absence and presence and the kinds of incorporated knowledge that affect the construction of gender roles and hierarchies.

In theatre and dance studies, the concept of performativity usually describes the lively co-presence of actors and audiences in the time-space relation of theatrical presentations (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 67), which in recent research also includes transient and social constellations created in and with media of communication, hence broadening the scope of face-to-face interaction (Auslander 1999: 61–62). The concept is usually connected with John L. Austin's model of the performativity of speech act while theatre and dance studies shift performativity closer to the notion of performance. In the work of Judith Butler performativity is defined as an iterative and corporeal action, that is linked to the speech act *and* the corporeal act by borrowing the notion of ("social") "drama", drawing attention to the doing of one's body, that is always an iterative and possibly subversive act (1990: 178–179). The concept of performativity draws attention not only to speakers or performers as such but to

the concurrent relation of actors and observers (Krämer 2004: 14) or actors and audiences. The notion of theatricality here plays a crucial role as an epistemological category that describes specific situations in a particular time and place, where bodies of actors and audiences relate to each other as a temporally-bounded social community (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 55–60). Thus, by linking Austin's and Butler's models of performativity to the concept of corporeal and hence theatrical performativity we are able to understand relations between actors and publics in a non-teleological way and distinct from normative assumptions. Drawing on the notion of theatrical performativity, we can address a diverse range of actions that involve audiences and actors in an intermittent, fluid or fragile fashion, including actions that fail or are meant to fail. Tactical operations like flash mobs or rather 'traditional' formats like marches and demonstrations meet the conditions of theatricality and at the same time performatively generate another conception of public space for a certain (transitory) period of time, hence subverting and exposing institutionally or socially predetermined regulations on how to act in urban spaces and, then again, in media environments as well.

Performance as an artistic practice and performativity as a theoretical principle allow to interrogate and subvert social norms, power hierarchies and gender relations that have traditionally structured forms of public articulation. In this volume the disciplinary perspectives of media and communication studies and theatre and dance studies enter into a vibrant dialogue, demonstrating how an overarching framework of practices can mutually enrich and challenge analytic repertoires. In such an interdisciplinary dialogue the notion of 'movement' is critically reevaluated as well. The contributors analyse social and protest movements which mobilise actors in different ways, that affect and disorient them and which invite participation on a whole range of levels. Some of the case studies address movements which expose forms of gendered spectatorship and intervene in regular movement of academic discourse (see Hartmann in this volume). But movements also question social norms and experiment with new translocal modalities of articulation and resistance (see Foellmer and Warstat in this volume). Movements can take on deserted urban locations and reinvent the narrative of a place through interventions of its occupants (see Argyropoulou and Siouzouli in this volume). Or they may expose movement and non-movement in public space, drawing attention to the variegated mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Standing still as a performative act (see Ertem in this volume) can then become an interventionist strategy that is remarkable precisely because it is inconspicuous on the level of the quotidian. The notion of movement and mobility in a literal sense brings people, ideas and hierarchies in motion. Whether and how such movements trigger changes in practices is the common question that the contributions to this volume seek to address.

Structure of the Volume

The volume is composed of two parts: The first part presents two articles on how media practices can be understood against the disciplinary background of both media and communication studies and theatre and dance studies. The second part presents individual case studies, which use the concept of media practices to address the social, aesthetic and political dimensions of processes of social change. These case studies span a broad geographical terrain—from Egypt to Japan, from Mexico to Turkey, from Greece to Germany—and outline in what ways media practices can be applied in very different socio-political contexts and for different individual and collective actors. The volume is concluded by the programmatic article “A Precarious Dance, a Derivative Sociality” by Randy Martin. We reprint this article, which originally appeared in *The Drama Review* (2012), in appreciation and honour of our deceased colleague Randy Martin whom we had the pleasure to invite as a contributor to our lecture series “Media Practices in Transformation: (De)Gendering Social and Political Movement in Quotidian Cultures” taking place in the summer term 2014 at Freie Universität Berlin. We are thankful for having had one of the last opportunities of joining a presentation in which he congenially connected topics from both dance studies, sociology and economy in the vivid, elaborate as well as literally corporeal demonstrating way, that has been so typical for his papers.

From the perspective of media and communication studies, *Margreth Lünenborg* and *Christoph Raetzsch* address the question how the concept of the public sphere is today challenged through constellations of actors, where personal practices of semi-public communication contribute to the emergence of publics outside of institutionalised frameworks. Reviewing the criticism of the public sphere and its gendered hierarchies of exclusion, the authors draw on recent scholarship in journalism and social movement studies as well as practice theory to develop the analytic model of media practice (in the singular). The aim of this analytic model is to analyse “performative publics” in their inherently gendered structure beyond the obsolete distinction between public and private. In the fluidity and reciprocity of performative publics new dynamic roles of actors and observers become established, which emphasise that gender structures are both precondition and result of ‘going public’. This opening article retraces the shift in media and communication studies from institutional to practice-based conceptions of publics to make comparable translocal forms of gendered articulations, that resist the logic of either social movements or public spheres.

From the perspective of theatre and dance studies, *Susanne Foellmer* and *Matthias Warstat* will introduce concepts of mediality in the realm of dance and theatre. These two genres can serve as media of communication by inheriting always already multiple *medial* qualities, that e.g.