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# To Media Study: Media Studies and Beyond

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To study media is to study more than what we already recognize as media. The beauty of media study should involve the possibility of methodological and theoretical labor that investigates what even constitutes its object of knowledge and the process through which such objects of knowledge are stabilised as the thing that circulates as “media” in academia. It even includes the possibility of considering academia as an institution and its practices as “media,” a proposition made by Friedrich Kittler (2004). Indeed, universities consist of a changing set of practices and techniques programmed into students and future staff, hardware from libraries to mail systems and objects of knowledge that provide one operating system for a range of contemporary operations—mathematics to philosophy as well as computing. Not that we need to accept all the details and specifics of the story (and its European bias, as Kittler also stated) but the methodology of realising that media relates not to “communication,” but to material architectures, cultural techniques, and infrastructures from hardware to standards is the key takeaway. In short, even the academic study itself is, well, media.

To study media is to study what then even becomes media in the first place, and how mediation is much more than what counts as media as such. Hence, media study and its stabilized version in academia, Media Studies, can be in a privileged position to understand how the question of media shifts from the human scale of interface to large-scale networks, infrastructure, and logistics. Some of the greyest things are the most exciting when it comes to understanding the powers of media: administration, logistics, infrastructural arrangement and territorial governance. Media is placed in actual spatial, material, and institutional realities.

Not that the academia is the sole place of media study – media study also happens outside Media Studies. Indeed, to radicalize Kittler’s point about media at the university, we need to recognise the subtle – and sometimes not so subtle – mechanisms of economic power that enable and disable the possibilities of study. To study media is also to recognise, as Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) importantly argue, that it happens in contemporary contexts of debt and governance that are, one might add, part of the “media” and cultural techniques of the university and of how it produces experience and habit. To study should not be about the reproduction of misery as part of the policy of the current academic institutional landscapes, or as Moten puts it: “I think that a huge part of it has to do simply with, let’s call it, a certain reduction of intellectual life – to reduce study into critique, and then at the same time, a really, really horrific, brutal reduction of critique to debunking, which operates under the general assumption that naturalised academic misery loves company in its isolation, like some kind of warped communal alienation in which people are tied together not by blood or a common language but by the bad feeling they compete over.” (Harney and Moten 120).

For many reasons we also need to focus on what is understood as “study” that is irreducible to the institution. To study is to connect and to work collectively, across and

beyond academia as well. In Harney's words: "That opened up another question for me, which was when you leave the university to study, in what way do you have to continue to recognize that you're not leaving the place of study and making a new place, but entering a whole other world where study is already going on beyond the university? I felt I ought to have some way to be able to see that world, to feel that world, to sense it, and to enter into it, to join the study already going on in different informal ways, unforming, informing ways." (Harney and Moten 118). This is also true of media study that *de facto* has happened across different sites and practices, from critical hacker labs to art studios, reading groups to zine archives and more.

Both media study and the field of Media Studies can be said to be part of the same waves of radical rethinking that has characterized the Humanities since 1980, and which Rosi Braidotti identified as interdisciplinary practices: "Women's, Gay and Lesbian, Gender, Feminist and Queer Studies; Race, Postcolonial and Subaltern Studies, alongside Cultural Studies, Film, Television and Media Studies" (Braidotti 105). Braidotti later added Posthuman studies, or the Critical Posthumanities to her genealogy, as the contemporary practice that emerged from it. To paraphrase Braidotti, these studies should work against structural anthropocentrism and methodological nationalism while being grounded in "real-life present world" (106-108). As part of the Critical Posthumanities, we also need to consider that it is media (machines and systems) which do the study: in other words, it is media that study, organize, analyze, "see", and process data whether in the administrative or logistical sense. They are part of the large-scale reorganization of agential forces and algorithmic power, and to be able to understand them properly, to be able to exploit them properly, we would do well to follow the Critical Engineering manifesto's lead (Oliver et al).

By now it should be amply clear that media study arrives as many—it arrives not just as a discipline but as an already buzzing link between multidisciplinary investigations. Besides the connections to science and engineering as technical cousins of the practice of media, two exciting directions that can be named are architecture and (critical) legal studies. Why these two? Both architecture and law are examples of disciplines which are able to articulate their effects and impacts across spatial transformations in ways that are at times effectively geared toward an activism of sorts. Indeed, even they have the power to speak in context to the spatial set of governance and transformation, which media study can learn from and interact with in relation to questions of spatial justice for example (see e.g. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2014). It is here also that critique is not merely about debunking but remains committed to the transformation of the existing conditions of practice – and this practice, as Braidotti argues, is one that is already embedded in “real-life present worlds”.

Hence, we also need to ensure that the (at least partly) radical legacy of media studies—and its constitutive energy as media study—is sustained in contemporary academia despite the pressure of austerity economics and neoliberal policies, climate change denialism, and disciplinary cynicism. Media study is not reducible to the academic standardisation of media studies, and we should remain invested in also keeping the academic part of the spectrum as radical and inspiring as it can be.

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