

19th NECS Graduate Workshop **Private and Public Mediated Knowledge**

June 22, 2022

Hosted by the National University of Theatre and Film (Bucharest)

Deadline for submissions: 31st January 2022

Keynote speakers: Samaneh Moafi & Stefanos Levidis (Forensic Architecture)

The 2022 NECS Graduate Workshop seeks to explore how media protocols regulate the formation of knowledge and how these processes influence our participation *in* media, whether we're talking about public, private or hybrid configurations. To this end, we consider it necessary to reevaluate different models of participation and their relation to the production and circulation of knowledge by looking at documentary film, produsage and social media. In light of once highly anticipated technological progress, we must ask ourselves what is to be gained, but also what is lost, given the contemporary transition to more decentralized frameworks of media production and consumption. While individual contribution is considerably more achievable now, is it reasonable to assume a self-serving agenda inherent in social media propagation algorithms, perpetuating hegemonic power structures that merely operate differently while staying similarly influential? Is the proliferation of amateur and vernacular creativity synchronous with a general devaluation of low-budget audiovisual content? Additionally, and of equal importance, by what protocols does our present-day mediasphere allow us to reframe and reappraise the moving image works of the celluloid era and uncover their epistemic potential?

Firstly, theorizing documentary film has entailed highlighting various epistemic stances and sources of knowledge, ranging from poetic and fragmented accounts of reality, to quasi-scientific ambitions and a focus on "visible evidence", emphasis on affect and experience over objective facts, inquiries into performativity, all the way to skepticism towards the possibility of representation itself. The notion of participation in documentary has itself undergone constant shifts, revealing how the epistemic is politically intertwined with matters of authorship and agency. In the 1960s, participatory practices highlighted the situated social roles of the filmmaker(s) and their "subjects". Over time, they would become instrumental in shaping documentaries as decentralized, and even activist, arenas for more progressive regimes of representation, turning the films themselves into potential platforms for dissensus and social change. The advent of video further expanded the possibilities of the participatory camera to act as a "confessional but without a confessor" (Morin, 1985), catalyzing a surge in subjective micro-narratives (from home movies to diary

films and even amateur films), challenging mainstream top-down representations, from a cultural, historical, and artistic perspective.

In more recent decades, as a consequence of the technical affordances of digital interactive media, it would seem like participation in the form of produsage has permeated our culture at large, normalizing the overproduction of autobiographical content and therefore shaping ostensibly private media spheres. Nevertheless, while self-archiving has become a practice no longer limited by economic or cultural capital, it is still determined by the logic of a market that prioritizes consumption and encourages the exhibition of the self as spectacle.

At the same time, the “prosumer” media economy has corroded the barrier between self-expression and surveillance. Previously celebrated as a revolution in audiovisual access, enthusiasm over the empowering of users of portable digital interactive media to become filmmakers, reporters and curators has begun to wane, diminished by security concerns, the primacy of metadata over deliberate creative choices, as well as the negative psychological impact of social media. More often divisive than collectively empowering, this abundance of digital self-expression appears to have fallen short of its assumed democratizing potential of challenging univocal histories, with the exception of a few token individual achievements. For example, amateur footage - when curated by independent community-driven gatekeepers or when coupled with the use of innovative image processing and AI tools and methodologies - can also serve as a basis for resisting social injustice and homogenizing dominant narratives.

Secondly, we’re also interested in engaging with the recent transformations within media ecologies and how they are redefining meaning-making processes as acts of communication and interpretation. Seeing how the recent Covid-19 pandemic has amplified a tendency of media to engulf users in an unremitting flow of information and self-monitoring, we consider it relevant to inquire into the restructuring of social relations and ostensibly shared mediated public spaces in order to examine the epistemic consequences of this phenomenon.

More precisely, when thinking about the interpersonal acts of communication which occur within the “screen-sphere” (Sobchack, 2016), we feel it is important to question the extent to which media ecologies actually lead to polyphony or dialogical forms of intersubjectivity, and ultimately what the broader implications of this type of narrative regarding our post-participatory culture are. The Habermasian-inspired model of personal communication within the public sphere - one that strives towards critical public debate, understanding and community-formation - has repeatedly been challenged. Sybille Krämer, for instance, argues in favor of a “postal/technical principle of communication”, according to which the media act not as tools for bridging distances and differences, but instead preserve them, leading to what she

describes as “the negotiation of radical alterity” as opposed to the formation of a “consensus reality” or “unification” (Krämer, 2015).

Given the generalized current trust crisis, the question of how knowledge is transmitted within the public media sphere is deeply entangled with the use of social media, as social networks increasingly aspire to become arbiters for digital content. In the post-truth era, social media has proven to be a viable host for closed structures, harboring exclusion and discreditation, in the shape of echo bubbles and epistemic chambers. In turn, they can generate mechanisms ranging from rumor propagation, to homophilic interaction and extreme polarization of opinions. Such is the influence of social media that it has affected and restructured socio-political narratives, undermining collective belief systems, decision-making and action on a global scale. How, then, are these virtual dynamics influencing our judgment, agency and autonomy and what do they reveal about our individual and collective intellectual maturity?

In this context, we encourage reflections on the past and present-day legitimacy of a delineation between a public and a private sphere of mediated knowledge, on their inclusiveness and on the larger roles which interferences, differences and ephemeral meanings play in our contemporary networked communities.

Submissions may include, but are not limited to, the following research fields/topics:

Formats

- participatory documentary filmmaking
- found footage films
- home movies
- diary films
- amateur archives
- digital interactive media
- interactive documentaries
- social media

Methodologies

- media archeology
- Big Data & cultural analytics
- forensic architecture
- critical discourse analysis

Case studies

- user-generated content
- self-archiving

- ethics of mediated presence
- tele-presence, videoconferencing and self-monitoring
- co-creation
- pluri-vocality & polyphony
- vernacular media cultures
- media ideology & prosumer capitalism
- digital access and digital divide
- citizen media
- collective identities
- machine learning, machine vision and algorithmic culture
- empathy machines
- hybridization of private and public media spheres

SUBMISSION

Early-career researchers from cinema, visual and media studies are invited to submit proposals for contributions by 31 January 2022 to graduates@necs.org. The submission should include the name of the speaker, an email address, the title of the paper, an abstract (max. 200 words) and a short bio (max. 150 words).

Applicants are welcome to submit a proposal to the 2022 NECS Conference as well.

The National University of Theatre and Film will not provide funding: participants are required to cover their own travel and accommodation expenses. Travel information, as well as a list of affordable hotels and other accommodation, will be provided on the conference website and program. Workshop attendance is free, but valid NECS membership is required to participate. Participants must register with NECS at <https://necs.org/user/register> and pay their fee by 1st February 2022. For the terms of NECS membership, please also refer to our website: <https://necs.org/faq>.

Please address all inquiries to graduates@necs.org.

Graduate Workshop organizers: Liri Alienor Chapelan, Miska Lakatos, Andreea Mihalcea, Claudia Negrea, Irina Trocan