

TRACK 13

ENGLISH VERSION

Disappearance, maintenance and reinvention in the biographies of technical objects.

Perspectives on the transformative vulnerabilities of technology at the intersection between STS and Media Studies

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Over the last years, we have seen an increasing interest in the overlapping areas of STS and Media Studies towards examining the multifaceted vulnerabilities of technical objects. Within STS, research on maintenance and repair practices has been attracting growing attention since the works of Susan Leigh Star (1999) and Marianne de Laet and Annemarie Mol (2000), which set the ground for the study of the vulnerability of sociotechnical networks. A number of contributions have then addressed issues relating to obsolescence and fragility, durability and tinkering, adaptation and re-use, to the extent that a distinctive interdisciplinary field of inquiry – Maintenance and repair studies (MRS) – has emerged. Among the valuable insights offered by this field of inquiry is the transformative power of moments of vulnerability, which becomes evident when we consider how innovation emerges from obsolescence, maintenance and repair, and how new sociomaterial, ethical and political orders, as well as new geographies of responsibility are established through the practices that deal with technical vulnerability.

Similarly, in Media Studies, growing attention has been paid to the to the ever-shifting relations between “old” and “new” media, to the suppressed, the outmoded and the technological dead ends in media history – see, for instance, Huhtamo and Parikka’s *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (2011) - to how “old” media may survive in residual conditions and be reactivated or reinvented in multiple ways (see Acland’s *Residual Media* [2007]), and to how allegedly “dead media” can be materially revived by a politically informed art method which Jussi Parikka and Garnet Hertz notoriously described as “hardware hacking” (2012).

Way beyond the strictly historiographic level, the discussion on these topics raised new social concerns, problematising the effects of the planned obsolescence pursued by commercial industry as well as the material aspects of mass-produced technology – which enhanced a focus on the conditions of hardware circulation, accumulation, disposal, decomposition, recycling and renewal also from an ecological angle.

This growing awareness that the study of media change should include their life cycles as material objects, reflects a more general interest in taking into account the moments of transformation in the social biographies of media technologies which often correspond to their critical moments of vulnerability.

We aim to enable a fruitful discussion between exponents from the fields of STS and Media Studies concerning the manifold processes of transformation fostered by or related to the vulnerabilities of technical objects over the course of their biographies. Thus, we call for papers which address, among others, questions about differences in understandings and vocabularies as well as explorations of empirical, methodological, and theoretical overlappings.