Workshop 4: "Social movements and their technologies, 1968 and today"
Tuesday, May 29th, 2018, 10am-3pm, Lunch 12-1pm
River Room, King's Building, King's College London, Strand campus, London WC2R 2LS

Convener Paolo Gerbaudo, Department of Digital Humanities, with Ludovica Rogers (architect, activist, and member of Debt Resistance UK), Photini Vrikki (Research Fellow in Digital Humanities at Brunel University London), and Aaron Bastani (Royal Holloway University of London, founder and editor of Novara Media)

Abstract:

This workshop will explore the imbrication between social movements and communication technologies, tracing the lines of continuity and discontinuity between the movements of 1968 and recent social movements. It is well documented how social movements are strongly influenced by the technologies that are available at the time of their emergence. The affordances of different technologies, as well as the meanings and cultures that are associated with their use, shape processes of organisation and mobilisation. 1968

protests were famous for their inventive use of posters, newspapers and radio. Contemporary movements have instead used internet and social media in their operations. What are the commonalities and differences between the technological and political practices of these two movement waves? We will examine these issues with a group of media scholars and activists working on media activism and social movements.

The morning session, 10am-12pm, will look at:

- 1968 and now: similarities and differences between two waves of protest media
- Looking ahead: what are the emerging trends in social movement communications

The afternoon, 1-3pm, will consist of four presentations and discussion:

- Photini Vrikki, "Reviving Old Technologies: The New Podcast wave in the UK and Vernacular Voices of Resistance"

    Podcasts are audio files distributed through the internet for an audience that wants to have control of what, when, where, and how they want to listen (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007:82). In 2018, almost 18 years after the medium first appeared, the number, the audiences and the discussions around podcasts are growing again in the UK. This shift relies to a great degree to the loss of trust

to social media platforms (Reed and boyd, 2016), which have led marginalised youth to look for more open technologies for communication. Based on seven focus group interviews and three semi-structured interviews with 25 black and brown London-based podcast hosts, this paper will suggest that this vernacular digital technology offers podcasters an avenue to express their 'lived experience' to wider audiences. Here, I explore how a podcast's affordances are used in everyday practice as a means for broadcasting "authenticity", resisting the mainstream notions of creative agency, and interrupting power structures through a new 'politics of voice'. The new face of podcasts is a mix of old and new technologies, and not least old and new social and cultural practices of speaking, listening, and circulating audio. In this context, podcasts must be understood simultaneously as a cultural practice, a networked technology, and a medium for representation.

- Paolo Gerbaudo, "From cyber-autonomism to cyber-populism: social movements, digital technology and ideology"

  Reflecting the seismic shift in perceptions and attitudes produced by the 2008 crash, and the connected shifts in social movement ideology, digital activism has moved from the

margins to the centre, from a
countercultural posture to a
counterhegemonic ambition. I
describe this turn as a transition
from cyber-autonomism to cyber-
populism as the two defining
techno-political orientations of
the first and second wave of
digital activism. Reflecting the
influence of neo-anarchism and
autonomism in the anti-
globalisation movement cyber-
autonomism saw the Internet as an
autonomous space where to
construct a countercultural
politics outside the mainstream.
To the contrary cyber-populism,
informed by the populist turn
taken by 2011 and post-2011
movements, sees the Internet as a
"popular space", which needs to be
appropriated by ordinary citizens,
turned away from consumption
activities and towards the purpose
of popular mobilisation against
the neoliberal elites. This shift
that substantially modifies the
way in which activists conceives
of and utilise digital media goes
a long way towards explaining the
differences in digital activism
practices, and their contrasting
views of the internet as a tool
and site of struggle.

- Ludovica Rogers, "Power and
  Technology in the movements of the
  squares"

  Technology was one of the
  determining factors of how the
  movements of the squares came
  about and developed. It gave

power to the people but also
carried with it inherent power
structures that could not be
ignored. Vica Rogers was involved
in the Occupy movement in London
and in the international networks
that developed between the
movements of the squares from 2011
to 2012. She will give a personal
account of the technologies that
were used at the time and their
implications.

- Aaron Bastani, "1968 vs 2011: Digital
  Media and the New Possibilities of
  Sedimentary Networks"

  Aaron Bastani will explore the
  continuities and differences
  between the social movements of
  1968 and 2011 and their respective
  media practices. Bastani is the
  founder of the alternative media
  Novara Media, and has a PhD in
  political communications on the
  digital communication practices of
  post-crisis social movements.