

Call for papers

## **Articulating alternatives: agents, spaces and communication in/of a time of crisis**

*A workshop for new scholars hosted by the Centre for the Study of Global Media and Democracy, Goldsmiths, University of London, 03 May 2012.*

This is a workshop which addresses a series of issues around the mediation of political life in a time of crisis. The last couple of decades have witnessed the intensification of the neoliberal logic, culminating in a profound crisis of capitalism. This has been accompanied by the widespread de-legitimisation of political institutions as citizens lose trust in the political process and confidence in the capacity of political elites to protect their interests. Concomitantly, recent years have seen the emergence of a myriad of actors (from indigenous people's movements to alter-globalisation movements to current mobilisations like the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement), which challenge the neoliberal hegemony and seek to construct alternatives. Such actors are engaged in various forms of knowledge production oriented towards the development of critiques of the current system as well as the elaboration of alternative forms of economic, social, and political organisation.

In the workshop, we wish to explore some of the complexities of the relationship between mediated communication and politics in a time of crisis. The intensive mobilisation of citizens around the world raises a number of questions in relation to how agents of transformation are constructing political vernaculars and actions at different scales and across different sites, both physical and virtual. The notion of a politics of crisis is set as a framework for the exploration of the agencies, spaces and communication practices of counter-capitalist voices.

Pertinent here is the addressing of the structures of both the nation-state and global economic actors where the use of digital communication channels ranges from information-spreading to organisation and mobilisation. Many recent protests have been distinctly invested in particular localities (squares, streets), but appear to also express a sense of globality (evident for example in the argued global reach of the Occupy movement). New communication technologies appear to be offering unprecedented opportunities for the dissemination and elaboration of ideas, potentially playing a significant role in social processes of knowledge production and the articulation of alternatives. At the same time, conventional media are arguably in a state of crisis, arising from tendencies of commercialisation and concentration of ownership. As the media lose the confidence of their publics and thus their privileged epistemic status, questions are raised about their capacity to foster democratic public spheres.

We are interested in addressing questions in relation to the discursive construction of alternatives, the agents involved in these processes, the spaces that are being opened up for articulation and action, as well as the modes of politics which characterise the current time of crisis. The themes we wish to explore include:

- *Agents.* Are there new actors emerging in the context of political, economic and social crises? What form do such actors take, and what kinds of politics do they engage in? What role do conventional media as well as new information and communication technologies play in the emergence and organisation of such actors? How might media contribute to the elaboration of alternatives and the construction of transnational solidarity across geopolitical boundaries?
- *Spaces.* How do the geography and spatiality of politics impact on the perspectives and claims arising in resistance to capitalism? What spatialities and scales are enacted through current modes of political praxis and forms of communication? What is the 'place of place' in contemporary political practices and discourses, and how does this relate to the 'national', 'transnational' or 'global'? What role do media play in the politics of place and scale? Where does the matter of politics exhibit itself both online and offline?
- *Communication.* How can we conceptualise the relationship between media and citizenship in the current climate of crisis? What role do the media play in the communication of a politics of crisis? How might media be implicated in the continued subalternisation, exclusion or incorporation of alternative/emergent knowledges and practices? Can the mainstream media be reformed to resume their (idealised?) democratic function as the guarantors of an open democratic public sphere? Or should we instead entrust our hopes to the burgeoning field of social and citizens' media?

In order to facilitate in-depth discussion and collective knowledge production, the workshop will be restricted to a limited number of participants. We welcome submissions of original work from early-career researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds including (but not limited to): media and communications, sociology, politics, anthropology, cultural studies, geography, and information studies. Interested participants should submit a 250 word abstract and brief biography by 15 March 2012 to Eleftheria Lekakis ([e.lekakis@gold.ac.uk](mailto:e.lekakis@gold.ac.uk)) and Hilde Stephansen ([h.stephansen@gold.ac.uk](mailto:h.stephansen@gold.ac.uk)). The authors of successful abstracts will be notified by 22 March 2012 and are invited to submit working papers of between 1500-3000 words in advance of the workshop.