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Theorizing media phenomenologically[1]

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Contemporary research into media, technology and communications has entered a phase in the last decade or so in which it is effectively orthodox to presume we must pay attention first and foremost to the intricacies of everyday experience. Ethnographic audience studies, for example, have critiqued the assumption that there is a discrete relationship between media and audiences, arguing that media forms, content and technologies have indeterminate and multifaceted significance within the rhythms and spaces of everyday life. Studies of digital and networked media, meanwhile, have cast doubts about the very notion of audiences as the starting point for understanding mediated experience. The circulation of information via social media, for example, is not only dispersed and multidirectional – blurring of the boundary between media consumption and production – but also algorithmically-sorted, raising new questions about the agency of software platforms. There are also early signs of renewed interest in media production, not as a site for the production of media as it is experienced elsewhere, but as a form of media experience itself, with its own forms of orientation and inhabitation.

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For some, accounting for the intricacies of everyday mediated experience has meant inverting the old media effects question of what do media do to people, to ask instead what people do with media. But for others this is not enough; instead, the crucial question is what constitutes the conditions of mediated experience in the first place. For instance, how do the political configurations of discourses and inherited behavioural dispositions prefigure mediated action? Or, how do material arrangements themselves constitute environments for mediated experience? How might we account for nonhuman agency, for example the ways in which software objects interact not only with human perceptions but also each other? Such questions point to a renewed interest in explaining not just how but also why media, technology and communication are experienced as they are. When such questions were asked in the past the answers were often functionalist: mediated experience in one way or another serves to reproduce the status quo and all the iniquities associated with it. Now, however, there is a growing awareness that while experience is inextricably linked to context, neither its precise form nor its implications are entirely predictable.

These interests in the very conditions of mediation suggest, if sometimes only implicitly, an emerging interest in the phenomenology of media. Indeed, phenomenology – broadly speaking, the structuring of perception – has seemingly obvious relevance for recent academic interest in media experience. Yet its invocation in media studies has thus far been scattered. This might simply reflect the considerable diversity of phenomenological philosophies and their applications. As Glendinning (2007) suggests, phenomenology is perhaps best understood not as a doctrine but rather an umbrella term for a series of methodological affinities or styles. At the same time, recent years have seen concerted and often critical debates around how phenomenological perspectives might be reimagined across the social sciences and humanities. Paired with recent interest in mediated experience, the time seems apt to reassess what it might mean to theorize media phenomenologically.

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This volume brings together scholars from a wide range of disciplines and perspectives – media studies, media history, philosophy, geography, software studies, audience studies, critical theory, film studies and journalism – to reflect explicitly on the phenomenological groundings of their work on media. The approach taken in it is deliberately non-canonical, with the result that there are various counter-intuitive references alongside those which would be expected of a book about phenomenology. The radical divergences of topics of discussion and objects of analysis could easily have produced an incoherent whole, a perhaps useful assemblage of the diverse applications of phenomenology in media research today. However, it soon becomes clear that the chapters speak to each other, whether openly – something we have encouraged editorially – or tacitly, emerging from shared concerns and concepts, speaking from distinct but mutually comprehensible corners of the history of ideas, drawing on similar methods and ways of teasing out implications, or simply asking the same kinds of question. Foremost amongst these is: what are the conditions that underpin mediated experience? The contributors to this book do not take for granted that 'the media' as such – i.e. media texts, media institutions, mediums – can be the sole subjects or objects of media studies or media criticism (cf. Bennett et al., 2011). Instead, they share a broad commitment to taking a closer look at that which is experienced as self-evidently of media or mediation, and investigating under what specific conditions that experience of self-evidence is possible. Those conditions are multifarious, ranging from physical infrastructure and software protocols to contextually normalized social expectations and capitalism. With this kind of variety, there is no overarching narrative of determinism or of the things that media do to people. On the flipside, however, the level of critical reflexivity wielded by the authors included here frequently demonstrates what alternatives are possible when a break is made with our usually seamless, immediate experience of the mediated world.

A brief phenomenology primer

Phenomenology is the study of how things – objects, ideas, events – emerge to consciousness, or more generally to tacit experience of the world. Its emergence is not a linear history of ideas, and this in part explains its divergent offspring, particularly in the contemporary fields of philosophy, psychology and neurology. Indeed, this volume itself testifies to the panoply of phenomenological thinking found today, not only across the humanities and social science but also within the disciplines of media studies. Modern phenomenology largely derives from the nineteenth century analytic tradition and its examination of how sensory perceptions come to be experienced as thoughts and instincts (Brentano, 1874). But phenomenology also has origins in theology, meaning that the 'thing' at the core of phenomenological inquiry was God. What was important in this context was that phenomenology 'bracketed out' the question of the existence of God: this was regarded as a metaphysical distraction from understanding the religious experience. For Søren Kierkegaard (1844), this meant that the meaning of faith is neither affirmed nor invalidated by the existence or otherwise of God; its meaning consists instead in how it is experienced precisely in the absence of that knowledge. Analytic philosophy is also premised on such a pragmatic bracketing out, though around the question of whether an equivalence between an object and its apprehension is ever possible.

Analytic philosophy however largely maintained a focus on discrete moments of perception, the legacy of which can be seen in contemporary cognitive psychology. Kieregaard and the theological tradition, by contrast, are emblematic of the move in continental philosophy to deploy phenomenology towards understanding our very being in the world. This is evident across a series of writers in the continental tradition: from Sartre's (1958) preoccupation with whether the subjective experience of being can ever be substantively moral; to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) concern for the implications of so much of

our worldly experience being corporeal rather than conscious; to Levinas' (1969) advancement of the humanist imperative to apprehend what it means to live in a world not merely full of perceived objects, but other subjects (an enterprise subsequently challenged by Derrida, 1974, among others).

Now, further references to religion are thin on the ground in this volume, but the broad principle of bracketing out remains very relevant to the phenomenological perspectives on media explored in the pages that follow. This is particularly so around the question of mediated causality when it comes to understanding how people act, think and feel. Bracketing in our context implies a double move. First, bracketing out means rejecting the assumption that behaviour can be predicted, whether by nature, by principles of rational calculation, or by making inferences from knowledge of 'deep' structures (e.g. as in historical materialism). Yet at the same time, bracketing out means maintaining that actions have reason and can be explained, at least to an extent. It implies remaining alive to the notion that there exist conditions of possibility which underpin, but do not necessitate, observed behaviour.

This line of thinking derives from Hegel's rejection of the Kantian distinction between noumenon and phenomenon – that is, between the thing-in-itself and knowledge about that thing. For Kant, since all knowledge is a product of cognition, there must be a reality that is unknown to us, the world before it is thought about. Hegel (e.g. 1807) observes that even fencing off such a pre-cognitive space defined in opposition to knowledge constitutes knowledge about it. There are more nuances to Hegel's thinking around the status of knowledge, thought and sensation than can discussed here. But his claim is primarily a practical one: in bracketing out a noumenal realm, one posits a space in which the rules of logic cannot be applied. If we accept that there is nothing outside of phenomena, then we can get on with the business of trying to understand the world as it unfolds across time. For Hegel, the world stripped of our cognition of it does not constitute a deeper truth. Instead, our

task should be to understand how the world appears to, shapes and is shaped by human thought and action.

In the twentieth century, it is however Edmund Husserl (e.g. 1931) who is cast as the grandfather of phenomenology, and specifically his approach to understanding conscious experience. For Husserl, it is the notion of intention – the possibility for thought about objects in the world – that takes centre stage. But, as will be clear later when we consider phenomenology's methodological principles, this does not amount to taking stated intention at face value. Rather, Husserl's interest is best described by the term intentionality, which captures the contingent, collective and non-instrumental forms that intention takes. This holds to the basic phenomenological tenet that one does not discover the world merely as an empirical object, rather the world emerges to consciousness through the interplay of subject and object; intention shapes its meaning, though intentionality is itself of the world and should not be used as shorthand for volition or will. Thus, although Husserl is often misunderstood as positing an all-encompassing originary idealism, in his work it is clear that consciousness only comes to exist in codetermination with that which it encounters in the world. So while the lived experience of the world remains of primary importance to the phenomenologist, it is very much within her remit to seek to understand what structures and forces sustain this 'lifeworld' (*Lebenswelt*). Husserl's lifeworld is strikingly familiar for contemporary media researchers inspired by the phenomenological tradition, comprising the taken-for-granted stream of everyday routines, interactions and events that constitute both individual and social experience.

The revolution ushered in by Husserl's pupil Martin Heidegger is in many ways more profound than Marx's inversion of the dialectic of subjectivity and objectivity set out by Hegel in *The phenomenology of spirit*, with Marx asserting the primacy of object over subject, of materialism over idealism. In *Being and time* Heidegger (1962) also emphasizes

the primacy of the world, though not by way of a reworking of how experience emerges through a dialectic of subject and object. Instead, for Heidegger an analysis of the things themselves involves not merely accounting for how objects emerge to consciousness, but more fundamentally how the essence of objects emerges when they are not thought about at all, but recede into the background of practical action. As a result, for some Heidegger's emphasis on the ontology of being provides a sideways return to realism, or at least to questions of tools, equipment or technology (e.g. Harman, 2002; Ihde, 2010) – an emphasis which we will see has been important for some media theorists. Yet Heidegger's contribution is best described in more general terms, as concerned with the world into which we continually find ourselves thrown, a world which is always-already there: full, seamless and present to us as encounters demanding responses, but where those responses – for the most part – do not feel demanding. This world cannot be understood by thinking about it, only by being in it, interacting with it in ways that do not in general require reflection, still less philosophizing; ways that are self-evidently meaningful, useful, normal.

It is this focus – questioning how at the level of the everyday the worlds we inhabit come to be experienced as self-evident and in some way meaningful – that defines the phenomenological approach. The potential scope of such an approach is enormous, especially when expressed in the form of a classic phenomenological question: how did this come to be experienced as normal? The 'this' could be more or less anything, from God to Facebook. Care needs to be taken, however, against making normative assumptions about what counts as 'normal': resignation, fatalism, pain and relief can feed into the taken-for-granted experience of the world as given just as much as habits that come to be felt as instinct. More accurately, then, phenomenologists ask how this object or that phenomenon come to be experienced as things that do not demand explanation from first principles on the part of those doing the experiencing. The refusal of metaphysics (putting to one side phenomenological offspring

such as object-oriented ontology, mentioned later) means that human nature and determinism are bracketed out of such lines of inquiry from the outset.

This in turn raises the pertinent question of what, precisely, phenomenology contributes to our understanding of human experience. It can on the face of it appear to be a celebration of the banal, a cataloguing of the intricate but unnoticed skills needed to type, for example, or navigate a public transportation system. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) was particularly interested in the way we inhabit the world bodily: movement, carriage and positioning reveal as much about lived experience as conscious reflection, a point that Shaun Moores takes up in the second of the critical dialogues in this volume. Denson, meanwhile, homes in on disruption rather than habituation in experiences of technology, setting out a theory of 'body shocks' in relation to the development of cinema and the humble escalator. But the point is that habituation is never neutral: Merleau-Ponty asserts that body hexis is socially inculcated, and the body matters not because sensory experience is elevated above cogitation, but because the body is where we grasp the fusion of "what we aim at and what is given" (1962, p. 167). Further, if bodies are not objects of intention and experience but their condition, they are also matter – like other bodies, like other objects in the world. It is this understanding that pushes phenomenological inquiry beyond either the mere cataloguing of observed behaviour or giving voice to people, since the conditions of experience are not only mechanical or individual, but technical and social.

Phenomenological turns and returns in media theory

This book is premised on the claim that recent years have witnessed a proliferation of interests in the phenomenology of media. But this is not to imply media theory broadly defined is without more longstanding engagements with phenomenological thinking. Notable in the field of media and communications is Paddy Scannell's (1996; 2014) writing on radio

and television, the phenomenological groundings of which he articulates in the first dialogue of this volume. In his book *Radio and television in modern life*, Scannell analyses the 'logic of intentionality' that made it possible for broadcast programmes to be a form of interaction. Programme makers may have particular intentions in for example making television news, and audiences will make their interpretations or form their opinions of that news, but such intentions, interpretations and opinions can only arise on the basis of an always-already existing, taken-for-granted world of shared understandings. Film theory arguably has a longer and more developed set of engagements with phenomenological thinking, extending back to a noted 1945 essay by Merleau-Ponty (1964), as well as the film criticism of André Bazin. These writings set the stage for later Anglo-American interests in the distinctiveness of cinematic experience. Sobchack's (1992) seminal book *The address of the eye* is exemplary here: its emphasis on the embodied and sensual dimensions of cinematic experience over dominant psychoanalytic and structural approaches to film theory is emblematic of the simultaneous phenomenological rejection of Marx and Freud. In recent years the phenomenological turn in film studies has further grown in prominence, opening up new forms of analysis that prioritize the sensorial, embodied, emotional, architectural and haptic aspects of cinema (e.g. Bruno, 2007; 2014; Chamarette, 2012; Cooper, 2013), not to mention self-reflexive accounts of film practice such as Brylla's chapter in this book.

What is new, then, is that the turn in recent years across a series of media-related academic fields has been oriented toward a wider family of phenomenological styles of thinking, orientations which have not always involved engaging directly with canonical touchstones of phenomenology. A prominent and recent example in this vein is the notion that media studies has undergone a turn to practices (see especially Bräuchler and Postill, 2010; Couldry, 2004), connecting with a more general turn to so-called practice theory across the social sciences (see Schatzki et al., 2001). For media theorists like Couldry, thinking of

media in terms of practices involves prioritising the how of media over the what. That is, swinging the focus of media research from media per se – "as objects, texts, apparatuses of perception or production processes" (Couldry, 2012, p. 35) – to the situated activities through which such phenomena emerge as media. This move can be seen as classic phenomenological bracketing out: an emphasis on mediated experience itself, rather than media as an extrinsic force or element of a structural system. A broadly similar bracketing out is apparent in Morley's (2007; 2009) notion of non-media-centric media studies, which has been explicitly connected to phenomenology by Moores (2012). Though decentring media may seem like a paradoxical move for a discipline named media studies, putting everyday experience at the center of media analysis, as Moores shows, not only brings into view the interconnections of different media (what Bausinger, 1984, called the 'media ensembles' helping constitute daily life), but also how media are interwoven with practices and technologies not clearly devoted to media production or consumption, for example mobile practices such as walking, driving or air travel.

Non-media-centric approaches propose, therefore, an environmental view of media (see McQuire, 2008; Rodgers et al, 2014), in which media may have determining features, but only via "technological environments rather than individual artefacts" (Gunkel and Taylor, 2014, p. 2, emphasis removed). In shifting focus from singular media to situated experiences of everyday media environments, new cross-disciplinary linkages have opened up, perhaps most notably with human geography, which like media studies is a relatively combinative discipline (e.g. Adams and Jansson, 2012). Conventionally, the contact made between media theory and geographical analysis has been via accounts of how media technologies progressively deemphasize distance and erode the specificity of place. But as Krajina shows in his chapter, media forms such as screen surfaces – which might otherwise be dismissed as just another example of media saturation and encroaching placelessness – deserve close

ethnographic analyses, which might reveal how their encounter and experience is often one where place is realized or maintained as part of contemporary urban life. Likewise, Lavi argues in his chapter against conventional accounts that presume the diasporic experience of media is one of connecting to a country of origin at a distance, and rather sees diasporic space as an utterly contextualized, everyday achievement of orientation and habitation. While Krajina and Lavi are largely informed by Moores' (2012) engagements with classic phenomenological (e.g. Relph, 1976; Seamon 1979; Tuan, 1977) as well as recent non-representational (e.g. Thrift, 2008) human geographies, as McKim points out in his contribution to this volume, accounts which see media in ambient or environmental terms might also be productively informed by phenomenological traditions in architectural theory.

Yet even as such environmental views of media showcase the sort of approach for which phenomenological perspectives are supremely suited – an analysis of the real conditions of experience – for critics such as Sparrow (2014) it is possible they would also highlight their limits: the preclusion of a properly metaphysical account of reality. Sparrow argues that for all its merits, the attention phenomenology advocates to the things themselves is fundamentally limited to those things that appear within situated human experience. While Sparrow's argument is contentious (e.g. Zahavi, 2016), it does point us to some tensions between different strains of media theory and research that nevertheless share broadly phenomenological sensibilities. Just as writers such as Couldry, Moores and Morley advance a non-media centric media studies, others inspired by the work of writers such as Kittler (e.g. 1999; 2010) and Stiegler (e.g. 1998) at least appear to do the opposite, arguing that we bring technical media back to the forefront of media theory. In this volume, at least three chapters (Denson, Barker, Sutko) start from the premise that technical media structure experience, a priori. This is a premise that other phenomenologically-inspired approaches to media might bracket out, since it invites an analysis of the autonomous (if not causal) qualities of media

forms and infrastructures, outside of or prior to particular situated experiences. Indeed, Lisa Parks' exploration of an isolated local transmission facility, discussed in her contribution to the first dialogue, implies a form of media analysis that homes in on media infrastructures entirely hidden from everyday media perception.

Questions of media autonomy have received renewed attention in part due to the nature of computational technologies, which entail forms of software-enabled automation or agency only partly perceived or authorized through situated human experience (Kitchin and Dodge, 2011; Mackenzie, 2006; McKim, this volume; Rodgers, 2015). As Couldry notes in his contribution to the second dialogue, using Facebook involves being used, in that inherent to the platform is the generation of metadata that is both operationalized and commoditized. Couldry labels this 'tool reversibility,' but as Berry (2011) suggests, human users become objects for computational media in ways that go beyond social networks. Computational interfaces for Berry constitute new sorts of environments that are fundamentally 'unready-to-hand,' operating in-between Heidegger's distinction of readiness-to-hand and present-at-hand. What this means is that the experience of computational media is only occasionally immersive, more frequently demanding its users pay attention to the interface itself in order for it to be workable. In his own contribution to the second dialogue, Berry deploys this understanding of computational media to think through how the algorithmic 'stream' architecture of platforms such as Twitter encourages a future-oriented relation to media. This implicitly adds a qualification to phenomenological analyses of time, such as Heidegger's threefold temporality of the present always-already entailing projection into the future as well as inheritance of the past. For Stiegler (1998), this notion of temporality fails to recognize how technical artefacts form the fundamental conditions of possibility for *Dasein* to have access to a past and future. This criticism extends beyond the specifically computational: as Barker (this volume) highlights in his discussion of so-called German media science, older

media technologies such as cinema and television can also be seen as structuring perceived time.

Yet there are risks present in such theories of media autonomy. One is a view of media as discrete objects, which as Kember and Zylinska (2012) forcefully argue, invites a 'false division' in which new media are seen as 'things' that unilaterally bring about social and cultural transformations. Another is slippage into a media physicalism, a contention Malin's chapter captures evocatively in its discussion of early 20th century psychology, whose practitioners presumed it possible to identify and measure the physiological processes brought about by specific technical media or their content. Yet it is debatable whether contemporary theories of technical media are physicalist in this sense, or otherwise guilty of a crude technological determinism via discrete mediums. Although Kittler for example urges us to analyse technical media in their own right, as prior to human perception, his larger body of work is best seen as an analysis of the historical interrelationships between media hardware, discursive formations and perception – a point Barker emphasizes in his chapter. And though Stiegler insists on technics while rejecting the notion of humanity as subject – a point which features in the discussion at the end of the second dialogue – the context for this insistence is that what makes humanity distinct is the irreducible incorporation of technics within the social and the body, a condition some see as a response to Derrida's notion of 'originary technicity' (e.g. Bradley, 2011). Nor are practice-theoretic and non-media-centric approaches, meanwhile, marked by irretrievable subjectivism or idealism. Constantly kept in view are the 'particularities' (Morley, 2007, p. 1) or 'distinctive features' (Moores, 2012, p. 108) of media amongst other objects of the world. In the same way, the contributions to this book are best seen as interventions along a spectrum of understanding between mediated experience and the technical media that form their conditions of possibility. Denson's notion of body shocks, mentioned earlier, sees media change in embodied terms, an 'anthropotechnical interface' of

organic bodies and technical media. Richardson and Wilken also emphasize corporeality, and via an analysis of Google Glass, argue for a relational perspective that avoids allocating a priority to either mediums or processes of mediation, advancing instead an approach that attends to their irreducible interrelation.

The relational focus seen in most of the contributions to this book could be accused of what Meillassoux (2008) describes as the inability to think beyond the human-world nexus, in turn perhaps inadvertently falling into the trap of either naïve idealism or naïve realism. Yet such anxieties are sure to be felt more acutely by philosophers of phenomenology and metaphysics than media researchers seeking to make use of such debates. Philosophers since Kant have quite understandably been concerned with clarifying the idealism-realism (or phenomenon-noumenon) relationship which, as Harman argues in his contribution to the first dialogue, phenomenologists have classically treated as a 'pseudo problem': an issue effectively sidestepped by repeatedly positing that there is an irreducible correlation between subjective experience and the always-already present world (the given) that is the possibility for such experience. Tackling this problem head-on is one of the main provocations of recent work falling under the banners of object-oriented ontology and speculative realism (e.g. Bogost, 2012; Brassier, 2007; Bryant et al., 2011; Gratton, 2014; Harman, 2011; Meillassoux, 2008). Yet by contrast most media theorists and researchers seem less concerned about the status of metaphysics within their own fields, or for that matter philosophy. This is not to preclude the possibility they might be, even ought to be, if only to more explicitly refuse or affirm metaphysical concerns in the theorizing of media. And of course, ideas and concepts need not travel in one direction, from philosophy to media theory: Harman (this volume) argues that longstanding ideas of media theory, such as those found in the writing of Marshall McLuhan, might also shift accepted ways of doing philosophy. What is evident across the contributions to this book is that current media theory and research engages

phenomenological thinking for quite a variety of uses or inspirations, often in conjunction with other, potentially incompatible, traditions; relatively freed, perhaps, from manifest worries about making a philosophical faux pas. Shared by all, however, is an abiding concern for the conditions of mediation itself, whether those conditions center on the body, on technical media or mediated environments. This interest in conditions of mediation is anchored in explaining, if only to a degree, the nature of experience, rather than establishing deep structures as necessary features of media behaviour. They all hold, in other words, to the phenomenological principle of bracketing out; where they might differ is in where they place the brackets.

Can phenomenologies of media be political?

At this point it is clear that phenomenological research aims to explain experience and not simply describe it, which brings us to a question that is usually implied and sometimes made explicit in critiques of phenomenology: where is the politics? This question, of course, has recently taken on pressing importance following the 2014 publication of the *Black notebooks*, which not only underscores Martin Heidegger's well known, enthusiastic embrace of Nazism, but also reveals the extent of his anti-Semitic views. This has opened up renewed and vigorous debates around whether Heidegger's philosophy is irretrievably poisoned by his politics (e.g. see Farin and Malpas, 2016). Yet phenomenology more generally, as perspective and method, is often depicted as apolitical. In less generous accounts sometimes encountered in the literature (Ricoeur, 1967; Thierry, 1995), phenomenology is portrayed either as a kind of anthropological thick description *pace* Clifford Geertz, or else a commitment to refrain from casting judgement on culture, politics and technology from the ivory tower and instead to foreground how people feel about them.

The conflation of phenomenological and uncritical approaches to social research that border on the narcissistic, and are easily dismissed as bourgeois, is an unfortunate one. By contrast, what unites the contributions to this volume is precisely a refusal to take observed or reported experience as given. This is not the place to restage battles between different research ontologies, so suffice it to say that the mischaracterization of phenomenology as superficial usually stems from a misreading of its refusal of depth. A phenomenological perspective does not reduce media experience or behavior to a mere play of surfaces. Rather, it rejects the notion of a deus ex machina, some ultimate 'deep' explanation of observed phenomena. One result is that, while the analysis of withdrawn or background conditions of mediated experience (e.g. technical media, discursive formations) is fundamental to phenomenological method, that enterprise is not necessarily an attempt to reveal the manipulative manoeuvres of ruling interests, nor the playing out of historically-determined structures. As Scannell argues in his contribution to the first dialogue, this sort of default stance of suspicion, found across conventional media studies, limits more affirmative readings of the ways in which media experience becomes naturalised and taken for granted. Yet the phenomenological rejection of a deus ex machina can be entirely compatible with approaches to media research that are explicitly interested in politics, from the focus of hermeneutics on historicized texts and interpretation to the focus of conventional critical theory or political economy on coercive or hierarchical power relations.

Phenomenology then is, or can be, political. But this raises difficult issues for the researcher. If someone's experience of media or technology is self-evidently meaningful and benign, are we then committed to diagnosing false consciousness as we tease out the conditions of possibility of that experience? Simply put, not necessarily. By making an epistemological break with the immediacy of felt experience, as well as what Bourdieu (1977, p. 3) called a double epistemological break with participant reflections on that experience, it

is important that the researcher aims methodically to construct that which underpins the experience of immediacy in ways that will not be readily available to those participants (see, for example, Markham, 2011). This is seen consistently in Bourdieu's empirical research (see, for instance, Throop and Murphy, 2002), grounded in a philosophical framework that draws strongly on phenomenological influences while applying structural analysis to the lived experiences observed by the researcher. And yet this is different from claiming to know the participant's mind better than they do. As several chapters make clear, by rejecting the deep explanations of materialist structuralism, phenomenological approaches are able simultaneously to take what people say about their experiences seriously, and to contextualise them analytically in ways unlikely to have occurred to them. A potent example of this is the chapter by Forrest, demonstrating as it does that a positive experience of media practice, in this case photography, need not be written off as naïve or deluded. Bendor, meanwhile, shows eloquently how the conditions of exploitation or alienation that might underpin interactive gaming technologies can be experienced as harmless and fun, and alternatively that in certain circumstances gameplay can provoke a heightened sense of awareness of the objective reality of one's existence.

These and other chapters illustrate one further advantage of the phenomenological approach to media: the ability to place questions of ethics at its core. There is a danger when deep power structures are presumed that the ethical dimensions of everyday spheres of practice are deprioritised or treated as peripheral – as symptoms, not the disease. But there is equally a risk in trying only to give voice to individual experience, as it is experienced, insofar as it is limited to declaiming that this voice needs to be heard or that a particular experience should be registered as painful or undignified. While everyday practices are experienced as affectively, corporeally and subjectively individual, that experience cannot be conceived apart from the social and technical environment in which it is situated. This means

asking: how do everyday practices come to be experienced as routinized, taken-for-granted and personally owned? Nick Couldry's contribution gets to the heart of this, arguing that while there is a tendency among academics and other commentators to talk up the importance of algorithms in contemporary media, and to downplay individual agency and reflexivity, we simultaneously overlook the impact that such technologies have on people's ability to mobilise and work towards collective aims. And in Jordan's chapter we explore the ethical dimensions of using technology to shape our auditory environments according to our individualized desires – a desire for silence from others, specifically. How do such auditory regimes affect our capacity to listen and hear the sounds of others? Burchell, meanwhile, asks us to take a timely step back and ponder that while we tend to characterise our media world as one of hyper-connectivity, how much of the work that we put into our mediated communication is actually about erecting and maintaining barriers to interaction? These and other chapters seek to understand 'the politics of' such phenomena not in terms of individuated choices, nor structural imperatives, but rather as complex questions of how we conduct ourselves in an increasingly mediated world.

Context and contributions

All books result from an evolutionary process, and this volume is no different. Reflection on that process, if undertaken at all, is typically and quite rightly confined to a preface or acknowledgements. In our case, however, it is worth accounting for at least some the evolutionary process that led to the pages that follow. Not only to provide some context to the contents and structure of the book, but also to highlight its potential uses and contribution to current debates on media, technology and communication.

This book owes it origins to a conference held in 2013 at Birkbeck, University of London, which ran under a similar name to the title given to this book. The resulting pages

here should not however be seen as conference proceedings. Less than half of the chapters published here were also presented at the conference, and these have all been revised significantly. More importantly, all of the chapters speak to one another, and this has been encouraged in the editorial process. Yet having made that proviso, one direct connection to that 2013 conference is the two critical dialogues that immediately follow this introductory chapter. These two dialogues (the first including contributions from Graham Harman, Lisa Parks and Paddy Scannell; the second including contributions from Shaun Moores, Nick Couldry and David Berry) inaugurated the 2013 conference, and have undergone relatively light editing for this book. We have deliberately sought to retain a certain liveness, not only to provide a fairly accessible introduction to important writers at the forefront of current thinking on mediated experience, but also to highlight the agreements, disagreements and even confusions that emerge when different phenomenological perspectives on media are brought together at one particular moment. The coming-together represented by these dialogues comprises both consolidations and new directions. Scannell, for example, provides an evocative account of the former, describing how his thinking and research on media over many years has always in some sense been phenomenological, even before he realized it and explicitly named it so. Berry, meanwhile, perhaps represents an example of the latter, in his explication of the challenges he and others will face in coming to terms with the specificity of computational technologies as rapidly-evolving forms of contemporary social and cultural experience. What we hope readers will gain from the agreements and disagreements, consolidations and new directions, embodied in these critical dialogues is a sense that media research can be inspired, extended and challenged by both longstanding traditions of phenomenology as well as new styles of thinking which might be described as post- or even anti-phenomenological.

The 13 short chapters that follow the critical dialogues represent a further broadening out of such consolidations and new directions. While some chapters emerge out of sustained engagement with classic phenomenological writing, others are a result of a provocation to think through more implicit or latent concerns in the phenomenology of media via other interests, whether these be understanding media in terms of (for example) nonhuman agency, affect, emotion, embodiment, or urban space. Our thematic grouping of the chapters is not however defined by degrees of phenomenological provenance. Rather, the three sections into which the chapters have been organized embody resonant emphases in setting out what is at stake, or of prime concern, in theorizing the conditions that underpin mediated experience.

The first section (Bodies, Technics, Agency) tackles head on a classic concern of media theory: the dynamic relationships between the users and technics of media, and the debates about agency that arise from such relationships. As Denson suggests in the opening chapter, such debates usually arrive at a stalemate, with some strands of media theory proclaiming the far-reaching impact of particular mediums upon human perception, and others countering that the biological conditions of perception not only evolve at a far slower pace, but in ways that are relatively resistant to singular technological inventions. In proposing a 'techno-phenomenological' approach, Denson connects with a broad way of thinking found throughout this volume, in which any neat divide between the agency of media technologies and media users – however these are delineated – is unhelpful if we want to understand the conditions underpinning the experience of media, and how that experience may transform over time. So, Forrest's chapter challenges conventional theories of photography focused on representation and the image with an emphasis on the embodiment of photography, not in an individuated photographic subject, but rather a photographer made through an irreducible entanglement of body and camera. In a similar vein, Richardson and Wilken offer a phenomenological analysis of Google Glass that puts into question attempts to see the

relationships of media (i.e. particular mediums or interfaces) and mediation (i.e. broader social and cultural media environments) in hierarchical and consequential terms, where one precedes and takes precedence over the other. The experience of Google Glass depends on the familiarity of wearing eyeglasses while at the same time affording a new interface for seeing and interacting with the world, without one being reducible to the other. The notion of an irreducible relationship between media and users need not, however, imply that the possibilities of any particular media form are exhausted in their use. As both Barker and Sutko suggest – via discussions of mediated time and intellectual property respectively – technical media entail a similarly unknowable and unpredictable surplus to that which we normally associated with the dynamic social and cultural processes of media-related practices.

The chapters in the first section all anticipate an analysis of media as emerging through environments, rather than media understood through narrowly individuated intention or singular mediums. The second section (Spaces, Places, Environments) puts this environmental view of media front and center. As McKim suggests, phenomenologically inspired conceptualizations of media as atmospheric, ambient and environmental have become increasingly dominant in recent literature focusing on media and urban space. Yet the literature informing such environmental views has often been attenuated to media theory, missing entirely potentially informative phenomenological traditions in architectural thought, which offer a distinct way into the phenomenology of media as McKim shows in his chapter. Krajina and Lavi, meanwhile, connect extensive qualitative research – on everyday encounters with digital screens and diasporic uses of media respectively – with longstanding phenomenological influences in cultural geography. Instead of adopting the common tropes of media technologies eroding authentic places, or bridging the distances in-between localities, both examine the ways in which media are intrinsic to the process of place-making

as a form of everyday orientation. And while the mediated nature of everyday environments is often naturalized and therefore invisible, it just as often demands continuous, self-reflexive management. As Burchell shows drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical analysis, even as mobile devices potentially afford an environment of perpetual availability or presence, their everyday use is comprised by accomplished practices of purposeful unavailability or absence.

The emphasis the chapters of the final section (Meaning, Politics, Ethics) place on how mediated experience can give way to more explicit forms of meaning and political praxis challenges the conventional presumption that phenomenology, in prioritizing and even celebrating the banal, is apolitical. There are good reasons for such presumption, however. As Malin argues, phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty share some of the same physicalist inclinations as early 20th century psychology, in that both implicitly position themselves against folk psychology – common sense ways of explicitly stating one's mental perceptions. For Malin, taking a non-reductive approach to media involves striking a balance between, on the one hand, taking self-reflective statements about media experience seriously, and on the other hand, avoiding an uncritical and unquestioning celebration of ordinary people's voices. So, a non-reductive approach can and should, for example, still invite an analysis of the structuring qualities of technical media. As Bendor shows in his chapter on interactive gaming, the fundamental undecidability of computational interfaces – the ways in which their everyday workability requires intermittent recognition of the interface itself (see also Berry, this volume) – can produce disruptions that lead to meaningful moments of clarity or reflexivity. Properly attending to such questions of meaning, and in turn politics, might however require creating interdisciplinary dialogues between complementary approaches and methodologies. In an account of his own documentary film practice, Brylla brings phenomenological approaches into contact with cognitive film theory to think though the translations of meaning that take place from the practices of filmmaking to the experience

of audiences. As we noted earlier, one potential merit of a phenomenological approach to media politics is the rejection of a deus ex machina – a politics that emerges from deep causal structures – and the related priority placed on experience and practice, from which a consideration of media ethics might emerge. Jordan's chapter deals most directly with questions of ethics, showing how consumer discourses which surround recent noise cancellation devices somewhat problematically inherit long-posited philosophical and often specifically phenomenological appeals to quiet, so as to open up a space for thought.

Collectively, too, we hope that the chapters of this volume open up novel ways of thinking about media, raising as many questions as they answer. Rather than capturing and resolving debates over how media are experienced, the dialogues and chapters have been curated and edited so as to point towards new lines of inquiry, demonstrating what becomes thinkable when scholars from disparate disciplines engage over shared concerns and curiosities about media.

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