University of Western Sydney

CENTRE FOR CULTURAL RESEARCH

CCR seminar series 2010

# Scott Rodgers

(Birkbeck, University of London)

## Communicative practices and the city: the mediated phenomenologies of urban life

Recent work in both urban and media studies have increasingly demonstrated converging concerns in what have traditionally been quite separate areas of scholarly inquiry. Yet when such work has asked specifically political questions about the media-cities intersection, there has been a tendency to embrace either a centred image of 'the media' or a functionalist account of mediation. In this context, both 'media' and 'urban' get rendered into discrete domains for the production or reception of particular political effects and affects.
This paper seeks to challenge this by emphasizing what media and urban studies share around matters of politics. It begins by exploring two accounts of political space: Roger Silverstone's (2007) mediapolis and Engin Isin's (2002) use of polis to connect cities and citizenship.
Despite their apparent ontological contrasts, we argue these works'
shared engagement with political theory indicates the potential to move beyond the functionalist and effects-oriented understanding of politics at the media-urban interface. In particular, we suggest they point to the importance of reading politics in a rather ordinary sense: as those practices of claiming and negotiating who gets what, when, where and why; practices through which potential matters of public concern and concerted public action are articulated. This allows for media to be repositioned as the technologies intrinsic, in a phenomenological sense, to communicative practices of world-disclosure and addressing others. In such a revised formulation, media might be seen as technologies embedded in dispersed practices of routine urban life, and thereby constitutive of the phenomenological conditions of communicative practice in general.
And at the same time, what are usually called 'the' media might be seen as assemblages of integrative practices that help to constitute political objects and agents as specifically urban.

**Scott Rodger**s' research is focused on the intersections of media, politics and cities. One important strand of this interest is an exploration of how urban life has been a longstanding focus for and milieu of professional and amateur journalism, around which he is currently writing a book on the unraveling relationship of the newspaper and the city. He is also developing new projects on recently-proliferating forms of urban 'place blogging' and the place of media in making urban housing markets.

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# Bob Hodge

(CCR, University of Western Sydney)

## Complex order out of confusing chaos: Cultural research and the challenge of engagement

'Complexity' is a key term for the new approaches to cultural analysis that the CCR seeks to develop. Yet this project faces a crucial problem, in theory and practice. If the 'complexity turn' requires researchers to get on top of a new and demanding set of concepts and methods of analysis, why not stay longer with the standard tool-kit? And even if it is the case that most important problems today involve extraordinary levels of uncertainty, complexity and chaos, who wants to be told about it? If we want to make our mark as a force to be reckoned with in the major debates of today, we need to do more than mutter sagely, 'It's all very complex'. Or even worse: 'It's chaos'. At a minimum we need to be able to show that acknowledging chaos and complexity is an essential first step in providing clarifications and solutions. We need a powerful, accessible and non-reductionist set of theories, methods, and practices of research.
This seminar will report on current outcomes of an ARC project that aims to meet this need. Sydney's rail and transport system are constantly accused of being in crisis with problems typical of the complex, dysfunctional systems designed in the 20th century to deal with problems of the 21st.
This paper diagnoses a core problem, understanding common threads in a bewildering variety of views and weaving them together into possible outcomes for action, in a common tendency to react against the seemingly chaotic by imposing restrictive, unilateral forms of order. The more rigid the order that any party seeks to impose, the more relevant meanings it excludes, and the more voices it ignores.
This project draws on the idea of three-body analysis from Poincaré, to structure the mass of materials and players into three groups, each incorporating core oppositions, to make up a set of six interactants in a virtual hexalogue. It uses a software program, Leximancer, that is able to identify emergent concepts and themes in large amounts of data in order to see what core meanings, related to this structure of players, provide a potential basis for a common understanding, what pathways exist across the data, crossing what semantic obstacles, and what key themes may be blocking potential alliances and networks across current contending groups.
One particular challenge for an engagement strategy will be addressed: how to communicate findings of this research to key players currently hard to reach behind a fortress of linearity they have constructed, with strategies which are demonstrably making things worse?

**Bob Hodge**, FAAH, is Research Professor in Humanities in the Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney. He has degrees in English, Classics and Education from the University of Western Australia, and a PhD from Cambridge, where he was Research Fellow of Churchill College. He has written 20 books across a wide range of fields, including seminal works in social analysis (Social Semiotics 1988), Australian culture (Myths of Oz, 1986, Borderwork in Multicultural Australia 2006) and contemporary Aboriginal Culture (Darkside of the Dream 1990). Recently he has worked on highly complex problems at interfaces between science, technology and society, applying chaos and complexity theory to social issues (e.g. in Social Fuzziology 2002, Chaos Theory and the Larrikin Principle 2010).