

Conference report “Mediality and self-world relations”

Spring conference 6–8 March 2024

**International Graduate School “Resonant Self-World Relations” Max Weber Center Erfurt,
University of Graz**

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The IGS spring conference focused on 'Resonance and Mediality'. It discussed the praxeological, 'in depth hermeneutic' and communicative implications of the scientific use of media and how such use and the nature of media can promote resonance experiences or help understand world relations.

The opening keynote of Eva Schürmann discussed the philosophical concept of mediality. Schürmann first discussed the double meaning of the concept: the apparatus of a medium vs. the non-objective aspect of it. Since many things are media, the question is what they all have in common. Conceptually seen, they have general properties, the same features. Sometimes they are visible things: such as light, USB sticks, TikTok. In these cases, something is always conveyed into something other. Media, then, is alterity, is otherness; it is not neutral, but creates a reality itself. Martin Seel and Sybille Krämer, e.g., presuppose that something must be mediated and thereby produce something mediated. According to Kant, there is something given which is then perceived. Thus, there is a paradoxical structure and simultaneity. The exemplary case Prof. Schürmann talked about was the medium of perception, or the practice of seeing. In three steps, she presented the structural characteristics of the practice of seeing according to Helmut Plessner (1), the medial activity in which and through which world relations take place (2), as well as seeing as a performing practice of how something is perceived (3).

On the next day and in a second keynote, the archaeologist Ioannis Mylonopoulos in his presentation “Mediality and ancient Greek religious art as a product of construal process” spoke about how scholarship goes from the social life of objects to them being perceived as bearers of memory. In considering (and labelling) things, these can tell us about the life of things, their biographies in specific settings and contexts. A transition of context, however, can also produce a transition of meaning, thus weapons or clothes can have religious lives if they are transferred into other than their immediate contexts. On the other hand, vases could end their religious lives and become everyday objects, if so used.

After the keynotes, participants took part in a number of workshops on literature and archaeology.

In the first part on the workshop on literature, Ursula Gärtner and Clemens Wurzinger showed that ancient literature surprisingly often reflects on its own mediality: there are not only a large number of texts that emphasize their function as a medium, but also texts that go beyond their own boundaries as media and – despite their textual form – make use of intermediality to initiate a relationship with their recipients. It is precisely these two groups of texts that were in focus; with poems by Catullus, Ovid, Virgil, Martial, and the *Anthologia Graeca*, the reflexivity about their own medium as a literary technique of ancient poetry was presented briefly and discussed with the participants.

In the second part, Hans Jürgen Scheuer and Dina Bijelic discussed the Revelation of John as a media spectacle. The abundance of media emerging in the apocalypse represents channels ('relations') reaching out into the world. At the same time, it displays a closely meshed media network that produces 'world' in the first place. This apocalyptic figure of thought was demonstrated using three different historical formats and their apocalyptic content: first, on 16th century pamphlets spreading (bad) news; second, on the depictions of the 15 signs before Doomsday in medieval codices of the 14th century; and third, on the media depictions in the Revelation of John where the book format of the scroll plays a major roll.

In the archeology workshop, first the contribution by Valentina Limina, “‘Material’ Worlds: Alternative Narratives investigating past Identities and Landscape organization through Archaeological Objects and Computer Simulation”, aimed to reflect the need for more insightful interpretations of archaeological objects as “media products” that can reveal how the dynamics of identity and landscape formation worked in the past. Through the presentation of her post-doctoral project, RELOAD (REthinking Liminality Open Access Data), funded by F.R.S.-FNRS at UCLouvain as a case study, the paper argued that alternative narratives of the past could be achieved thanks to a better understanding of the interdependency between objects, human behaviour, and environment. Second, Marina Schutti showed how she works with mediality in her Ph.D. project which consists of an examination of the relationships between humans and pigs in Cyprus between the Neolithic, from when the pigs were transported to the island by humans, until the Classical/Hellenistic period (ca. 11,000–400 BCE). She deals with archaeological evidence such as pig remains, especially bones and teeth, written sources and iconography (depictions of pigs on vases or figurines) from a range of archaeological sites on the island. Third, Elisaveta Boiko talked about contemporary museum work and how it involves archived objects. She presented methods and cases putting museum artefacts in the context of archeology.

For the evening program, the alumni of the IGS, Blaž Ploj and Sára Heidl, presented the results of their finalized dissertations, „Resonante Weltbeziehungen im Kontext der rituellen Handlungen in den Komödien des Titus Maccius Plautus“ and “Event Religion. A Conceptual Approach with a Comparative Analysis of Three Case Studies“.

On the last conference day which focused on “Learning from art“, Vincenzo Cerulli talked about filmmaking practices within the theoretical framework of a resonance relationship. He looked at the media products of those artistic practices, films, from the perspective of Bruno Latour’s *Science in Action*, where he developed a critical and demythologising research method capable of showing what goes on behind the curtain of scientific practices: that is, how a given theory or technological artefact comes to develop and establish itself as generally accepted and taken for granted. In this sense, Cerulli framed films as medial “black boxes” whose content can only be detected through the study of their “past”, their formative processes. He used Theodor W. Adorno’s thought of works of art as privileged crossroads for the encounter of necessity and contingency, where he states that every work of art claims its own “wholeness”. Through exemplifications of the film “Blow-Up“ by Michaelangelo Antonioni, Cerulli asked if it is possible to trace back “the course of the river” to reveal and acknowledge the infinite web of contingencies and accidents that co-generated them.

In his presentation on “A Critical Theory of Listening“, Martin Mettin started with a figure of thought, placing the soundscape of the Berlin State Library on Potsdamer Platz as mirrored by the Architecture of the Berlin Philharmonic building facing it. As a theoretical background of his talk, Mettin used Ulrich Sonnemann’s concept of “Negative Anthropologie“, which i.a. states that language should be a medium of the ear, not of the eye, keeping a presence of the inner ear: listening means a confluence of the past, presence, and future. Thus reading slowly ‘with the ear’ is better than reading fast with the eye. Mettin brought three pieces of sound or listening techniques that he presented to the audience and later discussed: Pauline Oliveros’ “Deep Listening” that is supposed to keep the hearing ‘fresh’; Bach’s “Ricercar” and Anton Webern’s version of it; and Steven Kazuo Takasugi’s compositions, in which he modifies a set of sounds with algorithms and in the end curates them again himself.

Last but not least, the psychoanalyst Timo Storck gave an introduction to deep hermeneutic cultural studies and sociology and spoke about the investigation of crises using different film examples.

The conference program was accompanied by a work of art of Maximilian Stühlen titled “AFK Eden“, which was installed at the Max Weber Center research building.