

## Disobedience and Complex Systems (London, 29 Sep 17)

Iklectik Arts Lab, Old Paradise Yard, Carlisle Lane, London SE1 7LG, Sep 29, 2017

Deadline: Jul 16, 2017

Andrew Chesher, Chelsea College of Arts

Disobedience and Complex Systems: Art, Design, Media and the Political

A symposium organised by the Informed Matters Community of Practice, University of the Arts London to be held at Iklectik Arts Lab, London on 29 September 2017.

Call for Papers: We invite proposals for papers or presentations of 15 minutes in length, which speak to one of the panel topics below. If you would like to make a proposal please read the Symposium description below and prepare a 250-word abstract, which should be submitted by Sunday 16 July 2017 as part of a brief form you can find at:

[goo.gl/EKUt2Z](http://goo.gl/EKUt2Z)

Confirmed Speakers:

Marieke Borren, Utrecht University

Maria Tamboukou, University of East London

Neil Cummings, Chelsea College of Arts

Panels:

Panel 1. Arendt and the Political

The symposium starts with a panel considering the contemporary relevance of Hannah Arendt's contribution to political theory and, in particular, her concept of action. Marieke Borren's presentation, which will introduce the panel, will explore the philosophical dimensions of what a 'political phenomenology' arising out of Arendt's work might be, asking whether the phenomenological notion of the worldliness of human existence could be a promising resource for current debates on civil and political democracy.

Panel 2. Art and Politics after Arendt

The second panel explores the entanglements of art, action and politics, and will offer readings of Arendt's theory of action diffracted through the prism of other thinkers' arguments and art, design and media practices. The panel will begin with Maria Tamboukou's articulation of Arendt with Ranciere's politics of aesthetics, Deleuze and Guattari's notion of assemblage and Karen Barad's agential realism.

### Panel 3. Disobedience and Complex Systems

The third panel engages with problems raised by the complexity of contemporary social, cyber and organisational systems for the exercise of political agency, posing the question of whether disobedient acts are the only responsible acts in these contexts. The panel will start with a presentation by artist Neil Cummings exploring the necessity, in an environment of state and commercial surveillance, of struggles for privacy and of thinking about encryption, openness and misuse.

About the Symposium:

The point of departure for the symposium is the work of Hannah Arendt.

Why Arendt?

Arendt's work has been much invoked since the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, and her visibility in political theory has become even more prominent since the Arab Spring of 2011 and the subsequent Occupy movements.

Like others, we recognise the resonances that her work holds for our own practices and its value for understanding the contemporary period. More specifically, Arendt has been chosen because her work has helped both to shape the themes that *Informed Matters* is exploring in 2016-201 – namely action, complex systems and disobedience in the context and horizon of art, design, media and digital practices – and to give us a means to develop an understanding of those themes. Arendt enables those of us who are engaged in art, design and media practices to re-conceptualise critically and creatively what it is that we 'do' in terms of her 'political phenomenology' (Borren, 2010; Lejeune, 2013; Marder, 2014).

How so?

Firstly, she allows us to re-think the relationships between art, design, media and digital practices and the public and politics. Being able to evaluate these relationships with Arendt from the point of view of praxis enables us to conceive of and develop our practices as forms of (public) action that are political (and ethical) in character, rather than simply as (private) work or labour that are 'expressive' or 'aesthetic' in character.

Secondly, as a thinker of praxis (which she theorises as the *vita activa* or active life), Arendt allows us to think about contemporary practices, and the socio-political and socio-economic conjuncture which they articulate, in a 'holistic' and historic way. Her articulation of the distinctions among action, work and labour, as well as between power and violence, coupled with her analysis of totalitarian regimes, offer us a systemic approach to our situation, albeit through "what one might perhaps call her unsystematic system-building" (Canovan, 1992: 5).

Thirdly, she raises the question not only of 'what is action?', as well as of 'what should we do?' or 'how should we act?', but the importance of 'thinking' in that action too. That is, she raises questions of obedience to norms, rules, laws and established practices. In particular, she highlights the necessity, at times, of disobedience, and how acts of disobedience may yield specific insights into the potential ethical and political import of our practices in the current conjuncture, which might be called the Great Recession (Lanchester, 2011).

## The Call: Building upon Arendt

Arendt is a starting point, but her work does not unproblematically yield insights that we can simply put into practice, apply or appropriate. The symposium is interested to consider, firstly, insights that Arendt's work yields and might yet be or already have been put into practice, and secondly and equally, those generated from practice that can be used to extend and re-think Arendt's concepts. Last and not least, we are keen, in light of Arendt's work, to explore the interpenetration and interweaving of insights for practice and insights from practice.

It is these recognitions which lead to our call:

- What other thinkers and what other kinds of works are needed to develop Arendt's thinking so as to yield insights into contemporary art, design, media and digital practices, understood as action?
- What other kinds of works and practices are of interest if we are to generate and put to work insights that are resonant with, even if critical of, the kind of reflexive and diffractive thinking that Arendt initiates and calls for?

If you would like to respond to these questions and participate in the symposium, please submit your proposal at the googleform address above by Sunday 16 July 2017.

We look forward to hearing from you.

If you have any questions please contact:

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Allan Parsons (a.l.l.a.n.parsons@csm.arts.ac.uk).

### Reference:

CFP: Disobedience and Complex Systems (London, 29 Sep 17). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 13, 2017 (accessed Jun 7, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/15797>>.