

Video Conferencing: Practices, Politics, Aesthetics

Deadline: Apr 15, 2021

Olga Moskatova

The COVID-19 pandemic has reorganized existing methods of exchange, transforming comparatively marginal technologies into the new normal. Video conferencing in particular has become a favored means for spatially distributed forms of communication and collaboration without physical copresence. Corresponding apps and their infrastructures proliferate, leading to a widespread adoption of video conferencing in various societal domains, such as work, education, leisure, friends and family. This sudden omnipresence of video conferencing has already provoked a burst of reactions in recent months, with the rise of Zoom coming to stand for new practices of networked, synchronous online sociality. Scholars have discussed, for instance, Zoom's physical effects (e.g., "zoom fatigue"), privacy issues, malicious practices (e.g., "zoom bombing"), and split-screen aesthetics. Despite this attention, however, video conferencing remains relatively understudied in media studies. The "Video Conferencing: Practices, Politics, Aesthetics" anthology therefore takes the current situation as a point of departure for examining the mediality of video conferencing, while expanding the scope of the examination beyond the context of the pandemic to address video conferencing as a medium more broadly.

Video conferencing establishes connections and mediations whose analysis requires the consideration of different levels and their interrelation. Its mediality prompts to interrogate the complex interplay of materiality and software, platform structures and economies, education and society, and the aesthetics of encounters and their associated practices and technical procedures. The focus on the conditions, procedures, and effects of mediation raises questions both technical and cultural, political and aesthetic, and historical and topical. What socio-technical and practical needs does video conferencing respond to, and which practices and conditions, conversely, are produced by video conferencing in the first place? What political, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts are operative or altered in the process? To what extent are new opportunities of access, participation, and spanning distances opened up, or the conditions of being-with narrowed? And finally, what aesthetic forms are being generated, passed on, or modified?

To address these questions, the anthology puts emphasis on media processes and configurations that constitute video conferencing and structure its practices, politics, and aesthetics. As an umbrella term, "video conferencing" includes diverse and historical applications, such as image and video telephony, telepresence, and visual communications, and thus demands attention to the specific meanings and media practices it acquires in different contexts. Although the anthology is broadly conceived, it especially encourages proposals that engage approaches in media studies and related disciplines, such as media theory, film and television studies, critical infrastructure studies, science and technology studies, software and platform studies, critical theory, cultural studies, and interface studies. These diverse approaches share an interest in issues of

mediation and together enable a comprehensive account of the complexity of video conferencing as a media phenomenon. In this respect, the use of the gerund is also programmatic: in contrast to the noun "video conference," the progressive form "video conferencing" deliberately stresses the procedural, praxeological, and agential aspects of the subject.

The collection seeks proposals that engage with the mediality of video conferencing by connecting material from case studies to fundamental theoretical questions. Of particular interest are media theoretical perspectives that can shed light on how the current boom in video conferencing challenges the prevalent understandings of digitally networked media, possibly by interrelating different areas, ecologies and scales. Therefore, we particularly look forward to discussions regarding the role and significance of video conferencing in relation to other media and media practices. We also welcome proposals focusing on the impact of video conferencing on social and cultural stratifications, reflecting on the nonnormative or artistic uses of video conferencing or intertwining the aesthetical issues of video conferencing with issues of privacy and data-driven economies. In addition, papers may explore the ways in which video conferencing systems alter or influence the relations and tensions between technologies and modes of use, circulations and infrastructures, public and private spheres, individuals and collectives, proximity and distance of encounters, and audiovisual and other data practices.

Given that video conferencing represents a global phenomenon designed to cross borders yet bound to specific territorial conditions and local contexts, the anthology aims to gather international perspectives that may expose the different conditions prevailing in different regions of the world. Therefore, we particularly look forward to proposals from colleagues based outside Europe and North America.

Please send your abstract in the range of 500 to 700 words (including a short bibliography of three to five items) and short biography by April 15, 2021, to videoconferencing-anthology@sfb1187.uni-siegen.de. (Authors who are unable to keep the submission deadline due to COVID-19-related problems may however arrange an individual extension with the editors.)

The selected contributors are invited to submit draft chapters, which will be discussed at an authors' workshop. Depending on the global pandemic situation, the event will either take place at the Collaborative Research Center Media of Cooperation at the University of Siegen, Germany, on March 10 and 11, 2022, or will be held online. The anthology will be published by the German Transcript Publishing and distributed in the United States by Columbia University Press.

Timeline and Submission Deadlines:

- Initial abstracts due: April 15, 2021
- Author notification due: May 15, 2021
- Draft chapters (5,500–7,000 words) due: December 15, 2021
- Authors' workshop (incl. feedback and internal review of draft chapters): March 10–11, 2022

Editors: Axel Volmar, Olga Moskatova, Jan Distelmeyer

Reference:

CFP: Video Conferencing: Practices, Politics, Aesthetics. In: ArtHist.net, Feb 27, 2021 (accessed Jul 19, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/33482>>.