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ZeMKI Research Seminar

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Structure and Reproduction of Media Relationships: Exploring Possible Research Paths for Media and Social Change

Abstract:

This study explores the relationship between non-representational media (such as microscopes) and long-term social change. Existing media research predominantly focuses on micro-level practices or uses representational media (print, television, internet) as markers for periodizing society, while overlooking non-representational media that span multiple social stages. Under a broad conception of media, new theoretical approaches are needed to understand how non-representational media like microscopes relate to long-term social transformation. Taking a media perspective with specific media objects as research subjects, this study employs "media relationships" as its core analytical concept and constructs a dual-dimensional framework of "media relationship structure-reproduction" to connect micro-level media practices with macro-level social change. The study proposes that: (1) The media perspective comprises two core elements: the materiality and relationality of media objects. Here, relationships are understood as context rather than ontological relations, material properties exist within relationships, and media emerge as non-essentialist contextual formations. (2) Media history is the history of media relationships. Media relationships are both the object upon which media act and the context within which media are situated. (3) Unlike most studies that focus on structural dimensions, this research proposes two analytical dimensions of media relationships: media relationship structure and media relationship reproduction. Media relationship structure (vertical dimension) refers to the structural characteristics among relational elements mediated by media objects. Media relationship reproduction (horizontal dimension) refers to the scale of diffusion and degree of institutionalization of media relationship structures. These two dimensions dynamically co-constitute each other, jointly positioning media objects within specific contexts. (4) Social change is not an external backdrop to media, but rather a process that manifests and realizes itself through media relationships. Building on this theoretical approach, this study attempts to further explore media history narratives of objects such as microscopes.

Bio:

Guofei Gao is a Ph.D. candidate at Zhejiang University, China. She received her Bachelor's degree from Renmin University of China and Master's degree from Minzu University of China. Her current research interests encompass media sociology, philosophy of media, and media history. She has published in leading Chinese academic journals. Her doctoral dissertation focuses on the media history of the microscope, examining how this non-representational medium has shaped scientific knowledge production and social transformation.