

Challenges of Media Anthropology

Princeton-Weimar Summer School for Media Studies

Bauhaus-Universität Weimar—Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnikforschung und Medienphilosophie
Princeton University—German Department

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The Princeton-Weimar Summer School for Media Studies—a collaboration between Bauhaus-Universität Weimar ([Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnikforschung und Medienphilosophie, IKKM](#)) and Princeton University ([German Department](#))—returns to Weimar in 2017 for its seventh installment. This year's session will be concerned with the dynamics at work between the forms and practices of human being on the one hand and media operations and orderings on the other. Interested in far more than the mere study of media appropriation in different cultures or media usage by various disciplines, the summer school will focus on the co-agency and co-reflexivity of media and human existence, a commonality that renders impossible any division of the latter pair as separate entities.

The summer school will be directed by Lorenz Engell (Weimar) and Thomas Y. Levin (Princeton). The faculty will include Jane Bennett (Baltimore), Elisabeth Bronfen (Zürich), Beatriz Colomina (Princeton), Erin Manning/Brian Massumi (Montreal), Avital Ronell (New York), Christiane Voß (Weimar) and others.

The Princeton-Weimar Summer School for Media Studies invites applications internationally from outstanding doctoral candidates working in media studies and related fields such as film studies, literary studies, philosophy, art history, architecture, sociology, politics, the history of science and visual culture.

For updates to the program and faculty of the Princeton-Weimar Summer School for Media Studies please visit <http://german.princeton.edu/ssms> and <http://www.ikkm-weimar.de/>.

All application materials should be sent by email to ikkm-conference@uni-weimar.de and must be received by **January 1st, 2017**.

Coordinators:

Katharina Rein (Weimar), William Stewart (Princeton)

Please submit all inquiries to: ikkm-conference@uni-weimar.de

Annual Topic: Media Anthropology

Media anthropology is generally understood, especially in the Anglo-American realm, as the investigation of different forms of media appropriations and media usages across cultures, sub-cultures, or societies, including of course the medial practices of anthropological research itself. However, as relevant as such topics are, they raise a host of much bigger and more complex issues that urgently demand careful theoretical interrogation.

Within the realm of media studies, the position of what used to be called “the human” is both delicate and highly disputed. On the one hand, some theorists challenge the validity of the very category of “the human” and thereby also the conceptual and empirical foundations of the above-mentioned approaches. According to the basic concepts of radical materialist media theory and media archeology—perhaps most paradigmatically in the work of Friedrich Kittler—the “so-called human being” is manifest, if at all, only as an epiphenomenal effect. In this view, time will ultimately expose the fundamental contingency of the construction of “the human,” as Michel Foucault insisted with his famous image of the footprint on the beach that is washed away by the next wave. For media theory, there is no such thing as human exceptionality—no “soul,” no “spirit,” no “ingenuity,” no “inventiveness,” no “intelligence” that could not be described either as the product of discursive, epistemic and laboratory practices, or as technically reproducible by means of implemented mathematics. Nevertheless, there are elements of media theory and philosophy, even in some of its most advanced forms, that remain haunted by the shadow of the—now forbidden—anthropological question. Indeed, somewhat surprisingly, this anti-anthropological move was preceded and paralleled by the rejection of explicitly anthropological positions in works of post-Nietzschean modern philosophy by authors as diverse as Theodor W. Adorno and Martin Heidegger.

On the other hand, certain key positions of early media theory, as exemplified in the work of Marshall McLuhan, are purely anthropological in character, as evidenced in the primordial mutual involution of the human and the technological, in McLuhan’s conception of media as extended perception, and, from a more global perspective, in his gestures towards the different functions of technical media in non-Western cultures and traditions. Anthropological concerns also emerge as a less explicit but underlying concern of 20th-century philosophy, as manifest in the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the philosopher of media Günter Anders. In philosophical terms, it has even been argued that non-anthropocentric thinking is simply impossible.

Recent developments such as global migration and ecological catastrophe demand that one rethink human existence as regards its forms, terms, operations, as well as its conditions and situatedness. This in turn makes imperative a reconsideration of the relation between the human and media. Yet the urgent contemporary discussion of “the Anthropocene” largely ignores the function of media and of technologies in general as co-agents in their own right. Important media-anthropological questions are also raised by the renewed debates on the relevance and reason of human and animal rights and the recurring concern in popular culture with the human in relation to machines, programs, robot technologies and other humanoid artifacts. In these contexts theoretical models of “symmetrical” (Bruno Latour) or “non-anthropic” anthropology (Robert Welsch) seem deeply appropriate, yet nevertheless fail to address the mediatic grounds on which any relational anthropology would have to take place.

Based on the premise that there is no human without media, the seventh annual Princeton-Weimar Summer School for Media Studies will focus on the diverse forms and operations of the coupling, the co-agency and the co-evolution of humans and media instead of their traditional distinction and separation. The conceptual challenges posed by such questions of human-media relatedness will be examined along four loosely defined sets of concerns:

1. Concepts and theories: How does the philosophical tradition conceive of the (non-)human and how is it conceptualized in media theory and related fields? Are there theoretical models that might contribute to an understanding of the reciprocally co-constitutive character of human existence and mediatic operations and orderings?

2. Knowledge production: How did and how does the shaping of the (non-)human work in experimental physiology, recent neurology, paleoanthropology, and other sciences? In their wake, how are specific technologies of observation and inscription involved in the production of what then is called "the human"?

3. Practices: In light of questions posed by "visual/sensory anthropology," how are we to conceive of media in ethnography or, conversely, the ethnography of media? How do human-media interrelations generate sensorial activity and vice versa?

4. Aesthetics: How do media cooperate in the perception, representation, reproduction and experience of the (non-)human, and with what effects? How are the realms of aesthetics and aesthetic experience linked to the intertwined and mutually generating categories of the human and media?

About the Summer School

The Princeton-Weimar Summer School for Media Studies provides advanced training in the study of media and cultural techniques. Focusing on one special topic annually, it affords a select group of fourteen graduate students the opportunity to work with distinguished international scholars from all fields of media studies in an intimate and highly focused context, as well as a platform for dialogue with other doctoral students from around the world working in similar or related fields. In addition to the seminar sessions, workshops and lectures, the summer school program includes opportunities for extended one-on-one consultations with the faculty.

Five morning seminars are led by the directors of the summer school, respectively. Afternoon sessions taught by the summer school faculty provide further opportunities for interaction and participation. A series of evening events including invited lectures and film screenings explore other facets of the summer school's topic.

Participants will receive a reader with texts and material for the seminars. The working language of the summer school is English.

How to Apply

All applications should be submitted electronically in PDF format and should include the following:

1. Letter of Intent indicating academic experience and interest in the summer school's annual topic (max. 300 words);
2. Curriculum Vitae (max. 2 pages);
3. Abstract of a possible presentation at the Princeton-Weimar Summer School for Media Studies, double spaced, with standard margins (max. 450 words);
4. Contact information (name, institutional address, email) of two potential references.

Please use the following naming convention for your application files:

Lastname_Letter_of_Intent.pdf

Lastname_Curriculum_Vitae.pdf

Lastname_Abstract.pdf

Lastname_Contact_Info.pdf

All application materials should be sent by email to

ikkm-conference@uni-weimar.de

and must be received by **January 1st, 2017**.

Applicants who have been admitted will be notified in late January 2017.

Once admitted, applicants are required to transfer a participation fee that covers tuition, full accommodation, meals, and all study materials during the entire week of the summer school. The payment of \$750 should be received by February 28, 2017, to guarantee the spot. A limited amount of travel funding will be available upon application.