

The Technologization of Cultural Techniques.  
What Happens When Practices Become Algorithmic Technologies?

Princeton-Weimar Summer School for Media Studies  
Internationales Kolleg für Kulturtechnikforschung und Medienphilosophie  
(Bauhaus-Universität Weimar)  
German Department (Princeton University)  
Weimar, Germany, June 22–29, 2019

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 2019 for its ninth installment. At an historical moment marked by a shift from mass media to what could be described as the implementation of cultural techniques, the 2019 session will be devoted to the question what happens to concepts derived from cultural techniques – like writing, erasure, image, number, not to mention the concept of culture itself – when implemented by algorithmic routines that run on computers or mobile media and thus effectively become digitized cultural technologies.

The 2019 Princeton-Weimar Summer School for Media Studies – which will be directed by Thomas Y. Levin (Princeton) and Bernhard Siegert (Weimar) – will attempt to map out approaches to media as networks of cultural technologies. We invite applications from outstanding doctoral students throughout the world 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 the most up-to-date information on the program and faculty of the Princeton-Weimar Summer School for Media Studies please visit <http://www.ikkm-weimar.de> and <http://german.princeton.edu/ssms>.

All application materials should be sent via email to: [ikkm-conference@uni-weimar.de](mailto:ikkm-conference@uni-weimar.de) and must be received no later than December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

Coordinators:

Katharina Rein (Weimar), Elias Pitegoff (Princeton)

Please submit all inquiries to: [ikkm-conference@uni-weimar.de](mailto:ikkm-conference@uni-weimar.de)

## Annual Topic

Describing what he calls “the emblematic media corporation of our age”, i. e. Google, John Durham Peters states in his 2015 study *The Marvelous Clouds* that “media have shifted from mass media to cultural techniques not only in theory, but in fact.” Google does not produce programs as such but provides organizational services based on algorithms by which cultural techniques like search, document storage (archiving), calendars, maps and navigation, or translation are implemented. This shift has changed the field of Media Studies in a dramatic way: Media histories are challenged by the fact that their subjects are no longer radio, cinema or TV but practices and operations that traverse various media and multiple dispositifs. The recasting of media as cultural techniques demands new media histories that map out the histories of practices and operations across epochs and disciplines: histories of navigating, searching, sampling, counting, or drawing, not to mention the elemental cultural techniques like reading and writing that were subjected to a special fate in the era of their digitization.

When thinking of concepts such as image, number, or tone it is crucial to recall that, as Thomas Macho once stated: “cultural techniques are always older than the concepts generated from them.” People made comparisons before they possessed the concept of the metaphor; people navigated land and sea before they possessed an abstract concept of space; people measured time before they had an abstract concept of time. Indeed people most probably processed the distinction between inside and outside before they derived from those operations the political concept of the city. Hence, the question is not how techniques leave the domain of the human in the course of becoming digital technologies but how these processes of “exteriorization” (Leroi-Gourhan) change the very concepts of, say, number, image, comparison, space, time, or city.

However, the anthropological category of “exteriorization” does not fully do justice to these processes since they operate retroactively and recursively on the original techniques. Alongside the concept of the text and the book, the practice of reading has also changed in the course of digitization and the algorithmization of knowledge processing; together with the concept of comparison the practice of comparing has changed since comparing (for instance of images) has turned into an operation which is based on data mining and machine learning. Yet inversely we must also consider – in a media-archaeological manner – the technological state of the art as a starting point from which to ask what cultural techniques were in the first place. How does the computerization of cultural techniques produce new forms of subjectivity? As the concept of cultural techniques implies already the notion of “chains of operations” and thereby a permanent (retro-)coupling of human and nonhuman agency, how does the technologization and computerization of cultural techniques change the very nature of knowing, of affect, of being-with-others (people, things, animals)?

Finally, classic cultural techniques like indexing or tagging, for instance, have gained ontological powers in the age of Google: only that which is tagged exists at all. Only what is searchable is at

all. At the same time, in the fantasies of media corporations the range of objects that can be tagged (including people) tends to become co-extensive with the world of phenomena itself (if not the real world), which then will always be just an augmented version of itself.

The 2019 Princeton-Weimar Summer School for Media Studies invites doctoral students to present case studies of cultural techniques rearticulated as algorithmic technologies that may or may not explore one of the examples mentioned above.

## 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 and provides a platform for participants to engage in dialogue with other doctoral students from around the world working in similar or related fields. The directors of the summer school lead four morning seminars. Afternoon sessions taught by the summer school faculty provide further opportunities for interaction and participation. A series of evening events, such as lectures and film screenings explore other facets of the annual summer school 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:

Letter of Intent indicating academic experience and interest in the summer school's annual topic (max. 300 words);

Curriculum Vitae (max. 2 pages);

Abstract of a possible presentation at the Princeton-Weimar Summer School for Media Studies (max. 450 words);

Contact information of two potential references (name, institutional address, email).

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 via email to: [ikkm-conference@uni-weimar.de](mailto:ikkm-conference@uni-weimar.de) and must be received by **December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018**.

Applicants who have been admitted will be notified in February 2019.

Once admitted, applicants are required to transfer the participation fee, which covers tuition, room and board, as well as all study materials during the entire week of the summer school. The payment of 600€ should be received by February 28, 2019 to guarantee a spot in the program. A limited amount of travel funding will be available upon application.