

## Challenging Methods

### 1. Lüneburg Summer School for Digital Cultures

**20.–26.9.2015, Leuphana Universität of Lüneburg, Germany**

Hosted by Digital Cultures Research Lab and the Institute for Advanced Study on Media Cultures of Computer Simulation

Organized by Florian Sprenger and Christoph Engemann

The inaugural issue of the Lüneburg Summer School for Digital Cultures explores the question and challenge of methods in media studies and digital cultures. Hosted by the Institute for Advanced Study Media Cultures of Computer Simulation (MECS) and the Digital Cultures Research Lab (DCRL), the Lüneburg Summer School for Digital Cultures provides advanced training in the study of media, their theory, aesthetics and history. Focusing on one special topic annually, it affords a select group of 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.

This year's topic, Challenging Methods, reacts to the demands for a discussion of methods that recently have become prevalent in the context of media studies. Historically and institutionally, this field of research originated when scholars from a variety of fields started to confront their disciplines and specifically their methodologies with the questions of media epistemology. From those investigations of the hitherto overlooked media-theoretical presumptions and media practices of their original fields, a discourse emerged that was labeled media studies – “Medienwissenschaften”.

Incorporating heterogeneous approaches ranging from philosophical and aesthetic via ethnographic and sociological to epistemological and performative as well as interventionist practices and net criticism, media studies has not developed an overarching theoretical or methodological frame and instead privileged object specific approaches.

Nonetheless, it is within this exchange among disciplines, and fostered by the tasks brought forward by digitalization, that the question of the relationship between media and methods recently has become a prominent field of inquiry. This includes demands for a specification of methods in media studies. Data-driven analysis of large corpora of texts, visuals or sounds have led to a re-adjustment of the question of empirical, qualitative and historical research, while at the same time raising methodological expectations. The stakes of digitalization, themselves important topics of the field, intervene in the economy of sources, their circulation and availability, hence in the practices of research and increasingly turn out to be a challenge of methods for media studies.

It is this situation between new technical possibilities and an institutional consolidation that frames the Summer School. Despite these developments, it seems futile to simply project the longstanding methodological debates of sociology, history, or eth-

nography onto the respective fields of media research. In this regard, the stakes of media studies lie in the assumption that methodological questions always question the media of methods: those very technologies and epistemological presumptions that underlie all methods.

This is the point of departure for the Summer School. Instead of taking account of different methods, we intend to create an open and provocative space for the reflection of the technical, epistemological, historical, and perhaps also methodological conditions of methods, either under the reign of digitalization or regarding a re-formulation of specific presuppositions. As a forum, the Summer School "Challenging Methods" will investigate the historical situation of the current demand for methods, the importance of technological developments, and the subsequent transformations of our own research, writing, and thinking.

Considering the experience that methodological questions are most thoroughly addressed in dissertations, the Lüneburg Summer School for Digital Cultures will bring together a group of around 18 young international scholars with renowned faculty to investigate the status and challenge of methods in media studies. Connecting scholars from different fields, it aims to open up discussions in media studies, while at the same time offering the chance to investigate the specific mediality of methods in other fields.

The weeklong Summer School is structured as a series of shared seminars, keynote lectures and three streams taught in small groups. The first stream will investigate the promise of digital tools; the second stream will tackle the dimensions of a politics of methods; and the third stream will confront methods as cultural techniques:

1. *Tools of Methods – Chaired by Till Heilmann (University of Bonn), Keynote by David Gugerli (ETH Zürich)*

This stream asks how the increased use of digital devices in humanities research affects methodology. Starting with an introduction to the different media theoretical conceptions of tools the stream will investigate the specificity of digital tools and ask if the notion of the tool changes under digital conditions. In light of this background the group will investigate the relation between new digital tools like text editors or database systems and the evocation of new methods as promoted by the digital humanities. How can such recursive research into the evolving digital research infrastructures help us to understand our own changing methods and allow us to shape new types of methodologies, without methodology becoming an end in itself?

2. *Politics of Methods – Chaired by Hanno Pahl (University of Luzern), Keynote Nina Wakeford (Goldsmiths University of London)*

Methods play a central role in shaping the knowledge regimes of scientific disciplines. Studying the often contentious history of their institutionalization within a field allows an investigation of how the introduction of methods privileges certain epistemological positions. Via comparing media studies to two establis-

hed disciplines – economics and sociology – this stream will explore the history and presence of the politics of methods in their institutional and epistemological effects. How can such comparison not only help to profile the specifics of digital media studies' methods, but also provide evocative potential for exchanges between media theory, social theory and theoretical takes on markets and capitalism?

3. *Cultural Techniques – Chaired by Christina Vagt (Humboldt University Berlin), Keynote Wolfgang Schäffner (Humboldt University Berlin)*

The three primary registers of cultural techniques (image, writing, number) can help to understand the role of materiality and technology within the sciences and humanities. In this respect, cultural techniques are modern auxiliary sciences (an assemblage of methods and objects) that can disrupt or stabilize specific objects or methods within disciplines. The stream will ask its participants to practice and reflect on their own field of study and their methodological framework as cultural technicians. It will also question, how the cultural techniques approach, which so far has gained particular traction in historical and epistemological research contexts, can be made fruitful in contexts of ethnographic or interventionist inquiry.

<b>Faculty / Keynotes</b> David Gugerli Wolfgang Schäffner Nina Wakeford	<b>External Faculty</b> Till Heilmann Hanno Pahl Christina Vagt	<b>Internal Faculty</b> Christoph Engemann Florian Sprenger Boris Traue
<b>Participants</b> Carolin Anda Stefanie Bräuer Sarah Brown Elinor Carmi Mathias Denecke Judith Dobler	Brian House Carla Ilten Meg R. Jackson Nils Menzler Esther Meyer Martin Müller	Eva Schauerte Rory Solomon Nathan Taylor Kornelia Trytko Scott Wark Siyuan Yin