

Call for Papers

Literature and Media Theory: Mediality – Materiality – Cultural Techniques

Göttingen University, 19 – 21 March 2015

Keynote speakers:

Christoph Reinfandt (Tübingen)

Laurence Rickels (Saas-Fee/Karlsruhe)

The so-called *medial turn* and the ever-growing importance of film, television and the internet in recent decades have led not only to a radical change in the humanities but also to an alteration of the way we read and investigate literature. The field of literary studies has been increasingly broadened in the light of this development. After the crisis of theory and the erosion of the deconstructionist paradigm at the turn of the millennium, media theory has become one of the most productive approaches to literature. Yet, while the relation between literature and other media has already been investigated in a number of critical studies, this conference aims at discussing literature as a medium in its own right. The theoretical foundations allowing such a conception of literature go back to the 1960s; however, what is still lacking in literary studies is both a detailed scrutiny of the benefits and (dis)advantages of these and examinations of the results of said advanced theories by re-applying them in readings of concrete literary texts. A concept linking both the term *literature* and the term *medium* that promises to solve these theoretical problems is that of *cultural technique*.

Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Jussi Parikka have recently (2013) shown that the term *cultural technique*, which has a long tradition primarily in German theory, has experienced a widening of its semantic range since the turn of the millennium: it covers phenomena as diverse and disparate as gadgets, artefacts and infrastructures on the one hand, and skills, routines, practices and techniques on the other. Hence, the term invites us to look at literature from the perspective of cultural studies. *Cultural techniques* – because they focus less on technical media than on processual and performative mediality while maintaining their dialectical relation – form a connection with recent developments in media theory. Ultimately, this allows for transcending prevalent aporia: first, the metaphor of ‘culture as text’, and second, the hardware-determinism of Friedrich Kittler. While the limits of the former are themselves medially determined in that it solely understands culture as a discursively organized phenomenon, the latter suggests that basically everything is reducible to sheer materiality.

It is the aim of this conference to critically investigate literature as a medium in the light of cultural techniques: How can the mediality of literature be explored without reducing it to textuality? What are the benefits in using theoretical concepts such as cultural technique and mediality when interpreting a given literary text? How is the field of literary studies supposed to respond to the described theoretical circumstances? Fundamentally relying on its material and technical nature – writing, print, text, etc. – literature is also constitutively not reducible to them. We believe that the dialogue between literary and cultural studies, on the one hand, and media studies, on the other, promises to open up new perspectives and opportunities. We are particularly interested in contributions combining advanced theoretically informed thought with a historical perspective on concrete literary texts. We invite proposals that combine theoretical rationale with readings from Anglophone literatures spanning from the Early Modern period to the present.

We invite proposals for 30-minute-papers as well as for pre-formed panels. Possible topics may include, but are certainly not limited to, the following:

- Literature in/and media philosophy
- The history of the (cultural) technology of literature
- Reduction or increase of complexity? Narrative as a cultural technique for structuring reality
- Story-telling and narrative as cultural techniques
- The materiality of writing
- Cultural techniques of reading and interpretation
- Translation as cultural technique
- Transmission – Storage – Processing: Literature and the changing configurations of its medial functions in history
- White noise and breakdowns: Literature of/and interferences
- The texture(s) of literature
- Questions of genre
- Cultural techniques as impetus for professionalisation: Institutionalisation and commodification of literature
- *Writing* back? Media theory and postcolonial literature
- Messengers and go-betweens: figurations of the medial in literature
- Cultures of orality/manuscript/print/the digital: Simultaneity and mutual influence of the primary, secondary and tertiary media of literature
- The intrinsic logic ('Eigenlogik') of literature and the creativity of mediation
- Kittler re-visited: Discourse Networks prior to 1800?

We intend to publish a selection of papers after the conference.

Conference convenors:

Susanne Bayerlipp (Munich)

Ralf Haekel (Göttingen / Darmstadt)

Johannes Schlegel (Potsdam)

Please send abstracts (up to 400 words) and a short bio-bibliographical note by 15 August 2014, as well as general inquiries, to literatureandmediatheory@gmail.com

We will notify you by 1 September 2014.

www.literatureandmediatheory.wordpress.com