

## CALL FOR PAPERS

# MEDIA HISTORY FROM THE MARGINS

CSF Summer Seminar at Monte Verità, Switzerland

August 19-24, 2018

Co-organized by the Universities of Lausanne and Luxembourg, and USI  
Università della Svizzera Italiana

### Keynote Speakers

- Weihong Bao, University of Berkeley
- Jérôme Bourdon, University of Tel Aviv
- Lisa Parks, MIT
- Trevor Pinch, Cornell University

The summer seminar aims to rethink media history from the margins and to place at the center of our attention neglected, alternative, or censored media texts, uses, and technologies. By shifting the discussion from hegemonic actors, dominant institutions, and successful mass media to the fringes of media history, it pursues the double objective of rewriting media *history* into media *histories*, and of opening a space to rethink historiographical practices and methods. The writing of marginal histories is inseparable from a reflection on the modes of operation and politics of historical writing: bringing together established and emerging scholars, the seminar investigates what has been left over by hegemonic mass media *and* hegemonic historical narratives.

Traditionally, media history has been conceived as a ‘grand narrative’ of singular media and national institutions: the ‘birth’ of cinema at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its subsequent ‘coming of age’ with the conversion to *talkies*; the history of public broadcasters in European countries; the dominance of post-war TV; and more recently the hegemony of digital media. Given the importance of media for the construction and consolidation of national mediascapes, media history has furthermore received mostly attention from a national angle, notwithstanding the importance of transnational communication in a globalized world.

More recent historiography has challenged these narratives by highlighting the importance of transnational circulations and intermedial relations. Instead of studying singular media within national borders, it focuses on the “entanglement” of actors, practices, and technologies approached from the perspective of dynamic relationships and interdependences. Building upon this scholarship, the seminar favors a multilayered perspective emphasizing transient media experiences, material and conceptual hybridity, and marginal events. More particularly, it proposes to critically reflect upon centers and peripheries in media history: the expression ‘from the margins’ is borrowed from postcolonial history exploring the peripheries of world history in order to “de-center” Western histories, as well as to stimulate a debate on history as a discipline. Here, rather than retelling the past, history functions as an act of resistance countering dominant narratives.

The seminar is structured in three sections expanding on three days, to which is added a one-day graduate symposium. Titled *Marginal Spaces*, *Marginal Objects*, *Marginal Times*, the thematic axes pay particular attention to geographical and spatial, material and technological, and historiographical aspects of marginal media histories.

- *Marginal Spaces* looks at media and communication realms located outside the axes of traditional media history, and below or beyond national actors or geographically situated objects. We look for papers that rewrite the geography of producers, users, and discourses, and that revisit the logic of center-periphery and of inside-outside mainstream media by focusing, for instance, on migrating media objects, or alternative and activist media. We wish to discuss organizations and media makers working outside dominant media structures and to study, for instance, media making in the scientific and military sphere.
- *Marginal Objects* analyzes the diversity of technologies for recording, reproducing, projecting, and storing sound and images, text and data at various historical conjunctures. Embracing concrete and imaginary devices, successful machines and forgotten gadgets, the papers consider a variety of sources that exceed the technical discourse and relocate media materialities within their social, political, and economic contexts. We look in particular for papers that present original media objects and technologies from the perspective of an intermedial and hybrid media history, and that take the singular dispositif as a starting point for a broader theoretical discussion. In other words, we are interested in marginal objects that help reframe our methodological and theoretical perspectives.
- *Marginal Times* emphasizes media histories from a *longue durée* perspective that pays attention to the long life of once “new media”, and that looks at media practices in times of reconfiguration of the mass media ensemble. This section reconsiders “classic” periodizations in media history, and historically rethinks notions such as *convergence* or *transmedia* that structure current debates on contemporary media. It is interested in historical media and objects that “travel” across decades, and even centuries, acquiring new meanings and forms through such “time travel”. The notion of “times” finally refers to trends and “non-trends” in media history: which episodes or phases in media history have been neglected so far, and which disciplines or theoretical approaches might offer new perspectives in understanding media changes and continuities?

Situated on the top of a hill overlooking the Lake Maggiore, the location at Monte Verità is unique and offers a setting favorable for exchange and discussion (<http://www.monteverita.org/en/24/conference-centre-monte-verita.aspx>). We aim to take full advantage of this place to create a space for collaboration and dialogue. Rather than being conceived as a conference of one-way presentations, we consider the event as a collective exploration of the fringes of our field.

In consequence, we are interested in contributions that associate historical case studies with broader historiographical analysis, and that think about their own margins and blind spots. We welcome papers that address the overall theme by asking questions rather than giving answers, and that include the audience from the start on. We further look forward to proposals from scholars working outside the field of media studies and whose research challenges our own work. Finally, we encourage collaborative submissions that investigate innovative forms of academic work, and that communicate in formats other than the traditional talk.

### ***Graduate Students Symposium***

We invite Ph.D. students working on related topics to apply for the one-day graduate symposium. Held on the first day of the event, the graduate student workshop brings together Ph.D. students and seminar participants, and aims at facilitating exchange between emerging and established scholars on research-related issues. The graduate students will pre-circulate a short paper related to their thesis, which will be discussed in small groups. The discussion-

based format of the workshop allows for Ph.D. students to interact with participants and receive concrete feedback on their research.

### **Organization**

In order to create the best possible conditions for the summer seminar, we require the presence of all participants during its entire duration.

The provisory program is as follows:

Sunday, August 19: Arrival of participants

Monday, August 20: Welcome event and Graduate Students Seminar

Tuesday, August 21: *Marginal Spaces*

Wednesday, August 22: Group discussions (morning); excursion (afternoon – evening)

Thursday, August 23: *Marginal Objects*

Friday, August 24: *Marginal Times*, Conclusion, Departure of participants

### **Finances**

The seminar is organized at the Conference Centre Monte Verità, Ascona, Switzerland, the venue of choice for Congressi Stefano Franscini, the international conference platform of ETH Zurich. It is generously supported by the Congressi Stefano Franscini and the universities of Lausanne and Luxembourg. For participants who may not be able to cover their expenses via their universities, we may provide a stipend.

The costs are as follows:

Full Board and Accommodation Single Room : ca. 172.- / night / person

Full Board and Accommodation Double Occupation : ca. 85.- / night / person

### **Organizers**

François Vallotton and Anne-Katrin Weber, University of Lausanne

Gabriele Balbi, USI Università della Svizzera Italiana

Andreas Fickers, University of Luxembourg

### **Deadline for the summer seminar and the graduate student symposium:**

We look forward to abstracts of maximum 500 words and a short bibliography until January 31, 2018. Participants will be notified by March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018. Please include in your message whether you apply for financial assistance.

To apply for the graduate students symposium, we ask for a summary of the doctoral thesis and a short abstract of the questions / topic / primary sources you would like to discuss with the other participants. The short input papers will be circulated beginning of August 2018. Please include in your message whether you apply for financial assistance.

Please submit your abstract including a short biographical note to [François.Vallotton@unil.ch](mailto:Francois.Vallotton@unil.ch) and [Anne-Katrin.Weber@unil.ch](mailto:Anne-Katrin.Weber@unil.ch)



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