

**5<sup>th</sup> Ph.D. Summer School 2016 of Cultural Transformations presents a Two-Part Event:**

## **Sensing Collectivities—Rethinking the Haptic: Touch, Movement, and Surfaces**

**International PhD course, 16-18 June 2017, Hamburg University, Germany**

## **Thermal Objects—Theorizing Temperatures and the Social**

**International Workshop Hamburg 14-15 June 2017, University of Hamburg**

For this year's summer school of cultural transformations we have planned a two-part format: the PhD-course on "Sensing Collectivities" and a workshop on "Thermal objects". Students will have the opportunity to participate in both events and are able to gain 5 ECTS credits for the Summer School and an additional 3 ECTS for participating in the workshop on "Thermal Objects".

### **Part I: International Workshop Thermal Objects 14-15 June**

#### **Organisers**

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## Description

When heat and cold appear in the humanities and social sciences, they are often treated as metaphors. Since the very beginnings of sociology at the turn of the twentieth century, key theoretical concepts such as community and society have been described in hyperthermal terms: authors like Ferdinand Tönnies and Helmuth Plessner, from different normative perspectives, described the formation of the modern, urbanized society as a cooling process that freezes the warm, authentic community. Thermal metaphors turn out to be useful—perhaps even constitutive—tools that make abstract notions imaginable and tangible. However, the question of temperature was mostly overlooked by sociological theory, especially in its material relation to social phenomena.

The phenomenon of fire, for example, has been investigated from both scientific and cultural-historical perspectives and has been understood as crucial for the formation of the social. On the one hand, fire as one of the elements has been conceived of as a timeless force beyond society. On the other hand, the control of fire is seen as a precondition for culture—not only for basic cultural techniques like cooking, but also for language development and group formation. In a representational line of thinking, sociology tends to reduce the sensory qualities of heat and cold to mere metaphors for culture and the symbolic. The example of fire shows that the metaphoric and literal dimensions of heat are closely intertwined. Highlighting temperature leads us to a range of questions about the sensory materiality of the social, including the senses, the mediality of heat and cold, the conception of thermal objects, and thermopolitics.

Sensory studies have addressed sensory dimensions that are not explicitly listed in the classical five senses, such as the sense of motion and the sense of temperature. But is thermoception only an additional field for sensory studies, or does it also inflect our understanding of the social? In contrast to the sense of sight, which separates the seeing body from the object world, the thermal sense annihilates the subject/object divide. Thermal information always indicates directional effects: the perception of coldness, for example, presupposes that an object or the environment makes a body colder. From this perspective, affect theory has described heat as affect, as the “catalytic” and potentially emancipatory energy of becoming and involvement.

In this rather enthusiastic account, the question of the relation between the metaphoric dimension—for instance, in terms like “flow” and “energy”—and the sensory dimension of heat and coolness re-emerges. How can we take

into account our own use of (thermal) metaphors in our arguments and recognize their productivity? And how can we theoretically account for more-than-human thermal objects and elements, such as clouds, dust, or fire, without idealizing and anthropomorphizing them?

Returning to our earlier example, fire has clear infrastructural and mediating functions. Fire generates a thermal environment that consists of specific objects, infrastructures, and media technologies. When we grasp thermal elements as media, their material characteristics and properties become visible: for instance, their rhythms and movements, and their capacity to store, transfer, and conduct, but also their relatively short half-life. Do we need an enlarged notion of media in order to theorize thermal objects? Which sensory effects and relations do they produce? When we move away from the human body as the point of reference, the thermal qualities themselves become crucial. Smoke, dust, and clouds are bodies that have no simple edges or borders; they are, rather, absolute surfaces turning on themselves. Drawing on the account of Michel Serres, who has described the skin (not only of human bodies) as a milieu or a place of minglings, we will address thermal objects and atmospheres as phenomena that are perceived by their heterogeneously configured surfaces. How do different thermal bodies and surfaces meet, and how are their minglings and detachments organized? How are the senses of touch and temperature related?

There seems to be something genuinely controlling and regulating about thermoception, as it helps to maintain a certain body temperature. The biologic notion of homeostasis, which was taken up by cybernetic thought, turns us to the important question of measurement, control, and regulation of temperature, for instance in new thermal technologies of sensory control used by public security systems, the military, and the police. The politics of temperature have received renewed attention in and due to the discussions on climate change and its political effects (e.g., climate refugees, environmental catastrophes). However, the question of thermopolitics should not be reduced to that of climate change: we need a broader social and media-theoretical account of thermoception and thermal objects.

### **1. Tempered senses: Cool sensations and warm atmospheres**

- Skin-topologies and thermal bodies
- Haptic and visual surfaces
- Architectural spaces and tempered atmospheres
- Cultures of coolness and distance

- The thermal configuration of high and low, close and distant senses

## **2. Tempered media: Infrastructure and media hot and cool**

- Media environments and ecologies
- Temperature problems as infrastructural problems
- Data storage, freezing, and cooking information
- Heat as computing-power and engineering problem

## **3. Thermopolitics—between control and transgression**

- Thermodynamics and cybernetics
- Thermal utopia and dystopia
- History of the sciences: Historical discourses of temperature
- New thermal technologies

### **Invited speakers (confirmed)**

Nigel Clark (Lancaster)

John Hockey (Gloucestershire)

Helmut Lethen (Vienna)

Wolfgang Ernst (Berlin)

Esther Leslie (London)

Gunnar Schmidt (Trier)

### **Conference locations**

June 14th:

Central Congress: <http://centralcongress.de/>

June 15th:

Warburg-Haus: <http://www.warburg-haus.de/>

Interested participants should register via mail. For talks and presentations, please submit a short CV and a one page abstract (with title, 250 words max.) of your research related to temperature by **3 April, 2017**. Notification of acceptance will be given by April 10, 2017.

### **Contact**

[elena.beregow@wiso.uni-hamburg.de](mailto:elena.beregow@wiso.uni-hamburg.de)

**Credit Points** 3 ECTS

**Cost/ Policy** Participation fee 20€, each participant covers their own travel & accommodation.

**Max. number of participants** 30

**Exam:** active participation (e.g. conference report); no presentation necessary, but welcome if the Ph.D.-project fits into the frame of the workshop, subject to acceptance by the workshop organizers.

## **Part II. Summer School Sensing Collectivities 16-18 June:**

The summer school is funded by the Ph.D. program *Loose Connections: Collectivity in Urban and Digital Space*, University of Hamburg. The event is part of a cultural studies summer school network with Warwick University, University of Southern Denmark, Södertörn University, University of Hamburg, and Aarhus University as partners.

### **Organisers**

Prof. Dr. Urs Stäheli, Department of Sociology, University of Hamburg, [urs.staeheli@wiso.uni-hamburg.de](mailto:urs.staeheli@wiso.uni-hamburg.de)

Dr. Michael Liegl, Coordinator of the Ph.D.-program “Loose Connections”, University of Hamburg, [michael.liegl@wiso.uni-hamburg.de](mailto:michael.liegl@wiso.uni-hamburg.de)

Partners: Aarhus University, DK, Warwick University, UK, University of Southern Denmark, DK, Södertörn University, SE, CESAU, DK, Copenhagen Business School, DK

### **Confirmed keynotes**

Assistant Professor Nerea Calvillo, PhD – Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies, Warwick University, UK

Assistant Professor Anne Harris, MD, PhD – Technology & Society Studies, Maastricht University, NL

Post Doctoral Researcher Dr. Hanna Göbel – Human Movement Sciences / Performance Studies, University of Hamburg, Germany

Assistant Professor Mark W.D. Paterson, PhD - Sociology, University of Pittsburgh, USA

### **Lecturers / workshop organizers / discussants**

Staff of the PhD program “Loose Connections” at Hamburg University and members of the SSCT network

**ECTS** 5 ECTS

**Time** 16-18 June

**Location** Institut für Bewegungswissenschaft, Feldbrunnenstr. 70, 20148 Hamburg

**Cost/ Policy** Participation fee 30€, each participant covers their own travel & accommodation.

**Max. number of participants** 30

### **Description**

This summer school explores human and nonhuman collectivities as sensory, haptic beings. Classically, collectivities have been conceived of as visual and (to a lesser degree) auditory entities, most famously with the frontispiece of Hobbes’s Leviathan. The visual promised an imaginary totalization whereby the elements of a collectivity merged into a whole; likewise, the auditory focused on the self-referential moment wherein a collectivity—for example, a cheering crowd—heard itself. In contrast to these well-established approaches, we want to ask how the haptic senses, such as touching and kinesthesia, figure in the construction and dissolution of collectivities (think, for example, of the handshake as social touch). The haptic is often overlooked but is a central dimension of modernity; one might even wonder, as Walter Benjamin did, whether the tactile sparks a new ordering of the modern sensorium. To inquire into sensing is to move beyond the distinctions between subject and object or between self and other. Jean-Luc Nancy has put this paradox beautifully as “se toucher toi”: through its reflexive nature, touch blurs the boundaries of collectivities and points at new nonrepresentational analytical strategies for analyzing collective sensory processes.

“Sensing collectivities” addresses a double question: First, how do collectivities as a whole sense themselves and their environments? This question makes it necessary to regard sensing as a transindividual—perhaps even emergent—process, similar to viewing affect as transcending each separate body. It highlights the sensory capacities that collectivities possess and the role that sensing plays in such groups’ (dis)organization. How are collectivities able to sense themselves, and do

modes of sensual reflexivity arise? What cultural techniques and media technologies organize collective sensing?

Second, how and where is it possible to sense collectivities? These questions have become even more pertinent with the advent of sensory technologies in urban environments (the “smart city”), the establishment of new technologies of control and surveillance, and the remote sensing of less accessible areas by satellite technology. In addition, understanding collectivities as moving and rhythmic entities (whose rhythm includes moments of stillness, quietness, and standby) makes it necessary to ask how these movements are observed, processed, and channeled. The question of how to sense collectivities is also a methodological challenge for the researcher: How do we account for the sensory processes of collectivities? How do we put our often very fixed and immobile methodologies in movement without losing ourselves?

“Sensing collectivities” also addresses the underside of collective sensory processes. Movements might accelerate and escalate; touch might produce too much closeness. In short, the feedback mechanisms of touch and movement are fragile and precarious: it is no accident that early modern discourses about nervousness addressed questions of hectic and irregular movements; of electric shocks; of vertigo, contagion, and oversensitivity. The early twentieth-century diagnosis of “oversensitivity” arose simultaneously with the broad range of new, often machinic experiences of the haptic. Which practices and techniques have emerged for dealing with “oversensitivity”? What measures can counter these bodily-machinic stimulations and irritations? What new techniques can enable us to become distant, indifferent, and possibly even immune?

Highlighting the haptic in our discussion of “sensing collectivities” necessarily turns us to surfaces—notably, as Michel Serres suggested, to the skin (but also to media technological surfaces), as the contact zones that (dis)organize not only single bodies, but also collectivities. The surface is not limited to an aesthetic phenomenon in the narrow sense (as it were), or even to the broader idea of an interface with more depth. Thinking the haptic requires us to go beyond the old dichotomy between flat and deep—to account for how surfaces emerge not as passive backgrounds, but as active processes: as a doing of surfaces, as Tim Ingold has emphasized in his work on lines. When we begin to consider surfaces not simply as static givens, not simply as the passive medium for signs and meaning, it becomes essential to trace how surfaces move and fold. Drawing from sensory and affect studies, our investigation of surface processes may

help us to account for the dynamics of modern collectivities; for collective flows of energy; for collective endeavors in which surfaces are produced, controlled, and dissolved.

Topics related to this theme include:

- Haptic metaphors and collectivities (e.g., from movement to new social movements)
- Immunity and collectivity
- Techniques for producing and dissolving surfaces
- Tactile politics: From Untouchables to public political gatherings
- Media-skin: What can surface studies contribute to the analysis of new media?
- Mediality of sensing: From bodily sensing to remote sensing
- Cultural anthropology and history of touch and movement
- Discourses of oversensitivity as crisis diagnosis and cultural critique
- Surface as method? Methodological challenges
- Collective haptic experiences in urban spaces
- Haptic atmospheres and collectivity
- Bringing affect and sensory studies into dialogue
- Haptic surveillance technologies
- Sense and sensuality: The materiality and corporeality of collectives

### **Exam:**

The examination will consist of three parts:

1. Full paper hand-in (deadline May 22);
2. Attending workshops and doing group assignments;
3. Paper presentation and discussion of papers.

### **Deadline for submission**

**April 3 2017:** Send an email to Michael Liegl: [michael.liegl@wiso.uni-hamburg.de](mailto:michael.liegl@wiso.uni-hamburg.de)

Attach a description of your research topic and project (max. 300 words).

**April 10 2017:** You will be informed if your abstract got accepted, and you will be asked to confirm your participation.

**May 22:** Deadline for submitting a full paper (10 pages)



### **Preparation for teachers**

April: Organizers will read the abstracts and form participants groups.

Mid May: The group of teachers will be responsible for 3-4 papers, that he/she has read carefully in advance in order to 1) place the paper within the theme of the summer school 2) to be a discussant of the paper and to give an open and constructive feedback at the summer school.

### **About the summer school network (SSCT)**

The network and summer schools focus on three academic fields: 1) Im/materiality (e.g. studies of affect and materiality), 2) digital media ecologies and 3) participation and new collectives. Each summer school can decide to focus on one of them or to investigate the relations between two or all three of them.

The network and events aim at creating stronger connections and academic interaction between sociological, aesthetic and cultural studies departments in (Northern) Europe interested in the abovementioned academic areas. The network and events are furthermore especially interested in the relationship between theoretical developments and methodological challenges”.

<http://cc.au.dk/en/research/research-programmes/cultural-transformations/ssct-phd-summer-school-and-other-ct-phd-courses/>