

Call for Papers

Media Transitions and Cultural Debates in Arab Societies: Transhistorical Perspectives on the Impact of Communication Technologies International Conference of the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA)

Beit al-Hikma / The Tunisian Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts, Tunis

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In the last decades, the Arab world has witnessed the emergence and broad diffusion of 'new' media, most prominently the Internet. The opportunities provided by these new communication technologies have not only inspired and empowered a new generation of youth for political dissent, but have also fostered the emergence of new modes of cultural expression, literary styles and genres as well as new layers of readers and writers.

While the impact of new communication technologies has been mainly studied in regard to social and political movements, this workshop will focus on the relation between medium and cultural, particularly literary, production. In addition, the study of media in the Arab world is predominantly marked by what Walter Armbrust called a 'relentless presentism', which tends to look at digital media from a synchronic perspective, as if it were the first 'new media' to appear in the Arab world. However, the adoption of Internet technologies in recent times could be compared to the transition from oral to script culture that took place in the 9th century, or to the spread of print technologies after several centuries of a flourishing manuscript culture in the 19th century. The transhistorical perspective has proven useful in the field of media studies in general, but requires further exploration with specifics to the Arab region.

With regard to different media at different time periods, we are interested in exploring how the emergence and diffusion of 'new media' or communication technologies in Arab societies have affected the (conditions of) literary and cultural production, distribution, and reception and how cultural debates are shaped by the use of different media. The questions we would like to discuss include:

- Does the emergence of new communication technologies correspond to the emergence of new cultural actors? And do previously existing professions change or disappear?
- What happens to the notion of authority? If existing norms and authorities are overthrown, do new norms and authorities emerge? Where do they draw their authority from?
- How does the emergence of new media create new networks, be it over greater distances or even locally?
- Do media transitions necessarily involve a change in the public and the reception of the 'text'? If so, what are the consequences?

- How do 'old' and 'new' media compete, coexist or complement each other with regard to cultural production?
- Does content and character of public debates change with the emergence of new communication technologies?
- Do form and content change when the medium of production and transmission changes? And if so, how and why?
- Does the spread of a new media entail the emergence of new artistic/cultural forms?
- What is the relationship between media and language and style?

The conference is organized by AGYA members Barbara Winckler (Junior Professor for Modern Arabic Literature, University of Münster), Carola Richter (Professor for International Communication, Freie Universität Berlin) and Bilal Orfali (Associate Professor for Arabic Studies, American University of Beirut), in cooperation with Teresa Pepe (Associate Professor at the Institute for Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo). It is a project of the AGYA Working Group "Common Heritage & Common Challenges".

It builds upon the experiences of an exploratory workshop held in Münster (Germany) in October 2015, where participants have explored preliminary ideas for a transhistorical perspective on the relation between 'new media' and Arabic literature, focusing in particular on 'writing technologies' (writing, print, digital; see www.uni-muenster.de/ArabistikIslam/tagungen/workshop_media_transitions.html). In this second phase, we aim at further exploring issues we discussed in the previous workshop by including other media (e.g., radio, TV, photography, film, cultural magazines, paperbacks) and by discussing how cultural debates are shaped by the use of a particular medium. We invite papers that deal with specific case studies and/or questions of methodology, with a particular focus on (some of) the research questions mentioned above.

The conference aims at creating a dialogue between scholars from various disciplines, such as Arabic literature, communication and media studies, history, art history, and cultural anthropology, who work on various media in different time periods. Thematic paper presentations will be completed by roundtable discussions which will discuss overarching themes across different periods of time and with regard to different media. By involving practitioners in the cultural field, such as writers, bloggers and journalists, it seeks to reach out to a wider public beyond the academic sphere. Selected papers will be published with an internationally renowned publisher, in an edited volume or a special issue of a peer-reviewed journal.

Speakers will be requested to give a 15 minutes paper presentation, followed by a 15 minutes discussion. Travel and accommodation expenses of invited speakers will be fully covered by AGYA.

Please submit an abstract of 250 words and a short CV to mediatransitions@agya.info by 31 August 2017. Do not hesitate to contact us for general inquiries.