

Taking the Humanities on the Road | THoR

An Ideas-and-Actions Lab

Call for Participation – Gathering 3



Offen für alle Interessierten aus der Philosophisch-historischen Fakultät – und darüber hinaus!

Anrechenbar für Doktorierende der GSH (vgl. unten)

Leitung: Dr. Ruramisai Charumbira, Dr. Michael Toggweiler
Datum/Zeit: 19. Oktober, 2018, 14:15 – 17:00
Raum: tba
ECTS: 0.5 (Pflicht oder Wahlpflicht ICS / Wahlpflicht SLS und GS)
Anmeldung: Bis spät. 19. September 2018 an: toggweiler@wbkolleg.unibe.ch und (falls nötig) über KSL: <https://www.ksl.unibe.ch/> (Login mit UniBe-Account, Suche mit Titel)

Taking the Humanities on the Road (THoR) is an Ideas-and-Actions-Lab at the Walter Benjamin Kolleg to crowdsource ideas and actions that showcase the vitality and innovative potential of the humanities at the University of Bern, Switzerland, and beyond. The initiative aims at establishing a discussion of concrete ways to build bridges between academia and the public, individual research and participation, analytical and engaged scholarship.

External stakeholders from politics or the general public – at least in the media – increasingly question the practical and economic usefulness of the humanities. Innovation and life changing knowledge production at the dawn of the twentyfirst-century seem to have been mostly linked with the natural, physical and health sciences and engineering. What's more, these disciplines seem to have found better ways of communicating the meaningfulness of their research and to somehow have eclipsed the humanities as spaces for making and finding meaning.

ThoR argues that in face of these explicit or implicit demands and critique, we humanities scholars should take the opportunity to reclaim and self-confidently showcase the humanities' already existing expertise and innovative potential as well as its strenghts: verstehen, deep description, analysis, differentiation, selfreflexivity, critical thinking, or critique.

The following two questions at the core of THoR are thus formulated more offensively rather than defensively:

- ❖ How can we make our research more meaningful for ourselves and for others? For example: What is the meaning of being an anthropologist, historian etc.? How do we make sense of what we are doing to ourselves and to others? How do we justify our professions? How do we reclaim expertise of and for the humanities – an expertise which is crucial to society?
- ❖ And how can we communicate the meaningfulness of our research? For example: How do we, and others, benefit from the fruits of our labor? How do we explain what we are doing? How can we manage conversation – inside and outside academia, with experts and non-experts?

In Spring 2018, the interdisciplinary Walter Benjamin Kolleg has launched THoR to increase the visibility of humanities' research, to demonstrate its "usefulness" and its potential for innovation and engagement. THoR is a bottom up working group. It invites scholars from all disciplines, at all levels who are passionate about engaged scholarship to participate. As an ideas-and-action lab it is part seminar (conceptualizing), part lab (doing), part marketplace (showcase & disseminating), and part life (rigorous intellectual engagement and fun!).

As of now there are three working groups – CoLABs – within THoR as offered by the current projects of current participants with a fourth in development. CoLABs (as in collaborative labor) are the mini labs within the larger lab that is THoR:

CoLAB Humanities Outreach and Translation Practice | HOT

HOT argues that the humanities have much to offer to society: our research stimulates reflection, builds bridges, and entertains. These qualities must become more visible. HOT is the platform for the development of innovative formats and programs to make humanities insights and practices accessible to a wider audience outside of academia.

CoLAB Embodied & Participatory Practice

Three neologisms stand at the core of this CoLAB: Co-participatory stands for working horizontally, breaking the hierarchy between academics and informants. Co-collaborative means that we wish to prevent from vertical acts of transfer, in which academics "vulgarize" their knowledge in a simplified way. Rather, we encourage the reflection on the modes of sharing already at an early stage of our investigations. Finally, co-creative stands for pitching our investigations in a creative way, as we are working alongside artists or have artistic backgrounds ourselves.

CoLAB Engaged Connected Practice

This CoLAB argues that it is our responsibility as scholars to engage with the vibrant revival of the humanities that is currently taking place "under the radar" at the margins of the established university system – in Egypt and many other places (including Bern). This requires an "engaged connected practice." With the term "engagement," we want to underline the necessity to recognize and challenge the politics of knowledge production, including the specific role that we play in those politics. With the term "connectedness," we invite for a conversation about and with a variety of (non-Western) humanistic traditions and to rethink the porous boundaries between the humanities, the arts, and the sciences. With the term "practice," we want to emphasize the need to integrate this engagement and connectedness into our research and teaching practices, notably through participatory and decolonizing methods.

Join THoR!

THoR is open to new participants: we invite scholars (from all disciplines, at all levels) who are passionate about engaged scholarship to participate in a lively conversation about "Taking the Humanities on the Road." Specifically, we ask you to join one of our CoLABS.

Or you just come by to the third gathering to get a sense what THoR is all about.

Those joining for the first time, please register to toggweiler@wbkolleg.unibe.ch, if possible already with an idea you would like to discuss with the group. One sentence will do.

At the third gathering in October we will hear updates from existing projects as well as discuss new ideas-and-actions.

Required reading (for those joining for the first time):

Mikhail Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities: A Manifesto* (2012);

Further suggestion:

Markus Zürcher, *It's the Humanities, Stupid!* (2016)