Format Matters.
Theories_Histories_Practices

Interdisciplinary Conference
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Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz
Conference Locations: Alte Mensa & Erbacher Hof
fm.uni-mainz.de

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The conference Format Matters at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz brings together international scholars from a variety of disciplines to explore the cultural meaning, social dynamics and aesthetic effects of media formats.

“Format” can refer to a great range of very dissimilar objects, practices and cultural registers: From the size or folding of a book to the shape, color and “weight” of a film; from the durational rhythms of a television program and syntactic orderings of a computer file to formalized ways of record-keeping, cataloging and description. Formats are historically specific modes of organizing sensory experience that inscribe the economic, technological and cultural conditions of a particular age into concrete objects. Format is a category that allows us to seize and understand the hierarchy of gradations and material differences which relate “tabloid” to “broadsheet” and separate an 8mm film from a Laserdisc.

Yet in film, television, media and literary studies, questions of format have thus far remained subordinate to questions of form, content or genre. Acknowledging the urgency of a new field of “format theory”, as proposed by media scholar Jonathan Sterne, Format Matters will address methodological and theoretical concerns of the interdisciplinary study of formats in media culture.