

## assemble

### Call for Papers for the Annual Conference of the Society for Media Studies

September 25-28, 2024 at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

From festivals and banquets to protest actions and processions to group photos, sessions and Zoom meetings - events and movements bring together bodies and images and are accompanied by performative practices. Assembling/gathering is by no means always a consensual act; assembling also involves disruption and conflict. Conflicts can arise during, before or after a gathering. Or they are the reason why people gather in the first place. Accordingly, assemblies are also the focus of many political theories from Hannah Arendt to Judith Butler.

In addition to temporary assemblies, parliaments, theaters, train stations, malls, public squares, stadiums, churches and cemeteries refer to permanent architectures of assembly that (re)direct people and things. This also applies to processes of datafication, commodification and selection on digital platforms that gather large bundles of data, but also users in social media and people in the material world. Databases, archives, libraries and museums create a specifically permanent order of things from materials, documents, evidence and arbitrarily definable corpora with correlations and cross-references. These orders are repeatedly expanded by informal gatherings, social histories of movement, ephemeral "archives of feelings" (Ann Cvetkovich), but are also called into question. In the case of amateur collections - hobby cellars, attics, memoirs and self-storage spaces - targeted gathering is often replaced by excessive accumulation (piling, messiness), which undermines attempts at order. Such excessive accumulation can be accompanied by inner restlessness, to which subjects respond with practices of inner collection and self-gathering as well as balancing self-techniques, such as hermitage, meditation, prayer or "de-netting" (Urs Stäheli).

Etymologically, two practices of assembling can be distinguished: gathering and coming together (reflexive, assemble) and gathering in the sense of summoning and drawing together (transitive, gather). Both forms are decidedly political and presuppose at least traditionally intentionally acting subjects. They can be understood as fundamental forms of participation that extend the space of the political to the private, physical and intimate. It is not only subjects or objects that gather or are collected, but also non-human actors and human-machine relations, automated filtering and classification systems and data volumes represent arrangements of collecting and gathering. Algorithmic attempts at ordering on social platforms provoke new disorder and protests against the censorship or invisibilization inscribed in them.

Gathering is characterized by at least three structural aspects: a group of people or objects, a specific purpose and a spatio-temporal localization. These three components can be formed differently in the media. They also concern the quantity and attributed relevance and authority of documents or persons as well as the relationship between virtual and material spaces. Of particular interest is the agency with which the practice of assembling is endowed. While in the case of assembling, the power to act lies with the human or machine actors, gathering is based on a center where things and people are brought together (e.g. imperial, powerful data centers).

Here, at the latest, it becomes evident that such assembly practices also raise questions about unequally distributed power and agency as well as regulated access to media and knowledge. In view of the precarious situation in refugee camps, the restitution of post-colonial museum collections, but

also the restricted access to educational institutions such as the university, we can ask: Which assembly is legitimate, which assembly produces which spaces, which knowledge, which inclusions and exclusions?

With regard to media studies research and the problematization of gathering, there are a variety of possibilities for contributions that can be linked to the following points, among others:

- the construction of structures and (dis)orders, such as the gathering of documents in archives or user-generated content on platforms, of signals in circuits and infrastructures, of geographical points on maps, of individuals in the community, of knowledge and perceptions in fictional narratives and speculations that challenge established orders;
- media practices, e.g. the gathering of evidence, mapping, protesting, collective filming, acting on assembly furniture such as the table or concrete forms of social coexistence, etc;
- the production of relations and interdependencies, of punctual and temporary "modes of relationship" (Bini Adamczak) such as hashtags and newsfeeds that constantly gather new, personalized posts; films consisting of sound-image-writing montages; the interaction of individual media in media locations such as film sets or television studios (with cameras, spotlights, microphones), laboratories (with microscopes, scanners, screens) or newsrooms (with multiple screens and communication interfaces).

At the 2024 annual conference, members of the Media Studies Society/Gesellschaft für Medienwissenschaft (GfM) can gather and submit contributions in the following 90-minute formats

#### PANEL

As every year, grouped panels consisting of max. 3 persons and 1 moderator can be submitted. Each presentation should last no longer than 15-20 minutes.

#### SOLO

It is possible to submit an individual presentation with a maximum duration of 15-20 minutes. This will later be grouped into panels by the organizers.

#### TEAM UP

In this area, more open panel forms can be submitted, such as group work or panel discussions, which should aim at getting people engaged in discussion with each other. The maximum duration here is also 90 minutes. Please include detailed information on content, organizers, participants, schedule, etc. in your application. Bring any necessary equipment with you.

#### WORKSPACE

The format brings together a larger number of contributors (approx. 5-6) who present 5-minute inputs on texts that have been jointly defined in advance. The focus in this format should not be on the presentation of results, but rather on presenting interim results, methods or experiments for discussion. The time of the inputs should not exceed 45 minutes, as the focus of the maximum 90 minutes should be on the discussion.

#### CRITICAL FRIENDS

In this format, a maximum of 3 short thematic presentations (max. 10 min.) should be answered with responses (max. 5 min.). The group itself decides whether the responders are one or more persons.

For the application, all participants must be named as well as information on the content of the presentations and responses.

## ENCOUNTERS

This format helps people get to know each other. The aim is to bring together people who do not yet know each other or have not yet worked together. The format is intended to open up unexpected networks and enable chance, location-independent, unusual encounters. Interested individuals should submit a CV and a short idea pitch on one of the keywords listed below on the topic of assembling. After the application deadline, applicants will be assigned to groups of 3-4 people. It is up to the groups whether they make contact in advance or whether the first gathering takes place at the annual conference. Moderations should be formed from among the participants. Please select one of the following keywords: Relationships, commitment, conflicts, consensus, (dis)orders, historiography.

## WORK GROUPS

One slot is provided for each working group in the program. If a working group does not require a slot, please notify us by 31.03.2024 at the latest at [GfM2024@uni-mainz.de](mailto:GfM2024@uni-mainz.de)

### **Selection criteria:**

The decisive factor for acceptance is the fit with the conference theme. Cross-location formats and formats initiated by working groups are particularly welcome. The organizers reserve the right to reject submissions that clearly deviate from the conference topic, as well as exclusively male\* panels ("Manels"). In the interest of a fair and equal process, all formats are designed for 90 minutes, the time limits should be strictly adhered to.

### **Submission modalities:**

Submissions can be made from now until 31.03.2024 at the latest exclusively via <https://www.conftool.pro/gfm2024/>. Late submissions will not be considered. Notifications of acceptance or rejection will be sent by e-mail by **31.05.2024** at the latest.

For the PANEL, TEAM UP, WORKSPACE and CRITICAL FRIENDS formats, you will need a framing text with a title (max. 2000 characters incl. spaces). Panel submissions that are organized by GfM working groups should include a reference to the respective working group. For each individual presentation, a title, abstract and bibliography (max. 2000 characters incl. spaces) must also be submitted. Each participant should also include a short biography (max. 500 characters incl. spaces). Each person can only register one presentation for the conference program. Multiple presentations are possible.

An overview of recommended accommodation in Mainz and other useful information will soon be available on the conference website; early booking is strongly recommended.

The organizers are making every effort to provide all participants with barrier-free access to the conference. You are welcome to let us know if you have any special requirements or requests in this regard.

**Contact**

If you have any questions, please contact the organization team at [GfM2024@uni-mainz.de](mailto:GfM2024@uni-mainz.de).

We look forward to receiving your submissions!