CALL FOR PAPERS:

(Re-)Defining the Human: Modern Media and Subjectivity

We are pleased to announce "(Re-)Defining the Human: Modern Media & Subjectivity," an interdisciplinary colloquium to be held on Friday, October 11, with a keynote by Professor Karen Beckman, Eliot and Roslyn Jaffe Professor in the History of Art Department and the 2013-14 Director of the Penn Humanities Forum at the University of Pennsylvania, on Thursday, October 10 at 6pm. Together these events will inaugurate "Dialogues on European Cultural Studies," a series of lectures and colloquia co-organized by graduate and undergraduate students under the aegis of the Program in European Culture Studies (ECS).

This colloquium will explore points of intersection between, on the one hand, various strategies and technologies subsumed under the term media and, on the other hand, historically contingent notions of what constitutes or demarcates subjectivity and the human in modern European culture.

Kant’s assertion of the subject as an entity separate from nature and the world of objects was pivotal to the establishment of European modernity. The development of technological media, including photography, cinema, and sound recording, fundamentally altered not only the social and political status of art, but also its relationship to subjectivity. Writings on media by Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Gilles Deleuze, and Friedrich Kittler (among others) variously argue that media shape and renegotiate relationships between human subjects and the external world, not only transmitting cultural values but also transforming subjectivity itself. Newer media technologies of digital scanning, coding, transmission, and display continue to test the limits of the Kantian model of the human subject, revealing the instability of borders between subjects and the world of objects.

We invite proposals for papers that will explore how changing conceptualizations of the human subject in European culture since the eighteenth century have intersected with transformations in media and media theory. Questions of interest include: In what senses might the concept of the human subject still be seen as productive today? What should we recognize as new in recent accounts of the agency and ontology of objects and matter, and what might be seen as continuous with earlier strands of thought in European culture? How have the latest forms of social and other media transformed the status of social and political subjects in Europe, and what are the implications of those transformations for the social sciences and the humanities? How have discoveries in neuroscience, biology, and genetics challenged conceptions of what is human? In what ways have investigations into the subjectivity of animals and machines reframed definitions of the human since the Enlightenment, and what have been the implications of those investigations for concepts of human rights and humanity in European societies?

Please send a 250-300 word abstract for a 20-minute paper with your department/year to ECSDialogues@princeton.edu by September 1, 2013.