Göttingen Spirit Summer School (Göttingen, 5-10 Sept 16)

Lichtenberg-Kolleg, Historic Observatory, University of Göttingen, Germany, Sep 5–10, 2016
Deadline: May 1, 2016

Vogel, Christian

Göttingen Spirit Summer School:
Academic Collecting and the Knowledge of Objects, 1700-1900

Convenors:
Dr. Marie Luisa Allemeyer (Zentrale Kustodie, University of Göttingen)
Dr. Dominik Hünniger (Lichtenberg-Kolleg, University of Göttingen)
Christian Vogel (Zentrale Kustodie, University of Göttingen)

Experts/Speakers:
Dr. Anne Mariss, University of Tuebingen
Professor Maria Rentetzi, National Technical University of Athens, Lise Meitner fellow, University of Vienna
Dr. Kim Sloan, British Museum London
Dr. Emma Spary, University of Cambridge

Topic and Purpose
Early modern cabinets of curiosities/Wunderkammern can be considered as an important space especially for those developing sciences that wanted to transcend text based scholasticism and base their knowledge solely on experience. Scholarly engagement with collections laid the foundations for knowledge production that was based on experiment and research with and on objects. Since this development took shape during the 17th century, collecting, storing, ordering, and the presentation of objects has become a strong concern for many academic disciplines. Accordingly, technologies that transformed things into objects of knowledge and rendered them accessible and sustainable are equally practical as well as epistemological techniques. Current research in the history of science and knowledge focusses increasingly on practices of collecting, ordering and presenting. Thus highlighting how scientific research and its results are intertwined with and rely upon different cultures of materiality and the handling of objects is the main concern of the summer school.
In addition to questions concerning the role of objects and collections in the processes of knowledge production, we would also like to address the state and development of object based research in the humanities. How can humanities research be enhanced by engaging with objects? Which methods and theories can be successfully employed in order to achieve meaningful knowledge about these processes on a medium and larger scale?

Each day of the summer school will be dedicated to a specific topic where four PhD candidates will present their research and give an introduction to their projects, with one expert commenting and leading the discussion for each project.
As we acknowledge the epistemic value of engaging with objects, visits to the relevant academic collections at the University of Göttingen are an integral part of the program. Two of our experts, Kim Sloan and Emma Spary, will also give keynote lectures on Monday and Wednesday respectively. On Thursday evening, Anne Mariss will introduce her recent book “A world of new things”. Praktiken der Naturgeschichte bei Johann Reinhold Forster (Johann Reinhold Forster and the practices of natural history), thereby reflecting on her process of writing a thesis on praxeological aspects of knowledge production and engaging with material culture.

The four thematic sections are:

From encyclopaedic to specialised collecting: Practices of collecting and exhibiting, the role of collectors and things // Expert: Kim Sloan, British Museum
During the two centuries between 1700 and 1900, a far-reaching transformation took place that influenced both the scientific practices related to objects and the role of collectors. Burgeoning university collections differed considerably from most private or courtly cabinets of curiosities regarding their claims to establish order, classification and systematic comparison: the typical and the ordinary gradually replaced the rare and the unique, and the learned collector became the collecting scholar. The 18th century can be seen as a period of transition and the nineteenth 19th century was a threshold in the process of the differentiation of academic disciplines. This also influenced the collections, which were separated as well and thereby shed new light on the objects and thus eventually led to new ways of knowledge production. Accordingly, we especially invite presentations that address continuities and discontinuities in practices of collecting and the role of the collectors, as well as the actual order, presentation and spatial distribution of objects in the collections. Additionally, presentations that engage with wider epistemological, cultural, social and political contexts are equally welcome.

„Putting nature in a box.“ The material order of things: shelves, cabinets, boxes and other furniture of order // Expert: Maria Rentetzi, NTU Athens, University of Vienna
Furniture that helps to order and to store collections is an important part of the social world of collecting and is embedded in the epistemic practices surrounding collections as well. Material appliances influence the rules of the handling of objects and permit as well as prohibit certain practices. Thus, they are not neutral vessels but material conditions of possibilities regarding what and what cannot be known at a particular time and space. Which role do these vessels play concerning the development of object centred sciences in the18th and 19th century, especially concerning the production of knowledge and its contents? How did cabinets and other storage systems help natural historians to organise knowledge, and how did they help to create knowledge about the natural world? How did boxes become multifunctional tools in transferring the collected material into systematics? Could this furniture be regarded as a kind of laboratory that decontextualized and re-contextualised objects in changing spatial-systematic vicinities?

Networks, Actors and Objects // Expert: Emma Spary, Cambridge University
Current research in the history of science and knowledge no longer focuses solely on individual collectors and well-known collections, but also on complex and far-reaching networks of collect-

ing that mobilised and thereby often transformed objects, actors and inscriptions. This approach lead to the decentralisation of the persona of the collector and collections were conceptualised in the Latourian framework as "centres of calculation". Special emphasis was laid on the analysis of the diverse spaces within which objects of knowledge were constituted and circulated. This panel wants to address the complicated movements of objects, materials, specimen and living creatures (both humans and other animals) within these wide and heterogeneous networks. Studies that address their itineraries between various spaces of encounter, e.g. academic collections, the marketplace, the scholars' houses, lecture halls, hospitals, etc. are especially welcome. Additionally, we are interested in the multitude and diversity of the actors in these spaces. Extending the research beyond the scholar as the classical focus in the history of science, we want to know about artisans, merchants and, very importantly, the members of the source communities from where the objects originated. It will be interesting to see if these diversities also produced different kinds of knowledge. Besides well-studied analytical and systematic forms of knowledge, other kinds, especially corporeal, implicit and tacit knowledge as well as technological, practical and artisanal competence – that all of these actors applied in one way or another – will be the focus of this panel. Calculation, Ordering and Classification are only three possible practices that would highlight these processes, and we are equally looking forward to presentations addressing further practices.

The long road to the image: strategies of visualisation in collections // Expert: N.N.
Images are also part of the transformation processes surrounding objects but they exemplify a special form of inscription in their claim to be mimetic. Current history of science and interdisciplinary visual culture studies have shown that the road from object to image is not as straightforward and simple as previously acknowledged. In order to understand the visual representation of collections, objects, and collectors, the manifold processes that lead from object/subject to image have to be analysed thoroughly. Traditions and conventions of image making have to be studied in order to show how social, epistemic and affective contexts of image production and presentation have influenced these processes.

Applications and Selection Procedure
The summer school will be held in English and welcomes PhD candidates or advanced postgraduates to apply. Up to 16 applicants will be admitted. Interested applicants are asked to send a cover letter, a CV and a research exposé (1500-2000 words/approx. 3-5 pages) preferably via e-mail as one pdf-file to summerschool@kustodie.uni-goettingen.de by 1st of May 2016. The cover letter should address to which of the four sections the project would correspond to. Ideally, it should already mention a special interest in one or more academic collections from Göttingen (http://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/die-sammlungen-im-detail/521326.html), as well as contain a short explanation why the certain collection(s) would be interesting for the PhD or postgraduate project. The selection will be conducted by the convenors, the experts and the academic advisory board of the Zentrale Kustodie. Successful candidates will be informed early in June, and will then be asked to send in a more developed research exposé (up to 8000 words/approx. 15-20 pages) within 6 weeks of the invitation.
These texts will be circulated among all participants of the summer school and will be the basis for the experts‘ commentaries and the discussions during the summer school. We ask all applicants to address not only the research content of their projects but also to include references to concepts and methodologies and an explication of their research agenda and the sources

employed. A discussion on how objects and collections feature in the research project is very much appreciated.
Thanks to the generous support of the „Goettingen Spirit Summer School"-program at the University of Göttingen, we are able to provide board and lodging for all participants. The participation fee is 50 €.
For further information and questions, please contact Christian Vogel (summerschool@kustodie.uni-goettingen.de)

Preliminary program

Monday, 05.09.2016

5 pm – 6 pm: Arrival and registration
6:30 pm – 8 pm: Keynote lecture (Kim Sloan)
8 pm: Opening Dinner

Tuesday, 06.09.2016

From encyclopaedic to specialised collecting: Practices of collecting and exhibiting, the role of collectors and things / Kim Sloan

9:30 am – 10 am: presentation of the chair
10 am - 12:30 pm: 2 project presentations
1:30 pm – 3:30 pm: visit of a collection
4 pm – 6 pm: 2 project presentations
6:30 pm – 8 pm: Guided tour Historic Observatory
8 pm: Dinner

Wednesday, 07.09.2016

„Putting nature in a box." The material order of things: shelves, cabinets, boxes and other furniture of order / Maria Rentetzi

9:30 am – 10 am: presentation of the chair
10 am - 12:30 pm: 2 project presentations
1:30 pm – 3:30 pm: visit of a collection
4 pm – 6 pm: 2 project presentations
6:30 pm – 8 pm: Keynote lecture (Emma Spary)
8 pm: Dinner

Thursday, 08.09.2016

Networks, Actors and Objects /Emma Spary

9:30 am – 10 am: presentation of the chair
10 am - 12:30 pm: 2 project presentations
1:30 pm – 3:30 pm: visit of a collection
4 pm – 6 pm: 2 project presentations
6:30 pm – 8 pm: Book presentation by Anne Mariss

8 pm: Dinner

Friday, 09.09.2016

The long road to the image: strategies of visualisation in collections / N.N.

9:30 am – 10 am: presentation of the chair
10 am - 12:30 pm: 2 project presentations
1:30 pm – 3:30 pm: visit of a collection
4 pm – 6 pm: 2 project presentations
6:30 pm – 8 pm: Anthropology Performance
8 pm: Dinner

Saturday, 10.09.2016

10 am – 11 am: Departure

Reference:
ANN: Göttingen Spirit Summer School (Göttingen, 5-10 Sept 16). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 5, 2016 (accessed Nov 3, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/12383>.