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Resetting the Black Box (Rome, 21–22 Sep 17)

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Toni Hildebrandt

Resetting the Black Box? Beyond Art History and Science Studies

International Workshop in collaboration with Institut für Kunstgeschichte - University of Berne, and Institut für Wissenschaftskommunikation und Hochschulforschung - Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt, Wien.

The use of the term "black box", which was initially conceived to describe phenomena in electronic circuit theory and cybernetics, has over the recent years expanded in the manifold realm of art history and science studies, spanning curatorial studies, systems and practice theory, informatics, as well as the philosophy of science and cognition. In the arts and especially in curatorial studies, the black box is in principle understood as a possible opposite to the white cube. It thus describes a space, in which video art, film, theater performances or installations are displayed and projected in closed darkness, which thereby entirely changes the conditions of beholding and participating. On the other hand, even the opacity or ambiguity of certain artworks has been, metaphorically, described with the term black box.

This metaphorical usage resonates with the analogy used in science studies: laboratory studies early on described "black-boxing" as a constitutive part of the sociotechnical construction of scientific facts (e.g., Latour and Woolgar 1979[1986]) and, in particular, visual analysis in this domain has examined "black-boxing of the image production" (Lynch 2015). A related idea, both in philosophies of art and systems theory, is that "the only conceivable way of unveiling a black box, is to play with it" (Negarestani 2014). Taking its cue from this general idea, this international workshop homes in on different ways of playing with "black boxes" in the arts and sciences and, more specifically, on the distinctive kinds of (black) boxes, metaphorical and literal, that happen to be displayed through such play, idle and serious. As its title indicates, the conference invites a broader reflection on disciplinary canons, their modernist legacies and clichéd celebration, as well as their possible suspension.

Program
Thursday, 21 September 2017

18:15 Welcome
Joëlle Comé (Swiss Institute in Rome)
Introduction & Chair
Philippe Sormani (Swiss Institute in Rome)
18:30 The Black Box as Dispositif and Dilemma
Andrew V. Uroskie (Associate Professor, Department of Art History and Criticism, College of Arts

and Sciences, Stony Brook University)
19:30 Aperitif

Andrew V. Uroskie is an Associate Professor in the Art Department and the Director of Graduate Studies in Art History and Criticism at Stony Brook University (NY). He specialises in late modern and contemporary art. His research into the history of expanded cinema was awarded the Chancellor's Dissertation Fellowship at UC Berkeley, and he has held additional research fellowships at the Townsend Center for the Humanities and the Stanford Humanities Laboratory. His essays have been published in many acclaimed arts journals and collections and have so far been translated into French, Spanish, Portuguese, Korean, and Basque. Among his publications: Between the Black Box and the White Cube. Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art(University of Chicago Press, 2014).

Friday, 22 September 2017
Session 1

10:00 What Happened to "The Black Box" in Science and Technology Studies?
Philippe Sormani in conversation with Martina Merz (Swiss Institute in Rome & Alpen-Adria University Klagenfurt, Wien)
10:40 Spaces and Traces of the Black Box in the Arts
Toni Hildebrandt (Department of Modern and Contemporary Art History, Institute of Art History, University of Bern)
in conversation with Guelfo Carbone (Swiss Institute in Rome)
11:40 Black Box Integrity, Site Specificity: Tales of Schwitter's Merzbau
Neil K. Jenkings & Martyn Hudson (Sociology/Art History, Newcastle University)
in conversation with Samuel Gross (Swiss Institute in Rome)
12:20 Whose Black Box Is It?
A Praxeological Perspective on Contemporary Art Conservation
Yaël Kreplak (EHESS, Paris) in conversation with Andrew V. Uroskie
Session 2
14:30 Zooming Into a Black Box: On Judith Hopf's Video "More"
Vera Tollmann (HFBK, Hamburg/University of the Arts, Berlin)
in conversation with Toni Hildebrandt
15:10 Lab-Box: Camera Obscura, Black-Box and Photographic Process
Francesco Maria Ferrara (Ars Imago, Rome / Zurich)
16:10 Who Needs a "Black Box"? Electronic Images, Digital Imaginaries
Valentina Valentini (Faculty of Humanities and Philosophy, Sapienza University, Rome)
in conversation with Dario Cecchi (Sapienza University, Rome)
16:50 Closing remarks, followed by farewell drink

The workshop is public and will be held in English and Italian.
Simultaneous translation is provided.