

## The Museum as Mirror (Florence, 23-24 Nov 17)

Florence, Photothek in Palazzo Grifoni Budini Gattai, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut, Via dei Servi 51, Nov 23–24, 2017

Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut

The Museum as Mirror. Reflections on Encounters between People and Objects

Workshop organized by the Max-Planck-Research Group "Objects in the Contact Zone – The cross-cultural Lives of Things"

"The museum is the colossal mirror in which man, finally contemplating himself in all forms, and finding himself literally an object of wonder, abandons himself to the ecstasy expressed in art magazines." Whilst for Georges Bataille (Documents, 1929) the mirror was a metaphor of the museum as a whole, the museum selfie can be understood as a symbol of the visitors' desire to document their own individual and embodied experience of an exhibit. Yet this experience—although seemingly unique and personal—is mediated by the conceptual frames the museum itself embodies, which include: aesthetic delectation, academic inquiry and identity formation. In fact, the museum functions at a critical juncture in the mutually constitutive relationship between the visitor's body, the material space of physical objects (displays, architecture) and the construction of social and cultural concepts (such as national identity, race, and gender).

A long intellectual tradition has maintained a subject/object divide in Western thinking, which has meant that this juncture remains something of a blind spot. More recently, a turn towards material studies has attempted to blur the conceptual boundaries between people and objects through new perspectives on the social lives of things, thing theory, and affect theory. However, this so-called post-humanist trend tends to focus on the object more so than on its effect on the subject. Just as art historians study the origins and history of objects before they enter the museum, so too must we take seriously the specificity of visitors to museums and their histories and experiences of race, sex, gender, culture, religion, class, queer, trans and other identities. This workshop aims to put these many modalities of analysis of the subject/object relationship into a more balanced dialogue with a rigorous focus on the intersectional experience of bodies (people and objects) across multiple vectors of identity. We seek to analyze how material, cultural, social and political construction functions on both sides of this subject/object relationship as both are inscribed with histories and identities and can also change or mutually reinforce one another within the space of the museum.

Encounters between humans and objects in museums are mediated and animated by a number of different factors, which may be culturally shared and transmitted but at the same time are not stable, fixed, or automatic. These factors include: time, space and culture. The temporality of the encounter may be inflected by the time difference between the origin of the object and the person,

time-period, or how time is constructed—for both people and objects—according to paradigms like modernism, classicism or primitivism. The space of the encounter includes the museum's location, architecture, mode of display, or purpose (for example, nation building, identity formation, memorial, aesthetic or religious experience). Finally, we are interested in how the histories, belief systems and cultural codes that are manifested by both people and objects inscribe, or in some cases forbid, their encounter.

## PROGRAM

### THURSDAY 23 NOVEMBER

10:15

Introduction

Alison Boyd, Eva-Maria Troelenberg, Felicity Bodenstein

### PANEL I ENCOUNTERS OF PERCEPTION

10:45

Worker-Object-Museum: The Skilled Industrial Worker as Museum Visitor

Claire Jones | University of Birmingham

11:30 Coffee Break

12:00

Faster than a Flâneur, more than a Macaroni: British Antiquarians, Connoisseurs and the First Museum Guides c. 1760-1850

Jonathan King | Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge

12:45

Performing the Self at an Indian World Heritage Site: The Curious Case of Ellora Cave 14

Sarada Natarajan | Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin

13:30 Lunch Break

### PANEL II ENCOUNTERS WITH BODIES

15:00

A Private and Public Circulation: Carl Van Vechten's African American Portrait Photographs and Charles Sheeler's African Sculpture Photographs at the Barnes Foundation

Alison Boyd | Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut, Florence

15:45

Art as Dialogue: Museum Education as Mediator between Object and Subject

Nathaniel Prottas | Wien Museum, Vienna

16:30

Wandering Eye / Bodily Confrontations: Lina Bo Bardi's São Paulo Museum of Art  
Adrian Anagnos | Tulane University, New Orleans

FRIDAY 24 NOVEMBER

PANEL III ENCOUNTERS WITH HERITAGE

10:30

Art, Faith, and Belonging: The Golden Madonna in Essen as Mirror of Identity in the 20th and 21st Centuries

Katharina Christa Schüppel | Technische Universität Dortmund

11:15

Brazilian Modernism, the Affective Economy and the Museum as a Space for Citizenship: Rethinking Lasar Segall's 1943 National Retrospective

Edith Wolfe | Tulane University, New Orleans

12:00

The Asen. William Kentridge's "Praise of Mistranslation" and the potentiality of a riddle

Elke Anna Werner | Freie Universität Berlin

VENUE

Photothek in Palazzo Grifoni Budini Gattai

Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut

Via dei Servi 51

50122 Florence

ORGANIZATION

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