

Humanism between Ideal and Ideology (Florence, 28–29 Nov 24)

Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut, Nov 28–29, 2024

Deadline: Sep 2, 2024

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Humanism between Ideal and Ideology: Images and Notions of the Human, 1844–2024.

Transdisciplinary Workshop at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut.

Organizers: Hana Gründler and Katharine Stahlbuhk; Research Group “Ethico-Aesthetics of the Visual”.

How can we critically rethink the contested notion of Humanism, a concept integral to Western thought? What is its potential today? And how does it inform, if not transform, our understanding of the human, in a time in which a reconsideration of the relation to the “non-human” is essential? Starting with the ‘human human being’ or the ‘human being human’ (that is “der menschliche Mensch”, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, 1844) in Karl Marx’s early writings up to current discourses on neo-, post- and trans-humanism, this workshop is interested in both the reception of Humanism as well as the often contradicting images and concepts of the human created and (still) influenced by its interpretations or formulated in opposition to them.

What we nowadays generally refer to as Humanism – in all its nuances, varieties and ambiguities – is related to two programmatic assumptions: first, the human being distinguishes itself for its capacity (and its longing) for knowledge, *doctrina*. And, second, that ‘human nature’ goes hand in hand with a specific form of dignity, *dignitas*. Ever since its first conceptual elaborations in the nineteenth century, be that in art history, philosophy or historiography, scholarship on Humanism has been often imbued with an idealistic and ideologized reading of the sources and the image of the human being postulated therein. Already Jacob Burckhardt famously praised the Italian humanists of the fifteenth century as a “new class of people”, leaving the problematic implications underexposed. Significantly, some of the most influential and controversial contributions were written in the shadow of the darkest chapters of the twentieth century. The spectrum ranged from the interpretation of the humanist epoch – including the heroic image of the New Man – in the service of nationalism and totalitarianism both in the fascist as well as in the communist context to attempts of courageous opposition, but also of resignation in the face of advancing inhumanity.

The questions, ambiguities and expectations brought forward by the humanist epoch, and by its evolution over time, as well as the countless evaluations of Humanism as a figure of thought and a normative set of values are of unbroken topicality: To that end, we aim for a transdisciplinary

discussion and seek to offer a differentiated look at Humanism and its reception and/or deconstruction within diverging ideological systems across different geographical areas. We are particularly interested in, but not limited to, the three following areas:

1) Humanism in the wake of world wars: What is the impact of the experience of (interior) migration and war on readings and/or definitions of Humanism? What is the critical import of these studies today? (Baron, Kristeller, Panofsky, etc.) And how do we deal with the writings of authors who have actively embraced totalitarian ideologies, who have adapted to the ruling system in a questionable way or whose later studies reveal a process of discerning self-questioning? (Gentile, Heidegger, Brinckmann, etc.).

2) Humanism during the Cold War: after the atrocities of the Second World War, and under the still ongoing colonialism, there was a radical rethinking and reimagining of the human and Humanism both in "East" and "West". How can we reassess this philosophical but also artistic legacy of a critical Humanism under the auspices of an imminent new cold war? (Arendt, Bloch, Fanon, Althusser, Praxis Group, etc.).

3) "Humanism" today: Do contemporary circumstances stimulate a renewed confrontation with Humanism, making earlier texts fruitful for today's contentions about the possibilities and limits of the human condition? (Haraway, Nussbaum, Said, Margalit, etc.).

We welcome papers from art history, history, history of ideas, literature and philosophy, and related fields that focus on the evolution of specific concepts or terminologies of Humanism as well as analyses of images or imaginaries of the human. Scholars are also invited to present single case studies or translations of sources in their specific socio-political background that might shed light on underexplored material.

Papers should not exceed 20 minutes and will be followed by a discussion.

Please send title, abstract (max. 2000 characters) and a short bio summarised in one PDF-document to katharine.stahlbuhk@khi.fi.it by 2 September 2024.

<https://www.khi.fi.it/en/aktuelles/call-for-papers-applications.php>

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