*Introduction | Einführung*, Workshop *Digital Art History – Intersections. A question of theory? | Digitale Kunstgeschichte – Schnittmengen. Eine Frage der Theorie?* at the 3rd Conference on Empirical Methods in Art History and Visual Studies, Department of Art History of the University of Vienna 17–18.11.2017

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(Translation: Rupert Hebblethwaite)

## Introduction

Following the establishment of *DHd – Digital Humanities im deutschsprachigen Raum* in Hamburg in 2013 the first annual meeting of the organisation took place in March of the following year in Passau. The meeting was entitled: "Digital Humanities – methodischer Brückenschlag oder 'feindliche Übernahme'? Chancen und Risiken der Begegnung zwischen Geisteswissenschaften und Informatik. *(Digital Humanities – methodical bridge building or hostile takeover? The opportunities and risks of the coming together of the humanities and informatics)*. In his introductory keynote the computer linguist John Nerbonne (University of Groningen, President of the European Association for Digital Humanities) asked whether informatics isn't one of the humanities anyway. According to Hegel's distinction between the natural and the spiritual, which is in any case unfortunate for modern scholarship, informatics has less to do with nature and much more to do with the processing of information related to products of the human spirit. Nerbonne also recommended pragmatism and advised us not to lose ourselves in the definition of "digital humanities" because there's so much more to be done ("beg, buy, steal or borrow")! In the digital humanities one can be successful by, for example, focussing on solving tasks using computers. Given that one of the greatest problems facing the humanities is fragmentation, the maxim is: Find serious partners who know what it's all about and look for expertise![1]

The keynote contribution from the humanities came from the field of artistic studies and was delivered by Katja Kwastek (University of Amsterdam). In retrospect this was important because visual studies continue to be significantly underrepresented in DHd. She briefly spoke about the development and the heterogeneous approaches of digital art history. Its origins lay in coding and classification (HiDA, MIDAS, DISKUS and Iconclass), the ideological criticism of IT in museums and the ability of machines to read paintings and artefacts, etc. Beyond issues of iconography and style, art history is feeling its way towards empirical research into reception. The exploration of ideas is accompanied by new images and visualisations (timelines, network analysis, quantification, visual text analysis, big data images, etc.). In this way digital art history not only analyses images but also produces new ones, a fact

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[1]  Ralph KNICKMEIER: Aufbruch der Digital Humanities in Passau, in: *Arbeitskreis Digitale Kunstgeschichte (Wiki)*, [Report of the:] 1st Annual Meeting of Digital Humanities im deutschsprachigen Raum (DHd 2014), University of Passau, 25 –28.3.2014 [Vienna, 2.4.2014], DOI: 10.11588/artdok.00005392 [last retrieved: 15.11.2017].

that led Jan Christoph Meister (the first chairperson of the DHd, Department for German Studies at the University of Hamburg) to ask the admittedly abridged but not wholly unjustified question of whether the field of artistic studies is not assuming the role of the artist too much at the expense of its ability to analyse and discuss.[2]

This work with computers has thus completely transformed art history in the past few decades. Indeed, in this year of Luther's quincentenary one is tempted to compare this transformation with the way in which the invention and rapid spread of printing encouraged the schism in the church. But where does the discipline of art history stand today? The debate between *digitalised* and *digital art history,* which was formulated in the last millennium, is well-known.[3] However, despite numerous digital projects, the continuous improvement of computer-supported research instruments and such scholarly publications on the subject as the special issue of *Visual Resources*[4] or the latest article in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*[5], there is still a failure to develop theories of digital art history.

This is why the declared aim of today's workshop is to trigger a debate about what a theory of digital art history or of art history in the age of digitalisation could look like. The urgent need for such a debate was demonstrated recently in Vienna at the 7th Networking Meeting of *DArtHist Austria – dem Netzwerk für Digitale Kunstgeschichte in Österreich (The Network for Digital Art History in Austria)* on the occasion of the inaugural meeting of the Museum Cluster. The keynote was dedicated to the museum as a place of longing in digital space.[6] In the subsequent discussion the range of opinions regarding the development of a new theory of art history quickly became clear. The basic question was whether this theory (already) made sense at the current time. And, if so, who should promote it? And what role would be played by universities and institutions of memory (GLAMs) such as museums? It is thanks to the presence of Laura Commare and Hanna Brinkmann at that meeting that we are able to organise this panel as part of the *3rd Art & Science Conference on Empirical Methods in Art*

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[2]  Ibid.

[3]  KATJA KWASTEK/ HUBERTUS KOHLE (eds.): Digitale und digitalisierte Kunstgeschichte. Perspektiven einer Geisteswissenschaft im Zeitalter der Virtualität, in: *zeitenblicke* 2 (2003), No. 1, URL: http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2003/01/index.html [last retrieved: 15.11.2017].

[4]  Special Issue: Digital Art History, in: *Visual Resources* 29 (2013), No 1-2, URL: http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/gvir20/29/1-2?nav=tocList [last retrieved: 15.11.2017], and the latest call for papers (Special Issue): Digital Art History. Where Are We Now? to *Visual Resources* (2018), URL: http://explore.tandfonline.com/cfp/ah/gvir-cfp-digital-art-history-1q2017 [last retrieved: 15.11.2017].

[5]  HUBERTUS KOHLE: Art History and the Digital Humanities. Invitation to a Debate, in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 79 (2016), pp. 151–158; RAPHAEL ROSENBERG: Bridging Art History, Computer Science and Cognitive Science: A Call for Interdisciplinary Collaboration, in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 79 (2016), pp. 305–314.

[6]  Ralph KNICKMEIER: *Das Museum als Sehnsuchtsort im digitalen Raum*, Keynote lecture to the 1st Workshop of the Museum Cluster during the 7th Network Meeting of *DArtHist Austria – Netzwerk für Digitale Kunstgeschichte in Österreich*, Department of Art History of the University of Vienna, 17.8.2017 [Vienna, 18.10.2017], DOI: 10.11588/artdok.00005398 [last retrieved: 15.11.2017].

*History and Visual Studies*, which this year is taking a critical look at the methods employed in the field.[7]

In the light of this the question is whether we need to develop a theory of digital art history. In terms of the basic orientation of our discipline this will result in the convergence of the challenges of yesterday and today, challenges such as how we should react to the flood of images made possible by digitalisation. In the light of the breaking down of borders between media can art history continue to claim to be the "mother of all visual studies" or did it surrender this role long ago? Do we now see ourselves as art historians or visual historians? What social responsibilities are bound up with this question? Who determines the rules – or are artistic rules being done away with altogether? Which images do we select for preservation for posterity and which do we present to museums?

The digitalisation of art history has long since reached every corner of the discipline. The argument that the digitalisation of artistic studies is still in its infancy is as untenable as the suggestion that art history has missed the boat (James Cuno)[8]. But how can we interpret this methodologically? And at the end of the day, given the ever-accelerating complexity of the world around us, shouldn't digital research tools simply be the "extended arm" of traditional artistic studies?

## Guest Speakers

We are delighted that we have been able to attract and welcome three colleagues who have already been dealing with digital research instruments for some time – albeit with very different focusses:

**Harald Klinke** is a specialist in business informatics as well as an art historian, visual historian and media theorist. An expert in electrical design and visual communication he currently teaches Digital Art History at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich and Art and Media History at the University of Göttingen. He studied art history, media theory, painting, cultural studies, philosophy and business informatics in Karlsruhe, Berlin, Norwich and Göttingen. From 2008 to 2009 he worked as a lecturer in visual studies in the Art History Department of the University of Göttingen. Supported by a research grant from the DFG, the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, he was a visiting scholar at Columbia University in New York between 2009 and 2010. He is editor of the *International Journal for Digital Art History*.

**Dominik Lengyel** is Professor of Visual Representation in the Cultural Heritage Centre of Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg. He studied physics, mathematics and, in particular, architecture at the University of Stuttgart, the Ecole d'architecture Paris-Tolbiac and the ETH Zürich. He subsequently worked for Gwathmey Siegel & Associates

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[7] 7th Network Meeting of **D**ArtHist Austria – Netzwerk für Digitale Kunstgeschichte in Österreich, Department of Art History of the University of Vienna, 17.8.2017, URL: http://www.darthist.at/newsreader/id-7-vernetzungstreffen.html [last retrieved: 15.11.2017].

[8] JAMES CUNO: How Art History is failing on the Internet, in: *The Daily Dot* 19th November 2012, URL: https://www.dailydot.com/via/art-history-failing-internet [last retrieved: 15.11.2017].

Architects in New York and Oswald Matthias Ungers in Cologne. He established the office Lengyel Toulouse Architekten together with Catherine Toulouse. He was then a professor at Cologne University of Applied Sciences before being appointed to the chair at BTU Cottbus in 2006. The focus of his research is the visualisation of archaeological hypotheses with a special consideration of the representation of scientific uncertainty. His work has been widely exhibited including at the Pergamon Museum Berlin, the Egyptian Museum in Munich and Cologne Cathedral.

**Peter Bell** studied art history, business and economics, graphic design and painting at Philipps-Universität Marburg. Between 2006 and 2011 he was a research associate in the art history sub-project of the special research centre "Strangers and Poor People". He received his doctorate in 2011 for a thesis entitled "Getrennte Brüder und antike Ahnen. Repräsentationen der Griechen in der italienischen Kunst zur Zeit der Kirchenunion (1438–1472) *(Separated brothers and ancient ancestors. Representations of Greeks in Italian art at the time of the Church Union (1438–1472))*". He subsequently carried out research work with the Computer Vision Group of the University of Heidelberg and the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences. After working at the U of Dortmund he assumed the leadership of the project "Artistic and artificial seeing. Computer vision and art history in methodical and practical cooperation" at the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences. He is also a research associate of the Prometheus Image Archive of the University of Cologne and is working on a conceptual project of the BMBF for the digitalisation of the image collections of Rom e.V.