

Engaging audiences: international perspectives on museum and heritage visiting

**Friday 21st May 1.30-4pm
Wentworth College 222**

Programme, abstracts and speaker information

1.30 Introduction and welcome – Geoff Cubitt (Department of History and IPUP) and Sharon Macdonald (Department of Sociology and ECCE)

1.40 Laurajane Smith (School of Archaeology and Anthropology, Australian National University): *Visitor emotion, affect and registers of engagement at museums and heritage sites*

2.20 Laurie Hanquinet (Department of Sociology and ECCE, University of York): *Mondrian as kitchen tiles? Artistic and cultural conceptions of art museum visitors in Belgium*

3.10 Tea

3.20 Geoff Cubitt and Sharon Macdonald: *Engaging audiences – perspectives on museum and heritage visiting: General discussion and themes for future museum, heritage and social memory workshops.*

Speaker abstracts and biographical notes

Laurajane Smith *Visitor emotion, affect and registers of engagement at museums and heritage sites*

This lecture will outline some of the findings of ongoing research which, to date, has included 4,400 visitor interviews undertaken at 45 sites of heritage in Australia, England and the USA. The work compares visitor responses to the representation of history at

heritage sites and museums representing national narratives, as well as those museums and heritage sites that represent challenges to master narratives and/or represent dissonant understandings of history and the present. The presentation identifies a number of themes emerging from this research and in particular explores the role emotions play in allowing visitors to either engage or disengage with the histories and heritage they are visiting. It also introduces the idea of 'registers of engagement' and the implications this has for understanding the emotional and intellectual investments that visitors can make in their visits to sites and museums and the ways emotions and critical insight interact to reinforce or challenge visitor understanding and viewpoints. Documenting the ways in which people use and engage with sites of heritage allows a greater understanding of the ways in which history and the past are not only understood, but actively used in the present by individuals to negotiate contemporary social and political issues and their sense of self and place.

Laurajane Smith is Professor of Heritage and Museum Studies, and Australian National Council Future Fellow, at the Australian National University, Canberra. She has conducted extensive research on museums and heritage visiting, and the uses and politics of heritage. She is Chair of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies and Editor of the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. Her books include *Heritage, Communities and Archaeology* (with Emma Waterton, 2009), *Uses of Heritage* (2006) and *Archaeological Theory and the Politics of Cultural Heritage* (2004).

Laurie Hanquinet *Mondrian as kitchen tiles? Artistic and cultural conceptions of art museum visitors in Belgium*

This presentation discusses the ways visitors of art museums define their relationships to art and culture and how this affects their perceptions of art museums. Existing approaches have traditionally attempted to define the meaning of art museums on the basis of the socioeconomic composition of museum audiences. Using qualitative and quantitative data about the audiences of the six main museums of modern and contemporary art in Belgium, I argue for the need for a more complex and comprehensive framework to understand visitors' attitudes towards art museums and cultural artefacts in general. I show that people characterized by similar cultural tastes

and practices use similar strategies to interpret their relationship to culture, art and museums. As they rely on the same principles of classification, legitimation and justification, I argue that those with a comparable cultural profile belong to the same 'interpretive community' (Fish; Hooper-Greenhill).

Laurie Hanquinet is a Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the University of York. Trained in Belgium, her main research interests are in the sociology of art. She has carried out extensive research on museum visiting, resulting in papers in journals including *Museum and Society*, *Cultural Trends* and *Sociological Review*. She is currently completing a monograph on her museum visitor research; co-editing the Routledge Handbook of *The Sociology of Art and Culture* and managing an EU project on the Europeanization of Everyday Life.

Engaging Audiences: International Perspectives on Museum Visiting is intended as part of a series of future events on social memory, museums and heritage. These are organised by Geoff Cubitt (Department of History) for the Institute for the Public Understanding of the Past, and Sharon Macdonald (Department of Sociology) for the European Centre for Cultural Exploration.

Geoff Cubitt is Senior Lecturer in Modern History and a member of both IPUP and the Centre for Mediaeval Studies. His research includes extensive expertise in social memory and the social, political and cultural aspects of relationships to the past in modern societies. His books include *History and Memory* (2007) and *Representing Enslavement and Abolition in Museums. Ambiguous Engagements* (2011; co-edited with Laurajane Smith, Ross Wilson and Kalliopi Fouseki).

Sharon Macdonald is Anniversary Professor of Cultural Anthropology and Director of the European Centre for Cultural Exploration. She has carried out museum and heritage visitor research in the UK and Germany. Her books include *Difficult Heritage. Negotiating the Nazi Past in Germany* (2009) and *Memorylands. Heritage and Identity in Europe Today* (2013).