



Call for Papers

Art and Craft. Technique in the Eighteenth Century

Annual Conference of the German Society for Eighteenth Century Research
at the University of Stuttgart

In cooperation with the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach (DLA)

16-18 September 2024

Until the eighteenth century, *techne* – a term with its roots in antiquity – denoted practices of artistic making and doing; during the eighteenth century, this understanding underwent a change. Fields of knowledge became increasingly varied: technical objects were invented, including James Watt's steam engine; the Mongolfière brothers carried out experiments in flight; new printing techniques and technologies were developed. As art was increasingly demarcated as an independent functional system with its own rules and clearly distinguishable from other systems, the traditional coupling of art and craft inherent in the *techne* concept was reconsidered and revised. At the same time, new techniques created pressure to reassess the connections between art and technology, whether with regard to individual cases deemed novel or to the recognition that 'old' techniques continued in parallel to the new. In conjunction with these developments, the eighteenth century discovered progress could be both an opportunity and a challenge: Whereas previously the imitation of the ancients had been considered desirable – while simultaneously advancing new techniques – Rousseau now provocatively criticized civilization in general. For him, the state of nature was the ideal; he and his followers criticized (to put it in general terms) the overly cultivated, the man-made, including techniques in both the old and the new sense.

This conference addresses these constellations and tensions from an interdisciplinary perspective, examining both the techniques of manual and machine work as well as examples of 'everyday techniques' in the eighteenth century – those of painting, reading, writing, piano playing, etc. A particular focus will be placed on historical techniques of collecting on the one hand and, on the other, on the technical possibilities for *researching the eighteenth century*, thereby establishing an intersection with the Digital Humanities. A data basis can be provided by portals such as albrecht-von-haller.ch, the digital collection of eighteenth-century journals held by the University Library Bielefeld, or the research database "Scholarly Journals and Newspapers in the Age of Enlightenment" (GJZ). Digital editions such as that of Voltaire's works (Voltaire Foundation) open up many different author-related questions and potential new connections. Digital corpora like the Drama Corpora Project DraCor (Frank Fischer et al.), which also includes eighteenth-century holdings, and the digital research projects of the Marbach Weimar Wolfenbüttel Research Association aim at specific research questions – ranging from drama analysis through to the visualization of author libraries to digital provenance research. Furthermore, it is evident that texts of the eighteenth century – especially Goethe's "Werther" – have become cardinal examples of digital analysis (cf. the



project CRETA, University of Stuttgart), an act of canonization that should, simultaneously, be subject to critical discussion.

The conference will therefore be divided into the following sections:

Section 1: Reflections on technique in philosophy and science

Section 1 examines the theoretical reflection on technique and the definition of technique in the philosophical discourse of the eighteenth century as well as the current understanding of the term. Which concept of technique is the discourse of the eighteenth century built on? Against this background, with what approach can research most usefully operate? Questions regarding the (lack of) demarcations between art and craft are of particular significance here. Furthermore, this section will identify how contemporary technical developments were reflected upon in the eighteenth century and the cultural-analytical debates into which they were incorporated. A useful context in this regard is, for example, the contrast between nature and civilization (art), which many approaches aimed to overcome, while others aimed to underscore it in order to highlight 'maldevelopments'. The section will thus also discuss the relationship between technique and progress.

Section 2: Technical innovations: knowledge, invention, epistemic techniques

This section addresses technique in the narrower sense and examines individual examples of technical innovation and their impact: What role do innovation and progress play? The cultural and social effects of nascent industrialization must be taken into account here. This section also analyses techniques for understanding the world from which the 'modern' Enlightenment self-image was generated. This includes, for example, the translative reading of the divine message in nature, as can be found implemented in the concepts of Bodmer/Breitinger or in the poetry of Brockes.

Section 3: Aesthetic techniques

The differentiation of craft and art was decisive for developments in the eighteenth century in a characteristic way. Section 3 focuses on tracing these transitions and analysing individual aesthetic techniques. This could include, on the one hand, specific techniques of painting, art printing, writing, or music. On the other hand, this will provide the context for discussion of the methods of technical aesthetics as well as the relation between the discourse on technology and media-theoretical approaches. How is the problem of aesthetic technology discussed in contemporary theory? How is this expressed in art and literature?

Section 4: Collection and distribution techniques

Section 4 focuses on techniques of collecting and accessibility, in particular in the field of the book medium: how are libraries which specialize on the one hand in collecting and conserving and, on the other hand, in making books accessible to the public curated – especially with regard to literary works, bearing in mind the growth of the reading public? In this light,



techniques of distribution are of key importance – as are new printing technologies and translation techniques. Significant in this regard is also the flourishing of numerous learned journals and literary magazines over the course of the eighteenth century.

Techniques of ‘knowledge acquisition and management’ in early modern scholarship as well as of reading and textual excerption might also be considered within this new scholarly environment.

Section 5: The digital eighteenth century: Enlightenment research using twenty-first-century technical means

After the historical focus of Section 4, Section 5 takes a different perspective and engages with digital accessibility of and digital research into the eighteenth century. Contributions will present, on the one hand, ongoing digitization projects and their potential for scholarship and research and, on the other hand, current Digital Humanities research projects in order to explore further research possibilities for the future.

This section therefore aims to explore the potential of digital tools and asks to what extent digital approaches provide insights into the new materiality of collections that were established as a result of the emerging technologies, techniques, and practices of the eighteenth century (for example, in the fields of communication, production, philosophical discourse / world views) – and to what extent a clear differentiation from, but also continuities with, the Early Modern Period can be discerned.

Keynote lectures will be delivered by Katy Barrett (London), Elisabeth Décultot (Halle), and Nick Hopwood (Cambridge).

Researchers at all career stages are invited to submit papers on the themes outlined above. A short abstract (300 words, preferably in German or English) for a 30-minute presentation as well as a brief CV and selected publication list should be submitted via the DLA’s [portal](#) by **31 January 2024**.

The conference will be held in German and English. Travel and accommodation costs during the conference will be covered by the organisers.

Convenors:

PD Dr. Kristin Eichhorn, University of Stuttgart

Prof. Dr. Sandra Richter, German Literature Archive Marbach