

Artefacts Meeting, 8-10 october 2017

Musée des Arts et Métiers, Paris.

What work for what object ? Gestures, savoir-faire and body culture in museums of science and technology.

The collections of the science and technology museums preserve and exhibit instruments and machines which incorporate in them a history of work made of professional gestures and inscribed in a specific body culture. However, this intangible heritage of « savoir-faire » is not systematically preserved and therefore remains largely at the margin of the patrimonial policies pursued by the curators of the scientific and technical heritage. Thus, the public has only a restricted access to this tacit knowledge and contemplates objects without understanding all the complex and intertwined relationships embodied between the tangible and the intangible heritage.

The social sciences studies of gestures in working context could theoretically help us to contextualize and understand these implicit « savoir-faire » embodied in the objects of the science and technology museums. In France, the sociology of work, the anthropology of techniques and the history of science, the three disciplines concerned with these problems remain, however, a field of research largely underdeveloped and there is only few transversal work than seek to take advantage of the respective contributions of these different disciplines in a comparative perspective. In the English-speaking context, the research, although more interdisciplinary, concentrate mostly on the consumption and circulation of artefacts and knowledge (Artefacts 2016), but very rarely to the processes of production prior to these circulations in which the implicit « savoir-faire » are important. Moreover, researchers have not really been interested in the objects of the science and technology collections as a relevant corpus and a field of investigation complementary to ethnographic fieldworks. An interdisciplinary meeting where professionals of science and technology museums and researchers from the social sciences could work together is therefore more than necessary to think about what the tacit « savoir-faire » in scientific and technical heritage are and what can be a museum collection of gestures in working context.

For this 2017 Artefacts conference at the Musée des arts et métiers in Paris, which extends the 2016 Artefacts conference at the Science Museum in London, we invite you to make methodological and theoretical proposals, based on case studies, which would help to advance these research questions and propose a new look to the science and technology collections.

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