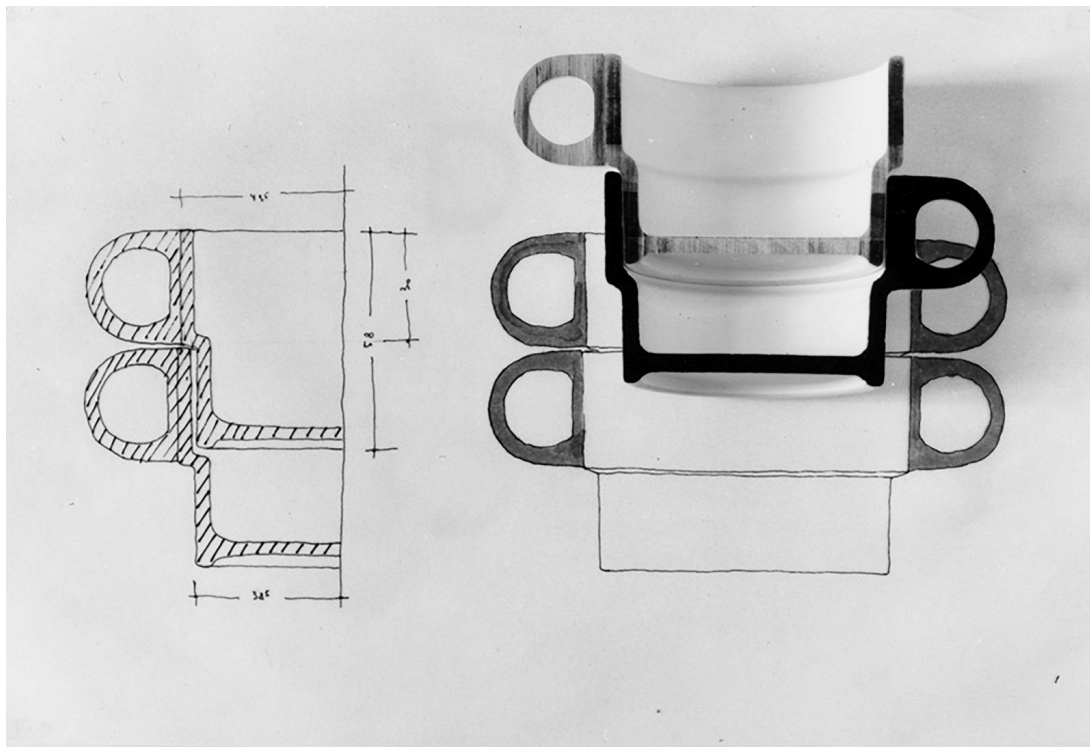


PRESS RELEASE
Florence, 22 January 2024

NEW RESEARCH GROUP

The KHI Launches New Lise Meitner Excellence “Coded Objects”

As part of the Max Planck Society’s highly competitive Lise Meitner Excellence Program (2023–2028), the group will investigate the programming of objects through design, focusing on proto-algorithmic thinking as material and spatial practice. “Coded Objects” is led by architect and architecture historian Anna-Maria Meister, professor for architecture theory at KIT Karlsruhe and co-director of saai | Archive for Architecture and Engineering. The launch event will take place on 24 January 2024 in Florence and online.



The Lise Meitner Group “Coded Objects”

At a moment when the design and distribution of information has become a dominant driver of world politics and economy, the formal and material implications of “codes” often remain unnoticed or unchecked—as do concurrent shifts of agency and attempts to program society through spatial and formal measures. Hence, the research group will look at the space of coding not as abstract technology or remote activity, but at the programming of objects through design. What would it mean to take *Coded Objects* not as stable denominator, but as a methodological investigation of form-giving operations and the *matter* of design? With form as epistemic entry point, the multi-disciplinary research group investigates the role of material forms in automated processes. In short, this project will focus on proto-algorithmic thinking as material and spatial practice.

Taking coded objects as central lens of refraction will question any ready dichotomy of design and bureaucracy—and any assumptions of “neutral” technology. The investigation of the form of processes and the objects they produce—locating design moves in systems imagined as automated—promises to unveil uncomfortable friction and productive affinities necessary for this research to bear on the present. The matter of processes matters, so to speak. Shaping things is often masked by rhetoric of technological “neutrality,” but given the global circulation of images and objects, and the embedded design of information, form-giving operations and the matter of design demand closer scrutiny. This project will carve out discourses of responsibilities, aspirations and techniques of forming values through aesthetic means. After all, what is coded here are not only objects or tasks—but subjects.

By looking at the coded objects that surround us as a set of human, material and aesthetic negotiations, the group wants to move the focus toward the importance of formal intentions (and consequences) in prescribed processes and programs. At the same time, it will consider the making of objects and giving form as locally and culturally highly specific practice, be it the deliberate shaping by experts or intelligent solutions for material processes developed by communities. Building on the critical work around “precision,” “objectivity” or “technological efficiency,” especially its questioning through feminist and queer methods, the group will study practices developed by shape-givers together with bureaucrats to create form (both historically and contemporaneously). Techniques of making will serve not just as tacit knowledge, but as skillset and tool in the operations of (always already) coded objects.

The group includes doctoral and postdoctoral positions, collaborative and individual research projects, as well as scientific guests, aiming for a wide range of scientific and public outcomes and building upon three modes of research: rigorous, in-depth archival work to uncover and evaluate case studies; intensive interdisciplinary exchange toward shared terminology and methodologies; and, lastly, a strong focus on making as form of knowledge, namely on the tangible, material and formal skills and sensorial experience of formgivers and their practices.

Anna-Maria Meister

Anna-Maria Meister is an architect and architecture historian. She is Lise Meitner Group Leader at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut (KHI) and professor for architecture theory at KIT Karlsruhe, where she also co-directs the saai archive, one of the most comprehensive architecture collections in Germany. Her work, situated between histories of architecture and histories of technology, focuses on the entanglements of processes of design and the design of processes, specifically regarding their political, social, and aesthetic consequences. She holds a PhD from Princeton University, a Master's degree from Columbia University and a diploma from TUM, and was a fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin. She is currently working on a book manuscript titled *Formatting Objects, Forming Values: The Paper Architectures of 20th Century Germany*, and has co-edited a special issue for the *Journal of the History of Knowledge* on entangled temporalities that investigates time as embedded in matter (2023), as well as the collection *Are You a Model?*, a volume on the architectural model as epistemological process (2024).

She is co-curator of the international research project “Radical Pedagogies” and co-editor of the eponymous book (MIT Press, 2022).

The Lise Meitner Excellence Program

The Max Planck Society launched the Lise Meitner Excellence Program to recruit and promote exceptionally qualified female scientists. The program is aimed at the future stars within a research field – at a very early stage in their scientific careers. Successful researchers are included in the pool of outstandingly qualified candidates with the subsequent chance of becoming a director at a Max Planck Institute. There is a multi-stage, competitive selection process, held in close consultation with interested Max Planck Institutes. Every new researcher in the Lise Meitner Excellence Program receives the offer to take part in the tenure track process, which—following a positive decision by the tenure committee—will lead to a permanent W2 post with group equipment. The Max Planck Society thus wants to identify and promote these outstanding talents and offer them transparent and attractive internal career perspectives. The Lise Meitner Groups are furnished with their own resources for their entire duration of five years.

Launch Event

Date: 24 January 2024, 2:30pm

Venue: Palazzo Grifoni Budini Gattai, Via dei Servi 51, 50122 Florence, Italy

Link for online attendance: <https://t1p.de/vhxmj>

At the launch event, Anna-Maria Meister will first introduce the group’s approach with some examples, followed by a round-table discussion with KHI research group leaders Hannah Baader and Hana Gründler, director of the Photothek Costanza Caraffa and KHI director Gerhard Wolf. By addressing the two terms defining the title—coded and objects—we will try to open up questions and establish future connections. Asking for example what is at stake in the distinction between coding vs. coded, how objects are belatedly coded for scholarly use, how one reads and unread them, or even what constitutes an “object” in diverse contexts and how their objecthood shifts, destabilizes or materializes are some first attempts at the larger question of how we might work toward a methodological definition of coded objects as a working thesis.

More information: <https://t1p.de/launch-lise-meitner-group-coded-objects>

Further Information

The **Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut**, founded in 1897, has been an institute of the Max Planck Society since 2002. Its research focuses on the histories of art and architecture in a transcultural perspective over a wide chronological and geographical range. A prime concern is to combine historical research with a critical engagement in current debates and challenges, for example urbanism, ecology, aesthetics, heritage, migration and diversity, the future of museums, media and material cultures and the digital transformation, among others. The institute is particularly committed to supporting young scholars, while its renowned library and Photothek are open to the international community of researchers.

The **Max Planck Society** is Germany’s most successful research organization. With 31 Nobel Laureates among the ranks of its scientists, it is on equal footing with the best and most prestigious research institutions worldwide. The more than 15,000 publications each year in internationally renowned scientific journals are proof of the outstanding research work conducted at Max Planck Institutes—and many of those articles are among the most-cited publications in the relevant field. The

currently 84 Max Planck Institutes and facilities conduct basic research in the service of the general public in the natural sciences, life sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. Max Planck Institutes focus on research fields that are particularly innovative, or that are especially demanding in terms of funding or time requirements.

As the “research university of the Helmholtz Association,” the **Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT)** creates and disseminates knowledge for society and the environment. Its aim is to significantly contribute to global challenges in the fields of energy, mobility, and information. To this end, around 9,800 employees work together on a broad disciplinary basis in the natural sciences, engineering, economics, humanities, and social sciences. The KIT trains its 22,300 students for responsible tasks in society, business, and science through research-oriented university studies. Innovation activities at the KIT bridge the gap between knowledge and practice for the benefit of society, economic prosperity, and the preservation of our natural resources. The KIT is one of the German Universities of Excellence.

The history of the **Faculty of Architecture** at the KIT goes back to the founding of the University of Karlsruhe in 1825. The tradition of the Karlsruhe Faculty of Architecture includes numerous well-known names, from Friedrich Weinbrenner and Johann Gottfried Tulla to Heinrich Hübsch and personalities such as Egon Eiermann, Fritz Haller and Dieter Kienast. Today, 22 professorships and an interdisciplinary teaching staff guarantee practice-oriented and state-of-the-art teaching for around 1,000 students.

Press Images

Press images can be downloaded here: <https://owncloud.gwdg.de/index.php/s/UCQcJHBZGTqDHIM>

Contact

Davide Ferri M.A., Scientific Coordinator & Head of PR
Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut
davide.ferri@khi.fi.it | +49 160 99072795

Dipl.-Des. Frank Metzger, Head of PR
Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Faculty of Architecture
frank.metzger@kit.edu | +49 721 60846143

Prof. Dr. Anna-Maria Meister, Lise Meitner Group Leader
Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut
anna-maria.meister@khi.fi.it

Anna Luise Schubert M.Sc., Lise Meitner Group Coordinator
Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut
annaluise.schubert@khi.fi.it

khi.fi.it

[instagram.com/khiflorenz](https://www.instagram.com/khiflorenz)

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