

Arts & Media Archaeology

Research seminars – in the framework of the Science at the Fair project

How to piece together a historical narrative based on very limited and highly fragmented sources? How to deal with historical characters who did a great deal of self-staging? How reliable are the sources they circulated about themselves, their shows and exhibits? What is the role of objects and artefacts in historical analysis and how can we make sense of their performative effect? What impact do (new) visual media and technologies have on our gaze? To what extent do they influence beauty ideals and even (pseudo) science? What is the role of the carnivalesque and how to interpret the presence of “grotesque” bodies in historical sources?



University of Antwerp
ARIA | Antwerp Research
Institute for the Arts



AMA Research seminars

Aim & format

This series of seminars will enable junior academic and artistic researchers to become acquainted with a variety of concepts, methods, and approaches in the fields of historiography, performance studies, media archaeology and cultural theory and to enter into dialogue with a number of specialists in those respective fields. Sessions are meant to be informal in nature and will consist of (1) a presentation by the invited speaker and (2) a discussion based on a set of texts that will be made available to read beforehand. In addition, (3) participants will be invited to think about the ways in which the discussed material might be relevant to their own projects.

Unless communicated otherwise, these sessions will all take place from 2.30-5pm in the ARIA meeting room (S.S209), Lange Sint-Annastraat 7, 2000 Antwerp.

You can sign up for one session or the entire series by sending a message to SciFair@uantwerpen.be. Please do mention your current project and briefly describe why you are interested in attending the seminar(s).

Please refer to our website for updates on the programme: www.scifair.eu

Planning

Sep. 5, 2022	Mechanics, Marionettes and Mechanical Theatre: Origins of Early Media Culture — Erkki Huhtamo & Thomas Weynants
Nov. 21, 2022	Lies, Exaggeration and Myths in Historiography — Tine Van Osselaer
Jan. 9, 2023	The Carnavalesque — Sarah J. Adams
March 13, 2023	Objets chargés — Thibaut Rioult & Kurt Vanhoutte
May 15, 2023	Faces, Physiognomy and Caricature — Evelien Jonckheere

The series is organized in the framework of Science at the Fair: Performing Knowledge and Technology in Western Europe, 1850-1914 (www.scifair.eu) a five-year research project coordinated by Nele Wynants, funded by the European Research Council (ERC). www.scifair.eu

Programme

Sep. 5, 2022	Mechanics, Marionettes and Mechanical Theatre: Origins of Early Media Culture — Erkki Huhtamo & Thomas Weynants
<p>Travelling fairground attractions left few traces. Except for a few fragments in the form of flyers, posters, programme sheets, newspaper reports, postcards and photos. Erkki Huhtamo and Thomas Weynants discovered the collection of a travelling theatre from the nineteenth century at a flea market in Ghent. This was the start of a media archaeological excavation. The rediscovery of Théâtre Morieux is an extraordinary story of serendipity, opportunity, insight, and determination. Based on this case study, they discuss how historical research on early media culture often resembles a detective story in which not only discursive sources play a role, but also material and visual sources turn out to be important pieces of the puzzle.</p> <p>Preparatory readings</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Huhtamo, Erkki. "Mechanisms in the Mist: A Media Archaeological Excavation of the Mechanical Theater: Deep Time of the Theatre", in <i>Media Archaeology and Intermedial Performance: Deep Time of the Theatre</i>, edited by Nele Wynants, 23-82. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019. DOI:10.1007/978-3-319-99576-2_22. Huhtamo, Erkki. <i>Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles</i>. Leonardo Book Series. Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2013. <p>Erkki Huhtamo is Professor of Design Media Arts, and Film, Television, and Digital Media at the University of California Los Angeles. He is internationally known as a founding figure of media archaeology. He is also a major collector of items related to the early history of visual media. Professor Huhtamo has lectured worldwide, curated exhibitions, directed television programmes, and published widely in over ten languages. His most important book to date is <i>Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles</i> (The MIT Press, 2013). <i>The Fairy Engine: Media Archaeology as Topos Study</i> is forthcoming.</p> <p>Thomas Weynants is an internationally acknowledged collector of wondrous visual media devices and the founder of the visual-media.be website. "Early Visual Media" (www.visual-media.eu) is an unconventional website, a "contemporary raree-show" or modern Peepshow, looking at the past of media entertainment and a rich source for researchers and early media lovers interested in magic lanterns, optical toys, vintage photography, early film, television, conjuring arts, magic & illusions, spiritism, <i>physique amusante</i>, circus and fairground arts.</p>	

Nov. 21, 2022

Lies, Exaggeration and Myths in Historiography — Tine Van Osselaer

“It is important to remember that fraud of every kind is an [sic] historically determined phenomenon” (Eliav-Feldon, 2012, p.11). In other words, lies, forgeries and false identities are an excellent means to explore the historical context in which they “worked”. They allow us to see what fears, dreams and beliefs preoccupied people’s minds. In this seminar we will explore some of the work that has been done on lying and impostors. We will see how in order to look “credible”, liars needed to play upon the expectations, existing roles, images and storylines that their contemporaries would recognize. Taking our cue from studies like Houlbrook’s *Prince of Tricksters* and Eliav-Feldon’s *Renaissance Impostors* we will thereby reflect on the historical conditions (like mobility and anonymity) that allowed such personal reinvention.

Preparatory readings

1. White, Luise. “Telling More: Lies, Secrets and History”, *History and Theory*, 39 (2000), 11-22.
2. Eliav-Feldon, Miriam. “Introducing an Age of Impostors”, in *Renaissance Impostors and Proofs of Identity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 1-15.
3. Houlbrook, Matt. “Gambit”, in *Prince of Tricksters. The Incredible True Story of Netley Lucas, Gentleman Crook*. Chicago, 2016, 1-21.

Tine Van Osselaer is associate professor in the history of spirituality, devotion and mysticism at the Ruusbroec Institute of the University of Antwerp. She has published on gender and religion; and edited volumes on religion and medicine, religion and the family, religion in the Great War and on corporeality and emotions. She was the principal investigator of STIGMATICS: “Between saints and celebrities. The devotion and promotion of stigmatics in Europe, c.1800-1950”, a project sponsored by the European Research Council (Starting Grant) and is currently leading the projects “Patients and Passions. Catholic Views on Pain in Nineteenth-Century Austria” (sponsored by FWO/FWF, a collaboration with Maria Heidegger) and “Contested bodies. The religious lives of corpses” (sponsored by FWO/SNF, a collaboration with Angela Berlis).

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Jan. 9, 2023

The Carnavalesque — Sarah J. Adams

In *Rabelais and His World* (1984), Mikhail Bakhtin traced the influence of the carnival and the “carnavalesque” in European early modern culture, ranging from the market space to literary works. The carnivalesque mode is characterized by laughter, the profane, exuberance, and the presence of “grotesque” bodies. Its most important feature, however, is the temporary suspension and subversion of supposedly fixed norms and boundaries — meaning that the dead can resurrect and fools can become kings. As such, it is an expression of a living and transgressive aesthetic that manifests itself in relation to power structures, ideologies, and institutions. Bakhtin’s theory should be framed within a broader postmodern belief that culture is in essence centered around dialogue, polyphony, and innovation and therefore has a particular political potential. This session will address the carnivalesque from a theoretical angle and discuss its possibilities and limits when applied to two case studies, Willem van der Hoeven’s popular pantomime *Arlequin, tovenaer en barbier* (1730) and a 1801 carnival festivity in Haarlem.

Preparatory readings

1. McGehee, Scott. “The Pre-Eminence of the Actor in Renaissance Context: Subverting the Social Order”, in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell’Arte*, edited by Judith Chaffee and Oliver Crick. New York, 2015, 9-16.
2. Smith, Joy L. “The Dutch Carnavalesque: Blackface, Play, and Zwarte Piet,” in *Dutch Racism: Intersecting: Place, Sex, and Race*, edited by Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving. Amsterdam/New York, 2014, 219-238.
3. Isherwood, Robert M. “Entertainment in the Parisian Fairs in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Modern History*, 53.1 (1981), 24-48.

Sarah J. Adams is an FWO postdoctoral researcher at Ghent University and the University of Antwerp, where she explores the modes, scenarios, tropes, and techniques used to design “Blackness” on the comic Dutch stage and investigates the different functions of these modes of representation before the heyday of minstrel culture. She has published on the construction of whiteness and Dutch metropolitan representations of “race” and slavery in several peer-reviewed journals. A public edition of her PhD thesis on antislavery theatre will be published with Amsterdam University Press in 2022. Sarah is co-editor, together with Jenna M. Gibbs and Wendy Sutherland, of *Staging Slavery Around 1800: Performances of Colonial Slavery and Race from International Perspectives* (contracted with Routledge).

March 13, 2023

Objets chargés — Thibaut Rioult & Kurt Vanhoutte

Performance and media histories are littered with objects: props, posters, postcards, newspaper clippings, costumes, slides, (remains of) technologies, etc. They are pieces of the puzzle we create every time we try to reconstruct and understand a live event from the past. However, by the obscure life that is theirs, by their “auratic” power, some objects do not appear as inert human possessions but instead as actants, with specific features, energies, and potentials. We call them *objets chargés*. The charged object imposes its singularity. It is charged because it exceeds its mere materialization or mere utilization. In its most paradigmatic form it appears as magical, sacred, supernatural or ritual, as it signals towards a radical elsewhere. It seems to transport its own context – archaeology, archives, ethnology, folklore, fiction – with it, at least for the connoisseur viewer. And, yet, the object lives through the efforts of its mediators who breathe life into it by establishing a link with the spectator: shamans, priests, artists, demonstrators, curators, collectors, antique dealers, auctioneers, archaeologists. The *objet chargé* allows performance scholars to “touch time”, to experience the past in the present and to imagine new futures. When, where, and how does an object of this type take on a theatrical life and contribute to performative events? These questions prompt us to think outside of methodologies in theatre and performance studies that feature solely human agents of artistic practice and scholarship.

Preparatory readings

1. Agamben, Giorgio. “Mme Panckoucke; or The Toy Fairy”, in *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 56-60 (to go further, see the whole part II, 31-60).
2. Roelstraete, Dieter. “Art as Object Attachments: Thoughts on Thingness”, in *When Things Cast no Shadow: 5th Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art*, edited by Elena Filipovic and Adam Szymczyk, Zürich: JRP/Ringier, 2008, 446 [republished in *The Object*, edited by Antony Hudek, Cambridge (MA): The MIT Press, 2014, 65-67].
3. Cook, James W. “The Feejee Mermaid and the Market Revolution”, in *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001, chap. 2, 73-118.

Thibaut Rioult is a postdoctoral researcher and member of the SciFair team at the University of Antwerp where he works on the project “Objets chargés : mettre en scène l’âme des choses” (Charged objects: performing the soul of things). Rioult is a scholar in magic studies. His doctoral thesis investigated the “Illusion of Supernatural and Illusionists during the Renaissance Period” (Paris, ENS, 2018). He is assistant editor of *Arcana Naturae*, a journal for the history of “secret” sciences, and secretary of the French association *Magie, Histoire et Collections* (the world’s oldest association of magic collectors, founded in 1937). He co-led the axis “L’art magique, pratiques et discours” of the programme “Deceptive Arts. Machine, Magic, Media” (2015-2018). He has written several research papers and book chapters on illusionism in various fields (performance

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studies, philosophy, history, media studies, aesthetics, etc.). He belongs to the “Fantastic Illusionism” art movement.

Kurt Vanhoutte is associate professor, chair of Theatre and Film Studies at the University of Antwerp and director of the Research Centre for Visual Poetics (www.visualpoetics.be). Vanhoutte was granted major projects with specific relevance to the interplay of theatre and science, including a European 7th Framework program on digital immersive technology, several projects on performing science granted by the French Ministry of Culture and Communication and a JPI Cultural Heritage project on the magic lantern. Currently, he is spokesperson-coordinator of B-magic (Excellence of Science Program, 2018-2023), a project enabling an interdisciplinary team to study the optical lantern and its impact as a visual mass medium between instruction and entertainment (www.B-magic.eu). He is also Principal Investigator in “Historical Bias, a project researching ideological bias through intersectional analysis of past data (c.1800-c.1940)”. Vanhoutte has published many book chapters and articles in journals, including in *Early Popular Visual Culture*, *Contemporary Theatre Review* and *Foundations of Science*. He has been active in the field of art and science as a curator and dramaturg.

May 15, 2023

Faces, Physiognomy and Caricature — Evelien Jonckheere

What impact do (new) visual media and technologies have on our gaze? To what extent do they influence beauty ideals and even (pseudo) science? By means of the texts below, we investigate how visual media (such as theatre, illustrated magazines, film, television) and new technologies (such as gas lighting, photography and face-recognition technology) not only affect representations of faces on paper, stage and screen, but also identity formation and (pseudo) science.

Preparatory readings

1. Pearl, Sharrona. "Building Beauty: Physiognomy on the Gas-Lit Stage", *Endeavour*, 30.4 (2006), 84-89.
2. Gunning, Tom. "In Your Face: Physiognomy, Photography, and the Gnostic Mission of Early Film", *Modernism/Modernity*, 4.1 (1997), 1-29.
3. Wegenstein, Bernadette, and Nora Ruck. "Physiognomy, Reality Television and the Cosmetic Gaze", *Body and Society*, 17.4, 27-54.

Evelien Jonckheere is an FWO postdoctoral researcher and member of the B-magic-team at the University of Antwerp. In her research project "Physiognomic culture in popular performance: on the use of stereo-"types" in *fin-de-siecle* Brussels" (funded by the FWO since 1 November 2021) she investigates popular performance (cabaret, fairground, circus, variety theatre and different kinds of café-culture) in relation to arts and legitimate theatre. Her PhD, an investigation of the tensions between the Belgian café-concert, variety theatre and official theatre, was defended at Ghent University in 2014, and awarded and published by Leuven University Press in 2017. She published several articles, book chapters and books on popular entertainment and artistic practices in *fin-de-siecle* Belgium.