

DEEP TIME OF THE THEATRE

Archaeology/Technology of the Senses

As an age-old art form, theatre has always embraced 'new' media. Literally 'a place to observe,' the theatron has been an obvious platform for new technologies and scientific objects, such as mirrors, electric light, the magic lantern, the theatrophone and, more recently, cameras, digital projection devices and mobile media. To create theatrical effects and optical illusions, theatre makers were ready to integrate these state-of-the-art technics and technologies, and by doing so they playfully explored and popularized scientific knowledge on mechanics, optics and sound for live audiences. Theatre history thus reflects the history of media.

This two-day symposium proposes a media archaeological approach to contemporary theatre and intermediality. Studies of intermedial theatre have discussed ways in which digital technologies refocus, enhance and/or disrupt established theatrical practices by integrating the spectator and playing with narrative and representational conventions. Now is the time to historicize and to uncover the past in the present. Through the interplay between present performances and their archaeological traces this symposium intends to revisit old and often forgotten media approaches and technologies in theatre. This archaeology will be understood less as the discovery of the past than as the establishment of an active relationship between past and present. Rather than treating archaeological remains as representative tokens of a fragmented past that need to be preserved, we aim to stress the return of the past in the present, but in a different, performative guise.



Film still *In Waking Hours* (c) Sarah Vanagt

More information on schedule and program can be found on our websites:

www.visualpoetics.be
<http://spectviv.ulb.ac.be>

An event organized by La filière en arts du spectacle vivant (ULB) and the Research Centre for Visual Poetics (UAntwerp) supported by the Faculty of Arts and Art on Campus (UAntwerp) and the Research centers MuCiA and ReSIC (ULB).

Thursday 3 December 2015

9.30 am - 6.00 pm
Antwerp - De Studio
Maarschalk Gerardstraat 4
Antwerp

Friday 4 December 2015

10.00 am - 6.00 pm
Brussels - ULB - Maison des Arts
Avenue Jeanne 56
Ixelles / Elsene

Entrance is free, but it is required to register in advance by e-mail at nele.wynants@ulb.ac.be

With lectures, presentations and performances by **Muriel Andrin** (Université libre de Bruxelles), **Sarah Bay-Cheng** (Bowdoin College, USA), **Edwin Carels** (KASK School of Arts), **Pieter De Buysser** (author and performing artist), **Chiel Kattenbelt** (Utrecht University), **Rudi Knoops** (KULeuven/LUCA School of Arts), **Peter Missotten** (ZUYD, Toneelacademie Maastricht), **Kristof van Baarle** (UGent), **Sarah Vanagt** (film and media artist), **Katrien Vanagt** (Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands), **Melissa Van Drie** (French National Centre for Scientific Research), **Karel Vanhaesebrouck** (Université libre de Bruxelles), **Kurt Vanhoutte** (Visual Poetics, UAntwerp), **Kris Verdonck** (media and performance artist), **Érika Wicky** (Université de Liège) and **Jozef Wouters** (scenographer).

Program Thursday 3 December - Antwerp (De Studio : zaal DE FRED)

09:30 - 10:00 [Welcome & introduction](#)

[Nele Wynants](#)

10:00 - 11:30 [\[the Divine machine \]](#)

From Sputnik to Surveillance: Performing with Machines

[Sarah Bay-Cheng](#)

This talk considers Norbert Wiener's work on Cybernetics from the late 1940s, Jacques Ellul's *Technological Society*, and Marshall McLuhan's *From Cliché to Archetype* in relation to contemporary surveillance art. What are the histories, technological and cultural, that have established contemporary cultures of surveillance, dataveillance, and self-surveillance? What strategies of resistance are available to artists working in and with surveillance? While much current analysis on surveillance focuses on image and technology, this presentation considers the role of performance and theatre as critical concepts in understanding, and perhaps, reshaping contemporary surveillance culture.

Sarah Bay-Cheng is a professor of theater and performance studies, teaching experimental theater and researching the intersections of media technologies and performance, both historically and in contemporary culture.

[sbaycheng@bowdoin.edu]

Between the Body and the Object

[Kris Verdonck - Kristof van Baarle](#)

In the course of history, the relationship between man and machine has more than once been compared to his relationship with God. Because the essence of the divine is: control over everything, omnipotence. Man as an imperfect, unpredictable, uncontrollable and mortal being, longs for the domain of the perfect, the controllable, the immortal. Man longs for the mechanical: he wants to create a robot or to be one in order to escape from his own imperfection and mortality.

Kris Verdonck studied visual arts, architecture and theatre. His creations are positioned in the transit zone between visual arts and theatre, between installation and performance, between dance and architecture.

[kris@atwodogscompany.org]

Kristof van Baarle works as a dramaturge for Kris Verdonck - A Two Dogs Company. He is a fellow of the Research Foundation - Flanders (FWO) preparing a PhD on philosophical posthumanism in contemporary performing arts.
[kristof.vanbaarle@ugent.be]

11:30 - 13:00	<p>[Archaeology of technology driven art]</p> <p>Theatre as a Technology Driven Art: the Survival of the Fittest.</p> <p>We would like to discuss the idea of theatre being a hypermedium, which not only provides a stage for the physical body of the performer, but also for other (in particular screen) media. One of the key concepts that we will reflect on is intermediality and we will specifically relate this concept to theatre and technology and to the role of theatre in technology driven art and in a mediatised culture. Our examples will not only be taken from contemporary theatre and art, but also from the era of the pre-digital or — with the historical avant-garde in mind — proto-digital.</p>	<p>Chiel Kattenbelt - Peter Missotten</p> <p>Chiel Kattenbelt is associate professor in media comparison and intermediality at Utrecht University. In teaching as well as research, his fields of interest are theatre and media theory, media comparison and intermediality, and aesthetics and semiotics. [M.J.Kattenbelt@uu.nl]</p> <p>Peter Missotten is trained as a video artist. He teaches performance arts at the Toneelacademie Maastricht and is professor Technology Driven Art for the Arts department of Zuyd Hogeschool the Netherlands. [peter.missotten@zuyd.nl]</p>
13:00 - 14:30	<p>Lunch break</p>	
14:30 - 16:00	<p>[Performative media]</p> <p>Cinema's Savoyards</p> <p>Pre-filmic forms of animation (the flipbook, the zoetrope, shadowplay etc.) still continue to inspire visual artists to create significant artworks. This contribution focusses on the survival of the magic lantern, and more particularly its performative characteristics. Before the lantern became an affordable commodity, there could be no presentation without the presence of a lanternist, in the 17th and 18th century also called a Galantee showman or Savoyard. Considering the dispositif of the magic lantern as a template for the cinema, I want to suggest an unexpected legacy of these itinerant magic lanternists within the larger field of expanded cinema practices.</p> <p>FRAME/-ING The Illusion of 3D in Cylindrical Anamorphosis & the Perception of Layered Sound</p> <p>I will discuss the workings of cylindrical anamorphosis in my media installation <i>Speculum Musurgica</i>: how embodied perception – or a framing through the body – of this 17th century analogue media technology generates an illusion of three-dimensionality; how this visual illusion relates to and influences the perception of layered sound.</p>	<p>Edwin Carels</p> <p>Edwin Carels is a teacher and researcher at KASK/Faculty of Fine Arts of the University College in Ghent. He works as a freelance film programmer and curator, with a special interest in the relationship between the visual arts and film, video and photography. He published essays on media archaeology, visual arts, film and animation.</p> <p>Rudi Knoops</p> <p>Rudi Knoops combines his artistic practice with a PhD in media arts (KU Leuven / UAntwerp). Central to his practice-based PhD is the appropriation of cylindrical anamorphosis. Using a media archaeology inspired methodology of short-circuiting past and present, he gauges the affordances of this 17th century media technology and its significance for how we engage with the techno aesthetics of contemporary society. [rudi.knoops@kuleuven.be]</p>
16:00 - 16:30	<p>Coffee break</p>	

16:30 - 18:00 [Performing science: astronomy]

Spectacular Astronomy: the Case of Henri Robin

In the second half of the 19th century, Parisian modernity saw a surge in popularity of performances characterized by a taste for spectacular astronomy, where showmen happily mixed new technologies with theatre, science with entertainment, rationality with fiction. Strictly spoken, practitioners in this field were not always men of science. They often played the scientist – and here play can be interpreted as a subtle back-and-forth between pretended and real, representation and enactment. My contribution will focus on Henri Robin, an influential yet forgotten protagonist of these so-called ‘physiques amusantes’. Issues to address include the complex struggle between aesthetic conditions and didactic concerns, the relation to changing ideas of theatricality and the remarkable persistence of Robin’s shows to intermingle magical and the rational.

Spectacular Astronomy: the Case of Letizia Alvares de Toledo

We will investigate in what sense Letizia Alvares de Toledo, the Argentinian writer that had an explosive, illuminating effect on Borges, might lead us into the most vibrant question that haunts today’s cosmologists and physicist: the Theory of Everything. [1] It will not be the theoretical nor fictional work miss Alvares de Toledo has produced that will lead us, it will be the striking coincidence of a pneumothorax that so unfortunately has hit a member of the audience during my previous lecture on her work, in September ’15 in Mar del Plata. In my attempt to assist the detective investigating this incident, I accidentally caused the death of causality as we know it. Unable to fix it, but eager to know more, I got on an expedition with a mourning, jobless zombie-like detective on my heels. Despite these rather uncomfortable travel conditions (the moment where finitude came to an end was in particular challenging for my speech impediment), I have discovered elements of a new cosmology that I need to share with you, since it has a far reaching political impact. We will have to address this free of all spectacular speculation, as well as free of all anthropocentric empirical slavery. All we need is some acrobatics of the tip of the tongue and a planetarium.

[1] This Grand Unified Theory should link and explain the laws in large scale and high mass regions: galaxies, stars, universes. And the laws in regions of small scale and low mass: sub-atomic particles, atoms, molecules.

Kurt Vanhoutte

Kurt Vanhoutte is professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Antwerp. He is spokesperson of the Research Centre for Visual Poetics (www.visualpoetics.be). He recently had a fellowship at the Centre Alexandre Koyré (EHESS - CNRS) in Paris, where he initiated an interdisciplinary research group with historians of science, planetarium professionals and artists to investigate the popular astronomical spectacles. [kurt.vanhoutte@uantwerpen.be]

Pieter De Buysser

Pieter De Buysser, fellow researcher at the Toledo Center of the Center, is playwright, performer, director and novelist. He studied philosophy in Antwerp and at Paris 8 Vincennes Saint-Denis. His work has been presented on numerous international festivals and received several awards. His new performance *The tip of the tongue* will premiere at the KFDA 2016 in coproduction with HAU (Berlin), Theatre les Amandiers (Paris-Nanterre), Kaaitheater (Brussels) and Archa (Prague). [post@pieterdebuysser.com]

20:00

Evening program:

Visit: installation *Speculum Musurgica* by Rudi Knoops
Antwerp cathedral, Groenplaats 21, 2000 Antwerp.

Program Friday 4 December - Brussels (ULB: Maison des arts, salle de réception)

10:00 - 11:30 [\[Performing science: optics\]](#)

In Waking Hours

Film projection in “salle de projection” (third floor).

Miniature Cinema in the 17th Century

Lecture-performance in “salle de réception” (first floor)

“Take the eye of a freshly slaughtered cow, carefully remove the layers at the back, and you will see a ‘painting’ that perfectly represents the world outside.” With these words, the 17th century physician Vopiscus Fortunatus Plempius, invites his readers to explore how vision works, by looking inside the eye.

In the short film *In Waking Hours*, we follow the instructions of Plempius, leading us to the place where images are born. We are inside a camera obscura. A fresh cow’s eye is placed into the hole of the camera. And then, a wonder of nature is taking place: a living picture appears on the retina of the eye, upside down. The film projection will be followed by a presentation in which we recount our experience of performing and filming this dissection experiment. We will explore the historical meaning of the experiment, with special attention to Plempius’ explicit invitation and his detailed instruction manual. The performative aspect is, as we will show, no less important than the actual theoretical implications of this disembodied eye experiment.

[Sarah Vanagt and Katrien Vanagt](#)

Sarah Vanagt makes documentaries, video installations and photos, in which she combines her interest for history with her interest for (the origins of) cinema. The film *In Waking Hours* (2015) premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam. [sarah@vanagt.com]

Katrien Vanagt (1977) is a historian of science with a special interest in the transmission of knowledge. Her PhD thesis entitled *The Emancipation of the Eye. V.F. Plempius’s Ophthalmographia and Medical Theories of Vision*. She published several articles on medical history, and has recently been awarded a Sarton Medal by the University of Ghent. She was involved in an experimental film project with filmmaker Sarah Vanagt, by reconstructing historical experiments dealing with eyes and the camera obscura. [katrienvanagt@yahoo.com]

11:30 - 12:15 **Staging the creation and re-creation of pre-cinema optical experiments**

Halfway between science, history and art, and like Sarah and Katrien Vanagt have so wonderfully proposed in their film *In Waking Hours*, many artists and filmmakers have dreamt about staging experiments which have paved the way to the Lumière Cinematograph in their own films, creating an interesting mise-en-abyme. This talk will examine how zoetropes, praxinoscopes, celluloid, camera obscura or even Marey’s chronophotographic photographic gun have reappeared and inspired contemporary re-enactments questioning what is cinema (or even expanded cinema) today in a self-reflexive and synesthetic way.

[Muriel Andrin](#)

Muriel Andrin teaches at the Université Libre de Bruxelles in the Master in cinema and lectures at the Belgian Royal Film Archive. Her PhD thesis was published under the title *Maléfiques. Le mélodrame filmique américain et ses héroïnes (1940-1953)* (PIE Peter Lang, 2005). She is the author of articles on women’s representations, as well as on women directors, and on new forms of interactions between cinema and contemporary art. [mandrin@ulb.ac.be]

12:30 - 14:00 [Lunch break](#)

14:00 - 15:30 [Technologies of the senses]

Olfactory Art and Theater: a Matter of Proximity

[Érika Wicky](#)

Based on the 19th-century hygienist olfactory culture and on the reception of fin-de-siècle olfactory devices in theatre performances, this communication will highlight how smell challenges traditional theatre by raising issues of proximity. Our conceptions of smell, inherited from the hygienic nineteenth century, lead to a search for privacy and intimacy in the contemporary olfactory experience. I will demonstrate how contemporary olfactory art and theatre devices play with the distance between the spectator and the source of smell in order not only to make it legible and non-offensive or unhealthy, but also to initiate a reflexion on the body, the other and the olfactory perception.

Érika Wicky is an art historian and a postdoctoral fellow (FNRS) at university of Liege. Her research focuses on 19th-century visual and olfactory culture. She recently published *Les paradoxes du détail : voir, savoir, représenter à l'ère de la photographie* (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015).
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Uncovering fin de siècle encounters between theater and sound reproduction technologies.

[Melissa Van Drie](#)

This paper focuses on early sound reproduction technologies, such as the phonograph and the théâtrophone, in the construction of fin de siècle spectacular culture. This paper is about recalling the fundamental and continual centrality of listening in the art of theater. I will explore the potentiality of engaging media archaeology methods for grounding and understanding theater aesthetics and practice today. The paper reveals different intermedial encounters occurring between sound reproduction technologies and the stage as early as the 1870s. I suggest that both the physical acousmatic experiences of these *dispositives*—as well as the corresponding imaginaries—had substantial impact on audience sociability and artistic practice. For example, the théâtrophone constructed early 'virtual' experiences of the theatre, which would redefine limits of theatrical space, modify sensorial hierarchies of theatre-going practices, and inspire dramaturgical experimentation with sound. Yet the effects are not one-sided: the proximity of these sound technologies to the theater influenced the articulation of their broader social functions.

Melissa Van Drie is a cultural historian interested in sensory approaches as a means of investigating knowledge production and sharing across disciplinary boundaries of the arts and sciences. Her Ph.D. (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3) examined the impact of early sound reproduction technologies on French theater. Subsequent postdoc research positions (Sorbonne-Panthéon, EHESS, BnF, CNRS) permitted further work on new mediatized listening practices emerging in the late 19th century. She also worked on training the senses in medicine and performances of science (STS Department, Maastricht University).
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15:30 - 16:00 [Coffee break](#)

16:00 - 17:30 **Deep Space or the Re-invention of Scenography**

Between 1738 and 1757 Giovanni Niccolo Servandoni, a French architect, painter and set designer with Italian roots, obtained the concession for the Salle des Machines in Paris. Servandoni used (or even abused according to some contemporaries) the infrastructure to conduct elaborate research on the theatricality of scenography, considering space itself as an autonomous theatrical sign (in that sense one could even say that Craig, Appia and the likes are to be considered as his direct heirs).

The work and ideas of Servandoni functioned as the direct source of inspiration to *Infini* (2015), a project conducted and supervised by Jozef Wouters (the title of the project directly refers to the tradition of the painted backcloths). The Brussels-based theatre KVS is equipped with a full fly installation but does not use its own infinis anymore – it has become, to use Wouters' words, “a slide projector without slides”. With his *Infini*-project he investigated, in collaboration with a number of other artists, how old techniques can inspire but also question theatre today. In their talk Karel Vanhaesebrouck, who will also introduce and contextualize the project, and Jozef Wouters will address the potential of historical techniques for present-day performing arts while at the same time tackling the misunderstandings surrounding so-called ‘historically informed re-enactments’.

[Jozef Wouters](#) - [Karel Vanhaesebrouck](#)

Karel Vanhaesebrouck is a professor and chair of theatre studies at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, where he teaches courses in the MA program Arts du spectacle vivant. He also works as a theory lecturer at the Brussels-based film and theatre school RITCS, the Royal Institute of Theatre, Cinema and Sound of the Erasmus University College, where he coordinates the performing arts section and where he teaches courses in theatre history and cultural history. [kavhaese@ulb.ac.be]

Jozef Wouters is a set designer and visual artist. Always starting from a specific context, his constructions and scenographies attempt to focus the gaze of an audience. Jozef Wouters wants to build strategic spaces that will give value and shape to the issues that keep him awake. In 2015-2016 Wouters develops the project *Decoratelier/Infini 1-14* with KVS in Brussels. [wouters.jozef@gmail.com]

17:30 - 18:00 **[Round table - closing discussion](#)**