

SATURDAY, JUNE 7, 2014, 9:30-11:30 am

Imagining/Imaging the Feast

Renaissance and Baroque Festival Culture in the Southern Netherlands

Chair: Ralph Dekoninck, Université catholique de Louvain

By virtue of its multimedia nature and its primary concern with issues of representation, the Renaissance and Baroque festival emerges as a fascinating object for early-modern art history and cultural analysis, especially in the Spanish Netherlands where this spectacle culture was blooming. Moreover, it presents itself as an invaluable site to explore cultural exchange among various social and political fields, and between countries and regions. The festivals were the joint result of the efforts and planning of multiple institutions, disciplines, artists and artisans. The contributions of these various agents and media blend in a spectacular and overwhelming whole, of which it is impossible to grasp or absorb all details. Hence, eye-witnesses typically label their experiences under "*meraviglia*": placing the spectacle in the realm of the marvelous, indicating the extraordinary character of both the event and their experience.

The aim of this workshop is to discuss the processes and the mechanisms operating within the festival in the 16th and 17th-centuries Southern Netherlands and their transformations of actors, objects, space and time. We will consider the artistic, scientific and ideological forms of knowledge and modes of expression involved in their production. Special attention will be paid to the variety of material, technical, economic, artistic and human factors engaged in the festival, as well as the circulation of different forms of knowledge and cultural practices stimulated by the festival. We will also stress the analysis of festival books as literary genre reinventing the moments and monuments of celebration. The type of messages and effects produced by these books will be studied not exactly as direct representations of the festivities but as symbolical recreations of the ephemeral events and ornaments

Rather than focusing on the decoding of rich and oftentimes complex iconographic and symbolic messages of single festivals, we invite speakers to adopt a wider and methodological perspective to analyze the complex scenic devices of Renaissance and Baroque spectacles and their transformative effects. Special attention will be devoted to *framing, performativity* and *experience*.

1/ Framing

As *frames*, we mean all elements of festival *apparati*, such as triumphal arches, scenery devices and porticoes, and sound effects that serve to set off the representational arena, inviting the audience to become active participants. Transforming the pre-existing space into a symbolic place dense with meaning, the framing devices also invite the participants to interpret the multitude of media and messages. Contributing to the overall impression of exuberance, the framing offers a

major device to engage the participants and make them receptive to strong emotions.

2/ Performativity

In Renaissance and Baroque spectacles, two levels of *performativity* are at play. On the one hand, the religious and/or political action or social ritual at the core of the festival transforms social and religious realities. On the other hand, the festive performance brings about a transformation on a more intimate, personal level. Because of this double degree of performativity, the spectacle is a powerful transformative agent, compelling people to step out of their ordinary lives and roles, effectively changing their social status, as well as transforming their state of mind.

3/ Experience

Because of its overwhelming character and its simultaneous appeal to all senses, the average spectator cannot possibly take in all messages contained within the competing media of the festival. So it is perhaps not so much the coded program of the ceremony, as the experience provoked by these special effects that defines the spectacle. By deliberately provoking emotions, the spectacle establishes itself above all as a moment of immersion aiming at persuasion, at the conversion and participation in a more or less active form. By means of the framing and experience of the spectacular devices, spectators are transformed into active participants of the spectacle.

The participants (max. 8) will be asked to give a short presentation (10 mins) either on a specific corpus or theme (preferably in conjunction with one of the three aforementioned directions), stressing the methodological issues and the interdisciplinary benefit. A large part of the workshop will then be devoted to discussion. An indicative bibliography and some articles will be sent to participants beforehand, in order to establish a common ground of knowledge.