

PANEL NECS 2017 **Experimental Media Archaeology and the Re-Sensitisation of Scholars: Theory & Practice**

DATE Saturday July 1
TIME 9-10.45 h
LOCATION 13, Rue Santeuil = Paris 3 Main NECS Conference site **Panel H5**
For details: <https://necs.org/conference/>

Panel organizer

First name *
Last name *

Panel chair

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Panel

Title of panel

Experimental Media Archaeology and the Re-Sensitisation of Scholars: Theory & Practice

Panel abstract

This panel aims at introducing scholars and curators to a new, hardware and hands-on approach in the field of Experimental Media Archaeology (EMA), taking the sensorial, experiential, and tacit dimensions of past media practices into account. As it aims at a critical reflection on its epistemological and methodological challenges, the set-up will be twofold approach:

First, we will sketch the theoretical framework on which EMA is build. Central concepts such as "re-enactment", "heuristic of groping", "experimental knowledge production", "thinkering", sensitisation /desensitization cycles (SCDs), media awareness, media transparency will be outlined and discussed in the light of their analytical potential;

Second, methodological implications and "best practices" will be presented, aiming at offering a useful guideline and a research protocol for doing experiments.

The methodological reflections are based on a critical assessment of disciplines having a long tradition in undertaking experimental historical research, such as experimental archaeology, experimental history of science, musicology, ethnography and cultural anthropology. The objective is to offer valuable tips and points of reflection for planning, realising, documenting and analysing experiments in educational (university teaching) and curatorial (museums) settings.

The point of departure is the search for alternative ways to draft historical statements on past media practices. The main question is how historical objects of media technology can be used as sources for a sensorially-focused history of technology and media. As the sensuousness of technical objects has been broached hitherto in media historiography almost purely from an aesthetic perspective, EMA offers the opportunity to combine an experimental setting (hands-on, sensorial, tacit) with a self-reflexive and phenomenological analysis of media use. The experiential, heuristic and cognitive possibilities offered by an experimental approach will be teased out through a focus on the materiality of past media devices, reaching beyond their function as evidence of the past.

Participant 1

First name *

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Short bio

Annie van den Oever is Head of the Film Archive at the University of Groningen and Associate Professor of Film respectively Professor by special appointment to the chair in 'Film and Visual Media' at the University of the Free State, South Africa. Associated Researcher & Visiting Professor for Cinema and Audiovisual Studies of the Research Institute ACTE - UMRS CNRS Université Paris I, Panthéon-Sorbonne. Series Editor The Key Debates. Mutations and Appropriations in European Film Studies. Editor of NECSus. Contact Details: <http://www.rug.nl/staff/a.m.a.van.den.oever/>

Paper title

Critical reflections on the heuristic and educational potential of medium-awareness and (re)sensitisation experiments

Paper Abstract

Based on recent scholarship in the field of experimental media archaeology, this paper will reflect on small experiments with a variety of historical objects of film technology and how such experiments can be used as sources for a sensorial-focused history of film technology.

It is a historically well-documented fact that viewers have been startled by new image technologies, but that these initial effects are temporary. Media quickly become "second nature" to users. Media histories mostly take these transparency effects for granted. Novel visual media may startle viewers at first, but they soon become accepted and often appreciated. IMAX, iPhone and LCD TV screens are examples of innovations that evoke a sensitivity to the medium eventually followed by desensitization. Such cycles may be called Sensitization Desensitization Cycles (SDCs). They are common in media use. The problem is that they are ill-understood. Moreover, in retrospect SDCs are easily overlooked, precisely because novelty effects dissipate. As a result, historical and theoretical accounts of media use easily take desensitization and transparency effects for granted. In other words: they affect our understanding of film and media history.

Focusing on a series of small media archaeological experiments with the film apparatus executed with students in the Groningen University's Film Archive, I will critically reflect on the heuristic and educational potential of such (re)sensitisation and medium-awareness experiments. The first objective is to assess if and how such experiments can be sources for a sensorial-focused history of

film (technology). The second objective is to offer valuable tips for planning, realising, documenting and analysing small experiments in educational (university teaching) and curatorial (museums) settings.

Bibliographical References

--Chateau, Dominique, and José Moure, Screens. From Materiality to Spectatorship – A Historical and Theoretical Reassessment. The Key Debates. Amsterdam: AUP, 2016.

--Fickers, Andreas, and Annie van den Oever, "Experimental Media Archaeology: A Plea for New Directions." In Techné/Technology: Researching Cinema and Media Technologies - their Development, Use, and Impact. The Key Debates. Amsterdam: AUP, 2015.
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--Fossati, Giovanna, and Annie van den Oever, Exposing the Film Apparatus. The Film Archive as Research Laboratory. Framing Film. Amsterdam, AUP, 2016.

--Noordegraaf, Julia, et al. Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art. Challenges and Perspectives. Framing Film. Amsterdam: AUP, 2013.

Participant 2

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Short bio

Andreas Fickers is an historian of media and technology. He is director of the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C2DH) which aims at promoting a hands-on approach to new digital tools and technologies in the field of history. His current research focuses on the epistemological and methodological challenges of digital history and experimental media archaeology.

Paper Title

Critical reflections on the heuristic potential of re-enactments

Paper abstract

Based on recent scholarship in the field of experimental media archaeology, this paper will reflect on how objects of media technology can be used as sources for a sensorial-focused history of technology and the media. Focusing on a recent media archaeological experiment with stereophonic sound recording technologies in the radio play studio of the Bavarian broadcasting in Munich, this paper will critically reflect on the hidden or non-verbalised, sensorial, corporal, and tacit knowledge that informs our engagement with old media technologies - in this case with dummy-head recording devices developed for binaural stereo recording in the early 1970s. This experiment, which involved sound engineers, script writers, industrial developers, actors and media historians, will serve as a test case for the critical reflection on the heuristic potential of re-enactments or media archaeological

experiments. In producing a radio play on the history of binaural stereophonic sound recording, the researchers were turned into script writers and actors performing in a professional studio environment respectively, thereby experiencing the challenges – both technical, social, and aesthetic – of interacting with this specific recording technology ‘in practice’. While the listener can only experience the immersive effects of spatial hearing that this specific recording technology enables when using headphones, the experiment allowed us to experience the multi-sensorial complexity of a recording / production situation in situ. In search for alternative ways of producing historical knowledge about past media practices by doing (documented) media archaeological experiments, we explore the sensual and experiential potential of technical objects in re-use and thereby aim at promoting a new approach to media history in general.

Bibliographical references

- Fickers, Andreas, Hands-on! Plädoyer für eine experimentelle Medienarchäologie, in Technikgeschichte 82 (2015) 1, pp. 67-85.
- Ihde, Don, Experimental Phenomenology: An Introduction. State University of New York Press, 1986.
- Serres, Michel, The five senses. A philosophy of mingled bodies. New York: Continuum Press, 2008.

Participant 3

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Short bio

JOHN ELLIS is professor of Media Arts at Royal Holloway University of London and initiator of the ERC-funded ADAPT project. He is the author of Visible Fictions (1982), Seeing Things (2000) and Documentary: Witness and Self-revelation (2012). Between 1982 and 1999 he ran Large Door Productions, making programmes for Channel 4 and BBC on film, TV and popular culture, some of which are at www.largedoorltd.com. He was vice-chair of the producers’ trade association PACT and now chairs the education charity Learning on Screen, encouraging the use of moving image and sound in education and research. Before the ADAPT project, he was involved in the three phases of the EUscreen project and is an editor of View, the online journal of European TV history and culture.

Paper Title

Critical reflections on the heuristic potential of simulations in television research

Paper Abstract

Television recording technologies require skilled users: each shaped by the other, within the wider requirements of the institutions in which they worked. The institutions of TV and film production historically require combinations of skilled (camera, sound, light) people and specialised equipment (16mm film, analogue video etc), combinations which have now disappeared from routine use. Based on recent scholarship in the field of experimental media archaeology, and drawing from findings

from the ADAPT project (funded by the European Research Council), this paper will reflect on 'simulations' with skilled TV workers using their (now historical) equipment as they are reunited with old devices in hands-on encounters, which are filmed using multiple cameras. The workers are invited to recreate their typical working procedures, and the results show the complex factors involved. The workers refamiliarize themselves with the equipment, remembering "what they had to do", and the physical adaptations of their bodies that the equipment required. They slip back into the routines and habits of working together, performing defined roles, remembering the jargon and the banter, and living again the pressures of professional performance. This paper will reflect on the question how these 'simulations' or reconstructions help research on these institutionally-specific implementations of people and equipment (who produced thousands of hours of television in the period from 1960). How can such 'simulations' reveal the constraints and affordances that produced the distinctive pictorial and aural styles of the television that now sits in our archives? Furthermore, how can they illuminate vanishing working cultures and their ingrained attitudes? It will be argued that none of these data could have been gathered through conventional interview, through paper archive trawls or even by 'untrained' hands-on experience of the equipment.

Bibliographical references

Murphy, Amanda, Vanessa Jackson, Rowan Aust, & John Ellis. "Adapt Simulation: 16mm Film Editing for Television." VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture [Online], 4.7 (2015): 7-10. Available at: <<http://www.viewjournal.eu/index.php/view/article/view/JETHC077/175>>.

Ellis, John, Documentary: Witness and Self-revelation, Routledge 2012

No 4th participant

Respondent (optional)

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