

Report

Spring School Historical Performance Studies

27/03-31/03, Groningen

DAY 1

Monday the 27th of March we gathered in the University building in the centre of Groningen for an introduction on what would become a very fruitful week of lectures, workshops and discussions about historical performance studies. We were welcomed by the organisers of the Spring School of the Huizinga Institute and the Universities of Groningen and Ghent. With a brief discussion of an image of Bidloo's anatomy of the arm (1690) Lucas van der Deijl touched on the varied topics that we would examine during the following days, immediately illustrating the breadth of performance and performativity. The variety of research topics, time periods and approaches mentioned during the short introductions of participants and attending lecturers, equally forecasted the diversity of topics we would encounter in the span of a week.

This first introduction was followed by a first glimpse of the city during the walk guided by Renée Vulto in which she engagingly taught us about the public celebrations at the end of the 18th Century. Walking in the market squares, we were invited to imagine the Dutch-French alliance that took place there in 1795. The addition of maps, paintings and music of the time completed this immersion. While singing the triumph song together, the sounds of passing cars and roadworks evaporated, the liberty tree seemingly rose on the main square and we quickly felt united as a group. This sense of community strengthened while we all got to know each other better over drinks at a local bar.



DAY 2

We continued the next day in the Van Swinderen Huis with the first lectures on rituality, performance and performativity by Marian Füssel from the University of Göttingen and Rina Knoeff from the local University of Groningen. We learned more about the origins and the history of rituals of violence and graduation, as well as rituals of public anatomies, linked to the Academic institution in which we all take part. Both lectures had attention for the changes of these rituals over time: we saw how the symbols of the academic rituals remained the same but were assigned new meanings in different historical contexts and how private anatomies and anatomic preparations incited developments in the rituals of the public anatomies. Moreover, the presentations revealed not only the unifying, but also the divisive power of rituals, which was linked to Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power and social magic.

The meaning and differences between the concepts of ritual, ceremony, performance, performativity, staging etc. got further exploration during the discussion and the pitches in which participants linked them to their own research. Jorn Hubo investigated the potential of the Middle Dutch romance *Rose-Cassamus* as a public text and the identification processes of the courtly public. Through an engaging inspection of one of Picart's engravings, Steff Nellis presented the theatricality of Picart and Bernard's *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (1723-1737). Imke Vet guided us through Late Medieval Maastricht and reconstructed the routes of the urban processions based on the proxemic signs in the *Libri Ordinarii* of the Collegiate Church of Saint Servatius and the Collegiate Church of Our Lady. Ricarda Schier taught us about the performativity of Byzantine letter sending in the Eastern Roman Empire, showing the varied levels of performance in which one text can function.



DAY 3

The third day of Spring School was centred around embodiment, performativity and self-fashioning. Presenting three cases of self-fashioning in early modern England, Sidia Fiorato of the University of Verona taught us about the relationship between the body and the identity of normativity or alterity. We reflected on the fight of the individual within the collective structures. Catrien Santing invited us to think about self-fashioning aimed at the performance of well-being in courtly handbooks and the 15th century encyclopaedic manuscripts, referring even to present-day aspirations of *beata vita* with the #goodlife on Instagram. We were encouraged to critically reflect on the readings of the day which incited discussions about the fashioning of the self to revolt or conform and doubts about the historical specificity of the concept.

We explored these ideas further during the pitches of the participants. I explored Constantijn Huygens' self-fashioning in and through his garden and garden poem *Hofwijck* and how this self-fashioning leads him to a feeling of entitlement in relation to his environment. Marly Terwisscha van Scheltinga engaged with the concept of self-fashioning in her presentation of the Dutch lottery rhymes and illustrated how men and women present themselves through the rhymes that are performed during the event of the lottery. Lies Verbaere examined how Giovanni Battista Calderari promoted himself through the dramatic paratext of *La Mora*, *La Schiava* and *Armida* and building on his literary network.



DAY 4

On Thursday we delved into, for many of us, very new approaches to performance studies. In the morning Erika Kuijpers, Dinah Wouters and Andrea Peverelli familiarized us with digital humanities and the opportunities of digital tools and computational methods for the study historical performance. Erika Kuijpers from the VU Amsterdam presented the project “Embodied Emotions” about sentiment mining in early modern Dutch theatre texts. She explained the development of the model HEEM, how they applied it and its potential for future research. In the following workshop, Dinah Wouters and Andrea Peverelli from the Huizinga Institute presented the Translatin project and their experience and

application of digital tools and computational methods in their part of the project. Their examples and case studies were very encouraging and illustrated the possibilities of these methods and the tools for our own research. We were invited to ask and discuss specific questions and obstacles in using digital tools in humanities, which was undoubtedly very helpful for the development of our own projects.

As a welcome variation on the daily pitches, we continued the afternoon with a workshop historical acting techniques given by Laila Cathleen Neuman. Very fittingly, we met in a lecture hall of the Harmony Building which was once a theatre. We explored acting techniques and expression of passions and emotions based on Aaron Hill's *Essay on the Art of Acting* (1753) and Johannes Jelgerhuis' images and treatise on gesticulation. We all elegantly practiced our contrapposto, learned about the importance of the position of the hands and in the end performed a poem and three passions together.



DAY 5

We finished the Spring School with an exploration of the concept of imagineering. Frans-Willem Korsten, Kornee van der Haven, Karel Vanhaesebrouck and Inger Leemans were with us to present the concept of imagineering or marketing violence. Through the example of the windmill, Frans-Willem Korsten taught us about the circulation of images that define how people present and find themselves in the world. Kornee van der Haven further clarified the shift from theatrical spectacle to a regime of representation propelled by the market and how the eye gets lost in the swirl of images that this market triggers. Karel Vanhaesebrouck explored this further through the case of the Amsterdam Schouwburg linking the imagineering shift to a development from hyper mediacy to transparent imediacy. They all emphasised the importance of questioning what is and what is not shown and what is kept concealed in these processes of representation.

The exploration of imagineering was concluded with three pitches of participants of the Spring School. Miente Pietersma explored the opportunities of the concept of imagineering in the study of martial arts handbooks and the epistemology of the senses by looking into the interplay of texts and images in the *Opera Nova* of Achille Marozzo. With her presentation on Frederik Ruysch' anatomical cabinet, Estel van den Berg shed a new light on the topic of anatomy that we studied in the context of rituality. She related the anatomical preparations and catalogues to the cultural imagination of life and death. To close this last session of pitches, Mart Rewinkel presented the idea of the Dutch mountains and explored the conceptualization and imagination of the mountain in the seventeenth century low countries.



There was ample time for questions on the presentations and the readings we prepared for each day. Which led to discussions connecting the topics of the day and concepts we got in contact with during the different lectures of the week. I personally found it very stimulating to hear everyone's perspective on the theories and how they related the theoretical concepts to their own specific research. In this way, we were brought in contact with very specific cases, while still being encouraged and challenged to recognize the similarities between them.

During lunch, dinner and coffee breaks we often continued talking about the subjects and related topics of today's society. The violent rituals of initiation of the early modern university brought us to violence and death in initiation rituals of students of modern universities, while anatomical theatres and cabinets gave rise to reflections on the ethicality of human remains in museums and scientific archives. With these reflections we all said goodbye and hoped to see each other again for the next equally thought-provoking Spring School.

