

CONFERENCE REPORT „Projecting Knowledge“ 13-14 Oct. 2022 in Utrecht

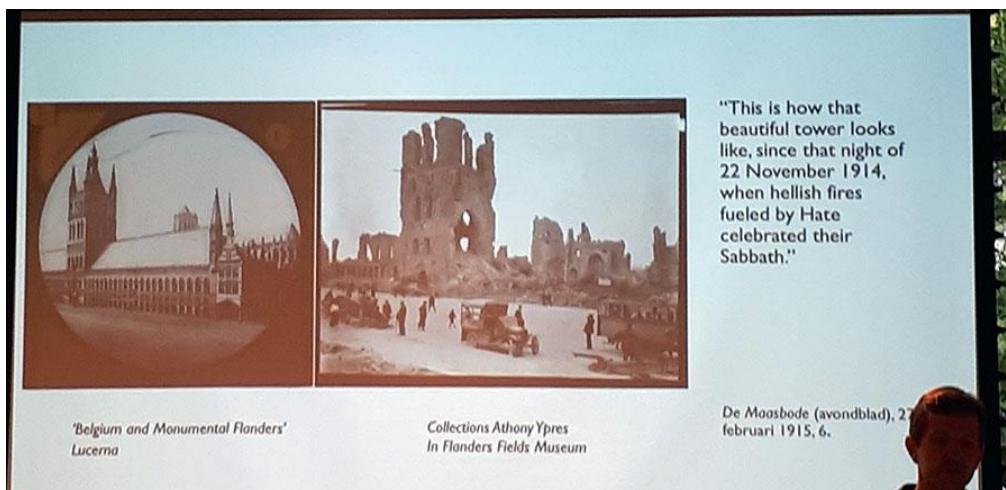
For two days, media specialists and researchers from all over the world discussed the impact of projecting knowledge (images, experiments...) on science and popular culture. Philosophical and more practical questions were addressed and discussed.



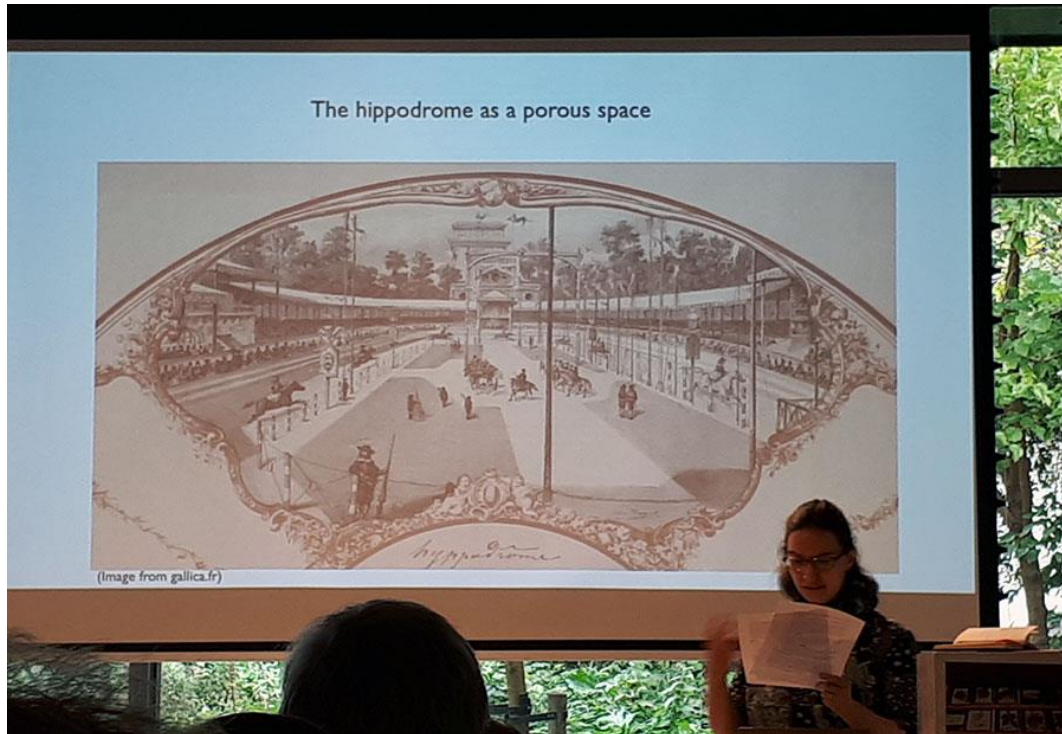
There were five panels: Audiences, Pedagogy, Images, Spaces, and Sources. A publication is planned!

1. Audiences

Klaas de Zwaan gave insight into the use of the magic lantern and lantern slides for political and war propaganda. Lectures by Wormser about the Second Boer War, showing South African landscapes and Boer families, and lectures by Puyvelde showing Belgian cities before and after the destructions of World War I were used to creating sympathies and gather support for a cause. In most cases, there was no need to convince the target audience. Lecturers sought an emotional response to rally the audience for a specific cause.



Annelies Andries dived into the theme of the audience by means of printed representations of events at the 19th-century Parisian Hippodromes. Those enormous performance spaces were used for music festivals, but also to reenact important battles, animal shows, and provide amusement for 'all people' on the blueprint of Ancient Rome's panem et circenses. Accounts and etchings about events and imagined audiences at Hippodromes vary greatly depending on the source (educational, satirical, or artistic) they are printed in.



2. Pedagogy

Bert Theunissen gave an overview of the changes in academic practices and objectives between 1880 and 1940, that prepared the ground for applied sciences and the use of the magic lantern in natural sciences and beyond. And – we learned why Justus von Liebig (creator of the famous Liebig Fleischextrakt for cooking) was seen as a bad example for university professors!

Lourens de Rooy made us familiar with the problems of students of anatomy following their classes in too small halls without the right lighting. From the 1900s onward, the anatomical 'toolbox' expanded, and new methods were introduced. Not only lantern slides, but models (for instance by Blumenthal) and 'in vivo' presentations were used now in their formation, and new fitting lecture halls were built.

Jamilla Notebaard's presentation was as well devoted to the challenges the projected image imposed on teaching methods and locations within the educational dispositive, this time in botanical studies. Painted wall charts were combined with lantern slides, that were also used to show film still – like sequences, for instance of plant development or movement. In some instances, colored paintings were manufactured after a photograph, to show yet more detail.



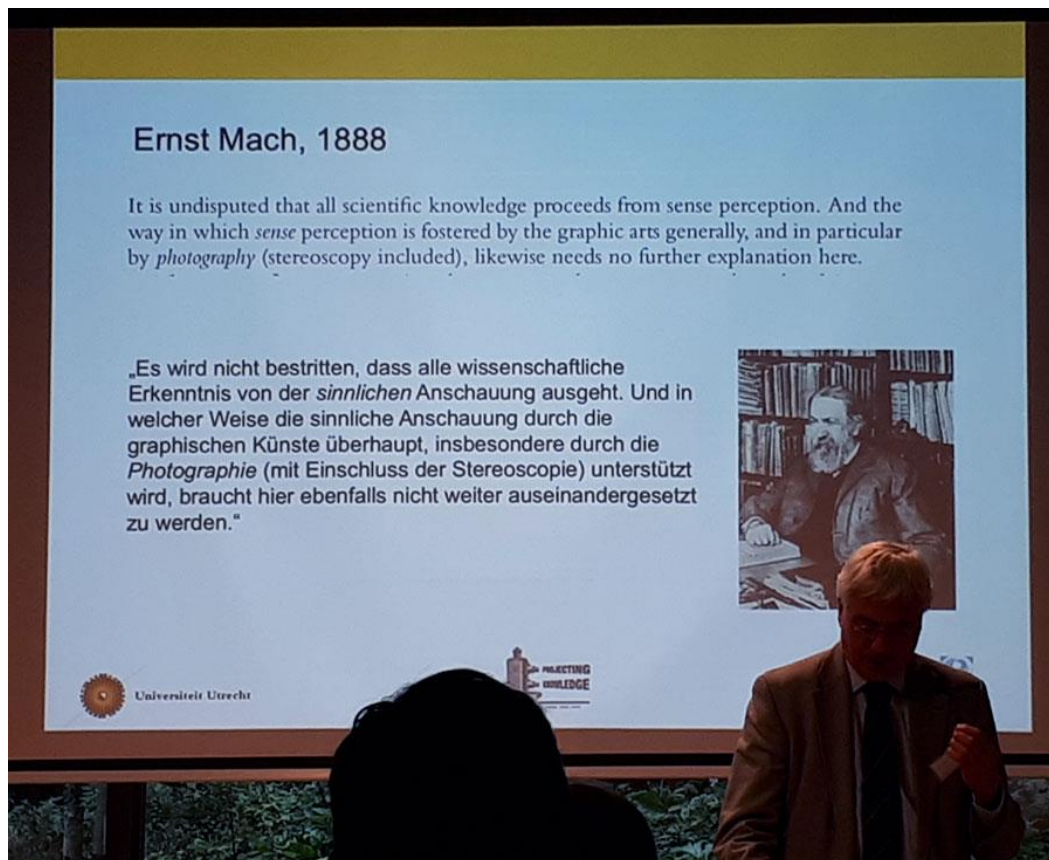
A lecture hall for presentations. To the left, the projector room with opening, and the illumination rows on the side of the room, so the projection was not disturbed and the students could take notes.

3. Images

Scott Curtis spoke about the evidential character of a photograph / projected image, not only in science but also in law. Who had to decide whether an image was 'self-evident' and substitute for the thing itself, or needed additional (written or spoken) testimony to be of value? Science, the courtroom, and pedagogy had different answers to that question. In a scientific lecture, the projected image was supported by the testimony of an expert – but slides publishers such as Keystone advertised with a direct efficiency of images that went 'right into school children's brain' without detour.

Alison Griffiths used the lantern slides of the famous New York "Explorers Club" to show how the slides can be understood as 'evidentiary media'. Next to the concept of 'wonder' that incites people to go on expeditions and explore 'mysteries' is also the idea of contra-vignetting: a look onto the margins, where for instance indigenous people, 'helpers' of the white male explorers, are shown. Many lectures with slides and film were (also) used as self-advertising of the members of the club.

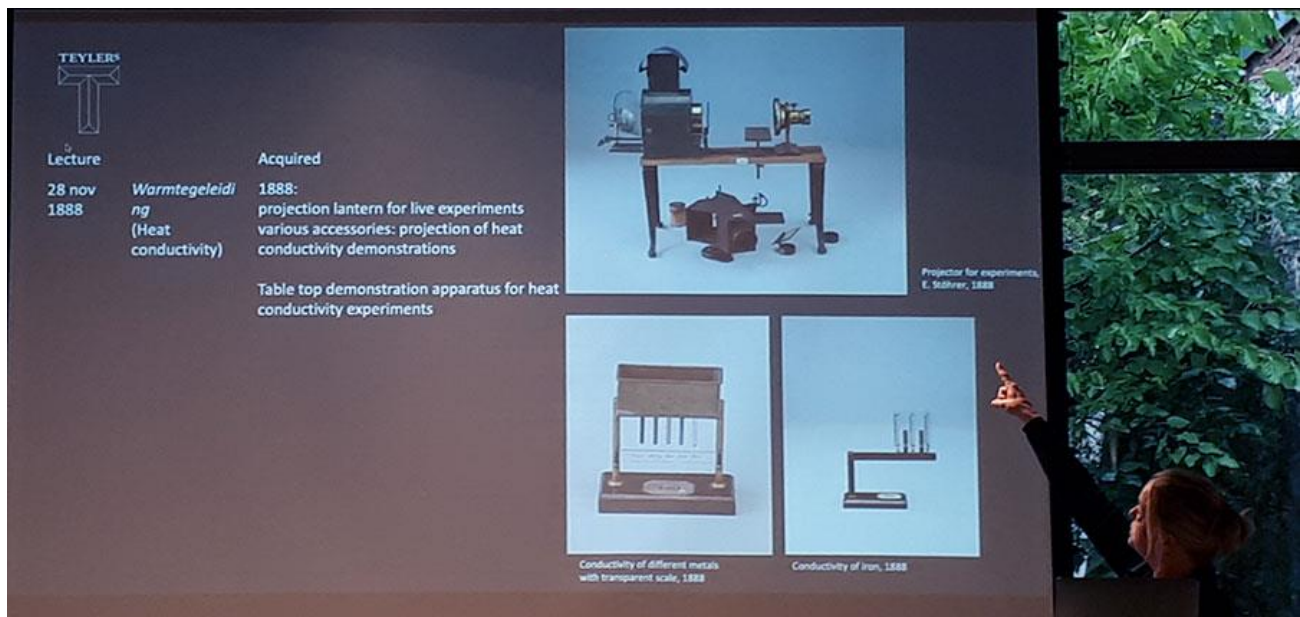
Frank Kessler's lecture was about the use of slide projection for knowledge transmission in so far as the projection is not only an illustration but also shapes the way of communication. Since when there were 'visual conventions' and how was someone supposed to look at an image, that was presented as evidence, but differed in size and color (s/w-images) from the original?



4. Spaces

Martin Bush delved into a rather unexpected theme: the Planetarium, its projectors, and the space where this particular projection of knowledge took place. After a long tradition of mechanical models to show the nature of the solar system, the first planetarium projector was developed in the 1920s by Zeiss. The enthusiastic reactions of the audience show that the planned 'illusion of openness' of 'infinite space' within the enclosed dome was a success.

Trienke van der Spek, introduced us to the wonderful collections of the Teylers Museum, where she officiates as chief curator. The Science & Arts Museum, established in the 18th century, was open to the public and offered guided tours. Scientific instruments, optical lanterns (also to show experiments), and slides (f.e. from Krüss in Hamburg with prehistoric animals painted from fossils) are still there. Acquisition notes by Van der Ven and Lecture notes by Van Breda from the 19th century give insight into methods of teaching and motivations for the use of different media.



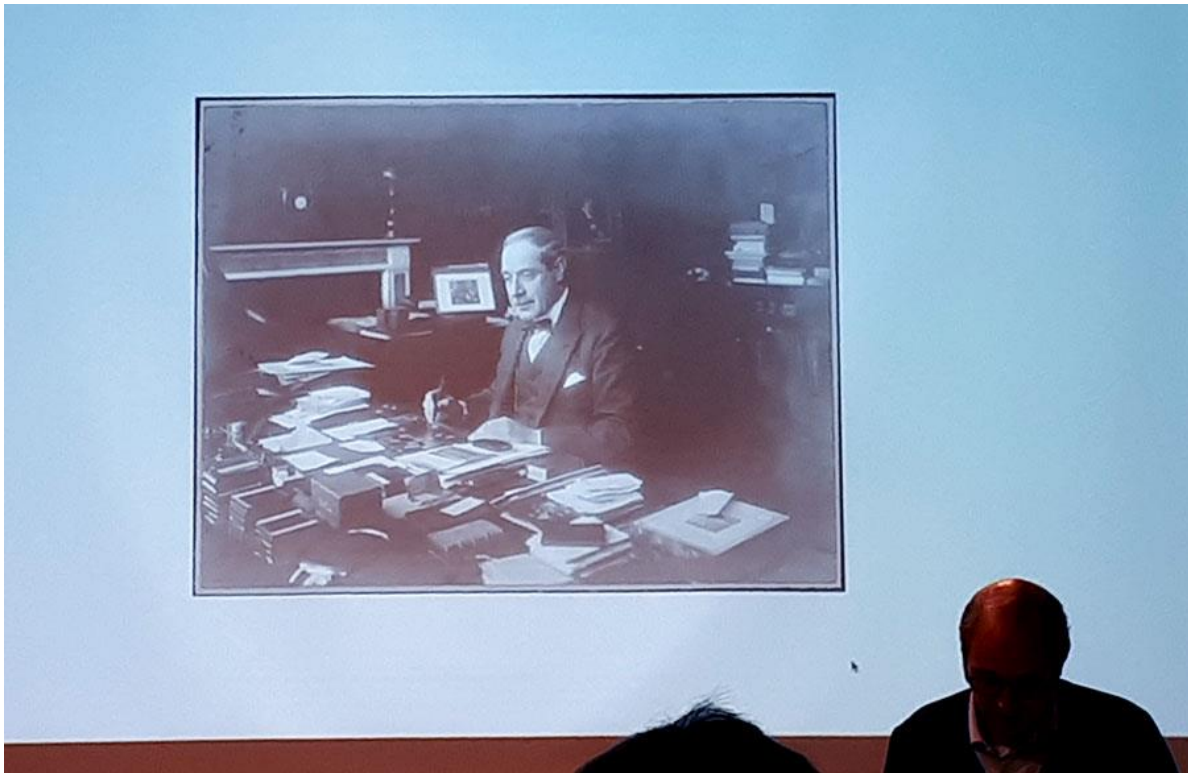
Dulce da Rocha Goncalves placed the public lectures in their social and structural frame, as they were an integral part of the specific Dutch 'Vereinigungskultur'. The many various clubs did not only build spaces for lectures but also rented them. A lecturer had to adapt to luxurious halls for middle-class audiences as well as to a café in a village. Public lectures were, however, not only a time for education in various fields, but a social occasion per se.

5. Sources

(The first contribution to this panel was my own. I spoke about lantern slides in the media-archaeological surroundings of the Seminar of Art History in Hamburg and showed 4 examples of slides with their archival documentation from 4 different time periods. Those 'time capsules' are a unique opportunity to study the ways of knowledge transmission and networks of knowledge)

Next, Vincent Longo introduced his project to create a multimedia platform about Orson Welles's unfinished "Heart of Darkness". Students collaborated to gather information from different archives and created different media content (including animations and maps) for the layered publication. It is hoped the publication can become a blueprint for similar projects and generate interest not only in this topic but in (film-) archival work in general among the students and a wider public.

Niko de Klerk spoke about the newspaper reviews of public lectures, which were quite often not written by a reporter who attended the event, but sent as a sort of press kit in advance (and thus, written by the lecturer). One of the reasons seems to have been the wide range of topics in those lectures and the missing experts among the reporters, especially in small newspapers.



Professor Vogelsang working on a lecture. Note the stacks of slides in front of him!

All in all - densely packed two days, that left us with many roads to explore further: what is evidence and proof; the relation between 'creating a special experience' to impress an audience to a 'direct imprint'; the question of audiences in general, their reactions, and the places / spaces where everything took place; the field of tension between pedagogy and entertainment. Last but not least: how can we interest students to look into 'dusty archives' of old media?

More on the "Projecting Knowledge - The Magic Lantern as a Tool for Mediated Science Communication in the Netherlands, 1880-1940" research project on the [WEBSITE](#)