



*Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study
in the Humanities and Social Sciences*

Spectacle and Society: Melodrama and Spectacular Mass-culture as a Mode of Modernity, 1789-1914

Workshop @ NIAS, Wassenaar 13 October – 15 October 2011

Organisers: Kati Röttger, Bram van Oostveldt (University of Amsterdam)

Description

This workshop will explore features of visual culture in Western Europe in the 19th century. Departing from the notion of the spectacular it will explore the effect of new technical and spectacular devices on the social imagination. To reach this goal, the workshop will bring together an interdisciplinary group of international scholars from theatre and media studies, visual culture studies, art history and history.

More precisely, this workshop investigates and reassesses the contribution of spectacular performances like melodrama, phantasmagoric shows, wax displays and the like to social practices of imagination in the Netherlands and in Europe between 1789 and 1914. It aims to unravel how the increasing, yet highly contested spectacularization of modern culture during the 19th century was accompanied by the creation, mediation and negotiation of mental and physical images of social identities (class, nation, religion, gender, etc.). The special interest in exploring these images is twofold: firstly, it will allow an examination of the extent to which these images were constructed along the lines of spectacular performances, and in how far these images affected spectacular mass-performances. Of central importance will be the impact of melodramatic practices that had developed into a most powerful mass-medium of that time. Secondly, it will serve to find out in how far these practices mirrored and affected the modern individual's imagination of his social role in the course of the long 19th century. At stake is the combination of both its strong socio-political as well as its aesthetic effects on the social imagination on 19th century Western society.