Thomas Smits

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SUMMARY

I am a historian of visual (news) culture. My work is located at the intersection of media history, media studies, and digital humanities. Fascinated by the increasingly visual nature of modern societies, I helped pioneer the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to analyze large collections of historical digitized images. Convinced of the benefits of interdisciplinary exchange, I used critical insights from history to further the development of culturally-responsive AI.

CURRENT POSITION

Assistant professor of Digital History & AI — November 2023 Present
Amsterdam School for Historical Studies, University of Amsterdam — *Amsterdam, NL*

PREVIOUS POSITIONS

Postdoc — April 2021 – Present
GOA project. The History of Implicit Bias, University of Antwerp — *Antwerp, BE*

Postdoc — March 2019 – April 2021
ERC-funded Remembering Activism, Utrecht University — *Utrecht, NL*

Lecturer Political History — Sept 2018 – Feb 2019
History department, Utrecht University — *Utrecht, NL*

Lecturer Modern History — 2016
History department, University of Amsterdam — *Amsterdam, NL*

EDUCATION

Radboud University — Nijmegen, NL
PhD in History — *January 2019*

University of Amsterdam — Amsterdam, NL
Research Master in History Cum Laude (GPA: 8.5/A+) — *September 2012*

Freie Universitat/Humboldt Universitat — Berlin, DE
Erasmus Exchange — *2007-2008*

VISITING FELLOWSHIPS

Researcher in residence — Dec 2019
CESTA, Stanford University — *Stanford, USA*

Researcher in residence — 2017
National Library of the Netherlands — *The Hague, NL*

GRANTS, HONOURS AND RECOGNITIONS

– Research Society for Victorian Periodicals Field Development Grant 2023: "Distant Viewing the Illustrated Worlds of the Nineteenth Century" (with Paul Fyfe and Ben Lee) ($23.000).
– (2023) Round Table forum in *Media History* on my first monograph *The European Illustrated Press and the Emergence of a Transnational Visual Culture of the News, 1842-187* (2019).
– (2020) Colby Book Prize for *The European Illustrated Press* ($2000).
– (2019) Grant to support Research in Residence position at the Centre for Spatial and Textual Analysis (CESTA), Stanford. ($1800)
– (2018) Best Paper award at Digital Humanities Benelux (2018) for 'Seeing History: Analyzing large-scale historical visual datasets using deep neural networks'
– (2018) Stimuleringsfonds voor Creatieve Industrie, 18DB/014(2018). Project: Aesthetics of Exclusion. We used AI techniques and the Google Street View archive to study processes of urban transformation, such as gentrification (with Sjoerd ter Borg) ($2000).
– (2019) Valorisation award of the Amsterdam School of Historical Studies for our blog *Over de Muur* (€250).
– (2017) NWO. With Sophie Levie. Computing time on Cartesius, the Dutch supercomputer
– (2017) Curran Fellowship of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals to support a research stay at The British Library ($2000).
– Travel grants to attend conferences in Kansas City, USA ($600), Wilmington, USA ($1000), Florence, London, and Freiburg ($600).

Editorial Positions

- (2019-pres) Editor of *Tijdschrift voor Mediageschiedenis/Journal for Media History*.
- (2017-pres) Co-founding editor of *Over de Muur*
    - *Over de Muur* is an online blog that connects the research of historians to present-day events and topics. Since 2017, we have published 161 blogs.
- (2016-2018) Editor of the *Journal of European Periodical Studies*.
- (2015-2016) Editor-in-chief of *Tijdschrift voor Tijdschrift Studies/Journal for the Study of Periodical Media*.
- (2013-2017) Editor-in-chief and editor of *Historisch Cafe*.

Academic Service

- (2023 - pres) Program Committee member of Digital Humanities 2023 (Leuven, BE).
- (2020-pres) Co-organizer of the Alan Turing Institute's Special Interest Group on Computer Vision for Digital heritage.
- (2022) Committee member of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals Field Development Grant.
- (2022) Local organizer of Computational Humanities Research (CHR) in Antwerp
- (2021) Program Committee member of HistoInfomatics21 (International Workshop on Computational History)
- (2015-2020) Member of *Faces of Science*
    - Faces of Sciences is the youngest cohort of The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW).
- (2015-2018) Board member of *Koninklijk Nederlands Historisch Genootschap*.
- (2016-2018) Founder and board member of *Jong KNHG*
    - As a board member of the KNHG, I founded *Jong KNHG* to promote the interest of unestablished historians
- (Book) revierwer for: European Research Council, Swiss National Science Foundation, Israel Science Foundation, Routledge, *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, *Memory Studies*, *ADHO Digital Humanities Conference*, *Computational Humanities Research*, *Digital Humanities Benelux*, *Memory Studies*, *Journal of Open Humanities Data*, *Archive and Records*, *Media History*, *Journal for Media History*, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, *Journal for European Periodical Studies*, *The Lion & the Unicorn*

Teaching

Postgraduate
- Loren Verreyen (PhD), Distant Listening: analysing the fact/fiction divide in true crime radio shows and podcasts (with Mike Kestemont).
- Eleonora Paklons (PhD), Projecting Worlds. The Construction of a Shared Experience of Place through the Magic Lantern in Belgium (1880-1929) (with Kurt Vanhoutte).
- Committee member for Kenzo Milleville, Unlocking the Potential of Digital Archives via Artificial Intelligence (Ghent University, 2024).
- Committee member for Dilawar Ali, AI-Based Methods to Enrich, Geolocalize, and Rephotograph Historical Newspaper Photos (Ghent University, 2023).
- Supervisor of Ruben Ros (associate researcher), Distant Viewing Visual Memory project, REACT, Utrecht University.
- Supervisor of Meritxell Vinyeta and Hannah Jakobsen (RMA research interns), Projects on visual public memory, REACT, Utrecht University (with Ann Rigney).

MA
- Instructor of the intensive programming bootcamp of the MA digital text analysis (University of Antwerp).

BA
- Kunststroming: Modernisme (Radboud University)
- Van Beowulf tot Brecht: Meesterwerken uit de Europese Letterkunde (Radboud University)
- Inleiding Geschiedenis I (University of Amsterdam)
- Inleiding Geschiedenis II (University of Amsterdam)
- Tutoraat Geschiedenis (University of Amsterdam)
- Moderne Geschiedenis (Utrecht University)
- Tutoraat Geschiedenis (Utrecht University)
- BA stages (Utrecht University)
- BA scripties (Utrecht University)
- (developed) Leerlaboratorium: Beeldmanipulatie. Van airbrushing tot DeepFakes (University of Antwerp)

Other
- (2022) Two lessons for the *Programming Historian* on Computer Vision for the Humanities (with Daniel van Strien, Kaspar Beelen, Melvin Wevers, Katherine McDonough)

- (Athens, 2023) Digital Humanities Bootcamp. Course: Distant viewing: multimodal machine learning and visual archives.
- (Antwerp, 2022) Children's Literature Summer School. Course: Close and distant reading bias in illustrations of children's books (with Vanessa Joosen)
- (Antwerp, 2018) One-day tutorial on Computer Vision for Digital Humanities at the summer school "Digital Humanities: Processing and Analysing Images" (with Melvin Wevers and Mike Kestemont)
- Guest lectures on visual AI for digital history on BA and MA level (Utrecht University / University of Antwerpen) and historical research in Delpher (University of Amsterdam).

PUBLICATIONS

Book
- Rigney A and Smits T (2023) *The Visual Memory of Protest.* Amsterdam: AUP.
- Smits, T. *The European Illustrated Press and the Emergence of a Transnational Visual Culture of the News, 1842-1870.* London: Routledge, 2019.

  - *The European Illustrated Press* was awarded the 2020 Colby Scholarly Book Prize and was short-listed for the 2022 research prize of the European Society for Periodical Research. The prize committee noted: 'The work refocuses research on ways of thinking beyond the comparative and offers a clear definition of what transnational might mean for future study. [It] provides a clear methodology that ... will no doubt have a transformative impact on the field of periodical and newspaper study.' A review in *Victorian Periodicals Review* described it as 'stimulating, original, scrupulously researched, very readable, and informed by state-of-the-art theory and methods.' It was favorably reviewed in several journals and is the subject of a roundtable forum in *Media History.*

Special issues (ed)
- Smits T and Asser S (2022) The great Unseen. Introduction to the special issue on the history of photojournalism and the (digital) archive. *Journal for Media History* 25(1): 1-17. DOI.
- Smits T (2018) Berichten van het Thuisfront. Oorlog, Media, en Mediageschiedenis. Introduction to the special issue on the history of war and journalism. *Leidschrift* 33(3): 7-18 Link
- Smits T (2015) Editorial to the special issue on Delpher and Historical Research. *Tijdschrift voor Tijdschriftstudies* 38: 5-7 DOI.

Peer-reviewed articles
- Smits T (2023) Author's Response. Roundtable: The European Illustrated Press and the Emergence of a Transnational Visual Culture of the News, 1842-187. *Media History.* DOI.
- Smits T and Wevers M (2023) A multimodal turn in Digital Humanities? Using contrastive machine learning models to explore, enrich, and analyze digital visual historical collections. *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities.* DOI
- Smits T and Ros R (2021) Distant reading 940,000 online circulations of 26 iconic photographs. *New Media and Society* 25(12): 3543–3572. DOI.
- Smits T and Ros R (2023) Does transnational contention lead to transnational memory? The online visual memory of the February 2003 anti-Iraq War protests. *Social Movement Studies* 22(1): 23-45. DOI.
- Smits T (2022) A Network of Photographs. The Visual Public Memory of the Dutch Provo Movement, 1967-2016. *Memory Studies* 15(1): 184–203. DOI.
- Smits T and Wevers M (2021) The Agency of Computer Vision Models as Optical Instruments. *Visual Communication* 21(2): 329–349. DOI.

  - This article historicizes viusal AI technology as an optical instrument and shows that SSH researchers can contribute to debates in AI. Leading scholar Kate Crawford praised our work and included it in the Critical Dataset Studies reading list. Leading digital art historian Harald Klinke described it as 'the most exciting article I've read in a while.'

- Wevers M and Smits T (2020) The Visual Digital Turn. Using Neural Networks to Study Historical Images. *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 35(1): 194-207 DOI.
- Smits, T. (2017) Looking for The Illustrated London News in Australian Digital Newspapers. *Media History* 23(1): 80–99. DOI.
- Smits T (2016) Making the News National: Using Digitized Newspapers to Study the Distribution of the Queen's Speech by W. H. Smith and Son, 1846–1858. *Victorian Periodicals Review* 49(4): 598–625. DOI.
- Smits T (2012) Een problematisch symbool van vooruitgang . De representatie van de spoorwegen in De Hollandsche Illustratie (1864-1884) *Tijdschrift voor Tijdschriftstudies* 32(1): 151–64. DOI

Peer-reviewed chapters in books
- Smits T and Ros R (2023) Space and place in online visual memory: the Tank Man in Hong Kong, 2013-2020. In: Rigney A and Smits T (eds), *The Visual Memory of Protest* Amsterdam: AUP.

- Smits T (2021) Piracy, Copyright, and the Transnational Trade in Illustrations of News in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," In: Delamaire M. and Slauter W (eds), Circulation and Control: *Artistic Culture and Intellectual Property in the Nineteenth Century*. Open Book Publishers. Link.
- Smits T (2019) Een explosie van beeld. De visualisatie van het nieuws in Nederlandse kranten, 1840-1930. In: Wijfjes, H. and F. Harbers (eds), *De krant: een cultuurgeschiedenis*. Amsterdam: Boom.Link.

Peer-reviewed published papers
- Smits T and Kestemont M (2021) Towards Multimodal Computational Humanities. Using CLIP to Analyze Late-Nineteenth Century Magic Lantern Slides. In: Proceedings of the Conference on Computational Humanities Research 2021 (eds M Ehrmann, F Karsdorp, M Wevers, et al.)pp. 149–158. CEUR-WS. Link.
- Wevers M and Smits T (2020) Detecting Faces, Visual Medium Types, and Gender in Historical Advertisements, 1950–1995. In: Computer Vision – ECCV 2020 Workshops (eds A Bartoli and A Fusiello), Cham, 2020, pp. 77–91. Springer International Publishing.
- Smits T and Ros R (2020) Quantifying Iconicity in 940K Online Circulations of 26 Iconic Photographs. In: Proceedings of the Workshop on Computational Humanities Research 2020 (eds F Karsdorp, B McGillivray, A Nerghes, et al.)pp. 375–384. CEUR-WS. Link.
- Kleppe M, Smits T and Faber W (2019) Three Perspectives on a Collaborative Attempt to Use Computer Vision Techniques to Automatically Classify Historical Newspaper Images. In: Proceedings of the Twin Talks Workshop at DHN 2019, vol. 2365 (DHN 2019, Copenhagen: CEUR-WS, 2019), 5–12, Link.

Peer-reviewed lessons/tutorials
- Van Strien D, Beelen K, Wevers M, Smits T and McDonough K (2022) Computer Vision for the Humanities: An Introduction to Deep Learning for Image Classification (Part 1 and Part 2) *Programming Historian*. DOI

Book reviews
- Review of C Dewhirst and R Scully, eds., Voices of Challenge in Australia's Migrant and Minority Press (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) in:*Victorian Periodicals Review* (2023).
- Review of N Bair, The Decisive Network: Magnum Photos and the Postwar Image Market, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020) in:*Journal for Media History* (2022).
- Review of J Atkinson, French Novels and the Victorians (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) in:*Victorian Periodicals Review* (2022).
- Review of A Korda, Printing and Painting the News in Victorian London: The Graphic and Social Realism, 1869–1891 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015) in:*Journal for European Periodical Studies* (2017).
- Review of L K Hughes and S Robbins, eds. Teaching Transatlanticism. Resources for Teaching Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Print Culture (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) in:*Victorian Periodicals Review* (2017).
- Review of H Cox and S Mowatt, Revolutions from Grub Street. A History of Magazine Publishing in Britain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) in *Tijdschrift voor Tijdscrhift Studies* (2014)

Non peer-reviewed
- J Coomans, Smits T and Zurné J. (2013) *Snelweg Naar Rome. Een nieuwe generatie historici over het verleden* Amsterdam: Prometheus.

Popular
- "Hoe gaat jouw Instagram-post geschiedenis schrijven?" Presentation for the Universiteit van Nederland. (link)
- Op-eds in *NRC Handelsblad* on (post)colonial Dutch History (link), the World Press Photo contest (link), and the Dutch rememberance of the Second World War (link)
- Book reviews in the *Nederlandse Boekengids* on this history of climate change (link) and the history of American Imperialism (link)
- Six blogs for *Over de Muur* on (public) history (link)
  - I spearheaded the thematic focus on the history of the climate crisis and interviewed historian and activist Andreas Malm about how the crisis impacts historic causality.
- Thirteen blogs about my research for *Faces of Science* (link)

Talks

Future invited talks
- (5 December, 2023) "Roundtable: Digital Art History", Art Within Reach. Photomechanical Reproductions of Works of Art from Print to Digital, Prague, CZ

Invited
- (17 October 2023) "Greetings from! Using Computer Vision, HTR and Large Language Models to extract address information from 100,000 historical picture postcards", Clariah-VL workshop Reading Historical Maps in a Digital Era, Antwerp, BE.
- (9 June 2023) "Mutlimodal AI and the digital archive", Imperial War Museum/Eyecon workshop on culturally-responsive AI in the digital archive, London, UK.

- (10 May 2023) "Multimodal Machine Learning and Digitized Newspapers" British Library/Living with Machines workshop on AI and Historical Newspapers, London, UK.
- (29 March 2023). "Space and Place in Online Visual Memory: The Tank Man in Hong Kong, 2013–2020" Remembering Activism: Critical Perspectives on the Memory-Activism Nexus, Utrecht University, Utrecht, NL.
- (20 January 2023) "Distant Viewing the Illustrated World of the Illustrated London News, 1842-1900" ESPRit Online Seminar, European Society for Periodical Studies, Online. YouTube
- (13 January 2023) "Panel: Why study the region and its cultures transnationally?" Cultural Representations of the Region in Transnational Contexts, c. 1840-1940, Radboud University, Nijmegen, NL.
- (2 December 2022) A multimodal turn in digital history? Using multimodal machine learning to explore and analyze visual collections. Nordic Media History Network, Online.
- (26 October 2022) "A Multimodal Revolution in Digital Humanities," DigArv seminar, Lund University, Lund, SE.
- (6 October 2022) "Advertisements and multimodal Digital Humanities," Alan Turing Institute, London, UK.
- (9 June 2022) "Using Computational Methods to Track and Map Re-use of Images in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals," Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Bochum, DE.
- (22 February 2022). "Computer Vision and the humanities", KBR Digital Heritage Series. Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels, Belgium. YouTube
- (25 November 2021). "The Visual Digital Turn: history and computer vision", Digital Humanities seminar, Université de Genève, Genève, CH.
- (4 December 2019). "Using Computer Vision to Explore Historical Newspaper Collections", Second International Conference on AI for Libraries, Archives, and Museums, Stanford University, Stanford, USA.
- (July 2019). "Computer Vision in the Library", AI in the Library, National Library of NL, The Hague, NL. YouTube
- (22 May 2019). "Analysing the Transnational Trade in Illustrations of the Universal Exhibition of 1867", Stereotypes in Motion, Universität Bochum, Bochum, DE.
- (June, 2018). "Automatische beeldherkenning en de analyse van historische visuele bronnen", Jubileumcongres Nederlandse Boekhistorische Vereniging, Amsterdam, NL

Conference (2017-pres)
- Smits T. and Wevers M (July 2023). "A Clash of Colorful Worlds. Dominant Color Use in Western Visual Representations of the Orient and Occident, 1890-1920". (long) paper presented at DH 2023, Graz, AT.
- Smits T, Fyfe P., and Lee B. (July 2023). "Using Multimodal Machine Learning to Distant View the Illustrated World of the Illustrated London News, 1842-1900." paper presented at DH 2023, Graz, AT.
- Smits T, and Paklons E. (July 2023). " A Model of Heaven: Tracing Images of Holiness in a Collection of 63.000 Lantern Slides (1880-1940)" paper presented at DH 2023, Graz, AT.
- Smits T (August 2022). "Using multimodal models to study multimodality in media history" Paper presented at XXIII International Congres of Historical Sciences 2020/2022, Poznań, PL.
- Smits T. et. al. (June 2022). "Using CLIP to extract and analyze images of the family in 3,000 Dutch-language children's books, 1800-1940." Paper presented at DHBenelux 2022, City-of-Science-Belval, LUX.
- Smits T et. al. (June 2022). "A Clash of Colorful Worlds. Distant Viewing Color in Visual Representations of the Orient and Occident, 1890-1920." Paper presented at DHBenelux 2022, City-of-Science-Belval, LUX.
- Smits T and Wevers M (July 2019). "Advertising Gender - Using Computer Vision to Trace Gender Displays in Historical Advertisements, 1920-1990", Paper presented at DH 2019, Utrecht, NL.
- Smits T, Impett L and Wevers M (July 2018). "Modeling the Genealogy of Imagetexts: Studying Images and Texts in Conjunction using Computational Methods", Poster presented at DH 2018, Mexico City, MEX.
- Smits T. and Wevers M (July 2018). "Seeing History: Analyzing large-scale historical visual datasets using deep neural networks". Paper presented at DH 2018, Mexico City, MEX.
- Smits T. and Wevers M (July 2018). "Seeing History: Analyzing large-scale historical visual datasets using deep neural networks". Paper presented at DH Benelux 2018, Amsterdam, NL.
- (April 2018). "John Cassell vs George Stiff. Copyright, piracy, and images of the news in the mid-1850s", Paper presented at Image, Copyright, and the Public Domain in the 19th Century, Winterthur Museum, Delaware, USA.
- (August 2017). "Illustrations to Photographs. Using Computer Vision to analyze news pictures in Dutch newspapers, 1860-1920", Paper presented at DH2017, Montreal, CA.
- (May 2017). "French images in British Victorian illustrated newspapers. Henry Vizetelly, the Illustrated London News, and the transnational trade images of the news, 1842-1872." Paper presented at NAVSA/ASVA La Pietra conference, Florence, IT.
- (July 2017). "French images of the Crimean War in Britain. The dissemination of L'Illustration's images of the Crimean War in the British Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper, 1853-1856." Paper presented at the Annual conference of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals, Freiburg, DE.

LANGUAGES/CODE/TOOLS

Languages: Dutch (native), English (fluent), German (proficient).

Code: Python, Pandas, Google Colab, Jupyter Notebook, Git, HTML (basic), LaTeX (used for this CV).
Tools: Palladio, Gephi, and Nodegoat.

References

Prof. dr. Mike Kestemont
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University of Antwerp
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Prof. dr. Ann Rigney
Professor of comparative literature
Utrecht University
a.rigney@uu.nl