

# 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

<b>Assistant professor of Digital History &amp; AI</b> <i>Amsterdam School for Historical Studies, University of Amsterdam</i>	November 2023 – present <i>Amsterdam, NL</i>
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## PREVIOUS POSITIONS

<b>Postdoc</b> <i>GOA project. The History of Implicit Bias, University of Antwerp</i>	April 2021 – November 2023 <i>Antwerp, BE</i>
<b>Postdoc</b> <i>ERC-funded Remembering Activism, Utrecht University</i>	March 2019 – April 2021 <i>Utrecht, NL</i>
<b>Lecturer Political History</b> <i>History department, Utrecht University</i>	Sept 2018 – Feb 2019 <i>Utrecht, NL</i>
<b>Lecturer Modern History</b> <i>History department, University of Amsterdam</i>	2016 <i>Amsterdam, NL</i>

## EDUCATION

<b>Radboud University</b> <i>PhD in History</i>	Nijmegen, NL <i>January 2019</i>
<b>University of Amsterdam</b> <i>Research Master in History Cum Laude (GPA: 8.5/A+)</i>	Amsterdam, NL <i>September 2012</i>
<b>Freie Universitat/Humboldt Universitat</b> <i>Erasmus Exchange</i>	Berlin, DE <i>2007-2008</i>

## VISITING FELLOWSHIPS

<b>Researcher in residence</b> <i>CESTA, Stanford University</i>	Dec 2019 <i>Stanford, USA</i>
<b>Researcher in residence</b> <i>National Library of the Netherlands</i>	2017 <i>The Hague, NL</i>

## GRANTS, HONOURS AND RECOGNITIONS

- (2023) 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

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- (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

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- (2023 - pres) Program Committee member of Digital Humanities Benelux 2023 (Leuven, BE).
- (2023 - pres) Committee member of the European Society for Periodical Research book award.
- (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) reviewer 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, *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

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### 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

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### 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 visual 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 Slaughter 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: Wijffjes, 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

- Contribution to round table on Asseraf A *Electric News in Colonial Algeria in Media History* (2023)
- Review of Dewhirst C and Scully R, eds., *Voices of Challenge in Australia’s Migrant and Minority Press* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) in: *Victorian Periodicals Review* (2023).
- Review of Bair N *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 Tijdschrift 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 remembrance 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

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##### 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) ”Multimodal 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 Congress 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.

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#### 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

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**Prof. dr. Mike Kestemont**

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