ESF RESEARCH CONFERENCES

Rapporteur Report

Partnership:	ESF-LIU
Conference Title:	Images & Visualisation: Imaging Technology, Truth and Trust
Dates:	17 – 21 September 2012
Chair:	**Brigitte Nerlich**, University of Nottingham, UK
	Andrew Balmer, University of Manchester, UK
	Annamaria Carusi, University of Copenhagen, DK
Rapporteur:	Adam Bžoch

General Comments

Any general comments you might have concerning the conference, your role, the scientific area covered by this conference, etc.

The concept of the conference was simple but very clearly formulated – to discuss the reliability of images in the context of natural, social and human sciences in the age of images. The main question which came up was if we can trust (some) images produced by the sciences and if (some) of these images are products of mimesis or rather modeling or even manipulation. The conference lasted for almost four days; there were no parallel sessions which allowed interdisciplinary exchange and discussions between researchers form very different fields. The conference covered several scientific areas (see BALANCE OF PARTICIPANTS). The experts in the human sciences and art practice were mostly trained also in the natural sciences. The importance of this conference consists in the fact that there was found a relevant common interest for researchers from the various fields. As a rapporteur of the conference for the SCH I was able to follow most of the contributions, but a certain disadvantage was that I am not trained in the natural sciences.

Quality of Scientific Programme, Presentations and Discussion

Comments on the balance and scope of the scientific programme, the scientific quality of the presentations and discussions.

The quality of scientific programme, presentations and discussions was very high. The conference offered a rather rare situation of understanding between researchers from human, social and natural sciences. The discussions were very vivid and productive for most of the participants. In the discussions took part also the audience (non-contributors). A part of the programme was the presentation of posters, with the possibility to speak to the authors. During the lunches and in the evening there was a plenty of time to discuss the particular issues informally. The younger researchers were very active during the discussions but earned also recognition as presenters.

Informal Networking and Exchange; Atmosphere

Was the schedule and the atmosphere conducive to an easy exchange of information? Was there time and space for an informal discussion? Were younger researchers integrated?

The atmosphere was extremely fortunate for informal exchange – especially during the coffee-breaks, lunches and evenings the participants could clarify their particular points which could not be discussed during the session because of lack of time. One of the results of both the official and informal discussion is the brainstorming on color of the images in the natural sciences which currently takes place between the participants on internet.

Balance of Participants

Was there an appropriate balance between young and senior participants? Was a balance of national groups and researchers from different (sub)fields achieved?

The conference brought together researchers from an exceptionally diverse array of backgrounds, including: philosophy, sociology, art practice, history, anthropology, quantum physics and nanotechnology, art history, medical practice, photography, geography, astronomy and design.

The numbers of speakers and presenters:

	Early career researcher (above 1976)	Established researcher (below 1976)
Speakers	3	14
Short talk presenters	10	12
Poster presenters	6	2

The majority of speakers and presenters came from the U.K. and Scandinavian countries, a handful from Germany, France, Italy, US, Canada and Israel. The conference can be considered as balanced from the point of view of scientific and national participation, gender and age as well.

Outlook and Future Developments

Will new collaborations emerge from this conference? (How) could the conference outcomes be utilized further? Are there suitable (ESF) programmes or instruments to further the work of the conference?

Prior to the conference there existed a few disparate groups of researchers working in these areas. Small concentrations of researchers in Europe, for example in the UK and in Scandinavia, have been brought together now into a larger network of researchers with tighter and more substantive connections. This European network is now also connected to important nodes in the USA. Post-conference we have already seen developments in the sharing of papers and ideas, discussion has continued by email and we are in the process of developing a wiki, through which conversations and information sharing will continue, with the hope of developing grants and papers in the coming months and years.

Brigitte Nerlich, Chris Toumey and Chris Robinson are currently in contact with Leonardo, the premier visualisations journal published by the MIT Press to discuss an edited collection (though funding will be required for this) or a special issue developing the themes established during the conference.

Andrew Balmer and Philip Moriarty are currently discussing a lab visit that will lead to a more profound collaboration around generation of images in the nanorealm, taking an important theme of 'bodies' that was established at the conference into the laboratory. This will begin with a few ethnographic visits to establish relationships and break ground for ideas for a larger project grant.

Follow-up

What immediate and long term follow-up would benefit collaborations and dialogues that may have begun at the conference?

The participants have begun to develop soft connections through email and through development of the wiki. One of the most important outcomes of the conference was the generation of a number of themes that extended through the discussions. These themes need to be addressed further by connecting them up with harder collaborations supported by funding, further more specific workshops and through collaboration over papers.

Organisation and Infrastructure

Were venue, catering and accommodation appropriate for this conference? Were participants satisfied with the on-site administration and support?

The venue of the conference was of great importance – the Faculty of Art and Sciences of the University of Norrköping / Linköping supports interdisciplinary study and research since years; the emphasis on focus based learning and the

relevance for the society are the main aims of the University. Several years ago, the University established a Visual Centre which helps to popularize the results of the research.

Catering and accommodation were very good. The hotel and the restaurant (lunches) were next to the place of the conference.

Summary & Overall Assessment

Was the conference successful; were its aims achieved?

The conference was without doubt very successful in terms of stimulating interdisciplinary thinking and especially creating understanding between natural and human sciences. It seems that the social sciences, in particular sociology of natural sciences, can play in the future a prominent role as the mediator between extremely different fields of knowledge. On the one hand the high level of self-reflection of most of the researchers in natural sciences, on the other hand the rare understanding of the development in the natural sciences in the case of the researchers from the human and social sciences, helped to create the platform for common discussions and recognition of the common interest (which is the critical approach to the image in the age of promiscuity of images, as Martin Kemp put it). The conference touched upon many urgent points of the contemporary sciences – first of all the question of trust, but also prognosis, modeling, communication, rhetoric. Without exaggerating one could say that on the basis of such discussions like in Norrköping during the conference on Visualisation a new kind of science can emerge (which is of course always the aim of interdisciplinarity). Especially the reasonable questioning of the status of image in medicine, nanotechnologies and astronomy can lead to rethinking of the "conditio humana" in the exact sciences. I can only warmly recommend supporting such scientific exchange in the future which helps to come to the human roots of the sciences.

About ESF Research Conferences

The Scheme

This conference is part of the European Science Foundation's (ESF) Research Conferences Scheme. The Scheme aims to promote scientific excellence and frontier level research throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Conferences aim to provide leading scientists and other participants, including young researchers, with a platform to present their work, to discuss the most recent developments in their fields of research and to network.

Conference Format

The core activities should be based on lectures by invited speakers, who are leaders in their respective fields, followed by extensive discussion periods. An informal exchange of ideas, both inside and outside the lecture room, should be encouraged, and the number of sessions in the daily timetable should be limited in order to allow sufficient time for interaction between the participants. Time should be reserved for a 'Forward Look Plenary Discussion' about future developments in the field.

Participants can take all their meals together to encourage further contact and networking, which can be particularly beneficial to younger researchers who may be less outspoken in the formal lecture room setting. In order to gain optimum benefit from the conference, both the speakers and the participants are asked to stay for the whole duration.

Division of Tasks

The Conference Chair is responsible for ensuring the quality of the scientific programme through the selection and invitation of speakers, and through the selection of participants.

The ESF Conferences Unit is responsible for managing all the logistical aspects of the conference organisation, including the provision of an on-site secretariat.

Further information: www.esf.org/conferences