

THE POWER OF MEDIA

PATRONAGE, REPRESENTATION
AND PROPAGANDA IN THE
EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1450–1800)
BETWEEN THE MEDITERRANEAN
AND CENTRAL EUROPE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

SPLIT, 13–15 JUNE 2018

CALL FOR PAPERS

Research within the project “Visual Arts and Communication of Power in the Early Modern Period (1450-1800): Historical Croatian Regions at the Crossroads of Central Europe and the Mediterranean” opens up a possibility for a multidisciplinary encounter and exchange of opinions, experiences and new insights on topics and issues related to the role of media and art commissioners, representation and propaganda during the early modern period in the area delineated by the geographic boundaries of the Adriatic Sea and Central Europe. In the 1450–1800 period, certain political, religious and cultural events and processes were played out on the historical stage of this area, which have since marked its identity profile.

Here are the most important ones: the dominance of the Republic of Venice on the coasts and islands of the Eastern Mediterranean in the 15th century; the Ottoman invasion; the Habsburgs’ accession to power and the creation of a strong absolutist state; reformation and counter-reformation; Wars of Liberation and the expulsion of the Ottomans from most of the Kingdom of Hungary; the emergence of Renaissance, Mannerism and Baroque in visual arts, music and theatre. A cultural and social novelty of far-reaching significance was the establishment of printing and all media connected to it (prints, illustrated leaflets, “news-papers”, posters, advertisements, etc.).

The conference on the power of media will focus primarily on the interactive function of the early modern period’s media as carriers of (political) representation, propaganda and memory in the defined geographic, political and historic area. The role of paintings, prints, theatre, music and historic narratives (chronicles, collected biographies, genealogies) will be considered within the context of their utilisation by art commissioners – primarily secular and religious dignitaries, but also various city institutions (communal authorities, fraternities, universities, academies, etc.).

Media and their contents undoubtedly are also carriers of cultural, social, religious and political change (agents of change, E. Eisenstein). Therefore, the main topics to be discussed are as follows:

1. Construction and propagandist operationalisation of the political and the ecclesiastical-political power narratives (Habsburg rulers, Doges of Venice, Hungarian kings, church dignitaries, reformation and counter-reformation, cities, various institutions...).
2. Mediation of the symbolism of power and the dissemination of propaganda through media (paintings, sculptures, prints, theatre, music, literature, court historiography...).
3. Effects of media use in the social context.

At the same time, we should seek to obtain a clearer understanding of a subtle and not always unambiguous relationship between propaganda, representation and memory. Should these three communication functions – in the way they took place in the past – be necessarily identified with each other, or should they be separated, i.e. does media representation always have a function of propaganda or memory as well?

As part of the issues related to this concept, which are associated with cultural transmission (transfer), one can consider the relationship between centre and periphery, which is particularly important in terms of the “echoes” of propagandist, representational and memorial communication in peripheral areas, away from the centre of power. In this context, one should address the phenomenon of transition of the cultural models “attached” to certain communication contents, whose transfer from one area to another is owed to certain art commissioners as carriers of transmission (agents of transmission, M. Espagne).

The goal of this conference is to summarize and update previous models of interpretation of the role of media in the aforementioned period and area through an analysis of concrete cases and more general trends. In a wider sense, its goal is to establish the following: Have there been any advances in our present cultural-historical understanding of the interpretation of media, the art commissioners and the function of their social influence (propaganda, the shaping of public opinion, representation, memory, cultural progress) as compared to their understanding by previous generations of cultural historians? Do these advances consist solely in a quantitative enhancement and a deepening of knowledge or do they also have a theoretical-epistemological character?

If you are interested in participating in the conference, please send your presentation proposal (the title and a short summary in English) to my address, mpelc@ipu.hr, until January 15th 2018.

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