Objective

"The project investigates two closely interrelated issues: what is the role of imagination in early cinema and what does it mean for a representational work to be fictional? Specifically, it asks what the criteria are according to which we categorize texts as fictional and what counts as proof for reconstructing the experience of historical spectatorship. The project innovatively proposes that the period between 1880 and 1915 provides a unique opportunity for construing how a representational medium becomes employed in the production of fictions and the crucial role the discourse on imaginary engagement plays in this process. In other words, the project asks why we engage some films as fictions and other as documentaries despite the fact that they are both based on actuality material – photographs. For instance, why, when watching Méliès’ 1898 The Astronomer’s Dream or the Man in the Moon, do we nowadays regularly say that we are watching an astronomer whose gazing at the moon turns into a series of fantastical mishaps? Why do we engage such a film as a
fiction rather than as a documentary of actors performing in front of painted sets? Especially if during the early era, such films were regularly seen as instances of “canned theater”, i.e. as documentaries of theatrical performances. Methodologically, the project is highly unique in its twofold approach. On the one hand, the proposal draws on analytic philosophy to articulate the key concepts informing the inquiry – fiction and imagination. Fiction, crucially, is construed as "any mandated imagining/make-believe" following the work of Kendall Walton. On the other, the project applies the new film history method to late 19th and early 20th century sources such as trade press, catalogues, lectures, and more general discourse on cinema and adjacent cultural practices to determine what place the notions of fiction and imagination played in the production, promotion, exhibition, and reception of early cinema."

Fields of science

Programme(s)

Topic(s)

Call for proposal

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Funding Scheme

Coordinator

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