



Close Encounters

ScienceLiteratureArts

*The 4th European Conference of the Society for
Science, Literature, and the Arts*

Amsterdam, June 13-16, 2006



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General

Host

The 4th European meeting is hosted by the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis ([ASCA](#)) of the University of Amsterdam.

Streams

The conference is organised around 11 thematic streams. There will be more than 250 paper presentations and various panel discussions in about 80 parallel sessions spread over three days. For an overview see "Programme", for the paper abstracts see "Sessions".

Plenary speakers

Gillian Beer + Evelyn Fox Keller
Andrew Carnie + Richard Wingate
Joseph McElroy

Programme Chair

Manuela Rossini

Local Programme Committee

José van Dijck (UvA), Sher Doruff (Waag Society/Multimedien), renée c. hoogland (Radboud U, Nijmegen), Manuela Rossini (UvA/U of Basel), Cor van der Weele (U Wageningen), Willem Weststeijn (Director of ASCA), and Robert Zwijnenberg (U Maastricht/U Leiden/The Arts and Genomics Centre, UvA).

With the organisational support of: Eloë Kingma (Managing Director of ASCA) and Jantine van Gogh (Office Manager of ASCA), and students Stephan Besser, Sean de Koekkoek, Ivett Reyes Maturano, Laura Schuster, Eliza Steinbock, Gözde Onaran.

Welcome!

Welcome to *Close Encounters: ScienceLiteratureArts*, the 4th European Biannual Conference of the SLSA (Society for Science, Literature, and the Arts).

Like encounters between individuals of different genders, ethnicities, cultures or species, encounters between members of different academic disciplines and professional groups can take many forms, ranging from hostility and indifference to curiosity and intimacy. When a musician enters into conversation with a neurologist on the topic of cognition or when a literary scholar talks to a biologist about metaphors, the experience of that close encounter may well be of “the third kind”, in a double sense: either utterly alien with no mutual understanding at all, leaving what C.P. Snow described almost 50 years ago as a “gulf of mutual incomprehension” wide open or, on the contrary, producing a new discourse that communicates across disciplines and thus manages to bridge the two-cultures divide. In the latter case, the encounter leads to new insights and to the revision of one’s own assumptions and premises. In other words: no participant remains the same after the encounter.

On behalf of ASCA and the programme committee, I wish all of us many pleasant and interesting encounters over the next few days.

Yours,
Manuela Rossini (Programme Chair)

Keynotes

CLOSE ENCOUNTER 1

Gillian Beer & Evelyn Fox Keller

ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN MODES OF EXPLANATION: NATURE, MAGIC AND THE NATURAL

Evelyn Fox Keller: As part of my interest in the enduring unproductivity of the nature-nurture debate, I focus here on the problematic relation between nature and the natural. For if the definition of nature is problematic, its semantic relation to 'natural' is even more so. I explore some of the problems that arise from slippage between substantitive and normative conceptions of 'natural' (inviting collateral slippage between *is* and *ought*), from the bifurcatory structure of its negation, and from changing assumptions about nature's domain.

Gillian Beer: How to fill the explanatory gap between what is manifest and what has brought it about?: that question of how to knit up causes and effects preoccupies both science and literature. In this paper I look at Darwin's encounters with indigenous systems of explanation when on the Beagle journeys and how he resisted and learnt from them. My other examples, from Helmholtz, Thomas Mann, and Thomas Hardy, also raise questions of what is 'magical' or 'natural' in explanation.

The talk is moderated by **Cor van der Weele**.

CLOSE ENCOUNTER 2

Andrew Carnie + Richard Wingate

CLOSE COLLABORATION BETWEEN ART AND NEUROSCIENCE

Andrew Carnie and **Richard Wingate** have worked together on and off over a period of five years. Their collaboration as artist and scientist and their ongoing process of dialogue has resulted in two art works: *Magic Forest* in 2002, shown at the Science Museum London, and the International Film Festival Rotterdam and in the Design Museum Zurich and *Complex Brain*, first shown in 2005 at the British Association Science Fair, Exeter. The nature of the collaboration has changed as they have moved on. The first was very much an exchange with Andrew taking forward the ideas and making the work, the second involved greater interchange and a blending of the ideas. In the air is a third project, a chance to work together anew. How would they take on a new project in relation to the experience of the first two projects? Andrew Carnie and Richard Wingate will talk about their own

work as individuals, their shared experience of working on their two 'collaborations', and how they might move onto their next venture together. The talk is moderated by **Robert Zwijnenberg**.

CLOSE ENCOUNTER 3

Joseph Mc Elroy in Conversation

The distinguished American novelist **Joseph McElroy** will read from his current fictional and theoretical projects, concentrating on the topic of "conceptual fields accessible to and conditioning or enlarging the possibilities of prose fiction". The reading will be followed by a panel on McElroy's work (Session 6E-2), to which the novelist will also contribute.

Chair: **Yves Abrioux**

Respondents: **Noëlle Batt** and **Joseph Tabbi**.

