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Making Publics Project
McGill University
Montreal

Vera Keller recently defended her dissertation in history at Princeton, on the international career of the Dutch natural philosopher and engineer Cornelis Drebbel (1572-1633), and is currently a postdoctoral fellow at McGill's Making Publics Project. She is now working on a series of articles on the pan-European history of wish-lists (*desiderata*) in programs of political/economic/philosophic reform, from Jakob Bornitz and Francis Bacon at the turn of the seventeenth-century, to the early eighteenth-century. Forthcoming works include "From Secrets to *Desiderata* in the Hartlib Circle," *Reordering the World: Textual Technologies and Early Modern Natural Knowledge*, ed. Matthew Eddy, and "How to Become a Seventeenth-Century Natural Philosopher: The Case of Cornelis Drebbel," *Knowledge Affairs in the Early Modern Low Countries*, ed. Sven Dupré and Christoph Lüthy, (LIT Verlag).

AUTUMN, 2009, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY W 17:45-20:15 SGW

With guest appearances from:

- Victor Boantz, Department of History, McGill University
- Andrea Falcon, Department of Philosophy, Concordia University
- Vera Keller, Department of English, McGill University
- Ted McCormick, Department of History, Concordia University

Brief Description:

The natural philosophy of the 17th century is marked by a widespread effort to redescribe natural change exhaustively in terms of the size, shape, and motion of subvisible particles or corpuscles. This endeavor has long been held to have constituted a wholesale rejection of premodern theories of natural change, which relied upon a metaphysics of matter and form being guided through change in accordance with their natural ends or teleology.

Week Seven: 21 October (Guest lecture from Vera Keller)

CENTRAL NITRE THEORY, PERPETUAL MOTION, AND RELATED TOPICS

Readings: Andreas Libavius, *Alchymia triumphans* (1607, translation ours); Michael Sendivogius, *A New Light of Alchemy* (1605); Cornelis Drebbel, *Een kort Tractaet van de Natuere der Elementen* (1621, translation ours).

Week Eight: 28 October (Guest lecture from Vera Keller)

MAGNETIC PHILOSOPHY AND RELATED TOPICS

Readings: Petrus Severinus, *Idea medicinae* (1571, translation ours) Johann Hartmann, *Praxis chymiatricae* (1670); Heinrich Khunrath, *Catholic Magnesia* (1599); Robert Fludd, *The Mosaical Philosophy* (1659); Jean-Baptiste van Helmont, *A Ternary of paradoxes: The magnetick cure of wounds, Nativity of tartar in wine, Image of God in man* (1649).

The McGill HPS seminar Fall 2009 Series / Série d'automne 2009

Friday 23 October, 3pm

Vera Keller (McGill / Making Publics project)

Cornelis Drebbel (1572-1633), the Submarine, and the limits of possibility in early modern Europe

Postdoctoral Fellow

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- » I defended my dissertation, entitled "Cornelis Drebbel(1572-1633): Fame and the Making of Modernity" at Princeton in September on a quondam celebrity - the Dutch engraver, alchemist, engineer, inventor, submariner and natural philosopher active in London and Prague. At McGill, I am currently working on a manuscript on the history of wish lists. The manuscript is tentatively entitled: The Wish List: Collecting the Future in the Early Modern Past, An Irrational History of Modernity. In this work, I examine the way changes in the category of reason, from a logical, deductive ratio to an instrumental "reason of state" or "interest" affected the relationship between the pursuit of desire and the structure of society. At a time when the pursuit of private desires or interests threatened the public good, the collection and publication of wish lists seemed to many an effective means to re-organize society and its actions (in space and time) around the pursuit of shared desires. The history of wish lists falls between the histories of late apocalypticism, humanism, and the new politics of Machiavelli, Guicciardini and Botero. It offers a fresh perspective on the emergence of economics, Baconian utilitarianism, the idea of progress, and that peculiar sort of reason called "rational actor theory," which is so fundamental to capitalist societies today.
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Activities

- »[Vera Keller, "Forms of Internationality: The Minor Genres Across Early Modern Europe"](#)
(presented at Richard Helgerson and Making Publics, Montréal, QC, August 21, 2009).
- »[Vera Keller, "'The Desiderata List: Collecting the Future in the Early Modern Past'"](#)
(presented at Language and Publics, Montréal, QC, 21 October 2008).
- »[Vera Keller, "Perfective Artists: The Engraving, Alchemy and Natural Philosophy Of Drebbel and Goltzius"](#)
(presented at Harvard Center for the Humanities, Cambridge, MA, December, 2008).
- »[Vera Keller, "The Desiderata List: Collecting the Future in the Early Modern Past"](#)
(presented at History of Science Society, Pittsburgh, November, 2008).

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Interview: Magic

Conducted by Gyan Prakash over email.

Balzan Prize winner, Anthony Grafton, currently Henry Putnam University Professor of History and the chair of the Council of the Humanities, talks about the mechanical rabbit that farts fire, the historical Faustus, the sexuality of magic and more...

- The editors

Tony Grafton: In the fifteenth, sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as Tom Kaufmann, Paula Findlen and others have taught us, natural philosophers often adopted a ludic style. Many figures who were taken very seriously by scholars and patrons alike—for example, Cornelis Drebbel, the Dutch philosopher/chemist/artisan on whom Vera Keller has just finished a fine dissertation—expended as much effort on creating display pieces (in his case, hydraulic organ automata) as on enterprises that could reveal the deepest secrets of nature (his perpetual motion machine) or could yield great power (his working submarine). But in the course of the seventeenth century, Bacon (in some moods) and others began to distinguish, in a new way, between serious and trivial pursuits in the study of nature, and magic and related fields like astrology were gradually marginalized. The details of this process still need to be sorted out.