

RESEARCH CLINIC

General information

Supervisor:	Dr. Jacqueline Hylkema
Title of clinic:	Before the Deepfake: Political and Military Forgery in Early Modern Print Culture
Number of students:	Max. 6
Major (<i>if applicable and approved by the Major Convener</i>):	HD, GED and WP
(Pre)requisites (<i>if applicable</i>):	Reading knowledge of at least one other European language and an interest in political/cultural history. Having taken 'AW Forging the Enlightenment: The Power and Politics of Fakery (1700 – 1800)' is useful but certainly not a requirement.

Research context

Last November, archived footage from August 1969 surfaced in which President Richard Nixon announced that the Apollo 11 mission had ended in disaster. Of course we all know that this is not true: Neil Armstrong and his team made it back to Earth safely. It was soon revealed that the footage was a so-called deepfake forgery, produced by MIT's Center for Advanced Virtuality as part of its *In Event of Moon Disaster* project, which invites the public 'to consider how new technologies can bend, redirect and obfuscate the truth around us'. This question is timely and important: the deepfake is on the rise and appears increasingly able not just to rewrite the past but also affect our future. Earlier in November, a highly convincing deepfake video had appeared in which Boris Johnson urges Britain to vote for his rival Jeremy Corbyn and in the same month, a public debate started in the Netherlands about whether or not it would be ethical for the military and intelligence services to deploy deepfake technology.

None of this is new, in the sense that the perceived ties between media technology, truth and reality are as old as the abuse of that relationship. In this research clinic, we will investigate the forerunners of today's deepfakes in early modern print culture. The invention of the moveable type printing press caused an explosion of forgeries, created by those in power as well as those who sought to fight them. We will research military and political forgeries created by both sides in early modern Europe and look for structural similarities and differences in their aims, methodologies and effectiveness. We will also ask what impact the exposure of these forgeries had on early modern society and whether they evoked the same debates as today's deepfakes.

Students' tasks and activities

In this research clinic, students will mainly assist in mapping and analyzing political and military forgeries in Europe in the period between 1550 and 1800. The first part of the clinic will focus on identifying as many of these forgeries as possible. The second part will be devoted to the analysis of these cases and establishing a taxonomy for them, with particular respect to their methodology, intended audience and purpose as well as their effect and their relation with a specific political conflict or conflict discourse.

We will meet six times in blocks 3 and 4, starting with a special seminar at the Special Collections at Leiden University Library where we will examine several forgeries and discuss the key concepts and the methodology of the study.

The project will be concluded with short research presentations and a final discussion of the research data. The students' work will be assessed on the basis of the quality of their research assignments and participation.