

# PHOTO-LIT

## The Belgian photonovel: the local reuse of a European cultural practice

**DURATION**  
 15/01/2017-30/04/2021

**BUDGET**  
 495 285 €

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Context:

PHOTO-LIT is a project that addresses the increasing intermedialization of literature and storytelling and that aims at breaking new ground in the creative and interactive online disclosure of contemporary popular cultural heritage. Its object is an understudied aspect of modern culture, if not an endangered form of literature, given the material fragility of its host medium (mostly pulp paper magazines) as well as the extreme difficulty to access the material (hardly described in official catalogs or repertories). For all these reasons, the photo novel is a fascinating case for the conversion of practically inaccessible paper archives to open access digital archives.

General objectives and underlying research questions:

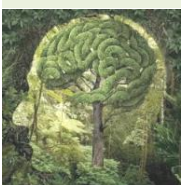
The photo novel, a form of visual narrative with staged photographs, generally printed in magazine format, was the dominant popular form in postwar pre-television Europe. At the crossroads of film novel, comics, melodrama, and serialized romance, its presence and impact were unequalled, and its adaptations and reappropriations in later periods remain an exceptional example of the dynamics of creativity and heritage, where they instantiate the visual turn in the transformations of reading and writing today. The Belgian contribution to the photo novel, important and very diverse, has been completely overlooked by the existing scholarship –which focuses mainly on the Italian and the French production - and the existing material hosted, yet hardly catalogued, by Belgian archives and libraries as well as in private collections, has never been explored, contrary to the well-studied domain of comics and graphic novels. To avoid any misunderstanding, by “Belgian production” we understand “made in Belgium”, that is: produced for Belgian publishers and published in Belgium. A large portion of the relevant Belgian collections is at the premises of KBR, such as *Bonnes Soirées* and *Femmes d’Aujourd’hui/Het Rijk der Vrouw*. The corpus covers both the period 1947-1965 (before the legal deposit) and 1966-today (since the introduction of the legal deposit).



Cover of the magazine *Femmes d’Aujourd’hui*, n234, 27 April 1961



Cover of the magazine *Bonnes Soirées*, n1748, 7 August 1955



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Excerpt of the photo novel published in the magazine  
Ons Land met Iris, n26, 1 July 1967

The aim of the project is twofold: the digitization in open access of the Belgian photo novel (KBR, Europeana), and the internal and historical study of the genre (via two PhD projects in Leuven and Liège). In both cases, we will try to single out the specific contribution of Belgium (francophone as well as Dutch-speaking) to a typically European genre which is often narrowed down to its French and Italian practices.

#### Methodology and interdisciplinarity:

PHOTO-LIT involves an important digitization project. The specific analytical methodological framework, which brings together researchers from narratology, documentation sciences, cultural history and digital humanities, will be that of *media archeology* (cf. Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, *Media Archeology: Approaches, Applications, Implications*. Berkeley: California UP, 2011) and that of *comparative textual media* (cf. Katherine N. Hayles and Jessica Pressman, *Comparative Textual Media*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2013). This framework helps bring together the two research objectives of the project. On the hand the framework enables to produce a media-focused, interdisciplinary and comparative analysis of a 'forgotten' cultural practice. On the other hand it includes an open view of the relationship between print culture and digital culture.

#### Finished products:

The analytical part of the project will be disclosed and presented through two PhDs, which will study the internal form and logic as well as the history of the genre, always taking into account the specific Belgian context.

The output of the digitization project will be a repository and online archive, with the following characteristics:

- Cross-lingual, poly-chronological, and multimedia: the archive will not present the sampled history of the photo novel in Belgium, but build a network to link this material in other than purely chronological ways and to other fields than that of the photo novel in the narrow sense of the word.
- Not only backwards looking, i.e. as a digital archive trying to "save" the original pieces (although this aim is of course part of the overall objective of this research project), but more importantly generative and productive: the basic idea is to use the archive as a building tool.
- A multilingual thesaurus will be published, such as the one CS Digital produced for Europeana Photography (<http://bib.arts.kuleuven.be/-photoVocabulary/en.html>). This thesaurus will contain specific photo novel terminology, and will support two languages to start with: English and French. For its development crowdsourcing will be explored.
- The collection will be on display on a portal at KBR, with expertise delivered by CS Digital. Metadata and preview upload into Europeana is foreseen and will be facilitated by Photoconsortium.
- Digitization will be performed at KBR and if needed at KU Leuven Digital Lab, to the highest standards with state-of-the-art equipment.
- A metadata committee will be setup, including experts from the photo archive world, to define the EDM-compliant metadata.
- An IPR committee will monitor all rights clearance issues.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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