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**Figurative Thinking and Mystical Experience in the
Baroque Age**

Main Introduction to the Session

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This session is the presentation of a collaborative project funded by the National Fund for Scientific Research in Belgium from 2012 to 2015, which is entitled: “Figurative thinking and mystical experience in the baroque age: A new emerging culture of representation”. The corpus under study is part of the digital library *Bibliotheca Imaginis Figuratae*, and more specifically the works by the Jesuit Maximilian van der Sandt (or Sandaeus). The starting point of the project is the translation from Latin into French of his *Clavis mystica* (1640) by Aline Smeesters.

This project aims to renew the understanding of theoretical and practical foundations of representation in the early modern period. It explores the way in which figurative thinking works from within spiritual and mystical literature, producing a meta-discourse on representation. The working argument is as follows: linking the uses of figurative thinking in emblematic literature and in mystical literature reveals a process of figurability, the latter being understood as the potentiality or the virtuality of the appearance either of the image within language or of language within the image, according to Louis Marin’s definition. In order to carry out this study, we will, on the one hand, analyse the vocabulary related to the field of *figura* (based on the emblematic corpus of the *Bibliotheca Imaginis Figuratae*). On the other hand, we will study the interactions between this corpus and a group of mystical texts from the early 17th century. We mean to find the conditions under which mystical experience is recast into the rhetorical shape of symbolic language.

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