

# « History of Computing » Day

## Faculté d'informatique, FUNDP, Namur, May 18th 2009

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Version française en p. 2

### 14h-15h30: "From Sounds to Software: Using Computers in 1960," talk by Gerard Alberts, Universiteit van Amsterdam

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Abstract: This talk, which is part of the Staff-Sem at the Faculty of Informatics, will expand on five main issues. First is that of sounds. I shall discuss how sounds came from the computers in the pioneering years 1950-1960. Loudspeakers were mounted not primarily to play with, but to monitor the process of a program in execution. The need to monitor these processes was answered by auditory, not by visual monitoring devices. Second is that of users as listeners to these computer sounds. Who would listen to the sounds, and who would stop them? Did different kinds of users mean different computer regimes? Was it a matter of academic pioneering or of IBM culture? Third is that of "sounds replaced". Inner service programs of the computers gradually relieved the need of monitoring. Starting around 1955, programming computers became a layered activity, leading out to the devising of metaprograms, automatic programming or programs producing programs. Fourth is that of the advent of software as silencers of computer sounds. In the US the manufacture of programs, and in particular systems of programs, developed into an economic activity and acquired a name of its own: software. As software develops, the loudspeakers were brought to silence. Fifth and last is the issue of Europe as regards to these issues. Even when in Europe the same activities were developed (writing compilers, input-output programs, operating systems) these were not so clearly called software. I shall here discuss this point about meta-programming and Algol compilers. I shall close by some comment on how 1960 was the turning point towards a proper European tradition of software.

### 15h30-16h : Coffee

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### 16h-18h : Round Table and Discussion on Belgian Computing History

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- **16h-16h10 : « Belgian Computing History at the FUNDP »** by Sandra Mols & Marie d'Udekem-Gevers, FUNDP
- **16h10-16h40 : « The Machine Mathématique IRSIA-FNRS (1952-1962) »** by Marie d'Udekem-Gevers & Sandra Mols, FUNDP
- **16h40-18h : Round Table with Belgian Computing Pioneers.** Participants: François Bodart (FUNDP), Rita De Caluwe (Université de Gand), Paul Gennart (Ecole Royale Militaire), René Florizoone (KUL), Jean Meinguet (UCL and Centre d'Etude des Calculateurs Electroniques), Réginald-Ferdinand Poswick (Centre Informatique et Bible), and Michel Sintzoff (Laboratoire de Recherches MBLÉ and UCL).

### 18h : Reception

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### Information and registration

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**Place :** Faculté d'informatique, 21 rue Grandgagnage, B-5000 Namur

**Programme:** Sandra Mols ([sandra.mols@fundp.ac.be](mailto:sandra.mols@fundp.ac.be))

**Practical information, registration (free of charge) :** Isabelle Daelman ([isabelle.daelman@fundp.ac.be](mailto:isabelle.daelman@fundp.ac.be))

# **Journée « Histoire de l'informatique »**

## **Faculté d'informatique, FUNDP, Namur, 18 mai 2009**

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*English version on p. 1.*

### **14h-15h30: "From Sounds to Software: Using Computers in 1960," présentation par Gerard Alberts, Universiteit van Amsterdam (Staff-Sem de la Faculté d'informatique)**

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Abstract: This talk, which is part of the Staff-Sem at the Faculty of Informatics, will expand on five main issues. First is that of sounds. I shall discuss how sounds came from the computers in the pioneering years 1950-1960. Loudspeakers were mounted not primarily to play with, but to monitor the process of a program in execution. The need to monitor these processes was answered by auditory, not by visual monitoring devices. Second is that of users as listeners to these computer sounds. Who would listen to the sounds, and who would stop them? Did different kinds of users mean different computer regimes? Was it a matter of academic pioneering or of IBM culture? Third is that of "sounds replaced". Inner service programs of the computers gradually relieved the need of monitoring. Starting around 1955, programming computers became a layered activity, leading out to the devising of metaprograms, automatic programming or programs producing programs. Fourth is that of the advent of software as silencers of computer sounds. In the US the manufacture of programs, and in particular systems of programs, developed into an economic activity and acquired a name of its own: software. As software develops, the loudspeakers were brought to silence. Fifth and last is the issue of Europe as regards to these issues. Even when in Europe the same activities were developed (writing compilers, input-output programs, operating systems) these were not so clearly called software. I shall here discuss this point about meta-programming and Algol compilers. I shall close by some comment on how 1960 was the turning point towards a proper European tradition of software.

### **15h30-16h : Pause café**

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### **16h00-18h : Table ronde et discussion sur l'histoire de l'informatique en Belgique**

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- **16h-16h10 : « Le projet d'histoire de l'informatique en Belgique aux FUNDP »** par Sandra Mols & Marie d'Udekem-Gevers, CITA et Faculté d'Informatique, FUNDP
- **16h10-16h40 : « La Machine Mathématique IRSIA-FNRS (1952-1962) »** par Marie d'Udekem-Gevers, & Sandra Mols, CITA et Faculté d'Informatique, FUNDP
- **16h40-18h : Table ronde avec des anciens de l'informatique en Belgique.** Participants : François Bodart (FUNDP), Rita De Caluwe (Université de Gand), Paul Gennart (Ecole Royale Militaire), René Florizoone (KUL), Jean Meinguet (UCL et Centre d'Etude des Calculateurs Electroniques), Réginald-Ferdinand Poswick (Centre Informatique et Bible), et Michel Sintzoff (Laboratoire de Recherches MBLÉ et UCL).

### **18h: Réception**

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### **Information et inscriptions**

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**Lieu :** Faculté d'informatique, 21 rue Grandgagnage, B-5000 Namur

**Information sur le programme :** Sandra Mols ([sandra.mols@fundp.ac.be](mailto:sandra.mols@fundp.ac.be)).

**Informations pratiques et inscription (gratuite) :** Isabelle Daelman ([isabelle.daelman@fundp.ac.be](mailto:isabelle.daelman@fundp.ac.be))