



All in your Head:

Reviewing the History of the Mind through
Approaches, Classifications and Objects

20th April 2023 - KU Leuven/ On-line

Programme



KU LEUVEN

- 9:00 – 9:30** **Arrival/Coffee & Tea** (Heymans Lounge)
- 9:30 – 9:45** **Opening**
[Prof. Kaat Wils](#) and [Fernando Gonzalez](#) (KU Leuven)
- 9:45 – 10:15** ***Unruly Herbaria: Vegetal Inscriptions and Plant Agency in Latin American Literature and Art***
[Azucena Castro](#) (Stockholm University / Stanford University)
- 10:15 – 10:45** KEYNOTE
Decolonizing Drug Studies: Psychoactive Plants and the Pluriverse
[Prof. Brigitte Adriaensen](#) (Radboud University)
- 10:45 – 11:00** **Coffee & Tea** (Heymans Lounge)
- 11:00 – 11:30** ***Italian criminal anthropology and the criminal mind***
[Franco Capozzi](#) (KU Leuven)
- 11:30 – 12:00** ***Classifying Maternal Mental Illness: Race and Diagnostic Categories from the late 19th to Mid-20th Century***
[Udodiri R. Okwandu](#) (Harvard University)
- 12:00 – 12:30** ***Why we shouldn't medicalize homosexuality***
[Prof. Pieter Adriaens](#) (KU Leuven)
- 12:30 – 13:15** **Lunch** (Heymans Lounge)
- 13:15 – 13:45** KEYNOTE
Hysterical Attack and the Role of Images in its Re-emergence as a Scientific Object in Current Neurology
[Paula Muhr](#) (Karlsruhe Institute of Technology)
- 13:45 – 14:15** ***Brainmedia, 20th century histories of fascination with brain science***
[Flora Lysen](#) (Maastricht University)
- 14:15 – 14:30** **Coffee & Tea** (Heymans Lounge)
- 14:30 – 15:00** ***Children's Minds in Comics: On Delinquent Styles***
[Prof. Maaheen Ahmed](#) (Ghent University)
- 15:30 – 15:30** ***The Cult and the Occult***
[Hannah Zeavin](#) (Indiana University)
- 15:30 – 16:00** **General Discussion**
[Prof. Kaat Wils](#) (KU Leuven) and [Prof. Steven White](#) (St. Lawrence University)
- Moderators:** [Prof. Kate Kangaslahti](#) and [Prof. Joris Vandendriessche](#) (KU Leuven)
- Event Media Manager:** [Els Minne](#) (KU Leuven)

All times in the programme are CET ([Time zone converter](#))



Speakers

Pieter R. Adriaens

Why we shouldn't medicalize homosexuality

Is homosexuality a disorder? Many contemporary Westerners believe it is not, but what reasons do you they have to say so? I begin this talk with a brief historical note on the medicalization and de-medicalization of homosexuality. How, in the 1900s, did psychiatrists come to consider it a disorder, and why, in the second half of the twentieth century, did they change their minds? Then I enlist the help of contemporary philosophers. I review their many definitions of the concept of disorder – normativism, naturalism, hybridism, and pluralism – and find them wanting, at least in the context of homosexuality. I conclude with a defense of the claim that there are good moral reasons to say that homosexuality is not a disorder.

Pieter R. Adriaens is associate professor at the Institute of Philosophy (KU Leuven, Belgium). He works on topics related to the history and philosophy of psychiatry and sexology. In this context, he recently co-authored a book on science and homosexuality, *Of Maybugs and Men: A History and Philosophy of the Sciences of Homosexuality* (The University of Chicago Press, 2022). He is also interested in the relationships between humans and other animals, and he enjoys doing public philosophy.

Decolonizing Drug Studies: Psychoactive Plants and the Pluriverse

Drug studies have become an important field of study within Latin American studies, in which especially historians have played a key role. In the last decades or so, several monographs have appeared on the socio-economic and cultural history of different substances, like cocaine (Gootenberg), peyote (Dawson) or marihuana (Campos, Britta). These monographs study the role of Latin America in the production, trade and consumption of these substances (the 'chains of commodities') in order to understand how they have contributed to the development of local and global capitalism (Courtwright). The importance of this debate within Latin American studies is not surprising, as the subcontinent offers the richest variation in psychoactive plants in the world. This results not only in an intensive trade, but also in the violence related to the illegal status of this trade and in different transnational geopolitical strategies to supposedly 'control' that violence.

In my project I propose to shift perspectives from drugs to plants, from a historical perspective to a more material, posthuman one. I propose to consider psychoactive plants in particular as semi-subjects which act like agents in a network and which can be studied also from a decolonial environmental perspective. In my talk I will try to further explore how concepts like the pluriverse (Escobar) can be of use, and how approaches towards multispecies entanglements or assemblages (Anna Tsing) might open our understanding of these plants and their impact. At the same time, a historical perspective is needed to also critically approach the increasing commodification of Indigenous spiritual knowledge related to these plants, entailing alternative forms of colonial power dynamics.

Brigitte Adriaensen holds a PhD from K.U.Leuven and is currently a Professor of Hispanic Studies at Radboud University Nijmegen. She is the principal investigator of the NWO Vici research project 'Poison, Medicine or Magic Potion? Shifting Perspectives on Drugs in Latin America (1820-2020)'. Earlier, she directed the NWO Vidi research project 'The Politics of Irony in Contemporary Latin American Literature on Violence'. Her publications are situated in the fields of humour studies, violence studies and environmental studies.

Children's Minds in Comics: On Delinquent Styles

In his seminal, *The Origins of Comics*, Thierry Smolderen makes a case for understanding comics drawing as polygraphic or combining multiple strains of graphic styles and the connotations accompanying them. This is most obvious when contrasting styles are present in an image, as in the use of graffiti in William Hogarth's *The First Stage of Cruelty* (1751) and George Cruikshank's *Jack Sheppard* (1839-1840) illustrations on the life of the notorious nineteenth century delinquent. Through following examples of childish and untutored drawing styles in both older and more recent comics and graphic novels, ranging from Cham's *Un génie incompris* (1841) to Dominique Goblet's *Faire semblant c'est mentir* and Lynda Barry's manuals on comics making, I will try to trace the changing connotations associated with unskilled drawing and the different values that have been attached to them. I examine the extent to which childish – and childlike – drawing styles are used to represent children in comics and what we can glean from such incorporations (which are very often imitations), of children's drawings. This also requires making connections with the status of as a marginal medium and, sometimes, even one read by delinquents.

Secondary sources cited

Thierry Smolderen, *The Origins of Comics: From William Hogarth to Winsor McCay*. Translated by Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen. University Press of Mississippi, 2014.

Maaheen Ahmed is associate professor of comparative literature at GhentUniversity and principal investigator of COMICS, a five-year multi-researcher project, funded by the European Research Council which seeks to piece together a cultural history of children in European comics. Her previous research has focused on the functioning of long-form comics and the relevance of good monsters in alternative comics. She also has a keen interest in the kinds of memories informing comics. She recently edited the *Cambridge Companion to Comics* (forthcoming in 2023).

Italian criminal anthropology and the criminal mind

What makes a person a criminal? In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso came up with an answer: criminality is the result of a biological predisposition that leaves visible traces on the body and the mind. Despite the many criticisms, Lombroso's theory of the born criminal exerted an enormous influence on the scientific community of his time and contributed to globally shape institutions such as prisons, criminal insane asylums and the police. This paper attempts to reconstruct how Lombroso and his disciples understood the criminal mind and sketches out the theoretical evolution of the Italian school of criminal anthropology in the interwar period by analyzing a number of sources, including criminological treatises and court records. Finally, the paper investigates the transatlantic impact of Lombroso's theories by focusing on the work of Cuban criminal anthropologist Israel Castellanos, one of the most powerful social scientist of the Machado era. Castellanos' case illustrates how the concept of criminal mind was employed to justify pre-existing social hierarchies and exclude minorities from nation-building processes.

Franco Capozzi is a PhD candidate at KU Leuven and the University of Turin. His research project investigates the legacy of Cesare Lombroso and the fate of criminal anthropology in the age of totalitarianism.

Unruly Herbaria: Vegetal Inscriptions and Plant Agency in Latin American Literature and Art

What can literary and artistic approaches to plants show about ways of inhabiting the world? How can vegetal inscriptions in literature and art render meanings of plant agency? What can Latin American literature and art tell us about plant sentience by using vegetal vocabularies and images? In my paper, I will address these questions by analyzing how a contemporary literary and artistic corpus from the Southern Cone (*Herbarium* by Cecilia Fontán; *SemiYa* by Cecilia Vicuña; *Ar* by Josely Vianna Baptista) presents botanical, medicinal and erotic images of vegetal life as sentient beings transforming our understanding of how plants shape social and political relations. Drawing on the concept of “plant-thinking” (Michael Marder), and other ideas from vegetal philosophy and plant humanities (Patricia Vieira, Eduardo Kohn, Emanuele Coccia), I will examine how these vocabularies and images register plants’ modes of expression without using vocalization and their spatial forms of inhabiting. By delving into the idea of “unruly herbaria” as a form of plant resistance, I will reflect on how literature and art can open our perception to plant agency for planetary health in contexts of anthropogenic violence. Finally, I will explore how these literary and artistic renderings of plant agency build a phytocentric approach (Marder) in culture that defies anthropocentric and speciest epistemes.

Azucena Castro is a Swedish Research Council postdoctoral researcher at Stockholm Resilience Center, Stockholm University working with a project on multispecies futures and biocultural diversity in Latin American fictions funded by the Swedish Research Council. During 2022-2024, she is a visiting postdoc at the Department of Iberian and Latin American Cultures at Stanford University, where she co-coordinates the Focal Group materia. In 2021, she was a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Geography, University of Buenos Aires, working with the “Nature, Culture, Territory” Focal Group. Her research focuses on environmental humanities, cultural studies, and art research in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Brainmedia, 20th century histories of fascination with brain science

Flora Lysen will introduce core ideas from her recent monograph *Brainmedia* (2022), in which she investigates twentieth century examples of performances of 'live brains': from exhibitions of giant illuminated brain models and staged projections of brainwave recordings to live televised brain broadcasts, brains hooked up to computers and experiments with "brain-to-brain" synchronization. Together, these case studies demonstrate how scientists performing brain science were significantly influenced by new recording and broadcast media in their conceptions of - and experiments with the brain. New media impacted how researchers could think about the active brain as a type of "live" brain.

Flora Lysen Flora Lysen is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Maastricht University, where she researches past and present (media) technologies embedded in scientific research, particularly in the field of medical imaging and brain science. In her most recent book *Brainmedia: One Hundred Years of Performing Live Brains, 1920-2020* (Bloomsbury, 2022), she examines past and present ways in which scientists, science educators, and artists use new media to conceptualize, examine and demonstrate the "brain at work". In her current research she focuses on the history of artificial intelligence in the field of automating (medical) image reading in the post-WWII period.

Hysterical Attack and the Role of Images in its Re-emergence as a Scientific Object in Current Neurology

Hysteria, an elusive disorder known since antiquity, is widely considered to no longer exist. The same fate is attributed to the hysterical attack, hysteria's most dramatic symptom that stood at the centre of medical research into this disorder throughout history. However, not only is hysteria, now renamed functional neurological disorder, common in present-day neurological clinics, but also the hysterical attack, now called a non-epileptic or functional seizure, is currently regarded by experts as this disorder's most frequent symptom. After a long hiatus caused by its putative disappearance as a medical phenomenon, the hysterical attack/functional seizure has recently become the focus of scientific research in the context of current neurology. In this talk, I will argue that this development is closely tied to the systematic use of different types of images of patients' brains and bodies. To make this case, I will draw attention to diverse images that are used epistemically in two different strands of current research on hysterical attacks/functional seizures. On the one hand, I will discuss the use of video-EEG recordings in clinical research to diagnostically differentiate functional from epileptic seizures. On the other hand, I will outline how fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) is used in neuroimaging research to explore the neural mechanisms underpinning functional seizures. Drawing on Lorraine Daston, I will conclude by arguing that, through the initial medical insights they have generated thus far, these diverse images have jointly transformed the hysterical attack/functional seizure from a highly contested symptom into an increasingly coherent object of intensifying scientific enquiry.

Paula Muhr is a postdoctoral researcher at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) and a visual artist. She studied visual arts, art history, theory of literature, and physics before receiving her PhD at the Institute of Art and Visual History, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (*From Photography to fMRI: Epistemic Functions of Images in Medical Research on Hysteria*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2022). Her transdisciplinary research is at the intersection of visual studies, image theory, media studies, science and technology studies (STS), and history and philosophy of science. She examines knowledge-producing functions of new imaging technologies in natural sciences, ranging from neuroscience over medicine to black-hole physics.

Classifying Maternal Mental Illness: Race and Diagnostic Categories from the late 19th to Mid-20th Century

This paper explores how racial science and ideology informed the evolving classification and diagnostic practices associated with maternal mental illness in the United States from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Beginning in the 1840s, American mental health professionals and obstetrician-gynecologists argued that psychiatric and psychological ailments that impacted women during pregnancy, childbirth, and early childrearing constituted a unique and distinct diagnostic category, which they called “puerperal insanity”. While such a framework would suggest that all childbearing people were candidates for the diagnosis of puerperal insanity, in reality, the disorder was constructed in relation to white feminine normativity and, disproportionately, excluded non-white racial groups. Yet, by the 1920s, new eugenicist thinking led to a shift in how maternal mental illnesses were understood and classified. Instead, practitioners argued that pregnancy, childbirth, or postpartum changes simply unveiled pre-existing vulnerabilities and underlying mental illness. While this framework facilitated the erasure of the unique nature of postpartum disorders, it also further perpetuated the racialization of postpartum disorders by failing to recognize how different racial groups were seen as more or less prone to particular mental illnesses. This, ultimately, resulted in highly divergent and racialized prognoses and therapeutic practices. Ultimately, this paper will demonstrate how ideological and social constructions of motherhood that center white (upper and middle class) feminine normativity informed the evolving classification of maternal mental illness from the early nineteenth to mid-twentieth century.

Udodiri R. Okwandu is a doctoral candidate in the History of Science Department and Presidential Scholar at Harvard University. Broadly, her research examines how scientific and medical disciplines facilitate the production of hierarchies of race, gender, and class in the United States from the late 19th century to the present. She explores these issues in her dissertation, which traces how medical understandings of maternal mental illnesses -- such as postpartum depression and psychosis -- have produced racialized and classist distinctions between “good” and “bad” mothers. Her work has been supported by various organizations, including the Consortium for History, Science, Technology and Medicine, Commission on Women and Gender Studies, and Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History.

The Cult and the Occult

The Cult and the Occult examines Freud's complex relationship to occult forms of communication, or "thought transference," as he was establishing his discipline and its theory of transference. After examining the historical religious antecedents for Freud's nascent theory, I turn to a failed séance that Freud held in his own apartment. I argue that Freud's envy and anxieties surrounding telepathy and mind-reading are continuous with his concerns about the presence of media and communication technology in the psychoanalytic scenario. After demonstrating that psychoanalysis has traditionally ignored the presence of such media, or relegated them to the realm of mere metaphor, the paper argues for a double revision of thinking of psychoanalysis and mediated and as a secular occult practice.

Hannah Zeavin is a scholar, writer, and editor. She is an Assistant Professor at Indiana University and the Founding Editor of Parapraxis and the co-director of The Psychosocial Foundation. Her first book, *The Distance Cure: A History of Teletherapy* was published by The MIT Press in 2021, and she is currently at work on her second book, *Mother's Little Helpers: Media, Childminding, and the American Family*.

Discussants

[Steven White](#) is the co-founder of [Microcosms: A Homage to Sacred Plants of the Americas](#) and former Lewis Professor of Hispanic Studies at St. Lawrence University. He is the co-editor of *Ayahuasca Reader: Encounters with the Amazon's Sacred Vine* (2016), author of *Arando el aire: la ecología en la poesía y la música de Nicaragua* and editor of *El consumo de lo que somos: muestra de poesía ecológica hispánica contemporánea*. He is also the translator of *Lorca's Poet in New York* and of the ecocritical collections *Seven Trees Against the Dying Light* (Pablo Antonio Cuadra) and *The Bones of My Grandfather and Pollen* (Esthela Calderón). Prof. White is also a member of the editorial board of *Plant Perspectives: An Interdisciplinary Journal*.

[Kaat Wils](#) is professor in history and former head of the Cultural History since 1750 Research Group, senior fellow at the Vossius Center for the History of Humanities and Sciences (2022) and currently professeure invitée at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. Some of her recent (co)edited volumes include *Sign or Symptom? Exceptional Corporeal Phenomena in Religion and Medicine in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (2017), *Bodies Beyond Borders. Moving Anatomies, 1750-1950* (2017) and *Learning with Light and Shadows. Educational Lantern and Film Projection, 1860-1990* (2023). Prof. Wils is also the coordinator of the International Research Network 'Medicine and Catholicism since the late 19th Century' and her current research deals with the therapeutic use of hypnosis in nineteenth-century Belgium.

Moderators

[Kate Kangaslahti](#) is a visiting professor at the Cultural History since 1750 Research Group (KU Leuven, specialized in the relationship between art and politics in the first half of the 20th century. She has recently co-edited the volumes *MODERN ART REVIEWed: Art Reviews, Magazines and Gallery Bulletins in Europe, 1910-1945* (2023) and *Crisis: The Avant-Garde and Modernism in Critical Modes* (2022). Her previous affiliations include the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum and the Department of History of Art, University of Cambridge.

[Joris Vandendriessche](#) is research professor at the Cultural History since 1750 Research Group (KU Leuven), director of the [Leuven Centre for Health Humanities](#), PI of the ERC project Scientific societies and the globalization of science (1930-1990) (GLOBAL ACADEMIES) and co-editor of *Medical Histories of Belgium. New Narratives on Health, Care and Citizenship in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (2021). He is also co-director of the Medicine and Catholicism since the Late 19th Century Research Network and a board member of the Young Academy of Belgium.

Organizers

[Fernando Gonzalez Rodriguez](#) is a Marie Curie Fellow affiliated with Cultural History since 1750 Research Group (KU Leuven). His recent publications include *Indigeneity in Latin American Cinema* (2022) and *Ontologies and Natures: Knowledge about Health in Visual Culture* (2022). He is currently working on a series on papers on the intersection between language, historical sociolinguistics, advertisement of medicines, STS and history of science.

[Els Minne](#) is a doctoral candidate at the Cultural History since 1750 Research Group (KU Leuven). She works on poverty organizations, religiously inspired solidarity in post-war Belgium (1945-2000) and the relation between welfare institutions and faith-based organizations. Her doctoral project is embedded within the SOLIGION constellation.

[Kaat Wils](#) ([↗](#))