

Undoing Knowledge. Stories of Knowledge Formation in the Long Nineteenth Century.

Two-day Workshop at the Department of Literary Studies

KU Leuven, Faculty of Arts

December 14-15, 2023

Decades of scholarship on the mechanisms of knowledge formation have generated a wide awareness that the transhistorical nature of knowledge and authoritative statements of truth need to be approached critically. It has become a truism that scientific knowledge is never outside of historical contingencies, that range from large-scale dynamics to institutional idiosyncrasies. For every epistemic poetics that gained wider currency, non-poetic modes of knowledge foundered due to undercurrents that are not mapped and of which we are often unaware today. A closer examination of the processes of knowledge formation in the long nineteenth century reveals alternative, unsystematic ways of collecting and structuring knowledge: queer modes of thinking, one could call them, that stand outside of normative and institutional forms of knowledge acquisition and dissemination. Such peculiar modes of thinking can be discerned in the dense writings of the early nineteenth-century German-Jewish author Rahel Levin Varnhagen or in the work of early twentieth-century art historian Aby Warburg. Both offer examples of non-taxonomical, eccentric modes of knowledge accumulation, though the latter is widely more canonized today than the former.

Our two-day conference wants to address unconventional forms of knowledge and their eclipse in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the period that lays the institutional foundations of scholarly and scientific knowledge as we still know today. The aim of our conference is not to build a cabinet of curiosities, but to gain insight into different dynamics and forms of knowledge that existed, possibly proliferated and/or disappeared from the realm of standard expertises. These forms of knowledge may vary in terms of media and genre: they can be constituted as letters, diary entries, essayistic writings, unpublished manuscripts, imagery, ... We are interested in stories of knowledge from diverse scientific fields that developed next to or outside dominant templates and invite papers that investigate alternative discourses of knowledge acquisition, case-studies that explore unconventional ways of explaining and thinking, and how these functioned – and disappeared – in the standards of cultural and scientific dissemination.

Abstract Deadline:

To submit a proposal, please send your abstract (200-300 words) and a brief bio to carolin.loyens@kuleuven.be by **October 15, 2023**. The accepted proposals will be notified by October 23, 2023.

Location:

Department of Literary Studies, KU Leuven

Blijde-Inkomststraat 21

3000 Leuven (Belgium)

Or online

For **questions**, please contact Carolin Loyens (carolin.loyens@kuleuven.be).