

Epigenetics: Innovation of Memory? Life Science Paradigms as Challenge and Opportunity for Historians, 13 to 15 June 2018

Program

Wednesday, 13 June 2018

from 5:00 p.m. Registration
(not necessary for those who will only be attending the public keynotes)

6:00–9:00 p.m. **Public Keynote**
In Place of Healing: The Dangers of Therapeutic Models of Remembrance
Jay Winter (Yale University)
following reception with finger food

Thursday, 14 June 2018

9:30 a.m. **Welcome and Introduction**
Dagmar Ellerbrock / Bettina Hitzer

10:30 a.m. ***Epigenetics and Cellular Memory***
Bernhard Horsthemke (Universitätsklinikum Essen)

11:30 a.m. Coffee Break

12:00 p.m. ***Histories and Life Science Paradigms***
Tatjana Buklijas (University of Auckland)

1:00 p.m. Lunch Break

2 p.m. ***Epigenetics—The Origins and Evolution of a Fashionable Topic and its Ideologization in the 21st Century***
Ute Deichmann (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev)

3 p.m. ***Epigenetics and the Epigenetic Landscape in Science and Culture***
Susan Merrill Squier (Penn State University)

4:00 p.m. Coffee Break

4:30 p.m. ***The Epigenetics' Legacy amidst Scientific, Political and Individual Agency***
Flavio D'Abramo (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin)

5:30 p.m. ***Traces: Epigenetics, Trauma, and Memory***
Vanessa Lux (Ruhr University Bochum / McGill University Montreal)

6:30 p.m. End of Sessions

Friday, 15 June 2018

9:30 a.m.	Public Keynote <i>Do Epigenetics Matter? A Historian's Issues with Memories, Narratives and Intergenerational Transfer</i> Dorothee Wierling (Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte, Hamburg)
11:00 a.m.	Coffee Break
11:30 a.m.	<i>The New Generational Order of Epigenetics</i> Ohad Parnes (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin)
12:30 p.m.	<i>Epigenetics and Aging Research: Between Adult Malleability and Early Life Programming</i> Ruth Müller (Technische Universität München)
1:30 p.m.	Lunch Break
2:30 p.m.	<i>Impressionable Biologies: The Politics of Corporeal Plasticity from Humoralism to Epigenetics</i> Maurizio Meloni (Deakin University, Melbourne)
3:30 p.m.	Coffee Break and Preparation of Final Discussion in Disciplinary Groups
4:00 p.m.	Disciplines in Discussion
5:00 p.m.	End of Conference

Interested in attending this conference?

Please note that all talks start precisely at the advertised time (ST not CT).

Venue: Max Planck Institute for Human Development
94 Lentzeallee
14195 Berlin
Large conference hall
(closest station Breitenbachplatz)

No registration required if you only wish to attend one or both public keynotes.

Those who are interested in any session in addition to the public keynotes **MUST** be registered to attend.

There is no registration fee but seating is limited.

To register please send an e-mail to rockmann@mpib-berlin.mpg.de by **5 June 2019**.

We kindly ask you to inform us about your affiliation and the area of your research focus.

We send you a confirmation of your registration as soon as possible.

About the conference

History examines change and questions how experiences and memories influence contemporary societies. Epigenetics researches how environmental influences are reflected in gene functions. The field thus offers an interesting opportunity for researchers working in the humanities and natural sciences to combine their scientific queries and for broadening the scope of historical research through models borrowed from the life sciences.

In contrast to the neuroscientific concept of plasticity, which focusses on the changeability of brain structures throughout an individual life, epigenetics examines how environmental influences cause heritable changes in gene expression, and in doing so, claims to open up a transgenerational perspective on genetic alterations.

Epigenetics thus not only provides a more complex understanding of the relationship between genotype and phenotypes. Epigenetic approaches also suggest a new conceptualisation of the materiality and historicity of the body.

Popular history books have begun using epigenetic arguments to make the claim that experiences of war and expulsion have wide-reaching, transgenerational consequences. At the same time, researchers have until now failed to undertake a systematic conceptual analysis as to whether, and if so how, epigenetic research can be connected to historical research. Today, popular science approaches have swapped out appeals to psychoanalytic concepts like trauma with appeals to epigenetics to discuss things like low birth rates, 'German angst' and experiences of war. The conference will examine these arguments using scientific historiography.

The central focus lies in gauging how epigenetic perspectives and methods could provide new areas of insight and chances for the further development of historical research. Might 'epigenetic history' perhaps offer an approach that—in contrast to 'genetic history'—would examine historically more recent and considerably shorter periods? What would scientific historiography stand to gain from insights provided by such a shift in perspective? Can the paradigm of epigenetics change historiography's fundamental theoretical assumptions? Must experience and memory as basic categories of historical research be reconceptualised in the light of the claims of epigenetics?

Convenors

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Prof. Dr. **Dagmar Ellerbrock** is professor at Technische Universität (TU) Dresden, Chair for Modern History; acting managing director of the Department of History, TU Dresden

PD Dr. **Bettina Hitzer** is Minerva Research Group Leader at the Center for the History of Emotions at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin