Departmental Seminar

TITLE

Crime, Clairvoyance, and the Weimar Police

SPEAKER

Dr Heather Wolffram

Day, Date, Time, Venue

Wednesday, 7 November, 3 pm
HY/PS Lounge, AS1-0401

Abstract

My seminar will consider the strange collision of forensics and the occult – embodied by the criminal telepath - that occurred in Germany following the First World War. My aim is to explain the emergence of these occult detectives and the effect that they had on the public’s relationship with the police. Using a wide range of newspaper reports and critiques, I will also attempt to elucidate the way in which the media molded this relationship. The interaction and co-operation that occurred between police forces in a number of German states and criminal telepaths will be the other focal point of my presentation. Mining police publications and the works of legal experts, I will consider the reasons that the police became involved with this group of occultists and the consequences of this unlikely union. Ultimately, I will argue that the use of clairvoyants by the German authorities needs to be understood in a context in which a wide range of new technologies and scientific techniques were adopted by the Weimar police in their ongoing attempt to become a professional crime fighting force.

About the Speaker

Heather Wolffram is a postdoctoral fellow in the History Department and the Science, Technology and Society Research Cluster at NUS. She received her PhD from the University of Queensland, in 2005 for a dissertation on parapsychology in Germany in the period c. 1870-1939. Since then she has continued to research in this field publishing articles in The European Legacy and The Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences. Her postdoctoral work, however, focuses on the use of hypnosis as a medical therapy in Wilhelmine sex research, a topic she will discuss in a seminar in the STS cluster in the second semester.