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Leiden  
The Netherlands

## Foreword to the Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference, Issue 1 (2013)

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### Citation

Zijlmans, K. (2013). Foreword to the Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference, Issue 1 (2013). Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20529>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# FOREWORD

‘IMAGINING EUROPE - Perspectives, Perceptions and Representations from Antiquity to the Present’ was the first of the two-yearly graduate symposiums organized by PhD researchers at the Leiden University Institute for Cultural Disciplines, which has been one of the seven research institutes of the Faculty of Humanities since its reorganisation in 2008. The LUICD united the study of European languages and cultures (literatures, arts, media) from classical antiquity to the present and of contemporaneous Latin American, North American and African languages and cultures. Precisely because we uphold the interdisciplinary exchange of expertise in a wide array of diachronic, cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural methods, as well as the ways in which the arts act on and shape the societies in which they are created, preserved and disseminated, the institute decided last year to change its name into LUCAS: Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society. A name that expresses the institute’s aspirations far better.

From the foundation of Leiden University in 1575, the humanist interest in the languages, literature, art and cultures of all human beings, in Europe and the rest of the world, has been the university’s core business, and it is now the core business of LUCAS in particular. This interest has transformed itself over time into a study of culture in all regions of the world, from a deep knowledge of European culture – but not from a Eurocentrist perspective – based on the conviction that to understand the arts is to study all human cultures and the interac-

tions between them. The subject of the symposium then, ‘Imagining Europe’, reflects this ambition outstandingly.

The conference explored the different ways in which Europe has been imagined and represented, from inside as well as outside Europe and from classical antiquity to the present day, with particular attention to the historical and cultural contexts in which these images were created, both visual and textual. So what is Europe, the organizers asked? A piece of land? A union of a multitude of countries and cultures, a way of life, a metaphor, an ideal, the old world? What do the images or representations we encounter in a wide variety of media actually tell us? Although the emphasis of the conference was on different and changing perspectives, perceptions and representations, it also aimed to explore the notion of similarity; are there any aspects that keep recurring in the different visions, aspects that might even be said to be intrinsically European?

This conference originated from an initiative of LUCAS PhD researchers, who wanted to bring together a new generation of young scholars from the Humanities worldwide to meet and exchange ideas, perspectives, commonalities and differences in approach, focus, issues and themes now current in the field of the Humanities. In that respect, the overarching theme of the conference, Europe in both its unity and diversity, mirrored the aim of the social aspect of the conference: to bring together many different young scholars who are connected by their united interest in matters of the mind and imagination, and their related cultural practices. The conference indeed succeeded in this. It was already a success before it actually started: 45 graduate speakers from six continents were present! And long before that they had already met frequently at the Facebook group especially set up for this research exchange. This also found so much acclaim that the group is still functioning.

The effort and perseverance of the organisers resulted in a great conference in which graduate students, PhDs as well as several MA's, presented their research and shared their thoughts and ideas on a great variety of topics, ranging from Barbarians and colonizers, art and cultural identity, borders, the Cold War and after, the Occident and the Orient, the classics, to migrant cinema, the Enlightenment, and issues of self and other. Apart from scholarly debate, the conference was a social happening - and a lively one too. Two outstanding keynote speakers set the tone: Jonathan Israel from the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton and Edith Hall of the University of London. When Professor Israel received the invitation to give the keynote lecture, he agreed immediately, adding that it sounded like "a most interesting conference". And it *was* great.

I am extremely proud that the papers of the first LUCAS Graduate Conference have resulted in this Journal, and I would like to express my thanks to all those who have made an effort in realizing it, foremost the initiating and organising committee of the conference: Thera Giezen, Jacqueline Hylkema and Coen Maas; the editorial board of Issue # 1: Linda Bleijenberg, Anna Dlabacova, Corina Koolen, Han Lamers, Daan Wesselman; and last but not least, the Series Editor: Jacqueline Hylkema.

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