

History of Psychiatry Conference

Zwiefalten, FRG, June 13-15, 2012

Centre and Periphery in the History of Psychiatry

Research has for a long time focused on asylums and psychiatric hospitals in both city or rural surroundings or university clinics. It has done so in practically all parts of the world, though with varying breadth and depth. Their crucial role in hosting, treating or closing away the mad and handicapped and in showcasing contemporary ways of therapy and treatment often has been examined in detail. However, in respect to the establishment of all these, not only in the heyday of the establishment of these institutions – predominantly in the second half of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century – but also later on, the relationship, difference (e.g. in ideas, ideologies and identities) and commonality between institutions in peripheric situations and those in the centres of power, knowledge and government, their sometimes interdepending dynamics, their (not always varying) therapeutic concept and social or medical function, are studied rarely and by far less systematically. Applications of this approach will profit from widened historical perspective induced by what has been named the „spatial turn“.

Not only did geographically peripheric institutions and initiatives earn less attention than those related to urban culture, also were pioneering and regionally adapted initiatives or institutions often overlooked - in comparison to „mainstreaming“ models, and thus never made it beyond „marginal“ significance. So, approaches generated by the History of Science or Science and Technology Studies, to complete the picture, are welcome here, too.

In a more abstract reading of centre and periphery, research on colonial psychiatry and its meaning, aim, continuity and discontinuity, as well as its relationship to colonial centres of power deserve more research than has been conducted until today, in the (Post-)Colonial Studies' or History of Medicine's respected research areas. Consequently, studies in these contexts as well as contributions exemplifying the application of „global“ versus „local“ psychiatric practice and/or theory are in the frame of the conference ahead.

Focussing on scientific, research and educational matters and aspects of the history of psychiatry suggests the comparative study of e.g. academic and non-academic spaces of psychiatry, in and outside the walls of institutions, as well as the study of respected identity discourses („linguistic turn“). How would comparative studies enrich the topic at stake?

Last not least, this symposium turns attention to the relationship between central and peripheric forms of housing, treating and caring for the mentally ill and handicapped in historical perspective, it aims at portraying the variety of forms and modes created, extending research from asylum history to the care in rural or/and agricultural settings, lay institutions or family care, concepts of psychiatry in the colonial sphere and minority initiatives. Its focus will also be placed on the peripheric institutions' ambition, originality, relationship to the

“greater” institutions and, in particular, their engagement with the social (culture). The questions explored may include:

- rural versus urban / metropolitan care of the mentally ill
- region - state - continent aspects and relationship in different forms of care for the mentally ill
- what ambitions motivated the idea of establishing an institution in a particular (rural or urban) location and which were its objectives
- what was the long-term impact of the establishment of a certain type of care institution on the region, nationally and internationally
- how were medicine and psychiatry displayed at the institutions and what role they played
- which specific influence did contemporarily „outstanding“ and „modelling“ institutions like the ‚famous‘ French, English or German etc. psychiatric institutions have on the institutionalization of the various forms of care, asylum building, and practicing psychiatry in the (factual or labelled) margins?
- how did lay culture perceive and evaluate the eventual and specific aim, function and therapeutic value of each single psychiatric initiative, and how psychiatric professionals reflected these „voices“ from a lay field and realm?

The symposium encourages an inter-disciplinary approach to the topic. Papers including reflections on the (preferably: German) history of psychiatry are therefore welcome from scholars in a wide range of disciplines, including the history of medicine / science, general history, health politics, anthropology, ethnography, architecture, art, cultural studies etc.

Further academic activities, as e.g. a publication on the conference’s topic are planned.

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