



Call for Papers

MATERIAL CULTURES OF PSYCHIATRY

Workshop, Hamburg

Date: 3-4 May 2018, Hamburg

Organisers: Dr Monika Ankele (Department for History and Ethics of Medicine at the University Clinic Hamburg-Eppendorf) and Prof. Benoît Majerus (Centre for Contemporary and Digital History, University of Luxembourg)

Deadline: 15 December 2017

Languages: German, English

In the past, our ideas of psychiatric hospitals and their history have been shaped by objects like straitjackets, cribs and binding belts. These powerful objects are often used as a synonym for psychiatry and the way psychiatric patients are treated. But what do we really know about the social life (see Majerus 2011) of psychiatric patients and the stories of less spectacular objects in the everyday life of psychiatric institutions? What do we know about the material cultures of these places in general?

The workshop will use the term “material cultures” very broadly and in the plural. This term refers not only to medical objects, objects of therapy and objects of care, but also to everyday cultural objects. The latter are subject to change when they enter the realm of psychiatry, where they become part of the specific cultural praxis of psychiatric institutions: a bed clearly changes its meaning in a psychiatric hospital, but so do flowers, a mirror and a blanket. The term “material cultures” also includes phenomena that have a material dimension like air, light, colours and sound (see Kalthoff et al. 2016). The use of the term in the plural should make us aware of the different, often competing cultural practices that emerge when we focus on the application and appropriation of objects and materials by patients, doctors and nursing staff. It also raises the question of the extent to which material cultures influence both therapeutic treatment and the production of knowledge.

Objects as agents

Objects can be described as agents since they have a stabilising, destabilising and transforming impact on the practice of psychiatry; they organise social relationships, influence or predetermine the practice of psychiatry, have an impact on power relations and create specific self-relations and relationships with others. Presentations should analyse objects from the history of psychiatry as agents and explore their fields of action.

Means of appropriation and expropriation

The (artistic) works of patients, as found in historical collections such as the Prinzhorn Collection in Heidelberg and the Morgenthaler Collection in Bern, are impressive testimonies of the manifold ways that patients appropriated the different materials of psychiatric hospitals, including remnants, clippings, bedsprings and much more. They are part of a material culture of psychiatry and bear its traces. In parallel, patients' works as well as personal belongings were subject to expropriation, interpreted as symptoms of a disease or used for the implementation of new (power) relations. Appropriation concerned not only materials but also therapeutic objects or objects of care that had to be appropriated by patients, doctors and nursing staff.

Scenography of things

The term "scenography" refers to the design of stage scenery. It draws attention to the spatial arrangement of people and things as well as the scripts that are inscribed in an object, which the spatial arrangement (of a ward, a day room, a hall) should express. It poses the question of how objects and material phenomena structured the perception, communication and movements of patients, nursing staff and doctors, and how these spatial arrangements of objects and agents influenced the interactions and power relations between them.

Transformations

How do objects of therapy and objects of care, as well as everyday cultural objects, materials and material phenomena, acquire their specific meaning for the various agents of a psychiatric institution? What transformation process do they go through? What transformations do these objects undergo in practice? Objects should also be seen as an interface, where ways of thinking and acting meet, condense, shift and materialise.

Economies

Examining the material cultures of psychiatry involves looking at questions of economy: the economy of the institution, individual economies like the exchange of materials and things, the economical use of materials, etc. In what ways do the economic conditions of the institution influence the material cultures of psychiatry and how do these cultures affect the economy of the institution?

Presentations should take into account the social and cultural background of objects of psychiatry, their various meanings, their involvement in actions, their ability to act and to shape social and spatial relations as well as their reference to practices of knowledge, specific discourses and power relations. Corresponding approaches referring to the "material turn" are the focus of much interest in the cultural and social sciences and have been the subject of research in the history of medicine, but they have been neglected in historical research on psychiatry, at least in the German-speaking realm.

Possible research objects for your presentations could be the following: beds, baths, doors, corridors, walls, bed screens, tables, chairs, bedside tables and bath tubs; tools, dishes,

knives, spoons and forks; murals, bars, fences, windows; bowling alleys; keys and locks; paintings, books, plants, flowers, mirrors; light, darkness, water, electricity, smells; syringes, needles, sleeping pills and tranquilisers, straitjackets, binding belts; blankets, pillows, sheets, clothes, white coats, fabrics; straw, seaweed, horse hair, paper, packing material, cigarettes; telephones, watches, typewriters; food, etc.

We are also interested in discussing the epistemic value of a material approach for the history of psychiatry and its possible additions to or corrections of this history. What agents, practices and social interactions come into view when we focus on the material dimensions of psychiatry? What agents and practices that previously went unnoticed gain significance by focusing on the material cultures of psychiatry? And what new perspectives on the psychiatric institution open up?

Please submit an abstract (max. 2000 characters) with a short CV to m.ankele@uke.de by 15 December 2017. Inventive approaches and presentations are especially welcome. We would also be delighted to receive proposals for artistic work.

The workshop is part of the research project “Bed and Bath: Objects and Spaces of Therapy in Psychiatry of the 19th and 20th century” (head of project: Univ. Prof. Dr Heinz-Peter Schmiedebach), funded by the German Research Foundation. We are not yet sure that travel and accommodation costs will be fully covered.

It is planned to publish the papers presented at the workshop in an edited book. The contributions (15 to 20 papers) should be submitted by 10 July 2018 to ensure a quick turnaround.

Dr Monika Ankele

Universitätsklinikum Hamburg-Eppendorf
Zentrum für Psychosoziale Medizin
Institut für Geschichte und Ethik der Medizin (Geb. N30b)
Martinistraße 52
D-20246 Hamburg
m.ankele@uke.de

Prof. Benoît Majerus

Université du Luxembourg
Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History
Maison des Sciences Humaines
11, Porte des Sciences
L-4366 Esch-sur-Alzette
benoit.majerus@uni.lu

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