

Book Review

***Arbeitsrhythmus und Anstaltsalltag: Arbeit in der Psychiatrie vom frühen 19. Jahrhundert bis in die NS-Zeit.* Edited by Monika Ankele and Eva Brinkschulte. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag. 2015. 237 pp. €48.00 (softback).**

As Thomas Müller notes in the opening pages of his contribution to this book, there has been renewed interest in the humanities over the last fifteen years in the question of labour. In this volume the two editors, historians Monika Ankele and Eva Brinkschulte, enter into this debate, thus opening up the historiography of psychiatry to larger societal questions.

The volume is based on a conference held in 2013 in Hamburg that placed into a broader chronological context a DFG project entitled ‘Family care and more active medical treatment: a multi-perspective approach of occupational therapy in everyday psychiatric institutions in the 1920s’. It assembles ten chapters that treat the question of patient labour inside psychiatric institutions in Germany from the early nineteenth century until National Socialism. In their introduction, the editors underline four important points: first, that the notion of labour in society has important repercussions on the function of labour inside asylums. The Weimar constitution proclaimed that ‘any German . . . without prejudice to his personal freedom, has the moral obligation to use his mental and physical strength as required by the general welfare’. It was therefore not surprising that the interwar period was a moment where the place of labour inside psychiatric institutions was particularly fiercely debated among German psychiatrists. Second, they emphasize that working inside the asylums of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries relied substantially on the traditions of the workhouses from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Labour inside psychiatric hospitals is therefore not something new but has a long history that is sometimes more influenced by the *longue durée* of cultural and social history than by short-term orientated political history. Next, they argue that the function of labour inside psychiatry remains heavily linked to other institutions of welfare: the right to care during the Weimar period was determined by the ability to work not only inside the asylums but also in other social apparatuses dispositives. Finally, they note that contrary to other treatment, such as electroconvulsive therapy, psychotherapy or psychochemicals, work as therapy is still underexposed in historiography but also in the collective imagery of what the life inside an asylum was.

While some contributions present rather philosophical reflections based on the discussion of historical texts written by psychiatrists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on labour inside asylums (such as the contributions by Heinz-Peter Schmiedebach and Eva Brinkschulte), most texts are local case studies, which not only illustrate the general hypotheses formulated in the introduction, but also offer further and concrete insights into the daily practices of work. For example, in rural areas in the nineteenth century, patients left the asylums on a daily basis to work for the local farmers, thus making the walls of the asylum permeable. The labour of patients was also central in organizing the days inside the asylums. Finally the ability to work—or not—was an extremely important criterion during World War Two for ‘inclusion or exclusion’ (Stefanie Coché) of patients from the national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*): patients who were unable to participate in daily work ran a higher risk of becoming victims of T4 (forced euthanasia).

Undoubtedly, the high point of the book is the illustration of the permanent tension between the theoretical therapeutic values of patients' work and the pragmatic reasons to make patients work (such as cheap labour force, ensuring self-sufficiency for the asylum) that appear in many contributions.

This book is highly recommended for any reader interested in understanding the changes experienced by the notion of work inside German psychiatry from the early nineteenth century to 1945. I would however like to formulate three reservations.

First, it is regrettable that the leitmotif of the book—labour rhythm and everyday life inside the psychiatric asylum—is only articulated through the patients and not through other categories of psychiatric populations such as physicians, keepers or nurses. How did physicians define their work? How did they combine working inside asylums and in their private practice, which often constituted their main source of revenue? How did the nurses' notions of care collide with their working conditions?

Second, the history of occupational therapy in Germany could have been more clearly embedded in a transnational history of transfers of ideas and practices. This would have been particularly interesting for the interwar period. In these two decades, not only was Germany influenced by the mental hygiene movement, where labour played an important role, but German psychiatry was also an internationally influential model, thanks in part at least to Hermann Simon, who was considered the founder of the modern occupational therapy. His work was widely read and discussed in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and elsewhere.

Finally, the chronological limit—1945—is all the more deplorable as the reform of psychiatry in the second half of the twentieth century is closely linked to new discussions on the function of work inside psychiatry. It illustrates how hard it is for German historiography of psychiatry to go beyond the classic and now well-researched period of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century and to engage with the contemporary history (*Zeitgeschichte*) of psychiatry.

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Benoît Majerus
University of Luxembourg