



## SEMINAR SERIES HISTORIES OF BIOMEDICAL KNOWLEDGE

What histories can we write about the biomedical sciences? Which material, textual, oral, and visual sources can we use? How can we analyse and contextualise what it meant and implied to obtain and apply scientific knowledge about the normal and the pathological, the biological and the social in the long twentieth century? How were disciplinary boundaries drawn and transformed, and what do we include in our studies?

The junior research group *Learning from Alzheimer's disease: A history of biomedical models of mental illness* invites young scholars to discuss their case studies in the seminar series *Histories of Biomedical Knowledge*. The seminars offer a forum for presenting new material, discussing the respective historiographical approach, or testing the overarching argument of work in progress.

The seminar series is open to all interested in histories of biomedical knowledge. Registration, also for individual events, is mandatory to receive pre-circulated papers.

Time: 10–12 h

- Dates: 23. 3. 2018: Thomas Erslev, Aarhus Universitet  
*An Archive of Brains: Mobilisations of Past and Future in a Danish Brain Banking Debate*
4. 5. 2018: Alfred Freeborn, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin  
*What was "Biological" about the "Biological Revolution" in Psychiatry?*
15. 6. 2018: Christof Sendhardt, Technische Universität Berlin  
*Zwischen 'Seuchenstall' und 'Inselflur': Praktiken und Räume der Isolation im Versuchstiermanagement des Seruminstituts Insel Riems*  
(Master's thesis: selected chapter)
13. 7. 2018: Cora Stuhmann, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München  
*"mutual incomprehension and red herrings": Strategies of Disciplinary Competition in the Sociobiology Debate*

We will be glad to receive your registration at: [seraphina.rekowski@hu-berlin.de](mailto:seraphina.rekowski@hu-berlin.de).

Thomas Erslev, Aarhus Universitet

AN ARCHIVE OF BRAINS:  
MOBILISATIONS OF PAST AND FUTURE IN A  
DANISH BRAIN BANKING DEBATE

23 March 2018, 10–12 h

My project revolves around a Danish brain collection established in 1945 consisting of 9.479 brains from psychiatric patients who died in state hospitals. These brains were collected without consent and without informing next of kin. Active collection stopped in 1982, but the brains were kept and has since been enrolled in several research projects, especially on familial dementias, depression, and schizophrenia. The collection has been the subject of public debate at several occasions since the early 1990s, and the Danish Ethical Council has issued two independent statements (1992 & 2006) about the ethics of the collection. Last year, in June, the regional council who bears financial responsibility for the collection, decided to close it down. A public bid was opened up for other research institutions interested in taking over the collection, but so far none have been able to allocate the needed storage space, or sufficient funds. If no bid is placed before summer, the collection will be destroyed, presumably by cremation. This decision also has spurred a lively public debate, and renewed ethical deliberation.

My broad, initial interest in the collection is twofold and has to do with ontology and temporality: First, how does the (discursive and material) transformation from subject to object take place, and what kind of cultural tropes, hopes and anxieties accompany it? What is specific to brain sciences that deal with material brains rather than images and models (as imaging sciences and neurochemical research)? Second, what role does history and historicity play in the debates about the collection? How is history put to work in different political, epistemological, and ethical arguments?

My paper will present an overview of the collection's history and attempt to parse out the uses of history in the recent debates.

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Alfred Freeborn, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

## WHAT WAS “BIOLOGICAL” ABOUT THE “BIOLOGICAL REVOLUTION” IN PSYCHIATRY?

4 May 2018, 10–12 h

This paper draws from interviews with psychiatrists and psychologists in the UK and USA who began research projects in the late 1970s and 1980s which re-centred clinical research on biological validators for psychiatric illnesses. The key historical bifurcation traced here is the divergence in experimental cultures between earlier attempts by psychiatrists to performatively realize the brain through electromechanical models (Ashby, Walter et al) and the experimental neurobiology which focussed on in vivo attempts to unlock brain function. The experimental culture of the latter proved politically useful for the psychiatrists of the 1980s in using an in vivo experimental design which supported a reductive biological realism. I argue here that attention to the different experimental cultures is an effective way to understand how the meaning of the biological in psychiatry was transformed in this period. By also looking at how the theories associated with these experimental cultures were popularized in “brain books”, these constellations of concepts and theories will be contextualised in their political and social context. Overall, the “biological revolution” will be assessed as a moment in the shifting identity of the late-modern psychiatrist, and as part of a longer historical attempt to construct a ‘biology of mind’.

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Christof Sendhardt, Technische Universität Berlin

## ZWISCHEN 'SEUCHENSTALL' UND 'INSELFLUR': PRAKTIKEN UND RÄUME DER ISOLATION IM VERSUCHSTIERMANAGEMENT DES SERUMINSTITUTS INSEL RIEMS

15 June 2018, 10–12

In den vergangenen Jahren sind Tiere verstärkt in den Fokus wissenschaftshistorischer Arbeiten geraten. In Studien zur Experimentalwissenschaft wurden insbesondere Versuchstiere in ihrer Funktion als wissensgenerierende Modelle in den Blick genommen. Jüngere Untersuchungen haben darauf hingewiesen, wie diese epistemologische Perspektive, Tiere als Repräsentanten von Wissen zu konzeptualisieren, die naheliegende Frage vernachlässigt, wie Tiere als widerstrebende, materielle Lebewesen zu Versuchstieren in kontrollierten Experimentalumgebungen werden.

In meiner Masterarbeit näherte ich mich dieser Frage mit einer Fallstudie zu Tieren in der Serumforschung und Infektionsmedizin. Am Beispiel der staatlichen Produktions- und Forschungseinrichtung auf der Ostseeinsel Riems, die zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts zur Herstellung eines Serums gegen die Maul- und Klauenseuche gegründet wurde, soll diese Untersuchung aufzeigen, welche Rolle die hygienische Separierung und Isolation der „Serumtiere“ spielte, um die Rinder, Schweine und Meerschweinchen zu Versuchs- und Produktionstieren zu machen. Besonderes Augenmerk liegt auf Ställen als zentrale Orte biomedizinischer Forschung. Ställe waren mit spezifischen Funktionen verknüpft: der Entnahme von Blut, der Infektion, der Durchführung von Versuchen oder der Haltung der Tiere. Die Koordination der Tiere zwischen verschiedenen Räumen gründete auf einem System von Aufschreibeverfahren. Mit Serumbüchern und Tierregistern konnte der Verkehr der Tiere erfasst, überwacht und gesteuert werden. Diese *paper technologies* lassen sich als Teil von hygienischen Praktiken verstehen, mit denen Isolation zwischen Tiergruppen erzeugt, verstärkt oder abgeschwächt werden konnte. Das Management der Isolation besaß eine wichtige epistemische Funktion. Verfahren der Serumevaluation und Infektionsversuche unterwarfen die Körper der Tiere einer lückenlosen Dokumentation ihrer Infektionsgeschichte: Der Erfolg der Versuche hing davon ab, ob die Tiere bereits mit dem Erreger der Maul- und Klauenseuche in Kontakt gewesen und entsprechend immun waren. Praktiken und Räume der Isolation zielten auf die Kontrolle von Infektion auf der gesamten Insel. Ich argumentiere, dass isolierte Räume, hygienische Praktiken und Vorstellungen von Reinheit den Rahmen bildeten, vor dem die Tiere des Riemser Serum Instituts zu Versuchs- und Produktionstieren wurden.

*(selected chapter from Master's thesis)*

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Cora Stuhmann, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

## “MUTUAL INCOMPREHENSION AND RED HERRINGS“: STRATEGIES OF DISCIPLINARY COMPETITION IN THE SOCIOBIOLOGY DEBATE

13 July 2018, 10–12 h

Much has been written about how Sociobiology pitted two camps of biologists against each other on moral, political and scientific grounds in 1975: The Sociobiologists, led by E.O. Wilson, hoped to build a new discipline and encountered vocal critics, many like Richard Lewontin and Stephen Jay Gould with a Marxist background, attacking them as genetic determinists and naive reductionists. This conflict within biology, as well as the accompanying media coverage, has drawn most of the attention and the controversy surrounding Sociobiology is still commonly seen as a mere expression of the political tensions of the 1970s.

However, this exchange is only the beginning of a much broader academic debate that continued into the 1980s and even 1990s. With passages such as „It may not be too much to say that sociology and the other social sciences, as well as the humanities, are the last branches of biology, waiting to be included in the Modern Synthesis“, Wilson's book questioned the validity of existing disciplinary boundaries. Therefore, the controversy should not only be seen as the result of a political conflict, but also as a competition between disciplines about where the borders of their territories are to be drawn.

It is almost impossible to keep track of the flurry of publications regarding Sociobiology: the edited volumes, conference proceedings, monographs, and articles fill tens of thousands of pages. Many of them not only debate the possibilities and limitations of evolutionary explanations for human social behavior, but they also contain what Thomas Gieryn termed boundary-work: They aim to convince the reader of the validity and legitimacy of a given discipline or to discredit the approaches and results generated by a disciplinary competitor. By tracing these publications and their reception in reviews, we can ascertain different strategies of disciplinary competition.

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