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Elsbeth Bösl, Anne Klein, Anne Waldschmidt, eds. *Disability History: Konstruktionen von Behinderung in der Geschichte. Eine Einführung (Constructions of Disability. An Introduction).* Bielefeld: Transcript - Verlag für Kommunikation, Kultur und soziale Praxis, 2010. 215 pp. EUR 26.80 (paper), ISBN 978-3-8376-1361-2.

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This is the first book to be published in the German language with âdisability historyâ in its title. It is only the sixth volume to be published in transcript Verlagâs Disability Studies series, which might very well be Germany's largest series to explicitly address this topic. These modest numbers indicate that in Germany, disability studies has only begun to emerge in the last few years. One of the most important German disability studies scholars has been Anne Waldschmidt, who has published and edited several articles and volumes, including the introduction to this volume. While there have been some publications which could be labeled disability history, the term has been rarely used. The first efforts to summarize the mostly American and British research on this topic for a German audience were undertaken by Elsbeth BÃ¶sl, one of the editors of this volume.[1]

Being an introduction to the subject, this book endeavors to offer insight into fundamental principles of disability history and provide an outline of its relevant topics by presenting some examples. The first part of the book is a chapter called âFundamental Principles of Disability Historyâ and focuses on presenting disability history as an emerging subdiscipline of historical research. Distinguishing it from existing approaches to a history *of* disability, concepts and methods of disability history are summarized in order to outline a rather new field of study offering new insights. The second part is divided into three chapters and consists of nine examples chosen to represent the spectrum of possible research and its characteristics. These three chapters are: (1) âScientific Constructions and Subjective Experience,â (2) âInstitutions and Politics,â and (3) âBody, Art and Culture.â

The opening chapter, âFoundation Principles,â consists of three essays, each written by one of the editors. First is Anne Waldschmidtâs âWhy and to What End Does Disability Studies Need a Disability History? Programmatic Reflections.â The original German title (âWarum und zu welchem Ende â¦â) is an allusion to a lecture by Friedrich Schiller regarding the nature, needs, and ends of general history as an academic discipline. Like Schiller, Waldschmidt wants to lay down a foundation for the field of study itself. Before turning to disability history, the author acknowledges the fact that the nature and objectives of disability studies need some explanation when addressing a German readership. She outlines the discipline, referring to disability as a social construct and distinguishing disability studies from the paradigm of rehabilitation. Afterwards, she summarizes the social model of disability and its critics, but to then offer a cultural model of disability which allows the ex-

ploration of disability through the means of cultural studies. This is possibly one of the best short introductions to disability studies available in German.

This foundation allows an equally clear and systematic summary of disability history. After a short history of German disability history and its very beginnings, Waldschmidt outlines the goal of disability history to not only rewrite the history *of* disability, but to rewrite history in general by the means of disability research. She presents the reader with the heuristics of disability history: While the social model of disability allows exploration of the relationships between disability and society, the cultural model makes use of the (dis)abled body to analyze fundamental concepts of the modern age–including health, normalcy, deviance, identity, reason, and human dignity. In short, she asks for disability to be understood as a âleading categoryâ (*Leitkategorie*, p. 26) of modern societies which allows history to be written anew.

The second article is written by Elsbeth BÃ¶sl, who asks âWhat is Disability History?â She tries to answer this question by presenting some kind of âinventoryâ (*Bestandsaufnahme*, p. 30). This inventory focuses on German publications. But since they are scarce, others works are also considered. Firstly, she gives some examples of disability history as a form of writing a history of science and/or culture, asking why and how disability came into being as a social category and which people were assigned to it. Secondly, BÃ¶sl outlines research undertaken involving people with disabilities as active subjects, denying the homogenization of individuals categorized as disabled. Finally, she gives examples of how discourses of disability were institutionalized and how they shaped modern welfare states. In the end, she demands application of the full range of disability history developed in the United States and elsewhere to German history in order to point out the usefulness of disability as a category for historical analysis. Only then will disability history be regarded as an important part of the historical sciences.

The last essay of the first chapter is Anne Klein's âHow do You Practice Disability History?â, which focuses on methodological questions. As there is no definitive catalogue of disability history and its methods, she offers a foundation of the methodological design of historical research in general. She tries to approach the methodology of disability history in five steps. First, she seeks the research interest of disability studies in general, and a reflected choice of methods in order to produce objective results and reduce ideological influences. Second, she outlines scientific methods as a means of generating objective knowledge, strengthening participative research and biographical approaches. Third, she takes a look at historical methods and acknowledges recent developments in this field of study. In a fourth step, Klein outlines historical implications of disability history. Finally, she offers three outstanding examples of German disability history studies which are either designed to be very participative, offer educational potential, or allow people with disabilities to tell their own (hi)stories by the means of oral testimony. She concludes with three important characteristics of the right method: the analysis of power relations, the application of poststructuralist theories, and the participation of people with disabilities.

Chapter 2, âScientific Constructions and Subjective Experience,â begins with âThe Mad are Always the Others,â an essay by Cornelia Brink. Looking at public statements by people labeled mentally ill around 1900 and during the 1970s, she tries to retrace notions of healthy/unwell and normal/abnormal during these respective periods. In the late nineteenth century, men and women diagnosed as mad came forward in order to prove that they were not actually sick, and thus abnormal. While they acknowledged that a line had to be drawn between the normal and the mentally ill, they thought of themselves as normal and argued about the range of normalcy. In the 1970s, several people living in psychiatric hospitals told journalist Ernst Klee in a radio interview about the severe conditions in the institutions they lived in. They labeled themselves as sick and asked for the help and care they actually needed, but which they had been denied. They thought of society itself as being sick and producing sick people due to high stress levels at work and in private life. Brink makes good use of these examples of disability for a valuable analysis of more general chapters of history: while during the late nineteenth century self-identification as abnormal was unthinkable (and more important, unspeakable), defining oneself as abnormal and extending the range of the abnormal to large parts of society had become acceptable by the 1970s. Flawless role conformity was of crucial importance around 1900, but had lost its meaning seventy years later.

âDiagnostic-Therapeutical Demarcationsâ by Susanne Pohl-Zucker retraces the medical discourse on cell therapy in children with Down syndrome that took place in Germany during the 1960s and 1970s. She outlines how a group of pediatricians and some psychiatrists who worked as scientific advisors to the âLebenshilfeâ–a well-known organization for people with mental disabilities–

argued about the benefits and dangers of injecting children with Down syndrome with specific animal cells. Though they mainly disagreed, both parties remained committed to underlying assumptions regarding the possibilities of development in children with Down syndrome. Both saw the syndrome as a form of deviance strictly limiting these possibilities in all affected children, relied heavily on medical treatment, and linked the opportunity for social integration to physical and physiognomic normalcy. Thus, the author manages to illustrate how societyâs underlying presumptions shape discourses on disabilities which bring forth the limits to and possibilities for development and assistance available to people with disabilities.

Petra Fuchs chose âJust be yourselfâ (Sei doch dich selbst) as the title for her essay, quoting the intentionally grammatically incorrect title of a notebook by a German artist who spent several years in a psychiatric institution in South Germany. She tries to demonstrate the potential of using clinical records as sources for patient-oriented disability history. She does not limit this approach to records of institutions for people with disabilities, but instead tries to apply disability as a distinct category to analyze clinical and other records. She concisely narrates crucial steps in the life of a young man labeled deaf-dumb in 1928 and killed by Nazi eugenicists in 1941. In a second example, she retraces classifications of people with physical and cognitive disabilities in the Oskar-Helene-Heim, one of the largest and most important institutions for young people with physical disabilities in Weimar Germany. In her last example, the author makes use of the criminal record of a man with a physical disability who was incarcerated and executed in Nazi Germany. She comes to the conclusion that a huge variety of records offer possibilities for visualizing the subjectivity of people with disabilities–even in places and institutions where subjectivity is usually thought to have been largely eliminated. Furthermore, the records can be used to write a social and cultural history of disability which takes into account the views of people with disabilities themselves.

Chapter 3, âInstitutions and Politics,â begins with Gabriele Lingelbachâs essay âConstructions of âDisabilityâ in Public Relations and Donation-Advertising of Aktion Sorgenkind since 1964.â Aktion Sorgenkind is a well-known German welfare organization that collects and distributes money for people with disabilities. It came into being during the 1960s after large numbers of children had been affected by the side effects of their mothersâ thalidomide medication. Lingelbach points out how Aktion Sorgenkind portrayed the life of people, especially children, with disabilities in order to collect as much money as possible via donations and the distribution of lottery tickets. She retraces formations and reformations due to criticism offered by the disability movement and others. While the organization has been criticized a lot, Lingelbach also demands acknowledgement of the positive transformations it has undergone during the last decades.

âIntegration by Employment: Disability Policy and the Evolution of the Swiss Welfare State 1900-1960â by Urs Germann asks how physical difference became a topic of social welfare and how it was thus being constructed as a social phenomenon. Until the 1950s it was only the individual Swiss federal states (*Kantone*) that provided welfare for people with physical disabilities. A uniform, state-wide system had yet to be put into place following legislation passed in 1959, which defined disability largely as the inability to work. Germann points out that this superficially simplified the lives of people with disabilities, linked their social identity to the ability to work, and defined the ability to work as part of human normalcy. The author retraces how this was designed to benefit both the individual, by offering independence and self-reliance, and society as a whole by relieving it of financial burdens. As a good example of disability history, Germann's text refrains from writing a linear (success) story, but offers an alternative interpretation which makes use of a much broader view: that the late 1950s welfare policy was in large part a result of full employment and increasing individualization.

Wilfried Rudloffâs âThe End of Institutions?â discusses ideas of (de-)institutionalization in the history of German welfare policy. While at the end of World War Two most people with disabilities in Germany were living in large institutions, todayâs paradigm dictates, at least in theory, inclusion in communities, independence, and individualization of living circumstances. He retraces how people with disabilities were placed in âtotal institutionsâ until the first changes took place in the 1960s. But it wasnât until the late 1970s, when psychiatric hospitals were also criticized, that large transformations were made.

Finally, Rudloff takes a look at possibilities for independence and altered power relations in more deinstitutionalized ways of living. He comes to the conclusion that the question of appropriate housing and living is one of the many representations of culturally and historically contingent interpretations and constructions of disability

itself. While once the total institution seemed perfectly normal, it has become an anachronistic abnormality in todayâs discourses.

The final chapter, âBody, Art and Culture,â begins with âA History of Disabled Sports: The Example of National Socialismâ by Bernd Wedemeyer-Kolwe, who takes a look at an often disregarded chapter of German disabled sports. He wants to investigate how integration and marginalization, healing, and annihilation of people with disabilities were interrelated in Nazi Germany. Before 1933, children with physical disabilities were offered several sports in which to engage, and World War One veterans organized sports groups among themselves. At that time, disability theory demanded such activities in order to promote and ensure the individualâs physical fitness and thus his employability. After the Nazis seized power in 1933, the purity and supremacy of the âAryanâ race had to be fostered by improving the fitness of every single individual. This included people with disabilities, especially when they were needed as both workers and soldiers during the years of war. Physical exercise was thought to allow the individual to overcome his disability and become a ânormalâ member of society. Wedemeyer-Kolwe concludes that this chapter in the history of disabled sports shows how people with disabilities were tolerated and more readily accepted in Nazi Germany if they could be of use to the economy and culture, but also how they were at the very same time inevitably devalued to the extent of being excluded, and murdered, if they failed or were unable to fulfill these criteria.

âThe Playmate of the Infantaâ by Maaike van Rijn inquires into the roles and functions assigned to little people in the visual arts. She wants to illustrate that, while they have always been present in paintings, they have only recently been included in the category of people with disabilities. She focuses on tasks and functions of little people depicted and asks how their portrayals were used as complex symbols within discourse. She analyzes and interprets several paintings, spanning from the fifteenth century to contemporary art. In the end, she asks for more research to be undertaken on the subject to elucidate how visual arts participate in the social construction of disability. Furthermore, she regards paintings as a possibility for investigating the history of physical differences that are today categorized as disabilities.

In the last essay of the book, Claudia Gottwald asks: âIs Disability Comic?â She wants to grasp when and why people came to laugh about embodied differences like disabilities. After inquiring into notions of the âcomicâ she retraces bodies that inspired laughter in their times. While dwarfs at medieval courts and early modern literature allowed people to laugh about people with physical differences, this became taboo in eighteenth-century Europe. Laughter was being replaced by pity. This notion persisted until the mid- or late twentieth century, when people with disabilities refused to be pitied anymore and at the same time encouraged people to laugh at their own jokes about disability. With people with disabilities taking the lead in allowing people to laugh, the power relations obviously shifted. They became the ones who determined whether laughing was acceptable or not. While laughter was a means of excluding and marginalizing certain people some centuries ago, people with disabilities nowadays make use of laughter in order to promote their inclusion into society.

All in all, this book is exactly what it says on the cover: an introduction. It not only offers three essays that efficiently introduce the reader to the basics of disability history, but also enlivens the picture with examples that dig deeper into specific chapters of history. Thus, the reader is provided with texts allowing him to explore the fundamental principles of this field of study. But he is also able to get both a broad and a realistic view of how disability history research is conducted, which approaches might be useful, and what outcomes can be expected.

For the German audience, this is also an interesting introduction to the main aspects of disability studies in general. The three example chapters also offer insight into what kinds of topics research in contemporary disability issues can target. What is missing is an example of disability history extensively applying Foucauldian theories and methodologies. With all three introductory articles full of both explicit and implicit references to the possibilities such an approach would have to offer, it would seem important to include a corresponding example. But given the introductory character of the book, it is likely to stimulate the readerâs interest. And the interested reader will then find a huge collection of various approaches to disability history, including ones applying Foucault, already published in English. As a first read, this book is definitely a good choice for readers to become acquainted with the subject before starting their own research.

Note

[1]. See `http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/forum/2009-07-001.`

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