

In collaborazione con:



Call for Paper

MEMORIES OF DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION IN ITALY

ORAL TESTIMONY, SUBJECTIVITY AND PUBLIC NARRATIVES OF LIBERATION FROM THE ASYLUM (FROM THE 1960S TO THE PRESENT DAY)

International seminar

Turin, 10-11 October 2024

CFP deadline: 15 April 2024

For a long time, psychiatric hospitals were enclosed places, not only for people that were hospitalised but also in the public's perception. In Italy, mainly from the late 1960s, public imagination began to change, thanks to the actions of the anti-institutional movement and reformist psychiatrists, together with the "voices" that started to cross the material and immaterial walls of psychiatric hospitals. The words of the inmates, women and men whose "subjectivity was finally restored", began to spread and be heard, along with those who criticized the "total institution" and worked to revolutionize cultures of mental illness while altering practices of care. At different times, such testimonies produced various memories of liberation from within the asylum—individual and collective memories shaped by specific groups, dependent on personal and professional experience and political involvement. All these were cultivated by specific communities of remembrance, conditioned by gender identities, tied to specific places, disseminated through particular devices, channels, and communication tools—which in turn influenced the formation of collective narratives and public memories.

The conference focuses on the memories and narratives around practices of deinstitutionalization in Italy and it aims to discuss forms and times through which individual stories and personal testimonies of the asylum, and its overcoming, have been collected and used from the 1960s to date. The "voices" – recorded, transcribed, and disseminated before, during, and after the closure of psychiatric hospitals – belong to patients, medical staff, social workers, administrators, members of associations and cooperatives, journalists, writers, directors, artists, political activists, architects, and designers. They have been called upon to discuss the transformation of spaces

and, later on, their repurposing. To these are added the voices of those, who, for many reasons and from different perspectives, had lived, in whole or part, through the long history of Italian deinstitutionalization..

These “voices” differ greatly, also in terms of origin, genre, and purpose. Among them, for example, we find audio or video-recorded interviews of witnesses, those used in investigations, television broadcasts, documentaries, newspaper interviews and more recently, online ones. There are also memoirs, audio and audiovisual recordings, full or partial transcripts of speeches on public events or work meetings (such as chronicles or reports of meetings, assemblies, demonstrations, political groups in the press, archives, etc.). Finally, they could also be transcripts of personal encounters (which may be documented in journalistic chronicles or in some whistleblowing publications), testimonies in legal processes, revised sources of novels, memoirs, biographies, and autobiographies, footage used in exhibitions or museum installations or catalogued in archives, clinical interviews, social work documentation, unreleased footage for audiovisual productions, etc.

All these “voices” lead studies towards a biographical and autobiographical perspective, highlighting the subjectivities involved in personal experiences and the process of overcoming the “total institution”. Above all, they compose of a diverse repertoire of orality, at the basis of the formation processes of individual, collective, and public memories of the asylum and deinstitutionalization, which remains to be investigated.

The conference aims to survey the forms of use of the witnesses’ “voices” in the narrative of deinstitutionalization, with the aim to reconstruct when and how they have been collected and used, to understand why they managed to go beyond the walls of psychiatric hospitals and to overcome stigma, to interpret to what extent they contributed to redefining the inside-outside relationship (between asylum and society) and, finally, to analyse the mechanisms through which they have become memories. Overall, the purpose of the seminar is to reflect on the nature of the public memory of deinstitutionalization and to study, by comparison, the genesis and morphologies of individual and collective memories. Moreover, it seeks to highlight gender, geographical, and chronological connotations, as well as examining their circulation (both in Italy and abroad), reception, and forms of intergenerational transmission.

As a mere example, contributions may include:

- Individual and collective memories of deinstitutionalization.
- Processes involved in the formation of public memories, their characteristics, and various perspectives.
- Memories of supporters, critics and detractors of psychiatric reform or its implementation.
- The relationship between gender and memories.
- Contexts of testimonial production and individual communities of remembrance.
- Relationships between memories and local cases.
- The circulation and reception of memories of Italian deinstitutionalization abroad and a comparison with memories from other international experiences.
- Campaigns for collecting interviews and oral history research.
- Investigative journalism
- Thoughts, memories and debates on psychiatry and architecture (recorded tapes, minutes and transcripts in magazines of discussions with architects; interviews on the topic recorded or published; testimonies of architects who designed the spaces of post-asylum psychiatry, etc.).
- Transcriptions of public meetings, assemblies, and gatherings.
- The use of asylum testimonies in political groups and collectives.
- Reflections and debates on health and mental health within feminist groups (e.g., transcriptions in magazines, pamphlets, minutes, etc.).
- The interaction between the production of imaginary, public narratives, public history and memories.
- The public use of testimonies (in museums, literature, cinema, public history projects, etc.).

- Public and private archives.
- The relationship between memories, subjectivity and places.
- The relationship between memories and the transformation of spaces.

Papers from scholars in various disciplinary fields are warmly welcome. Please submit a title, an abstract (maximum 2000 characters), and a brief CV of the author **by April 15, 2024**, to davide.tabor@unito.it, with the subject **“CFP Memories of Deinstitutionalization in Italy”**. The papers will be evaluated by the Scientific Committee, and the responses will be communicated by May 15, 2024. Some selected contributions, reviewed and revised as essays, will be published in a collective book.

The conference is part of the actions of the PRIN 2022 “Narration and care. The deinstitutionalization of the psychiatric system in Italy: history, imagery, projects (from 1961 to the present)”, organized by the Department of Letters, Languages, and Cultural Heritage at the University of Cagliari, the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Turin, and the Department of Civilization and Forms of Knowledge at the University of Pisa.

Scientific Committee

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