

Society/Environment/Biology

Colloquium of the Chair in Science and Technology Studies

Rejected Miracles: Reflections on a medical archive at the boundary between skepticism and the supernatural.

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University Library Veranstaltungssaal (1. OG), 16.00

P r o f . D r . A N N E H A R R I N G T O N

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This talk is about what must be the most unusual medical archive in the world. It is an archive of medical miracles – supernatural healings that don't just ask you to take the patients' word for it, but that have been extensively vetted by medical authorities. The archive is not in some distant, exotic part of the world. It is just a short train or plane ride away from Freiburg, at the Catholic pilgrimage site in southern France called Lourdes.

The view of the medical authorities who assess all the reported miracles is that supernatural healings are possible, but rare. Of the more than 7,000 reported miracles whose cases are documented in this archive, only 70 have been officially sanctioned. What, though, about the 6,930 others – all the “failed” miracles? We should not assume that a failed miracle is by definition an uninteresting miracle. On the contrary, in this talk I will argue that if we really want to understand the miracles of Lourdes -- really want to understand the specific kind of Catholic supernaturalism that still flourishes in the modern age -- then focusing on the “failed miracles” may have the most to teach us.

The lecture is free and open to the public.