DOI: 10.21248/ka-notizen.83.4

Situated Withnessing in/as Intervention: Co-Laborative, Ethnographic Long-Term Research with Social Psychiatry

Patrick Bieler

Abstract

As part of my research on the relations between mental health and urban environments in Berlin, Germany, I observed in and worked with a project that aims to improve living conditions for people with severe mental health problems facing an increasingly expensive and competitive housing market. Over the course of the project, I became an active member of the project rather than a 'mere' participant observer. This kind of engagement is based less on an ethical commitment to the research partners' moral and political goals than on generating situated empirical knowledge and concepts. Working with the project created situations of critical dialogue and confrontation from which analytical insights gradually emerged. This ultimately blurs the distinction between known and knowing subject(s), as well as those between observing, intervening and analyzing. Moreover, actively participating in this way serves as an ethnographic long-term intervention, which can produce novel research questions and methodological insights that may guide further research. The intervention's target is thus beyond locally observed problems. I will briefly illustrate this argument by discussing my contribution to the interdisciplinary field of urban mental health research.

Keywords: ethnographic analysis, co-laboration, withnessing, relational anthropology, urban mental health

Patrick Bieler, Institute of European Ethnology, Humboldt Universität, Berlin, Germany

Introduction

In 2018, I participated in a meeting between community mental health care workers, a representative of private landlords, and a member of parliament for the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Germany. The meeting was part of the Inclusion Project, a 5-year funded project on strategies for inclusive living for people with mental health problems, and was hosted by a national welfare organization. The Inclusion Project, which was one of the field sites for my doctoral research on the relations between mental health and urban environments, was a response to the increasing housing challenge faced by mental health care services. Due to rapidly increasing rents and a general lack of affordable housing in many German cities – as well as some rural areas – mental health care services have been confronted with the regular eviction of their clients, and have seen an increasing number of homeless people applying

for psychiatric assistance. As a result, the Inclusion Project's main aim was to establish alliances between mental health care services, representatives of housing corporations, private landlords, and political stakeholders.

During this particular meeting, one of the departmental heads from the welfare organization employed the phrase "hardware of inclusion" ("Hardware der Inklusion", fieldnotes, 20.03.2018), in order to emphasize the fact that the successful cohabitation of people with and without mental health problems was not only a question of available housing and social attitudes, but could also be fostered by particular material arrangements and objects. His suggestion did not provide concrete proposals, but served as a provocation: it challenged the arguments put forward by the employees of the community mental health care services, who had previously focused on reducing stereotypes and tackling the prejudices of landlords. In the departmental head's opinion, addressing the quantity of available housing, as well as people's individual attitudes, were not in themselves sufficient to ensure a decent standard of living arrangements for their clients. I agreed with him, and added that a report written by myself and the project manager supported his claims. When asked about problems and potential improvements regarding their living conditions in focus group interviews, mental health care clients had expressed wishes for basic decorative or practical objects, such as a bathtub or flower boxes, and asked for sound insulation to avoid conflict with neighbors. In addition, they had highlighted neighborhood arrangements such as green spaces, meeting areas, and public transport.

While this discussion had no immediate consequences in the meeting, it was of great significance for me as an ethnographer, because the departmental head had articulated limitations in his colleagues' approach, and by doing so had opened up the possibility of changing the Inclusion Project's course. Weeks later, in an attempt to unpack the analytical importance of the encounter, I recounted the conversation in a presentation to the Inclusion Project's team and the advisory board.[1] I thereby tried to provoke a discussion about the potential to establish future cooperation between social psychiatric services and private landlords by carefully designing neighborhood life (Imrie & Kullman 2017). To me, this seemed to be a chance to problematize two of the Inclusion Project's core ontological assumptions; firstly, that the integration of people with severe mental health problems into urban 'communities' is necessarily an issue of (tight-knit) 'social' relations between humans, and, secondly, that mental illness is an individual state within a person's body which creates a particular kind of behavior, separate from and independent of its environment. I hoped to initiate a joint reflection about the pitfalls of reproducing the dichotomy between 'the mentally ill' and 'the mentally sane', the structural antecedents that have constituted this reproduction, and the limitations that complicate more flexible provision of care under current housing market conditions. Moreover, I wanted to gain insight into the actors' knowledges of how the built environment affects people with mental health problems, and what – according to them – good cohabitation of people with and without the need for psychiatric assistance could look like.

[1] The project team consisted of members of community mental health care services in two German cities and two rural areas in Germany, mental health care clients, and a project manager (who was an employee of the welfare organization). Moreover, every six months an advisory board – comprising representatives of federal ministries, private landlords, the real estate industry, renters, and organizations for homeless people – met to evaluate the Inclusion Project's development and discuss further action.

In this paper, I use my involvement in the Inclusion Project as a vantage point for methodological reflection. I will depict how I gradually transformed from a participant observer of the Inclusion Project into a quasi-member, and demonstrate how I worked with the project while simultaneously trying to provoke discussions within it. After describing the Inclusion Project and my research process, I will discuss two interrelated implications: firstly, the blurring of distinctions between knowing and known subject(s) as well as the seemingly clear-cut spatial and temporal separation of observation (in fieldwork encounters), intervention (co-creating objects of analysis in and beyond fieldwork) and analysis (after fieldwork and away from the field). Working in and with (activist) interventions (such as the Inclusion Project) and feeding back observations and preliminary interpretative thoughts, I argue, serves as an ethnographic method: a means to learn from and with research partners through joint attempts to change problematic situations. Secondly, in this way, participating *in* an intervention functions *as* an intervention aiming at ethnographic knowledge production. Thus, an approach that sometimes sides with and sometimes criticizes research partners aims neither to intervene into the research partners' practices from an outside perspective nor to intervene on behalf of their interests, but rather to enhance ethnographic (as well as interdisciplinary) knowledge production by generating situated, distributed analyses from within fieldwork encounters. These can lead to situated concepts and be mobilized for methodological reconceptualization. This, I claim, is a long-term endeavor that targets the development of novel research questions and methodological approaches that can inform debates far beyond the problems of a local intervention. I will shortly illustrate this argument with an explication of my contribution to the interdisciplinary field of urban mental health research. Taken seriously, these methodological implications call for a broader problematization of ethnography as (usually) individual, short-term and project-based research.

Participation in the Inclusion Project

In my current research, I problematize the relation between urban life and mental health. My research is part of a long-term co-laborative research focus on psychiatric practices established at the Institute of European Ethnology (at HU Berlin). My initial research design was especially inspired by the concept of niching developed by Milena Bister, Martina Klausner and Jörg Niewöhner (2016). This concept enables an analysis of how people with mental health problems create bearable living conditions while navigating urban environments beyond their treatment in psychiatric institutions. While psychiatric institutions were the starting point and remained an important field site for Bister and colleagues, they also accompanied mental health care patients after their release from clinics. This enabled an analytical shift away from Foucauldian analyses of subjectivation through psychiatric classification and treatment – a common interpretive framework within the empirical study of psychiatric institutions. As their co-laborative partners in psychiatry were well aware of and familiar with this mode of critique, Bister and colleagues decided to confront them with "ethnographic material [which] demonstrates that much more goes on than can be captured solely by the vocabulary of control and resistance" (ibid.: 190). This confrontation could potentially create generative tensions between anthropological and social psychiatric thought styles.

Building on this co-laborative work in the field of psychiatry, I undertook extensive fieldwork with mental health care clients in the public realm (Lofland 1998). I started my research

with go-alongs (Kusenbach 2003).[2] However, I soon realized that the relations between mental health and urban environments cannot be fully understood through a sole focus on situated immersions in socio-material surroundings, because the daily routines of clients are shaped in large part by (emplaced) care infrastructures (Söderström et al. 2017) and broader social and political dynamics (Rose 2019). In order to capture this, I expanded my initial research focus by conducting participant observation and interviews in various branches of the community mental health care system of a local district in Berlin (community mental health care services, the social welfare office).

Particularly, I became interested in the topic of housing – which is simultaneously a necessary but scarce precondition of community mental health care provision and a highly influential factor determining clients' everyday exposures to urban life (Lancione & McFarlane 2016: 49). Hence, housing is entangled with and a vital element of clients' recovery processes. When I began my research, the lack of affordable housing in Berlin (Holm 2016) in conjunction with rapidly rising rental costs triggered gentrification processes in inner-city neighborhoods (Frank 2017; Lees 2008; Schulz 2017), which posed major problems for the psychiatric care system (Bieler & Klausner 2019b): mental health care clients were threatened by (potential) eviction from their homes, while the population of homeless people applying for mental health care services dramatically increased. This not only had an impact on the affected people themselves, but also posed problems for the mental health care services that provide apartments for their clients. On the one hand, the service providers were afraid of rental contract cancellations and their clients losing apartments, while on the other, their housing resources and work capacities were too limited to effectively deal with the situation.

In various sites in Berlin, mental health care service providers and public administration employees began to publicly lament and criticize these problems and started forming networks for political action. When I started my research at the end of 2015, I encountered the Inclusion Project, which had already been running for about a year at that time. This project explicitly addressed the aforementioned problems and translated them into public issues (Marres 2007) by fostering alliances with housing companies and political stakeholders – an attempt which has so far been unique in Germany (according to the project's self-description). These alliance building practices became a strategy to pursue the overall goal of the project: enhancing dwelling opportunities for people with severe mental health problems. However, the alliance building practices did not always have a clear and straightforward trajectory, since they entailed an inquiry into housing market actors' wishes, needs and practices.[3] Rather than simply demanding rights and resources, project participants assessed the problems and needs of mental health care clients, community mental health care services, and housing companies, and tried to establish possibilities for alliance building between housing companies and social policy stakeholders.

Before beginning my research, the manager of the Inclusion Project and I had agreed that I would be able to observe the regular meetings of the advisory board, as well as the meetings

[2] Go-alongs are a mobile research method somewhere between participant observation and (narrative) interviews. Researchers follow their informants on their routes through urban environments (mostly walking together), observe the informant's embodied use of (public) places, and conduct conversations about perception, experiences, and memories. For a discussion of go-alongs as an iterative, long-term method see Bieler & Klausner 2019a.

[3] Moreover, these practices were continually debated within and beyond the project team, since there was often no consensus on solutions to the aforementioned problems.

of the local project team in Berlin. In return, she asked me to present my observations to the advisory board and team every now and then. Over the course of the research, my involvement in the Inclusion Project intensified. This began most noticeably when I started co-writing a report based on focus group interviews with mental health care clients. The interviews had been conducted by a private research institute for the project. My task was to analyze the interview material and, together with the project manager, deduce actionable recommendations from the results. From that point on, I found that I had access to otherwise confidential meetings with housing companies and political stakeholders. Even more importantly, my status within the Inclusion Project changed: I became a quasi-member of it. I accompanied the manager to various conferences, and we held joint presentations about the project results. I even stood in for her at one conference because she was unavailable. We discussed publications in specialized journals, as well as a leaflet informing actors across the housing market about potential cooperation with mental health care service providers. We co-wrote the final report of the Inclusion Project (including further policy recommendations), and I was involved in planning the project's closing conference.

Co-working, however, did not mean to "go 'native'" (O'Reilly 2009: 87). Although I took over the tasks of a regular team member at times, it was always clear to everyone that I was at the same time conducting research. Throughout my involvement in the project, I actively emphasized the differences between the Inclusion Project members' thought styles and my own ethnographic way of thinking. In my regular presentations, I not only informed the advisory board and project team of my observations, but also tried to involve them in ongoing discussions regarding both the potential and the limitations of their mutual cooperation. This distinction was formally indicated by the titles of my presentations, such as "Discussing the outside perspective of an anthropologist", or "Preliminary ethnographic conclusions of the project results". Finally, I was able to present my "social scientific view on the project" in the concluding conference, as well as in the final report. In addition, co-writing the two reports that featured recommendations for action, co-presenting the results at conferences, and co-designing the final conference for the Inclusion Project itself allowed for even more direct forms of dialogue. Overall, I was directly confronted with the ways in which the project team dealt with, legitimized, and problematized practical obligations and pressures, while I was simultaneously able to confront the project team with (often) divergent, ethnographically informed readings of the situation and to construe complementing or alternative conclusions.

Preparing presentations to the advisory board and project team, as well as co-working with the project manager, were important, tentative, analytical steps carried out during the ethnographic fieldwork process. These presentations also offered a chance to mobilize my ethnographic knowledge in ongoing interventions: they were my attempt to contribute to the Inclusion Project's overall aim of improving the living conditions of people with mental health problems by both questioning its rationalities and trying to provide perspectives that had not been considered relevant thus far. Specific analytical topics gradually crystallized as I prepared my ethnographic reading of observations in order to provoke discussion or to argue in co-working situations, even though the empirical material had not been fully processed.

Our recurring discussions did not only impact the Inclusion Project's work and conclusions, but also shaped my own analytical work. Taking up the discussion on the "hardware of inclusion" that I introduced in the beginning of this article, for instance, allowed two different things at once. Firstly, I could convince the project manager to include a section on the

necessity of planning and developing urban neighborhoods in the final report for the welfare organization. Importantly, this implied a shift from a focus on social relations between humans to the design of socio-material arrangements – introducing atmospheres and infrastructures as topics of community mental health care, aspects that have so far been marginal if not completely absent from mental health care. Secondly, the particular fieldwork situation itself, and my subsequent attempts to reflect upon it, were of analytical and conceptual importance. These prompted me to question the nature of social relations in neighborhoods in two ways: on the one hand it became clear that neighborhood sociality is not to be equated with dense (and generally harmonious) social networks (as the notion of community suggests), and on the other hand I needed to work with a concept that could account for more-than-human sociality when analyzing the relation between urban life (and particularly neighborhood cohabitation) and mental health. Consequently, my involvement in the project had a strong impact on elaborating and sharpening my main analytical concept: the (urban) encounter.

In the remaining pages of this article, I will reflect upon my approach with regard to the relations between ethnographer and research partners, as well as those between observing, analyzing and intervening. I argue that participating in an intervention such as the Inclusion Project is not an end to ethnography, but a means to jointly generate situated and distributed knowledge. This, I claim, is itself an ethnographic intervention that aims at the production of novel insights and analytical as well as methodological enhancements. Subsequently, I illustrate the argument by explaining how far the concept of encounter(ing) contributes to interdisciplinary debates on urban mental health research.

Blurring the Distinctions between Observing, Intervening, and Analyzing

In cultural and social anthropology, participant observation is *the* core method of research (Spradley 1980; Breidenstein et al. 2013). Based on active participation within a research field, ethnographic knowledge production is necessarily an interactive endeavor, produced in and through encounters with interlocutors (Lindner 1981; Boyer 2014). Specific in my case was that I supported my interlocutors in their attempts to overcome a problematic and complex situation. I joined them in actively intervening into mental health care design and urban politics, trying to change conditions for the better. This is a somewhat common procedure in forms of participatory research (Bergold & Thomas 2012) or militant anthropology (Scheper-Hughes 1995), in which acting ethically on behalf of the interests of interlocutors and building alliances with activists guides the ethnographic endeavor. However, while in these modes of knowledge production intervening into the world (by targeting injustices) and formulating political claims serves as the "primary rationale for research" (Marcus 2018: xiii), I understand my engagement first and foremost as an analytical method: "a simultaneous attention to the engagement of actors and practices […] *and* to reflexive learning from those actors and practices" (Downey & Zuiderent-Jerak 2017: 225).

My participation in the Inclusion Project's intervention – understood as the production of new realities in messy, non-linear and surely non-homogeneous attempts to achieve transformation (in this case through forging alliances with housing market actors) – was not a strategically planned objective of my research, but rather a methodological opportunity I grasped when it appeared. In this case, participating in an ongoing intervention was a means

to enhance ethnographic knowledge production (Binder 2018): I *collaborated* with my research partners. Compared to 'conventional' participant observation or modes of ethical knowledge production, collaboration implies shifting from a relatively hierarchical to a more symmetrical relationship: the research subjects are taken not only as knowledgeable key informants but also as epistemic partners whose potential to reflect on the conditions of their own practices is of analytical value (Sánchez Criado & Estalella 2018). Participating in such an intervention, then, is not necessarily motivated by an ethical commitment to the research subjects, and it is not dependent on agreement with their political agenda.[4]

Highlighting the special epistemic potential for ethnographic knowledge production, George Marcus and colleagues (e.g., Holmes & Marcus 2005) have offered the metaphorical para-site as a methodological concept, which describes "a bounded space of orchestrated interaction that is both within the activities of a particular fieldwork project and markedly outside or alongside it" (Deeb & Marcus 2011: 52). In this context, the research partners are "open to risking interpretations together with the researcher about ideas fundamental to the political organization of their institutional contexts and functions" (ibid.). With the label co-laboration – which both relates to Marcus and colleagues' methodological claim and draws from a critique of integrative modes of interdisciplinary research (Barry & Born 2013) – Jörg Niewöhner (2016) has proposed to pay particular analytical attention to the clashes between thought styles, actively embracing, and potentially even creating them, within and beyond fieldwork.

Co-laboration is not a completely distinctive genre of ethnographic knowledge production. It requires the collection of empirical material through 'classic' ethnographic techniques, such as participant observation or interviewing, and it operates via the epistemic differences between ethnographer and interlocutors. However, these differences are not taken into account as empirical material that can be interpreted "after the fact" (Knecht 2012: 264) from spatially and temporally safe distances. Rather, analytical insights and epistemic differences emerge from engaging with and involving oneself in the practices of interlocutors, not by withdrawing from the field and using concepts to alienate oneself from these experiences (e.g. Amann & Hirschauer 1997).

I pursued this goal by working together with the members of the Inclusion Project, in particular by co-writing reports and elucidating policy recommendations. While this meant temporarily co-working with my research partners from time to time, I also offered my own observations to the members of the Inclusion Project, and confronted them with critical questions based on my ethnographic perspective. Rather than being a seamless fit between ethnographer and epistemic partners, then, my co-laboration in the Inclusion Project was characterized by "tentative situations in which anthropologists […] are drawn into intense interventions in the field, at times working smoothly with counterparts, at other times clashing with them" (Sánchez Criado & Estalella 2018: 10). In this way, I performatively co-constituted objects and situations that had an impact on the practices of the Inclusion Project: I "*participated* in the production of the very things I was studying" (Marrero-Guillamón 2018:

[4] Liburkina (this issue) rightfully observes that my way of conducting research in and with the Inclusion Project was simplified by (and maybe even dependent on) a minimum of shared understandings of specific (political) problems and injustices and, more broadly, a commitment to scientific practice by my research partners. In her article she shows very well why and how collaboration (and especially co-laboration) could and should also be possible with opposing actors. My argument on withnessing as intervention is convergent with her claim that the target of ethnographic interventions is not limited to the dyadic relations with individual research partners.

183, emphasized by the author). By "empirically unpacking" (Zuiderent-Jerak 2016: 75) this process, my involvement became part of my ongoing, gradual analysis (Bieler et al. 2021b). Elsewhere, colleagues and I have discussed such a mode of co-laboration as decentering the subject of ethnographic knowledge production: rather than the act of an isolated individual interpreting observations (the ethnographer), the practice of reflecting observations and developing analytical ideas is distributed among a network of actors (Bieler et al. 2021a). In accordance with insights from practice theory and material-semiotics, we highlight that interpretation and reflection are situated and distributed processes rather than unique (mental) capacities of the modern scholar. Here, I wish to emphasize the temporal dimension of this problematization: co-laboration questions the seemingly clear-cut separation of observation and analysis; not only is the division between the knowing and informing subject blurred, but the linear succession of and spatial separation between observation and interpretation is suspended (Corsín Jiménez 2003).[5] As a result, the distinction between acting on the world (intervention) and knowing it (analysis) is transcended as well (Zuiderent-Jerak 2015). The active engagement in, with, and in contrast to the field generates an ethnographic analysis in an iterative way, while simultaneously shifting the intervention practices that the ethnographer is part of. Following Estrid Sørensen (2009: 134), co-laboration in intervention introduces a shift from witnessing to situated *with*nessing – "participat[ing] carefully in the sociomaterial knowledge and contribut[ing] to its continuous gradual mutation".

Crucial to Sørensen's argument is that situated withnessing is not limited to the immediate, embodied presence of the ethnographer in fieldwork situations. Supporting and changing ongoing interventions to solve problems is neither the final aim nor end point of engagement but an important step in developing concepts that are neither too close nor too distant from situated problematizations. Thus, participating *in* the Inclusion Project's intervention also functioned *as* intervention into ethnographic and interdisciplinary knowledge production aiming at "the production of new […] knowledge and […] the production of new normativity" (Zuiderent-Jerak 2016: 76).

Hence, by siding with my research partners, I was interested less in solving their problems than I was in contributing to the transformation of ethnographic knowledge production by developing concepts as well as discussing methodological implications for further research. With concepts and methodological enhancements that I partially derive from my fieldwork with the Inclusion Project, I am able to relate to ongoing ethnographic and interdisciplinary knowledge production on the topic of urban mental health. Thus, the ethnographic intervention that I pursue is a long-term endeavor that draws on and enhances what Stefan Beck (2008) has called a relational anthropology:

> "a new kind of research pragmatics, systematically designed for interdisciplinary cooperation, which organizes and makes fruitful relationships between different knowledge systems, thought styles and modes of research" (ibid.: 198; own translation).

[5] I have written of co-working when describing the actual instances of joint work on the project (writing reports, giving presentations for the project etc.). Collaboration, or co-laboration, is a methodological abstraction that I use to describe the full process of my engagement, including reflection upon the relations between ethnographer and informants/epistemic partners as well as those between observation, intervention, and analysis. As I will continue to argue, co-laboration also extends beyond the immediate fieldsites and aims to intervene into different (scientific) discourses.

Co-laborative Anthropology of Urban Mental Health: a Long-Term Intervention

So far, I have described the process of my involvement with the Inclusion Project, which gradually developed into a form of co-laboration blurring two conventional separations of ethnographic research: the split between knowing and known subjects (that is, between the ethnographer and informants) as well as the spatial and temporal distinction between participating (including observing *and* making) and analyzing. As I have demonstrated, this resulted in the inclusion of certain ethnographic findings in the publications and recommendations of the Inclusion Project, while simultaneously altering my own analytical understanding.

One crucial concept I was able to develop through my withnessing in the Inclusion Project was the above-mentioned concept of encounter(ing), which facilitates attendance to the specific relations between urban life (and particularly neighborhood cohabitation) and mental health, highlighting more-than-human socialities. With my conceptual discussion of encounter(ing) I relate to wider debates on the entanglement of mental health and urban environments – a research question that has only recently been rediscovered in psychiatric and ethnographic work (Manning 2019; Amin & Richaud 2020; Winz & Söderström 2020). Most researchers in both domains argue for the necessity of inter- and transdisciplinary modes of knowledge production. While in psychiatry this is usually conceptualized as an integrative interdisciplinary mode aiming for generalizable findings (e.g. Lederbogen et al. 2013), ethnographers argue for the necessity of ontological problematization of the relationships between mental health and the urban in co-laborative endeavors, in order to thicken research designs (Fitzgerald et al. 2016; Söderström 2019; Rose et al. 2021).

Through my engagement with the Inclusion Project, I was able to identify, develop, and enhance encountering as an ecological concept that introduces different avenues for urban mental health research. Using encounter as an analytical heuristic, I have started to problematize the conceptual identification of neighborhood with the notion of community and tight-knit social relations in mental health care (Pols 2016) and psychiatric research. Following discussions with project partners in the field, I started to relate and translate anthropological (Faier & Rofel 2014), geographical (Wilson 2017) and sociological (Blokland 2017) debates into an ecological concept of encountering (Bieler 2021). The notion of encounter allows us not only to address the importance of weak or absent social ties (Small 2009, 2017; Felder 2020), but also to analyze the mutual co-constitution of humans and urban environments, highlighting how emergent environments are at once embodied and effected by these embodiments. Such a heuristic pays particular attention to material elements as active forces within an encounter, and through this interrogation the distinction between 'the social' and 'the biological' is transcended. Moreover, such a focus pushes for a radical reconceptualization of mental health: no longer conceptualizing it as a uniquely human and intersubjective matter, but instead problematizing the overlaps and entanglements of human and more-than-human life (Ingold 2014).

Taking part in the Inclusion Project's intervention has also revealed an important methodological lesson that should be taken into account in ethnographic and interdisciplinary research: namely, that reflections on the practical limits and obligations of mental health care practitioners have typically been neglected in studies of the relations between mental health and urban environments. Inquiring into situated interventions which deal with and target the conditions of mental health care practices, and encountering these actors as complexly

constrained epistemic partners, is a means of jointly producing analytical work that is uniquely sensitive to their working conditions. Local actors such as the staff of mental health care services and welfare organizations are knowledgeable regarding the everyday lives of people with mental health problems and the diverse features of neighborhood cohabitation. Moreover, they actively shape, design, and try to transform the relations between mental health and urban environments. Engaging with these actors and interventions creates a valuable site for situated ethnographic concept development, and is, I argue, a necessary component of situated research on the relations between mental health and urban environments.[6]

To conclude, I have argued that evolving situated concepts as part of withnessing enables contribution to a local intervention, while itself being an intervention into dominant modes of ethnographic and interdisciplinary knowledge production. It is thereby first and foremost a long-term endeavor. This shift of temporal scale allows researchers and practitioners to think beyond the narrow spatial and temporal contexts of one intervention in a single project. Surely, my participation in the local intervention of the Inclusion Project has contributed to its results and shifted its emphases, if only slightly. Whether or not any of the emergent concerns – especially those raised by my contributions – will be taken up by local actors and influence any particular course of action remains difficult if not impossible to know. However, the success or failure of my intervention does not depend on these outcomes. Rather, what is meaningful is whether the concept of encountering is able to "animate anthropological debate within as well as flourishing on its outside" (Strathern 2014: 34), "shift[ing] the axis of analysis" (ibid.: 30) of urban mental health research.

Finally, I do not wish to claim that withnessing is a primary task for ethnography, or a more adequate way of conducting it. Rather, it is a specific mode that, I argue, is a productive means of highlighting the relevance of ethnography and sharpening its critical contribution within controversial debates in the face of pressing global concerns (Latour 2004). While my approach certainly does not imply a comment on or evaluation of individual research projects or short-term research endeavors, it necessitates a reflection on the use, implementation and infrastructural conditions of long-term ethnography in teams and beyond disciplinary boundaries. It is at least doubtful that my engagement with the Inclusion Project would have been as productive without prior research by committed colleagues and a shift away from exclusively Foucauldian analytical registers. Moreover, my own contribution is not intended as a direct critique of (or attempt to impact upon) mental health care practice or research; rather, its value lies in its relation to other inquiries. How ethnographers and their inter- and transdisciplinary epistemic partners might be involved in long-term dialogue has recently been discussed and (prominently) implemented in social and cultural anthropology (Choy et al. 2009; Fortun et al. 2014). A relational anthropological take on urban mental health that co-laboratively withnesses mental health care practice and administration, I claim, is about to gain momentum and provide meaningful conceptual and methodological insights for the discipline.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the members of the Inclusion Project – and especially its two project managers – for allowing me to carry out participant observation and making joint work possible. In addition, this article benefitted greatly from close reading and commenting by the editors of

[6] These conceptual and methodological implications necessarily remain brief. For a more thorough discussion, please consider Bieler 2021.

this volume, especially Kathrin Eitel and Martina Klausner, as well as language editing by Lauren Cubellis and Sam Wiseman. Moreover, I received valuable feedback from the participants of the lecture series of the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology at Goethe University Frankfurt, where I presented a first draft of this article in January 2020. The overall argument is inspired by years of joint work in the Laboratory: Anthropology of Environment | Human Relations at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

References

Amann, Klaus & Stefan Hirschauer (1997): Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur: Ein Programm. In: Stefan Hirschauer & Klaus Amann (eds.), Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur: Zur ethnographischen Herausforderung soziologischer Empirie. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 7–52.

Amin, Ash & Lisa Richaud (2020): Stress and the ecology of urban experience: Migrant mental lives in central Shanghai. In: Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 45/4, 862–876.

Barry, Andrew & Georgina Born (2013): Interdisciplinarity: Reconfigurations of the Social and Natural Sciences. In: Andrew Barry & Georgina Born (eds.), Interdisciplinarity: Reconfigurations of the Social and Natural Sciences. London, New York: Routledge, 1–56.

Beck, Stefan (2008): Natur | Kultur: Überlegungen zu einer relationalen Anthropologie. In: Zeitschrift für Volkskunde 104/2, 161–199.

Bergold, Jarg & Stefan Thomas (2012): Participatory Research Methods: A Methodological Approach in Motion. In: Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung 13/1. https://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1801/3334 [Letzter Zugriff: 13.04.2021]

Bieler, Patrick (2021): BioÖkologien des Begegnens: Eine ethnografische Untersuchung der relationalen Konstitution psychischer Gesundheit und urbaner Umwelten. Unveröffentlichte Dissertation, Berlin.

Bieler, Patrick, Milena D. Bister, Janine Hauer, Martina Klausner, Jörg Niewöhner, Christine Schmid & Sebastian von Peter (2021a): Distributing Reflexivity through Co-laborative Ethnography. In: Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 50/1, 77–98.

Bieler, Patrick, Milena D. Bister & Christine Schmid (2021b): Formate des Ko-laborierens: Geteilte epistemische Arbeit als katalytische Praxis. In: Berliner Blätter 83, 87–105.

Bieler, Patrick & Martina Klausner (2019a): Eine ethnografische Methode zur Erforschung des Zusammenspiels von psychischen Beeinträchtigungen und städtischer Umwelt: Iterative Go-alongs. In: Silvia Krumm, Reinhold Kilian & Heiko Löwenstein (eds.), Qualitative Studien in der sozialpsychiatrischen Forschung. Hintergrund, Perspektiven und Praxisbeispiele. Köln: Psychiatrie Verlag, 173–183.

Bieler, Patrick & Martina Klausner (2019b): Niching in Cities under Pressure. Tracing the Reconfiguration of Community Psychiatric Care and the Housing Market in Berlin. In: Geoforum 101, 202–211.

Binder, Beate (2018): Rechtsmobilisierung. Zur Produktivität der Rechtsanthropologie für eine Kulturanthropologie des Politischen. In: Johanna Rolshoven & Ingo Schneider (eds.), Dimensionen des Politischen. Ansprüche und Herausforderungen der Empirischen Kulturwissenschaft. Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 51–61.

Bister, Milena D., Martina Klausner & Jörg Niewöhner (2016): The Cosmopolitics of 'Niching'. Rendering the City Habitable along Infrastructures of Mental Health Care. In: Anders Blok

& Ignacio Farías (eds.), Urban Cosmopolitics: Agencements, Assemblies, Atmospheres. London, New York: Routledge, 187–205.

Blokland, Talja (2017): Community as Urban Practice. Cambridge, Malden: polity.

Boyer, Dominic (2014): Reflexivity Reloaded: From Anthropology of Intellectuals to Critique of Method to Studying Sideways. In: Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Christina Garsten & Shalini Randeria (eds.), Anthropology Now and Next. Essays in Honor of Ulf Hannerz. New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 91–110.

Breidenstein, Georg, Stefan Hirschauer, Herbert Kalthoff & Boris Nieswand (2013): Ethnografie: Die Praxis der Feldforschung. Konstanz, München: utb.

Choy, Timothy K., Lieba Faier, Michael J. Hathaway, Miyako Inoue, Shiho Satsuka, Anna Tsing (2009): A New Form of Collaboration in Cultural Anthropology: Matsutake worlds. In: American Ethnologist 36/2, 380–403.

Corsín Jiménez, Alberto (2003): Teaching the Field: the Order, Ordering, and Scale of Knowledge. In: Anthropology Matters 5/1, 1–10.

Criado, Tomás Sánchez & Adolfo Estalella (2018): Introduction. Experimental Collaborations. In: Adolfo Estalella & Tomás Sánchez Criado (eds.), Experimental Collaborations. Ethnography through Fieldwork Devices. New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 1–30.

Deeb, Hadi Nicholas & George E. Marcus (2011): In the Green Room: An Experiment in Ethnographic Method at the WTO. In: PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review 34/1, 51–76.

Downey, Gary Lee & Teun Zuiderent-Jerak (2017): Making and Doing: Engagement and Reflexive Learning in STS. In: Ulrike Felt, Rayvon Fouché, Clark A. Miller & Laurel Smith-Doerr (eds.), The Handbook of Science and Technology Studies (Fourth Edition). Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 223–251.

Faier, Lieba & Lisa Rofel (2014): Ethnographies of Encounter. In: Annual Review of Anthropology 43/1, 363–377.

Felder, Maxime (2020): Strong, Weak and Invisible Ties: A Relational Perspective on Urban Coexistence. In: Sociology 54/4, 675–692.

Fitzgerald, Des, Nikolas Rose & Ilina Singh (2016): Revitalizing Sociology: Urban Life and Mental Illness between History and the Present. In: The British Journal of Sociology 67/1, 138–160.

Fortun, Kim, Mike Fortun, Erik Bigras, Saheb Tahereh et al. (2014): Experimental Ethnography Online. In: Cultural Studies 28/4, 632–642.

Frank, Susanne (2017): Gentrifizierung und neue Mittelschichten: Drei Phasen eines wechselhaften Verhältnisses. In: Barbara Schönig, Justin Kadi & Sebastian Schipper (eds.), Wohnraum für Alle!? Perspektiven auf Planung, Politik und Architektur. Bielefeld: transcript, 87–100.

Holm, Andrej (2016): Sozialer Wohnraumversorgungsbedarf in Berlin. Studie im Auftrag: DIE LINKE. Fraktion im Abgeordnetenhaus von Berlin. https://www.sowi.hu-berlin.de/de/lehrbereiche/stadtsoz/mitarbeiterinnen/copy_of_a-z/holm/bericht-wohnraumversorgungsbedarf-berlin-holm-2016.pdf. [Letzter Zugriff: 13.04.2021]

Holmes, Douglas R. & George E. Marcus (2005): Cultures of Expertise and the Management of Globalization: Toward the Re-Functioning of Ethnography. In: Aihwa Ong & Stephen J. Collier (eds.), Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems. Malden, Oxford: Blackwell, 235–252.

Imrie, Rob & Kim Kullman (2017): Designing with Care and Caring with Design. In: Charlotte Bates, Rob Imrie & Kim Kullman (eds.), Care and Design: Bodies, Buildings, Cities. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 1–17.

Ingold, Tim (2014): Designing Environments for Life. In: Kirsten Hastrup (ed.), Anthropology and Nature. London, New York: Routledge, 233–246.

Knecht, Michi (2012): Ethnographische Praxis im Feld der Wissenschafts-, Medizin- und Technikanthropologie. In: Stefan Beck, Jörg Niewöhner & Estrid Sørensen (eds.), Science and Technology Studies: Eine sozialanthropologische Einführung. Bielefeld: transcript, 245–274.

Kusenbach, Margarethe (2003): Street Phenomenology: The Go-Along as Ethnographic Research Tool. In: Ethnography 4/3, 455–485.

Lancione, Michele & Colin McFarlane (2016): Infrastructural Becoming. Sanitation, Cosmopolitics, and the (Un)Making of Urban Life at the Margins. In: Anders Blok & Ignacio Farías (eds.), Urban Cosmopolitics: Agencements, Assemblies, Atmospheres. London, New York: Routledge, 45–62.

Latour, Bruno (2004): Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern. In: Critical Inquiry 30/2, 225–248.

Latour, Bruno (2007): Turning Around Politics: A Note on Gerard de Vries' Paper. In: Social Studies of Science 37/5, 811–820.

Lederbogen, Florian, Leila Haddad & Andreas Meyer-Lindenberg (2013): Urban Social Stress – Risk Factor for Mental Disorders. The Case of Schizophrenia. In: Environmental Pollution 183, 2–6.

Lees, Loretta (2008): Gentrification and Social Mixing: Towards an Inclusive Urban Renaissance? In: Urban Studies 45/12, 2449–2470.

Liburkina, Ruzana (2021): Extraordinary Ethnographic Encounters in Extraordinary Times: A Plea for Experimental Interventions in More-than-Business Relations. In: Kathrin Eitel, Laura Otto, Martina Klausner, Gisela Welz (eds.), Interventions with/in Ethnography. Experiments, Collaborations, Epistemic Effects . Kulturanthropologie Notizen 83, 14–26. DOI: 10.21248/ka-notizen.83.2

Lindner, Rolf (1981): Die Angst des Forschers vor dem Feld: Überlegungen zur teilnehmenden Beobachtung als Interaktionsprozeß. In: Zeitschrift für Volkskunde 77/1, 51–66.

Lofland, Lyn H. (1998): The Public Realm. Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory. New York: De Gruyter.

Manning, Nick (2019): Sociology, Biology and Mechanisms in Urban Mental Health. In: Social Theory & Health 17/1, 1–22.

Marcus, George E. (2018): Foreword. Collaboration Mode 3: A Found Condition of Anthropological Field Research Today … and What Might Be Made of It. In: Adolfo Estalella & Tomás Sánchez Criado (eds.), Experimental Collaborations: Ethnography through Fieldwork Devices. New York, Oxford: Berghahn, xi–xvi.

Marrero-Guillamón, Isaac (2018): Making Fieldwork Public: Repurposing Ethnography as a Hosting Platform in Hackney Wick, London. In: Adolfo Estalella & Tomás Sánchez Criado (eds.), Experimental Collaborations: Ethnography through Fieldwork Devices. New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 179–200.

Marres, Noortje (2007): The Issues Deserve More Credit: Pragmatist Contributions to the Study of Public Involvement in Controversy. In: Social Studies of Science 37/5, 759–780.

Niewöhner, Jörg (2016): Co-laborative Anthropology: Crafting Reflexivities Experimentally. In: Jukka Jouhki & Tytti Steel (eds.), Ethnologinen tulkinta ja analyysi. Kohti avoimempaa tutkimusprosessia. Helsinki: Ethnos.

O'Reilly, Karen (2009): Going 'Native'. In: Karen O'Reilly, Key Concepts in Ethnography. Los Angeles, London, New Dehli: Sage, 87–92.

Rose, Nikolas (2019): Our Psychiatric Future: The Politics of Mental Health. Cambridge, Medford: Polity Press.

Rose, Nikolas, Rasmus Birk & Nick Manning (2021): Towards Neuroecosociality: Mental Health in Adversity. In: Theory, Culture & Society N/N. doi:10.1177/0263276420981614

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy (1995): The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology. In: Current Anthropology 36/3, 409–440.

Schulz, Guido (2017): Aufwertung und Verdrängung in Berlin – Räumliche Analysen zur Messung von Gentrifizierung. https://www.destatis.de/DE/Methoden/WISTA-Wirtschaft-und-Statistik/2017/04/aufwertung-verdraengung-berlin-042017.pdf?__blob=publicationFile. Letzter Zugriff: 01.06.2021

Small, Mario L. (2009): Unanticipated Gains. Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Small, Mario L. (2017): Someone To Talk To. How Networks Matter In Practice. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Söderström, Ola, Dag Söderström, Zoé Codeluppi, Lilith Abrahamyan Empson & Philippe Conus (2017): Emplacing Recovery: How Persons Diagnosed with Psychosis Handle Stress in Cities. In: Psychosis 9/4, 322–329.

Söderström, Ola (2019): Precarious Encounters with Urban Life: The City/Psychosis Nexus beyond Epidemiology and Social Constructivism. In: Geoforum 101, 80–89.

Sørensen, Estrid (2009): The Materiality of Learning: Technology and Knowledge in Educational Practice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Spradley, James P. (1980): Participant Observation. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Strathern, Marilyn (2014): Anthropological Reasoning: Some Threads of Thought. In: HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory 4/3, 23–37.

Wilson, Helen F. (2017): On Geography and Encounter: Bodies, Borders, and Difference. In: Progress in Human Geography 41/4, 451–471.

Winz, Marc & Ola Söderström (2020): How Environments get to the Skin: Biosensory Ethnography as a Method for Investigating the Relation between Psychosis and the City. In: Biosocieties. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41292-020-00183-8

Zuiderent-Jerak, Teun (2015): Situated Intervention: Sociological Experiments in Health Care. Cambridge, London: The MIT Press.

Zuiderent-Jerak, Teun (2016): If Intervention Is Method, What Are We Learning? A Commentary on Brian Martin's "STS and Researcher Intervention Strategies". In: Engaging Science, Technology, and Society 2, 73–82.

Author Information

Patrick Bieler is a researcher at the Institute of European Ethnology at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. His PhD thesis BioÖkologien des Begegnens is a co-laborative ethnographic inquiry into the relational constitution of mental health and urban life. He is interested in broadening anthropological conceptualizations of human-environment relations by combining approaches from Science and Technology Studies, Urban Studies, and Medical and Environmental Anthropology. He is currently exploring these interests through an interdisciplinary research project with social psychiatrists.