

## Schedule

11:45

### Welcome

12:00 – 13:00

**Sabine Arnaud** [MPIWG Berlin]

Fashioning a Role for French Medicine:  
Physicians and Teachers Struggle for  
Authority (1847-1867)

13:00 – 14:00

Lunch break

14:00 – 15:00

**Claire Shaw** [University of Bristol]

We Do Our Deeds in Silence, and Our  
Deeds Speak for Us: Visions of  
Russian Deaf Selfhood after 1917

15:00 – 16:00

**Florence Encrevé**

[University of Paris VIII]

The History of the Deaf and the  
Evolution of French Society Since the  
Eighteenth Century: Sign Language  
and the Idea of Progress



13. December 2013

## Perspectives on Deafness in Eighteenth- to Twentieth- Century France and Russia



Room 265

Workshop organized by  
Sabine Arnaud  
In German Sign Language,  
International Sign Language and  
Spoken English



The event is free.  
Please register:  
[lfrenzer@mpiwg-berlin.de](mailto:lfrenzer@mpiwg-berlin.de)

MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR THE  
HISTORY OF SCIENCE

Boltzmannstraße 22, 14109 Berlin

[www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de](http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de)

MPIWG Research  
Group:  
The Construction of  
Norms in 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>  
Century Europe and the  
United States



### **Sabine Arnaud**

Fashioning a Role for French  
Medicine: Physicians and Teachers  
Struggle for Authority (1847-1867)

**Abstract:** In the late eighteenth century, medicine was not part of the institutional approach to 'deaf-mutes' in the Western world: it was teachers rather than doctors who could claim competence for their care. Yet by the second half of the nineteenth century, doctors had supplanted teachers in this role, despite having made no major therapeutic contributions. The change proceeded via a series of crises in which specialists confronted each other on professional and disciplinary grounds. How did doctors position themselves in their dialogue with educators? How did they construct their own identity within a discipline dominated by teachers? How did they secure the support of the state and of deaf people themselves? How did they announce and consolidate their presence within a field of forces? This paper illuminates the strategies pursued in the production and reception of medical knowledge, by examining the controversies around Parisian physician Alexandre Blanchet during the 1840s.

### **Claire Shaw**

'We Do Our Deeds in Silence, and  
Our Deeds Speak for Us': Visions of  
Russian Deaf Selfhood after 1917

**Abstract:** In the aftermath of the Russian revolutions of 1917, deafness became a key experimental ground on which new theories of revolutionary selfhood were played out. On the one hand, the work of revolutionary psychologists such as Lev Vygotskii cast deafness as a hangover of the capitalist era, a practical obstacle which deaf individuals would leap - with the help of sign-language interpretation, education and social welfare structures - to become labourers and citizens on an equal footing with their hearing peers. On the other, Marxist theories of language focused on oral speech as the key to attaining revolutionary 'consciousness', and condemned sign language as the root of deaf people's inherent and ineradicable 'abnormality'. This paper explores the tensions and overlaps between these two visions of deaf selfhood, and considers how their legacies were played out in the deaf social organisations of the Soviet 1920s and 1930s

### **Florence Encrevé**

The History of the Deaf and the  
Evolution of French Society Since  
the Eighteenth Century: Sign  
Language and the Idea of Progress

**Abstract:** The history of French deaf people is one of sidelining people considered disabled in the name of the unity of a supposed common language, French. My project studies the evolution of French society since the eighteenth century from the point of view of the deaf and how society perceived them. My Ph.D. thesis in history focused on the nineteenth century, from 1830 to 1905. During this period, the philosophy of progress—which first blossomed during the eighteenth century—gradually gained strength, while less and less attention was paid to the deaf and sign language was less and less accepted. Those who did not know sign language believed that it inferiorized deaf people and was counter to progress; deaf people, however, did not agree. My research argues that sign language fell victim to a certain interpretation of the idea of progress, which ultimately relegated deaf people to a position of inequality.