

CENTRE FOR THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE SEMINAR SERIES 2011-2012 SPRING TERM

Tuesday, 28 February 2012 (Week 8)
5.00 pm – Ramphal Building Room R.014

Dr Karl Borromäus Murr
(Director, Staatliches Textil- und Industriemuseum Augsburg)



*A Life Between Mystical Experience and Mental Illness: the
Textile Worker, Capuchin and Lamplighter Jacob Gruber
(1874-1954)*

The autobiography of the Bavarian Capuchin monk Jakob Gruber, written between 1896 and 1899, provides a detailed account of the extreme physical dimensions of Catholic monastic life around the turn of the twentieth century. Gruber's life is characterised by extensive bodily rituals including painful self-flagellation as a means to mystical consciousness. While Capuchin spirituality provided Gruber with the cultural means to express his faith – it also unleashed the tempting Satan the monk was fighting.

Adopting a micro-historical approach, the paper explores not only the history of piety in Catholic monastic life around 1900 but searches for the significance of the eminent bodily experience of religious rituals. It reveals an economy of suffering that mirrors a thin line between mystic pursuit and mental illness.



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