Amos Kuster:
“Psychiatric Tree”

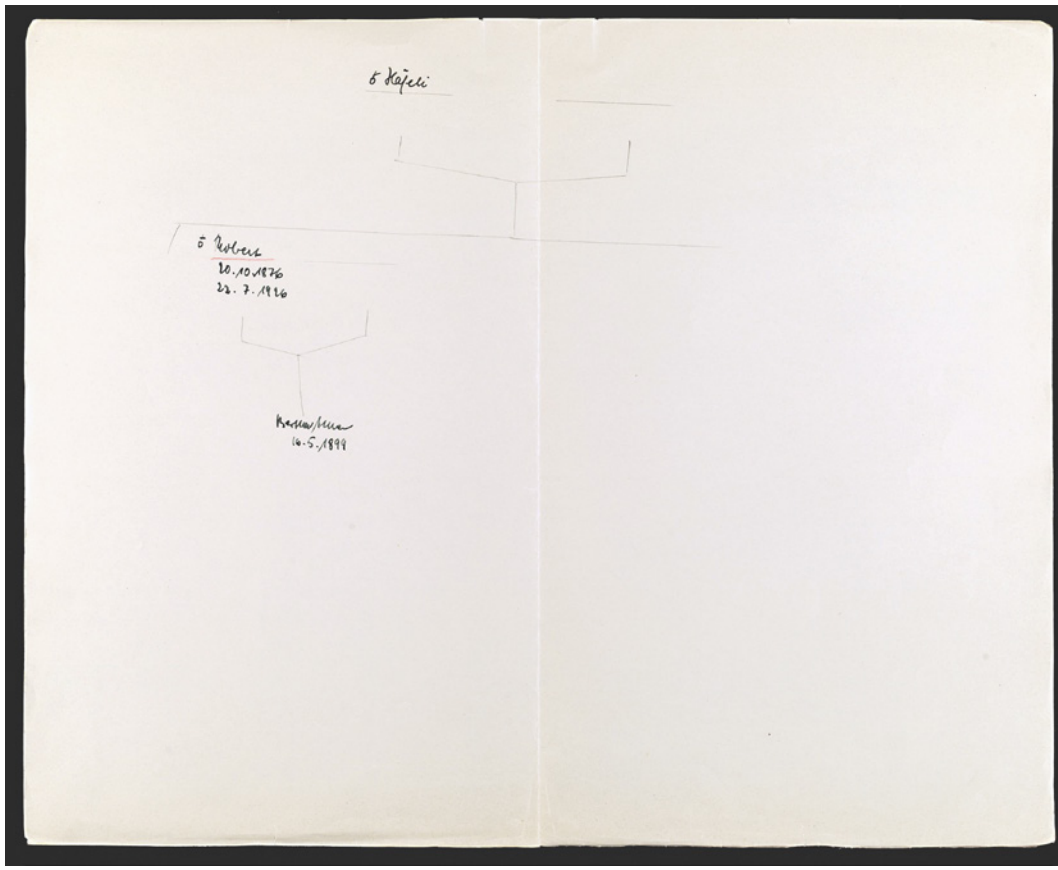
in: Eric Hounshell, Ruth Amstutz (eds.):

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SHADOW OF THE TREE

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PSYCHIATRIC TREE Brittle Branches



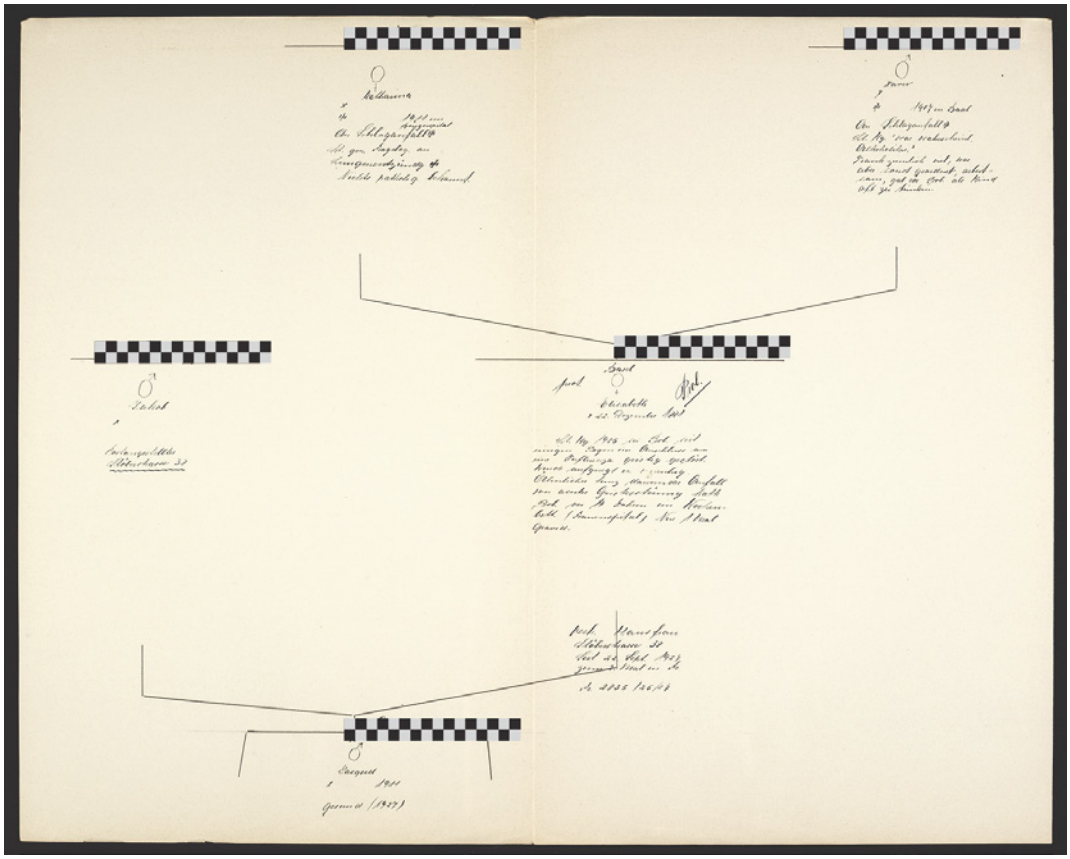
Family tree from the clinical files of Robert Häfeli, Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt, KG 53 (1) 14158.

Two persons are registered in this genealogy: Robert Häfeli and his daughter Bertha Anna. These two are set in an arrangement of lines drawn in pencil, which indicate where to fill in Häfeli's parents and the mother of his daughter. The empty space on the sheet is not quite *empty* but refers to the idea of what should have been there.

A couple of brittle branches make this pedigree a sad and withered diagram. Gnarled and mostly barren, it stands apart from the exuberant trees that carry in their branches the fruits of old power and long-lasting fertility. This lousy pedigree stems from a psychiatric ward, and it bears witness to the research in heredity in the 1920s. In their genealogical research, scientists at the time gathered data for their statistical approach to the problems of heredity. They would pick a single person as a starting point from which they would try to inquire into his or her biological family. As these procedures were also performed in mental institutions, they left traces in the medical records. There, one can find admission forms sketching family histories as well as trees of such kind.

"The first task for the study of families according the approach prescribed by experimental heredity research is to register all blood relatives of a subject whose hereditary formula is to be determined according to several natural-scientific perspectives, including both his ascendents and descendants and collaterals – not just the ill relatives but also the healthy [...]."

Ernst Rüdin: "Einige Wege und Ziele der Familienforschung, mit Rücksicht auf die Psychiatrie", in: *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* 1/7 (1911), pp. 487–585, p. 528.



Family tree from clinical files, Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt, KG 53 (1) 11451.

Usually the pedigrees produced in the clinic looked more like the complete one above. Such trees would grow with family size.

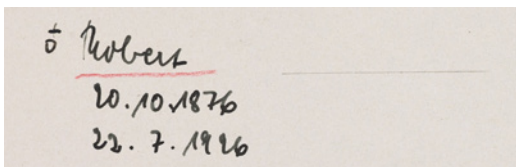
Tabelle 7. Häufigkeit der Trinker in verschiedenen Geschwisterschaften.

Probanden	Geschwister	Trinker		Darunter Delirium tremens	
		absolut	%	absolut	%
Chronische Alkoholiker	239	27	11,29	1	0,41
Basler Durchschnittsbevölkerung (*Brugger* [2])	460	4	0,86	—	—
Münchner Paralytiker- und Arteriosklerotikerehegatten (*Luxenburger* [8])	695	11	1,58	—	—
Münchner Krankenhauspatienten (*Schulz* [10])	373	3	0,80	—	—
Alle Durchschnittsbevölkerungen ([1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12])	4216	48	1,13	2	0,05

Carl Brugger: *Familienuntersuchungen bei Alkoholdeliranten,* Berlin: J. Springer (1934), p. 114.

When a family's tree was included in a statistical sample its members would be dissolved into tabular form.

PSYCHIATRIC TREE Solitude or Aloneness?



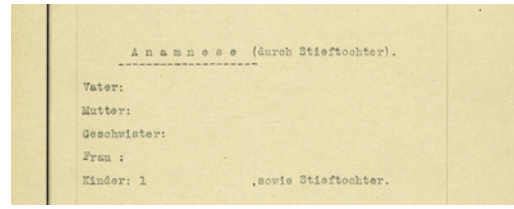
Detail from the family tree from the clinical files of Robert Häfeli, Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt, KG 53 (1) 14158.

In this detail of Häfeli's family tree, one can see the genealogical symbol for deceased. Robert Häfeli as the proband, the starting point of the genealogical research, is underlined in red.

Robert Häfeli is located all alone on the edge of a vast sheet of paper. Only his daughter stands by him. No parents, no wife, no grandparents. Needless to say, the medical personnel at the Basel psychiatric clinic had tried to obtain more information on his family. On the front page of his admission form they prepared a list of family members they wanted to get hold of – father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, etc. But this empty space remained empty. Was there nobody to provide this information? No relatives, no family? But not only this: in a letter sent to the communal authorities of Häfeli's hometown, they made inquiries about his parents and possible siblings. These efforts were not very rewarding. Apparently, the records revealed no siblings, and regarding his parents no information could be found. Hence all the blanks on the outlined tree had to remain empty. Actually, this genealogical tree might give the impression that Robert Häfeli was a man lacking almost all family ties.

"For an extremely important medical inquiry that should inhibit the proliferation of pathological hereditary dispositions and thereby contribute essentially to the maintenance of public health, I request a graciously cost-free response to the following questions regarding: Robert Häfeli, born 20.10.1876."

Letter from John E. Staehelin to the Communal Counselor Flumenthal, from the medical files of Robert Häfeli, Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt, KG 53 (1) 14158.



Anamnese (durch Stieftochter).

Vater:
Mutter:
Geschwister:
Frau :
Kinder: 1 ,sowie Stieftochter.

Entry in medical history from the clinical files of Robert Häfeli, Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt, KG 53 (1) 14158.

In the anamnetic part of the medical history, the psychiatrists left space for Häfeli's family members. The only filled-in blank records that he has a child as well as a stepdaughter.

Of course, loneliness is not an uncommon phenomenon in psychiatric institutions – neither today nor in the past. Sometimes it was obvious, more obvious than in the case of Häfeli. People were secluded, solitary, and forlorn. For one patient, her file reads that she was "completely alone and has no relatives here in Basel."[1] Even more unambiguous is the verdict on a patient not only without family but cut off from all relationships: "Supposedly no relatives at all and completely alone in the world."[2] For every human being, the researchers assumed biological parents. Father and Mother. That is how families were presumed, and based on this presupposition research was carried out. Were those family members missing, would that mean that people were lonely? And does aloneness mean solitude in the first place?

"In fact, at the root of every delusion is the tendency of the personality to loneliness – the enhanced ego-orientation with a particular experience of relations and of meaning and the affectivity that follows from it, which approaches every experience with the question: What does that mean for me? more precisely: what does that mean for me in my loneliness?"

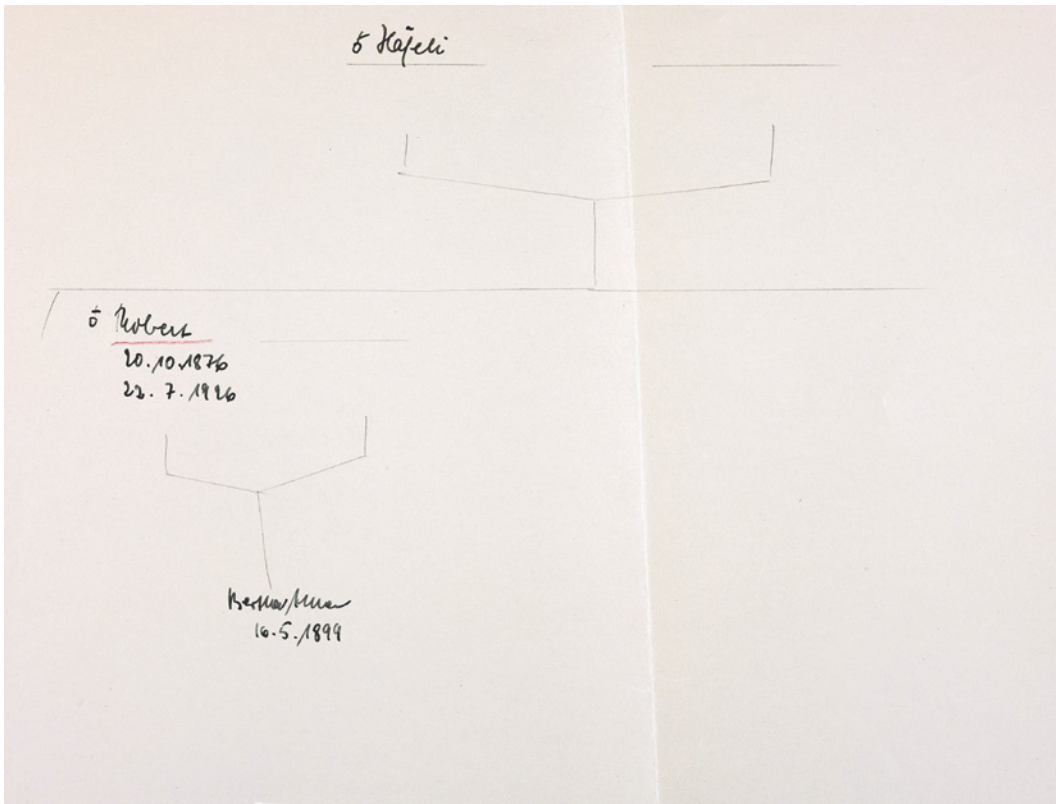
Eugen Kahn: "Über Wahnbildung", in: *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten* 1/88 (1929), pp. 435–454, p. 440.

"Work conditions demand a lot of solitude of the patient. Under the influence of such periods, there gradually develops a high degree of nervous irritability and a depressive disposition with states of anxiety (particularly when alone), headaches, sleep disruption, obsessive sexual thoughts, to which are added erotic hallucinations during nights with a lack of sleep."

Leopold Loewenfeld: "Weitere Beiträge zur Lehre von den psychischen Zwangszuständen", in: *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten* 3/30 (1898), pp. 679–721, p. 703.

PSYCHIATRIC TREE Revenant Relationships

For sure, to have a family implied knowing about those belonging to it. Every diagram began with sketching out the known individuals. When researchers could not get beyond these persons to fill out a complete family genealogy, they would leave the diagram as it was, unfinished. The tree conjures the image of an abandoned construction site with skeletal structures looming into the sky. Maybe this is in fact what happened, and this tree has been given up. Were the researchers discouraged by the setback in their investigation? Was the case material shifted elsewhere, where it left no traces in our sources? In any case, the clinical story of Häfeli's tree ended right there.



Detail from the family tree from the clinical files of Robert Häfeli, Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt, KG 53 (1) 14158.

The basic structure of the tree has been sketched out with a pencil. Those strokes build the framework of the relations which can be assumed to must have existed from a biological point of view.



Pfeuffer-Maikmus J., Tapez.-Mstr.
Pfeuffer Paul, Asst.
Siegrist R., Hilfsmonteur
Waldvogel Karl, Schachtelm.
Wiesenz Joh., Reis.
22 †Shaffermann B.
Burkhart Rob., Kommis
Grauwiler Hans, Wagenwärter
Haller Herm., Farbarbeiter
Jaeslin Ernst, Deschenträger
Maxy Alfr., Glrts.
Nater Berta, Glätt.
Nater Wwe. Maria
Pawelzik Joh., Schneider
Stampfli Theod., Assfr.

Mauerstraße

1 †Ges. f. Chem. Ind.
Wagner Joh., Nachtw.
81 †Ges. f. Chem. Ind. (Magazine, Schöpfe)
103 †Bad. Bahnverw. Eisenecker Gg.,
2 †Brauerei Feldschlößchen
Bernardi Joh., Marmorpol.
Brodbeck Hans, Metalldrückerm.
Braun Hans, Chauff.
Häfeli Rob., Wirt
Roth Rch., Schreiner
Vökt Jos., Farbarb.
3 *Frey Heinr., Schuhm'mstr.
Fäßler Art., Labor.
Roniger Jos., Maurer
Vollmy Ad., Schloss.
Vollmy Ernst, Bureaudiener
4 *Nolt Friedr., Zig.-händler
Nolt Fr., Zahntechn.
Ohnemus Josef, Schlosser
Wittlin E., Schreiner
5 *Dreiner Frida, Merceriew. und
* Greiner V., Merceriew.
Greiner Wwe. Maria
Schwestern Greiner, Mercerieware
Odermatt Josef, Mag.
7 *Müller Rch., Klm.
Eni Luise
Oldemann Reinh., Parq.
Hügli Gottl., Elektromonteur
Kaiser Hans, Schlosser
Kaiser Wilh., Betr.-Assistent
Röbel H., Zimmerm.
13 *Dörfel Max, Coiffeurmstr.
Dörfel Max, Spedit.-Angestellter
Ehrmann E., Monteur
Latscha E., Hilfsarb.
Meilet P., Polizkorp.
14 *Dilger Wwe, L., Möbelhdlr.
Müller Jos., Handarb.
Pfefferle Wwe. K.
Pfefferle Liva, Büral.
Schneider Ernst, Handlanger
Zimmermann Eug., Spengler
15 *Glikker J., Farbarbeiter
Furrer K., Erdarb.
Glikker Rich., Buchbinder
Münch Ludw., Labor.
Schmidlin Paul, Kommis
Strub A., Fabrikarb.
Baumann Rich.
Schilling Franz, Fahrknecht
Schmuki Emil
20 *Arnet Theod.
Haag Marta, Hilfsarb.
Haag Wilh., Schreiner
Haas Karl, Betr.-Assist. BB.
Haas K., Schreiner
Jäggi Joh., Wagenführer
Ohnemus Maria, Ladengeh.
Ohnemus Jos., Brauereitagl.
Ohnemus Jos., Schreiner
Riggenbach & Cie., z. Arm. Kolonialw.
21 *Saur Jul., Spengl.-Mstr.
Dörflinger Friedr., Hilfsarbeiter
Gautschi Adolf, Landwirt
Gröbbiel Ernst, Elektriker
Maier Emil, Schloss.
Saur Fr., Spengler
22 *Schnurr Wwe. Kath.
Hlusicka Leopold, Coiffeurmstr.
Wirth Karl, Kommis
Wirth Wwe. Marie
26 †Lachenmeier R.
27 †Schoefer G. H.
Ammann Wwe. Barb.
Ammann Ed., Tagl.
Ammann Karl, Kommis
Ammann Max, Hilfsarbeiter
Ammann Paula, Einlegerin
Degen Alb., Tagl.
Lacher Wwe. Barb.
Lacher Wwe. Ida
Meier Jos., Schlosser
Räber Wilh., Fabrikmeister
Stehlin Jos., Hilfsarb.
28 *Grimm Jakob, Bahnarb.
Abt Wwe. Emma
Dürst Jos., Käfer
Gätter Fr., Erdarb.
Hediger Rud., Kommis
Pfründer Rosa, Kellnerin
Pfründer Wwe. K.
Rigola Fr., Maurer
Ritter Jos., Klm.
Schulze Emilie, Pfer.
Talleri Enr., Silberhergarb.
Tschudin Paul,

Address book of the City of Basel and the Commune of Riehen 1926, Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt STA H 43 72, p. 170.

The entry in the directory shows Robert Häfeli's address. He as well as his son-in-law are specified, though their spouses remain invisible.

Then again, sometimes things take a turn. It so happens that Häfeli wasn't wholly devoid of relationships as the diagram of him and his family might suggest. A look into his file in the clinic renders a series of interactions that place him in a quite close-knit web of kin and acquaintances, albeit not entirely conflict-free. His second wife brought a daughter into their marriage. One time, Robert Häfeli was brought to the clinic by his first wife's new husband – on another occasion his son-in-law signed his admission forms. Häfeli lived under one roof with his second wife, his stepdaughter, his daughter, and her husband. In this exact house, Häfeli kept an inn – all involved with the neighborhood. But all this is simply of no interest to a tree created to gather biological descent and aimed at statistical research on the heredity of disease.

Notes

1 Entry in medical history from the clinical files number 11894, Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt, KG 53 (1) 11849.
2 Entry in medical history from the clinical files number 1628, Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt, KG 53 (1) 1628.

Further Readings

Jean-Paul Gaudillière: "Exoteric Knowledge and Esoteric Knowledge: Ludwik Fleck, Pedigrees and the Visualization of Pathological Heredity", in: *Medicina nei Secoli* 20/3 (2008), pp. 767–789.

Bernd Gausemeier: "Pedigrees of Madness: The Study of Heredity in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Psychiatry", in: *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 36/4 (2015), pp. 467–483.

Yoshio Nukaga: *A Genealogy of Genealogical Practices: The Development and Use of Medical Pedigrees in the Case of Huntington's Disease*, Montreal: McGill University Press (2000).

Theodore M. Porter: *Genetics in the Madhouse: The Unknown History of Human Heredity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (2018).

Sigrid Weigel (ed.): *Genealogie und Genetik: Schnittstellen zwischen Biologie und Kulturgeschichte*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag (2002).