

CONFERENCE REPORT

Time, memory and history

7th International Conference on Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology, University of Heidelberg, 23–26 September 2004

Jointly organised by the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Heidelberg, the Society for Philosophy and the Science of the Psyche, and the International Network for Philosophy and Psychiatry, this conference was an opportunity for mental health clinicians and philosophers to further the project of a philosophy of psychiatry in discussions grouped around the themes of time, memory and history. There were four main aspects to the encounter between philosophy and psychiatry staged by the conference: the task of conceptual clarification and the orientation of psychiatry; pure philosophical analysis, which opened up spaces for a new thinking of pathology; the delineation of features of psychopathology which could illuminate existing philosophical concepts, and, finally, the application of philosophical theories to direct psychiatric treatment of a variety of disorders.

The main philosophical protagonists within the conference were Husserlian phenomenology, particularly as applied through Jaspers's seminal work on psychopathology, and adherents of concepts of narrativity and narrative time derived from appropriations of Ricoeur's work. For example, Nassir Ghaemi's paper argued for a return to the pluralistic model of Karl Jaspers as an escape from the eclecticism of the biopsychosocial model in psychiatry. A similar thematic of a return to phenomenology as a basis for other forms of thinking psychopathology emanated throughout the conference, for example in Dan Zahavi's talk of the pre-eminence of a self-referential concept of selfhood in any discussion of narrative accounts. However, there was occasionally in these papers a lack of historical analysis as to how the phenomenological method would be mediated by technological and social changes in late modernity.

Giovanni Stanghellini attempted just such a discussion in his account of the 'pornographic self' conducted through a parallel reading of sociological accounts of late-modern selves and first-person accounts of eating disorders. The 'imperative flexibility' of these selves accounted for a new form of embodiment which did not rely on situated bodies, but rather on an instrumental attitude towards embodiment as something to be manipulated. Stanghellini offered a suggestive form for a new psychopathology which could be conducted in terms of deriving pathological phenomena in accordance with the loss of different forms of self: schizophrenia arising from the loss of a pre-cognitive self; melancholy, the loss of a narrative self; and eating and personality disorders from the loss of discursive/relational selves. Robert Kimball complemented this picture with his account of mania and depression as disorders which are characterized through breakdowns in time, and the loss of narrative time.

Different forms of thinking temporality other than through a Husserlian phenomenological analysis of a temporal field of present, past and future gave a more complicated and nuanced account of the relation between temporality and pathology. Iben Damgaard's interesting paper on Kierkegaard's philosophy contrasted the form of temporality encapsulated by Judge Vilhelm in *Either/Or* with Kierkegaard's concept of temporality in his later works. The judge refers to himself as an editor of experience, ordering experience into a narrative whole in relation to a linear temporal flow, but this form of temporality is problematized in Kierkegaard's later writing, which emphasizes discontinuities and interruptions in the flow of time. James Phillips pointed to similar congruences in the work of Freud and Heidegger. Rather than being viewed as a developmental theory, Freud's work stresses interruptions and intensities to experience, as well as forms of repetition and retrieval which are unwilled.

Keith Ansell-Pearson's paper on Bergson's 'curious time of memory' outlined an image of memory as outside time, as a form of dead time, that one could be stuck in either creatively, as in the form of the Proustian involuntary memory, or pathologically, in terms of some states which could be equated with schizophrenia. The question he did not have time to address was what the criteria are for entering into such a time: what would determine either a creative or a pathological entry into the 'dead time' of memory?

The question of history, in a philosophical sense, was perhaps the most underrepresented in the conference, despite historical symposia on the Nazi 'euthanasia' programme and the history of psychiatry. The question of the mediation of forms of mental disorder by historical and cultural changes in forms of experience was occasionally addressed, for example in Ian Prenelle's paper on urban psychosis, which used Debord and Benjamin to attempt to think the concept of schizophrenia as a historical and changeable experience which is itself being constructed as an image through media, user and psychiatric representation. This was one of the few papers to reference the Marxist tradition directly and pointed to one of the main philosophical gaps in the conference.

Nevertheless, the event provided a vast and diverse range of thought on the interrelationship between philosophy and psychiatry, ranging from Werdie van Staden's intriguing attempt to use neo-Fregean relational theory as a treatment typology and modality for borderline personality disorder, to important conceptual work on the philosophy of neuroscience. Overall, the conference provided a mine of resources for all of us working in the field, attempting to resist the dominance of biological approaches within psychiatry.

Alastair Morgan

This two-day conference provides a critical forum to debate the relationship between globalisation and the problem of representation. Can globalisation be represented, or is globalisation a further challenge to the possibility of representation itself? It brings together academics, practitioners, journalists and activists to transgress the traditional disciplinary boundaries and the theory/practice divide.

The Global City
International Relations
Democracy, Politics and Economics
Virtuality and Representation
Texts and Locations
Globalising Identity
Objects and Spaces:
Architecture and Design
Culture Industry
Revisited
Imaging The Globe:
Art And Ethics

CALL FOR PAPERS

Globalisation & Representation

12-13 March 2005
School of Historical and Critical Studies
Faculty of Arts and Architecture
University of Brighton



Mike Davis
Esther Leslie
Achille Mbembe
Charles Harrison
Lindsey German
Terry Eagleton
Sue Gollifer
John McKean
T J Clark
Julian Stallabrass
Kate Soper
Geoff Eley
Alex Callinicos
Neil Lazarus
Jonathan Woodham



www.brighton.ac.uk/globalisation

For further information contact:
a.rupprecht@brighton.ac.uk

*
University of Brighton