

Western Canadian Theoretical Psychology (WCTP) 2016

September 22 – 25

Star of the North Retreat Centre, 3A St. Vital Ave, St. Albert, AB

Program

Sept 22 (Thursday)

Arrival and Reception at Floyd's (Suite 104-9316-82nd Ave NW)

Sept 23 (Friday)

Morning

- Bill Smythe & Jaime Williams (University of Regina): *The Case for the Nonconceptual*
- Panel Discussion: *Re-visiting depth* (Angelina Baydala, Nathan Foerger, Leo Mos, Jeff Hankey)

Afternoon

- Brad Piekkola (Vancouver Island University): *Personality: Chance and choice*
- Wanda Power (Simon Fraser University): *Epistemic injustice and epistemological violence in psychology*

Sept 24 (Saturday)

Morning

- Cor Baerveldt (University of Alberta) and Floyd Dunphy (University of British Columbia): *Eschatological Depth: Prophecy, Calling and Vocation*
- Culture-in-Action Lab, University of Alberta (Cor Baerveldt, Vickie Richard, Evan Shillabeer): *CIA Remembers: The Center for Advanced Study in Theoretical Psychology*

Afternoon

- Chris Peet (King's University): *Deep stuff: Perennial or incomparable or other?*
- Panel Discussion: *The Future of Depth* (Adam Dressler, Marvin MacDonald, Jeff Stepnisky, Randall Tonks)

Sept 25 (Sunday) – Business meeting

Abstracts

Bill Smythe and Jaime Williams (University of Regina): *The Case for the Nonconceptual*

The recent “performative turn” in qualitative social science research has fostered an interest in *nonconceptual* forms of knowing, as embodied in performances and other expressive forms. Our paper is a preliminary attempt to understand the epistemology of the nonconceptual. We begin with the *contact realism* of Dreyfus and Taylor (2015), who offer an epistemological view based on an embodied agent who is embedded in the world as a condition of having knowledge of it. The nonconceptual is understood in this view as an aspect of frameworks of background understanding that are both inescapable and, ultimately, resistant to articulation. The background not only gives shape to our activities but is also shaped by them, both in our everyday coping with the world and in extra-ordinary activities that take us beyond the realm of the everyday. To better understand the latter, we turn next to the epistemological perspective of the *feminist posthuman*. Drawing on the work Hayles (1999) and Braidotti (2006, 2013), among others, we outline an emancipatory framework for embodied, nonconceptual knowing that recognizes the transformative potential of performances that press embodied understanding to its limits. Braidotti’s work, in particular, offers a methodology of cultivating affect grounded in respect for the deep connections among all human and non-human life forms and energies that allows the boundaries of the nonconceptual to expand and opens the way to the transcendence of “becoming-imperceptible.”

Brad Piekola (Vancouver Island University): *Personality: Chance and choice*

Personality psychologists have evaded an important factor in personality development and change—personal agency and choice. Nomothetic procedures evade the disclosure of such an influence because personal choice and the conditions for its operation are highly idiosyncratic, and historically and socially conditioned. Universality considerations preclude the personal as unique, contextually and historically bounded, and highly variable. Choice may be universal but nomothetic procedure are not suited to its divulgence. What is needed are idiographic methods that tap into life-experience and life-trajectories, which are idiosyncratic in the concrete, but which cumulatively may reveal something common—agentive choice. It is contended that one such method is biography and the case of Corey Pegues is offered as illustrative.

Culture-in-Action Lab, University of Alberta (Cor Baerveldt, Vickie Richard, Evan Shillabeer):
CIA Remembers: The Center for Advanced Study in Theoretical Psychology

The Center for Advanced Study in Theoretical Psychology (1965-1998) at the University of Alberta was an crucial milieu of debate among prominent psychologists of differing theoretical perspectives. As an independent administrative unit, the Centre offered students and researchers an opportunity to discuss fundamental issues concerning psychological research, while also drawing important figures in the history of psychology to discuss and defend their respective theoretical positions. Recently, the Culture in Action lab at the University of Alberta has

recovered important audio-visual records of lectures within the Center, and has begun the project of archiving and documenting these artifacts. These documents offer insight into early debates concerning the role and development of psychology, and provide suggestions for current perspectives that maintain fundamentally distinct positions on the role of psychology outside of the natural science pursuits that preoccupy most academics within the field. We will provide an initial sketch of the documents and our research goals.

Chris Peet (King's University): *Deep stuff: Perennial or incomparable or other?*

In modern scholarship on mysticism, a long-standing claim has been that a sufficiently deep spiritual experience reveals a universally same structure. Popularized as “the perennial philosophy” by Aldous Huxley, and espoused by scholars like William James, Abraham Maslow, and Huston Smith, the diversity of religions are understood to be different paths to the same goal, or different expressions of the same core. In a more recent, postmodern vein, scholars of mysticism such as Bernard McGinn contest this position and emphasize the crucial importance of context. Steven Katz has subjected the perennial claim to extensive critical study, and countered that experience as historically and socially constituted within a tradition is irreducible to a universally same core. Katz’ position suggests that at sufficient depth experiences will prove incomparable.

This paper engages these positions using Daniel Brown’s study of stages of mindfulness based on a comparative study of Yoga and Buddhist practice. Brown argues for an apparent alternative that inverts the perennial claim and acknowledges Katz’ position to some extent, claiming that different traditions endorse the same path, but lead to different experiential outcomes.

Cor Baerveldt (University of Alberta) and Floyd Dunphy (University of British Columbia):
Eschatological Depth: Prophecy, Calling and Vocation

Four years ago when we set out to try to imagine what “Depth and Culture” might mean, I quite naturally turned, as I always have done, to a paired reading between a premodern context, this time late medieval prostitution, and the modern site of the highly charged masculine spaces of contemporary urban fitness gyms. I contested that there was a kind of “threshold,” or in-between dynamic at play in both settings, but indeed also in between the two sites of medieval and modern. Cor turned his attention to the genre of “Thick Description” as it was broadly conceived in the Geertzian anthropological corners of the 70s and 80s. This serendipitous confluence of social energies between the collision and collusion of our two projects burst open in a plenitude that would chart our course for the next several years. Fraught with tensions, digressions, omissions and even the odd realisation, Depth for us began to open up as a posture one could embody in approaching other texts, material sites, and cultural and psychological phenomena.

In year two, we distilled the entire scope of our intuitions into an organism of several key moving parts. For this we appealed to the figural hermeneutics of Erich Auerbach. Auerbach wagered that there was a relationship of depth that was generated between the Old Testament

figuration and New Testament fulfillment. What was instructive for our project on depth from Auerbach's figure and fulfillment was that it was suggestive of a potentially intuitive algorithm that for our purposes began to give shape to the operations and practices of depth. From this we culled a procedural form of "pointing" in which the Old Testament figure pointed to its fulfillment in a New Testament reality. However, unlike conventional western Christian eschatologies in which the figure gets swallowed up in the final realisation of the New Testament fulfillment, Auerbach's contribution corrected the hasty conclusions of a prophecy fulfilled by emphasising that the Old Testament figure retained its robust materiality and that the New Testament moment was as much a figure pointing back to the Old Testament, and found its fulfillment in the New Testament as well. For our part, this reciprocal form of pointing was suggestive of a stratified hermeneutics that frustrated the typical forward trajectory of conventional views of temporality and historicity. More than that, our moment of discovery was further advanced in Auerbach's insistence that, taken together, figure and fulfillment pointed to a yet outstanding third moment. And for us this was *figura*, a device and disposition that naturally lead to what for us appeared to be the inner workings of a practice and production of a kind of depth that we could embody as a posture when approaching whatever domains of material inquiry that became a concern for us.

Out of this constellation of figural hermeneutics we were able to identify several key moments that would inform the disposition of the practice of depth. First off we came to realise that the principle of "risk" was integral to the practice of depth. Like Hamlet, we linger along the corridors of Elsinore Castle in the hopes that "the figure like the King" might rise from his late repose and appear to us. The risk comes in when something, or nothing may show itself. This is why the practice and discovery of depth also requires the discipline of "sustained attention." There are no quick fixes for the production of depth. Depth demands trained intuitive patience and a sustained fixation upon a material moment. Naturally, this sort of disciplined, sustained attention betrays a certain erotics and love for the thing in which we lie in wait. It also betrays our own complicity in the production of this certain kind of depth, a complicity that we think is best described by the term "regionality." For something to be regional it means that it must become a thing of concern for us and for our purposes something can only become a thing of concern when we are in proximity to it, dwell with it, be in its region. But it is also at once an admission of our contamination of this very same region, and we think that is ok. Hamlet haunted the galleys of Elsinore Castle as much as his late father "the figure like the King" did. Hamlet was constitutive of the production and visitation of the apparition of the figure of his father for in each visitation and haunting Hamlet's late father appears in different garb. Here we realise that in order for any visitation and haunting to take place both parties are required to show up in a figural relation: the apparition appears even in the throes of our contamination and production of that very apparition. Our reception is contamination. Figural depth is not a form of ontology. It is an advent of a stratified truth that begins in our own complicity with the object that we seek to know better.

At the close of year two, there was a growing awareness and abiding concern that our project was at risk of falling prey to vulgar conceptions of time and historicity that would have rendered

our attempts at depth as a mere form of allegory that rehearsed all of the tired binaries up to the present: inside/outside, etic/emic, past/future, hidden/seen and other such oppositions that dissolve superfluously into the over-celebrated notion of difference. We therefore invoked the spectre of Heidegger in year three to loose our project from the bonds of conventional temporality. For us, as for Heidegger, time is a spatialised entity. Rather than understand Auerbach's figura through the mode of conventional temporality rendering his insights into an overly-simplified form of allegorical successions and transmissions, we chose to understand the dynamic of history as a series of visitations and hauntings that come to us in the form of letters written and sent onward without an addressee and their serendipitous arrival to us as a chosen moment of disclosure patiently attended for. In order to undertake this recalibration of this way of understanding the past, and temporality more generally, we turned to Heidegger's notion of *Augenblick* in trying to recast temporality in spatial terms.

In order to make better sense of Heidegger's notion of *Augenblick*, we had to read it against the two impulses running through it: *Ursprung* and *Zukunft*. The "ur" of *ursprung* ushers us into a different conception of time that is spatialised. Heidegger speaks of the dynamic of being sprung from that which is most primordial to that which is most futural. And this springing-being-thrown from the furthest past to the furthest futural is a traumatic breaking open of vulgar conceptions of time into a spatialised temporality that is Heidegger's abyss. And Heidegger's abyss was a more graphic understanding of his version of the hermeneutical circle. Against so many flattened out accounts that read Heidegger's hermeneutical circle as the circuitous "question and answer" of Gadamerian hermeneutics, we understand Heidegger's account of this as a form of trauma, as a leaping and being thrown into, not a two-dimensional disc, but into an abyss. The hermeneutical circle is a spatial orb that stretches out in both temporal directions and the leaping-being-thrown into that which is most primordial to that which is most futural occurs in the moment of the *Augenblick*. *Zukunft* indicates an entire disposition of a "to" and a "to come" that opens us towards the future, but not a temporal future, but to the openness of the place of a moment, the *Augenblick*, the flash moment of a glance, of a blinking of the eye, a moment of authenticity and depth for which we are chosen to bear witness to some authentic material density about to rise into the clearing of those who have been called to be an eyewitness.

Because Dasein has the eschatological structure of existence, and because existence by its nature is never finished, Dasein has at its core something of a lack that is always outstanding and unfinished. But this is not futural. Rather, we understand Dasein as structured by a promise, by the propensity to always position itself (*Zukunft*) towards the potentiality of being chosen for authenticity. Dasein's unfinished eschatological structure is a promise toward being thrown into a moment, *Augenblick*, to bear witness to some spatially meaningful material reality that otherwise recedes into the background of the everyday. And this being called and chosen to see in this way and to bear witness begins in a moment of trauma, of being-thrown, a jarring form of a waking up that shakes us from the drudgery and coma of the everyday. We wake up, and then we see. We behold, and then we come near. Bearing witness is a spatial act of depth that occurs in proximity, not time.

Dasein then, at its structural core, is shot through with a prophetic propensity to see more intuitively, not into the future, but into the dalliance of the existence of the right here and now. And for us, this is profoundly spatial, which is to say, this prophetic bearing witness to occurs in a place, a region in which we have been fortunate enough to inhabit at the right moment, *Augenblick*. And this is what we mean by depth.

This prophetic awakening, what we are here attempting to think through as depth, this new way of spatial seeing, occurs as a visitation, a form of haunting, for only something of a trauma can pull us from the dead hooks of the everyday. The depth of haunting stalks the corridors of the everyday, and like Hamlet's father, the figure like the king, comes upon those who are structured with the prophetic, bequeathed with a visitation, a chosen dis-closure, for those patient in sustained intuitive attention. Modern critical theory is too fast, too hurried, too in a rush. Here, we are not proposing yet another theory complete with empty algorithms can be copied mechanically to produce a certain result to mimetically reproduce the likeness of depth. Depth, as we are here imagining it, is patient, invites, is invited, invokes, incants, listens, and once in a while receives the plenitude of a visitation, the *Augenblick*. The practice and search for depth, in poetic terms, is akin to a death stalk, an openness to be haunted, to entertain apparitions, figural realities that emerge from the forgetfulness of the text of the world. Depth is a mood and a form of approach. The practice and patience of depth has as one of its primary impulses Heidegger's notion of "*Ent-Fernung*," or the collapsing of distance, or "dedistancing," which is a spatialised abolishing of conventional temporality that is necessary in order for the moment of *Augenblick* to be visited upon us. Depth occurs when vulgar time disappears and we are ushered into a spatial nearness. In this nearness, this here-ness, or Dasein, reality disrobes and we are brought in the prophetic mysteries of all that hides in the light of day. Here, and in this way, Depth is a form of prophecy, but a prophetic understanding of the right here and now. In fact, we might say that because Dasein is structured by existence, and that existence in its very nature is always unfinished and always has something outstanding, almost something of a promise, of something more, always to come, it could be said that Dasein is that chosen moment of the prophetic. Dasein is prophetic. And in this Dasein is the moment of prophetic depth.

But this conundrum of Dasein, Depth and prophecy does not take as its goal and grasp some future yet to come. Prophetic depth resists the totality of conventional Christian eschatological horizons, resists vulgar conceptions and totalities that swallow up every figural part in favour of the whole. Instead, prophetic depth limits its concerns to our own present moment and understands that there is an epoch's worth of materiality already present which lies in wait for us. Prophetic depth will leave the future to its own devices and tomorrow's worries for another day.

And here we are brought quite naturally to year four and to our present concerns. For us, the past three years of figuration, taken together, point toward the fulfillment of several key themes that we feel have practical implications for our own contemporary moment as academics both inside and outside the modern academy: prophecy, calling and vocation. We will attempt to bring this emerging notion of figural depth to bear upon those who we think should be practicing it most: researchers, writers, academicians, artists, thinkers. We have a growing conviction that the

practice and disposition of depth should take the form of a calling, a prophetic calling, which may perhaps take the form of a vocational calling. Our intuition is that real depth is not generated without the kinds of approach we have been outlining. This year will attempt to bring depth home for all of us.