

Dialogues of Enlightenment

IASH Research Theme: August 2008 - July 2011

Context

Conversations between two or more people have historically been a key mechanism for the generation of inquiry, leading to enlightenment across many fields of human endeavour. Etymologically, meaning literally 'flows through' discussion and debate of this kind. In both Greco-Roman and Indian classical traditions instruction, persuasion and entertainment were accomplished through dialogue. From Sumerian dialogues and disputations, Rigvedic dialogue chants and the epic *Mahabharata* to the Socratic dialogues of Plato, Cicero's *De Oratore* and *De Re Publica*, and key works of the early Christian tradition, our ways of thinking and learning have been shaped by exchanges characterized by reciprocity and openness of style and mind.

In a number of areas of human inquiry - epistemological, ontological, historical, ethical, pedagogical, political - the dialogue experienced a revival in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Fénelon's *Dialogues des morts (Dialogues of the Dead, 1712)*, Malebranche's *Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion* (1688), and Berkeley's *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713) all helped to shape the resurgence of the form in different areas of inquiry. Edinburgh's residents entered fully into the formal and informal possibilities of dialogue: it was here, for example, that the sociability of David Hume, Adam Smith and their compatriots in the Scottish Enlightenment became a defining feature of social and intellectual progress. Their work and that of their successors in Europe's Enlightenments continues to inform our understanding of individual, social and political life in the twenty-first century. Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779), for example - a work considered so inflammatory that its author wished it to be published only after his death - continues to delight and instruct its readers. The Institute draws on the distinguished history of interdisciplinary discussion and publication associated both with the University and with the city of Edinburgh. Much of our current interdisciplinary research in the humanities advances through the lively exchange of ideas, and formal and informal conversations in which views are formed, evidence is tested, and conclusions are modified. At their best, these conversations become dialogues.

Dialogue allows the present to confront the past, East and West to converse, dyads and binaries of all kinds to come into communication. Practiced in philosophical, literary, religious, historical and political contexts, as a genre it offers an important heuristic for interdisciplinary study in its own right.

Description

This IASH research theme will address all aspects of dialogue in its Enlightenment contexts: close study of key examples of the form; toleration, moderation and radicalism in the form and practice of dialogic exchange; the dialogues of Enlightenment with its 'others'; pedagogy and pleasure. We shall also be concerned with such issues as

- Dialogues between forms: words and music, text and performance, art and instruction
- Dialogues between languages, and between nations; their limit-points and breakdowns
- Socratic, scholastic, egalitarian, or other: dialogue as form and content
- the emergence of character through dialogue

- 'alternative conversations': the dialogues, for example, between centres of sociability and established institutions during the Enlightenment
- Communication and its failures; obstacles to dialogue: confrontation, power and fear
- Modern and contemporary theories of dialogue as tools of explication and enlightenment: Buber, Bakhtin, Friere

Events

Symposia: a fortnightly series of workshops and discussions involves visiting speakers, researchers from across the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, colleagues in other Scottish universities, and graduate students. Interested participants from beyond the university are welcome. Following Plato's example, wine and soft drinks will be served to facilitate further discussion. Details of the programme for Spring 2010 can be found at <http://www.iash.ed.ac.uk/dialogues.events.html>.

As part of the University of Edinburgh's events to mark the bicentenary of Charles Darwin, the Spring 2009 series took the form of "Dialogues with Darwin: Darwin and Edinburgh". The talks by Ian Duncan, David Fergusson, Walter Stephen, Gregory Radick and John Polkinghorne are available as IASH Occasional Papers.

Annual Conference of Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes, Edinburgh, 11 - 13 June 2009. The Institute hosted this prestigious event which took "Dialogues of Enlightenment" as its theme. Details at: <http://www.iash.ed.ac.uk/chci-iasn.conference.html>

Further meetings will be announced shortly. We welcome suggestions for additional events. Information about all IASH activities is published on the website.

Fellowships

Applications for Fellowships in relation to any aspect of this theme are invited from researchers in any field of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. See the Fellowships Programme (<http://www.iash.ed.ac.uk/fellowships.html>).

Links with other IASH Themes

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Translations, Adaptations and Modalities

Joint IASH / VARIE (Visual Arts Research Institute Edinburgh)
Research Theme, June 2008 - May 2011

Context

In August 2007 the South African musical show 'Truth in Translation' was staged at the Fringe of the Edinburgh International Festival. In this drama about the Truth and Reconciliation hearings of the 1990s, translators tasked with translating every testimony into the eleven official languages of South Africa come to realize that there are as many versions of the truth as there are languages. Ostensibly dispassionate, employed as transparent media of communication, they find themselves involved as witnesses and perpetrators at every level. Their dilemma - precisely located as it is both temporally and culturally - may stand as a dramatic exemplification of issues that concern modern Translation Studies more generally: what is the meaning of accuracy? What kinds of truth survive, or are created, in translation? How are they conveyed in languages? What are the responsibilities and culpabilities of the translator? What is the relationship between translation and interpretation, and how may communication be effected? What are the consequences of mistranslation?

From Biblical Studies to contemporary politics, these are issues of pressing concern in an age of global communication. The practice of translating has a long history; Translation Studies, by nature interdisciplinary as well as multilingual, is a relatively recent formation, whose rationale and methods inform lively comparative scholarship across the humanities and social sciences, from architecture to music, and philosophy to International Relations and Social Policy. 'Modernity,' the Latin American critic Ilan Stavans has asserted, 'is not lived through nationality but ... through translationality.'

Description

Translation has always been conceptually contentious, regarded variously as traducing, enriching, mechanical, creative, impossible This IASH research theme aims to sustain lively debate in the field and to carry forward recent scholarship in the multi-disciplinary aspects of translation studies into new contexts and combinations; its focus will be less on the linguistic practice of translation than on the implications of transformative shifts for modalities of meaning, expression or structure. Modality has technical meanings in Law and Philosophy which connect with more broad-ranging considerations of manners or states of being or behaving, as distinct from substance or identity. The politics and ethics of translation offer further expansion of the theme. Transgressive modes of translation (forgery, ventriloquism, performance, impersonation) provoke legal, ethical and cultural responses.

Interest may focus on what is preserved, what is transformed, and what lost in translations, adaptations and modalities of all types; equally, it may be concerned with the invisibility or intrusiveness of transformative processes, and those who accomplish or suffer them. Movement between 'source' and 'target' may emphasise origins and originality, or call them into question. Translation and transmission of cultural memory (the survival of texts and images, memorializing strategies) and cultural continuities, are active concerns in several current research groups, including [STAR](#) (Scotland's Transatlantic Relations Project) at IASH, and [VARIE](#) (Visual Arts Research Institute Edinburgh, which hosts the e-journal *Art in Translation*).

Translation theory's vocabulary of 'equivalence' and 'function' offers suggestive possibilities for processes and comparisons in many disciplines; there are opportunities, too, for considering issues of domestication and estrangement. Subjects for discussion and study in the programme for this theme will include the interaction of translation and culture; appropriations and colonisation; movement between media and contexts; new ways of thinking about influence; processes of re-inscription and critique; metaphor; interpersonal or inter-textual transference.

Local resources of interest to participants in this theme include [BOSLIT](#) (the Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation), established in 1994 by the University of Edinburgh and the [National Library of Scotland](#) to create a complete online record of Scottish literary works in translation. In addition to poetry, drama and prose, and translations of material from the oral tradition, this database includes writings by Scottish historians, philosophers, scientists, theologians and other works of aesthetic, intellectual and cultural significance.

While Literatures, Languages and Cultures might seem the natural base, colleagues from Arts, Culture and the Environment, African Studies, East and South Asian Studies, Divinity, Scottish Studies, Politics, Philosophy and Sociology all have interests in this area; events will seek to represent the full range of the topic, and applications for Fellowships are welcome in any aspect of translation study in its widest senses.

Events

- **Workshop Programme** - a regular series of workshops. Full details and abstracts are on the website at <http://www.iash.ed.ac.uk/translations.events.html>. To join the mailing list for information about these seminars, please email iash@ed.ac.uk
- *Art Writing: Translations, Adaptations and Modalities.*
Symposium on Translation in Visual Culture, Edinburgh, 23/24 April 2009
- Practical Translation Workshop: "Alice in Real Life": Thursday 7 May 2009
- Conference: "Romantic Translation, 1780-1830": Tuesday, 12 May 2009

Further meetings will be announced in due course; we welcome suggestions for additional events. Information about all IASH activities is published on the website.

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Atmospheres and Atmospheric

IASH Research Theme (starting in May 2011)

Context

Two astronauts go into a bar on Mars. They order drinks and find a table. They sit silent and glum for about 15 minutes until finally one turns to the other and says, 'You know the trouble with this place is that there's just no atmosphere'. It's an old joke, but it conveniently highlights two key senses of the word atmosphere: on one hand the gaseous environmental milieu necessary for the support of life; and on the other that impalpable yet immersive quality that cannot be directly apprehended or analyzed but is somehow 'in the air.' The joke operates by conflating (literally 'blowing together') the two meanings, but it is a conflation that is increasingly the reality of our new technically engineered atmospheric envelopes, such as the 'designed air' of contemporary shopping environments, conditioned and scented in order to produce an ambience conducive to sales. More generally, against the background of an atrophying planetary environment, practices of atmospheric modification and design have taken on a new and pressing cultural and political urgency, which suggests that the production and stabilisation of atmospheres will be one of the key areas of future social and economic endeavour, contest and conflict. Atmospheric engineering proposals that involve climate modification on a global scale are increasingly coming to public attention through publications such as the Royal Society's recent report *Geo-engineering the Climate: Science, Governance and Uncertainty*. At the same time, atmospheric and climatic technologies are being extended in military research and incorporated in new ways into projected scenarios: thus the Pentagon-produced paper *Weather as Force Multiplier: Owning the Weather in 2025* outlines a future in which battlezone environments can be 'designed' to advantage.

Increasingly we find a new attention being paid to atmospheric across different domains of cultural production. Our visual culture - to take one example - has become increasingly cloudy, to judge from the development of such immersive atmospheric installations as Diller + Scofidio's *Blur* pavilion, Olafur Eliasson's *Weather Project*, Anthony Gormley's *Blind Light*, or Jaroslaw Kozakiewicz's *Cloud Maker*, a device intended to literally vaporize Stalin's gargantuan Palace of Culture building in Warsaw. In all these works a 'thickened', visually opaque medium is produced. Yet it is striking that what they seem to oppose, that is our new visual technologies of scintillating high-definition, appear in their own way to be striving toward an atmospheric - because enveloping and immersive - condition: as the advertising line for high-definition televisions tends to run, 'Don't just watch it, live it!' With this, previous models of spectatorship are complicated as mediation increasingly tends toward something we would have to call 'immediation' (which would be the outcome of the intensification or acceleration of mediation, rather than its disappearance), the high-definition 3-D system pioneered by James Cameron in his film *Avatar* being only the most recent development. But outside the gallery or cinema as well, atmospheric products proliferate. As atmosphere increasingly becomes a thing that is designed, so it is increasingly subjectivized and enters the commodity market. Now one does not just drink mineral water, but purchases devices to atomize it to form a personal cloud of purity within which to breathe.

Before claiming atmosphere as a new object of study, however, one might pause a little, if only to register the inherent difficulty of using the term 'object' in relation to something that characteristically lacks the closure, separation and boundedness that the word implies. We are never, for example, in a situation of simple externality to the atmosphere we breathe: rather we are literally infused by it. Consequently it comes as no surprise that writers' vocabularies become atmospheric when they characterise societies in terms of a collective morale or spirit. Reporting on

his visit to Moscow in 1937, Lion Feuchtwanger, figured the difference between east and west in pneumatological form: 'The air which one breathes in the West is stale and foul. In the Western civilisation there is no longer clarity and resolution ... One breathes again when one comes ... into the invigorating atmosphere of the Soviet Union.' Equally, however, the invasive, interiorizing properties of the gaseous allow it to emerge as a cipher of totalitarianism: the Hungarian poet Gyula Illyés' 'On Tyranny', written around 1951, compares its pernicious effects to that of a leaking gas pipe in a house whose emissions envelope and permeate everything.

If atmosphere is the thing within which we are immersed, at the same time it is the saturated medium and support through which all signals, transmissions and communication must pass. Aroma and scent, the visual phenomena of aura, glow or radiance, the babble of Michel Serres' cacographic milieu of background noise -these are matters for atmospheric thinking, as indeed are all emanations. Unsurprisingly, visions, phantoms and hallucinations - each an emanation of sorts - are popularly imagined to take nebular form as coalescences within the atmospheric medium. ('Dead men's souls!', Ruskin thought, as he gazed up at his fearful storm cloud of the nineteenth-century). Typically we are told that ghosts are at first felt - they bring a chill, almost as if they might be localised weather systems - before being seen, vaporously appearing like the spectres of the historic phantasmagoria shows that were projected onto smoke.

Description

Some scholars, such as Peter Sloterdijk, have argued that cultural theory needs to undergo a meteorological turn in order to respond to our present atmospheric situation. The research theme will explore this idea, taking a broad cross-disciplinary and humanities-based approach to the question of atmospheres and atmospherics in their historic, contemporary, and potential future conditions. We seek, in particular, proposals that mobilise 'atmospheric thinking' in a creative and critical way in order to open up innovative approaches and insights into researchers' areas of study. This might involve new ways of considering artistic media, thinking about background music in cinema, conceptualizing the impalpable in literature, etc. Equally, insofar as the theme identifies a crucial zone of interaction between technology, society and the environment, we hope to receive a number of proposals that address the philosophical, political, and ecological implications of our contemporary 'cultures of atmosphere'. This research theme will run in parallel with an IASH series on the Senses, and we will seek opportunities for interaction and dialogue. Specific areas that might be addressed by applicants include:

- Histories and theories of atmosphere
- Pneumatological aesthetics
- Atmospheric imaginaries and futures
- Atmospheric commodification
- The poetics of atmosphere
- Media atmospherics

Theory in Practice, Practice in Theory

IASH Research Theme: January 2009 – December 2011

Context

The past few decades have been dominated by a ‘theoretical turn’ in most if not all fields of the social sciences and literary and cultural studies. As well as the rise of social, literary, cultural theory and so forth, perhaps the most striking feature of the period was the existence of something like ‘theory’ as such, without any qualifying adjective. This involved a substantial migration of ideas from continental Europe to the English-speaking countries, as well as the reconfiguration of these ideas in local terms under categories such as ‘post-structuralism’. Derrida’s mutation from French philosopher to North American and global ‘theorist’ is emblematic of this process.

The prevalence of ‘theory’ as something transcending the existing academic disciplines in their various national configurations coincided, however, with a substantial side-product: the orientation of the leading ‘practitioners’ and their followers to ‘practical’ issues of politics or policy. Foucault’s activities in relation to prisons or Derrida’s in relation to the University as institution are again exemplary of this. More recently, philosophers have discerned a ‘practical turn’ in their subject, where this means more than just ‘applied philosophy’, philosophy applied to ethical or political dilemmas, but a broader conception of the historicity of philosophy and other forms of intellectual life. Theorizing comes to be seen as a human practice among others, and philosophy as what Jurgen Habermas has called a ‘place-holder and interpreter’. Habermas in Germany, Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in France, Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Rorty and Charles Taylor in North America can stand here for many of their contemporaries, as well as thinkers of the subsequent generation such as Seyla Benhabib, Axel Honneth or Judith Butler.

In other fields, such as psychoanalysis, art or architecture, a practical orientation was built in from the start. What was called in the 1970s the ‘finalization’ of science, its application to practical purposes, is exemplified by environmental science and, more recently, by biotechnologies of all kinds. The diffusion of mapping technologies in satellite imagery and global positioning systems is an example of the application of a previously hermetic technology which changes our representation of space and opens up new relationships between conceptualization and visualization. While on the one hand, researchers have grown increasingly distant from their objects of study (as a result of technology and virtual representation) there has been a counter-move towards a direct engagement with them. This can be seen in environmental writings, in which the researcher is also the walker, ‘mapping’ the landscape through the body, and, more generally, in participatory research. In a different context, neuroscience re-makes something like phrenology in the forms of modern science and technology. A theme such as memory has been a major focus of recent thought, approached from such diverse perspectives as those of neuroscience, the psychopathology of trauma, and oral history and life-writing (the subject of a recent IASH research theme).

The practical application of theory is only one aspect of this development. From the other direction, in social and political policy, ‘evidence-based’ policy and ‘practice-led’ theory and research in social work have become increasingly prominent. (‘Evidence-based’ has been cited by the *THE* (August 28 2008) as one of three increasingly frequent terms in recent social science.) ‘Reflexivity’ is one way which thinkers have sought to capture this feature of our modernity; the concepts of memes and viral transmission (featured in the work of a 2009 IASH fellow) represent another. Neuroscience has also been seen as increasingly relevant to literary reflection on consciousness, and environmental concerns have become increasingly prominent in literary theory.

Description

This research theme will bring together thinkers from a variety of disciplines who are exploring or exemplify this practical turn and act as a bridgehead to practitioners seeking a forum in which to theorize their practice. It should therefore also function as an innovative contribution to current initiatives in knowledge transfer. Relevant areas of research might include:

Evidence-based practices (for example, policy research, procedures in crime and detection such as forensics and psychological profiling.)

The transformations of theory into practice, and the dialogue between theory and practice, in therapeutic interventions such as psychoanalysis and psychotherapy.

The relationship of theory to practice in cultural production, such as creative writing, performance and performativity, the visual arts, architecture and the built environment, media practices.

The translations of religious beliefs into political discourse.

The articulation of the theory/practice interface with that of the relationship between distance and proximity in, for example, anthropology, documentary media practices, environmental research and activism.

Events

- *Seminars*: a fortnightly series of seminars on Tuesdays at 4 p.m. In the autumn of 2009 the series focused on “Thinking Animals”. Details of the programme for the Spring Semester 2010 at <http://www.iash.ed.ac.uk/theory.events.html>
- *Symposium: Reading the Photographic Image*: 19 March 2009

Further meetings will be announced in due course. Information about all IASH activities is published on the website.

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The Academic and the Civic

IASH Research Theme: September 2009 – August 2012

Context

Relations between universities and their geographical, cultural and political contexts are a source of enduring concern. The academic and the civic have been regarded as, variously, opposed, inextricable, and mutually complicit. In the New Jersey school system, the Plainfield Academy for 'at-risk students' recently elected to change its name to the 'Barack Obama Academy for Academic and Civic Development.' Across the United States education is being newly described in terms that unite learning and citizenship imperatives; in the United Kingdom, citizenship has become a statutory element in the National Curriculum for Schools. In higher education the 'knowledge transfer' agenda attempts to build new relationships between academics and the 'users' of research. Such initiatives need to be understood within a broader framework which is both historically dense and conceptually sophisticated.

Long before the nineteenth-century emergence of the English civic university movement from private institutions led to the foundation of the great city universities of Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and Sheffield, Scotland had ancient universities embedded in and supported by their city contexts. The University of Edinburgh was founded in 1582; known as the 'tounis college,' it was promoted by the ministers and Town Council. But, as a recent historian has put it, 'A university could be an affliction as well as an asset' to the community that fostered it:

Throughout most of western Europe students had, since the Middle Ages, developed an unenviable reputation for drunkenness, brawling and whoring. Worse, universities were founded by bishops, and both staff and students might also enjoy legal and social privileges, granted to them by their ecclesiastical patrons, setting them apart from local society. Medieval Brussels, Barcelona and sixteenth-century Nuremberg had all turned down the prospect of a university on these grounds.

Every university has its own history of 'town and gown' relationships: close, mutually supportive, troubled and antagonistic. At any historical moment and in any particular location, the relationship between the academic and the civic may reveal much about a society's values, anxieties, practical requirements and larger aspirations.

Description

IASH has strong connections with some of the great European city universities, including Utrecht, Bologna, Charles University in Prague and Jagellonian University in Krakow. This research theme will address particular aspects of the dialogue between different universities and their civic contexts; comparisons between how relationships have been sustained in different national and cultural contexts and at different points in time; and more conceptual issues around the identification and constitution of learning and research as special activities, and the effect of institutionalising them in centres located in, but set apart from, other aspects of civic life. What did, and do, nations and cities want from their universities and their academics? If in the eighteenth century Edinburgh's town council promoted reform of the University to fit it to provide a modern education for a participant in 'civil society,' it seems now that universities are increasingly urged to

provide vocational training and practical innovation to support a business economy. The effects of civic pressures on disciplinary formation and innovation are complex and penetrate well beyond the teaching curricula of universities to re-shape the very idea of 'research' and its value to society.

When did the image of the 'ivory tower' emerge to isolate what went on in universities from the life that surrounded their precincts, and to what extent does that image still remain in the minds of citizens? Do academics still retain an aura of cultural authority, and from what is it assumed to derive? In the context of government pressure to demonstrate the 'impact' and 'knowledge exchange' components of university research, we shall investigate the mechanisms by which ideas are generated, transmitted, and 'applied' in extra-academic environments. At its largest, this theme invokes the relationship between social existence and the generation of knowledge.

Events

- Public Debate: the theme will be inaugurated by a public debate involving prominent academics and figures from public life, on the role of the university in modern society. Details to be announced.

Additional events already planned include

- Developing collaboration with the Universities of Utrecht, Helsinki and Bologna

Further events will be announced in due course.

We welcome suggestions for additional meetings. It is expected that there will be creative interaction with other current IASH themes, details of which can be found at <http://www.iash.ed.ac.uk/themes.html>.

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Embodied Values: Bringing the Senses back to the Environment

An Andrew W. Mellon Foundation John E. Sawyer Seminar: 2010-11

Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, The University of Edinburgh

The inadequacy of contemporary models of human-environmental relationships suggests the need to reconfigure existing and historical models of the senses within new paradigms informed by the inter-dependent exchange between mental and physical ecology: that is, embodiment. We propose a Sawyer Seminar series that will seek to challenge, and to re-think, presuppositions of Western twentieth-century engagement with the world such as anthropocentrism, mind-body dualism, and isolated subjectivity. The rationale for these comparative seminars is clear: firstly, we shall seek to clarify the degree to which sensory engagement in the world is a necessary precondition for the ethical self, for the intellectual self and the fully realized human being. Secondly, we aim to articulate ways in which bodily, sensory and extra-sensory perception are being or may be re-engaged with the environment – ‘nature’ as both immediate experience and independent reality. Cumulatively, the intention is to think what has been lost and what acquired in our historical sensory engagements; to meditate on the effects of sensory loss and deprivation, and on the conditions for enhancement.

A stimulating scratch group on ‘Values and the Environment’ held at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities in 2007-08 has generated a series of discussions with, we feel, great potential for further exploration. We wish now to also engage the expertise of colleagues in Music, Art History, Environmental Education, Psychology, Neuroscience, Cognitive Science and Informatics in discussion with leading international figures from different cultural traditions, to develop new models and practical possibilities for holistic engagement of the human and the environment. It is integral to the nature of the project to bring practitioners and academics into dialogue; the idea has been developed in discussion with leading contemporary artists, health professionals and educators, who will bring additional contexts for comparison to the seminars.

The six proposed seminars concentrate on each of the five senses individually, plus one on the sixth sense (haptic sense). They will be followed by a concluding conference, ‘**Making Sense of the Senses**’, to focus and develop the earlier discussions for a wider audience and to address directly questions of the value of sensory perception and its relation to the intellect and reasoning. Each bi-monthly seminar will be led by 3-5 international experts, whose papers will describe how their current research bears on the given topic. All the seminars will be attended by the core participants, who will ensure continuity, and an invited group of local and UK-wide scholars. At the final conference we hope to invite Michel Serres, one of the most eminent contemporary scholars of the senses, and Marina Warner, a distinguished writer of books on the imagination of the senses, to speak to an audience comprising as many as possible of the seminar participants and a public audience.