July 18-22, 2012

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The second joint meeting of Cheiron and the ESHHS was held at Dawson College, Montreal, Canada, July 18-22, 2012. Program chairs Mike Pettit (York University, Cheiron) and Uljana Feest (Technische Universität Berlin, ESHHS) put together a wonderfully rich program of papers and symposia, seamlessly integrating the two societies. Local arrangements chair Sam Parkovnick (Dawson College) fed the participants very well and made sure that all the arrangements ran smoothly.

The conference began on Wednesday with afternoon paper sessions on ‘Psychiatry and Social Order’ and ‘Measurement’, followed by a poster session and a lavish reception. Thursday’s full day of papers and symposia was kicked off by a double session on ‘Biography in the History of Psychological Disciplines’ (chaired by Sonu Shamdasani), which presented work in progress by PhD students at the newly formed UCL Centre for the History of Psychological Disciplines. Both psychologists’ and patients’ biographies were discussed. The session on ‘Historiography’ included papers on post-WWII historiographies (James Capshew), the use of digital humanities techniques (Chris Green et al.) and the vicissitudes of the term ‘social technology’ in the history of the human sciences (Maarten Derksen).

In the afternoon, a symposium was devoted to Milgram’s experiments on ‘Obedience to Authority’. Recent archival work on the actual proceedings cast some doubt on the alleged ethically benign and intellectually insightful character of Milgram’s work (Ian Nicholson), discussed Milgram’s deception in his written accounts of the experiments (Gina Perry), illustrated the role of rhetoric and negotiation between experimenters and subjects with audio fragments from the sessions (Stephen Gibson), and highlighted the alleged connections between the Holocaust and the obedience to authority experiments (Nestar Russell).

A second afternoon symposium focused on ‘Community, Collaboration and the Construction of Psychology’, with contributions on the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (Alice White), the notion of ‘psychological factory’ (Jeremy Burman) and the evolution of British Child-Study Societies 1889-1927 (Nathalie Chernoff).

Thursday closed with a movie night with Cathy Faye and Lizette Royer from the Archives of the History of American Psychology, presenting film footage from the Vineland Laboratory on the grounds of the Training School for Feeble-Minded Boys and Girls in Vineland, N.J. Following the film, Ian Lubek, Chris Green and Dave Devonis auctioned off books and reprints, which brought in $575 to support graduate student travel to ESHHS or Cheiron.
On Friday morning Alexandra Rutherford chaired a double session on ‘Gender and Feminism in Psychology and Social Life, 1890s-1970s’, with contributions ranging from daffodils (Millicent Shinn’s flower references in her baby biography) to the subversive role of Girl Scouts, the ‘woman problem’ as elucidated by Bryan and Boring in the 1940s, and the emergence of shelters from domestic violence in the 1970s. Kristian Weihs’ paper on Charlotte Bühler analyzed the significance of a portrait of Bühler in a Dutch-language book from the 1930s which sheds new light on both Bühler and the changing role and identity of the professional woman.

A recurring topic on Cheiron and ESHHS conference is the social and cultural role of psychology, including efforts to popularize psychological insights. After a session (Thursday) on ‘Media and Messages’, Friday saw papers on E.G. Boring’s ‘Psychology for the common man’ (Ben Harris), an unpublished and undelivered speech to the Eastern Psychological Association, and on debates on physiology as represented in scientific journalism in mid-19th century France (Sharman Levinson).

After lunch the Cheiron Book Prize was presented to Richard Noll (DeSales University) for his book American Madness: The Rise and Fall of Dementia Praecox (Harvard University Press, 2011). After some brief remarks and questions for Noll, our keynote speaker, Andrea Tone was introduced by Mike Pettit. Her address, “Spies and Lies: Cold War Psychiatry and the CIA,” described the work of Ewen Cameron at Allen Memorial Institute, Montreal and his mind control project known as MKULTRA involving attempts to “de-pattern” patients’ personalities with drugs such as LSD, intense ECS and other “treatments.

Psychology and psychiatry have given rise to a variety of ‘Therapeutic Cultures’, ranging from experiments on ‘mind-blindness’ (Scott Phelps) to psychological testing of children in the first half of the 20th century (Annette Mülberger), and from child rearing in popular Hungarian magazines (Zsuzsanna Vajda) to Synanon’s confrontational group therapy (Claire Clark), both from the 1950s.

The 1860s and early 1870s are considered a seminal phase for German philosophy and psychology. The philosophical concerns and directions of German thought in this period were subject of a symposium, which featured the work of Hermann Lotze (William Woodward), Gustav Fechner (David Robinson) and Kant’s influence on Wundt (Saulo de Freitas Araujo).

Saturday morning started with parallel sessions on the relations of psychology with adjoining disciplines. One was on the interrelations between biology and psychology, as represented in the work of Darwin (Francis Neary) and Freud; Martin Wieser in ‘From the Eel to the Ego’ focused on the early laboratory work of Freud on visuality and hidden organic structures, and subsequently Jannes Eshuis discussed the similarities between the drive models of Konrad Lorenz and Sigmund Freud. The other session was on psychology and anthropology, with contributions by Arthur Leal Ferreira on ‘Anthropophagy’ (the role of various, changing identities in Brazil), Bateson’s reading of
Lewin and Pavlov in a chapter in a never published book (Gerald Sullivan) and ‘Maslow’s Betrayal of Ruth Benedict?’ (Feigenbaum and Smith)

In the afternoon, it was again hard to choose between parallel sessions. Sessions on ‘Forming Psychological Communities’ (in Great Britain, Argentina and Finland) and ‘Knowing the Social’ rivaled with an extended symposium on ‘History and Memory’, organized and chaired by Régine Plas and Nathalie Richard. The symposium featured papers on anniversaries and commemorations in various scientific fields (archeology, sociology, psychology, psychiatry, and the Humboldt brothers). ‘Knowing the Social’ included interesting papers on psychology and citizenship in Spain (Belén Jimenez-Alonso), Harvard Functionalism (Lawrence Nichols), the role of Mark A. May in the Yale Institute of Human Relations (Dennis Bryson) and on the career of Carolyn Wood Sheriff, whose scientific contributions originally were overshadowed by her husband, Muzafer Sherif, but came to light in the early 1960s (Donald Routh).

Saturday had a splendid finale with a banquet at Le Nouvel Hotel, where the courses were pleasantly interrupted by cheerful speeches, rituals and even a bit of poetry, ‘Montreal moments’, written for the occasion by Philip Bell. The easy mingling of participants at the dozen (or so) tables and the lively commuting in between, provided an unmistakable proof – if necessary at all – of the joint nature of this conference.

But the conference wasn’t over yet: Sunday morning had two sequences of parallel sessions that proved the vitality of both presenters and audience. At nine o’ clock, sessions started on ‘The Past and Present of Theoretical Psychology’, with papers by Zhipeng Gao (on reflexivity) and Philip Bell (on ‘Psychology without foundations’ by Brown and Stenner), and on ‘Behaviorisms: Philosophical and Applied’, with papers by David Clark (on behaviorism and philosophy of mind), Sam Parkovnick (on G.H. Mead) and Edward Morris et al. (on Applied Behavior Analysis).

The conference closed with a session on ‘Human sciences and liberalism’ and, secondly, a lively exchange of practices, views and experiences between colleagues from various countries who are involved in innovations in the training of historians and the teaching of history.

Both societies of course also had their business meeting during the conference. At the Cheiron Business meeting, Nathalie Chernoff and Geoff Blowers were elected to the Review Committee to replace Leila Zenderland and Dave Schmit who were rotating off. New procedures for the Young Scholar Award, approved in 2011 were reviewed and there was a discussion about ways to attract new members. We will contact all the authors of books submitted for consideration for the Book Prize as a first step. Cheiron 2013 will be held June 20-23 at the University of Dallas. Larry Stern and Barbara Lusk are program co-chairs and Bob Kugelmann is in charge of local arrangements.

The ESHHS saw changes in the Executive Board. Petteri Pietikainen (University of Oulu) succeeding Ruud Abma as president, and Sharman Levinson (American University of Paris) replacing Uljana Feest as secretary. Jannes Eshuis (Open Universiteit
Netherlands) continues as treasurer. The ESHHS 2013 conference will be held in Würzburg, July 30- Aug 2, hosted by Armin Stock. The ESHHS has a new website: www.eshhs.eu.

On the whole, this second joint conference was a pleasant and stimulating occasion, with participants from all over the globe, including South America and Japan. Not only was the conference truly international, it also was truly interdisciplinary, with contributions investigating the human sciences in their full range, in their connections with other scientific fields, ranging from astronomy to the literary sciences, and with relevant political, social and cultural issues that are closely interconnected with the endeavors of psychology and other human sciences. What a treat!