
REPORT | POROČILO

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THE ART OF LINGERING HOSPITABLY A REPORT

During June 2023, I was privileged to attend the International Symposium in Hermeneutic Philosophy titled *On Beauty: The Utopia of Imagination, Here and Now?* in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The symposium was organized by the collaborative efforts of an international cohort, including Prof. Dr. Ramsey Eric Ramsey (Barrett, The Honors College at Arizona State University, USA), Dr. Andrej Božič (Institute Nova Revija for the Humanities, Slovenia), Prof. Dr. Dean Komel (Faculty of Arts at University of Ljubljana and Institute Nova Revija for the Humanities, Slovenia), Tomaž Zalaznik (Institute Nova Revija for the Humanities, Slovenia), and Janko Rožič (KUD Sestava, Slovenia).¹

The meeting featured students, scholars, and intellectually-inclined professionals from a range of disciplines including philosophy, architecture,

¹ The program of the symposium as well as the video of the lectures delivered on its final day are freely accessible on the website and the YouTube channel of the Institute Nova Revija for the Humanities (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYf_qH9Jshk).

environmental studies, psychology, literary studies, and social work. Each aspect of this meeting, including the setting, project themes, conference structure, and planned activities, materialized the values of academic integrity, hospitality, international coordination, intellectual development, and friendship. While there is much to be said about this unique experience, its essence can be distilled into its value for homebuilding, education, and hospitality.

Homebuilding and intellectual exchange

310 In a world malaised by the saturation of technology as a mediator and utility as an idol, questions of utopia are often met with snickers and rolling eyes. It is associated, at best, with genres of philosophically-inclined literature that are amusing to study for their historical value. This symposium leveled such ideas and re-affirmed utopia and beauty as concepts, for which society has a greater need, here and now, more than ever. Opening remarks by our distinguished organizers chartered a course on the question of beauty and utopia's relevance to our contemporary moment. How does utopia simultaneously disclose the dire nature of our present world, while revealing the status quo as impotent and impermanent—a facade of finality that relies so heavily on the branding efforts of Western propaganda machines?

The projects of the symposium's 16 presenters seemed to fall along a handful of different tracts. Works by Elise Poll, Adam J. Goldsmith, and myself disputed traditional notions of utopia merely as an unattainable destination. Ms. Poll's essay argues that utopian literature erupts into our consciousness, disavowing what is held to be possible by narrow, technocratic discourses, and encourages the kind of creativity that is necessary to handle the day's challenges. Mr. Goldsmith's work complements Ms. Poll's elegantly. He surmises that these eruptions into conventional thought lead to more refined faculty of judgment for political organizers with supplementary evidence of his own experience in organizing a prominent graduate student union in Chicago comprised of over 2000 members. I argued that, far from being purely unattainable, the utopian also finds its way into our present, lived experiences, as a radiant glimmer towards a possible (actualizable) future, one that is never grasped, but can still be touched. The salient connection between our work is the recognition that

utopian content has the power to inform and expand our present by putting us in contact with the heralds of a brighter future.

Following this initial, theoretically focused panel, the tone of the conference shifted towards applications of utopian theory to various disciplines. Jared Rusnak spoke to the importance of utopian works in education as a necessary rite of passage for those who are trying to address the world's most pressing environmental concerns. These were echoed by fellow Barrett alum, Hailey Gilles, who argued for a utopian overhaul of the U.S. justice system and its prioritization of punishment over rehabilitation. She suggests a turn towards "laugh-tivism" (a portmanteau of laughter and activism) as a means, through which to engineer social reform. At the heart of this tactic, is the recognition of humor's ability to simultaneously challenge power (regarded as such already in the early philosophical tradition through Diogenes of Sinope, for example) and foster new connections among a socially isolated populace. Both thinkers call for play to inform politics and to prefigure policy as such.

Zmago Švajncer Vrečko spoke to the applications that studies of beauty and utopia have in clinical therapeutic practice. One keen insight from Mr. Vrečko's work is the damaged relationship to beauty that frequently is found in his working with the survivors of cults and spiritually abusive practices. His conceptualization echoes and amplifies the work of several established hermeneuticians who have understood the faculties of imagination, play, and sensorial-aesthetic engagement with the world as an ontological feature of being-human. His clinical explorations reminded this writer of the erudite notion that it is poetry and aesthetic dwelling (rather than prose and rote explication) that offer a path to spiritual renewal.

Jonel Kolić and Janko Rožič, pupil and professor, composed a complementary set of essays arguing for a re-envisioning of the Heideggerian notion of space as defined by human concerns, projections, and opportunities. Indeed, Mr. Rožič is one of the main creative directors of the hermeneutic appropriation of the prison that was once housed in Hostel Celica's walls. Their shared endeavors as professional architects are defined by this specific vision: to reclaim the foci of our dwelling spaces as the invigoration of human-being, rather than their current status as ergonomic apparatuses for the promotion of modern capitalist productive practices.

The final day of the conference was reserved for those whose work carried us through the final loop of the hermeneutic circle: the return to fresh ground where new thoughts find the chance to blossom. Andrej Božič and Alenka Koželj's essays discussed the hermeneutics of poetry both as historical artifacts, which teach us of the future, and poetic objects, which transform the understanding. Dr. Božič focused on Paul Celan's poetics of u-topia, in which the topos is conceived as the interplay between the physical notion of space and its status as a wellspring of meaning, through which identities, histories, nationalities, and cultures are both generated and re-made. He explores the dialectic between topos (as the space of being-human) and u-topos as the unarticulated future, which might alleviate the wounds and reminiscences of a harrowing past. Dr. Koželj's essay turned to the poetry of Hildegard of Bingen's notion of beauty within the Holy Spirit of the Christian faith. From different vantage points, these essays celebrated beauty as an engine for transformation, as something which reroutes us to the state of playful exploration that is rooted so deeply in our being-within-a-world.

312 The two closing contributors were from the Barrett faculty at Arizona State University, USA. Diane Gruber's essay brought attention to the proposed hermeneutic shift at the heart of David Graber and David Wengrow's ambitious text, *The Dawn of Everything*. One of its seminal moves is to call in question the popular liberal notion of inequality as a rigidly shaped feature of all societies that is best leveled through the existence of unregulated market economies. This historical practice has been elevated to the status of a metaphysical truth for many modern scholars. However, if such a challenge can be raised towards the place inequality holds in our society, Dr. Gruber ponders, how then must our own sense of helplessness in the face of systems-level catastrophes be altered to disclose our own nature as existentially free actors in a modern world?

Finally, Ramsey Eric Ramsey closed our meeting with an eye towards a new beginning. He remarked kindly and genuinely on the gathering of the minds that had taken place in Ljubljana. The temptation of modernity is the reduction of life to a series of formulas, methods, and transactions. Beauty by its very nature is the opposite: it calls us towards play, spontaneity, and the sense of meaning and purpose that is generated through human connection with one

another and our environment. Beauty's current status, as an instrument for amplifying monetary value, has become a symbol of humanity's current state as having fallen far from grace. By exploring beauty in its own right as a mistaken feature of our world, he argues, we can then become re-oriented towards ontological dwelling.

The Slovenian symposium: an educational topos

The International Symposium in Hermeneutic Philosophy aligned itself wonderfully with the *raison d'être* of its hosts. Over the course of a week, participants were provided space to interact within the beautiful walls of the Hostel Celica—a former communist-era prison since repurposed as affordable accommodations for international travelers in a setting that prizes environmentally sustainable practices, friendly and purposive interaction between guests, and the courageous reimagining of the future of urban dwelling.

Rather than conceal history, Hostel Celica's project is a sophisticated interpretive response to world events that shaped its home. It daringly offers a paradigm, through which human beings might work to tackle questions of historical memory that we, as a species, have been demonstrably inept at doing. Moreover, as a Westerner whose country is embroiled in a genus of politics that cares little for the truth of its own history, the stewardship of its natural resources, or the spirit of its people, I found myself nestled between awe and humility at the innovate projects of our Slovenian hosts. Drawing on the efforts of an international team, this project negotiates themes of cultural legacy, the complicated pain wrought by war, imperialism, and gentrification, along with the duty of future generations to both preserve traditions while still forging new paths in response to the questions of the day, such as environmental change.

Each prison cell has been re-imagined as a hospitable space for travelers that incorporates cultural elements of its former inmates by contemporary artists of the same origin. One notable room features work from a Russian artist, Maksim Isaev, that includes a breathtaking mural. This mural depicts a scene, which recalls the agony of imprisonment by incorporating scratches

on the wall, representing the countdown to an inmate's release. These are accompanied by a soothing blue acrylic paint and aquatic imagery—an homage to the freedom that was to come, and that we, as members of the future, should hold dear. The only room that has been left untouched is the cellar, which once housed the solitary confinement cells. Celica has no interest in erasing the fact that its grounds once acted as a place for practicing horrific acts of human debasement. At the same time, it is not Celica's goal to inspire survivor's guilt within its visitors. These traumatic memories are present in the form of independent or guided tours without necessarily being at the forefront of their activities.

314 Consequently, Hostel Celica succeeds in deriving motivation from memory. Each of its spaces is stunning, unique, and highly functional. The integration of historical memory serves to encourage participation in what would be, for many, a radical alteration in one's usual lifestyle. Individual rooms remain and are suitable for individual purposes (sleep, storing small luggage, personal reflection, or hosting another guest), and not much else. The bulk of the facility is devoted to engaging its residents with history and politics through the presence of art, intellectual conversation, communal eating spaces, and (almost daily) events and activities. *Their project is clear: interact with each other to be cultivated by one another.*

Hospitality as dwelling-with

It has been my great fortune as a Barrett alum to attend many similar events and conferences. The symposium provided a unique environment for its attendees, one I have rarely experienced in other academic events. More importantly, the symposium's model harkens towards a fresh paradigm for public intellectualism. The beauty of the academy is its ability to provide junctures for new forms of thought to blossom, and to do so with a kind of rigor that demands our intellectual horizons as a community to stretch. A short visit into its history, which traces its roots in the Socratic-Platonic tradition and method, can confirm this.

With this tradition in mind, the stereotype of the academy as an "ivory tower" is not only a reductive illusion, but an inaccurate one. Plato's academy was an ivory tower, only insofar as it was a space reserved for learned minds to

expand their understanding through interaction with others *and, thus, be able to bring this understanding back into the world of their concerns*. The academy is a symbol for intellectual discourse as an inextricable element of what it means to be-human-within-the-world. The summer symposium honored this tradition impeccably. From the onset, our Slovenian hosts were master provisioners of hospitality. They provided lodging and food, classrooms and artistic spaces, cultural and intellectual exchange. Undergraduate students were welcomed into conversation with graduate students, tenured professors, and established professionals. While collegiate degrees or certificates might have a hierarchical effect in many areas of life, that sentiment did not continue within the symposium. The horizon of social relations was flattened—each member of the symposium was viewed on a shared principle: we are all lovers of wisdom and we welcome the Other’s contribution. Several individuals remarked on our host’s warm reception and prioritization of rigorous (but accessible) intellectual engagement.

Our cohort’s activities stretched far beyond the preparation of traditional academic materials (papers, presentations, and publications). We attended a sublime showing of Rembrandt’s drawings at the National Gallery of Slovenia. One of our hosts, Janko Rožič, was kind enough to provide symposium attendees with a walking architectural tour of Ljubljana. He attended to several elements of the city’s history: architectural styles, city planning decisions (especially the prioritization of communal spaces), the role of major historical events in the decision-making process, and more. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, he shared the kinds of projects that modern European architects were using to retain the “soul of their cities.” That is, how are architects and urban planners able to continue developing urban spaces in a manner that respects the human need for dwelling-with alongside the challenges of the modern market-focused society.

In truth, the Slovenian symposium marked itself as a vibrant edition of an academic topos. It was a beautiful reminder of the academy’s essential role in the modern world and a hint at the contributions it will continue to disclose to us in the future. This gathering left myself and many others thankful for the labor that brought us together and energized at the thought of what future collaborations will offer us.

phainomena

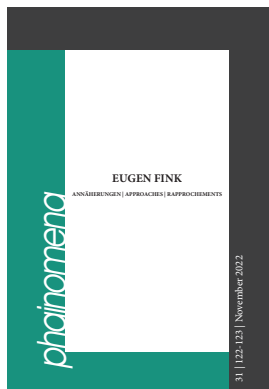
REVIJA ZA FENOMENOLOGIJO IN HERMENEVTIKO
JOURNAL OF PHENOMENOLOGY AND HERMENEUTICS



Phainomena 32 | 124-125 | June 2023

Passages | Prehodi

Alfredo Rocha de la Torre | Miklós Nyíró | Dario Vuger |
Ming-Hon Chu | Maxim D. Miroshnichenko | Jaroslava
Vydrová | Malwina Rolka | René Dentz | Igor W. Kirsberg |
Izak Hudnik Zajec | Primož Turk | Adriano Fabris



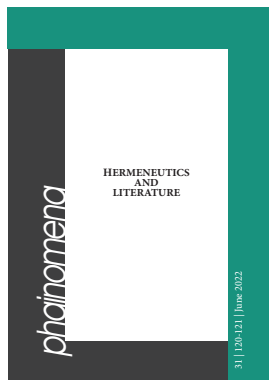
Phainomena 31 | 122-123 | November 2022

Cathrin Nielsen – Hans Rainer Sepp – Dean Komel (Hrsg. |
Eds. | Dirs.)

Eugen Fink

Annäherungen | Approaches | Rapprochements

Cathrin Nielsen | Hans Rainer Sepp | Alexander Schnell
| Giovanni Jan Giubilato | Lutz Niemann | Karel Novotný
| Artur R. Boelderl | Jakub Čapek | Marcia Sá Cavalcante
Schuback | Dominique F. Epple | Anna Luiza Coli | Annika
Schlitte | István Fazakas



Phainomena | 31 | 120-121 | June 2022

Andrzej Wierciński & Andrej Božič (Eds.)

Hermeneutics and Literature

Andrzej Wierciński | John T. Hamilton | Holger Zaborowski
| Alfred Denker | Jafe Arnold | Mateja Kurir Borovčič |
Kanchana Mahadevan | Alenka Koželj | William Franke |
Monika Brzóstowicz-Klajn | Julio Jensen | Małgorzata Hołda
| Ramsey Eric Ramsey | Beata Przymuszała | Michele Olzi |
Simeon Theojaya | Sazan Kryeziu | Nysret Krasniqi | Patryk
Szaj | Monika Jaworska-Witkowska | Constantinos V. Proimos
| Kamila Drapało | Andrej Božič | Aleš Košar | Babette Babich

