



# VIRTUOSITY:

## Newsletter of the ASCP

Australasian Society for Continental Philosophy

## Issue 7, November 2016

*The ASCP circulated a newsletter during the latter part of the 1990s under the title "Virtuosity." We re-launched the newsletter in 2009 as a way of detailing important news and events of interest to members of the ASCP and wider Continental philosophy community in Australasia. This issue gives a summary of important events over the past year, as well as thoughts on future directions of the Society. Future issues of the Newsletter will include news, conference calls, new journal issues, links to reviews of ASCP authors, and other items of interest to the Australasian Continental philosophy community. We look forward to receiving contributions from members of the ASCP community and welcome ideas or suggestions for future issues. Thanks to all the contributors to this issue.*

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### 1. Welcome

2016 has been an eventful year for the ASCP, with plenty of ups and downs for members. With the humanities and social sciences being effectively excluded from ARC Science and Research Priorities, and metrics for research funding shifting to impact measures, the sense that our research is undervalued seems to be a recurrent theme. We have cause to celebrate continental philosophy's resilience, however, as the Society celebrates its 20th anniversary this year – its inaugural conference taking place in Melbourne in 1996. See the article below on the early days of the Society, by ASCP veteran Dr Melissa McMahon. From this auspicious beginning, the community has remained active, with events this year including workshops on the work of Alain Badiou, Hannah Arendt, research methodology, friendship, race, and the inaugural [Australian Hegel Society](#) conference. The Melbourne School of Continental Philosophy ([MSCP](#)) and Sydney School of Continental Philosophy ([SSCP](#)) continue to offer the kinds of courses and teaching opportunities that are almost imper-



missible in most universities. Having navigated the cumbersome ARC funding outcomes interface, I have also found the good news that ASCP members have been successful in the most recent round: Dr Chris Mayes has won a DECRA at University of Sydney with a project on “Bioethics in the Antipodes: A history of Australian bioethics since 1980;” Professor Moira Gatens has won a Discovery Grant on “Spinoza and literature for life: A practical theory of art;” and Associate Professor Catherine Mills has won a Discovery on “Legal and ethical issues in the inheritable genetic modification of humans” (apologies to anyone I’ve not been able to find).

There has also been sadness this year, with the deaths of György Márkus and John Dalton, obituaries for whom are included below. This year the ASCP launched a bursary scheme to assist Australasian postgraduate students and under-employed graduates to attend the annual conference, and we have named this bursary in memory of John, who was himself a precarious academic worker.

We are excited to be including a new feature profile of an ASCP member, Simone Bignall, an initiative of our Equity and Diversity team, and hope that the member profile will become a regular item in Virtuosity. Simone is outgoing Secretary of the ASCP, and co-editor of the ASCP-associated book series “[Continental Philosophy in Austral-Asia](#),” the first books of which will be launched at the conference reception in December. We encourage members to consider publishing with the series. Please [contact me](#) if you would like to meet during the conference to discuss ideas about your potential book.

This year marks the end of my term as Chair of the ASCP, as well as the completion of terms for the Deputy Chair (Robert Sinnerbrink), Secretaries (Simone Bignall and Andrew Inkipin), and International Liaison Officer (Diego Bubbio). On a personal note, I would like to say that it has been a pleasure working with the ASCP committee, every one of whom has brought to their role an enthusiasm and commitment to the goal of serving the community of scholars in continental philosophy in Australasia. Despite occasional but inevitable differences of opinion, all of them have also brought a professionalism

and spirit of good will to the service they do. I have enjoyed the privilege of representing the ASCP, and look forward to seeing the Society continue to flourish under new leadership. Thank you comrades — onwards and upwards!

- *Joanne Faulkner, Outgoing Chair*

## 2. ASCP Annual Conference 2016

The [annual conference](#) will be held at Deakin University (Burwood Campus) this year, from December 7-9. The conference will run up to nine parallel sessions over the three days and features a number of curated streams, including ‘Philosophies of Self-Formation’, ‘Philosophy and Creative Practice’, ‘Continental Philosophy and Other Traditions’, ‘Phenomenologies of Oppression’ and ‘Law and Philosophy’. A special plenary panel will also be devoted to the work of Russell Grigg.

The keynote speakers are [Penelope Deutscher](#) (Northwestern), [John Lippitt](#) (Hertfordshire), [Anne Sauvagnargues](#) (Paris Ouest) and [John Sellars](#) (King’s College London).

If you would like to attend, please register in advance via the conference website at <http://www.deakin.edu.au/adi/our-research/2016-australasian-society-for-continental-philosophy-conference>. Detailed information about the conference can also be found here, including, once it has been finalised, the conference program.

- *Sean Bowden, Treasurer and Conference Organiser*

## 3. ASCP Annual General Meeting

All ASCP members are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held at the Annual Conference, at 12:45-2:25 on Friday 9 December 2016. The minutes from the last AGM can be viewed at [http://www.andrewinkpin.net/ASCP\\_AGM\\_2015\\_Minutes.pdf](http://www.andrewinkpin.net/ASCP_AGM_2015_Minutes.pdf), and members can also view the meeting agenda at [http://www.andrewinkpin.net/ASCP\\_AGM\\_2016\\_Agenda.pdf](http://www.andrewinkpin.net/ASCP_AGM_2016_Agenda.pdf).



## 4. ASCP Executive Committee 2016

### Call for nominations for vacant positions on the sitting Executive Committee.

The following positions will become vacant and require filling at the 2016 AGM: Chair, Deputy Chair, Secretary, International Liaison Officer.

### Descriptions of the positions are as follows:

The **Chair** is responsible for the ensuring the functioning of the Executive Committee and for overseeing the general running of the Society and its various activities. The chair takes responsibility for ensuring that the Society and its members uphold the Constitution and fulfil the aims of the Society in its activities and events. The chair will also appoint as required a 'Public Officer' (who must be a New South Wales resident) for the purposes of the Society's incorporation as a (non-profit) association. The 'Public Officer' will normally be a member of the executive.

The **Deputy Chair** is co-responsible with the Chair for overseeing the running of the Executive Committee and general activities of the Society, and who can stand in for the Chair if he or she is temporarily unable to perform these functions. The Deputy Chair is generally co-responsible with the Chair for ensuring that the Society and its members uphold the constitution and fulfil the aims of the Society in its activities and events.

The **Secretary** is responsible for managing all data and information records related to the Society, including correspondence to and from the Society, the Society's database, mailing lists, copies of minutes, membership registers, list of sponsored activities, and for reporting on these subjects to the Executive Committee in accordance with relevant sections of the "Model Rules For Associated Incorporations Under the Associations Incorporation Act, 1984".

The **International Liaison Officer** is responsible for initiating and sustaining relationships with other philosophical societies and associations beyond Australasia, as well as co-ordinating others' efforts in linking with international organisations.

Nominations are to be forwarded in writing to the

ASCP Secretary, Dr Simone Bignall (simone.bignall@flinders.edu.au) or Dr Andrew Inkpin (ainkpin@unimelb.edu.au) by Friday, 2 December 2016. Nominees are requested to include a brief CV, the name of an ASCP member who has agreed to second their nomination, and a brief statement expressing their vision of the ASCP.

### ASCP Constitution:

Members can nominate themselves for any position other member of the Society agrees to second the nomination. Members wishing to nominate themselves for a position on the executive committee must do so in writing to the sitting executive committee at least seven days before the scheduled date of the annual general meeting.

The AGM and ballot will take place at Deakin University, during the Annual Conference, 12:45-2:25 on Friday 9 December 2016. (Location of AGM to be confirmed.)

- *Andrew Inkpin, Secretary*

## 5. The Dramatisation Of An Idea, Or, "Hey, Let's Put On A Show!"

What I like about organising conferences is taking an abstract idea or goal - x event on y topic - and analysing it into an array of concrete coordinates: it has to happen somewhere, at some time, it brings together a certain number of bodies who need to see, hear, sit, speak, eat, drink, keep warm (or cool) and perform ablutions. It occupies a certain space and time, punctuated and modulated. It must be paid for. This is put in place - on paper. Then the nametags and cashbox are set out on the registration desk, the first attendee is ticked off and the performance begins, with its own sets of coordinates and encounters, the actualisation of the event. A conference is the "dramatization" of an idea, as per Deleuze's method. Instead of using the classical philosophical question - "what is x?" - to determine the essence of a thing, we instead favour questions such as "who?," "how?," "where?," "when?"



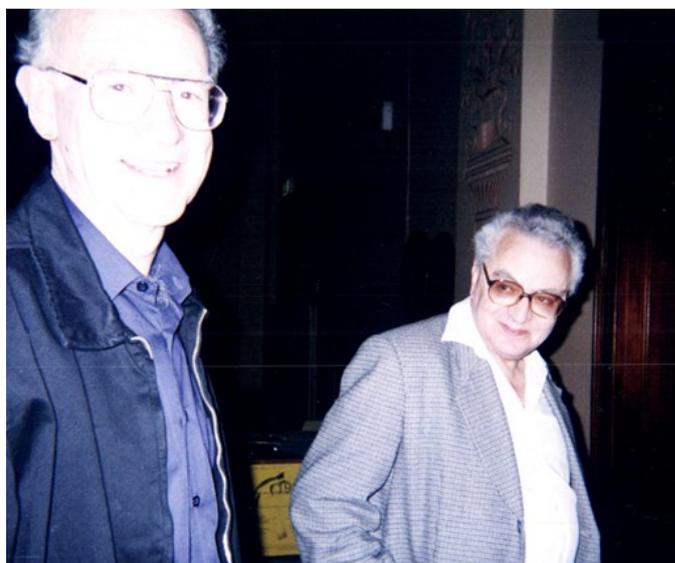
and “how much?” These questions aren’t just incidental details external to the concept, but spatio-temporal dynamisms and multiplicities intimately folded into the identity of the idea. As any conference planner knows, a conference is not a thing, but a million things.

At the other end of the cultural spectrum, conferences, and the ASCP conferences in particular, are a fairytale about little people with big dreams and boundless enthusiasm - “Hey, let’s put on a show!” The ASCP did not start small. The first conference - 1996’s “Time and Memory” - sprang straight out of the gates with an array international guests such as Keith Ansell-Pearson, Constantin Boundas, Philip Goodchild and Brian Massumi. Graham Jones, whose brainchild the ASCP really is, was never sure whether the people he first corresponded with knew who he was, or wasn’t. They obviously had a good time - two or three of those first guests came back for more in later years. There was clearly a need for this kind of conference in Australia, and it enjoyed the moral support and participation of leading figures on the local scene such as Paul Patton, Rosalyn Diprose, Liz Grosz and Max Deutscher, among many others. This was a major part of the success of the conferences, despite the limited institutional and financial support, but - to finish with an indication of the corny sentimental pride I feel about the achievements of the ASCP - the engine room was just a bunch of postgrads who could.

Some photos from 1999’s “To Be Done with Judgement: ethics, aesthetics, etc”, held 27-29 August at Glebe Town Hall.



1. John Bacon and Alain Badiou. The 1999 conference finished with the launch at Gleebooks of the English translation of Badiou’s *Manifesto for Philosophy*. Oliver Feltham, at that time translating Badiou’s *Being and Event*, coordinated Badiou’s visit to Australia. Badiou had been my supervisor in Paris and the ASCP was very happy to assist with the Sydney leg. The photo suggests otherwise, but Badiou enjoyed his visit to Australia, despite the audiences being much smaller than the packed lecture halls he addressed back home, and much smaller than they would have been had he visited a couple of years later.



2. Paul Crittenden and the late, great György Márkus. The 1999 conference featured a special panel on the history of continental philosophy in Australia. The panel included George Markus, Max Deutscher, Paul Patton, Paul Redding and, from memory, Paul Crittenden and Robyn Ferrell.



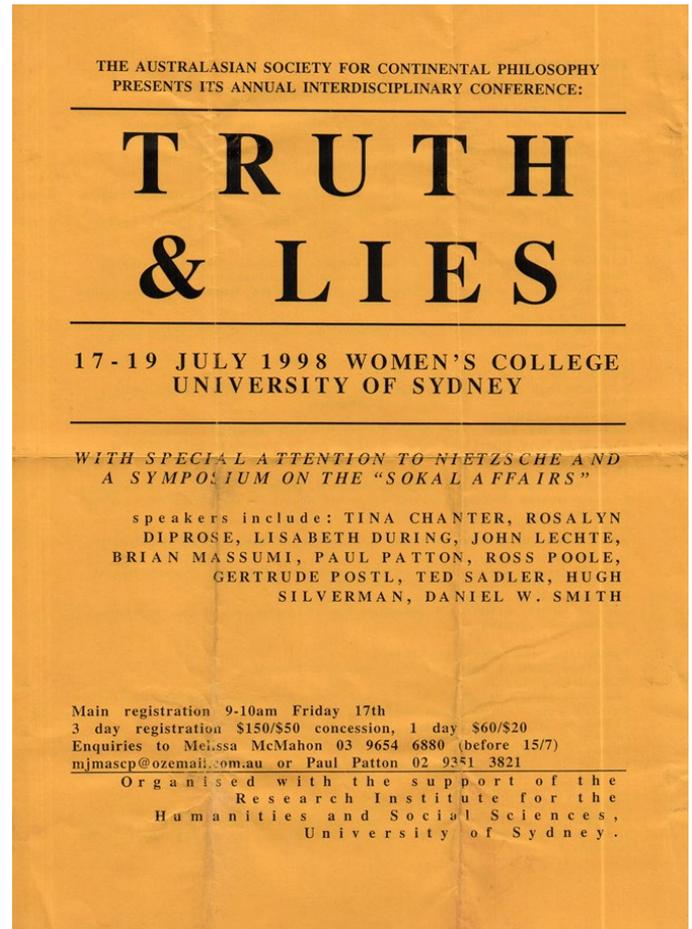
3. Max Deutscher. Max Deutscher's idiosyncratic papers have been a fixture on the ASCP program from the beginning, just as he himself has been a fixture of continental philosophy in Australia from the beginning.



4. Laleen Jayamanne and the other keynote of the 1999 conference, Steven Shaviro.



5. The 1999 organising committee: Esther Anatolitis, Andrew Montin, Melissa McMahon and Timothy Rayner. All of us have pursued careers outside of academia, which I think says something about the pragmatism and romanticism it takes to put on a show.



6. Flyer for the 1998 conference at University of Sydney.

- Melissa McMahon was involved with the organisation of three ASCP conferences, from its second one in 1997 - "Topologies" - then 1998's "Truth and Lies", and 1999's "To Be Done with Judgement."

## 6. ASCP Equity and Diversity Statement 2016

This year the ASCP Equity and Diversity officers were Marguerite Le Caze and Ross Barham. The following is a summation of the main E&D goals achieved since 2015:

- First E&D Statement included in Virtuosity
- Accounting of nominal gender diversity in ASCP Executive Committee: Male ~70%; Female ~30%
- First ASCP Member's Profile published in Virtuosity
- E&D session organised for ASCP Conference



- Explicit E&D focus given for ASCP Conference travel bursaries
- New links added to E&D webpage
- Review and reinstatement of '2015 ASCP Statement on Equity and Diversity'
- Ongoing development of roles and responsibilities for the ASCP Equity and Diversity Officer

An Equity and Diversity session is becoming a regular feature of the ASCP conference. See you at this year's!

- *Marguerite Le Caze and Ross Barham*

## 7. The 2015 ASCP Equity and Diversity Panel: Postgraduate Reflections

The Equity and Diversity Panel at the 2015 ASCP Conference generated a lively, inclusive discussion that came to focus largely on finding practical strategies for encouraging meaningful diversity at future conferences and other affiliated events (with a view to broader questions about demographics within the profession as a whole). The concerns raised by postgraduates before and during the meeting drew attention to the complexities generated by the different roles that student members of the ASCP often find themselves occupying. As might be expected, postgraduates form a key target group for attempts to foster greater diversity in the profession, based on the recognition that making space for under-represented voices requires particular support during the challenging junior career stage. On the other hand, however, postgraduates are also tasked with implementing such efforts themselves, especially in their roles as teachers, event organisers and committee members. This means that postgraduates from under-represented groups tend to occupy positions on both sides of the lectern simultaneously, so to speak, and require different types of support to navigate the distinct challenges that they face on each side.

The concerns and proposals offered by postgraduates at the meeting can be subsumed under three broad headings: representation, accessibility and resources.

Postgraduate attendees emphasised the importance and positive impact of seeing diverse groups represented at professional functions, particularly as keynote speakers, panellists or invited contributors. While significant progress has been made in this direction in recent times, attendees noted that there was still room for improvement. Two key concerns arose in light of this discussion. These were, firstly, that efforts at encouraging more diverse representation could end up being tokenistic if not implemented properly, and, secondly, that they may inadvertently position members of minorities as having to speak for whole groups. In addressing these problems, several attendees suggested that such worries show the complexity and long-term nature of the task ahead, but should not paralyse attempts at fostering greater diversity. Proposals for short-term strategies included formulating guidelines for choosing keynotes and invited speakers, as well as integrating philosophy by and about minority groups more explicitly into the conference program. The suggestion here was to encourage future conferences, for example, to devote a whole stream and/or a slot in several sessions to work by philosophers from under-represented groups, or to salient themes (one example given was a panel about Merleau-Ponty and the philosophy of race). This kind of proposal also seeks to target the problem of sessions related to such work being seen as 'less important' to the conference or 'easy to avoid/skip', attitudes that many attendees claimed to have encountered at previous events.

Accessibility proved to be another key theme, articulated in terms of entry to affiliated events as well as the more intangible entry to the profession (especially through opportunities to interact with senior researchers) that such events can represent. Students outside and within the meeting signalled that they strongly value both kinds of access, consider them crucial to fostering any equity-related goals, and are concerned about potential future limitations placed upon such access. Discussions showed that postgraduates recognise the considerable efforts of the ASCP and associated groups in making their events accessible to attendees from diverse backgrounds, and hope that this develops further. Postgraduates also noted with appreciation that recent conference and event programs have encouraged junior and senior



researchers to interact, especially by including papers from speakers at various career stages within the same session. Attendees suggested that these efforts could be extended by opening up further avenues for collaboration and network-building. One proposal involved the creation of a database of any researchers attending conferences or events who would be willing to be contacted for advice, mentoring or collaborations; if launched far enough ahead of the conference, this could become a platform for planning panels and co-authored talks. This scheme would, of course, have to be planned carefully so as to avoid generating more accessibility issues than it solves.

The final category of concern raised by students at the meeting refers to the need for resources that support postgraduates in their own efforts to foster greater diversity within the discipline and profession. As noted above, postgraduates themselves are often at the forefront of equity and diversity initiatives, particularly when it comes to teaching undergraduates and planning professional events. To do this effectively, postgraduates require support in the form of materials, training and advice. One suggestion that attracted much support at the meeting was the creation of a database of useful links and information. This would involve gathering together existing resources (such as lists of philosophers from under-represented backgrounds, so that students know where to look when seeking to invite speakers) as well as creating new ones (e.g. teaching advice based on the latest empirical research about factors impacting undergraduate demographics). Postgraduates, however, also need help in navigating the conditions under which they are asked to implement such efforts. In encouraging postgraduates to become better teachers and planners, we must avoid reproducing the kinds of inequities that under-represented groups already face (for example, through inadvertently asking individuals from minority groups to take on a disproportionate part of the work – especially emotional/informal labour – of combating inequitable circumstances, or treating individuals as default representatives of entire groups). This is not to diminish the role that postgraduates can and should play in fostering diversity within the discipline; it is to suggest, rather, that this role and the needs it generates are multifaceted.

From the perspective of a then-postgraduate, the

2015 Equity and Diversity Panel represented a refreshing opportunity to explore broader questions about inclusiveness and dialogue without losing sight of the need for concrete short- and long-term strategies. While the postgraduate attendees clearly understood that the efforts of the ASCP in implementing any proposals will ultimately be constrained by factors outside of the organisation's control, like limits of funding and time, the level of frank and stimulating discourse in this session nonetheless established a distinct sense of optimism.

- Marilyn Stendera, *PhD*

## 8. Winner of the ASCP Postgraduate Paper Prize, 2015

We are pleased to announce the winner of the 2015 ASCP Postgraduate Paper Prize, Gabriella Blasi, for her paper "Nature, History and 'Critique of Violence' in *The Thin Red Line*." Judges were impressed with the polish of the essay, and the "articulate and sophisticated manner that it manages to combine philosophical reflection and interpretation with critical and aesthetic analysis of a challenging film."

Gabriella is a PhD student in the School of Communication and Arts, The University of Queensland, and her PhD thesis focuses on nature-culture relations in Terrence Malick's films, applying Walter Benjamin's philosophy of art and technology to the emergent figural methodology in film and new media studies. Gabriella presented the winning paper in the Film-Philosophy stream at the 2015 ASCP conference at UNSW, Sydney. Her prize is \$250 and publication of her paper in the ASCP special conference issue of *Parrhesia*, to be launched at the 2016 conference.

## 9. György Márkus (1934-2016): Philosophy as a Way of Life

It was with great sadness that I learnt of the death of György Márkus on October 4, 2016, who succumbed to cancer after years of illness. I was one of



many students he had taught over the two decades he spent in the Department of General Philosophy at the University of Sydney (1978-1998), and one of the impressive number of postgraduate students who were fortunate enough to have received doctoral supervision from him during those years (which he continued informally until the mid-2000s). George, as he was fondly known, was one of the most admired and respected members of the School of Philosophy, which famously split into two Departments—the Department of Traditional and Modern Philosophy and the Department of General Philosophy—during the 1970s, before their eventual re-unification in 2000. Amidst the controversies and conflicts of those volatile years, George remained a diplomatic and stabilising presence, always mindful of the greater good of Philosophy at the University, and always able to find constructive ways of making what he once described as the ‘unhappy marriage’ between the analytic and Continental Departments work better ‘for the sake of the kids’.



The story behind George’s arrival in Sydney is itself a dramatic tale. Born in Budapest in 1934, and narrowly escaping capture by the Nazis during the war (close members of his family perished in the Holocaust), George was educated in Moscow, where he met his Polish-born wife, Maria (who would later become Professor of Sociology at the University of New South Wales). Along with Agnes Heller and Ferenc Feher, he was one of the core members of the ‘Budapest School’ of Western Marxism, influenced by the great Hungarian Marxist philosopher and aesthete, György Lukács. As John Grumley explains in his wonderful obituary for George, the Budapest School, comprising Lukács’ most brilliant yet critical students, were ‘interested in a renaissance of the true Marx in both theory and practice, building a humanist socialism’. This commitment, however, coupled with their protest against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, brought them into conflict with the Hungarian Kadar regime, which led

to the dismissal of some of the group from their academic posts (and to George’s resignation in solidarity). After living precariously for a number of years off translation work, it was the regime’s threats to impede their sons’ educational prospects that finally drove George and Maria to emigrate. After spending time teaching in Berlin, along with a sojourn in the United States, George and Maria came to Sydney in 1978, where he took up a lectureship in Philosophy.

To use an old-fashioned term, George was a true (Central) European intellectual: a man of great learning, with wide interests in art, history, and culture; someone who was erudite, knowledgeable, yet unfailingly modest; a person who was scrupulously polite and respectful, yet who also displayed, when the occasion warranted, a dry wit and an appreciation of humour. One can only imagine that he must have found his new Antipodean home something of a culture shock. He related an anecdote about his first impressions of Australia, after the formality of academic life in Germany. When in Berlin, he always addressed (and was addressed by) other colleagues—such as Jürgen Habermas, who dedicated a section of his famous *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* to a critique of George’s major work, *Language and Production* (1986)—as ‘Dear Herr Professor Doktor so and so ...’ A far cry from German intellectual formalities, George’s arrival in Sydney meant plunging immediately into first-year lecturing duties, introducing ‘Descartes and the Rationalists’ to an auditorium full of restless young students, most of whom had never studied philosophy before. ‘After one of my lectures,’ George recalls, ‘a young student approached me, completely uninhibited, and said to me, “Hey George, could you explain that cogito stuff again?” I was shocked, truly shocked! I remember thinking, what would they think of this in Germany? But then, after a while, I realised that I liked it, I liked it because it was so egalitarian, so free, and I thought, this could be a good place to be.’ There is no question that George made this a good place to be, and that this place was made immeasurably richer by his contributions to the wider philosophical community—not only for the many undergraduates who took his course as students, the postgraduates who studied under his supervision, but also those who went on to academic careers of their own at a time



when the discipline came under increasing pressure.

George's courses were legendary, both for their density and their drama. In any given course, there were students from other disciplines, other Universities, as well as other walks of life. His lectures were philosophical performances by someone who not only mastered the great texts of the Western philosophical tradition but knew how to bring them life, to demonstrate their power and relevance for the next generation. His work and his teaching were always intimately entwined. Indeed, he became a polymath (though he always denied this) across several areas of philosophy, from German Idealism (especially Hegel), the history of Marxism, classical aesthetics in the 'Continental' tradition (from Kant and Hegel to Benjamin and Adorno), philosophies of history and theories of modernity, the Frankfurt school of critical theory, to hermeneutics and philosophies of culture (a sample of his voluminous archive of papers was collected in the important 2011 volume, *Culture, Science, Society: the Constitution of Cultural Modernity*). For all his erudition and formidable intellect, George always wore his philosophical learning lightly. He had the rare ability to inspire respect and admiration but also to allow students to find their own paths, to discover their own way. He was a latter-day embodiment of the Enlightenment ideal of *Bildung*—cultivation and self-formation through learning, both inheriting tradition and transforming it anew—an ideal that he put into practice in his entire way of being.

For his Australian students, whose exposure to the history of philosophy (like mine) may have been limited to thumbing copies of Bertrand Russell's *A History of Western Philosophy*, his courses were an exhilarating and intoxicating experience. Eschewing today's pedagogical apparatus of audiovisual technology coupled with 'dot point' teaching techniques, George would arrive at the lecture theatre with nothing more than a pen and a school-sized notebook, crammed with written notes in his idiosyncratic (and indecipherable) hand, to which mysterious annotations would be added, sometimes during a lecture, in the margins and on opposing pages. After a pause, he would begin, transforming forbiddingly foreign and impenetrable texts into a compelling intellectual drama. He elaborated historical context and philosophical narrative with consummate skill so as to

bring these works to life, conjuring 'the mighty dead' as interlocutors from whom we all had much to learn.

For me, these lectures were a philosophical revelation. Philosophy, as we had sometimes been taught it, was deemed a specialised intellectual skill, a way of posing and resolving puzzles and problems, framing arguments and refuting objections, testing one's opponent and winning argumentative debates. Nowhere was this tendency more evident than in teaching the history of philosophy. Great thinkers of the past were paraded as examples of bad argumentation, confused logic, or woolly metaphysics. One could study passages from Plato, Descartes, or Kant but only as a kind of philosophical target practice; we entertained the illusion of superiority over these superseded thinkers, who remained pedagogically useful, but offered little else to contemporary thought. One of George's lasting contributions was to refute this common caricature of the history of philosophy. He showed us the power and brilliance of these thinkers, demonstrating that every philosophical problem, concept, or debate has a complex history, and that those who remain ignorant of this (intellectual and cultural) history are condemned to repeat it. He instilled in us a sense of ethical responsibility to read philosophy critically, never assuming a stance of implicit superiority or dogmatic progress that might tempt one to dismiss the achievements or ignore the legacies of the past. He taught us that enlightenment was something achieved through individual and collective effort rather than assumed as one's intellectual or cultural birthright. He once suggested that the most difficult thing in philosophy was to come up with an original idea, something that only a fortunate few might enjoy once or twice in a lifetime.

Despite his battles with the idiosyncrasies of the English language, George had a gift for telling philosophical stories. In his hands, Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, or Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* became adventures in thought, with all the dramatic excitement, conflicts, and twists of a gripping novel. I recall the conclusion of one of his semester courses on the Frankfurt School. As the final hour of the final lecture on Walter Benjamin's philosophy of culture drew to a close, George concluded the course by recounting Benjamin's tragic suicide: Benjamin taking his final copies of *Theses on*



*the Philosophy of History*, stored in a suitcase, fleeing to the Spanish border hoping to escape the Nazis, only to find that it had been closed the day before, and poisoning himself that night in despair. The next day, the border reopened—an absurd historical tragedy worth of Kafka. As he told the tale of Benjamin's death, keeping us hanging on every word, George's voice became quieter, more melancholy, his expression thoughtful and sombre, as the class sat spellbound in the fading light, perfectly still and silent, unsure, when he had finished, whether to applaud or to weep.

George showed us that philosophy is not something one learns from reading lots of books, although the art of reading philosophically is essential (he often mused about a course in 'Reading Philosophy' that would consist entirely of 'Introductions' to selected philosophical classics). He taught us that philosophy is not simply a matter of analysing arguments and raising objections, although the art of critique—one that reconstructs a philosophical position with hermeneutic charity, or maximum cogency, before commencing to criticise it—is the lifeblood of philosophical dialogue and intellectual debate. He also taught us that philosophy not really a 'profession' but rather a shared cultural and historical practice: one that is textually mediated, conceptually articulated, but also existentially animated—a way of life, to use the ancient phrase. It can be a living force with the power to reveal who we are and to question the world, but only if we cultivate the arts of reading and writing, interpretation and analysis, questioning and critique, enhanced by a humanistic ethics of responsibility towards both the traditions we inherit and to the future we help create.

Vale George, an exemplary philosopher and admirable human being, who taught by example what it means to think, and whose conduct was powerful testimony, in every sense, to the life of the mind.

- Robert Sinnerbrink, *Outgoing Deputy Chair*

## 10. In Memory of John Dalton

Dr. John Patrick Dalton, academic, philosopher and friend, died on the 2nd of August 2016 in Black-

heath, NSW. He was 45 years old.

John was dark, dry, and at times, very funny. He had a cleft palate that made him attractive in the way gapped teeth make some people sexy. He couldn't smile, but he had a wicked laugh.

John was born on the 30 January 1971 in Marrickville (Salvation Army Bethesda Hospital) NSW. He grew up in a Housing Commission in Redfern with adoptive parents, who watched daytime television and read detective novels, parents who may well have been bewildered by their son's fierce intellect and philosophical pursuits. John's mother, Ruth Dalton, died in 2007. His father, to John's great distress, died in 2010.



As a boy in school, John excelled, receiving a first place in 2 and 3 Unit English and 2 Unit Art at Cleveland Street High School in Sydney.

He went on to receive a Bachelor of Arts with First Class Honours in Philosophy from Macquarie University. In 2003 he completed his Ph.D. with a thesis entitled, 'The Finitude of Ethics: Levinas, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger.'

When asked about John, his dear friend and colleague, Dr. Julie-Ann Robson, recalls 'a copy of *The Road* by Cormack McCarthy he insisted I needed to read and would ask when I met him if I had. . . It was a hard cover (he hated paperbacks) that he had "liberated" from Goulds. He said books needed to be liberated from Goulds. It was the language in *The Road* that he delighted in, reading passages to me to show me why I should read it.'

There was a passion about John when it came to language, an urgency that is sometimes missing in universities today. With John, books and the ideas they contained were discussed, debated, questioned and rehashed.

'He should've been born in another era,' Julie-Ann



says of John, 'one where he could retire to a mahogany-clad office in a tweed jacket with patches at the elbows, smoke a pipe and terrify the daylights out of his students with his savage intellect.'

John worked as a casual academic for twenty years, from 1996 until this past semester, when he was not offered a contract. He taught literature and philosophy at Sydney University, Macquarie University and Western Sydney University. Despite his qualifications, John often struggled to pay rent and, in addition to academia, he worked at a book shop and as an administrator, returning essays to undergraduate students—though the latter job hardly suited him; he used to remove the bell from the student enquiry counter.

John's 'commitment' to university administration was noticed, and eventually he was maneuvered out, at which time he took to casual academia as his sole means of support. Previously he'd taken the odd casual contract, but in 2006 he took to it and left 'secure' employment for good. I always said I couldn't do what John did ... as it turns out, neither could John.

John was interested in the big questions. And he wasn't confined to a small focussed area of study, like so many academics today. His knowledge and interests spanned from the ancient Greeks to Heidegger, from contemporary human rights issues to his favourite novel, *The Malady of Death*, by Marguarite Duras.

In 2001 John co-founded, with Nicholas Strobbe and Peter Banki, *Contretemps, an Online Journal of Philosophy*. He designed and edited the journal that ran for five years and sought to be something different from the same old 'recycling of the "historical philosophy"', something applicable to today's events. In addition to this he wrote papers, presented them at conferences, read profusely and contributed to a robust and relevant contemporary philosophical debate.

Whenever he walked into a room at uni, I used to wonder: Am I smart enough to have a conversation with this man? Then I'd swallow hard and try. And we'd talk: about David Malouf's *Ovid*, about Sophocles, about the problem of students who don't read. He had zero patience for students who don't read. We'd talk about how painful it was to mark online

because, he said, 'The only way to get through it is to take the stack of papers to the café and drink ten coffees.'

There was an intensity about John when it came to books and big ideas; he became a vegetarian after reading Peter Singer, an Australian moral philosopher. John was, at times, obsessive and these obsessions were as varied as his intellectual pursuits—they ranged from lap swimming to computer games and the newest technology. But, on casual academic pay (where you don't receive any money from December to March) he couldn't always afford the credit on his phone.

Over time, John's research interests shifted from the topic of his thesis, continental philosophy, to philosophy of the mind [via de Sade], and most recently (according to conversations with Julie-Ann) the theories of Richard Dawkins. However, towards the end of his life, he ceased to discuss his theories. Nevertheless, he was rarely seen without a book and notebook. It was, perhaps, after what was apparently an unsuccessful conference paper John ceased to write or present his work publicly, except with insightful and incredibly intelligent posts and movie reviews on Facebook.

In recent years, when we met John in the corridors, he looked weary; there were dark circles under his eyes. He must've had demons the rest of us didn't know about.

None of us will ever know what was going through John's head in the days before he died. When he sat at home in Summer Hill contemplating suicide, he was alone in the world, in a house with his books in the cold dark days of early August. And books are not enough to sustain one's self. We need people. On the 2nd of August, he took a train to the Blue Mountains and jumped off a cliff in Blackheath.

Fellow academic and friend, Dr. Paul Alberts, remembered John eloquently at his funeral. 'I enjoyed his irreverent, funny, slightly misanthropic company,' Paul said, 'and wonder, sadly what else I might have done to keep him with us longer.' Many of us wonder the same.

John Dalton should've taught hundreds more students. He should've grown into a grumpy old man



spouting lines of Nietzsche and Dawkins at the café around the corner.

That dark brilliant face, that crazy laugh is imprinted on our memories. A hint of derision always, but a wonderful, hearty laugh that expressed the side of John I prefer to remember. Not the dark, haunted side that led to his decision to leave us, but the joyous side that took delight in life.

You are not forgotten, John Patrick Dalton, though you're gone—free from your demons—and we all know there's no afterlife.

- Sarah Klenbort and Julie-Ann Robson

### **Tribute to a dead poet**

I have only very few words to say about John. Mostly recollections and some impromptu conversations first at the Institute Building where we met in 2001 where he worked as an administrator and then over the bad coffee made by the courtyard café, when we talked about Heidegger, existentialism and the deterioration of morals at the university of Sydney.

When I met him he was holding in his hands two books, the poems of Arthur Rimbaud and the *Stranger* by Albert Camus. He was quick to condemn my Mediterranean superficiality. But we talked endlessly about philosophy, poetry, cinema and life without ever asking any personal questions. He didn't know who I was and I didn't know anything about him. Books and ideas kept us together and we felt a deep urge to see where each one of us was at every time we met after he moved to the University of Western Sydney.

I always felt that his departure from Sydney University was an incalculable loss to the philosophical conversations we tried to inaugurate there. He was intolerant and dismissive of all pretentious conceptual acrobatics that dominated analytic philosophy, the grand contribution of Sydney University to philosophical parochialism.

He thought of philosophy as a great contribution to the art of living, actually to the art of experiencing your inner life, the deep life of existence, which we discover and confront when the lights of socializing vanish. With him, you immediately felt the energy

of that inner life, full of dynamism, abrasiveness and anger. John was inspired by a vision of pure thinking, of a deep commitment to philosophy and human communication, even when he didn't want to communicate.

We worked together in 2006 when we organized the first conference on Martin Heidegger in Australia. Despite all my fears, he was friendly, collegial, helpful. 'This is my atmosphere,' he told me. Today his words ring so ominous and so lonely. I think it was only then when he started liking me. 'You hide the best part of yourself,' he told me then. I always had the impression that he did the same, maybe better than I did it.

I think that we lost a deep, sensitive, perceptive mind, an uncompromising individual, a man of profound integrity. I have this last recollection of him. At the Footbridge theatre bridge, in his usual way, he came in front of me and abruptly asked me: 'Do you know that Plato defined philosophy as the rehearsal of death?' 'Yes, I do,' I mumbled. 'Why don't you ever talk about things of substance?' he said angrily. 'What is the Greek expression for this?' I said: 'melete thanatou is the expression. Melete means study, meditation, rehearsal.' That will be, he said, the title of the book I plan to write,' and left me there without saying anything else.

His greatest book was his life: the life of the mind, introspection and self-reflection. John humanized reality for me: he made me understand the meaning of pure thought. I will treasure all the moments with him. He was one of the very few individuals who made Sydney University a place for knowledge. My mind is now with the people he loved and his friends.

- Vrasidas Karalis

See also [this opinion piece](#) about John's death by George Morgan.

If these articles raise issues for you, contact:

Lifeline 131 114

MensLine 1300 789 978

Beyondblue 1300 224 636



## 11. ASCP Member Profile & Interview

Dr Simone Bignall is a researcher and senior lecturer in Politics, based in the Office of Indigenous Strategy and Engagement at Flinders University in South Australia. Her research focus is on Indigenous self-governance and postcolonial politics. She is Secretary of the ASCP, and Co-editor of the ASCP-linked book series titled 'Continental Philosophy in Austral-Asia', published by Rowman and Littlefield UK



**Tell us a bit about how you came to philosophy and your graduate experience.**

I came to philosophy via politics. Among other activities, I was involved politically with the Ngarrindjeri Indigenous community assisting their efforts to protect their cultural heritage and supporting their long protest against the institutionalised racism of settler law. As a student activist in the 1980's and '90s, I was interested in feminist-socialist revolutionary theory and political philosophy more generally. At the same time, I was impressed by the emerging paradigm of systemic change that was (then) coming into view through the new physics of chaos, uncertainty, catastrophe, and complexity; I connected this paradigm in a naïve way to Foucault's early thinking about epistemic rupture and historical discontinuity, and his later work on systemic power formations conceived in the light of Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche in terms of force-relations. I wanted to understand how these ideas potentially conspired in a vision of the world that could be useful in thinking about political, legal and social transformation. I began to formalise this thinking in an Honours thesis on anarchism and poststructuralism, which then morphed into a doctoral study in Philosophy at the University of Sydney where I was fortunate to be supervised by Professor Moira Gatens. After completing my PhD I was mentored often and very generously by senior

colleagues, and especially by Moira and by Paul Patton. As a graduate, I worked part time lecturing and editing - mainly in other disciplines - while writing and publishing philosophy as much as possible. My published work began attracting citations and I started receiving invitations to publish and speak internationally. After a period of despair over my future prospects as a waged philosopher, I eventually won a Vice-Chancellor's Postdoctoral Award in Philosophy at the University of New South Wales and then was appointed to Faculty. In 2015 I accepted a job as Senior Lecturer in Indigenous Strategy and Engagement at Flinders University, where I continue to work with the Ngarrindjeri community as a researcher theorising technologies of Indigenous self-governance and investigating possible points of alliance between Indigenous Australian and Continental European philosophies.

**Can you share with us a technical aspect/argument in your work, why it interests you, and what hangs on it being understood?**

Motivated by my long-standing commitment to political justice through decolonisation, my first book used aspects of Deleuze's Spinozism to conceive a postcolonial theory of social transformation that prioritises alterity over identity, and aims to preserve cultural differences in positive forms of relationship rather than reconciling them through assimilation. I argued that non-imperial processes of transformation and sociability rely upon a constructivist - and broadly anarchist - conceptualisation of agency comprising three components: a concept of non-appropriative desire; a concept of non-dominating power; and a concept of non-sovereign subjectivity.

This framework is extended in my current work, which is a project titled Excolonialism: Ethics after Enjoyment. Starting with my personal experience of cohabitation with an Indigenous Old Person - historical sources tell of a Kurna Ancestor buried in the earth that later became my garden - this project rethinks postcolonial entitlement in the context of multiple and coexisting claims to territory. The juridical division of Indigenous Country into individualised fenced parcels allows the private enjoyment of property but forbids Indigenous peoples the public enjoyment of significant cultural practices and ances-



tral relationships associated with the territory that is captured within suburban blocks. The potential for realising a collectively constituted 'excolonial' life – as a mode of sociality that refuses to be characterised by colonialist institutions – would seem to require the critique of exclusive entitlement as it appears in law today. My aim is to conceive ways it might be possible to bridge the fissure between private ownership or the singular 'enjoyment' of things, and the multiple and coexisting pleasures to be found in shared practices of belonging. The project accordingly troubles the advantage attached to possessive 'enjoyment' as a politics of right or entitlement. I'm worried by the ways in which 'enjoyment' describes the satisfaction of the exceptional sovereign subject in his personal property. My feeling is that this conceptual structure feeds into a model of appropriative selfhood that is finally unable to contend with the relational subjectivity of empathetic engagement, with the postcolonial materiality of coexisting jurisdictions, or with the potential for inventing a common politics of 'excolonial' satisfaction. The project insists upon the postimperial responsibility of European thought to conceptualise ways of living together that align with Indigenous perspectives and better account for an ethics and politics of consensual coexistence: it asks, what resources can be found within the history of Continental philosophy to assist the inheritors of European colonial privilege as they grapple with this task?

### **What do you see as the most pressing challenge for philosophy or for the ASCP as a community?**

Supporting the next generation of philosophers in a neoliberal context, where the research funding model increasingly devalues the enterprise of Philosophy and threatens its viability as a profession in the academy.

*- Simone was interviewed by Ross Barham, joint Equity and Diversity Officer.*

## **12. 16th International Association of Women Philosophers' (IAPH) Symposium July 2016, Monash University, Caulfield**

The theme of this 40th anniversary symposium was 'Women and Philosophy: History, Values, Knowledge'. The IAPH conference is held regularly at Universities around the world, and originally began as a German-based organisation in 1976. IAPH has around 380 members from over 35 different countries. This conference began when the Victorian Government approached Prof. Karen Green and asked her if she would be willing to host it at Monash. So she and Dr. Jacqueline Broad took on the challenge of organising this large international conference. The first event of the symposium was a joint celebration of the 30 year anniversary of the 1986 'Women in Philosophy' supplement to the Australasian Journal of Philosophy with the Australasian Association of Philosophy Conference, edited by Janna Thompson. Lorraine Code, Moira Gatens, Karen Green, Denise Russell, and Janna Thompson provided reflections on the publication and progress or otherwise of the situation women in philosophy since then. This event was recorded for the 3CR Radical Philosophy programme. That evening the history of IAPH was described by Linda Lopez McAlister at the Art Exhibition 'Disinterment' and reception for the conference at Monash.

Keynote speakers Moira Gatens, 'Lifting the veil: George Eliot's theory of mind and morality', Ruth Hagenruber, 'The history of philosophy as told by women philosophers', Sally Haslanger, 'Ideology and knowledge of what matters' and Lisa Shapiro, 'Revisiting a philosophical canon' gave stimulating talks followed by searching discussions. As well as the theme of women in the history of philosophy, which was strong amongst the keynotes, were streams including Asian feminisms, ethics and moral psychology, identity, Indian feminisms, language, political philosophy, technology and violence. The Conference dinner on Saturday night was held at Ilona Staller restaurant in East St Kilda and was a particularly enjoyable occasion. The final session of the conference was 'Reports



on the status of women in philosophy' presented by Sally Haslanger, Fiona Jenkins, and Stella Villarmea, which offered realistic empirical and philosophical perspectives on women's employment and prospects in the profession. At the general assembly meeting it was decided that the next IAPh conference will be in Beijing in 2016 in association with the World Philosophy Congress. See: <http://www.women-philosophy.org/>

- Marguerite La Caze, *joint Equity and Diversity Officer*

### 13. Members' Books

We would like to congratulate the following members for books published since the last issue of Virtuosity:

Andrew Inkipin, *Disclosing the World: On the Phenomenology of Language* (MIT: 2016)

Christopher Mayes, *The Biopolitics of Lifestyle: Foucault, Ethics and Healthy Choices* (Routledge: 2016)

Lubica Učník, *The Crisis of Meaning and the Life-World: Husserl, Heidegger, Arendt, Patočka* (Ohio University Press: 2016)

Saige Walton, *Cinema's Baroque Flesh: Film, Phenomenology and the Art of Entanglement* (Amsterdam University Press and University of Chicago Press: 2016)

Joanne Faulkner, *Young and Free: [Post]colonial Ontologies of Childhood, Memory and History in Australia*. Series in Continental Philosophy in Austral-Asia (Rowman & Littlefield: 2016)

Jane Lymer, *The Phenomenology of Gravidity: Reframing Pregnancy and the Maternal through Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and Derrida* Series in Continental Philosophy in Austral-Asia (Rowman & Littlefield: 2016).

Matthew Sharpe, *Camus, Philosophe: To Return to Our Beginnings* (Brill: 2015)

Patrick Stokes, *The Naked Self: Kierkegaard and Personal Identity* (OUP: 2015)

Robert Sinnerbrink, *Cinematic Ethics: Exploring Ethical Experience through Film* (Routledge: 2016)

And editors:

Patrick Stokes & John Lippitt eds., *Narrative, Identity, and the Kierkegaardian Self* (EUP: 2015)

Jack Reynolds & Ricky Sebold eds. *Phenomenology and Science: Convergences and Confrontations* (Palgrave: 2016)

Our members' books raise the profile of Australasian continental philosophy. More information about members' books published this year can be accessed on the [website](http://www.ascp.org.au/ascp-members-books/members-book-submission). If you have published a book that does not appear in this list, please submit it to the ASCP Members' Books webpage at <https://ascp.org.au/ascp-members-books/members-book-submission>, and we'll add it to the next newsletter.

### 14. ASCP-linked Book Series

Continental Philosophy in Austral-Asia is a book series published by Rowman and Littlefield in collaboration with the ASCP. The series is co-edited by Simone Bignall, Diego Bubbio, Joanne Faulkner and Paul Patton. We encourage our Members to [visit the website](http://www.ascp.org.au) and consider submitting a proposal. Two exciting and important new titles have been produced this year:

*The Phenomenology of Gravidity: Reframing Pregnancy and the Maternal through Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and Derrida*, by Jane Lymer.

*The Phenomenology of Gravidity* explores Continental philosophy of feminism and offers a voice that articulates the specific process of gestation and the concrete experiences of pregnant women as both gendered and particular. Jane Lymer develops the philosophical and ethical implications of an understanding of embodied gestation in feminist philosophy which acknowledges the developmental importance of the maternal-foetal relation to human cognition and our intersubjective relations. Through an engagement with the work of Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and Derrida, *The Phenomenology of Gravidity* outlines the role of maternal embodiment in our development. It offers a feminist and ethical framework for a hospitality of gravidity which welcomes the place of the pregnant mother in all her guises.

<http://www.rowmaninternational.com/books/the-phenomenology-of-gravidity>



*Young and Free: [Post]colonial Ontologies of Childhood, Memory and History in Australia*, by Joanne Faulkner.

Tracing the complex yet intimate relationship between a present-day national obsession with childhood and a colonial past with which Australia as a nation has not adequately come to terms, *Young and Free* draws on philosophy, literature, film and testimony. The result is a demonstration of how anxiety about childhood has become a screen for more fundamental and intractable issues that vex Australian social and political life. Joanne Faulkner argues that by interpreting these anxieties in their relation to settler-colonial Australia's unresolved conflict with Aboriginal people, new ways of conceiving of Australian community may be opened. The book engages with philosophical and literary characterizations of childhood, from Locke and Rousseau, to Freud, Bergson, Benjamin Agamben, Lacan, Rancière and Halbwachs. The author's psychoanalytic approach is supplemented by an engagement with contemporary political philosophy that informs Faulkner's critique of the concepts of the subject, sovereignty and knowledge, resulting in a speculative postcolonial model of the subject.

<http://www.rowmaninternational.com/books/young-and-free>

Forthcoming in 2017 is a new title by Christopher Mayes:

*Unsettling Alternative Food: The politics of food, land and agriculture in Australia*

This book casts a critical light on food, land use and political activism in Australia. Using a philosophical history of food and agriculture in Australia, this book brings contemporary alternative food discourse and practice into tension with Australia's colonial past, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and anthropocentric relations to the land.

Congratulations Jo, Jane and Chris!

- Simone Bignall, on behalf of the series editors (Simone Bignall, Diego Bubbio, Joanne Faulkner, and Paul Patton)