

Inaugural meeting: Aesthetics and Mental Health Group – One Day Advanced Study Seminar

A first meeting of this group was held at St Catherine's College, Oxford, on June 13th 2014 - 20 people attended. The meeting was organized by Professor Michael Musalek and Dr Helena Fox and hosted by Professor Bill Fulford and Mr Ashok Handa. Michael Musalek with colleagues Martin Poltrum and Guenda Bernegger, described the theory and practice of social aesthetics as used in the Anton Proksch drug treatment clinic in Vienna; and Helena Fox gave an interactive presentation of her arts-led doctoral work in 'connective aesthetics' in medicine. Other members of the group gave presentations covering work in the addictions, dementia, psychosis, the clinic atmosphere, compassion and empathy.

The aim of the meeting was to gather people together to share experiences of working in an aesthetic mode in mental health and to explore ideas including future collaborations. The rich range of presentations and positive sharing of experiences in group discussion offered an opportunity for broadening of knowledge through deeper sensory connection with self, each other, community and environment. In this way, one can begin to see how an aesthetic mode can add a more integrated approach to understanding, bringing thinking that is full of experience and new insights, and creating an arena for fuller discussion and sharing of subjective experience through deeper understanding and empathy. Various collaborative follow ups are planned including publications and a further meeting for a year hence with other members of the group sharing their work.

We are grateful to our academic sponsors, the Philosophy sections of the World Psychiatric Association and the European Psychiatric Association, the Philosophy Group in the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and the International Network for Philosophy and Psychiatry; and to St Catherine's College and the Laces Fund for their generous hospitality.

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