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International Society for the Study of Time

Aperiodic Newsletter

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No. 11

FROM THE EDITOR

It was with deep regret that I gave up my plans to be with all of you at Gargonza, but family circumstances so dictated. As a consequence, I feel a sense of lack, of something missed and missing. I am looking forward to catching up on what I've missed with The Study of Time V. In the meantime, I hope all of you will make an extra effort to keep me informed of the goings-on of our Society and its members to help counter my lack of first-hand experience. Needless to say, I am already looking forward to our next conference in 1986! Glad to see the Council is working on plans now. Congratulations to our new ISST President, John Michon, whose column had to be mailed from Germany due to a Dutch postal strike, and to all other new members of the Council.

Sharon Schwarze

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Time present and time past
 Are both perhaps present in time future,
 And time future contained in time past.
 (T. S. Eliot: "Four Quartets")

Recently my wife and I spent a brief vacation in a small, 16th-century town in the heart of the French Provence. In several respects this heavily fortified town resembled Gargonza, the memorable site of our Society's 1983 conference. That already created a sense of temporal continuity. The cottage where we stayed had a small bookshelf filled with the usual holiday left-overs: Agatha Christie, James Bond, Doctor Kildare, and a 1979 Guide "Bonne Table." The one and only outstanding item in this collection was a copy of T. S. Eliot's Complete Poems and Plays, including, of course, "Four Quartets."

Just before leaving for France I had gotten word from our Founder and Secretary that he was expecting me to deliver my first "Message from the President" soon. Those of you who are familiar with Eliot's poem will understand why, while I was facing this burden, my unexpected confrontation with "Four Quartets" strongly enhanced the sense of continuity that I already mentioned (as did my subsequent efforts of understanding what I was reading). To them it will come as no surprise that in this message I wish to underscore the importance of continuity for our Society.

At last, I have been called to the High Office of my favorite Learned Society. To be in the same rubric with Gerald Whitrow, Satoshi Watanabe, Gert Mueller, David Park and the inimitable George Ford. What else can a devoted student of Time wish? Of course the real continuity of ISST over the past seventeen years lies not in the presidency but in the secretary's office! Yet, it is their collective labor that carried the Society to where it is now and what they achieved in the past will, no doubt, be contained in the future.

Notwithstanding all past continuity, we are facing the question: Where do we go from here? The "formula" developed by J. T. Fraser and the past Presidents and Councillors has proved most successful and we may keep it intact. What needs further thought, however, is how we may secure continuity for future times when ISST may not be able to benefit as much from the commitment of a single person as it does today. The Council will have to consider in some detail how, at some future time, the Society may be turned from a master-work into a self-organizing structure.

Thinking about structure, even self-organizing ones, is much easier than thinking about content -- a fact that bureaucrats will deny. Of course, the present Council is going to establish itself as an eminently content-oriented body. But its task, in my opinion, involves more than discussing the subject matter of the next conference. I think that it should be a matter of concern to our Society -- and that includes individual members and corresponding members! -- to consider the possibility of a somewhat more programmatic, co-operative approach to the study of time than we have adopted thus far. In this context a reference to Hilbert's Program is a gigantic hyperbole, but an illuminating one: Hilbert, by stating the major unsolved problems in mathematics, has kept mathematicians busy, if not quite happy, for well over four-score years. Why, even with a much more modest goal in mind, shouldn't ISST be able to establish a slightly co-ordinated program? It seems to me that several contributions to our conferences contained in the volumes of The Study of Time and, not in the last place, J. T. Fraser's own works, can supply us with useful hints and guidelines. And there may be other suggestions as well. I am not trying to impose my specific ideas on you at this point, but I feel strongly that the present Council will have to look for ways and means for stimulating and facilitating an exchange of thought that may contribute to a concerted effort and, in particular, to one that is attractive to more than a small fraction of the membership.

Then a cloud passed and the pool was empty.
(T. S. Elliot: "Four Quartets")

John Michon

THE FOUNDER'S COLUMN

The 1983 conference of ISST focused its attention on the position of knowledge, especially scientific knowledge, in the context of China and the West and how they compare. The papers demonstrated the broad spectrum of assumptions, temperaments and modes of legitimating truth that the many ways of modern knowing demand and allow. In a deeper sense, however, at least to this participant, they mapped into scholarship the confusion of an epoch which in spite of its technological and scientific advances remains uninformed because it has not yet established a way of addressing itself. In terms pertinent to our theme, it still seeks an understanding, a coherent framework within which the significance of time can be traced from the atemporal roots of the universe to the modicum of dignity which must be the due of each human life.

Whether the contemporary struggle between the fragmenting and unifying forces of social change herald the emergence of a new cultural order or only announce the breakup of the old ones is yet to be seen. In any case, there is not much this Society can collectively offer for the solution of the vast economic, social and political problems of our days. But by allowing for an organized plurality of perceptions concerning the central themes of time, science, and society, The Study of Time V should be able to demonstrate the usefulness of methodological multiplicity in the service of common interest.

Going beyond Gargonza with Dr. Michon as President, the Society will be ready to turn its attention from concerns with historical understandings of time and from debates on research reports to the formulation of future directions of inquiries in the study of time appropriate to an age of computers, space flights and human turmoil.

J. T. Fraser

REPORT FROM THE SECRETARY

The Study of Time V will probably bear the main title, Time, Science and Society in China and the West and use "The Study . . ." designation as its subtitle. It will be published by the University of Massachusetts Press. The task of the three Editors with the help of at least a dozen referees is to recommend revisions where needed, and accept those of the invited papers that meet the professional standards of the first four volumes. It is hoped, but we cannot be sure, that the volume will be in print before the end of 1984.

The Gargonza meeting was reported by Drs. Fan Dainian and Jin Guantao of Academia Sinica in Beijing, in the October 1983 issue of the Journal of Dialectics of Nature. Their report is now being translated.

The Evaluating Committee, under the chairmanship of Professor Oliver W. Holmes, prepared a questionnaire addressed to all members and corresponding members of the Society. These were mailed out to addresses on record on December 6, 1983. Please return the completed questionnaires to Professor Holmes, Department of History, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT 06457, USA, before the deadline indicated in the cover letter. Professor Holmes will then prepare for the Council of the Society a summary report based on the returns.

The first meeting of the new Council has been tentatively scheduled for August 1984. Its agenda will include the consideration of proposals for the location, exact date and program of the 1986 (sixth) conference of ISST, the items mentioned in the Message from the President in this Newsletter, and all such other items as may come to its attention.

J. T. Fraser

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN

I am pleased to report that at the end of 1983 I have on record 104 members and 74 corresponding members, for a total of 178 people. The membership includes at least one person from each of the following twenty-six countries: Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Poland, Roumania, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, the USSR, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the Republic of Zaire.

Samuel L. Macey

PROFILE

Carlos A. Mallman

Carlos A. Mallman is an Argentine physicist. For several years he worked in the low energy field, then served as the director of an atomic research center in San Carlos de Bariloche, a beautiful mountain region in the south of Argentina, near the Chilean border. He turned his attention from physics to the human and social sciences and, together with a handful of other Argentine intellectuals, he founded Fundacion Bariloche in 1963. The Fundacion, a private, non-profit institution, has won general admiration for its unfailing support of intellectual creativity and freedom in a setting where the natural environment is highly inspiring but political conditions are far from being so. Dr. Mallman is the Executive President of Fundacion Bariloche.

As a researcher, his papers deal with nuclear physics, the quality of life, human need and human and social time. In this last connection he has edited, together with Oscar Nudler (also a member of ISST), a volume entitled Time, Cultures and Development forthcoming under the imprint of Pergamon Press. Dr. Mallman is also Program Director of the United National University and in this capacity he is conducting an international research network on the problems of social development.

Background Information by
Oscar Nudler

Michael Heller

Michael Heller is known among Polish physicists primarily because of his work on General Relativity Theory. Philosophers and theologians appreciate his new interdisciplinary approach to fundamental ontological questions presented in a post-positivistic manner uniting non-standard style with substantial, inventive contributions. Friends admire his charm and his personality, rooted in a world of ideas and poetry, of value, and of Platonically interpreted mathematics.

A bibliography of Father Heller's work lists over 200 papers and eight books dealing with the philosophy of science and relativistic cosmology. Encountering the Universe and The Science of Space-Time are in English.

Michael Heller is a professor of the philosophy of nature at the Pontifical Academy of Cracow and a member of the staff of the Vatican Observatory. In "Prayer for the Unitary Theory of Fields" he wrote recently:

I ask You for a new equation
Which would screen You completely from our eyes. . . .
You are not in the lacunae of our knowledge,
You are in everything.

Background Information by
Joseph Zycinski

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