**Ageing, Embodiment and the Self, 18/03/16, Warwick**

Opening the day was Chris Gilleard who spoke on ‘Corporeality, Embodiment and Ageing’. He captured for us a useful distinction between embodiment as a state of agency and corporeality as a state where we believe our body to be letting us down, trapping us or misrepresenting us in some way. This allowed him to draw out different conceptions of how we understand and relate to later life as well as interrogate what about the process of ageing and being old is socially constructed in a way that leads us to believe it is our fault if we show signs of ageing because of what eat, how we act, and so on.

This theme tied nicely into the second talk from Lucy Burke on ‘*The Fear*: Popular representations of dementia and the logic of disaster capitalism’. She analysed the TV show *The Fear* TV, ‘The Dementia Challenge’ laid out by David Cameron, and *King Lear* in order to show how fear is being used to increase consumer engagement with particular ways of thinking and thus products. “We choose our epidemics in some sense,” she argued, and, in agreement with Gilleard, this marketing of epidemics often suggests to us that the responsibility to avoid them lies with us.

Next was a theatre and performance panel that included presentations from Anna Harpin, Nicholas Johnson, and Bridie Moore and was chaired by Jonathan Heron. The broad theme was how theatre and performance could help us understand ageing and embodiment and it approached this not just by looking at how theatre represents the ageing person on stage but through the ageing body of the performer. Harpin focused on analysing the different ways the play *Juliet and her Romeo* and the film *Amour* dealt with love in the later stages of life. Johnson then looked at stage productions of mainly Beckett plays and schools of practice in theatre performance to argue that a study of the human life-span and ageing process can inform acting in interesting and pertinent ways and that acting can impact upon the wellness of those ageing. Moore rounded off by analysing the case of the actor Peggy Shaw who appears to be a significant embodiment of the narrative of frailty as she incorporates the physical afflictions resulting from her stroke into her act and plays with her persona of ‘gentleman drag’, but does not succumb to the issues that beset many who try similar things.

After lunch there was a roundtable led by Liz Barry which included informal presentations from Jonathan Cole, Christopher Vassilas, and Sarah Falcus and Katsura Sako. Falcus and Sako opened with a discussion of their foray into contemporary children’s literature which deals with dementia and their finding that it offers up a very didactic and clinically-informed picture as well as often containing representations of a child’s supposed ‘special relationship’ with the elderly relative suffering some sort of mental incapacity; in some way the child ‘gets them’ more than any other adult can. Cole and Vassilas then shared ruminations their professional involvement with ageing patients in medial, therapy, and end-of-life care contexts.

Helen Small then delivered her philosophical paper entitled ‘Does Self-Identity Persist into Old Age?’ In it she tackled many of the stalwarts of the philosophy of personal identity (Williams, Rorty, Parfit, and so on) and sought to establish that (a) personal identity is very much a mix of physical, mental and social criteria with a lean towards physical features being a favoured defining feature due to their public accessibility, and (b) in ageing the burden of identification falls to a greater and greater degree onto the outside, 3rd person perspective – particularly where identity not only changes but where what could be constituted as an identity erodes completely.

We were then treated to a preview of a work-in-progress performance of ‘Rosemary’; a piece arising from Jonathan Heron’s five-year collaboration with the Beckett actor and renowned scholar Rosemary Pountney. The performance was affecting and offered some moments of poignant insight into ageing and chances to reflect upon personal loss and bereavement. The final piece, to be shown on 15th July 2016 as part of the ‘Modernism, Medicine and the Embodied Mind’ conference in Bristol, is definitely not one to miss!