

Centre for Political Ideologies Conference, “The Politics of Interpretation & The Interpretation of Politics”



From left to right: Professor Michael Freeden (Oxford), Jens Olesen (Oxford), Professor Jean Grondin (Montréal), Dr Carsten Dutt (Heidelberg), Professor Dieter Teichert (Konstanz/Lucerne).

Even though the interpretation of texts is part and parcel of humanities and social sciences scholarship, approaches to textual interpretation are seldom subjected to critical scrutiny across disciplinary divides. Moreover, there has virtually been no interdisciplinary exchange about the question of whether these approaches are ideologically sustained, and if so, what consequences this has for our understanding of texts. The two-day international conference on “The Politics of Interpretation & The Interpretation of Politics”, organized by Jens Olesen, that was held at the Department on 23 and 24 September 2011 sought to redress these imbalances.



From left to right: Dr Carsten Dutt (Heidelberg), Dr Reidar Maliks (Oslo), Professor Paul H. Fry (Yale), Professor Mark Bevir (Berkeley), Dr Michael L. Frazer (Harvard).

The conference brought together over fifty established and younger scholars from Canada, China, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Russia, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States, and from a variety of disciplines including history, law, literary theory, philosophy, political theory, and sociology. In six panels structured around ‘Hermeneutics’, ‘Contextualist Approaches’, ‘Feminist Interpretations’, ‘Deconstruction’, ‘Philosophy, Law & Interpretation’, ‘Strauss and Esoteric Reading’, as well as one panel devoted to graduate students and early career researchers, experts in their respective approaches engaged in lively discussions which benefited from the diversity of perspectives of the speakers and participants.



From left to right: Dr Pamela Anderson (Oxford), Dr Elizabeth Frazer (Oxford), Professor Terence Ball (Arizona), Professor James Connelly (Hull), Professor Al P. Martinich (Texas)

Issues such as the role of intentions in the interpretation of texts, the question of how much, if any, contextual information is required for their understanding, and whether ideologically charged approaches induce interpreters to systematically ignore some aspects of texts, whilst emphasizing others, were among the questions raised and discussed.

Interdisciplinary fluidity and transnational perspectives on the politics of textual interpretation constituted one of the conference’s major strengths. Most of its papers spoke across the disciplines rather than to field-specific internal dialogues, thus demonstrating the pertinence of cross-disciplinary collaboration.



From left to right: Dr Lasse Thomassen (London), Professor Mark Bevir (Berkeley), Dr James Martel (San Francisco), Professor Joshua Foa Dienstag (UCLA), Dr Charles Develennes (Kent), Dr Philipp von Wussow (Leipzig), Jens Olesen (Oxford), Dr James Martel (San Francisco), JanaLee Cherneski (Oxford)

In light of the enthusiastic reception and the high quality of the conference, audio recordings of its presentations will be added to Oxford University's 'itunes U' section shortly. More information about the publication of the conference's proceedings will be released in due course.

The conference was sponsored by the [Gerda Henkel Foundation](#), the [Department of Politics and International Relations](#), the [Centre for Political Ideologies](#), the [Mind Association](#), and [Princeton University Press](#).