

TEXT LECTURE PERFORMANCE:

Graham Parkes + Helen Parkes – Being Here—There's no App for That!

[27. November 2015 – Philosophy On Stage #4 – Tanzquartier Wien HALLE G]

A distinctive feature of the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche is his emphasis on the human body, and a corresponding concern with its relations to the various places it inhabits. Whether the place he was in was urban or rural, Nietzsche insisted that the immediate environment has a profound effect on one's physical and mental health. Although such ideas may not be so popular these days, they are borne out by recent discoveries in 'context-based medicine' in the West and a 2500-year tradition of philosophy and medical practice in China. Another way of putting this is to say that if we're interested in flourishing, we had better pay attention to our *being here*.

But aren't we always here in any case, in the particular place where our bodies are? No, because when we're distracted—as in daydreaming, for example—we aren't here in any robust sense, but are rather absent. And indeed one of the major differences between Nietzsche's time and ours, some 150 years later, is that the prevalence of modern information and communications technology has enormous power to distract us from being here. Nowadays television, computers, videogame consoles, tablets, igadgets, mobile phones—all these devices, while purporting to connect us with other people and things (not to mention with more information than anyone could assimilate in several lifetimes), serve to distract us from being here by exporting our attention elsewhere.

Most of us accept this situation without question, assuming that all these gadgets are enhancing rather than diminishing our lives. A consideration of Nietzsche's ideas about the importance of place and the nature of our being here allows us to question the value of our communications technologies, and to ask whether the advantages they bring may in some cases be outweighed by the losses they inflict on our ability to be here.

This project examines these ideas in the context of Vienna, a city that for many years Nietzsche wanted to visit. He even intended at one point to study mathematics at the University, but never quite made the move. He would have discovered—and we today can discover—many places that enhance a sense of being here.