



## **NEWSLETTER**

**July 2020**

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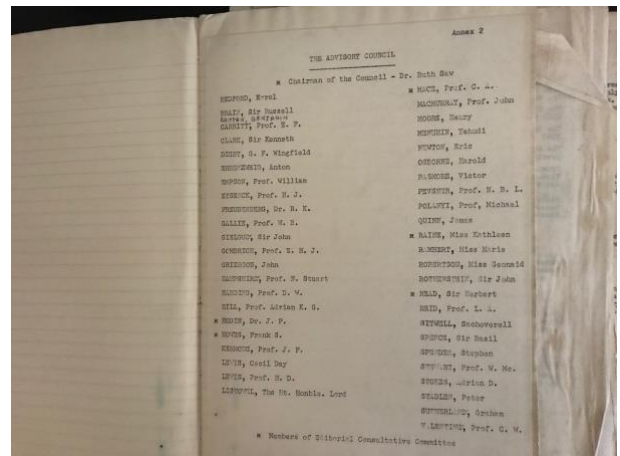
# 'LARGE AESTHETIC UMBRELLA': THE BSA'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY AND ARCHIVE

The story of the founding of the British Society of Aesthetics has not been written. "It is quite a story", wrote the Society's first Hon. Secretary, Sylvia Schwappe, "and when I have the time I shall try and write it up". That was in a letter to the Society in 1988. I don't know if she did. There's no evidence in the archive that contained the letter. She'd attached to the letter a copy of newspaper clippings from 1960. But, that's all the archive offers.

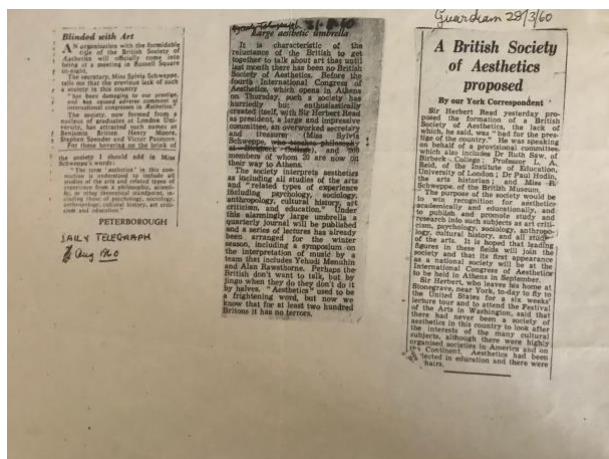
The Daily Telegraph thought the Society's wide interpretation of 'aesthetics' to include psychology, sociology, anthropology, cultural history, art criticism, and education, an "alarmingly large umbrella". It ended suggesting "'Aesthetics' used to be a frightening word, but now we know that for at least two hundred Britons it has no terrors". The first membership of 200 included 20 representing the new Society at the 4th International Congress of Aesthetics in Athens.

well as Sylvia Schwappe. It reports that the committee hoped leading figures in the arts would join. And that in the meantime Read was off on a 6 week lecture tour in America.

I wonder if Read left Schwappe with a list of possible 'leading figures' to contact. The archive contains a statement of the Society's aims that I assume was sent with covering letters to them. Disappointingly, the archive doesn't contain any of that correspondence. But the results are evident in the first Advisory Committee.



The first Advisory Committee, 1960



Newspaper clippings from 1960 reporting the founding of the Society

Sylvia Schwappe had no doubt worked tirelessly to, as she wrote, "get the Society on its feet when previous efforts had failed". Herbert Read, the Society's first President, had proposed a British Society of Aesthetics in March 1960. The Guardian reported the proposal and a provisional committee that also included Ruth Saw and Paul Hodin, as

The typed list has "Britten, Benjamin" added in ink. Perhaps, I speculate, he was the last to accept the invitation to be on the committee, duly impressed to be in the company of Sir Kenneth Clark, Sir John Gielgud, Henry Moore, and Yehudi Menuhin, among others.

The archive has evidence too of the efforts to get funding for the Society and a publisher for a journal. Again, Sylvia Schwappe is seen in letters to and from organisations like the Nuffield Foundation and the Carnegie Trust using Read's status to get financial backing. She writes, again in the 1988 letter, that "I was personally responsible for getting a publisher for the Journal when all seemed lost". Sadly, again, the archive doesn't contain sufficient material to fill out the story. But, we know the result was successful. The Journal's first issue was published before 1960 was out.

A series of lectures had been arranged too, including lectures by composer Alan Rawsthorne and violinist Yehudi Menuhin.

Lectures by philosophically-minded practitioners would be a feature of Society meetings for a few years more and included the potter Bernard Leach and painter John Hoyland. The archive contains a Member's Card for 1962-63 that gives a flavour of the Society's interests and operation. By then, Sylvia Schweppe had left. And the Society was changing focus too.

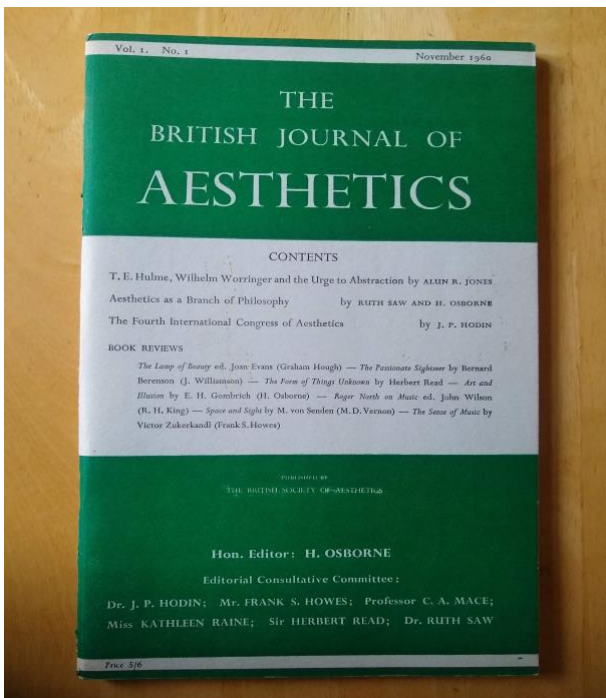
MEETINGS		
at 7.30 p.m. held at the Holborn Central Library, 321 & 323 Tottenham Road, W.C.1*		
October 3	BELOW THE SURFACE Techniques of Renaissance Painters	Helmut Rubemann
November 7	THE FILM AS AN ART FORM	Ernest Lindgren
December 5	PROBLEMS IN MODERN ARCHITECTURE	Prof. H. O. Corfuato
January 2	IMAGINATION AND IMAGERY	Peter McKellar
February 6	THE AESTHETICS OF INDIAN MUSIC	A. A. Bate
March 6	JANE AUSTEN AND OTHERS	Lawrence Lerner
April 3	THE JAZZ ARTIST	Eric Hobbsawm (Francis Newton)
May 1	WHAT IS A POEM ABOUT? The Concepts of Form and Content in the Aesthetics of Goethe and Schiller	Prof. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson
June 1	To be announced later	

\*Buses 5, 19, 38, 170, 172 pass the door

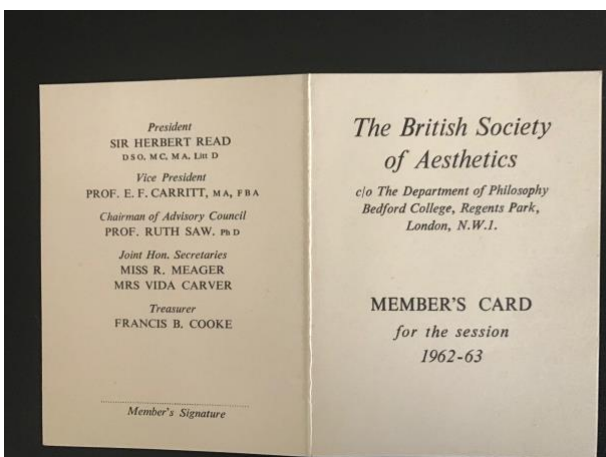
BSA Member's Card, 1962-3, and that year's meetings

Jeffrey Petts

(This is a brief summary of a fuller version due to be published in 2020 on the Society's website.)



Vol. 1, No.1, The BJA, 1960



## CONFERENCE REPORTS

### Aesthetics of Imperfection BSA Workshop

5-6 October 2019

Literary and Philosophical Society, Newcastle upon Tyne

Part of Newcastle Festival of Jazz and Improvised Music 2019, the Aesthetics of Imperfection Workshop tackled a central issue of creativity in music and other arts: improvisation and spontaneity.

Musicians and researchers engaged with the nature of improvisation as part of an aesthetics of imperfection, which values spontaneous creation and openness to contingencies in the performing situation over rigorous planning and refinement of form.

Headliners from the festival's programme of concerts opened up on their principles and approaches to improvising – how they embrace risk and failure, how you can practice to be spontaneous, and whether improvisation is a kind of composition.

Leading musicians from the European and North American improvised music scenes gave talks peppered with spontaneous examples on the saxophone, piano and drums: Evan Parker, Tony Buck, Achim Kaufmann, Alexander Hawkins, and the duo of Brodie West and Evan Cartwright.

Alongside them were presentations from musician-researchers Raymond MacDonald (saxophone and composition), Shelly Knotts (live algorithmic performance), Nina Kümin (baroque violin), Pablo Seoane (piano and composition) and Márcio Steuernagel (composition and conducting).

Contributions from Lara Pearson (South Indian classical music), Guy Dammann (classical music criticism), Liila Taruffi (psychology, neuroscience, and aesthetics), Katherine Hambridge (nineteenth-century music theatre) and Laura Leante (ethnomusicology) connected the discussions to a broad range of creative practices and contexts.



Brodie West and Evan Cartwright



Liila Taruffi

(photos by Lara Pearson)

A selection of recordings of workshop talks, and more about the Aesthetics of Imperfection, are available at <https://www.andyhamilton.org/aesthetics-of-imperfection>.

Durham University contributed additional funding, and thanks are due to Wesley Stephenson and the Newcastle Festival of Jazz and Improvised Music team, The Literary and Philosophical Society, and Newcastle Arts Centre.

*Andy Hamilton (Durham University) and Samuel Horlor (Durham University)*

### Beauty and Goodness: Exploring the Intersection

University of Southampton, Thursday 19th and Friday 20th September, 2019

The aim of our conference was to advance the study of philosophical issues that emerge at

the intersection of ethics and aesthetics. The event brought together ethicists and aestheticians in an effort to advance ethicists' understanding of issues in aesthetics, and aestheticians' understanding of issues in ethics.

The talks covered a broad range of topics, such as: aesthetic vices and virtues; aesthetic agency; empathy through art; opacity, transparency, and ethical value; and the ethics and aesthetics of appreciating animals.

Thanks to generous support from the British Society of Aesthetics and the Thought Trust, our conference comprised six regular papers and two keynote talks by Prof. Paul C. Taylor and Prof. Heather Widdows. Regular sessions lasted 90 minutes and keynote talks 120 minutes, which allowed plenty of time for lively and constructive discussion.

The first day of the conference opened with Brian McElwee and his paper "Vices of Over- and Under-demandingness in Ethics and Aesthetics", which explored whether there is an aesthetic analogue of the vice of moralism, the disposition to too readily or too harshly engage in moral criticism. Continuing with the virtue approach, Alan Wilson argued in his paper "The Nature and Significance of Aesthetic Courage" that aesthetic courage is vital for the possession of other aesthetic virtues, such as creativity or aesthetic honesty, and for an aesthetically virtuous life. In her paper, "Looking at Animals: The Ethics and Aesthetics of proper Attention", Samantha Vice argued that the appreciation of beauty in animals should focus on animation, on animals being perceived as minded, and that this aesthetic appreciation leads to the recognition of our moral duties toward them. Heather Widdows closed the day with her talk "Beautiful Girls are Good Girls", in which she argued that a very narrow standard of physical beauty has become a global ethical ideal. According to this ideal, we are virtuous and live good lives insofar as we are firm, smooth, slim, and young. Given this radical change of paradigm, Prof. Widdows invited ethicists and aestheticians to pay attention to, and care more about, current social practices, so that philosophy has something meaningful to contribute to their discussion.

Jonathan Gingerich opened the second day with his paper "Aesthetic Agency", in which he

criticized moralized theories of agency, such as David Velleman's, for treating aesthetic experiences as tangential to human life, and argued for the need of pluralistic theories of agency. Next, in her paper "Cinematic Humanism: Opacity and Transparency in Value Interaction", Britt Harrison argued that the distinction between opaque and transparent appreciation of films impacts what we take to be moral values of works, and that it is therefore crucial for the value interaction debate. Contrary to recent criticism in philosophy, Stephen Bush argued in "Empathy in Ethics and Art" that empathy plays a crucial role in our moral life because of its salience and focus on individuals, and examined the work of Doris Salcedo to show that art can elicit empathy and moral concern for others without falling into sentimentalism.

Finally, Paul Taylor closed the conference with his talk "Ethical Dimensions of Aesthetic Practice", which emphasized the importance of philosophy as cultural criticism and motivated the need for a "prophetic" aesthetics. Prof Taylor invited professional ethicists and aestheticians not only to bring philosophy to new audiences and broaden the topics of concern, but to use the institutional resources at our disposal to criticize the shortcomings of our discipline and effect change.

Our programme featured two female speakers out of six regular sessions, and one keynote speaker out of two. This meant that female speakers made up for 37% of our programme. We are fully committed to continue working towards improving this figure on future occasions. We made sure female speakers were treated equally in all conference materials. We aimed at making the conference as accessible as possible. We were prepared to offer childcare for both days of our conference, although we didn't receive any requests. We offered and used a hearing loop, our venue was wheelchair accessible and had nearby accessible toilets, and we offered a quiet room if required. Talks were followed by five-minute breaks before discussion, and we scheduled a fifteenminute break in between sessions. We also permitted written, rather than spoken, questions during discussion. Finally, we had funds available to offer four travel bursaries for early career researchers up to £100; unfortunately, in the end we were only able to award two because



our other two delegates had to cancel their participation at the last minute.

*Organized by Adriana Clavel-Vázquez, Panos Paris, and Nils-Hennes Stear on behalf of the Aesthetics & Ethics Research Group and the Art & Ethics Marie Curie Fellowship project*

## **Pictorial Experience: Aesthetics, Epistemology and Perception**

September 4-5, 2019. Senate House, University of London

Although the study of pictorial representation has connections with various areas of philosophy, for the most part, it has been developed mainly within the area of aesthetics and the philosophy of art. The idea of this 2-day conference was to bring philosophers working on different sub-areas of the discipline to reflect on pictorial experience or depiction from the point of view of epistemology, philosophy of mind and perception and their intersections with aesthetics. There were a total of six speakers:

- Paloma Atencia-Linares (UNAM, Mexico) / Aesthetics, philosophy of perception
- Alex Grzankowski (Birkbeck College, UK) / Philosophy of mind, language, metaphysics and epistemology
- Zoe Jenkin (Harvard University, USA) / Epistemology and philosophy of perception
- Errol Lord (UPenn, USA) / Epistemology, ethical theory, philosophy of mind and action.
- Antonia Peacocke (Stanford University, USA) / Epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind.
- Robert Hopkins (NYU, USA) / Aesthetics, philosophy of mind.

The topics discussed touched on fundamentally these lines of discussion:

1. Is there a common nature of the objects of pictorial and perceptual experience? Pictorial experiences involve or require perceptual experiences. However, it is not clear that the objects of pictorial experiences are the same sort of things as the objects of perception. Some philosophers have claimed that experiencing objects in photographs is like experiencing objects in ordinary perceptual experiences. Now, one could argue

that, since pictures—including photographs—can depict non-existent objects, pictorial experiences might resemble the objects of hallucination. In light of these reflections, one could ask: what are the prospects for a unified theory of the contents of sensory experiences and of pictorial representations? The presentations given by Errol Lord and Paloma Atencia-Linares were related to this topic.

2. The scope of the content of pictorial experiences  
Apart from objects, what other things can figure in the content of pictorial experiences and what role does the picture vehicle play in constraining this content? What sorts of temporal features are part of the contents of our experiences of pictures? While it seems that temporal content is necessarily part of perceptual experience, the corresponding claim for pictures is not obvious. If a picture represents its object as bearing certain properties, must it also represent something about the time at which it bears them (at once, at different times, and so on), or can a picture lack temporal content altogether? These issues were taken up from various angles by Rob Hopkins and Alex Grzankowski.

3. Aesthetic and Epistemic interactions in our experience of pictures and picture appreciation.  
Some philosophers have argued that moral defects can be aesthetic virtues in our experience of works of art in general, and pictures in particular. It is rarely argued, however, that an epistemic defect can be an aesthetic advantage; but is this a possibility? A case to consider are instances of pictorial works of art where conditions of exhibition require using light or different technologies that transform the real look of the picture or create a sort of illusory experience in order to improve or restore its original aesthetic appeal. Zoe Jenkin discussed these issues in her presentation.

4. Can pictorial styles develop new ways of seeing?  
Art historians and philosophers often write as though there are technological advances in pictorial representation. But what developments could these be? Are they developments in picture-making or in picture-viewing? Can these two kinds can be meaningfully distinguished? If there were such things as pictorial technologies, and we

somehow got our hands on a picture made far in the future that benefited from several such technologies, would we be able to see in this picture what it really depicts? Antonia Peacocke developed these questions and others in her talk.

5. Can the nature of pictorial representation could help us to understand mental representation? There are properties of the contents of visual experiences that are shared with pictorial contents and it is tempting to think that there might be a common explanation. In work on the format of mental representation it is sometimes suggested that whereas beliefs are sentence-like, perceptual states trade in picture-like representations and hence inherit the expressive limitations of pictures. If this is correct, why do pictures have these limitations? On the other hand, if depiction is mediated by visual resemblance might the explanation not go the other direction – pictures being limited by the way things can look? These were the sort of questions Alex Grzankowski discussed in his talk.



BPA/SWIP and Diversity

This event featured speakers from all professional levels. Two of our speakers were early career researchers and our event provided many opportunities for London graduate students to interact with our visitors. 50% of the speakers at this event were women.

*Conference organisers: Paloma Atencia-Linares (UNAM), Alex Grzankowski (Birkbeck College, UoL)*

## **Documentaries and the Fiction/Nonfiction Divide**

Queen Mary University of London, on November 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

The conference hosted 29 delegates from the UK, the US, and Continental Europe. The aim of the conference was to revive the philosophical research on documentaries in the light of recent discussions of the fiction/nonfiction divide in analytic esthetics. The method consists in encouraging a dialogue on this issue with film critics and theorists, as well as with historians and practitioners. Film studies, indeed, have a longer tradition of doubting the neat division of fiction/nonfiction when it comes to documentary. Ultimately, the goal was to explore how film scholars can contribute to philosophical issues such as the fiction/nonfiction divide as much as philosophy can contribute to our appreciation of documentaries.

The first day was opened by a keynote speech by Brian Winston, who discussed philosophical approaches to the documentary from the point of view of film scholars. Then the talks by Patricia Holland and John Cook highlighted the contribution of the filmmaker Peter Watkins to this debate, while Katerina Loukopoulou and Stuart Mitchell considered the place of portraits and anti-heroes in documentaries. The philosophical approach became central in the talks given by Elizabeth Cantalamessa and Manuel García-Carpintero, who both addressed the relationship between documentaries and philosophical debates on the fiction/nonfiction divide. Lastly, the talk given by Catalin Brylla and that given by John Ellis provided a fruitful counterbalance by the fiction/nonfiction divide from the perspective of film scholars working on documentaries.

The second day was organized in two parallel sessions in order to allow a fairer selection given the quality and quantity of submissions received (approximately 60 individual and three pre-constituted-panel proposals). The opening sessions were two preconstituted panel, one on the fiction/nonfiction divide in Chinese cinema, with talks by Chris Berry, Kiki Tianqi Yu and Lin Feng, and the other on borderline forms of documentary such as animation, comics and games, with talks given by Bella Honess Roe, Nina Mickwitz and Julia Eckel. The talks by Marco Meneghin and James Peter Moffatt addressed the issue of sound and music in documentaries, while that by Stefan Dux and Christian Iseli, and that by Michael Grabowski, considered the role of technologies and codes in the making of documentaries. Julian Koch's talk focused on Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* as a paradigmatic film that addresses by means of its images the issue of truth and falsity in documentaries, which Neri Marsili's talk then addressed in philosophical terms. Gracia Ramirez's and Natascha Drubek's talks focused on case studies involving news and the representation of war, while the talks by Elizabeth Watkins' and Zed Adams' talks considered more technical and stylistic issues related to colorization and archives. The talks by Eric Studt and Inge Ejbye Sørensen discussed the case of documentaries made by means of Virtual Reality technologies. Lastly, Stacie Friend's keynote speech highlighted how crucial is the connection between the fiction/nonfiction debate in philosophy and the research on documentaries in film studies.

The conference approached gender parity with 13 female presenters and 16 male ones (keynotes were 1 male and 1 female) which also reflected the gender ratios of the abstract/panel submissions authors. The organizers are currently preparing a proposal for the special issue of *Studies in Documentary Cinema* with altogether 6 authors (3 female and 3 male).

*Mario Sluga*

### **Improvisational Virtue Conference** University of St Andrews, November 2019

Although the first application for this conference was for a major grant (i.e., up to

£14,000) from the BSA, the much smaller amount (£4,370) was very gratefully received. Indeed, that amount proved more than ample for having a small but concentrated conference. There were numerous compliments regarding the quality of the conference, including from people one might not have expected. One attendee—from Duke University—said: “This was a superb conference! All of the papers were uniformly excellent. It's exactly the kind of thing we would love to have at Duke.” There was no doubt that each paper added much to the overall discussion of the conference topic.

The goal of the conference was to bring people who work in and on improvisation together with those working in virtue theory. Those working in/on improvisation were:

Garry Hagberg: Garry is a professional improviser and also well known for his writing on improvisation. He is Professor of Philosophy at Bard College. Since he has written in areas that connect improvisation and ethics, he was a natural fit for the conference topic. Since members of the BSA will no doubt be familiar with his work, one need say no more.

Suzanne Ravn: Suzanne added a number of excellent dimensions to the conference. Her appointment at the University of Southern Denmark is in the Department of Sports Science and Clinical Biomechanics. She is Associate Professor and head of the unit “Movement, Culture, and Society.” So she is not ‘officially’ a philosopher, even though she is very philosophically astute. She also works in dance rather than music. A number of the musicians in the audience were quite taken by her phenomenology of dance in which she spoke of the kind of empathy necessary for dancing with a partner. A further way in which her paper rounded out the conference is that she focused particularly on the tensions involved in group improvisation.

Bruce Ellis Benson: Having come up with the idea and term ‘improvisational virtue’, Benson provided the first talk, which laid the groundwork for the kinds of questions and concerns that the topic raises. Hagberg mentioned that his book *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue* (Cambridge) was key in terms of putting the topic of improvisation on the philosophical ‘map’. While that work has a concluding chapter on the ethics of improvisation, Benson's focus in recent years has turned to improvisation that manifests



itself in many aspects of human existence, including his work as Senior Research Fellow at St Andrews on apology and forgiveness.

Those were the people in the conference working on issues in improvisation. The three other main speakers were scholars who have never worked on improvisation:

Nancy Snow: Nancy is the Director of the Institute for Human Flourishing at the University of Oklahoma and the editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Virtue*. As she readily admitted when first asked her to be part of the conference, she had never written anything on improvisation and was not fully informed as to how it all worked. However, provided with a bibliography of some key texts, she came back with a very astute analysis of creativity (that built off of the work of Berys Gaut) and how the virtue of humility helps facilitate greater creativity and being creative with others.

Glen Pettigrove is Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University. He is perhaps best known for his book *Forgiveness and Love* (Oxford). But he was keen to work on the topic of improvisation. Like Snow, Pettigrove focused on creativity but through the lens of the issue of autonomy.

Kevin Scharp: Kevin is Reader in Philosophy and head of Arché at St Andrews. His work focuses particularly on 'conceptual engineering', a relatively new but burgeoning area of philosophy. He had been asked to bring his skills as conceptual engineer to the topic of improvisation. How do we think of improvisation and how should we think about it. His talk was the last one of the conference and was designed to open up questions for developing the area of improvisational virtue. It was very effective in stimulating conversation at the concluding roundtable.

In line with the BPA/SWIP guidelines, two of the five speakers at the conference were female and three were male. Moderating the sessions were three men and two women. The speakers and moderators were from different disciplines—philosophy, religion, and sports/movement. Although no participants chose to utilize the day care facility regularly used by the university, it was available.

*Bruce Benson*

## CALLS FOR PAPERS

See the BSA website for details and more news:

<https://british-aesthetics.org/news/>

## FUNDING AND AWARDS

The latest funding opportunities are also on the website.

Go to:

<https://british-aesthetics.org/funding/>

