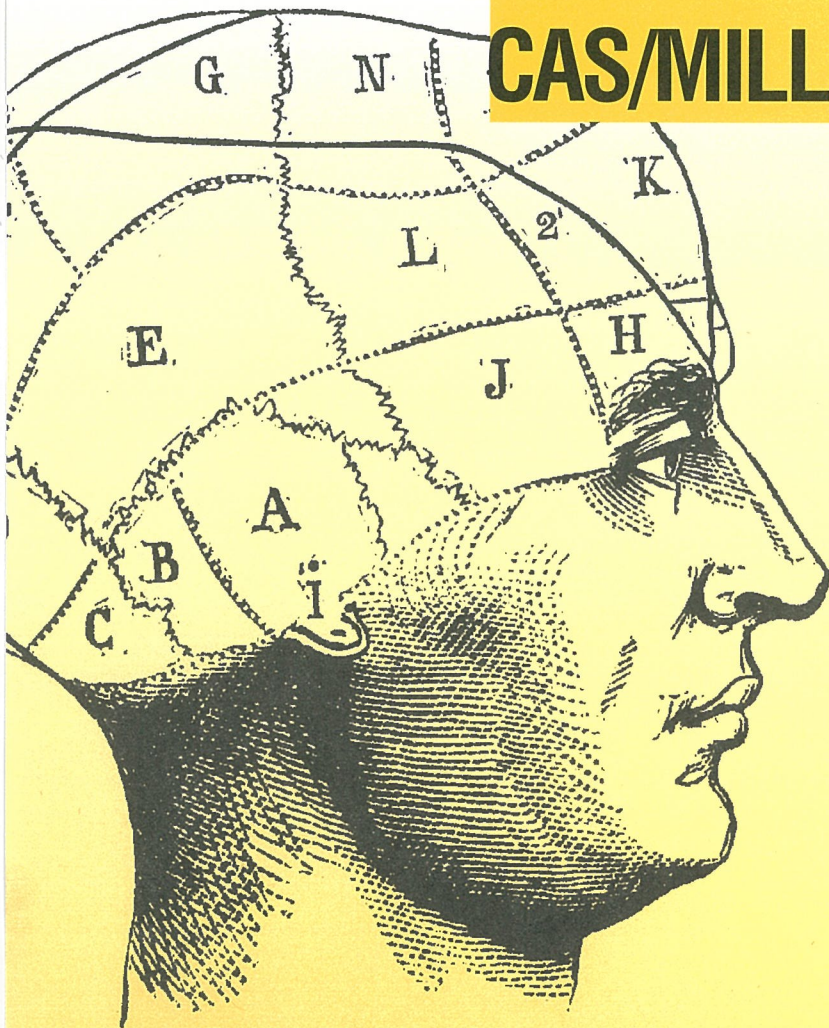


CAS/MILLERCOMM97



Ian Hacking

*Department of Philosophy
and Institute for the History
and Philosophy of Science
and Technology, University
of Toronto*

March 6, 1997

Thursday 7:30 pm

Third Floor, Levis Faculty Center
919 West Illinois Street, Urbana
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Mad Travellers Culture, Construction and the Reality of Mental Illness

We are besieged by what seem to be new mental illnesses. We wonder which ones of them are affectations, cultural artifacts, clinician-enhanced, or copycat syndromes, and which ones, as we briefly and obscurely put it, real. We are profoundly confused about an entire group of mental disorders, feeling that their symptoms are both nurtured and natural, both moral and neurological.

Hacking uses the example of *mad travellers*, a long-forgotten psychiatric epidemic to think about such issues. Following hard upon a wave of multiple personalities that

struck France after 1875 came another new disorder, which today is termed *dissociative fugue*. Individuals with only a foggy sense of who they were, or where they were going, felt compelled to go, usually on foot, to the ends of the earth. The story has plenty of familiar elements arranged in new ways—the homeless, the police, the military, anti-Semitism (the Wandering Jew)—but this lecture focuses on the quite special circumstances that made it possible for a new psychiatric illness to appear, and then fade away.

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