

Age and Care Graz 2023

**September 21, 2023:**

**16.15-17.45 Keynote 3: Stephen Katz**

“Dementia Care and the Dilemmas of Personhood”

The history of dementia is a complex story of medicine, culture, ethics, aging and care, with the status of personhood as central due to fears of its loss associated with dementia. This presentation, tracing four phases of care research, explores how dementia and personhood have confounded each other, beginning with Euro-Western ideals of rationality, agency, memory and individuality. First, since the 1960s, the sciences of aging became optimistic that Alzheimer disease, no longer tied to obsolete ideas about senile dementia, could be isolated and managed by medical research, clinical technologies and pharmaceutical promise. A second phase grew from a critique of this medical model based on a philosophy of person-centred care inspired by Tom Kitwood (1937-1998) advocating more humane and dignified dementia care practices that rejected images of bleak helplessness, subjective loss and biographical discontinuity. A third increasingly interdisciplinary phase saw the expansion of creative approaches that looked to the dynamics of relationality, the politics of citizenship, the phenomenology of embodiment and the imaginative interventions of dance and the arts. Fourth, dementia researchers are embracing a new phase advancing post-human, more-than-human, de-colonial and materialist frameworks to transcend neuro- and anthropocentric conceptions of personhood. Here the trend to de-center personhood brings into view assemblages of multiple, environmental, temporal, sensorial and mobile aspects of dementia experience. In reviewing these overlapping phases of dementia theory, culture and research, each with their own limitations, this presentation asks what kinds of relationships between personhood and dementia should we pursue today, where might critical dementia studies better benefit the care for and inclusion of persons living with dementia and how does thinking about aging and dementia tap into a deep and reflecting well of ethical meaning about human identity, suffering and sociality.