

Educational Lecture

📅 Sat. Sep 27, 2025 9:00 AM - 9:50 AM JST | Sat. Sep 27, 2025 12:00 AM - 12:50 AM UTC 🏛️ Session
Room 1 (Main Hall A)

[Educational Lecture 5] Toward a Poetics of Illness and Healing

Moderator: Junko Kitanaka (The Department of Human Sciences at Keio University in Tokyo)

[EL-5]

Toward a Poetics of Illness and Healing

*Laurence J. Kirmayer¹ (1. McGill University (Canada))

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[Educational Lecture 5] Toward a Poetics of Illness and Healing

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[EL-5] Toward a Poetics of Illness and Healing

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This lecture will present some of the main ideas in a recently published book, "Healing and the Invention of Metaphor: Toward a Poetics of Illness Experience" (Cambridge University Press, 2025). The book explores how metaphors structure illness experience and symbolic healing. The presentation will discuss the influence of metaphor, narrative, and imagination in experiences of suffering and processes of healing across cultures. The aim is to show how the study of metaphor clarifies mechanisms of illness experience and healing that depend on embodied meaning and symbolism, myth and imagination. Approaching illness experience and healing through the study of metaphor can help lay bare the cognitive machinery, discursive practices, sociocultural matrix, and forms of life that constitute and transform experience in sickness and in health. Metaphor theory provides ways to link meaning and mechanism, content and process, connecting personal and cultural history with the unfolding psychophysiology and sociophysiology of illness experience. At the same time, examining the metaphors used in psychiatric theory can provide a critique of assumptions that undergird the epistemology and practice of contemporary biomedicine, psychiatry, and psychotherapy. Becoming aware of the root metaphors of our practice can open the door to more creative use of alternative models and metaphors. Throughout, the goal is to advance an embodied and enactive theory of language that can deepen our understanding of the poetics of illness experience and the process of healing.