

**ABSTRACTS**  
**22nd Annual Meeting of the**  
**Nordic Society for Phenomenology**  
***Phenomenology in the Anthropocene***

April 22–24, 2026

Tampere University

Linna Building, Kalevantie 5,

FI-33100 Tampere, Finland

**DAY 1 – WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22**

**11:15–12:45**

**Fiction, Literature, Painting**

Wednesday, 11:15–12:45, Linna K108

**Martta Heikkilä** (University of Helsinki)

Post-Phenomenological – Post-Human? On the Notion of Fiction

How is the notion of fiction described in post-human and object-oriented and, respectively, in poststructuralist theories? In my presentation, I shall examine the compare the idea of fiction from a methodological point of view in the context of, first, (post-)phenomenological and secondly, of post-human theories that aim directly at questioning the dominance of Anthropocene.

The poststructuralist concept of fiction relies on the general assumption that things do not have any true idea, essence or origin beyond them, but each thing has its ground in the singular way it presents itself. This is to say that their identity is originally fictioned, imagined and therefore without ground. This means also that the groundless foundation of things, as they come into presence, is non-subjective and inhuman – using Derrida’s expression, a text produces other texts. Yet, such ground is also anthropological in the sense that these “texts” are fundamentally fictive: culturally produced and dependent on their contexts and current discourses.

The post-human, object-oriented theories bring forth the notion of a reality that is irreducible to subjectivity, subjective meanings or intentions. For instance, in art, images and objects are produced; as such, they appear as factual. One might thus understand the idea of art practice also as a kind of

fiction(ing) or “myth”: as for its origin, fiction is non-subjective and non-familiar, that is, without subjectivity outside of discourses. Yet, how are the aspects of experience and interpretation accommodated by the post-humanist theories?

My paper deals with these two notions of fiction – the post-phenomenological with an emphasis on the cultural context, and the post-human post-subjectivist one, with a focus on the object. To illuminate these viewpoints, I shall refer to Graham Harman’s object-oriented philosophy and Mike Kelley’s extensive essay “Myth Science” (1995) concerning art as a configuration comparable to fiction and myth.

**Lovisa Andén** (Åbo Akademi University)

### Truth and Experience in Testimonial Literature

How are we to understand truth claims in witness literature? Witness literature or testimonial literature is a literary genre, famous for describing experiences of concentration camps, slave camps, working camps, genocide and the like. One of its most famous writers, Elie Wiesel, labels it the literature of our time: “If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony”. However, the genre situates itself in an ambiguous position between literature and testimony. Moreover, it bears witness in a double sense: both to the objective reality it testifies to and to the significance that the historical events held for the witness. The aim of this paper is to outline a phenomenological understanding of the relationship between literary descriptions, experience and truth in testimonial literature. In particular, I draw on Merleau-Ponty’s examinations of literature in his lectures at the Collège de France. Furthermore, the paper argues that Merleau-Ponty provides us with an understanding of the reciprocity between literary expressions and experience from which we can construe a notion of truth that reconciles both the objective and subjective dimensions of testimonial literature.

**Lisa van Sorge** (Tilburg University)

### On the Im/possibility of Shared Experience in and through Painting:

#### Merleau-Ponty and the Expressivity of the Artistic Gesture

Art gives form to how one is always already in the midst of things. Merleau-Ponty situates painting at the heart of his phenomenology, conceptualizing it as that which gives expression to how the world is in the process of appearing. In accordance with this, I outline how art has the capacity to give provisional form to the processes that configure sense. By turning to the work of contemporary artists like Ellen Gallagher and Laure Prouvost I show how art stages an encounter with the possibilities for, and limits of, shared experience. In order to substantiate what grounds this ability, I elaborate on Merleau-Ponty’s notion of intercorporeality. By challenging the rigid distinctions between self, world, and others, and by putting forward a mode of being that is grounded on reversibility and flesh, his phenomenology provides a radically different understanding of what constitutes artistic expression and subsequently, who is considered to be able to express. If the artistic gesture explicitly does not come from the individual, it can open up a space for feeling-with others. At the same time, by comparing the artistic gesture to Merleau-Ponty’s figure of the hands as touching and touched in *The Visible and the Invisible*, I foreground the limits of this reversibility, and therefore, the necessary limits of feeling-with. In each attempt to make an experience visible, painting refuses complete exchange or understanding. With each encounter or experience with a gesture that is outside of one’s reach, painting invites a responsivity to what one’s perspective does not yet encompass. Offering an encounter with an indeterminate gesture is vital in times of immense environmental challenges, as it blurs the boundaries between what comes from the self, the

(nonhuman) other, and the world. In this context, artistic expression retains the capacity to reconfigure sense in times of crisis.

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## **Affective Climates of the Anthropocene**

Wednesday, 11:15–12:45, Linna K109

**Alexandru Bejinariu** (University of Bucharest)

### It Doesn't Feel Like Home Anymore: The Experience of the Uncanny and Climate Change

Arguably one of the most pervasive feelings in the age of the Anthropocene is that of the *uncanny* (Trigg 2020, Saari 2018, Bubandt 2018). Following Freud's definition of the *unheimlich* (*Unheimlich*) as „that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (Freud 2003), in the last decades ecological philosophy has linked the concept of the uncanny with the profound and disturbing changes of our surrounding landscapes, environments and atmospheres due to climate change, thus coining the term *ecological* or *environmental uncanny* (Irwin 2024, Richardson 2019, Eggan 2017, Carroll 2016, Morton 2012). In light of these developments, this paper offers a phenomenological investigation of the uncanny as an eco-emotion, i.e. of the way in which the experience of the ecological uncanny is constituted in the first person singular or plural subject. To begin with, I offer a short overview of the different forms of ecological uncanniness, from the mere vague feeling of something being ‘out of place,’ when we see our old lilac tree blossoming again in autumn, to more extreme forms like the fear of apocalyptic doom. By further drawing on Husserlian concepts such as home- and alien-world, and on Waldenfels's notion of threshold, I develop a phenomenological account of the uncanny eco-emotion as a species of the experience of alienness in the midst of the own and the most familiar domain. Framing ecological changes in terms of bursting alienness allows me to finally shed new light on the relation between nature and human behavior in the constitution of the feeling of familiarity and address questions like: Is the uncanny a form of surprise in the face of sudden change or does it imply different degrees mounting up to a general feeling of disquiet? Is the feeling of ecological uncanny always object-related or does it relate to a more vague atmosphere? And finally does it presuppose a perceived agent of change, thus involving an opposition between me or Us and Them?

**Chantalle Brückel** (UiT – The Arctic University of Norway)

### A Phenomenological Investigation of Climate Denial

In the Anthropocene, a phenomenon often regarded as having high ethical relevance is climate denial. While this term can refer to the non-acceptance of empirical facts, it can also indicate a refusal to take responsibility for one's own actions in the face of the climate crisis, constituting a moral issue. In recent literature, the latter understanding of climate denial is often traced to climate anxiety, which individuals may try to escape. Understanding the relationship between climate anxiety and climate denial could help address the ethical problem of avoiding responsibility. In this presentation, I investigate the phenomenon of climate anxiety, using Søren Kierkegaard's and Jean-Paul Sartre's concepts of despair and anguish.

I will start by phenomenologically investigating climate anxiety as feelings of worry, fear, and loss of control in response to the climate crisis. Then I argue that these psychological structures can be interpreted through existentialist concepts, which can provide important philosophical and phenomenological insights. Fear and worry in this context relate closely to Sartre's description of anguish in *Being and Nothingness*, while feelings of helplessness resonate with Kierkegaard's notion of despair in

*Either – Or.* Both concepts carry ethical implications: they illuminate why individuals may evade responsibility. I argue that understanding climate anxiety through this existentialist lens can shed light on why some people accept climate science, acknowledge the threat it poses to human life, yet still deny personal responsibility. In doing so, this approach offers a deepened understanding of climate denial and can open new ways to address the moral challenges associated with it.

**Mintautas Gutauskas** (Vilnius University)

### Environmental Trauma and Complexity of Experience in the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene proposes new scales of time and space. In the vastness of these scales, humanity appears as a geological force and a species. This species is characterized by unintended consequences, harmful effects (pollution, depletion, species extinction) on the environment on a global scale, as well as the responsibility associated with these impacts. Can we say that the Anthropocene scales are the new horizon of our experience? It seems that there is no relation between personal experience and time scales that often exceed our imagination. However, increasing sensitivity to the vulnerability of environments has led to some changes in our experience. How can phenomenology describe it? First, we need to focus on the growing complexity and reflexivity of experience. Anthropocene scales provide a new evaluative landscape, and we begin to experience the world through the lens of different scales. It makes our experience more complex and more ambivalent. E. Casey's description of environmental trauma shows the growing affectivity and ability to respond to the vulnerable environment. The complexity and reflectivity of such an experience require more than a Levinasian response to the call of the Other and a more complex phenomenological description. Asking what makes the Anthropocene experience more complex, we see that the Anthropocene provides such scales that often confront the usual social practices. With the growing awareness of hyperconnectivity and slow disaster, we begin anew to evaluate our consumption and waste. Practices such as the Zero Waste movement foster a new hyper-reflexive consciousness, which evaluates all everyday actions through the lens of waste and potential harm to the environment. The task for phenomenology in the Anthropocene is to describe the new evaluative landscape and the new forms of experience that emerge within it.

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## **Knowledge, Ignorance, Self-Deception**

Wednesday, 11:15–12:45, Linna K110

**Mikko Wennberg** (University of Turku)

### The Paradox of the Anthropocene:

#### Knowledge, Value, and the Human–Nature Distinction in a Planetary Age

The term *Anthropocene* was introduced to mark the recognition that human activity now exerts a planetary-scale causal influence on Earth systems. Although initially proposed as a geological classification, the concept rapidly expanded into anthropology, political theory, philosophy, and the humanities, where it denotes not only a change in planetary conditions but also a transformation in how the relation between human life and the natural world is conceptualized.

The Anthropocene presents a direct challenge to the modern assumption that nature and humanity belong to distinct ontological and explanatory domains. If human actions shape the physical dynamics of the Earth system, then natural processes cannot be conceptualized as external to human history;

conversely, human activity cannot be fully explained without reference to geophysical conditions and constraints. Human and natural processes can no longer be treated as belonging to separate ontological orders.

Scientific accounts of anthropogenic planetary change have presupposed this division to frame humans as causal agents acting upon external systems, but the empirical content of the Anthropocene undermines the separation it presupposes. Conversely, approaches that have attempted to dissolve the distinction entirely conceptually rely on the very boundary they seek to critique. The Anthropocene thus presents a structural paradox: it requires the human–nature distinction to formulate its claims, but the phenomena it names render the distinction untenable.

This is not a failure of conceptual clarity. Instead, it signals that the separation must be reconceived not as a foundational ontological claim but as a conceptual instrument with a context-dependent epistemic function. To develop this point, I draw on Hilary Putnam's (2002) critique of the fact/value dichotomy and pragmatist accounts of knowledge as situated and normatively structured, arguing that the Anthropocene requires a model of epistemic ecology, in which objectivity is understood not as value neutrality but as the regulated coordination of multiple forms of reasoning directed toward a shared world.

**Gústav Sigurbjörnsson** (University of Iceland)

### Sense and Ignorance

In this talk I will show how approaches that attempt to grasp the deeper, more pernicious and systemic forms of epistemic injustice and wilful ignorance we find in our societies, often reach a theoretical crossroads at which a focus on beliefs, statements and utterances, no longer suffices. I develop this claim through three illustrative moments in the literature.

First, is Miranda Fricker's (2007) account of hermeneutical injustice – while primarily focused on the notion of epistemic resources – also acknowledges that failures to recognize “emotional and intuitive styles” can exemplify this form of injustice. Second, Charles Mills argues that white ignorance cannot be captured by framing it simply as an aggregate of mistaken beliefs; it is instead “a particular optic, a prism of perception and interpretation” (Mills 2015). And third, drawing on Max Horkheimer, Linda Martin Alcoff, suggests that our “organs of perception” are shaped by our situatedness and by the oppressive structures within which we live, such that we sometimes cannot but fail to perceive otherwise than they dictate (Alcoff 2007).

I argue that one way we might navigate the intellectual space these authors open up is through Merleau-Ponty's articulation of *sense*, primarily in his later works (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 1968). I argue that the notion of sense can illuminate how ignorance is not only discursive or propositional, but sedimented in embodied habits, affective orientations, and pre-reflective structures of meaning. Finally, I consider how the epistemologically oriented approaches have typically been focused on marginalized realities on axes of race, class, gender and disability, and how the broader scope offered by the concept of sense can be used to understand the forms of wilful ignorance that undergird structural injustices and harms done to non-human animals and to nature more broadly within the Anthropocene.

**Amane Watahiki** (University of Tokyo)

On the Possibility of a Microphenomenological Study of Meat-Related Cognitive Dissonance and Self-Deception

In contemporary society, reducing consumption of animal products has become an urgent imperative to avert environmental, health-related, and ethical crises. Although more and more people are aware of this fact, most continue to consume meat and other animal products. With respect to concern for animal welfare, this phenomenon has been termed the “meat paradox”: people believe that animals should not be harmed, yet they eat them (Loughnan et al. 2010). This belief-behaviour inconsistency generates an aversive state, referred to as meat-related cognitive dissonance (MRCD), and individuals adopt various strategies to reduce it while continuing to consume meat (Rothgerber 2020). Although a considerable number of psychological studies on MRCD have been conducted, they do not explain how individuals spontaneously select their preferred strategy, how MRCD unfolds and diminishes over time, or what its microstructure is. In this presentation, I will argue that microphenomenology, originating in Vermersch’s elicitation interview and developed by Petitmengin and others (Petitmengin 2006; Petitmengin et al. 2019), can address these limitations in the existing literature. Furthermore, it may offer a new form of intervention-based experimental design. Finally, I will discuss whether and how a microphenomenological study of MRCD can contribute to philosophical theories of self-deception.

Loughnan, S., Haslam, N., & Bastian, B. (2010). The role of meat consumption in the denial of moral status and mind to meat animals. *Appetite*, 55(1), 156–159.

Petitmengin, C. (2006). Describing one’s subjective experience in the second person: An interview method for the science of consciousness. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 5(3-4), 229–269.

Petitmengin, C., Remillieux, A., & Valenzuela-Moguillansky, C. (2019). Discovering the structures of lived experience: Towards a micro-phenomenological analysis method. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 18(4), 691–730.

Rothgerber, H. (2020). Meat-related cognitive dissonance: A conceptual framework for understanding how meat eaters reduce negative arousal from eating animals. *Appetite*, 146, 104511.

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## **Submitted Panel: Inhabiting the Atmosphere**

Wednesday, 11:15–12:45, Linna K113

Phenomena associated with the atmosphere tend to elude our attention. Yet with more urgency than ever, there has been a recent resurging interest in our relationship with the air we breathe and the atmosphere in which we are immersed. In this vein, Emanuele Coccia has suggested that we inhabit the atmosphere in an even more intimate sense than the earth on which we stand. As a concept, atmosphere is often used to discuss our affective experience of place, space, and architecture, yet the atmosphere is first and foremost what provides air for us to breathe, an aspect which tends to be neglected. Focusing on this primordial sense of the atmosphere, this panel explores what it means to inhabit the atmosphere by attending to three interrelated but distinct aspects: horizon, permeability, and technology.

**Espen Dahl** (UiT – The Arctic University of Norway)

The Phenomenology of Air

A phenomenological account of air confronts an initial aporia. On the one hand, air is taken entirely for granted, as breathing and perceiving bodies. On the other hand, air typically eludes our perceptual grasp, insofar as it is invisible, intangible, and silent. This tension poses a challenge for any phenomenology of air. The traditional conception of intentionality seems to privilege perception—what is given *in person*—and thereby presupposes a world populated by substantial entities. Only what appears to the senses as solid objects, bodies, or fields can be straightforwardly perceived. Air, however, lacks this kind of substantial density and seems to fall outside the scope of such perceptual intentionality.

Yet we do have a kind of awareness of air, and this calls for phenomenological clarification. I consider two possible avenues. (A) One option is to expand the notion of perceptual intentionality so as to include air. This would require beginning from exceptional cases where air becomes perceptual (strong wind, polluted air, odor, humidity) and letting these disclose structural features that can reflect light on the ordinarily “invisible” air. However, this approach risks overlooking the everyday way in which air precisely appears as non-appearing or invisible. (B) A more promising alternative, I propose, is to understand air as given in a non-intentional mode. The concept of horizon offers a compelling candidate: like the surrounding halo, the contextual field, or the background of any figure, air also withdraws into the background. It does not disappear but is part of what makes the perception of solid phenomena possible. I ask: Can the horizon, as something constantly there and yet intrinsically elusive, capture the phenomenology of air?

**Sivert Vorren** (NTNU: Norwegian University of Science and Technology)

Exhaust and Exhaustion: Toward a Phenomenology of the Permeable

Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) offered an early warning that humanity was entering an era in which human activity permanently alters the spaces shared with other species. By revealing how synthetic chemicals were transforming and damaging natural systems, Carson anticipated the Anthropocene and its recognition of humanity’s geological-scale impact. Her poetic depictions of sudden, puzzling, and mysterious mass die-offs – perceived by farmers, rangers, and hikers as almost incomprehensible – underscore a key feature of pesticides: they are phenomena we encounter primarily through our bodily porosity. Like exhaust fumes, microplastics, and radiation, they permeate rather than appear as solid, equipment-like entities in the world.

This paper focuses on one such phenomenon: exhaust. Permeating phenomena are not experienced as tangible solids but as elusive presences dispersed through host substances. In the case of exhaust, the air. Yet we clearly do experience exhaust fumes: we avoid walking behind cars, and in many cities, face masks are used to mitigate pollution. These atmotechnical measures reveal exhaust as what Mary Douglas calls “matter out of place.” When fumes remain unobtrusive, they seem to disappear; when they intrude, when they are out of place, they become perceptible.

This dynamic recalls Martin Heidegger’s account of the *un*-ready-to-hand in its *obstinacy*, insofar as exhaust can “stand in the way” of our everyday concerned dealings. Yet exhaust differs from typical obstinate entities: it is not something we can simply “shove aside” like a used tissue or a cigarette butt. Against the backdrop of the Anthropocene, this paper extends Heidegger’s analysis of obstinacy to permeating, *un*-‘shovable’ phenomena and, using this extension as a point of departure, outlines several “atmotechniques” capable of putting such dispersed matter back into place.

**Edvard Lia** (UiT – The Arctic University of Norway)

The Imperatives of Breathing and Technology

In *The Imperative of Responsibility*, Hans Jonas claims that what he calls “the technological age,” an early conception of the Anthropocene, demands a radical revision of ethics. That human life on planet Earth might be at stake was never considered by traditional ethical theories. Jonas claims that this has changed with the emergence of modern technology. In the Anthropocene, human societies have made themselves completely dependent upon modern technology, a fact which Jonas compares to the relationship between the ability to breathe and the necessity of breathing. *That* we can breathe means that we *must* breathe all the time. Likewise with modern technology: That we possess technical capacities requires the continuous actualization of those capacities. We have thus surrendered to the rule of technology.

Grounded in Jonas’s theory of responsibility for the Anthropocene and contemporary respiratory philosophy, this paper explores how modern technology radically alters how we inhabit the atmosphere in which we are immersed. In this context, I draw on what Peter Sloterdijk has called “the principle of air conditioning, whose basic idea consists in disconnecting a defined volume of space from the surrounding air.” By virtue of being technical beings, we necessarily condition the air we breathe by enclosing it. By enclosing free air, we safeguard ourselves from its elemental unruliness. Yet this procedure also hides vital aspects of the air we breathe and potentially stifles our relationship to the natural world. I claim that the solution to our unrestrained pollution of the atmosphere is not to carry out the impossible task of eradicating our status as technical beings but rather to rethink how we might inhabit our atmosphere more responsibly.

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**14:00–16:00**

**German Idealism, Romanticism, and Vitalism**

Wednesday, 14:00–16:00, Linna K108

**Paul Gabriel Sandu** (University of Bucharest)

Phenomenology at Its Limits: Hermeneutic Intuition and Its Romantic Sources

In my paper I want to examine the early Heideggerian concept of hermeneutic intuition as a decisive yet understudied moment in the transition from transcendental phenomenology to existential analytic, and as a structural transformation of the Romantic notion of intellectual intuition. My claim is that hermeneutic intuition constitutes a paradoxical but philosophically generative attempt to reconcile immediacy and mediation—*Anschauung* and interpretation—by grounding understanding not in reflection but in lived experience itself. Whereas Kant posited *intellektuelle Anschauung* merely as a regulative possibility for thinking the unity of nature, and early Romanticism (Novalis, Schelling) transformed it into the expression of a self-revealing spiritual interiority, Heidegger reconfigures this lineage within a phenomenological register: life is not illuminated by a higher intellect, nor does it poetically disclose the Absolute; rather, it interprets itself in and through its own unfolding.

Hermeneutic intuition (*Erleben des Erlebens*) thus names an originary form of self-understanding that precedes theoretical objectification. It is neither a passive receptivity nor a discursive mediation, but the immanent articulation of sense within factual life. Yet this reconfiguration also entails profound methodological consequences. By dissolving the reflective distance essential to Husserl’s project of

“rigorous science,” Heidegger roots philosophy in a mode of engaged praxis that risks collapsing critical evaluation into historical participation. As Losurdo observes, the refusal of autonomous theory opens the possibility of an onto-politics in which thought mirrors the pathos of its epoch.

By situating hermeneutic intuition within its Kantian, Romantic, and phenomenological genealogies, the paper shows that this concept is not a mere terminological curiosity of the early Heidegger but a crucial hinge for understanding both the power and the danger of his project: the attempt to ground philosophy in the living movement of existence itself.

**Aura Valkonen** (Tampere University)

Viewing Nature as a Saturated Phenomenon as a Way of Overcoming “the Melancholy of All of Nature”

To begin, I will build on Christina Gschwandtner’s examination of Jean-Luc Marion’s theory of saturated phenomena, particularly her interpretation of nature as a saturated phenomenon. A saturated phenomenon is a counter-experience that reverses intentionality, forcing the subject to be constituted by the phenomenon. The saturated phenomena give more in intuition than the subject’s intention can organize, overwhelming it with pure givenness. As Gschwandtner suggests, nature can be interpreted as a saturated phenomenon, for it overwhelms our capacities for comprehension and resists our attempts to objectify it.

I will describe, following Gschwandtner, the consequences of viewing nature as a saturated phenomenon for environmental thinking. I will then propose that Marion’s and Schelling’s somewhat similar views on melancholy can help us welcome the overwhelmingness of nature without succumbing to the denial of the consequences of our destructive actions towards the natural world in our current Anthropocene.

Schelling holds that humanity’s objectification of nature and exploitation of natural resources through technological means cast a melancholy over the natural world. By denying nature’s intrinsic meaning, nature as a living, interconnected organism, we lose our connection with this giver of all life and forget that harming nature harms us.

Marion, partly influenced by Schelling, describes melancholy as a mood in humans characterized by pervasive sadness and an inward focus that prevents us from accepting the boundless love of the other. My suggestion is that if we ignore the calling of nature to a responsive relationship with the source of all life, we risk succumbing to the melancholic self-occupation that leads to nihilism and apathy towards the challenges of our age. The root cause of our melancholy must be addressed to overcome “the melancholy of all of nature.”

**Alonzo Heino** (University of Helsinki)

Art and Its Ideals: Exploring the Environmental Implications of Mastery, Perfection, and Genius

It’s through the arts – understood broadly as encompassing various skillful activities across the fine arts, crafts and technology alike – that humans alter themselves and their surroundings. A fine artist, athlete, craftsperson, or engineer comes to the scene and once their work is done, some transformation has taken place – either in human nature, surrounding nature, or both. In these processes, I argue, our ideas about nature and the vocation of humanity become concrete acts.

This forms the backdrop for my exploration of the various ideals attached to art and the environmental implications that lie hidden therein. I will focus on mastery, perfection, and genius by first examining

them from a practitioner's perspective (1st person view), after which I'll conduct a philosophical analysis of these ideals, drawing from German idealism and early romanticism.

While mastery and perfection have their pedagogical benefits, I argue that these ideals can easily furnish notions of total control: that humans can become absolute masters of themselves and their surroundings. Such an attitude goes comfortably together with a mechanistic view of nature which accents the predictability and potential controllability of both human and surrounding nature. In contrast, the idea of genius highlights the significance of the unforeseen, the unpredictable, the uncontrollable.

Focusing on the romantics, I argue that their conception of genius as the intersection of deliberate human effort and the overwhelming force of an organically conceived nature might, surprisingly, offer a fruitful avenue for environmental thought. Instead of valorizing exceptional individuals, the ideal of genius could contribute to a less hubristic understanding of human agency in relation to nature.

My presentation contributes to the ongoing environmental-philosophical re-evaluation of German idealism and romanticism by offering a novel twist on a key concept of romantic aesthetics.

**Henriikka Hannula** (University of Geneva)

Humanism vs. Vitalism in 1920s and 30s German *Lebensphilosophie*

In this talk, I have two aims. First, I offer a historical characterization of the *Lebensphilosophie* movement in the 1920s and 1930s Germany. Rather than proposing a definition of *Lebensphilosophie* in systematic terms, I provide a descriptive mapping of the figures, intellectual resources, and thematic concerns involved. This historical approach is justified because *Lebensphilosophie* did not constitute a unified doctrine or system. Instead, it was a broad, cross-disciplinary discourse – not only in philosophy but also in psychology, history, and biology. I argue that *Lebensphilosophie* was primarily concerned with developing a hermeneutics of both collective and personal life. The discourse varied in what its participants took the central concept – *life* – to mean: biological life or historical life.

The second aim of the talk is to compare the philosophies of Ludwig Klages and Georg Misch. While largely forgotten today, they were major figures in the Weimar philosophical landscape. They represent two different strands of *Lebensphilosophie*: vitalistic and humanistic-hermeneutic. Both thinkers drew on many of the same philosophical resources: they employed the shared vocabulary of “life” and were concerned with the emergence and constitution of individuality. Both relied heavily on historical argumentation, drew from Wilhelm Dilthey's descriptive psychology (although Misch more than Klages), and from Nietzsche's *Tiefenpsychologie* (although Klages more than Misch). However, they moved in different directions. Klages developed a vitalist critique of logocentrism, identifying modernity, rationality, and anthropocentrism as the spiritual root cause of humanity's alienation from the rest of nature. This made him a pioneering, though in many respects politically contested, figure in ecological thinking and environmental movements. Misch, in turn, advanced a humanistic, hermeneutic, and historically oriented philosophy of life.

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## Ecophenomenologies

Wednesday, 14:00–16:00, Linna K109

**Ulrik Nissen** (Aarhus University)

### The Responsive Nature: K. E. Løgstrup and Current Eco-Phenomenology

Since the term, “the anthropocene”, was coined in 2000, it has come to describe an awareness of the anthropogenic causes of the current planetary crisis. This is partly an epistemological crisis concerning the relationship between humans and the rest of nature. If non-human nature continues to be primarily viewed as a resource, it remains vulnerable to exploitation. This presentation outlines the potential contribution of the Danish philosopher and theologian, K. E. Løgstrup, particularly his cosmo-phenomenological philosophy of nature in *Source and Surroundings* from 1984 to the field of eco-phenomenology which was coined as a term in 2012.

The presentation falls in three parts: The first part gives a brief overview of the early formative phases of eco-phenomenology in the mid 80ies focusing on works such as Erazim Kohak’s *The Embers and the Stars* (1984), and how these forerunners drew on classical phenomenological sources. While Kohak drew on Edmund Husserl, Løgstrup found more inspiration in Martin Heidegger. Løgstrup remains largely overlooked outside of a Scandinavian context.

Part two briefly outlines how Løgstrup’s cosmo-phenomenology can both contribute to current eco-phenomenology and be reformulated in light of this emerging philosophical field. The presentation will argue that Løgstrup’s philosophy of nature can make a significant contribution through its emphasis on the human being’s omnipresence in the universe. According to Løgstrup, the senses are distanceless, thereby uniting the human being with the universe.

The third and final part of the presentation outlines a responsive eco-phenomenological ethic. Drawing on both Løgstrup and current eco-phenomenology, this section argues that the unity and yet phenomenological encounter with nature gives rise to a responsive relation to nature with a normative call for responsibility.

**Suvielise Nurmi** (Aarhus University)

### Relationality, Responsiveness and Responsibility for the More-than-Human World

Co-author: **Ulrik Nissen** (Aarhus University)

According to a widely shared view, the modernist human-nature, mind-matter, nature culture and subject-object dichotomies play a crucial conceptual root cause of environmental crises. Against this background, adoption of relational conceptual framework is promoted as a deep leverage point transformation for sustainability. Relational philosophy is particularly well placed to assist in mitigating loss of biodiversity, which is a relational concept in complex ways (IPBES 2022, 2024). However, there is a paucity of inquiry into the concept of relationality and its potential in environmental or biodiversity ethics. Our study asks, what does the concept of relationality drawing on phenomenology imply for environmental ethics, especially regarding biodiversity conservation.

Phenomenology has provided significant insight into various relational environmental philosophies. In addition to *ecophenomenology* as a distinctive field, including modes that either naturalise phenomenology by calling into question the traditional idea of conscious experience or not, phenomenology has significantly inspired also *ecofeminist*, *critical posthumanist* and *new materialist* notions of relationality. The

concept of relationality suggests the presence of responsiveness or response-ability, which, in turn, is associated with responsibility. However, interpretations of relationality are various, entailing differences in conceptions of responsibility and the following normative implications. A particular challenge for relationality in ethics is that it calls into question the modernist notion of the subject, and consequently, the modernist, non-embodied notion of autonomy, a prerequisite of responsibility in modern ethics. There is thus a concern, whether relationality undermines moral accountability. In this regard, approaches to relationality adopt disparate positions.

Our presentation compares selected phenomenologically oriented concepts of relationality in environmental philosophy discussion to show how they impact in the ideas of autonomy, moral accountability and responsibility, and explores, whether and how responsibility entailing relationality is applicable to responsibility for biodiversity.

**Maryam Vahedi** (Independent scholar)

The Moving Body as Ethical Anchor:

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone and the Qualitative Turn in Ecophenomenology

A core philosophical tension within the Anthropocene—the prioritisation of a quantifiable, objective world over the lived, qualitative reality—is rooted in the mathematisation of nature, as critiqued by Edmund Husserl. The resulting shift, which marginalises the subjective life world, parallels and underpins the ecological crisis by abstracting humanity from its material and meaningful existence.

This paper argues that Maxine Sheets-Johnstone’s phenomenology of movement provides crucial resources for an ecophenomenology capable of addressing this crisis by directly confronting the dualism implicit in the scientific worldview, asserting the primacy of movement, and grounding the mind in the kinetic, unified body-consciousness.

Through the analysis of dance, Sheets-Johnstone demonstrates that movement is not merely an object undergoing displacement but a sheer visual appearance that creates a distinct, real qualitative world with its own immanent space-time. Unfolding the phenomenon requires that the dancer surrenders to the qualitative flow, making the dance itself the “doing the doing”: a non-objectifiable model where quality constitutes the movement’s essence, offering a profound alternative to the static, measurable reality dominating the Anthropocene.

By re-anchoring philosophy in the animate, qualitative body, Sheets-Johnstone’s analysis advances phenomenology’s capacity to articulate a non-anthropocentric self-understanding, one which values the qualitative, felt dimensions of existence over purely objective quantification. Such a self-understanding is essential for forging an embodied ethic capable of responding to the complexity of contemporary environmental challenges.

**Nina Vurdelja** (Tampere University)

Ecophenomenology of Moving-with-the-Forest in the Anthropocene

For my conference paper, I would like to propose the phenomenological analysis of forest-based movement research that I have been pursuing as a part of my Phd thesis in *Performing Naturecultures*. The larger context of the work examines the performative and embodied aspects of what might be the performance ecology of hybrid body-landscapes.

Bringing together microphenomenology of movement and ecophenomenology of more-than human relational spaces, I would like to comment how the felt, embodied sense of the human-nonhuman interconnectedness is activated through the act of moving and thinking with the forest.

At the core of the practice-based research are ecosomatic and cultural practices of relating to environment, that I have been employing in creation of performing scores- as simple embodied prompts for moving in/with the forest. I have also been referencing *thinking at the edge* and *focusing* methods (Grendlin) to interpret and comprehend the embodied experience of the forest landscape in the Anthropocene.

The aforementioned methods are diffracted through the theoretical framework of posthumanism, and especially through the lenses of conceptual proposals of intra-action (Barad) and trans-corporeality (Alaimo). My practice-based interventions in Finnish and Estonian old-growth forests are led by thinking and enacting *assemblages as performances of livability* (Tsing, 2015) and referring to diverse points of disturbance in physical and epistemological spaces of naturecultures.

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## **Embodiments of the Anthropocene**

Wednesday, 14:00–16:00, Linna K110

**Stephan Dietrich** (Austrian Daseinsanalytic Institute)

### Phenomenology of Inorganic Life: *Leib*, Experience, and World in the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene marks a profound transformation of the order of experience. Whereas earlier forms of being-in-the-world were shaped by relatively stable objects, tools, and locally grounded structures, contemporary experience is increasingly structured by machinic–planetary assemblages. Internet infrastructures, AI networks, global logistics systems, cryptocurrency networks, and climatic processes unfold their own intrinsic logics, eluding human control and oversight. These assemblages are not merely technical objects but inorganic–living structures: they grow, transform, reproduce, decay, and bring forth new forms of world. As a result, the ontological ground structure of experience shifts—from a world of things to a milieu of inorganic–living processes.

This shift carries far-reaching phenomenological implications. Traditionally, the human body (*Leib*) has been the site where perception, sensory modalities, and relations to the world converge. Within the machinic configuration of the Anthropocene, this body becomes fragmented: it is affected by digital rhythms, planetary flows, and technical atmospheres, without gathering experience within a coherent horizon. Phenomena such as machine noise, algorithmically generated presence, or the invisible yet powerful dynamics of decentralized blockchain systems exemplify this sensory and symbolic dispersal. The classical phenomenological attitude—rooted in bodily gathering and presence—reaches its limit here.

This contribution develops the fundamental outlines of a phenomenology of inorganic life. Instead of presupposing organic centrality or a subject–object schema, it focuses on the human being's exposure within inorganic–living interspaces. This makes it possible to phenomenologically grasp the altered conditions of appearing in the Anthropocene—as a new, shared mode of being within planetary assemblages.

**Piotr Konderak** (Marie Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin)

What Is It Like to Become a Body? Prenatal Roots of Bodily Expressivity

**I. Rethinking the human in the Anthropocene**

The Anthropocene urges us to reconsider the “very self-understanding of humanity,” particularly by foregrounding the human as relational, ecologically embedded, and non-autonomous. I propose that phenomenology can contribute to this task by beginning not with adult reflective subjects, but with the earliest phase of embodied life. Drawing on the phenomenology of movement (Sheets-Johnstone 2015) and fetal development studies (Piontelli 2015), I argue that structures of *bodily expressivity* develop gradually along a continuum from prenatal, pre-reflective movements to later forms of embodied experience. This developmental continuity reveals the human as fundamentally formed within, dependent on, and shaped by its surrounding environment. I support my claim by focusing on two prenatal phenomena: the supramodal character of fetal body and the emergence of a body schema.

**II. Prenatal movement as emerging bodily expressivity**

During the prenatal period, the body progressively acquires the contours of its own possibility. The fetus encounters resistance, tension, and fluctuating spatial constraints, discovering the limits and potentials of its movements. This process is entirely pre-reflective: there is no distinction between “me” and “my body”: the fetus is its body in motion. General movements and other spontaneous actions show that early fetal activity is inherently supramodal: tactile, proprioceptive, and vestibular sensations arise together as unified bodily events. This reveals the primacy of primordial, whole-body engagements (as stressed by e.g. Merleau-Ponty), from which sensory modalities gradually emerge.

**III. Development of the body schema**

Adult bodily expressivity presupposes a pre-reflective awareness of spatiality and orientation, grounded in the body schema. I argue that the roots of this schema form prenatally: repeated, refined, and gradually sedimented movements give rise to the structures of bodily orientation (Lymer 2011). Thus, the fetus does not merely move; it acquires the earliest sense of its postural possibilities and embodied world-relations.

Lymer, J. (2011). Merleau-Ponty and the affective maternal-foetal relation. *Parrhesia* 13, 126–143.

Piontelli, A. (2015). *Development of Normal Fetal Movements: The Last 15 Weeks of Gestation*. Berlin: Springer.

Sheets-Johnstone, M. (2015). *The Phenomenology of Dance*. Temple University Press.

**Tris Hedges** (University of Copenhagen / Freie Universität Berlin)

The Instituted Senselessness of Sexual Difference

In this paper I further develop the concept of *Stiftung* to critically engage with phenomenological accounts of how the sexed body is intersubjectively experienced. When we encounter objects or people, we experience them as expressing a stylistic identity that pertains to their certain manner of being (Husserl 1989). In apprehending the other, one intuitively synthesises their expressions, gestures, clothing, hairstyle into a unified (and sexed) whole (Beauvoir 1949/1972 14-15). As Merleau-Ponty (1964, 54) writes, “a woman passing by is not first and foremost a corporeal contour for me ... She is a certain manner of being flesh which is given entirely in her walk”. While this account resonates with his contemporaries, such an emphasis on how sexuality is expressed by a duality of embodied styles fails to register how historical institutions modulate our "perceptual faith" in the world (Merleau-Ponty 2012), and what could be called our 'ontological faith' in others. In this paper I argue that the sexed body is not a mere facticity to be observed but is always made sense of according to a *Stiftung* of sexual difference

that secures its status through the normative statutes of a modern colonial gender system. The concept *Stiftung* is central for understanding what Merleau-Ponty (1964) refers to as Husserl's (1989) "intentional history" and helps make sense of the intentional and normative linkages across scales of sense-making, from primordial experience to socio-historical milieux. After first introducing this conceptual framework, I demonstrate its critical theoretical import through the phenomenon of sexual difference. Although sexual difference is being weaponised as a naturalised dimorphic binary evidenced by observable features, a critical phenomenological analysis shows how this institution has suffered from a process of *Sinnentleerung*, whereby it is now "mutilated" (Merleau-Ponty 2010) from intentional experience, functioning instead as an abstract universality with a fixed determinate meaning.

**Esa Kirkkopelto** (Tampere University)

### Body Techniques for the Interspecies Phenomenology

From a phenomenological perspective, the 'Anthropocene' suggests that 1) no part of the Earth's natural environment is untouched by human influence, and that this influence shapes our first-person experience of that environment, and 2) due to that influence, the number and the variety of more-than-human phenomena is diminishing. This situation forces phenomenology to reconsider its ethics and premises. The focus is no longer just on studying phenomena, but also on safeguarding their possibility, protecting them from excessive and destructive human influence so that they can appear freely and for their own sake. How to extend the "alien phenomenology" as sustained by Waldenfels to the area of more-than-human species without re-humanizing them? In this paper, which is based on the long-term experimental arts practice with more-than-human embodiment, I will explain how Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'strange kinship' between species can be realised at an experiential level, and how to understand its logic. For interspecies encounters to be possible on an equal basis, both human and non-human beings must have a body. To understand this kind of shared corporality, I draw on Helmut Plessner's theory of organisms as 'boundary' beings. However, this does not suffice to explain the possibility of interspecies empathy. Technically, this requires humans to perform an alienating act of corporeal imagination, leading to: 1) the construction of a virtual intermediary embodiment combining elements and qualities from both human and alien bodies; and 2) the re-embodiment of that boundary construct. The resulting experience is heterogeneous and alien, enabling us as human beings to assure ourselves of the embodied existence of non-human beings and to study it from within. It proves that the interspecies embodiment is not just a matter of speculation, or poetry, but a medium for a rigorous phenomenological study.

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## **Posthumanism and New Materialism**

Wednesday, 14:00–16:00, Linna K113

**Natalia Artemenko** (TU Dortmund)

### Humanity in the Anthropocene: Posthumanism, Responsibility, and Visions of the Future

The paper explores the understanding of the human being in the Anthropocene epoch, drawing on the ideas of E. Bińczyk, A. Cera, Yuk Hui, posthumanist thinkers, as well as E. Vögelin, S. Žižek and G. Agamben, to investigate how post-anthropocentric and posthuman concepts shape philosophical discussions about the future. The Anthropocene is defined as a modern geological and technological epoch in which human-made technology becomes the key force transforming the biosphere to such a degree that it threatens the stability of planetary systems, producing what Bińczyk calls "Anthropocene apathy and melancholy." The epoch can thus be regarded as a technocene, where the natural environment

is increasingly replaced by a technical one, raising the question of human responsibility for the destructive processes it sets in motion. While responsibility has been central to environmental ethics of the 20th century—most notably in H. Jonas’s principle of responsibility understood as total and continuous—such universal formulations have been criticized for fostering domination rather than care and stewardship. Post-anthropocentrism offers a possible way out of the Anthropocene crisis by rejecting the notion of human autonomy and instead emphasizing entangled relations with non-human entities, proposing not further technological solutions, which may deepen the crisis, but a revision of the ideological and value foundations of human activity toward humility, modesty and respect. Nevertheless, despite the potential attributed to posthumanism, the paper notes the conceptual ambiguity of the posthuman figure itself. To clarify this ambiguity, different approaches to imagining the future are examined: Vögelin views Modernity through the lens of immanentist Gnosticism aimed at achieving goals rooted in the present, whereas Žižek and Agamben speculate on a yet unknown future grounded in transcendence-like constructs. Applied to debates on the Anthropocene, these contrasting temporal orientations illuminate divergent strands within posthumanism and critiques of anthropocentrism, suggesting that the posthuman should be understood not as a future event but as an evolving conceptual framework within postmodern and poststructuralist thought.

**Rita Niineste** (Tallinn University)

#### Desire, Subjectivity, and the Crisis of Motivation

This paper approaches the Anthropocene not primarily as a geological or historical designation, but as a phenomenological condition marked by a destabilization of the horizons within which human desire, agency, and responsibility have traditionally been oriented. While phenomenological discussions of the Anthropocene often focus on perception, embodiment, and human–nonhuman relations, less attention has been paid to the affective and motivational structures that underlie meaningful action in a world whose future appears increasingly uncertain.

Drawing on phenomenological accounts of desire that reject both essentialist subject models and purely processual or machinic conceptions, the paper argues that desire should be understood as an orienting relation between subjectivity and world rather than as a lack driven impulse or a self-contained drive. In the current conditions, however, this orienting function is put under strain: the fragmentation of worldly horizons and the entanglement of life, technology, and environment disrupt the implicit sense of “for-the-sake-of-which” that normally guides action.

The paper explores the philosophical difficulty that arises from this situation: if neither classical theories of autonomous subjectivity nor contemporary posthuman or process-oriented models adequately account for motivated, meaningful agency, how are we to understand desire’s role in ethical and practical orientation today? Rather than offering a solution, the paper aims to clarify the contours of this unresolved problem and to discuss the phenomenological tools available for articulating the affective stakes of acting, caring, and desiring in a world whose stability can no longer be taken for granted.

**Erika Ruonakoski** (University of Helsinki)

#### A Losing Paradigm? Phenomenology as a Component of New Materialism

While phenomenological analyses of ecological and animal questions have failed to gain similar popularity as the posthumanist and new materialist philosophies of, say, Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, phenomenology is repeatedly used as a *component* of these newer trends (see, e.g., *New Materialisms* edited by Diane Coole and Samantha Frost, 2010). In addition to highlighting this connection, I analyse the reasons why phenomenology fails to draw the attention of broader audiences in this context, drawing

from Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions. Arguing that Kuhn's theory can indeed be used to analyse the rise and fall of philosophical schools of thought, I suggest that while phenomenology is currently redefining itself in order to make itself more approachable and more political, it is in the phase of normal science, which means that successful and efficient work in the field is done without questioning its main points of departure. Even though the method can be applied to discuss ecological threats and the persisting anthropocentrism, these questions are not its driving force but random bifurcations among a multitude of topics. New materialism, on the other hand, while eclectic in nature and somewhat unstable as an academic practice, is driven by a concern for climate change and related ecological issues. For this reason, it is more inviting to new generations of scholars: as Kuhn's theory predicts, it is rather the promise to focus on specific questions than an actual proof for being able to solve them successfully that brings about a paradigm shift in a field. Even if phenomenology is likely to persist in questions closer to its central concerns, it may be doomed to remain a losing paradigm and only a component of the winning ones in ecological questions.

**Arwen Rosenberg-Meereboer** (Åbo Akademi University)

### Cyborg Phenomenology

Donna Haraway's concept of the cyborg, and her cyborg feminism have formed an important basis for an environmental movement that allies itself with technology, as well as for a new materialism that questions the boundaries between the animal, the human, and the technological. However, scholars of disability theory have criticized Haraway, and other "cyborg theorists". The examples of cyborgism are nearly always examples of people with disabilities, and Allison Kafer argues that this suggests that when Haraway says "we are all cyborg" some are still more cyborg than other. In this presentation I will examine the critique from Kafer, as well as Tobin Siebers, who argue that a fundamental part of the cyborg theorists both utilize disability as a metaphor while leaving out the actual experiences of disability. Siebers and Kafer both use mobility aid, and they argue that Haraway's cyborg is often a seamless melding of flesh and technology, which makes the cyborg almost super-human. Siebers especially speaks on the pain of the seam between the flesh and the technology, Haraway forgets that prosthetics chafe. I want to expand on this phenomenology of chafing and dys-appearance, and take seriously what it would mean for a post human theory to pay attention to the seams and the chafing between the parts. I want to argue, using Drew Leder's concept of the Dys-appearing body, as well as Sara Ahmed's work on willfulness, that the concept of chafing and friction adds an important dimension of otherness to the analysis of the post human subject, as well as a new materialist environmentalism.

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## **Keynote: Global Warming and Another World**

**Susanna Lindberg** (Leiden University)

Wednesday, 16:15–17:30, Vänö Linna Auditorium (Linna K104)

What is the world of global warming?

Of course, for the natural attitude, the world of global warming is our home planet that, as we all know, is increasingly ravaged by rising temperatures, and that, as we also know, is our unique homeworld. There is no planet B.

In this conference, however, we do not need to repeat the evidences of the natural attitude but examine the world of global warming in a phenomenological attitude. My hypothesis is that the inherited

phenomenological concept of world is insufficient to think through the phenomenon of global warming, so that, to properly face it, we need a different concept of world. This is partly because the phenomenological concept of world is tightly tied to experience. It is problematic to speak about the experience of global warming either because, as Dipesh Chakrabarty says, we cannot have an experience of it, or because, as I would like to suggest, the “we” who experience it are different from the classical phenomenological *ego* or *Dasein*: the “subject” of the experience of global warming is a new kind of inauthentic and asubjective subject.

In my paper, I will first show quickly why the classical phenomenological concept of the world is insufficient to account for global warming. This concept, as laid out in particular by Husserl and Heidegger, depicts the world as a total horizon of a subject’s experience (*ego*, *Dasein*). If one wishes to explain global warming in this framework, one will inevitably resort to the idea of the epoch of technics, which can effectively give a philosophical grounding to the idea of the Anthropocene. In my paper, I will show, however, why the underlying idea of totality renders the idea of the epoch of technics insufficient in the case of global warming.

After that, I will show how the poststructuralist thinking of the world, developed in particular by Derrida and Nancy, starts by the question of the “end of the world”, which designates both the ends of the concrete lifeworld and the end of the classical phenomenological concept of the world. Instead of the latter, Derrida and Nancy develop a thinking of globalisation, which helps to reformulate the problem of agency at the epoch of the Anthropocene. I will show, however, why their idea of globalisation is despite everything ill equipped to properly account for global warming as a techno-natural process.

Finally, I will present a hypothesis of another thinking of the world that I hope to be better suited for the problem of global warming. This concept is still found in a phenomenological manner, so that it opens as a transcendental question rather than as an ontological hypothesis (such as OOO or new materialism). Here the world is not thought as totality anymore, but as an enmeshed tissue of events in which existents are immersed. Akin to Merleau-Ponty’s idea of the flesh, it differs from it because it isn’t related to bodies and perception, but to a primordial technicity of the techno-nature. I will then show how to conceptualize it in terms of “bio-technics”, “technics of naturing”, articulation or fabrication. I will suggest that they help us articulate a more adequate picture of the world of global warming.

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## DAY 2 – THURSDAY, APRIL 23

### **Nordic-Japanese Plenary Session: Life-World and Person under Accelerated Objectification Takuya Nakamura (Doshisha University)**

Thursday, 10:00–11:15, Väinö Linna Auditorium (Linna K104)

This lecture rethinks the present—often indexed by the term “Anthropocene”—as a moment of accelerated objectification and, correlatively, of a transformation of the life-world. My guiding thesis is that subjectivity constitutes an objectified world yet cannot be exhausted as an object; this duality becomes concrete in Husserl’s correlation of life-world and person.

First, I clarify the life-world as the pre-given horizon in which sense and validity first take shape through embodied practice, history, and communal life. Scientific objectivity does not replace this horizon; it is an idealizing substruction that still depends on modes of givenness and on graded evidence.

Second, I develop the life-world–special-worlds relation as a circulation rather than a one-way grounding. “Special worlds” formed by goal-directed interests (including the sciences) draw meaning from the life-world, while their achievements—measures, models, standardized procedures, technical forms—flow back into everyday life and reconfigure what counts as salient, real, and binding in sense and validity.

Third, I analyze how this circulation is inscribed within the life-world by way of habituality and sedimentation. Decisions and convictions endure beyond the passing of experiences and can be reactivated; what sediments is not a dead residue but a latent force that quietly orients present judgement and action. The person is thereby understood as the concrete unity of a life that acquires a past: not a mere object among objects, but a practical-rational subject capable of revising its stance, resisting affective solicitations, and committing itself to reasons.

Finally, I indicate how normativity and responsibility emerge from this temporal formation of the person within the life-world. Phenomenology here does not oppose science; it secures the legitimacy of objectification by recovering its life-worldly conditions in functioning subjectivity, and by re-centering the dignity of responsible agency in an age of accelerating objectification.

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**11:30–13:00**

## **Technologies in the Anthropocene**

Thursday, 11:30–13:00, Linna K108

**Agostino Cera** (Università di Ferrara)

### How Much Do You Love Your Monsters? (A Phenomenology of Care in the Anthropocene)

This presentation deals with a *phenomenology of “care” in the Anthropocene*, the latter understood no longer as a geological epoch but as the best candidate to become the *métarécit* of our age. More specifically, I will outline two meanings of the neologism “*techno-care*”. In the *first part* I present Bruno Latour's interpretation of techno-care, followed in the *second part* by a critical reading of it. So, on the one hand, we have *techno-care* as “the care that human beings should exercise toward technology”; on the other hand, *techno-care* as “the care that technology itself should exercise toward everything that requires care”.

In his 2011 essay *Love Your Monsters*, Latour offers a provocative reinterpretation (aligned with *Ecomodernism*) of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. According to him, “Dr. Frankenstein's crime was not that he created a creature through a combination of hubris and high technology but that he *abandoned the creature to itself*”. Similarly, our sin is “not that we created technologies but that we did not love and care for them”. Latour's solution is to *de-modernize our gaze* by considering “*human development* not as a liberation from Nature, but as a process of *becoming ever-more intimate with a panoply of nonhuman natures*”.

Opposing Latour's argument, I read techno-care as a *moral oxymoron* – namely, the alibi to establish our “planetary management”. Within the Anthropocene framework, nature risks being subjected to an unprecedented form of reification: the “*pet-ification*”. This implies that it is no longer *homo faber* with his Promethean arrogance who enacts this domestication, but a planetary steward who acts in the name of a

noble (eco-)altruism. The paradox that makes *techno-care* a moral oxymoron lies in the fact that *we could become earthmasters as caregivers* – i.e. not through a “will to power” but through an unsuspected “*will to care*”.

**Christa Laurens** (Wageningen University & Research)

Phenomenology, the Life-World and Technology: Revisiting Husserl, Heidegger and Arendt in Light of Contemporary Life under (Digital) Technological Conditions

Co-authors: **Vincent Blok** (Erasmus University), **Bernice Bovenkerk** (Wageningen University & Research), **Nolen Gertz** (Twente University)

This presentation starts from the observation that in the Anthropocene, humanity increasingly relies on science and technology, or technoscientific practices, in order to address the challenges it faces, most importantly, the climate crisis. A good example is *DestineE*, an EU funded project that aims to develop a digital twin of planet Earth in order to support human decision-making for the design and testing of effective strategies to deal with climate change (e.g. geo-engineering). The example of *DestineE* illustrates how digital technologies exceed the individual and collective level, and become aimed at addressing the global phenomenon that is the Anthropocene understood as the self-awareness of humanity’s systematic exploitation of natural resources and production of waste beyond Earth’s carrying capacity. In this presentation, I will argue that phenomenology, by virtue of the concept of the life-world, its horizon and historicity, is exceptionally well-suited to contribute to the task of articulating humanity’s self-understanding in light of these contemporary developments. I will turn to the work of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt to philosophically reflect on the question of how digital technologies can be said to be disruptive of the life-world. Respectively I will discuss Husserl’s thesis of the mathematization of nature and technization [*Technisierung*], Heidegger’s analysis of the essence of modern technology [i.e. *Gestell*] and Arendt’s reflections on the telescope as the herald of the modern age. My hypothesis is that revisiting Husserl, Heidegger and Arendt through the lens of the question of the technological disruption of the life-world can critically contribute to articulating humanity’s self-understanding, whilst demonstrating the need to go beyond certain limitations of their analyses (e.g. the anthropocentric orientation and general neglect of nonhumans).

**John Haglund** (Åbo Akademi University / Södertörn University)

Mnemotechnics and World-Temporalization in the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene is increasingly invoked as a geological, political, and moral threshold or tipping-point—the moment when anthropogenic climate change becomes decisive and human activity becomes a planetary force. Yet this discourse presupposes a disclosure of the world that is at once technological, temporal, and mnemonic: a mode of selective retention and erasure that structures how ecological crisis appears—or fails to appear. I argue that phenomenology, supplemented by Derrida’s deconstruction of temporality and the archive, offers powerful resources for rethinking these presuppositions.

Drawing on previous work on Heidegger’s philosophy of technology, I show how the Anthropocene can be understood as an epoch in which not only nature but the human appears as standing-reserve (*Bestand*) within a global representational framework. In this encounter with the natural environment and nonhuman life, human agency and planetary vulnerability are thus constituted together. I then argue that within the horizon of this encounter, *hypomnesic* regimes are crucial—digital archives, climate modelling, and attention economies that exteriorize memory and program our experience of “world”. These are *pharmacological* in that they both enable and erode world-disclosure by conditioning what can be perceived, remembered, and anticipated.

These mnemo-technological conditions ultimately presuppose a more fundamental phenomenological structure of temporalization. Husserl's analyses of world-temporalization clarify the horizontal synthesis of world disclosure. Deconstruction further reveals that the very notion of an epochal turning point presupposes a temporal unity—the self-identity of the “now” and the living present—which perhaps cannot be maintained.

By integrating these analyses, I propose that the Anthropocene can be understood phenomenologically as an exposure of the auto-immunitary structure of worldhood itself. The very technics through which the human world is disclosed and sustained are also what undermine its human and nonhuman conditions of possibility.

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## Uexküll's Environments and Lifeworlds

Thursday, 11:30–13:00, Linna K109

**Katja Tiisala** (University of Helsinki)

### Sentient Lifeworlds, Lifeworld Plurality and the Anthropocene

Different sentient beings have their own phenomenal realities. All sentient beings are by definition phenomenally conscious, which entails that there is something it is like for them to experience the world and their life (see e.g., MacClellan 2012, p. 118). Also, as the concept of sentience is typically used in animal ethics, sentient beings have their own affective lives (see e.g., *ibid.*) – they are also *affectively* phenomenally conscious, and may suffer, for instance, which is a reason to conceive the treatment of all sentient beings as ethically important. The phenomenal realities of sentient beings may have similarities but also important differences. In this paper, I draw on research on the phenomenal realities of various sentient beings, animal ethics, and environmental ethics to examine the diversity of these realities as an issue of justice, in the context of the Anthropocene. I analyse *sentient lifeworlds*, by which I refer to the experienced and lived phenomenal worlds of sentient beings, by drawing on Jakob von Uexküll's (2010/1934) Umwelt theory, animal studies, and phenomenology, such as animal phenomenology of Dominique Lestel (2014). I introduce the concept of *lifeworld monism* to refer to the ideology that hides the plurality and diversity of sentient lifeworlds and represents the reality according to the phenomenal world of a dominating party, such as humans. Especially, I criticise current politics of sustainability that presents environmental issues predominantly through the human lifeworld, thereby erasing nonhuman lifeworlds from the discourse of sustainability. I argue that lifeworld monism is a form of injustice and that it has been a central element in the objectification of nonhuman sentients. Their objectification has arguably also enabled the destruction of nature and, hence, it has been an essential origin of the ecological crisis (Crist 2013). As a remedy, we should approach the Anthropocene through lifeworld plurality.

Crist, E. (2013). Ecocide and the extinction of animal minds. In M. Bekoff (Ed.), *Ignoring nature no more: The case for compassionate conservation* (pp. 45–61). The University of Chicago Press.

Lestel, D., Bussolini, J., & Chrulew, M. (2014). The phenomenology of animal life. *Environmental Humanities*, 5(1), 125–148. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3615442>

MacClellan, J. P. (2012). *Minding nature: A defense of a sentiocentric approach to environmental ethics* [PhD dissertation, University of Tennessee]. [http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_graddiss/1433](http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/1433)

von Uexküll, J. (2010/1934). *A foray into the worlds of animals and humans: With A theory of meaning* (J. D. O'Neil, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.

**Niki Hadikoesoemo** (Ghent University / University of Amsterdam)

The Art of Trickery: Cunning Intelligence Across Species from Uexküll through Despret to the Ancient Greeks

Since Husserl, phenomenology has been concerned with the question of meaning. Recent work in human–animal studies, post-human studies, and Anthropocene philosophies, however, challenges human-centric views of how meaning is constructed. Camouflage, mimicry, and trap-setting reveal forms of cunning interaction that invite us to reconsider how and where meaning arises, allowing for cross-species understanding. To explore this, I draw on Jakob von Uexküll’s concept of the Umwelt, which shows that all living species embody systems of signification and thus occupy a subject position in the environment, constitutive of meaning. Philosophical ethologist Vinciane Despret supplements this perspective by emphasizing the affective dimension of human–animal relations: we share in our capacity to construct meaning insofar as we share affective modes of engaging with the world. These insights resonate with ancient Greek reflections on cunning intelligence (*mētis*) in authors such as Homer, Plato, and Aristophanes. In my paper, I focus on behaviours of camouflage and mimicry as examples of this shared capacity for meaning-construction. I start with a curious episode of human animal deception from the Amsterdam Zoo, described by von Uexküll in *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (1934), introducing the logic of Umwelt; Despret’s analysis of cunning in *Beast and Man* (2007) expands this framework, which I then bring into dialogue with Greek accounts of camouflaging practices. This allows me, finally, to argue for an account of *mētis* as a proto-phenomenological concept of situated intelligence, offering phenomenology new interdisciplinary ways of thinking about relationality and cohabitation in the Anthropocene.

**Morten Tønnessen** (University of Stavanger)

What Characterizes a More-than-Human Phenomenology Suitable for the Anthropocene?

To address this question, it is pertinent to start out with the observation that the Anthropocene discourse is at its core a discussion about humanity’s impact on the natural environment that emerged from geology. At the same time, the Anthropocene has also over the last several years been vividly discussed from the perspectives of social sciences and the humanities. There is a disconnect between how the Anthropocene has been discussed in a natural science setting, and how it is being discussed in social science and humanities settings, with third-person objective perspectives predominating in the first and subjective perspectives prevailing in the others.

In my view, to be suitable for the circumstances of the Anthropocene, a more-than human phenomenology must meet the following criteria:

- \* It must account for human lifeworlds as well as non-human lifeworlds
- \* It must account for human phenomena and non-human phenomena within a consistent and comprehensive theoretical framework
- \* It must be capable of explaining how human agency can lead to material changes in the natural world, and how these material changes affect living conditions
- \* It must be capable of tackling the problem of human bias which appears e.g. in the form of anthropocentrism and zoocentrism, and which distorts our thinking about nature

I will present a version of more-than-human phenomenology that draws on biosemiotics and Jakob von Uexküll’s Umwelt theory which I will argue meets the abovementioned criteria. The relevance of such a

brand of phenomenology is supported by the fact that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty both engaged with von Uexküll's work in their discussions about animal lifeworlds. By outlining the main characteristics of a more-than-human phenomenology suitable for the Anthropocene, I simultaneously address key issues related to the nature, scope, and purpose of ecophenomenology.

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## Phenomenological Ethics of the Anthropocene

Thursday, 11:30–13:00, Linna K110

**Kirstin Waldkoenig** (Appalachian State University)

### Grounding a Lithic Ethic: Continuity and Difference in Deep Time

Building upon and responding to Ted Toadvine's phenomenology of earthly time in *The Memory of the World*, this paper explores the ethics latent in ecophenomenology, particularly in its attentions to our "constitutive lithic materiality" (Toadvine 2024). Grounded in what Brian Burkhart recognizes as an Indigenous phenomenology (Burkhart 2004), I will show how *deep time's* conceptual origins in North American Indigenous perspectives discloses the requirements of responsible relations with the more-than-human world. In turn, this pushes Anthropocenic ethics not only to consider reparative obligations toward the members of the biosphere, but also to that which has been largely excluded from environmental ethics discourses: the lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, and other abiotic processes.

This attention to Indigenous ethics may appear to create some tension with Toadvine's project since he focuses primarily on the singular alterity of nonhuman others and decidedly not "kinship" relations. However, I contend that Indigenous accounts of kinship and continuity can work in alliance with Toadvine's emphasis upon otherness. With inspiration from Val Plumwood's feminist materialist vision of "self-in-relationship" (1991), I propose the bodily experience of deep time as the foundation of a lithic ethic that is able to accommodate the continuity and difference of the nonhuman other in the embrace of Earth's corporeal memory.

Burkhart, Brian. 2004. "What Thales and Coyote Can Teach Us: An Outline of American Indian Epistemology," *American Indian Thought*. Anne Waters, ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 15-26.

Plumwood, Val. 1991. "Nature, Self, Gender: Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism," *Hypatia*, vol. 6 no. 1, pp. 3-27.

Toadvine, Ted. 2024. *The Memory of the World: Deep Time, Animality, and Eschatology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

**Irina Poleshchuk** (European Humanities University)

### Il y a, Enjoyment, and Bathing: Can Levinas's Perspective Contribute to the Anthropocene?

Emmanuel Levinas has been always known for his radical ethics of the face-to-face relation with the other. He has crafted a challenging phenomenology of intersubjectivity focused mostly on the other. However, before he really launched his famous thesis "ethics as first philosophy" which primarily describes the nature and the origin of responsibility for the other person, he has developed his original view of being-in-the-world before the subjectivity is addressed by the appeal of the other.

There are three modalities in which the subjectivity exists, and which are preconditions for being-for the other: *il y a*, enjoyment, and bathing in the elemental. *Il y a* (or *there is*) is impersonal existence which is often interpreted as a negative one and as an opposition to ethical relation. It is seen as a deep horror of being, it is a burden of existence expressed as insomnia, fatigue, and laziness. The second modality is enjoyment. Giving a profound phenomenological analysis of intention in enjoyment which is never fulfilled and is never completed, Levinas describes enjoyment of the environment as a foundational condition for any ethical relation: sharing enjoyment is the first welcoming of the other. Only the one who knows how to enjoy without reducing or annihilating otherness of the world is able to be with and for the other. The third modality of subjectivity is bathing. The process of bathing is a beautiful metaphor to explain interdependency and acceptance. Bathing in the elemental (where the elemental means literally everything and everyone inhabiting this world) is our interconnection with all which exists in environment but without consuming. Bathing is a beautiful image of being-with without absorbing the world, without being a centre, and without dominating it. It is “letting be”. Thus, I would like to take a risk to suggest that *il y a*, enjoyment, and bathing are concepts standing close to the philosophy of the Anthropocene.

**Martina Properzi** (Babes-Bolyai University)

Biodiversity and Artificial Life: Expanding the Ethical Understanding of Living Variation

The term “Anthropocene” refers to the period during which humanity has become a planetary force of change. One of the consequences of human activities on Earth is the loss of biodiversity. By this, we mean the loss of living variation, ranging from genes and phenotypic traits to species and ecosystems. Contemporary research in the ethics of biodiversity focuses on a “natural” understanding of life as a principle or a quality of animate beings or an organismic state characterized by capacity for metabolism, growth, reaction to stimuli, and reproduction. Advancements in the field of Artificial Life (A-Life) have introduced a novel perspective that challenges these traditional definitions, unveiling “artificial” forms of life such as robotic organisms and virtual ecosystems. In this paper, we present the key ideas underlying our project, which aims to address the existing gap in ethical theories concerning the impact of A-Life on living variation.

The project is divided into two parts. In the first part of the project, we will examine the generative processes of signification and retention, as well as the transformation of meaning that concern the fundamental concept of “diversity.” Such processes include intergenerational sedimentation and memory, as explored by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Foucault. These processes underscore a dialectical tension between identity and diversity, which underlies the minimal conditions of life shared by natural and artificial entities, including embodiment, situatedness, (un)boundness, and temporality.

The second part of the project involves the construction of an ethical framework that addresses specific normative commitments of artificial living variety. Our proposal for a normative theory-building is characterized by a pluralistic attitude that highlights the interdependence and tension between different norms in different “technology games” (Coeckelbergh 2018). This pluralistic approach, facilitated through the utilization of case studies, will mitigate the risk of oversimplifying A-Life technologies.

Akama, S. (2024). *Artificial Life. How to Create a Life Computationally*. Springer: Cham.

Coeckelbergh, M. (2018). Technology Games: Using Wittgenstein for Understanding and Evaluating Technology. *Science and Engineering Ethics* 24(5): 1503–1519.

Dalissier, M. (2025). The Weight of Sedimentation: From Husserl to Foucault. *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review/Revue canadienne de philosophie*. E-version: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0012217325100917>.

Garson, J., Plutynski, A. and Sarkar, S. (2017). *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Biodiversity*. Routledge: London.

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## **Submitted Panel: Fractured Realities: Selfhood, Psychosis, and Imagination in the Age of the Anthropocene**

Thursday, 11:30–13:00, Linna K113

This panel seeks to explore how our sense of reality and self-understanding can be altered in many different ways—especially in relation to a rapidly changing world, characterized by an ecological crisis and digital mediation, amongst other things. Our panel examines three interconnected phenomena that challenge conventional boundaries between imagination and perception, individual experience and collective world.

First, we explore how reality as a socioculturally constructed phenomenon—shaped, for instance by religious practices, social media environments, and collective imaginaries—conditions the shaping and kindling of psychotic experiences. Recognizing that psychotic experiences are fundamentally entangled with their cultural worlds carries profound implications, especially given contemporary transformations in human-technology-nature relations and the proliferation of artificial agents.

Second, we examine hyperphantasia and “reality shifting” as limit cases that destabilize traditional phenomenological distinctions between perception and imagination. These phenomena challenge the assumption that only perceptual experiences possess a distinctive “sense of reality” or “phenomenal force.” This challenge intensifies within digitally mediated environments, platforms like TikTok, immersive technologies, and AI-generated content, which systematically blur experiential boundaries between what is actual and what is imagined.

Finally, we turn to phenomenological accounts of guilt and shame in psychotic depression and schizophrenia. Expressions of guilt and shame as inherently social emotions and hence a highly malleable phenomena that are shaped on the world we find ourselves in. In the Anthropocene, with new narratives of responsibility and impending catastrophe, the psychopathological emotions may be transformed, which may have repercussions for care.

Across these domains, the Anthropocene functions not merely as an environmental backdrop but as an experiential horizon: it re-scales imagination, burdens moral emotion, and reconfigures our social worlds.

**Kasper Møller Nielsen** (University of Copenhagen)

### The Sociocultural Construction of Reality and Psychosis

In a paper from 1984, the German psychiatrist Wolfgang Blankenburg argues that “cross-cultural psychiatry concerns the relationship between the intersubjective constitution of reality (within certain ethnic groups) and mental disorders. In a one-sided perspective, [...] the ‘social construction of reality’”. Despite Blankenburg being one of the luminaries of phenomenological psychopathology, this relationship that Blankenburg points to has not received much attention in phenomenological psychopathology.

In this talk, I will try to elucidate this relationship between sociocultural construction of reality and mental disorder - in particular by exploring psychotic experiences in schizophrenia. To do this, I will draw on recent work in (psychiatric) anthropology that stresses the importance of the sociocultural background

in relation to how certain atypical experiences are discerned and identified, as well as the meaningfulness or distress associated with these experiences. This is what is known as social kindling, namely that the local social world has a profound impact on content of experiences, but also the very occurrence of experiences.

Grasping this relationship between the sociocultural construction of reality and mental disorder may aid us in understanding the somewhat puzzling but established findings from psychiatric epidemiology concerning migrant psychosis and the developmental trajectories of schizophrenia in different cultures. This relationship may also prove therapeutically crucial, i.e., understanding that atypical experiences are partial outcomes of the sociocultural world, and that they are thus not simply epiphenomena of a diseased brain. This also means that a biographical framing and cultural meaningfulness may be pivotal for patients. Such ideas are reflected in various initiatives, such as the Hearing Voices Movement, where reframing and taking ownership of one's experiences play a central role.

**Laura Oppi** (University of Copenhagen)

### Hyperphantasia, Reality Shifting and the Sense of Reality

The purpose of this talk is to examine two cases that seem to put pressure on the traditional distinction between imagination and perception. This distinction is usually expressed through the absence or presence of something called the “sense of reality”. In this talk, I will focus on hyperphantasia, i.e., exceptionally vivid mental imagery described as “perfectly clear and vivid as real seeing”, and “reality shifting”, a phenomenon rooted in social media, where practitioners claim to consciously “travel” to alternate realities.

The “sense of reality” has historically been defined as the distinctive phenomenal quality that distinguishes perception from imagination. Contemporary philosophers of mind, however, have questioned whether this quality is exclusive to perception, considering the possibility that imagination can actually carry a sense of reality (Teng 2023, 2024; Rivadulla-Duró 2025; Dokic 2025). If so, we would expect to find it most clearly in imaginative experiences that reach their maximum intensity and vividness.

Despite being a relatively common phenomenon, hyperphantasia remains an underexplored pole of the phantasia spectrum. Hyperphantasia refers to exceptionally vivid mental imagery and has been defined as “visual imagery ‘as vivid as real seeing’” (Zeman 2024: 467), or as “conferring strong and sometimes photo-like imagery” (Keogh et al. 2021: 292). The other case to be discussed is reality shifting, whereby ‘shifters’ claim to consciously ‘travel’ to their desired realities (often fictional universes, such as Harry Potter’s Hogwarts). Shifters describe their experiences as literal presence in other worlds, achieved through meditation, visualisation and manifestation techniques, rather than as ‘vivid imagination’.

If hyperphantasia and reality shifting can indeed be considered imaginative experiences with a sense of reality, this would have significant implications for debates in epistemology and philosophy of mind. However, as I will conclude, this may be premature.

**Mads Gram Henriksen** (University of Copenhagen)

### Phenomenological Reflections on Guilt and Shame in Depression and Schizophrenia

In the last decades, we have witnessed a renaissance of phenomenological research in psychopathology, clarifying the experiential nature of mental symptoms and proposing new avenues for research and treatment. By contrast, surprisingly little attention has been devoted to the phenomenological study of emotions in mental disorders, though some emotions such as guilt and shame are central to the patients’ suffering and deep sources of solitude and suicidality.

Guilt and shame are intimately connected to one's self-understanding, i.e., who takes oneself to be, and they are infinitely human emotions. In some mental disorders, these emotions can become so amplified or transformed that it becomes almost unbearable to be who one takes oneself to be. Both emotions are conceptualized by Lewis (1992) as self-conscious evaluative emotions, mediated by intersubjectivity and culture, but are by phenomenologists (Sartre 1943, Brooke 1985) considered pre-reflectively lived before they are reflectively known.

What exactly are guilt and shame, and how do these emotions manifest in psychotic depression (melancholia) and schizophrenia? The aim of this presentation is to provide preliminary answers to these questions.

Drawing on phenomenological and phenomenological psychopathological literature, I will first explore phenomenological descriptions of guilt (Brooke) and shame (Sartre). I will then examine how these same emotions often manifest differently in psychotic depression (Kraepelin 1912, Janzarik 1965, Tellenbach 1980) and schizophrenia (Conrad 1959). Finally, I will discuss when it makes sense to consider such basic human emotions as forms of psychopathology.

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14:15–16:15

## Phenomenologies beyond Anthropocentrism

Thursday, 14:15–16:15, Linna K108

**Alexander Barnett** (Duquesne University)

Buddhist Phenomenology and the Anthropocentrism Problem:

A Potential Future For Eco-Phenomenology Between Heidegger, Derrida, And Xiong Shili

It is not new to say that phenomenology has an anthropocentrism problem. It wasn't even new when Derrida levied this charge against Heidegger in his 1989 work *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, though, as I shall argue, it was a particularly good formulation of it. But despite this accusation's lengthy history, it continues to haunt contemporary phenomenology, especially eco-phenomenology. There has been a litany of writers who have attempted to solve the problem; we can name John Lewelyn, Simon James, and Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei as just a few, and yet a resolution seems elusive.<sup>1</sup> One author addresses the concern, another refutes the address, another complicates the refutation, and so on. In this context, I offer up Buddhist phenomenology as a fresh perspective.

It actually seems somewhat odd that eco-phenomenology has, as of yet, neglected to take Buddhist phenomenology into account. There is a proliferation of ecologically minded texts within Buddhism, much of which would seem to only benefit the project of eco-phenomenology. In this paper, I will be utilizing the work of Xiong Shili, specifically his text *The New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness*, to try and bring a new perspective to the anthropocentrism debate. I will spend some time comparing Xiong's notion of the human to Heidegger's notion of Dasein, and then show how Xiong is able to avoid Derrida's critique of Heidegger despite their shared principles. In particular, I will be noting Xiong's understanding of the wholeness of Reality that allows him to conceptualize the category of the human as merely provisional, a useful trick of language that does not hold up within Fundamental Reality. In this way, Xiong is able to seriously unveil the structures of consciousness, or what he terms the mental associates, and return to things themselves without falling into the anthropocentrism trap.

Moreover, his emphasis on “the return to nature” being necessary for human freedom creates an ethical imperative to deconstruct the category of human, making ecological thinking essential to human well-being. Beyond arguing for this claim, I hope that this project will create a further dialogue between Buddhist and ecological phenomenology.

- <sup>1</sup> Lewelyn, John. “Prolegomena to Any Future Phenomenological Ecology” in *Eco-phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*. Edited by Ted Toadvine and Charles Brown. State University Of New York Press, 2003; James, Simon. “Phenomenology and the Charge of Anthropocentrism” in *Nature and Experience: Phenomenology and the Environment*. Edited by Bryan Bannon. Rowman and Littlefield, 2016; Gosetti-Ferencei, Jennifer. “Phenomenology, Environmental Humanities, and the Crisis of Ecology”. *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, Volume 45, Number 2, 2024, pp. 215-245.

**Barbara Schellhammer** (Munich School of Philosophy)

Phenomenology of the “Anthropos”: The Fragile Human Being as Critical Response to the Anthropocene

The term “Anthropocene” refers to a geological era in which human beings grew into the most influential factor of Earth’s geology. Even more than that, looking at the devastating developments with regards to the climate crises and the destruction of ecosystems, it denotes to the fact that the biggest threat to humanity is mankind itself. Although the term has been popularized across disciplines, the actual anthropological question is rarely raised: Who is this “Anthropos” who has become the most powerful threat for his own future?

The paper comes from a philosophical anthropology that seeks to be phenomenological from the outset. Instead of referring to traditional philosophical answers to the question “What is the human being?”, phenomenological anthropology asks: “How does being human manifest itself?” The phenomenological approach I favor, originates in the French tradition (Levinas, Merleau-Ponty) and has been further developed by the German phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels who speaks of “Responsive Phenomenology”. Instead of beginning with a sovereign subject, Waldenfels seeks to describe the experience of being human from “the other” – from alienating moments, the unconscious, the gap between our rational ability and the nature that we are, or the intermediate space of being in the world.

My claim will be that a phenomenological approach to our self-understanding as human beings can be a critical response to dominant anthropological assumptions of the Anthropocene (e.g. autonomy, andro- and anthropocentrism, rationalism). To further unfold this argument, the paper analyzes human-nature relationships and their presuppositions. Drawing from Helmuth Plessner, it seeks to show that it is particularly the constitutive fragility and vulnerability of the human being that can become a critical impetus for transformation.

**Eliška Fulínová** (Charles University)

Phenomenology for the Anthropocene: Rethinking Our Being-Together with Jan Patočka

If we follow Crutzen’s statement about the Anthropocene as the era in which we recognize that “nature is us,” a central philosophical question arises: Who is this “us”, or the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene? According to Chakrabarty, the answer requires holding together three senses of the human: humans as agents within diverse socio historical contexts, as members of the species *Homo sapiens*, and as geological agents. These analytically distinct domains involve different temporalities, and for Chakrabarty the “generalized” human – humans as a species and a geological force – cannot be accessed in lived experience. This paper proposes, through a phenomenological reinterpretation of the dictum “nature is

us,” that this experiential inaccessibility is not inevitable. Drawing on the late philosophy of Jan Patočka, I revisit the central question by reformulating it phenomenologically: Who am I, and *who are we*, as collective subject of the Anthropocene situation? The “we” becomes crucial here – and it is also where the Anthropocene challenges phenomenology itself. While classical phenomenology begins from the “me” or the experiencing self, the Anthropocene forces us to acknowledge with a new radicality that being-in-the-world is always already a *being-with* – a being-in-the world *together*. The “me” emerges from concrete relations, dependencies, and entanglements of human and non-human others, from situations and contexts they share. A phenomenology adequate to the Anthropocene shift should therefore start from the “we”, or original communion, which opens conceptual space for rethinking debates on anthropocentrism, universalism, and presumed human mastery. From this vantage point, phenomenology can offer a nuanced account of the Anthropocene – one attentive to relationality, situatedness, and the shared yet differentiated nature of our being-in the-world. In this sense, some of Patočka’s insights resonate with motifs later developed by Latour, Haraway, and other post-humanist and more-than-human thinkers, while grounding these perspectives in a phenomenological analysis of lived experience.

**Thomas Schwarz Wentzer** (Aarhus University)

#### Chakrabarty’s Challenge and the Anthro-Event

Dipesh Chakrabarty’s seminal paper (2009) and his succeeding book (2019) pose a challenge to phenomenology. What has been provisionally baptized the *Anthropocene* marks an epochal event that perforates the conditions of historical experience in its modern Western ontological matrix. It operates on geological timescales that transcend the categorical frame of historical comprehension as well as political agency. In this perspective, Crutzen’s conceptual intervention has not just been a game changer for IPCC and Earth System Scientists. It has introduced a beast into the various discourses in the humanities that the available theories cannot account for without further ado. How, Chakrabarty asks, are we to tackle the fact that geological time consciousness has entered into our lifeworld? “What does it mean to dwell [...] with the awareness that what seems ‘slow’ in human or world-historical terms may indeed be ‘instantaneous’ on the scale of earth history, that living in the Anthropocene means inhabiting these two presents at the same time?” (Chakrabarty 2019: 179)

The talk will take its point of departure in Chakrabarty’s challenge. Discussing Toadvine’s (2022) and others criticism I will defend the historical legitimacy of Chakrabarty’s challenge and its plea towards a new philosophical anthropology. The event nicknamed ‘the Anthropocene’ has altered the conditions of how to conceive of dwelling in our times, as it urges to integrate the category or the ‘Earth’ into everyday awareness, demanding to think and to act in light of timeframes that only mythical traditions might provide suitable vocabularies for. There is ‘something new under the sun’ (McNeill 2000), and the novelty is to be located in the agential (Stengers, Latour) or speculative (Yusoff, Clark & Szerczynski) qualities of planet Earth. Phenomenology as eco-phenomenology is summoned to deal with the epochal event that introduced the category ‘Earth’ anew.

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## Merleau-Ponty's Natures

Thursday, 14:15–16:15, Linna K109

**Juho Hotanen** (South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences)

### Changing Seas: Anthropocene, Merleau-Ponty, and the Elemental Ocean

In Anthropocene discourse, the oceans are increasingly framed as finite, vulnerable biogeochemical systems whose warming and acidification will have unprecedented consequences for all life on Earth. Yet the very uncertainties that characterize oceanic change – its indeterminacy, volatility, and open futurity – also shape the lived experience of the sea. For those who work on or with the ocean, the sea appears less as a controllable system than as an ever-changing and fundamentally unpredictable element.

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's account of the withdrawing dimension of experience, I propose to understand the sea as an element that exceeds objectifying grasp: unbounded, abyssal, and resistant to stabilization. When brought into dialogue with the Anthropocene discourse of human planetary agency, this phenomenological insight reveals a tension between the epistemic framing of the ocean as a manageable climate regulator and the experiential reality of its uncontrollability.

By juxtaposing the Anthropocene perspective – which often presupposes human efficacy and control – with the elemental phenomenology of the sea, I argue that the changing ocean exposes the limits of our control. Rather than a passive medium awaiting human intervention, the sea appears as an elemental force that precedes and exceeds us.

**Zhong Xian Chua** (Leiden University)

### “Man and His Doubles”: Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature

The Anthropocene assumes a relation between humanity and Nature: our activities transform the regions of (i) non-human Nature and (ii) humanity itself. Understood thus, the Anthropocene provides an additional perspective to philosophical anthropology: to study the human being as fundamentally malleable. Despite this, the merger between anthropology and the Anthropocene leaves a difficulty untouched: the place the questioner-philosopher within Nature. The *fact* that it is a human being who questions her own nature results in an irreducible doubling of the human. This brings out complex philosophical difficulties: for instance, while the irreducibility of the human leads one to erroneously posit an unchanging humanity, the doubling of the human leads to errors that Foucault discussed under “Man and his Doubles”. In short, the merger between anthropology and the Anthropocene leaves a representational *style* of questioning untouched.

In this talk, I show how Merleau-Ponty provides *phenomenology* as a non-representational thinking. I focus on his concept of reversibility and show how his *Lectures on Nature* provides an example of phenomenology. Reversibility accounts for (a) the relation between the human and non-human, and (b) a relation between the human-questioner and her account of reversibility. Reversibility then provides a *path* where (a) the merger between anthropology and the Anthropocene *problematizes* (b) the human who questions her own nature. This path from (a) into (b) provides a Merleau-Pontian *way* into phenomenology.

While biologists (discussed in the *Lectures*) take symbolism to *distinguish* between humans and animals, Merleau-Ponty claims that symbolism institutes a *reversibility* between them. Moreover, the Merleau-Pontian path from (a) into (b) brings this reversibility (between the human and non-human) onto the level of the human-questioner. Philosophy then searches for symbolism in animals (second *Lecture*) and

for animal instincts in human (third *Lecture*). I conclude by showing how phenomenology provides a *method* for philosophical anthropology.

**Antony Fredriksson** (University of Pardubice)

### Kinship with the Non-Human: Merleau-Ponty's Concept of Nature

The ordinary meaning of “kinship” alludes to a family relationship. To be someone’s kin, entails that we come from someone that was there before us. Our qualities and features are formed by something that preceded our existence. This is the specific meaning of the kinship between the human subject and nature that Merleau-Ponty had in mind in his later work. Our form of life is structured upon nature and receives its foundational characteristics from the non-human world which preceded our form of life. In *Sense and Non-Sense*, Merleau-Ponty articulates it as the “inhuman nature upon which man has installed himself”. In this understanding the human subject is not autonomous, transcendent or external in relation to nature, but rather co-constituted by an agency that is non-human.

This articulation of nature acknowledges how the human body is constituted by the same fabric as the encompassing material world, subsequently this view renders the human/non-human relation to be lateral, rather than hierarchical. This ontology of nature goes against the grain of philosophical traditions of the enlightenment, in which human subjects are primarily understood as constituted by the higher cognitive capacities of beings that are rational and linguistic animals.

Through an assessment of the implications of Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of nature, and its influence on contemporary phenomenologists like Anya Daly, Annabelle Dufourcq and Hayden Kee, my aim is to bring potentially new perspectives to the discourse on environmental ethics by scrutinizing the notions of kinship and relationality between the human and non-human. The main ethical question that needs to be addressed is: How can we claim kinship with non-human nature while acknowledging its alterity?

**George Webster** (University of Oxford)

### From Phenomenology to Quantum Reconstruction: An Argument from Merleau-Ponty

There has been a surge of recent interest in phenomenological approaches to quantum mechanics. But despite this interest, a striking passage in Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible*, in which he explicitly addresses quantum theory, remains underexamined.<sup>1</sup> This paper offers a close reading of that passage, reconstructing Merleau-Ponty’s argument and its implications for contemporary attempts to interpret quantum theory in the philosophy of physics. Extending his analyses, including a critique of Louis de Broglie (an early interpreter of quantum theory), I argue that many contemporary interpretations of quantum mechanics attempt to reaffirm a “perceptual faith”, which distinguishes sharply an “objective” domain of independently determined objects from a “subjective” domain of our representations of them in experience. This diagnosis helps to explain the current interpretative impasse in the philosophy of quantum theory, which features manifold incompatible interpretations with little theoretical or empirical basis for resolution. I also argue that Merleau-Ponty motivates a phenomenological reassessment of quantum reconstruction, an alternative research program in physics which aims to derive the quantum formalism from empirically indubitable and operationally defined physical principles. Specifically, his claim that we “must recognize as legitimate an analysis of the procedures through which the universe of measures and operations is constituted starting from the life world”, and that we must do so if “physics means to say *what is?*”,<sup>2</sup> promises a novel account of reconstruction according to which its operationalism need not entail instrumentalism, a worry that features prominently in the limited philosophical engagement with this program. In this light, quantum reconstruction appears not merely as a technical

project, limited to clarifying formal structure and inter-theoretic relations, but as one that resonates with a deeper phenomenological reorientation of our understanding of nature.

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Northwestern University Press, 1968), 16–18.

<sup>2</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 17–18.

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## Phenomenology of Waste and Pollution

Thursday, 14:15–16:15, Linna K110

**Maria Robaszkiewicz** (Paderborn University)

### On Human Wasteful Noise and Migrating Birds' Routes

There is always a certain purposefulness of natural sounds: the sound of breaking waves manifests the conditions on the sea, the sound of striking thunder marks the dangers of a storm, birds' singing is their way of communication. These sounds make worldly sense as they inform all perceptible beings about their surroundings, about the momentary conditions of the world. Accordingly, sounds of nature are limited in scope (an assertion that may be challenged by environments such as native jungle, though a different register of perception could be expected there), to the extent that when we happen to be in spaces empty of anthropogenic sounds, our experience might be very close to an experience of silence.

Humans, on the contrary, produce a lot of noise polluting our earthly surroundings. This noise is often wasteful; it doesn't communicate anything specific that we need for a better orientation in the world. Continuous passing of cars in front of my window, the monotonous noise of a machine, the drilling and hammering of endless construction sites consume time repeating the same futile message over and over again.

In Anthropocene, it is not only noise that is wasteful this way: it's also light, energy water or oxygen. Through the continuous decrease of, especially animal, diversity, human noise becomes hegemonial. In urban spaces, the declining presence of singing, cawing and quacking birds constitutes perhaps the most noticeable change in this respect, one of the reasons for which is anthropogenic harm to birds' migratory routes.

I argue that phenomenology as an attentive style of thinking helps us to notice the scale of the problem, which is the condition of possibility for action and change. In doing this, I reach to different ecophenomenological readings of Merleau-Ponty, ecophenomenologies of sound, and descriptive studies of birds' migration.

**Liam Maher** (Loyola Marymount University)

### Ontogenesis and the Birth of *Homo Plasticus*

A defining characteristic of the Anthropocene is the accumulation of human waste. Plastic waste is one of the more pernicious species of human waste, as it does not biodegrade but rather remains in the Earth, possibly breaking down into micro and nano plastics. Our constant production and disposal of plastics is altering the world and the living species populating it, as is evidenced by the rapidly growing research into the effects of microplastics. This essay aims to philosophically analyze the problem of microplastics by considering the late ontology of Merleau-Ponty, especially the notions of ontogenesis and carnal

adherence. Human ontogenesis occurs through a nourishment from the Earth to the mother, which then begins to form the child. At each stage of its development, the human being generated encounters plastic; from the Earth to the mother's placenta and breast milk, to the air breathed upon being born, plastic seeps into the body. Once alive and in the world, plastics are inescapable, having made their way from the peaks of the Himalayan mountains to the bottom of the Mariana Trench. Humans have made plastic ubiquitous throughout the world, but it is the very world that we adhere to; it is our very flesh. So, what does this mean for humanity? The first section will explore the envelopment of the world's flesh in plastic. Section two will delve into ontogenesis, drawing from *The Visible and the Invisible*, and the *Nature* course notes. Section three will then assess the state of the Earth which we adhere to, and assert that ultimately, if we have entered not into the Anthropocene, but the Plasticene, we should expect the coming of *homo plasticus*.

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## Phenomenological Politics of the Anthropocene

Thursday, 14:15–16:15, Linna K113

**Kristian Larsen** (NTNU: Norwegian University of Science and Technology)

### Nature and Politics in Plato's *Statesman*

A new ideal of science and rationality emerged in the 16th century that, while allowing us to control nature “for the relief of man's estate” (Bacon), arguably has led to an impoverished understanding of ourselves and our place in nature. The natural crisis we face today where human beings have become, for better or worse, a planetary force of change is partly a result of this development.

While some phenomenologists have argued that the modern ideal of science and rationality already lies latent in Plato and Aristotle (Nietzsche, later Heidegger, Derrida), others argue that it results from a rejection in early modernity of ancient Greek thought and its reliance on everyday human experiences (early Heidegger, Klein, Strauss), and that a partial retrieval of Plato and Aristotle may help us address problems resulting from this ideal.

In this presentation, I explore what resources Plato's *Statesman* contains for rethinking our relation to non-human animals and the connection between political expertise and nature. The dialogue has been criticized for conflating human and animal nature (Miller) and the method of inquiry used in it for disregarding questions concerning of worth and value (Rosen). I argue that these features of the dialogue are fruitful for rethinking the way human beings are situated in the world.

I concentrate on three features of the dialogue. First, I argue that the dialogue's analysis of human expertise, political wisdom and the connection it urges exists between politics and caretaking of non-human animals provide a sobering account of politics in human life. Second, I argue that the dialogue's method of inquiry helps articulate the way human beings are embedded in nature. Third, I argue that this embeddedness is highlighted further through the claim that human beings, as if in a dream, know everything, but at the same time are ignorant when awake. To become fully awake, we need to see how we are part of nature.

Miller, Mitchell. 1980. *The Philosopher in Plato's Statesman*. Martinus Nijhoff

Rosen, Stanley. 1983. *Plato's Sophist – The Drama of Original and Image*. Yale University Press.

**Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen** (University of Jyväskylä)

Conditions of Appearance: Reimagining Critical Political Theory with Arendt in the Anthropocene

Arendt's *The Human Condition* has inspired rich analyses of *vita activa* and its fundamental conditions. However, the underlying concept of conditionality—her account of how conditions configure the possibility of appearance—remains strikingly underexplored. This neglect, I argue, partially explains common misinterpretations of Arendt's thought (e.g., “phenomenological essentialism”) and obscures her distinctive appropriation of the phenomenological method. In this paper, I contend that Arendtian analysis of conditions (*Bedingungen*) offers an underutilized resource for restructuring political thought beyond the “weariness of critical constructivism.”

For Arendt, conditions such as life, worldliness, plurality, natality, mortality, and Earth do not determine action but configure the parameters within which appearances become possible. Conditions form a dynamic, historically plastic network that shapes the horizons of experience and action. Their modality is possibility, not causation. This conception resists metaphysical notions of “nature” and challenges interpretations of Arendt as offering a fixed ontology. Instead, her work presents a phenomenological analysis of the interplay between structural conditions and the actualization of experience—a perspective that aligns with, yet innovates upon, the critical tradition from Kant to Foucault.

Apart from elaborating this framework, the paper demonstrates its material dimension and relevance for rethinking freedom and democratic action in the Anthropocene. Following Arendt's call for “a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears,” I argue that in the Anthropocene, what once served as a relatively stable background of human activities—such as the circulation of natural elements—has entered short-term cycles of change, radically altering the context for labor, work, and action. By bringing conditionality to the fore, this paper offers a way to revitalize critical theory and articulate a phenomenology of appearance attuned to planetary transformations, yielding an ecologically limited *and* enabled concept of freedom.

**Joonas Martikainen** (University of Turku)

Against All Odds: Political Agency in an Age of Polycrisis

My presentation contributes to phenomenology of political agency, understood here as the ability to perceive political action as something one can meaningfully engage with in concert with others. Such agency can be in short supply in the time of an unfolding “polycrisis,” especially if one is a fan of a healthy planet, democracy, and bright future horizons for mankind. A sense of helplessness and hopelessness appears to be a widespread planetary phenomenon. Still, many people keep up the fight. Whether becoming committed activists, or just participating in the political lives of their communities, they keep on doing what they can. What can such determination and *faith* in the meaningfulness of political action despite overwhelming odds reveal to us about political agency more generally?

In her book *Hope under Oppression* (2021) Katie Stockdale poses “intrinsic faith” as something that many political actors draw on when there are no epistemic reasons left for having faith in a successful outcome. Such a faith has often allowed one to persist and ultimately succeed. This approach alludes to an embodied, motivational aspect of faith as a *tie to the world* which is, in a sense, prior to any cognitively held belief about it. Stubborn and even joyous resistance in seemingly hopeless situations reveals to us something important about the experiential roots of all political agency. I make use of Hannah Arendt and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to describe a relationship to the world which animates the *intentional arc* of embodied experience, is characterised by a *principled* stance towards the shared public world, and is always rooted in subjectivity and identity as culturally and politically *instituted*. These elements of faith allow us to experience motivation and even joy in acting against all the odds.

**Janne Säynäjäkangas** (University of Eastern Finland)

The Phenomenology and the Politics of Simplification in the Anthropocene

In its ecological sense, simplification takes place when the number of different biotic or abiotic factors and the intricacy of their relations is reduced within a given area. In contrast to the ecological simplification, the kind of simplification phenomenology has been primarily occupied is ontological in character and is exemplified by what Husserl called the “mathematization of nature”, which postulates as real only that which can be expressed mathematically. Mathematization of nature counts as simplification in the ontological sense, because it constructs a world that is much simpler than the one inhabited by those aspects of experience which do not offer themselves readily for mathematization. Heidegger pursued the investigation of ontological simplification even further, tracing the history of metaphysics to the identification of being with the simplest possible form, the form of one. This presentation addresses the relationship between the ontological and the ecological senses of simplification, and the relevance of this relationship in the context of the Anthropocene.

This relationship becomes more apparent when ontological assumptions are understood as part of the means by which human individuals and communities reproduce themselves in environments composed of unlimited complexity. A given form of ontological simplification derives its practical significance from the way it serves as a means to delimit the range of possible actions into a manageable number of options. While ontological simplification is therefore inevitable in some degree, any particular form of simplification is never imposed by necessity. In contrast, the choice between simplifications is always contingent and therefore political in character. This presentation argues that as the Anthropocene Event accelerates, dominant simplifications are losing their sense-making power. For the same reason, however, the Anthropocene also affords new kind politics, grounded on possibilities foreclosed by prevailing simplifications.

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**Keynote: Reckoning with the Time of the Earth**

**Ted Toadvine** (Penn State University)

Thursday, 16:30–17:45, Väinö Linna Auditorium (Linna K104)

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## DAY 3 – FRIDAY, APRIL 24

10:00–11:30

### Place, Space, and Meaning

Friday, 10:00–11:30, Linna K108

**Hermann Yli-Tepsa** (University of Jyväskylä)

#### Socially Mediated Feelings of Place-Belonging and Respect of Natural Environment

My presentation analyzes and critically assesses the role of the experience of place-belonging as involving a sense of social belonging in a respectful affective relationship with local natural environment. Local residents have played important organizing or supporting roles in many environmental movements, for instance in the environmental dispute over the Grimsås peat bog in Sweden in 2022, or the still active environmental movements that oppose damming the Iijoki and Ounasjoki rivers for energy generation in Finland. A central facet of why someone who is a local inhabitant experiences the surrounding natural environment (the forest, the fields, the river) as important or valuable is that they feel that they belong to that place.

In particular, in my presentation I will reflect on a claim recently argued by Thomas Szanto, according to which belonging to a place is closely related to belonging to a social group. I will illustrate Szanto's claim by reflecting on my own childhood experiences as having grown up alongside a river in Northern Finland, adopting one important aspect of a traditional communal relation to the river as a means of subsistence (salmon fishing) and as a pathway, namely the socially valued skill of pole paddling. In this example, the skill of pole paddling, builds up an appreciating relation to the river as a natural environment, but at the same time it reflects what is valuable to the local community.

The example will be followed up by a critical discussion. First, I will ask whether the active experience of place-belonging always requires some sense of social belonging. Second, I will address Szanto's distinction between belonging and solidarity and look at the relation between socially infused place-belonging and respect of natural environment through critical lenses. Namely, social feelings of place-belonging can also be used against "out-group" environmental activism.

**Jan Varpanen** (Linköping University)

#### Childhood and Meaning in Life in the Anthropocene

At its core, the Anthropocene is an existential crisis in the sense that it calls for re-evaluation of what makes life meaningful. This entails that children and young people – so childhoods in a very broad sense – are centrally implicated in the theoretical discussions surrounding it. After all, children are the ones who will live the now uncertain future. Perhaps as a result, rich research has already been conducted on how children feature in various phenomena central to the Anthropocene, such as ecological questions and technology. On occasion, this research even builds on phenomenological approaches, broadly understood. However, the research concerning children in the Anthropocene rarely addresses the philosophical discussion of meaning in life.

In this presentation, I develop a phenomenological account of the place of childhood in meaningful life. To do so, I take a spatial perspective to phenomenology, building on the readings of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in the works of Jeff Malpas, Annabelle Dufourcq and Tim Ingold. I combine these authors' work with contemporary discussions of meaning in life, particularly Antti Kauppinen's hybrid model. This helps me articulate a spatial view of meaning in life, directly synthesised from existing phenomenological literature. I then turn to my more original contribution and ask, where is childhood in this view? I develop a conceptualisation of childhood as a region of phenomenological space. This region is not limited to children, but is visited also by adults, for example when parenting or otherwise engaging with children. I suggest that this conceptualisation of childhood helps make sense of why children seem to be foregrounded in debates about the uncertain future and to see the potential of childhood as an intergenerational space for crafting meaningful ways of life for the future.

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## Husserlian Ecologies I

Friday, 10:00–11:30, Linna K108

**Jodie McNeilly** (Australian Catholic University)

### What's the Matter with Things? Steps Towards a Shared Horizon of Ecological Intuition with Husserl

How can phenomenology contribute to ecological thinking on the problem of waste, pollution, extractivism and their remedies within circular economy? In this paper, I highlight the realist dimensions in early Husserl to promote a 'theory of things' for an 'other-than-human framework'. I argue there is a special kind of intuition of things that connects to a shared horizon of *ecological intuition* that responds to 'climate trouble'.<sup>1</sup>

First, I articulate Husserl's concepts of the 'material a priori' and 'affective allure' as 'non-object' dimensions of matter and things, prior to their valuing as objects and reduction to phenomena.<sup>2</sup>

Second, I emphasise these two dimensions via three distinct modes of givenness, as (i) a thing which 'gives itself' to us as object [*gibt sich*] (ii) a thing being 'given to us' as object [*uns geschenkt*] and (iii) an object being 'given for us' [*für uns gegeben*] as phenomenon. The other-than-human world is not just there 'for-us' to instrumentalise; things come to us—or not. They avail themselves with independent, a priori necessity and seduce us in their call.

Third, I draw on Husserl's mereological analysis of simple and categorial intuition and argue for qualitative differences in their fulfillment as unique 'intuitive styles'. These vary in relation to a thing's transition to object in the mode given. Intuitive acts bestow meaning and are guided by the thing in accordance with its non-object dimensions.

Finally, I consider exemplary cases of 'persons with hoarding tendencies' (PHT) in their special relations with things.<sup>3</sup> I de-pathologise PHT asking: are their intuiting styles more open to the non-object dimensions of things which affect an intense force on their lives. I describe how PHT value, care and claim "guardianship" over things regarded as useless, connecting deeply within a shared horizon of 'ecological intuition', thus offering an alternative way of valuing the other-than-human.

<sup>1</sup> I engage Colebrook's broader notion of climate whereby our recognition of it exposes us to our destructive power and Harraway's creative resilience in "staying with the trouble" through thinking practices. Colebrook, C. *The Death of the Posthuman: Essays on Extinction, Volume One*. Open Humanities

Press, 2014. Harraway, D. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl, E. *Logical Investigations Volume II*, trans. J. N. Findlay. Routledge, 1997; Husserl, E. *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: lectures on transcendental logic*. Trans. A. J. Steinbock. Kluwer, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Hoarding is clinically described as the acquisition and inability to discard things that are of limited value to others.

**Shohei Suzuki** (Tohoku University / University of Cologne)

### Phenomenology and the Limits of Realism:

#### Husserl on Nature, Intersubjectivity, and the Possibility of Multiple Natures

This paper addresses the possibility of speaking of “reality” or “nature” within the phenomenological framework. Phenomenology forbids any commitment to objects as existing independently of subjectivity, and likewise rejects the claim that a “real” thing exists behind the appearances given in experience. Nevertheless, Husserl repeatedly invokes “things independent of the subject” or “nature as the core of the object” (Hua XXXIX), especially in his analyses of intersubjectivity. Since intersubjectivity presupposes that multiple subjects can encounter one and the same object, Husserl appears compelled to speak of reality or nature in order to secure the sameness of the object across different experiential perspectives.

The question guiding this paper is therefore: **to what extent can phenomenology, while remaining faithful to its reduction, legitimately speak of reality, nature, or the object’s identity beyond any particular stream of consciousness?** I argue, first, that phenomenology cannot posit the ontological identity of nature or the world as something existing “in itself” and shared by all subjects. Such claims exceed the methodological limits of transcendental phenomenology. Second, I show that although phenomenology cannot affirm this ontological identity, it can describe **how the appearance of such identity is constituted in consciousness**, particularly through structures of communal verification, harmonious appresentation, and the mutual correction of perspectives.

By shifting the problem from ontology to constitution, the analysis shows that what is usually taken as a fixed, independent world arises from intersubjective practices that align and stabilize different perspectives. The apparent unity of the world is thus generated through contingent, practice-based modes of sense-making. I then relate this phenomenological view to anthropological multinaturalism, arguing that multinaturalism extends this insight by treating such modes of world-formation as genuinely ontological.

**Kelly Hrupa** (Tallinn University)

### Vulnerability and the Anthropocene as Seen from the Phenomenological Attitude

My presentation contributes to recent studies on phenomenology of vulnerability (Gilson 2011, 2014, 2015; Quepons 2017, 2020, 2022; Boubllil 2018, 2023, 2024) and connects this discourse to the idea of the Anthropocene to surface an understudied dimension of ecophenomenology (cf. Wood 2001). I suggest that these subject-oriented analyses of vulnerability gain philosophical depth when supplemented by an object-oriented approach grounded in Husserl’s (2012: 49-60) distinction between the natural and the phenomenological attitude. To develop the idea of object-oriented vulnerability, I use Stein’s (1964) phenomenology of empathy as a model.

While Wood (2001) connects phenomenology with ecology, characterizing it through plexity of time and boundaries of thinghood, I explore a different approach: a Husserlian one that looks at how the phenomenological attitude itself makes sense of the Anthropocene in terms of vulnerability. Husserl's (2012: 88) phenomenological attitude renders the world contingent – partly constituted through conscious acts – and thereby vulnerable. This matches the human-environment relationship definitive of the Anthropocene. Stein's work, in turn, opens pathways to frame vulnerability as a condition of possibility both for subject-oriented empathy and for what I call *enlogy* as an object-oriented act.

I apply Stein's threefold structure of empathy (perceiving the other, delving into their experience, returning to perception with a fuller understanding) to describe a parallel account of enlogy conceived as a triadic act whose intentional object is *worldness* rather than otherness as in empathy. Building on Gilson's (2014: 2, 8) claim that vulnerability grounds empathy, I develop a more holistic view to show that vulnerability also serves as a precondition of enlogy. Thus vulnerability channels subject-oriented connections to others (empathy) as well as object-oriented connection to the world (enlogy).

I conclude by sketching a notion of *vulnerable agency*: an ethically inflected mode of agency responsive to the world's contingent fragility in the Anthropocene.

Boublil, E. (2018). The ethics of vulnerability and the phenomenology of interdependency. *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 49(3), 183-192.

Boublil, E. (2023). Vulnerability, Interdependence and the Care for the Living. In *The Vulnerability of the Human World: Well-being, Health, Technology and the Environment* (pp. 143-157). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Boublil, E. (2024). A critical phenomenology of vulnerability: Toward a paradigm shift? A contribution to an interdisciplinary dialogue on vulnerability. *Human Studies*, 47(2), 275-285.

Gilson, E. (2011). Vulnerability, ignorance, and oppression. *Hypatia*, 26(2), 308-332.

Gilson, E. (2014). *The ethics of vulnerability: A feminist analysis of social life and practice*. New York: Routledge.

Gilson, E. (2015). Intersubjective vulnerability, ignorance, and sexual violence. In *Routledge international handbook of ignorance studies* (pp. 228-238). New York: Routledge.

Husserl, E. (2012). *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by W. R. Boyce Gibson. London and New York: Routledge.

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## Submitted Book Panel: The History and Future of Democracy

Friday, 10:00–11:30, Linna K113

Presenters: **Minna-Kerttu Kekki** (University of Helsinki), **Timo Miettinen** (University of Helsinki)

Discussant: **Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen** (University of Jyväskylä)

This panel explores the intersection of phenomenology and democratic theory through two multidisciplinary works: Minna-Kerttu Kekki's *The Potential of Public Discussion in Media* (Palgrave, 2024) and Timo Miettinen's *Time of Democracy* (Routledge, 2026). The authors will be joined by a discussant to examine these themes.

Kekki's book analyzes the theoretical potential of public discourse across traditional and social media in democratic societies. The phenomenological part of the book provides an analysis of media-based empathy in the sense of Husserlian and Steinian *Einfühlung*, public discussion in media revealing, in Husserlian terms, multiple alienworlds (*Fremdwelt*) within one society – what appears as one's homeworld (*Heimwelt*) – and affectivity in media environment.

Miettinen's *Time of Democracy* offers a macro-historical perspective, tracing democratic ideas from Renaissance thinkers like Machiavelli to modern concepts of crisis. It illustrates how political systems are shaped by our understanding of the past, present, and future. The work defends the openness of the future against both totalitarian visions and nostalgic retreats, arguing that democracy withers when history is used to foreclose alternatives.

The discussion will focus on two themes:

1. **Political Phenomenology:** The theoretical intersections between phenomenology and the theory of democracy.
2. **Democracy in the Anthropocene:** While we possess the technical tools to address ecological crises, many societies lack the necessary political will. The panel investigates the potential of media and public discussion to bridge this gap and foster democratic governance in an era of environmental urgency.

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## Keynote: “There’s Magic in the Web of It”: From Animal Imagination to Sustainable Praxis

Annabelle Dufourcq (Radboud University)

Friday, 11:45–13:00, Väinö Linna Auditorium (Linna K104)

This paper challenges the widespread assumption that imagination is both a uniquely human faculty and a primary source of ecological denial. In classical philosophical traditions, imagination is often treated as a distinctively human power, separating humans from other forms of life. More recently, imagination has also been criticized as a liability: an ability that allows humans to withdraw into a bubble of images, narratives, and forms of denial that obscure the material reality of the climate crisis. This diagnosis partly underlies the striking revival of realism in the twenty-first century, accompanied by calls to exit the imaginary “matrix” and confront ecological reality more directly.

I argue that abandoning imagination altogether is neither possible nor desirable. Instead, I propose a reconceptualization of imagination that situates it within a broader, more-than-human field of life. Drawing on insights from phenomenology of life, animal studies and environmental philosophy, the paper suggests that imaginative processes precede the emergence of human beings and can be understood as a transcendental mode of exploratory, creative and relational perception shared across species. From this perspective, imagination is not merely a faculty of escapist representation but a way of participating in the dynamic “web” of ecological relations. The paper thus also encourages a renewed engagement with premodern imagination explored through the contrast between Prospero and Sycorax in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

Reframing imagination in this way allows it to become a resource rather than an obstacle for ecological thought. Rather than sustaining denial, imagination can cultivate sustainable praxis: forms of reflective action capable of transforming human relations with animals and ecological systems.

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14:15–15:45

## Film and Media in the Anthropocene

Friday, 14:15–15:45, Linna K108

**Janne Vanhanen** (University of Helsinki)

### MAD MAX: Deleuze, Desert and the Anthropocene

This paper approaches the *Mad Max* films of George Miller as a cinematic laboratory in which the Anthropocene appears not as an impending disaster but as a regime of deterritorialization already fully operational. In the world of *Mad Max*, climatic collapse, the exhaustion of resources, and the disintegration of social structures have produced a planetary desert—a wasteland milieu that functions not merely as backdrop for action but as a phenomenological precondition. Drawing on Deleuze's (and Deleuze & Guattari's) concepts of territory, desert, and geophilosophy, I argue that the desert denotes the point where the Earth itself enters thought, forcing human existence into direct contact with nonhuman forces and intensities. Looking back, the desert has been used as such a figure in fiction for ages.

The *Mad Max* films' sensorial excess—dust, heat, speed, metal—constitutes an aesthetic of extreme surfaces in which bodies are reconfigured by their environment rather than standing apart from it. Here appears the Deleuzoguattarian concept of Body-without-Organs. In this sense, *Mad Max* stages an encounter with a form of post-anthropocentric phenomenality: a world in which ecological and geological processes determine the conditions of experience. By reading the desert as a geophilosophical figure in Deleuze's oeuvre, with comparison to Merleau-Ponty's use of the same figure, the paper shows how the films make visible a mode of thought and perception emerging from environmental extremity, where existence is revealed as a negotiation with planetary forces rather than a reaffirmation of human mastery.

**Christian Ferencz-Flatz** (University of Bucharest / National University of Theatre and Film, Bucharest)

### Why Look at Fake Animals: A Phenomenological Reading of AI-Generated Wildlife Clips

In recent years, social media has been flooded with AI-generated clips of animals engaged in fantastical or improbable behaviors. Several examples that went viral (racoons jumping a trampoline or a bear sounding a doorbell) illustrate how these synthetic depictions blur the boundaries between genres as diverse as nature documentary, meme, surveillance recording and digital fabrication. Frequently mistaken for genuine footage, the videos circulate widely, shaping public perceptions of animals while challenging traditional notions of authenticity in wildlife representation. Building on John Berger's classical essay "Why Look at Animals?", which examines the incongruities of observing animals at the ZOO against the backdrop of a shifting history of human-animal relations, and a more recent study by Anette Pick, which extends Berger's reflections to the ethical stakes of contemporary wildlife surveillance, the presentation uses film- and media-phenomenology to reflect on how AI-generated wildlife films signal a different emerging mode of looking at animals. Unlike documentary or surveillance footage, AI animals appear lifelike yet are entirely constructed, raising pressing questions about recognition, empathy, and affect in human-animal perception. Consequently, the paper draws on phenomenological resources to ask: How do viewers perceive agency or intentionality in simulated animals? Can Berger's relational gaze emerge toward beings without corporeal presence, or is recognition fundamentally altered? How does empathy

arise, or fail to arise, when observing playful, entirely constructed behaviors, and how does awareness of their human artificiality transform emotional engagement (Ferencz-Flatz)? Can a simulated animal provoke a sense of presence, vulnerability, or ethical responsibility comparable to that of a living being, or is the encounter with its otherness inevitably altered (Derrida)? By examining AI wildlife through these philosophical lenses, the paper investigates how digital mediation reshapes perception, affect, and ethical imagination, revealing a novel state of human-animal encounter in the age of algorithmic representation.

Berger, J. (1977). Why look at animals. In: *About Looking*. New York: Pantheon, 1-26.

Derrida, J. (2008). *The animal that therefore I am*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Ferencz-Flatz, C. (2017). Humanizing the Animal, Animalizing the Human: Husserl on Pets. *Human Studies*, 40(2), 217-232.

Pick, A. (2015). Why not look at animals? *NECSUS. European Journal of Media Studies* 4(1), 107-125.

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## Husserlian Ecologies II

Friday, 14:15–15:45, Linna K109

**Juha Himanka** (University of Lapland)

### Husserl's Earth and the Anthropocene

The Husserl manuscript D17, marked with the note “The Earth does not move,” has long divided phenomenologists. Although published first among the posthumous texts, it was never included in the *Husserliana*, and its status remains uncertain. Given Husserl's tendency to repeatedly start afresh, not all manuscripts merit equal weight; the question is whether D17 should be taken seriously.

Alfred Schütz stressed that Husserl was not trying to replace scientific results with “primitive speculation,” and the manuscript shows that Husserl knew how provocative his claim would appear. Some commentators dismiss D17 as naïve, while others, such as Pierre Kerszberg, read it as a philosophically astute critique of aspects of relativity theory. This divergence calls for a more careful phenomenological assessment.

Jaakko Hintikka's analysis of the fate of intuition helps clarify matters. Hintikka takes the Copernican shift as an example of how early modern science undermined a premodern notion of immediate intuition. D17 can thus be read as resisting such modernizing interpretations: the primordial experience of the Earth as immobile is not an empirical belief but an intuitive orientation that persists alongside scientific knowledge.

For Husserl, the Copernican turn lies in conceiving the Earth as a body (*physische Erde*). Phenomenologically, however, the Earth appears as the grounding horizon for movement and rest. A parallel with Einstein's later, non-mechanical notion of ether highlights the structural point: just as spacetime provides the condition for physical events, Husserl's Earth provides the condition for original orientation.

Unlike replaceable bodies, the Earth is unique and shared by all. In the context of the Anthropocene – marked by fragmentation and ecological exhaustion – Husserl's insight gains renewed force: D17 makes visible what our ecological moment obscures, namely that the Earth is not an object at our disposal but the unnoticed condition of our shared world.

**Hayden Kee** (Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Crisis, Ecology, Anthropocene: On the Natural-Historical Foundations of the Sciences and Human Connection to Nature

In *Crisis*, Husserl (1970) identifies a close connection between scientific crisis and the formal, mathematized character of modern physics. In an appendix to the *Crisis*, he entertains the idea that if biology had been taken as the paradigmatic science, European science may not have arrived at crisis (Husserl 2013). Husserl reasons that the conception of *life* in biology retains a close enough connection to the originary givenness of life in everyday perception that a crisis of foundations is less likely to occur.

Angus (2018) has argued that the reasons Husserl gives for taking biology as the exemplary science actually provide better reason for taking *ecology* as the exemplary science. Ecology studies life in its interrelatedness and hence is even less prone to crisis than biology, Angus holds. Not all phenomenologists share this evaluation of ecology, however. Evernden (1993) claims that modern ecology is itself effectively a branch of classical physics.

I propose that the disagreement here hinges on what we take ecology to be. Angus' positive evaluation is steeped in a romantic conception of ecology, while Evernden's critical perspective depends on some ecologists' proposal to make ecology more rigorous. At the heart of this debate is a question concerning ecology's relationship to *natural history*: the observation and description of nature, especially organisms in their habitats. What is really at stake in the search for the "exemplary, crisis-free science," I suggest, is the need to appreciate the foundational role of natural history in the genesis and transcendental grounding of *all* natural sciences.

Finally, there is a parallel between this theoretical crisis of the sciences and the practical crises of humanity and nature in the Anthropocene. Analogously, there is a possibility of restoring human connection to nature through natural history while also securing the foundations of the sciences.

Angus, Ian. 2018. "Crisis, Biology, Ecology: A New Starting-Point for Phenomenology?" *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 49 (4): 267–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2018.1466466>.

Evernden, Neil. 1993. *The Natural Alien: Humankind and Environment*. 2nd ed. University of Toronto Press.

Husserl, Edmund. 1970. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Translated by David Carr. Northwestern University Press.

Husserl, Edmund. 2013. "Addendum XXIII of The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology." *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 44 (1): 6–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071773.2013.11006784>.

**Patrick Fuery** (Chapman University)

"The Gloom of the Wood": Towards "Wild Phenomenology"

What would a phenomenology of the wild look like? And, in a related sense, what would 'wild phenomenology' enable us to enact and think through? Building on how Husserl employs nature (in particular his recurring references to trees) to explicate ideas and concepts, this paper proposes that we can think of a version of phenomenology within a certain frame of 'wildness'. In particular, we can think of how Husserl's use of *hylē* (a word that holds both 'matter' and 'wood' in its origins) carries many of the seeds of wild phenomenology. Notably, in the later Husserl we find a reworking of *hylē* in terms of internal time consciousness; we discover an almost unconscious forming of wildness as the ways in which phenomenology addresses the issues of humanity's disturbed relationship to the natural world. As Gregory Bateson puts it: "The major problems of the world are the result of the difference between the

way nature works and the way people think". Wild phenomenology offers the possibility of how a Husserlian approach provides insights into such disjunctions of consciousness. Part of this paper focuses on what Husserl calls the parallel acts of consciousness: the 'real (*wirklicher*) act' and the shadow act ("an act improperly so-called"). The phenomenology of wildness examines these shadow acts; and wild phenomenology shifts our consciousness to be 'in' such shadows. At best, wild phenomenology thus provides us with a seemingly lost capacity to reconnect with wildness in the world and within ourselves. The environmentalist philosopher George Monbiot speaks of such lost connections: "We carry with us a ghost psyche, adapted to a world we no longer inhabit, which contains – though it remains locked down for much of the time – a boundless capacity for fear and wonder, curiosity and enchantment. We are pre-tuned to the natural world; wired to respond to nature." In this we see echoes of Husserl's example of our in-between state of being separate yet connected to the natural world – the gloom of the woods that plays with our capacity to perceive and synthesize.

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## **Submitted Panel: Human Animality and Existential Affectivity**

Friday, 14:15–15:45, Linna K113

This panel examines what existential affectivity reveals about human animality. We focus on three ways of being affected – organismic horror, planetary loneliness, and ecstatic longing – each of which exposes the ambivalent ways human animals inhabit their bodies and the world they share with other beings. While these affects often arise from painful ruptures or vulnerabilities, they also reveal forms of connectedness that bind us to other beings.

The first presentation analyses the horror evoked by the body-as-organism. The second presentation approaches loneliness through the lens of human animality and large-scale affective attunements. The third presentation explores existential and affective traits of longing from the perspective of bodily presence and absence.

Together, these contributions share the intuition that estrangement from our own animality is a defining feature of the destructive relationship humans have with nature. Rethinking our relation to our own animal life also opens possibilities for experiencing ourselves as inseparable from the natural world.

**Elina Andelin** (University of Helsinki)

### Horror and the Body-as-Organism

In this part of the panel, I draw on Merleau-Ponty's concept of anonymity and Simone de Beauvoir's account of the body's alien life. I argue that the personal subject is not the master of the living body, but rather its co-inhabitor: the body is also inhabited by the organism. My person and my organism are irreducible to another, and they both express themselves in the living body intermittently (Merleau-Ponty 2012). The organismic body is not merely physiological, but rather it signals the presence of foreign intentional life (Heinämaa 2003). Often, we try to suppress the organism, but sometimes it takes over our bodily being.

The body-as-organism brings us face to face with the limitedness of our freedom. For this reason, it evokes horror when we encounter it in ourselves or in others. In order to avoid this horror, humans have rejected the organism in themselves and projected it onto bodies marked as inferior (Beauvoir 2011). I suggest that these oppressed bodies include women and non-human animals, among others. Only these

oppressed bodies are recognised as embodying horrifying animality, and the privileged bodies claim full humanity.

I argue that the liberation of oppressed bodies requires not only recognising the oppressed bodies' transcendence (see Beauvoir 2011), but also recognising and coming to terms with our own animality. I suggest that the horror the body-as-organism evokes in us is partly related to our tendency to view the natural world as something to be controlled, not as something to simply be-with. Animal or biological life is not limited to mere immanence (Ruonakoski 2020), and we could say that human animality marks the presence of an *other* within us. I argue that a post-anthropocenic attitude includes becoming friends the animal in ourselves, and in this way experiencing ourselves more as a part of the natural world.

Beauvoir, S. de. (2011). *The Second Sex*. Translated by C. Borde & S. Malovany-Chevallier. Vintage.

Heinämaa, S. (2003). *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by D. Landes. Routledge.

Ruonakoski, E. (2020). When Living is Not Only Dying: Immanence and Animals in Beauvoir's Discussion of Oppression. *Simone de Beauvoir Studies* 31(1), 105-126.

**Sanna Tirkkonen** (University of Helsinki)

### Human Animals in Lonely Climates

The second part of the panel approaches loneliness through the lens of human animality and large-scale affective attunements. Research on loneliness often cites animals that become depressed, stressed, or even die when deprived of contact (e.g., Cacioppo year). Loneliness is thus framed as an inevitable psychophysical consequence when the natural need for companionship and connection remains unmet. At the same time, loneliness is described as spreading like a virus, producing a global epidemic partly mediated by new technologies and life forms. We might speak of *planetary loneliness*, especially when human animals confront overwhelming crises.

Previous phenomenological accounts of moods, existential feelings, and background feelings have provided a framework for studying loneliness as an affective experience and as a collective attunement. Matthew Ratcliffe, for example, characterizes loneliness as a pre-reflective way of being in the world that shapes experience as a whole - a painful sense of detachment where interpersonal possibilities seem inaccessible (Ratcliffe forthcoming; 2023). This framework has also been used to analyze online interactions, defining "extended loneliness" as a background sense of disconnection arising from hyperconnectivity (Candiotta 2022). Other theorists (Slaby & Stephan year) distinguish layers of background feelings, from basic vitality feelings to socially variable ones. Loneliness is placed to the latter, as norms and expectations strongly influence the experience. This, however, raises the question, couldn't non-human animals also be lonely.

To solve this, I argue that loneliness might span on multiple layers of background feelings. This offers a more inclusive account that explains why non-human animals also experience loneliness without necessarily engaging in human practices. Second, I suggest that to conceptualize loneliness as a more global experience, we must scale the phenomenological theory of background feelings to encompass even broader collective affective phenomena – "lonely climates." Even though my analysis expands the human-centric theories of loneliness, I explore how affective climates are experienced from the first-person perspective.

- Cacioppo, P./Patrick, W. (2008): *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, New York: W. W. Norton Company.
- Candiotto, L. (2022): “Extended loneliness. When hyperconnectivity makes us feel alone”, in: *Ethics and Information Technology* 24(4), Article 47.
- Ratcliffe, M. (forthcoming): “Loneliness, grief, and the lack of belonging”, in: Luna Dolezal/Daniela Petherbridge (Hg.), *Phenomenology of Belonging*, Albany: SUNY Press.
- Ratcliffe, M. (2023): “Lonely Places and Lonely People”, in: *Topoi* 42, S. 1123–1132.
- Slaby, J./Stephan, A. (2008): “Affective Intentionality and Self-Consciousness”, in: *Consciousness and Cognition* 17(2), S. 506–513.
- Schuetze, P./von Maur, I. (2022): “Uncovering Today’s Rationalistic Attunement”, in: *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 21, S. 707–728.
- Tietjen, R. R. (2023): “Feeling and Performing ‘the Crisis’”, in: *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 22(5), S. 1–19.

**Joni Puranen** (University of Helsinki)

Longing: An Existential-Phenomenological Analysis

Many animals return to those they have lost. This part of the panel explores the existential and affective traits of longing from the perspective of bodily presence and absence. Drawing on Martin Heidegger’s and Jean-Luc Nancy’s analyses of being-with-our-departed and holding vigil, I argue that longing is not exclusively a major feature of grief (Køster 2021) or one among its many aspects (Ratcliffe 2018). Rather, it is a spectrum of emotions grounded in the standing-unto the withdrawal of the other.

After the initial, all-consuming grief loosens its grip, allowing space for a broader spectrum of emotions, their hollowed presence returns to us from time to time, with their departure remaining unknown to them for eternity. Sorrow intertwines with glimpses of serenity, when we find ourselves longing for a beloved other who is no longer here.

I first show that longing is shaped by the introduced asymmetry in the ecstatic with between me and the departed, marked by the exactitude of their withdrawal. Therefore, when I long for them, they act upon me, and their absence calls me unto them. This opens an ecstatic tension between us. Each time, it is their bodily presence that I miss, which I cannot reach ever again.

Second, I argue that we experience the exactitude of their withdrawal as both cruel and serene – cruel because it exposes a distance that I cannot bridge, yet serene because in this very opening, they remain with me as long as I live.

Longing lets me linger with the gentle insistence of my beloved’s absence rather than resist it. It allows me to acknowledge the ways they continue to touch me.

Køster, A. (2021). What is longing? An existential-phenomenological investigation. In E. Holte Kofod & A. Køster (Eds.), *Cultural, existential and phenomenological dimensions of grief experience*. Routledge.

Nancy, J.-L. (1978). *Psyche*. Première livraison, no. 16.

Nancy, J.-L. (2005). *Noli me tangere* (F. Raffoul, Trans.). Fordham University Press.

Ratcliffe, M. (2019). The phenomenological clarification of grief and its relevance for psychiatry. In G. Stanghellini et al. (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of phenomenological psychopathology*. Oxford University Press.

Ratcliffe, M. (2020). Towards a phenomenology of grief: Insights from Merleau-Ponty. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 28, 657–669.

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