**Abstracts**

**Experience and Non-Objects: Towards a Phenomenology of the Indiscernible**

Society for the Phenomenology of Religious Experience

Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, Duquesne University

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***Naturalistic Nondual Nothingness***

*Bill Adams, independent scholar*

In epistemological dualism, objects are defined in relation to subjectivity. Any known object presupposes a knower. That is true in phenomenology where both noetic and noematic aspects are acknowledged. Advaita Vedanta and other Eastern philosophies emphasize the transcendent unity of knower and known, but it is not clear to a traditional Western thinker what knowledge means in that case. Is knowing the same as being? For most Western thinkers, nondual knowledge is difficult to appreciate. This paper describes investigative methods that track a path from epistemological dualism to objectless experience and back. The methods are naturalistic, dealing only with observable evidence and reasoned inference, eschewing spiritual explanation and authoritative assertion. One is a syncretism of Husserlian phenomenology and yoga meditation. A second substitutes a quasi-fictional narrator for the investigating ego to circumvent paradoxes of the ego’s point of view. These methods lead to description of an object-free nothingness dynamically interacting with ordinary experience in a way that accommodates both epistemological dualism and nondualism. A novel account of experience arises that hermeneutically maps to many religious ideas.

***The Element as Non-Object***

*Peter A. Antich, Dominican University of New York*

I propose to undertake an analysis of the "elemental" as non-object based on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Levinas. Merleau-Ponty's late work explores the intertwining of the visible and invisible, not just in terms of the intersection of objectivity and subjectivity (which is largely what the literature has focused on), but also in terms of the intersection of the idea and spatiotemporal object. Just as Merleau-Ponty describes the flesh as the domain in which subjectivity and objectivity intertwine, so he describes the element as the domain within which ideal and real, essence and existence, universal and particular, intertwine. The element – both non-object and non-idea – is, according to Merleau-Ponty, the invisible of the visible. Similarly, for Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*, the element is not an object of representation, but that *from which* we live, or that which we enjoy as sensation. Levinas too describes the element as a non-object: as content without form, or quality with substance. Whereas objects are bound by sides, the element is that within which we are immersed. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, I show how the elemental describes an essential domain of human experience, which nevertheless cannot be conceived as an experience of an object, but rather as a kind of hyper-object or pre-object, i.e., a being presupposed in the experience of objects. I substantiate this analysis in part by drawing on Maggie Nelson's descriptions of her desire for the color blue in her work, *Bluets*, and by considering the mythic tendency to personify elements as divinities.

***Post-Linguistic Acts and the Worshiped Invisible***

*Michell Atkinson III, Polish Academy of Sciences and New York University, Abu Dhabi*

For communities on the margins of hostile or indifferent power structures, the practices and norms constituting power often do not appear in the social space. For such communities, the political other can be experienced as a force whose acts are not motivated by reasons in accord with recognizable norms. Power, then, as a social phenomenon, is naturalized in the sense that it is dehumanized. Derrida explored some of this territory in his final seminar, the Beast and the Sovereign: power becomes a latent animality, structuring social life as it removes itself from mechanisms of accountability. And yet, power of precisely this kind is experienced as ever-present impossibilities—symbolic impossibilities structuring day to day life. These impossibilities may be sedimented in associative complexes that give rise to habituation, a multidimensional function of our conscious experience I call recoil. At the same time, the Black church ritual, in the United States and elsewhere, provides an experience of a norm-sustaining and norm-bound power, whose invisibility is taken as coextensive with its omnipresence. The act of worship becomes a project of counter-habituation whereby power can be constituted as just and life-affirming. Simone Weil’s spiritual writings on the necessity of God’s love can be of some assistance here, but her concern with “decreation” put her theology at odds with the enacted understanding characteristic of the ritual under discussion. Quentin Meillassoux’s speculative materialism, in its metaphysical ambitions, provides arguments against any interpretation of God as a necessary being; the “refutation” of such arguments should not be given in a straightforward, logic-chopping way, but rather through the careful explication of the kind of social experience described here, its constitution and facticity. To grasp the counter-habituating project of the ritual, we must see it as founded in non-linguistic thinking and Post-linguistic acts. The use of music, the laying on of hands, lying prostrate, chant, speaking in tongues—all of these acts are sequenced and juxtaposed in such a way as to bring the worshiper “through” linguistic acts to another kind of experience, in which the freedom to worship an invisible God is manifest.

***Religious Experience: Objects and Provinces of Meaning***

*Michael Barber, St. Louis University*

Husserl resists empiricist reductionism through constituting eidetic objects founding regional ontologies that require different methodological approaches. A “Transcendent Being” could found a regional ontology, an object not to be dismissed because sensibly inaccessible. In *Grenzprobleme*, reason is said not to conflict with religious experience, given in an “originary, intuitive (evident) certainty.” Husserl locates a site for such intuition in the lifeworld where the manifold practices of ‘religion’ appear, among other values, cultural objects, and institutions. Following Schutz, one can describe religious experience as one of many “finite provinces of meaning,” modifying pragmatic everyday life (seeking pragmatic mastery) and consisting in six features of a cognitive style (epoché, form of spontaneity, tension of consciousness, self-experience, temporality, and sociality). The ultimate object guiding its form of spontaneity is unspecified (e.g., Tillich’s ultimate concern). Scheler, though, criticizes James for positing as ultimate a utilitarian touchstone, “the happy issue of convictions in practical life” and insists that God is personal, accessible to a distinctive religious act, awaiting a free revelation. If the ultimate object is personal, Schutz’s features, which appear as a subjective (noetic) framework, alter (one’s tension of consciousness relaxes as one lets go of psychic rigidities impeding a loving interaction with God). Scheler, Alston, Steinbock (with the Abrahamic religions), and others develop this version of religious experience (one of Wertz’s circumscribed essences?), which, while theorized, is itself not theory but a loving relationship, with distinct emotional evidences (feeling oneself loving and being loved). One can critically/theoretically reflect in enclaves on oneself with others in the tradition, pursue interreligious dialogue, and even find evidence against empiricist reductionism. Relativity to traditions does not preclude evidences, but the genetic/generative disclosure of never-exhaustively-understood *Heimwelt*/*Frem-dwelt* origins across centuries requires tentativeness.

***A Physics With No Objects? Quantum Physics and Phenomenology***

*Michel Bitbol, CNRS and L’École normale supérieure, Paris*

Several arguments are presented in support of the progressive demise of the concept of object in quantum physics. The main line of argument is based on the usual unavailability of any criterion of re-identification in the microscopic domain and on Quine's conviction that there is "no entity without identity". The reasons for the apparent persistence of a quasi-object concept in the discourse (or meta-language) of quantum physicists, under the name of "physical system", despite its *de facto* obsolescence, are then discussed. They revolve around the Husserlian distinction between noema and objects.

***The Reality of The Invisible in The Phenomenology of Religious Experience is Scientifically Tenable***

*Don Borrett, University of Toronto*

Any attempt to relate the phenomenological dichotomy of the visible and invisible with the conceptual dichotomy of the observable and unobservable in the natural sciences cannot invoke explanations that assume the nature of the sciences. To do so would reflect a relapse into the objectivism that phenomenology is attempting to overcome and replace the coherence without concept that defines the Logos of the phenomenal field with a conceptually constructed coherence based on the nature of the particular science invoked. An explanatory reversal is needed to demonstrate how the mode of disclosure of the natural sciences emerges within phenomenal experience. A temporal ontology of the self as the intertwining of the visible and invisible in which the invisible is experientially real is proposed and mathematized. By identifying universal conditions that apply to all such systems, necessary consequences that are independent of content can be identified. Specifically, the intertwined visible/invisible formalism of the mathematized phenomenal field can be shown to be the condition for the possibility of the observable/unobservable dichotomy in the sciences in a manner that maintains phenomenological accuracy while still remaining amenable to the quantitative confirmability needed for scientific rigor. Success not only required that the intertwined visible/invisible instantiate a unity in difference in which the time horizons of the invisible were unchanging despite flux in the visible but that the horizons in the invisible were infinite in scope. Because the phenomenology of religious experience has been described as such a unity in difference or as the experience of the infinite, it may paradoxically represent the condition for the possibility of the observable/unobservable dichotomy in the sciences.

***Sacred Architectural Spaces as Saturated Phenomena***

*Yael Canetti, Ariel University and Bar-Ilan University*

*… all strong and sincerely felt religious emotion… [can] profoundly affect us and occupy the mind with a wellnigh bewildering strength… in the atmosphere that clings to old religious monuments and buildings, to temples and to churches. If we do so we shall find we are dealing with something for which there is only one appropriate expression mysterium tremendum.*

*(Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy).*

Otto’s description points to the unique experience of holiness that certain architectural spaces can induce. An experience that is ineffable. In certain situations, which can only be understood in retrospect, an architectural space is perceived by those inside it as a place in which a transcendental entity is also present with them. This experience of holiness can occur whether the experiencing person is a believer or not, and amounts to that unique phenomenon which Jean-Luc Marion describes as saturated phenomena. A phenomenon so ample with meaning that is beyond explanation or conceptualization. The origin of the metaphysical dimension, which has been attributed to various religious buildings throughout history, precedes their particular symbolic character, and is rooted in the fact that three-dimensional space, the space in which we live our lives, is continuous, homogeneous, and boundless. Since mankind cannot live in an infinite spatiotemporal space, a spatial order (distinctions such as here-there, near-far, center-periphery etc.) must be created, an order that is constituted upon a metaphysical order. Both in Christianity and in Judaism interesting correlations can be found between the notion of God and the perception of architectural empty space. The paper is a phenomenological analysis of our perception of three-dimensional space, as well as the unique attributes of certain architectural spaces that are experienced as housing a presence of a meaningful abstract transcendental entity.

***The Object Conundrum: Beyond Ineffability in Nonobjective Abstract Visual Art***

*Bob Kalivac Carroll, independent researcher*

An old Maine folk story illustrates the thematic direction of this paper. A traveler stopped to ask a farmer how to get to a certain location, and the reply—no doubt offered with a deadpan face—was “You can’t get there from here.” In short, one seemingly cannot investigate nondualistic visual art from a dualistic orientation (definitions to be explored later). Nonetheless the aesthetic impulse to transcend the subject-object dichotomy and reveal ultimate reality is evident in some nonobjective abstract visual art. When common sense tells us that even nonobjective abstraction appears to be an object (an unrecognizable object), one must ask, where do we find the evidence for transcending the art object? Subtopics include artistic confluence in modernism, aesthetic ocularcentrism, invisibility and blindness, ecstasy, numinous presence, and relevant aspects of perception (psycho-physical aspects of all perception), [Husserlian](https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=b5dcea39dfafec11&sca_upv=1&sxsrf=ADLYWIL65Zirdc6RY4ZAxmB4l3JbEUw-2g:1718382938585&q=Husserlian&spell=1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi4wZGlw9uGAxXsDHkGHQe1DjUQBSgAegQICxAB&biw=1497&bih=793&dpr=1) *Bildbewußtein* or image consciousness (“depicting” consciousness) as well as *Epochē*, *Gefühl* (feeling), prehistoric art, as well as sacred presence in Asian art, especially regarding Advaita Vedanta. Additional themes such as wonder as disruption and revelation in consciousness, nondualism and the sublime are also referenced. Some artists make clear a spiritual connection—Kandinsky, Hilma af Klint, Mondrian, Charmion von Wiegand, Adi Da Samraj, Malevich, Emma Kunst and others. Scholarly resources include commentaries from philosophers Jean Gebser, Espen Dahl, Rudolf Otto, Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Michel Henry, Derrida, Kant, Schopenhauer, Sankara, Swami Vivekananda. These and numerous other individuals had something to say about objects in visual art. For example, the small New Mexico Transcendental Group of 1930’s included both abstract nonobjective artists as well as art theorists. Another example is Swami Medhananda’s (Ayon Maharaj) presentation of Swami Vivekananda’s epistemic argument for supersenuous perception, which serves as a key resource herein.

***‘Existence Without Existents:’ On Levinas’s Concerns about Beauty as An Expression of The Sacred***

*Mathew Coate, Kent State University*

In a certain sense, the experience of beauty is objectless. Of course, only in a certain sense: for the experience evidently makes some object manifest—namely, the object found beautiful. Yet to find an object beautiful—as Kant, perhaps first, recognized—is to find that it somehow, given the juxtaposition of its material elements, expresses something beyond conception or understanding, and thus directs us towards something that could never be given as an object of experience at all. Kant thus claimed that beauty ultimately expresses the purportedly supersensible basis of all being, apparently accounting for the sense of meaningfulness and repose that the experience of beauty brings about. Levinas, expanding on Kant’s analyses, calls this an expression of the sacred. Levinas, however, thus worries about our appreciation of beauty: for if the sacred, as Levinas argues, does manifest some apparently unmanifestable mystical or metaphysical absolute as if in immediate unity with the material forces that traverse and underlie beings, then beauty’s repose ultimately represents the mere moral complacency of a disclosure that “all is right” on some “deep level.” By contrast, the holy, which reveals itself in the relation to another as other and which Levinas opposes to the sacred, represents a different unmanifestability and inconceivability——of the other as such and of the infinite responsibility to which the other’s appeal, by decentering one absolutely, subjects one thereby—but this encounter, instead of inviting complacency, thus incessantly challenges us.In my presentation, I’ll defend Levinas’s position, by first explicating Levinas’s Kantian-inspired account of beauty and showing that beauty does manifest an unmanifestable sacred. I’ll then discuss Levinas’s distinction between the sacred and holy and argue for the cogency of his worries about the former, and I’ll conclude by discussing the caution that we should thus exercise when we appreciate beauty.

***Toward Liminal Metaphor: Husserl on Object, Eidos, and Intersubjectivity***

*Peter Costello, Providence College*

When Husserl describes the experiences of objects, intersubjectivity and essential intuition phenomenologically, he uses terms like pairing, overlaying, awakening, and pulsation in order to bring forward transcendental structures as perceived at the edges or the limits of our intuition. In this paper, I will take up these liminal descriptions in order to demonstrate the richness of Husserlian intentionality for the metaphysics. Bracketing the question of being is only an initial step in Husserl. As we move through the constitution of object, essence and intersubjectivity, we find that, contrary to Kant's a priori structures, transcendental structures of consciousness for Husserl are themselves experienceable in a novel way. I experience an object as such, an eidos as such, and intersubjectivity as such. These experiences radiate within concrete experiences of individuals and help to show how our intuition opens onto being as significance.

***The Crush of Life’s Passion: Interiority in Michel Henry as a Possibility for the Experience of God***

*Simon Cunningham, Nottingham College*

The question of if God can be given in first-hand experience is debated in the secondary literature of Michel Henry. Articulating the history and structure of interiority more deeply provides a more precise conceptualization of his interiority to emerge and settle the question, namely that Henry’s thought contains both a dualism and duality. As a dualism, Henry’s interior appearing is fundamental. It has no capacity to reconcile with the world’s appearing that posits exteriority as a foundation of what is given. Yet an interior/exterior duality emerges within Henry’s foundational interiority. Experiences of things like chairs are exteriorly given to life, while experiences of affectivity like gratitude are interiorly given to life. Since interior experiences are unified with our life and are our life, they lack any phenomenological distance that reduce God to finitude. Thus interiority, when both founded and interiorly given, possesses the possibility for a first-hand experience of God. The article closes by showing how Henry suggests a specific name for God when given in first-hand experience: the Holy Spirit.

***How We Experience That Which Is Not the Content of an Experience***

*Neal DeRoo, Institute of Christian Studies, Toronto School of Theology*

Almost from its inception, phenomenology has been interested in our experience of non-objects. Specifically, it has explored the (transcendental) conditions of experiencing. These conditions are part of every experience, but not as the content or object of experience. This talk will examine three modes of our experiencing of transcendental conditions: how we experience distinct modes of generating *Empfindnisse* (sensings), how we experience various sense-giving traditions (*Stiftungen*), and how we experience that which gives rise to distinct modes of generating *Empfindnisse* (spirit).

***The Enigma of Ritual Space: Absence and the Negation of ‘Its’ Form***

*Ian C. Edwards, Duquesne University*

Ritual space according to phenomenological accounts is naturally expected to be experientially focused on how we encounter events. However, the conditions of a ritual space when construed in this way is problematic. Almost the entire precept for a ritual space is based on what is no longer here. The sorcerer consequently looks to unravel what has up until now been the assumed condition and position for conducting a ritual or ceremony. Here, absence bleeds in, time passes, and ancestors are forgotten. Words and names used to describe ritual space suffer from an inability to articulate its experience, that is unless we accept that our apprehension of them comes from how we continue to contribute towards their deviated/afflicted presentation of form. In keeping with Merleau-Ponty this understanding underlies the experiential depth which he considers to be the "dimension of dimensions' where being is best understood as “winding”. This “dimension of dimensions” is based on neither a metaphysics of presence nor a metaphysics of absence, but on something that lies both between and beyond, where there is a paradoxical, aporetic experience of “presence-in-absence” and its corollary “absence-in-presence.” This “geminus” defies what Derrida called, “the law of non-contradiction” and allows the sorcerer to linger with the Impossible. By then applying this approach to the practitioner, we should be able to understand how a basic proposition of ritual experience reveals the mereological winding and folding back of absence, unknowing, forgetting, imagination, and dreaming that takes place when negotiating the undefined frontier of total alterity in a ritual space. This disclosure of form’s presence and absence reveals an oscillation between being and non-being, an ontology of becoming and immanence.

***Phenomenological Closeness: Performative Relationality in Quantum Systems and Religious Experience***

*Charles A. Gillespie, Sacred Heart University*

Religious experience can prompt a totalizing sense of unity, a spooky closeness in all that is. Can this radically fundamental relationality be experienced discreetly enough to be phenomenologically described? Albert Einstein's theories of relativity underscore the centrality of relation: all observation is relative to the observer. Spacetime curves when close to a massive object; time and space fluctuate close to the speed of light. Years prior to empirical verification, Einstein developed imagistic thought experiments for his ideas: chasing a beam of light, a freefalling elevator, and speeding trains. Quantum theory, especially Carlo Rovelli’s theories of relational quantum mechanics, interprets the world at indiscernibly small scales that conceive phenomena granularly. Every object is a quantum system once we get close enough. Even the observer is *part* of that quantum system. Quanta that behave like both waves and particles such as a photon or graviton might be poetically described, mathematically represented, and illustrated. But these quanta cannot be experienced like objects. Objects experienced in the world are, rather, relations of granular quanta interacting with indeterminate freedom (Heisenberg's uncertainty principle). Philosophies of performativity help make sense of these radically relational quantum systems. Chairs, bread, bears, and black holes only ‘exist’ for an observer insofar as a larger quantum system performs in relation to that observer, themselves also a performative quantum system. All objects become performances of relation. Though performativity is indiscernible apart from performance (just as the uncertainty principle makes electrons indiscernible apart from their relations), a performance nevertheless can be experienced and described. Religious language stays close. Rovelli invokes the Indian mysticism of Nāgārjuna to articulate ‘emptiness’ under these performances of relation. I will argue that other religious experiences report a fullness performing like a non-object. A reduction to relationality does not negate the possibility for an experience of non-objects on analogy to the way the performance of quantum systems does not negate the experience of objects in the world. The poetics of religious experience can get close to such non-objects like God or the singularity of a black hole. I will conclude with a rereading of Julian of Norwich's hazelnut vision as such a phenomenology of closeness: her experience of God's relation to everything which is made expressed as a quantum system of indiscernable smallness so little that it could suddenly fall into nothing.

***Among These Rocks: The Silence of Conversion in Kierkegaard and Eliot***

*Jesse Goodman, Duquesne University*

In both Eliot’s poem and the writings of Søren Kierkegaard, conversion serves as an escape from the noise and din of social life. “The crowd” appears in Kierkegaard as a villainous category, while Eliot’s “The Waste Land” explores neurotic feelings within the crowded streets of 1920’s London. Conversion appears in both thinkers as a response to the pressures of social life, and as a breakdown in communication between religious adherents and their society. Kierkegaard especially articulates the impossible space of Christians within “Christendom.” This paper takes as its point of comparison Kierkegaard’s *Concept of Anxiety*, *Practice in Christianity* and “At a Graveside,” with Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” and “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” First, I will work through the development of anxiety through history in both “Waste Land” and *Concept*, before turning to Eliot and Kierkegaard’s depiction of the conversion event as incarnational, and as self-obliterative. I will then explore the silence after conversion, with a particular interest in the cessation of metaphysical speculation. What does the convert see? Do Eliot and Kierkegaard believe in a metaphysical God, or an apophatic God-as-absence? Is the absent God a metaphysical reality, or only a phenomenal perception? And what can these poets communicate of their beliefs in writing?

***The Origin of Non-Objects***

*Graham Harman, Southern California Institute of Architecture*

We begin with the “indiscernibility” side of the conference theme. Object-oriented ontology (OOO) has always been suspicious of the idea that something is simply either accessible or inaccessible to the mind. Philosophy, as philosophia, requires a nuanced position between these extremes. This will lead to a critique of “literalism” as a model for philosophy. From here we turn to a different sort of non-object: the qualities or accidents of a thing. Here I will account for the difference between OOO’s theory of qualities and the “reism” of Franz Brentano in the Theory of Categories.

***Outsiders, Outliers, and Outcasts: Ethnographical and Sociological Considerations of the Scientific Backstage***

*Juan de Jager, University of Ljubljana*

Benjamin Lee Whorf suggested that the theory of relativity would be far more accessible to Hopi speakers than to the average Westerner. Although many of his claims have been critiqued for their linguistic reductionism, it is worth noting that Whorf passed away at a young age, and despite his almost exclusively linguistic focus, he was indeed onto something significant. Beyond language, numerous sociological and biographical factors influence the direction of scientific inquiry, particularly when it comes to exploring the boundaries of our paradigms, such as in the study of non-objects. Physicists and mathematicians like Sabine Hossenfelder and Jonathan Gorard have highlighted the sociological aspects that contribute to dead ends in quantum physics, including politics, academic inbreeding, and a lack of supportive environments. The contribution of outsiders and outliers has been crucial in physics. Currently, we lack visionaries who can integrate theoretical and phenomenological perspectives, filling the shoes of people like Abdus Salam, who along his academic life also emphasized the importance of attending to the Global South and acknowledged the intertwining of his scientific practice and his religiosity. Embracing metaphysical perspectives is risky, as no one who intends to keep their place in the academia wants to be tagged as the next Fritjof Capra and become an outcast. Yet, it holds the potential for significant breakthroughs; Nicola Tesla, another notable outsider, stated, “The day science begins to study non-physical phenomena, it will make more progress in one decade than in all the previous centuries of its existence.” As an anthropologist who has conducted research among shamanic practitioners, I can attest that the experience and conceptualization of non-objects are also epistemologically challenging within our discipline. However, anthropology holds the promise of being understood as “the art of learning to see things ‘we’ didn’t know existed” (Swift, 2024). In this presentation I want to address some of the sociological hindrances in the academia and review alternative approaches that are being carried out across disciplines to foster metaphysical exploration.

***Transcendence in Jean-Luc Marion: Between Theology and Phenomenology***

*Otniel A. Kish, Durham University*

This paper proposes a reading of Marion’s phenomenology from an early text, arguing that the various phenomenological innovations which are introduced in this work are subordinated to a central concept, namely that of transcendence. Furthermore, it will be argued that this organizing principle takes its particular shape in accordance with a theological claim. Specifically, that the relation between religious revelation and experience must be one of radical alterity and asymmetry, while nevertheless permitting a disclosure in experience under certain conditions which it alone determines. This paper will proceed first by offering a reading of Marion’s early programmatic text, followed by an argument about how Marion’s notion of revelation, and its related mode of relation as transcendence, governs and subordinates his other phenomenological innovations. Specifically, it will be argued that the extent to which Marion is willing to insist on his notion of revelation is evident in the manner his phenomenology dramatically reconfigures the transcendental subject and the phenomenal object, as well as the relation between the two. To state matters differently, Marion’s phenomenology can be understood as the attempt to reconcile, phenomenologically, a theological dilemma. Namely, how to immanentize a radical form of transcendence, religious revelation, while preserving its alterity and asymmetry. The argument of this paper is that this dilemma captures the central tension which animates Marion’s entire phenomenological project in this early work. Lastly this paper will discuss how though the concept of transcendence in Marion has often been discussed and critiqued, such discussion generally misses the precise manner in which Marion’s notion of transcendence, and its appearance as revelation, represents what is necessarily a theological intervention.

***The Phenomenology of Wonder: An Existential, Feeling of Being***

*Mark Legg, University of Edinburgh*

Many Western philosophers consider wonder, *thaumazein*, the prime motivator and genesis of all philosophy. Wonder is “elusive,” “exceptional,” and “anomalous” among feelings, and recently somewhat neglected by psychologists and philosophers (Vasalou 2016). In this essay, I will give a phenomenological account of wonder. I’ll consider two kinds of wonder, *existential wonder,* and *curious wonder*, which reveal a third wondering: *primordial wonder*, an ever-present, existential feeling that attunes us to the world. This attunement does not have bodily sensation or the world as its object. Instead, it is co-primordial with understanding as such. First, I’ll sketch a positive account of wonder as a feeling. The feeling of wonder opens up the meaning of an experience as novel or strange—mysterious—holding possibilities open. When wonder strikes us, its phenomenology emphasizes the world as the striker, yet it also relies on the wonderer’s history and perspective. Wonder may emphasize a disposition to investigate, making it nearly synonymous with curiosity. I call this wonder *curious wonder*. Other times, an experience deeply arrests the wonderer and requires a profound accommodation of mystery, which I call *existential wonder*. I’ll then argue that both kinds of wonder reveal a deeper background orientation toward the world, *primordial wonder*. I’ll argue that primordial wonder can be considered a “feeling of being” per Matthew Ratcliffe and an existential mood via Heidegger (2008). So, if we reject or flatten primordial and existential wonder through dogmatism, we are inauthentic to our position in the world. From infancy, we came into the world with constant wonder, child-like wonder. To flatten wonder denies the very present background existential orientation of primordial wonder. Dogmatic stances close the possibility for fruitful imagining, experiencing, thinking, and, above all, phenomenological consideration.

***Embodied Inwardness: The Foundation for Intuition of Non-Objects***

*Olga Louchakova-Schwartz, University of California, Davis*

In this paper, I will use the concepts from Husserl's mereology and formal and transcendental phenomenological researches to describe consciousness of embodied inwardness (CEI). I further argue that this consciousness constitutes an ontological region specifically hosting primary non-objects – a concept which I will also define. Uncovered as a foundation of religious experience across world traditions, CEI also produces originating intuitions for microphysics. The core characteristics of CEI are discovered to be (a) the self-disclosure of passive syntheses of flesh, (b) transitivity between flesh and the ego, (c) reversibility in both the ego and in flesh, (d) localization of psychic hierarchies, and (d) the oddities of time and space which are isomorphic to quantum concepts. Then, I demonstrate that both religious meaning and intuition of probabilistic quantum concepts have some of their genetic roots in inwardly disclosed flesh.

***On the Experience of the Non-Experienceable: Perspectives from a Phenomenological Epistemology and Ontology***

*Giulio Marchegiani, Bergische Universität Wuppertal*

The paper aims to elucidate the structure of the experience of non-visible objects as in the case of religious experience as a border-experience by utilising key elements of the Husserlian theory of knowledge. The relationship between intention and intuitive fulfilment is central to understanding the peculiar form of intentionality proper to religious experience, in which there is the necessity of intention towards the position of existence, but this is not accompanied by the givenness of the object posited as existing. The relationship between the belief-mode and the fulfilment that is supposed to motivate it is a kind of anomaly: regarding the position of the object of faith, its fulfilment is not presented in any intuitive form. Religious consciousness is therefore defined by the lack of any epistemic basis for justification. However, it is also characterised by the necessary permanence of the existential mode of belief. The interplay between presence and absence, fullness and emptiness, and certainty and non-determinacy leads to revisiting Anselm's ontological proof of God's existence from a particular perspective, while at the same time revealing the significance of religious life both as a limit-experience and as experience of limit. To complement this, it will be necessary to discuss how the realm of invisible objects, and in particular religion, is integrated (as a distinct region of being) into the phenomenological system of regional ontologies, by virtue of the necessary reference of each region of being to a particular structure of experience (according to the phenomenological principle of noetic-noematic correlation). The result is a unified account of reality that takes account of the regional differentiations of the various object spheres (by virtue of the different modes of givenness), but at the same time recognises each as having full reality, so that, for example, invisible objects “are” with the same legitimacy as ordinary objects.

***Deriving the Spiritual from the Material: A Speculatively Realist Perspective***

*Ian McLaughlin (he/they), independent scholar*

Speculation, whether fictional or philosophical, is a profoundly hopeful framework for understanding reality, particularly when reintegrating the material and the spiritual. Speculation as a mode of thought—that is, contemplating possibilities beyond the actual— draws from philosophical insights that parallel spirituality. Further, Speculative Realisms challenge ontological hierarchies inherent in Western philosophy since Plotinus by positing the equal existence of all objects. This shift from anthropocentrism reopens a door to recognizing the ontological status of spiritual (non-)objects by approaching them through the material. Thus, the inversion of the pre-modern approach and the reparation of modernity’s attempt to sever the spiritual from the scientific allows us to build a democracy of objects in which all are (inter)created equal. Yet, the spiritual is not merely a matter of matter created by correlation with human experience; instead, spiritual objects exist qua themselves, and Speculative Realism enables us to account for them by examining interactions between material objects. Central to this appresentation is the concept of conatus, the inherent tendency of all objects to continue to exist, and how compound objects are always more significant than the sum of their parts. This more-ness allows the derivation of the spiritual from the material, such that every object, from quanta to the universe itself, is as much a spiritual object as a material one. Thus, Speculative Realisms advocate a holistic understanding of reality, wherein every object possesses a spiritual essence, simultaneously reflecting and creating the interconnectedness and vibrancy of the universe

***The Reality of the Invisible: The Phenomenology of Invisibility in H. Conrad-Martius’ Metaphysical Realism***

*Ronny Miron, Bar-Ilan University*

The suggested paper will present and explore three forms of invisibility discussed in the thinking of the realist phenomenologist Hedwig Conrad-Martius (1888-1966): The primordial nothingness of Being, the selflessness of the I-being (*ichhafte Sein*), and Transcendence. The first concerns the inception of Being in nothingness that is preserved as abyss depth and maintained as an essential end awaiting any finite being. The second refers to the human spiritual being manifested as "infrastasis" (*Infrastase*), thus indicating the capability of the I to totally empty oneself via self-elevation above, outside, and beyond itself outwardly to something other than itself. The third element of transcendence is displayed as possessing an indisputable stance in mundane reality that is first experienced by humans via the external world. To this extent, the ontological phenomenology of the external world lays the foundation of the phenomenology of transcendence. In this regard, the I is displayed as bearer (*Träger*) of a certain natural situation of transcendence in the sense that "no specific act of some sort or executing 'salto mortale' is needed" on its part. Thereby, the elucidation of the I-being within the phenomenology of transcendence is necessitated. Certainly, none of the indicated forms of invisibility responds to the form of an object. However, the discussion will illuminate the unique path taken by Conrad-Martius' phenomenology, in which Husserl's method of 'essence intuition' appears to be elaborated into an 'object-less intuition' capable of responding to 'invisible non-objects'. Furthermore, the proposed analysis will strive to draw the webs that are being woven, connecting between the related forms of invisibility discussed in Conrad-Martius' writings. Finally, 'nothingness', 'selflessness' and 'transcendence' will be established as indispensable milestones on the path of evolution from phenomenological realism to metaphysics.

***Phenomenology and Metaphysics of World: On the Ontological Status of Horizon***

*Felix O’Murchadha, University of Galway*

The core claim of this paper is that the ‘matter of concern (*Sache*)’ of Phenomenology is ‘world’ and hence all phenomenology is in the end a phenomenology of world. Objects are worldly in the sense that they are constituted horizonally. The appearing of an object refers to an infinity of horizons of that object and those horizons of appearance are always already in relation to the appearing of other entities in the world. What this means is that no consciousness (not even god’s) can correspond to the being of the object. All such correspondence is partial and incomplete. The correspondences that phenomenology articulates do not amount to complete descriptions, but rather are important precisely in that they fail. But this failure is characteristic of experience itself, as it indicates its constitutive openness, that is its directedness towards a non-object: world. In exploring the ever- retreating phenomenon of ‘horizon’, we recognize that it is never the object of intentional consciousness, not alone because it is indistinct, but because it is radically incommensurate with all determinability. Horizon is rather the openness that makes not alone the object of perception possible but also any perceiving of that object. This is the fundamental exposure of subjectivity with respect to world: to perceive is already to be constituted horizontally. To understand this situation correctly we need to recognize the being of the perceiving entity to be fundamentally a locative one and its relation to the world to be rooted in its instinctive life. Such instinctive life is both a primal fact of animal being and is constituted through the happening of world that transcends itself infinitely. The horizon as a pivotal hinge between finitude and infinitude is thus best understood in relation to desire.

***Non-Sensory Religious Experience***

*Kengo Myazono, Hokkaido University*

This paper discusses phenomenology and epistemology of what I call "non-sensory religious experience". Non-sensory religious experience, which is discussed in Lecture III of James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, is a kind of religious experience where the subject explicitly denies any sensory awareness of the object. About phenomenology, I will argue that non-sensory religious experience can be understood as a peculiar perceptual experience with presentational phenomenology without sensory phenomenology. About epistemology, I will argue that non-sensory religious experience gives us prima facie justification for believing the existence of some (supernatural) entity in virtue of its presentational phenomenology.

***Phenomenological Topology of the Invisible***

*Martin Nitsche, Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences and Charles University*

This talk focuses on various phenomenological conceptions of the invisible in order to consider to what extent and in what way they involve moments of hiddenness. The relationship among phenomenality, invisibility, and hiddenness is examined in the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Henry, and Merleau-Ponty. The talk explains why phenomenologists prefer speaking about the invisible over a discourse of the hidden. It shows that the phenomenological method does not display the invisibility as a limit of experience, but rather as a dynamic component of relational nature of any experiencing, including the religious one. Special attention is paid to topological moments of the relationship between the visible and the invisible – showing the importance of the transitional sphere between the invisible and the visible as the field in which the invisible can be localized and described.

***Intuitive Saturation and the Affect of Horror***

*Justin Pearl, Carnegie Mellon University*

Jean-Luc Marion first employed the notion of the saturated phenomenon in Being Given in order to emphasize the radical autonomy of givenness vis-à-vis intentionality. Whereas for Edmund Husserl the relation between intuitive givenness and intentionality takes two forms—either the “absence” or “adequation” of intuition—for Marion, logic suggests a third unexplored possibility: the “surplus of intuition and/or lack of signification.” This surplus of intuition breaks through every possible horizon such that the phenomenon is permitted to fully give itself from itself without reserve. Such phenomena manifest outside of the categories of understanding and without object. In his account of saturation, Marion overwhelmingly situates his phenomenological analysis within a Christian theological framework—figuring the revelation of Christ as the paradigmatic exemplar of saturation and methodologically privileging Dionysius’ Mystical Theology. The result is a framing of saturation within a largely positive affect: the proper response to that which cannot be conceptualized is praise or prayer. What is lost in this sanguine account of the inability to constitute an object is the very real possibility that this failure could produce an affect of horror. As Immanuel Kant suggests, such phenomena are “monstrous (or magnificent or terrible).” To use the language of the weird fiction author H.P. Lovecraft, these phenomena are “all the more menacing because they could not be named, understood, or even proven to exist.” By drawing upon case studies from the literature of weird fiction and accounts of real-world anomalous experiences, this presentation will seek to uncover and clarify this affective possibility. For while saturated phenomena might arouse feelings of wonder, amazement, or praise, the failure of intentionality to constitute an object can also produce an alien otherness that strikes the heart with dread.

*‘Good God, Manton, but what was it? Those scars—was it like that?’ And I was too dazed to exult when he whispered back a thing I had half expected—‘No—its wasn’t that way at all. It was everywhere—a gelatin—a slime—yet it had shapes, a thousand shapes of horror beyond all memory. There were eyes—and a blemish. It was the pit, the maelstrom—the ultimate abomination. Carter, it was the unnamable!’*

*H.P. Lovecraft, “The Unnamable,” in* Waking Up Screaming: Haunting Tales of Terror*, 54.*

***Rūmī on Absence: A Sufi Phenomenology of Non-Objects***

*Zahra Rashid, independent researcher*

For Rūmī, a 13th century Sufi theologian residing in Konya, poetry was the primary communication for expressing his spiritual experiences. Absence formed a major theme in his poetry and his words present a phenomenology of absence. My paper’s endeavor is rooted in the impetus to uncover how the expression of ineffable experiences in Sufi poetry, is in fact an attempt by the poet to capture the complex intertwining of everyday objects and other-worldly non-objects and how they are presented to their consciousness where somehow our subject-object dichotomizations wither away. For the purposes of this paper, I will be focusing on five different aspects of absence prevalent in Rūmī’s poetry: absence of the beloved, absence of a self, absence of place, absence of speech and absence of knowing at the level of certitude. Absence of the beloved signals towards the ever-present non-object of separation. A reed flute which sings a lament in separation from the reed-bed, is an indirect analogy to Rūmī, whereby he places his poetry as a product of this experience of absence. Absence of a self is denoted through the idea of being a non-I in his spiritually ek-static experiences, as he speaks: *You and I, without You and I, come together with such fervor.* This is potentially an expression of a phenomenology that decenters subjectivity and substantiality and thus welcomes self-lessness as a non-object. The absence of place represents the experience of a “non-place” or an other-worldly realm, a non-object which cannot be captured in our rational articulations of space. Thus, Rūmī says:

*You were a special hawk, aging in imprisonment,*

*When you heard the drum, you left towards non-place*

The absence of speech is a hallmark feature as most of his poems end with “silence!” or “be silent!”, whereby the non-object of silence serves as a more appropriate communicator for his experiences. And lastly, the absence of certain knowledge or *hairani* (wonder) in Rūmī’s terms is the non-object of “not-knowing” that flows from his spiritual states. By exploring the above samples on absence, I wish to direct us towards how the Sufi articulation of non-objects is an opening for a discourse on the nature of these non-objects and their relevance for phenomenology.

***Emotions and Infinity: Experience Without Objects***

*Christos Sideras, University College London*

I discuss various psychoanalytic perspectives, outlining a relationship between infinity and emotions. This is the case for infinity both as repetition of meter as is usually fielded in the modern secular world, as well as a more intractable sense of infinity in its originary sense of indefiniteness. In this latter sense, an object of emotion, if there is any as focus to the feeling, under the influence of emotion, depending on the emotional intensity felt, acquires characteristics of indefiniteness, in its sense of meaning, with its determinate being, and even those categories supporting its understanding, changing. Some themes outlined include ‘generalizations’, and ‘symmetrizations’ of understanding, of thinking, as a first step towards a process of union or melding. Another may include thematics of ‘distinction-union’ of feeling and thinking processes, as twin aspects themselves, creating objects that are both closed and open, distinct and indefinite, partaking of a world of structure, like a semantic web, of nodes and lines, of determinate objects-in-relations, and, also, a world beyond a grasping of a delimited and delimiting ego, a part and tool-aspected knowing. This latter can be experienced as a world without perspectives and orientations, yet also in flux, in rhythm, with contours, and texture. The relation of an object-world to a non-object-world, as 'thing' and 'not-thing', is discussed. I am able to offer some examples from various experiential practices echoing some of these notions from another, less objectifying mode of experience, in contrast to the usual worlds of things, as in commerce, analysis, transaction, scientism, and formalist thinking, bringing up the role of parthood, in its relation to wholeness. Time allowing, I also present some of my own thinking on the matter.

***Deciphering Ego Dissolution: A Husserlian Approach***

*Dylan Skurka, University of Toronto*

In this paper, I use Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology to account for ego dissolution. Ego dissolution is one of the most confounding aspects of psychedelic experiences in which the distinction between the self and others appears to dissolve, and time itself seems to collapse. While psychedelic researchers have made progress in demarcating the psychobiological mechanisms underlying ego dissolution, little attention has been paid to the *meaning* of this experience, specifically as it pertains to three philosophical questions: (1) how can one plausibly have an experience as a non-self, (2) how can one plausibly have an experience outside of time, and (3) what does it mean to experience “unity” or “oneness” with the world? Consulting numerous first-hand accounts of ego dissolution, I argue these accounts bear a striking resemblance to Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, a method through which one suspends judgments on the “natural attitude” to uncover the basic structures of consciousness. In turn, I argue Husserl’s transcendental phenomenological concepts can be utilized to help resolve the ambiguities ego dissolution raises. Primarily focusing on his *Cartesian Meditations* and *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness,* I propose that in response to (1), what Husserl calls the empirical ego is dissolved while the transcendental ego, which amounts to pure subjectivity, is directly experienced, in response to (2), during ego dissolution, what Husserl calls objective and subjective time are transcended and one directly accesses the absolute consciousness underlying them, and (3) the experience of unity can be regarded as an instance of transcendental intersubjectivity in which one recognizes that they do not exist as an isolated ego, but instead live in communion with a harmony of other selves. By applying a Husserlian approach to ego dissolution, I aim to illuminate complex features of altered states of consciousness while demonstrating the relevance of Husserl’s work in this pursuit.

***Merleau-Ponty and Hildegard’s Apophatic Aesthetics***

*Yue Jennifer Wang, Villanova University*

In his ‘Working Notes,’ Merleau-Ponty says that “one cannot make a direct ontology. My ‘indirect’ method (being in the beings) is alone conformed with being – ‘negative philosophy’ like ‘negative theology.’” This paper is an attempt to bring Merleau-Ponty’s indirect ontology of flesh into conversation with mysticism. Representing mysticism is the medieval Christian visionary, teacher, doctor, artist, and abbess Hildegard of Bingen. While Hildegard is well-known for her visions, I will argue that she can also be read as an apophatic thinker and a mystic of being, one who transcends intuition, images, and thought to “enter the ‘darkness’ and the ‘nothingness’ of the Godhead itself.” The claim that Hildegard is an apophatic thinker is counterintuitive because of her reputation as a visionary. However, she understands these visions (both visual and aural) as results of her encounters with God as an aspatial, imageless *lux vivens*. These effects also include the more general awareness of *viriditas*, the presence of the Spirit as a light within creation. It is in the perception of *viriditas* that I see a connection to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the carnal idea found within his articulation of an ontology of flesh. The carnal idea (e.g., the idea of light, the musical idea) is said to be within, beneath, between, behind, adhering to sensible sounds and sights while having no spatial coordinates. The idea is not intellectual but is instead an absence and, evoking the language of apophatic theology, a negativity that is not nothing. Paradoxically, the latter can only be grasped in embodied perception, in and through the flesh. Likewise for Hildegard, *viriditas* can only appear through the mediation of matter. Both Hildegard and Merleau-Ponty present a kind of apophatic aesthetics by way of mysticism and phenomenology, respectively. In this apophatic aesthetics, darkness or negativity is not the direct object of perception but is instead approached indirectly through the visible which is the condition of possibility for its revelation. The entanglement between the visible and invisible found in the works of these two thinkers offers one answer to the question of whether and how the ego can appresent non-objects.

***Relations Are Real Non-Objects: Semiotics and Religious Experience in the Phenomenology of C.S. Peirce***

*Lawrence A. Whitney. National Museum of American History and Smithsonian Institution*

Progenitor of American pragmatism Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) developed a phenomenological approach in philosophy roughly contemporaneous to that developed by Edmund Husserl. Both were heavily influenced by Kant, but whereas Husserl also took impetus from other moderns such as Descartes and Hume, Peirce delved back to medieval scholasticism in formulating his phenomenology. From that engagement with the scholastics, especially Duns Scotus, Peirce developed a strong commitment to the reality of universals, i.e. scholastic realism, meaning the metaphysical reality of relations that are irreducible to the objects they relate. As a result, perception of non-objects such as relations and other generals follows the same semiotic process as objects, and so presents no problem for Peirce. In fact, neither two of his three phenomenological categories nor the semiosis by which objects and relations constitute experience would be possible if relations were not real since they are all themselves relations. After briefly elaborating his phenomenological scheme, I consider causation and consciousness as examples of such non-object relations perceived in experience. Religious experience for Peirce is somewhat distinct from such non-object relations as experience of that which stands behind the three phenomenological categories, the “creator of all three universes of experience.” Religious experience in “musement” (meditation) is of the relation of the three categories to one another, which he acknowledges results in a vague hypothesis to which the principle of (non-)contradiction does not apply, requiring further determination and pragmatic validation in habits that guide everyday life. I conclude that turning to realistic strains within phenomenology and refining them through engagement with medieval realisms is necessary for accounting for experience of non-objects, including religious experience.

***From Experience to Action: Ricoeurian Reflections on the Phenomenology of Religious Experience***

*Samuel R. Underwood, Memorial University of Newfoundland & Labrador*

Ricœur is well-known for his hesitation to speak of “religious experience” and his preference to focus his occasional discussions of “revelation” on revelatory *texts.* Many scholars nevertheless maintain that Ricœur has something to offer discussions of religious experience and revelation. This paper seeks to contribute to this discussion through a consideration of the relationship between experience and action. The paper’s title is a modification of Ricœur’s collection of essays entitled *From Text to Action*, in which he argues that text and action are interrelated such that action can be interpreted as a quasi-text and texts can be interpreted as quasi-action. What I aim to draw from this is that one way of distinguishing specifically *religious* experience might be through an examination of the kind of action that the experience enables. For Ricœur, the positive function of religion is the regeneration of human capability. This “regeneration” occurs when one’s imagination is transformed by the world of the sacred text. “Religious experience,” therefore, is always particular: *what* is experienced, and *how*, always depends on multiple factors, including one’s expectations that have been shaped by one’s beliefs, community, etc. The skeptic can always point to the ways that someone is primed to have certain religious experiences and not others; and in a sense, of course, the skeptic is correct. When even one’s own consciousness is not self-transparent, as Ricœur argues, no reduction will be radical enough to definitively show that a religious experience was not shaped by one’s anticipations more than it was a genuine disruption. But if Ricœur is right that religion can regenerate human capability, then perhaps we can ask a different question: is the experience enabling or disabling? This question reflects Ricœur’s preference for an ontology of act and power—viz., an ontology that is less interested in *esse* and more interested in *dynamis*. The tension between the “discernible”—what *is*—and “indiscernible”—what *may be—*is negotiated through action, in which the possible world of the text becomes the actual world.

***The End of the Reign of the Object and Interpretation***

*Victoria Yakusha, independent scholar*

Religious experience is one of those concepts that is as densely filled with stereotypes as possible. As a rule, when studying a religious experience, scientists try to give a classification of such an experience, paying attention to the characteristic of the experience. Thus, concepts with a greater or lesser number of varieties of religious experience appear, and differences between one or another type begin to play a major role. But this is an experience that implies much more freedom and opportunities than one of the classifications. Based on intuitive feelings, we say that we love or have loved, although love is an objectless concept. Love has “intention” or “direction” in the same way as religious experience, but at the center of love is the experience, not the object. We need to stop approaching our own and other people's religious experience from the position of a prosecutor. We proceed from subject-object relations as if this opposition is primary. But in experience primary sensations, their individual subjectivity. Ultimately, due to the fact that we are afraid to be subjective, in pursuit of the universal objective, we lose the meaning of what is happening. We should stop making a trial out of your own life and demanding facts and evidence. Since the 1950s, philosophy has been searching for criteria for the veridicality of religious experience, turning all new research into the old question about the possibility of God's existence. It's time to abandon the dichotomy of causality, from which we usually proceed: if there is an object, there is a veridical experience, and vice versa, if there is a veridical experience, then there is also an object. But if our attitude to what is happening is primary, religious experience brings us into the sphere of responsibility for our own interpretation of what we experience. Moreover, atheism and agnosticism are one of the forms of religious experience. If we look at religious experience more broadly, it will cease to be a point of conflict between an atheist and a believer, as well as believers of different denominations. Because the questions of whether there is God and, if there is, then what kind of concrete God, disappear along with the reign of the object as evidence of the objectivity and reliability of our experience. We should not allow the interpretation of religious experience to become a universal doctrine, but we should also avoid unambiguous doctrinal interpretation of such experience.