

Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture  
e p t c - t c e p  
Théorie et culture existentialistes et phénoménologiques

## Conference 2023 / Conférence 2023

York University (Toronto) / l'Université de York (Toronto)

**29 May to 31 May 2023 / 29 Mai au 31 Mai 2023**

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## Many Thanks / Merci beaucoup

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## PhaenEx

*PhaenEx is a journal affiliated with the Society for Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture.*

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## EPTC 2023 Schedule

May 29	FC 113	FC 119
9:00 - 10:00	<b>• A Phenomenological Case Study on Behalf of Butler's Sex/Gender Thesis: Testosterone in Medical Textbooks</b> Steven Burgess (Benedictine University) Commentator: Avery Dawson Moderator: Brett Robinson	<b>Panel: Crisis and Ecology – on Ian Angus's Phenomenological Marxism</b>  Chair: Gregory Cameron (Wilfred Laurier University)
10:15- 11:15	<b>• Body Slams that Matter: The Material Impact of Performativity on Selfhood in Professional Wrestling</b> Brett Robinson (Brock University) Commentator: Steven Burgess Moderator: Avery Dawson	Panelists: Mahdi Ghanbari (York University) Tyler Gasteiger (York University) Bryan Smyth (University of Mississippi) Ian Angus (Simon Fraser University)
11:30- 12:30	<b>• A Critical Phenomenology of Affective Power: Preserving Sense as Resistance</b> Avery Dawson (University of Western Ontario) Commentator: Brett Robinson Moderator: Steven Burgess	
<b>LUNCH</b>		
2:00- 3:00	<b>• Practical Aesthesis</b> Rob Shields & Nicholas Hardy (University of Alberta) Commentator: Julia Henderson (Institute for Christian Studies) Moderator: David Collins	<b>Panel: Myth and Critique</b>  Chair: Bryan Smyth (University of Mississippi)  <b>Authenticity and the Apocalypse: The Making of a 'Myth'</b> Ian Rhoad (American University)
3:15- 4:15	<b>• Disclosure and Negative Capability: Beauvoir and Keats on Art as an Exercise of Freedom</b> David Collins (University of Oxford) Commentator: Frances Grace Fyfe Moderator: Rob Shields	<b>The Myth of Myth: Stories Philosophical Nationalism Tells</b> Ammon Allred (University of Toledo)  <b>Experience Motivation Apprehension: Mythology and the Possibility of Politics</b>
4:30- 5:30	<b>• Celan's Poetics of the Handshake</b> Frances Grace Fyfe (Concordia University) Commentator: David Collins Moderator: Rob Shields	Gregory Cameron (Wilfred Laurier University) <b>Reflections on Myth and Spontaneism</b> Bryan Smyth (University of Mississippi)

## EPTC 2023 Schedule

May 30	FC 113	Mclaughlin College-MC Hybrid
9:00 - 10:00	<b>Joint Panel: Posthumanist Entanglements – The Beyond of Embodiment</b> <b>(with the Posthumanist Research Institute)</b> Chair: Trevor Norris (Brock University)	<b>Joint Panel: Theories of the Background</b> <b>(with the Canadian Sociological Association)</b> Chair: Reiss Kruger (York University) <b>I: Responding to the Everyday</b> (8:30 – 10:00) Cole Freeman (University of Victoria)
10:15- 11:15	<b>Contemporary Art as Immanent Experiential Praxis</b> Fiona Blaikie (Brock University) <b>Divination and Bridging Nature/Culture Divides</b> David Fancy (Brock University) <b>Being-with the Lifetimes and Deathtimes of a Shaggy Mane Mushroom</b>	Nob Doran (University of New Brunswick) Robert Williams (Bennett College) Joshuamorris Hurwitz (Stanford University) <b>II: Dialogues with Justice</b> (10:30 – 12:00) Steven Bailey (York)
11:30- 12:30	Chris E. Hurst (University of Waterloo)	Saeed Hydaralli (Roger Williams University) Alan Blum (York University) Kieran Bonner (St. Jerome's University)
LUNCH	Executive Committee Meeting	
2:00- 3:00	<b>• Resurrecting Reciprocity: Green Burial as Immanent Critique of Modern Conventional Burial</b> Gillian Gawron (University of Victoria) Commentator: Neal DeRoo Moderator: Renxiang Liu	
3:15- 4:15	<b>• Transcendence of Life and Immanence of Death: On the Compatibility of the Two Dimensions of Heidegger's Conception of 'Finitization'</b> Renxiang Liu (Tsinghua University) Commentator: Trung Ngo Moderator: Neal DeRoo	
4:30 5:30	<b>• Heidegger's Alethiology: A Propaedeutic Approach to Essential Thinking</b> Trung Ngo (York University) Commentator: Renxiang Liu Moderator: Neal DeRoo	

## EPTC 2023 Schedule

May 31	FC 113	
9:00 - 10:00	<b>• Four Reasons for Rebellion: On the Existentialist Revolt against the Crowd</b> Antony Aumann (University of Northern Michigan) Commentator: Tyler Correia Moderator: Victor Bruzzone	
10:15-11:15	<b>• The Banality of Emancipation: Phenomenology and Possibilities for Radical Democratic Transformation</b> Victor Bruzzone (University of Toronto) Commentator: Antony Aumann Moderator: Tyler Correia	
11:30-12:30	<b>• Intersubjective Histories and the Spirit of Cosmopolitanism: Theorizing a Phenomenological Method of Political Community Today</b> Tyler Correia (Acadia University) Commentator: Victor Bruzzone Moderator: Antony Aumann	
LUNCH		
2:00-3:00	<b>• The Phenomenological Basis of Technology in Everyday Life</b> Cole Freeman (University of Victoria) Commentator: Mark Standish (Institute for Christian Studies) Moderator: David Collins	
3:30-4:30	<b><i>Annual General Meeting</i></b> <i>(to be followed by an optional post-conference dinner, location TBA)</i>	

## Abstracts

### **Antony Aumann, “Four Reasons for Rebellion: On the Existentialist Revolt against the Crowd”**

This paper examines why existentialists often encourage us to rebel. The focus will be on a specific form of rebellion, namely that which involves resisting the “crowd” or “public.” Four justifications for such resistance will be considered. First, we ought to rebel against the norms of mass society because they are wrong. Second, our social norms merit resistance because they are inflexible. Third, we should rebel against our social norms because they are one-sided: they ignore other equally legitimate points of view. Fourth, we ought to resist the authority of the crowd because we ought to resist all external authorities.

### **Victor Bruzzone, “The Banality of Emancipation: Phenomenology and Possibilities for Radical Democratic Transformation”**

I offer a phenomenological analysis of the possibility for radical democratic transformation consistent with agonistic democracy and autonomist democracy (specifically Hardt and Negri). I argue is that all these theories have an under-acknowledged requirement about how citizens involved in political struggles will temper their attitudes and feelings of enmity toward their political adversaries. Using the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, I offer an account of the challenges associated with these kinds of transformations. Indeed, my basic claim is that emancipatory change does not occur because of citizens becoming more thoughtful, open, and spirited, but is instead the result of new habitually thoughtless normalities taking hold.

### **Steven Burgess, “A Phenomenological Case Study on Behalf of Butler’s Sex/Gender Distinction: Testosterone in Medical Textbooks”**

Judith Butler’s early work includes the provocative investigation into whether the constellation of concepts essential to the scientific study of biological sex can be understood independently of a gendered social context, the heterosexual matrix. Surprisingly, it is Heidegger’s phenomenology that can be most fruitfully appropriated to this end. This paper takes up a case study of testosterone as paradigmatic of accounts of biological sex given in medical textbooks; I also show that such accounts of testosterone are founded in three elements of the heterosexual matrix, *binary sex*, *naturalized masculinity*, and *heteronormativity*. Applying Heideggerian phenomenology to this theme brings to light the invisible ways the heterosexual matrix is operative in medical sex education.

### **David Collins, “Disclosure and Negative Capability: Beauvoir and Keats on Art as an Exercise of Freedom”**

There is a striking similarity between Simone de Beauvoir’s idea of disclosure as a matter of making oneself “[a] lack of being in order that there might be being,” and the Romantic poet Keats’s notion of ‘negative capability,’ or the ability to be “capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries [sic], doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason”—i.e., to deal with ambiguities without seeking to explain them away or reduce them to a simpler (and totalizing) explanation. Putting Beauvoir and Keats in dialogue gives a different account of art as disclosure from Heidegger’s better known one, and, because of the connection Beauvoir makes between disclosure and transcendence, lets us understand art as both a manifestation of, and an occasion for, human freedom.

### **Tyler Correia, “Intersubjective Histories and the Spirit of Cosmopolitanism: Theorizing a Phenomenological Method of Political Community Today”**

Phenomenological explorations are generally motivated by two problematics: that the phenomenological subject demands attention to their intersubjective basis, as historical; and that the intersubjective realm that opens for phenomenological exploration must avoid the reification of cultural, linguistic, or existentially predefined communities. Combining these two concerns, I argue, motivates a revaluation of democratic and intercultural historical understanding as the accretion of dialogical processes in, or as, time. Such processes are irreducible to static communities. Following the development of this approach, I argue, bears far-reaching implications both for the understanding of history, as post-national historical encounter from which well-established subject-communities cannot be easily derived, and for considerations of socio-political encounters today, as predicated on a ‘cosmopolitan attitude’ that recognizes an organic subjective finitude and theorizes its ‘beyonds.’

### **Avery Dawson, “A Critical Phenomenology of Affective Power: Preserving Sense as Resistance”**

Under the Pinochet dictatorship, the Chilean secret police extra-judicially arrested, tortured, and executed citizens *en masse*. The threat of being “disappeared” hung as a silent but palpable fear terrorizing 1980s Chile. This paper foregrounds the resistance of 23-year-old prisoner Miguel “Quila Leo” Gallardo through the testimony of police defector Andrés Antonio Valenzuela reported in *Cauce* magazine and reimagined in Nona Fernández’s *The Twilight Zone*. Through Merleau-Ponty, this paper phenomenologically describes Gallardo’s resistance as an affective power rooted in the preservation of sense reckoning with the total domination of a totalitarian regime determined to, as Arendt explains, raze the human person.

### **Cole Freeman, “Technology and Everyday Life”**

This research synthesizes two specialty topics hitherto understudied at the intersection of social phenomenology and philosophy of technology. I extract key ideas from Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*—namely Dasein and everydayness—and apply them to a phenomenological theorization of everyday life in the technological age. This research is not only warranted but *necessary* given unprecedented advances in technology resulting in radical transformations to human life in the twenty-first century. The purpose, as such, is to unearth primordial observations about the ontological constitution of Dasein, insofar as the Being of this entity is disclosed according to a technological framework of intelligibility.

### **Gill Gawron, “Resurrecting Reciprocity: Green Burial as Immanent Critique of Modern Conventional Burial”**

Conventional burial practices in North America serve to protect human identity from a collective suppressed fear of death, decay, and dispersal into the non-human world. While some communities maintain a healthy relationship to death through cultural practices, the dominant narratives here create an affective cycle, following Massumi’s definition, which preserves our fear of death by maintaining its distance. Green burial, which prohibits embalming, caskets, and non-native plantings, presents an immanent critique of such practices. It provides a path towards more ecologically sound death practices which embrace a reciprocal, rather than an adversarial, relationship with the non-human world.

### **Francis Grace Fyfe, “Celan’s Poetics of the Handshake”**

This paper considers Paul Celan’s claim that there is “no difference” between a poem and a handshake as a starting point for a phenomenological reading of his poetry. I argue this total interchangeability between poem and handshake is most apparent in Celan’s poem “Here,” which uses spatial deixis to indicate, or point to, the poem’s own meaning, as in the line, “Here, that means here.” Like in Merleau-Ponty’s account of “reversibility,” reality here does not exist beyond the world “at hand.” Likewise, in Celan’s later experiments with the reflexive verb, “here” is always both constituting itself and making itself known to the other, a poetic conceit that fits into Celan’s larger project of making undeniable the real horrors of the past.

### **Renxiang Liu, “Transcendence of Life and Immanence of Death: On the Compatibility of the Two Dimensions of Heidegger’s Conception of ‘Finalization’”**

This paper focuses on how Heidegger’s notion of “finitization” [*Verendlichung*] helps deepen the understanding of finitude. My analysis is situated in the framework of immanence and transcendence. Borrowing from Edith Stein’s critique of Heideggerian being-towards-death, I distinguish between the immanentist and the transcendentist interpretation of finitude. Then, looking at several passages with the word “Verendlichung” (from five of Heidegger’s texts), I show how they sometimes support the immanentist reading, sometimes the transcendentist. Third, I propose a dynamic account of finitization, in which immanence (the inner crumbling of life) and transcendence (the tireless striving of self-transcending) are compatible and even interdependent.

**Trung Ngo, “Heidegger’s Alethiology: A Propaedeutic Approach to Essential Thinking”**

Martin Heidegger has meditated for a long time on the topic of “unconcealedness” in the development of his phenomenological approach to philosophy. *Aletheia*, which he defines as unconcealment, permeates all his musings from metaphysics to poetry and from arts to religion. This essay investigates the epistemic and therapeutic implications of Heidegger’s approach and its potential applications in Eastern traditions. This task includes the explication of Heidegger’s alethiology, the investigation of its potential sources, and the comparison with similar philosophical approaches. Being preparatory and propaedeutic, it is argued that Heidegger’s phenomenology offers the flexibility for exploring comparative studies with non-Western traditions.

**Brett Robinson, “Body Slams that Matter: The Material Impact of Performativity on Selfhood in Professional Wrestling”**

While Butler’s theory of performativity offers a means to understand how an individual exists as a unique materially embodied being, I argue that materiality can be both an effect of the powerful ideological operations of performativity *and* have an autonomous affect that impacts selfhood on a fundamental level. I turn to professional wrestling as it hyperbolically demonstrates how subjectivities and bodies are molded by ideological forces while also being profoundly shaped by physical encounters with the materiality of others and objects. I contend pro wrestling illustrates the dynamic influence of materiality on performativity and, consequently, subjectivity and embodiment.

**Rob Shields and Nicholas Hardy, “Practical Aesthesis”**

Aesthesis is at the heart of innumerable problems that plague global society. From its pre-Socratic origins, aesthesis has been a somatic concept, allowing the basis for a re-evaluation of the distinction between experience and abstraction. Drawing on a relational interpretation of Protagoras’ aesthesis, we show that contemporary critics of the ‘colonization’ of aesthesis (Mignolo & Vasquez) by formal Aesthetics recognize and develop the relational and ethical aspects of aesthesis. We propose using Arendt’s and Weil’s insights on the polis as collective experience and as obligation, respectively, to reconnect situational aesthesis with broader ‘moral politics’ of political-economic action.



### **Joint panel with the Posthumanism Research Institute**

Organizer: Christine Daigle (Brock)

Chair: Trevor Norris (Brock)

### **Posthumanist Entanglements – The Beyond of Embodiment**

Our panel will explore what it means to exist as entangled and embodied humans and nonhumans. Posthumanist theory and methodology seek to dismantle humanist constructs of human exceptionalism along with dualist thinking that separates the human from the nonhuman, nature from culture, and the mind from the body. Grounding their work in this approach, panelists will present their perspective on what these entanglements signify and how they manifest but also will reflect on what methodologies are best suited to explore and communicate such entanglements. The goal of the panel is to expand our thinking about humanness, human and more-than-human connections, and bodily and material entanglements. To this end, we put to work a posthumanist methodological orientation for knowledge creation which champions postdisciplinarity along with a decolonization of research practices. The panel will be a space for idea generation and idea sharing. It will be launched by presentations by each speaker and unfold through grounding and interactive explorative activities. Attendees are asked to read the “Weird Research Manifesto” (<https://brocku.ca/pri/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/Weird-Research-Manifesto.pdf>) prior to attending and to ask themselves how to think the new thoughts our world urgently needs.

#### **Fiona Blaikie, “Contemporary Art as Immanent Experiential Praxis”**

Posthuman artworlds shape and are shaped by the intuitive archeological ontologies of humans and non-humans, entangled materialities, spaces, limitations, and potentialities. There is a burgeoning tendency in western contemporary art making and exhibition that moves beyond the conventions of white cube gallery spaces, drawing on and expressing a Deleuzian ontology of immanence alongside Elizabeth St. Pierre's conceptualization of the post qualitative. Focusing on works by Canadian artist Annie MacDonnell, Marina Abramovic, and artist Sophie Calle, contemporary art will be contemplated as immanent experiential praxis, as collaborative, performative, entangled, situated, and affective.

#### **David Fancy, “Divination and Bridging Nature/Culture Divides”**

Proceeding gnoseologically rather than epistemologically, the diviner resonates or feels their way through the world in order to bring events and arrangements, seemingly unknowable from the perspective of classical empiricism and its scientific descendants, into awareness and into the world. The work of divination recalls Deleuze's affirmation that ‘we must be Egyptologists’ in our reading of signs, an important invitation especially in the context of the Anthropocene where, as a species, we struggle to read, discern and engage with the complex ecologies of which we find ourselves part. The specific figure of the geomancer will be positioned as a key mode of diviner who proceeds via harnessing the complex relationalities between themselves and the earth's many energetic bodies and forces. The figure of the geomancer will be proposed as a central conceptual persona involved in non-supremacist geophilosophical and geoartistic transindividual activities that can help imagine futures outside and beyond the Anthropocene.

#### **Chris E. Hurst, “Being-with the Lifetimes and Deathtimes of a Shaggy Mane Mushroom”**

This presentation will explore temporal entanglements with nonhuman kin, and specifically, the material-affectivity of lifetimes and deathtimes of a shaggy mane mushroom at Silent Lake Provincial Park. The presentation will illuminate some of the many ways in which times are entangled in relations of being-with place and being-with nonhuman kin in nature-based tourism, and what that might mean for conservation futures. The presentation will consider the productive possibilities of affective and sensory-based methodological practices for embodied temporal attunements with more-than-human nature places. The presentation will conclude with a discussion on (re)imagining (re)presentations of times in research and what it might mean to response- ably care for times as multiple, overlapping, and relationally entangled with affects, agencies, and other temporalities in nature-based tourism.

### Panel

Organizer: Gregory Cameron (Laurier)

#### **Crisis and Ecology – On Ian Angus’s Phenomenological Marxism**

Given the general theme of the 2023 Meeting of Congress, “Reckonings and Re-Imaginings”, a sustained engagement with Ian Angus’s *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism* (2021) is both timely and highly appropriate. Angus’s work draws out the convergences between and parallel weaknesses of Husserl’s *Crisis of the European Sciences* and Marx’s *Capital*, especially with respect to the “fecundity of nature”. The text culminates with a discussion of an ecological phenomenology and its potential for opening dialogue between western and Indigenous ways of knowing. This panel seeks to explore the many themes developed in *Groundwork*—technology, labour, capital, lifeworld, modern science, ecology, Indigeneity, etc.—as they relate to the theme of the 2023 Congress. *Groundwork* is a major work by one of Canada’s most important scholars in phenomenology and critical theory. Ian Angus has been a continuous participant in and contributor to the activities of EPTC. Ian has agreed to attend and respond to the papers presented in the panel.

### Panel

Organizer: Bryan Smyth (Mississippi)

#### **Myth and Critique**

Enlightenment has long been understood in direct opposition to myth viewed as an irrational regression that is typically also politically reactionary, and critical theory today still tends to understand itself as grounded on a decisive rupture with myth so construed. But if, as a phenomenology of horizons would suggest, there is always an outer horizon of meaningfulness that conditions all experience, yet which itself never takes the form of a discursive logos, then myth may well be an inexorable feature of human consciousness, and the idea of moving beyond myth altogether, however theoretically appealing it may be, could be the greatest ‘myth’ of all. If such is indeed the case, and if myth does continue to play an unacknowledged role even in contemporary critical theory, then it is important to regard myth as an important site of philosophical and political intervention. The key question that arises here is whether this intervention, rather than being regarded as a more resolute effort to eradicate myth, should instead be taken up as an effort to rehabilitate myth for the progressive purposes of critical theory: *can myth be a resource for critique?*

#### **Joint panel with the Canadian Sociological Association**

Organizer: Reiss Kruger (York)

#### **Theories of the Background – Responding to the Everyday & Dialogues with Justice**

This session will offer a space for explicit engagement with the ideas, structures, and ways of knowing that often represent the ‘background’ of everyday life. Many theories have attempted to grasp at this liminal space: lifeworld, habitus, tacit knowledge, pre-reflective backgrounds, primary frameworks, spheres and counter-spheres, etc. We investigate how questions of such ‘theories of the background’ apply (and perhaps ought to be adapted) to the current circumstances of our age, whether epistemic, ontological, or ethical. The strength and flexibility of such a session is that all social questions—including such reckonings and re-imaginings as the focus of this year’s Congress—carry buried within them the question of ‘what is going on in the background?’ Sociology’s inherently interdisciplinary nature represents a strength in this regard and therefore, with the help of the Society for Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture, the presentations included will represent a host of disciplines to help spark new theoretical engagements to answer the questions of today, tomorrow, and beyond.