

## **CRITICAL & POLITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY IN DEBATE**

In phenomenology, two lines of thought have recently emerged, both dealing with the experience and structures of political conflicts and with social relations of domination: critical phenomenology on the one hand and political phenomenology on the other. Both claim to respond to the crises of the present and to inner-phenomenological desiderata.

Classical phenomenology, despite its turn to lived experience and embodied subjectivity, has failed to adequately address these dimensions of experience. Both political and critical phenomenology aim to compensate for this deficiency. They aim to show that phenomenology not only analyzes consciousness, subjectivity, lifeworld, and intersubjectivity, but can also illuminate the multiple experiences of marginalized subjects, historicize perceptual schemas, and thematize political experiences.

The online lecture series is intended to open a debate on critical and political phenomenology in which, on the one hand, methodological and content-related differences are to be worked out and, on the other hand, common goals are to be brought into view. In particular, the advantages and benefits of a critical-political phenomenology over constructivist and normative theories of the social and political will be discussed.

The invited speakers will each develop their concept of a critical and/or political phenomenology in a lecture. Each lecture will be accompanied by a response and then opened to public discussion: In this way, critical and political phenomenology will be “in debate.”

## **Program / Abstract**

16.10. 18h15 CET

Elisa Magri (Boston College)

### **Describing the Project of Critical Phenomenology: Challenges and Promises**

The aim of this talk is to discuss some of the challenges I encountered in writing the book “Critical Phenomenology: An Introduction” (co-authored with Paddy McQueen), but also to examine the intersection between classical phenomenology and contemporary philosophical discourse on “marginalized identities.” In particular, I focus on the relation between power and selfhood, as well as between norms and understanding. My objective is to show in what sense some of the methodological insights of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty can be employed to avoid not just the paradox of agency of Foucault and Bourdieu, but also the dualism between empirical insights and normative claims.

Elisa Magri is an assistant professor of Philosophy at Boston College, and an honorary associate member of the CFUL at the University of Lisbon, conducting a project on The Architecture of Social Sensitivity.

Response: Vanessa Ossino (University of Cologne)

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Rescheduled: 13.11. 18h15 CET

Gail Weiss (George Washington University)

### **Curating Embodied Resistance Through Social Media: The Role of Virtual Audiences in the Fight for Social Justice**

This paper revisits Judith Butler’s account of the political power of street protests as intercorporeal performative actions that enact “the collective will of the people,” in light of Sara Ahmed’s and José Medina’s reminders of how frequently performatives become nonperformatives when they don’t receive proper uptake. Heeding this reminder forces us to follow closely what happens not only before and during a protest, but what happens after it takes place. While the number of people who turn up in the streets to march for social justice is usually the primary barometer that is used to assess its success, it is the political impact the protest has (or fails to have) over time, that is the truer measure of its performative power. Virtual audiences can serve as epistemic activists, I argue, by assuming responsibility for how social justice protests are portrayed and disseminated through social media. What voices are we amplifying as we click and scroll through our daily newsfeeds, liking and sharing posts with one another? This is an urgent ethical question we need to be asking given the ever-growing power online audiences have, simply through the touch of their fingers, to increase or decrease a social protest’s transformative effects.

Gail Weiss is professor of Philosophy at The George Washington University.

Response: Hannes Wandler (University of Cologne)

20.11. 18h15 CET

Johanna Oksala (Loyola University Chicago)

### **A Critical Phenomenology of Climate Change**

The lecture addresses the role of experience in political thought and practice through a phenomenological investigation of climate anxiety. The phenomenon of ecoanxiety or climate anxiety has become significant enough that psychotherapists are increasingly offering counselling on how best to manage it, and the internet provides dozens of sites dedicated to advice on how to deal with it. I will argue that climate anxiety has a distinctive structure and philosophical meaning, which make it different from both psychological anxiety and existential anxiety, as commonly understood. Whereas ten years ago environmental philosophers such as Tim Morton could contend that the key problem with combating climate change was that we could never experience climate change directly, today it seems clear that many of us have developed the ability to experience it: we not only see it and feel it in particular instances, but, as I will try to show, it structures the horizon of meaning that has become constitutive of all our experiences. Therefore, my contention is that a critical phenomenology of climate change, with a clearly limited cultural and historical scope, has now become possible for the first time. My investigation is critical/political in the sense that I will also draw out the consequences of my phenomenological analysis of climate anxiety for climate politics. My contention is that forms of prefigurative climate politics can best respond to the profound disorientation and apathy regarding our future and help us face down the hyperbolic nihilism shadowing us.

Johanna Oksala is the Arthur J. Schmitt Professor of Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy at Loyola University Chicago.

Response: Marcus Düwell (TU Darmstadt)

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11.12. 18h15 CET

Lanei Rodemeyer (Duquesne University)

### **Analyzing the 'Critical' in Phenomenology**

The recent term 'critical phenomenology' implies a method that integrates a critical perspective with a phenomenological approach. This paper seeks to argue that the tension between experience and structure—a key component to early phenomenological analyses—informs the current debates still. Further, the work to recognize institutional oppressions and effects is not just a current concern, but one already analyzed—and debated—amongst early phenomenologists. If so, then it might not be necessary to pit 'critical' phenomenology against 'classical'. Instead, we might find that phenomenology as a whole is, and always was, critical.

Lanei Rodemeyer is associate professor and director of graduate studies at Duquesne University.

Response: Gerhard Thonhauser (TU Darmstadt)

15.01. 18h15 CET

Marieke Borren (OU Netherlands)

### **Understanding Embodied Agonistic Politics. Perspectives from Political and Critical Phenomenology**

In this lecture, I will explore two different understandings of embodiment in the (radical) democratic struggles of marginalized citizens and non-citizens: the precarious or vulnerable body on the one hand and the mobile-capable body on the other. The first view is associated with the work of Judith Butler, and prominent in critical phenomenology, the second view can be reconstructed from Hannah Arendt's political phenomenology, with important complements based on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. I will argue that the two understandings disclose different meanings and dimensions of democratic struggles.

Marieke Borren is an assistant professor of Philosophy at Open University Netherlands, Heerlen.

Response: Steffen Herrmann (FernUniversität Hagen)

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05.02. 18h15 CET

Neal DeRoo (ICS Canada)

### **The Case for a Phenomenological Politics**

This lecture argues for the development of a 'phenomenological politics' akin to the 'phenomenological psychology' of phenomenology's early days. Drawing on the phenomenological concepts of expression (in Husserl, Derrida and Merleau-Ponty) and spirit (in Husserl and Henry), the paper argues that both subjects and subjectivity are socio-politically (and not simply inter-subjectively) constituted. It then shows the crucial quasi-transcendental role (Guenther; Derrida) that Stiftungen play in that constitution vis-à-vis the transcendental and ultra-transcendental dimensions at play in 'classical' transcendental phenomenology. In doing so, the paper suggests that phenomenology is both essentially political and politically essential.

Neal DeRoo is Professor and Senior Member in Philosophy at The Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Canada.

Response: Thomas Bedorf (FernUniversität Hagen)