

Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture
eptc - tcep
Théorie et culture existentialistes et phénoménologiques

Conference 2025 / Conférence 2025

George Brown College (Toronto) / Collège George Brown (Toronto)

2 June to 4 June 2025 / 2 Juin au 4 Juin 2025

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Location / Emplacement

George Brown College – Waterfront Campus
50 Dockside Drive, Toronto (south of Queen’s Quay, east of Lower Jarvis)
Rooms WF19 and WF19

Many Thanks / Merci beaucoup

The executive committee would like to express its gratitude to the following scholars who were instrumental in helping to assemble this program.

Le comité exécutif voudrait exprimer sa gratitude aux spécialistes dont les noms suivent pour l'aide qu'ils ont apportée à la mise au point de ce programme.

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PhaenEx

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

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Website / site Internet: www.eptc-tcep.net

EPTC 2025 Schedule

June 2	Room: WF 18	Room: WF 19
9:00 - 10:00	• The God of Infinite Possibility: Kearney and Dewey on Reimagining the Divine Tyler May-Gruthusen (Institute for Christian Studies) Commentator: June Moon Moderator: Nina Belmonte	<u>Panel – Paulin Hountondji’s Radical Philosophical Universalism</u> Coordinators: Tyler Gasteiger & Mahdi Ghanbari (York U.) • Critique of Ethnophilosophy as a Phenomenological Return to Subjectivity Mahdi Ghanbari (York University)
10:15-11:15	• Reflections on Objectivity: Situated Knowledges and Visual Metaphor Kathryn A. Last (Trent University) Commentator: Ece Cizmeci Moderator: Nina Belmonte	• Paulin Hountondji and the Science Question in Africa Zeyad El Nabolsy (York University) • The Histories of Paulin Hountondji Patrick Eldridge (University of New Brunswick, St. John)
11:30-12:30	• Tenderness and the Inhuman Gaze beyond the Anthropological Border Ece Cizmeci (Brock University) Commentator: Kathryn Last Moderator: Nina Belmonte	• Ethics and Truth: Hountondji’s Challenge to the Primacy of the Practical Tyler Gasteiger (York University) • Hountondji and the Future of Philosophy Carmen De Schryver (Trinity College, CT)
LUNCH		
2:00-3:00	• The Image of Thought and Radical Imagination: Deleuze and Castoriadis Sahidul Islam (Memorial University of Newfoundland) Commentator: Janae Sholtz Moderator: David Collins	<u>Panel – Material Spirituality</u> Coordinator: Neal DeRoo (Institute for Christian Studies) • Political Agency as a Basis for Material Spirituality Nuzhat Khurshid (Seneca Polytechnic University) Respondent: Benjamin Strachan
3:15-4:15	• A Virtual Art Exhibition on Deleuze, Guattari, and Cosmic Art Alaine Beaulieu (Laurentian University) and Janae Sholtz (Alvernia University) Commentator: Sahidul Islam Moderator: David Collins	• Selfhood in the World: Phenomenological Dimensions of a Relational Identity Benjamin Strachan (Institute for Christian Studies) Respondent: Alayna Erickson
4:30-5:30	• The Aesthetics of Disruption Grant Spraggett (Independent Scholar) Commentator: David Collins Moderator: David Collins	• Attending to Experience: Hospitable Communion in Material–Spirituality Alayna Erickson (Institute for Christian Studies) Respondent: Neal DeRoo

EPTC 2025 Schedule

June 3	Room: WF 18	Room: WF 19
9:00 - 10:00	• A Sketch of the Phenomenology of the Public Sphere Tyler Correia (University of the Fraser Valley) Commentator: Avery Dawson Moderator: Michelle Charette	<u>Panel – Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and World Philosophy</u> Coordinator: Paul Brienza (York University) • Vertical Reading: Heidegger, Schelling, and Dao Jay Goulding (York University)
10:15-11:15	• Redefining the Topology of ‘Community’: Fusion vs. Differential Process Avery Dawson (University of Western Ontario) Commentator: Victor Bruzzone Moderator: Michelle Charette	• On Paracausality: A Fundamental Analysis on the Archimagus' Invisible Ontology Michael Vintila (York University)
11:30-12:30	• Democracy, Phenomenology, and Deference Victor Bruzzone (University of Toronto) Commentator: Tyler Correia Moderator: Michelle Charette	• Darkness, Yearning, and Ungrund: Jakob Boehme's Theosophical Influence on Schelling's 1809 Freedom Essay Christopher Satoor (York University)
LUNCH		
2:00-3:00	• The Modality of Primordial Temporality in Heidegger's <i>Being and Time</i> Aman Sakhardande (University of Toronto) Commentator: Renxiang Liu Moderator: David Collins	• Individuality and Anonymity in Merleau-Ponty's Social Atmosphere Emily Kuch (Toronto Metropolitan University) Commentator: Shannon Hoff Moderator: Nina Belmonte
3:15-4:15	• The Excess of Space upon the Priority of Time: A Reverse Reading of Bergson's <i>Essai</i> Renxiang Liu (Wuhan University) Commentator: Aman Sakhardande Moderator: David Collins	• Merleau-Ponty on Sex, Gender, and the ‘Span’ of the Body Shannon Hoff (Memorial University of Newfoundland) Commentator: Emily Kuch Moderator: Nina Belmonte
4:30-5:30	<i>Executive Committee Meeting</i>	

EPTC 2025 Schedule

June 4	Room: WF 18	Room: WF 19
10:15-11:15	• But A.I. Has No ‘I’: A Phenomenology of Intelligence without Self George Saad (Triton College) Commentator: Michelle Charette Moderator: Victor Bruzzzone	<u>“Back to the Things Themselves!”</u> Coordinator: D. R. Koukal (University of Detroit Mercy) • Transgender and World Alienation: An Intersubjective Phenomenology Emilia Russo (SUNY Stony Brook) Commentator: Kenneth Knies
11:30-12:30	• Presence in the Medaverse Michelle Charette (York University) Commentator: George Saad Moderator: Victor Bruzzzone	• Touching Without Hands: The Sublime Phenomenon of Fragility Kenneth Knies (Sacred Heart University) Commentator: Emilia Russo
LUNCH		
2:00-4:00		<u>Workshop in Applied Phenomenology</u> Organizer: D. R. Koukal (University of Detroit Mercy) Facilitator: Kym Maclaren (Toronto Metropolitan U.) All are welcome to participate!
4:15-5:45	<i>Annual General Meeting</i>	

Paper Abstracts:**A Virtual Art Exhibition on Deleuze, Guattari, and Cosmic Art** – Alain Beaulieu and Janae Sholtz

This paper aims to present the genesis, theoretical framework, and content of a virtual exhibition entitled “Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Cosmic Art,” which was launched recently and remains available online. Deleuze and Guattari’s thesis on the cosmic value of modern art will be contextualized, the various sections of the exhibition will be presented, and some of the works by contemporary artists included in the exhibition will be discussed in light of Deleuze and Guattari’s thesis on cosmic art.

Democracy, Phenomenology, and Deference – Victor Bruzzone

This paper examines the tension between deliberative and agonistic democratic theories, engaging phenomenology to explore the possibility of mutual understanding in contexts of deep political and identity-based differences. While some advocate epistemic deference to marginalized perspectives, I argue that phenomenology—particularly concepts of intersubjectivity and radical empathy—demonstrates that mutual understanding is achievable. Drawing on standpoint epistemology and phenomenological insights, I contend that communicative democracy is best served by fostering reciprocal understanding rather than epistemic deference. Ultimately, this paper defends a democratic ethic that prioritizes intersubjective engagement as a means of overcoming structural barriers to solidarity and political cooperation.

Presence in the Medaverse – Michelle Charette

This short essay offers a preliminary discussion of virtual presence in medical simulation platforms used to train medical residents. I begin by outlining distinct conceptualizations of presence (in virtual worlds) offered by human factors engineers, media scholars, and communication theorists. I juxtapose these against the enactive conceptualization of presence offered by Alva Noë (2012). Then, I turn to an in-depth description of my own experience using a medical simulation platform. I conclude by emphasizing the value of using phenomenologically grounded qualitative research (Køster and Fernandez 2023) to understand the nature of experience in virtual reality.

Tenderness and the Inhuman Gaze beyond the Anthropological Border – Ece Cizmeci

This paper explores how the affective capacity of the film *Cow* (2021) cultivates “tenderness” toward nonhuman animals classified as “livestock”, through Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s “inhuman gaze” and Anat Pick’s “creaturely poetics.” I argue that tenderness—marked by care, attention, and “entangled empathy”—can challenge exploitative human-animal relationships. By critiquing Martin Heidegger’s human-animal distinction and drawing on Jacques Derrida’s “anthropological border,” I propose a post-anthropocentric perspective that emphasizes interconnected, embodied engagement with nonhuman lives. Drawing on affect theory, I show how *Cow* invites viewers to move beyond “arrogant anthropocentrism” and respond to othered bodies with tenderness.

A Sketch of the Phenomenology of the Public Sphere – Tyler Correia

In the following talk, I outline how phenomenological insight can advance theoretical scholarship on the public sphere. Alongside a perennial concern with experience, the tradition of phenomenology presents ample opportunities to expand upon and critique the idea of the public as comprised of individuals engaged in acts of deliberation and self-disclosure amongst others. A discussion of the public sphere touches upon questions of agency, appearance, the tensions between life, mortality and the pursuit of immortality. In all cases, we must look to the contributions of phenomenological thinkers in these considerations—but perhaps more so, to generate a self-standing discourse of the phenomenology of the public sphere itself.

Redefining the Topology of 'Community': Fusion vs. Differential Process – Avery Dawson

In this paper, I present two contrasting models of community: a community of fusion, where difference is elided through an undifferentiated social "Body," and a community-in-process, based on local transformations that continuously reshape community—a constant deferral of identity and play of difference in Derridean terms. Framing these models through various philosophers, I argue the latter more accurately depicts the dynamic topology of community. The former evokes fascism and dangerously obscures difference with various overarching "abject social bodies". Difference is thereby subordinated to identity, resulting in self-annihilating communities unable to break free from the unrealizable fiction of an undifferentiated Body.

Merleau-Ponty on Sex, Gender, and the 'Span' of the Body – Shannon Hoff

If, as Merleau-Ponty argues, experience is a bodily and worldly matter, then we are phenomenologically forbidden from treating the biological and the cultural as experientially separate, and must track instead the nature of their jointure with the help of what Merleau-Ponty calls *sur-reflexion* or "hyper-reflection." This paper pairs Merleau-Ponty with feminist, trans, and queer theory to challenge the traditional distinction between sex and gender, while discerning a better way of capturing the relevance of bodily materiality to historically gendered beings, particularly in the domains of reproduction, sexuality, and the shaping of bodies by gendered expectations.

The Image of Thought and Radical Imagination: Deleuze and Castoriadis – Sahidul Islam

The study explores the role of the image of thought in constituting knowledge, experience, and understanding. For this purpose, it examines changes that occurred over time in Deleuze's thinking about thought and image. It then explores the genealogy and genesis of the image of thought by juxtaposing Deleuze's radical empiricism with Cornelius Castoriadis's concept of radical imagination. Through this comparison, the paper seeks to illuminate the role of imagination and its active and creative constituting of experience and reality. In this context, the paper tends to clarify the apparent circular relationship between the image of thought and thinking by demonstrating that the *a priori/a posteriori* distinction becomes epistemologically irrelevant in light of their interdependence.

Individuality and Anonymity in Merleau-Ponty's Social Atmosphere – Emily Kuch

In response to theories which deny intersubjectivity as fundamental to individual consciousness, Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, attempts to show that there is a fundamental relation of coexistence, or being-with, that grounds individual existence. This sense of coexistence appears to have a general, anonymous form, a mere social atmosphere, which seems not to relate in any way to others as individuals. However, I will argue that Merleau-Ponty's account of the social atmosphere, particularly his discussion of communication, should be understood as a fundamental intersubjective relation which recognizes others both in general and as individuals.

Reflections on Objectivity: Situated Knowledges and Visual Metaphor, Kathryn A. Last

This paper critically examines dominant epistemologies of vision through a feminist, new materialist, and phenomenological lens. Drawing on Donna Haraway's concept of *Situated Knowledges*, I challenge traditional notions of objectivity and vision as disembodied, neutral acts. Engaging the works of Merleau-Ponty and Foucault, I argue that perception is always mediated and shaped by discourse, power, and embodiment. In juxtaposing Haraway's critique with Descartes' mechanistic image of the body in *L'homme*, I expose the limitations of objectivist frameworks that reduce knowledge to detached observation. I explore how positionality reconfigures both the act of seeing and the production of meaning. The paper concludes by proposing a reimagined account of knowledge grounded in agency, relationality, and resistance to epistemic dominance. Through this lens, vision becomes an ethical, situated practice, essential to rethinking how we engage with systems of knowledge.

The Excess of Space upon the Priority of Time: A Reverse Reading of Bergson's *Essai*, Renxiang Liu

In this paper, I raise the question what “giving each other space” can be in addition to “giving each other time.” I situate the question in the context of Bergson's *Essai*, where he argued for the ontological priority of time over space. Acknowledging this priority, I offer a reverse reading of Bergson's arguments to show that the spatialization of time means not just an impoverishment but perhaps also an enrichment. If time is the principle of differentiation, space is where differences thus produced are allowed to be as differences. The exteriority of space is a precondition for pluralism of rhythms.

The God of Infinite Possibility: Kearney and Dewey on Reimagining the Divine, Tyler May-Gruthusen

Richard Kearney reimagines the divine as eschatological possibility. Critics argue that Kearney leaves ambiguities unexamined in his language of God. These critiques do not pay enough attention to Kearney's discursive situation. Kearney privileges possibility over actuality to express poetically an alternative to religious dogmatism. His God should be engaged more as poetry rather than theory. This paper will juxtapose Kearney with the more “theoretical” John Dewey. Both substitute religious imagination for authoritarianism, but Dewey's theoretical implications and practical consequences are clearer. I demonstrate how Dewey can reinforce Kearney's project by bringing conceptual clarity to Kearney's discursive situation.

But A.I. Has No ‘I’: A Phenomenology of Intelligence without Self, George Saad

In this paper, I will present a phenomenological argument against the possibility of artificial general intelligence (AGI) by considering it in the context of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I contend that, while artificially intelligent technologies can mimic consciousness, their inevitable deficiencies can be understood as the result of their lack of self-consciousness. First, I will give a very general overview of the relevant sections of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I will then consider the shortcomings of artificial intelligence in the context of this phenomenological account of what it means to be a thinking being.

The Modality of Primordial Temporality in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Aman Sakhardande

Scholars disagree significantly about how to interpret Heidegger's conception of “primordial temporality” in *Being and Time*. A principal disagreement is about whether primordial temporality is authentic or modally indifferent. This paper argues that primordial temporality is ecstatic temporality, that ecstatic temporality is modally indifferent, and that, according to Heidegger's own criteria, he is mistaken to claim that primordial temporality is authentic.

The Aesthetics of Disruption, Grant Spraggett

This paper will look at a number of notable thinkers who approached questions of art, of aesthetics, as attempts at ‘thinking outside the box’. While each of them lived through different periods of remarkable social upheaval and collective struggle, all of them were confronted with political crises that left them at a loss to explain, let alone affect, the course of events that engaged the lives of their contemporaries. Despite their different political commitments, they all found in artistic expression—in aesthetics—an opportunity to move beyond the political certainties of their times—certainties that they came to believe held back the imaginative possibilities open to people engaged in collective struggles.

Panel Abstracts:**Paulin Hountondji's Radical Philosophical Universalism**

Coordinators: Mahdi Ghanbari (York University) and Tyler Gasteiger (York University)

This panel aims to celebrate the life and intellectual legacy of Beninese philosopher Paulin J. Hountondji, who passed away in February 2024. Although best known for his critique of ethnographic concepts about philosophy in Africa and the wider non-European world ('ethnophilosophy'), the scope of Hountondji's work encompasses the perennial problems of philosophy refracted through the prism of the burning problems of the present. At the centre of his project is an extraordinarily creative reading of Husserl's idea of phenomenology as rigorous science and its ethical implications, a reading which grounds his passionate defence of a radical universalism that transgresses the geopolitical confinement of rigorous philosophical thought to the 'Western' world. Individual contributors will explore Hountondji's idea of philosophy and its wider significance, his approach to problems in the philosophy of history and the philosophy of science, and the phenomenological basis of his critique of ethnophilosophy.

Material Spirituality

Coordinator: Neal DeRoo (Institute of Christian Studies)

This panel seeks to explore the concept of "material spirituality." The concept draws roots from Hegel, was fleshed out by Husserl, Conrad-Martius, Henry, and Anzaldúa (to name a few), and has been highlighted in recent phenomenological work most notably by Neal DeRoo. The panel is partly occasioned by DeRoo's next book, *Material Spirituality: A Transcendental Phenomenology of Religion*, but its focus is much wider than that, asking questions about the topic's significance for various philosophical, political, and phenomenological problems, including identity formation, colonized subjectivity, political agency, and hospitality.

Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and World Philosophy

Coordinator: Paul Brienza (York University)

This session will seek to explore the interlinking facets of a hermeneutics of world philosophy. This will mean a focus on the ways in which philosophical approaches, from different traditions, often explore similar themes and discussions. The centrality of hermeneutics to this approach is essential since the 'interpretive' processes involved in bridging traditions is a task that is made real in and through dialogue. From German Idealism to medieval Latin theology, to the traditions of Daoism, this session seeks to forge a new and active intersection and to 'live in the space between' seemingly unrelated traditions. Of particular interest to the presenters, will be the ways in which ontological questions frame a deeper dynamic between different philosophers and traditions. The goal is to imagine a philosophy that reflects the diversity of these traditions while also forging a more-inclusive and potential world philosophy.

"Back to the Things Themselves!"

Coordinator: D. R. Koukal (Detroit Mercy University)

Back to the Things Themselves! (BTTTT!) is an annual attempt to put aside the more conventional scholarly practice of textual exegesis/critique, and return to the lived world to divine the essential structures of experience through careful phenomenological description. In short, *BTTTT!*'s main aim is to "do phenomenology"—that is, to generate original descriptions of phenomena in the lifeworld.

In the afternoon there will be a two-hour **Workshop in Applied Phenomenology**, led by Kym Maclaren, where we will investigate together some core issues that arise for practitioners of phenomenology. All are welcome to participate!