

About the things themselves

Newsletter of the Society of

Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture

Volume IV.1, Summer 2006

About the things themselves

Chief Editor:

Gregory Cameron, grcameron@wlu.ca

Contents:

1. **Editor's Comments.**
2. **Call for Papers: EPTC 2007**
3. **Call for Papers: PhaenEx**
4. **Congress and Panel Reports, York University, 2006**
 - a) **Congress 2006: Report by Astrida Neimanis**
 - b) **'Prey for the Living': Death and the Outside of Freedom: Report by Brian Lightbody**
 - c) **Phenomenology and Politics: Report by Neil Braganza**
 - d) **Resurfacing Tragedy: Report by John Duncan**
5. **Forthcoming Thesis 11: *Thinking with Lefort***
6. **Call for Papers: Reconstructing Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* - an EPTC 2007 Panel**

1. Editor's Comments

Gregory Cameron

Welcome to the first newsletter for the 2006-7 year. It was excellent to see everyone again in May, and quite sad to have missed both many people and many papers. I was, unfortunately, only able to be present for one day of the meeting, but the papers I heard were both excellent and stimulating. Conversations with other EPTCers, as always, got my brain going and plans started brewing for next years meeting. I hope everyone else had as inspiring a time as me.

As with previous years what I find most exciting about EPTC/TCEP meetings is the enormous range of papers and panels. From philosophical themes raised by phenomenology and existentialism to engagements with literature, theatre, music, to questions of politics, ethics, and representation, and, of course, exegetical issues in the reading of the philosophical cannon, EPTC conferences offer the depth and interdisciplinary breadth implied by the very notion of phenomenology. It is time now (or rather after the World Cup!) to start thinking about how next year's meeting is going to unfold. This year, if I am not mistaken, saw the inclusion of more panels than in previous years, and Neil Braganza and I have already been talking about returning to the theme of phenomenology and politics. This allows for a greater concentration of attention on specific themes. Now is a good time to start thinking up panels for next year; it is also important for those whose interests are more based in the philosophical issues raised by phenomenologists and existentialists to start thinking through their papers.

In other news...this is an exciting year for EPTC. Our journal PhaenEx should be on line some time over the next couple of months (a separate e-mail will announce its appearance). You will also notice below a call for papers for an upcoming issue of the journal. This will be an excellent opportunity for members to get to know each other's work and of course to attract more attention to the society.

Finally, I would like to welcome new members and especially those who are taking on new positions within the society, and to say goodbye and thank you to all those who are moving on. On a personal note, I would like to say a special thank you to Christine Daigle whose work on the newsletter, both as the French language editor and in every other conceivable way has been indispensable. It won't be the same without you Christine!

Hope you are all having a great summer and that Ghana continues to play as well as they did today (17 June 2006)!

Gregory Cameron: Chief Editor
grcameron@wlu.ca

2. Call for Papers: EPTC/TCEP 2007

The society for the study of Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture (EPTC) invites papers and panel proposals discussing any aspects of existential or phenomenological theory or culture. For example, papers or panel proposals dealing with theoretical or cultural issues in relation to authors such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Beckett, Husserl, Heidegger, Jaspers, Levinas, Malraux, Marcel, Buber, Frankl, Sartre, Camus, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir, Irigaray, or Laing are all welcome. Submissions from all disciplines are welcome.

EPTC will meet at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, in conjunction with the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities of Canada during the last few days of May 2007. Every year the Congress brings together some 100 learned associations and more than 5,000 scholars from Canada and the international community for approximately 10 days of interdisciplinary symposia, cultural events, and public discussions. For more information see: <http://www.fedcan.ca/>.

I. Interested authors should submit the following electronically in Rich Text Format: 1. A copy of your paper, not more than 4,500 words, and prepared for anonymous review (identifiable by paper title only). 2. A separate abstract, not more than 100 words, also listing the paper's title, author's name, complete mailing address, institutional affiliation, and e-mail address.

II. If you are interested in either presenting a commentary (of not more than 1,000 words) on a paper, or chairing a session, please submit a brief email note indicating as much, including your name, complete mailing address, institutional affiliation, e-mail address, and relevant areas of interest.

III. If you are interested in organizing a panel, please submit the following electronically in Rich Text Format: 1. A brief description of the proposed panel by Friday September 29, 2006 -- **note this is a new date for EPTC**. Then, by Friday February 2, 2007 please submit: 2. a copy of each participant's paper, not more than 4,500 words, and prepared for anonymous review (identifiable by paper title only); and 3. a separate abstract, not more than 100 words, also listing the paper's title, author's name, complete mailing address, institutional affiliation, and e-mail address for each participant. Each panel organizer is encouraged to ensure both that the papers for his or her proposed panel meet the general standards of academic conferences, and that the panel as a whole is suitable for

EPTC; EPTC reserves the right to reject individual papers or panels.

Except for item III.1., the submission deadline for the above materials is Friday February 2, 2007.

EPTC is able to waive Congress fees for a few delegates each year. Such awards will be made according to criteria of financial need and quality of paper at the discretion of the conference programme coordinator. Non tenure-steam delegates interested in this award should append a note indicating as much to their submission materials.

Submissions should be sent to:

Professor John Duncan, EPTC/TCEP President
John Duncan [<JDuncan@trinity.utoronto.ca>](mailto:JDuncan@trinity.utoronto.ca)

3. Call for Papers for Publication: *PhaenEx*

The long-awaited launch edition of our new electronic journal *PhaenEx* is set to appear this summer. The first annual Fall/Winter Special Topics Issue is currently under discussion.

The Editorial Collective now invites submissions for the first annual Spring/Summer Open Issue of *PhaenEx* to be based on a selection of the proceedings from the recent annual EPTC conference (May 2006) and to be published before the next conference (May 2007).

Authors should prepare to submit their papers (less than 10,000 words) electronically, in Word, according to MLA style guidelines, and for peer review well before September 1, 2006.

Please contact *PhaenEx* Editor Paul Gyllenhammer, the Lead Editor on the Editorial Collective for the Spring/Summer 2007 Open Issue, for submission procedures: gyllenh@stjohns.edu

4. EPTC 2006 Congress Reports

a) Congress 2006

Astrida Neimanis

EPTC/TCEP held its annual conference at York University (Toronto) from the 27 to the 29 of May this year. As anticipated, the number of both submissions and accepted papers rose considerably this year – thanks

not only to this year's Congress venue, but also (we like to think) thanks to EPTC's growing reputation for high quality papers and commentaries. Since EPTC's inception in 2003, we have been able to provide conference attendees with the opportunity to listen to a broad range of diverse insights into existential and phenomenological theory and culture, and this year was no exception. Our programme showcased 54 papers, each with its own commentary. Approximately half of these papers and commentaries were part of one of the five special panels organized for this year's conference (see below for further information about these panels). Because of the high number of quality submissions this year, papers and panels were presented for the first time in three concurrent sessions. While this allowed us to accommodate more papers, it also required delegates to make difficult choices in terms of deciding which sessions to attend.

In addition to the papers and panels, EPTC also held its Annual General Meeting on May 29. At this meeting our society said good-bye and thank-you to our outgoing members of the Executive and welcome to its new members (For more information, please consult our website, where minutes of this meeting are archived). Additionally, we had the pleasure of hosting two receptions for EPTC delegates – one downtown, thanks to Trinity College and the Philosophy Department at The University of Toronto, and one at York, thanks to The Graduate Programme in Social and Political Thought and the Dean of Arts at York University.

In spite of both soaring temperatures and an unanticipated public transit strike, attendance at this year's conference was high and feedback was positive. We look forward to another great Congress in Saskatoon next year – please consult our Call for Papers in this newsletter.

A special thank-you also goes to Christine Daigle for her efforts in organizing this year's conference programme, and to both Christine and Adrian van den Hoeven for all of their contributions to EPTC over the past four years.

b) 'Prey for the Living': Death and the Outside of Freedom Brian Lightbody

The EPTC panel, "Prey for the Living: Death and the Outside of Freedom" began in earnest as a caffeine laden conversation between Brian Lightbody and Luke Fraser at a downtown café in St Catharines, Ontario. We both wanted to present a comparative philosophical panel that would juxtapose Sartre's notion of freedom to those of other existentialists. However, we also realized that such comparisons between Sartre and

Heidegger, or Sartre and Nietzsche for example, were more than ample in the secondary literature, and therefore we were unsure as to whether we could present something that was truly original. It was then suggested (I don't recall by whom) that if it could be shown that Sartre's philosophy of death (as seen in *Being and Nothingness*) was a **direct consequence** of Sartre's earlier analysis of freedom, then a truly unique and interesting panel on Sartrean freedom could be had. In short, we would use Sartre's treatment of "death" as a hermeneutical touchstone to interpret his understanding of freedom. Our next task was to reinterpret the philosophical expositions of freedom as seen in the works of Marcuse, Nietzsche and Heidegger in terms of each respective author's understanding and treatment of "death." Finally, by comparing and contrasting Sartre's philosophy of death with that of other existentialist and/or contemporaries, we would obliquely arrive at a better understanding of Sartrean freedom as a whole. Overall, the panel generated some very interesting and vigorous philosophical debate. The organizers would like to thank the presenters (Brian Lightbody, Jody Toetenel, and Luke Fraser) as well as the commentators (Emilia Angelova, David Duquette and Mark Eshleman) for their important contributions and criticisms. We would also like to thank the audience members for their patience, attentiveness, and time. Finally, we would like to thank Martin Ford for reading earlier drafts of each presenter's papers.

c) Phenomenology and Politics

Neil Braganza

The idea for the panel "phenomenology and politics" was inspired, in part, by the really interesting sessions Brian Singer and Mark Blackell organized last year on the work of Claude Lefort. I found the phenomenological subtext of those sessions extremely tantalizing. So, encouraged by the hospitality of EPTCers (and here I want to make special mention of Gregory Cameron, John Duncan, Christine Daigle and Astrida Neimanis), I decided to circulate a call for papers that asked specifically about the relationship between phenomenology and politics. I was thrilled that such excellent and diverse submissions came in. When the panel eventually materialized, it was very well attended and we had some lively discussion. Papers were presented by Ian Angus, Jay Goulding, Asher Horowitz, Kheya Bag, Jonathan Short, Bryan Smyth, and David Koukal. The panel theme opened conversations that stretched (and sometimes strained) across disciplinary boundaries. For me, hearing these papers, commentaries and discussions was a luxurious indulgence of curiosity – pure guilty pleasure!

I won't attempt a substantive summary of the ideas covered in each session. What I'll do instead is try to articulate some curiosities that persist about the question of phenomenology and politics. I've organized these

into five areas of inquiry that, I think, would be very much worth pursuing together at future meetings. The areas of inquiry that follow are, of course, far from exhaustive; I offer them only to encourage further interest in the question of phenomenology and politics:

1. There is the question of how phenomenological research in and around the academy has in the past created venues for cross-cultural, interdisciplinary and political discussion. This is related to the question of how phenomenological inquiry and self-understanding has grown from these encounters and appropriations, and what closures and openings this has involved.

2. There is the question of what kind of political impact, if any, phenomenological philosophy can have. Husserl described the epochē as a radical transformation similar to religious conversion. Is it possible to see the epochē and what it requires as an intervention into the social and political relations of the natural attitude? If so, what is the nature of that intervention? How do we draw out its political implications in given contexts and articulate these in a way that remains rigorously true to the requirements of the epochē?

3. There is the question of how phenomenology might help clarify complexities of political experience and philosophy. For instance: How might phenomenological and existential philosophies offer ways to describe different constellations of law, knowledge and power? How might they offer ways to describe the coloniality of the present and the tasks of decolonization?

4. There is the question of how to philosophically justify inquiry into the politics of phenomenology. That is, must a “phenomenology of phenomenology” necessarily see phenomenology as political? Does the question of politics have any priority in phenomenological reflection? If it has priority, how can this be demonstrated? What does phenomenology, ultimately, have to do with politics?

5. There is the more general question of whether certain historical and political conditions facilitate phenomenological practice more than others. If phenomenology is more than mere method, but participates in, or presupposes, a community (sociality) of some kind, how do we talk about the genesis of that community historically, transcendently and ethically?

I hope we'll have the chance to pursue these and related inquiries together over the long term. On that note, I'd like to close this report by relaying two suggestions people had for organizing further collaboration. Gregory Cameron suggested that we try to have a panel on this theme every year. Bryan Smyth suggested that we organize a workshop on phenomenology and politics in which participants read each other's papers ahead of time and then meet to discuss them. I think both these suggestions are great. Let's keep in touch about this. If you research in this area and would like help organizing further excuses to have conversations about phenomenology and politics, please drop me an

email at braganza@yorku.ca. I can put an email string together and we can take it from there.

d) Resurfacing Tragedy

John Duncan

I began looking for authors last Fall in order to put together a panel on tragedy from the perspective of existential or phenomenological authors -- I am very pleased with the result. To accommodate rather intricate travel commitments the panel took place over the course of two consecutive afternoons. The first afternoon opened with a wonderfully unconventional analysis of Kierkegaard's Abraham as a tragic founder who makes it possible for his followers to live the ethical life without having to leap into the founder's tragic role, presented by Elsebet Jegstrup. After my own attempt to reconstruct the essential stance of Nietzsche's infamous *Birth of Tragedy*, Thomas Bartscherer presented a superb paper on Nietzsche's discussion in *Daybreak* of cruelty. This was followed by Jonathan Salem-Wiseman's witty and engaging discussion of Heidegger's bizarre reading of Wagnerian tragedy and music. Excellent commentaries were presented by Nick Zunic, Tom Curran, Javier Ibanez-Noé, and Kent Enns, respectively. The second afternoon began with two papers on Heidegger. The first, by Ozgur Gurel, probed Heidegger's early discussion of *Antigone* with respect to political possibilities, sparking heated debate in the question period. The second, which also heated the audience, was presented by David Tabachnick, who worked through the tragic fatalism at the heart of Heidegger's musings on technology. The final two papers of the panel took us back to the theatres themselves -- at least as much as could be managed within the confines of a panel. In the first of these, Nick Mount argued that although Beckett appreciated Sartre, *Waiting for Godot* evades both tragedy and comedy as it shuns the silver lining of freedom characterizing Sartrean existentialism. Finally, Susan Dodd led us through the incredibly bizarre and disturbing world of Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman*, working out an analysis of tragic suffering and its memory. As on the first day, excellent commentaries were presented, this time by Stuart Murray, Ian Angus, and Darren Gobert, with me having to stand in for the respondent on Nick Mount's paper (because Richard Holmes was unavoidably kept from presenting). My heartfelt thanks go to each and every one of these participants, as well as to the audience, referees, and conference organizers.

5. Journal Announcement: Thesis 11

The November issue of Thesis 11 will be devoted to a series of articles on the thought of Claude Lefort. Entitled *Thinking with Claude Lefort: the Political and the Symbolic*, this special issue grew out of a panel devoted to Lefort at last year's EPTC meeting. Lefort is perhaps best known in North America as an

editor of the posthumous works of Merleau-Ponty, but he is also an extremely important political philosopher. This issue should be of special interest to EPTC members not only because of its origins, but also because of the on-going interest in the relation between phenomenology and politics.

The articles presented in the journal consider most aspects of Lefort's thought: from his early interests in bureaucracy and totalitarianism to his relationship with such thinkers as Leo Strauss and Hannah Arendt, his debt to phenomenology, his consideration of the theologico-political problem and his more general arguments concerning democracy. *Thinking with Claude Lefort*, however, is not intended to be a series of commentaries on the work of Lefort: rather by thinking with Lefort the articles take up some of the challenges he has opened for thinking the political in general. The timeliness of the issue is also well attested by the recent publication of Bernard Flynn's excellent and engaging *The Philosophy of Claude Lefort: Interpreting the Political*.

The articles in the journal, including long-time EPTC members, are by Raf Geenens, Gregory Cameron, Gilles Labelle, Mark Blackell, Brian Singer and James Ingram.

6. Call for Papers: EPTC 2007 Panel on Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*

Reconstructing Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*: I am looking for submissions that deal with significant features of Nietzsche's work between 1873 and 1876, the period of his *Untimely Meditations*. Submissions might discuss one of the principle texts, or a problem that crosses a number of them. The aim is to generate a panel of perhaps half a dozen papers on these somewhat neglected early publications by Nietzsche. Please contact John Duncan at jduncan@trinity.utoronto.ca if you are interested.