

Practical Intersubjectivity

Stuart Grant

University of Sydney

In the 1960's and 1970's there was a brief flourishing of practical and group phenomenological work, spurred by a renewed intention towards the things themselves. Despite a growing turn to phenomenology across the Humanities since the 1990's, there is still much more written about phenomenology than phenomenology performed. This essay sketches a brief history of group phenomenological methods which have sought to remedy this situation and outlines a project nearing completion at the Department of Performance Studies at the University of Sydney, Australia, using a small group of trained phenomenological researchers to study the phenomenon of being in audiences.

a) Group Phenomenology

In *Doing Phenomenology*, published in 1975, Herbert Spiegelberg lamented two concerns for the state of “relative sterility” of phenomenology at the time, dominated as it was in his view, by “mere meta-phenomenology through textual and historical studies”:¹

What is needed today is a revival of the spirit of doing phenomenology directly on the phenomena, the “things,” the spirit which permeated the first generation of phenomenologists. What can be done to reawaken it in a different setting?²

And, in response to the still tediously trotted out accusations of solipsism:

What I would like to show is that there is nothing in the nature of the phenomenological approach that confines it to isolated practice, that it can be performed, like any other observation, in groups as well as in isolation, and that these groups could and should communicate.³

This state of affairs persists. Because phenomenology exists institutionally, usually in departments of philosophy, it tends more towards arguing the finer points of interpretations and differences in the explorations of the great figures in the phenomenological movement than it does to *doing* phenomenology, working and testing phenomenological methodologies on the things of the world. Consequently, we are left with the situation where

more is written about phenomenology than about the things themselves.

And despite the take-up of phenomenology, particularly since the 1990's, in many areas of the human and natural sciences, encouraged precisely by the promise of working directly on the phenomena, the second of Spiegelberg's concerns, the applicability of group phenomenology as a remedy to the supposed solipsism of phenomenology still remains largely unexplored. In this essay, I briefly sketch out some attempts to remedy this situation, by Spiegelberg and others, as prelude to describing an ongoing group phenomenological project convened at the Department of Performance Studies at the University of Sydney, between the years 2003-2005, to provide data for my PhD thesis: *Gathering to Witness, A Phenomenology of Audience*.

Herbert Spiegelberg's "New Way into Phenomenology"

Spiegelberg conducted his renowned seminal series of workshops between 1965 and 1972, at Washington University in St. Louis, in an attempt to raise group philosophizing above the level of chatter and argumentation *about* philosophies and philosophers to the dignity of "a method of cooperative research."⁴ He writes of a tendency in the history of philosophy towards *sym-philosophiein*, philosophizing together, from Platonic dialogue to Husserl, and finds "significant precedent" in some group work developed by the Oxford language philosopher, J. L. Austin.⁵ In his work on idiom in specialized areas of discourse, Austin employed trained groups of "a dozen or so working together" to collect idiomatic terms and their usages. Over a number of sessions, the members of the group were able to reach "virtual unanimity" on their interpretations and categorizations of idiomatic usages in the areas under study, with fewer inaccuracies and more detail than might be attained using questionnaires conducted "in the wild."⁶

Spiegelberg hoped the group method might

overcome the seemingly hopeless stalemate between contradictory 'intuitions' ... narrow down clashes by entering sympathetically and empathically into one another's perspectives and ... some of the alleged chaos of subjectivities could be overcome.⁷

This aim was instrumental in addressing one of the initial and central concerns of the audience phenomenology project, which had its genesis in response to my attendance as a member of a group of students to a dance performance entitled *Skyhammer* by the de Quincey Company.⁸ The students in the group spoke about the performance (which they didn't like) with last resort appeals to taste, in the ultimately irreconcilable court of subjectivity—"it's just not my cup of tea," "it did nothing for me." I found this frustrating and unproductive. It seemed to me that through a phenomenological examination of how subjectivity is given to itself in audiences, and of how the relations between performances, audiences and subjectivity are given, that something more substantial might be said in these cases where the resort to the dead-end pronouncements of sovereign subjectivity silences all inquiry.

But I needed a method. Spiegelberg's book, *Doing Phenomenology*, proved crucial to the shape of the work.

The first Washington University workshop, in 1965, consisted of a small number of graduate students working through four phases:

- 1) carrying out "parallel private investigations" of selected phenomena;
- 2) preparing brief written reports of their findings;
- 3) reading their notes to joint sessions for comparison and mutual exploration; and
- 4) discussion of disagreements.⁹

Across the following five years, techniques were varied and refined, but the workshops were always conducted according to three ground rules:

1. the rule of turn taking in response to the danger of self-important monopolizing of the exchanges;
2. the rule of exploration against the danger of insufficient communication through ambiguous expression or inadequate inspection; and
3. the rule of tolerance without indifference against the danger of intimidating persuasion.¹⁰

With characteristic scholarly prudence, Spiegelberg makes no great claim of achievements or breakthroughs for the method, but "suggests" that working in groups stimulates the opening of new perspectives, aids clarification in the need to communicate, attains to objectivity in the

sharedness of the results, enriches and complements through the addition of further perspectives, and attunes understanding of each other's viewpoints, positions and findings.¹¹

The Carbondale Conference

A 1996 conference, "Back to the Things Themselves," convened at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, partly in tribute to the Spiegelberg workshops, "with the conviction that phenomenological philosophy is a communal endeavour."¹² A group of researchers, some of them veterans of the Washington University workshops, set itself an aim:

The communal experience of philosophizing together—Aristotle's as well as Husserl's ideal, symphilosophiein—is our task and experiment.¹³

The conference did not seek to "reproduce the Spiegelberg workshops *per se*" but emerged as an expression of a "confidence" that the phenomenological approach can be "taken up in a unique, rigorous and fruitful way" towards the important issues and matters facing our lives: "ethics, ecology, reason, feminism, dialogue, religious experience, the body, political power etc... and can be emancipated from the relatively static and sterile atmosphere of most academic settings."¹⁴

In the introduction to the conference, Anthony Steinbock surveyed the state of phenomenology thirty years after Spiegelberg's groups, finding the issues largely unchanged, but reconceptualized. The problem of solipsism, for instance, re-posed in a 1990's academic climate had become

the danger ... that phenomenological description become idiosyncratic, or put in more drastic terms, that it stop at phenomenological autobiography ... a narrow attentiveness to my lived experience ... How does the phenomenological description of experience avoid being the expression of mere opinion and the voice of my thoughts locked up in my own private existence?¹⁵

Steinbock's answer evokes the noematic pole of the noetico-noematic correlation, and the intersubjective basis of objectivity, through an "identifiable core of sense that shapes a context within which various

elements form meaningful relations,”¹⁶ leading to the possibility of:

using my experience as a leading clue ... (to) the characteristics of the world of life for the intercorporeal, intersubjective, and intercultural spheres of experience.¹⁷

Rather than merely comparing notes or sharing separate investigations, the 1996 conference sought to draw the attendees together in “the open atmosphere of learning,” “socializing,” and “active involvement in doing phenomenology.” There were no concurrent sessions, and participants were asked to attend for the duration of the conference. The “uniquely intersubjective inquiry” which would thereby emerge, would hopefully assure the convenors’ trust that:

the phenomenological approach to the things themselves will be more than a technique, and become a style of living critically with others, on the ground of the earth, and within the world.¹⁸

I should note that it is not my intention here to offer critique or assessment to these efforts, but merely to draw together a loose methodological tradition devolving to and affective upon my own group research into the uniquely and fundamentally intersubjective phenomenon of audience.

David Seamon—Environmental Experience Groups

In David Seamon’s seminal work in human geography, *A Geography of the Lifeworld*, first published in 1979, he used “environmental experience groups” to study “the human being’s inescapable immersion in the geographical world ... people’s day-to-day experiences and behaviours associated with places, spaces and environments in which they live and move.”¹⁹

Seamon’s work offered the Audience project a means of validation, showing the ways in which the work might lift itself out of mere opinion, even the slightly expanded mere opinion of a small group of interested scholars, to attain to claims of essentiality.

The environmental experience groups set out “through intersubjective verification—the corroboration of one person’s subjective accounts with other persons’—to establish generalizations about human experience.”²⁰

The primary value of Seamon's work to the audience project came in remedy to the sense I had of the phenomenological inadequacy of qualitative market research techniques of 'respondents' surveyed "in the wild," as had been applied to audiences in studies such as Willmar Sauter's 'Theatre Talks' groups.²¹ I was also certain that neither ethnographic nor sociological methodologies, nor scientific semiotic micro-analyses of spectators according to reader response/reception theories, would lead to the essential, transcendental-phenomenological results I sought. I knew these approaches would only produce facts about the natural attitude of individual audience members. Trained phenomenological researchers beginning the first reduction of the naïve psychological world from their own experience could more effectively attain access to the transcendental than an analysis of second and third-person data.

I sought attainment to a "plane of existence" at which "we each share common characteristics"; to perform a study which, though "based on a limited set of experiences,"²² might

apply to other lifeworlds past, present and future. If the groups were conducted in other contexts—with Sudanese villagers, Pennsylvania Amish, New York Sophisticates, or characters in Thomas Hardy's novels—the specific experiential reports would describe a significantly different lifeworld, but underneath should appear the same underlying experiential structures.²³

And Seamon's deeply experiential approach to validation offered a promising way towards this aim. Rather than "statistically proper procedures as a prerequisite for legitimate generalization," Seamon's interpretation of group corroborative phenomenology assumes a "different measure of accuracy and objectivity." In order to attain to this different measure, to "reflect human experience in its typicality," it is necessary to seek out, explore, question, discuss and compare each other's insights, accords and disagreements with "as much precision as possible."²⁴

In this view, each individual's viewpoint constitutes and is constituted as a noetic adumbration of a noematic whole which becomes "a composite picture which is greater than each description alone."²⁵

And the intersubjective objective proof, the verification of the accuracy of the findings thickens when a reader encounters the work and either finds or doesn't find accord and attunement there.

The aim, in other words, is not to think about the discoveries of the group process—to argue their validity logically—but to search out their existence in day-to-day experience. In this way, the reader touches the experiential source of the group discoveries and accepts and rejects them in terms of his own and others' daily living.²⁶

So the reader's experience enters into the objective verification, deepening and enriching the shared truth of the experience; entirely in accord with, and in enactment of Merleau-Ponty's dictum:

Our relationship to the world, as it is untiringly enunciated within us, is not a thing which can be any further clarified by analysis; philosophy can only place it once more before our eyes and present it for our ratification.²⁷

Phenomenology cannot rely on anything as taken for granted, even the supposedly immutable truths and laws of the falsifying objective physico-mathematical sciences, but must further the infinite task of exploring, establishing and enriching the total intentions, meaning structures and givenness of the things themselves in their "unique mode of existing."²⁸

Duquesne Psychology

My encounter with the pioneering work in phenomenological psychology at Duquesne University cracked open multiple theoretical and practical avenues into the work. I found here a rich history of rigorous and systematic studies of humans making meaning; employing well-developed processes of validation and verification of first and second person reporting, working not from samples, but individuals and groups, requiring no quantification, no unwieldy preordained schemata, and seeking, as phenomenology, the essence of human behaviours.

From this context, the work of Amedeo Giorgi was most influential on my work. His, detailed, systematic and rigorous methodologies of practical applications of phenomenological concepts and approaches to lifeworld experimental situations, promised

the removal of the natural scientific methodology from the privileged position ... to free psychology from artificial boundaries and

restrictions in terms of the number and kinds of phenomena that can be studied, and also in the ways in which these phenomena can be approached.²⁹

From the more than thirty prolific years of work published by Professor Giorgi and his peers at Duquesne, I took the confidence that I was working within a rapidly growing tradition which had produced significant results in a wide variety of theoretical and practical applications.

*

Overall, Spiegelberg's hope for his "New Way" has not borne much fruit. There is still very little evidence of trained phenomenologists working together at description aiming at essence.

However, I am certain that the Audience groups are part of a growing trend in applied phenomenology. Anthony Steinbock, Natalie Depraz and others conduct ad hoc group work with students; Elizabeth Behnke has convened the Initiative in Phenomenological Practice;³⁰ and this issue of *Janus Head* certainly points to some development of the field.

b) The Audience Groups

The Preliminary Research

In 2001 I wrote phenomenological descriptions of my attendances to four consecutive nights of the performance of *Nerve 9* by Tess de Quincey.³¹ I examined these audience experiences in light of what I had been doing previously on the day of the performance, the foreknowledges I brought to the performance, my conscious and sensuous apprehension of it, and how it gave itself to me. I was baffled to find that my responses to this performance, the quality of which was remarkably consistent from night to night, had varied from near disinterest on one night, to highly intellectualized over-interpretation on another night, to seeking narrative where there was none on another, to a night of almost complete unbroken synaesthetic immersion in lights pulsating to rhythms of recorded text as the dancer's body shimmered in a sound aura and my own body twitched in metakinetic sympathy.³²

I realized there was a lot more to being in an audience than a more or

less ‘competent’ spectator undergoing cognitive, representational, affective and interpretive processes which might be revealed by semiotics, psychology and sociology. It would require a full phenomenological intentional analysis to reveal the hidden subjective, objective and intersubjective structures in which these mysterious variations became possible.

I took two primary clues for further research from the experience. Firstly, I found more or less thematized intentional correlations affective upon the experience of an audience member: between the individual audience member, their foreknowledges, the other audience members, the audience as a whole, the place and temporality of the performance.

I expected that a phenomenology of the specific intentional analysis of these relations might account for the phenomenon of being in audiences in a sufficiently exhaustive manner.

And secondly, I recognized the need for verification and validation, but was aware that my method of self-examination would not be workable on naïve audience members going to their theatres, churches and sporting events. Audience-goers in the natural attitude would likely and justifiably find it intimidating, annoying and just plain rude. Very few people are interested in being involved in research to find out what they are “really doing.” However, I was sufficiently certain of my own limited findings, of their worth as bases for pursuing further research, to believe that a small group of trained phenomenological researchers performing phenomenological self examinations, and corroborating in a mutual attunement of their results, would be the best means for further exploration.

Constitution of the Group

I began canvassing for people for the audience groups in mid-2003. I had decided to recruit six people from either a philosophy or performance studies background who understood or were willing to study a few basics of phenomenology. I feared a larger group would have proved too dispersed and unmanageable or would have given insufficient time to develop themes and follow threads in the required depth.

At this stage I was still vague as to precisely what we were to do and how we were to proceed in the audiences themselves. I wanted to leave it open as far as possible for the group to find its own direction and specific methodology. By the time the first group met, there were seven of us, five from performance studies and two from philosophy:

The performance studies people were skilled at performance analysis, with backgrounds in sociology, ethnography, semiotics and poststructuralism; the philosophy students were knowledgeable about the history and concepts of phenomenology, but none of them had much experience at *doing* phenomenology: practising reduction or other phenomenological techniques on the things themselves.

Our first meeting lasted two hours. We introduced ourselves, stated our areas of expertise, and discussed my preliminary research. I told the group that at that stage I had not developed a full program of how to proceed but that I hoped we would be able to work out our method together.

Some of the questions we addressed at this first meeting were: What does it mean to *do* phenomenology? How do we perform a reduction? Is there some kind of attentional switch that we can flick to go from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude? What of the shocks and surprises that put us out of our habitual attitudes and patterns of behaviour, making the familiar strange; are they types of reductions? Is the *Nausea* of Sartre's Roquentin some kind of pebble-induced reduction? Why, after a hundred years of phenomenology, are we still getting a lot more written about phenomenology than phenomenology performed? Why has there been so much more written about the reduction that brought back from within it?

I handed out readings for the following session, scheduled a fortnight later: "Chapter 3. A New Way into Phenomenology: The Workshop Approach" from *Doing Phenomenology*,³³ the Preface to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*;³⁴ and two articles from the 1996 "Back to the Things Themselves" conference: Anthony Steinbock's "Back to the Things Themselves: Introduction,"³⁵ and Edward Casey's "Sym-Phenomenologizing: Talking Shop."³⁶

The theme that arose most prominently the following week in people's gleaning from the readings was Heidegger's concept of *attunement* (*Stimmung*), appropriated by Spiegelberg thus:

The expression [i.e., "attunement"] is taken from the field of music ... that something can be done about dissonances and about attuning instruments that are out of tune may be indications of what can be tried out with discrepant accounts of phenomena. Mutual exploration may reveal that the instruments of description are out of tune, i.e., that the disagreements among the describers are merely verbal, and that a

readjustment of the linguistic tools can clear up some discrepancies. But ‘attunement’ is also possible at a deeper level if the dissonances should be in the prelinguistic experiences. Here it is possible to direct and redirect our viewing by ‘drawing attention’ to factors previously overlooked, by pointing out unconscious preconceptions and the like.³⁷

We took as our first order of business the need to attain some shared sense of what we were doing, and how we, as a group, might become a phenomenological instrument. We were all in agreement about the need for clarification rather than argumentation and criticism. I was careful to suggest that we shouldn’t necessarily adhere too strictly to Spiegelberg’s rules, but rather take up their general attitude to find out what worked for us.

Jakob, a coffee addict, wrote a detailed description of the experience of drinking a strong cup after abstaining from his drug for 24 hours. He wrote it as “a detailed description of the specific experiential situation which aims towards eidetic insight ... focused on a noetic rather than a noematic description.”³⁸ He described the actions of ordering and anticipating the beverage, the place, the appearance of cup, saucer and spoon, the sensuous qualities of the coffee itself, and the onset of the effect of the drug on his state of mind and thinking.

We discussed his paper, practiced turn taking, sought clarification. John became very concerned over the question of whether and how the writing was phenomenology. This raised the issue of how each of us understood phenomenology and our need to attune with each other in our task.

After a few weeks of practising eidetic reduction through free variation on cups, tables, the room and our attitudes, we decided to attend our first performance.

We attended a one-man show: *A Good Story* by Maurice Murphy at the Stables theatre, a small well-established venue in Kings Cross, Sydney, with a history of promoting local writers and actors.³⁹ There was a desultory turnout of no more than six people other than our group. The performance was dull at best. At intermission we sat together at a small table in the foyer and discussed how bad the show had been. We were surprised that the more we shared our disinterest in the show, the more we felt like an audience. I observed that where the performance had failed to gather us, our discussion

of our shared attitude had succeeded. We went back in after the break with a sense of our 'groupness' and consequently enjoyed being in the audience a little more, even though the show remained relentlessly uninspiring. We also surprisingly found more sympathy for the performer.

The upshot of this experience for me was the thematizing of the question of *gathering*, of how that which calls for witness gathers its audience and of how our discussion in the foyer had gathered us when the show itself had not been able to. As a result of this line of thinking, *gathering* became a central operator of the thesis. I decided that gathering was essential to being in audiences, even audiences of one person. A gathering becomes an audience when it gathers with intention to witness. Gathering to witness is the essence of all and any audiences. Anything that gathers to witness is an audience, and anything that does not gather to witness is not an audience. This eidetic reduction was obviously a crucial, formative, definitional turning point. The object of the work was revealed. The job of the thesis became the description and measurement of the intentionality of *gathering to witness*.

As we attended more performances, it became apparent that we had no specifically phenomenological method in the audiences. Some of the group were resistant or unable to suspend the natural attitude in which they attended the performances. I suggested that the judgements of taste with which they were leaving the audiences were precisely the phenomena we needed to study and posed the question of how, once having established such behaviour as the natural attitude, it might be possible to suspend it.

I decided that I needed to impose an approach of performing specific reductions in the audiences we attended in. I proposed that we should begin with a series of intersubjective reductions, concentrating on the effect of the other audience members on our apprehension of that to which we bore witness; then move through some attentional reductions, observing how our concentration on the performance and other factors ebbed and flowed, leading to a consideration of durational aspects of the audience; and then try some placial reductions, noting the effect of the buildings and other features of the place where the performance occurred.

The work proceeds. The group has not stayed constant. At present, the work is being conducted by a core of four. It has become apparent that the smaller the group, the more focused and productive the work, the clearer the aim at the things themselves. The rigorous phenomenological questioning and drive towards essence seem to be self-checking. If something is not

essential it cannot stand up to the test of free imaginary variation. The need for attunement provides humility and rigour. If argument against the essentiality of any finding can be effectively sustained, then it must not be defended, but reassessed and either submitted to further analysis or dispensed with. There is no room for opinion. A doubtable essence is useful only to the extent that its doubtfulness allows. It must remain provisional and ultimately be replaced. My faith in the process is now greater than when I began, and the test of the work remains in those who ultimately read the results. If they can provide doubt where the group could see none, then the work will be of limited use to them and will require further refinement and reassessment. This is the Cartesian spirit of Husserlian phenomenology.

Further, all knowledge, all truth, all objectivity is produced through intersubjective validation. As Giorgi observes, even quantitative scientific knowledge requires two levels of critical evaluation. Apart from the consideration that “the researcher should not simply posit what he or she finds without checking that all procedures, analyses and calculations have been properly implemented,⁴⁰ he contends that

a second level of criticism, of course, comes through publication, which gives qualified members of the scientific community an opportunity to confirm or criticize the knowledge presented.⁴¹

The ultimate court of all knowledge is the appeal to intersubjective validation. Even if the calculations are correct, it must be agreed that the right calculations are being performed.

c) An Example of Intersubjective Phenomenologizing

On the way to attending a performance of *Ma*⁴² by the Akram Khan Company at the Sydney Opera House, Pauline and I found ourselves discussing the sort of people we might find there. This ‘sizing up’ of the other audience members increased as we approached the box office and entered the foyer. We acknowledged that the phenomenon was probably due in some part to our decision to perform an intersubjective reduction on the other audience members, suspending considerations of whether we enjoyed it or how it compared to other performances and concentrating as far as possible on the other audience members; how they were given to us, our participation with them and how that participation affected

our apprehension of the performance. Nevertheless, we also felt that this was something that we always did, more or less consciously, more or less thematized, whenever we were going into an audience.

After the next show we attended, a performance by Steven Berkoff at the Seymour Centre, Jodie picked up the thread.⁴³

She wrote:⁴⁴

Downstairs foyer area before the show: small groups of people (ranging from couples to four or five), standing, sitting, looking at programs, going to the bathroom, returning from the bathroom, lightly chatting, waiting. Some are buying tickets. Some are wearing sports jackets over cotton shirts, coats worn and slung over shoulders, an array of darkened colours, and make-up on faces, umbrellas. A gathering of people dressed less casually than what might be expected for a performance at the Performance Space.⁴⁵

I replied:

This sizing up of the other audience members according to dress, bearing and size of groups in which they arrive; measuring *who* they are, gauging an overall sense of the type of people in the audience. Is it some question of whether or not I *belong with* them? Whether I can *belong to* something with them? It is without doubt a move towards *my* constitution of the audience in which I am about to immerse myself, an attempt to constitute them *as a group*. At any rate, it is the beginning of my constitution of the entity—this audience; building a sense of some sort of grouping, something to which I might or might not be gathered, in belonging or otherwise, to perform the witnessing.

The relation between gathering and witness—does being gathered more closely, more intensively, facilitate an easier or more complete or readily attained state of witness? Whether or not I in my thinking set myself apart from them as *not like me* or draw them close as *my kind of people*, the absolute physical there-togetherness,⁴⁶ or more fundamentally, the sharedness of our specific task, inevitably involves us in a gathering to witness, thereby instituting an instance of the essence: Audience. Irrespective of the stories I tell myself about who they are and who I am.

Jodie again:

The postural stance of a seated being, whose attentional/intentional acts operate more actively within the sagittal plane from self to

single object (performer) and more passively on the horizontal, intersubjective plane. This works paradoxically insofar as everyone looks and feels to be alone ‘audiencing’ ... but at the same time looks and feels to be together.

Me again:

This play between, on the one hand, the more subtle (something in me baulks at ‘passive’ here) lateral and less attentionally focused relation to the other audience members in the dark, and on the other hand, the more concentrated focus of attention on the performer, manifests as a more heavily subjectified state, in which the others are dethematized but exist for me as a *those among whom I am held*. I have a sense of being held, being part of something, subject to something, but paradoxically my subjectivity is simultaneously enlarged or thematized in some way.

We need to examine this play of attentionalities. It seems there is a key question concerning how the bloating of the subject occurs in the context of this close intersubjective situation, yet also how the immersion seems to simultaneously foreground and promote the judging, pontificating subject. I guess that it occurs similarly in church, where the immersion among the faithful shores up and buoys the faith of the individual believer. We need more description of the full intentionality of this.

Jodie:

Anyway, once we are full the noise escalates, excited chatter, expectation and anticipation as heads move from side chatter to front and down reading to up and front. Once Berkoff begins we are uniformly present for him. Independent conversations and the vacillation of head movements have ceased. I think there was applause???

Me:

“Expectation and anticipation”: This sense of building towards. We are carried by the rising tide of chatter, but without thematizing it as an object of consciousness. It takes us up into the building expectation. Maybe we talk a little louder, become a little more excited as the room fills and the noise of the audience grows. Is this noise, with its movement of contagious affect, a substantial manifestation of a transcendental intersubjectivity, caught in affective moment on the individual audience members?

Jodie again:

The moments where Berkoff addresses the audience, to cajole latecomers, ask questions and flirt with the blonde in the front row, do we become more aware of ourselves as a group? The eruptions of laughter starting in one area, spreading to involve the laughing sounds of others, infects self like a contagion, often released without any logical necessity to perceiving the performer and his material as humorous. Here is where I feel caught up, warm belly, part of, to quickly break away and question validity of laugh. In the dark the laugh of Audience has width, barbs, fluid pools dipped into and shaken off, lapped up elsewhere. Like nocturnes we seem to all react to lighting inflections, mesmerised and quietened by colour and shape. An audience in obedience, serving well its functioning whole.

Me:

Applause and Laughter. The performer addressing us directly. How do these work?

I recall from the Akram Khan performance how, when my attention was more fully involved in the dancing, my sense of being among others in an audience was minimized. There was just me, a conscious subject, caught up in appreciation, enjoyment and judgement of the performance, with my attention ebbing and flowing, following different dancers, being carried by the rhythm and lights, referring, comparing, quizzing, delighting and interpreting. The effect of the other audience members was largely dethematized. However, when the narrative sections, particularly the comedic parts occurred, I was, through the laughter, more aware of the others and my place among them. The laughter of the others allowed my own laugh. At other times when I found myself laughing alone, my attention swung to the others, in judgement of them. There was something here of a recognition of, or a lack of, a shared meaning endowment. There was a sense of reassurance and belonging as infectious clusters of laughter and spontaneous pockets of applause erupted, crackled and spread through the room.

We need to do some work on how laughter and applause give themselves.

This brief email exchange illustrates the method as it has evolved so far, seeking not critique of the fellow phenomenologist's description, but clarification and an aim towards essence through free variation in the imagination. The joint phenomenological endeavour attunes, deepens and enriches. And the phenomenon itself becomes successively clarified, released from its taken for grantedness, its mystery and hiddenness.

d) *Conclusion*

The work in audiences continues. As the object—*the ideal transcendental intersubjective movement of gathering to witness*—becomes clearer, the method develops. When we began the work, it was not possible to say that we were dealing with this particular transcendental essence of Audience. It is becoming revealed, allowed to show itself through our work. The more we dwell in it and speak of it, the greater the sensitivity with which we turn towards it and the more it shows itself.

We now share a sense that the given audience we are attending in at any performance is an instance of the transcendental phenomenon of Audience, consisting as gathering to witness. The reductions we perform give us openings into and outlines of the phenomenon. It is not something that can be grasped and quantified, though there are certainly measurable quantitative dimensions which are affective on the way it forms and manifests. The measures by which we live in and from the audiences we attend to, the listening, the immersion, the taking-up, are given to us by those audiences, but ultimately they are unencompassable. The thesis itself has become conceived as a writing from ... , in the sense of the Levinasian concept of "living from ... ,":

We live from "good soup", air, light, spectacles, work, ideas, sleep etc... These are not objects of representations. We live from them.⁴⁷

As a writing from audiences, the thesis is nourished by the audiences it is a saying of. It lives from audiences. They are its nourishment, and they become it as it says them. And Audience, the transcendental intersubjective essence of all audiences, is undoubtedly "good soup" from which we live; a consummation and a nourishment. But it is only apprehendable in the 'living from...' As transcendental, it cannot be exhausted as knowledge, encompassed by representation, but it can, through group

phenomenological practice, be lived in its saying. Rather than seeking to contain or categorize or predict the behaviour of audiences, or to disclose the ultimately undisclosable mystery of the soup of Audience as a “this or a that,” or to ascribe and fix meanings to Audience as a “something,”⁴⁸ the thesis aims to speak Audience from within, as immanent description, to allow it to announce itself, to sit or stand together-towards in hearing the call to gather in completion of that which requires witness.

We collect data, shine light in small corners of large dark rooms full of people, follow leads, recognize patterns, talk to each other, and stand continually amazed as each different audience calls, shapes, subjectivizes and escapes us differently.

References

- Behnke, E. (2005). *Initiative in phenomenological practice*. Retrieved from Initiative in Phenomenological Practice website on December 27, 2005: <http://www.phenomenology.ro/ipp/>.
- Casey, E. (1997). Sym-phenomenologizing: Talking shop. *Human Studies* 20, 169–180.
- Fitzpatrick, T. & Batten, S. (1991). Watching the watchers watch: Some implications of audience attention patterns. *Gestos* 12, 11-29.
- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Giorgi, A. (1971). Phenomenology and experimental psychology I & II. In A. Giorgi, W. Fischer & R. von Eckartsberg (Eds.), *Duquesne studies in phenomenological psychology, Vol. 1*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Giorgi, A. (2005). The phenomenological movement and research in the human sciences. *Nursing Science Quarterly* 18(1), 75-82.
- Levinas, E. (1969). *Totality and infinity*. (A. Lingis, Trans.). Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Levinas, E. (1981). *Otherwise than Being, or beyond essence*. (A. Lingis, Trans.). Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- McNeilly, J. (2005). Write up for Berkoff 180305.doc, attachment to personal email, sent Thursday 24/03/2005 9:55 PM.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception*. New Jersey: The Humanities Press.
- Sartre, J-P. (1965). *Nausea*. Ringwood Australia: Penguin.
- Sauter, W. (2000). *The theatrical event: Dynamics of performance and perception*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Seamon, D. (1979). *A geography of the lifeworld*. London: Croom Helm. Retrieved from Kansas State University website on December 27, 2005: http://www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/lifeworld_chaps/partI.htm.
- Smith, D. (2002). Preface to the Second Edition. In D. Smith, *Fearfully and wonderfully made: The history of Duquesne University's Graduate Psychology Programs (1959-*

1999): *A human science psychology: An existential phenomenological approach*. Pittsburgh: Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, Duquesne University, 2002. Retrieved from the Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center website on December 27, 2005: <http://www.library.duq.edu/silverman/bookprefacessecond.htm>.

Spiegelberg, H. (1975). *Doing phenomenology*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Steinbock, A. (1997). Back to the Things Themselves. *Human Studies*, 20, 127-135.

Steinbock, A. (2005). Personal website. Retrieved from A. Steinbock's personal website on December 27, 2005: <http://mypage.siu.edu/steinbock/>.

Urmson, J. (1965). J. L. Austin. *Journal of Philosophy* 62(19), 499-508.

Ziegler, J. (2003). A phenomenological description of coffee. Inpublished submission to the Audience Research Group, 2003.

Notes

¹ Herbert Spiegelberg, *Doing Phenomenology*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975) 25.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. 24.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ J. O. Urmson, 'J. L. Austin', *Journal of Philosophy* 62(19), October, 1965, 502.

⁷ Spiegelberg 25.

⁸ De Quincey Company, *Skyhammer*, Performance Space, May 2000.

⁹ Spiegelberg 26.

¹⁰ Ibid. 33.

¹¹ Ibid. 32-33.

¹² Anthony Steinbock, 'Back to the Things Themselves', *Human Studies* 20, 1997: 130.

¹³ Ibid. 131.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. 128.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. 132.

¹⁹ David Seamon, *A Geography of the Lifeworld*, (London: Croom Helm, 1979). Accessed on-line, April, 2005: URL = http://www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/lifeworld_chaps/partI.htm

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Willmar Sauter, *The Theatrical Event: Dynamics of Performance and Perception*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000) 174.

²² Seamon, op. cit.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (New Jersey: The Humanities Press, 1962) xviii.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Giorgi, A., 'Phenomenology and Experimental Psychology I & II', in A. Giorgi, W. Fischer & R. von Eckartsberg (eds.), *Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology, Vol 1*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1971.

³⁰ <http://www.phenomenology.ro/ipp/>

³¹ Tess de Quincey, *Nerve 9*, Performance Space, Thursday-Sunday May 24-27 2001.

³² The concept of *metakinesis* was developed by the dance critic John Martin in the 1930's. it describes the way the dancer's movement "is transferred in effect by kinaesthetic sympathy to the muscles of the spectator". John Martin, *The Modern Dance*, (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Dance Horizons, 1933), p. 85.

³³ Spiegelberg 24-34.

³⁴ Merleau-Ponty vii-xxi.

³⁵ Steinbock 1997.

³⁶ Edward S. Casey, 'Sym-Phenomenologizing: Talking Shop', *Human Studies* 20: 169-180.

³⁷ Spiegelberg 1975, cited in Casey 1997: 176.

³⁸ Jakob Ziegler, 'A Phenomenological Description of Coffee', unpublished submission to the Audience Research Group, 2003.

³⁹ Maurice Murphy, A Good Story, Stables Theatre, Tuesday August 19, 2003.

⁴⁰ Amedeo Giorgi, 'The Phenomenological Movement and Research in the Human Sciences', *Nursing Science Quarterly* 18(1), 2005: 78.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Akram Khan Company, *Ma*, Sydney Opera House, Wednesday February 9 2005 8pm.

⁴³ Steven Berkoff, *Shakespeare's Villains*, Seymour Centre, Friday March 18 2005 8pm.

⁴⁴ The quotes from Jodie McNeilly are all from an attachment to a personal email to Stuart Grant: 'Write up for Berkoff 180305.doc', sent Thursday 24/03/2005 9:55 PM.

⁴⁵ Performance Space is a Sydney venue specializing in contemporary experimental performance. Seymour Centre, where the Berkoff show was performed, is a more traditional theatre venue.

⁴⁶ This there-togetherness should not be understood in the limited sense of co-presence in the same room. A reality TV show audience is there-together in a more dispersed proximity, gathered in their separate homes around their screens observing the same event; counterparts, witnesses, members of the same audience in every sense of the word, gathered by the shared purpose of constituting themselves as a public, expressing belonging to values through the voting off of undesirables. At the most fundamental level of its essentiality, Audience is a specific movement of *transcendental* intersubjectivity; not a group of people in a room.

⁴⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, transl. Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) 110.

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, transl. Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981) 37-38.