



Entangled phenomenologies: Reassessing (post-)phenomenology's promise for human geography

Maximilian Gregor Hepach 

Cambridge University, UK

Abstract

This article calls into question recent attempts to move beyond, to 'post' phenomenology by highlighting the continued relevance of key phenomenological concepts (intentionality and correlationism) for human geography. I show how these concepts are pivotal to addressing problems raised by post-phenomenologists themselves concerning affects and objects. Drawing on recent phenomenological theory, I develop a spatial account of how subject and object cohere in experience. I argue that the very relation between/entanglement of the human and more-than-/non-human can best be accounted for phenomenologically. Such a phenomenological approach promises new ways of understanding various phenomena such as landscape, weather or climate.

Keywords

correlationism, entanglement, intentionality, phenomenology, post-phenomenology

I Introduction

What promise has phenomenology got left for human geography? In what follows, I seek to highlight how phenomenology is uniquely able to capture an aspect of experience of particular importance to human geography, namely how subject and object *cohere* or *correlate* in experience. Phenomenology, I argue, casts a light on this in between space in which subject and object are intertwined in distinct ways. *Intentionality* and *correlationism* are the phenomenological concepts which enable one to account for the structure of this entanglement. Being able to account for the structured correlational nature of experience gives phenomenological accounts their explanatory and critical purchase. It follows that the phenomenological promise for human geography rests in the fact that many phenomena of interest to human

geographers (and post-phenomenologists in particular) are correlational in nature, that is, they can best be understood by reflecting on how the human and more-than-/non-human are entangled in distinct ways.

Furthermore, clarifying this entanglement addresses a broader question that has recently arisen concerning the difficulty to clearly distinguish between phenomenology and post-phenomenology in geographical discourse (Backhaus, 2009: 143; Lea, 2009). Ash and Simpson note that

Corresponding author:

Maximilian Gregor Hepach, Department of Geography,
Cambridge University, Downing Place, Cambridge CB2
1TN, UK.

Email: mgh44@cam.ac.uk

post-phenomenology is not about abandoning the key insights of phenomenology. Instead it is about *refiguring* and *expanding* phenomenology's analytic and conceptual boundaries. It is about exploring what Quentin Meillassoux (2009) [sic] terms 'the great outdoors' – an excessive world that lies outside of the human-environment correlate but which is central to shaping human capacities, relations and experiences. (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 63, emphasis mine)

Yet it is difficult to square this conciliatory tone with the stark critique of phenomenology's basic concepts, such as intentionality. If 'the post-phenomenology emerging thus far in geography can be taken most simply to be the development of a phenomenology beyond intentionality' (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 53–54), then what is left of phenomenology in post-phenomenology?

It is this (perceived) gap between phenomenological and post-phenomenological key concepts, I believe, that has motivated critiques by geographers such as David Seamon, who recently raised his concern 'about the "critical" and "post-" labels', namely that 'almost everything these thinkers aim to accomplish can be readily accommodated by conventional phenomenological principles, concepts, and methods' (Seamon, 2019: 42). Similarly, Thomas Dörfler and Eberhard Rothfuß have voiced concern that 'the relationship between *experience* – *knowledge* – *interpretation* [...], which forms the basis for all subjective and objective understanding of social and material matters of fact' remains 'completely unclear' (Dörfler and Rothfuß, 2018: 97, translation mine) in post-phenomenological/post-hermeneutical theory.

Most recently, Eden Kinkaid (2020a) has offered an excellent response to critiques raised by post-phenomenologists in human geography by demonstrating 'how *critical phenomenology* has developed more nuanced and critical responses to the same problems that post-phenomenologists have identified in classical

phenomenology' (Kinkaid, 2020a: 2, emphasis mine). The aim of Kinkaid's critique of certain aspects of post-phenomenology is to make post-phenomenology 'a more critical and politically self-aware geographic paradigm' (Kinkaid, 2020a: 2). As Kinkaid and I discuss different phenomenological responses to, while sharing a number of concerns about post-phenomenology, I believe both pieces complement each other exceptionally well.

The aim of what follows is not to adjudicate the debate outlined, but rather to deliver a phenomenological response to the larger issues raised by post-phenomenology (for other phenomenological responses to post-phenomenology, see also Simonsen, 2007, 2013).

Specifically, I set out to offer an account of how phenomenology may fulfil its promise to human geography by first giving, in section II, a brief definition of both intentionality and correlationism.

I then go on, in section III, to respond to critiques of intentionality and correlationism raised by post-phenomenologists by demonstrating how two of post-phenomenology's central aims – (i) rethinking 'intentionality as an emergent relation' and (ii) recognising that 'objects have an autonomous existence' (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 48) – can be accomplished not by moving beyond intentionality, but by recognising and accounting for the correlational nature of experience. Following a number of suggested post-phenomenological methodologies (Ash and Simpson, 2019), I go on to propose that phenomenology itself might be a way of 'doing post-phenomenology'.

Having outlined how phenomenology may respond to recent critiques, I proceed, in section IV, to draw on recent contributions to phenomenological theory in order to develop a *spatial* account of how subject and object cohere or correlate, providing a novel answer to the problem of the 'great outdoors'.

I conclude by reiterating wherein phenomenology's promise for human geography lies and suggest *spatial phenomenology* as a particularly novel and promising approach to understanding the entangled nature of experience and existence.

II Defining Intentionality and Correlationism

At the heart of the arguments to follow are two central phenomenological concepts – *intentionality* and *correlationism* – and their potential for advancing geographical theory. So as not to obfuscate my argument with vague jargon, I begin by giving brief definitions of intentionality and correlationism, following Dan Zahavi's (2018) account in his recently published introduction to phenomenology.

Intentionality is a central concept for phenomenology because it describes, on a foundational level, the structure of consciousness. As Zahavi explains, our conscious life is not a mere unstructured '*amalgam* of more or less intense internal sensations and feeling states' (Zahavi, 2018: 16, emphasis mine). Rather, consciousness – seeing, hearing, remembering, imagining, thinking, hating and so on – '*is about something*' (Zahavi, 2018: 16, emphasis mine). Consciousness hence '*has a directness* to it, it is a consciousness of something, it is characterised by *intentionality*' (Zahavi, 2018: 16, emphasis mine). As the different ways of being conscious mentioned above show, consciousness '*is not concerned or preoccupied with itself, but it is, rather, by nature self-transcending*' (Zahavi, 2018: 16, emphasis mine). By virtue of being about something, consciousness is always beyond itself. Zahavi summarises that for 'the phenomenologist, "intentionality" is the generic term for this pointing-beyond-itself proper to consciousness' (Zahavi, 2018: 16).

One might now assume that, because phenomenology is concerned with intentionality (the directness of consciousness),

phenomenologists deal with *subjective* experience alone, with what is going on 'in our heads'. But this would be a substantial (yet common and prominent) misunderstanding of phenomenology. Zahavi explains that phenomenologists *reject* the view that 'experiences are in and of themselves subjective happenings with no immediate bearing on the world outside' (Zahavi, 2018: 20). Because consciousness is defined by its 'intentional openness' and 'world-relatedness' (Zahavi, 2018: 24), it would be 'misleading to regard the world as somehow outside or external to us' (Zahavi, 2018: 23).

Hence, for the phenomenologist, the subjective and objective cannot be disentangled; they are 'systematically interrelated' (Zahavi, 2018: 17) in intentionality. Given this *entanglement*, the study of intentionality is not only necessary in order to understand the nature of consciousness, but also in order to 'pave the way of a proper understanding of reality and objectivity' (Zahavi, 2018: 27). The very distinction between epistemology (the study of how we know) and ontology (the study of what is) is undermined by phenomenology, because both the (subjective) act of knowing and the (objective) reality of what is are intertwined in intentionality (Zahavi, 2018: 27). Hence for the phenomenologist, the idea that what 'things really are'

is something completely divorced from any context of use, network of meaning, or theoretical framework, and that whatever experiential and theoretical perspective we might adopt on them is consequently bound to miss its target, is not only a *deeply obfuscating claim*, but also one that is *epistemologically naive*. On what basis and from what perspective could such a claim ever be justified? *We cannot look sideways at our experiences in order to see to what extent they match with reality*. This is so, not because such a view is extremely hard to reach, but because *the very idea of such a view is nonsensical*. Any understanding of reality is by definition *perspectival*. Effacing our perspective does not bring us any closer to the world. It merely prevents us from

understanding anything about the world at all. (Zahavi, 2018: 28, emphasis mine)

Understanding the systematic interrelation of subject and object in experience thus means to understand how our perspectival understanding of reality takes shape. The ‘aim of the phenomenological analysis’ is hence ‘not to investigate either the object *or* the subject, either the world *or* the mind, but to investigate their *interrelation or correlation*’ (Zahavi, 2018: 34, emphasis mine).

Much of the conceptual work behind understanding *correlationism* is already done in understanding intentionality. Correlationism is simply ‘the view that subjectivity and objectivity cannot be understood or analysed apart from one another because both are intertwined and internally related’ (Zahavi, 2017: 174). Hence correlationism is an epistemologically modest philosophical position: instead of making claims ‘about that which transcends us, [. . .] correlationism might be a way of acknowledging the finite and perspectival character of our knowledge’ (Zahavi, 2016: 301).

Before I turn to post-phenomenological critiques of intentionality and correlationism, it is important to emphasise why we, as human geographers, should be interested in this fairly technical discussion. As I aim to show through the examples below, many phenomena of interest to human geographers (and post-phenomenologists in particular) take place in this space between subject and object; they are, as I argue, inherently *correlational*, that is, they cannot simply be reduced to subjectivity or objectivity, but rather *correlate* subjects and objects in distinctive ways. Erasing the correlational and hence entangled nature of these phenomena would risk obfuscating their very nature.

III Post-Phenomenology: Overcoming Correlationism?

The critique of intentionality is central to post-phenomenology in that it constitutes a ‘major

point of cohesion’ between different post-phenomenological approaches which otherwise ‘emerge from a variety of intellectual traditions and in many cases utilize different onto-epistemological assumptions about the world that by no means fully coincide’ (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 62). In spite of their differences, said approaches share a ‘commitment to overcoming the human-world, subject-object correlate and, in doing so, unsettling the *intentional correlate of experience*’ (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 62, emphasis mine).¹

This point of cohesion detailed by Ash and Simpson brings to light a further central concept that is critiqued by post-phenomenology: correlationism. Phenomenology’s correlationism has most prominently been called into question by Quentin Meillassoux in his book *After Finitude*, where he defines correlationism as

the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call *correlationism* any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined. (Meillassoux, 2008 [2006]: 5)

The allure of post-phenomenological inquiry and its critique of correlationism and intentionality is hence to break free from this ‘correlationist circle’ (Meillassoux, 2008 [2006]: 5), ‘to access a great outdoors’ (Meillassoux, 2008 [2006]: 50), ‘a behind-the-scenes world’ (Zahavi, 2018: 14), ‘an excessive world that lies outside of the human-environment correlate but which is central to shaping human capacities, relations and experiences’ (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 63). This, I argue, is true not only of post-phenomenology as it is discussed and further developed by Ash and Simpson, but of post-phenomenology more broadly: Post-phenomenology is defined by overcoming correlationism, one way or another.

Overcoming correlationism faces two key challenges: (i) How do we break free from the

constraints of intentionality and correlationism? (ii) Having ‘broken free’, how do we account for how the ‘excessive world that lies outside’ shapes ‘human capacities, relations and experiences’ (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 63), when these human capacities, relations and experiences are themselves characterised by intentionality? For the phenomenologist, as I outlined above, breaking free from such constraints is impossible because they are what make any meaningful understanding of reality possible.

In what follows in this section, I will answer to these challenges by showing how phenomenology can (i) rethink ‘intentionality as an emergent relation’ through affectivity and (ii) recognise that ‘objects have an autonomous existence’ (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 48) without abandoning intentionality and correlationism. In fact, as I aim to show through my discussion of (i) affects and (ii) objects, correlationism is central to understanding how both shape human capacities, relations and experiences. Finally, I suggest that (iii) phenomenology might be a way of doing what post-phenomenology seeks to accomplish.

I Affects (and Intentionality as an Emergent Relation)

In order to highlight what is at stake in post-phenomenological critiques of intentionality and correlationism, I first focus on one of the possible ways to break free from the ‘correlational circle’ identified by Ash and Simpson: *affectivity* (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 55). Drawing on Michel Henry’s phenomenology of life, Ash and Simpson argue that the ‘*primary affectivity* in all appearing precedes, and so lays the ground for, any sort of appearance to intentionality’ (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 55, emphasis mine). Consequently, for ‘the post-phenomenologist, appearance comes before intentionality’ (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 55). As others have argued, Henry’s concept of affectivity as ‘auto-impression’ (Henry, 2008

[1990]: 26) cannot be *about* anything in particular, since aboutness presupposes intentionality (Harding, 2012: 96).

As Henry himself notes, in this ‘entirely new terrain’ of affectivity there simply ‘are no longer any objects’ (Henry, 2008 [1990]: 48) which an affect could be about. For Henry, affectivity is ‘an absolutely self-sufficient, non-ecstatic, irrelational self-manifestation’ (Zahavi, 1999: 232). The question thus arises what reality such an irrelational self-manifestation has for us as intentional beings (Seyler, 2012: 98). Put differently, what is the relationship between (post-phenomenological) appearance and (phenomenological) intentionality?

I argue that phenomenology itself, as outlined in section II, can give an account of this relationship and hence of the affective phenomena of interest to human geography, such as ‘the specific affective phenomenality produced by [...] technological interventions’ (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 55) or the phenomenality of vulnerability, of passive bodies, such as sleeping or comfortable ones (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 56). Rather than going beyond intentionality, phenomenology can account for affective phenomena as intentional and correlational while endorsing post-phenomenology’s call to conceive of *intentionality as an emergent relation*.

Herein a first instance, I depart from the post-phenomenological account of intentionality identified by Ash and Simpson, whereby intentionality

relates to the proposition that an experience is an experience of something—we are always looking at something, listening to something, thinking about something, and so on. This ‘aboutness’ implicates the presence of an intentional subject *in advance of experience*. For experience to be ‘about’ something, there has to be an *author* of this aboutness and a point from which the directness of the experience comes. This notion of intentionality is then closely tied to a particular conception of subjectivity whereby the subject

governs through ‘internal representational thought’ (Rose, 2006: 546). (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 53, emphasis mine)

A potential point of departure with this account is the *authoriality* here ascribed to the intentional subject, the ‘*erroneous subjectivizing* of intentionality’ (Heidegger, 1982 [1975]: 63–64, emphasis in original; see also Pickles, 1985: 71–72; concerning intentionality without representationalism, see also Drummond, 2012). As Kinkaid critically points out with respect to post-phenomenological construals of intentionality more broadly: this ‘is the moment in which ‘intentionality’ morphs, without explanation, into “intentional subject”’ (Kinkaid, 2020a: 9); it ‘remains unclear what this subject has to do with phenomenology and the concept of intentionality’ (Kinkaid, 2020a: 9).

While phenomenologists would agree that subjectivity plays some role in intentionality, they would disagree that the subject or subjectivity in general is the ‘intentional author’ of intentionality (for a more detailed account of phenomenological approaches to subjectivity and their relation to post-phenomenology, see also Kinkaid, 2020a). As Dörfler and Rothfuß (2018: 100) note, subjectivity is neither impotent nor omnipotent. We are always *both* actors [Akteure] and pathors² [Patheure] (Hasse, 2015: 13), patients [Patienten] and respondents [Respondenten] of/to experience (Waldenfels, 2011 [2006]: 27–28; concerning the passivity of subjectivity, see also Hannah, 2019: 60–63; Waldenfels, 2004). Indeed, as Zahavi’s exposition of intentionality highlighted, conceiving of the phenomenological subject in intentionality as somehow governed by subjectivity would misrepresent the very nature of intentionality as the correlation between subject-object, mind-world; intentionality is irreducible to either ‘end’ of the correlation.

Returning to the question of affectivity, one canonical example of a non-representational

and non-authorial phenomenological account of intentionality can be found in Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, where he gives a detailed account of affectivity under the headings of *attunement* [*Befindlichkeit*] and *mood* [*Stimmung*]. As Heidegger notes, moods have the disquieting characteristic of arising in such a way that one ‘does not *know why*’ (Heidegger, 2010 [1927]: 127, emphasis in original) they have arisen. We ‘cannot know why because the possibilities of disclosure belonging to cognition fall short of the primordial disclosure of moods’ (Heidegger, 2010 [1927]: 127; see also Throop, 2018: 202), that is, any attempt to cognitively understand from where a mood arose comes *too late* because any cognition already takes place *within* a mood. Far from governing moods as an intentional subject, Heidegger uses moods to introduce his concept of ‘*thrownness*’ (Heidegger, 2010 [1927]: 127); moods exemplify that we do not author our experiences, but are rather ‘*delivered over*’ (Heidegger, 2010 [1927]: 127) to them.

Still, Heidegger’s account of moods remains correlationist: he accounts for moods not as lying somewhere beyond intentional experience, but rather as inextricably caught up with intentionality itself. Moods are not given to us in this intentional relation through internal representational thought, through the ‘mode of looking’ (Heidegger, 2010 [1927]: 128), but rather through ‘turning toward or away’ (Heidegger, 2010 [1927]: 128) to or from different moods. Moods are given to us in the mode of correlation while still exhibiting the ‘inexorability of an enigma’ (Heidegger, 2010 [1927]: 128). That moods have this enigmatic or mysterious character to them does not lead Heidegger to abandon correlationism as the descriptive bedrock of his account, but rather to develop a more nuanced account. As moods show, the intentional subject is not necessarily given in advance of experience. It is through moods that anything comes to matter to us, that we come to find ourselves in the world. Mattering itself is

‘grounded in attunement’ (Heidegger, 2010 [1927]: 129). Far from being authored by an intentional subject, *moods correlationally author experiences of intentional subjects* by making things matter to said subjects.³

Heidegger’s principal claim concerning moods is not that they merely *can* be accounted for phenomenologically within a correlationist framework. Moods are irreducible to either the ‘subject-’ or ‘object-pole’ of intentionality, *because they themselves correlate subject and object in distinctive ways*. This is what it means for moods to be correlational.

Answering to one of the two aims of post-phenomenology I discuss here, conceiving of affect as correlational allows one to give an account of the *emergence of intentionality* through attunement. Moods, correlationally conceived, occur ‘beyond, around, and alongside the formation of subjectivity’ (Anderson, 2009: 77).

2 Objects (and Their Autonomous Existence)

According to Ash and Simpson, a ‘post-phenomenological geography argues for a reinvigorated account of objects and suggests that objects present a starting point for analysis’ (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 59). Following theoretical developments from within object-oriented ontology (Harman, 2018; Morton, 2011), ‘post-phenomenology allows us to consider how objects have capacities for relation that humanistic forms of phenomenology would only assign to human beings’ (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 59). Taking the ‘autonomy of objects seriously’ allows post-phenomenology ‘to investigate relations between non-human objects without reducing these relations to how they appear to human beings’ (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 59).

How may the phenomenologist respond to taking objects as a starting point for analysis? As Zahavi’s exposition of intentionality already

pointed to, starting from objects does not contradict the phenomenological method, yet phenomenology cannot start from either subject or object *in isolation* from the other. Phenomenology cannot investigate objects apart from intentionality, that is, ‘completely divorced from any context of use, network of meaning, or theoretical framework’, because, to the phenomenologist, ‘*the very idea of such a view is nonsensical*’ (Zahavi, 2018: 28, emphasis mine; for a detailed phenomenological critique of speculative realism and object-oriented ontology, see also Zahavi, 2016). Conversely, as Meillassoux himself notes in his account of correlationism, we ‘can never grasp a subject that would not always-already be related to an object’ (Meillassoux, 2008 [2006]: 5).

Although this approach may hence not be successful in breaking free from the ‘correlationist circle’, it is successful – as I will show – in accomplishing post-phenomenology’s goal to understand how human capacities, relations and experiences are not authored by subjects, but shaped by objects.

In order to show how phenomenology may take into account the autonomy of objects from within a correlationist framework, I first turn to another affect of interest to post-phenomenology: *comfort* (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 56).

Although David Bissell (2008), in his paper on ‘Comfortable bodies: sedentary affects’, does not coat his analysis in phenomenological language, it aligns itself well with a phenomenological approach. In his account of sitting, Bissell shows that comfort ‘as an affective relationality between bodies and objects must consider the way in which the chair also acts on the body, thus mediating the nature of affect experienced through the body’ (Bissell, 2008: 1705). As the above discussion of Heidegger’s theory of attunement and moods brought to light, affectivity is irreducible to either ‘subject’ or ‘object’, because affectivity itself correlates subject and object in distinctive ways. I suggest that ‘affective relationality between bodies and

objects' is a different way to phrase a distinctive correlation between subject and object. Comfort too correlates subject and object in particular ways.

A correlational account of comfort can follow the model of other paradigmatic correlationist accounts from phenomenology, such as phenomenological accounts of (object-)perception. Similar to how we seek a position of optimal comfort when sitting, Edmund Husserl shows in his lectures on *Thing and Space* that in perception we also seek the best possible perspective from which an object can be seen, what he coins 'maximum points' (Husserl, 1997 [1907]: §36, 106). Husserl points out that 'we need to speak naturally not of a *single* maximum point but instead of a *correlated group or sphere of maximum points*' (Husserl, 1997 [1907]: §36, 106, emphasis mine). According to Husserl, there is not a single perspective from which a given object can be seen best. Rather, whichever perspective is best is a correlate of (i) the perceiver, (ii) the conditions of perception and (iii) what is of interest concerning the object of perception (for a detailed discussion of Husserl's approach to interest and attention, see also Hanah, 2019: 48–54).

Although a large object, such as a tall statue, can only be seen in its entirety from afar, I may be more interested in some detail or texture of the statue, shifting the point of maximum givenness ever closer to it. Equally, although a very bright day may be preferable to see the statue in its entirety, certain elements of the statue may go unnoticed, as shadows cannot trace the statue's finer details. Getting tired, I may prefer to view the statue from afar, taking in it and its surroundings in an almost unfocused gaze. I may finally be too tired to lift my head long enough to take in such a scene and instead opt to sit next to the statue leaning against it, resting my eyes on some minute detail. Falling asleep, I then experience the heat of the day as an afterglow through the warmth of the statue's stone.

As this example shows, the 'maximum points' in perception are innumerable, but not arbitrary; phenomenological correlations are not amalgamations, but rather have certain structures which can be systematically articulated. This emphasis on the *structure* of correlation gives correlationist accounts their explanatory and critical purchase.

Returning to the question of object-perception, although the subject's state/position may play an important role in such experiences, this does not entail that the subject authors these perceptions. More often than not, the intentional subject reaches its authorial limits in the conditions or the object of perception and, in a reversal of authoriality, is 'authored' by them.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2012 [1945]) offers a related account of perception in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, but places greater emphasis on the role of the object.⁴ 'For each object', he argues, 'there is an *optimal distance from which it asks to be seen* – an orientation through which it presents more of itself – beneath or beyond which we merely have a confused perception due to excess or lack' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012 [1945]: 316, emphasis mine). The shifting distances between subject and object in perception, and the varying degrees of clarity that result from such shifts, resemble 'a tension that oscillates around a norm' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012 [1945]: 316); a tension (or correlation) that is sustained by the subject, the conditions of perception and the object of perception. Here, the purported authoriality of the subject is undermined by the object dictating the distance from which it 'wants' to/can be seen. As Sara Ahmed notes, 'if consciousness is intentional, then we are not only directed toward objects, but those objects also *take us* in a certain direction' (Ahmed, 2006: 545, emphasis mine).

Merleau-Ponty goes on to describe how another, more inconspicuous non-human participant holds sway over both subject and object in perception: 'The *lighting* directs my gaze and

leads me to see the object, so in one sense it *knows* and *sees* the object' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012 [1945]: 323, emphasis mine). Our 'own vision', Merleau-Ponty explains, simply follows the 'phosphorescence' (Lingis, 1968: xlii) of the world, 'the pathways traced out for it by the lighting, just as in hearing a phrase we are surprised to find the trace of an external thought. We perceive according to light, just as in verbal communication we think according to others' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012 [1945]: 323).

The 'certain manner that we have of receiving' object and lighting in perception has its counterpart in the 'certain manner that the outside has of *invading* us' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012 [1945]: 331, emphasis mine). Merleau-Ponty emphasises that objects here play the role of constituting our very perceptual capabilities, given that 'we only grasp the unity of our body in the unity of the thing, and only by beginning with things do our hands, our eyes, and all of our sense organs appear to us as interchangeable instruments' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012 [1945]: 336). Objects author not only individual experiences, but the very way we relate to the world. The things we perceive, Merleau-Ponty later writes in a striking reversal of authoriality, are 'much more than a correlative of my vision' as they impose 'my vision upon me as a continuation of [their] own sovereign existence' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968 [1964]: 131, see also 146); a sovereign existence that is nonetheless given correlationally in experience as that which withdraws itself from immediate perception or understanding.

As Kinkaid aptly points out in their defence of Merleau-Ponty against post-phenomenological misconstruals, 'this attention to objects, their agency in shaping worlds, and their existence beyond human perception [of import to post-phenomenology, MH] is not really at odds with classical phenomenology's aims' (Kinkaid, 2020a: 7; see also Anderson and Wylie, 2009: 323–325; Wylie, 2006: 522–527).

Bringing this brief analysis of the role objects play in correlationist accounts of perception back to its starting point, comfort too can be analysed as a correlated group or sphere of 'maximum points' of comfort, which are held in tension by subject, object and the conditions of experience. Where we find comfort when sitting depends on (i) the *state* of our bodies, for example, being alert or tired, (ii) the *conditions* in which we are trying to get comfortable, for example, meteorological/atmospheric (Hitchings, 2011, 2016) or social conditions (Bissell, 2008: 1704), and finally (iii) the *materiality* of the chairs themselves, inviting dwelling or transience (Bissell, 2008: 1705).

Comfort here highlights an aspect of the correlational nature of experience which is more difficult to bring to the fore in the case of perception: experience has an immersive effect, whereby we overlook the fact that subject and object are not simply given in experience, but correlated in distinct ways (for a phenomenological account of experiences that interrupt immersion, see also Ahmed, 2006; Allen and Hosseinnia, 2018; Hannah, 2019; Norwood, 2018). That we do not distinguish between the different correlational aspects of comfort in experience (when we are comfortable) is grounded in the fact that the very correlational *staging* or *enactment* of comfort subverts our cognition (on staging and enacting space, see Hasse, 2015: 14; see also Shove, 2003).

Similar to perception, the moments where, when and how we are comfortable are innumerable, but not arbitrary; they reveal certain structures. Comfort is enacted through correlational rules, which are uncovered as we (phenomenologically) analyse the relations between bodies, circumstances and objects. Reflecting on such rules brings to light how certain spaces and objects are engineered to make certain bodies more comfortable than others, as Bissell's account shows, and hence enables us to address and change these rules, revealing phenomenology's critical potential (on critical

phenomenology, see also Kinkaid, 2020a, 2020b; Mattingly, 2019; Simonsen, 2013).

In short, as with Heidegger's moods, comfort appears to be inherently correlational. A phenomenological account teaches us that it would be false to assume that comfort is a single definite state, a property an object can simply have. Far from such rigidity, a correlative understanding of comfort allows one to reflect on the 'multifaceted and multilayered scaffold' (Zahavi, 2018: 20) of subject, object and circumstance in experience. Engaging in phenomenological inquiry in such a way allows one 'to open up, in short, new possibilities for thinking by means of our concrete encounters with others, objects, situations, events, and the world' (Throop, 2018: 201). Following such concrete encounters, a correlationist approach to the autonomy of objects would seek to explicate how objects withdraw from and shape our experiences and existence.

3 Doing (Post-)Phenomenology?

By way of summarising what has been discussed so far, I want to suggest that one may turn to phenomenology in order to see 'how post-phenomenology might be practiced' (Ash and Simpson, 2019: 140). The correlational analysis of moods, perception and comfort sketched out above bears some resemblance to the 'postphenomenological *style* of analysis', which calls for 'an orientation for research that lays emphasis on the coconstituted nature of our being in the world and the need for a more thoroughgoing acknowledgment of, and attempt at, understanding this' (Ash and Simpson, 2019: 140).

If Ash and Simpson 'define a postphenomenological style as a matter of learning to explicitly attend to the various shifting expressions of objects and how those expressions contribute to how a situation works' (Ash and Simpson, 2019: 144), then such a style can also be called

an analysis of intentional experience, if the only access we have to the 'expressions of objects' is through (actual or imagined) experiences about objects.

If 'a postphenomenological writing style is about creating languages and vocabularies that establish connections between previously unconnected things and, through this connecting, generates new ways of thinking, seeing, and feeling such things' (Ash and Simpson, 2019: 145), then such a process may be understood as a continuous phenomenological variation of intentional structures, that is, a reflection on the different possible ways in which things may be given in experience.

The two post-phenomenological styles Ash and Simpson explicitly suggest – *allure* and *resonance* – equally go together well with the above brief discussion of the phenomenology of moods, perception and comfort. Ash and Simpson write

We have chosen to focus on the combination of *allure* and *resonance* for a number of reasons. First, these styles reflect the core tenets of a post-phenomenological approach: an emphasis on objects and how they appear, while remaining excessive of these appearances (*allure*) and the moments of encounter and translation when these objects collide with human sense and change both objects and humans in the process (*resonance*). Second, both of these styles point to a way of accounting for human sense without reducing objects to the way they appear to human sense. In other words, the *allure* and *resonance* of objects are *not human interpretations* of these phenomena. (Ash and Simpson, 2019: 146, emphasis mine)

As my short discussion of moods, perception and comfort has shown, every object of intentional experience shapes and remains excessive of experience. *Allure* is constitutive of intentionality as it incessantly guides our experience beyond what is momentarily given (see also Bower, 2017).⁵

Correlationism, finally, functions as a condition for the possibility of resonance: Only through the inseparable entanglement of the human and non-human in intentionality can resonance take place as a process in which both are co-constitutive without being reducible to each other. Through a phenomenological analysis of moods, perception and comfort, allure and resonance come to the fore as basic facts of intentional experience (see also Husserl, 2001 [1966]: §32–35; Throop, 2018: 203). In light of this, calling for the ‘end of phenomenology as a philosophy’ (Ash and Simpson, 2019: 142; Sparrow, 2014) or as a geographical methodology appears premature (see also Zahavi, 2016).

IV Entangled Phenomenologies

I have argued above how a phenomenologist might respond to certain challenges raised by post-phenomenology not by abandoning correlationism, but by embracing it. By emphasising the correlated and hence entangled nature of experience, phenomenology, as I lay it out here, casts a light on how experience and our understanding in general is irreducible to subjects or objects. Correlationist accounts, I argue, hold these different aspects of any given experience/correlation in suspense, in a tension that cannot be resolved in favour of any single aspect. Correlationism mediates between nouns (subjects and objects) and verbs (agencies, relations and doings), which constitute central themes of different theoretical approaches in human geography.⁶

Situating this phenomenological approach in the longer history of phenomenological research in human geography, it runs counter or orthogonal to both *geographical phenomenology* and *phenomenological geography*, as identified by John Pickles (1985; see also Rehorick, 1991). On the one hand, I reaffirm Pickles’ critique of ‘humanistic’ interpretations of phenomenology in geography –

‘geographical phenomenology’ (Pickles, 1985: 5–11) – in that I too am critical of subjectivist approaches. On the other hand, I question Pickles’ own Heideggerian approach – phenomenological geography – to ground geography as a science in an architecture of regional ontological structures (Pickles, 1985: 169).

I here follow Bernhard Waldenfels’ critique of both Husserl and Heidegger, in which he emphasises that experiences of alterity must lead us to question the idea of such ontological architectures that ground and prefigure experience and existence. Reflecting on the nature of intentionality, Waldenfels notes there is a ‘significant difference’ [signifikative Differenz] (Waldenfels, 1997: 19, translation mine) between *what* is experienced and *how* it is experienced which allows us to experience something *as* something. Put differently, intentionality most simply means that something appears ‘this way and not differently’ (Waldenfels, 1997: 20, translation mine). Reflecting on this basic fact of intentionality, one realises that the very structure of intentionality is porous (Merleau-Ponty, 1968 [1964]: 149), always already exposed and ‘*entangled* in a heterogeneous logic of difference’ (Anderson and Wylie, 2009: 319, emphasis mine).

Instead of an ontological architecture, instead of ‘traditional sphere or layer models’ (Waldenfels, 1997: 68, translation mine) of reality where an authorial subject radiates out from some centre, Waldenfels suggests the *figure of thought of entanglement* [*Denkfigur der Verschränkung*], in which oneness and otherness are more or less intertwined, ‘like a net which can be loosened or fastened’ (Waldenfels, 1997: 67, translation mine).

Of crucial importance is the *methodological imperative* that results from entanglement: ‘Like in the case of ribbon or thread patterns, [...] the disentanglement of the intertwined elements and lines leads to the destruction of the pattern, which stands and falls with this intertwining’ (Waldenfels, 1997: 67–68,

translation mine; on patterned stabilities, see also McCormack, 2017, 2018: 28). It is this pattern that is at risk of being effaced in post-phenomenological accounts; accounting for this pattern requires a more *gentle* approach (Pottinger, 2020). Highlighting entangled phenomenologies, as I do throughout this article, emphasises that one cannot disentangle the human from the non-human without destroying the very pattern that shows our inherent intertwinement with that which is other/more-than-/non-human.

By way of concluding, I outline one last phenomenological approach to preserving the patterned nature experience and existence which holds much potential for future geographical research: Günter Figal's (2010, 2015, 2019) phenomenology of spatiality.

1 Spatial Phenomenology

Figal sets out his account of the phenomenology of spatiality by asking a question that has reocurred in different forms throughout the arguments above: How is it that we do not experience the *phenomenality* of experience itself, that is, how phenomena are distinct correlations of subject and object, but rather appear to experience ourselves and objects as (independently) given, as (more or less simple and separate) facts of experience (Figal, 2016: §4, 58)?

It is this question, Figal argues, that Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty faced in different ways⁷: How does one account for the fact that phenomena are at once unified in experience *and* differentiated into subject and object as correlates of experience (Figal, 2016: §4, 59)? It is a misunderstanding of this problem, as I argued above, that leads to the post-phenomenological claim that phenomenologists unilaterally resolve this tension between unity and difference in favour of an authorial subject. According to Figal, however, the 'exclusivity of phenomenology over all other possible ways to relate in and to the world' (Figal, 2016: §4,

60, translation mine) is that it reflects upon and articulates this very tension.

Figal's own answer to this question is to account for the correlation between subject and object *spatially*. As numerous examples above have shown, what is given in experience transcends experience in distinct ways. Consequently, a condition of possibility of experience is that what we experience is set apart, at a distance (Figal, 2016: §4, 73). The correlation between subject and object, Figal concludes, is hence a 'possibility of space' (Figal, 2016: §4, 73, translation mine).

Figal goes on to distinguish three basic characteristics of the spatiality of experience that *govern both subject and object of experience*: *Everything perceived* has (i) its place, where it is (ii) open to be experienced (iii) at a distance from others (Figal, 2016: §5, 76). *Perception itself* is spatial in that what I perceive is (i) there and not here, from where I perceive, my perception is (ii) open in that it is not fixated on a single object or way of perceiving and (iii) the object of my perception always remains at a distance no matter how near I draw (Figal, 2016: §5, 76).

The crucial point that follows from this account is that spatiality itself, governing both subject and object, is what guarantees the coherency of subject and object in experience while allowing them to be set apart; 'the unity of phenomena is only possible as a spatial [unity]' (Figal, 2016: §5, 77, translation mine).

Returning back to the questions raised above, Figal answers that this spatiality at the heart of all experience is not experienced as such because we always already experience objects as admitted somewhere, open to experience and distanced from us *without considering admittedness, openness and distantness itself* (Figal, 2016: §5, 84).

2 The 'Great Outdoors'?

Figal's spatial approach provides a novel answer to the problem of the 'great outdoors'

(Meillassoux, 2008 [2006]: 50; Ash and Simpson, 2016: 63) posed by post-phenomenologists, that is, that we have to break free from the ‘correlationist circle’ in order to uncover what/how things ‘really are’. Positing spatiality as the condition of possibility of correlationism turns the distinction between (subjective) inside and (objective) outside on its head:

Oneself, as the living being that one is, cannot be an Inside; for that to be the case one would have to be able to be “inside oneself”, and then one would be a space/room for oneself. But oneself is, seen from the position of oneself, always outside, in an Outside that does not stand in opposition to an Inside – in the limitless Outside. (Figal, 2016: §13, 211, translation mine)

The Outside Figal outlines here is the outside in which both subject and object coincide in experience; the spatiality that coheres subject and object.

Conceiving of correlationism in such a way addresses the post-phenomenological concern that intentionality (purportedly) covers up ‘the idea that sensibility may take place as a relation with an exterior, may be composed from the outside, through and as a passive exposure’ (Harrison, 2008: 430).

As the examples above aimed to show, intentionality is the very structure that enables us to recognise the correlated nature of our experience and existence, allows us to recognise that we are always already exposed to the Outside. Here *vulnerability*, which ‘asks us to think interiority as somehow always already involved with and turned towards its exterior’ (Harrison, 2008: 436), becomes the default state of experience and existence (see also Hannah, 2019: 96–101). Through a reflection on the correlational nature of experience, ‘I appear to myself completely turned inside out under my own eyes (Merleau-Ponty, 1968 [1964]: 143).

The entanglement(s) I have drawn attention to throughout this piece highlights that we are never inside ourselves, but always already stand

in a certain correlative relation that lies beyond the distinction of inside-outside. That ‘the subject is structured intentionally within itself’ (Heidegger, 1982 [1975]: 60) does not mean that experiences or thoughts are somehow trapped ‘within’ us, but rather that the subject is always already exposed to what is ‘without’. Experiences are not ‘in consciousness as things are in a box’ (Husserl, 2010 [1973]: 52). Nor is ‘the great outdoors’ somehow ‘outside the box’. We should do away with such ‘box-thinking’ altogether (see also Heidegger, 2010 [1927]: 56–57; Merleau-Ponty, 1968 [1964]: 138; Zahavi, 2018: 23–24). The ‘heavy sense of interiority so central to the phenomenological tradition’ (Roberts, 2019: 551) must, I hope to have shown, be neither central nor heavy.

V Conclusion

So, what promise does phenomenology have left for human geography? As stated in the introduction, phenomenology casts light on how subject and object cohere in experience. *Entangled phenomenologies* give accounts of the different distinct ways in which subject and object are intertwined. *Intentionality* and *correlationism* are the key phenomenological concepts which allow one to clarify the *how* of these entanglements.

Concerning the challenge of post-phenomenology, my discussion of the work of various phenomenologists (Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Waldenfels, Figal and Ahmed) has shown that phenomenology addresses many of the questions that are central to the post-phenomenological project. Mischaracterising phenomenology as ‘idealist’ or ‘subjectivist’ risks obscuring the potential, the promise that both past and contemporary phenomenology holds for understanding our relationship with, for example, the more-than-/non-human (notable exceptions include Anderson and Wylie (2009) and Wylie (2006) on Merleau-Ponty’s work). Instead of ‘posting’ phenomenology, I

suggest revisiting core phenomenological questions concerning the nature of intentionality and correlationism.

Beyond the narrow debate around post-phenomenology, reconsidering key phenomenological concepts is of import to human geography more broadly. As the examples I have discussed above emphasise, intentionality and correlationism cast a light on a key problem that is already discussed in various areas of geographic research, albeit without the explicit use of phenomenological concepts: What part do subjects, objects and circumstances play in particular experiences and experience in general (on ‘the circumstantial’, see also McCormack, 2017)? Making use of different phenomenological methods and models, such as the ones I have introduced above, helps draw this interplay of correlational entanglement (of concern to human geographers) out into the open.

Possible areas of application for such an approach, as detailed above, are geographical accounts of how affectivity and objects shape subjectivity itself. Emphasising distinct correlational entanglements, and thereby opening them up to critique, is a method which is already being practiced successfully by critical phenomenologists in human geography (Kinkaid, 2020a, 2020b; Revill, 2016; Simonsen, 2013) and beyond (Mattingly, 2019; Weiss et al., 2019). Drawing on the work of past and contemporary phenomenologists, Hannah has recently developed a phenomenological account of *embodied directedness*, redressing ‘a characteristic lacuna of much socio-spatial theory and philosophy’ (Hannah, 2019: 87).

In my view, Fial’s *spatial phenomenology* holds particular promise for geography, renewing a spatial understanding of geography as ‘chorology’ (Sauer, 1925: 20). In spatial phenomenology, space no longer only describes the ‘subjective’ space of lived experience, nor ‘objective’ extended Cartesian space, but rather the very way subject and object cohere in experience. What may at first seem like a

fantastically abstract approach promises unique insights into the nature of landscape (following Wylie, 2006), weather (following Ingold, 2005, 2007, 2010; Hepach, 2017) or climate (following Hulme, 2017; Johnson, 2019), accounting for each of these phenomena as neither subjective nor objective, but rather as cohering our experience and existence in distinct ways. With the help of spatial phenomenology, one may grasp how we are entangled in various ‘elemental milieu[s]’ (McCormack, 2018: 20), and what far-reaching existential consequences we might expect from changes in these milieus in the face of climate or other environmental change. Through the lens of entangled phenomenologies, such changes spell a shift in the very comprehensibility of our world. In short, the promise of phenomenology for human geography lies in bringing to light the entangled nature of experience and existence at a decisive moment.

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ORCID iD

Maximilian Gregor Hepach  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7180-2754>

Notes

1. Throughout this article, I follow the assessment of both Ash and Simpson (2016) and Kinkaid (2020a) that although post-phenomenology is still an ‘emerging paradigm that, as of yet, admittedly lacks coherence and a stable reference point’ (Kinkaid, 2020a: 2), the heterogeneous approaches to post-phenomenology nonetheless coincide in their critique of central phenomenological concepts, such as intentionality (Harrison, 2008: 430; Lea, 2009: 375; Roberts, 2019: 545–546; Rossetto, 2019: 131; Wylie, 2006: 525).
2. Pathor [Patheur] is a technical term introduced by Hasse to describe a certain form of subjectivity. Whereas an actor is defined by their ability to be proactive, a pathor is defined by their *inability* to be proactive. Instead of acting, a pathor (from the Ancient Greek *pathos*) passively experiences or suffers through events.
3. This account of moods bridges the gap between two different understandings of affect identified by Ben Anderson. On the one hand, moods are similar to affects understood ‘as intensive “capacities to affect and be affected”’ (Anderson, 2016: 735; see also McCormack, 2003). On the other hand, they resemble the ‘ways in which things become significant and relations are lived’, which Anderson identifies as the common characteristic of ‘pragmatic-contextual translations of the term “affect”’ (Anderson, 2016: 735, see also 2014).
4. I would like to thank one anonymous reviewer for suggesting I include Merleau-Ponty’s work in my account.
5. As Hannah (2019: 60–63) argues, phenomenological accounts of attention highlight that the way we become aware of both ‘internal’ thoughts and feelings and ‘external’ objects is best accounted for by describing how our objects of attention become *obtrusive* in such a way that they elicit a response from us, underscoring the primordial *passivity of attention* that calls into question once more the authoriality of subjectivity even ‘in its own home’. Subjectivity here is ‘characterised by “directional asymmetry”’, in that we ‘are constantly “open” to appeals, desires, impulses and solicitations [to the alluring, MH] from all directions, both internal and external, but largely only able to act in a sustained and deliberate way in a directionally limited fashion’ (Hannah, 2019: 2).
6. I would like to thank one anonymous reviewer for this insight.
7. Figal’s approach might be viewed as an alternative to the ‘lingering humanism’ (Ash and Simpson, 2016: 56)

in Merleau-Ponty’s late work on the concept of *flesh* – ‘an ongoing, ordinary, process of intertwining and separation’ (Anderson and Wylie, 2009: 324) ‘between’ subject and object –, which has received much attention across phenomenology and post-phenomenology (Kinkaid, 2020a; Simonsen, 2013; Wylie, 2006).

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Author biography

Maximilian Gregor Hepach is a PhD candidate at the Department of Geography, University of Cambridge. He works towards a better understanding of how we experience climate and its changes, drawing from different philosophical approaches, such as Ancient Philosophy, Japanese Philosophy, Phenomenology, and the Philosophy of Science. His other research interests include the Blue Humanities and Vegetal Epistemologies. He previously studied Philosophy in Vienna, Freiburg, and Stony Brook.