

Embodiment, Experience, Enculturation

A joint Philosophy conference between the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and the University of Exeter

May 13-14, 2024
University of Exeter, Streatham Campus

What is it to be embodied and enculturated? How do human bodies interact, experience each other, and “experience with” each other? How do we interact with technologies, and how are contemporary technologies transforming experience? How do embodied experiences change over time? How should scientists study embodiment, and what role do embodiment and action have in scientific understanding?

These are just some of the questions that this joint Philosophy conference between CUHK and Exeter will explore. Scholars with expertise in phenomenology, metaphysics, philosophy of science, embodied cognition, and more, will come together to compare a variety of philosophical approaches on the themes of embodiment, experience, and enculturation – from both Western and Eastern perspectives.

Program and abstracts can be found below.

Registration is free.

All talks are in-person, but a Zoom link will be emailed to those who register for online attendance.

All in-person attendees are invited to all coffee breaks (on both days), and to buffet lunch on May 14 in Byrne house. (Lunch on May 13, and both dinners, are for speakers only).

Please note the **different venues** for the two days.

May 13

Venue: Queen's Building, MR2/3

9.00-9.30 Coffee and Welcome

9.30-10.15 Chong Fuk Lau *On the preconditions for disembodiment*

10.15-11.00 Nick Rimell *New animalism*

11-11.20 Coffee break

11.20-12.05 Luna Dolezal *Striving for presence on a hospital ward: considering phenomenology and re-embodiment for a nurse-operated telepresence robot*

12.05-12.50 Saulius Geniusas *Musical works as embodied and encultured idealities: Husserl, Ingarden, Celibidache*

12.50-14.00 Lunch break (lunch provided for speakers only)

Graduate student session:

14.00-14.35 Agn  Vesait  *–Embodied Language of Play: Conversing through movement in the Zhuangzi and Gadamer*

14.35-15.10 Beatrice Pagliarone *Toward a dialogical understanding of embodied subjectivity: insights from early development*

15.10-15.45 Yin, Xunwen, Simon *Accounting for the minimal “we”: on the priority between embedded enculturation and embodied second-personal encounter from a Husserlian perspective*

15.45-16.15 Coffee break

16.15-17.00 Tom Roberts *Imaginary friends: AI as self-involving interactive fiction*

17.00-17.45 Joel Krueger *Tell me how I feel: emotions and "AI extenders"*

18.45 Dinner (speakers only)

May 14

Venue: Byrne House seminar room

9.30-10.15 **Rose Trappes** - *What is behaviour? Mapping epistemic pluralism in research on behaviour*

10.15-11.00 **Kirsten Walsh** *Let others try the experiment, and judge: The role of enactment in early modern experimental philosophy*

11-11.20 *Coffee break*

11.20-12.05 **Ed Skidelsky** *How sodomites became gay: a study in historical phenomenology*

12.05-12.50 **Yao Zhihua** *Body, Mind, and Consciousness: Comparative Reflections*

12.50-14.00 *Lunch break (buffet lunch in Byrne House; all invited)*

Graduate student session:

14.00-14.35 **Tam Ka Yu Jacqueline** *The “tacit” tacit cogito in flesh*

14.35-15.10 **Juan Diego Bogotá** *The phenomenology of shared imaginative worlds: the case of Dungeons & Dragons*

15.10-15.30 *Coffee break*

15.30-16.15 **Lo Tien-Chun** *Externalism and Ockhamism*

16.15-17.00 **Kate Townsend** *The embodied child: becoming autistic in British schools*

17.00-17.15 *Closing words*

18.15 *Dinner (speakers only)*

ABSTRACTS

Agné Veisaitė (CUHK)

Embodied language of play: conversing through movement in the Zhuangzi and Gadamer

Daological encounters with human and non-human participants often appear through the language of play in the *Zhuangzi*. Even though Zhuangzi does not address play directly, the concept of “free and easy wandering” *xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙遊 is especially important. I look at the notions of *you* 遊 (wander, play) and *le* 樂, since *le* may also be understood as a “pleasant *activity* – leisure or playful behavior” (Hansen 56). I also introduce Zhuangzi’s notion of mirroring *jing* 鏡 as an essential concept for reflecting and responding to the counter-player. The play happens through “non-storing” and reflective experiences that allow us to arrive at a more encompassing understanding at large. Since Zhuangzi does not explicitly define playful engagements, I use Gadamer’s understanding of play as strongly overlapping with the Zhuangzian framework. For both Zhuangzi and Gadamer, a genuine dialogue of play consists of wandering and insight realization that cannot be achieved in isolation. The dialogical counterpart is a vehicle and instigator for transitoriness into more fruitful ways of becoming. Playing is not merely an imitation (*mimesis*) but a process of “bringing forth” and of being transformed by it. I argue that Zhuangzi and Gadamer’s notions of play are dialogical yet largely grounded in movement – the body itself. Since play is conversational and nevertheless rooted in bodily motions, it affords a broader spectrum of speech – we do not need to share a verbal language to enter play. Transformative play is embedded in the *bodily* mode of conversing, which affords a genuine dialogue with both – fellow humans and non-human others.

Beatrice Pagliarone (Exeter)

Toward a dialogical understanding of embodied subjectivity: insights from early development

In this presentation, I argue that a genuine consideration of human embodied development requires us to acknowledge the inherent relational nature of subjectivity. Through the lens of Stawarska’s dialogical phenomenology, I offer an alternative framework to mainstream individualistic accounts of selfhood that prioritize the disembodied individual subject and the first-person perspective. In the light of developmental literature, I instead defend the equi-primordiality and co-constitution of the first- and second-person, recognizing the central role of intersubjectivity and incorporeality in shaping the fundamental architecture of human subjectivity. The proposed dialogical framework serves as a promising middle ground between deflationary and individualistic accounts of minimal selfhood, and more demanding social constructivist and narrative accounts of selfhood. By pairing this alternative theoretical framework with the literature on prenatal development and early infancy, I argue that even the most rudimentary forms of self-experience are grounded in our embodied relation to another.

Chong-Fuk Lau (CUHK)

On the preconditions for disembodiment

While Cartesian mind-body dualism has largely been set aside in modern philosophical discourse, the notion that consciousness might exist as a non-spatial, disembodied entity persists. This paper delves into arguments against the possibility of a disembodied mind as presented by thinkers such as Kant and Strawson. It posits that while the idea of a disembodied mind may seem logically coherent, it actually emerges from a more foundational notion that presupposes an original unity between mind and body—a unity embodied in the concept of a person. This primary unity of mind and body is logically antecedent to the idea of the mind as a disembodied entity. Therefore, the feasibility of a disembodied mind ultimately hinges on the presupposed existence of a physical and spatial world.

Ed Skidelsky (Exeter)

How sodomites became gay: a study in historical phenomenology

There's a debate among historians of sexuality between those who, following Foucault, think that the eighteenth century saw the birth of a distinctively "gay" identity, and those who think that gay people have always existed, and that the eighteenth century differed only in paying them more attention, usually of a hostile sort.

In this talk, I will suggest that same-sex attracted people have probably always existed, but that the perception of them as a distinct sub-category of humanity ("mollies" etc.) was an innovation of the eighteenth century. So this was fundamentally a shift in perception, not fact. But perception and fact are not always clearly distinct, at least where human existence is concerned. Many gay men embraced the perception of themselves as mollies, cultivating, whether in submission or defiance, the style we call "camp". They learnt "how to be gay", as historian David Halperin has put it – learnt, that is, how to be a class *for* themselves as opposed to just *in* themselves.

Joel Krueger (Exeter)

Tell me how I feel: emotions and "AI extenders"

For proponents of the extended mind thesis (ExM), much of our mental life happens outside our head. We rely so deeply on different tools and technologies like notebooks, maps, computers, and smartphones that these beyond-the-head resources become part of our minds. In recent years, some ExM proponents have considered the way emotions might similarly extend — as well as why this matters for topics like the creation and experience of art or the development and treatment of mental disorders. In this paper, I contribute to ongoing discussions of extended emotions. But I do so by investigating a fast-moving topic that has only recently begun to receive more attention: the relation between emotions and artificial systems.

More precisely, I consider the relation between emotions and (current and future) “AI extenders” (Vold and Hernández-Orallo (2021)). AI extenders — unlike cognitive tools such as notebooks and calculators — are not static resources. They are devices, wearables, and apps fuelled by AI (e.g., deep neural networks, large language models) and can implement kinds of cognitive processes on their own. Importantly, they have a kind of autonomy and agency. I argue that AI extenders can similarly extend our emotions. This is because emotions are complex processes composed of multiple dimensions — including evaluative, neurophysiological, motivational, expressive, and experiential aspects — and AI extenders potential target all these dimensions. I sketch some ways how so while also clarifying how the dynamics of AI-extended emotions will differ from those of AI-extended cognition. I conclude by highlighting some important ethical considerations worthy of further attention, including issues surrounding responsibility and trust, interference and control, and addiction and over-reliance.

Juan Diego Bogotá (Exeter)

The phenomenology of shared imaginative worlds: the case of Dungeons & Dragons

Social imagination is a common occurrence in our everyday life: children imagine things *together* when playing games of make-believe, architects imagine *together* how a building may take shape, etc. It is thus surprising social imagination has received little attention in the philosophical literature. Following Kendall Walton, I take social imagination to involve a group of people (1) imagining something together, (2) being aware that they are doing so, and (3) committing to do so. The latter two conditions have been analysed by Julia Jansen and Thomas Szanto, drawing, respectively, from phenomenology and philosophical views on collective intentionality. I argue, however, that their views fall short when it comes to condition (1). I use the example of the popular table-top role-playing game ‘Dungeons & Dragons’ (D&D) to develop a phenomenological approach to the question of how a group of people can imagine the same objects together. I argue that, as illustrated by D&D, social imagination may involve the intersubjective co-constitution (and thus, co-experiencing) of a shared imaginative world when the freedom characteristic of the phenomenology of imagination is limited, mirroring some of the constraints characteristic of the phenomenology of perception. In such cases, one may come to incorporate an imagined self whose (quasi-)perceptual horizon is partly shaped by the imaginative resources of other people. Jointly, a group of people can then co-(quasi-)perceive that imaginative world.

Kate Goldie Townsend (Exeter)

The embodied child; becoming autistic in British schools

British children are being diagnosed with autism at an astonishing rate. This may be due to an improved understanding of what autism is and how it manifests differently between people, across genders (for instance). It may be due to an increasingly narrow understanding of what counts as normal behaviour and learning performance in British schools. Perhaps it’s due to both. Building on Joanne Limburg’s analysis of the emergence

of standardised testing in Victorian England and the impact this had on cultural understandings of autism, I will explore the recent explosion in autism diagnoses amongst children in relation to their embodied experience in a rigidly neuro-normative learning context.

Kirsten Walsh (Exeter)

Let others try the experiment, and judge: the role of enactment in early modern experimental philosophy

In 1672, Sir Isaac Newton published a paper reporting the discovery of a new optical phenomenon which had led him to discover the true composition of white light. His new theory of light, however, was challenged by the Jesuits of Liège, who argued that Newton hadn't discovered a new phenomenon at all. The debate turned on the outcome of a deceptively simple experiment: in a darkened room, use a triangular prism to project a small beam of sunlight onto a distant screen. When Newton conducted this experiment, he produced an image that was five times longer than it was wide, transverse to the axis of the prism and circular at the long ends—a surprising result, if the prism was positioned such that the two refractions were equal. The Jesuits, however, were unable to reproduce this result. Newton's response was to facilitate enactment of the experiment—enactment was the key to grasping the phenomenon and therefore accepting the new theory. Occurring at a time when modern science was just emerging, and epistemic standards and experimental procedures were in flux, this case, I argue, is revelatory of the interplay between the development of reliable experimental processes and the emergence of strong consensus among expert communities.

Lo Tien-chun (CUHK)

Externalism and Ockhamism

Ockhamists believe that God's foreknowledge is compatible with creaturely freedom. The aim of this talk is to defend Ockhamism from the challenge that God's (past) beliefs about creatures' actions in the future necessitate those actions and thereby undermine their freedom. In this talk, I suggest that Ockhamists can resist this argument by drawing on some externalist resources, including (i) the idea of extended mind, (ii) the potential influence of a mental state's causal history on its content, and (iii) the idea of semantic plasticity.

Luna Dolezal (Exeter)

Striving for presence on a hospital ward: phenomenology and re-embodiment for a nurse-operated telepresence robot

In this paper I consider Vålky, a full body teleoperated robot deployed in a hospital environment, which enables nursing care to be delivered to patients through a robot avatar.

I explore the phenomenological challenges and opportunities of nurse clinicians that were trained to provide robotic care at a distance. These reflections draw on qualitative research and critical reflections generated during a trial of Vålky in a hospital ward. I will explore various ways that nurses were ‘striving for presence’, attempting to close the gap between a technologically-mediated remote environment and their immediate field of perception and action, examining four modalities of embodied presence through a phenomenological analysis of these experiences: (i) presence enabled by technological transparency, where a remote environment is experienced as immediately present without the mediating technology ‘getting in the way’; (ii) presence enabled through skill acquisition, where clinician-operators strive to master technology in order to enable seamless motor-action in a remote environment; (iii) presence felt through affective, intercorporeal and social resonance, where interpersonal presence and relations of care are transmitted through the robot avatar; and (iv) presence enabled through recognition, where nurses strive to have their social and human existence affirmed while operating the robot.

Nicholas Rimell (CUHK)

New animalism

Old animalism says that we are fundamentally and essentially animals (so, not essentially persons) and that we have brute-physical (rather than psychological) persistence conditions. New animalism affirms that we are animals but denies at least some of old animalism’s modal or criterial claims. Adopting new animalism allows us to say that we are animals who, in cerebrum transplants, go with our cerebra. But almost nobody says this. Those who do say this also say one of two things about how we persist: they say either (i) that there is no informative necessary and sufficient criterion for our persistence, or (ii) that it is sufficient for our persistence that we stand in *either* biological *or* psychological continuity relations. In this paper, I consider which (if any) varieties of new animalism both allow us to say that we are animals who go with our cerebra and are independently plausible. I argue that no extant version of new animalism meets both desiderata, and that this is because no extant version of new animalism distances itself enough from old animalism. I then develop and defend, as a promising alternative, a version of new animalism according to which psychological continuity is both necessary and sufficient for our persistence.

Rose Trappes (Exeter)

What is behaviour? Mapping epistemic pluralism in research on behaviour

Behaviour is a key object of scientific research. But what exactly is behaviour, and how should researchers conceptualise and study it? One of the few philosophers of science to address this question is Helen Longino. Longino distinguishes three main approaches to conceptualising and studying behaviour: the individual-level approach, interactionism, and the population approach. She argues for epistemic pluralism, such that the scientific community should pursue all three approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of behaviour. I develop a framework for mapping this pluralism. On one dimension, the three

approaches Longino identifies can be distinguished in terms of the scale of the focal entity, from individuals through small groups to populations. On another dimension, the approaches differ in whether they consider behaviour as a property or as an event or process. This framework reveals overlaps and gaps in the epistemic landscape, thereby improving our understanding of pluralism about behaviour.

Saulius Geniusas (CUHK)

Musical works as embodied and encultured idealities: Husserl, Ingarden, Celibidache

In light of recent phenomenological and hermeneutical studies, I will engage anew in the classical phenomenological controversy over the ideal status of musical works. I will argue that musical works are embodied and encultured idealities. I will maintain that the listener's capacity to apperceive physical sounds as musical melodies, which can be repeatedly and intersubjectively experienced, accounts for the ideality of musical works. Conceived of as embodied and encultured idealities, musical works 1) are bound to the acts that sustain them; 2) do not have retroactive validity; 3) are inseparable from their reproductions; 4) are modified by the performances.

Tam Ka Yu Jacqueline (CUHK)

The "tacit" tacit cogito in flesh

In *Phenomenology of Perception (PhP)*, Merleau-Ponty proposes a distinction between spoken cogito and tacit cogito, which forms a two-layered view of subjectivity. Embodied and connected with the world, tacit cogito lies at the core of the subject that grounds language and thought. In his later texts, Merleau-Ponty recognizes a need to bring the results of *PhP* to an ontological explicitation. He often critiques his analysis in *PhP* as hinging too much on classical concepts such as subjectivity, consciousness and synthesis. In particular, he finds tacit cogito "impossible", as it does not explain "the passage from the perceptual meaning to the language meaning, from behaviour to thematization". It remains to be resolved how language and thought relates to our embodied perceptual experience.

Moving further away from a philosophy of subjectivity, Merleau-Ponty's ontology of flesh attempts to dissolve the subject-object and the consciousness-world dichotomies. Flesh is the primordial structure of the world where self, others and the world are all caught up and intertwined. It is an inner framework, with intersections of different dimensions or fields. Flesh is characterized by reversibility and divergence. The lived body has a relation to itself as it carries both activity and passivity. The touching self and the self being touched are connected and mirror each other, yet they are never exactly the same. There always exists an interval between them. Such distance, which is a negativity, is what connects the agent and recipient as well as where their meaning originates. Likewise, this reversibility and divergence in the body's self-relation can explain the relation among the body and all other things, including thought.

Is tacit cogito an abandoned concept in the ontology of flesh, only doomed to criticism? I argue against this point of view. In my current work, I propose two readings that support the connection between tacit cogito and flesh. First, the concept of flesh is a continuity and expansion of the early proposal of tacit cogito. Tacit cogito already points to a universality, a contact between the body and the world as the foundational layer of Being. And the concepts of intertwinement and field can already be seen in its description. Second, I argue that tacit cogito still has its place and importance in flesh. Integrated with the new ontological concepts of reversibility and verticality, it becomes part of the negativity, the “invisible”, that contributes to the thickness of flesh. The extent to which tacit cogito understood in this new framework can explain the transition from perceptual meaning to linguistic meaning will be investigated.

Tom Roberts (Exeter)

Imaginary friends: AI as self-involving interactive fiction

I explain and defend a fictionalist view of the “minds” of artificially intelligent systems. When we interact with conversational AI, such as *ChatGPT* or *Replika*, we make-believe that we are talking to an agent with concerned perspective of its own. AI agents, on this view, are fictional characters who participate in fictional events and fictional dialogue. The fictions are unlike those found in traditional media, such as literature and film, however, in being *interactive*, *self-involving*, and set *in the real world*.

Yin, Xunwen Simon (CUHK)

Accounting for the minimal “we”: on the priority between embedded enculturation and embodied second-personal encounter from a Husserlian perspective

This paper addresses a debate over how to understand the foundation of human community or “we-intentionality”, i.e., whether it is the embodied second-personal encounter between individuals or it is the embeddedness within a particular cultural and historical background that is more fundamental (Ko, 2015). Inspired by Husserl, Zahavi (2019) argues that embodied second-personal encounter should be prioritized, for to have a minimal sense of “we”, i.e., a sense of “one among the others”, requires one to transcend one’s innate first-personal perspective (Zahavi, 2022), and this is initially achieved by taking on another subject’s perspective upon himself communicated through second-personal encounter. Contra Zahavi, I would like to argue that according to Husserlian phenomenology (Husserl, 1989, 2012, 2013), embodiment provides a cognitively less demanding (Rochat, 2003) and more primitive way of transcending the minimal self without presupposing second-personal encounter, which is passive association on the basis of observed similarities. Furthermore, by shaping bodily and cognitive habitualities, the cultural and historical dimensions also penetrate into the realm of passive association. This further strengthens the thesis that embeddedness within a cultural background is more fundamental, for this background resides at a deeper layer of passivity lying beneath any egoic activities required for second-personal encounter.

Zhihua Yao (CUHK)

Body, mind, and consciousness: comparative reflections

In the last few decades, the study of mind and consciousness has become a very lively field of contemporary philosophy. It has even developed into an interdisciplinary science of mind or consciousness. Buddhism is one of the few religious and spiritual traditions that have actively engaged in this field. Francisco Varela (1946-2001), who coined the term “neurophenomenology,” also initiated the ongoing dialogue between Buddhism and the science of mind and consciousness. The results of these dialogues have become the most creative and theoretically significant aspect of contemporary Buddhist studies.

In the present paper, I will reflect on the Buddhist approach to body, mind and consciousness against the backdrop of contemporary theories of mind and consciousness. I will proceed in three sections. First, I will interpret the Buddhist doctrine of no-self as the denial of independent spiritual entity. Then I will examine the material basis of mind and consciousness from a Buddhist point of view. Finally, I will discuss the possible Buddhist contributions to the contemporary exploration of the mystery of consciousness.