

An aerial, high-angle photograph of a city street, likely in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The street is wide and paved, with a river flowing alongside it. Buildings line the street, and there are some trees and greenery visible. The image is in black and white, with a slightly grainy texture.

International Conference

ON THE TRACES OF TOGETHERNESS

**PHENOMENOLOGY OF SOCIALITY
IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE**

May 30–31, 2024

City Hotel, Dalmatinova ulica 15
Ljubljana, Slovenia

ABSTRACTS

International Conference

**ON THE TRACES
OF TOGETHERNESS**

**PHENOMENOLOGY OF SOCIALITY
IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE**

Andrej Božič (*Ed.*)

ABSTRACTS

Ljubljana 2024

The Institute Nova Revija for the Humanities organizes the conference as part of the effectuation of the research program *The Humanities and the Sense of Humanity from Historical and Contemporary Viewpoints* (P6-0341), the research project *The Hermeneutic Problem of the Understanding of Human Existence and Coexistence in the Epoch of Nihilism* (J7-4631), and the infrastructure program *Center for the Promotion of the Humanities* (I0-0036), which are financially supported by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS).

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THE PROGRAM OF THE CONFERENCE

THURSDAY, MAY 30, 2024

13.00 *Lunch*

15.00–15.30 **The Opening of the Conference**

Tomaž Zalaznik (INR)

Cristian Ciocan (CEESP)

Andrej Božič (INR)

15.30–17.00 **Lectures**

Witold Płotka

4 **Phenomenology and Community. Reimagining the
Phenomenological Movement**

*Fenomenologija in skupnostnost. Preosmislitev fenomenološkega
gibanja*

Jaroslava Vydrová

Phenomenology in Central Europe and Action Art

Fenomenologija v Srednji Evropi in akcijska umetnost

Dean Komel

Philosophy, the Humanities, and Social Criticism in Slovenia

Filozofija, humanistika in družbena kritika v Sloveniji

17.00–17.30 *Coffee Break*

17.30–19.00 Lectures

Uldis Vēgners

From Objectification to Re-Subjectification. The Embodied Perspective on Autonomy in Vaccine Hesitancy

Od objektivizacije do re-subjektivizacije. Utelešanjski pogled na avtonomijo pri nasprotovanju cepljenju

Luka Trebežnik

Communal Existence and the Sacred

Skupna eksistenca in sveto

Dragan Prole

Community Ending Phenomenologically Explained

Konec skupnosti, fenomenološko razjasnjen

19.30 Dinner

FRIDAY, MAY 31, 2024

13.00 *Lunch*

15.00–16.00 **Lectures**

Cristian Ciocan

Testimony as a Trace of Togetherness

Pričanje kot sled skupnosti

Manca Erzetič

**Testimony in the Epic Narrative and Its Importance for
Understanding the Human Coexistence. On the Epic Poem *The
Doors of No Return* (2015–2017) by Boris A. Novak**

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*Pričevanje v epski pripovedi in njen pomen za razumevanje
človeškega sobivanja. Ob epski pesnitvi Borisa A. Novaka Vrata
nepovrata (2015–2017)*

16.00–16.30 *Coffee Break*

16.30–17.30 **Lectures**

Marco Russo

**A Broad-Minded Way of Thinking. Cosmological Perspectives
in Kantian Cosmopolitanism**

*Širokosrčen način mišljenja. Kozmološke perspektive kantovskega
kozmpolitizma*

Andrej Božič

The Inter-Vocality of the Social

Medglasje družbenega

7

17.30-18.00 *Coffee Break*

18.00–19.30 **Concluding Discussion**

PHENOMENOLOGY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE TODAY
[FENOMENOLOGIJA V SREDNJI IN VZHODNI EVROPI DANES]

Presentation of the monograph:

Andrej Božič (*Ed.*)

Thinking Togetherness. Phenomenology and Sociality

(Ljubljana: Institute Nova revija for the Humanities, 2023.)

20.00 *Dinner*

PROGRAMMATIC OUTLINE

ON THE TRACES OF TOGETHERNESS

PHENOMENOLOGY OF SOCIALITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

On the occasion of the publication of the scientific monograph entitled *Thinking Togetherness. Phenomenology and Sociality* (ed. by A. Božič), representing a comprehensive collective effort, within which 32 scholars from different countries interpret various fundamental aspects of the phenomenological approach to the question of the social dimension of human co-existence in the world, the Institute Nova Revija for the Humanities organizes an international conference dedicated to the elucidation of the phenomenology of sociality in Central and Eastern Europe.

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Phenomenology has since its commencement at the dawn of the 20th century evolved into one of the central and vivacious philosophical movements that integrally entails the discussion of sociality. The foundational work of E. Husserl was carried onwards and additionally advanced by his students and their successors. If Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity stands at the heart—and at the crossroads where paths converge or diverge—of the phenomenological disputations concerning the problematic of the social, its heritors, among whom one can designate a plentitude of independent thinkers, such as M. Heidegger, E. Fink, G. Walther, A. Schütz, H. Arendt, and many others, often contested it with critically accentuated reflections. Through the endeavors of the latter, phenomenological thought quite early began to gradually exert its influence also within the philosophical circles of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where it has, at least to a certain degree, found one of its academic domiciles. Today, especially the Central and East European Society for Phenomenology (CEESP) seeks to gather, with its activities, the scholars affiliated to the field of phenomenology into a mutually supportive community. In 2021, the annual meeting of the CEESP was organized as an online event by the Institute Nova Revija

for the Humanities: its thematic focus on the relation between phenomenology and sociality formulated the basis for the book *Thinking Togetherness*.

The international conference, at which several representatives and active members of the CEESP will present their contributions, would like to offer the opportunity, on the one hand, to encourage the profound scrutiny of further facets of the already accomplished phenomenological conceptualizations of the social as well as, on the other hand, to enhance from different stances the knowledge regarding their multilayered resonances within the historical and the contemporary development of philosophy in Central and Eastern Europe. If the theoretical contemplation upon the problems of sociality assumes a dis-position of crucial importance within phenomenology, it has, as numerous (personal and professional) destinies of personalities appertaining to the movement testify, likewise lead phenomenology through—at times paradoxically contrary—dis-engagement to conflicts within the practical effectuation of sociality: as humanity itself, the phenomenological thinking had—and still needs?—to endure (the consequences of) the catastrophic cataclysms and the turbulent perturbations of the 20th century.

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Whilst within the first quarter of the 21st century phenomenology—both globally as well as in the whole of Europe—occupies a (more or less) consolidated (and—less or more—respected) place within the purportedly autonomous, self-sufficient sphere of the academic world (of the humanities), the challenges of all the heterogenous—military and medical, ecologic and economic, etc.—crises, with which humanity today is confronted, maybe, once more, require a (new? renewed?) re-consideration of the question what co-constitutes the human as a social being, a being of togetherness. How can phenomenological philosophy, also in Central and Eastern Europe, contribute to the conversation about the traces (of the primordial experience? of the basic evidence?) of the inter-human in-between within society today? How will—and does?—*it*, how do—and will?—*we* respond?

THE INTER-VOCALITY OF THE SOCIAL

The presentation attempts to—in a cursory, preliminary manner—outline the significance of voice as one of the fundamental dimensions of human(e) dwelling in the world for, and within, the constitution of sociality. The phenomenon of vocality, of coming-to-voice, can be considered not only in its originary verbality, but, precisely as such, acquires also multifarious figurative meanings, entailing the aspect of the political. How—if at all—does the inter-weaving of voices within the inter-personal encounter with the other, which necessarily likewise re-calls the self as yet another other, actively contribute to the experience of the social, its “bond”? How—if at all—does it, within the conditions and the circumstances of the contemporary, techno-scientifically trans-formed world, let itself be heard today?

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TESTIMONY AS A TRACE OF TOGETHERNESS

In the talk, I will explore the phenomenon of togetherness, starting from one of its possible traces, namely the testimony. Bearing witness is only the last phase of a more encompassing phenomenon understood as a process passing through several structural moments: the becoming-witness as a witness-presence in front of a disturbing event, the rumination of the self in relation with oneself, and the self-affirmation of the witness-speech before others. The subject is instituted as a witness, and it passively endures this institution, which radically modifies its way of being. Torn from the preoccupation specific to everyday concerns, the self still finds oneself cut off from the common world, hovering between the already lost “common world” (*Mitwelt*) and not yet found world of one’s own (*Selbstwelt*). Before being able to bear witness in front of others, the witness must above all bear witness *to oneself* regarding the event s/he went through, and must first enter into a proto-dialogue with oneself. In the phase of rumination, the relation to the others is privatively marked by loneliness, since encountering others can take place only in the next phase of the experience, with the passing from rumination into discourse. In this last phase, the self-projection of the witness upon the others opens the possibility of re-constituting a common world, a possible new “togetherness,” a world, to which the witness can belong once again.

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Prof. Dr. **Cristian Ciocan** is a member of the Doctoral School in Philosophy of the University of Bucharest and senior scientific researcher at the Institute for Research in the Humanities of the University of Bucharest (Bucharest, Romania). Currently, he is the president of the Central and East European Society for Phenomenology (CEESP).

Manca Erzetič

**TESTIMONY IN THE EPIC NARRATIVE AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR
UNDERSTANDING THE HUMAN COEXISTENCE**

ON THE EPIC POEM *THE DOORS OF NO RETURN* (2015–2017)

BY BORIS A. NOVAK

12 The lecture initially refers to the article “The Hermeneutics of Testimony in the Context of Social Mediation” published in the monograph *Thinking Togetherness. Phenomenology and Sociality* (ed. by A. Božič), which addresses the problem of conceptualizing testimony in its social context. The focus of the presentation relates to the specific case of testimony in the epic narrative, especially the recently published epic poem *The Doors of No Return* (trilogy; 2015–2017; selected fragments in English translation 2022) by the Slovenian poet, playwright, professor of comparative literature, editor, chairman of the Writers for Peace committee of PEN International (1990–1999), social activist, and member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts Boris. A. Novak. The key supposition of the contribution is that the structure of the epic narrative displays a special significance for the constitution of community, which is probably the main reason why Novak uses it in his attempt to reconstruct human coexistence in the historical, cultural, social, and familial contexts defined by the historical conditions of the 20th century. In conclusion, I shall present the main aesthetic and hermeneutic aspects of testimony as offered by the poetic work as well as its ethical and social implications.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. **Manca Erzetič** is research fellow at the Institute Nova Revija for the Humanities (Ljubljana, Slovenia) and lecturer at the Faculty of Slovenian and International Studies of the New University (Ljubljana, Slovenia).

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Dean Komel

PHILOSOPHY, THE HUMANITIES, AND SOCIAL CRITICISM IN SLOVENIA

In the three decades since Slovenia became an independent state and subsequently a member of the European Union, its political, economic, social, legal, cultural, educational, scientific, and media domains have undergone an intensive restructuring that has been accompanied by numerous conflicts of interest, emanating from various important centers of power within the society. This has had a profound effect on the shape of the public intellectual debate, which should not be taking place in service to those centers of power, but should rather be bound to make sense of social dynamics in the age following the “end of ideology.” What now remains relevant in the way of “ideas,” “spirit,” “form,” “freedom,” “justice,” “meaning,” as well as expressiveness of the *inter-esse* of human existence and coexistence is undoubtedly a question that has marked both the perspectives as well as the horizons of such discussions.

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Prof. Dr. **Dean Komel** is professor at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana (Ljubljana, Slovenia) and head of research activities at the Institute Nova Revija for the Humanities (Ljubljana, Slovenia).

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PHENOMENOLOGY AND COMMUNITY

REIMAGINING THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL MOVEMENT

14 The paper deals with a metaphilosophical topic, i.e., the question of how should we understand some essential features of the phenomenological movement. I attempt to show that within Edmund Husserl's phenomenology there is a significant tension between the call for rigorous examination and a belief that we, as human beings, are fallible. For this very reason, one has to overcome the limits of individual, privileged experiences, and discuss the results we achieve within a communal effort that characterizes the phenomenological movement as a whole. The paper shows that a solitary perspective needs to be overcome. In this regard, I refer not only to Husserl, but to Eugen Fink as well. Additionally, the paper refers to the ideas of *philosophia perennis* and of co-philosophizing. A further aim of my paper is to contextualize the concept of the phenomenological movement within the Central and Eastern Europe.

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Dragan Prole

COMMUNITY ENDING PHENOMENOLOGICALLY EXPLAINED

Amidst the various possibilities of communal existence, its ultimate possibility points towards negation, towards the cessation of togetherness. By this, we do not mean to suggest that the termination of community constitutes its essence, but rather that the essence of community phenomenologically cannot be grasped, if this ultimate possibility is omitted. The manner and character of a community's dissolution, in any case, provide us with an eloquent testimony of the specific form of community beyond mere natural existence within it. While a natural stance, on the one hand, assumes the existence of some form of community and takes it for granted, a phenomenological assessment of disruptive threats to the community, on the other hand, yields multiple outcomes.

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Marco Russo

A BROAD-MINDED WAY OF THINKING

COSMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES IN KANTIAN COSMOPOLITANISM

16 Kantian cosmopolitanism—the idea of a peaceful universal society—is usually read in the purely ethical-political key. I intend to show that cosmopolitanism has a cosmological background. The advantage of this reading is to give more substance to the notion of the world: earth, sky, and human history considered in one complex unity. On this basis, we can even assume that the earth becomes a subject of moral obligation. In the first part, I show how Kant deconstructs the traditional notion of the cosmos, by replacing it with the idea of *a world in progress*. I then show that the anthropological-pragmatic world is the earth as the geo-historical reality of human praxis. Here, the cosmopolitan project can be developed as an attempt to intentionally overcome the phenomenal–noumenal duality, relocating the earth in the broader universe. Of this project, I only consider the pedagogical-moral aspect, in order to highlight the transition from the factual world (an aggregate of parts) to the world as a universal community (a coordinated whole of parts). Finally, I sketch out how one can interpret the originally theological and teleological framework of this transition in the cosmological sense: God’s finalistic kingdom could be the world itself, which becomes the ultimate cosmopolitan subject of political projects and ethical obligations.

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COMMUNAL EXISTENCE AND THE SACRED

Today, when it is obvious that the communal perspective of life is in deep crisis in the face of unbridled individualist ideologies, we must return to the most fundamental condition of our existence, which is essentially characterized by communality. Every emergence of the world is always already being-shared, says Jean-Luc Nancy; this fundamental fact of our existence means that every appearance is a co-appearance. To explain this thesis in more detail, we need to distinguish between two aspects of communication. On the one hand, there is primarily the linguistic aspect, which ensures the transmission of meaning, and, on the other hand, there are community-building gestures that can also take place outside of language. In the attempt to explicate Nancy's thesis, we will relate it to the insights of Georges Bataille, who recognized that after the death of God, authentic community is only possible through a radical break with the everyday, only through excessive gestures of sacrifice and violence. At the most basic level, these can be understood as exclusionary gestures that always separate the community from its exterior. On a more concrete level, however, it is sacrificial violence that establishes the sacred, which holds the community together precisely through transgression.

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. **Luka Trebežnik** is research associate at the Institute for Philosophical and Religious Studies of the Science and Research Centre Koper (Koper, Slovenia) and lecturer at the Faculty of Humanistic Studies of the Alma Mater Europea (Ljubljana, Slovenia).

Uldis Vēgners

FROM OBJECTIFICATION TO RE-SUBJECTIFICATION

THE EMBODIED PERSPECTIVE ON AUTONOMY IN VACCINE HESITANCY

18 Vaccine-hesitant persons have been characterized as being irresponsible free-riders. However, by exploring the relationship between the phenomenological approach to agency and the concept of autonomy in the philosophy of medicine and bioethics, I want to argue not only that this is a reductive perspective to vaccine hesitancy, but that vaccine hesitancy in certain situations might be the only responsible response. I attempt to show that through their vaccine hesitancy people try to reassert their subjectivity and embodied agency as a response to the objectification threats by vaccination policy, pandemic management, and societal attitudes. Responsibility and ethical decision-making are possible if a person is autonomous. However, autonomy presupposes subjectivity as the bearer of all its “I cans.” Without it, a person cannot be asked to be responsible. As the experienced objectification threatens to destroy the very possibility of being a subjectivity and, by extension, an autonomous person, capable of making responsible, ethical decisions, asserting one’s subjectivity by opposing all that threatens to take it away, could be viewed as the ultimate embodied and ethical response.

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PHENOMENOLOGY IN CENTRAL EUROPE AND ACTION ART

The phenomenological movement in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe during communist regimes developed in a particular way, in the unofficial sphere, on the margins. It also penetrated into non-philosophical environments, which mutually influenced the thematic focus of the various disciplines as well as the ways, in which thinkers were associated, engaged, and performed. Therefore, in the first part of my paper, I will discuss the distinctive practice of phenomenologists. In the second part, I will focus on the art forms that accompanied phenomenology in the 1960s and 1970s, such as performances and happenings. In what ways were the artists' achievements close to phenomenology and how can this kind of art be interpreted phenomenologically? I will look for answers to these questions in the work of the phenomenologists and artists in 19
Czechoslovakia of this period.

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ON THE TRACES OF TOGETHERNESS

PHENOMENOLOGY OF SOCIALITY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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