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Introduction: Giving Room to Embodied Relationships

The special issue *Z(a)dziwienie ciałem—to Wonder (to Wander) in Corporeal Relationships* aims to contribute modestly and imaginatively to the recent wave of work around wonder. In some respects, too, it continues the short seminar “Discussing Wonder” published in *Studia Philosophica Wratislaviensia* vol. XV, no. 2 (2020). In the ancient Greek philosophical tradition, wonder helped philosophers make sense of the nature of their own inquiries and their striving for knowledge. This is the context in which Plato and Aristotle first discussed wonder (*thaumadzein*). The concept was reprised in a similar framework when Descartes and Spinoza laid foundations for modern philosophy, and Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt looked back to wonder when they tried to rethink the role of philosophy in the 20th century. These are only some significant points along the way of a concept with a varied and complex history.

In the current century, some publications offer historical overviews of wonder.¹ Others closely analyze the term itself,² while still others engage with existing accounts to develop novel approaches. The “Discussing Wonder” seminar gave an initial impression of the span of the contemporary debates about and around wonder. Contributors to that seminar included the co-editors of the current issue, Jeremy Bendik-Keymer and Urszula Lisowska, as well as Wojciech P. Małecki. Bendik-Keymer

¹ G. Lloyd, *Reclaiming Wonder: After the Sublime*, Edinburgh 2018.

² S. Vasalou, *Wonder: A Grammar*, Albany, NY 2015.

presented wonder as a mode of autonomous and accountable disagreement. Lisowska focused on wonder as a response to diverse forms of life, whereas Malecki adopted a critical approach to wonder informed by empirical research. Each of these interpretations moved far beyond the original focus on wonder as a tool for philosophy's self-understanding.

The focus of the current issue—wonder in corporeal relationships—has emerged at the intersection of the topics addressed by Bendik-Keymer and Lisowska in their respective papers in the “Discussing Wonder” seminar. Two points of reference stand out as particularly important for the general idea of the collection. One of them is Luce Irigaray's essay on wonder from her book *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*.³ There, Irigaray rereads Descartes to present wonder as the openness to the irreducible difference of another person, including their sexual, that is—bodily, difference. Thus, for Irigaray wonder contributes to corporeal relationships such that bodies relate to each other as different rather than despite their differences.⁴ The other coordinate is provided by Martha C. Nussbaum's discussion of wonder. For Nussbaum, wonder is an emotion that responds to the inherent, non-instrumental value of what—or whom—evokes it.⁵ Like Irigaray, Nussbaum thus links wonder to the radical openness to difference. But she goes on to add that what causes wonder is the perception of inner activity, the recognition that the wonder-inspiring being has a life of their own.⁶ In this way, Nussbaum moves beyond Irigaray's approach to emphasize that wonder answers to the diversity of all kinds of bodies, both human and other-than-human.

In the spirit of these two contemporary approaches, the articles in this issue ask if and how wonder can help us relate to otherness and are particularly (though not exclusively) interested in its bodily manifestations, taking into account both human and other-than-human beings. Moreover, relating to otherness also involves self-reflection, something that can be seen in the papers in this issue taking up the role of wonder in embracing one's own uncanniness.⁷

Some of the contributors to the issue have already published on wonder. Anders Schinkel is the author of the monograph on the educational importance of wonder.⁸ Jeremy Bendik-Keymer has extensively engaged with Nussbaum's approach en route to developing his own idea of wonder as the mind's positive anxiety (or excitement

³ L. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, transl. C. Burke & G. C. Gill, Ithaca 1993 (1984).

⁴ Cf. also M. La Caze, *Wonder & Generosity: Their Role in Ethics and Politics*, New York 2013 for the discussion of Irigaray's concept of wonder.

⁵ M.C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge 2001.

⁶ M.C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Cambridge–London 2007 (2006); M.C. Nussbaum, *Justice for Animals: Our Collective Responsibility*, New York–London–Toronto–Sydney–New Delhi 2023.

⁷ This should be remembered when considering Bonnie Mann's worry, in her criticism of Luce Irigaray's writing on wonder, about the potentially self-undermining effect of wonder on the wondering person (B. Mann, “Feminist Phenomenology and the Politics of Wonder,” *Avant* IX [2] (2018), pp. 43–61, doi: 10.26913/avant.2018.02).

⁸ A. Schinkel, *Wonder and Education: On the Educational Importance of Contemplative Wonder*, London–New York 2021. Cf. also K. Egan, A. Cant, G. Judson (eds.), *Wonder-Full Education: The Centrality of Wonder in Teaching and Learning Across the Curriculum*, New York–London 2014.

over sense and meaning).⁹ His account has further argued for wonder's political¹⁰ and environmental relevance.¹¹ Urszula Lisowska has also approached wonder as an environmental category, linking it to Hannah Arendt's concept of reflective judgment.¹² Other authors have not explicitly written about wonder before but have been working for some time in its vicinity. Brian Hisao Onishi, too, is in the process of writing a book about New Materialist wonder in dialogue with phenomenology.

There are a number of things that are stylistically distinctive about the issue. It is interdisciplinary, philosophical in a broad sense, not owned by the professional discipline of philosophy. While five of the authors—Jeremy Bendik-Keymer, Magdalena Hoły-Łuczaj, Urszula Lisowska, Brian Hisao Onishi, and Anders Schinkel—are trained in professional philosophy and teach as philosophy professors, Anders Schinkel is also on the faculty of education of his institution, Jeremy Bendik-Keymer has worked in a department of international studies, and Brian Hisao Onishi is part of an interdisciplinary humanities faculty. The remaining three authors of the issue include the anthropologists, Shannon Lee Dawdy and Zak Arrington, and the sociologist, Danielle Celermajer. Moreover, Shannon Lee Dawdy is a serious filmmaker, and Danielle Celermajer heads the Sydney Environment Institute, which is constituted in an interdisciplinary manner and has published a notable work of memoir and public reflection on the extinction crisis happening along with global warming. Among those trained in philosophy, Magdalena Hoły-Łuczaj and Urszula Lisowska were trained in Poland, Ander Schinkel in the Netherlands, and Brian Hisao Onishi and Jeremy Bendik-Keymer in the United States of America—the former from a strongly phenomenological program and the latter from a program known for its form of analytic moral philosophy and the depth of its history of philosophy. The wide range of backgrounds and approaches behind the work in this issue can be felt.

At the same time, the issue is strongly phenomenological or working with thinkers who have moved in and out of the phenomenological tradition. This raises a number of questions about the meaning and status of phenomenology that are not directly engaged in the issue but that should be noted here. The main matter concerns the critical limitations of phenomenology. These depend on everything from

⁹ Cf. Kierkegaard: “anxiety is freedom’s actuality as the possibility of possibility” (S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety: A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, transl. R. Thomte, Princeton 1980 (1844), p. 42). Cf. also V. Glaveanu, *Wonder: The Extraordinary Power of an Ordinary Experience*, London–New York 2020 on wonder and the exploration of possibilities.

¹⁰ J. Bendik-Keymer (with images by M. Morrison), *Nussbaum’s Politics of Wonder: How the Mind’s Original Joy is Revolutionary*, London–New York–Dublin 2023.

¹¹ J. Bendik-Keymer, “Beneficial Relations Between Species & The Moral Responsibility of Wondering,” *Environmental Politics* (2021), pp. 1–18 [online], doi: 10.1080/09644016.2020.1868818; “The Other Species Capability & The Power of Wonder,” *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 22 [3] (2021), p. 161, doi: 10.1080/19452829.2020.1869191, pp. 154–179; “The Reasonableness of Wonder,” *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 18 [3] (2017), pp. 337–355, doi: 10.1080/19452829.2017.1342385. Cf. also R. Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*, New York 1998 (1965) for a classic discussion of wonder in the environmental context.

¹² U. Lisowska, “Wonder and Politics in the Anthropocene: Beyond Curiosity and Reverence,” *Environmental Philosophy* 19 [2] (2022), pp. 269–287, doi: 10.5840/envirophil2022915120.

its particular forms of subjectivity to its transcendental aspirations, notwithstanding its complex fantasy of presenting as a rigorous methodology rather than a mere descriptive exercise. Phenomenology is also historically situated, as Sarah Ahmed so well explored,¹³ and its historical situation involves complicated questions of positionality in what might now be understood as the epistemology of coloniality. In other words, if this issue were an edited volume of book length, a section on the historicity of its aspirations and assumptions would be in order.

What is perhaps worth noting is that all of the pieces are rooted in broad struggles against domination, oppression, or the narrow normalization of important modes of being like being-toward-death, aging, or the experience of being in the world. In this regard, they provide one rooting for a larger and broader critique of normalization as a feature of historical assumptions and predispose readers to look for how the world could be otherwise. Thus, they might be said to contribute to the critical attitude that Foucauldians have long espoused, provided that we do not think of them as excluding a further historical genealogy of their positions and assumptions.

This critical attitude—a making of space around ideas and norms so that we can wander enough in them to become playful with them and possibly oppositional—is reinforced by the stylistic innovations of several of the pieces, which tacitly or explicitly challenge conventional academic norms. Of the clearly innovative formats, one paper is a piece of creative writing that mixes first-person prose poetry with aphorism involving theory. Written by Danielle Celermajer, whose book *Summertime: Reflections on a Vanishing Future*¹⁴ was nominated for one of Australia's highest literary awards, this piece, *Wondering Through Our Outlines*, takes up her work from her memoir and essay on omnicide and develops it in a manner that could sit alongside the late work of Roland Barthes. The result is artful to read, philosophy in a sense to which Nietzsche accustomed us through his literary styles. Or while *Stirred by Your Presence* by Jeremy Bendik-Keymer may present at times like condensed phenomenology, it nonetheless develops the rhetorical notion of a “strobe” drawing on that word's root, “to whirl.” The paper proceeds through strobe pulses of reflection combined with three absurd and eerie photographs that enact, somewhat ironically, the point of the piece. Readers may recall Jean-Luc Nancy's writing from *Birth to Presence*, but the reflection is as much grounded in Martha C. Nussbaum, Bernard Williams, and Charles Larmore's capacious analytic moral philosophy as it is in the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion and the spirit of Sarah Ahmed's enlivening of disorientation. Finally, Shannon Lee Dawdy and Zak Arrington carry on a dialogue together rather than writing a paper and explicitly describe their work as counter-normative in academic circles. The open-ended and almost tattered form of the discussion itself raises a formal point about what it takes to bring wondering into academic research. The authors discuss the ethnographic method and discoveries, a way of doing philosophy that is resolutely engaged with non-academics and their views. What does that method teach us about philosophizing with wonder?

¹³ S. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Orientations, Others*, Durham 2006.

¹⁴ Penguin Random House 2021.

Even in the more traditional academic papers, the authors reported stretching themselves and trying out something a bit different for each of them. *Others in My Aging (Confronting de Beauvoir, Malabou, and Heidegger to Make Sense of Aging)* by Magdalena Hoły-Łuczaj involves autobiographical reflection to center its core intuition around which it builds its argument drawing on Heidegger, Malabou, and de Beauvoir. “*You Shouldn’t Try to Be What You Can’t Be*”: *How Wonder Freed Embodied Agency* by Urszula Lisowska likewise reveals itself to be a discussion of the author’s own bodily condition. Brian Hisao Onishi’s paper, *The Wonder and the Terror of Getting Lost in “The Room,”* is part journaling combined with philosophical reflection on virtual reality and gaming. Finally, *Wondering Animals: Reflections on Human Exceptionality* by Anders Schinkel is the author’s first major paper on wonder and the biological broadly construed.

So, this special issue is deliberately a bit weird and at times painfully soulful. There is a larger point behind its conception that often makes it into the content of the studies themselves. We live in an age with a great deal of social alienation. The polycrisis of the past half-decade is with us: climate crisis, resurgent authoritarianism, xenophobia and racism, queerphobia around relationships, child-raising and gender, the pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine, and economic recession. But these crises overlay the still deep social alienation of the long unwinding of European imperialism and its entanglement with capitalism, neo-liberalism, extractivism, and ongoing settler colonialism (including coloniality). Good relationships need to be restored and, in many ways, created. Subject to the broader historical critique to which we have gestured in this introduction,¹⁵ we think wonder has a role to play in this larger social project. Wonder in the post-Kantian—not neo-Humean—tradition can be a settled cast of mind, not some flighty epiphany of emotion. Wonder can be steadied into the virtuous appreciation of the differences and singularities of others as autonomous people or even beings with forms of life of their own. Throughout the issue, wonder is considered as an active power, capable of breaking the entrenched patterns of domination, rather than itself being held captive by them. So, the essays in this issue work in their own weird ways to win back forms of soulfulness within our relationships with each other, other forms of life, our environments, and our materiality, beginning with our bodies and the metaphysical conditioning of our time as it passes through political economy. Soulfulness can only be authentic. In a world that is socially alienated, it takes strangeness to get there.

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¹⁵ With thanks to one of our reviewers for pressing us on this lacuna.

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