

SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL AND MENTAL DISORDERS IN POST-PANDEMIC TIMES

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Further Reflections on the Psychoanalytic Sources of *The World is Gone*: Philosophy in Light of the Pandemic (2021)

Gregg Lambert (Syracuse University, U.S.A. / Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences)

“The World is Gone”: Philosophy in (the) Light of the Pandemic is comprised of seven meditations written during the first full year of the lockdown, exactly between June and December 2020, and represents an existential investigation into the extreme states of solitude, boredom, and fear of madness that were associated with the experience of isolation caused by the lockdown. I employed the literary trope of Robinson alone on his island as a manner of distancing myself from my own experience, but more importantly, to raise the question of “who is speaking?” in the manner of the following statement by Borges’ story of “Other Man”: “The encounter was real, but the other man spoke to me in a dream, which is why he could forget me; I spoke to him while I was awake, and so I am still tormented by the memory.” However, on the fifth and sixth days, “The Schizoid and the Depressive,” and “The Worst-Case Scenario Lullaby” (from the song by the artist Bonaparte), I step out from behind the Robinson persona and speculate on some of the psychoanalytic conclusions that might be drawn from my existential investigation. In my talk I will reflect further on some of these conclusions in the context of the sources by Freud, Deleuze, Guattari, Klein, Winnicott, and Lacan. *The World is Gone* is available as an open-access publication through the “Manifold” platform of University of Minnesota Press at <https://manifold.umn.edu/projects/the-world-is-gone>

Hikikomori and the Collapse of Desire : Can Technology Counter Social Reclusivity? Joff P. N. Bradley (Teikyo University)

In this talk, I will provide an update on my research into the hikikomori phenomenon, focusing on how emerging technologies might influence social reintegration. I will examine two examples: Pokémon Go and, more recently, the Metaverse. My aim is to explore how these technologies can either facilitate reintegration into society or exacerbate isolation, thereby trapping individuals in perseverative cycles of repetitive behavior at home. The key question is how to use the pharmacology of technology—perhaps through games and anime on the internet—to shift the sense of immersion, transforming passive consumers into active participants. I will think about these issues by way of continental philosophers such as Bernard Stiegler and Han Byung-Chul and situate the discussion on the collapse of desire from the historical perspective of Deleuze and Guattari, Wilhelm Reich and R. D. Laing.

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Atmospheres in the “Hikikomori System” Yukiko Kuwayama (University of Tokyo)

Hikikomori as a social shortcoming is understood by a Japanese psychiatrist, Saitō Tamaki to have a specific system which is called the “hikikomori system” (Saitō 1998). According to Saitō, this system has a structure in which the society, the family and the person concerned (of hikikomori) participate but in a mutually oppressing way. The person concerned of hikikomori can feel guilty (to the “society”) or anxious about not being able to work outside of his or her home. Additionally, their family blames and criticizes him or her for not being able to contribute to “society”, which makes it more difficult for him or her to “come out” of the hikikomori system (see also: Furuhashi 2023). Here, the so-called “society” seems to be understood as a kind of “instance” which exists outside of them and gives them a certain image of normativity. In this system, there is a certain stability as long as the participants of the system continue to criticize and lock the person concerned (at home) and to externalize the so-called “society” (ibid.). In this presentation, I will pose the question whether this social (or peer) pressure can be understood as a part of phenomena of something “atmospheric” which develops in the intersubjective “between” of our interactions. I will try to analyze the formation of the oppressive atmosphere in the hikikomori system with a help of the New phenomenology on “subjectivity” and “emotions as atmospheres” introduced by Hermann Schmitz (1928-2021).

Kimura Bin’s Psychopathology and Hikikomori Higaki Tatsuya (Senshu University)

Kimura Bin, a Japanese psychiatrist active primarily in the latter half of the 20th century, was influenced by phenomenology (particularly Heidegger) and the Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitaro. His thought consistently centered on the idea of “the self becoming itself,” grounded in his examination of depersonalization cases where “the self is not felt as itself.” While Kimura’s active period was in the late 20th century and did not extensively address the phenomenon of hikikomori—given the socio-economic conditions during Kimura’s clinical work differ from those of today—the issues of “the self becoming itself” and “the self not being able to become itself” remain fundamentally relevant to the non-communication and self-neglect characteristic of hikikomori. From this perspective, I acknowledge the gap between Kimura’s theories and the phenomenon of hikikomori but wish to explore the potential for bridging this gap.

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Possibility and Spatiality: Rethinking Watsuji Tetsurō's Hermeneutic Ethics in Regard to Hikikomori **Akihiro Miyata (University of Tokyo)**

Though “hikikomori” encompasses a wide range of conditions, some sociologists have characterized its essential feature as “inability to move” based on the testimonies of those who experience it. It is not that they simply choose to stay in their rooms or refrain from social participation; rather, they cannot go out and engage in social life. While support workers often emphasize “ability,” some individuals experiencing “hikikomori” feel further marginalized by this focus. To truly respect each person’s experience and offer meaningful support, we must understand this “inability.” However, what does it mean to understand “inability”? If understanding itself is a kind of “ability,” then reflecting on how we approach the impossibility experienced by “hikikomori” forces us to question our own frameworks of understanding. In this context, Watsuji Tetsurō’s concept of “possibility” in his hermeneutic ethics offers a valuable perspective. His philosophy challenges traditional Western thought by shifting focus from individual subjectivity to the dynamics of collective subjectivity, or “betweenness” (*aidagara*), and by emphasizing spatiality over temporality as the primary framework for understanding human existence and its possibilities. These ideas invite us to reconsider what it means to understand experiences of “hikikomori,” not merely by framing them within existing structures of potential and ability, but by reflecting critically on the very act of understanding itself.

Dance as an Escape from Prison

Hana Polanská Turečková (The Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, Music and Dance Faculty)

Dance is coming under the spotlight of scientists because it is a complex activity that can help combat various diseases and unpleasant conditions. Above all, dance has been linked to better quality of life, a reduction in depressive symptoms, and the maintenance of physical and mental fitness. These benefits are connected to concepts such as neuroplasticity, vitality, kinesthetic empathy, and relationality—or “the other”—due to the socializing nature of dance, which can effectively reduce an individual's isolation. However, not all dance is the same. In my talk, I will focus on dance rooted in somatic practices, improvisation, and other practices at the intersection of art, philosophy, and therapy. This perspective moves us away from viewing dance as a separate phenomenon and instead as part of broader social structures. It shifts the focus from the modern emphasis on specific dance techniques and expression toward exploring the possibilities of dance and choreography and their ontological nature, where corporeality becomes central to dance itself. Dance can thus be seen as a specific form of knowledge that permeates society and acts as an agent of change. The liberating nature of dance can lead us not only out of the rigid structures of our bodily patterns but also from the confines of dysfunctional societal structures.

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Introduction to the Basic Form and Concept of Tojisha Kenkyu **Yuki Yamamori (Osaka University)**

Tojisha-kenkyu is a unique dialogue practice in mental health that originated in underdeveloped areas of Japan. Unlike psychotherapy, which focuses on individuals, it is a group-based activity in which people study their own problems. The benefits of this activity include the subjectivization of mental patients and the revitalization of community. This activity is sometimes referred to as “semi-psychiatry” because of its parodying aspect of psychiatry.

At the reception after the study group meeting held in Tokyo in June, I found that basic information on Tojisha-kenkyu has not yet been fully shared with many of the participants. Therefore, at this study group meeting in Prague, I will introduce the basic method and concept of Tojisha-kenkyu, how it has emerged, and the philosophy behind it.

The Creative Solitude of the Non-depressive Self according to Deleuze and Phenomenology **Petr Prášek (Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences)**

The social isolation of hikikomori patients can to some extent be viewed positively: it is a spontaneous existential act by which the self attempts to escape the depressing sociality of everyday life and thereby reveal its non-depressive form. In my presentation, I will draw on the work of G. Deleuze and some phenomenologists and try to thematize this non-depressive self with regard to the creative aspect of its solitude. If the solitude is taken up by the human imagination, then it can be transformed into a creative space in which the self becomes a kind of artist creating out of its “real” experience.

Concept of Similar Other: a Possible Development of the Deleuzian Philosophy **Koichiro Kokubun (University of Tokyo)**

Deleuze’s name has forever been associated with “schizophrenia”, which composes, alongside “capitalism”, the subtitle of the books that he wrote together with Félix Guattari. Granted Deleuze-Guattari’s works are framed definitively through and by schizophrenia, it seems to me however far less clear whether Deleuze’s own works can be assimilated to this framework. For this 20th-century French philosopher’s thought seems rather to show a close proximity to the experience of a different mental disorder. The concept of the “Other”, which figures prominently in his early thought and is developed most fully in his essay “Michel Tournier and the World Without Others”, included in the Appendix to The Logic of Sense, presages what recent research on ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) has since brought to light. For the Deleuzian “desert island”, an experience of the “world without others”, is true also of an autist’s perception of the world. People with ASD are often said to have difficulty in recognizing Others: it is as if they were living on a desert island. If therefore the recognition of the Other is not innate but something which must be learnt, it is imperative that we inquire how such a recognition takes place. Through this inquiry, I will take the Deleuzian concept of the Other in a novel direction, to propose a new concept of the “Similar Other”, a concept which I believe can contribute concretely to Autism Studies. Through this concept, I will also explain the social exclusion of ASD as an effective consequence of the present neoliberal economic regime.

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Ontological Withdrawal in Philo-fiction and Speculative-philosophy

Toshiya Ueno (Wako University)

This paper explores the reason why Felix Guattari should write speculative fiction titled *Love of UIQ* and some other theater plays. Were these just hobbies or self-amusement? Some thinkers always need a certain kind of style of fabulation. (R.D. Laing or Vilem Flusser, and others etc.) All these thinkers are engaged with the questions of ontological anxiety or withdrawal. In Guattari's case, as a failed author (writer of fiction), UIQ might be a form of auto-curing practice in my view. His idea of UIQ (living ambience of artificial intelligence in infra-quark) is also related to his affective or enthusiastic interests in the culture and society of Japan (in terms of 'reading air' as modulating moods, vibes, and attunement). In the mid-1970s Guattari paid attention to the question of how the tactics of anti-psychiatry could reproduce oedipal relationships, where the potential of Laing's fictive or poetical fabulation would be easily dismissed. But their paths were no longer crossing each other. Guattari has nothing to do with a romanticization or idealization of schizophrenia, with which ecosophy grappled through cartographic and diagrammatic practices along with the speculative fiction or philo-fiction (Laruelle). In my view, Guattarian ecosophy could be quite critical against the series of DSM paradigms, paternalistic or biopolitical (redundant) care taking, and the self-directed research or study of party (program of assessment and rehabilitation for persons themselves in mental disorder), *Tojisha Kenkyu*. I do admit that Guattari could have a sympathy for method and practices in Bethel's House where it began with. This paper would try to grasp Guattari and others fictional writings as a way of understanding withdrawal in ways of (non-)human tactical leaking (escaping), deceleration, and exodus from the conventional discourse and way of living.

Social Isolation and the Far Right

Anthony Faramelli (Goldsmiths, University of London)

Reading the insights of Reich alongside and through the work of Foulkes, Lacan, and Guattari, this talk will look at the impact of social and libidinal prohibition can have on the psyche. It will specifically, look at the way in which social deprivation gave rise to xenophobia and racism during the pandemic, a situation that has only worsened in the years since lockdown measures ended.

The talk will begin with the assertion that the foundation matrix (Foulkes) is imbued with racism, meaning that, as the psychoanalyst Fakhry Davis argues in *Internal Racism* (2011), the social unconscious is structured by racist violence. Then, building on the early work of Reich, I will argue that xenophobia is a symptom of the social deprivation experienced during the lockdowns. Fear of the Covid-19 virus came into conflict with the libidinal desire for socialisation. The fear of the virus is repressed in order to satisfy the libidinal desire, but the social prohibition remains. The fear of the virus as a foreign object is displaced onto another type of "foreign object"; immigrants and others who are racialised as non-white. The prohibition to socialisation is therefore seen by some as imposed upon the individual not because of public health, but as a reaction to immigration. They view immigration as "infecting" the social body, creating the public health emergency. This form of symptom formation, however, is an effect of an educational apparatus that exists online. The talk will then turn to the insights of institutional psychotherapy in an analysis of the psychosocial impact of online far right pedagogy. It will conclude by proposing an anti-fascist pedagogy through a reading of Guattari's "micro-politics of desire".

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Social Withdrawal as Limit Modus of our Coexistence
Petr Kouba (Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences)

Social withdrawal, in Japan known as hikikomori, represents a phenomenon of non-psychiatric pathology, or at least a pathology that is difficult to grasp psychiatrically. The psychiatric literature distinguishes between secondary hikikomori, which is associated with other psychiatric diagnoses (anxiety, depression, social phobia), and primary hikikomori, which is not accompanied by any comorbidities. For this reason, it seems more useful to offer a different, non-normative approach based on phenomenology and symptomatology. While phenomenology, following Binswanger's example, is able to describe the structure of the world where people are enclosed in their social isolation, symptomatology, as understood by Foucault or Deleuze, describes symptoms before they become clinical entities of the diagnostic manual. In this sense, Sacher-Masoch or Sade are symptomatologists of a certain way of life and a certain investment of desire. The particular lethargy that the Japanese psychiatrist Tamaki Saito mentions in his book on hikikomori allows us to use Goncharov's novel Oblomov, whose main character shows many of the basic symptoms of hikikomori, as a symptomatological model. However, even if it is possible to use this literary pattern to describe the basic structure of the world of hikikomori, this social phenomenon poses a challenge to phenomenology itself. In the first place, it forces us to overcome the romantic residues that led the early Heidegger, in the period of *Sein und Zeit*, to see in the ability to endure solitude the basic condition of authentic existence, without at the same time taking into account the risk of a pathological inability to leave solitude. Even the radical overcoming of these residues that we see in Jean-Luc Nancy's revision of the Heideggerian conception of our coexistence, on the other hand, confronts us with the question of what it means to withdraw into social isolation if the meaning of Being derives solely from our coexistence with others. Is social withdrawal even conceivable under these conditions?