Dialogic Phenomenology: Wonder and Performative Action

Aalborg University

May 14-16, 2019

3 ECTS

Registration to: hannepc@hum.aau.dk

Registration deadline: March 22, 2019

Location: Aalborg, room to be announced

Requirements: 30 days before the start of the course, each participant is asked to send a 7-page paper on reflections in connection with his/her work on the dissertation. Start the paper with the core wonder-question you have and qualify or expand this wonder through bringing in some experiences connected to or thoughts relevant for your dissertation.

These short ‘wonder-papers’ will then be discussed in the afternoon workshops. The participants will be divided into groups of 5-6 participants. It is expected that every group member has read all 'wonder-papers' in their group prior to the course. In addition, there will be two designated feedback givers (1 PhD student & 1 teacher) who will give detailed feedback.

A detailed program for each day will be sent out in April. Morning workshops will be held in English. There will be both English-language and Scandinavian-language afternoon workshops (depending on the language of the 7-page papers submitted).

Lecturers:

Ronald C. Arnett (Ph.D., Ohio University, 1978) is professor and chair of the Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies and the Patricia Doherty Yoder and Ronald Wolfe Endowed Chair in Communication Ethics at Duquesne University. He is the former Henry Koren, C.S.Sp., Endowed Chair for Scholarly Excellence (2010–2015). He is the author/coauthor of eleven books and the recipient of eight book awards. His most recent work is Levinas’s Rhetorical Demand: The Unending Obligation of Communication Ethics (2017, Southern Illinois University Press), which received the 2017 Top Book award from the National Communication Association’s Communication Ethics Division and 2017 Distinguished Book award from National Communication Association’s Philosophy of Communication Division. He was selected as a 2017 Distinguished Scholar by the National Communication Association.

Finn Thorbjørn Hansen (Ph.D, Aarhus University, 2002) is professor in dialogical and philosophical practice at the Centre for Dialogue and Organization, Department of Communication, Aalborg University (and host of this PhD-seminar). He also own a Professor-2-position at Agder University (Norway), where he is developing a research environment in Ethics and Professional Work seen from an Practice-Phenomenological approach. During many years, he has been doing research in the phenomenology of wonder, and how Socratic and wonder-based dialogues can be applied in qualitative research and especially phenomenological-oriented action research. He has written several books on these subjects and also facilitated practice-based and phenomenological action research in different areas of professions such as Design School, Hospice, Innovation in Public Organisation and hospitals, who all wanted to inquiry how the existential and ontological dimensions in these fields can be understood and seen as a resource.
Course description, incl. learning objectives and prerequisites:

There is a strange relation between being in wonder through a dialogue and relation with the subject matter itself (den Sachen) on the one hand – and on the other hand being in a relation with the subject matter through performative action. Both genuine philosophical wonder (Vita Contemplative) and whole-hearted actions performed as deeds in interpersonal relations or as ‘truth-telling’ in the public sphere (Vita Activitas) are gateways to and openings for deeper understanding of human conditions and relation in human and social science.

The German philosopher and ‘action phenomenologist’ Hannah Arendt (1958, 1978) has a sharp eye for this strange connection. Wonder somehow seems to qualify the openness towards the world and strangely enough also the human being’s (phronetic) judgement in ethical, existential and political affairs.

And performative actions understood as deeds and as moments of new beginnings (natality) where the person’s action and speech co-exist as responses to a call give also life and expressions to a kind of ‘wonder-in-action’, not to be confused with ‘reflection-in-action’ (Schön) or “thinking-in-action” (Benner).

This kind of ‘wonder-based action research’ or ‘action-oriented dialogical phenomenology’ might be of special interest for researchers in human and social science – in health, communication, education and social work – who want to research in the ‘human factor’ and unique ‘beautiful moments’ of care, creativity and meaningfulness in human relations.

In the quest for a ‘re-humanization’ of modern but too ‘effective’ institutions and too ‘professionalized’ human affairs and conditions these fragile moments of I-Thou-meetings and meaningfulness are in danger of disappearing (Arnett, 2013, 2017).

What is asked for is a kind of existential Bildung and ‘humanistic and existential resilience’ (Hansen, 2018) which can help people in health, communication, education and social work to reflect and act critically and creatively against the instrumentalization and de-humanizing forces of modern ‘productive’ organizations. What kind of new understanding of and ‘culture of quality’ in human-relation-oriented organization will allow moments of quite wonder and thinking and caring presence, actions and relations to emerge?

Taking a view on contemporary qualitative research and action research one is surprised to see, that this kind of research do not seem to have sufficient understanding of and practice for how to bring this kind of phenomenological wonder and ethical performative action into play in qualitative research.

Being in wonder in qualitative research is typically connected to a scientific and epistemological form of wonder (‘communities of inquiry’). But being in wonder in a phenomenological and ontological sense is a radically different approach and mode of being (‘communities of wonder’).

In contemporary language philosophy the concept of ‘performative action’ is well known (Austin, Searle) and Wittgenstein seems to have paved the way for ‘linguistic turn’ where the performative action is connected to a pragmatic and contextual understanding between being, language, and action (Gergen, Rorty). But if we look closer to the thinking of Wittgenstein it is rather an ‘ontological’ or maybe ‘pre-ontological turn’ that he aspires to in his thinking. ‘In the beginning was not the word but the deed’, as he says. And the deed seems to emerge in the meeting with a fundamental ‘wonder-in-the-very-concrete-world’.

The ethical phenomenologists, Levinas and Patocka, have a fine sense of this strange significance of being attuned towards wonder as a kind of ethical calling from the very concrete, the face of the
other, the fragile tone of hope in a voice. How do we as qualitative researchers and action researchers cultivate our sense of the Call of the phenomenon or ethical call of the situation?

Levinas (as well as Marion with his concept of ‘the Saturated Phenomenon’) gives us a view on philosophy and the inquiring mind as a practice or openness towards “wisdom of love at the service of love”.

Patocka emphasizes that in order to get into a dialogue with what matters in human lives the human and social researcher must also work with a kind of ‘ethical care of the soul’. That is, how should the researcher live his or her own life in order to ‘live the question’ (Rilke) and in order phenomenologically to hear the voice of the phenomenon itself?

**Course aims**

The main aim of the course is to support course participants’ PhD projects by working with phenomenological-oriented and wonder-based or wonder-inspired approaches to qualitative research, practice-based dialogue and action research.

On the first day of the PhD-course professor Ronald C. Arnett will dwell upon the question and experience of what it means to act upon a call as a qualitative and communication researcher, and why both Arendt and the French ethical phenomenologist Levinas give rise to a kind of ‘dialogical phenomenology’ in the face of the Other and experience of transcendence. Arnett’s notion of ‘dialogic ethics’ (Arnett, 2018) will also be reflected.

**Lecture 1 (morning): Challenging the Secular Trinity of Modernity**

Arnett will take people through his understanding of Arendt as the principal critic of modernity, as described through his book, *Communication Ethics in Dark Times*. Arnett will take people through the entire book of *Communication Ethics in Dark Times*, but the hermeneutic entrance will be on the secular trinity of modernity, which is articulated throughout the book.

**Lecture 2 (afternoon): Rhetoric Otherwise than Convention**

Arnett will take people through his understanding of Levinas as the principal critic of the “originative I” within the West as described in his book, *Levinas’s Rhetorical Demand*. Emmanuel Levinas is often used as an example of rhetorical critique. Levinas was quite displeased with the Western focus on rhetoric. The work unpacks an understanding of rhetoric that begins with a “derivative I” rather than an “originative I.” The class will explicate this, working through all the chapters with this hermeneutic entrance.

On the second day professor Finn Th. Hansen will then ask how we – inspired by Wittgenstein’s notion of ‘philosophy as therapy’ and the Czech phenomenologist Jan Patocka’s notion of ‘Socratic Care of the Soul’ – as qualitative and action researchers in human and social science can train ourselves in practice in the art of the Socratic maieutics and ‘communities of wonder’. Hansen’s notion of ‘humanistic and existential resilience’ will also be reflected.

On the third day the PhD-students together with Arnett and Hansen will take up some core questions, which have emerged during the first two days of the course. The PhD-students will also work in groups and under supervision of Arnett and Hansen on how to design and practice dialogical and action-based phenomenology (“wonder-in-action”) in their own field of research.
Course format

The course will be organized along lectures, dialogues and interactivity through workshops. Morning lectures will be thematically organized in order to address the themes and questions listed above. The lectures will be followed by Socratic dialogue workshops, where a community of wonder around chosen questions will be practiced. These are preparations for dialogue between the course participants and speaker of the morning session.

The afternoon will start with a short question of wonder by one of the other speakers of the course and inspired by the morning session. Then the afternoon lecture will be presented and dialogue workshops will follow.

On the third day, the course participants will present some wonders and questions connected to their PhD-work and feedback in groups by Arnett and Hansen will be done.

Afternoon workshops will be divided into groups of 5-6 participants. It is expected that every group member has read all papers in their group prior to the course. In addition, there will be two designated feedback givers (1 PhD student & 1 teacher) who will give detailed feedback. A detailed program for each day will be sent out in April. Morning workshops will be held in English. There will be both English-language and Scandinavian-language afternoon workshops (depending on the language of the 7-page papers submitted).

Preliminary program:

May 14th:
Morning session: Welcome and presentation of speakers, participants and programme by Professor Finn Thorbjørn Hansen

Lecture 1: Professor Ronald Arnett, Challenging the Secular Trinity of Modernity

Workshops and dialogue

Afternoon session:

Lecture 2: Professor Ronald Arnett, Rhetoric Otherwise than Convention

May 15th:
Morning session: (with musical inspiration)

Lecture 3: Professor Finn Th. Hansen: Wonder and ‘the ontological turn’ in Wittgenstein’s view on language, meaning and action

Dialogue workshop

Afternoon session:

Lecture 4: Professor Finn Th. Hansen: The qualitative researcher’s Care of the Soul (Patocka) in order to hear ‘den Sachen selbst’

Workshops and dialogue
May 16th:

Morning session: (with artistic inspiration)

Open dialogue: *Where are we now on the question of what a Dialogical and action-oriented phenomenology might look like in theory and practice?* Arnett, Hansen and course participants

*Group discussion and feedback around course participants’ individual ‘wonder-question’*

Afternoon session:

*Continued Group discussion and feedback around course participants’ individual ‘wonder-question’*

Rounding off and goodbye!
Primary Literature (expected to be read before course):


Secondary literature:


