

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

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Title: **The Monstrous Other as a Challenge to the Integrity of the Self**

Abstract:

Even though monstrosity occupies a recognised place in cultural narrative, featuring in numerous literary and artistic depictions, the monstrous Other remains largely *terra incognita* in philosophical discourse. In this paper, I present a phenomenological analysis of encountering the corporeality of human monstrosity. This analysis is based on Edmund Husserl's reflections in *Cartesian Meditations*, as well as on the phenomenology of Bernhard Waldenfels.

I argue that the experience of monstrosity in the Other gives rise to a particularly acute phenomenon of *horror alieni* as a result of a disruption in the process of typification. A bodily form that both resembles and differs from my own living body disrupts assimilating apperception and intentional reference to an established objective sense. This disruption to the pairing process (Paarung) prevents the object of experience from being fully recognised – the monstrous physical form is and is not an *alter ego* at the same time, resulting in an ambivalent, propulsive-repulsive experience of a particularly intense phenomenon of uncanniness.

The extreme difference, or physical deformity, makes the monster radically Other, i.e. alien. When analysing encounters with the Other, Bernhard Waldenfels highlights the ambivalence of this experience. The alien is perceived as both a temptation and a threat, a concept known as *horror alieni*. By presenting its deformity, the monster simultaneously presents the possibility of an order that is different to that inherent in our bodies. As the Other, it threatens our normality, yet simultaneously fascinates as an alternative version of the standard human body. It should be noted that, for Husserl, my living body is always presented to me as Here, while another body is presented to me exclusively as There.

Therefore, the Other is not perceived as simply my duplicate, but rather as possessing spatial manifestations that I would possess if I were There. In other words, I perceive the Other as I would perceive myself if I were There. In this context, Waldenfels' observations are interesting, as he notes that the closer the alien is to us, the more the boundary between the Self and the Other is activated. What is particularly striking is the sense of familiarity in the Other, alongside the sense of difference. This experience simultaneously reveals the sphere of Otherness within us, showing that the corporeal self is perceived as alien — 'never entirely present to itself' (Waldenfels, 2011: 43) — always somewhat distant and not fully graspable. This reveals that our integrity is not static, but stretched dialectically between ownness and alienness.

Waldenfels, B. (2011). *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic concepts*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.