

# Framing Phenomenology in the Wild

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Ablist culture is as insidious as it is familiar. Tolerance for difference ‘much less wildness’ is minimal, if it exists at all. My first critical engagement with stressed embodiment was initiated through the lens of my own bodily rupture in everyday activities. Subsequently, this experience of personal loss provided the opportunity to question the unique role of the body and its dys-appearing presence in the homeworld I once could take for granted. It also brought me face to face with others who exude wild being and radical discordance much more visibly in their habitual experience of the world.

This presentation is part of an ongoing project that begins with the unexpected discovery of attentive wonder in the context of persons with autism (ASD) and pervasive developmental delay (PDD). Here I suggest the possibility for new horizons of expectation that emerge beyond the instrumental reason of a disembodied status quo and its presumptions of ‘thorough-going concordance’. I embrace a phenomenological orientation to discovery through focused reflection and construction of photographic images of the lived experience of wildness in the activities of two movement-education programs for children with autism/PDD in the Niagara Region here in Ontario, Canada.

Galen Johnson’s (2010, 6) recent recasting of Merleau-Ponty’s commitment to attentive wonder is a helpful reminder of the temptation to relentless apathy toward encounters with difference and the semiotic foreclosure of self and world within the pale of the familiar. Johnson offers the possibility of retrieval of the beautiful as an ‘appreciation of the world and of others that is a signature of a unique openness to the world and the other in thinking and living.’

My recent move to photography as a scholarly, phenomenological and semiotic project over the last five years has provided another critical lens for discovery of the lived experience of the wild. Learning the discipline of documentary photography and its crisis of ‘disappearing witnesses’ (see G. Garner, *The Disappearing Witness*, 2003; J. Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame*, 2009) has compelled a deep and critical reflection on the hermeneutics of testimony akin to Paul Ricoeur’s (1975, 1980, 1983-85, etc.) foundational work on the correlative role of confession-narration in biblical narratives. As I will show, the temptation to claim ‘spontaneous witness’ (Garner) and the pretense of a ‘spontaneous hermeneutic’ (Ricoeur) fail to take into account the inextricable role of the witness in the unfolding appearance of things: “in my particular case a witness who also inhabits a world of wild being. “Framed” by camera, photographer,

and a rich phenomenological tradition, making photos in the context of screaming disruption and the immanent threat of unscripted chaos can provide intriguing possibilities for re-imagining new spaces of experience and new horizons of expectation.

I am especially interested in further explorations of the necessary ground inherent in “seeing the things themselves” which haunts Merleau-Ponty’s famous first lines in the posthumous collection, *Le Visible et L’Invisible* (1964), and characterizes his final essays and course notes. I will argue that accounting for the reciprocity of subject and object within the framing project of wild being allows for refiguration of the typical foreclosures of a disembodied status quo (i.e., a cultural system foreclosed to self and other) and offers the possibility of radical openness to something strange and beautiful within the flesh of the world.