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# Post-phenomenology and method: styles for thinking the (non)human

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# Post-phenomenology and method: styles for thinking the (non)human

## Abstract

Recently cultural geographers have become increasingly interested in post-phenomenological ways of thinking. This paper develops a distinct post-phenomenological style of analysis. Such a style is twofold, referring both to a style of conceptualising and writing about objects and a concern for those objects' style. Drawing upon the example of the television show 'In the Night Garden', the paper demonstrates two post-phenomenological styles of thought – allure and resonance – and how these styles enable us to understand the style of these objects and the role they play in the construction and experience of different cultural worlds.

Keywords: post-phenomenology, object, non-human, method, style

## Introduction

“The phenomenological tradition, once a beacon of integrity, has become emblematic of a failure in thought to think outside of the subject. Instead, the method purportedly reduces the world of things to an anthropomorphised world, enclosed at all times with an unbreakable alliance between subject and world” (Trigg 2014: 3).

Recent work in cultural geography has sought to re-engage with phenomenology in the development of a post-phenomenology (Ash and Simpson 2016; Lea 2009; Rose and Wylie 2006). This approach has drawn upon a range of phenomenologists, post-structuralists, (new) materialists, and object-oriented ontologists to destabilise notions of subjectivity as the source or foundation of experience.<sup>1</sup> As part of this, there have been at least three ways in which post-phenomenology has engaged critically with phenomenology:

“First, there has been a move away from the assumption of a subject that exists prior to experience towards an examination of how the subject comes to being or through experience. Second, this has led to a recognition that objects have an autonomous existence outside of the ways they appear to or are used by human beings (Harman 2002; Meillassoux 2008). Finally, there has been a reconsideration of our relations with alterity in light of these points (Wylie 2009; Rose 2010), taking alterity as central to the constitution

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<sup>1</sup> This is in some contrast to the school of post-phenomenology led by Idhe. While Idhe is also critical of Husserlian phenomenology’s transcendental subjectivity, Idhe’s approach to post-phenomenology is primarily based on a conversation between phenomenology, pragmatism, and technoscience (see Idhe 2009).

of phenomenological experience given our irreducible being-with the world” (Ash and Simpson 2016: 49).

Surprisingly, though, to date there has been relatively little discussion of what methodologies are required to allow us to pursue such advances empirically (though see Ash *et al* (2018); McCormack (2017); McHugh and Kitson (2018)). Thus far, much debate has been theoretically orientated in terms of defining what post-phenomenology is and how related points of concern (materiality, subjectivity, objects, etc.) should or could be understood rather than how post-phenomenology might be practiced. This is not to install a false binary between theory and method. Rather, this is simply to say that post-phenomenology’s development has, thus far, been definitional in orientation. An exception here, though, can be found in the work of Derek McCormack whose work has variously sought to find means of attending to and expressing the circumstantial coming together of a host of human and nonhuman entities and processes (for example, see McCormack 2014; 2017). Nonetheless, there remains significant work to be done in terms of “opening up glimpses of nonhuman and inhuman intensities and forces” and so better understanding more-than-human lifeworlds (McHugh and Kitson 2018: 158).

The absence of methodological discussion in debates around post-phenomenology is surprising for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is surprising given the central place methodology has held within phenomenology itself. As we discuss in the next section, from the start phenomenology was developed as a *practice* based around particular methodological protocols. In fact, central figures in phenomenology’s history spent much time and effort articulating and re-articulating how phenomenology was to be done, as opposed to actually

doing phenomenology. Therefore, for a post-phenomenology, it seems reasonable to expect such questions of doing to hold a prominent place in its further development.

Secondly, it is also surprising given that post-phenomenological work in geography has expanded “the realm of what counts as the empirical field (and how we go about evidencing this)” (Lea 2009: 374). The expanded onto-epistemological realms opened up by post-phenomenology raises questions over the appropriateness of traditional social science research methods and methodologies for ‘doing’ post-phenomenology. We should note, though, that recent scholarship in geography has done quite a lot in terms of critically engaging with research methods, especially in light of non-representational theories, work on practice, mobility, and so on (Davies and Dwyer 2007; Dewsbury 2010; Engelmann 2015a, 2015b; Greenhough 2010; Merriman 2014; Williams 2016; Vannini 2015). This has led to both suggestions of ‘new’ techniques, technologies, and methods that might allow for the ‘capture’ of the elusive and ephemeral phenomena now under examination (Lorimer 2010), as well explorations of how more ‘traditional’ methods and techniques might be enlivened (Hitchings 2012). However, we would caution that thinking in terms of ‘methods’, and more so, thinking in terms of particular technologies and techniques for ‘doing’ post-phenomenology, risks those methods and techniques/technologies somehow being viewed in and of themselves as ‘the answer’ to the challenges presented by conceptual developments such as post-phenomenology.

So, our purpose in this paper is to develop a particular post-phenomenological *style* of analysis (also see Vannini 2015). For us, post-phenomenology’s style is itself attentive to the style of objects’ being and interactions within cultural worlds. Such a style is not something

tied to specific methods or techniques nor is it to be dissociated from others. Rather, it is an orientation for research that lays emphasis on the co-constituted nature of our being-in-the-world and the need for a more thoroughgoing acknowledgement of, and attempt at, understanding this. Put in another way, it is a question of trying to find means of disclosing the specific operations and expressivity of human and non-human objects in their 'worlding' (McCormack 2017).

To develop this style of analysis, the rest of the paper forms four parts. Section two discusses whether phenomenology as such can be understood as a method or style of approach. Section three defines a post-phenomenological style as a matter of learning to identify the expressivity of human and non-humans in order to understand how these objects contribute to the operation of a situation in terms of their style. Section four outlines two different forms of style that can be used to analyse objects in particular from a post-phenomenological perspective: allure and resonance. The conclusion returns to the key distinction between style and method and discusses how post-phenomenological styles contribute to the geohumanities.

## Phenomenology as method and style

Concerns over methodology were central to the development of phenomenology and to the translation of phenomenology into geography. The central project of phenomenology for Husserl (2001: 168) was to "go back to the things themselves". Phenomenology was to be a practice of philosophizing that described phenomena and the manner in which they appear to consciousness (Moran 2000). Such description was to avoid misconceiving experience as a

result of presuppositions based on, for example, religious belief, cultural traditions, everyday common sense, or science. Central to this practice was the 'reduction': a radical shift in view point akin to a suspension or 'bracketing' of such attitudes. This was to lead the phenomenologist back to pure transcendental subjectivity and to allow them to "isolate the central essential features of the phenomena under investigation" (Moran 2000: 11).

That said, Husserl perpetually revised and re-articulated this phenomenological method (Sparrow 2014). Such revision also emerged through the way that Husserl's project of phenomenology came to be taken up and elaborated upon by subsequent philosophers (see Lavery 2003). Despite Husserl's methodological (re)elaborations, according to Sparrow (2014: 4), "Husserl's descendants...rarely take his efforts to establish the science of phenomenology as seriously as he did". Rather, the orientation of phenomenology shifted away from a desire to be a rigorous scientific philosophy and became, with his most prominent heirs at least, something more on an existential project. Merleau-Ponty (2002: vii), for example, explicitly suggested that phenomenology was a "style of thinking" that seeks an account of the world as we are actually involved in it. This moves away from a concern with the sort of methodological exactness discussed above and what we end up with is, rather broadly, a "philosophy that dispenses with abstractions in order to get us back in touch with what it is like to live and think in the real world" (Sparrow 2014: 4).

This evolution potentially leaves phenomenology in a difficult place. Sparrow (2014: xiii) suggests that the "idea of phenomenology lacks a coherent center" and that this absence "results from a failure on the part of phenomenology to adequately clarify its method, scope, and metaphysical commitments". This means that we end up in a position where what is



called phenomenology, and what is claimed by ‘phenomenologists’, do not always end up coinciding with what is ‘authorized’ by the (albeit ill-defined) phenomenological method. Resultantly, we find a range of claims in the works of, for example, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas, that bear at best a familial resemblance to the sorts of claims Husserl’s method would allow and which could also be simply taken as forms of “thick empirical description” or “poetic embellishment” (Sparrow 2014: 8).

Turning to geography and its past engagements with phenomenology we can see something of this definitional and methodological ‘looseness’ in terms of what it discusses and the claims that are made. For example, Pickles (1985) noted that humanistic geographers were limited in their engagement with the method(s) of phenomenology. Pickles drew attention to Buttimer’s suggestion that “[it] is in the *spirit* of the phenomenological purpose...rather than in the *practice of phenomenological procedures*, that one finds direction” (Buttimer 1976: 280, cited in Pickles 1985: 62 [emphasis added]). For Pickles (1985: 8) this meant that “Husserl’s entire project [was] treated only in caricature form and thus to the empiricist seems to make no sense”. While phenomenology may have provided humanistic geographers with resources with which to re-think the positivist emphasis then prominent in geography, that is not to say that the resultant geography was actually a ‘phenomenological geography’.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, through such developments we end up with phenomenology being something less than a ‘rigorous’ method that follows a strict set of tenets of one thinker and something more

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<sup>2</sup> For a critique of geographical work on place/placelessness on the basis of its ‘non-phenomenological’ nature, see Trigg (2012).

like a loose style of work that incorporates different aspects of various thinkers. In turn, phenomenological geographies become a more or less broad focus on human experience, based upon the often taken for granted assumption that subjects are inherently linked with the world around them and have some sort of intentional or sense-bestowing relation towards this world. While for Sparrow such a 'demotion' of phenomenology to a broad style of work marks the 'end of phenomenology' as a philosophy, it does not necessarily mean (for us at least) the same for a *post*-phenomenological geography. Rather, and echoing recent methodological development in geography around non-representational theory, there is a lot of potential here in developing a methodological style that might animate accounts of lifeworlds, "embrace experimentation", and "unsettle the systematicity of procedure" associated with 'traditional' social science methodologies (Vannini 2015: 15). The specific methods employed in such a style of work are not the key concern (Dewsbury 2010). Rather, it is more about onto-epistemological foundations and so the disposition of the researcher towards the world that comes with the style employed.

In the face of these concerns with phenomenology's methodological rigour both in and after Husserl, and how that has translated into geography, it is important to re-iterate that the agenda of this paper is based around the development of a *post*-phenomenological methodology. If we are not to adhere strictly to Husserl's methodology or his phenomenological project, if we are quite open in advocating non-intentionality, the autonomy of objects, and the presence of a troubling radical alterity, then we *are* leaving something of phenomenology behind. Hence the 'post' of post-phenomenology. The question is: how might we constructively think from phenomenology's various post-Husserlian styles of analysis and augment them through a range of other philosophical

dispositions in developing a post-phenomenological style of working? How, for example, might we take up and move off from the sort of style Merleau-Ponty proposed? What styles of analysis might we develop beyond this reflective reduction that can help us understand our pre-reflective engagement with the world that take place entirely separate from our presence or ability to perceive them? What sorts of vocabularies and dispositions might we cultivate that will allow us to become “attuned...to how the process of worlding takes shape, through circumstantial arrangements of bodies, machines and devices” (McCormack 2017: 11)?

## Post-Phenomenology and Style

If we are to develop such a post-phenomenological style of analysis, we need first to think further about what ‘style’ might mean beyond the subservient position Sparrow (2014) gives the term relative to concerns for methodological rigour in the discussion above. To define a post-phenomenological style, we can turn to the work of Ming-Qian Ma (2005). Ma draws upon Deleuze and Serres’s understanding of style. For Deleuze (1995: 140-141), “style...is the movement of concepts...Style is a set of variations...a modulation...a...doing that can’t be a homogeneous system, it’s something unstable, always heterogeneous...[S]tyle carves differences of potential between which thing can pass, come to pass, a spark can flash and breakout...There’s style when...sparks leap...even over great distances”. Here style is the performance of a particular practice or activity that is not repetitive or mechanical, but imbued with a creative spark that brings something new into the world. For instance, we might talk of a chef’s particular style of cooking. This style may incorporate the introduction of unfamiliar ingredients into a familiar dish, or utilising alternative techniques or methods

for preparing or cooking that dish (see Longhurst *et al* 2008). Ma expands this Deleuzian understanding of style by linking it to the work of Serres, who suggests style is a form of embodied, risky gesture. In Serres's words: "a unique style comes from the gesture, the project, the itinerary, the risk – indeed, from the acceptance of a specific solitude...Repetition of content or method entails no risk, whereas style reflects in its mirror the nature of danger" (Serres and Latour 1995: 94).

Drawing Ma's discussion of Deleuze and Serres together, we might say that style is the unique, new or singular that emerges from the risky repetitions that form the basis of thinking and doing. For Deleuze, this newness is ultimately located in some virtual 'outside' which is actualised in a moment or event of encounter. In Deleuze's words, style is a 'spark' that emerges in a moment, but can then become durable through repetition. It is through this dual process of the spark of the new and the repetition of the action associated with a practice that a style can come to be identified and named as this or that style associated with a particular body or object.

Building upon this point, Spinoza *et al* (1999: 19) argue that style is not an additive, placed on top of or alongside a practice or activity, but is constitutive of the very practice or activity itself:

"there is more to the organization of practices, however, than interrelated equipment, purposes and identities. All our pragmatic activity is organized by a style. Style is our name for the way all the practices ultimately fit together. A common misunderstanding is to see style as one aspect among many of either a human being or human activity, just as we

may see the style as one aspect of many of a jacket. Our claim is precisely that a style is not an aspect of things, people or activity, but rather, constitutes them as what they are”.

Style is thus crucial to what a person is, in the sense that style is fundamental to the practices through which a being expresses itself. For example, Spinoza *et al* (1999: 19) discuss the different styles of mothering that are distinct to different cultures and how this mothering might affect the style of the babies’ behaviours as they grow into adulthood:

“Japanese mothers tend to place babies in cribs on their backs so they will lie still...whereas American mothers tend to place babies on their stomachs, which encourages them to move around more effectively...In many different ways...Japanese mothers promote relative passivity and sensitivity to harmony in the actions of their babies, whereas American mothers situate babies’ bodies...in such a way to promote an active...style of behavior. The babies...take up the style of nurturing to which they are exposed”.

While we might not want to accept fully the sort of deterministic argument present here, this example does suggest in distinction from Deleuze and Serres that style cannot be defined as the spark of the new that comes from some outside, but that it emerges as a response to particular cultural settings. In the case of child development and other taken for granted cultural practices, such as accent, posture, and gait, style is developed and transmitted implicitly and automatically. But style can also be developed explicitly. Think, for example, of the role of (ever changing) post-natal guidance given to parents and how this might influence the sorts of tendencies discussed by Spinoza *et al*. Style is therefore not about being technically good at a particular activity. Someone can be outstanding at playing piano for

example, but might have no style, playing in a robotic and unsurprising way. Someone with a strong sense of style however, has internalised and fully understands the various styles of playing piano, but then offers a twist, such as using rhythmical figures from one genre in another genre, potentially creating a new genre and thus defining a new style.

What is interesting about Spinoza *et al*'s account of style is that style does not just emerge in a moment, but works to prime how a person with that style goes on to experience other situations and practices not associated with the style they have developed. For instance, a great manager can have a style of management that is highly successful in their own company. But, they can also utilise that style to identify where things are going right or wrong in another company and encourage that manager to develop a style that is appropriate for that particular situation. In other words, once identified, one style can be used to investigate other styles that are not specific to that practice. In Spinoza *et al*'s words: "one can find a situation familiar even when one has never experienced it's like before. In such a case what makes a set of practices feel familiar is that they share a style" (1999: 19). Following this logic, we could argue that the opposite is also true. Understanding practices through the concept of style allows us to attend to a myriad number of different practices and identify their distinct styles.

Developing Spinoza *et al*'s (1999) point, we can define a post-phenomenological style as a matter of learning to explicitly attend to the various shifting expressions of objects and how those expressions contribute to how a situation works. In other words, post-phenomenology's style is characterised by a mode of analysis that seeks to understand what objects express, what can influence this expression and how this expression might go on to

prime what happens. Pushing Spinoza *et al's* work, we can state that this style is not just reducible to human bodies and human culture, but also extends to non-human objects and entities as well. Style is not just a matter of how humans respond to things, but also how objects address themselves to one another. Take Harman, who discusses the style of a sequoia tree. In his words: "it doesn't have that apple look, that corn cob feel, or that soybean air about it; rather, we sense that familiar sequoia thickness and grandeur" (2010: 18). This distinctive style is important to Harman because it "commanded me to see it as an object, as a durable 'sequoia style' amidst the scrambled hysteria of contradictory forest objects" (2010: 20). For Harman, non-human style is a matter of differentiation, through which objects appear as distinct from one another. Furthering this point, we can suggest that non-human style, like human style, is based upon a set of habits, contractions and durabilities. While at first this claim appears nonsensical, Grosz (2013) provides a number of examples of how non-human objects express style. In relation to her work on the habits of the non-human, she suggests:

"even the plant...has habits, modes of repeated engagement with its environment. Even the plant has a kind of memory, embodied in its cellulose structure, and in the arrangement of roots, leaves, branches and flowers or fruits, a memory that gives it regularized forms of engagement with what it needs to continue to live" (2013: 231).

Here style is the singularity of the plant's expression as it contracts forces from its environment, which conditions what that plant is and what it can do. This style is 'situational' in the sense that how the plant contracts forces and expresses them, also shapes the possibility of styles of other objects. Perhaps the plant's long leaves block sunlight from reaching smaller plants below it, which in turn shape the height of these plants and the size

of their leaves, which in turn impinges upon the style of that plant. In Harrison's (2000: 512) words: "style operates by drawing out the potential of...contexts....Style operates by liquefying (molecularising) some of the consistency of habit. Habits set boundaries for forms of life and so ways of seeing and saying, delineating a field in which certain moves are sensible".<sup>3</sup>

Like Harrison, we recognise that style is forward facing in that it can delineate what happens. In a shift in emphasis though, we suggest that style partly emerges from the inexhaustible nature of objects themselves, rather than only being given through a potential immanent to these things (Harrison 2000). In other words, an object's style is not just the result of the relations that object enters into or draws from. The object also has a style which exceeds any of its relations or habits. How the plant sits in the earth, or the ways leaves hang this way and that can be partially explained through the way it contracts other forces in the environment. But, at the same time, an objects style is partially manifest by what that thing is, which remains ultimately irreducible. For instance, while the right atmospheric conditions might allow a weed to grow tall and thick, it could not be confused with the grand style of a sequoia tree. As we go on to argue in the next section, focusing on the inexhaustible nature of objects has a direct effect on how to analyse style. Rather than analyse a thing's style in terms of its relationality or immanence, we suggest style can be understood in terms of an object's allure and resonance.

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<sup>3</sup> For a range of critical engagements with habit that attempt to develop such openness in their accounts, see Dewsbury and Bissell (2015); Hynes and Sharpe (2015); and Lea *et al* (2015).



Such a conceptualization of style poses questions when it comes to writing a post-phenomenological account of the world. Such a style requires the development of a conceptual language that avoids the organising principle of self referentiality, where language works to both name and delineate objects and in doing so tame them through a logic of identification. As Ma (2005) suggests, drawing upon Deleuze, this in turn makes things to appear to be self-given and thus create a common sense organised around a unified self-given subject and a unified self-given object. Indeed, Ma (2005) argues that this logic of self-referentiality is central to Husserl's phenomenological notions of reduction. Rather than a process of reduction, a post-phenomenological style of writing is one that attempts to bring sense into being "not in the form of the manifest or denotative meaning of language but in the form of lateral relations or kinships implicated in the occult trading of the metaphor – i.e., in the form of possibilities, of potential, and of becoming, promised in the process of metaphorical transfers and exchanges" (Ma 2005: 101).

In doing so, metaphor itself becomes a form of metamorphosis. Here a post-phenomenological language and writing works: "to bring unknown things to life, to summon forth new worlds to come...and...engage...the (re)organization of the materials of writing" (Ma 2005: 102).

Put in another way, a post-phenomenological writing style is about creating languages and vocabularies that establish connections between previously unconnected things and, through this connecting, generates new ways of thinking, seeing, and feeling such things. It is a post-phenomenology because it does not follow the method of phenomenological reduction, which works to name given things. Rather, it seeks metamorphosis via the logic of "adding or addition – i.e., a returning the knowledge of things back to things themselves rather than a

reducing things to the knowledge of them” (Ma 2005: 109). As such, it operates as a “phenomenology purged of the phantom...[I]” (Ma 2005: 108). The next section works to illustrate and develop these points and demonstrate how the style of objects can be analyzed and written about in a post-phenomenological style. As will become clear, a post-phenomenological perspective allows us to interrogate both the familiarity and unfamiliarity of human practices as well as familiar and unfamiliar non-human objects as well.

## Two Post-phenomenological styles

Cultivating a post-phenomenological style, then, is a matter of working with things as they appear both to one another and to us to identify their particular style. With this in mind, in this section we consider two styles that a post-phenomenological approach could cultivate: allure and resonance. These styles subtly alter the contours of how we think about and write the (non)human and provide an alternative to the design and implementation of research method.

As Spinoza *et al* (1999: 21) put it, depending on the style that we identify, “not only...[does]...the style allow different things to appear; they make different things significant and worthy of notice”. Therefore, there are many potential starting points for thinking about style here. We have chosen to focus on the combination of allure and resonance for a number of reasons. Firstly, these styles reflect the core tenets of a post-phenomenological approach: an emphasis on objects and how they appear, while remaining excessive of these appearances (allure) and the moments of encounter and translation when these objects collide with human sense and change both objects and humans in the process (resonance).

Secondly, both of these styles point to a way of accounting for human sense without reducing objects to the way they appear to human sense. In other words, the allure and resonance of objects are not human interpretations of these phenomena. Rather the style of the objects themselves drives how they are experienced and used. Resultantly, both allure and resonance are useful when it comes to thinking through the excessive nature of materiality and how materializations take place across the interrelations of human and nonhuman worlds (McCormack 2017).

In exploring these styles we draw on the example of the live-action children's television programme 'In the Night Garden'. Our selection of this example is largely circumstantial. At the time of writing the paper one author was routinely spending a significant amount of time watching this programme with their 2-year-old daughter. Amid the routine of pre-dinner-time watching, that day's reading, discussion, and reflection on ideas of style crystalized. As such, we are not suggesting that this case should be seen to be in some way preferential when it comes to thinking about these styles or style in general. It is quite possible that a range of other objects could have formed the starting point for this discussion. There is also, though, more to this example than this personal connection. In addition to provoking us to think, there is a broader relevance to working with this sort of object. It is widely recognized that such forms of popular media play a significant part in shaping social life, individuals' behaviors, and cultural understandings (see Adams *et al* 2014). 'In The Night Garden' is a clear example of this. The programme was first broadcast in 2006 on the 'CBeebies' BBC channel and is currently shown in the UK daily in the 'bedtime slot' of approximately 6.20pm. This longstanding position on a prominent broadcasters' channel (alongside being shown in a total

of 120 countries (Lane 2007)) means that 'In The Night Garden' features prominently amongst many children's daily lifeworlds.

'In The Night Garden' is aimed at pre-school age children. The basic 'plot' revolves around a humanoid character – a blue cuddly toy called Iggle Piggle who carries a red blanket and has a bell in his foot – sailing off on a small boat to 'the garden in the night'. This is meant to represent the dreamlike time between waking and sleeping (BBC 2007). In the garden, we find an idyllic green forest landscape occupied by an array of toys, including humanoid characters and apparently sentient objects. These include Upsy Daisy (a doll who likes to dance and sing), Makka Pakka (a bipedal humanoid who lives in a cave/collects rocks), and the Tombiboos (3 smaller humanoids who live in a bush). The vocabulary of these characters is generally limited to saying the various syllables of their own names. There are also the Haahoos (giant inflatable pillow-like creatures), the Tittifers (an array of tropical song birds), the Ninky Nonk (an apparently sentient/driverless train – see below), and the Pinky Ponk (an apparently sentient/driverless air ship). The programme is narrated by Derek Jacobi. Each episode is based on various combinations of these characters engaging in an activity – playing with a ball, looking for one of the other characters, riding on the Pinky Ponk/Ninky Nonk, and so on. At times, episodes consist of the characters simply appearing and introducing themselves before walking off and making no further appearance.

## Allure

One way of understanding the style of objects that are involved in 'In The Night Garden' would be to analyse their allure. The term allure emerges from Harman's work on objects. Here

allure refers to “a special and intermittent experience in which the intimate bond between a things unity and its plurality of notes partially disintegrates” (Harman 2005: 143). As Shaviro (2014: 53) explains, allure refers to:

“the sense of an object’s existence apart from, and over and above, its own qualities. Allure has to do with the showing forth of that, which is, strictly speaking inaccessible...In the event of allure, I encounter the very being of a thing, beyond all definition or correlation. I am forced to acknowledge its integrity, entirely apart from me”.

To partly identify an object’s style, a post-phenomenologist could attempt to understand what is alluring about an object, by examining how an object’s qualities tend to shift, while remaining a distinct recognisable entity. This analysis would then focus on the relationship between the allure of an object and what Shaviro calls its metamorphosis. Shaviro defines metamorphosis as a kind of inverse of allure. For Shaviro (2014: 53-54):

“There is also a kind of aesthetic event that has to do with the retreat of things beyond our grasp...Metamorphosis is a kind of wayward attraction, movement of withdrawal and substitution...In metamorphosis, it is not the thing itself that attracts me, over and above its qualities; it is rather the very unsteadiness of the thing that draws me onwards as it ripples and shift in a kind of protean wavering”.

One way of understanding the style of an object would be to analyse how it is designed or constructed to enable this continuing shift between allure and metamorphosis, which influences what the object expresses and how it is addressed by humans and other objects. To do this, a post-phenomenologist could begin by focusing on what appears to be alluring about an object and how that allure gives way to metamorphosis as they encounter it. They

can explore the conditions under which an object transitions between allure and metamorphosis and begin to speculate on whether these transitions are intentional or accidental. If the transitions are deemed intentional, the post-phenomenologist can then begin to investigate what the aim of these transitions are and their effectiveness. Of course, the allure and metamorphosis of objects cannot be directly known in and of themselves. Rather allure and metamorphosis operate as useful concepts that provide a starting point for exploring how the qualities of objects seem to shift and change, while remaining ostensibly the same thing. Here allure is understood as a “process...[that]...allows impregnable objects to communicate with each other in their sensual form” (Nieuwenhuis 2014: 12).

To make sense of the difference between allure and metamorphosis and how these concepts can be practically employed to analyse the style of objects, we can turn to an example from ‘In The Night Garden’. Take the object of the Ninky Nonk (see Figure 1). The Ninky Nonk is a vehicle consisting of five individual wheeled sections linked by a connecting pipe. The leading section is a red banana shape with lights and a green globe in the middle. The second section is a smaller globe shape with a hollow middle and windows. Unlike the first section, this section has a door that opens and allows passengers to enter. The third section is a far smaller detached house, also with a door for passengers to enter. The fourth section is a tall phone box like construction with an upstairs seating section and a door for passengers. The final section is a one seater buggy, which also has a door for passengers. From a narrative perspective, each section of the Ninky Nonk serves as a vehicle for different characters from the show to travel around the Night Garden. But the Ninky Nonk is not just a narrative device, it is also an alluring thing that seems to exceed and confound the viewers expectations and understandings on a number of different levels.

**Figure 1: A Toy Ninky Nonk**



First, the allure of the Ninky Nonk is expressed by the variety of objects it seems to mimic and how it mimics them. Sometimes the Ninky Nonk expresses serpentine qualities as it bursts through a bush into the Night Garden at the start of an episode. At other times, the Ninky Nonk expresses train like qualities as it stops and starts to let the characters on and off. On other occasions, it seems to express qualities of a playful dog or squirrel as it zooms around of its own accord with no particular purpose or destination in mind and dashes vertically up a tree trunk or upside down along a branch. Expressing these wide variety of qualities, the Ninky Nonk is alluring in the sense that it acts as a ‘lure for feeling’. As Shaviro (2014: 54-55) puts it:

“the qualities of a thing...are only the bait that the thing holds out to me in order to draw me toward it...When I respond to a lure – and even if I respond to it negatively, by rejecting it – I am led to envision a possibility...and thereby to feel something that I would not otherwise”.

For one of the author’s children the Ninky Nonk was alluring precisely through the way its shifting qualities generated a range of affective responses that were seemingly tied to these qualities. Fear, as the Ninky Nonk burst through the bush like a snake, turned to surprise as it whizzed around like a dog, which ended with a giggle as the Ninky Nonk drove in loops around a tree branch. From a post-phenomenological position, these responses were at least partly a result of the Ninky Nonk’s movements between allure and metamorphosis. As Shaviro (2014: 54) explains: “in the movement of allure, the web of meaning is ruptured as the thing emerges violently from its context; but in the movement of metamorphosis, the web of meaning is multiplied and extended, echoed and distorted...as the thing loses itself in its own ramifying traces”. Shooting through the bush, the Ninky Nonk seems to break with the existing calm context of the Night Garden, generating a sense of fear. But, in expressing dog and squirrel like qualities, it becomes hard to pin down exactly what the Ninky Nonk is or what it can do, generating a sense of surprise and then playfulness: ‘what’s it doing, daddy? Silly Ninky Nonk’. In this case, part of the allure of the Ninky Nonk is that it is dog like, squirrel like, train like and snake like, while not being reducible to any of these individual qualities.

Second, the Ninky Nonk is also an alluring object because of its ambiguous spatiality. The makers of the show have stated that the Night Garden was designed to be a space that exists in-between the worlds of wake and sleep. In this regard, it could be argued that the Ninky



Nonk's ambiguous spatiality is utilised to reinforce this dreamlike feeling. Specifically, the relative exterior size of the Ninky Nonk changes depending on the perspective from which it is viewed and which character is entering or exiting it. Driving through the forest – an actual woodland setting in the UK – the Ninky Nonk appears to be the size of a child's toy and much smaller than the show's characters. This is also the case at the end of each episode when all of the characters assemble next to a band stand to do a dance. However, when characters stand alongside the Ninky Nonk waiting to board, it is a very large vehicle many times their height.

From this position, space is not a container within which the Ninky Nonk sits. Rather, how the qualities of the Ninky Nonk shift and relate to the other objects in 'In the Night Garden', such as the trees, the grass and the characters, alters both of their spatialities in ways that heighten the allure of these objects for the viewer. For instance, from an external view the Ninky Nonk has an allure as it appears to be a single object, composed of different parts that remain the same shape and size. Furthermore, the doors and windows in the various sections of the Ninky Nonk allow the viewer to see the interior sections and provide a sense that the inside and outside of the Ninky Nonk are actually connected as part of one space. But, when a character approaches the Ninky Nonk to get into one of the carriages, this solidity gives way to a sense of metamorphosis as the internal shots defy spatial scale between characters on the outside and inside of the vehicle.

For Shaviro (2014: 56) "what an entity feels is what an entity is" and any feeling results in "some alteration of the one who feels...whether grandly or minutely". From a post-phenomenological perspective, the ambiguous spatiality of the Ninky Nonk can create a

dreamlike feeling precisely through the way the Ninky Nonk shifts between allure and metamorphosis: as something whose spatial consistency changes, depending on what or who encounters it. Here the Ninky Nonk is not interpreted as dreamlike by the viewer. It is itself dreamlike and has a dreamlike allure, which can then alter the viewer in a dreamlike way. This allure allows children and adult viewers alike to recognise the Ninky Nonk as an everyday, familiar thing, but also something that appears strange and magical. Put in another way, while its qualities may be subject to change throughout 'In The Night Garden', the Ninky Nonk continues to be recognisably the Ninky Nonk, rather than the Pinky Ponk, or anything else. As Shaviro (2014: 55) puts it, the allure of an entity points to the fact that "what affects me is not just certain qualities of the thing but its total and irreducible existence".

Reflecting on the two examples above, we can consider how the Ninky Nonk shifts between allure and metamorphosis and suggest that this specificity is key to the Ninky Nonk's style, which we could name as magical or intriguing. The concept of allure is useful here because it suggests that the magical style of the Ninky Nonk is not just the sum total of the qualities it expresses, but how these qualities have been designed to shift between allure and metamorphosis to create an entirely singular, highly engaging object. Analysing the style of the Ninky Nonk in terms of allure thus allows us to understand one reason why children enjoy watching 'In The Night Garden' and how this sense of magic and intrigue is generated.

While much more could be said about 'In The Night Garden', what we want to emphasise in this short vignette is that the concept of allure can be used as one way to interrogate and analyse the style of things. In this example, further analysis could seek to understand how the metamorphic and alluring styles of the Ninky Nonk relates to objects from 'In the Night

Garden’ and how these styles potentially impact childrens’ engagement with the show. Crucially, such an approach would allow us to account for these experiences by focusing on the objects themselves, rather than reducing the effects of these objects to how they are interpreted by children who watch ‘In the Night Garden’ alone.

## Resonance

A second way of understanding the style of objects found ‘In the Night Garden’ would be to examine how they come to resonate with other objects or entities. Resonance comes from the Latin *resonare*, which means “to sound again” (Augoyard and Torgue 2005: 108). Important here though is the proximity of *resonare* to “its homonym *raisonner* (to reason)” (Augoyard and Torgue 2005: 108). This has meant that a number of connotations have come to be associated with the term. It is common, for example, for reference to something (a sentiment, argument, mood, and so on) ‘resonating’ with us or someone being ‘on the same wave length’ as another. Further, Bryant (2011: 222) suggests that “Resonance refers to the capacity of one system to be perturbed or irritated by another system”. This is interesting in the way that it draws attention to resonance as being both about encounter but also impact – it’s not just about one thing being aligned in some way with another (being on the same wave length etc), but more generally that there is an interaction that does something to those that interact. This might mean a situation of sympathy or synchronization – as suggested above – but it might also mean a disruption. In either case, it might lead to something different emerging in the resultant action. Finally, there is also the question of temporality here. This brings in the related term reverberation which can be understood as a ‘propagation effect’ whereby something is more or less extending in across space and over time, returning

to the listener while changing as it does so (Augoyard and Torgue 2005). In this sense resonance might be seen to unfold, and in that unfolding differ more or less intensely.

Based on this, a post-phenomenologist could attempt to understand how people and objects come to resonate with each other, on what registers of sense as well as meaning such resonance takes place, to the differences that emerge in such resonance, and to what end (and beginnings) such resonance leads.

It is important to be clear here that such interaction and potential synchronization lies at a particular level of corporeal encounter (when bodies are involved) or a broader turbulent materiality where resonance occurs between objects. As Nancy draws attention to, for example, the body is a resonance chamber. He asks:

“Isn't the space of the listening body...just...a hollow column over which a skin is stretched, but also from which the opening of a mouth can resume and revive resonance? A blow from outside, clamour from within, this sonorous, sonorized body undertakes a simultaneous listening to a 'self' and to a 'world' that are both in resonance” (2007: 42-43).

Pursuing this sonic emphasis, the post-phenomenologist's focus is pushed beyond a concern for the *content* of sound – its meanings, significances, references, and so on – as is so often the case when it comes to social scientific accounts of sound, and instead towards to the *force* of sound in the resonance it brings about (see Simpson 2009). A phenomenology of sound might entail a directed consideration of certain attributes of the sound occurring, making sound the intentional correlate of our attention (Idhe 2007). Distinct from this, a concern for

resonance focuses the analysis on the expressivity of sound and so a more general receptivity of bodies and objects whereby sound is contemporaneous with such bodies and objects, rather than something a subject comes to, and orientates itself towards, through analytic reflection. This places “emphasis on the sensory relationship between world and listener, a listening that begins not with the search for meanings but on the basis of the sensory qualities of sounds” (Kane 2012: 443) and on the perturbations that come to unfold between objects in their encounters (Ash 2013). The post-phenomenologist can then start to explore how resonance emerges but also the extent to which such resonance is specifically targeted or an objective of that entity, agent, or other involved party.

Returning to ‘In the Night Garden’ we can consider a specific form of sonic encounter whereby resonance emerges as a central component of the interaction: the programme’s soundtrack. Programmes such as ‘In the Night Garden’ have come under fierce criticism for the perceived negative impact they can have on the children’s linguistic development, given their potential prominence in children’s everyday soundscapes (see Mills 2017). As with other well known programmes from the same production team – such as ‘The Teletubbies’ – the fact that the characters do not speak ‘properly’ is felt to lead to similarly improper speech in children. However, such an interpretative focus – a limitation of concern to the lack of meaning in the sounds broadcast here – misses a key function of the programme’s sounds and their role in routine familial practices. The show overtly intends to produce a certain type of resonance with its young audience (and their parents). As the show’s Executive Producer Anne Wood notes,

“We [Wood and creator Andrew Davenport] became very aware of the anxiety surrounding the care of young children which manifested itself in all kind of directions –

but the one big subject that came up again and again was bedtime. It's the classic time for tension between children who want to stay up and parents who want them to go to bed. We wanted to explore the difference between being asleep and being awake from a child's point of view: the difference between closing your eyes and pretending to be asleep and closing your eyes and sleeping. So this is a programme about calming things down whereas most children's TV is about gee-ing everything up!" (BBC 2007).

With that, it is intended that the characters are deliberate silly, echoing the eccentricities of those found in more traditional nursery rhymes. As part of that silliness, repetition and routine form fundamental features of the programme's resonant style. For example, when a number of the main characters appear, the narrator sings their song and the character dances along (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/curations/night-garden-songs>). These are generally very short – lasting around 15 seconds – and are normally made up of a single verse. The music has been described as having a lilting 'hurdy-gurdy' like quality (Lane 2007). In many ways, beyond including repeating reference to/use of the character's name, these songs are almost completely nonsensical: for example, "Ipsy, Upsy, Daisy Doo" from Upsy Daisy's song, or "Appa yakka" from Makka Pakka's song. They don't convey any meaning relevant to the events happening in the programme, the character, or really any meaning at all. However, as Jacobi notes, "These may be silly words, but they're nice words: charming, attractive, fun words".

Just because these songs appear meaningless, that does not take away their capacity to resonate in a particular way with those who listen. There is clearly an expressive functionality here. The strong rhymes, alliteration, the rhythm and cadence, and so on, and, fundamentally,

their regular repetition *episode after episode* lends them an immediate and clear familiarity. This is a very deliberate agenda of those behind the programme. As Davenport notes, the intention was to: “make a calming programme that would capture the atmosphere that I remembered [from his own childhood], that sense of peace and security, warmth, the moments of silliness that you share with whoever's reading you the [bedtime] story” (Lane 2007).

In having this soothing or comforting style despite their apparently nonsensical content, these songs can be seen to be expressive in the sense that:

“Expressions are gestures, fancies, rituals, vocalizations, and speech. Expression never simply represent, depict, describe, or report on the things we couple up with. Expressions anticipate couplings our bodies will make, go back to couplings our bodies have already made and no longer make, slow down the couplings our bodies are making with things and events or accelerate them, detach them or unite them, map them out or segment them. Our bodies, for their part, with the couplings they make with things, expose themselves, extend themselves in expression” (Lingis 2004: 274).

In such expression, these recurring short musical interludes acts as refrains and it is through this that a particular resonance emerges between sound, video, and viewer. Through this, we are “catching on to a musicality that opens up space for movement. And a space for recurrence” (Lingis 2004: 287). Such an “expressive refrain...has to be conceived dynamically as a *style*...a constant pattern that generates variation” (Lingis 2004: 281). The songs here are “like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos”, a calm amid the potentially troubling time that is bed time. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 343).

Upsy Daisy and Makka Pakka's songs are 'functional refrains' in that they create a feeling of being at home and they are territorial refrains in that they "establish a home base" (Lingis 2004: 284). The components of the song, the rhymes, the nice silly words, the dances that go with them night after night "are used for organizing a space...The forces of chaos are kept outside as much as possible" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 343).

While the expressivity of these songs will vary with specific circumstances (Lingis 2004) – anything from the particular mood or disposition of a child on a given day, to issues of colic or other ailments that might affect sleep, to cycles of hunger and feeding– their repetition creates expectation and their repetition meets that expectation, night after night. For all their silly rhythmic rhyming nonsense, they seek to organize. And with that, they also allow for a future horizon to emerge – they mark and make possible a process of movement towards sleep. In this way, as Bennett (2001: 6) suggests, "the repetition of word sounds not only exaggerates the tempo of an ordinary phrase and not only eventually renders a meaningful phrase nonsense", but also a nonsense phrase can be rendered meaningful. In both cases "it can also provoke new ideas, perspectives, and identities" (Bennett 2001: 6). In being expressive nonsense becomes meaningful; "In an enchanting refrain" we gain "a new sense of things" (Bennett 2001: 6). Here "One ventures from home on the thread of a tune" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 344) that might lead to sleep (or the garden in the night)

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have sought to further recent developments in geography around post-phenomenological ways of thinking about everyday life. In particular, this paper has taken



steps in filling a notable gap in the existing post-phenomenological literature in terms of how we might 'do' post-phenomenological research (also see Ash *et al* 2018). A fundamental challenge for post-phenomenological research comes in how we might learn to attend to both the "affective palpability of post-phenomenological worlds" and how such worlds are simultaneously irreducible to a human-world correlate (McCormack 2017: 7). In response, we have proposed that post-phenomenology be understood as a style of analysis that in itself is attentive to the styles of objects' being and interactions within cultural worlds. This attentiveness to the style of objects and interactions involves learning to identify the expressivity of both human and non-human beings so that we can understand their contribution to the functioning of a given situation. We have shown this through the discussion of two such styles – allure and resonance.

What should be clear from these examples is while a post-phenomenological style needs to be based upon the tenets or postulates mentioned in the introduction (otherwise it could not be considered post-phenomenological), a style is not a general or universal thing. Rather, a style has to be developed in response to a particular phenomenon, object, or issue and is specific for each domain or issue the post-phenomenologist attempts to study. Unlike a method, such as semi-structured interview, a post-phenomenological style cannot simply be re-applied using the same protocols and procedures to a range of different objects. Analysing 'In The Night Garden' might involve one style or set of styles, while analysing a smart phone might require a rather different set of styles. Of course, this makes a post-phenomenological analysis more difficult and time consuming than becoming skilled at interviews and then interviewing people. But, with this expense comes a potentially more fine-tuned mode of analysis that can offer a custom-built set of tools that may enable researchers to engage with

an issue with increased sensitivity. In a world brimming with entities that are advertently and inadvertently contributing to a whole host of issues and problems, we suggest such sensitivity is very helpful to researchers who rightly have difficulty in accounting for these entities using humanistic techniques, such as interviews or surveys.

To conclude, a post-phenomenological style is active and creative in how it engages with its objects. Just as an expert can identify the styles in a situation and then respond to this situation by subtly twisting or altering these styles, we suggest that those working in the geohumanities concerned with the non-human learn to develop and apply styles to their own objects of analysis. This is not to say that style and method are opposed to one another. Styles can produce methods and methods can inform styles. But we would propose that care be taken to avoid the instrumentalization of the styles of thinking we discuss. Working post-phenomenologically requires that researchers must always remain open to the strangeness of objects. It is in sensing the strangeness and uncanniness of the familiar that news ways of engaging and expressing objects and things becomes possible.

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