

# *Subjects Without a World? An Husserlian Analysis of Solitary Confinement*

*Lisa Guenther*

## **Human Studies**

A Journal for Philosophy and the  
Social Sciences

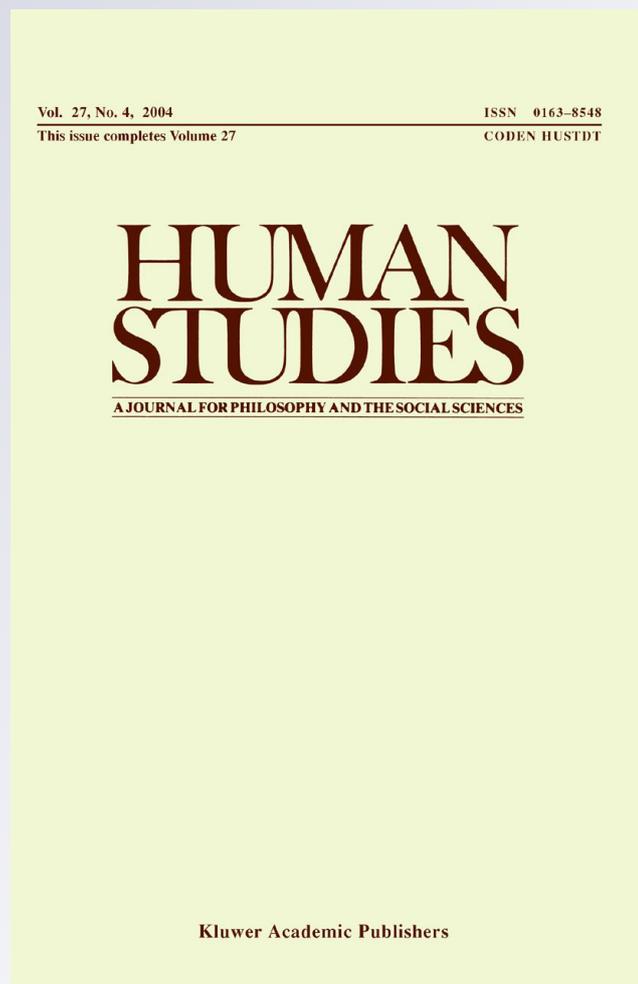
ISSN 0163-8548

Volume 34

Number 3

Hum Stud (2011) 34:257-276

DOI 10.1007/s10746-011-9182-0



**Your article is protected by copyright and all rights are held exclusively by Springer Science+Business Media B.V.. This e-offprint is for personal use only and shall not be self-archived in electronic repositories. If you wish to self-archive your work, please use the accepted author's version for posting to your own website or your institution's repository. You may further deposit the accepted author's version on a funder's repository at a funder's request, provided it is not made publicly available until 12 months after publication.**

## Subjects Without a World? An Husserlian Analysis of Solitary Confinement

Lisa Guenther

Published online: 28 June 2011  
© Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2011

**Abstract** Psychiatrist Stuart Grassian has proposed the term “SHU syndrome” to name the cluster of cognitive, perceptual and affective symptoms that commonly arise for inmates held in the Special Housing Units (SHU) of supermax prisons. In this paper, I analyze the harm of solitary confinement from a phenomenological perspective by drawing on Husserl’s account of the essential relation between consciousness, the experience of an alter ego and the sense of a real, Objective world. While Husserl’s prioritization of transcendental subjectivity over transcendental intersubjectivity underestimates the degree to which first-person consciousness is constitutively intertwined with the embodied consciousness of others, Husserl’s phenomenology nevertheless provides a fruitful starting-point for a philosophical engagement with the psychiatric research on solitary confinement.

**Keywords** Husserl · Solitary confinement · Supermax prisons · Phenomenology

The practice of prolonged solitary confinement has raised many questions since the emergence of supermax prisons in the mid-1980s: legal questions about the constitutionality of a practice that strikes many people as cruel and unusual punishment; ethical questions about the permissibility of radical isolation, whether or not it is found to be constitutional; clinical questions about the psychological effects of prolonged isolation; social questions about the racialization of crime and the hyper-incarceration of African-Americans and Latinos; economic questions about the growth of private prison corporations and the cost of holding inmates in high-tech surveillance units; and political questions about the complicity of state and federal governments in the prison industrial complex. These questions intersect

---

L. Guenther (✉)

Department of Philosophy, Vanderbilt University, 229 Furman Hall, Nashville, TN 37240, USA  
e-mail: lisa.n.guenther@gmail.com

in manifold ways, raising further set of conceptual questions about the relation between subjectivity and community, which philosophers have been surprisingly slow to raise: What does it mean to belong to a community that isolates certain individuals for days, weeks, or even years, in the name of justice?<sup>1</sup> What implicit assumptions about the nature of subjectivity and the importance (or unimportance) of intersubjective relations are involved in the practice of solitary confinement? How are these assumptions challenged by the psychiatric literature on the debilitating perceptual, cognitive and affective symptoms of prolonged solitary confinement? What might we learn as philosophers about the relation between self and other through a philosophical engagement with this literature? And how might our understanding of the ethical, political, social and economic issues raised by supermax prisons be enriched through such an engagement?

In this paper, I propose a phenomenological analysis of solitary confinement in supermax prisons, drawing on Stuart Grassian's 1982 study of inmates in Block 10 of Walpole Penitentiary in Massachusetts. The inmates had been held in solitary confinement in a unit 1.8 m X 2.7 m in size, for a median time of 2 months (ranging from 11 days to 10 months). Since 1979, each unit had been sealed with a solid steel door blocking natural light, air flow, and a view to the outside; at the same time, all radios, televisions and reading materials apart from the Bible had been confiscated. Grassian was brought into Block 10 as an expert witness in a class action lawsuit on behalf of the inmates, who claimed that their conditions amounted to cruel and unusual punishment.<sup>2</sup> While many of the inmates were reluctant to speak at first, claiming that "Some of the guys can't take it—not me" (Grassian 1983: 1451), a pattern of cognitive impairment, perceptual distortions and affective strain soon emerged:

---

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this enquiry, I have bracketed out the reasons why an inmate might end up in supermax confinement, but it is important to note that there are many different paths to the SHU, including possession of contraband, suspected membership in a gang, and protection against threats of violence from other inmates. African-American and Latino inmates are over-represented in supermax units, in part because of policies concerning perceived gang membership, and mentally ill or developmentally-disabled inmates are also overrepresented due to "behavioral" differences that are interpreted as misbehavior (Haney 2003: 127; Arrigo and Bullock 2008: 633). Once an inmate has landed in SHU, it can be extremely difficult to get back into the general prison population; cases are reviewed internally by prison administration, and even a minor infringement of prison rules can result in further isolation.

<sup>2</sup> See *Libby v. Comm'r of Corr.*, 432 N.E.2d 486 (Mass. 1982). The court ruled that the conditions in Block 10 "did not offend the Eighth Amendment because its inmates were provided adequate food, clothing, sanitation, medical care, and communication with others" (Libby, 385 Mass. at 431–432). See Dayan's (2005) critique of the way cases claiming "cruel and unusual punishment" have for the most part worked against the interests of prisoners rather than protecting them. If the context of Grassian's research raises any doubts about its scientific neutrality, these doubts should be allayed by the consistency of his research with nearly every study of the psychological effects of solitary confinement. See Kupers (1999), Haney and Lynch (1997), Haney (2003). A dissenting voice in this literature comes from Bonta and Gendreau (1990), Canadian researchers who argue that while there is clinical evidence for the detrimental effects of long-term solitary confinement, there are few, if any, negative effects produced by solitary confinement under 10 days; but Bonta and Gendreau's research has been criticized for relying on evidence from voluntary solitary confinement rather than coerced solitude in prison. I have chosen to focus on Grassian's research in particular because he offers the most extensive and detailed reports of prisoners' first-person testimony.

I went to a standstill psychologically once—lapse of memory. I didn't talk for 15 days. I couldn't hear clearly. You can't see—you're blind—block everything out—disoriented, awareness is very bad. Did someone say he's coming out of it? I think what I'm saying is true—not sure. I think I was drooling—a complete standstill. (1453)

They come by [for breakfast] with four trays; the first has big pancakes—I think I'm going to get them. Then someone comes up and gives me tiny ones—they get real small, like silver dollars. I seem to see movements—real fast motions in front of me. Then seems like they're doing things behind your back—can't quite see them. Did someone just hit me? I dwell on it for hours. (1452)

Melting, everything in the cell starts moving; everything gets darker, you feel you are losing your vision. (1452)

I can't concentrate, can't read... Your mind's narcotized... sometimes can't grasp words in my mind that I know. Get stuck, have to think of another word. Memory is going. You feel you are losing something you might not get back. (1453)

Deprived of everyday encounters with other people, and confined to a space with radically diminished sensory stimulus, many inmates come unhinged from reality. Their senses seem to betray them; objects begin to move, melt or shrink of their own accord. Even the effort to reflect on their experience becomes a form of pathology, leading one prisoner to “dwell on it for hours,” while another goes into “a complete standstill”. They can't think straight, can't remember things, can't focus properly, and can't even see clearly. What is the prisoner in solitary confinement at risk of losing, to the point of “not get[ing it] back”? And what is it about the supermax unit that precipitates this loss?<sup>3</sup>

Grassian has coined the term “SHU Syndrome” to name the cluster of systems produced by long term confinement in a Special Housing Unit [SHU] or other supermax-level prison cell. He identifies six basic components of SHU Syndrome: (1) Hyperresponsivity to External Stimuli; (2) Perceptual Distortions, Illusions, and Hallucinations; (3) Panic Attacks, (4) Difficulties with Thinking, Concentration, and Memory; (5) Intrusive Obsessional Thoughts; and (6) Overt Paranoia (Grassian 2006, 335, 336). He notes that this particular configuration of symptoms is “strikingly unique” and that the perceptual disturbances in particular are “virtually found nowhere else” (Grassian 2006: 337). But he does not offer an explanation of why these particular symptoms occur together, or why they are produced by the specific situation of supermax confinement. In what follows, I will reflect on Grassian's research in light of Edmund Husserl's phenomenological explorations of

<sup>3</sup> The effects of prolonged solitary confinement overlap to a great degree with the effects of sensory deprivation (see Heron et al. 1956). It seems significant that the intensity of SHU syndrome at Walpole Penitentiary increased dramatically after the steel doors were shut, and the minimal stimulation of light, air and a view to the outside, was eliminated. In this paper, I focus on the importance of a bodily relation to others for constituting and sustaining a sense of Objective reality, but a further phenomenological exploration of the connection between sensory deprivation and solitary confinement is clearly warranted.

the relation between consciousness, others and objects in a shared world. Moving between the psychiatric and phenomenological literature, I will develop my own account of what subjectivity must be like in order for SHU Syndrome to be possible.<sup>4</sup>

### An Husserlian Account of Subjectivity

The challenge of phenomenology is to reveal, through a careful description of intentional consciousness, the transcendental conditions for the possibility of experience. Husserl proposes the phenomenological reduction as a method for demonstrating that there is both an irreducible distinction between consciousness and world—such that consciousness is not just “a little tag-end of the world” (Husserl 1991: 24), not a substantive thing that can be studied like an object—and also an essential correlation between consciousness and world, such that it would be incoherent to speak of “mind” as if it were separable from that of which it is mindful. To perform the reduction, I must suspend the assumption of the natural attitude, namely that the world exists in a realm apart from consciousness, that I am a mind “over here” and that the world is a set of objects “out there” to which my mind somehow connects. To bracket the natural attitude is to shift one’s attention from the objects of experience to the way in which these objects are given to consciousness and constituted by noetic acts. The *epoché*, and the reduction that it makes possible, show that consciousness is essentially relational and intentional; it is always “consciousness of...” This, in turn, shows that the world is more than just the totality of existing objects, but rather the open-ended context within which something can become meaningful to someone.

Husserl might seem an unlikely candidate for a philosophical engagement with the psychiatric literature on SHU syndrome; after all, he developed the phenomenology reduction as a critical response to (what he took to be) the methodological naivety of empirical sciences such as psychology or psychiatry. But this is precisely what makes a phenomenological engagement with SHU syndrome so promising: The phenomenological reduction is a way of leading back [*re-ducere*] from the natural attitude, in which the constitution of meaning is taken for granted, to the phenomenological and transcendental attitude, in which we are able to explore both the conditions for the possibility of meaning and the structures by which meaningful experience emerges. The question of meaning is raised by psychiatric accounts of SHU syndrome, insofar as prisoners report the derangement or destabilization of their meaningful experience of the world, and of themselves as coherent subjects

---

<sup>4</sup> I will focus in particular on the cluster of cognitive and perceptual symptoms in SHU Syndrome, temporarily bracketing the affective symptoms such as anxiety, panic, obsession and paranoia. While these affective symptoms are extremely important, and while a full exploration of their interrelation with the cognitive and perceptual effects is my ultimate aim, I focus on Husserl for this preliminary phenomenological investigation of solitary confinement both to provide a groundwork for further work and also because his insights into the relations between self, other and world are exemplary in their clarity and sophistication. The work of phenomenologists such as Heidegger, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre would be better suited than Husserl to teach us about the affective dimensions of SHU syndrome.

of experience; but the psychiatric literature does not have the conceptual language to address questions about the very *possibility* of meaning and the structural conditions of its dissolution. If we can learn more about the possibility of meaning from phenomenology, then perhaps we can also learn more about why supermax confinement tends to undermine not only the inmate's psychological health, but also her capacity for a meaningful experience of the world. This understanding is valuable for the development of psychological treatment and social programs supporting survivors of solitary confinement, and for bolstering the legal, ethical, social and political critiques of supermax prisons.

In what follows, I will draw on Husserl's introduction to phenomenology in *Cartesian Meditations* to explain the relation between subjects, objects and others. While Husserl makes important contributions to the phenomenological analysis of intersubjectivity in *Ideas II*, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*, and the three-volume *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität*, I restrict my analysis to *Cartesian Meditations* because it shows, in the most schematic way, both the promise and the limitations of Husserl's phenomenology for understanding the experience of solitary confinement.

What view of subjectivity does Husserl's phenomenology propose in *Cartesian Meditations*? Husserl distinguishes between different "levels" or layers of consciousness, each of which is nested within other, more fundamental levels. At the foundation of all possible experience is the transcendental ego, the pure stream of consciousness that unfolds subjectively in a singular, unsharable way for any given consciousness. Husserl calls the transcendental ego "the acceptance-basis of all Objective acceptances and bases" (Husserl 1991: 26); it is that without which there would be no experience of anything whatsoever, and therefore no meaningful experience of the world. The transcendental ego is not some kind of transpersonal being of which each individual ego would be a token or a particular manifestation; it is just the transcendental dimension of any ego whatsoever, human or nonhuman, taken in its most basic sense as the sheer capacity for (self-)awareness. No one can share my exact stream of consciousness, nor can I access the singular flowing stream of any other consciousness. Each ego experiences the same world, but from its own unsharable perspective. To say this is not to condemn the ego to solipsism, as if the singularity of the transcendental ego prevented us from getting to know other egos or coming to share a certain way of looking at the world; it simply means that we cannot experience the world *as* that other ego.

In addition to this transcendental ego, each ego has its own personal history of flowing impressions, which includes everything from the mundane experience of glancing from left to right across a room, then staring down at my shoes, wondering what's for dinner, and so forth, to the life-changing experience of world events, personal traumas, and other impressions that dramatically shape our personal ego, its habits, and its concrete perspective on the world. While the transcendental ego is singular and unsharable—or "absolutely simple" and "absolutely clear" (Husserl 1991: 111)—and therefore does not have specific attributes or determinations apart from its character as a pure capacity for experience, the personal ego has its own distinctive shape, history and habits, its own idiosyncratic way of relating to the world. While the pure ego, or transcendental ego, is nothing worldly, the person or

“man” both belongs to the world and maintains its own particular perspective on that world. I am both a transcendental ego and a person; but these levels should not be confused or collapsed. While the transcendental ego is the pure power of constituting, with nothing behind it or underneath it as a cause, persons are constituted:

not only in relation to a pure Ego and a stream of consciousness with its manifolds of appearances but also in relation to an intersubjective consciousness, that is, in relation to an open manifold of their streams of consciousness which, by reciprocal empathy, are unified into a nexus which constitutes intersubjective objectivities. (Husserl 1991: 118)

While the most basic necessary condition for personhood is the transcendental ego, such that a being utterly lacking in consciousness, like a stone, can never become a person, the transcendental ego alone is not sufficient to constitute the full sense of concrete personhood. For the latter, we need embodied relations with other egos in a shared world, where each of us has a different but overlapping perspective on the same objects.

The highest level of ego-life is what Husserl calls “monad,” or “*the ego taken in full concreteness*” (Husserl 1991: 67-8). While the word monad suggests a self-enclosed bubble complete unto itself, for Husserl it refers to the whole nested structure of transcendental ego, personal ego and world. At this level of analysis, the world is not just a transcendental structure but rather the very specific historical and cultural lifeworld of the ego. In this sense, the monad is not merely an individual, but (to anticipate Heidegger’s neologism), a Being-in-the-world, inseparable in its full concreteness from the specific, determinate but open-ended world of its experience. The full monad is the whole complex of interrelations within and between a multi-leveled self, a concrete world, and the other concrete egos who co-constitute this world. I will argue that this sense of full, concrete personhood is structurally undermined in prolonged solitary confinement.

### **From Consciousness to World**

The phenomenological project of providing a foundation for the natural and social sciences depends on showing that, while each consciousness constitutes its own singular, unsharable experience of the world, nevertheless, we are all oriented towards one common world, and this world transcends our experience of it. How does the singular ego constitute within itself the sense of the world, without thereby committing itself to a solipsistic identification of its own experience with the actual status of the world, thereby losing any meaningful sense of truth, reality or objectivity? Husserl addresses the threat of solipsism by adopting a “transcendental solipsism” for methodological purposes (Husserl 1991: 30). Already in performing the phenomenological-transcendental reduction, I had to bracket out both the assumption that objects within the world exist in a realm apart from my own experience of them, and also the assumption that other egos exist in a realm apart. “Other men than I, and brute animals, are data of experience for me only by virtue

of my sensuous experience of their bodily organisms; and, since the validity of this experience too is called into question, I must not use it" (Husserl 1991: 19). This bracketing of the *assumption* that other subjects exist apart from my own is necessary in order to show how the *sense* of other subjects and of a shared intersubjective world is constituted within transcendental consciousness. His point is not that the ego really is solipsistic, but that we must begin from a position of a methodological solipsism in order to show how and why solipsism is ultimately untenable. My main question in this section is whether even this provisional bracketing of others is possible, and what the implications for phenomenology might be if it turns out not to be impossible or even inconceivable.

In Meditation 5, Husserl proposes a further "reduction to ownness" within the phenomenological-transcendental reduction. In order to perform the reduction to ownness, I must bracket out the sense of "other subjects" in order to see what—if anything—remains within consciousness. In order to do this in a properly transcendental fashion, I cannot simply imagine that a "universal plague" has destroyed every other subject, leaving me alone in the world (Husserl 1991: 93). Such an empirical abstraction would not be radical enough; it would leave behind all of the structures that my previous experience of others has already contributed to my sense of ownness. In order to truly bracket out the *sense*, "other subjects," I must bracket out not only the existence of other conscious beings, but also all of the layers of meaning that other subjects contribute to my experience of the world, including "cultural predicates" and the sense of belonging to a common world with "the characteristic of being there for and accessible to everyone, of being capable of mattering or not mattering to each in his living and striving" (Husserl 1991: 95-6). In order to succeed, the reduction to ownness would have to suspend both the specific sense of "other subjects" and the more general, diffuse and implicit way in which my experience of other subjects as such has shaped the sense of inanimate objects as there-for-others, belonging to a shared world, and mattering not only to me but also to others. All of this must be "excluded abstractively" (Husserl 1991: 96) in order to access the sphere of ownness that is mine and mine alone, a sphere of experience to which nothing alien or not-mine has contributed.

What would remain after everything "other" had been bracketed out in this way? Husserl argues that I would still have an experience of bodies, but no longer *as* bodies animated by another consciousness. I would still have an experience of objects, but not *as* objects belonging to a shared world, available to anyone beyond myself (that is, not as real or independently-existing objects). I would be left with nothing but "*a unitarily coherent stratum of the phenomenon world*, a stratum of the phenomenon that is the correlate of continuously harmonious, continuing world-experience" (Husserl 1991: 96). This "unitarily coherent" stratum of "continuously harmonious" experience would be "the founding stratum" for my own meaningful experience of the world, and even for my meaningful experience of the others whose existence was bracketed out through the reduction to ownness (Husserl 1991: 96).<sup>5</sup> By stripping away the

<sup>5</sup> "[T]hat is to say: I obviously cannot have the "alien" or "other" as experience, and therefore cannot have the sense "Objective world" as an experiential sense, without having this stratum in actual experience; whereas the reverse is not the case" (Husserl 1991: 96).

contributions of others to my own experience of the world in its full concreteness, Husserl claims to have discovered the founding stratum of coherent, unitary, harmonious world-experience upon which both the sense of the other as an “alter ego” and the sense of the world as a real, “Objective world” will be founded.

I want to pause at this moment to consider the road not taken: the possibility of considering what my experience would be like in the *empirical* absence of others, after a “universal plague” has left me alone in the world. This possibility is excluded by Husserl because it would not tell us anything relevant to the *transcendental* structure of subjectivity and/or intersubjectivity; to perform the reduction to ownness by imagining the empirical absence of others would be to confuse two levels of analysis. And yet, as I will argue, these levels refuse to remain neatly distinguished even in Husserl’s own avowedly transcendental account of the reduction. If this is the case, then there may be something important for us to learn about the “transcendental” structure of inter/subjectivity from “empirical” studies of solitary confinement, and vice versa: a reflection on the “transcendental” structure of inter/subjectivity might shed light on the significance of “empirical” evidence from prisoners in prolonged solitary confinement. How do we bring these two levels together without confusing them? It’s not clear that we can; and yet, this “confusion” might be productive insofar as it sheds light on the constitutive intertwining of self and other in ways that are *both* empirical and transcendental.

Husserl claims that, while the world (temporarily) loses its status as an *Objective* world in reduction to ownness, it does not lose its harmonious coherence as a context for meaningful experience, or as what Husserl calls “Nature” (in inverted commas). The experience of “Nature” in the founding stratum is the experience of a “world” that has “lost precisely that ‘by everyone’” that pertains to the sense of the world as such (Husserl 1991: 96).<sup>6</sup> For Husserl, this “Nature” is still “*a kind of ‘world’*” (Husserl 1991: 98) since it includes both “the identical Ego-pole of my manifold “pure” subjective processes, those of my passive and active intentionality, and the pole of all the habitualities instituted or to be instituted by those processes” (Husserl 1991: 98). But it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine these “habitalities” apart from the intersubjective, intercorporeal context in which habitualities are customarily formed. Habitualities in relation to what or whom, structured by which cultural formations? On a sympathetic reading, Husserl is merely claiming that the basic patterns and norms of perception would remain stable throughout the reduction to ownness, such that even when I lose the sense of the table as “there-for-everyone” and therefore as a “real Object,” I do not thereby lose my capacity to experience the table in a harmonious, consistent, stable way *as* a table (which may or may not exist). And yet, this is precisely the question that the first-person testimony of prisoners in solitary confinement raises. Recall the experience of prisoners in solitary confinement:

They come by [for breakfast] with four trays; the first has big pancakes—I think I’m going to get them. Then someone comes up and gives me tiny ones—they get real small, like silver dollars. I seem to see movements—real fast motions in front of me. Then seems like they’re doing things behind your

<sup>6</sup> Later in *Cartesian Meditations*, he calls this proto-world of the solitary subject “the first, the “immanent” world,” while the Objective world is ““secondarily” constituted” (Husserl 1991: 134).

back—can't quite see them. Did someone just hit me? I dwell on it for hours. (1452)

Melting, everything in the cell starts moving; everything gets darker, you feel you are losing your vision. (1452)

For these prisoners, the empirical “abstraction” from a concrete, everyday experience of other subjects does not leave them with “*a unitarily coherent stratum of the phenomenon world*, a stratum of the phenomenon that is the correlate of continuously harmonious, continuing world-experience” (Husserl 1991: 96). In other words, it does not leave them with the same harmonious experience of the same objects in the same world, now under the sign of “Nature” rather than the sign of a really-existing “Objective world”. Rather, the experience of prolonged solitary confinement tends to disrupt the harmony of what Husserl calls the “founding stratum” of world-experience. The loss of other subjects as co-inhabitants of a shared world does not merely change the sign of the world while retaining its internal coherence; it actually erodes the inmate’s capacity to perceive objects clearly, and to sustain a coherent, harmonious experience of simple objects like walls and pancakes. The “habitualities” instituted by their own subjective processes of active and passive synthesis no longer function reliably to stabilize their own experience of “Nature”. Rather, it is as if the peeling-away of higher, more complex levels of the full monad have affected the internal coherence of the more fundamental or foundational “core” of subjectivity. But if this is possible—even if this possibility arises empirically rather than conceptually—then perhaps the levels of subjectivity are not as neatly separable as Husserl had claimed. Perhaps the “founding stratum” discovered through the reduction to ownness, and the “Nature” that is correlated to this founding stratum, is itself founded or at least sustained in its coherence by higher, purportedly “founded” levels of inter/subjectivity.

The strain of attempting to imagine a “Nature” purified of all epistemic contributions by other subjects shows up in *Cartesian Meditations* in sentences such as this, where the multiplication of inverted commas becomes almost comical: “I, the reduced “human Ego” (“psychophysical” Ego), am constituted, accordingly, as a member of the “world” with a multiplicity of ‘objects outside me’” (Husserl 1991: 99). How are we to read this sentence, if not by plugging in precisely the same concepts that we were meant to have bracketed out—“human Ego,” “psychophysical,” “world,” “objects”—while simultaneously suspending them or crossing them out? What is left in this sphere of ownness, if not the trace or the ghost of others who have been removed from the ego’s experience of the world only to show up as marks around the very concepts from which they have been removed? Perhaps the reduction to ownness is impossible to perform—not because we are too weak or untrained in the art of phenomenology to perform the reduction properly, but because the reduction itself involves a certain incoherence, because it cannot help but make implicit use of the co-constitutive contributions of the very intersubjective community that it has proposed to strip away, and which it is no longer entitled to use. The reduction to ownness may be not only practically impossible, but even transcendently impossible, because it cannot help but betray its own commitments by borrowing from transcendental intersubjectivity in order to clarify a

transcendental subjectivity that it asserts as absolutely primordial. But this failure of the reduction to ownness is also its success; it testifies to the transcendental role that others play in the very constitution of the world and even of my own subjectivity.

The transcendental Ego may be the most fundamental condition for the possibility of experience in general, but a phenomenological consideration of the psychiatric evidence from prisoners in solitary confinement suggests that intersubjective, intercorporeal relations are an indispensable condition for the possibility of a meaningful, coherent experience of the world. This evidence suggests that self, other and world may be equiprimordial structures, each made possible by a relationality that precedes the relata. The non-existence of the cogito may be inconceivable, as Husserl claims following Descartes, but the existence of a solitary ego who already has a meaningful experience of “nature,” or of “a kind of world” is equally inconceivable. *There is no solitary ego in the world*, and such an ego, reduced to its ownness, is literally unimaginable without the illicit use of the evidence that was meant to be bracketed out in the reduction to ownness.

I am not the only reader to argue that the reduction to ownness is conceptually incoherent or impossible to perform, even at a transcendental level. Suzanne Cunningham has argued that even the use of words like “object” and “world” presuppose the cultural institution of language, such that the meditating consciousness “cannot effectively divorce itself from its social context and is unable, therefore, to perform the radical phenomenological reductions,” particularly the reduction to ownness (Hermberg 2006: 122). Kevin Hermberg argues that the reduction to ownness “is not possible in the way that Husserl told the story”:

What is needed is some sort of mechanism for (or at least a description of or the establishment of the possibility of) a sort of feedback loop on which the awarenesses and familiarities that will be required for the presentation of another subject can take place within, or survive the reduction to, the sphere of ownness. Once that has been established, Husserl’s theory of empathy will work. (Hermberg 2006: 68)

In another context, Merleau-Ponty writes:

The philosopher cannot fail to draw others with him into his reflective retreat, because in the uncertainty of the world, he has for ever learned to treat them as consorts, and because all his knowledge is built on this datum of opinion. Transcendental subjectivity is a revealed subjectivity, revealed to itself and to others, and is for that reason an intersubjectivity. (Merleau-Ponty 1986: 421)

Even Husserl admits that his opening meditations had made use of intersubjective evidence without acknowledging it as such:

The empathies lie within the immanency that belongs to me as “ego” of the reduction. These non-originary presentations function together with all the others in the constitution of the “world”. *Therefore what is set forth in Meditations I-III must have made implicit use also of empathy—only it was not mentioned.* The difference between other persons and me as a person among persons is itself a constituted difference—constituted within the ego.

Within the ego: the transcendental differentiation between transcendental I (ego in the second sense [i.e., as an ego among others, an empathic ego]) and transcendental others; and the transcendental intersubjective constitution of the world, as a world for all and a world that contains the transcendental subjects, mundanized as men. In the absolute and original ego of the reduction the world is constituted, as a world that is constituted as transcendentially intersubjective in every transcendental Ego... And these transcendental others, are fundamental to further constitutive functions. (Husserl 1991: 64, emphasis added; 31, ftn 1; 52)

For Husserl, the difference between self and other is constituted *within the self*, and this could not be otherwise since the condition for the possibility of any experience whatsoever is the transcendental Ego. But even in making his argument for the absolute priority of the transcendental Ego, Husserl makes use of evidence supported by empathy: by the experience of others as other subjects.

The point of my analysis in this section is not to show that Husserl is wrong, but rather to argue that he stumbles upon a structure that disturbs his own transcendental idealism from within. The difficulty of saying which comes first, transcendental subjectivity or transcendental intersubjectivity—the difficulty of *saying* this, without already making use of a language that implies both a “transcendental” relation to other possible language-speakers and an “empirical” relation to the particular community in which I learned a particular language from particular others—is not so much a problem to be resolved by correcting the transcendental analysis, as a sign of the opening to the empirical within the transcendental, the historical within the conceptual, the social within the phenomenological. We witness this opening most vividly in Husserl’s discussion of pairing as the mechanism by which the subject discovers its essential correlation with an alter ego.

### From Self to Other

In the reduction to ownness, Husserl claims to discover the founding stratum upon which our experience of others as alter egos, and of the world as an Objective world, is founded. I have raised questions about the coherence of this claim, but in order to move forward with my reading of Husserl’s argument in the Fifth Meditation, I will accept the possibility that, when the meditating subject brackets the sense, “other person,” she is left with a coherent, harmonious experience of “Nature”. According to Husserl, synthetic unities still appear in my Nature after the reduction to ownness: objects such as the table whose front side is presented while its hither side is *appresented* as correlated to the front, and as potentially visible to me if I choose to walk around the table. According to Husserl, these synthetic unities are open to “harmonious verification” (Husserl 1991: 105) whether or not another person is there to corroborate my experience of the table; I am free to explore the objects in Nature and to correct any false impressions with a closer, more careful scrutiny of these objects. Such objects (*Gegenstände*) exist as “immanent transcendencies” (Husserl 1991: 106) within my sphere of ownness; they are the foundation for the

really-existing Objects (*Objekte*) which will be constituted at a higher level of worldhood, once consciousness has constituted the sense, “alter ego”.

Just as there are levels of subjectivity, there are also levels of worldhood for Husserl, each of which is correlated to a different level of intersubjectivity. The first is the primordial world of Nature from which others are excluded as other egos, even though they still appear as bodies, and therefore as immanent transcendencies along the lines of other objects. The constitution of the other as an alter ego gives rise to a second, more determinate level of worldhood: “an *Objective Nature* and a whole Objective world,” in which objects are infused with the sense of being “there for others,” and therefore as really-existing (Husserl 1991: 107). Upon the basis of this relation to an alter ego, a community of egos and ultimately a community of monads becomes possible, and along with it “one identical world” (Husserl 1991: 107): an open-ended, all-inclusive world shared in common with all other monads. This ultimate sense of the world is “essentially related to intersubjectivity (itself constituted as having the ideality of endless openness)... Consequentially *the constitution of the world essentially involves a “harmony” of the monads*” (Husserl 1991: 108).

How do we get from the Nature of the doubly-reduced ego to this open-ended world of the community or “harmony” of monads? Husserl’s first task is to show how the sense, “alter ego,” is constituted within the sphere of ownness. His explanation turns on the structure of embodied relationality in a shared, mutually-correlated space. Even at the founding stratum of ownness, I have an immediate experience of my own body as a primordial “here”. I encounter the table with my body; as I move from one side to the other, I not only see the table with my eyes and feel its smoothness with my hands, but I also feel *these feelings* in my body, and at the same time, I feel the kinaesthetic sensations of my own movements. My body is not like a marionette controlled by a puppeteer-mind; rather, my body is suffused with consciousness, and I experience my own body in a unique way, with a direct immediacy that is unlike my experience of anything else within the world. Only when I have a radically-disruptive experience of “I cannot” does the body appear to me as an object to be prodded, coerced, manipulated or moved by a separate or disjointed consciousness. The lived experience of embodiment is what Husserl calls *Leib*, or the phenomenal body, in distinction from *Körper*, or the objective body accessible from a third-person perspective. At this level of analysis, I think it is fair to say that the subject has only a nascent sense of its own body as *Körper*, since even my own objective body would remain an immanent transcendency for me until the constitution of an alter ego has made possible the sense of an Objective world.

In the primordial world of Nature, I encounter some objects that are different from others; these objects are bodies who present themselves to me in a “mirroring” of my own self and yet not a mirroring proper, an analogue of my own self and yet not an analogue in the usual sense” (Husserl 1991: 94). These bodies harmonize with my own, without being immediately accessible in the manner of my singular experience of my own body as my primordial “here”. And yet, the body of the other is correlated to my own body through an essential structure; my “here” is the other’s “there,” and if we switch places, the location of this other body becomes my “here,” while the other body occupies my former

location as what is now my “there”. As I move towards the place of the other’s body, I too can experience the world from that place, although I can never experience it *as* the other. Husserl argues that the body of the other appears to me through a “analogizing transfer” as an animated body that is *like* me, but *not* me (Husserl 1991: 111). Self and other, here and there, are given together in a relation of original “pairing” that is sustained not by a process of inferential reasoning, but rather by a “continuous primal institution in living actuality” (Husserl 1991: 112), “a living mutual awakening and an overlaying of each with the objective sense of the other” (Husserl 1991: 113). The perception of the other as alter ego is precisely that: a perception, unified through passive synthesis rather than through active deliberation over the likelihood that this other body is really another consciousness rather than a mannequin or an automaton.

The reason why the reduction to ownness does not get stuck in a permanent, non-methodological solipsism—the reason why Husserl can claim that I constitute the sense of an alter ego, and hence the sense of an Objective world, within the sphere of ownness—is because these “potentially verifiable syntheses of harmonious further experience” (Husserl 1991: 114) continuously support and sustain my sense of otherness and objectivity. If this harmonious synthesis were interrupted by radically non-harmonious or discordant, the body of the other would be “experienced as a pseudo-organism” and, presumably, given the essential relation between alter ego and Objectivity, my sense of the Objective world would become tenuous (Husserl 1991: 114). I rely on the “consistent confirmation” of pairing, experienced at the level of the affective, perceptive body, for my sense of the world as something more than mere Nature, as a really-existing Objective world, and perhaps even for my sense of my own body as an Objective body, beyond my singular lived experience of embodiment (119).

This point is crucial for our attempt to understand the experience of prisoners in solitary confinement. What would it be like to be blocked from this essential structure of pairing? To be denied the pre-reflective experience of “a living mutual awakening” of self to other and other to self? If the transcendently-reduced ego relies on the “changing but incessantly *harmonious ‘behavior’*” (Husserl 1991: 114) of the other in order to constitute the sense of the alter ego, and through this the sense of a real Objective world, then how might the disruption of this incessant harmonization impact the subject who has been *empirically* isolated from others, but who is no less reliant on essential transcendental structures for this reason? The pre-reflective nature of pairing as a passive synthesis rather than a process of inferential reasoning suggests that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to compensate for in other ways. Might this shed some light on the statement of the prisoner who felt like he was “losing something [he] might not get back”?

One might argue that the prisoner in solitary confinement is not actually in a situation of total, empirical solitude; after all, he is monitored 24 h a day by prison staff, forced to depend on them for everything from food to toilet paper, and subject to cell extractions, strip-searches and cavity-searches, as well as non-sanctioned forms of physical and sexual assault. This is true; today’s supermax prisons force inmates to interact in highly specific ways, punishing them with physical force and/or with further levels of deprivation when they fail or refuse to comply with the

rules. The SHU is a highly mediated, intensely “social” space insofar as it leaves the inmate no room to withdraw from the forced relationality of constant surveillance and control. And yet, this does not diminish the sense in which supermax inmates are deprived of the essential structure of pairing as a “continuous primal institution in living actuality” (Husserl 1991: 112) and “a living mutual awakening and an overlaying of each with the objective sense of the other” (Husserl 1991: 113). If anything, the asymmetry of forced relationality in the SHU only compounds the isolation of the prisoner, excluding her from the mutually-correlated, reciprocally-mirroring relationships with other embodied subjects, which Husserl identifies as essential for the constitution of the objective world, and even of a meaningful sense of humanity. The supermax unit is a site of isolation without solitude, relationality without relationships. But for this very reason, it is a form of violence against the *transcendental* structures that support the possibility of a meaningful experience of the world, others and even of oneself. We can only recognize this transcendental point through a concrete engagement with the empirical evidence of prolonged solitary confinement in supermax prisons. I will argue that this intersection of the empirical and the transcendental is essentially related to the intersection of subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

### Inter/Subjectivity

Husserl identifies the body of the Other as “*the intrinsically first Object, just as the other man is constitutionally the intrinsically first <Objective> man*” (Husserl 1991: 107). My experience of other animate bodies introduces a new dimension of sense into my own experience of myself, which I would not be able to generate in absolute solitude: a sense of myself as an Objective body in an Objective world. Even though, for Husserl, the transcendental ego is always the “first” subject from the perspective of its own lived experience, or the only ego I can experience in the mode of the “here,” nevertheless I am not the first *Objective* person who shows up in my own experience, and I owe this level of selfhood to the “intrinsically first <Objective> man,” the other. For Husserl, this insight in the mutual co-constitution of personhood ultimately rules out the very solipsism that he had initially adopted as a methodological tool:

On the contrary (and this carries over to the sociality of brute animals), in the sense of *a community of men* and in that of *man*—who, even as solitary, has the sense: member of a community—there is implicit a *mutual being for one another*, which entails an *Objectivating equalization* of my existence with that of all others—consequently: I or anyone else, as a man among other men. (Husserl 1991: 129)

Husserl makes a similar point in *Ideas II* in relation to the constitution of the sense, “I as man” or I as concrete person. While the sense of the phenomenal body is constituted through relations of self-touching, the sense of an embodied *person*, with a real existence in the concrete world, is first constituted by me as the personhood of an other, and only then transferred to myself: “It is only with

empathy and the constant orientation of empirical reflection onto the psychic life which is appresented along with the other's Body and which is continually taken Objectively, together with the Body, that the closed unity, man, is constituted, and, and I transfer this unity subsequently to myself" (Husserl 1989: 175).

The first concrete *person* or "man" is not myself, but the other; I transfer this sense of "man" to myself thanks to empathy with another encountered within an Objective world that itself was made possible by the appearance of the alter ego within my solipstistic sphere. In this sense, the strata of self-other relations are not simply or straightforwardly built outward starting from a core self towards a shared, objective world that includes myself and others; rather, these strata are in some cases built outwards (from myself towards others), and in other cases built inwards (from the other to myself).

But in spite of this radical thesis of the other as the "first man," or of the "Objectivating equalization" of myself and others, Husserl firmly maintains that transcendental intersubjectivity is ultimately nested within, and made possible by, transcendental subjectivity:

We need hardly say that, as existing for me, [the community of monads, or transcendental intersubjectivity] is constituted purely within me, the meditating ego, purely by virtue of sources belonging to my intentionality; nevertheless it is constituted thus *as* a community constituted also in every other monad (who, in turn, is constituted with the modification: "other") as the same community—only with a different subjective mode of appearance—and as necessarily bearing within itself the same Objective world. (Husserl 1991: 130)

On one hand, the very possibility of having a meaningful experience of the world presupposes a transcendental ego, an "I" to whom or for whom things appear. The sense of the world, and of any intentional object within the world, is constituted within my own solitary, methodologically-solipsistic ego, and in this sense, the ego enjoys a certain transcendental priority over others within my own experience of the world. But on the other hand, the full sense of a real, Objective world that exceeds my own personal experience of it—and even of myself as a concrete person in the full sense of the word—can only be *co*-constituted with others in a community of "mutual being for one another," in such a way that my own existence is equalized with that of all others, even "brute" animal others. The ego alone may be able to constitute a personal world or "Nature" full of harmonious relations, consistent patterns and more or less reliable evidence, but it cannot constitute the higher level of world or "Objective world" without a community of others with whom it partakes in a transcendental intersubjectivity.

But if this is the case, then the body is not just the absolutely singular "here" or "zero point" of orientation; it also marks the insertion of consciousness into a here/there structure of which it is a forever-incomplete part. As Merleau-Ponty puts it in *Phenomenology of Perception*, "there exists an internal relation [between myself and the other] which causes the other to appear as the completion of the system"

(410).<sup>7</sup> This formulation allows us to grasp the body as a hinge between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, or between the abstract, solipsistic subject that Husserl initially assumes for the sake of methodological simplicity, and the intersubjectivity of concrete persons in a shared, concrete lifeworld. Since transcendental consciousness is by definition singular and unsharable, such that I can never experience the world *as* another person, my access to others is constituted primarily through the body.<sup>8</sup> And yet, the body of the other is not just an outward sign or indication pointing to the inner psyche of the other; it is rather the locus of the other *as* alter ego, as the “there” which is correlated to my “here”.

This structure of multiple, correlating perspectives has important implications, both for the constitution of the sense “alter ego” and for the sense of a shared, Objective world. But it also raises a question of primordality, or chicken-and-egg question, that, in my view, haunts Husserl’s phenomenology. On one hand, I encounter others within the world, just as I encounter cups, tables and other objects; but on the other hand, the other ego is not just an object within the world, but rather another subject with her own perspective on the world. Just as she is “there” from the perspective of my “here,” so too am I “there” from the perspective of her “here”. Precisely because the world does not merely appear to me, but also co-appears to others from their own singular perspectives, I am able to experience the world (pre-reflectively, without going through a process of inferential reasoning) as more than just a subjective projection or hallucination, but rather an Objective world that exceeds my own personal experience of it. In this sense, other subjects are co-constitutors of the sense “Objective world”—which is the only sense that the world *as such* can have, if we are to be able to distinguish coherently between hallucination and perception, or between a fantasy world and the real, concrete world,. But if this is the case, then which comes first: my solitary constitution of the sense “other ego,” or the mutual co-constitution of a world in which I encounter both myself and the other as concrete persons? Is transcendental subjectivity the most primordial condition for the possibility of a world, or is transcendental intersubjectivity even more primordial in the sense that our experience of the world is always already intertwined with the experience of others?

In performing the methodological reduction to ownness by screening out the sense of other egos, along with everything that other egos contribute to my experience of the world, Husserl is able to isolate and describe the contributions that these other egos actually make in co-constituting the full sense of the concrete, Objective world, and even of ourselves as belonging to that world. But in the forced reduction to ownness that is solitary confinement, solitude is imposed in a way that blocks the co-constitution of the world and unhinges the prisoner from Objective reality. If we followed Husserl’s account to the letter, we would have to say that,

<sup>7</sup> For a perceptive reading of prison memoirs in relation to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of embodiment, see Doyle (2006).

<sup>8</sup> Of course, once the sense of other egos has been constituted, I can have relationships with others whom I never meet in person, who are accessible to me only through words or images, but Husserl’s point is that the basic sense of “alter ego” or another person is constituted through bodily relations. My question is: Can this sense be maintained indefinitely without the support of regular, concrete experiences of other embodied consciousnesses, or does it dissolve to some degree through prolonged solitary confinement?

even when the prisoner is deprived of the empirical presence of other embodied subjects, she still remains capable of a experiencing a “unitarily coherent stratum of the phenomenon world, a stratum that is the correlate of continuously harmonious, continuing world-experience,” such that even when deprived of the sense of Objective reality in an objective world, the solipsistic subject still retains the “founding stratum” upon which all other strata of experience are based (Husserl 1991: 96). But the first-person testimony of prisoners in solitary confinement suggests that, even though the sheer capacity for experience remains in prolonged solitude, the capacity for harmonious, unified, coherent experience is severely compromised. It’s not just that prisoners lose their sense of the distinction between reality and hallucination; they seem to descend into a generalized confusion that undermines their capacity to sustain a harmonious, coherent experience of the world. Consider this further testimony from the prisoners interviewed by Grassian (1983) at Walpole Penitentiary:

Spaced out. Hear singing, people’s voices—‘Cut your wrists and go to Bridgewater and the Celtics are playing tonight.’ I doubt myself—is it real? (1453)

I overhear the guards talking. Did they say that? Yes? No? It gets confusing. I tried to check it out with [the prisoner in the adjoining cell]; sometimes he hears something and I don’t. I know one of us is crazy, but which one? Am I losing my mind? (1452)

I hear sounds-guards saying, ‘They’re going to cut it [his nerve-damaged leg] off.’ I’m not sure. Did they say it, or is it my imagination? (1452)

Grassian comments on the final inmate’s statement:

If they did say it, the prisoner is suffering from derealization; if they said something else, or something not directed at him, he is suffering a (paranoid) perceptual distortion; if they said nothing, he is having a hallucination. There is no independent corroboration. (1452)

Even for the psychiatrist and expert witness, it becomes difficult to diagnose the meaning of the inmate’s experience in the absence of “independent corroboration”. For Grassian, this lack of independent corroboration makes the process of reality-testing difficult, if not impossible, for prisoners in solitary confinement. But Husserl’s account of pairing suggests a more radical interpretation of the harm inflicted in the SHU: Not only is the prisoner’s capacity to “test” reality in a psychological sense eroded by prolonged solitude, but also the basic structures of *any meaningful experience of the world*, as a real, Objective world, are undermined in these conditions. For Husserl,

The Objective world has existence by virtue of a harmonious confirmation of the apperceptive constitution [of an alter ego], once this has succeeded: a confirmation thereof by the continuance of experiencing life with a consistent harmoniousness, which always becomes re-established as extending through any “corrections” that may be required to that end. (Husserl 1991: 125-6)

If Husserl is right about this, then solitary confinement amounts to the systematic, structural withdrawal of this “harmonious confirmation” of others—a confirmation that sustains our meaningful experience of the world as something more than a source of subjective impressions or hallucinations. In this sense, solitary confinement is a form of expulsion from humanity, or from what Husserl calls “the harmony of the monads” (Husserl 1991: 108). It is a denial, not only of the company of others as a source of pleasant diversion from the boredom of solitude, but of the intersubjective, intercorporeal relations that sustain for us, in pre-reflective ways, the sense of the world as the open-ended, all-inclusive site of meaningful experience. My point is not that everyone outside of the SHU is guaranteed this harmonious confirmation, nor even that everyone in the SHU is always denied it, but rather that the policy of prolonged solitary confinement *structurally* undermines the inmate’s capacity to sustain a meaningful sense of the world and a meaningful sense of belonging to a common humanity.

Some inmates are better able to maintain their sense of Objective reality in the absence of empirical others. For example, one prisoner shared with Grassian his strategy of posing cognitive challenges for himself in order to remain connected to the world beyond his prison cell: “Got to try to concentrate. Remember list of the presidents. Memorize the states, capitals, five boroughs, seven continents, nine planets” (Grassian 1983: 1453). Robert King, a member of the Angola Three who spent 29 years in solitary confinement in a  $9 \times 6$  cell, focused on making praline candies by gathering packets of sugar, peanuts and powdered milk, fashioning a pot out of an aluminum can, and melting the sugar over a fire made by burning toilet paper; he also played chess on a board made from squares of folded-up toilet paper stuck to the ground with toothpaste (King 2010). Herman Wallace, another member of the Angola Three, continues to sustain his own sense of hope through an artistic collaboration with artist Jackie Sumell, to imagine, design and construct his dream home (Sumell and Wallace 2006).

These strategies are a testament to the incredible capacity for resistance that some inmates manage to sustain in the absence of everyday, mutually-supportive intercorporeal relations. But the success of some inmates in resisting the disintegration of meaning should not distract us from the sense in which solitary confinement attacks and tends to undermine or erode the essential structures that makes possible a meaningful experience of the world as a world, and of the “harmony of monads” as an all-inclusive community of embodied, conscious beings. The “harmony” to which Husserl refers here need not imply agreement; we may passionately disagree with others about the meaning of the world, or about the meaning of this or that object within the world, but this disagreement does not diminish the sense in which an ongoing, everyday experience of embodied others in a shared, intercorporeal world is *essential* to any coherent agreement or disagreement.

## Conclusion

In order to understand the experience—and the unraveling of experience—in supermax confinement, we need to explore the relations between self, other and

world in ways that go beyond the current psychiatric literature. Grassian, Haney, Kupers and others provide invaluable source material for further reflection on the experience of forced isolation, but to the extent that they take for granted the sense in which “man” is a social being, they exclude important questions about the *meaning* of sociality and subjectivity. Why does solitary confinement produce the particular configuration of perceptual, cognitive and affective symptoms gathered under the term, SHU syndrome? What does our everyday experience of others have to do with our ability to think clearly, to perceive objects as real and stable, and to sustain a sense of affective well-being? What are the ethical, political and ontological implications of radically isolating someone whose *essential* structure as an inter/subjective being is constituted through open, reciprocal relations with others in a shared world? What does it mean to live in a community that structurally undermines the constitutive relationality of some of its members, while expecting them to prove themselves worthy of reintegration into society?

In this paper, I have looked to Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* for one possible way of opening up philosophical questions of meaning in conversation with the psychiatric literature on solitary confinement. Husserl's account of pairing, in spite of its privileging of the transcendental over the empirical and the subjective over the intersubjective, helps us to appreciate the scope and depth of the violence of prolonged solitary confinement. But even Husserl's ambivalence towards the empirical and (for different reasons) towards the intersubjective raises a set of productive issues. By questioning the coherence of Husserl's own account of the reduction to oneness, and by troubling distinction between the transcendental and the empirical in Husserl's text, I have sought to raise the possibility, not of a simple return to the natural attitude, but of a renewed engagement of phenomenology with the evidence of concrete subjects in specific situations. The stakes of this engagement are not only intellectual, but also political. If it turns out that prolonged solitary confinement structurally undermines both the essence of personhood and the conditions for the possibility of having a meaningful experience of the world, then there can be no legitimate justification for its use against any conscious being, human or nonhuman. A phenomenological engagement with the psychiatric literature on supermax prisons promises to raise new and important possibilities for articulating the harm of prolonged solitary confinement, not only for mentally-ill prisoners, but for any inter/subject.

Husserl's account of the sense-constitution of Objectivity, read in the context of testimony from prisoners in solitary confinement, challenges us to ask: Is the world fundamentally *mine*, its condition of possibility founded in my own singular transcendental ego, or is it fundamentally *the gift of the other*, with a sense that could not possibly be constituted by a solitary transcendental ego, but which is rather partially received, partially co-constituted with others? If the world is the gift of the other, then the practice of solitary confinement amounts to withholding the gift of the world, withholding the gift of meaning, withholding the very conditions under which a full sense of concrete personhood emerges in relation to others in the context of a shared world.

## References

- Arrigo, B. A., & Bullock, J. L. (2008). The psychological effects of solitary confinement on prisoners in Supermax units: Reviewing what we know and recommending what should change. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 52, 6(December), 622–640.
- Bonta, J., & Gendreau, P. (1990). Reexamining the cruel and unusual punishment of prison life. *Law and Human Behavior*, 14, 347–366.
- Dayan, C. (2005). Cruel and unusual: The end of the eighth amendment. *Boston Review: A Political and Literary Forum* (October/November) at <http://www.bostonreview.net/BR29.5/dayan.html>. Accessed 22 September 2009.
- Doyle, L. (2006). Bodies inside/out: Violation and resistance from the prison cell to *The Bluest Eye*. In Dorothea, O., & Weiss G. (Ed.), *Feminist interpretations of maurice merleau-ponty*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.
- Grassian, S. (1983). Psychopathological effects of solitary confinement. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 140(11), 1450–1454.
- Grassian, S. (2006). Psychiatric effects of solitary confinement. *Journal of Law & Policy*, 22, 325–383.
- Haney, C. (2003). Mental health issues in long-term solitary and “supermax” confinement. *Crime & Delinquency*, 49, 124–156.
- Haney, C., & Lynch, M. (1997). Regulating prisons of the future: A psychological analysis of Supermax and solitary confinement. *New York University School of Law Review of Law and Social Change*, 23(4), 477–570.
- Hermberg, K. (2006). *Husserl's phenomenology: Knowledge, objectivity and others*. London: Continuum.
- Heron, W., Doane, B. K., & Scott, T. H. (1956). Visual disturbances after prolonged perceptual isolation. *Canadian Journal of Psychology*, 10(1), 13–18.
- Husserl, Edmund. (1970). *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy* (trans: Carr, D.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Husserl, Edmund. (1973). *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Texte aus dem Nachlass* (Vol. 13–15). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Husserl, Edmund. (1989). *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy: Second Book: Studies in the phenomenology of constitution* (trans: Rojcewicz, R. & Schuwer, A.). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Husserl, Edmund. (1991). *Cartesian meditations: An introduction to phenomenology* [CM] (trans: Cairns, D.). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- King, R. (2010). Experience: I spent 29 years in solitary confinement. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/aug/28/29-years-solitary-confinement-robert-king>.
- Kupers, T. (1999). *Prison madness: The mental health crisis behind bars and what we must do about it*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1986). *Phenomenology of perception* (Trans. C. Smith). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Sumell, J., & Wallace, H. (2006). *The house that herman built*. Stuttgart: Merz & Solitude.