

A surreal, colorful landscape with a yellow text box containing the text "close encounters". The scene is a vibrant, abstract landscape with a yellow text box in the center. The background is a mix of dark, swirling colors like blue, red, and orange, suggesting a cosmic or underwater environment. In the foreground, there are dark, rocky formations and a small, glowing sphere. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and otherworldly.

close encounters

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Close Encounters

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ABSTRACT: *Close Encounters* is an experience of proximity and distance, of the self and the Other, of the human and the non-human, of familiarity and strangeness, of possibility and impossibility. In short, it is an experience of experience. *Close Encounters* is a compilation of writings and images developed through a phenomenological practice involving a deliberate, prolonged study of technological objects as part of a UBC graduate course in the fall of 2022. Drawing on the work of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Bernard Stiegler, Don Ihde, and Max van Manen, our phenomenological practice created an opportunity for each member of the class to dwell within the nuances and complexities of our embodied experiences with our technological objects. Our writings that came from this experience, along with unique images created with Midjourney's AI image generator, are presented in this compilation. We hope experiencing *Close Encounters* helps create openings for new perceptions of the ordinary, new questions about meaning, and new insights into the world.

KEYWORDS: *phenomenology; technology; cultural objects; artificial intelligence;*

“Cyborgs are beings with organic and inorganic parts. Human cyborgs are humans equipped with mechanical, electronic, and robotic parts. But from a Stieglerian technics point of view, cyborgs should not be seen as humans outfitted with technological contraptions—caricatures of human ontology. Rather, technology is the condition of human evolution and existence. So, humans have always been cyborgs in the sense of being wound up with technology. But humans are organic and inorganic in an even more profoundly evolutionary sense.

Humans do not just create technology; they are in turn created by technology.

Their evolving biology and intelligence are creations of technology just as much as technology is their own creation. Therefore, Stiegler wants to correct Heidegger. It is not just the being of being that has been forgotten by philosophy, but the technics of being: technics is the fundamental ontology of humans.”

– Max van Manen, 2014, p. 184

Preface

I use the pen, I make the mark, but the pen is also using me.
- Don Ihde, 2017

Close Encounters is an experience of proximity and distance, of the self and the Other, of the human and the non-human, of familiarity and strangeness, of possibility and impossibility. In short, it is an experience of experience. It is an invitation for you to join us in the wonder of the everyday, in the “unwilled willingness to meet what is utterly strange in what is most familiar” (van Manen, 2014, p. 223).

Close Encounters is a compilation of writings and images developed through a phenomenological practice as part of Dr. Barbara Weber’s graduate seminar course, EPSE 604: Phenomenology in Practice, at the University of British Columbia in the fall of 2022. I was a student in this course. The course was designed to familiarize us with phenomenology and to expand and enrich our approaches to education, research, and life. As part of the course, each student in the class designed and facilitated a phenomenological practice activity. These activities, such as riding a bus to nowhere, moving our bodies in tune with Japanese radio calisthenics, and eating oranges as we never had before, opened doors to the wonder of the ordinary, fostering the sensitization of our perceptions. When it was my turn to lead the class in a phenomenological practice, I designed an opportunity for the deliberate, prolonged study with technological objects, described in detail below, which led to the creation of *Close Encounters*.

This preface serves as a manual of sorts. A manual, from the Latin *manus*, meaning hand, is a small book typically providing instructions or guidance. The word manual is also used to describe work done by hand and not by machine (Merriam-Webster, 2022a). This preface is a manual in that it aims to provide just enough information to guide you through our compilation. But is it a manual manual? Is this small book of writing, this preface you are reading right now, done by hand or machine? In our postdigital age (Jandrić et al., 2018), a time of messiness and uncertainty, of blurred boundaries between analog and digital, of technological and non-technological, what does it mean to do work by hand? Certainly, I am typing these words, but is my laptop a tool or a collaborator? I misspell a word; the software program automatically fixes it. I get stuck in my phrasing; a simple right click offers a list of suggestions. Would I have come to these words on my own? My fingers move automatically on the keyboard, touch typing their way through thoughts and ideas. Where does my body end and the machine begin? And does it matter? Questions such as these form the foundations of my Ph. D. research as a Media and Technology Studies Education scholar, as well as the foundations of the phenomenological practice that led to the creation of *Close Encounters*.

In the following, I provide a brief overview of phenomenology and the specific ideas related to phenomenology of technology that informed my design of our in-class phenomenological practice activity. Next, I explain the in-class activity in detail, then describe the creation of this compilation. Finally, I introduce the organization of this compilation and send you on your way.

Phenomenological Inspirations

Phenomenology marks both a turn from and an expansion of traditional philosophical study. Rather than attempting to reason one’s way logically and rationally through life, phenomenology offers openings for pushing into complexity, diving into the depths of experiences, and developing an attunement to the world (van Manen, 2014). Phenomenology shifts the focus from cognition to perception, challenging scientific approaches to meaning making. As Max van Manen (2014)

explained, phenomenology “is more a method of questioning than answering, realizing that insights come to us in that mode of musing, reflective questioning, and being obsessed with sources and meanings of lived meaning” (p. 27).

The phenomenological practice that led to the creation of *Close Encounters* was inspired by the notions of phenomenological reduction, embodiment, and lived experience. The phenomenological reduction is a way of bracketing assumptions and theories, and suspending presumptions, to push through the limits of our concepts (van Manen, 2014). Though phenomenological reduction can help us get closer to direct descriptions of experiences, we can never fully break free from the “prison house of language” (Henriques, 2010, p. 83). As the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2012) put it, “the most important lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction” (p. lxxvii). Nevertheless, phenomenological reduction can bring us closer to disclosing the subtleties and intricacies of experience. Embodiment connotes the knowledge of the body and the significance of sensory perception. Merleau-Ponty (2012) described how our bodies are our intermediaries through which we experience the world, writing, “the thing can never be separated from someone who perceives it; nor can it ever actually be in itself because its articulations are the very ones of our existence” (p. 334). Both the phenomenological reduction and embodiment help us take a reflective view of our lived experiences (van Manen, 2014). Simply put, lived experiences are our experiences as we live through them. Phenomenology provides opportunities for returning to these experiences, examining them, and dwelling within their nuances and complexities. In doing so, we can find meaning and wonder.

Of particular relevance to *Close Encounters* are Merleau-Ponty’s (2012) ideas about cultural objects. Cultural objects are more than the physical objects of culture, but extend to ideas, language, and even “the other’s body as the bearer of a behaviour” (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 364). Cultural objects can also make others possible to us while simultaneously leading to a sense of alienation. As Merleau-Ponty (2012) explained,

“In the cultural object, I experience the near presence of others under a veil of anonymity. One uses the pipe for smoking, the spoon for eating, or the bell for summoning, and the perception of a cultural world could be verified through the perception of a human act and of another [hu]man.” (p. 363)

Cultural objects, therefore, suggest the Other and allude to one’s cultural situatedness, but also elucidate the inherent distance of our perceptions. Cultural objects are also means of disclosure. For example, the cane of a blind person can transform into an extension of the body. As Merleau-Ponty (2012) illustrated, over time a blind person’s cane “ceases to be an object ... it increases the scope and the radius of the act of touching and [becomes] analogous to a gaze” (p. 144).

Phenomenology of Technology

The blind person’s cane in Merleau-Ponty’s example above is a type of technology. The word ‘technology’ is commonly used to refer to digital technologies, such as smartphones and laptops, or industrial technologies, such as factory robotics. A less common but still widely understood use of ‘technology’ has to do with tools and instruments, such as a hammer or a harmonica, as well as inventions, like the wheel. However, technology also has a deeper, more significant meaning in the context of *Close Encounters*. The word technology can be traced to the Greek words *téchnē* – meaning art, craft, or the method of engaging in art or craft – and *logos* – meaning word, discourse, reason, or plan (Merriam-Webster, 2022b). Technology, therefore, can be used to mean the way in which art is accomplished, as well as the writing or study of our ways of being-in-the-world through art.

The phenomenologist Martin Heidegger (1977) explained that we often accept an instrumental definition of technology as a means to an end and as a human activity. This definition

guides us to the idea that we are meant to master technology, to use it to carry out our will. Heidegger, however, posited that technology is not merely instrumentalist, but is a “way of revealing” (p. 12). This revealing, he went on to explain, is a provocation, a way of challenging or directing nature to produce. Technology as revealing, therefore, creates an enframing – a Gestell. This has led to a way of thinking in which everything, including humans, is understood as raw material (Huttunen & Kakkori, 2022).

Building on and critiquing Heidegger’s ideas, Bernard Stiegler drew from an interpretation of the myth of Prometheus to create a technogenic phenomenology (van Manen, 2014), which he developed in his trilogy *Technics and Time*. In the Prometheus myth, Zeus has molded all life forms and has assigned Prometheus the task of giving them features that will help them cope with the world before bringing them to life. Epimetheus, Prometheus’ brother, begged him to do the job in his stead, and Prometheus agreed. Being a bit vapid, Epimetheus inadvertently used up all the adaptive features, such as sharp claws to catch prey or speed to flee from predators, before reaching the final animal: humans. When Prometheus realized Epimetheus had left humans without any way to fend for themselves, he knew he had to give them something to prevent their immediate demise, so he stole fire from the gods. From fire, Prometheus knew humans could not only gather warmth but also create tools. According to Stiegler’s (1998) interpretation, the myth of Prometheus shows us that humans and technology have always been bound up together; without technology, we are without origin. Though Stiegler accepted Heidegger’s views of technology as a Gestell, he saw humans and technology as co-constitutive. From a “Stieglerian technics point of view ... technology is the condition of human evolution and existence” (van Manen, 2014, p. 184).

Another philosopher whose work has centred around phenomenology of technology is Don Ihde. Ihde’s technoscience postphenomenology outlined four types of human-technology relations: embodiment, hermeneutic, alterity, and background (van Manen, 2014). Ihde’s conception of embodiment relations built on the ideas pertaining to embodiment and cultural objects developed by Merleau-Ponty (2012), though Ihde (2010) argued that Merleau-Ponty was too indirect about technologies. Embodiment relations as defined by Ihde (1993) concern technological artifacts that we depend on so thoroughly that they have become part of us, such as eyeglasses. Hermeneutic relations describe our relations with technologies like thermometers that give us representations of the world. Alterity relations concern technologies that take on a state of otherness through the way we think of them. For example, smartphones have, for many people, become anthropomorphic extensions of the self (Park & Kaye, 2019). Finally, background relations describe those in which technologies, such as electrical wiring, have become so commonplace that we no longer notice or think about them at all. Ihde’s (2010) main point in elucidating these four types of relations is to show that technology cannot be understood in a vacuum but is always conceived through our experiences and relations.

Phenomenology in Practice: *Close Encounters*

In designing the in-class phenomenological practice that led to the creation of *Close Encounters*, I considered the various perspectives regarding phenomenology of technology described above as well as the questions mentioned in the introduction to this preface. I was especially fascinated with Stiegler’s reinterpretation of the Prometheus myth, and his ideas that without technology, humans would not exist. Ihde’s human-technology relations – in particular, his extension of Merleau-Ponty’s ideas concerning embodiment – also stood out as intriguing in light of our contemporary fixation with wearable sensors and computing devices. Though I was enthralled with these ideas, I was not sure if my classmates, all of whom were pursuing research in areas other than Media and Technology Studies Education, would be as interested in them as I was. Rather than

focusing on digital technologies, with their complex processes hidden behind smooth interfaces, I decided to design a phenomenological practice related to the close study of everyday technological objects. Ever wary of concepts, I intentionally avoided using the word technology when asking my classmates to bring an object to class for this practice, worried the term would constrain their choices. Instead, I requested that they bring objects that were functional, meaningful, and belonged to each of them personally.

For the in-class practice, each of us spent 10 minutes silently observing and writing descriptions of our objects. Writing, as van Manen (2014) explained, can bring our “experiences into being as experiences because we name and describe them” (p. 35). Through the phenomenological reduction and embodied attunement, we pushed into our experiences as we tried to perceive our familiar objects anew. After the 10 minutes had passed, we traded objects with a partner. With this trade, each of us had in our hands something entirely unknown. In encountering the object of another, we were not only experiencing the object, but were experiencing a means of making the other possible (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). After writing about this unfamiliar object for another 10 minutes, we came together as a group to discuss our experiences.

To push us even further, I then, with permission, collected and compiled our writing. I paired texts by object rather than by author, as I was interested in how the same object could be disclosed differently depending on one’s relation to it. For each pair, I selected words and phrases from the writings that stood out as particularly captivating, combined them together, and fed them into the Midjourney AI image generator. AI image generation tools like Midjourney’s use a machine learning algorithm trained on a large database to produce unique images from text prompts (Islam, 2022). Essentially, the Midjourney tool draws from an immense collection of language and images to discover how we have visually represented our concepts throughout history, and then uses this knowledge to create a new image based on specific textual input. After trying out combinations of phrases from the paired writings about each object, I selected images that best captured the sensations of the writings. I chose to include AI as a co-creator of our compilation as a way of offering another viewpoint on each of the objects; a viewpoint that is simultaneously an abstraction and a concretization of the meanings disclosed through our study. Midjourney’s AI image generation tool is both human and non-human; it was created by humans, its algorithm relies on data generated by humans, yet it does things in a way humans cannot do. To paraphrase Ihde (2017), we use AI, we give it the commands, but it is also using us. Introducing AI as a co-creator pushed us into the uncanny valley of the postdigital and created openings for further questioning, wandering, and wondering.

Organization of *Close Encounters*

Close Encounters is a collective collaboration born from the phenomenological practices described above. After this preface, you will find an alphabetical list of the compilation’s creators, followed by the body of the compilation. Paired texts describing the same object, one written by the owner of the object and the other by a classmate, are included with a corresponding image. There are also full-page images interspersed throughout the compilation that were created by combining phrases from multiple writings about different objects, bringing together our encounters and capturing the atmosphere of our conversations.

You will likely notice that the pages do not have titles and the names of the objects are not mentioned in the writings. This was a deliberate decision and is meant to contribute to the sense of wonder we hoped to create. We do, however, recognize that this approach may skirt the line between wonder and frustration for some readers, so we have included a list of our object participants as an appendix. We encourage you to wait until you have absorbed the writings and

images in the body of our compilation before taking a peek at this list. Or you may wish to ignore the list altogether, preferring to dwell in the mystery. The choice is yours.

An Offering

Most importantly, *Close Encounters* is our offering to you. In creating this compilation together, each of us have undoubtedly deepened and enriched our ways of knowing and being. We hope experiencing it helps create openings for new perceptions of the ordinary, new questions about meaning, and new insights into the world.

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1

The dial in the front is covered in transparent plastic, its round perimeter serrated, you can turn it around to adjust the speed of the clicks. Turning it produces a crackling noise, like the one heard when winding an analogue clock. It fits perfectly within my hand, and also has a stand that allows me to place it on the table in front of me. There are two types of click sounds it produces, one is an Bb tone, and another is a lower pitch A, which I prefer, since it sounds less digital and closer to an analogue metronome (although still identifiably digital in timbre). There is also a volume button that you can use to increase and decrease the loudness of the clicks.

A black and polished branded box. Smooth, static, and stable. Balanced by thin, weak, fragile detachable feet. Covered by interconnected white, silver, and red wheels. Slender and dense. Overwhelmingly accompanied by digits and, on occasions, signs. By unfamiliar words, rhythms, needs, and styles. Secret doors, holes, and switches, waiting to be revealed. A small, pocket-sized, hand-held, and quiet artifact. Ready to enjoy loudness.



2

I turn and shake trying to observe everything about it, but nothing about what I knew before. The sound of water against its metallic insides catapults me back into the reality of seeing a water bottle. I've seen them drink out of it. I know on a surface level its purpose is hydration, and yet this silver metallic bottle with its brand 'hydro

flask' subtly, classily displayed in black writing on the on the black lid is one of a kind. I can feel scratches on the handle. Indentations on the body of the bottle signalling this water bottle has been through some physical ordeal. Whether repeatedly dropped or tossed into bags - it seems used but loved and sturdy. Adorning the bottle are a plethora of colourful stickers that I can attempt to drag meaning from. A sticker with hearts that says 'best friend' that makes me think of my best friend, should I get her matching stickers? There's a pink sticker overlapping it - suggesting it's newer. The amount of wear in a sticker and its placement suggests the existence of a calendar or timeline I can just attempt to decipher. One sticker details a body with breasts and long hair being used as a bridge. Cars drive over it and breast shape mountains adorn the horizon. In small writing the url of the store www.menom.store and what I



assume are social media handles written on it. I first assumed Instagram, then questioned my judgement and wrote social media. Now I consider what I would have thought if I were unaware of the use of the '@' sign as an indicator of a social media username. "We have always existed" scrawled in white text over a pastel rainbow shape calls my attention from the sticker below. A Gemini sticker - I wonder if the owner of the bottle was born in June or July - so many stickers that for me serve as a hopeful window into their life - but what does it mean for them?

I drink from this. It offers hydration, and occasionally, caffeination. I flick the cap open. I take a long sip. In contrast to my old one, the 'loud' one, it makes VERY LITTLE NOISE, which is why my dear friend has gifted this to me. Although there is an exception: when I drop it, which is not infrequently, it makes a deep, echoing clang (clang, clang, clang) as it hits the ground. Stickers accompanied this gift as well: a pineapple welcoming me to my new home and country, the constellation of astrological sun sign, and two hearts above the words Best Friends. I take a sip and it feels like home. Since then, many more stickers adorned the curves of this cylinder: stay radical! We have always existed! A rainbow flag, and a tadpole-looking-creature holding a fish-shaped balloon (or is it a fish floating, tethered by a balloon-like string?) I check the long-neglected bottom of the object, which I rarely see, but flash to anyone in front of me when I take a drink. Now here is a sticker that I have never

considered, yet it tells me exactly what this object “is”: a 32OZ WIDE MOUTH W/
STRAW LID, GRAPHITE, 32oz (946mL) with bar code and all. To me, it is much
more.

3

It rests in my hand: smooth but determined. There is no question, no openness, but
an almost impatient directedness. And yet the actual point touching the page is so
small and fragile. How odd to make such a big thing for such a minuscule point of
contact. It says “Japan” and I think of a purist’s aesthetics - no excess, no redundancy.
Made for fragile hands, a pen is to an idea like a fishing rod is to a whale.



Cold steel, though warm to touch, with reliable lead forever sharpened. Made in
Japan, it crossed many seas to shine in tests of stress since 1999— I assure you, it is
not quick to snap. Stolen from my brother’s room as payback, it patiently willed,
migrating to now make its debut. Weightlessly guiding fingers, with precision, to the
most intuitive grip. With luck that is refillable, this is superstition— rid me of
perfectionism.



This object is about fifteen centimeters long. Half of it is made of a plastic cylinder-shaped piece with about one-and-a-half-centimeter diameter. This cylinder-shaped piece is yellow and is carved in four areas and raised in four areas between the engraved sections. The other half of the object is made of a long metal piece with about 0.5 cm diameter and a pointy end that is carved in four places. A hexagon cylinder-shape piece connects the yellow plastic part of the object to the metal part. This piece is made of a black rigid plastic material with one centimetre diameter.

Mustard yellow handle, yellow like French's mustard. The handle is short, smaller than the width of an adult hand in length; it sits still on the



table. There are four ribs on the handle that make it have an effective square posture without being square. The end is like a half-sphere. The ribs stop about an inch from the end of the handle; there is a small cylindrical portion for that inch with a rounded neck bump. The other end is metal. The yellow end is plastic. Between the yellow end and the metal end there is a black section of about an inch that is cylindrical. The hexagon is not aligned neatly with the square ribs but is offset. The black section is smaller in diameter than the yellow section. The metal section is yet again smaller. The small metal cylinder is smooth and terminated in a four-sided point. Between the four-sided edges, there are four indentations in the metal, causing it to have a star-like appearance when pointed toward the eye. The point is not very sharp but is blunted.

He's flat. Like Stanley, but more solid. Stanley would blow over in a gust of wind. This fella, however, is equipped to handle a storm. Even if I were to smack him on the table, he'd probably be okay. I wonder, would he or the table become dented? The answer to that question though, has nothing to do with his purpose. Unlike us, he's here on this planet for one purpose.

Or is he? The original concept of this item was for one thing. But this is some kind of spin off. The spinnage-offing of the original design has provided a plethora of bonus purposes. Now he is him, or at least he is a 'him' through my assumptions. He brings joy... though I suppose the original design concept would also bring joy... but the joy this guy brings to me is different. A more authentic joy. Funny enough, I've used him for two purposes mainly, neither of which are his designed purpose. It's ironic that the "item with a purpose" I brought to class is an object that I've never used for its intended purpose. . Anyway, I'm starting to drift off into a world of word garbage, which could have potential but likely will not amount to anything. So, let's get back to the point. The point of the object I brought today is to open alcohol bevies. I use it mainly as a keychain. Maybe someday it will bring me joy as I sip on a drink freshly popped open by this, but until then, I'll allow it to bring me joy because it was a gift, given to me by my sister. Really, I guess it's my sister offering me joy through an object that really doesn't serve its intended purpose in my life. Cool.



The paint around the rim of the flat piece of metal is worn away – the marks of time and use. The metal steals heat from my skin, leaving me with a comforting coldness. The chill and weight of such a small thing is satisfying and familiarly unfamiliar. The fisherman's gaping mouth is also a bottle opener. An auditory hallucination of the crisp hiss of a bottle opening. The link hangs loosely from the fisherman's head, hinting at the former presence of a larger, split ring and an unfulfilled purpose. On the back there is a small, round, flat metal button that could be magnetic. Or not. A label says, "Manufactured in Austin, Texas." I smile at the image of this old salty dog strolling the streets of the Texas town I know so well. He has come alive. Does he welcome my touch, or resent it? The fisherman's expression never changes, never betraying his feelings. I wish I could be more like this sometimes.



6

On the face of this weathered key, my eyes lock with an engraved demand, DO NOT DUPLICATE. Thoughts trickle in: What if I do duplicate this item? Just picture the solace of having a spare. But these capital letters scream that I steer clear. My eyes struggle to avoid these intrusive letters. I find momentary distraction in its resilience on display. But sedimented changes to its hue have only made its message more visible than ever. This must be the Master key, for it enslaves one with constant preoccupation of its protection.

It makes a high clicking sound. It speaks pieces of information as I touch it. It is both smooth and rough. There is a directionality to it. As I touch it, I am reminded of

teeth – little, sharp baby teeth. I see how time has engraved its signature. As I look closer, its imperfections appear almost like a landscape. A smell of heaviness. A key can open, but also close off a space. A key is to space like a beginning is to time.



7

The thin metal rod gently curves to a bend at the tip. Delicate yet powerful. The stem melts seamlessly into a smooth cylindrical segment of wood. There are two pairs of small indentations in the handle. They were made by cat's teeth, but only I can know that because it's mine. The metal rod is flattened near its point of integration with the wooden cylinder, stamped with "F/5-3.75MM." The shine of the metal compliments the warm, dull glow of the wood. The bottom of the wooden cylinder is rounded like the poles of the earth. Dark speckles mark the moment long ago when the wood was cut to make this. The metal feels flimsy and solid all at once. Just stable enough for

the task at hand. The callous on my palm aligns perfectly with its rounded wooden end. I know it with my hands and with the gifts we've produced together.

Pointy stick with wood. I don't know what you are. I don't know what you do. I'd try to figure it out, but you're not mine, and experiments to figure out what you do might cross boundaries that I don't know about because to be honest, I don't know the person who let me see you too well. So, to respect the owner, and you I guess, I will just stare at you aimlessly, pretending to know what is going on. Essentially how I spend the rest of the time in this class. lol. Jk. I am going to actually do what I do in this class, stare at you and try to figure out what the heck the point is. At first, when I saw you from a distance, I thought it was one of those sticks that people use to poke their pores to clear blemishes. Your owner does have beautiful clear skin, so maybe it works and this is the secret to her stunning complexion. Or, knowing that she's great



at techy-art stuff, you could be a tool of some kind, with a very specific techy-art purpose. One that your owner knows, because I seem to be noticing this recurring trend of her being very smart and knowing a lot of things that I do not know. Which is very cool. So therefore, she is cool. Aha. You must be what makes your owner cool. Which therefore makes you cool! Or I am just rambling uneducated blubber because the reality of it is that I have no idea whatsoever what the purpose of this object is. I wonder how often it is for rambling results in a good thing compared to when it leads us

nowhere and is just an endless puddle of opaque mud. Big word there. I hope opaque is the right one... the "not see through" one right. Hm. This object is opaque. Opaque looks like plaque. This tool could be used to remove plaque off teeth. Or something by some kind of dentist or dental hygienist. Or it could be not that. It also looks like the handle portion of a ribbon, like in rhythmic gymnastics. No ribbon though, so likely not a miniature one of those made for a racoon. I like how they said the art of phenomenology. That's cool. This could be an art tool. Maybe to shape, sculpt or poke things. Or for baking cakes. Maybe it's used to carve faces into fondant. Or to pick strings when repairing a guitar. I wonder what I would use this for if it were mine.



Cold but warm. Smooth and rough. Round but sharp. Harmless and violent. Sterile but filthy. Opening and closing. Opposites attracting each other to the rhythm of mellow harmonies. A mother-child dyad working in tandem to fulfill multiple tasks. Both grounded by a fundamental but irrelevant actor. Accessible and readily available to diverse hands, different needs, and varied purposes. Sharp, long, and slim extensions, in line, ready for action. Equipped with approval symbols supporting their function.

One of the openings in the handle is bigger than the other. When I tried to use it, I could not figure out how many fingers should go in each hole. Upon further inspection, and trying to imitate a cutting movement, I realized that my thumb went on top, and three fingers



went through the bottom opening. I use the scissors to cut a piece of paper and notice that they are sufficiently sharp, cutting through the paper in a clean and rather satisfying manner. In opening and closing the scissors there is a certain resistance I can feel in my hand, and it seems that this arises from residue of glue or some other sticky substance that the scissors may have cut through in the past. The grey plastic handle is rather tough and sturdy, and has a coarse texture to it, which is not my preferred texture when it comes to scissors. I would prefer a smooth handle, or even better, a rubber one, which would feel nicer against my fingers. The screw that holds the scissors together is encased in a round plastic button which allows you to swirl them around on the table, like a kind of spinning top.

9

Made of two sections, one black and one grey. The black is matte black, though it catches moments of the fluorescent light and reflects sharply. The grey part is shinier; there are more moments of light reflecting on it. The black section is two sections or two ends of the object connected through the grey part. Each black section is composed of a straight section and a section that looks like a capitalized D, but the Ds are positioned as mirror opposites, with the rounded part facing away from the other. If the two black parts were disconnected from the grey section, they would perhaps lay flat, but due to the height and twistedness of the grey section, only the two top parts of each D touch the table, while the straight parts are angled upward toward the joint within the grey section. The grey section is made up of a number of parts, a joint, a spring, and a few metal bars that are connected to each other. Two distinctly thicker bars have a crescent moon shape. Their crescent shapes are stacked perpendicular to the black D's and are about three-quarters of an inch apart. They are parallel crescents connected at each end by two bars that hold them parallel. The furthest out crescent is connected at two places firmly to the bars, while the crescent that is in the middle is connected at five points, two hoops at either end, two bars at the one-third sections and a spring in the middle.



This object is something I can hold in my hand. It has two handles like a pair of scissors. The handles are made of black plastic, and the rest of it is metal. The metal part has two curved-shaped pieces. One of the curved pieces is covered by a rubbery material. A spring connects one handle to one of the curved pieces. When I pull the handles together, the two curved shaped pieces collapse on each other. When I release the handles, the spring pulls one of the curved pieces back, so the two curved piece no longer touch each other. It is hard to tell what one can do with this object.

10

Its glimmering gold is so reflective I can see a distorted version of myself peering at it as I type. This smooth metal coated impersonation of a much bigger beast with its

limb extended in the air is still just about the size of my middle finger. It's a small elephant figurine - sitting like a pet in wait - the indentions meant to be its eyes look up at me plaintively. It looks decorative - a beloved desk trinket for an elephant lover. In fact, it waits for it's true use - it's raised trunk waiting to be the holder of rings. It's tusks long enough to do the same.

I pick it up trying to feel more, to gain a better sense of this object that has inhabited my room for so long. It's lighter than my phone, but heavier than a pen. Upon holding it I realize I'd forgotten its felt underbelly - soft enough to be dragged across any surface and leave no trace. Its four legs are moulded into its body - such that if I didn't see what it was, or had not known what it was replicating, I would have struggled to describe it. Had I been asked to describe it using purely my memory I would have insisted it had a tail. The absence of a tail when I looked reminded me that this thing that I see daily is still foreign to me.



And yet, in a way it has guided the way I dress myself. I had one ring when I was given this elephant. And, in an effort to appease its waiting trunk, I've made efforts to buy and collect more - wanting to ensure that this tiny trinket could live to its purpose and not simply be reduced to decoration. Before its presence in my life, any rings I obtained would disappear into oblivion lost somewhere behind bedside tables or in laundry baskets. Now my rings have a home.

It's heavier than I anticipated once I am holding this delightful belonging of theirs. Two eyes, two ears, two tusks, each three dimensional and there is a beautiful simplicity to the design. The cracks in the gold around the edges of its ears and tip of its trunk remind me of dandelion seeds blowing in the wind. It's so shiny. I wonder if it has a name. I wonder if it was gifted with love.

As I rotate it in my hands, I realize it's seated. When I first approached from the front, I perceived it to be standing tall. Now, I see its trunk lifted high above as it sits. I turn it forward once more, and my perspective is changed. No longer stretching from an upright stance, instead it is resting and reaching, grounding and rising.



Appendix:

object participants (in order of appearance)

digital metronome

metal water bottle

mechanical pencil

screwdriver

keychain bottle opener

key

crochet hook

scissors

eyelash curler

elephant-shaped ring holder

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