

# A Phenomenological Account of the Shooting Spree

Robert G. McInerney  
Point Park University

I presented a version of this paper in November of 1999 after the Columbine Shootings.<sup>1</sup> Currently, I have come to focus less on the gun as a technological augmentation and extension of desire and more on the mooded, lived situation of the immediate shootings. However, I have included a small portion of that previous analysis here in order to set the stage, if you will, for a phenomenological explication of the shooting spree. I put forth that the spree itself, as it is experienced, is an important consideration in further understanding and preventing rampage, mass killings in the United States.

Objects take on different shapes, working shapes, fighting shapes, loving shapes.  
-J.H. Van den Berg

That gun butt felt so smooth and warm cradled in your palm;  
Oh your childhood cried out into your head “they mean to do you harm”  
-Bernie Taupin

To understand and perhaps predict potential shooting sprees, researchers after Columbine investigated changing family values (Sleek, 1998), media representations, drug abuse, personality disorders (Bondü & Scheithauer, 2011; Watts & Erevelles, 2004; Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000), and societal norms (Newman & Fox, 2009; Spina, 2000). Popular media speculated about seemingly discrepant facts observed such as the social isolation of the perpetrator, a dysfunctional family life (Belkin, 1999), or the perpetrator having been bullied in school (Newman, Fox, Roth, Mehta & Harding, 2004). Further, some studies explore a plausible history of socio-psychological facts about the shooting spree killer, for example, confusion in sexuality (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003), the impact of violent video games and music, gender, and even a particular style of dress (Evans & Rey, 2001; Klein & Chancer, 2000; Spina, 2000). Using a kind of biological and disease model, the shooting sprees have been called an ‘epidemic’ (see Gellert, 2010). Newman and Fox (2009) have done excellent work in differentiating the shooting spree killer in high schools and colleges and additional work has been done in understanding certain shootings as a political act or in protest to bullying (Larkin, 2007) as well as, in general, individual reactions to bullying and the institutional life of the school (Leary, Kowalski, Smith & Phillips, 2003).

All the aforementioned studies (and many more) rely on a clear distinction between a given individual, the gun, and the circumstances of the shooting. We can certainly agree that the gun cannot kill without human involvement. It seems a common sense truth, or folk wisdom, that there is a clear divide between human beings and things and such a divide, in part, allows us to see ourselves in dominion over things. We generally believe that things are there for our instrumental use—they do not use us, so to speak. And, yet, it also seems to be true that things compel us and move us towards different feelings and moods, levels of intensity, intention and involvement (Latour, 1999; van den berg, 1970). Perhaps the thing is in some way inseparable from the human being experiencing it (Heidegger, 1971b; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; van den Berg, 1970). The divide between human being and thing may not be so vast and perhaps not so clear cut.

As the aforementioned investigations progress and as, unbearably, there are more killing sprees, inevitably the expression and NRA slogan “Guns don’t kill, people do” re-emerges (see Latour, 1999). This expression relates the common sense idea that it is the individual’s rational or irrational personality or pathology that is responsible for the shooting spree; not the lifeless gun or the situation of the spree itself. Bruno Latour (1999) takes up the NRA slogan as an example of our confused understanding of technological things. Latour uses, in part, the philosophy of Martin Heidegger as a foundation for his analysis. Latour suggests that, “If we study the gun and the citizen as propositions...we realize that neither subject nor object (nor their goals) is fixed” (p. 180).

Herein, I will review Latour’s insights into what he calls “...folding humans and nonhumans into each other” where the boundaries blur between human being and the technological instrument – the gun. As such we come to recognize a ‘citizen-gun’ in deep interrelation (p. 176). However, the proper work of phenomenology is to explore the constituting structures of human consciousness, which co-create the givenness of a phenomenon in the world.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, phenomenology blurs the lines not only between subject and object, but also reveals the worldly situations in which experiences come to be as phenomena. I will offer a phenomenology of the rapid fire gun that will include descriptions of the shooting *spree* as an *enactive* and *emergent* phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> The spree itself, I maintain, is the fervent context that permeates and co-constitutes the experience of using the rapid fire gun, and I will show how the shooter is absorbed within the *spree* such that the intimate interrelationship of person, gun, and lethal situation will be further revealed.<sup>4</sup>

*The Thing called Gun*<sup>5</sup>

Heidegger (1971b) tells us, "...the thingly character of the thing does not consist in its being a represented object, nor can it be defined in any way in terms of the objectness..." (p.167). Moreover, Don Ihde (1990) explains: "A naïve objectivist account would likely begin with some attempt to circumscribe or define technologies by object characteristics" (p. 97). Let us agree provisionally that there is a difference between things and objects. Put simply, objects are named and have socially and culturally prescribed functions; in contrast, things remain open, possible, and in some sense a mystery. But, this division is not so clear-cut and we can say too that objects retain a *thingly* character—objects can be more than their socially prescribed use (Heidegger, 1967, 1971b; van den Berg, 1970).

Therefore, handguns may not be simply object-instruments amenable to our means. Heidegger (1927) tells us that objects make-sense and make-use only in meaningful contexts, and especially those contexts in which we are *absorbed*. Objects are *equipment*, Heidegger explains, that make sense in a totality of meaning and use. Objects are, as J.J. Gibson understood, *affordances* that emerge and are ready-to-hand (Gibson, 1979). According to Heidegger (1927) objects in the situation emerge as useful in one way or another. Taking up Heidegger's (1971b) clarification of the thingly character of things, Benso (2000) explains "...things disclose themselves as what they are with the horizon of a world, which becomes the mediation for their own disclosure" (pp. 87-88). In fact, "There are no objects in themselves," Ihde (1990) tells us, because all objects only come alive, so to speak, within situational contexts (p. 32).<sup>6</sup>

For example, my old Swingline stapler is an object in that it has been made and named to be an object that staples. But its heaviness makes it a great paper weight, or useful for holding my books apart so I can search for a quote as I type at the same time. I have even knocked in a nail or two with this old stapler. The stapler is what it is, in relation to the worldly meaningful functions that it gathers. Note though that the stapler cannot emerge as any kind of thing; its meaningfulness and function are tied to its physicality. So, things have what Ihde (1990) calls 'quasi-otherness' in that a thing's otherness has its limits, its "borders of hermeneutic capacity" (p. 106). For Ihde, the object has an 'alterity relation' in that it can be other than what we naturally think that it is. This *alterity*, or otherness beyond its assumed reality, allows the object to have a 'quasi-autonomy' in our relations

with it. According to Ihde, “The reason technology cannot be controlled is because the question is wrongly framed. It either assumes that technologies are ‘merely’ instrumental and thus implicitly neutral, or it assumes that technologies are fully determinative and thus uncontrollable” (p. 140).

Ihde shows how these ‘cross-relations’ between socially prescribed functions and quasi-otherness are part of the instrumental ‘intentionality’ of the object. In other words, objects have intention in the sense that they have an *aboutness* to them, and I think also we may recognize how the rapid-fire handgun brings forth possibilities that shape us and our intentions. Things then, pre-reflectively, are, in any context, there and ready for us, and these things become objects when our meaningful actions and intentions enliven them and the object’s latent possibilities of intention enliven us.

Instrumental or technological use, in part, makes a thing into an object. For instance, imagine the first rock being thrown in anger toward another. The rock was projected as a thing in response to another. There exists a world of others, sometimes beyond our physical grasp, of which we could propel, or extend towards, using things as an extension. The rock thrown at another reveals its intentions as its thingly character transforms (from thing to object) in mid air! The rock thrown is a flying fist of propulsion and hardness born of the lived body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

However, we have to admit that when we pick up an object such as the rapid-fire handgun, we are not immediately affected (i.e., without cognitive mediation); we are not simply ‘be-thinged’ (Heidegger, 1971b) in such a way that leads us to kill, and kill many. We seem to be able to take it or leave it; namely, the handgun’s ‘alterity relation’ is not so bewitching that we cannot resist it, or perhaps we do not feel it at all. One could not make a case for being deeply moved and changed by the rapid-fire handgun simply by holding it, examining it and so on. The gun must be around and about (ready-to-hand, Heidegger says) for a long enough duration of time that it recedes into the everydayness of our lives. Heidegger (1927) tells us that ready-to-hand is how objects recede in their around-and-about us context in such a way that they only disclose themselves when they become present-at-hand, or theorized as a particular object.<sup>7</sup>

But presence-at-hand does not capture the object’s full potential.<sup>8</sup> Bruno Latour (1999) shows that there exists an interference between gun and human being such that a translation exists within the mediating moment of gun use (pp. 178-180). Translation seems to be a kind of “drift” in intention that the gun plays an active role in creating (p. 179). “You are different with

a gun in your hand; the gun is different with you holding it,” Latour tells us, and this difference is intuitive. It is understood in the interrelationship, or in the intermediate of the experience” (p. 179).

Latour (1999) offers us an important and compelling distinction between humans and non-humans; non-humans are not simply objects or things, they are “full-fledged actors in our collective” in which we humans are “entangled” (p. 174-175). According to Latour, “Humans, for millions of years, have extended their social relations to other actants with which, with whom, they have swapped many properties, and with which, with whom, they formed a collective” (p. 198).

I think we can and must go further and examine this translation, swapping, and drift that Latour has outlined. Things and objects are qualitatively different in their wandering relation with us. As Benso (2000) says, “Phenomenologically, then, things pack and harass existence in a variety of ways which determine the spectrum of not only bodily, but also spiritual, feelings and emotions” (p. 144). We must then examine this “what it is likeness” with this particular object (the rapid fire handgun) and recognize that it has a singular potential to evoke a moodedness. More importantly, we need to distinguish the mooded realm in which the rapid-fire handgun evokes and becomes dominant.

### *The Shooting Spree*

What Heidegger (1927) calls *Befindlichkeit* may help us further understand our mooded situatedness with things (Heidegger, 1971b). For Heidegger, *Befindlichkeit* is, in part, a fundamental, always already mooded mode implicit in situations that are there for us. This mood is not an aberration or appendage to our experience; it is instead holistically and fundamentally *of* the experience. Nor is mood an emotion – presumably compartmentalized, knowable and always directed towards a thing or person. An emotion is a feeling *position* toward something. For example, one may love one’s dog, or be frustrated with one’s boss. We see how the emotion has an object or person and a psychological and meaningful direction or position.

A mood is a *dis*-position and lacks direction and object, which is partially why mood disorders like depression or anxiety are so difficult to understand and feel so utterly hopeless to overcome. However, moods are not necessarily disorders of some sort; rather instead, they are everyday and permeate our activities. For example, one might be in a bad mood and not

know why, as the mood has no direction. Likewise, one might relate, “I feel rushed,” and in this rushing moodedness one may have no position to take. We are, instead, in a disposition, spread out and spread thin. Moods have a tendency to overlap and stack up and so one can feel manic or giddy and at the same time feel dread or forlorn. Moods, I suggest, dwell with and guide our emotional directedness, but, because of their interweaving quality, they may compound and conflate our emotional states. For instance, one may be laughing and crying at the same time and thus feel lost in both the moodedness and the lack of emotional directedness of this experience. None of this is to say that moods have no meaning. The meaningfulness of a mood is complex, changeable, and likely a convergence of many factors and circumstances and, as I have said, complicit with emotions. Moods, intrapersonally powerful in this way, may even remove or cover over our emotional directedness, and this may be of crucial importance in our understanding of the mooded shooting spree.

While historically emotions have been thought of as getting in the way of reasoning (Damasio, 1995), I think we now recognize that emotions provide clarity to our reasoning, a clarity that keeps us mediated between the cold and calculable reasoning that may commit acts of mass murder and the overwhelming emotions that are known as crimes of passion. The shooting spree, I will demonstrate below, is neither cold nor calculable nor an overwhelming of emotions; it is a being-rapt in mood.

The rapid fire gun has the shooter in a mooded *rush*, which, as we know, means both hurried and an intense flow of mood. The word “rapid” denotes both hurried and rushed (*rapidus*) as well as seizing or grasping; and so rapid also means to carry off (*raptus*), sometimes violently, and it is associated with “rape,” meaning to violently seize as well as “rapt” and “rapture,” which denotes being spellbound and captivated (Onions, 1992). Rapid firing thus is a rushed, and *raptured*, absorption. Rampage (*rampare*) denotes “ramp,” and “rampant,” which is a rearing up as threateningly (Onions, 1992). The rapid-fire handgun reveals the impetus, ease, and distance of mass murder; not wholly a desire found within one individual, or the so-called objective properties of the gun, but unconcealed in the worldly interrelationship of the gun’s rapidity and the person’s pre-reflective, mooded experience.

The *thingly* gun, with its rapidity, may put the potential killer in a mooded *charge* that I suggest may be, at times, too much to handle; hurrying the shooter and at once grasping the person and the situation at hand. Do we not recognize that rapidity is at times the bane of our existence? We

feel rushed, our commuting and communication is often rushed, our power lunches and power naps are rushed. The rapid fire killer, we may interpret, is not forging an emotion of anger directed toward a given individual or individuals. The rapid fire killer is in a dispersed mood of killing; the shooter is rushing through it.

When one has a “fling” one is in the mood, the spirit moves one and this moodedness lends to the vulnerability of the fling, the over-indulgence, if you will. To fling something is to moodedly let something fly, wildly, and without reasonable position or direction. Yet, the fling has direction, but it is recklessly directed. The fling may feel like a reckless abandoning as a kind of freeing up, but at the time feel out of control. The shooting spree is a mooded fling of violence. The quickening body is in a sudden increase, explosive, and a bursting forth, straight away. The *hand-gun* and the *fire-arm* are now thrust out as the fist once was, as a flying fist of extension, propulsion, and hardness; the melee ensues that is the gun, finger, arm and spree; the spree is a barrage, fling and a flail.

The word “spree” means, in part, to do in excess. The spree is Dionysian; it is etymologically related to merry-making (note the connection here to rapture). The word “merry,” interestingly enough, connotes rapidity and rush, and we associate it with a good feeling because “Time flies when you’re having fun.” We feel good (sometimes) when we are taken away in merry-making. Note the fine and teasing edge of merriment though—when we feel out of control within it and thus on the edge of its other possibilities, the pleasure of it recedes (or, the pleasure is a pleasure that is painful and beyond pleasure per se — *jouissance*).<sup>9</sup> To be merry means that you have caught the spirit or it has caught you.

Spree is related to spirit (*esprit*), and this should not surprise us. We are taken away (spirited away) by the spree and, at times, horribly inspirited; spirit is forceful. Spree is related to *spreath* (in Gaelic, a “raid”), and in Middle Irish to plunder and prey, which means both to stalk and hunt; and prey also signifies those hunted. Spree is a binge; a revelry of activity that has duration and mood. Spree is likewise related to “spray,” which means to scatter, as in scatter shot (Onions, 1992).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) tell us, “...all things are concretions of a setting, and any explicit perception of a thing survives in virtue of a previous communication with a certain atmosphere” (p. 320). Presently I interpret the shooting spree as an atmosphere, setting, and as a collective (as Latour says), or as the place of an unstable liminal-threshold where possibilities

compel us in a rush. The rapid fire gun's presencing is, dreadfully, an actant within the atmosphere and the collective of the spree (see Latour, 1999).

We can compare the overindulging of TV channel surfing to the use of the rapid fire handgun. Images appear quickly in succession – the image alive, so to speak, in one millisecond, and dead the next. Likewise, note the overindulgence and irresistibility of the cell phone, and of texting, now that it is small and carried in our pockets. Further, we can imagine today's shopping spree in relation to the change from shopping in a town to shopping in a mall – so much, and so accessible; and what of internet shopping? A click of the mouse allows much to be rapidly seen, bought, rushed- shipped and so on. Read the news and one discovers that we are perpetually on buying, spending, and shooting sprees. And then there is the eating binge, which is a spree (note that we “raid” the refrigerator!). We have so much food, with such diversity, all of it around us in images in magazines, on billboards; the supermarket is, for some of us, so tempting with possibilities to eat, eat more, eat with abandonment, and then we wonder why, for goodness sakes, have we not been more rational and in control.

But these overindulgences pale in comparison with the shooting spree, and this, again, is why I say we must take into account the zealous quality and concentrated transformation of the rapid fire gun as co-constituting the spree. Therefore, the shooting spree is a mooded collection of humans and non-humans, rushed on together, brought together; the spree is a ‘sub-world’ within the lifeworld where there is a torrent of activity (Ihde, 1990). We see then that to spree is to spoil in the overpowering possibilities born from technological objects that *be-thing* us (Heidegger, 1971b; van den Berg, 1970). And are we not asked to resist? Watch TV less, use our cell phones less, and get off the internet? These technological advances challenge and problematize our control over our mooded desires. In fact, such desires may not exist in this quality without the enlivening presencing of the technological object. The “channel surfer” and the “couch potato” were not born yet; no such human kind of being existed. The “shopaholic” and “foody” are a new kind of being-compulsion. Likewise, we may state that the rapid fire gun co-creates a shooting spree persona, a rampage killer and it is this persona and situation that reveals more about our relationship with the gun (Newman, Fox, Roth, Mehta & Harding, 2004).

The subtlety of the spree will be lost on us if we assume that the spree is simply wild behavior; it is not. The spree is objective as in pointed, picking off one at a time its victims at a distance. The spree thus objectifies but, as I



indicated above, without the mediation of reason and the clarity of emotion. The reckless aspect of the spree tells us of its waves of alacrity and its flinging outward. The spree is thoughtless and sudden but the spree is not wholly indiscriminate, it just does not *dwell* (see Heidegger, 1971a). A “discharge,” which is set off and released from the gun in a rush, incriminates, but the incrimination lacks an accusation directed to the unique other, and so there is no deliberation in the discharge. The gun discloses itself in a *discharge* of rapidity, and its spree-filled judgment of others fires at the line between indiscriminate and incriminate. The spree is certainly not aimless—the spree killer takes aim to be sure but the aim is a careless flash. This spirit, this rapture, kills! The spree is not reflective; it does not pace itself as it has little dynamics because its rhythm is but one scattered, directed salvo.<sup>10</sup>

*The wanton nature of the spree's brooding range becomes the horizon of possibilities for the destruction of the other and of lived distance.*

### *Spree and the Destruction of Distance*

The shooting spree, we have said, flings outward, hastily and uncontrollably, but we have not yet disclosed the destruction of distance that is characteristic of the technological gun as used within the spree (Heidegger, 1967; 1977b). Human beings feel the mooded existence of lived space. To be close to another is embodied; intimacy comes upon us simply by moving our bodies closer to one another. Also, we allow closeness when we truncate distance with our directed, teleos-technologies (‘de-distancing,’ see Heidegger, 1927). Our telephones, televisions and internet bring others near without resorting to the need of their physical presence. What is the rapid fire handgun’s *teleos* (i.e., its end goal or aim)? In part, the gun’s aim is to destroy distance between self and others. Likewise, the spree brings all things nearer but rapidly and in a massive (massacre) amount.

To kill another, from a far, is to both annihilate distance and to kill intimacy itself (Heidegger, 1967). How undignified it is to kill from a far; after all, the killer does not even give the courtesy of looking into the others’ eyes, feeling the others’ body and putting some effort into the act.<sup>11</sup> The spree is a hypnagogic jolt of object to objects in a flash and a stripping away of the uniqueness of the other. In a way, the spree is an irreverent orgy of human and non-humans because each has their mystery (or *alterity*), but this mystery is no longer awe inspiring precisely because the virtuous experience of the alterity of distance is executed even while the other is brought nearer through our de-distancing technologies, such as the rapid fire handgun.<sup>12</sup>

*The Spree and the Zombie*

The rapidity and rush of the “automatic” gun makes for easy killing, and killing many a brutal actuality where the automaticity is such that the person, as a dignified other, is not there. The spree killer is a zombie with a gun.

Now, let us return to the distinction between emotions and moods. The shooting spree killer usually comes in like a zombie: lifeless, transfixed, emotionless, and yet a horribly capable automaton. The shooting spree killer is already deadened, if you will – an object killer. We see now that the spree killer is not fully in one emotional position or another; the spree-killer is in a disposition, which is to say in, and on the brink of, the mooded spree. We understand too that the spree killer, like a zombie, is not caught up in directed emotions. What keeps the killer going is not a cause or an emotion, it is the spree itself as its vexing powers sustain, like a self-generating zombie. Our culture now loves the *zombie-fest*, which means “fast,” “festive” abandonment (Onions, 1992). Note that to “fast” before a festive occasion means to go without nourishment. But, once the fasting is over, the festive is a voracious feast (to fest). The zombie-killer as shooting spree-killer is a feasting-on-others, fast and insatiate. Rarely do you hear accounts of this kind of killer as angry or crying, or even speaking to anyone. In fact, the killer we are most frightened of is the one who is the most removed and fears death the least, treating self and the other like two disunited, fatally interacting objects. The zombie is a disfigured nonbeing (an object functioning), the *zombie-fest*, the *zombie-apocalypse* are about the non-being-ness that is to come, if, I suppose, we do not heed the warnings. The zombie culture in books and films are our culture’s way of revealing and recognizing the possibility of being lifeless (or, life without existence, which is a life of objects).

*Ethical relations and alterity relations*

To get at an ethical relation with regard to the spree, one may ‘see through’ the logical (i.e., gathering up facts, traits, and pathologies) and the appropriation of the world as *techné* (i.e., solving problems through technological efficiency) and look to the *imaginal* (Heidegger, 1977b; Hillman, 1975).<sup>13</sup> The spree is *imaginal* as it comes with imagination before the act, as the fantasy and mass murder is played out in the imagination (so often written out, videoed by the killer before the killing) again and again,

before the literal spree itself. I mean to indicate (implicate) the spree in our cultural imaginations as well as the imagination of the shooting spree killer. The rapid-fire hand gun, then, is a trigger toward the spree, a trigger that does not determine, or make an absolute prediction, but that is nevertheless a hair-trigger and meaningfully related to the coming and opening up of the spree. Thus, the *rapture*-spree is always before and of the future (*eschaton* as the possible or imaginable from out of the future, see Kearney, 2001). The rapture-spree then means to always already be caught up in it, in our collective imaginations. The spree then is always coming in the sense that it is always possible.

The greatest danger of the spree is the loss of *persona* within the spree's rapture. The *persona* is our uniqueness: "The *persona* is there to remind us that there is always something more to flesh and blood than flesh and blood" (Kearney, 2001, p. 13). For Kearney, the *persona* is the trace of the divine in the other. But we lose the *persona* of ourselves and of the other in the *shadow* relations (think alterity relations) of the spree. Therefore, transcendence can mean a movement beyond humanness to objectness and so we can become lifeless in the spree, object to other objects (zombies!). If we lose the *persona* we currently lose the other, as *Other*, who is dignified or intrinsically worthy and of value. The loss of the *persona* is neither the loss of the psychological self (personality as cognitive or psychodynamic) nor the Jungian social-mask *persona*; it is the loss of the transcendental possibility of others. The spree disfigures the *persona* in the rapture, where the *persona* is lost to the shadows of the spree.

I am describing the *daimonic* (or Jungian shadow, which behaves autonomously) with regard to the spree as possessing the potential killer. Rollo May (1969) considers the *daimonic* a cluster of motives unique to the person of which can become "daimonic possession" (p. 123). The aforesaid is the *daimonic* in the sense of an eruption, a complex, which means that the spree as *daimonic* is an architect of the symptoms and the violence of the killer (Jung, 1971). And yet, the spree is of our own making, our Frankenstein set off to be the worst of us. Note that the spree is, in effect, the denial of our own potential for enraged behavior. Rage, according to Diamond (1996) is "daimonic passion" (p. 14). Thus, the rapid fire handgun both co-creates, or triggers the spree and, at once, denies, in part, our responsibility.

Heidegger would say we are "gathered" by the rapid-fire handgun and not in control of it (1971a; 1967).<sup>14</sup> But this gathering, once more, is qualitatively singular. It does not merely gather a techné-self, preoccupied

and blindly efficient. The rapid-fire handgun gathers a whirlwind, a rampage. However, the spree is potentially a healthy guiding spirit (daimon), if you will, when taken up communally and when we recognize, and release ourselves to this guiding spirit we will have a potentially free relation with it (Diamond, 1996; Hillman, 1991). By daimonic, then, I optimistically signify it as part of a process of *individuation* (Jung, 1971) but said individuation is communal, that is to say that the daimonic is communal (*eudaimonic*, as in harmony with the communal shadow relations). My concern, though deeply interrelated with the gun as a technological object, is, again, with the spree and so to recognize this singular gathering is the danger recognized and a saving practice "...when grasped as the danger" before the spree has its way (Dreyfus, 1997, p. 48). The danger grasped as the danger is what I have tried to do here with a phenomenology of the shooting spree.

Dreyfus (1997) modifies Heidegger's warning that "only a god can save us" to "only some new gods can save us" (p. 52). Dreyfus' re-conceptualization seems to indicate a unique communal sense, one that moves beyond Heidegger's "releasement" to the recognition of the danger of technology and returns us to local, 'focal practices' (Borgmann, 1984) with others and things. In this I agree: we must not look to the gun as a mere thing or object, nor at the pathological individual but at our (American) communal sensibilities (or lack thereof).<sup>15</sup> The focal practice gathers but with an understanding of communal individuation or, put differently, we can gather to understand and ameliorate our own violence.

One key in our distinguishing a new communal sensibility (new gods, if you will) is to see our own violence in our "stoning" of others (Girard, 1987) at a distance, where we relieve ourselves of the daimonic spree, or better, it keeps us from recognizing our own daimonic violence (see also McKenna, 1992). We can then recognize and release ourselves to our own violence rather than distance it through the sacrifice of scapegoats; namely, the pathological individual and the banned gun (Girard, 1987). The "stoning" then refers to the casting of the first stone and to the first rock thrown, as I outlined above (which is our daimonic potentiality). Girard (1996) tells us: By scapegoat effect I mean that strange process through which two or more people are reconciled at the expense of a third party who appears guilty or responsible for whatever ails, disturbs, or frightens the scapegoaters. They feel relieved of their tensions and they coalesce into a more harmonious group. (p.12)

To cast the first stone shows our *mimetic* (mimicking) desire that is borrowed and shared as a desire from others, even others who murder (that is, violence is our shared burden). When we pathologize the gun, we relieve and deny ourselves of our own violence. When we merely pathologize the perpetrator, we again relieve ourselves of our own violence. For Girard (1987), for a community to have a sacrificial victim(s) safeguards the community from its own violence within: “The community satisfies its rage” and “The victim is held responsible for the renewed calm in the community and for the disorder that preceded this return” (p. 27). Girard’s reference to the ‘sacred’ victim is meant to show that the sacrificial victim is both dangerous and a saving grace, if you will. The victim is eschatological as the victim is coming along from the future in order to point us in the direction of our own destituteness and violence. The spree, likewise, is eschatological as it comes from the future; it comes as our possibility to be ‘monster gods,’ which means “...some horrendous presence or apparition that explodes all of your standards for harmony, order, and ethical conduct” (Campbell, 1988, p. 222). Thus, the danger of the spree increases each time we imagine we have control over it. To deny (repress) the daimonic presence (or presencing) of the spree is to rapidly perpetuate it, to quicken it, to feed its fest, to reify the horrible spirit of the spree.

Heidegger (1969) believes that “we can affirm the unavoidable use of technological devices and also deny them the right to dominate us...” (p.51; see also Heidegger, 1977b; see also Borgmann, 1984). If things have an ‘alterity relation’ as Ihde (1990) proposes, then perhaps we can establish the grounds, the practice or rituals for an ethical engagement at the communal level, where the spree is safely controlled. I hope to have shown more than an alterity relation of a thing, or a thing thinging, but the shadow relation within the spree, which, I anticipate, can likewise be controlled through a ritualized knowing of the spree itself, which is at once recognition of our own violence.

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### Notes

1. The paper was presented at the Graduate Student Conference at Duquesne University.
2. "To assume the phenomenological attitude means to regard everything from the perspective of consciousness, that is, to look at all objects from the perspective of how they are experienced

regardless of whether or not they actually are the way they are being experienced” (Giorgi, 2008, pp. 87-88).

3. Enactive here means a coupling of cognitive (thinking) and sensorimotor activities with the people, things and meaningfulness of a situation. Thus, that which is enactive is likewise emergent, which here means that the meaningfulness of the situation is not pre-programmed or reduced to cause and effect but comes to be in the moments of the situation (see Thompson, 2007).

4. My descriptions are my method and as such are interpretive. As Heidegger (1977a) says “How in general we pursue things (*methodos*), *decides in advance what truth we shall seek out in things*” (p. 300).

5. I am referencing the excellent Bonnie Raitt song “The Thing called Love” (written by Jon Hiatt) but wonder here are we ready for the thing call gun?

6. For Heidegger (1962) objects are ‘equipment’ or tools ready-to-hand.

7. The object is present-at-hand because it is experienced as no longer functioning as ready-to-hand; in other words, it is broken (Heidegger, 1962).

8. This is a potentiality that exists within the realm of primordial readiness-to-hand (Heidegger, 1962).

9. Here, quite broadly, I am referencing Jacques Lacan’s (1998) take on this term *jouissance* such that certain desires may be intolerable and pleasurable.

10. I am comparing the spree here to a barrage of music that has little or no dynamics (softer/ louder, slower/ faster, sparser/denser)

11. I am not, of course, suggesting that killing another can be dignified. All murder, I believe, is an assault on one’s dignity. However, there is a continuum of one’s uniqueness, or dignity, when we consider crimes of passion, self-defense or euthanasia.

12. We can use technologies and experience the alterity of others; however, the drone is the ultimate example of an autonomous, inhuman object that objectifies and annihilates distance.

13. “Smart guns,” for example are simply another technological (*techné*) answer to the problems of technology. I refer my readers to Heidegger (1977b), Dreyfus (1997) and Borgmann (1984) on the “free relation” with the “alterity relation” of technological objects.

14. I am loathing using Heidegger in this last section on ethics because of his association with Nazism. However, I will touch on him only insofar as I can use a small portion of his ideas for good (or goodness for all). See Hatab(2000) on the possibility of Heideggerian ethics.

15. Because the shooting spree killers are primarily young men, we may want to look to these focal practices and communal sensibilities in relation to why young men?