

My areas of research include continental philosophy of religion, film-philosophy, and, increasingly, the philosophy of technology. In continental philosophy of religion, I have very strong interests in the phenomenological work of Michel Henry, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jean-Luc Marion. More broadly, I am interested in the ideas of Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, and Charles Taylor. In film-philosophy, I have taught and published on André Bazin, Stanley Cavell, and Gilles Deleuze, as well as several filmmakers including the Dardenne brothers, Eric Rohmer, and Roberto Rossellini. I am also a co-organizer of a film-series at the TIFF Bell Lightbox called “Opening Frames” that features films and talks centered on cinema and spirituality.

I am currently working on a book-length monograph that brings together the complimentary ideas of Henry and Taylor in order to explore how certain central practices and developments of the Enlightenment — in particular, the fetishization of technology (the unquestioned conviction that technology will, and should, liberate humanity from natural constraints, including, even mortality), along with more assertive forms of secularism — continue to produce deleterious effects not only at the level of individual subjectivity but culture as a whole. The distrust of the body and sensibility, and, conversely, the over-emphasis of intellection has produced profound phenomenological alterations to the way we perceive ourselves and others. Technology has increasingly colonized what Husserl calls the *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld). The effects of technology go beyond what is merely visible like the smokestacks or electrical power lines that dominate our landscapes. For some time now, technology extends much further down into more fundamental dimensions of our being. By modifying and distorting our lifeworld — that is, the invisible background of our deepest values, inclinations, and aspirations — technology accelerates the problem of anomie, that is, the acute sense of estrangement that we feel from ourselves, others, and the world in general. These deep changes at the level of subjectivity impact all aspects of our social modes of being. Concurrent with the problem of technological overreach has been the emergence of more strident forms of secularism (the recent controversial secularism laws in France and Quebec, for example) and the growing influence of a scientism that advances a remarkably reductionist conception of materialism. These forms of exclusive humanism, as Taylor calls them, are not only starving the sources for traditional forms of spiritual practice, they also play a key role, along with an uncritical attitude towards technology, in fuelling some of the more pernicious features of our current malaise, which include social atomization, as well as the thoughtless objectification and destruction of the natural world. Taylor’s apt term for the ongoing erosion of our sense of embodiment and intercorporeality is *excarnation*. This felicitous term is meant to capture and underscore how removed we have become from the deeply incarnational sense of human experience that once characterized premodern life. In a similar vein, Henry adopts an equally vivid expression to describe our late modern condition. He refers to our current condition as a ubiquitous “flight from oneself.” But there cannot be any turning back to something before modernity. Instead, there is a pressing need, I argue, following both Henry and Taylor, to articulate other pathways to ‘modernity’ that have been overlooked until now. These other possible ways of being modern would acknowledge and emphasize the centrality of human finitude, embodiedness, and the rich plurality of spiritual practices around the world that can help to cultivate an appreciation of human limits.

I have supervised several MRPs and theses over the last few years. The range of topics is in some ways a reflection of my broad interests. These topics include the idea of the gift in Heidegger and Levinas, the notion of repetition in the philosophy of Kierkegaard, the problem of the 'other person' in Nietzsche and Levinas, Derrida and the messianic in secular culture, and the film-philosophy of Terrence Malick.

If any of this strikes a chord with you, or if you have any questions about the MA program that you think I might be able to help you with, please feel free to contact me at jcaruana@ryerson.ca