

From Reception to Resonance: Peter Wust and the Mahoukou Law

**FROM RECEPTION TO RESONANCE:
PETER WUST AND THE MAHOUKOU LAW**

Towards a Surpassing of Metaphysical Verticality

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Academic Article — Contemporary Phenomenology

2026

Abstract —

This article examines the philosophy of Peter Wust (1884–1940) as a *locus* of thought that presences, without formalising it, the trinitary structure of interpellative experience. Through a cross-reading of *Naiwität und Pietät* (1925) and *Ungewißheit und Wagnis* (1937), we show that Wust deploys an implicit phenomenology of reception that founders on the structural limit of every dyad: the impossibility of thinking the reciprocal transformation of subjects from a single vertical relation subject–being. It is precisely this stumbling block that the Phenomenological Law of Interpellation (Mahoukou Law) comes to formalise as an irreducible third moment — Resonance — making it possible to shift Wustian verticality towards a constitutive dialogal horizontality. We conclude that Wust is a *structural precursor* of dialogal phenomenology, of which the Mahoukou Law accomplishes the implicit requirement.

I dedicate this monograph to Father Gérard Eschbach, Dominican, whom I knew personally in Brazzaville (where he lived from 1968 to 1980), first as a seminarian and then as a philosophy student at Université Marien Ngouabi. During his stay in the Republic proclaimed "popular" of the Congo, he had — with a courage and a self-assurance that had surprised more than one ideologue of the era — founded a free faculty of philosophy standing as a bulwark against the Marxism then sweeping across Africa.

Years later, I met him in Paris just a few months before his death on 13 May 2021, the feast of the Ascension, at the age of 90. During an entire afternoon, we had exchanged on his philosophical work and on my project of making it the subject of my philosophy thesis, for which he had even validated the title and orientation. But it was on that occasion, as if by premonition, that he spoke to me of Peter Wust, on whom he had worked for his own doctoral thesis, insisting that I read him. Then he added: "If by chance, for one reason or another, you should decide to change the subject of your thesis, read Peter Wust and then meditate on the Trinity. I am certain you will find in him something that will be decisive in your research in dialogal phenomenology." I can attest today: he was not wrong...

Keywords — Peter Wust · phenomenology of reception · *Nauvität und Pietät* · *Ungewißheit und Wagnis* · Mahoukou Law · Call–Response–Resonance triad · dialogal phenomenology · dialogal impediment · Jean-Luc Marion

I. Introduction: A Forgotten Philosopher Between Two Thresholds

Uncertainty is not the enemy of thought — it is the condition of its depth.

— Peter Wust, *Ungewißheit und Wagnis*

Peter Wust belongs to that category of philosophers whom intellectual history relegates to its margins not because they lack depth, but because they arise at the intersection of currents that academic posterity has preferred not to allow to dialogue. A Rhenish Catholic, trained in Thomistic scholasticism, contemporary and friend of Max Scheler, an assiduous reader of Kierkegaard and Pascal, Wust occupies an uncomfortable interstice between the traditional metaphysics he seeks to restore and the nascent phenomenology he frequents without ever adopting its technical vocabulary.

His rediscovery, initiated by a few Germanist studies in the 1980s and 1990s, remains insufficiently articulated with the debates of contemporary phenomenology. It is precisely this articulation that the present article intends to produce: not a simple historiographical rehabilitation, but a philosophically productive reading that shows how Wust constitutes a *structural precursor* of a problematic that contemporary phenomenology — and more precisely the Phenomenological Law of Interpellation (Mahoukou Law) — is working to formalise.

The thesis we defend is the following: Wust deploys an implicit phenomenology of reception in three movements — *Nauvität* (primary reception), critical rupture (reflective resistance), *Pietät* (mediated reopening) — which corresponds structurally, but not formally, to the Call–Response–Resonance triad of the Mahoukou Law. Where Wust leaves this structure in the state of an anthropological and spiritual intuition, grounded in a vertical relation man–being–God, the Mahoukou Law operates its phenomenological formalisation and shifts the plane: from transcendent verticality to dialogal horizontality between co-constituting subjects.

We shall proceed in five stages: a presentation of Wust's intellectual context (II); a close analysis of his trinitary structure *Naiuität*–rupture–*Pietät* (III); a thematisation of the concept of *Wagnis* as anticipation of dialogal impediment (IV); identification of the structural limit of Wustian verticality (V); the Mahoukou Law as formalisation and surpassing (VI), before an open conclusion (VII).

II. Peter Wust in Context: Metaphysical Restoration and Phenomenology

2.1 A Thomist on the Threshold of Phenomenology

Peter Wust was born in 1884 in Rissenthal, in the Saar, and died in 1940 in Münster under severely deteriorated health conditions. His first major work, *Die Auferstehung der Metaphysik* (1920), is inscribed in a post-Nietzschean crisis context: the aim is to show that metaphysics did not die with Kantian critique and positivism, but that it awaits its resurrection. This programme is from the outset more than a return to Thomism: Wust intends to surpass the opposition between classical metaphysics and modern philosophy by showing that being imposes itself upon the subject with a precedence that precedes all intentional constitution.

This intuition brings him close to Husserl without his adopting its vocabulary: where Husserl poses the question of the mode of donation of phenomena to the constituting consciousness, Wust poses the question of the reception of being by a subject who discovers himself as always already *received* before receiving. The convergence is real, but remains programmatic. Wust is not a phenomenologist in the technical sense; he is what one might call an *implicit phenomenologist*: he practises an attentive description of the structures of human experience without providing its transcendental foundation.

2.2 Scheler as Mediator

The relation of Wust to Max Scheler is decisive for understanding his position. Scheler, who operates himself at the intersection of neo-Kantianism, Husserlian phenomenology, and Catholic philosophy, offers Wust a model of thought that integrates the descriptive rigour of phenomenology within a metaphysical and anthropological framework. Scheler's influence is perceptible notably in the way Wust thinks the relation of man to the world not as a relation of intention (Husserl) nor of being-in-the-world (Heidegger), but as a relation of *affective reception*: man is first a being who receives, who is touched, before being a subject who constitutes.

This debt towards Scheler does not prevent Wust from distinguishing himself on a capital point: where Scheler tends towards an idealism of values, Wust always anchors his reflection in the concrete finitude of man. It is this finitude — and the existential uncertainty that results from it — that constitutes the central philosophical lever of his late work.

2.3 Kierkegaard and Pascal: The Two Poles of Finitude

The two philosophers who most deeply haunt Wust's thought are Blaise Pascal and Søren Kierkegaard. From Pascal, he retains the dialectic of the *thinking reed*: man is fragile, crushable, but his greatness is precisely to know that he is crushed. From Kierkegaard, he retains the structure of the leap — the impossibility of founding existence on reason alone and the necessity of an act of trust that engages the whole man.

These two influences converge in the central problematic of *Ungewißheit und Wagnis* (1937): faced with the radical uncertainty of the human condition, man can only take the risk (*Wagnis*) of a trust that is not naive but mediated by the traversal of doubt. This structure — primary reception, ordeal of the negative, risky reopening — is precisely what we shall now analyse as an anticipation of the phenomenological triad.

III. The Wustian Trinitary Structure: Naivität, Rupture, Pietät

3.1 Primary Naivität: The Moment of the Unmediated Call

Naivität in Wust must not be confused with ordinary naivety in the pejorative sense. It designates a fundamental anthropological structure: the capacity of man to receive the real without prior critical distance, to let himself be reached by being before objectifying it. It is the posture of the child facing the world, but also — and this is what makes it a philosophical concept — the originary posture of every man before reflection comes to interpose between him and the real a screen of categories and doubts.

This primary *Naivität* is therefore a form of ontological availability: man is open to what befalls him, porous to the call of the real. Wust insists that it is not a deficiency of reflection but a richness that precedes reflection and that one must learn to recover. This recovering is not a regressive return: it is a *second naivety*, mediated, which is precisely what Wust calls *Pietät*.

Naivität corresponds, in the structure of the Mahoukou Law, to the moment of the **Call**: the inaugural moment when something gives itself to consciousness before consciousness has thematised it, the moment when the subject is touched before responding. The Call, in the Mahoukou Law, is precisely this pre-reflective openness to what arrives — to the other who interpellates, to the situation that convokes. Wustian *Naivität* is its anthropological and metaphysical equivalent.

3.2 Critical Rupture: The Moment of Response

Between primary *Naivität* and reflected *Pietät*, Wust intercalates what he calls critical rupture (*kritischer Bruch*): the moment when philosophical reflection comes to shatter the naive reception of the real. This is the moment of Descartes — methodical doubt — but also, more radically, the moment of Nietzsche: man discovers that the world is not given as meaning, that values can be overturned, that the death of God opens an abyss.

This moment is necessary for Wust: it must not be avoided. The man who has never traversed the critical rupture remains in a fragile *Naivität*, liable to collapse at the first shock. But the rupture, if it is not surpassed, leads to nihilism. It is therefore an obligatory passage, a constitutive ordeal — what Wust sometimes calls, in reference to Hegel, an *Aufhebung* of naivety: naivety is negated in order to be raised to a higher level.

It is in this moment of rupture that what corresponds, in Mahoukou, to **Response** is played out: the subject constitutes a position in the face of what has befallen him. The Response is not a simple mechanical reaction to the Call; it engages the whole subject in a taking of position that defines him. It is the moment of constituted subjectivity — not Husserlian transcendental subjectivity, but existential, engaged, risked subjectivity. Wust, through critical rupture, describes exactly this constitution of the subject through the ordeal of its own fragility.

3.3 Reflected Pietät: The Anticipation of Resonance

The most original and richest concept of Wust is without doubt *Pietät* — which must be carefully distinguished from ordinary religious piety, even if the latter is one of its avatars. *Pietät* is a fundamental attitude of man who, having traversed the critical rupture, returns to a relation to being, to the world, to others, and to God that is both deeper and more vulnerable than primary naivety. It is a second openness: it knows what it risks, it has traversed doubt, and it chooses nonetheless to trust.

Wust describes *Pietät* as an act of the whole being — not only of intelligence, but of will, affectivity, and flesh. It is in this sense that it surpasses simple critical rationality: it engages a transformation of the subject himself. The subject who has traversed the rupture and who chooses *Pietät* is no longer the same subject as the one who lived in primary *Naivität*. He has been transformed by the ordeal, and this transformation is irreversible.

It is here that the correspondence with the Mahoukou Law reaches its maximum density. **Resonance** — the third moment of the Call–Response–Resonance triad — is precisely this reciprocal transformation of subjects that authentic interpellation produces. Where the Call convokes and the Response constitutes, Resonance *transforms*: it modifies the interpellated subject, but also, and this is what gives dialogal phenomenology its specificity, the interpellating subject. Wustian *Pietät*, insofar as it describes the transformation of the subject through the ordeal of openness to being, is the anthropological anticipation of this third moment.

IV. Wagnis and Dialogal Impediment: The Reverse of Resonance

4.1 The Structure of Wagnis

If *Pietät* is the positive moment of mediated reopening, *Wagnis* (the risk, the wager) is its formal structure. Wust insists: man can only access *Pietät* by taking the risk of trust in the face of radical uncertainty. This risk is not an arbitrary decision: it is the response of the whole man to the situation of finitude in which he finds himself. *Wagnis* is always a *Wagnis des Selbst* — a risk of the self, a putting of oneself at stake.

Now, this risk can be refused. This is one of Wust's most profound intuitions: man can withdraw into the security of a closed self, refuse openness to being, prefer the illusory certainty of closure upon oneself to the painful truth of open finitude. This refusal is not simply an intellectual error: it is a mode of being, a manner of existing that excludes *Pietät* and blocks the transformation it should produce.

4.2 Refused Wagnis as Dialogal Impediment

The Wustian category of refused *Wagnis* finds, in the Mahoukou Law, its formal equivalent in what dialogal phenomenology names **dialogal impediment**: the structure that blocks the triad before Resonance can arrive. Dialogal impediment is not the absence of Call — there can be a Call and a Response without Resonance arising. This is precisely what Wust describes when he speaks of the subject who traverses critical rupture without arriving at *Pietät*: there has been reception, there has been ordeal, but the third moment — the transforming reopening — is blocked.

Dialogal impediment, in the Mahoukou Law, is an *immanent normative category*: it makes it possible to diagnose, from the internal structure of the triad, the deficient interpellative situations. It does not come from the outside as an added moral criterion; it emerges from the very logic of Call–

Response–Resonance, of which it designates the failed realisation. Refused *Wagnis* in Wust fulfils exactly the same function: it names, from the internal structure of the Wustian triad, the blocking point that prevents the triad from being accomplished.

4.3 The Forms of Impediment

Wust identifies several forms of refused *Wagnis*, corresponding to as many modes of dialogal impediment. The first is what he names *Titanismus*: the pretension of the subject to found himself, to need no other and no transcendent being in order to exist. The Titanic subject denies the very structure of reception — he refuses to admit that he is *received* before receiving. In the terms of dialogal phenomenology, this is the subject who refuses the Call by pretending to be at the origin of himself: the triad is short-circuited from the first moment.

The second form is nihilism: the subject who has traversed critical rupture and refuses to surpass it, who installs himself in the negative as if it were the final word. This is the impediment that blocks the triad between Response and Resonance: the subject has responded, but his response is a refusal of transformation. He maintains a closure upon the Response that prevents the advent of Resonance.

The third form, more subtle, is what Wust calls false *Pietät*: a simulated openness that in reality preserves the defences of the closed self. This is the man who believes he has made the *Wagnis* whereas he has only taken a calculated, controlled risk that puts nothing of himself at stake. In dialogal phenomenology, this is the most difficult impediment to diagnose, precisely because it imitates Resonance without producing it: there is indeed a third moment, but it is empty — a facade transformation that transforms neither the interpellated subject nor the interpellating subject.

V. The Structural Limit of Wustian Verticality

5.1 Verticality as Horizon and as Constraint

If Wust's philosophy constitutes a structural anticipation of the phenomenological triad, it nonetheless founders on a limit we must now thematise explicitly: the fundamental verticality of its horizon. In Wust, the fundamental relation in which *Näivität*, rupture, and *Pietät* are played out is always, in the final instance, the relation of man to being, and of being to God. The triad is played out in a vertical dimension: man receives from above, he responds upward, he is transformed by what comes from beyond him.

This verticality is not without philosophical coherence: it is rooted in the metaphysical tradition and in Wust's Christian conviction that man is a *creatura*, an essentially received being from God. But it produces a structural asymmetry that prevents Wust from fully thinking the reciprocity of transformation. In the vertical relation man–being–God, man is always the receiving pole.

5.2 The Unilaterality of Reception

This verticality produces what we may call the unilaterality of Wustian reception: the transformation that *Pietät* produces is a transformation of the human subject by the transcendent being, not a mutual transformation of two subjects through their encounter. Yet this is precisely what the Mahoukou Law requires as the condition of authentic Resonance: the transformation must be *reciprocal*. It is not simply that the interpellated subject is transformed by the Call and by his own Response: it is that the interpellating subject is himself transformed by the other's

Response, and that this double transformation produces a new space — the space of Resonance — that did not exist before the interpellation.

5.3 The Inter-human as Primary Plane

The limit of Wust can therefore be formulated precisely: he presences the trinitary structure of experience, he articulates it with finesse, but he deploys it in a plane — the vertical plane man–being–God — that cannot accommodate constitutive reciprocity. For reciprocity to be fully thought, it is necessary to shift the plane of the relation: no longer subject–transcendent being, but subject–subject in the space of the inter-human.

This shift is not a secularisation of Wust's thought, nor a reduction of his metaphysical horizon to immanence. It is an *enlargement*: dialogal phenomenology does not deny that the vertical relation can exist and produce its own effects. It affirms that the trinitary structure of interpellation is first and principally visible in the horizontal inter-human relation, and that it is from this primary visibility that one can then, if necessary, extend the analysis to other planes. The inter-human is the *primary phenomenological locus* of the triad.

VI. The Mahoukou Law as Formalisation and Surpassing

6.1 The Phenomenological Law of Interpellation: Recall of the Structure

The Mahoukou Law is formulated as follows: every authentic interpellative event requires three irreducible moments, the absence or blocking of any one of which constitutes a structural impediment: (1) the **Call**, inaugural moment by which a subject is convoked by another subject or by a situation before any response; (2) the **Response**, moment in which the interpellated subject constitutes an engaged position in the face of the Call; (3) **Resonance**, moment in which both subjects are mutually transformed by the interpellative exchange, producing a new space that was not contained in the two subjects taken separately.

This triad is distinguished from every dialectic by an essential trait: it is not a synthesis that abolishes the prior terms. The Call is not absorbed into the Response, and the Response is not absorbed into the Resonance. The three moments coexist in an irreducible dynamic tension. Resonance does not put an end to interpellation: it deepens it and renders it available for a new triad.

6.2 Resonance as an Autonomous Phenomenological Category

The most original contribution of the Mahoukou Law is the thematisation of Resonance as an *autonomous phenomenological category*, irreducible to the sum of Call and Response. Resonance is characterised by three distinctive traits. First, *bi-directionality*: unlike Wustian *Pietät*, Resonance transforms both subjects in an asymmetric but reciprocal manner. Second, *deferred temporality*: Resonance can arrive after a delay that is the time of transformation. Finally, *excess over the subjects*: Resonance produces something that belongs to neither of the two subjects taken separately — a common space, a shared meaning, a newly co-constituted world.

6.3 What Wust Contributes and What He Cannot Think

Reading Wust through the Mahoukou Law makes it possible to measure exactly the contribution and the limit of Wustian thought. The contribution is considerable: Wust articulates, with remarkable depth and density, the trinitary structure of the experience of reception. But what

Wust cannot think is precisely what the Mahoukou Law makes of the third moment: a moment of *reciprocal co-constitution* between two subjects equally exposed to one another. In Wust, the third moment is the transformation of the human subject by the transcendent being. In the Mahoukou Law, Resonance is the transformation of *two* subjects through their interpellative encounter.

6.4 Dialogal Phenomenology as *Aufhebung* of Wust

The relation of dialogal phenomenology to Wust's thought can be described, with the care that is fitting, as an *Aufhebung* in the Hegelian sense: a surpassing that preserves and elevates. Dialogal phenomenology preserves from Wust the trinitary structure of experience, the necessity of an irreducible third moment, the attention to the finitude of the subject and to his constitutive vulnerability. It elevates these intuitions by formalising them in a phenomenological law applicable to every interpellative structure, and it shifts them by making the horizontal inter-human the primary plane of phenomenology.

This shift also makes it possible to resolve a difficulty that Wust could not resolve within his framework: the question of pluralism. If the triad is played out in the vertical relation man–God, it is fundamentally singular. But if the triad is played out in the horizontal inter-human relation, it is fundamentally plural: there are as many triads as there are interpellative encounters, and these triads intersect, reinforce, and contradict one another, producing a weave of Resonances that is precisely what one can call, in the social and political plane, the fabric of a common world.

VII. Conclusion: Wust, Structural Precursor of Dialogal Phenomenology

At the end of this journey, we are in a position to formulate with precision the thesis defended in the introduction: Peter Wust is a *structural precursor* of dialogal phenomenology. He is so not in the historiographical sense — the Mahoukou Law constituted itself through its own path, of which Father Gérard Eschbach was the providential transmitter by directing this work towards Wust — but in the phenomenological sense: his thought articulates a structure that, once formalised and shifted from verticality to horizontality, corresponds term for term to the Call–Response–Resonance triad.

Wustian *Naivität* is the Call in its anthropological form. Critical rupture is the Response in its existential form. Reflected *Pietät* is Resonance in its metaphysical form. And refused *Wagnis* is dialogal impediment in its existential form. The difference between Wust and the Mahoukou Law is therefore not first a difference of structure, but a difference of *plane* and of *formalisation*.

There remains a task that the present article has not undertaken but which it indicates as horizon: to bring this Wust–Mahoukou articulation into dialogue with the phenomenology of donation of Jean-Luc Marion. For Marion himself, in his thematisation of the *adonné* and the saturated phenomenon, is exposed to the same limit as Wust, but in the inverse direction: where Wust founders on the impossibility of thinking reciprocity in the vertical relation, Marion founders on the impossibility of thinking Resonance in the gift–*adonné* dyad. This double stumbling block — Wust through verticality, Marion through the dyad — delineates the precise space in which the Mahoukou Law operates its surpassing: the horizontal, reciprocal, and formalised triad of authentic interpellation.

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