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Biography, Style, and the Phenomenology of Self-Writing

We are proud to present an issue of *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* dedicated to the complex but very inspiring relation between phenomenology and narrative. We believe that this issue, thanks to its contributors and the topics they address, is rich in content on its own. However, we also like to think of it as the beginning of a conversation that will continue in the next issue of our journal and, hopefully, be carried on by readers engaging affirmatively or critically with the ideas and interpretations presented by the authors of both issues. As we all know, nothing helps a narrative quite like bringing together different perspectives.

The title of this editorial – *Biography, Style, and the Phenomenology of Self-Writing* – clearly identifies three key themes that, in our view, frame the key

topics discussed in this issue. The perspective adopted in this issue expands the framework of classical phenomenology – focused on scholars associated with Spiegelberg's so-called phenomenological movement[1] – by taking a historical step back toward Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's philosophy and moving a step further toward the lesser-explored sphere of interdisciplinary interaction between phenomenology and the anthropology of new media. Before we guide the readers of this issue through a preview of the covered problems, let us anchor the topic of narrative and narrativity in the broader context of the humanities, conceptualizing to some extent phenomenology's position in the history of the subject.

The topic of narrative became one of the central preoccupations of humanistic inquiry in the second half of the twentieth century. Philosophy, literary theory, historiography, and the social sciences all converged on the question of how narrative structures experience, organizes time, and constitutes the subject. Within philosophy in particular, structuralism – especially the work of Vladimir Propp,[2] Ferdinand de Saussure.[3] and Mikhail Bakhtin[4] among others – supplied a rich toolkit for the analysis of narrative, as did hermeneutics, which developed concepts such as narrative identity and narrative understanding specifically in order to address this problematic. One could even say that these traditions became overpopulated with analytical frameworks devoted to the study of narrative. Poststructuralism further complicated the picture, questioning the stability of the structures that its predecessors had sought to isolate.

Among the humanities, narratology has perhaps developed the most sophisticated conceptual tools for the study of narrative and narrativity. Beginning with Gérard Genette's distinction between extra- and intra-diegetic narrators and the concept of

1) Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*, 3rd rev. and enlarged ed., with the collaboration of Karl Schuhmann (Martinus Nijhoff, 1982).

2) Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, rev. Louis A. Wagner, 2nd ed. (University of Texas Press, 1968).

3) Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin, ed. Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy (Columbia University Press, 2011).

4) Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (University of Texas Press, 1982). Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

focalization,[5] and continuing through to Mieke Bal's well-known *Introduction to Narratology*[6] – which presents not only the fundamentals for every scholar and student interested in these topics but also expands and deepens many of Genette's insights – narratology has established itself as the primary discipline for the systematic study of narrative. Most importantly, narratology is a discipline open to interdisciplinary research, including art, cinema, and new media such as video games (Marie-Laure Ryan[7]). Thanks to the illuminating work of scholars such as Monika Fludernik[8] and David Herman,[9] narratology has evolved in directions that incorporate cognitive research, bodily orientation, and the cognitive schemas structuring the everyday experience of human individuals.

Against this backdrop, it might seem surprising that the phenomenological movement – the tradition launched by Edmund Husserl and extending through Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas, and others – did not place narrative at the center of its investigations for a long time. The topic remained, as it were, in the background. This is not to say that phenomenological texts were untouched by literary concerns; quite the contrary. They were haunted by literature and often shaped in a literary manner. Sartre's writing is perhaps the most vivid illustration of this tendency. Starting with the novelistic fragments of *Being and Nothingness*,[10] continuing through the programmatic essay *What Is Literature?*,[11] and culminating in his Nobel Prize-winning autobiography *The Words*[12] – in which he claims that his whole life was divided into two parts: reading and writing – one could say that a passion

5) Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, foreword Jonathan Culler (Cornell University Press, 1983); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cornell University Press, 1989).

6) Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (University of Toronto Press, 2009).

7) See, for example, Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Marie-Laure Ryan, ed., *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling* (University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

8) Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (Routledge, 1996).

9) David Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (University of Nebraska Press, 2002); David Herman, *Storytelling and the Sciences of Mind* (MIT Press, 2013).

10) Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (Philosophical Library, 1956).

11) Jean-Paul Sartre, *What Is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Philosophical Library, 1949).

12) Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (George Braziller, 1964).

for literature animated Sartre's entire life and thinking. Martin Heidegger's sustained interest in the dialogue form (*Country Path Conversations*[13]) and his studies on poetry (*Poetry, Language, Thought*[14]) point in a similar direction. Merleau-Ponty not only drew inspiration from Marcel Proust's prose but, in the later period of his work, placed greater emphasis on metaphorical language, claiming that language is the flesh of the world, to be read as a text (*The Prose of the World*[15]). The highly metaphorical language of Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*[16] strengthens this bond between phenomenology and literature still further, suggesting that metaphor is an unavoidable vehicle of phenomenological description when it aims to grasp the subjectivity of experience.

Phenomenology engaged with literature from its very beginnings, across all its main centers: the Munich circle (Johannes Daubert[17]), the Göttingen school (Roman Ingarden[18]), and Freiburg (Heidegger). Contemporary French scholars such as Claude Romano,[19] Henri Maldiney,[20] Éliane Escoubas,[21] and Jean-Louis Chrétien[22] have further strengthened this phenomenological engagement with literature. However, the phenomenological interest in literature – whether in the work of Ingarden or Wolfgang Iser[23] – and even the creative inspiration drawn from literature in the

13) Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, trans. Bret W. Davis (Indiana University Press, 2010).

14) Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Harper & Row, 1971).

15) Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. John O'Neill (Northwestern University Press, 1973).

16) Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Duquesne University Press, 1969).

17) Daniel Roland Sobota, *Die Geburt der Phänomenologie aus dem Geiste der Frage: Johannes Daubert und der Anfang der Phänomenologischen Bewegung* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2023).

18) Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature*, trans. George G. Grabowicz (Northwestern University Press, 1979).

19) Claude Romano, *Le Chant de la vie. Phénoménologie de Faulkner* (Gallimard, 2005).

20) Henri Maldiney, *Regard, parole, espace* (Les éditions du Cerf, 2012).

21) Éliane Escoubas, *Imago Mundi: Topologie de l'art* (Galilée, 1986).

22) Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne A. Davenport (Fordham University Press, 2004); Jean-Louis Chrétien, *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Fordham University Press, 2003).

23) Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980)

cases of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas are not equivalent to a direct interest in narrative and narrativity. While the question of literature was addressed by most phenomenological scholars – including those already mentioned – the topic of narrativity was treated far less directly.

The first notable exception within the Husserlian lineage is Wilhelm Schapp, whose work on the entanglement of persons in stories[24] anticipated later developments but remained largely overlooked. While Ingarden addressed the problem of the literary work of art, he was primarily concerned with its ontological structure rather than with the lived narrativity implied by a work of art for the reader. The most extensive study of narrative produced by a scholar emerging from the phenomenological movement was offered by Paul Ricoeur in his three-volume *Time and Narrative*[25] (introducing the conception of threefold mimesis) and later in his well-known *Oneself as Another*,[26] which further developed the conception of the narrative self, distinguishing two modes of self-reference – *idem* and *ipse* – between which narrative understanding plays a mediating role. However, Ricoeur's own disciplinary identity remains ambiguous, and his methods often appear more hermeneutical than phenomenological.

David Carr's *Time, Narrative and History*[27] stands as the most significant contemporary phenomenological contribution to the debate on narrative that emerged at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While Ricoeur's approach to narrative was predominantly hermeneutical, Carr returns to the problem of phenomenological experience directly. He argues that there is an ontological level of narrativity that remains pre-reflective and manifests itself already in the temporality of experience. Furthermore, contrary to Ricoeur, he shows that narrative identity is not a concept applicable solely to individual human beings, but extends also to we-subjects – communities that constantly emerge, persist, and perish through history. In his investigation Carr also returns to Hegel's phenomenology, challenging the view, held

24) Wilhelm Schapp, *In Geschichten verstrickt: Zum Sein von Mensch und Ding* (Klostermann, Vittorio, 2004).

25) Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols., trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (University of Chicago Press, 1984–1988).

26) Paul Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

27) David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Indiana University Press, 1986).

by some scholars, that Hegel's philosophy has no place in contemporary phenomenological inquiry. Some of the authors in this issue refer directly to Carr's investigations (Roth), while others seem to touch on similar issues, but from a related yet different perspective (Marczyński). Nonetheless, Carr's spirit is strongly present throughout this first of the two *Phenomenology and Narrative* issues. We may already reveal to our readers that his presence will be even more pronounced in the second one – but it is a little too early to disclose the details. For now, as in any good narrative, let us allow the suspense to build.

The question of the relationship between Hegel and the phenomenological movement adds a further layer of complexity to this picture. The history of phenomenology is longer than the history of the phenomenological movement as described by Herbert Spiegelberg. One could claim that Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*[28] represents a crucial turning point in that longer history, at least insofar as the question of narrative is concerned. After all, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* has often been interpreted as a developmental narrative – a *Bildungsroman* – that tells the story of natural consciousness elevating itself toward wisdom.[29] Husserl himself rarely referred to Hegel directly, and when he did, he was mostly critical. Yet the scholars who emerged from the Husserlian tradition – Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Levinas, Ricoeur – drew extensively on both. A tendency to separate Hegel's phenomenology from the history of the phenomenological movement has therefore persisted among scholars, though it is one that is slowly beginning to change: recent publications, including Tanja Staehler's comparative study of Hegel and Husserl[30] and the Springer volume *Hegel and Phenomenology*,[31] signal growing recognition that the two traditions share more than a name. While the history of the phenomenological movement as such is not the topic of the present issue, the relationship between modern phenomenology and its Hegelian form remains present in the background of our central concern, which is narrative and narrativity.

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28) G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

29) Josiah Royce, *Lectures on Modern Idealism*, ed. Jacob Loewenberg (Yale University Press, 1919).

30) Tanja Staehler, *Hegel, Husserl and the Phenomenology of Historical Worlds* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

31) Danilo Manca, Elisa Magrì, Dermot Moran, and Alfredo Ferrarin, eds., *Hegel and Phenomenology* (Springer, 2019).

Among the contemporary phenomenological debates over narrativity, self--understanding, and identity, significant voices were raised by Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi. Both engaged in a debate with the analytic thinker Galen Strawson, who argued that the narrative perspective on self-identity is far from obvious and – according to Strawson – amounts to a kind of philosophical myth.[32] Strawson developed a distinction between *narrative* and *episodic* self-understanding, presenting both perspectives in strict opposition to each other and identifying himself with the latter. His observations prompted Gallagher and Zahavi to reinterpret narrative self-theory as it had appeared in psychology and hermeneutics. Rather than claiming that narrativity is the only viable approach to selfhood, Dan Zahavi – and to some extent Gallagher – argued in favor of a more fundamental level of selfhood, the *minimal self*, grounded in pre-reflective experience rather than narrative self-understanding, and served to establish a bridge between Strawson's episodic and diachronic perspectives.[33] The debate between these two traditions began with *Models of the Self*,[34] co-edited by Gallagher and Jonathan Shear, which featured Strawson's seminal essay on the episodic self, and culminated in *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*[35] where Strawson developed his own notion of the *minimal subject* – a momentary neural synergy identified with the living moment of experience – a concept that, while arrived at independently, enters into a productive tension with the phenomenological notion of the minimal self as understood by Zahavi. While this debate is not directly addressed by the authors contributing to the present volume, we believe its echoes can be heard by attentive readers, particularly in those texts that engage with the problematic of the narrative self.

Thus, all of the texts presented in this issue tackle the problem of the affinity between phenomenology and narrative from different angles and with different emphases. Nevertheless, all of them can be treated as contributions to the general problematic named in the title of the issue. The question of whether the proximity of phenomenology and narrativity is primarily a matter of historical justice or of

32) Galen Strawson, "Against Narrativity," *Ratio* 17, no. 4 (2004): 428–52.

33) Dan Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First-Person Perspective* (MIT Press, 2005); Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind* (Routledge, 2008).

34) Shaun Gallagher and Jonathan Shear, eds., *Models of the Self* (Imprint Academic, 1999).

35) Shaun Gallagher, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

substantive philosophical convergence – particularly around the problems of narrative, temporality, and community – is one of the animating concerns of the present issue. The authors accordingly address the problems of biography, self-writing, and self-narratives; the anthropology of new media and the ways it affects the narrativity of the self; the relationship between style and form; even the question of cinematic realism in relation to narrative experience; and the relation between auto-narration and the avoidance of stigmatization.

The relevance of Hegel's thought for the phenomenology of narrative – touched upon above – comes into focus in the first text of this issue. Allen Speight, in his article "Hegel and the Task of Biographical Narrative," shows that the author of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* had far more to say about the problem of self-writing than is often assumed by those who criticize Hegel's approach to the individual human being and who view the role of the self in his philosophy as marginal. Speight, the author of the well-known and innovative study *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency*,[36] once again examines the problem of narrativity in Hegel's philosophy, but this time from a different angle. While in his book he engaged with the popular paradigm of the *Bildungsroman* – demonstrating that *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is far more complex in narrative terms – the text presented here focuses on biographical writing, a dimension that appears crucial to Hegel's conception of historical progress yet has remained surprisingly neglected in narratively oriented studies of his philosophy. According to Speight, Hegel's philosophy of agency offers resources both to explore and possibly to resolve two conflicts that arise for the task of interpretive biography. The first involves "differing assessments of the motives behind an action," and the second concerns "what can be isolated as distinctive about an agent's own action and the larger elements of world-historical action at work around them." Hegel's phenomenological insights into the figures of the hero and the *Kammerdiener* remain, for Speight, especially useful tools for resolving the first of these conflicts.

The second text, by Ben Roth, is titled "From Ricoeur Back to Heidegger on Narrative and Self-Understanding" and focuses on the conception of the narrative self, anchored in a polemic between Heidegger and Ricoeur. While Ricoeur is best known for his conception of the narrative self, Roth shows that a Heideggerian approach to

36) Allen Speight, *Hegel, Literature, and the Problem of Agency* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

this topic – though not directly addressed by Heidegger himself – nonetheless presents a coherent vision of self-narrative grounded in the project of existential ontology. Therefore, Roth's paper can be perceived as a continuation of his searching observations presented in "Reading from the Middle: Heidegger and the Narrative Self."[37] The author not only offers an original reading of Heidegger's philosophy, showing how the problem of narrativity was indirectly addressed in *Being and Time*, but also formulates his own insights on the nature of self-understanding from the perspective of being within – or entangled in the middle of – a life-story. Roth's observations thus return to some extent to the origins of phenomenological interest in narrativity as presented in Schapp's writings. The result is both a compelling engagement with the most influential Ricoeurian conception of the narrative self and an inspiring piece of writing in its own right.

The text "'Do It for the Plot': A Ricoeurian Approach to Social Media Performativity," by Martina Lodi, is also focused on Ricoeur's narrative self. With considerable originality, however, Lodi confronts Ricoeur's conception of the self with new media, asking about its continued relevance. What Lodi does in her text might be considered more of an anthropological investigation than a strictly phenomenological one, yet she engages with the problem of lived experience by drawing on phenomenologists such as Sartre and sociologists such as Guy Debord and Erving Goffman, adding to this mix the perspective of new media researchers represented by Paolo Furia. As Lodi argues, Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity retains its usefulness in the context of new media: "Through Ricoeur, we recover the idea that subjectivity is neither the product of uninterrupted self-curation nor simply an accumulation of 'plot points,' but the outcome of a long, fragile, and ethical labor of interpretation" Lodi's text is genuinely original and merits the close attention of our readers.

Anton Marczyński, in his paper "The Entity as Being: On the Ontological Aspects of Style," reflects on the topic of style, grounding the phenomenological investigation at a level prior to that of pure appearance and experience. Marczyński, following Merleau-Ponty, returns to the fundamental level of appearing, arguing that the ontological dimension is already inseparable from presentation. His perspective allows us to think about the basic level of entities as stylistically shaped, thereby

37) Ben Roth, "Reading from the Middle: Heidegger and the Narrative Self," *European Journal of Philosophy* 26 (2018): 746–62.

problematizing the widespread assumption about a pre-narrative level of experience. According to Marczyński, style is not only the mode of appearing of the noema for consciousness but is first and foremost an aspect of being as such. Marczyński appears to argue for the necessity of narrative structure in passively synthesized experience, prior to any act of reflective reconfiguration, which is both bold and original.

Uryen Blánquez Gálvez, in "Retracing Bazin's Phenomenological Approach to Realism in Film," covers the topic of the narrativity of cinematic experience. Blánquez Gálvez argues that a contemporary reading of the study on the ontology of the photographic image by the famous film critic and co-founder of *Cahiers du cinéma*, André Bazin – first published in 1945 – proves that it remains surprisingly relevant today. Blánquez Gálvez proposes to situate Bazin's work within a broader phenomenological tradition and, consequently, offers what he calls a new reading of Bazin's study. One that provides a useful theoretical framework that may help to capture the significance of how cinema, even more than half a century since Bazin's death, affects or may affect the relationship between the real and the self. Blánquez Gálvez supports his reading of Brazin with an interesting analysis of Edward Yang's acclaimed film *Yi Yi*, which also serves as an inspiring example of how phenomenology-inspired theoretical tools may be applied to the analysis of a specific work of art.

Drawing primarily on phenomenological narratology and the ideas of post-structuralist authors, Jurga Jonutytė presents a thought-provoking interpretation of the stories of three women who adopt different strategies toward self-narration, united by their efforts to avoid stigmatization and totalization. According to Jonutytė, the key issue in resisting stigmata turns out to be the transformation of narrative modality. One of the bold and inspiring aspects of Joutyte's work is how skillfully she builds a compelling yet delicate connection between philosophical theories and those strategies for coping with trauma that are obviously rooted in the very specific and dramatic experiences. In her paper Jonutytė refers to the works of both David Carr and Roman Ingarden, but she broadens the scope of her analysis by incorporating, among others, Judith Butler's important insights.

The Forum section includes two essays – the first by Sławomira Żerańska-Kominek and the second by Deepa Majmudar. Żerańska-Kominek presents an in-depth study of Arnold Berleant's environmental aesthetics, which, though universally applicable, refers to music as a model of aesthetic experience. Żerańska-Kominek shows

and analyzes how Berleant, drawing on phenomenology and pragmatism, proposes a profound alternative to the Enlightenment aesthetic paradigm by shifting the emphasis from contemplation to participation. Deepa Majmudar, in her original essay, offers an interpretation of both the root historical cause and the metaphysical underpinnings of the current moment in time, which she interprets as "a conjunction between two epochs and a moment of Kairos," and analyzes it using, among other things, the concept of the Pendulum of History and the tension between hedonism and puritanism.

In addition, in the Discussion Papers section readers will find two studies which, despite dealing with different and geographically distant contemporary experiences, link the issue of narrative to that of recognition – including the recognition of these experiences and of those Others whom we too often prefer or choose to avoid thinking about in our daily lives. This refers, of course, to Ukraine and Gaza as seen through the perspectives of narrative, or what might even be called "lived narrative." In the first piece Rory J. Conces shares his reflections on a lecture by Palestinian author Isabella Hammad and her take on the role of narrative and narrative turning points in the experience of othering; but, above all, by pointing to what is absent from Hammad's speech (which was delivered in 2023 and then published in 2024) Conces invites readers – whether they agree or disagree with him or with Hammad – to "begin to think about that which was unthought." The second study by Oleksandra Bagatska offers a philosophical analysis of Ukrainian war literature – namely works by Artur Dron, Artem Chapeye, Artem Chekh, and Oleksandr Mykhed – confronting the reader with yet another experience whose significance has not been properly recognized. It seems that, particularly for academic researchers, the tension between mediated knowledge and lived experience – present in the works analyzed by Bagatska and further philosophically developed in her study – should be of particular importance. That is why we believe that both papers in this last section can be regarded as complementing this issue's Thematic Section by directly relating the topics referred to in the phenomenological studies of the narrative to pressing and tragic contemporary challenges and experiences.

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