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Knowledge and Narrative: An Aesthetic-Phenomenological Account

Abstract:

In this article, I reconstruct Ferdinand Fellmann's account of the relation between knowledge and narrative within his broader understanding of phenomenology as an aesthetic theory. I argue that narrative plays a constitutive role in mediating the relation between subjectivity, world, and meaning. From this perspective, Fellmann's position can be understood as a narrative reworking of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, developed through a critical engagement with Wilhelm Schapp's theory of entanglement in *hi/stories*. While the latter offers a critique of the central assumptions of classical phenomenology through a narrative approach that excludes any form of reconciliation with it, Fellmann's position, drawing on the historical and aesthetic roots of phenomenology itself, proposes a narrative retrieval of its transcendental claims. Through the fiction of *hi/stories*, the subject enacts a form of derealization of reality in which the very modes through which consciousness understands itself and the world are preserved, thereby allowing the phenomenological investigation of the universal to proceed without suspending the historical and factual conditions of lived experience, and thus, for Fellmann, revealing narrative as an immanent development of the phenomenological movement itself.

Keywords:

phenomenology, narrativity, knowledge, Ferdinand Fellmann, Wilhelm Schapp, *hi/stories*

Introduction

This article examines how Ferdinand Fellmann conceptualizes the relationship between knowledge and narrative within his understanding of phenomenology as an aesthetic theory. It argues that narrative plays a constitutive role in mediating the relation between subjectivity, world, and meaning. This issue is significant for at least three reasons. First, Fellmann's proposal offers an alternative to more established phenomenological accounts of narrative.¹ Second, he interprets narrative not as an external addition, but as the historical development of tendencies already present in early phenomenology and rooted in the aesthetic turn of the late nineteenth century, which profoundly influenced Husserl's project. Third, his conception of hi/stories as forms of knowledge provides a particularly advanced account of narrative within phenomenology, opening a new perspective on subjectivity and its relation to reality, and thereby reshaping the very idea of phenomenology.

A student of Hans Blumenberg, with whom he completed his doctorate in Bochum in 1967 and his habilitation in Münster in 1973, Fellmann began his philosophical trajectory with *Das Vico-Axiom* (1976), positioning himself within the context of critical historicism associated with the so-called "Neapolitan school."² From the early 1980s onward, however, his work shifts toward explicitly phenomenological and hermeneutical concerns, as evidenced in *Phänomenologie und Expressionismus* (1982), *Gelebte Philosophie in Deutschland* (1983), and *Phänomenologie als ästhetische Theorie* (1989). The investigations into phenomenological reduction and eidetic intuition developed in *Phänomenologie und Expressionismus* lead Fellmann to assign greater importance to the aesthetic implications of the phenomenological method than to its linguistic dimensions. Consciousness thus comes to be understood as the milieu in which reality is constituted in networks of sense and meaning through the mediation of a form of access to the world that becomes central in Fellmann's work, namely, hi/stories (*Geschichten*). Hi/stories, as vehicles of meaning, mediate between the world in its external given-

1) Among them, of course, Wilhelm Schapp's, the earliest chronologically and to be discussed in the following section, and, naturally, the one best known to the wider public, that of Paul Ricœur. See Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1; and Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*.

2) See Fellmann, "Vico e Kant in cammino verso la ragione storica."

ness and the inner dimension of the individual, and are situated in the intermediate domain of intentional consciousness. This theoretical framework informs, on the one hand, the author's hermeneutical reflection, as can be seen in *Symbolischer Pragmatismus* (1991);³ on the other hand, it supports the development of his own "idea of phenomenology," understood as a "universal theory of media," as proposed in *Phänomenologie zur Einführung* (2006).⁴ The central axis of this development lies in a sustained engagement with the relation between subjectivity and knowledge, grounded in the need for phenomenology to address the forms of understanding that emerge in and through narrative. In this respect, Fellmann advances an epistemological rearticulation of Wilhelm Schapp's concept of hi/stories, no longer confined to the framework of entanglement, but rather oriented toward a possible way beyond it, in the direction of a narrative reappropriation of Husserl's transcendental consciousness. In order to fully understand how the relation between knowledge and narrative is structured in Fellmann's thought, it is necessary to begin with the way in which it emerges in Schapp's theory of entanglement and with the manner in which Fellmann interprets it. This will be the focus of the first section of the article. The second section will examine the theoretical background within which his epistemological conception of hi/stories is situated. This involves, on the one hand, his interpretation of phenomenology as an aesthetic theory and, on the other hand, his account of the medial dimension of consciousness. On this basis, the third section will analyze his conception of hi/stories as "forms of knowledge," preparing the ground for some concluding reflections. The article is thus structured into three sections: (1) knowledge and narrative in Wilhelm Schapp's theory of entanglement in hi/stories; (2) Fellmann's phenomenology as an aesthetic theory: late German idealism and the medial dimension of consciousness; (3) hi/stories as forms of knowledge and Fellmann's theory of fictionality, which will lead into the concluding reflections on how Fellmann moves beyond entanglement toward a transcendental conception of narrative.

3) Fellmann, *Symbolischer Pragmatismus*, 162ff.

4) Fellmann, *Phänomenologie zur Einführung*, 151.

1. Knowledge and Narrative in Wilhelm Schapp's Theory of Entanglement in Hi/stories: Conceptual Framework and Limits

Wilhelm Schapp was one of Edmund Husserl's first students in Göttingen⁵ and a founding member of the "Philosophische Gesellschaft Göttingen (Philosophical Society of Göttingen)." His doctoral dissertation, defended under Husserl in 1909, was published in 1910 under the title *Beiträge zur Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*. In the third section of this work, he expresses doubts about the direct givenness of universal objects.⁶ Nonetheless, he develops a highly original phenomenological Platonism, which exerted a notable influence on leading figures in the phenomenological movement.⁷ Already in the two volumes of *Die neue Wissenschaft vom Recht*, which make up his reflection on the philosophy of law in the 1930s, Schapp began to question the phenomenological method,⁸ ultimately criticizing it sharply in the three works that compose his "philosophy of hi/stories."⁹ The first of these works, *In Geschichten verstrickt* (1953), introduces an innovative approach that reinterprets phenomenology through a narrative lens, deconstructing the fundamental concepts of the phenomenological method.

The ontological-hermeneutic scope of the concept of being entangled in hi/stories already emerges in the opening lines of *In Geschichten verstrickt*: "We humans are always entangled [*verstrickt*] in hi/stories [*Geschichten*]. To every hi/story there belongs someone who is entangled [*Verstrickter*]. Hi/story and being-entangled-in-hi/stories [*In-Geschichten-verstrickt-sein*] belong together so closely that they cannot be separated from each other, probably even in thought."¹⁰ In these lines the central assumption on which Schapp's theory of entanglement is grounded emerges: it is impossible to distinguish between the hi/story and the humans participating in the hi/story.¹¹ This conception soon takes on epistemological connotations, especially in contrast to what Schapp

5) See Conrad, "Survey of the Phenomenological Investigations," 111–12 and Schapp, "Recollections of Husserl."

6) See Schapp, *Beiträge zur Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*, 133ff.

7) Traces of this influence can be found in central texts of phenomenological Platonism such as Hering, *Remarks Concerning Essence*; Ingarden, *Essentiale Fragen*; and Spiegelberg, *Über das Wesen der Idee*.

8) See Schapp, *Die neue Wissenschaft vom Recht*, II, 38ff.; Nuccilli, "The Character of Things," 114f.

9) *In Geschichten verstrickt* (1953); *Philosophie der Geschichten* (1959); *Metaphysik der Naturwissenschaft* (1965).

10) Schapp, *In Geschichten verstrickt*, 1.

11) Cf. *ibid.*, 85. See Nuccilli, "To Participate in History(ies)."

identifies as the fundamental methodological approach of classical phenomenology, namely eidetic intuition. According to Schapp, the phenomenological method of intuition of essences presupposes two elements: (1) the identification of an identity-component of the object investigated; and (2) the perspective of a neutral observer.¹² Thanks to the theoretical attitude, which involves a form of abstraction from daily habits, perception allows the thing to manifest itself in its characteristics and essence through the presentation of the idea.¹³ Yet since it is impossible to distinguish between the hi/story and the humans participating in the hi/story, it also becomes impossible, according to Schapp, to have a neutral perspective on the hi/story. Even when the hi/story is theoretically investigated as an object or nexus of meaning, it already presupposes the hermeneutical background of the entangled. The hi/story can never formally constitute itself as an object, because with it we are already in an original relationship, a relationship that is given to us by being-entangled-in-hi/stories (*In-Geschichten-verstrickt-sein*).¹⁴ This entanglement already involves a background of hi/stories that prevent us from isolating a hi/story that presents itself to us as something objective and detached from our lived experience. Knowledge of the hi/story itself thus coincides with entanglement in the hi/story, that is, our being prepared (*Vorbereitetsein*) for the hi/story.¹⁵ Beyond the impossibility of separating the cognitive moment from the way in which we “participate” in the hi/story, the hi/story also possesses an irreducibility to the actuality of its emergence, to Husserl’s *hier und jetzt*. Every hi/story, in fact, has a pre-hi/story (*Vorgeschichte*) and a post-hi/story (*Nachgeschichte*),¹⁶ meaning that it always refers to a background. This background is the horizon of hi/stories that precede it, and already anticipates a series of developments that open up new possible future horizons.¹⁷ In this regard Schapp states:

12) See Nuccilli, “The Character of Things,” 106.

13) See Schapp, *Beiträge zur Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*, 130ff; and Nuccilli, “Species, Ideas and Stories,” 70ff.

14) This formulation with hyphens evokes Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world, and thus reveals a certain influence of Heidegger. For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between humans’ being-entangled-in-hi/stories and Heidegger’s being-in-the-world, see Nuccilli, “History and Stories,” 36–37; and Greisch, “Empêchement et intrigue,” 48.

15) See Schapp, *In Geschichten verstrickt*, 92.

16) *Ibid.*, 95.

17) See *ibid.*, 88ff.

If we look closely, one hi/story does not intertwine with another, nor is it, so to speak, just a drop in a sea of hi/stories. Rather, every hi/story exists alongside other hi/stories, and perhaps even alongside all hi/stories, within this dynamic nexus of which we have sought to provide a first impression. One might also say, perhaps, that every hi/story is situated within the horizon of every other hi/story, or that the horizon of every hi/story always holds space for other hi/stories.¹⁸

The “formation” (*Gebilde*) of hi/story is therefore not a formation with definable boundaries or a specific character. Instead, it always appears within a dynamic interconnection with other hi/stories. This interconnection depends, on the one hand, on the hi/stories and the narrative horizon in which the individual entangled subject is situated, and on the other hand, on the pre-hi/stories that ground the hi/story – that is, the hi/stories of things and humans that emerge within the hi/story itself. Let us take, for example, the case of the historical sentence known to all Westerners, “The die is cast,” uttered by Caesar when he crossed the Rubicon with his army. According to Schapp, the further explanations required to make the meaning of this sentence intelligible to a listener depend on how close that listener is to the background of hi/stories concerning the Roman Empire, its history, and Western culture in general. If one is dealing with someone who still retains some memory of Caesar from school, the explanation can be very brief. If, by contrast, one assumes that the sentence is to be explained to a seventy-year-old Chinese or Japanese person who is unfamiliar with Western culture, one would have to construct a much more extensive discourse, one that conveys many more elements of the cultural world in which this sentence is situated, as well as its epochal and metaphorical meaning and the hi/story of the one who utters it. The same applies to people who come from even more remote cultures and are even further removed from us, up to a point at which there is no longer any cultural foothold between us and the listener for recounting the hi/story, and one must therefore construct an entire world from the very beginning.¹⁹

18) Ibid., 94.

19) See *ibid.*, 296.

Caesar's sentence is particularly relevant in this regard because it allows us to see how the plane of understanding is intertwined with our hermeneutic horizon. First of all, the sentence is metaphorical, and in order to understand the metaphor one must belong to a world in which the die is an object that bears a specific relation to chance. Second, one must grasp the fundamental importance of fate within Roman culture. Third, one must know the meaning of this sentence in relation to the act of crossing the Rubicon and, from there, in a cascading sequence, its connection to the figure of Caesar as emperor and to the epochal significance that the decision to cross the Rubicon has had for the history of political effects down to the present day. For Schapp, this way of understanding and knowing the hi/story directly follows, through language, the lines of entanglement. The more our hi/stories condense around the narrative context in which a given written or spoken expression is situated, whether it is tied to a single word or to an entire sentence, the easier it becomes to understand it. The same applies when something has to be explained. The closer the world of hi/stories of the listener or the reader is to the written or spoken word or sentence, the more intelligible it will be to them. This is because this form of understanding takes shape as the continuation of a hi/story within the hi/stories in which we are, from time to time, entangled. When we read the newspaper of our own city, for example, the events reported there concern hi/stories that in some way connect with our own hi/stories. A building may have burned down that is connected to our past, an acquaintance may have been arrested, or the acquaintance of an acquaintance may have been injured in an assault. These hi/stories take shape as continuations of our own hi/stories, with which we somehow went to bed and which, in the morning, link up with these new hi/stories. This cannot be said, or only to a much lesser extent, when we read a newspaper from another city, or even from another country. Those hi/stories connect with ours in a far more distant way, and we do not always fully grasp their meaning. In this way, according to Schapp, words resonate within the hermeneutic horizon of the listener, seeking points of connection with the hi/stories in which we are entangled or co-entangled.²⁰ It is for this reason that Schapp asserts that his philosophy of hi/stories does not aim at

20) See *ibid.*, 297.

any “investigation of essence” (*Wesensuntersuchung*),²¹ nor does it seek to provide a conceptual definition of hi/story. Hi/story is not something that can be grasped through an objectifying act or dissected and examined by isolating certain aspects or parts of it through intention.

No understanding can be separated from entanglement, and the knowledge of the hi/stories can never be detached from the hi/stories in which, at any given moment, the self is entangled. Schapp clarifies better the epistemological and ontological implications of this position in reference to Husserl’s theory of intentionality in some notes following *In Geschichtenverstrickt*. Regarding the internal dynamic of truth-verification that takes place between intention and intuition, he writes:

According to the phenomenological method, perception is a cognitive act among other cognitive acts; it has its specific place within the structure of these acts, and thanks to this position, it is oriented toward the search for truth. However, the hi/story itself is not a cognitive act. We do not comprehend our hi/stories; rather, we are entangled in our hi/stories. This being entangled is not a cognitive act, is not composed of cognitive acts, and is not even founded upon them. This becomes clear when we consider that being-human [*Mensch-sein*] and being-entangled-in-hi/stories are one and the same.²²

Any cognitive act requires a foundation in the existential condition of entanglement, which constitutes the very ontological definition of the human being and thus the foundation of all knowledge and of the human’s participating in history. Therefore, no form of understanding can detach itself from the totality of the human, which is constituted by the intertwining of hi/stories, at the center of which we find the entangled self. The entangled self is not in a frontal relationship with the world, where the world appears before a consciousness and can be investigated by it, but rather the world itself emerges within the ontological and epistemological structure essential to the self’s being entangled in a network of hi/stories. In this regard, Schapp states:

21) See *ibid.*, 95.

22) Schapp, *Auf dem Weg einer Philosophie der Geschichten*, bd. 2, 127–28.

We only know a self or a person who is always again entangled in hi/stories, not a self who performs intentional acts or is directed toward the world through intentional acts... . In the world-environment [*Umwelt*], the human being is co-entangled, certainly not as a theorist, but as a whole human being. The world-environment can only be accessed through the hi/stories. One can inquire about the world as it appears in the hi/stories, but only from the person's centrality and the hi/stories' world-environment [*Geschichtenumwelt*] of this person's hi/stories.²³

There is therefore no truth that is not metaphysically and ontologically rooted in the essential condition of the being of the human, not only as entangleable, but as always already entangled in hi/stories. In reference to what has been discussed above, Schapp's theory of entanglement in hi/stories can be summarized in the following points, which move from narration to entanglement: (1) every reality always emerges from a narrative context, and there is no ideal reality – instead, reality itself is manifested only in a hi/story understood as a nexus of meaning; (2) this nexus of meaning does not exhaust itself in the syntactic/semantic dimension of narration, but is rooted in a ground shared between the hermeneutical horizons of the narrator and of the listener; (3) every narration brings forth one or more subjects who are entangled in a hi/story, and through narration, they are brought to itself-givenness; (4) the one who understands the hi/story can thereby have access to a spiritual dimension of the entangled subject through narration, so that what is given in itself-givenness is therefore not only the narrated hi/story, but also a part of the subject's life-hi/story and the world of the entangled subject; and (5) there is no access to reality and to others that does not pass through the filter of the hi/stories in which each individual is entangled: every itself-givenness always emerges from the context of the entangled subject's life-hi/story.

Now, although the theory of entanglement captures some central aspects of the human condition, it proves problematic in several respects for Fellmann. While Schapp's position shares with Husserl's late phenomenology the aspiration to account for historicity within the framework of a philosophy of the lifeworld, namely, through

23) Ibid., 136.

a reflective reworking of lived reality, it ultimately reinstates the very bond to finite facticity that phenomenology sought to overcome.²⁴ By deconstructing the intentional structure of consciousness through the notion of being entangled in hi/stories, Schapp effectively re-anchors subjectivity in the given conditions of its historical situatedness. For this reason, Fellmann compares Schapp's hi/stories to a form of inescapable prejudice, such that historicity comes to signify, above all, a binding relation to the givenness of the past. When Schapp claims that history "stands for" the human being, this amounts, for Fellmann, to a position akin to Sartre's formula *je suis mon passé*.²⁵ As a consequence, Schapp's theory fails to capture what is genuinely historical in the essence of hi/stories, since it never fully resolves the tension between history as lived event and hi/story as its narrative articulation. This unresolved tension reveals a deeper structural difficulty. Being entangled in hi/stories entails an immediate involvement in lived reality, whereas narration presupposes a certain distance from it. To narrate a hi/story is, in the first place, to take a step back from the facticity of the lifeworld. Those who are fully entangled in hi/stories cannot narrate them, and those who are able to narrate them are no longer fully entangled. The act of narration thus introduces a shift in attitude that transforms not only the relation to the hi/story, but also the relation to the world itself. Schapp, however, does not acknowledge this distinction between the world of hi/stories and the world of lived experience. This is evident, for instance, in his treatment of fictional narratives such as fairy tales, which he regards as a continuation of the hi/stories in which we are entangled. Referring to *Little Red Riding Hood*, Schapp shows that even fictional hi/stories are not arbitrary constructions, but are grounded in familiar elements of lived experience. Features such as the characters' age, their roles, and everyday objects sustain the unfolding of the hi/story and provide the conditions of its intelligibility. In this way, even a fairy tale draws its meaning from a shared life-world; without such a horizon, it would have to be reshaped or supplemented in order to remain understandable in a different cultural context.²⁶ Yet, as Fellmann emphasizes, the very form of the fairy tale signals a different ontological register. The opening formula "once upon a time" does not extend the horizon

24) See Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften*, 146.

25) Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, 152.

26) Cf. Schapp, *In Geschichten verstrickt*, 90f.

of lived hi/stories, but rather establishes a distinct horizon governed by different rules. The events of the fairy tale are not situated within the shared world of experience, but belong to a domain that is temporally and ontologically detached from it.²⁷

What has been said about fictional hi/stories applies, according to Fellmann, also to so-called real hi/stories. In every case, narration requires a modification of the subject's attitude with respect to the concrete experiences of the lifeworld. In his view, the same holds for the self that narrates hi/stories as Husserl claims for the phenomenologically oriented self. The phenomenological attitude introduces a kind of split between what we call the self that naturally experiences the world and the self that, in a different way, lives in the world while reflecting upon it. The phenomenologically modified attitude consists in a stance that constantly rises above the naïvely engaged self, in which the phenomenological self establishes itself as an observer, as a disinterested spectator. The same must apply to narration. In narration as well, the self must divest itself of any pathic involvement in the "what" and move freely around the event, as in Schiller's characterization of the epic narrator. In this respect, the narrator resembles the phenomenologist, whose description presupposes reduction and variation. As a result, the hi/story acquires a poetic character, in the sense that both poetry and narrative involve the same attitude of the subject, which finds expression in the difference between the hi/story and the event in which the human being is involved. In this sense, the hi/story, understood as an infinite plurality of ever new hi/stories to be narrated, forms, as it were, a domain between poetry and reality²⁸ – a domain which, as will be shown, is medial and aesthetic.

2. Fellmann's Phenomenology as Aesthetic Theory: Late German Idealism and the Medial Dimension of Consciousness

Fellmann's critical interpretation of Schapp's theory of entanglement in hi/stories is consistent with his narrative proposal and already contains key elements that reappear in his conception of phenomenology as an aesthetic theory. This aesthetic-narrative understanding is articulated within a broader conceptual framework in which

27) See Fellmann, "Das Ende des laplaceschen Dämons," 137.

28) Ibid. 137.

Fellmann traces the development of phenomenology in light of the intellectual climate from which it emerges.²⁹ This reconstruction unfolds through two main moments, structured around a constellation of concepts characteristic of German post-idealism and the broader cultural landscape of the early twentieth century. The first consists in identifying a common root shared by Husserlian thought, neo-Kantianism, and positivism. Fellmann locates this common ground in the “aesthetic turn,” through which several intellectual movements, including the pragmatism of James and Peirce, sought in the late nineteenth century to reformulate the relation between experience and knowledge, as well as between consciousness and reality. The second moment concerns Fellmann’s theorization of a medial dimension of consciousness, developed through a specifically aesthetic interpretation of the phenomenological concept of reduction. These two lines are mutually reinforcing and together structure Fellmann’s narrative approach to knowledge and his theory of hi/stories as “forms of knowledge.”³⁰

Let us begin with the first moment, namely what Fellmann identifies as the phenomenological reworking, in an aesthetic key, of tendencies already present in post-idealistic German philosophy. Central in this regard are Lotze’s objective idealism and Rudolf Eucken’s idealism of action, the latter described by Fellmann as a genuine “proto-phenomenologist.”³¹ With respect to Lotze’s objective idealism, Fellmann’s central thesis is that the phenomenological attitude should be understood primarily as a transformation of the idealist concept of spirit as it begins to take shape in *Mikrokosmos* and *Logik*. This transformation concerns, more specifically, the way in which consciousness relates to ideal objects. On the one hand, it involves a shift of Platonic idealism from the metaphysical plane to that of objective validity;³² on the other hand, it entails a reconfiguration of the relation between reality and appearance, leading to an immanent and essentialist analysis of perceptual processes. In contrast to the Hegelian conception of appearance as the mere expression of an ideal reality that transcends it and must be uncovered by consciousness as a third pole beyond the cognitive process, Lotze understands appearance as the only possible site

29) Cf. Nuccilli, “Preliminary Notes,” 13.

30) Fellmann, *Phänomenologie als ästhetische Theorie*, 19.

31) Fellmann, “La proto-fenomenologia di Rudolf Eucken,” 15.

32) Cf. Fellmann, *Phänomenologie als ästhetische Theorie*, 58.

of encounter between reality and consciousness. In this way, the substantial or essential moment is reduced to the act by which consciousness grasps appearance, which is no longer conceived as the manifestation of something, but rather as a manifestation for someone.³³ It is precisely in this semantic shift of the concept of *Erscheinung*, from “appearance of” to “manifestation for,” that the epistemological focus moves from the metaphysical dimension of being to a more properly psychological and cognitive one. Central to this transition is Lotze’s concept of essence. For Lotze, every manifestation in consciousness is accompanied by an essence, which functions as a kind of underlying structure guiding the dynamic of perceptual or sensory modifications. Such a structure is not given in the manifestation as such, but rather in the relatively stable and unified manner in which consciousness relates to it. In the first volume of *Mikrokosmos*, Lotze identifies as an irreducible feature of consciousness its character as a “unitary consciousness,”³⁴ whose unity does not derive from its natural properties, but from its constitution as an invariant pole of manifestation in the face of the variability of appearances.³⁵ According to Fellmann, this implies a certain detachment and transcendence of consciousness with respect to the perceptual-material dimension, and gives rise to a movement of self-observation grounded in a paradigmatically aesthetic figure, that of the “eccentric observer” (*exzentrischer Beobachter*).³⁶ This figure entails a departure from the mechanistic interpretive model underlying contemporary associationist psychology. Moving beyond the view of consciousness as a merely neutral locus of appearance, a view also found in Herbart, Lotze attributes to consciousness a genuinely creative function. By directing its gaze upon and through different representations, consciousness performs a synthesis that yields not only a new, unified representation irreducible to the sum of previous ones, but also a transformation in the being of the observer,³⁷ with implications that are ultimately hermeneutical. For Fellmann, the act of consciousness in Lotze can be understood as

33) Cf. *ibid.*, 61–62.

34) Lotze, *Mikrokosmos*, bd. 1, 165.

35) Cf. *ibid.*, 171.

36) Fellmann, *Phänomenologie als ästhetische Theorie*, 64.

37) Cf. *ibid.*, 66.

“an act of reading that transforms the flow of impressions into a unity of meaning.”³⁸ Rather than as a constitutive synthesis, it is thus better understood as an interpretive synthesis. By directing its “observing eye” (*beobachtendes Auge*), consciousness transforms the flow of appearances into a different kind of articulation, one that also takes into account the spatio-temporal situatedness of perception. Perception, in this sense, is not reducible to the mere succession of impressions, but emerges as a fusion of past and present mediated by the interpretive filter of self-consciousness.³⁹ Such an irreducibility of lived experience to perceptual experience anticipates phenomenology in Husserl in two respects. On the one hand, with regard to the dynamics of lived time, it prepares the ground for Husserl’s concepts of retention and protention, as developed in his analyses of the internal consciousness of time.⁴⁰ On the other hand, it introduces a transformation in the concept of self-consciousness, which will play a decisive role in the transcendental conception of the ego, especially in light of Husserl’s later genetic analyses of the constitution of the self “in a history,” as presented in the *Cartesian Meditations*.⁴¹ It is precisely this peculiar condition of the pure ego, which transcends the flow of consciousness while at the same time manifesting itself within the immanence of lived experience, that, according to Fellmann, corresponds to the transcendence of a “disinterested spectator who observes within the scenic space of consciousness ... and who can do nothing but allow the spectacle he himself has staged to unfold without intervening in the course of events.”⁴² On this basis, the unitary conception of intentional consciousness developed in the transcendental phenomenology of the *Ideas* would rest on an essentially aesthetic subject, whose function consists in carrying out an interpretive synthesis of what takes place within the stream of conscious experience.

To understand how this interpretive synthesis is configured, it becomes necessary, according to Fellmann, to address another central theme of phenomenology in Husserl, namely the phenomenological reduction. To grasp its aesthetic dimension,

38) Ibid.

39) Cf. *ibid.*, 67.

40) Cf. Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*.

41) Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 75.

42) Fellmann, *Phänomenologie als ästhetische Theorie*, 78.

however, as in the case of intentionality, it is not sufficient to analyze it in itself; rather, its roots must once again be traced back to post-idealistic German philosophy, and more specifically to Rudolf Eucken's noological method. Eucken develops this method in his 1885 work *Prolegomena zu Forschungen über die Einheit des Geisteslebens in Bewußtsein und That der Menschheit*, within the broader context of his reflections on cultural evolution. In brief, it consists in extracting ideal-typical structures, defined as "syntagms" or "forms of life," from social facts.⁴³ The strongly aesthetic character of this procedure lies in the fact that the return to the ideal element implies, according to Eucken, a "break with the surrounding world,"⁴⁴ a transformation that takes place through a "purification"⁴⁵ from the natural experience of the world and opens up a new perspective, a new way of seeing that leads to access to a more genuine reality.⁴⁶ The philosopher from Aurich describes this new way of seeing reality as a "revealing of the new within the familiar,"⁴⁷ and it is precisely for this purpose that he introduces the notion of reduction. The aim of reduction, in this sense, is to "dissolve the fixed and rigid structures of vital activity and to recognize everything particular as a testimony to the whole, in order to bring to the fore a generality that the fullness and rapidity of progressive movement had allowed to be overlooked, and thus to release and awaken a principle that had been enclosed, even buried, within action."⁴⁸ Reduction thus takes the form of a kind of purification from empirical givenness, leading to a demonstration of the rationality of the real. This, however, does not entail a return to the substantialism of Hegel's metaphysics of spirit,⁴⁹ since the new perspective on reality emerges from an "inner gaze" (*Innensicht*)⁵⁰ directed toward the analysis of the immanent structures of consciousness. This inner gaze, however, should not be understood as mere introspection, but rather as an "autonomous form of objectification of the subjective, analogous to the transcendental experience claimed

43) Fellmann, "La proto-fenomenologia di Rudolf Eucken," 20.

44) Eucken, *Prolegomena zu Forschungen*, 36.

45) Ibid., 40.

46) Ibid., 36.

47) Ibid., 67.

48) Ibid.

49) Cf. Fellmann, "La proto-fenomenologia di Rudolf Eucken," 20.

50) Eucken, *Prolegomena zu Forschungen*, 51f.

by phenomenology.”⁵¹ Through a specific form of reduction that Eucken calls separation (*Diremtion*), that is, the methodical distinction between the inner occurrence of lived experience and psychological functions and performances,⁵² the noological method opens up, much like the dialectic between pure and empirical ego highlighted in Lotze, a neutral perspective on the spiritual attitude assumed by consciousness in its encounter with material or ideal realities. However, in Eucken the aim is not to identify archetypal forms of perceived objects, but rather to examine, within the act of consciousness itself, the emergence of dynamic relations. In this way, it becomes possible to discern those structural aspects that rise above the series of discrete data offered to consciousness by perception or other functions.⁵³

These aesthetic roots that phenomenology inherits from post-idealistic German philosophy constitute the fundamental elements upon which Fellmann grounds his medial conception of consciousness. To clarify this aspect, it is necessary to refer to another central figure in the aesthetic development of phenomenology, namely Max Scheler. The latter represents, in this context, a crucial mediation between Husserl and Eucken. Scheler adopts from Eucken the concept of the world of work (*Arbeitswelt*). However, he applies to it a distinctive form of reduction which, in contrast to Husserl’s account, is oriented more strongly toward the historical dimension of reality, and which he designates as “causal reduction.” For Scheler, the task of causal reduction is to “trace every claim to validity back to its historical realization” and to “reconstruct the historical practice of predication in which such a claim comes to be constituted.”⁵⁴ With this distinctive interpretation of Scheler, Fellmann argues that the scope of reduction is expanded, opening up a new dimension for phenomenology that can be described as historical-spiritual. Within this dimension, the concept of the syntagm functions as a form of mediation between immediate individual lived experience and objective forms of spirit, between normativity and universal principles and their constitution in paradigmatic forms of historical existence.⁵⁵ While accepting in principle Husserl’s

51) Fellmann, *Phänomenologie als ästhetische Theorie*, 146.

52) Cf. Eucken, *Prolegomena zu Forschungen*, 60.

53) Cf. Fellmann, *Phänomenologie als ästhetische Theorie*, 148.

54) Scheler, *Frühe Schriften*, 327.

55) Cf. Fellmann, *Phänomenologie als ästhetische Theorie*, 175ff.

theory of reduction, Scheler acknowledges that the suspension of reality, in which the transcendental subject is set against the empirical ego, is more difficult to achieve than Husserl had assumed. Even when, through imagination, the self succeeds in distancing itself from external objects, it remains more deeply bound up with itself and, one might say, with its own “hi/story” than it might initially appear. For this reason, the reductive procedure struggles to transform self-consciousness completely into pure phenomenality. According to Scheler, Husserl’s proposed transformation of the forms of judgment must therefore be replaced by an “ascetic act of derealization,” a “suspension of the very impulse to live ... in relation to which the world appears primarily as resistance.”⁵⁶ Scheler thus strongly emphasizes the need for a different way of carrying out reduction. However, he never fully develops the significance of this technique of distancing from experiential reality within the practice of transcendental philosophy.

To carry out this form of derealization, Fellmann argues that a certain distancing from the immediate and individual lived experience of reality is required, one that calls for a specifically aesthetic mode of negation. When integrated into the discourse on reduction, this aesthetic negation involves not only the subjective dimension, namely the observation of psychological and historico-spiritual processes from a neutral standpoint, but also the objective dimension, that is, the function of world-disclosure and the opening onto the reality of the lifeworld. For Fellmann, the aesthetic negation of reality does not amount to a mere escape from everyday life or to the substitution of what exists with something imagined or projected by the subject’s fantasy. Rather, it entails an “expressionistic” gesture that annihilates the immediacy of everyday appearance and lived reality. Its aim is to enable a renewed, deeper, and more present reappropriation of reality, corresponding to a new access to a more intimate dimension of subjectivity.⁵⁷ According to Fellmann, this radical demand is already operative at the very foundation of phenomenological reduction, which, in Husserl’s *Ideas*, is conceived as “a means of attaining a new world that encompasses within itself all possible real worlds and all worlds in every extension of sense.”⁵⁸ The funda-

56) Scheler, *Späte Schriften*, 44.

57) Fellmann, *Phänomenologie und Expressionismus*, 60ff.

58) *Ibid.*, 73.

mental impulse of reduction can therefore be understood only in light of the dialectic between “renunciation” and “acquisition” that characterizes the aesthetic dimension of Husserlian phenomenology. It is only through this methodological application of aesthetic negation that phenomenology gains access to the absolute being of consciousness. Such a purified field of phenomenality corresponds to what Fellmann defines as the *medium* of consciousness. In its “purifying” operation, through which reality is freed from empirical contingencies and scientific misunderstandings, transcendental consciousness may indeed function, in Fellmann’s view, as an autonomous transcendental subject. Yet the syntheses it performs are not entirely independent of the conditions imposed by reality itself. The outward projection of consciousness beyond itself remains bound to a structure of references from which the self cannot fully detach. Such a structure, therefore, can only be interpreted as the medial dimension of transcendental consciousness.⁵⁹

3. Hi/stories as “Forms of Knowledge”: Fellmann’s Narrative Perspective

By distancing itself from immediately given reality, consciousness, according to Fellmann, constitutes itself as a “system of correspondences.”⁶⁰ If a medium is understood, in general terms, as a bearer of meaning whose function consists in differentiating and structuring what is immediately given, then it becomes possible to attribute a medial *status* to phenomenologically reduced consciousness. Such a status, being naturally given, in turn provides the point of departure for understanding any artificial medium.⁶¹ The meaning-conferring function of consciousness establishes a separation from its surrounding world, thereby providing the fundamental condition for the representation of reality through the filter of lived experience.⁶² Such lived experience, however, is purified of the empirical prejudices of the individual subject through reduction, and thus constitutes the condition for “the self-givenness

59) See Fellmann, *Phänomenologie und Expressionismus*, 138f.

60) Fellmann, *Phänomenologie zur Einführung*, 155.

61) Ibid.

62) Cf. Ibid., 163.

of things as they are in their absolute being.”⁶³ From this perspective, the Husserlian concept of the transcendental fully coincides with Fellmann’s notion of the medial. The difficulty, however, is that the sphere of absolute being, to which reduction grants access, excludes the reality of life and the concrete context of meaning in which all knowledge takes place. Individual lived experience thus remains a “terra incognita” for phenomenology.⁶⁴ Hi/stories thus become the only access to the vital-affective dimension of human existence and to the lifeworld. It is no coincidence that Fellmann places Schapp’s philosophy of hi/stories at the center of his account of phenomenology as a universal theory of media, even though the concept of medium does not explicitly appear in Schapp’s work. This assessment supports the hypothesis that the core of any understanding of reality lies in hi/stories (*Geschichten*) or narrated hi/stories (*erzählte Geschichten*) as the linguistic articulation of what Schapp calls concrete ideas (*konkrete Ideen*). Concrete ideas, as expressed in hi/stories, make it possible, in Fellmann’s view, to connect the abstraction and universality inherent in meaning and in the ideal sphere with the lifeworld and everyday experience.⁶⁵ Both the drive to attain an aesthetic dimension of experience and the attempt to grasp the universal through the historically situated and thoroughly personal perspective of individual lived experience, as articulated in narrative form, represent, according to Fellmann, the fundamental traits that phenomenology inherits from the late German idealist tradition. At the same time, they constitute the developmental trajectories through which phenomenology is able to respond to the challenges of contemporaneity and the digital world.⁶⁶

If we follow the two aesthetic moments that phenomenology inherits from post-idealistic German philosophy, as discussed in the previous section – namely (1) the hermeneutic interpretation of the “eccentric observer” and (2) realizing derealization – we see that every attempt to bracket individual lived experience remains, in part, incomplete. Although both aim at a form of abstraction from perceptual experience, according to Fellmann they ultimately remain bound to forms of objec-

63) Fellmann, *Phänomenologie als ästhetische Theorie*, 186.

64) Ibid.

65) Ibid., 9.

66) See Fellmann, *Phänomenologie zur Einführung*, 151–80; and “Prefazione all’edizione italiana,” 25f.

tification of consciousness that are rooted in a historically and culturally mediated understanding of reality. This is why any attempt to reduce the experience of reality to a static model such as eidetic intuition, or to conceive of the self as purified of its historical and social contingencies, proves to be fundamentally inadequate, as Scheler has shown. Hi/stories thus constitute the only viable path toward a deeper understanding of the cognitive processes internal to subjectivity, without requiring their complete detachment from their historical and worldly context. Accordingly, Fellmann maintains that forms of abstraction from perceptual experience can become accessible to phenomenological inquiry only if hi/stories are recognized as the basic forms of the representation of reality.⁶⁷ All knowledge is preceded by the subtext of lived experience. Any claim to reduction or derealization must therefore operate on an interpretive-textual level that is always articulated in lived or narrated hi/stories. If reduction and the corresponding access to the world are understood as a process of textualizing reality through hi/stories, it becomes possible to attain a genuine form of purification of the real without excluding the social and intersubjective dimension of the lifeworld. If hi/stories are considered not as artificial constructions of sequences of events, but as basic forms of the donation of meaning, it becomes possible to grasp both the interpretive and the factual dimensions of lived reality. Precisely because hi/stories are not objectifiable forms of knowledge, they immediately restore the context of meaning-giving within the individual's experience, insofar as that individual is involved in a hi/story and in the hi/stories of those closest to them.⁶⁸ In the same way, hi/stories articulate what Fellmann calls concrete ideas, that is, ideas which, in terms of content, correspond to universal concepts, yet whose actual realization remains bound to the perspective of the lifeworld context in which they arise. In this sense, things or concepts are not entities in themselves, and thus not directly accessible through intuition or abstraction from lived experience; rather, they emerge as such only insofar as they come into relation with human beings and the lifeworld within which experience unfolds. From a formal point of view, every hi/story exhibits narrative structures that can be identified by literary interpretation as forms of representation. However, according to Fellmann, the analysis of form has

67) Cf. Fellmann, *Phänomenologie als ästhetische Theorie*, 189.

68) Cf. *Ibid.*, 190–91.

philosophical relevance only insofar as it can be transformed into an inquiry into content. At the level of content, discourse corresponds to the deeper dimension of the behavior represented, namely the horizon of meaning within which the events of the hi/story are originally configured. This horizon of meaning defines the horizon of human behavior within a given context, singularized in the unique and irreducible experience of the individual. For this reason, it constitutes the point of convergence between form and content, which come together in both the individual life-hi/story and the narrated hi/story, through which other selves emerge and the possibility of entanglement is disclosed. According to Fellmann, there is a structural affinity between modes of representation and modes of behavior. Behavior encompasses not only the “how” but also the purpose and motivation, the “why” of action. Reduction thus consists in tracing the “what” of represented reality back to the “how” of human behavior, through which the reality of the lifeworld is constituted.⁶⁹

What has been outlined thus far defines the horizon of meaning within which the hi/story fully takes shape as an articulated form of experience of the world and as a primary access to the lifeworld,⁷⁰ and thus as a form of knowledge in the strongest possible sense. Such access, however, occurs, according to Fellmann, through an aesthetic form of derealization that takes place in and through narration, whereby a hi/story becomes, first and foremost, a fiction. Even when the hi/story is true, the very act of narration contains within itself a division between the hi/story as told and the narrated events. In narration, the truth conveyed is no longer directly connected with the lived truth of the individuals presented in the narrated hi/story. This also applies when we ourselves are the protagonists, since the narrative reconstruction of past events constitutes a form of mediation with lived experience and thus a fictional representation. In this sense, narration does not merely reproduce reality, but reconfigures it within a medial and aesthetic dimension, in which meaning is constituted through the very distance that separates the narrated hi/story from the immediacy of lived experience. According to Fellmann, moreover, the logic of the intentionality of acts is surpassed through narration, since in narration it is not simply a matter of something being narrated, but rather of narrating *about* something. Within the

69) Cf. *ibid.*, 192–93.

70) See Nuccilli, “Stories as a Critical Means.”

medium of narration, narrated events appear as situated within an independent context of meaning. It is in this way, through a transcendence of the reality of lived experience, that narratively represented events are stripped of their factual reality. Such a derealizing operation entails a form of overcoming of the empirical self similar to that achieved through reduction. However, the subjectivity of the narrator is now itself narratively represented and, precisely through the fiction inherent in discursive representation, its continuity with lived experience is preserved: "In narration, the empirical subject is derealized, without subjectivity being entirely removed. Narration preserves the subjectivity of the narrator, but as represented, as narratively presented. This has nothing to do with expression or lived experience, since the representative function goes beyond the reality of experience."⁷¹

If one seeks to grasp the richness of the relation between lived consciousness and the experience of the lifeworld, which constitutes the primary aim of transcendental phenomenology, one should not investigate the structures of pure consciousness, but rather what Fellmann defines as "forms of discursive representation," namely those structures inherent in narrative fiction that constitute the original forms of meaning-formation of the self and of the world, and which subsequently give rise to the meaningful fabric of hi/stories. The task of any reduction must therefore consist in recognizing the transcendental status of hi/stories and in isolating their fictional dimension. "Fictional hi/stories function as models of world-disclosure, through which the meaningful structure of the lifeworld becomes intelligible."⁷² This implies, first and foremost, that for Fellmann reduction must be understood not as a methodological principle of phenomenology, but rather as a natural continuation of the human process of representing reality through the original medium of hi/stories.

In recognizing the transcendental dimension of hi/stories, the discovery of the inherently medial dimension of consciousness likewise acquires a new and fundamental significance. In narrative fiction, a twofold process of meaning-constitution takes place: on the one hand, the narrated content stands in contrast to lived reality, of which it constitutes a fictional representation (derealization); on the other hand, the very mode of representation, mediated through the narrative filter, constitutes a form

71) Fellmann, *Phänomenologie als ästhetische Theorie*, 195.

72) Ibid., 196.

of organization of meaning that immediately restores the dynamic and vital relation between consciousness and the lifeworld (the medial dimension of consciousness). Despite the derealizing logic of representation, the hi/story, for Fellmann, remains an original form of access to the lifeworld, unfolding primarily within the semantic dimension of individual lived experience, in an intermediate domain between event and narration.⁷³

Conclusions

In light of the foregoing analysis, Fellmann's conception of hi/stories may be understood as a significant transformation of the phenomenological project itself. By grounding meaning-constitution in the medial structures of narrative, he reinterprets reduction not as a methodological suspension of reality, but as an immanent process through which reality is articulated and understood. From this perspective, the aesthetic dimension inherited from post-idealistic German philosophy proves central to phenomenology, insofar as it allows narrative to emerge as a mode of access to the lifeworld that preserves, rather than suspends, the historical and experiential conditions of subjectivity. This shift entails, first of all, a critical reorientation of Schapp's narrative-ontological project, which rests on a fundamental coalescence between knowledge and participation in hi/stories, and thus between lived and narrated hi/stories. By contrast, for Fellmann hi/stories can be narrated only insofar as they are distanced from lived experience and, precisely through their fictional character, offer new ways of reconfiguring it. In this sense, they enact an immediate form of reduction that situates them within the horizon of transcendental phenomenology itself. As such, hi/stories, in their narrative-fictional dimension, represent the most intrinsic development of phenomenological experience and method, revealing the extent to which the constitution of meaning is always already embedded in historically and experientially situated forms of life. Fellmann's account thus opens a way to reconcile the investigation of the universal with the irreducibility of lived experience, situating hi/stories at the very core of phenomenological knowledge.

73) Cf. Fellmann, *Phänomenologie zur Einführung*, 166 f.

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