

## CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

DELIA POPA\*, IAAN REYNOLDS\*\*

**ABSTRACT.** Phenomenological critique attempts to retrieve the lived experience of a human community alienated from its truthful condition and immersed in historical crises brought by processes of objectification and estrangement. This introductory article challenges two methodological assumptions that are largely shared in North American Critical Phenomenology: the definition of phenomenology as a first person approach of experience and the rejection of transcendental eidetics. While reflecting on the importance of otherness and community for phenomenology's critical orientation, we reconsider the importance of eidetics from the standpoint of Husserl's genetic phenomenology, highlighting its historical and contingent character. Contrary to the received view of Husserl's classical phenomenology as an idealistic and rigid undertaking, we show that his genetic phenomenology is interested in the material formation of meaning (*Sinnbildung*), offering resources for a phenomenological approach to a materialist social theory.

**Keywords:** *critical phenomenology, critical theory, genetic phenomenology, community, normativity*

Whether exemplified in Kantian criticism, Marxian political economy, or critical theory, philosophical critique has traditionally been driven by the effort to disentangle humankind from the hold of prejudices and disempowering political conditions. In this tradition of thought, clarity can only be obtained through a struggle whose epistemological dimensions are necessarily connected to the social and historical aspects of human experience. In critical social theory, more specifically, emancipatory thought is oriented toward a reflection on the social and epistemological effects of an exploitative social order, whether this order is understood in terms of reification, alienation, oppression, or more recently, colonization. Our aim in this special issue is to reflect on the way in which the phenomenological project is connected to these critical approaches through the ethos driving its research and its continuously revised philosophical methodology.

---

\* Department of Philosophy, Villanova University, Pennsylvania, USA. Email: [delia.popa@villanova.edu](mailto:delia.popa@villanova.edu).

\*\* Department of Philosophy, Villanova University, Pennsylvania, USA. Email: [creyno14@villanova.edu](mailto:creyno14@villanova.edu).

Since its earliest stages, phenomenology articulated a radical reflection on the possible uses of the philosophical method in light of a responsibly anchored world-vision.<sup>1</sup> Meditating on “the ultimately constitutive achievements of the heart and the will,”<sup>2</sup> Edmund Husserl thus experimented with various methodological tools – such as eidetic variation, phenomenological reduction and the recourse to intuition (*Anschauung*) – in order to gain clarity of philosophical vision and expression. Through methodological investigation, phenomenological critique attempts to retrieve the lived experience of a human community alienated from its truthful condition and immersed in historical crises brought by complex processes of objectification and estrangement. As phenomenology shares this orientation with the broader critical tradition, reflection on the specifically phenomenological approach to critique is likely to provide insights to contemporary projects in critical social philosophy.

Critical phenomenology has become a growing field of philosophical research. Recent years have witnessed the appearance of a journal dedicated to the topic,<sup>3</sup> an edited volume describing key terms for the field,<sup>4</sup> and several monographs.<sup>5</sup> In its departure from the classical phenomenological tradition, North American critical phenomenology has emphasized various modalities of the intersubjective life of gendered, racialized, and otherwise marginalized subjects. In these contributions, methodological tools such as the first-person account of lived experience and the bracketing of the natural attitude are used to disclose the “quasi-transcendental” structural conditions of the world, while contesting classical phenomenology’s presupposed lack of focus on contingency, due to its stress on transcendental eidetics.<sup>6</sup> Yet, is phenomenological eidetics truly incompatible with a critical approach of the experience of social marginalization? Is the first-person account of lived experience the only way to access it?

---

<sup>1</sup> As Andrea Staiti argues, the phenomenological worldview is about visualizing the world as a whole before theorizing (judging) it. Andrea Staiti, *Husserl’s Transcendental Phenomenology: Nature, Spirit, Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 267.

<sup>2</sup> “The highest and ultimate responsibility, however, arises in the cognition in the transcendental attitude concerning the ultimately constitutive achievements of the heart and the will.” Edmund Husserl, *First Philosophy* (Hua VIII), Lectures 1923/24 and Related Texts from the Manuscripts (1920-1925), transl. S. Luft and T. N. Naberhaus (Dordrecht: Springer, 2019), 194.

<sup>3</sup> *Puncta: Journal of Critical Phenomenology*: <https://journals.oregondigital.org/index.php/pjcp>.

<sup>4</sup> Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy and Gayle Salamon (eds.), *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g.: Michael Marder, *Phenomena–Critique–Logos: The Project of Critical Phenomenology* (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> E.g.: “But where classical phenomenology remains insufficiently critical is in failing to give an equally rigorous account of how contingent historical and social structures also shape our experience, not just empirically or in a piecemeal fashion, but in what we might call a quasi-transcendental way.” Lisa Guenther, “Critical Phenomenology,” in Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (eds.), *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, 12.

Regarding the second question, Yasuhiko Murakami has argued that instead of developing a first-person account of lived experience, phenomenology should rather be seen as the study of the lived experience of the “other”, in such a way that even when I attempt to describe my own experience, I have to see it as “another”. Yet, I can embody myself in the other’s life through my fantasy-lived bodily (*Phantasieleib*) experience, re-articulating its sense in close relationship to the situation in which it is lived. Phenomenological investigation is thus ultimately about “an interpersonal experience that opens an unexpected space of mutual comprehension.”<sup>7</sup> As for the first question concerning the relationship between transcendental eidetics and critical phenomenology, it is important to remember that “transcendental eidetic inquiry necessarily relies on historically embedded types and concepts,”<sup>8</sup> channeled by processes of meaning-sedimentation that continuously recreate the phenomenal cohesion of the world through hyletic relations of fusion and contrast.<sup>9</sup> Owing to this material character of eidetic analysis, Andreea Smaranda Aldea further argues that “transcendental phenomenology understood as *radical immanent critique* is able to diagnostically and normatively tackle not solely the eidetic, necessary, and ahistorical structures of experience, but also its historical, contingent, conceptual, and discursive ones.”<sup>10</sup>

But if phenomenological criticism is about thinking through the crust of already sedimented meanings, interrogating their inner sense and hidden teleology,<sup>11</sup> the normativity at stake in phenomenological description still remains to be questioned.<sup>12</sup> Rather than endorsing the problematic task of directly apprehending and “setting-

---

<sup>7</sup> Yasuhiko Murakami “La communication avec les patients en état végétatif. Une approche phénoménologique” in Delia Popa, Benoit Kanabus and Fabio Bruschi (eds.) *La portée pratique de la phénoménologie. Normativité, critique sociale et psychopathologie*, (Bruxelles: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2014), 247. (Our translation).

<sup>8</sup> Andreea Smaranda Aldea, “Phenomenology as Critique: Teleological–Historical Reflection and Husserl’s Transcendental Eidetics,” *Husserl Studies*, 32, 2016, 21–46, 23.

<sup>9</sup> “Affective unities must be constituted in order for a world of objects to be constituted in subjectivity at all. But for this to be possible, affective hyletic unities must become and must intertwine with one another homogeneously in essential necessity, initially in the hyletic sphere, that is, again, initially in the living present.” Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis. Lectures on Transcendental Logic* (Hua XI), transl. Anthony Steinbock (Dordrecht: Kluwer, [1918-1926] 2001), § 34, 210. See also *Ibid.*, Appendix 21, 522.

<sup>10</sup> Andreea Smaranda Aldea, “Comments on Johanna Oksala’s *Feminist Experiences*,” *Continental Philosophy Review*, 52, 2019, 125-134, 126.

<sup>11</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Hua VI), transl. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, [1938] 1970), 16-17.

<sup>12</sup> See: Maren Wehrle, “‘There Is a Crack in Everything’. Fragile Normality: Husserl’s Account of Normality Re-Visited” *Phainomenon*, 28, 2018: 49-75. See also, Thiemo Breyer and Maxime Doyon (eds.), *Normativity in Perception* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

right... the wrongs perpetrated by failures of justice,"<sup>13</sup> isn't phenomenology's aim to reflect on how such wrongs are even possible and how they modify our understanding of our humanity and of our situation in the world? A rapid leap from description to prescription threatens to cover the deep levels of meaning-formation whose provenance and development the phenomenological method is called to reflexively observe and question.

This methodological caution mainly concerns objectifications of social norms that leave little room for further inquiry and analysis. Alia Al-Saji discusses such an example of objectification in her phenomenological analysis of the temporality of colonial racism when she writes:

To move on, leaving it [racism] unchallenged in the background, allows its colonial construction of the past to become normative—adherent, generalized, and atmospheric. Critique requires not only the recognition of simultaneous, multiple *durées*, but resistance at the level of the past: reconfiguring its relations to generate intervals of buoyancy, ebb and flow, to make the past hesitate.<sup>14</sup>

As a critique of objectification, phenomenological methodology offers resources for a disruption of sedimented or instituted meanings and practices that hinder access to a shared life-world, where self-exposure, hesitation, and vulnerability shape our human connections and the practice of our freedom. If, as Lewis Gordon puts it in his comments on Sartre's "bad faith," "freedom involves taking responsibility for living in a world with others,"<sup>15</sup> phenomenological critique is a grounding component of such a responsible exercise of freedom. In support of the idea of a "critical freedom," Emmanuel Levinas points out in *Totality and Infinity* that "the knowing whose essence is critique cannot be reduced to objectification; it leads to the Other,"<sup>16</sup> who is understood as the source of an ethical awakening. However, following Levinas, this awakening is only possible if the movement of epistemological thematization is *inverted*, unifying spontaneous freedom and a critique "where freedom is capable of being called in question."<sup>17</sup> Opening itself to an alterity preceding

---

<sup>13</sup> Gayle Salamon, "What's Critical About Critical Phenomenology?" *Puncta: Journal of Critical Phenomenology*, 1(1), 2018, 8-17, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Alia Al-Saji, "Durée" in Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (eds.), *50 Concepts for Critical Phenomenology*, 103.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis Gordon, "Bad Faith" in Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (eds.), *50 Concepts for Critical Phenomenology*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An essay on Exteriority*, transl. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, [1961] 1979), 85.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

objectification, phenomenological critique thus discloses the abyssal responsibility pervading human relationships.<sup>18</sup>

In this regard, Husserl's genetic phenomenology is an invaluable resource,<sup>19</sup> since this underappreciated methodological direction understands the ethical form of life to result from an "essential formation"<sup>20</sup> of human existence whose historical dimension is necessarily bound to the irreducible contingency of the social world. Here Husserl abandons the static polarity between the intentional act of grasping and its content (*Auffassung-Inhalt*), in order to measure the temporal dynamic and material depth of lived experience in its motivational genesis and its plurally intentional implications.<sup>21</sup> A promising development of this genetic path is found in Marc Richir's phenomenology, for which lived experience presents the double dimension of being blindly absorbed in what it posits on the one hand, and of critically addressing it on the other.<sup>22</sup> From Richir's architectonic perspective, the transcendental dimension of phenomenological investigation depends on a critical viewpoint that observes the temporal journey of the self toward itself (*auto-traversée de soi*) through implicit past meanings and anticipations that intermittently blink and overlap. Interestingly, for Richir, the suspension effected by the phenomenological reduction allows for a new engagement of the self in its experience that frees it from its blind absorption in the values it posits, opening it to a "common presence."<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, in his commentary on Husserl's famous manuscript, *The Origin of Geometry*, Jacques Derrida develops a genetic account of the meaning of phenomenological critique. Following his interpretation, the ultimate legitimation (*Endstiftung*) of phenomenology lies in the operative approach towards an idea whose direct determination is impossible, being only announced in a "concrete consciousness which is made *responsible* for it despite the finitude of that consciousness, and insofar as it grounds transcendental historicity and transcendental intersubjectivity."<sup>24</sup> This leads Derrida to locate phenomenological critique in "lived

---

<sup>18</sup> See: Delia Popa "L'imaginaire de la vulnérabilité sociale. De la culpabilité à la responsabilité" in Elodie Boubliil (ed.), *Vulnérabilité et empathie* (Paris: Hermann, 2018), 283-309.

<sup>19</sup> See: Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Andrea Staiti (eds.), *Studia Phaenomenologica XVIII. The Promise of Genetic Phenomenology* (Bucharest: Zetabooks, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> See: Donn Welton, *The Other Husserl* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 199.

<sup>21</sup> See: Bruce Bégout, *La généalogie de la logique. Husserl, l'antéprédicatif et le catégorial* (Paris: Vrin, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Marc Richir, *Variations sur le sublime et le soi* (Grenoble: Millon, 2010), 159. We offer here our own interpretation of Marc Richir's phenomenological account of social engagement. See *Ibid.*, 158-161.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>24</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry, an Introduction*, transl. John P. Leavey Jr. (New York: Stony Brook, [1962] 1989), X, 141. Derrida opposes operative and thematic concepts, following Fink's methodological clarifications in "Operative Concepts in Husserl's Phenomenology" in William McKenna and Robert M. Harlan (eds. and transl.), *A priori and the World* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, [1957] 1981), 56-170.

*anticipation* as a radical responsibility.”<sup>25</sup> Through critique, phenomenology can investigate ways in which this lived anticipation is shared and transmitted further, cultivated in specific cultural contexts, and modified over time. But the formation and transformation of cultural traditions also runs parallel to a history of loss and forgetting.

How does an idea that has been discovered once outlive its momentary oblivion? To this question articulated in *The Origin of Geometry*, Husserl’s answer is an inquiry back (*Rückfrage*) and a reactivation (*Reaktivierung*) of the evidence of its discovery, which can be thus renewed at different moments of the history of its sense.<sup>26</sup> However, this history is not only made of actualized versions of instituted meaning (*Sinnstiftung*), but also of passive sedimentations entailing material processes of association and leading to new sense-formations and modified attitudes. Therefore, one question we need to raise in this context is about the historical transformation of, and political resistance to, sedimented meanings whose weight is oppressive and exclusive.

Contrary to the received view of Husserl’s classical phenomenology as an idealistic and rigid undertaking, his genetic phenomenology is deeply interested in the material formation of meaning (*Sinnbildung*). Critical reflections on this material dimension of phenomenological investigation have been carried out from Tran Duc Thao to Michel Henry,<sup>27</sup> stressing the importance of the hyletic infrastructure of lived experience. While Tran Duc Thao conceives of this infrastructure as a level of experience organized by the dialectical temporality of empirical historicity, Michel Henry attaches it to the self-affection of life in its inescapable singularity. Yet, the proper critical dimension of a materialist phenomenology can only be captured by an approach that takes into account a history whose genesis is transcendental (and not only empirical, as in Thao) and whose element of alterity and worldliness remains impossible to suspend (as opposed to Henry’s description of life as pure immanence). Jean-Francois Lyotard’s attempt to push Thao’s materialist reading of Husserl’s phenomenology in the direction of a revolutionary historicism thus returns to the need for phenomenological investigations of the consciousness specific to politically oppressive situations.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> See: Edmund Husserl, “The Origin of Geometry,” in Hua VI, [1936], 353-378.

<sup>27</sup> See: Michel Henry, *Material Phenomenology*, transl. Scott Davidson (New York: Fordham University Press, [1990] 2008); and Tran Duc Thao, *Phenomenology and Dialectical Materialism*, transl. Daniel J. Herman and Donald V. Morano (Dordrecht: Kluwer, [1951] 1971).

<sup>28</sup> “Faire à la phénoménologie sa part, c’est prendre en compte le rapport dialectique entre la conscience et l’infrastructure économique, et par exemple, respecter l’épreuve qu’existentiellement, les hommes font de leur liberté”. Daniel Giovannangeli, “Husserl entre Tran Duc Thao et Derrida” in Jocelyn Benoist and Michel Espagne (eds.), *L’itinéraire de Tran Duc Thao. Phénoménologie et transfert culturel* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2013), 133-146, 139.

Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* connects precisely this dimension of phenomenology to a program of social and political struggle. "In problem-posing education," writes Freire, "people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in process, in transformation."<sup>29</sup> The cultivation of new forms of perception – a collective historical transformation – underlies Freire's project of education as the practice of freedom. Drawing on Husserl's concept of horizon, Freire reflects on modalities of dismantling objectified meanings in order to reorganize the social world through shared knowledge and action:

That which had existed objectively but had not been perceived in its deeper implications (if indeed it was perceived at all) begins to 'stand out,' assuming the character of a problem and therefore of challenge. Thus, men and women begin to single out elements from their 'background awareness' and to reflect upon them. These elements are now objects of their consideration, and, as such, objects of their action and cognition.<sup>30</sup>

In Freire's work, the philosophical tools of phenomenological methodology are turned to the concrete task of transforming the consciousness of the oppressed, supporting collective practices of struggle.

However, absent an engagement with historical approaches to critical theory, even a practically oriented conception of phenomenology risks a reliance on interpretive conventions shaped by institutions of the same oppressive social order it strives to resist. This problem is particularly visible when it comes to the reading (or the absence) of Marx and the Marxist tradition in recent contributions to critical phenomenology. While many of these works orient their theoretical perspective toward the improvement of an unjust social order, authors in the Marxist and revolutionary decolonial traditions have often stressed the need to articulate a materialist social theory criticizing, or even suspending, these idealized normative conceptions.<sup>31</sup> The way in which "critical theory" aligns with and relates to a commitment to social improvement is a matter for extensive epistemological, political, and organizational debate. Indeed, it has long been an open question whether social

---

<sup>29</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, transl. Mira Bergman Ramos (London: Continuum, 2005), 83.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., Frantz Fanon's reflections on the normative force of the colonial order, for example: Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, transl. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, [1961] 2004); and, Max Horkheimer, "Materialism and Metaphysics," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, transl. Matthew O'Connell (New York: Continuum, [1933] 1992).

critique should be normatively grounded at all, rather than focusing on a historical genealogy of discursive formations,<sup>32</sup> or a materialist analysis of social forces.<sup>33</sup> For many authors in these latter traditions, critique must interrogate precisely our attachment to normative ideals themselves, as these are often screens behind which power is allowed to flow unimpeded.

How can we ensure that our meaning of “justice” is not merely a reflection of an exploitative social order, confirmed and sedimented through daily experiences and shared practices? While contemporary approaches to critical theory inspired by the Frankfurt School are often concerned with theoretically interrogating and grounding the normative commitments guiding critique, whether through the rational reconstruction of universal norms or historical learning processes,<sup>34</sup> or through a “metanormative contextualism” that seeks to combat the coloniality of Enlightenment universalism,<sup>35</sup> it is interesting to note that other approaches to the Frankfurt School tradition of critical theory reject the project of normative justification entirely.<sup>36</sup> Far from offering a clear social or political orientation to a prospective critical phenomenology, “critical theory” is itself a house divided. At the same time, the debates over the methods and purposes of critique connect the history of critical theory to the broader traditions of social and political philosophy traditions critical phenomenology also indirectly benefits from.<sup>37</sup>

Relying on the methodological directions sketched in this introduction, we would like to argue in favor of a phenomenological approach to a materialist social theory. For the genetic perspective we have indicated, normative imperatives –

---

<sup>32</sup> E.g., Niko Kolodny, “The Ethics of Cryptonormativism: A Defense of Foucault’s Evasions,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 22(5), 1996, 63-84.

<sup>33</sup> E.g., Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, transl. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso, [1965] 2005).

<sup>34</sup> These projects follow from the influential approaches of Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth, for example: Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, transl. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, [1985] 1998); Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, transl. Kenneth Baynes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, [1985] 1993).

<sup>35</sup> Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Christian Lotz, *The Capitalist Schema: Time, Money, and the Culture of Abstraction* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), xii-xiv; Frieder Vogelmann, “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Idealism in Critical Theory,” *Constellations*, Early View: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12548>, 2021; Fabian Freyhagen, “What is Orthodox Critical Theory?” *World Picture*, 12, 2017; and the authors cited in note 38 below.

<sup>37</sup> We are referring here to the critical line of thought initiated by Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Derrida, Gérard Granel, Tran Duc Thao, Jean-François Lyotard, and others, for whom the discovery of phenomenology entailed an irreducible socio-political dimension. This line of thought has been continued by the Nice school of phenomenology represented by Dominique Janicaud and Françoise Dastur.



even if they are limited to a specific social context – tend to cover over living processes of collective emancipation, in the same way in which for Husserl theoretical substructions obscure the realm of the life-world, veiling its intuitive evidence and disorienting the critical work of clarification.<sup>38</sup> If this tendency toward abstraction is rooted in the actual conditions of the production and reproduction of the social world – a process some have called “real abstraction”<sup>39</sup> – a materially-oriented phenomenology can provide an indispensable set of resources for critical theory, allowing for an in-depth investigation of the lived experience of social forms such as reified individuality and abstract labor, as part of a broader critique of capitalism.<sup>40</sup>

Closer attention to the Kantian tradition seems necessary in this connection, since Kant’s critical project underlies both the earliest works in phenomenology and the methodological experiments with Marx in the early 20th century that would eventually become critical theory. More attention to this shared historical background is bound to show that the distance between classical phenomenology and critical theory is less than is often implied, as well as revealing a richer, more nuanced – and indeed, more *critical* – understanding of both traditions.<sup>41</sup> Following Eugen Fink’s early lead in situating Husserlian phenomenology in relationship to the Kantian and post-Kantian critical project,<sup>42</sup> we thus seek to revive the phenomenological vision of criticism as a radical interrogation of the philosophical foundations of the

---

<sup>38</sup> See: Hua VI, §34 (d), 127.

<sup>39</sup> This theoretical conception, which originates in the work of Alfred Sohn-Rethel, is one result of the “New Reading of Marx” (*Die Neue Marx-Lektüre*) undertaken by some students of the Frankfurt School in the 1960s, and carried on in works conceiving critical theory as a critique of political economy. See: Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Riccardo Bellofiore and Tommaso Redolfi Riva, “The *Neue Marx-Lektüre*: Putting the Critique of Political Economy Back Into the Critique of Society,” *Radical Philosophy*, 189, 2015, 24-36. For contemporary work on critical theory as a critique of political economy, see: Werner Bonefeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Chris O’Kane, “The Critique of Real Abstraction: From the Critical Theory of Society to the Critique of Political Economy and Back Again,” in Antonio Oliva (ed.), *Marx and Contemporary Critical Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 265-287.

<sup>40</sup> For one example of a project moving in this direction, see: Anita Chari, *A Political Economy of the Senses: Neoliberalism, Reification, Critique* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), as well as the works by Freire and Tran Duc Thao above.

<sup>41</sup> See: Lucien Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy*, transl. William Q. Boelhower (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, [1973] 1977).

<sup>42</sup> Eugen Fink, “The Phenomenological Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Contemporary Criticism,” in R. Elveton (ed.), *The Phenomenology of Husserl. Selected Critical and Contemporary Readings*, transl. Roy Elveton (Seattle: Noesis Press, [1933] 2000), 70-139. In his own work, Fink goes further, radicalizing the Husserlian method from an analysis of the individual toward an analysis of the phenomenal field and from mere description toward speculation. See: Ovidiu Stanciu, “La radicalisation de la phénoménologie chez Eugen Fink” in *Phänomenologische Forschungen* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2020), 27-48.

present time, of the different meanings of ongoing structural crises, and of the new possibilities these crises reveal.

In Fink's view, Husserl's transcendental phenomenology generated a question that could not have emerged within Kantian transcendentalism, namely the question about the genesis of the world. With its critical delimitation of philosophy's reach to the objects of possible experience, Kantian philosophy already understood the world itself as a problem. However, this limitation also obstructed a view encompassing the world's genesis. According to Fink, Husserl found a way to go beyond the Kantian methodological limitation through the multiple phenomenological reductions leading ultimately to the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) understood as a sub-soil for a "we-subjectivity."<sup>43</sup> When the question of the *origin* of the world arises as a transcendental problem, it sheds new light on the freedom characterizing transcendental subjectivity,<sup>44</sup> and on the phenomenological community in which this freedom is both discovered and cultivated.<sup>45</sup>

The question made possible through the unfolding of the Husserlian transcendental project concerns not only the world as it can be currently experienced and normatively evaluated, but also the ongoing genesis of its meaning for us, within a system of motivations that is intersubjectively built, shared, and criticized. It remains to be seen what this genetic viewpoint can reveal of the invisible aspects of our social and political environment, whether it might yet free possibilities of thought and action capable of combating exploitation at its deepest levels, and in so doing, reorienting human life itself. If there is a phenomenologically embodied mode of community that grounds all social interactions, our presence and absence to each other is probably decisive for cultivating new modes of mutual attention and resistance that liberate the world in its material genesis, rather than merely reproducing the patterns of its exhaustion.

---

<sup>43</sup> "Constantly functioning in wakeful life, we also function together, in the manifold ways of considering, together, objects pregiven to us in common, thinking together, valuing, planning, acting together. Here we find also that particular thematic alteration in which the we-subjectivity, somehow constantly functioning, becomes a thematic object, whereby the acts through which it functions also become thematic, though always with a residuum which remains unthematic—remains, so to speak, anonymous—namely, the reflections which are functioning in connection with this theme." Hua VI, 109.

<sup>44</sup> Eugen Fink, *The Sixth Cartesian Meditation: The Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method with Textual Annotations by Edmund Husserl*, transl. Ronald Bruzina (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, [1932] 1995), 140-149.

<sup>45</sup> Marc Richir, "Community, Society and History in the later Merleau-Ponty" in Bernard Flynn, Wayne T. Froman and Robert Vallier (eds.), *Merleau-Ponty and the Possibilities of Philosophy* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009), 68.

\*\*\*

Bringing together scholars from a variety of geographical contexts and phenomenological orientations, this special issue aims to open conversations on the social and political aspects of phenomenological critique, in relationship to the historical background in which it is articulated, and the ethical responsibility it requires. From this perspective, **Stella Gaon's** "Phenomenology, Deconstruction, and Critique: A Derridean Perspective," engages with recent literature in critical phenomenology, putting these discussions into contact with the Kantian conception of critique, and the treatment of this latter project in the work of Jacques Derrida. Through an investigation of the "criticality" of phenomenology, Gaon shows that Derrida's deconstructive project has particular importance for a critique of normative commitments. A similar historical sensitivity is at work in **Christian Ferencz-Flatz's** "Naivität als Kritik," in which affinities and tensions between Theodor W. Adorno's and Edmund Husserl's respective critical projects are uncovered through a reading of the methodological role of naivety in their philosophical systems. Identifying a meta-critical element in both Adorno's critical theory and Husserl's work, Ferencz-Flatz brings attention to a historical connection between early projects of critical theory and phenomenology. **Yasuhiko Murakami's**, "The Rhythm of Reorganizing the World. Maldiney and the Theory of Crisis" develops a phenomenological account of existential crises and the rhythms of moving through them. This paper's attempt to ground Henri Maldiney's psychopathological and aesthetic phenomenology in Kant's third Critique, as well as its careful phenomenological attention to crisis – a topic with increasing relevance in critical theory – interestingly connects critical phenomenology to its clinical applications. In her "Phenomenological Variation and Intercultural Transformation: Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology and Abu-Lughod's Ethnography in Dialogue," **Laura McMahan** develops an account of intercultural understanding, drawing on Merleau-Ponty's reflections on science, as well as Abu-Lughod's ethnographic investigations of Bedouin communities. Showing a path between relativism and universalism in debates involving cultural difference, McMahan's paper questions prevalent social and political norms through the phenomenological application of imaginative variation. In "The Mending of a Fractured Self: On the Self as a Produced and Sustained Entity," **Sterling Hall** considers the persistence of subjectivity amid traumatic fractures as a problem fitting for political critique in its own right. Drawing on Levinas and his theory of subjective closure, Hall considers the moments of rupture characterized by the colonial situation as problems disclosing the deeper dynamics of subjectivity at work in the relationship to the other.

We would like to thank all our contributors for their inspiring reflections and for their collaborative work on this special issue. We address special thanks to Ion Copoeru and to the editorial team of *Studia UBB. Philosophia* for their support in the process of preparing this dossier. Last but not least, we want to thank our readers for their interest in the papers we have gathered here and in the phenomenological problems they debate.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Al-Saji, Alia, "Durée" in Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy and Gayle Salamon (eds.), *50 Concepts for A Critical Phenomenology*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020, 99-106.
- Aldea, Andreea Smaranda, "Comments on Johanna Oksala's *Feminist Experiences*," *Continental Philosophy Review*, 52, 2019, 125-134.
- , "Phenomenology as Critique: Teleological–Historical Reflection and Husserl's Transcendental Eidetics," *Husserl Studies*, 32, 2016, 21–46.
- Allen, Amy, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.
- Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, transl. Ben Brewster, New York: Verso, [1965] 2005.
- Bégout, Bruce, *La généalogie de la logique. Husserl, l'antéprédicatif et le catégorial*, Paris: Vrin, 2000.
- Bellofiore, Riccardo and Tommaso Redolfi Riva, "The *Neue Marx-Lektüre*: Putting the Critique of Political Economy Back Into the Critique of Society," *Radical Philosophy*, 189, 2015, 24-36.
- Bonefeld, Werner, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason*, London: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- Breyer, Thiemo and Maxime Doyon (eds.), *Normativity in Perception*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Chari, Anita, *A Political Economy of the Senses: Neoliberalism, Reification, Critique*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.
- Derrida, Jacques, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry, an Introduction*, transl. John P. Leavey Jr., New York: Stony Book, [1962] 1989.
- Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, transl. Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, [1961] 2004.
- Ferencz-Flatz, Christian, and Andrea Staiti (eds.), *Studia Phaenomenologica XVIII. The Promise of Genetic Phenomenology*, Bucharest: Zetabooks, 2018.
- Fink, Eugen, "The Phenomenological Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Contemporary Criticism", in Roy Elveton (ed.), *The Phenomenology of Husserl. Selected Critical and Contemporary Readings*, transl. Roy Elveton, Seattle: Noesis Press, [1933] 2000, 70-139.

- , *The Sixth Cartesian Meditation: The Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method with Textual Annotations by Edmund Husserl*, transl. Ronald Bruzina, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, [1932] 1995.
- , “Operative Concepts in Husserl’s Phenomenology” in William McKenna and Robert M. Harlan (eds. and transl.), *A priori and the World*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, [1957] 1981, 56-170.
- Freire, Paolo, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, transl. Mira Bergman Ramos, NY, London: Continuum, 2005.
- Freyenhagen, Fabian, “What is Orthodox Critical Theory?” *World Picture*, 12, 2017.
- Giovannangeli, Daniel, “Husserl entre Tran Duc Thao et Derrida” in Jocelyn Benoist & Michel Espagne (eds.), *L’itinéraire de Tran Duc Thao. Phénoménologie et transfert culturel*, Paris: Armand Colin, 2013, 133-146.
- Goldmann, Lucien, *Lukács and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy*, transl. William Q. Boelhower, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, [1973] 1977.
- Gordon, Lewis “Bad Faith,” in Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy and Gayle Salamon (eds.), *50 Concepts for A Critical Phenomenology*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020, 17-22.
- Guenther, Lisa, “Critical Phenomenology” in Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (eds.), *50 Concepts for A Critical Phenomenology*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020, 11-16.
- , *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- Habermas, Jürgen, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, transl. Frederick G. Lawrence, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, [1985] 1998.
- Henry, Michel, *Material Phenomenology*, transl. Scott Davidson, Fordham University Press, [1990] 2008.
- Honneth, Axel, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, transl. Kenneth Baynes. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, [1985] 1993.
- Husserl, Edmund, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Hua VI), transl. David Carr, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, [1938] 1970.
- , *First Philosophy. Lectures 1923/24 and Related Texts from the Manuscripts (1920-1925)* (Hua VIII), transl. S. Luft and T. N. Naberhaus, Dordrecht, Springer, 2019.
- , *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis. Lectures on Transcendental Logic* (Hua XI), transl. Anthony Steinbock, Dordrecht: Kluwer, [1918-1926] 2001.
- Kolodny, Niko, “The Ethics of Cryptonormativism: A Defense of Foucault’s Evasions,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 22(5), 1996, 63-84.
- Levinas Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, transl. Alphonso Lingis, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, [1961] 1979.
- Lotz, Christian, *The Capitalist Schema: Time, Money, and the Culture of Abstraction*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014.
- Marder, Michael, *Phenomena–Critique–Logos: The Project of Critical Phenomenology*, London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014.

- Murakami, Yasuhiko, "La communication avec les patients en état végétatif. Une approche phénoménologique" in Delia Popa, Benoît Kanabus and Fabio Bruschi (eds) *La portée pratique de la phénoménologie. Normativité, critique sociale et psychopathologie*, Bruxelles: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2014, 245-258.
- O'Kane, Chris, "The Critique of Real Abstraction: From the Critical Theory of Society to the Critique of Political Economy and Back Again," in Antonio Oliva (ed.), *Marx and Contemporary Critical Theory*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 265-287
- Popa, Delia, "L'imaginaire de la vulnérabilité sociale. De la culpabilité à la responsabilité" in Elodie Boubilil (ed.), *Vulnérabilité et empathie*, Paris: Hermann, 2018, 283-309.
- Richir, Marc, "Community, Society and History in the later Merleau-Ponty" in Bernard Flynn, Wayne T. Froman and Robert Vallier (eds.), *Merleau-Ponty and the Possibilities of Philosophy*, New York: SUNY Press, 2009, 61-77.
- , *Variations sur le sublime et le soi*, Grenoble: Millon, 2010.
- Salamon, Gayle, "What's Critical about Critical Phenomenology?" *Puncta: Journal of Critical Phenomenology*, 1(1), 2018, 8-17.
- Staiti, Andrea, *Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology: Nature, Spirit, Life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Sohn-Rethel, Alfred, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology*, London: Macmillan, 1978.
- Stanciu, Ovidiu, "La radicalisation de la phénoménologie chez Eugen Fink" in *Phänomenologische Forschungen*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2020, 27-48.
- Thao, Tran Duc, *Phenomenology and Dialectical Materialism*, transl. Daniel J. Herman and Donald V. Morano, Dordrecht: Kluwer, [1951] 1971.
- Vogelmann, Frieder, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Idealism in Critical Theory," *Constellations*, Early View: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12548>, 2021
- Weiss, Gail, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (eds.), *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2020.
- Wehrle, Maren, "'There Is a Crack in Everything' Fragile Normality: Husserl's Account of Normality Re-Visited" *Phainomenon*, 28, 2018: 49-75.
- Welton, Donn, *The Other Husserl*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, 199.