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Editorial

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Editorial: Phenomenological and Artistic Research Practices

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Phenomenological movement started with the slogan “To the things themselves!” which meant “Away from theories, away from books!” (Arendt 1971). Researchers within phenomenological movement nevertheless continued writing books and forming theories. Perhaps this is something that cannot be avoided entirely, but we should at least start from something else than books and theories, if we are to enter into the phenomenological method. The phenomenological central concept of ‘lived experience’ actually “announces the intent to explore *directly* the originary prereflective dimensions of human existence: life as we live it.” (van Manen 2014, p. 39.) While it would be easy to assume that this kind of approach to our habitual ways of engaging with the objects of everyday life as we live it would be practically unavoidable, it is, however, clear that we often do manage to avoid it and start to distance ourselves from this kind of starting point. When we start to reflect, in a theoretical manner, on whatever appears to us as it appears, explicate causes and read or write about something, there is danger that we distance ourselves from the things themselves which we intended to approach phenomenologically. In the *Idea of Phenomenology* -lectures Husserl states explicitly about phenomenology: “It does not engage in theory” (Husserl 1999, p. 43.) As the etymology of the word ‘theory’ suggests, we do not live the performance on stage but rather keep life at a distance by adopting the role of a spectator (*teōros*, spectator; *theōrō*, to look at, view).

The idea for this special issue emerged when we participated in Research Pavilion arranged in Venice during the 2020 Biennale. During the workshops and while creating exhibitions as well as conducting dialogues we found new starting points or beginnings between artistic and phenomenological research practices. From the phenomenological perspective beginnings are crucial. Husserl not only stated that philosopher is an eternal beginner – *ewiger Anfänger* – but he also kept starting over and over again throughout his academic career. Our meeting in Venice created some openings for dialogue between phenomenological and artistic research and we decided to enable more of those by announcing the open call for this issue. Some of these beginnings are documented in this special issue. In our discussions we also dealt with the question of what kind of beginnings are phenomenological. In this editorial, some background will be given in order to explicate the relation of these beginnings to phenomenological method.

As phenomenology is a shared project, we should at least sometimes articulate what constitutes the basis of the method in order to develop a degree of shared understanding of what we are doing together. Husserl himself did this by stating phenomenological principles, that is the principle of all principles (HuaIII) and the first methodological principle (HuaI). Husserl formulates the latter as follows:

It is plain that I, as someone beginning philosophically, since I am striving toward the presumptive end, genuine science, must neither make nor go on accepting any judgement as scientific *that I have not derived from evidence*, from ‘experiences’ in which the affairs and affair-complexes in question are present to me as “*they themselves*.” (§24)

What does it mean to follow this principle? Let me take an example. In Kirkkopelto’s article in this issue, the reader is instructed to do simple exercises, for example to repeat a phrase until the levels of its appearing became evident. One should do these exercises and after that he or she will then by making use of the principle be able to accept Kirkkopelto’s views as evident or not. Let us take another example from the world of performative arts to show that it is *something obvious* rather than complicated theoretical constructs that forms the starting point of the phenomenological approach. This example comes from the *Unknown Soldier* – a significant work in Finnish literary history – that the National Theatre of Finland adapted for stage in 2007. The play gave the story a new, radical interpretation, which was strongly criticized by a Finnish high government civil servant. However, it then turned out that he had actually not experienced the play first-hand but had only heard about it second-hand, and, eventually, he himself became target of criticism. Although not expressly stating it, the critics were actually criticizing the civil servant for not following phenomenological principles. In order to judge the play, he should have experienced it first-hand, in its way of appearing, instead of forming an opinion based on second hand sources.

In his reading of Husserl’s principles as presented in one of his last publications, Martin Heidegger gives a reduced version of them: Husserl’s method aims to bring things to their “own presence” (Heidegger 2002). So, when we are, for example, considering a number, say four, we should bring it to its own presence, that is we should count four things, let’s us say these four letters: X X X X. Following Husserl, I could go into explaining what happens when I count, what categorical acts take place, but it is important that the reader him- or herself can do the same thing: count to four and “see” how that which appears and its appearance correlate. So, instead of figuring out complicated theoretical reflections, in the phenomenological approach, one should do the exercises, see the play and count the number – or, in other words, take care that that which is studied appears in its own mode of being present.

Sometimes it is difficult to do this in writing. Number 4 and symbol 4 are similar in written text, but as the first one is counted and the second one is not, there is a crucial difference. This can be explicated – as I just did – but sometimes it makes more sense just to show the difference instead of explicating it. As is often the case with presenting artistic research – which involves frequent use of visual and other resources – showing things visually, for example, can convey the point more efficiently than a verbal presentation. Many of the contributors of this issue use *Research Catalogue* to be able also to show instead of mere telling. Some of the contributions in this issue, however, adopt a different approach to avoiding the problem of starting from books and theories. Books are results of a practice – that of writing. Instead of approaching texts as fixed units, one can open the way to the things themselves by turning to the possibilities of the practices where texts are created.

This takes us from principles to practice. Forty years before explicating Husserl's principle, Heidegger instructed us differently in reading Husserl's texts: we should distinguish between that what Husserl states and what he achieves in his real work (*wirklicher Arbeit*) (Heidegger 1994, p. 81). The latter – practice – is what really counts in Husserl's thinking. Phenomenology does not begin from a statement but from an act (Marx 1987). Statements can surely follow from this practice, but instead of building on them we should keep on returning to the act itself. Husserl called this act or practice *reduction*. We see this primordially of practice for example in *The Idea of Phenomenology* -lectures, where the act of thinking (reduction) leads Husserl to establish the correlation between that which appears and its appearance, that is the standpoint of phenomenological principles (Himanka 2019).

Phenomenology is a practice that is “always and already open for the possibilities of change” (Nuki 2002), it is open for new beginnings that could be reached by opening dialogues to other practices, such as artistic research. These beginnings are phenomenological if they follow the method of beginning which Husserl calls reduction. Husserl states this in his lecture *Phänomenologie und Anthropologie* (1931): “Ultimately, everything depends on the phenomenological reduction's method of beginning. ... If the meaning of reduction is missed, everything is missed” (HuaXXVII/172). It has turned out to be a difficult task to explicate how this act called reduction is to be done, but a couple of things are clear from Husserl's own testimony. First of all, reduction involves a shift, in Husserl's terms, from *natural attitude* to *phenomenological attitude*. We distance ourselves from our habitual ways of seeing things (natural attitude) to seeing these things as if for the first time (in phenomenological attitude). That is why Husserl sometimes compares this phenomenological point of view to a child “seeing” things for the first time. When considered from afar this difference in seeing seems to be a minor one, but is actually decisive. Husserl calls this kind of difference ‘a nuance’. Many of the contributions to this issue point out these decisive differences we usually (in natural attitude) remain unaware of.

Heidegger found Husserl's practice to be a key to understanding the phenomenological method but he soon turned from Husserl's texts to Aristotle in order to explicate practice. Aristotle's works are often read from the theoretical point of view and it is easy to find support for this kind of reading. But, as Heidegger emphasizes, the texts can be read taking *fronēsis* and *praxis* as starting points. Aristotle saw that there is a crucial difference between activities that he calls *poiēsis* and *praxis*. Roughly the former is a way of following a model, giving a speech by reading a pre-written text, for example, and the latter opens the possibility to create as one proceeds, when one speaks *ex tempore*, for example. From our modern perspective we could even venture to say that *praxis* in comparison to *poiēsis* is something creative and closer to what the artist does.

Editing a journal is an act of doing something. One can choose to follow established procedures as closely as possible and even at least partly automatize the process and come close to following a model, a *poiēsis*. The other possibility in the Aristotelian context is to keep the process open and see where it takes us as it unfolds. In practice this means that the discussions and dialogues that started in Venice continued during the process of putting together this special issue. In the process of editing this special issue there have been two guiding goals: the aim is to focus on phenomenological and artistic research practices and to proceed in a

phenomenologically solid manner. From the latter perspective we need to understand how we explicate history phenomenologically. Usually (that is, in natural attitude) history is telling a story of the past and this story often creates identities. Many have explicated over a hundred-year-old phenomenology in this manner and that helps us to understand how phenomenology differs from other kinds of approaches of doing research. However, when Husserl himself in his later works took a historical approach, he saw it as something different. Shigeto Nuki explicates this in his text “Phenomenology and the problem of history” (Nuki 2002). According to Nuki, the Husserlian approach distances itself from narrative approach and creation of identities. Instead of these Nuki emphasizes openness of phenomenology to others and to the future. This kind of openness requires taking risks which makes us vulnerable. In this intersubjective practice of editing this special issue we have indeed joined with tradition in many ways but from the phenomenological perspective the task has rather been to open the tradition to the future. We have also made attempts to cross the traditional barrier between phenomenological and artistic research practices.

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