



*Book Review*

## **Phenomenology and Human Science Research Today**

Massimiliano Tarozzi & Luigina Mortari (Eds.) (2010). *Phenomenology and human science research today*. Budapest: Organization of Phenomenology Organizations: Zeta Books. ISBN: 978-973-1997-44-5 (Paperback 325 pages)

by **Kate Galvin**

In this volume Massimiliano Tarozzi and Luigina Mortari have brought together a diverse collection of twelve chapters to pursue a timely project in Human Science research: The search for the essence of phenomenology in current phenomenology practice.

The book asks the following key questions:

- What is phenomenology exactly?
- How do we undertake phenomenological investigations?
- In what ways has phenomenology been reborn in our current times?

These key questions underpin Tarozzi and Mortari's contemporary book, which is organised into three interrelated parts: (1) Phenomenology as a Method: Concrete Studies; (2) Phenomenological Practice Methodological Reflections; and (3) Phenomenology as Theoretical Perspective.

The text opens with an overarching introductory essay that explores phenomenology as a philosophy of research, and provides a contextualised overview of the phenomenological movement. Tarozzi and Mortari then offer a consideration of phenomenology as a theoretical perspective, examine its contribution to qualitative research, discuss its faithfulness to experience and discuss the hospitality it offers to phenomena. In considering the distinctions of phenomenology from relativism and objectivism they guide the reader to the 'primacy of description' and clearly introduce an overview of the epoché as a

'principle of faithfulness'. The tone throughout is one of invitation to a 'passive- receptive way of being', to 'open attention', and to 'the reflexive act'. They say:

phenomenology is a troublesome path between the clear awareness of the senseless belief in an objective reality and the tireless research of the hidden profile of things - a never-ending exploration, dramatically adventurous, always open, and extremely complex (p. 35).

For readers interested in access to 'the complex' and 'adventurous journeys' this introductory essay has traction.

Part one presents illustrations from concrete studies that draw on a range of methods and approaches to complement phenomenological enquiry. The first study consists of a consideration of the embodied nature of learning and looks at how this may be grasped methodologically. Mia Herskind uses a sample of employees in a Danish Kindergarten to show how learning processes are situated and pre-reflective. The study makes use of observational and interview methods. Herskind's purpose is to reflect on 'what is carried in the body' in order to understand tensions and dilemmas in practice as well as to uncover how new ways of incorporating physical movement in kindergarten education can be developed. She considers the role of observation in illuminating unspoken aspects of the phenomenon.

The second study in this section of the book uses

narrative interviews to explore how social workers learn and to investigate whether they learn through informal processes. Giancarlo Gola makes a strong case for the use of narrative methods and a detailed description of qualitative analysis (however, not specifically phenomenological analysis) is given. The study indicates some understandings for the nature of informal learning but the reader would have benefitted from an analysis of the distinctions between narrative methods and phenomenological methods and from some locating of the study epistemologically.

The third study explores a multi-professional development project in a psychiatric setting for traumatised young people in Norway. Using a lifeworld oriented reflective process in action research, Solfrid Vatne considers the use of action research and some benefits of a reflective lifeworld approach. The steps and processes of the study are described with links made to key literature in lifeworld research. Her core premise centres on the nature of reflection and its access to 'not knowing' and felt knowledge for practitioners in their interaction with patients.

The fourth study by Luigina Mortari and Chaira Sita offers an additional methodological reflection on phenomenological 'content analysis' and uses interview data from teachers and parents concerning their experiences of working in partnership. These outline a descriptive phenomenological analysis and present summaries of meaning units that are then translated into the researchers' language. This is followed by a useful discussion concerning what is meant by the essence of a phenomenon, how an essential structure of an experience can be identified and the nature of the practical import or directions from descriptions of phenomena. This chapter presents a good example of the stages of analysis, particularly for students embarking on descriptive phenomenological studies.

Part 2 consists of four essays that delve into methodological reflections on phenomenological practice. Scott Churchill offers a deep consideration of the state and purpose of human sciences research in the 'wake of postmodernism'. This is at once a rigorous and playful essay, pointing to legitimate concerns about the lack of depth in some current day qualitative analysis that fails to go beyond the mere summary of data and simple 'correspondence' to access and uncover personal meaning. Churchill reminds us to remember our ground. He calls for a sensitive attunement to meaning in analysis if we are to develop insights into lived experience. He highlights the need for both structure and texture in what passes as phenomenological human science research as well as the need to embrace hermeneutic

principles to reach deep levels of meaning. Churchill asks us to 'hearken', to listen to the silence and to hear what is there, and to attune ourselves to the Other. In this deep kind of listening we can bear witness, and so 'understand what the talk is about' in shared understanding. Churchill skilfully employs Heidegger's care-structure as a helpful framework for pointing to the very clear distance between natural science, human science and postmodern approaches to generation of psychological theory. He also offers a gripping, and at times humorous, dialogue between human science and postmodernism. He concludes that "there is room for both the nomothetic and the idiographic in human sciences research" (p.169) and that the phenomenological method is 'well suited' to this pursuit. In addition, he makes a case for embedding phenomenology's own research traditions and broader history into research work. This chapter ends with pertinent questions for the reader to meditate on. These include: To what extent can any individual's expressions be taken as reflective of 'humanity itself'? What kinds of 'realities' (actual or virtual) are created by humanity? How do human science researchers move forward after facing the postmodern challenge?

This essay is followed by an essay by Letizia Caronia, who takes us where she says 'angels fear' to tread – "what is if any, the dark side of the postmodern, anti-realist approach in social sciences?" (p. 180). She draws out some of the epistemic and ethical consequences of a commitment to postmodern theory of 'language, reality and truth'. She provides illustrations of her own constructivist orientated analysis of discursive data and along the way she asks if contemporary postmodern researchers are really more respectful of their informants' talk. She answers her own question in the negative, because researchers move or change perspective, from participant (interviewer) to analyst (desk based story teller). In her subsequent analysis of theoretical perspectives to interrogate this question, she presents at least three levels of construction: the teller's perspective, the researcher as co-author perspective, and finally the researcher's writing practices 'that make, unmake and remake' what is performed. She further points to the ethical consequences of denying the referential value of narratives; that is, denying informants' skills to tell the truth and denying that they are reliable witnesses in their world and in delegitimizing informants' talk. She concludes by indicating that "the time has come to rethink our commitment to postmodernism" (p. 200).

The essay by Tobin, Mantovani and Bove points to the importance of plot, drama and narrative in video ethnography and reflects on links to phenomenology, specifically intentionality. Their project used video cues with focus groups to explore perspectives of

immigrant parents about their children's pre-school education. They were particularly interested in the ideas of parents compared to the ideas of practitioners. The videos were used to stimulate dialogue; and this dialogue formed the data for the study. The authors make the claim that videos produce sensory and emotional experiences that make access to meanings possible and can facilitate a process of self-reflection. This is at the heart of pedagogy but also "a key concept in phenomenological research" (p. 222).

The final chapter in this section explores evocative phenomenological research (expressive research) to reveal the empathic (pathic action) in health and social care as a foundation for personal transformation. Peter Willis and Sally Borbasi firstly examine the 'pathic' dimension as a mediator (a remoralizing power) of the demoralizing forces in a bureaucratic system of health and social care. They explain and make a case for expressive research in this regard. Secondly, they provide an example of an expressive portrayal of 'the pathic hand' in nursing care through a film clip and a poem. The stages of cuing the audience; the dramatic performance; construction of the expressive text; drafting the expressive text and display are richly described. The chapter concludes with a textured description of the nurses' lived pathic experience in the form of a poem and a number of questions concerning what was evoked, what kind of knowledge emerged and what was carried forward.

The third and final part of the book explores phenomenology as a theoretical perspective. Overarching themes of cultural importance form the focus of the last three chapters: Chris Aanstoos considers Holism and the Human Sciences; Daniela Verducci contemplates what may be revealed by the carrying

on of life in the face of nihilism, and Alan Pope revisits metabletics – the examination of historical-cultural phenomena (a focus in the world and history of humankind) and draws comparison with Indo-Tibetan Buddhism (a focus inward on the phenomenology and process of mind). The underpinning quasi phenomenological philosophies of each approach are explored and their methods are compared. All three chapters in this concluding section indicate and discuss 'big' transcendent themes for humanity that underline phenomenology's cultural relevance and its power to point to our times and our picture.

*Phenomenology and Human Science Today* is a diverse collection of 'how to do it' and 'what we need to attend to' essays. Overall, this is a stimulating book that provides some novel directions and illustrations of phenomenology embracing a range of perspectives and methods in its pursuit of understanding the world as it is lived. In my view what the book lacks is a concluding synthesis that returns to the essence of phenomenology and the state of human science research today. I wanted to hear more about 'the traps' that we can fall into, the dangers of inadvertently loosening our discipline, and some points regarding any complacency we may have about how human science and phenomenology can make its way in the world.

The multiple perspectives that are presented in this book reveal a legitimate optimism concerning the phenomenological attitude, both in its far reaching potential as well as in its precious and rock solid scientific boundedness. These two characteristics are at the heart of human sciences' ability to embrace methodological multiplicity coherently and to access the meaning of human experience.

### Referencing Format

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## About the Author



While nursing, Kate undertook a doctoral study concerning the evaluation of nurse-led practice using conventional research methods. Ironically, this drew her towards qualitative approaches and reminded her of her formative literary-rich education in Ireland and what had been lost in her specialized nurse education: a 'nourished' scholarship that incorporated the literary traditions, story, poetry and reflections on experiential meaning.

Observations in clinical practice at that time sensitised her to the reductionist nature of practice in contrast to the depth and detail of what people go through in suffering and in illness. Kate came to realise that knowing what to do in practice as a nurse didn't always come directly from a technical perspective; rather it came from somewhere deeper and she became fascinated with this 'deeper' could mean. This led to conversations with colleagues about existential issues and phenomenology, and to the work of the human science community.

The world of phenomenology opened a path to the fullness of her earlier experiences, and how poetry and written language are able to convey something richer than science and which is palpably present. This journey culminated in the development, with Swedish colleagues, of a lifeworld led approach to education which, later, was used by Kate when leading two innovative curricula developments at Bournemouth University: a professional doctorate and a set of lifeworld-led undergraduate education materials.

Kate has been pursuing interests in phenomenological research, existential philosophy, and poetry in a number of concerns in Health and Social Care, particularly regarding the meaning of 'what it means to care'. With Les Todres, she has written papers on the humanisation of care, a more contemplative approach to education for caring practices, and a developing theory of well-being. This work will be published (2012) in a book called 'Caring and Well-being: A Lifeworld-led Approach'.

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