

introduction



To be sure, we still have philosophical congresses. The philosophers meet but, unfortunately, not the philosophies. The philosophies lack the unity of a mental space in which they might exist for and act on one another.

—Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*

The publication of the second volume of *Glimpse* is an event that leaves me with as much disquiet as it does satisfaction. To be sure, included in these pages are exemplary pieces by respected scholars, some by thinkers seasoned in conference discourse, some by academic philosophers at the beginning of their careers, and much in-between. To be sure, these pages are open to a wide range of topics and approaches. To be sure, the Society for Phenomenology and Media continues to grow in numbers, improve in organization, and widen its non-partisan philosophical inclusiveness. To what end? I am not at all sure that La Jolla, the site of the society's first three conferences, has provided "the unity of a mental space" in which to meet and allow philosophers and others, in Husserl's words, "to exist for and act on one another."

Failure to find philosophical common ground is not the fault of the place and the generosity of National University, which has enthusiastically provided space and support for these conferences, nor can it be argued that the Torrey Pines campus isn't a hospitable and inspiring location for contemplative meetings and discourse. Nor is this to say that other conferences do or don't provide "unity of mental space," a concern better debated in other places at other times. It is simply my opinion that, in the case of the Society for Phenomenology and Media, a mental space does not yet exist in which important philosophical questions concerning media, its technology and use, have been or, perhaps, can be asked. At this point, our society conferences are more a place of reasoned statement of widely differing perspective than a place where questions are asked. By and large, we are a gathering of those with diverse answers, not questions. Again, this is not to say that the Society for Phenomenology and Media should be other than an occasion for academics to go on the record with their thoughts—or that these meetings aren't successful. I believe our conferences have been and will continue to be successful, but, again: To what end? It is difficult to answer the question. The very idea of the two terms in "phenomenology conference" suggests the difficult I am having.

First, our times have seen a rapid and enormous growth of an international class of professional philosophers within what may be called for the sake of intellectual fashion, if not rigor, “the conference culture.” I see zeal in these conferences; I don’t often find passion. Torrey Pines, the location of the first two and planned third annual conference of our society, as many have commented, is a beautiful location, but it has not yet provided the site for the mental space whose absence Husserl lamented over seventy years ago in his lectures in Paris. Second, I doubt that a mental space large enough can exist for common ground within disparate phenomenological thought or, more broadly, the “phenomenological movement.” This doubt, in turn, rests on a deeper doubt that questions the very existence of a phenomenological movement—at this time or any other—in any other than a nominalist sense. Allow me to add immediately that, at least for me, this nominalist sense is firm enough ground upon which to build a conference, if not a mental space.

When Herbert Spiegelberg in 1960 wrote with apostolic enthusiasm of a “phenomenological movement,” it is questionable if he had Husserl’s “unifying commonness” in mind. In the “Introduction” to *The Phenomenological Movement*, Spiegelberg explains that “In fact, the very term ‘movement,’ applied to phenomenology, requires some explanation and justification.” It appears to me that we remain in a century-long, extended period of explaining and justifying not only phenomenology as a movement, but phenomenology itself. Much of the justification is self-justification. Definitions offered by Spiegelberg are at least marginally self-serving, ones that cannot only be applied to phenomenology, but all thought. When Spiegelberg rejected the use of the appropriately loose term used by early phenomenologists, “circle,” and replaced it with “movement,” he may well have created an empty category or, perhaps, a category of unraveled European philosophical threads, though these ends often entangle thinkers outside of Europe trained in continental philosophy. Perhaps he intended “movement” to mean a “circle of circles.”

Spiegelberg also rejects the term “school,” although that word perhaps best expresses what Husserl meant by “the unity of a mental space.” For me, such discussion is one of acceptable nominalist refinements that are to be expected. The “Husserlian Marxist,” Tran Duc Thao, noted that after Husserl “the phenomenological school, along with existential interpretations, fell into irrationalism.” The appraisal seems accurate to me and, further, I agree with Thao that irrationalism cannot serve as the “unity” that underlies *mental space*. Along these lines, Husserl, continuing his lament, complains that

Instead of a serious discussion among conflicting theories that, in their very conflict, demonstrate the intimacy with which they belong together, the commonness of their underlying convictions, and an unswerving belief in a true philosophy, we have pseudo-reporting and a pseudo-criticizing, a mere semblance of philosophizing seriously with and for one another. . . . But how could actual study and actual collaboration be possible, where there are so many philosophers and almost equally many philosophies? (*Cartesian Meditations*)

Despite Husserl’s disappointment, the search for common philosophical, if not phenomenological ground, appears to be a worthwhile end. Last year, while reading Krystyna Wilkoszewska’s tribute to her teacher, *Maria Golaszewska: Fifty Years at the Jagiellonian University*, a brief discussion of the “congress life” which many of us live caught my attention. Golaszewska recalls that

Once upon a time Prof. W. Tatarkiewicz said that in the past philosophers gathered in schools and developed their views through arguments and disputes (e.g. Socrates,

Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, etc.)—then there was a time of writing huge volumes, and now we have the time of international congresses, conferences and symposia. She goes on to ask, “Have congresses fallen into a crisis, is their epoch ending?” She concludes that they are a place for the exchange of thought, academic contacts, and the starting point of cooperation. While I agree with the first two of her conclusions, I am not at all convinced that conferences are a “starting point of cooperation,” especially cooperation in a project of “rigorous science” that follows Husserl’s observation that phenomenology is a “science of Beginnings” and “the philosophy of the Beginning.”

I am pressed not to consider conferences as a mode of petit bourgeois theoretical production, the object produced and its collegial by-products shaped by the infrastructure of the ideological apparatus of the prevailing economic base, including those papers that intend to establish perspective outside of the triumphalist narrative of contemporary capitalism. Some who attend congresses do so because their universities have scholarship requirements for rehiring, promotion, and salary increases; some see additions to the “presentations” and “publications” sections of their vitae; some plan conferences as part of a vacation; some present their recent work to others for consideration. None of these reasons mitigates against the genuine scholarship, sincerity or value of what participants present in papers. We are assured that participants in our society’s conferences strive for all of these goals.

But even the best of practical considerations for participating in congress life fail to address Husserl’s desire for a “commonness of underlying convictions” and, when this occurs, the desire for philosophical unity of mental space, common ground, and collaboration becomes more difficult. Of course, Husserl’s grand hope that a conference be a place where philosophers collaborate on a common project can itself be questioned. My own view, however, is Husserl’s, though I do not locate the problem in the arena of “true philosophy,” but in the “semblance of philosophizing seriously with and for one another.” Surely, it is possible that common philosophical ground can be obscured by the semblance given off by discourse, what Jelauddin Rumi in *The Glance* calls “word fog”:

Words, even if they come from
The soul, hide the soul, as fog
Rising off the sea covers the sea,
The coast, the fish, the pearls.
It is noble work to build coherent
Philosophical discourses, but
They block out the sun of truth.

Conferences are not of necessity places of collaborative activity. That contemporary philosophers have little in common other than the individuality and difference of their intellectual pursuits is not an argument against continued effort; rather, it is more reason for attempting to overcome it, if it can be overcome, without whining. If the problem cannot be overcome, we may be attracted by the impossibility. So, with Husserl’s call for “actual study and actual collaboration” in mind, before returning to the fine papers included in this edition of *Glimpse*, I propose a collaboration, a phenomenological project. This proposal comes without topic or methodology except the search for common convictions. The topic is neither broad nor narrow, the approach a matter to be discussed. We are confined in this collaboration only by two words in our society’s name: “phenomenology” and “media.” At this point, this is a proposal for discussion. The direction, scope, and approach are to be determined collaboratively. I hope this collaboration would lead to a publication, perhaps setting-up an on-line threaded news group, but even these suggestions are for discussion only. If, on the other hand, this proposal does not arouse a response, I am comfortable with silence.

The essays included here reflect a divergence of philosophical interests and approaches. Allow me to point your attention to a few that suggest common themes, directions and concerns, and leave to the reader the sense of discovery in reading the others.

In “Nostalgia for a Digital Object: Regrets on the Quickening of Quick Time,” the conference keynote speaker, Vivian Sobchack, discusses Quicktime movies, an already antiquated medium, as a little box, although she does not view films in terms of a big box in her preference for cinema over new media.

In “Closeness that Grows Towards the User: Phenomenological Approach to Cyber Arts,” Janez Strehovec arrives independently at a conclusion strikingly similar to one found in my own essay, “Edith’s Empathy: Interactivity versus Intersubjectivity,” in which I suggest that “digital media do not reformulate the cogito’s perception of the world, but reformulate the object and, as a consequence, extend the object towards subject.” In a similar vein, Strehovec, suggesting that cyberart is based on communication, not exhibition, writes that the “model for this new constellation is a hologram as an optical memory unit that—metaphorically speaking—grows towards the observer, filling the space between the wall and the eye.” Expressed as other than metaphor, of course, Strehovec’ remark could easily be taken as a very unphenomenological statement made from the natural standpoint. Apropos the terms “extend” and “growing towards,” Husserl commented that the relationship

. . . is, as it were, a *noematic intentionality over against the noetic*. The latter carries the former in itself as a correlate of consciousness, and its intentionality passes in a certain way through the noematic and beyond it (*Ideas I* 271).

Attendant to the line of thought we both expressed, Husserl warned of one specific variety of object: “The corpse bears in itself the representation of a human soul but no longer appresents it; and thus we see precisely a corpse, which was a man, but now no longer is” (*Ideas II* 352). In other words, a philosophical zombie.

In “The Mother of All Phenomenological Websites,” Lester Embree discusses the phenomenological movement as a dominant force in world philosophy and the role of the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology (CARP). Embree, a St. Paul of contemporary phenomenology, has done as much as or more than any living philosopher to promote Spiegelberg’s idea of phenomenology as a movement. In recent years, Embree’s ecumenical phenomenology has brought together on a common ground representatives of all varieties within this philosophy and, to the extent that phenomenology can be considered a movement, his tireless activity as director of the CARP has served as a vanguard organizing effort. The importance of the CARP website is clear from Embree’s discussion.

Alison Leigh Brown’s subjectivist “Absolute Internet: A Gallery of Images” demonstrates that phenomenology need not only be restricted to philosophy, but can also be practiced in what may be called a “phenomenological style,” much in the manner of Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray. One way of viewing the history of phenomenology is to discuss the evolution of its ideas as a cumulative movement from methodology to attitude to style. Brown’s writing, besides being clever and stylish, exemplifies current trends.

Finally, before I leave the sense of discovery in reading the other papers included, I would like to mention Dr. Robert Livingston, to whom this volume is dedicated. Dr. Livingston, the founder of the Neurosciences Department and Institute for Information Systems at the University of California San Diego, had been scheduled as the keynote speaker of the 2nd Annual Conference of the Society for Phenomenology and Media. Health considerations at the last minute prevented his attendance.

Dr. Livingston’s seminal work in visual perception in many ways moved forward the

scientific investigation of consciousness, profoundly shaping the direction of cognitive science today and providing foundation for studies in Artificial Intelligence. But the importance of an article published in 1976, "Sensory Processing, Perception, and Behavior," and its discussion of philosophical questions originating in Descartes, goes well beyond those fields and is of importance, I believe, to contemporary phenomenology. Dr. Livingston's life achievements in psychiatry, neurology, and other fields are too many and well-known to detail here, but his most important work is in another area: the struggle for world peace and nuclear disarmament. It is in this arena that I met Dr. Livingston and became a friend. When in 1985 the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War received the Nobel Peace Prize, he was the organization's president. Dr. Livingston was and is a true champion for world peace and freedom from the fear of nuclear disaster. I have been privileged to know and work with him.

—Paul Majkut