

Editorial: Phenomenology, Publishing and Democracy

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I am sitting at my desk in the attic room mulling over my editorial for the upcoming issue. I think of democracy and its relationship to what we are doing in P&P; writing phenomenology and publishing to an audience of phenomenologists and others. What will I say about phenomenology and democracy and about publishing and democracy? Some weeks ago I read Jürgen Oelker's edited book *Futures of Education* (2001) and noticed Dietrich Benner's chapter entitled 'Education and democracy'. He presents a range of understandings of democracy and offers an historical detour in order to understand the challenges education is facing today. Our common understanding of education as the business of the state and the state's obligation to raise democratic citizens is one of several interpretations of the purpose of education. If one considers democracy to be a public issue, on the other hand, one will consider education of a human being to be different from that of a citizen, and education as a state issue to be different from education as a public responsibility. In the first case one asserts the primacy of politics over education and asks what education the state needs. In the second case one considers the primacy of education over politics and asks what are the societal needs of the human being who is being formed through education. As a consequence, there is a focus on the public rather than on politics, and on educating human beings rather than educating citizens. With regard to education, one orients to the essential question of what the public character of education and democracy should be (Benner 2001, p. 133-134). Benner's view, in accordance with ideals from the French Revolution, is that each individual has the right to select for themselves what form of life they prefer, and to exercise a certain freedom while also allowing others the same freedom. This includes that basic principles, established precedents, fundamental human rights – the state constitution - is a public rather than a political matter, and that the individual *in and of* the public might move beyond status quo. Limits are put on the power of the state and there is "a mutual interaction between the human being and the world constituted by diversity and freedom" (Benner 2001, p. 144). The individual is first of all a human being, then a citizen, an active contributor to work and production, and a member of the nation – all at the same time, Schleiermacher asserts (1814/1957, p. 166 cited in Benner 2001, p. 145). In this perspective, people are considered to pre-exist the state communities and thus cannot be fully absorbed in them. In the opposite, "educating young people in the affirmation of the existing situation would be just as para-pedagogic and para-political as indoctrinating them in the affirmation of a political innovation" (Benner 2001, p. 146). Benner's point is that the problem arises when education stops being mainly a public concern and is far more a state concern. What I would like to discuss in my editorial derives from how Benner analyses education. I start from the very last argument in Benner's chapter where he highlights one significant question for

education: should education be a public rather than a political concern? For education to be public and relevant for the common good, education has to “be able to stand up to the question of the contribution they [those who educate and are being educated] make to the argumentation of a discussing public” (Benner 2001, p. 150-151) not just being a knowledge and ability system. Seen in a democratic light, such an education shares qualities with publication, in this case, the publication of an academic journal, which also has to make itself relevant, interesting, and available. The term *publication* in fact means ‘the act of making publicly known, and a notification to the people at large’¹. Education and publication share the very premise for Benner’s analysis which is the significant consequences of the fact that basic democratic principles put a ban on democracy itself “against forcing the way people live into any standardized form prescribed by the state” (p.133). Phenomenological research and publishing certainly should be as free and independent as possible, and avoid standardized forms and contents prescribed by mainstream systems. There is an ethical and professional claim on publishers, publishing houses as well as independent journals (like P&P) to present the world *as it is* in its diversity and complexity, and to practice counter argumentation and resistance to taken-for-granted views and thoughts. Merleau-Ponty writes:

Scientific points of view, according to which my existence is a moment of the world’s, are always naive and at the same time dishonest, because they take for granted without explicitly mentioning it, the other point of view, namely that of consciousness through which from the outset a world forms around me and begins to exist for me. To return to the world itself is to return to this world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which all scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the country-side in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is. (2002, p. ix)

A language that speaks of a living world, like the one Merleau-Ponty describes, needs an existential vocabulary with lived-through qualities. Such a world cannot be prescribed or standardized and any future is open to the unforeseen. Thus, a language that should speak truthfully about our shared existence needs an unspecialized quality that speaks understandably of what is ordinary and quotidian in ways that all people can relate to cognitively and non-cognitively. As I have written elsewhere, “An unspecialized language [...] is a language that everybody can understand because it is concrete and relevant and interprets reality so that we recognize it. [...] It is for everybody and has existential and democratic qualities” (Saevi, 2014, p. 255). A language with democratic qualities, practiced in phenomenology for the purpose of public publication, should be open and searching and protective of what is vulnerable and exposed. Language exercises power and the ability to convince and influence people, thus emphasizing the need to attend to the language we practice in professional publishing. We affect others, teach them how to think and write phenomenologically, and provide authors with arguments, insights and words for their own writing. A phenomenological language should therefore be heterogeneous, support contradicting views and novel thinking, and above all, try to avoid assimilation of difference. A phenomenological language must be anti-authoritarian and seek justice for the other without violation of standpoints, preserve “the non-substitutional uniqueness of the other [...] and not kill by betraying it to the general” (van Manen 2000, p. 323). This means that an unspecialized phenomenological language does not aim at representing social conventions, norms and routines, but opens for nearness to

life, divergency and asymmetry, and recognizes ruptures, discontinuity, chaos and crises. The one who speaks through phenomenological writing and research is expected to speak with their own voice, and not on behalf of a representative system, even if the system represents a phenomenological society. These are high ideals and big words that easily are victims for a pragmatic practice. Mollenhauer, however, in his book *Forgotten Connections. On Culture and Upbringing*, translated into English in 2014, presents as his major advice to educators to keep open the conversation about the condition and premises for education. I suggest that we appropriate his advice to be critical also for professional publication if the process and aims for this practice should serve democratic and public interests and purposes.

References

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ⁱ Etymonline.com/publication