

## Aesthetics, new media and phenomenology

Phenomenology provides valuable insights to articulate the nature and experience of new media (Richardson, 2005, 2007; Heinzl et al., 2010; Majkut and Carrillo Canán, 2010). Phenomenology is a philosophical movement started by Edmund Husserl (1913; 1931) during the first decades of the 20th Century and further developed by different research approaches and philosophical doctrines over Europe and beyond (Moran, 1999; Cimino, and Costa, 2012; Kockelmans, 1967).

Phenomenology focuses on how phenomena appear to us through experience or in our consciousness. Consciousness is directed towards something – the intentional object – and is intentional as it refers to phenomena, which refer to consciousness – so consciousness is always consciousness of something (Moran, 2013; Mabaquiao, 2005). The relation between the act intending the object (noesis) and the object intended (noema) is called the correlational structure of intentionality, meaning that each pole cannot be understood apart from the other (Dreyfus and Hall, 1982; Rassi and Zeiae, 2015). Husserl (1936) developed phenomenology out of his critique of positivism, that separates the subject from the life-world (Lebenswelt) and reduces philosophy to scientific knowledge. In order to return back to the things themselves and their essences, he proposed the method of phenomenological reduction or *epokhé*, which refers to the suspension of judgment about the studied phenomenon (de Warren, 2014; Fink, 1981; Bernet, 2016).

Husserl's followers have criticized but also expanded his vision and method of phenomenology, developing different approaches to his theories, such as transcendental, hermeneutic and existential phenomenology (Kafle, 2011; Costa, Franzini, and Spinicci, 2002; Gadamer, 1994). Researches about art become quite popular among phenomenologists (Embree and Sepp, 2010; Ecker, 1998; Scaramuzza, 1976), even though Husserl has given little attention to it: the artist is the one who gives forms to intentionality, and the artwork is a living creation with intersubjective existence, through which we can reach the *Erlebnisse* of art (Luft, 1999; Costa, 1999).

For example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1948) challenges Husserl's transcendental consciousness by positing it as bodily incarnated into the world: it is the body-subject, as a percipient perceptibles, which perceives. Perception is characterised by reversibility: the body can touch something, but also be touched. In his final works Merleau-Ponty

(1961;1964) articulates an indirect ontology, or ontology of “the flesh of the world”, where subject and object viscerally inhere to each other (Cloonan, 2010) . Reversibility between artist and artwork is particularly powerful as the artist is the one who touches and communicates the two extremes of visible and invisible (Quinn, 2009; Mazis, 2012).

Similarly, Mikel Dufrenne (1953; 1989) analyzes aesthetic experience as a bodily comprehension of sensuous expression conveying truth. He first examines the aesthetic object, then the perception of such object, considering the two terms as inseparable. Artworks become aesthetic objects when are aesthetically perceived in their meaning and sensuous. Aesthetic objects exist in order to be perceived by spectators, and are ultimately perceived through feeling, which operates as transcendental organ. The work is characterized by the notion of depth because it requires the total presence of the subject; the aesthetic experience reveals the presence of both artists and spectators, and has a transcendental or a priori dimension which enables the reconciliation of subject and object, creating an us rather than a public (Franzini, 1996; Feezell, 1980; Manesco, 1977). Art can convey truth “because both art and reality are themselves only aspects of an all-encompassing being (Dufrenne, 1953, p539). The existential apriori knowledge is already possessed by the subject, thus it is virtual in the sense of possibility (Bekesi, 1999).

On the other hand, Roman Ingarden (1931; 1961) illustrates an ontology of the artwork conceived as a heterogeneous stratified creation, and differentiates the work of art from the aesthetic object, which is the concretion, or concretization, of the work (Iser, 1972; Scaramuzza, 2012; Mitscherling, 1997). He emphasizes the fundamental structure common to all literary works, without considering their intrinsic value.

I also strongly refer to Luciano Anceschi (1936; 1974; 1986), who offers a phenomenological theory of poetry and literature, focusing on poetics and literary institutions, while working as theorist and militant reviewer. Questioning neoidealistic aesthetics, he opposes its concept of close system by proposing an open systematic, understood as a system that forms itself through its structures and integrates the partial schemes into it, thus both theoretical and pragmatic perspective (1962; 1981; 1995). Aesthetics is ordered by the aesthetic idea, a transcendental autonomous methodological principle which is neither metaphysical nor a priori. Anceschi moves directly from the lived and concrete experience of art: to keep art alive theories need to start and continuously refer to experience. He was strongly

influenced by Antonio Banfi (1947; 1962), who introduced phenomenology in Italy, Paul Valery (1924; Crescimanno, 2006) and John Dewey. Dewey (1934; 1950) defines art in terms of experience and distinguishes between experience in general and "an" experience, which has individual and singular quality affecting our lives. The art process is considered as the development of an experience. The artwork is not an object but "the construction of an integral experience through the interaction between organic and environmental conditions and energies" (1934, p86) as it has vital value able to communicate emotions and meanings stimulating the imagination (Franzini, 2007; Gotshalk, 1964; Diodato, 2007).

According to phenomenological aesthetics, subject - as body-subject - and object inhere to each other in a reversible relationship as dialectical poles. Intentionality, self-consciousness, embodiment, and intersubjectivity emerge as key concepts. Referring to Merleau-Ponty and Dufrenne, our relation with new media is a body-tool relation. Aesthetic experience is also an embodied process, which exceeds a purely sensory perception. Perception is presentational, because the object is bodily present. Following Anceschi and Dewey, art is an experience profoundly connected to our natural and cultural environment. Therefore, theories need to move directly from the lived and concrete experience of art, and to give value to the notion of feeling. Phenomenology begins to be a methodology towards the concrete and recognizes the organic dynamism of experience, The epoché is methodologically intended, so denies the possibility of an essentialistic reduction. The phenomenological method proceeds with evaluations as hypotheses constantly verified, which constitute a dynamic and open order of relationships. Phenomenology can offer significant contributions to the study of aesthetics and new media.

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