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## Phenomenology: Where Is It and What Is In It For Us?

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### ABSTRACT

The new research interest in phenomenology brings with it the challenges it has faced in the past, especially phenomenology itself. This essay-styled paper is about the availability of phenomenology to education specialists. Phenomenology is approached here through a survey and then pursued as an approach to education. It does so by asking two questions: Where does phenomenology stand today and what does it bring to educators? Phenomenology as an activity is presented in an undistorted way, showing its availability, and is illustrated with examples of the thinking of important 20<sup>th</sup> century figures. The tools that phenomenology provides are explicated. The essay includes my own experiences of phenomenology as a musician-musicologist and concludes with a brief characterisation of education as a situation rather than a body of knowledge or a technique. It suggests, finally, that the most fruitful relationship between phenomenology and education would be a tool to orient and possibly change what defines the current situation.

**Keywords:** Phenomenology, Education, Method, Wicked problem, Skilful coping

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology, I argue in this paper, has become its own barrier to entry: it is a word used by as many practitioners from as many disciplines as they can attach intuitive meaning to it to capture their purpose of the moment (Tymieniecka, 2002; Adams & van Manen, 2008; Berrios, 1989). The term has become an umbrella term for so many activities that it can in itself be an obstacle to grasping the core principles and unifying elements of the field (Berrios, 1989). Despite its widespread scholarly use, few situations and applications that are now called phenomenological are explained in phenomenological terms (Giorgi, 2008).

Most often, phenomenology is an academic shorthand for an enquiry or explanation that follows autoethnographic lines, develops a narrative from a first-person perspective, or defends subjectivity as an ineffable and inaccessible component

of a learning and teaching situation (Smith, 2022). In such cases, phenomenology, which has represented a radical departure in philosophy since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is left out. Those who use phenomenology as a term for such descriptive generalisations usually end up in the territory aptly described by John Dewey in his pragmatic account of learning (Dewey, 2022), or the ethnomethodologists in their frame- and interaction-based accounts of situations such as classrooms (Macbeth, 2010).

How did phenomenology, a prudent research programme with scrupulously delineated concerns, come to be a quickly abandoned starting point for an eclectic application of methods that owe little to phenomenology and contribute even less to it? Is it that phenomenology, as St Augustine said of time, is something everyone thinks they know until they are asked to explain it? (Augustine & Chadwick, 2008). Today, as Graham

Harman (2007) revisits phenomenology phenomenologically to address the impasse in the work of thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, its new prominence and ambition make its sincere misjudgement in so many disciplines worthy of recognition, or at least exploration.

It may well be that phenomenology has been condemned to profound misunderstanding by its friends as well as its enemies. In today's context of philosophical, social and personal urgency, often highlighted by Deleuze, Badiou and Žižek, can phenomenology emerge in its appropriate dimension and fundamental radicality? This is the question that underlies my argument.

This essay is divided into two sections. The first half discusses how phenomenology is available to education professionals as a means of gaining a new perspective on their practices and framing them as a project, with a brief emic perspective of my own experience. It also outlines how phenomenology offers powerful tools for clarifying situations, worlds and projects. The second half focuses on the education sector as a whole and its stakeholders. I propose that the problematic nature of education in a particular society often results from a misalignment of stakeholders, leading to what is called a 'wicked problem' (see Tromp, 2018; Brown et al., 2010). The problem is 'wicked' because attempts to alleviate the problem between stakeholders only exacerbate it. Instead of addressing this problem through internal reforms, education experts and advocates should take on the task of managing and mitigating the misunderstandings between stakeholders. Thus, it may be beneficial for educators to engage in a proactive process of stakeholder management to create better conditions for themselves. The phenomenological tools should be made accessible by education professionals and

policy advocates to help stakeholders identify, evaluate and effectively use new forms of interpretation and action within their institutions, interests, mandates and key concerns. My own experiences of phenomenology as an educator bear reference here.

## **2 WHAT IS PHENOMENOLOGY?**

Introductions, analyses or historical overviews of phenomenology have already been attempted (Moran, 2010; Sokolowski, 2000; Spiegelberg & Schuhmann, 1994). This essay therefore explores the role of education professionals and their practices, focusing on the use of phenomenology. Education professionals, like other professionals (medical, legal, engineering, etc.), have expertise in identifying and solving problems related to learning and knowledge management (Shariq, 1997). However, these professionals must also be able to justify their methods and techniques to students who wish to enter the education sector and who will be assessed through standards-based examinations and assessments (Anikin et al., 2021). The latter requires education professionals to consider the larger project of education, including its quality and relevance, as judged by stakeholders such as the state, private sector and civil society (Gunter & Fitzgerald, 2013; Popkewitz, 1996; Green, 1990).

It was my journey with phenomenology that shaped my experience as both a performing musician and an academic in the university context of South Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. As a musician, it enabled me to engage with music in a meaningful and purposeful way. By experiencing music through a phenomenological approach, I was better able to appreciate the nuances and expressions of the music I was performing. In the academic context, my phenomenological perspective informed my understanding of the complex relationship between performing musicians

and their audiences. In paying attention to the experience of the person, rather than the more traditional approach of privileging the analysis of objects and their properties, I was able to develop a deeper and more meaningful insight into the objects, such as music, and their effects upon the audience.

Overall, phenomenology has had a significant influence on my understanding and appreciation of music, both as a performer and an academic. Its focus on the experience of the individual has enabled me to develop more intentional and meaningful relationships with both music and the people with whom I interact on a daily basis. But, as I discovered in my postgraduate teaching, as a phenomenon and an experience, a philosophical approach and a practice, it compelled further scrutiny.

At first glance, phenomenology seemed more like a series of archipelagos than a transferable line of tradition. On closer inspection, one finds that it is more like a vast and intricate network of tributaries and rivulets leading into the same ocean of common understanding.

## **2.1 Phenomenology's archipelagos: A crash course**

When Edmund Husserl proposed a phenomenological programme that could give philosophy a different status (Husserl, 1982), he was opposing what he saw as an unviable encroachment on the basic understanding and availability of concepts by the human and biological sciences of his time. Husserl was less interested in erecting a wall around philosophy that would stand against the claims of psychology to explain thought, or evolutionary biology to explain the inherited dispositions of mind and behaviour, or culture and history to provide a complete context for the thoughts and ideas of each epoch, than in creating a way to entertain thought and experience without becoming entangled in the hidden obligations they entail. In short, for Husserl,

psychology, experimental psychology, evolutionary biology, explanatory historiography, no less than neuroscience, cognitive studies and artificial intelligence today, presuppose a certain metaphysics, which is also the condition for their acceptance and practical feasibility. Husserl's aim was to develop a way of conceiving of these specific metaphysics and regional ontologies not as theses to be put forward and subsequently discussed, but as the enduring and unavoidable costs that accompany any attempt to make human experience explicit in scientific or even semi epistemological terms, or to explain human action in a way that can be divided into evidence and explanation. He agreed that all these efforts, which are attempts to explain the 'human', 'social' and 'cultural' as objects of knowledge, have their practical uses in justifying activities such as managing an organisation, allocating social goods, designing learning and structuring experiences to avoid trauma or harm. It would be a mistake to imagine Husserl as a late-blooming romantic who opposed explanations and technologies applied to humans for their better management, self-management and normative intelligibility. Rather, he was a high modernist critic of what Michel Foucault and others have taught us to see as the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century tools through which Western societies controlled themselves to become governable and more predictable by understanding how people can be represented and how they can represent themselves. For readers equipped with knowledge of biopower, governmentality and other Foucauldian tools for assessing the costs of a self-representing society, Husserl's phenomenology appears less as an attempt to rescue philosophy from replacement by a multitude of positive sciences than as a progressive insight into the ways in which these positive sciences and other self-explanatory systems are entangled in their own metaphysical basis of liabilities and costs of the knowledge and representations they achieve. In other

words, Husserl philosophically ended the era of unproblematic representation initiated by René Descartes, developed by Immanuel Kant and universalised by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel by removing representation from a comprehensive account of the philosophical field and replacing it with the extremely modern, surprisingly radical functioning of the concept of intentionality (Sartre, 1970, p.4). It was Husserl's companion and admirer, Martin Heidegger, who stated that Husserl "brought the great tradition of Western philosophical thought to completion" (Dahlstrom, 1996, p. 95).

Those who bring about the end of a dominant era of thought are often plagued by the difficulty of describing that era because their ability to intervene depends directly on its weakening. While it may seem that the 19<sup>th</sup> century (and here we must include Émile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud and Ferdinand de Saussure) productively shifted the project of representation from the speculative and conjectural foundations of Descartes, Kant and Hegel to methods that made use of experimentation and the explanatory tools of the natural sciences, effectively naturalising representation as if it were a fact synonymous with chlorine, genes and uranium. It was Husserl's insight that this apparent consolidation was a sign that the metaphysical commitment of the philosophy of representation had been exhausted, and that what looked like the final emergence of science from a philosophical ocean was a desperate attempt to negotiate the various costs of being able to assert a universal naturalism as the metaphysical basis of a subtle, widespread and multidisciplinary application of the representational programme.

Husserl wanted to start philosophy afresh without the debts mentioned above by dissolving its relation to representation, for this meant not only abandoning human

science but also the legacies of Hegel, Kant and Descartes in abeyance - phenomenology thus has the property of being a constant beginning. Insofar as it expands as a programme, phenomenology must carry within it this property of constant new beginning. If this does not happen, the phenomenological field is quickly re-infused with representational thinking, which was the lifeblood in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, leading to a bizarre eclecticism that explains the way phenomenology is used as a component of various hybrids in the academy today. The phenomenological field is not so much a promising terrain of conquest and exploration as an elaborate and subtle quarantine system against the multiple forms of the return of representational thought.

Let us assume that it is true that phenomenology is more like an archipelago than a road between Husserl and our time. In this case, it is because of its constantly repeated call to begin anew the endeavour to go beyond representation. Martin Heidegger (Heidegger & Stambaugh, 1996), for example, has taken up and reshaped much of Husserl's work because he discovered its starting point in an ontology (Agbo, 2018) that was inaccessible to Husserl because the latter flirted with the Kantian transcendental project and the constructivism of Descartes. Heidegger's ontology is therefore also understood as a starting point immune to the epistemological legacies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which continued to haunt Husserl despite his heroic efforts to escape them. Looking at the second (Martin Heidegger), third (Jean-Paul Sartre) and fourth (Maurice Merleau-Ponty) archipelagos, it is clear that Sartre (Sartre & Moran, 2020), a reader of Heidegger alongside Hans-Georg Gadamer, chose a deliberate strategy, which proved quite offensive to Heidegger, to invoke the Cartesian *cogito* in the midst of phenomenological ontology in order to eviscerate it and show that it was and is always the site of emptiness, the form of

nothingness, rather than the foundation of the representational project. Merleau-Ponty, in turn, has conscientiously reconstructed the human sciences' argument about the structure of behaviour with his *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty et al., 1996), which is rooted in the naturalistic assumptions of the human sciences about the mechanism of perception, thought and action at the heart of this reconstruction. Merleau-Ponty (1996) restarts phenomenology with the primacy of perception, destroying the claim of the human sciences to invoke the body, the organism as a naturalistic foundation. Starting from the obligatory phenomenological new beginning, he shows that the science of man is inherently ambiguous and an unstable mixture of transcendental and empirical metaphysics. It is safe to assert that the phenomenological new beginning that Husserl both exemplified and recommended is a way of identifying and liquidating the metaphysical commitment of representation in its naturalistic phase, leaving it floundering in a paradoxical rather than a grounded relation to itself.

## 2.2 Instruments made available by phenomenology

From these brief sketches of a productive way of looking at phenomenology in the mainstream of philosophical endeavour in Germany and France, it is clear that phenomenology has developed powerful tools to help discard inherited and habitual ways of thinking, in some cases even entire modern disciplines, that can be used to create free spaces or liberated zones from which research and action can begin anew, unencumbered by the constant inertia that pulls contemporary thinking back to the representational project or forward to the elaboration of new naturalistic foundations. Three projects for which phenomenology has been indispensable are those of Simone de Beauvoir (Beauvoir et al., 2012), who has

shown that women's struggles cannot become effective until they have formulated a new way of being and acting that is sufficiently detached from the metaphysical presuppositions of the patriarchal order and the dictates of prevailing common sense. Anyone who reads de Beauvoir today (and there should be more) will be struck by the extent to which her orientation towards women's goals is an orientation in a war of one metaphysics against another.

A second figure is Frantz Fanon (2021, 2008, 2007), who remains a mystery and continues to attract many exegetes from today's human-scientific, historicist and other neo-representational frameworks, as if elaborating the psychology or sociology of liberation. A clear reading of Fanon that acknowledges Sartre reveals Fanon as a lost practitioner of phenomenology, since he directs his attacks and recommendations not to criticism or moral denunciation, and certainly not to theories, but to the creation of an atmosphere in which the metaphysics of colonisers, invaders and occupiers no longer has oxygen.

A third oblique phenomenologist is the anti-psychiatrist Ronald David Laing (Laing, 1990) who, thanks to his insightful reading of Sartre, correctly recognised that the politics initiated in the 1960s was a politics of experience and not a politics of classes and institutions. Only a politics of experience could mobilise the resources of the political to question and point out possible alternatives that were consistently and oppressively produced by a politics that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was increasingly focused on the humanities and their social engineering of self-representation.

Today, the question would be whether phenomenology, even once clearly recognised, has not contextually exhausted itself in the necessary struggle to find room to manoeuvre in a world increasingly saturated with the project of representation

finely sliced and pierced into the pores of 20<sup>th</sup> century society by the social engineering zeal of American possessive individualism, Soviet communism and German fascism. I argue for a perspective in which Foucault (Foucault & Ewald, 2003) and Deleuze (2017) have shown in different ways that our societies are not far from the era of social engineering that has produced so many of the strenuous new beginnings in the history of phenomenology. Moreover, the global order of the 1990s is little more than a very economic kind of social engineering offered to whole nations and regions to apply to themselves when their territory is opened up for global use.

An observer of philosophy during and after the 1980s would be amazed at the number of reclaims that occurred. Instead of a new dawn prepared by the new left, Western Marxism, a politics steeped in the diversification of identity and culture, and a reckoning with modernity through postmodernism, philosophy at this time saw the emergence of Richard Rorty's attempt (1980) to dissolve the hold of analysis and expand the task of philosophy to include Ludwig Wittgenstein alongside Heidegger and Jacques Derrida as companions of Dewey's pragmatism. Umberto Eco (1976), considered a major philosopher whose point of departure is the problems of culture and its modalities, increasingly drew on Charles Peirce's labyrinth of thought to challenge the dominant conception of meaning and its mechanisms derived from de Saussure's linguistics. Given that Rorty and Eco each revive key figures of pragmatism, it is not surprising that Robert Brandom (2001) revisits the analytic project of philosophy as an explanation based on Rorty's pragmatism, which he extends to include Hegel.

In a different philosophical orientation, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014), who call themselves post-Marxists, take on a new

reading of Antonio Gramsci as a tactician and an invocation of Jacques Lacan as an anti-fundamentalist to bring a position to the project of European struggles that can best be described as pragmatic. Žižek (2019) is widely known for invoking Hegel, who jokingly claimed to be trying to prove that he was a Lacanian (Hanlon & Žižek, 2001). The basis of Žižek's extensive research is the return to German idealism in terms that liberate them from representational thinking and the naturalism inherent in psychoanalysis (Žižek & Daly, 2013). These examples relating to pragmatism are not so much evidence that pragmatism is an unjustly neglected heritage, but rather a sign that contemporary thought no longer wants to be guided by critique and that it therefore aspires to move directly into philosophical opposition to the endeavours that have rightly called themselves critical and analytical since Descartes.

The revival of pragmatism suggests that contemporary thought is returning to the metaphysical liabilities and presuppositions that have dominated that thought for the last two centuries. In doing so, they are approaching the project, or at least a place, to which the project of phenomenology can return as a radical new beginning achieved through the abolition of presuppositions. That this phenomenology would look different from its predecessors is to be expected because of the discontinuity that the phenomenological project exhibits on its way from Husserl through Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty to de Beauvoir, Fanon and Laing. The place where this new phenomenology emerged was the recent coming together of four otherwise very different thinkers under their self-chosen label of 'Speculative Realists' (Harman, 2010a). What united them was the follow-up to a book by Alain Badiou's student Quentin Meillassoux entitled *After Finitude* (Meillassoux, 2009), in which he sets out the central importance and problematics of what he calls

'correlationalism' in Western philosophy. Meillassoux's thesis enabled the identification of otherwise individually complex philosophers such as Deleuze, Žižek and his teacher Badiou as philosophers of relation. The group of speculative realists was then able to formulate philosophical projects that moved out of the shadow of these late 20<sup>th</sup> century giants towards a project of speculative realism rather than speculative idealism, culminating, in their view, in relationalism. A prominent representative of this group is Graham Harman (2010, 2007), who pioneered the translation of phenomenologists and reinterpreted Heidegger (Harman, 2007) to develop speculative realism in phenomenological terms, while promising that his anti-relationalism will restore the phenomenological project to the forefront of 21<sup>st</sup> century philosophy.

### 3 PHENOMENOLOGY AND EDUCATION

Before advocating or criticising phenomenology, let us consider the situation of educators. Since Aristotle, teaching has been considered the third impossible profession, along with healing and governing (Aristotle et al., 2009). What makes professions impossible is neither a lack of experience nor expertise, but the number and diversity of stakeholders (Horton et al., 2015) who depend on good governing, healing and teaching. Before recommending yet another tool to educators who already operate in an eclectic teaching and research environment and can never agree on a main approach or widely shared perspective, it is worth examining the expectations that educators and their students need to meet. It may well be that the constantly shifting affiliations in educational teaching and research are more a reaction to the permanent difficulties in aligning stakeholders (Gunter & Fitzgerald, 2013; Popkewitz, 1996; Green, 1990) than the result of a lack of access to the right

concepts with which educators can consolidate and represent their field.

Educators operate in an environment where civil society and the private and public sectors each believe they have the primary interest in ensuring the value, purpose and content of education. For politicians, it is the object of a manifesto promise, the corresponding policy and the accountable recipient of budgets. For civil society, it is the battleground and test bed for social justice, insofar as education prepares people for equal access to opportunities. For the private sector, education is an asset that turns employment into a career investment, and the quality and type of education is critical to the return on that investment. Based on this quick representation of stakeholders, the education sector must negotiate with three different forms of expectations from the three significant sectors of society and convince them to see the value of each other's perspective if the education process and content is not to be monopolised and shaped by the concerns of either civil society, the state or the market at any given time. The educator must therefore often advocate for his budget and for his necessary latitude and autonomy with stakeholders who are all end users of education but cannot agree that their mutual perspectives should be treated equally. Each of the stakeholders wants to get the maximum benefit from the funds or credibility they all grant to the educator, hoping to somehow minimise or bypass the other stakeholders because of the urgency of their concerns.

In the quest to 'live' phenomenology, much is demanded of the educator. In addition to the recalcitrant and exclusivist stakeholders, the educator must convince the expectant users in society to adopt a typical method so that the educational process is able to justify its approach, develop dimensions and indicators that are appropriate to it, and

work within the framework of a unified and measurable strategy and policy, at least for a given political or economic cycle.

If the educator insists on developing his strategy and unified approach for the sake of consistency and reliability of results, he will inevitably be accused by the three stakeholders of being introverted and failing to meet their expectations of a well-prepared graduate, resulting in endless and fruitless disputes, for example, between university teachers and employers in government, the market or civil society, who will each in their own way claim to be burdened with the costly and unnecessary retraining of already qualified individuals to meet the particular requirements of their sector (Mouton et al., 2012). They therefore call for the national knowledge base to be actively managed from early childhood development through schooling and university to work-integrated learning, lifelong learning, multiple active education pathways, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), continuing vocational education, reskilling and preparation for self-employment or entrepreneurship. In short, the demands on educators and the expansion of their responsibilities are constantly increasing as each education stakeholder encounters new problems in their field. Therefore, education has become far more of an impossible profession than Aristotle, an educator of a king, realised. Educators, who are professionals in that they perform their duties in the public interest while protecting the public from themselves and from harmful impostors, are coping with a 'wicked problem' (Tromp, 2018; Brown et al., 2010) that stems from the near impossibility of managing two of the processes of alignment of interest without exacerbating the remaining one. Could it be that educators, like abused partners, have a kind of Stockholm syndrome in which they see the problems of their dominant stakeholders as their very own problems, while being too attuned to those

stakeholders' demands and harsh on themselves for their inability to meet them?

### **3.1 Against phenomenology as a method**

If the scenario above is indeed the situation and dilemma of educators, what can phenomenology offer educators to assist them in their predicament? It is certainly not the case that phenomenology is a method, for nothing in philosophy, when conscientiously examined rather than remotely scoured for seemingly useful tools, is merely a method. Phenomenology arose to complete a long cycle that began in early modern philosophy with Descartes and was perfected by Kant. It proposed methods to order experience, thought and action and make them more reliable and responsible. The attempt to revive a method by naturalising research, using models and analogies from biology, linguistics and economics to carry out such concrete investigations as psychology, interpretive cultural studies and sociology, has yielded little of the results promised in her various manifestos and critically refined in her constant polemics. Its static universe was evident to Husserl when he proposed a philosophy of the concept and a philosophy of experience on entirely new foundations that eschewed the transcendental foundation Kant provided to the generalised Cartesian project as well as the dogmatic naturalism that underlies the task of the human and social sciences, which are now gathering recruits through artificial intelligence (AI), neurological foundations and other contemporary mutations of biology, economics and linguistics. Hence, phenomenology works out what thought and experience can be when they are no longer mortgaged to a method. It would be unfortunate if educators took the challenging and in some respects feral path of phenomenology in the hope of finding a better method than in the many descendants of Descartes and Kant, or a stable and intuitive foundation for and within the human sciences that lies above or below the



culture wars that 'overgrow' them and the materialist metaphysics that is thought to underpin them (Harman, 2011). Phenomenology has been proposed to show that the era of methods and its goals, despite its scepticism and appreciation of critique, is in fact a modern form of dogmatism. The path of phenomenology leads from one skirmish to the next against this dogmatism, which always presents itself as critical, analytical and profoundly anti-dogmatic.

### 3.2 Adapting phenomenology

What, then, can phenomenology offer the educator who seeks not to demonstrate the possibility of education but to show that, despite its impossibilities, it can produce results capable of sustaining the loyalty of its agents? Hubert Dreyfuss (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2008) was one of the most adept recent exponents of phenomenology in its 20<sup>th</sup> century form. He performed the balancing act of explaining phenomenology as an account of the disclosure of worlds using little more than the resources of what he called "skilful coping" (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2014). In advocating for phenomenology, we should be no less ambitious than Dreyfuss and commend its unique stance and ongoing inner transformation to educators who, more than anyone else, are called to continually uncover new possibilities in the worlds imposed on them by their discordant stakeholders. Fulfilling this task in a fundamental sense may only be possible through phenomenology, and it may be a new form of creative professionalism that can be achieved in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Educators must rely on their 'skilful coping' because they have little else and little prospect of anything more substantial in a situation where the demands on them, as well as the conditions of their legal and financial survival, depend on their recognising and expanding new scopes of action that only their participation in the worlds of their stakeholders can reveal to them.

In an increasingly globalised and interconnected world, it is essential for educators to develop innovative approaches to learning and teaching that promote critical thinking, interdisciplinary approaches and creativity. Phenomenology offers us such a perspective on the way we perceive and experience the world, as it emphasises the importance of individual subjective experiences rather than a blanket approach to learning. To illustrate, I focus finally here on how I have benefited from applying phenomenological approaches to educational growth from the perspective of a professional musician who is also a musicologist.

An educator all my life, I have found in phenomenology an invaluable tool for understanding the educational process. Through a phenomenological approach, individuals gain insights into their own experiences and the experiences of others. For example, through the experiences in my jazz improvisation class, I found that students had unique experiences in exploring their own creative process. They were able to better understand their own experiences and those of their classmates, as well as the creative process as a whole. This allowed my students to have a deeper understanding of their own creative process as well as the creative process of their classmates, which led to more meaningful educational experiences.

As a performing musician, who is an academic in a music department at a South African university, I faced, along with many others in the same boat, an interesting phenomenon in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Music as an academic field is typically conceptual and analytical, rooted in Western styles and approaches, often at the expense of African-influenced forms. At the same time, many of us as performers engage with popular and local styles of music that have their own methods, approaches and aesthetic values. Balancing these two worlds, academic and

performing, can be a challenge, to put it mildly.

The experience of this 'in-between' of academic and performing is best understood through a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology has enabled me to look at the experience of the individual in this space as the primary interpretive guide. By looking at the experience of the performer/academic and recognising my actions in this 'in-between' of academic and performative, I have been able to better understand the process of engaging with this duality. I recognised the uniqueness of this experience on an individual basis and appreciated how the skills, techniques and approaches the performer has developed through academic studies, influence and shape the approaches we bring to performing and engaging with our music.

In terms of education, phenomenology can serve as a guide for teachers and learners alike. It offers educators a way to recognise and appreciate the unique experiences that each learner brings to the classroom and the value that lies in individual approaches. It places the emphasis on learners' experiences rather than the structures of the curriculum or established pedagogical frameworks. Similarly, it enables learners to reflect on their own involvement in the learning process and recognise the value of their perspectives and knowledge.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

To conclude, my research endeavours show how phenomenology has influenced me in the field of music and highlight the potential of phenomenological approaches for pedagogical growth. Through my research and practice, I have found a way to merge the theoretical and practical aspects of music by engaging with it in an experiential and reflective way. I believe this can serve as an example to

educators on how to make teaching in general more dynamic and engaging by cultivating creativity and critical thinking, ultimately inspiring individuals and the class as a whole towards further growth and development.

Phenomenology thus has been many things since its first consistent proposal by Husserl. Yet each of these things can be understood by grasping the situation in which philosophers like Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty found themselves, and in which they would have failed or been forced to ironically compromise with old doctrines, ideals and methods if they had not been able to orient themselves. The strength of phenomenology has enabled these philosophers to work out this orientation into a project. By applying their talent and resources to this project, they became the most reliable guideposts in those situations that almost destroyed them. In this sense, phenomenology should be prominent among the tools and instruments with which pedagogy negotiates its turbulent place in the world, not because it could alleviate or calm that turbulence or give it a better foundation or a higher standpoint, but because it could enable the turbulence itself to become productive.

As a movement in philosophy, phenomenology sought to go beyond the inherited conditioning of the past. In this way it challenged the doctrines of modern philosophy from Descartes to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. I have argued that phenomenology is hardly understood as a method and still less as a critique, but provides a set of insights proposed as primary and provisional to all thought, perception and action, for which other philosophies and methods would then appear as obvious presuppositions and their kinds of metaphysics.

Despite the many systematists and gatekeepers around the main phenomenologists

since Husserl, I see the search for a definitive formulation of phenomenology as merely an indication of rent-seeking. I therefore argue for a situational use of phenomenology that can gradually enrich itself by forming a non-malignant circle with past phenomenological achievements.

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