

# Time and Matter: Historicity, Facticity and the Question of Phenomenological Realism

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**Abstract** This paper deals with the question of historical facticity in the phenomenological tradition. I argue that taking historicity into consideration in its factual constitution means transgressing the realm of the primordial or existential temporality. Following Ricoeur’s discussion of the idea of the “referential status of the past,” the question of the material foundation of historical meaning-formation, i.e., relation between temporality and materiality will be brought into the forefront of phenomenological investigations. It is with this context in mind that I argue that exploring the conditions of historicity with regard to its factual and material determinations should assume a realist position in phenomenology.

**Keywords** Phenomenology · Historicity · Facticity · Materiality · Realism

## Phenomenology, History and Facticity

Questions of history and historicity do not seem to enjoy a particularly wide currency in today’s phenomenological discourses (some exceptions include: Carr 2014; Lembeck 1988; Steinbock 1995). Indeed, this topic has only been discussed sporadically, even in the context of contemporary phenomenological studies on intersubjectivity, culture and society. This situation is all the more striking given that the denial of the significance of history with respect to the human condition appears to be counterintuitive. To be sure, most philosophers would agree not only that there is such a thing as “history” (or “histories”), but also—as Heidegger put it nearly a 100 years ago—that history is an “essential factor of our time” insofar as

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“we live in, from and with history” (1998: 33). In other words, the claim that history is a universal horizon upon which everything that has ever come into being can be in one way or another meaningfully situated seems to enjoy commonsensical plausibility. And even if philosophers tend to consider history as fragmentary, discontinuous and consisting of a multiplicity of different regimes and forms, rather than attributing to it a holistic meaning (or talking about the “history of Being” for example), we also tend to attribute some kind of *historical sense* to virtually everything that *exists*. Yet, thinking about what history really is does not constitute a very appealing phenomenological task for the contemporary scholar. Indeed, the question as to how one should understand this *universal horizon* is seldom asked with sufficient rigor despite the fact that, no matter how fragmentary, discontinuous and multiple it might be, this horizon seems to be able to leave a mark on everything we know, experience or assume to exist. In effect, it appears that by becoming essentially historical, we have paradoxically become somewhat immune to history.

In principle, a situation like this would justifiably call for phenomenological clarification, not simply because phenomenologists have a mission to take seriously fundamental questions that others take for granted, but also because engaging the problem of history appears to be an essential moment in the historical development of phenomenological philosophy itself. In fact, in the moment of its historical breakthrough, namely in the 1920s, the question of history and historicity appeared to be one of the fundamental problems (*Grundprobleme*) of phenomenological research. In the work of Husserl, and especially in that of Heidegger in which the legacy of Dilthey was pervasive, the topic of history delineated a field of problems that was repeatedly subject to meticulous examination. What is more, this orientation was deemed essential in order to come to terms with the sense and mission of phenomenological research itself. Thus, Husserl’s discussion of the problem of “world” and “life-world” and its cultural development included as its ultimate horizon the examination of the problem of historicity and historical constitution in general (Carr 1974), as did Heidegger’s preoccupation with the question of “existence” and “being in the world” (Bambach 1995).

However, in light of the current attitude toward history, the question can be rightly asked: what remains valid in these phenomenological commitments? Can the prevailing devotion to history manifested in Husserl and Heidegger be understood other than as a once compelling, but in our day rather obsolete attitude that was bound to fall prey to its own historical limitations? In sum, can we still rely on this legacy to revitalize phenomenological interest in the problem of history?

Without a doubt part of the answer lies in the significant *devalorization* and *devitalization* of historical thinking that took place in the development of the phenomenological movement itself. In fact, Husserl and Heidegger had few followers in their respective efforts to systematically explore the dimension of historicity in favor of an authentic phenomenological understanding of man and world. In the works of Ingarden, Fink, Lévinas and even in Schütz, the problem of historicity remained largely unexplored. There is a question as to whether Jan Patočka’s treatment of history in his *Heretical Essays* (1996) and other writings (e.g., 2002) remained within the boundaries of phenomenological research. Furthermore, it is a telling fact that when Sartre and Merleau-Ponty decided to

engage the topic of history in their philosophical works, they turned more to Hegel and Marxism than to the phenomenological tradition for inspiration. The legacy of Heidegger's historical phenomenology also reveals an ambiguity. Although the framework of philosophical hermeneutics inspired by him, especially in Gadamer, has forcefully portrayed history as the ultimate condition for human understanding, this has hardly led scholars to phenomenologically revisit the ontological premises upon which such a historicization of the human condition is anchored.

As far as the "new" French phenomenology is concerned, the balance sheet seems to be even weaker. Apart from some sporadic efforts aimed at integrating historical phenomena into the scope of phenomenological research, as in the case of Michel Henry's *Marx* (1983) and Marc Richir's *Le sublime en politique* (1991), some of the very early works of Jacques Derrida (1989, 2003, 2013) and the remarkable work of Paul Ricoeur (1988, 2007a, b) offer the only major examples of a phenomenological-style engagement with the question of historicity. But, even in Ricoeur's case, one could argue that phenomenology provides the passage for taking up the question of the "historical" rather than the design of its elaboration. Thus, in this latter instance one can wonder if, from a phenomenological point of view, Ricoeur's hermeneutical endeavor offers more than a masterfully orchestrated yet interminable philosophical dispute between instances of historical knowing and historical being.

Even if it is entirely correct to say that phenomenological perspectives on history "are centered in and generated out of the concept of experience" (Carr 2014: 5), this insight does not necessarily help to trace a conclusive path because, unlike in many other phenomenological problems, such as those of intentionality, perception, givenness, affectivity, body, life-world and so on, the notion of "historical experience" does not seem to offer a standard and compelling framework for philosophical description and interrogation that can be applied to further research. In other words, Husserl, Heidegger, Derrida and Ricoeur represent different versions of a phenomenological approach to history, rather than a more or less consolidated methodological or theoretical position. Nevertheless, even if the phenomenological tradition contains no *canonical responses* to the question of history, one can certainly uncover some *canonical presuppositions* that most phenomenological approaches (especially those with Husserlian and Heideggerian aspirations) share in dealing with the question of historicity. Ricoeur already called attention to some of these in the third volume of his *Time and Narrative* (1988: 23–44, 60–96).

Following the path opened by Ricoeur, one could say that (1) considering subjective *temporality* as the exclusive horizon on which the phenomena of historicity should, in one way or another, manifest themselves constitutes the primary principle of phenomenological research that seeks to engage with the question of history. (2) As a second premise, temporality is typically interpreted in the works of Husserl and Heidegger as a *genetic* or *originary horizon* that on the one hand permits historicity to be recaptured in its original subjective or existential state [such as the temporal series of "primal institution or endowment" (*Urstiftung*) in Husserl, or in the form of "happenings or occurrences" (*Geschehen*) in Heidegger]; on the other hand, this horizon exposes historicity as a constitutive layer of human

experience. (3) Finally, this genetic horizon of historicity is portrayed as being constitutive of the *objective order of history* or *world history*. This latter is supposed to characterize the position attributed to historical happenings, events and processes in the world when apprehended in an everyday, mundane sense. In sum—drawing upon one of Heidegger’s essential statements in *Being and Time*—one could say that the phenomenological inquiry into history is typically oriented to capture “to what extent and on the basis of what ontological conditions, does historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) belong, as an essential constitutive state, to the subjectivity of the ‘historical’ subject?” (2001: 434). Within this framework, historicity is to be exposed in its “essential constitutive state” as originary temporality insofar as this latter is understood as the mode of distribution of certain original (*ursprünglich*) “subjective” accomplishments related to the very experience of something having “happened”. To be sure, neither Husserl nor Heidegger meant to limit the scope of phenomenological analysis to the sphere of the so-called historical subjectivity. Yet, their respective efforts to account for the *intersubjective* or *factual* character of history [in the form of generative phenomenology in Husserl, or in Heidegger’s discussion of the question of the historicity of “Being-with-others” (*Mitsein*) and the world] remain predominantly embedded in a transcendental-genetic perspective within which an ultimate constitutive role is consistently ascribed to the sphere of original subjective self-temporalization.

Without a doubt, this set of phenomenological premises can be rightly criticized for its one-sidedness. Ricoeur (1988) has advanced quite far in this criticism, especially as far as the Heideggerian project of historical ontology is concerned. Partly following in his footsteps, I would claim that the most severe limitation of the Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenological approach to history is related to the fact that it renders the difference between original *subjective temporalization* and *historicity* virtually indiscernible. In other words, the phenomenological account of history tends to enclose itself in the realm of subjective or intersubjective constitution grounded in one’s temporal disposition. For this reason, this approach becomes insufficiently equipped to account for the *factual constitution* of historical reality itself. Certainly, the question of the relationship between temporality and facticity does not remain unaddressed in Husserl and Heidegger. But whereas for Husserl facticity indicates almost exclusively the sphere of monadic consciousness in its primordial temporalization in the world, for Heidegger it refers to the realm of ontological effectivity of the self (*Dasein*) in its Being-in-the-world. In effect, in neither of these cases does facticity seem to be endowed with a *historical meaning* other than that of the world-experiencing consciousness or existence. Thus, as a last resort, the “facticity” of history is simply derived from or mediated by the “fact” (*Faktum*) of the originary temporalization of the self.

By contrast, I would argue that taking historicity into consideration in its very factual constitution should mean precisely transgressing the realm of the primordial or existential order of temporality. In other words, if facticity can be characterized as properly historical it is because it refers to the ontological structure of not only what “happens” *to us*, but also what happens *without us*; it indicates not only the ontological concreteness of our belongingness to *our cultural and material world*, but also the effectivity of such worlds *beyond* our reach. In this sense, the factual

character of history cannot simply be derived from or explained by subjective temporal awareness and its world constitutive agency. Taken in its most elementary ontological form, facticity should rather be related to the “fact” of us being radically exposed to something other than *our own self and our own world*. Accordingly, what historical facticity is supposed to bring to the fore is primarily the existence or “being there” of *other times* and *alien worlds*. Phenomenologically speaking, what we are confronted with here is the question of a temporal situation that calls for a categorization in terms of *exteriority*, rather than in terms of the constitutive elements of a subjective or existential interiority. Thus, insofar as interrogating the “fact” of history leads us to the confrontation with the problem of temporal constitution in general, the analysis of historical facticity should embark on the path of the *de-subjectivization* and *pluralization* of time. Also, the question should be raised whether taking into account the *material* constitution of the world reveals an essential element for understanding historical facticity. From this perspective, the principal question pertaining to the phenomenological study of historical facticity could be formulated as follows: how, to what extent and on the basis of what ontological conditions can “historical reality” be constituted *beyond* and *outside* the horizon of “subjective” temporality and world constitutive subjective agency?

## A New Perspective on Historical Facticity

In his major philosophical works devoted to historical matters—*Time and Narrative* and *Memory, History, Forgetting*—Paul Ricoeur made significant steps in the aforementioned direction. His efforts to reframe the phenomenological problem of temporality and historicity by means of a novel and pragmatic articulation of the question of historical meaning-formation are of utmost importance—all the more so because Ricoeur sought not only to critically revisit the phenomenological theories of time and history (especially those of Husserl and Heidegger), but also to offer, through an intensive dialogue with certain historiographical theories, an in-depth analysis of the ontological premises of what he calls “historical condition”. In arguing for what one could label a “realist conception of history,” Ricoeur defines this condition in *Memory, History, Forgetting* as the “realm of existence placed under the sign of a past as being no longer and having been” (2007b: 280). In this respect, Ricoeur’s strong commitment to defend the idea of the “referential status of the past” goes hand in hand with his defense of the thesis of the ontological sovereignty of past events and occurrences. In doing so, he seeks to delimit the constitutive role of the temporal performance of historical subjects in the process of historical meaning-formation. The analysis of “trace,” along with that of “vestige,” “ruin,” “document,” “testimony” and so on—defined as concrete manifestations of the historical past—further reinforces this ontological commitment. According to Ricoeur, these “things of the past” disclose a historical horizon in the “positivity of the ‘having been’” that manifests itself across the “negativity of the ‘being no longer’” (2007b: 280). In this manner, he argues that the reality and positivity of the past reveals itself through the material and symbolic inscription of time onto things

and objects. These inscriptions appear as traces that in this function stand for the immutability of the past. As a consequence, the recourse to the notion of *représentance* in *Memory, History, Forgetting*—a concept already used in *Time and Narrative* and translated into English as “standing for” (Ricoeur 1988: 100)—serves to demonstrate the ontological self-sufficiency of the historical past, which, in its effectivity and veridicity, stands for the factual character of historical reality, while providing no ultimate existential or epistemological guarantee for the subjective appropriation or formation of its meaning.

Nevertheless, I would argue that, no matter how instructive they might be, Ricoeur’s analyses of the ontological constitution of the historical past remain far from conclusive. The main reason for their inconclusive nature is that in the moment he succeeds in *Memory, History, Forgetting* in philosophically securing the reality and referential status of the historical past, he shifts his focus almost immediately to the problems of *narration* and *representation* in the spheres of memory and history. In this way, his ontology of the historical condition tends to take an anthropological turn—so much so that one could claim that Ricoeur is engaged more in reconciling different existential and cognitive tenets constitutive of the human historical disposition than in tackling the topic of historical facticity in its proper ontological configuration. Similarly, in *Time and Narrative*, the question of the historical trace becomes absorbed by that of the “mediation” between the subjective (i.e., phenomenological) and objective (i.e., cosmic) order of time. What is more, this mediation reveals itself as having a “dialectical structure” of the “crossing (*traversée*) of time by the trace” in experience (Ricoeur 1988: 156). But in this way, Ricoeur does not seek to provide a direct answer to the question of how it is *ontologically*—and not simply epistemologically or hermeneutically—possible that objective instances (such as documents, objects, vestiges, ruins or even natural formations) can serve as “traces” capable of revealing something like history, and eventually the history of other times and alien worlds. In other words, one could argue that he fails to bring the very questions of the *factual* and *material foundation* of historical meaning-formation, or the relationship between *temporality* and *materiality*, to the forefront of his ontological investigations of history and historicity.

And yet, these issues are of vital importance. In fact, if the “positivity” and reality of the historical past, as Ricoeur argues, is not simply something remembered or constructed but also essentially linked to the material manifestations of the past, then it might well be that the entire ontological problematic of historical facticity needs to be anchored on the relationship between *time and matter*. Following Ricoeur—and in opposition to Bergson’s position in his *Matter and Memory* (1994), one could argue that whereas memory can always be contrived, in history the past of matter is indestructible. In any case, the “time of the things” seems to be able to convey to us a new idea of *historical facticity and phenomenality*. This idea refers to the fact of temporal change as *inscribed in the structure of material things*, including the human body. What is at stake here is precisely the question of material configurations in which the traces of temporal change are ontologically preserved and can still be detected. From an ontological point of view this means that the ontic configuration of any material being in principle carries a factual indication of a

certain *temporal position*, namely the one to which a particular being, owing to its *material genesis*, historically belongs in the world. Material beings in this sense are not simply apprehended as ontic or corporeal unities, but as ontological imprints of a given past situation. To be sure, the determination or authentication of a material being's temporal position in its past situation requires temporal or chronological measurement. However, as Ricoeur demonstrates, the establishment of any temporal classification is always the outcome of an essential overlapping of the physical or cosmic and the lived or phenomenological time. In this sense, one could argue that the manifestation of cosmic time is essentially related to the recognition of the inscription of temporal determinations in the very existence of material beings—namely the fact that they exist only through a certain time-sequence which marks their existence.

Without a doubt, it would be a standard but plausible philosophical objection to say that the historical quality accorded to the temporality of material beings is simply the result of a certain *projection* or *constitution* (intentional or narrative) performed by a subject or the self, namely the one that “makes the experience” of history or constitutes a historical world. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues, for example, that “world-historical entities” (by which he meant both objects of culture and nature) “do not first get their historical character by reason of an historiological Objectification (*historischen Objektivierung*); they get it rather as those entities that they are in themselves (*an ihm selbst ist*) when they are encountered within-the-world” (2001: 433). This means that world entities, according to Heidegger, are historical “in themselves” insofar as their *world* is historical. The world, however, is supposed to acquire its historical quality entirely from the being of Dasein, since “a world *is* only in the manner of *existing* Dasein, which *factically* is as Being-in-the-world” (Heidegger 2001: 432, italics original). Yet, one could also argue that it is within a materially formed historical environment, and precisely owing to the *effectivity* of material traces of the past, that any subject can apprehend something like a history (Ricoeur 1988: 121–123). Indeed, Heidegger insists that it is solely on the ground of the temporally ecstatic horizon of the being of Dasein that it becomes possible to be existentially related to the past and therefore to attribute a historical significance to the world. But the important question here is the following: is temporal awareness, no matter how deeply it is embedded existentially, sufficient for generating historical meaning? Does the “fact” (*Faktum*) of living in an existential trajectory provide a sufficient ontological condition for constituting historical relations? Or is it rather the case that in order to be able to transform *temporal awareness* into a *historical disposition*—i.e., in order to apprehend something as meaningful historically and not simply existentially—one must already be exposed to the factual conditions of the material processes traversed by time, including the materiality of one's own body? In short, in order to experience time, one may need only subjective awareness; but in order to recognize historicity, one is bound to be brought also into the realm of objective conditions fueled by material processes.

Heidegger could challenge this position by insisting that only due to Dasein's historically transmitted existential condition can one have an ontological access to the realm of the historical as such. Consequently, the facticity of Dasein's openness

in its temporality and historicity provides ground for the temporal understanding of any worldly and material facticity. Nevertheless, one could also argue that making ontological structures dependent on the structure of their accessibility (as the role accorded to existential analytics in Heidegger's ontological project suggests) is nothing else than bringing into play a transcendental argument in favor of claiming the absolute primordially of subjectivity in experience. But if Dasein's disclosure is considered as the only condition for the experience of the world then material and historical effectivity is reduced to be a mere correlate of subjectivity. In this light, in Heidegger's approach, as Max Scheler already critically observed, "the world is without any sense itself, value itself, without any independent reality in relation to the human being" (cited in Dahlstrom 2002: 77).

On the other hand, if openness and temporality, and hence accessibility, are not exclusive elements of an existential facticity but also are conditioned by the durability, resilience and aging of the material objects of the world, then the facticity of time can be rightly opposed to the experience of time in the sense that the former cannot be simply deduced from the latter. From a methodological point of view, accessibility and openness remain an important issue although not as an ontological condition, but simply as a heuristic necessity. This latter is fueled by the fact that precisely because temporal change transcends the realm of subjective or existential awareness, it compels us to apprehend its own effects as "traces" or "marks" of the time left in the configuration of material reality. This "stigmatic" character of time provides access for understanding the material world as an essentially historical configuration.

## Husserl and Heidegger on Time and Matter

A standard way of dealing with the question of materiality in the phenomenological tradition is to approach it within the terms of "givenness" and "constitution". Generally speaking, phenomenological constitution refers to the process by which phenomena with transcendent or immanent objective reference establish themselves and become meaningful in a series of corresponding acts of consciousness or experience. In this manner, the constitution of matter or materiality is often interpreted within the framework of sensory givenness as related to the experience of the body and nature. Thus, in Husserl for example, the constitution of materiality is essentially linked to the question of the constitution of the natural world insofar as that is where matter is originally given as "sense-object" in the sensory (hyletic) acts of consciousness (1989: 3–29). At the same time, in this context, the human body plays the central and constitutive role because, according to Husserl, all acts of sensation refer back to the body as their at once objective (i.e., corporeal) and subjective (i.e., lived) substrate of experience: "The Body is, in the first place, the *medium of all perception*; it is the *organ of perception* and is *necessarily* involved in all perception" (Husserl 1989: 61). In sum, the materiality of things is given and sensuously constituted by way of the human body's mediation in experience. Therefore, accounting phenomenologically for the *materiality of the body* becomes precisely a crucial problem for Husserl (Dodd 1997: 61–74).



Albeit in a very different phenomenological and conceptual landscape, the structure of this explanatory schema remains unaltered in Heidegger. The question of materiality emerges in *Being and Time* in connection with the ontological analysis of the world and worldly entities. Heidegger seeks to demonstrate that a genuine ontological characterization of the entities within the world cannot be achieved in reference to the substantial properties of thinghood, reality, nature, and so on. Rather, these entities should be captured and described phenomenologically according to the primordial way in which they are encountered in the world through human experience. As a result, Heidegger argues that worldly objects and even natural entities acquire their specific thing-like character primarily in practical and goal-oriented human behavior. Therefore, they fall into the ontological category that Heidegger calls “readiness-to-hand” (*Zuhandenheit*) (2001: 95–102), yet, on this ground, they can just as easily become objects of a disinterested or theoretical attitude as “present-at-hand” (*vorhanden*) beings. The primordial experience of materiality is thus related to the fact that matter is used, handled and transformed in human practice. Accordingly, the analysis of the human relationship to material objects is one of the primal lenses through which Heidegger discloses the existential constitution of the “worldhood (*Welttheit*) of the world”.

Although in explaining the constitution of nature and material world Husserl and Heidegger focus often predominantly on the crucial role played by spatiality (and respectively bodily) in this process, their phenomenological approaches provide also a framework within which the relationship between temporality and the material environment can be discussed. In Husserl, the temporal realm of reality is constituted by the internal “stream of consciousness,” which is the original ground for perceptions that make reality appear as a temporal configuration. Immanent time is thus the condition of possibility for transcendent time; in this way Husserl can claim that “objective time and subjective time (my immanent time and my space–time) are a single order of time” (1989: 215). Similarly, Husserl makes a crucial distinction in the second volume of his *Ideas* between the nature of material reality and that of the realm of lived experience. He calls attention to the fact “that material things are conditioned exclusively from the outside and are not conditioned by their own past; they are history-less realities (*geschichtlos Realitäten*)”; on the other hand, “it pertains to the essence of psychic reality that [...] psychic realities have precisely a history” (1989: 144f.). This distinction between *history-less* and *historical* realities is based on Husserl’s claim that, ideally speaking, material reality is so constituted that it is possible within it to return identically to an earlier stage of development. Such a possibility, however, is a priori excluded in the sphere of consciousness where the “earlier state necessarily functionally determines the following one” (Husserl 1989: 145).

In Heidegger, the question of the temporality of objects arises in a specific way in *Being and Time* in connection with the analysis of historicity and, more precisely, the historicity of the world. Within this framework (and in complete accordance with his analyses of the existential constitution of worldly objects as “ready-to-hand” and “present-at-hand” entities), Heidegger claims that the historico-temporal character of objects depends constitutively on the historical character of the world to which these objects belong in their factual being (2001: 432). In other words, if

both objects of culture and nature can become “world-historical” entities, it is because they involve a certain temporal situatedness “within-the-world” (Heidegger 2001: 440f.). At the same time, the world’s temporal foundation is located exclusively in Dasein’s temporal existence. This foundational relationship essentially means that Dasein’s historicity, grounded in its own existential “ecstatico-horizontal temporality,” gives the world its factual historical character. Thus, Heidegger goes as far as not only to affirm that only Dasein can be called “primarily historical” (2001: 433), but also that “there is no nature-time, since all time belongs essentially to the Dasein” (1988: 262).

Despite their significant differences in the scope and method of their phenomenological endeavors, Husserl and Heidegger share the conviction that objective and material entities—whether they belong to culture or nature—are incapable of revealing original traits of historicity. Rather, these entities owe their temporal or historical character to the consciousness or existence that apprehends them temporally and endows them with historical meaning. This conviction has remained largely unchallenged in the development of the phenomenological movement—so much so that one could argue that the thesis that “the objective world is incapable of sustaining time” (Merleau-Ponty 1965: 412) has tacitly reinstated a certain “temporal idealism,” even as phenomenological approaches have sought deliberately to break with all idealistic principles. At the same time, few endeavors in this tradition have been devoted to further exploring the relationship between temporality and materiality. In an otherwise influential work, the Vietnamese phenomenologist Thao (1986) sought to expand what he perceived to be the one-sidedness of Husserl’s genetic phenomenology by applying insights from dialectical materialism. However, his new-fangled research on the “relations of matter to consciousness” did not succeed in producing more than an amalgam of phenomenological descriptions and scientific explanations under the auspices of Marxism. In a diametrically opposite direction, Henry (2008) pursued phenomenological analyses under the label of “material phenomenology” in order to radicalize certain Husserlian insights pertaining to the originary lived constitution of temporality. For Henry, nevertheless, the genuinely material aspect of time-consciousness is related to its proper hyletic (sensuous) stream of experience of which Husserl failed to recognize the purely subjective or self-affective nature.

## Materiality, Temporality and Historicity

I would argue that in tracing the ontological and phenomenological implications of the relationship between time and matter neither the doctrine of historical materialism combined with phenomenology proposed by Trần Đức Thao, nor the thesis of the affective materiality of the life of consciousness advocated by Michel Henry seems to offer an appropriate perspective. These approaches, along with those of Husserl and Heidegger, fail to fully account for the temporal determinations and processes that characterize the being of the material entities and that conditions too, through the mediation of corporeity, the existence of human beings. More precisely, they fail to explore phenomenologically whether there is a level of

*material facticity* where a substantial demarcation between temporal subjectivity and temporal objectivity would no longer make sense. In other words, if material objects can be defined as objects having solidity, durability and visibility, then not only temporality must be an integral part of their objectivity, but it should include also the realm of human corporeity. Indeed, what material facticity brings into play belongs to the realm of concrete occurrences, events and processes that necessarily imply factual changes in the material and bodily environment and within which, precisely for this reason, the subject cannot enjoy an ontological privilege.

In effect, Husserl's argument for the "history-less" nature of material things only holds if one considers history, as he puts it explicitly, in terms of "ideal possibilities" (1989: 144). But, once one conceives of history in terms of *factual possibilities*, natural or material changes in the world could equally prove to be proper historical occurrences. And even though it seems correct to say that, contrary to psychic life, things "do not retain the past as past, as an element of their essential being" (Dodd 1997: 79), this claim can only be used to prove that materiality has no history if by history we mean exclusively the history of consciousness and not the *history of the material world* that factually situates and conditions the subject of that consciousness. Heidegger's thesis about the existential constitution of the historical world seems to suffer from a similar problem, namely that if objects gain their historical character by belonging to a historical world, then the fact of this belongingness cannot simply be explained by Dasein's existential capacity to confer on it a historical meaning. The facticity of objects within the world means precisely that they concretely and historically belong to a certain time (and to certain space) due to their objective and material subsistence. In sum, what seems to be missing from both Husserl's and Heidegger's account of historicity is the ontological commitment to broaden the range of entities capable of historical efficacy and agency, and thus to account for the phenomena of temporal individuation in the spheres of material and bodily existence.

To be sure, both Heidegger and Husserl would agree that material entities "bear the marks of the past," for temporal change or development frames their existence, and thus time passes in both culture and nature. But what is important to see is that, if the material "marks" of the past can reveal something like the passing of time and eventually a history, it is not merely because they can become the targets of a historical meaning-formation performed by temporally disposed historical subjects; it is also because the temporal determination linked intrinsically to the material existence of beings endows these marks with the immutable character of temporal or historical facticity. Ricoeur himself talked about the "marks of time" and the "thing-like character" in relation to historical traces (1988: 10–109). Nevertheless, his ontological approach needs to be pushed further, for we have to see that a material "trace"—and in fact any concrete material being whatsoever, including the human body—implies an objective or bodily individuation in which the time as the *historical position* of something which has a concrete and durable existence is ontologically preserved and can eventually be brought to light. It is in this sense, for example, as Ricoeur pointed out, that historians or archeologists can talk about the "historical authenticity" of an object. But it is precisely the factual irreversibility and material memory so to speak revealed by the concrete and effective existence of

things that allows them to interpret the temporality of these entities as a matrix of historicity, instead of conceiving it as a purely subjective or physical state of affairs.

It is interesting to see that Sartre's materialist ontological argument in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, namely, "the inert totality of worked matter, which, functioning as an inert universal memory, records and conserves the forms impressed on it by earlier labour" (Sartre 2004: 122) makes perfect sense in recent philosophically informed theories of archeology. As Laurent Olivier remarks, "archeology has no other object than the imprint of the past marked in the matter; basically, it interrogates the archive of this memory constituted by the archaeological remains" (2008: 14). In other words, the materialization of time through the constitution of archeological records entails a memory and provokes historical time-awareness. Furthermore, the argument that archeological records (i.e., material objects and constellations such as landscapes) do have their proper temporality can serve as a mean to demonstrate that the material circumstances of any present situation are made up of various past durations. Being reflected through the lens of archeologically detected processes historical reality proves to have a multi-temporal configuration (Lucas 2005: 32–43). Nevertheless, apart from enhancing methodological accuracy in archeology, this recognition of the material and multi-layered nature of historical temporality can entail some ontological consequences too.

Thus, if we assume, as Sartre argues, "that matter passes from one state to another, and this means that change takes place. But a material change is neither an affirmation nor a negation" (2004: 84), then it seems plausible to affirm that the temporality recorded at the level of material beings belongs to the realm of factual reality. This facticity is grounded in the non-variability or non-reversibility of temporal relations deployed at multiple levels of the existence of material beings. In other words, it is related to the factual necessity that the order of a concrete material genesis or sedimentation cannot be *post factum* altered. This inflexible character of material time is "factual" inasmuch as it serves as an ontological support for subjective historical meaning-formations rather than being dependent on them. If we can talk meaningfully about historical realities as embedded in deep time or as distant or alien to our world, it is because they are factually real. But ontologically speaking, the temporality of this reality is anchored in the temporality of a material world that, at its own level, lacks proper subjective or existential mediation. In other words, materially conditioned historical facticity should be understood as the facticity of *time without presence*.

It is important to point out that the temporality manifested specifically in the realm of material objects and configurations, which includes the human body, reveals a proper *phenomenological* possibility of accounting for historicity. From this point of view, the phenomenon of "aging"—taken as a synonym of temporal change or becoming—becomes of particular importance. Nevertheless, in this context, aging should not be simply understood as the subjective or social awareness of one's physicality that indicates one's approach towards death (Beauvoir 1972), neither should it be limited to the sphere of living beings in claiming that "dead things do not age" (Scheler 1957: 21). On the contrary, aging can be apprehended as a general material phenomenon insofar as it indicates the process through which a temporal development is reflected in an objective transformation that leaves

progressively phenomenal impressions—material *Urimpressionen* so to speak—on the surface or internal structure of a certain material configuration. As a qualitative ontological property it allows us to see multilayered and multi-rhythmical individuation processes in the sphere of material beings, rather than compelling us to homogenize their time and our access to their past. Accordingly, at the material level, aging indicates at once a temporal, a factual and a phenomenal process. Phenomenologically speaking, it does not simply bring into view the irreversibility of time, but also makes visible a regime of effective conditions to which all material entities, including the human subject, are *exposed* in their world, as well as *subjected* in their proper bodily being.

Consequently, the phenomenon of aging reveals a constitutive relationship between time and body—a relationship that remains virtually unaddressed in Heidegger, and that has very problematic implications for Husserl's phenomenology (Franck 2014: 163–166). In fact, even if it makes sense to distinguish between the temporality of the organism and the time of the matter (Jonas 1966), materiality and aging manifest themselves as two correlative and constitutive phenomenological traits of all inorganic and natural reality in general. In this sense, however, they seem also to be able to convey a new idea of *historical phenomenality*, because what is at stake here is precisely the manifestation of the phenomenality of time as inscribed in the essence of material beings, including all kinds of bodies, as a constitutive element of their individuation in the world. And, as far as aging is related to the human condition itself, it can also be interpreted as the irruptive presence of material historical facticity in the sphere of subjective life.

## Towards a Phenomenological Realism

Generally speaking, the analysis of historical facticity requires a significant shift away from exploring the principles and effectuations of subjective or intersubjective historical meaning-formation toward an exploration of the material conditions of historical becoming. Thus, conducting phenomenological research with the aim of exploring the *factual conditions* of the constitution of historical world and historical existence would entail abandoning a *transcendental* position. In fact, taking the topic of material facticity as a guiding thread in phenomenological research on historicity means framing the research with two general but fundamental questions: (1) what are the constituents of the historical subsistence of objects that prove to be irreducible to the realm of subjective experiencing?; (2) what are the constituents of the subject's historical existence that cannot be explained by means of an analysis of inherent subjective or intersubjective performances? With this context in mind, I would argue that any phenomenological research that seeks to explore the conditions of historicity with regard to its proper factual and material determinations not only should establish itself as a generative phenomenology—i.e., as an investigation of the patterns of historical and intersubjective meaning-formation (Steinbock 1995)—but should also assume a *realist position*.

Taking a realist position has a long and important tradition in phenomenology. From the Munich circle of phenomenologists aligned with Husserl (and in fact from

the Husserl of the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*), throughout the works of Roman Ingarden and Jan Patočka, up to the more recent research of Jocelyn Benoist, realism has not ceased to represent a viable way of conducting phenomenological research. Nevertheless, assuming such a phenomenological position is never limited to simply making claims about the “reality” of an external world that is supposed to exist independently of our representations. Generally speaking, phenomenological realism consists rather in claiming that there are certain conditions of experience that are not conditions belonging properly to the experiencing subject. In this sense, every realist position in phenomenology assumes also, tacitly or explicitly, a claim not so much about the nature of “independent reality,” but rather about the *ontological sovereignty* of an ideal or material world that stands in essential correlation with the structures of subjective experience.

In this light, I would argue that a realist phenomenology of the historical condition should first and foremost establish itself as an ontological project of the *historical world*, rather than of the historical subject. This ontology is grounded in the fact that any material and natural being can be considered as a *historical entity* inasmuch as its existence discloses a factual belongingness to a temporal position in the world. In this sense, any such entity also carries in itself an onto-factual indication of a historical situation. Nevertheless, a historical situation should not be hastily identified as that of the subject inhabiting the world. Rather, the proper ontological task here would be to examine the conditions and structures of this world-temporality in its *material determinations*, as well as the roles it plays as a factual condition in the constitution of levels of historicity, historical meaning-formation and historical experience. Such a materially oriented phenomenological approach could seek to recapture the *phenomenality* of historical processes as inscriptions of time in the corporeal configuration of beings. In this sense, a phenomenology of historical meaning-formation and experience could still fully make sense (Carr 2014), but should be complemented by a phenomenology of material objects and bodies of all sorts, including the human body, defined as “aging” entities. Designed in this manner, historical phenomenology would essentially be anchored on a *realist* and *materialist* project. But beyond any aspiration toward a kind of “speculative realism” (Harman 2005), this phenomenology would be nourished exclusively by the *reality of history*.

Taking a realistic phenomenological position would also mean that the privilege accorded to the objective and material processes in the analysis of historicity would by no means simply be the result of a philosophical decision. It is not that after a long tradition in phenomenology of the preoccupation with the “subject,” a new historical ontology would now have to set its focus on the study of objective instances. Material processes are privileged as long as they allow for *apprehending* and *reading history* from a phenomenological point of view. Within this framework, the topic of historical subjectivity still has its own place, only the priorities are reversed; instead of inquiring about a subject that is supposed to constitute, experience, or inhabit time and history, one should pay attention to a subject that, in its embodied existence, is *subjected* to historical processes as well as *inscribed* in the material realm of being. Without a doubt, such an approach would necessarily

entail a demystification of the ontological privilege of the subject, considering that historical processes also guide us *beyond* the dimension of human presence in the world. Accordingly, integrating the aspects of “deep history,” or archeological time, into the project of a realist historical phenomenology would represent a proper challenge, as it would open up the question of the *cosmological dimension* of historical reality. In principle, such an orientation would not restrict the relevance of phenomenological realism, but on the contrary accord it a particular philosophical significance, because material historicity nurtures perhaps the only idea of *radical transcendence* capable of challenging the idea of a God.

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