



## Intentionality and Narrativity in Phenomenological Psychological Research: Reflections on Husserl and Ricoeur

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### Abstract

*According to Husserlian scholars such as Mohanty (1989), description and interpretation coexist within Husserl's work and are envisioned as complementary rather than mutually exclusive approaches to inquiry. This paper argues that exploring the implications of this philosophical complementarity for psychological research would require distinguishing between both the multiple meanings of "interpretation" and the differing modes of interpretation within qualitative data. Husserl's model of passive and active intentionality and Ricoeur's theory of narrativity are examined in order to explore their relevance for research. It is argued that interview data can demonstrate both actively and passively intended dimensions, and that the psychological meaningfulness of this complexity points to the relevance of not only Husserl's static analysis but also his genetic analysis. Likewise, it is argued that Ricoeur's work on narrativity and narrative identity is invaluable in grasping ways in which narrative data is intrinsically self-interpretive, expresses self-identity, and is both situated within and responsive to the larger social horizon of the ineluctably relational interview context within which it is given.*

### Introduction

The present paper follows upon an earlier paper (Applebaum, 2011) questioning the use of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a guide or justification for approaches to qualitative research. I argued that epistemological and methodological clarity are critically important for qualitative researchers, because differing attitudes may be implied by describing and interpreting, even if these are moments within a single research method. Reflecting upon the argument that method is constitutive of science, I maintained that evoking Gadamer to argue against the importance of methodical research is unjustified; indeed, in later introductions to *Truth and Method* (1960/2006), Gadamer disavowed providing guidance for the conduct of research and wrote that he "did not remotely intend to deny the necessity of methodical

work within the human sciences" (p. xvii). I explored the idea that methods in science provide the context for a discovery process, observing that Husserl (1936/1970) had argued that, when a method drifts toward technization, it superficializes itself and thereby falsifies the meaning of method as such. To a large extent, Gadamer's critiques of scientism reflect common ground between Gadamer and Husserl, whose influence on Gadamer's work is frequently neglected (cf. Nuyen, 1990; see also Di Cesare, 2007, pp. 75-77). Unfortunately, Gadamer's writings are at times polemical or ambiguous enough to allow them to be read as critiques of methodical science as such, rather than of scientism (Bernstein, 1983).

This paper continues the exploration of the interrelatedness of phenomenology and hermeneutics. I will seek to problematize the drawing of an absolute

distinction between description and interpretation in phenomenological psychological research. For the purpose of this paper, *description* will be understood in the light of Mohanty's (1987) comment that "To say that a statement is descriptive is to say that it is adequately backed up by intuitive experience, or, what is the same, that it is made on the basis of intuitive experience" (p. 42).

For psychologists to assert a strict dichotomy between describing and interpreting based upon Husserl's account of phenomenology as a methodical inquiry would be philosophically problematic. Whereas the method of Husserl's static phenomenological analysis is descriptive, his genetic phenomenological analysis is an interpretive explication of passive intentionality in which there is not a fixed opposition between describing and interpreting (Husserl, 1918-1926/2001a). In the latter context, a strict distinction between describing and interpreting is not found; on the contrary, Husserl wrote that "all intentional analysis, all self-clarification of consciousness that finds its expression in description is interpretation" (Ms. A VII 13, p. 62b; cited in Luft, 2011, p. 229). Indeed, the term "hermeneutic" was not anathema to Husserl as a characterization of the genetic dimension of his phenomenology, nor was it incompatible with description. In his 1931 lecture "Phenomenology and Anthropology", Husserl spoke of steps toward continued investigation "on the basis of concrete experience and description", which required

... discovering the method of correlation-research, the method for questioning back behind intentional objectivity in a concretely disclosive way. In a manner of speaking, genuine analysis of consciousness is a hermeneutic of conscious life, that latter taken as that which continuously intends entities (identities) and constitutes them within its own self in manifolds of consciousness that pertain to those entities in essential ways. (1931/1997, p. 20)

Hence, despite the break with Heidegger, Husserl used the terms *description* and *hermeneutics* in reference to his own phenomenological project.

This paper is not intended to propose a new psychological research method, but rather to open up for descriptive phenomenologists a variety of questions regarding the data we encounter, and to invite fruitful engagement with those already engaged in psychological inquiry informed by hermeneutic philosophy. My argument will be based upon a reading of Husserl and Ricoeur, as well as upon a discussion of what occurs for a participant in phenomenological interviewing, understood as a lived-experience in its own right.

Husserl's work will be drawn upon in order to clarify the ways in which our data falls on the continuum of passive to active intentionality, and the extent to which interview data can reflect what Husserl terms a "natural attitude". Ricoeur's hermeneutics will be drawn upon to reflect upon the way in which the data gathered in phenomenological interviewing can be said to have an intrinsically narrative structure. Ricoeur's notion of narrativity will be referenced to shed light upon the varying intentional acts that are evident when a participant represents him- or herself as the protagonist of a narrative, constituted in the research situation through varying modes of self-interpretation. The term *constitution* will be used in the Husserlian sense of meaning-bestowing, by means of which consciousness finds its objects, a *finding* which is a kind of recognition and framing rather than a construction or creation *ex nihilo* (Biceaga, 2010; Moran, 2000).

What follows relies upon an important feature of Husserl's noesis/noema relationship, namely that the noetic constitution of the noema is an interpretive determination (*Auffassung*), and that the noematic object, so constituted, can be described in its modes of givenness (Husserl, 1913/2001b). I will argue that, in parallel fashion, the narrative given by an interview participant in phenomenological research is just such a noematic object: it is interpretively constituted by the research participant as his or her response to an interview question.

Central to my argument is the fact that the term "interpret" is not univocal: it has multiple differing meanings, and these must be clarified in order to avoid positing an unnecessarily fixed opposition between the terms. As will be addressed below, one meaning of "interpretation" is a position-taking with respect to the object, a perspective in relation to the object of consciousness. This sense of interpretation is not equivalent to a self-consciously theorizing attitude, either on the part of the research participant or that of the researcher. As will be seen, at stake is what *sort* of interpretation or self-interpretation the participant's response is, not whether or not interpretation is present. My argument will be that a variety of intentional relations to the noematic object are possible, and often occur within the very same interview session, some of which are closer to a natural attitude while some are further from it. I will give an account of the same Husserlian "map" of intentionality as it applies to the data gathered in descriptive phenomenological research, taking into account the meaning of narrative according to Ricoeur, and arguing that a range of intentionalities can be found in such data. Each of these types of intentionalities will be presented as moments in the research participant's noetic constitution of the noematic object that is the narrative comprising his or

her answer to the researcher's question.

The method that first Giorgi (1970, 2009) and then Churchill and Wertz (2001), Wertz (2011), Englander (2012) and others have articulated is named "descriptive", and represents a unique achievement in that it embodies a strong claim that *description as such is possible*, that description as an activity and as a living standpoint in relation to qualitative psychological data cannot be reduced to a mode of interpretively overlaying theory-laden meanings upon data. Giorgi (1992, 2000) has consistently defended the possibility of description in a qualitative research context within which all human science praxes are frequently subsumed indiscriminately within the term "interpretation" (Applebaum, 2011, 2012). Giorgi (1992) argues that interpretation, defined as the "clarification of the meaning of experienced objects in terms of a plausible but contingently adopted theoretical perspective, assumption, hypothesis, and so on", ought not to be viewed as the exclusive possibility for qualitative research (p. 122).

In dialogue with this method, I will argue that integrating both descriptive and hermeneutic dimensions of Husserl's philosophy, as well as Ricoeur's invaluable insights regarding narrative, would require acknowledging the interrelationship of interpretation and description in both the matter and the practice of research. I do not advocate a blurring of the differences between the two terms; on the contrary, I propose that, if the multiple meanings of the terms are more clearly delineated, the result will be greater freedom in recognizing their presence in interview data and their interrelationships in practice.

### Husserl: Noesis, Noema, and Interpretation

Intentionality is the term used by Husserl (1913/1982) by way of Brentano to name the ways in which consciousness grasps its objects, a grasping that is constitutive of the objects as such (§37, §100, §118). Constitutive means, for example in the case of perceiving a worldly object, that a multiplicity of sense-data (hyletic data) are grasped by the perceiver's consciousness as a unity, such that this unity stands out to consciousness. It is not that the object of consciousness exists "outside" of consciousness and is simply recognized by, or mechanically registered by, consciousness. Instead, for Husserl, consciousness *participates* in the being-there of the object, because it is an object that is there *for* consciousness. For Husserl, when the perceiver relates to an object in any way beyond merely noting its presence, the object is not present as a neutral datum for consciousness. Intentionality is not a featureless and generic reaching-out; rather, the intentional act includes a particular *mode and manner* of grasping the object that reflects a particular sense

of and relationship to it. This meaning bestowal is correctly named as interpretive (Mohanty, 1984, p. 117). Husserl (1913/1982) writes:

*In any act some mode of heedfulness dominates. But whenever the act is not simply consciousness of a thing, whenever there is founded on such a consciousness a further consciousness in which "a position is taken" with respect to the thing, then thing and full intentional Object (for example: "thing" and "value") ... separately arise.* (p. 77)

Thus, intentionality is not a formal or abstract registering, but a way of engaging with the world that entails the perceiver's particular way of relating to what is perceived. Husserl (1913/1982) continues:

In the act of valuing, we are turned to the valued; in the act of gladness, to the gladsome; in the act of loving, to the loved ... the intentional Object, the valuable as valuable, the gladsome as gladsome, the loved as loved, the hope as hoped ... becomes an object seized upon only in a particular "*objectifying*" turn. Being turned valuingly to a thing involves, to be sure, a seizing upon the mere thing; not, however, the *mere* thing, but rather the *valuable* thing or the value is the *full intentional correlate of the valuing act.* (p. 76)

In Husserl's technical language, the act of intentionally grasping the object is *noesis*, and the object so grasped is the *noema* (1913/1982, §88, §89).<sup>1</sup> The noetic act of grasping the object is *constitutive* in the sense that it is a *determination* or a meaning-bestowing *interpretation* of a manifold of data, data that could be determined in many other ways. The term Husserl uses for this is *Auffassung*, which can be translated as "interpretation" or "apprehension" or "determination" (1913/2001b). For Husserl, differing intentional perspectives on the same object will each yield a different meaningful grasping of the object, a grasping properly named interpretive (Luft, 2011). The varying modes of intending an object in the citation from the *Ideas* above – lovingly, valuingly, hopefully – convey a sense of how the noetic grasping is a determining of the object in a particular way that already implies the lived-context and situatedness of perceptual acts.

<sup>1</sup> Although these terms evolve throughout Husserl's work, the sense referred to here is based upon texts including *Logical Investigations* (1913/2001b) and *Ideas I* (1913/1982).

To explore this point further, taking the example of the wooden chair at my breakfast table: on waking in the morning, I might grasp the chair as the comfortable place I will sit to drink my coffee and read the news. Alternatively, I might grasp the chair as yet another piece of furniture I need to wearily move in order to sweep the kitchen floor, or as something to stand upon in order to change the burned-out light bulb in the ceiling. Or I might imagine this kitchen chair as something to prop against my front door to keep out the zombies, if I imagine myself in a zombie movie (I give the last example to show that an object is constituted in relation not only to factual situations, but also to imaginary ones). Alternatively, I might grasp the chair as an example to be used in a scholarly paper, as I am doing now (as I sit on it).

The point of these examples is that, for Husserl, in every case the noetic constitution of the object is guided by a particular *interest*, which leads me to constitute or determine the chair *as* something in particular rather than *as* something else (1939/1973, §20, p. 86; 1918-1926/2001a, Part 1, §8). For Husserl (1939/1973, §20), the *interest* with which I turn toward an object does not imply a specific willing act or self-aware planning; rather, interest is a meaningful, perceptual and affective turning-toward the object which *then* opens up further horizons in relation to being-with the object. As will be clarified in the next section, the interpretive constitution addressed here occurs passively rather than for a self-reflecting “I”.

At this point, an important clarifying distinction must be made regarding the multivocity of the term “interpretation”, because the varied modes of interpretation must be carefully distinguished from each other, having significantly different implications both for our understandings of our interview data and our self-understandings as researchers. The meaning of interpretation I have been working with thus far is focused on the constitutive determining of meaning in the noesis/noema relationship which Husserl terms *Auffassung*, for example in the *Logical Investigations* (1913/2001b). As Hopp (2011) notes, this meaning of interpretation is, for Husserl, “not at all like the interpretation of, say, a text. We do not, on Husserl’s view, first make objects of our sensations and then try to interpret them as signs of something else” (p. 150). The Husserlian meaning of interpretation in this context can be provisionally defined as *a subject’s pre-reflective, constitutive grasping of an object from a particular perspective, reflecting a specific interest (or interests) on the part of the subject in relation to the object, which could be constituted in a multiplicity of other ways*. Why this kind of interpretation is termed pre-reflective will become clear as we turn to Husserl’s distinction between passive and active

intentionality, which will be shown to be important in distinguishing between various modes of interpretation that may arise in an interview when a researcher asks a participant to describe a lived-experience.

### Husserl: Intentionality, Passive and Active

In Husserl’s phenomenology, a central distinction is made between passive and active intentionality, and hence between passive and active constitution (1918-1926/2001a). Passive intentionality implies the ongoing flow of consciousness constituting objects pre-reflectively – in other words, the steady stream of passively constituted objects that are always already given to me in my embodied-emotional life, and upon which I have not yet reflected, or at least am not *currently* reflecting, and which are thus unnamed. The realm of passive intentionality is therefore the always already-meaningful, pre-reflective givenness of the world and myself to me – the embodied-perceptual core upon which all reflections are founded. For Husserl (1939/1973), the passive realm includes all those potential and former objects of my active intending which have yet to be actively seized-upon, or which were actively seized upon in the past and have now receded into passivity, perhaps to be awakened later (§34, p. 152).

Therefore, from Husserl’s perspective, it is due to the ongoing flow of passive intentionality that the world – not just the external world, but my own bodily, emotional, and even cognitive being-in-the-world – is experienced as always already given to me and *recognized* or *turned to* in reflection, rather than created *ex nihilo* or “constructed” through reflection. For example, sitting in front of my kitchen window, a wide variety of objects stand out to me – neighbouring houses, parked cars, strangers passing by, the Oakland Hills, clouds, the sky, the sound of sirens in the distance, an aeroplane passing overhead. In the background, our dog is panting, my watch sitting on the table is ticking, the warmth of the afternoon sun begins to heat the apartment – the horizon of my home. All of this is with me in a bodily way, and yet, until I turned to observe them, all of these objects were passively intended. As soon as I turned my attention to them, I grasped them actively, and the sense of that transition was one of noticing what was already here, not (in this case) of discovering anything new. Even to recognize that the dog desperately wants me to walk her is not, phenomenologically, to discover something *new* – but, rather, to newly notice something that was in fact already the case!

This realm of passive intentionality is a living time of protentions and retentions, a now-point that for Husserl is, in a sense, both “pre-time” and “pre-ego”

(Ferrarello, 2014).<sup>2</sup> For Husserl (1939/1973), *interest* is present in the passive mode of intentionally reaching out toward objects, as was noted above, and these objects may be sources of *situations* – meaning that the one who will awake in active intentionality is already *situated* in relation to the objects (§59). A *situation* in this context is a not-yet-thematized “*passively preconstituted foundation, qualitative or relational*” that can later be recognized and objectified by an awakened subject (1939/1973, p. 241). Hence, in the passive mode, there is an ongoing, embodied life, a reaching out toward objects that implies a kind of “I”, but there is not a subject reflectively present to him or herself – for which reason, it is not only pre-reflective but *pre-egoic*. The “I” in passivity is known only retrospectively through the quality of “mine-ness” that characterizes all that was passively lived (Niel, 2010). Regarding the shift from passive to active intending, Husserl wrote:

The ego is awakened by affection from the non-egological because the non-egological is “of interest”; it instinctively attracts, etc.; and the ego reacts kinaesthetically as an immediate reaction. (Ms. B III 3, p. 5a; cited in Mensch, 2001, p. 40, note 10)

For Husserl, it is only when the “I” is stimulated by hyletic data to make a determination that there is a transition from passivity to active intending – a passage characterized by the “striving toward” or “original instinct of objectification” of an “I” who seizes upon one or another object (Ms. C 13 I & Ms. E III 9; cited in Mensch, 2001, p. 41). Prior to the shifting into active intentionality and the striving of an ego, what is lived is in a sense lived anonymously.<sup>3</sup> Along similar lines, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) posits that “every perception has something anonymous about it” (p. 247). Once the ego is awakened to the object, it thematizes the object, using the hyletic material to fulfil a previously empty structure, at which point the ego grasps what awoke it, fulfilling the now-structure that stimulated it to awaken (Ferrarello, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Due to the constraints of space, I will omit a discussion of the notion of time and temporality in Husserl’s phenomenology from my discussion of passive intentionality.

<sup>3</sup> Mensch (2001, p. 40, note 9) cites the following words of Husserl in this context: “Content is non-ego (*das Ichfremde*), feeling is already egological. The ‘address’ of the content is not a call to something, but rather a feeling being-there (*fühlendes Dabei-Sein*) of the ego ... . The ego is not something for itself and the non-ego something separate from the ego; between them there is no room for a turning towards. Rather the ego and its non-ego are inseparable; the ego is a feeling ego with every content” (Ms. C 16 V, p. 68a).

As has been noted, Husserl names the actively intentional determining of an object *as* something an *interpretive* act, *Auffassung*, which in this context can be understood as a constituting interpretation, or, as Husserl puts it in the *Logical Investigations* (1913/2001b), a “perceptive interpretation” (p. 762). For Husserl, in perceptual experience the objects “achieve their status as appearances *of* some object through interpretation” which “places them in a framework of identity in multiplicity” (Mensch, 2001, p. 133). So, for Husserl, pre-reflective embodied life is characterized by passive intentionality: objects of passive intentionality are already given to my bodily intentionality, constituted noetically by “me” “anonymously” (in Merleau-Ponty’s sense), but not yet named until I turn my attention to them and actively intend them – and I, too, am in a sense not “named” until I awake in actively intending. Of course, this principle applies not only to material objects: for example, if I realize at a certain point that I am feeling a kind of emotional absence, and then, on reflecting, recognize that I have lost contact with a good friend over the past week and want to phone him to reconnect, this experience can similarly be viewed in Husserlian terms as my having been passively living the missing of my friend (my friend is the noema, constituted *as* someone close to me whom I have been missing). Recognizing and naming something I have already been living is an example of the shift from passive to active constitution.

This example raises an important point about the interplay of passive and active intentionality, namely that, despite the fact that in passivity the “I” is pre-egoic, and non-objectifying, this is not to say that in passivity the “I” fails to recognize alterity. On the contrary, Biceaga (2010) argues that, for Husserl, the role of embodied passive intentionality “is to negotiate the relation between ownness and alterity” (p. 95). Therefore the passive life of consciousness is, as Vameşul (2010) writes, “the mediator between ownness and otherness” (p. 579).<sup>4</sup>

It should now be clear how objects – and, more precisely, *others* – given to me passively are seized upon by active intentionality in an ongoing way in everyday life: I recognize that the voice calling me from down the street is my friend’s, I am forced to acknowledge that the low-level aching in my jaw is a real problem requiring a visit to the dentist, when a waiter stares at me strangely I realize that I have been preoccupied and have forgotten to pay for my coffee.

<sup>4</sup> Similarly Ricoeur (1990/1992) writes that phenomenologically the experience of alterity is founded in “the variety of experiences of passivity”; hence “passivity becomes *the* attestation of otherness” (p. 318).

The condition of everyday lived-recognitions and events Husserl terms the “natural attitude”. What is critical here is that, inhabited wakefully, the natural attitude is a realm of active intentionality, the attitude of everyday life in which we recognize the things, people, places with which we engage on a daily basis and take them to be what, for us, they appear to be. So, one could say that the natural attitude, as an attitude, refers to the manifold acts of active intentionality through which we know and engage with our world in its everydayness. And, even though the natural attitude is “located” so to speak within active intentionality, I want to emphasize that *it makes no sense to think about the natural attitude without reference to passive intentionality*, because the person living in a natural attitude is able to do so precisely upon the foundation of the *ongoing flow of passive constitution*. The ongoing life of passive intentionality always accompanies the active accomplishments of wakeful consciousness; passivity is regarded as *ground* “not because it exists prior to experience and meaning but because consciousness ‘refers back’ to it in the ongoing process of explication of objects” (Biceaga, 2010, p. xvii, note 15). It is our pre-given embodied life in the world – the realm of passive intentionality – that is the soil within which our reflective lives are rooted. In fact, Husserl uses geological metaphors like soil, strata and terrain in his discussion of the relationship of the passive and active realms (Biceaga, 2010). A rich and ongoing perceptually, emotionally and even cognitively vital life exists in passivity. Passivity can be envisioned geologically as the far larger subterranean realm upon which the active realm is founded.

A promissory note is called for with respect to the methodological implications of the relationship between active and passive intentionality and Husserl’s static and genetic phenomenology. It is Husserl’s static phenomenology, articulated, for example, in the “Principle of all Principles” in *Ideas I* (1913/1982) that is correctly named a *descriptive science*, because it is based upon the articulation of the intuitive grasping of objects in active intentionality. As Husserl moved into the exploration of the passive genesis of meaning, his vision of phenomenology could no longer remain exclusively descriptive but opened to an explicitly hermeneutic phenomenological practice. This was necessary because the passive dimension of consciousness, the deep strata upon which the comparatively smaller layer of active intentionality – and, indeed, the natural attitude – is founded, cannot be accessed through the intuitions of a subject (whether in the first or second person) because passive intentionality is lived in a pre-egoic and consequently pre-intuitive manner. The phenomenological analysis of the deeper, passive strata would of necessity be hermeneutic, because it is

the unfolding of passively-lived intentional acts. Having offered a provisional sense of these ideas in Husserl’s work, I will now turn to Ricoeur.

### Ricoeur on Narrativity

In 1965 Spiegelberg described Ricoeur as “the French phenomenologist best informed about German phenomenology”, and at the same time a thinker whose “adherence to phenomenology is not unqualified”, since “the problem of the limits and limitations of phenomenology is one of his constant concerns” (p. 564). I am arguing not that there is an easy conjoining of Husserl’s phenomenology and Ricoeur’s hermeneutic narrative thought. My central contention is rather that Ricoeur’s work on narrative provides a particularly useful complement to Husserl’s explorations of intentionality in supporting researchers’ reflections on the varied modes of consciousness encountered in research. Ricoeur’s (1986) perspective on the tradition is reflected in his comment that phenomenology is in large measure a history of Husserlian heresies, and in fact “the structure of the master’s work meant that there was not a Husserlian orthodoxy” (p. 182; my translation).<sup>5</sup>

Ricoeur’s (1983/1984) exposition of the relationship of narrativity to human action and temporality, which he characterizes as a threefold *mimesis*, is too rich and complex to be fully addressed here. I will offer an overview intended to prepare the way for a questioning of the narrative dimension of phenomenological psychological research. In so doing, I will refrain from positing a strict dichotomy between the descriptive and hermeneutic streams in the phenomenological tradition. As Mohanty (1984) noted, for Husserl “being given and being interpreted are descriptions of the same situation from two different levels of discourse” (p. 117). Furthermore, Mohanty (1989) has argued that advocates of descriptive and interpretive approaches “can be either naïve or self-critical. When they are naïve, they perceive each other as opposed. When they are self-critical, they recognize each other as complementary” (p. 60). It is in the spirit of this complementarity that I turn to Ricoeur, since a participant’s story, which from one perspective is descriptive, can from another be correctly regarded as thoroughly self-interpretative

<sup>5</sup> Ricoeur (1986) wrote, “L’œuvre de Husserl est le type de l’œuvre non résolue, embarrassée, raturée, arborescente; c’est pourquoi bien des chercheurs ont trouvé leur proper voie en abandonnant aussi leur maître, parce qu’ils prolongeaient une ligne magistralement amorcée par le fondateur e non moins magistralement biffée par lui. La phénoménologie est pour une bonne part l’histoire de hérésies husserliennes. La structure de l’œuvre du maître impliquait qu’il n’y eût pas d’orthodoxie husserlienne” (p. 182).

– again, depending upon the specific sense of interpretation we are referencing. Ricoeur's work is presented here as an invaluable contribution to the study of expressivity and identity, rather than as an exhaustive account – if such a thing is possible – of identity itself (see Zahavi, 2007).

Writers in the hermeneutic tradition since Heidegger have emphasized the linguistic dimension of meaning-making. For Ricoeur (1983/1984, 1984/1985, 1985/1988, 1990/1992), *narrative* refers to an intrinsic structure of human linguistic expressivity linked to action, agency, identity and temporality. It is through expressing experience in stories, Ricoeur (1983/1984) writes, that "*time becomes human*", meaning in part that it is through the ability to express our lives narratively that we recognize and understand ourselves in the world and within temporality (p. 52). Correspondingly, it is through giving voice to our lives that we are able to express our individual and collective identities as beings who simultaneously have enduring characteristics and yet are subject to constant change, capable of re-envisioning not only our past but our present and our future: "what we call subjectivity is neither an incoherent series of events nor an immutable substantiality, impervious to evolution" (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 32).

The meaning of narrative for Ricoeur is therefore not restricted to self-conscious story telling or to cultural artefacts that convey stories – be they literary, musical, mythological, or religious. It represents a far broader category, because for Ricoeur "experience forms and presents itself in awareness as narrative" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 68). Vandeveld (2008) identifies Ricoeur's central claims as being that:

(1) action and life are structured or organized in their being by narrative-like features, so that telling the story is not an after-the-fact reorganization of what took place, but the making explicit of what was already implicit in action and life; and (2) the understanding of what in and of itself asked to be so rendered takes the form of narratives and feeds on narratives. (p. 141)

Ricoeur claims that consistent narrative structures can be observed in the way experiences are expressed in language, and that these features are to be "described rather than deduced" (1983/1984, p. 45). He further argues that the describable structures of human expressivity referred to in the study of literature by terms such as "plot" and "protagonist" can be said to be *already present* in the way lived experiences are expressed. Therefore, in Ricoeur's account,

The linguisticity of temporal existence may be termed *narrative* because it involves

action, language, and meaning. ... to say that human existence is characterized by an inherent "narrativity" does not involve the imposition of an artificial logical order upon it. (DiCenso, 1990, p. 125)

The concept of narrative is not an imposition upon the phenomenon of lived-expressivity because, according to Ricoeur (1983/1984), the ways in which human beings articulate their actions lead us to encounter "temporal structures that call for narration" (p. 59). Most simply put, in giving voice to what she has lived, the teller, to convey her story, will find herself conveying plot, the implicit or explicit passage of time, and characters including the protagonist, characters whose actions and attributes can be described and which may be enduring (*idem*, the principle of self-consistency in Ricoeur's account of identity) or changeable (*ipse*, the principle of self as dynamic) (Ricoeur, 1985/1988, p. 246). These actions occur in a context that is also describable, and neither the actions nor the contexts in which they occur are *sui generis*, but rather are understandable to others because the stories are comprised of elements that are at least to some degree intersubjectively recognizable within a given cultural-historical context.

Hence, in Ricoeur's words, to reflect upon any account of human action is to be able to respond to "questions about 'what', 'why', 'who', 'how', 'with whom', or 'against whom' ..." (1983/1984, p. 55). Likewise, "Every narrative presupposes a familiarity with terms such as agent, goal, means, circumstance, help, hostility, co-operation, conflict, success, failure, etc., on the part of its narrator and any listener" (1983/1984, p. 55). For this reason, he argues that it is possible to "speak of a narrative structure, or at least of a prenarrative structure of temporal experience, as suggested by our ordinary way of talking about stories that happen to us or which we are caught up in, or simply about the story of one's life" (1983/1984, pp. 59-60). In other words, people's everyday lived-experiences are *lived* as already stories *in potentia*.

Exemplifying phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophy's insistence on the situatedness of lived-experiences in a pre-given lived-world, Ricoeur (1983/1984) argues that individuals' narratives do not arise in a vacuum. On the contrary, they are shaped in significant ways by the social, linguistic and historical contexts within which they are born, because a narrative's setting is a world that is already pre-given to the narrator. Thus, "the composition of the plot is grounded in a pre-understanding of the world of action, its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character" (Ricoeur, 1983/1984, p. 54). These pre-understandings and meaningful structures refer to the intersubjective

community within which narratives are given, within which meanings and a host of types of narratives are already given. From this perspective, narratives, whether spontaneously produced rather than being the result of reflective composition, make use of themes that are pre-given in the narrator's culture as story elements.

Polkinghorne (1988) summarizes Ricoeur's account of the parallel but differing interpretive processes that occur in literary-historical narratives and life narratives:

The narrative structuring of experience is different from the narrative structuring of literature or history. In these narratives, all of the extraneous noise or static is cut out and only those events necessary to move the plot along are related. The equivalent, although not the same, selection occurs in experience through the human capacity for attention. ... in the life narrative, the self is the narrator of its own story. (p. 69)

This selectivity indicates the self-interpretive quality of any account of one's life, with *interpretive* here meant in the sense of *selective*, a position-taking in relation to the lived-experience that includes some details and omits others, frames events and their sense in a particular way and – of especially central significance for psychology – represents the narrator as protagonist in a particular light, highlighting certain characteristics and not others. This meaning of interpretive is not equivalent to theorizing, but rather denotes the seizing upon an event in the narrator's life in a certain way, representing it in a particular manner, embodying one of many possible relationships to a given lived-experience. For the purpose of this paper, the narrative seizing upon a lived-experience is regarded as paralleling Husserl's constituting interpretations in the noetic act. Ricoeur appropriates the noesis/noema relationship to acknowledge both the descriptive phenomenological and hermeneutic dimensions of narrativity, according to Vandavelde (2008): "on the hermeneutic side, narratives are an interpretive mediation, but, on the phenomenological side, they provide the meaning content or noema of what is so recounted" (p. 142).

Hence, in reflecting on the meaning of the life stories told to researchers by participants, or in reflecting upon the meaning of any such story, the issue of the relationship of narratives to lived-experience takes centre stage. At this point, I will associate the pre-narrated or pre-linguistic experience with the realm of passive intentionality described by Husserl. When prompted to seize upon previously passive contents of consciousness actively, the ego awakens and constitutes the object in a way reflecting a particular

interest. When active intentionality is expressed linguistically – when we give voice to what we have lived – narrativity is engaged, and, from the perspective of Ricoeur, we are now in the realm of mimesis, meaning that with the narrative we are in the presence of a *representation of a lived-experience* which, as a representation, is not simply a transparent link to unmediated prelinguistic experience. In this regard, Ricoeur, in *The Symbolism of Evil* (1960/1967), writes:

Have we really reached, under the name of experience, an immediate datum? Not at all. What is experienced as defilement, as sin, as guilt, requires the mediation of a specific language, the language of symbols. Without the help of that language, the experience would remain mute, obscure, and shut up in its implicit contradictions. (p. 161)

One may, through language, be able to convey the sense of what one has lived, or one may fail to do so, but in either case the linguistic account is not *equivalent* to the prelinguistic living toward which it reaches. From Ricoeur's perspective, language and words mediate experience. For this reason, "The lifeworld is a *limit* toward which a previously perceptualist phenomenology aims – but for Ricoeur it remains a limit and never a given" (Ihde, 1971, p. 170). This presents a very real challenge for a phenomenology that gathers not only linguistic descriptions but *others'* descriptions. As Ihde (1971) clarifies,

All structural phenomenology, whether in its Husserlian or existential guise, presupposes this nexus of prelinguistic experience. The first order of indirectness is established when the field of expression is chosen. Experience is to be understood through its expression. In this situation language becomes a *mediating* function. (p. 96)

Regarding Ricoeur, Ihde (1971) writes:

The prelinguistic lifeworld can never be reflectively seized upon in an absolutely transparent, fully given way. ... in reference to the reaching back toward the prelinguistic structures of experience, Ricoeur cites the questioning back that Husserl termed *Rückfragen*. (p. 170)

This questioning back, the investigation of meaning through the experiencer's narrative to seek to understand what was formerly passively lived, is what, in my opinion, brings together the hermeneutic and descriptive dimensions of phenomenology, rather than showing them to be mutually exclusive paths of



inquiry. But Ricoeur (1966/2014) is adamant that representing Husserl as beginning with logical reasoning in order to return in an unmediated way to the prelinguistic world would be mistaken:

We are meaningful through and through and reality is what is aimed by the totality of our signs. We shall never get back to the peaceful point of view of the immediate, for we are referred back to the point of origin (the originary) from the very heart of the logical domain. It is from the domain of discourse that we incline towards the silent presence, always criss-crossed by our signs. (p. 34)

Ricoeur's hermeneutics does not reduce all human being-in-the-world to language.<sup>6</sup> As DiCenso (1990) remarks:

Clearly, Ricoeur is not accepting a rigid dichotomy that imposes a choice between positing human access to "things as such" or positing closed linguistic universes incapable of self-transcending referential functions. (p. 127)

Nor, clearly, does Ricoeur reduce identity to whatever narrative identity a subject conveys in a given moment. The dynamism Ricoeur constantly asserts regarding narrative identity is due in part to the way that the ground of identity transcends the modes in which an identity is narrated in any given moment.

Finally, some words on embodiment. While this paper has focused narrowly on the effort to offer an overview of narrativity, Ricoeur's discussion of action, for example in *Oneself as Another* (1990/1992), is nevertheless centrally concerned with embodied life, and directly references Husserl's account of passive intentionality:

The flesh is the place of all the passive syntheses on which the active syntheses are constructed, the latter alone deserving to be called works (*Leistungen*): the flesh is the matter (*hülle*) in resonance with all that can be said to be *hülle* in every object perceived, apprehended. In short, it is the origin of all "alteration of oneness". (p. 324)

Hence it can be noted in a promissory way that Husserl's and Ricoeur's accounts of embodied meaning, taken together, are fruitful territory for psychological researchers.

<sup>6</sup> Di Cesare (2007) makes the same observation regarding Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics (pp. 155-156).

In summary, Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy offers researchers a means to grasp the ways in which lived-experiences – which, in Husserlian terms, are in large measure passively intended and therefore mute and anonymous – take shape when constituted through speech in the interview. In terms of Ricoeur's narrative identity, the articulation of lived-experience, mediated through language, simultaneously conveys continuities and discontinuities implicit in the narrator's interpretation of his or her self-identity. In narrative constitution, what was lived anonymously is given voice through a series of acts of the wakeful ego, acts that can be regarded as *at once interpretive and descriptive*.

To put things in a somewhat contradictory way: this narrative giving-birth to a story, while inescapably interpretive and mediated from a hermeneutic perspective, can be said to be descriptive to the extent to which it is an intuitive fulfilment of meanings previously unwitnessed and inchoate in the passive life of consciousness. In this sense, the interview is an act of interpretive determination (*Auffassung*). More precisely, I would argue that, to be considered descriptive within the context of the method of Giorgi (2009), the narrative now constituted must remain livingly in contact with the passive ground of the experience as it was prereflectively lived – which is to say, as it was passively constituted. However, hermeneutically speaking this descriptiveness can be achieved only through the narrative mediation of mimesis.<sup>7</sup>

Returning to Mohanty's (1987) definition of description, can there be descriptive fidelity to what is given in intuition as the sense of a story if what is given must necessarily be only partially intuitively fulfilled, the home-ground of that sense being in the passive, pre-egoic realm, and therefore in principle incapable of intuitive fulfilment? What can be intuited is, for Husserl, only that which can be perceived by an awakened ego. So here, I suggest, what is present to the awakened ego is a collection of inchoate meanings, more or less indistinct senses that are given, rooted in passive experience that remains *unintuited*. Active intentionality seizes upon and interpretively determines this manifold – and *once determined*, the whole can be fulfilled intuitively.

But even this fulfilment can be questioned, if it is envisioned as absolute. Ricoeur's (1966/2014) reading of the later Husserl is that "all 'fulfilment' is

<sup>7</sup> The nonverbal component of narration, including the many ways in which interview participants convey meaning alongside their words, is beyond the scope of this discussion, although certainly important to the way interviews are understood.

a 'fulfilment' in progress presenting different levels of completion, indefinitely distinct from perfect adequation" (p. 32). Ricoeur describes the later Husserl's "questioning back" (*Rückfragen*) to the passive, prelinguistic realm as questioning "toward primordial lived experience that will never be directly confronted but will always be designated by a movement of 'referring back'..." (1966/2014, p. 33). So there remains a necessary caesura between what is pre-reflectively and anonymously lived and what is spoken by a self-reflective ego. But this gap does not negate a kind of continuity between passive and active life, and for the awake narrator there may indeed be a sense of correspondence and "fit" between what is intuited in active intentionality and what is retained as an enduring passively-embodied sense of that which was lived. Nevertheless, this correspondence can never be complete (absolute) in the sense that no narrative can exhaust the passive contents of consciousness. I may retell the story of an important experience many times in my life, and each time the story may be importantly different, psychologically. I may grasp (determine intuitively) different aspects of what I lived in different tellings of the story. Different interlocutors may inspire radically different ways of conveying the story.

Following Ricoeur, the act of narrating within the research situation is ineluctably interpretive in a double sense: first of all, because it represents a selective articulation of what was lived by the research participant, an emplotment that is sense-bestowing through the exclusion of some potential details and perspectives and highlighting of others in line with an emerging plot, with a selected *dramatis personae*, and a shape given through the appropriation of story elements culturally available to the narrator. Secondly, the narrative given in research is a mimetic act in relation to passively-lived experience understood as a *limit* rather than as something that can be seized absolutely (Ihde, 1971). The narrative is a representation, the story is an objectification (in a Husserlian sense) and, as such, one that is not given in a vacuum, but rather is given from one person to another. I will turn to this and related implications in the next section.

### Implications for Research

Thus far I have drawn upon the work of Husserl and Ricoeur to describe the ground of waking life in passive intentionality, the transition to active intentionality, and some implications of narrativity. We have seen how, from Husserl's perspective, passive intentionality interpretively constitutes its objects, and how the initiation of active intentionality signals, in Husserl's terms, the "awakening" of a subject. A subject, so awakened, can inhabit a variety of attitudes, the first of which Husserl terms a *natural*

*attitude*. Furthermore, we have seen that the movement from passive to active consciousness is not unidirectional but that, for Husserl, there is a constant ebb and flow, engaging both. Ricoeur's work on narrative and narrative identity, developed by him in dialogue with Husserl and the phenomenological tradition as a whole, but not exclusively so, was addressed in particular to the difference and distance between the realm of speech, signification and culture, on the one hand, and its rootedness in the passive, prelinguistic realm on the other. To move this account closer to the experience of phenomenological research, I will focus on a particular kind of experience that provokes a transition from the passive to the active: responding to an interview question.

In descriptive phenomenological research, one's first task, having identified the phenomenon to be investigated, is to select a group of participants who can respond affirmatively to a question like, for example: "Have you had an experience of feeling deeply cared for by another person? And, if so, can you describe in detail what it was like?" I will explore a variety of kinds of intentional acts often recognizable in interviews. Prior to doing so, I will examine what is occurring from a phenomenological perspective when a potential participant replies affirmatively to the initial question.

The descriptive method (Giorgi, 2009) seeks descriptions given within the natural attitude because it aims to elucidate the psychological structure of phenomena that belong to everyday life. This makes eminent sense, given that we are interested in the psychological meanings of the ways in which a phenomenon is already being lived by the participants, rather than in their theoretical or analytical reflections upon these meanings (Englander, 2012). For this reason, we ask them to describe an experience rather than prompting them to provide a self-conscious interpretation or explanatory account of the experience (as in, "Please tell me what care means to you?" or "Please tell me why you think you experienced being deeply cared for in this way and not in another way?"). How the natural attitude relates to retrospective narratives is a question I will take up shortly.

Since this method aims at natural attitude descriptions, it seeks participants for whom the phenomenon under investigation is part of their lived-world, although not necessarily a quotidian event. On the contrary, a participant might be called upon to recollect a harrowing experience, a unique moment of joy or insightful discovery, or a once-in-a-lifetime traumatic loss. But, to the extent that the method aims at natural attitude descriptions, it must focus on experiences that were lived without specialized

modes of reflection upon what it was that was being lived – since within the natural attitude things are taken as they appear to be.

In Husserlian terms, what is occurring in subject selection? A question is directed toward the participant. Assuming that the question does not mirror an issue the participant has reflected on carefully, we are directing the question largely toward his or her sense of the event within a natural attitude, which itself is grounded in his or her passively intentional lived-sense of the phenomenon. What this means is that we are not asking the participant to engage with our question theoretically, define its terms, reflect analytically on his or her own experiences, and then isolate a relevant specific example if there is one.

Rather, we are looking for an immediate assent, a “yes” that is not the fruit of analytic reflection but instead bespeaks a spontaneous recognition that the way we have named the phenomenon in our question is immediately valid for the participant as a possible name for a specific experience that presents itself to him or her. The interviewer is careful not to pre-interpret the meaning of the phenomenon for potential participants. We do not define “being deeply cared for” but instead invite the participants to share a description of an experience that, for them, corresponds with being deeply cared for. By refraining from supplying a specific sense of “care”, we allow participants to supply their own, because our interest is in what are the already-present psychological meanings of “care” for them.

If this spontaneous and relatively easy assent is not forthcoming, and if a potential participant instead struggles haltingly to identify an experience that might fit the research question, I advise students that the participant is unlikely to be a good one, because the easy response to our question is not there – the name we have provided does not, for him or her, match something he or she has lived. Obviously, language and vocabulary are already critical at this stage, not only in terms of the literal language used – English, Swedish, Italian, et cetera – but also in terms of the way in which the participant inhabits his or her own language, or secondarily acquired languages. Is our question about “being deeply cared for” expressed in English that is “everyday” for the community within which potential participants live? If we are posing the question to someone for whom English is a second language, do the question’s key terms translate clearly into the participant’s first language? Does the issue of translation raise cross-cultural complexities? These questions are noted as an acknowledgment of the complexities, when one is not studying a homogenous population, in gathering linguistic data in general.

As Biceaga (2010) observes, hyletic data are, for Husserl, not building blocks for representations, but rather “nodal points in a dynamic relational system underlying the formation of perceptual sense” (p. 20). In Husserlian terms, subject selection and data gathering aim to stay close to the lived interconnectedness of passive and active intentionality. This can occur in two ways: the question may provoke the participant to actively noetically grasp and thematize a past experience, which previously had been only passively lived, as one of “being deeply cared for by another”. Now actively intending the experience as noema, she will provide her account of it in the interview. Alternatively, it may be that she has actively intended this experience in the past – that is, she has reflected upon it before, the transition from passive intentionality to active intentionality has been lived through before – and that it has subsequently “sunk” back into passivity where, as Husserl (1918-1926/2001a) expresses it, it is “sedimented in the accomplishments of original passivity” (pp. 275-276), to be re-awakened by the research question.

As I have mentioned, once the transition from passive to active intentionality occurs, the participant can be said to inhabit a natural attitude, at least initially, and can give an account of experience. And, at this stage, as interviewers we ask simply “what was it like” questions, intervening only minimally in the participant’s narrative, avoiding leading questions which would imply a direction to take, including any explanatory or quasi-theoretical ideas (for example, “Could it be you were afraid of being cared for before you met him?” or “Did this experience change how you relate to others?”). Our carefulness in attending to the meaning as it is emerging for the participant in the interview, without seeking to shape or guide it, is theoretically understandable as an effort to remain close to the natural attitude meaning. This is sometimes explained as an effort to avoid encouraging “self-interpretations” on the part of the participant.

But is the natural attitude free of self-interpretation? The answer depends on the meaning of “interpret” to which we are referring. A research participant responding to an interview question need not reference established psychological theories, seek to make inferences about her experience, or attempt to offer a causal explanation of what she has lived. These are all possibilities that can to some extent be mitigated by the way the research situation and task are framed and explained by the researcher to participants.

But, as we have seen, these possibilities do not exhaust the meanings of interpretation for either Husserl or Ricoeur. In the light of the varied meanings of interpretation that have been explored in

this paper, it is clear that an interview aiming to invite a natural attitude description will yield data demonstrating other types of interpretation, which can be understood as:

- (1) *Determination*: The participant's noetic constitution of his or her lived-experience in active intentionality is an interpretation in the Husserlian sense of *Auffassung*. In this sense, our data is the participant's interpretation of an experience that could be determined in multiple other ways.
- (2) *Emplotment*: The participant's narrative articulation of the experience, its "emplotment" in Ricoeur's terms, is a mimetic, linguistic representation of the lived-experience, and as such is an interpretation. In this sense, our data is a story that bears a meaningful relationship to a lived-event, but, at the same time, it is not the prelinguistic event "itself".
- (3) *Representation of narrative identity*: The participant's representation of himself as the protagonist of his narrative is an expression of narrative identity, and as such is a self-interpretation. As I will address below, this self-representative feature is particularly important to consider when the phenomenon being recounted is a socially or psychologically-charged one – for then the horizon within which the interview is given, and in particular the audience or imagined audiences, is a psychologically important factor for the participant.

These linguistically mediated interpretations, given in response to the invitation to describe an experience, ought not to be regarded as *mediated* in a pejorative sense – that is, as demonstrating a negative and avoidable distantiation from the lived-experience itself. On the contrary, it is through language that we come to know the other's experience, and it is often precisely through the mediation of speech that meaning is recognized by speakers themselves: as Merleau-Ponty (1960/1964) notes, "There is a 'linguagely' [*langagière*'] meaning of language which effects the mediation between my as yet unspoken intention and words, and in such a way that my spoken words surprise me myself and teach me my thought" (p. 88). Indeed, partly for this reason, participants often remark that the interview was an opportunity for them to understand their own experience more deeply. That acknowledgement alone communicates that the interview is its own experience in relation to what has been previously lived, and not merely a means of accessing it. The way in which a participant tells us his or her experience during the interview is not a mere reporting of something previously grasped, but rather the birth of something new. In Merleau-Ponty's (1960/1964) words: "Taking language as a *fait*

*accompli* – as the residue of past acts of signification and the record of already acquired meanings – the scientist inevitably misses the peculiar clarity of speaking, the fecundity of expression" (p. 85).

It might be objected that the descriptive method is focused on the phenomenon, and not on a depth understanding of the meanings of that phenomenon for the individual participants in the contexts of their own life stories or its place in their sense of their own identity. In other words, the dimensions of narrativity, it might be argued, would be relevant only if the researcher had an idiographic or quasi-therapeutic aim, whereas descriptive phenomenology is not focused on the subject but on elucidating the eidetic structure of the phenomenon itself. There is no doubt that Englander's (2012) distinction between a research and a therapeutic situation, a "subject-subject" emphasis versus a "subject-phenomenon" one, points to two fundamentally different contexts for and intentions regarding inquiring into another's experience, and hence to two different senses of directedness in relation to the other person.

But both instances are encounters between two people, and I want to pose, but not seek to answer, the following question: is it possible to be deeply interested in a phenomenon without being deeply engaged in the way it is being lived by the individual before me? Is there a necessary tension between seeking, on the one hand, to deeply understand in a psychologically sensitive way the manners in which three people have lived the phenomenon of "being deeply cared for" and how their accounts reflect particular ways of grasping their own identities and values regarding caring and receiving care, and, on the other hand, gaining a psychological structural understanding of being deeply cared for? Does the essence exist except in its instantiations? If the participant is viewed as secondary to the phenomenon, could this render him or her instrumental in a certain way, and, if so, how would this impact what Churchill (2012) terms the researcher's "empathy as a means of access to the meaningfulness of expression" (p. 8) of the other?

In addition, is individual psychotherapy focused exclusively upon knowing individual subjects, or is it rather – particularly in its existential interpretation – an effort to accompany an other in grasping something essentially human and intersubjective? As Sousa (2014) notes in his exploration of the implications of passive genesis for the practice of clinical psychology, Husserl emphasized the interrelatedness of passive and active intentionality and consequently the interrelatedness of static and genetic analysis. If the genetic dimension of phenomenology seeks to understand the grounds of the psychological self in pre-egoic intentionality, and

if, as I will argue below, the investigation of the presence of passive intentionality is called for by some of our data, then, in seeking to understand the anonymous life of our participants, and the ways in which that anonymity is rendered into narratives, are we strictly seeking to understand individuals as monads, or rather to grasp something intersubjective? These questions are named here but are beyond the scope of this paper.

Returning to the theme of self-interpretation, what descriptive researchers may well find is that participants “sum up” the meaning of their narrative as they bring the interview to a close, seeking to convey in their own words what they understand as the meaning of the story, a “tying it all together”. Nothing could be more typical of a communicative, wakefully intersubjective situation than this. The fulfilment of a story for the narrator is the listeners’ registering of the story in a way that communicates to the narrator that they have grasped the sense of what has been shared with them. I would maintain that the “summing up” that frequently occurs as the end of an interview approaches is potentially psychologically revelatory, and would only need to be regarded as an unfortunate lapse if we conceptualize our data gathering as an effort to capture a “pure” description, with purity conceptualized as free from all self-interpretation. What meanings of interpretation or self-interpretation could be considered problematic in phenomenological interviewing, and why?

In this paper I have argued that the data we seek is a narrative representation of what is being actively intended by the research participant, founded in an ongoing way in passive intentionality. I propose that a variety of modes of actively intending often occur in such data, which will be provisionally distinguished in the following way:

- (1) Speaking *from* an experience to the other;
- (2) Speaking *about* an experience to the other;
- (3) *Explaining* an experience to the other.

These are offered as descriptions of three possible attitudes reflecting distinguishable intentional acts that occur during the interview. As such, all may be alternately present in a given interview, or one may predominate.

The English word “from” etymologically comes from a root meaning “moving away” or “forward” and here refers to the sense of a participant’s *bringing forward* a meaning that is imminent for him or her – that is, it is both livingly present passively, and actively seized upon and thus intuitively present for him or her. In *speaking from an experience* to the interviewer, the participant’s attention is first and foremost on the intuitive presence of the phenomenon for him or her.

By emphasizing the role of passive intentionality in the interview, I intend to highlight the fact that a contact-full relationship with what was lived is not reducible to actively intentional recollection alone. As Hart (2009) explains, passive synthesis is an ongoing ground, prior to and informing active intuiting:

Before I am an active agent of manifestation I am first a passive primal presencing, a dative of manifestation, i.e., a passive agent of manifestation. Yet this is I myself most passively and elementally, and the field that passive synthesis opens up is the field of my life. It is all there even when I am not remembering it, i.e., actively recalling the past Nows as past Nows. ... The past is always being called forth in the sense that it is constantly informing the present in our perceptual life. (p. 70)

What the participant narrates is the passively intended experience *as seized upon actively* and articulated as meaningful in the present, in relation to the interviewer (this context cannot be forgotten). So this situation is doubly interpretive: first as a naming and determination (*Auffassung*), and secondly as narrative representation given to another (mimesis). And it is this kind of speaking that I argue is closest to the kind of data sought in the descriptive method (Giorgi, 2009). I am seeking to stress both the immediacy and the mediacy of the data: such data gathered in the natural attitude is, from the perspective explored in this paper, both in contact with the passive grounds of consciousness and unavoidably interpretive.

In *speaking about* an experience, I mean to evoke the etymological root of the word “about” which means “on the outside of”. By *speaking about an experience* I am referring to the moments during an interview when a participant is reflectively aware that he is trying to convey the sense of his story to the interviewer. Why does this distinction matter? Because, at that point, the interview may be shaped to a greater extent by the way the participant objectifies his account of his lived-experience as a story to be told to the other, and objectifies himself and the other as participants in the storytelling event, seeking to fulfil the event as a whole in a certain way.

In *speaking about* an experience, a participant is still in contact with the experience as it is intuitively present for him, actively seized upon – and, at the same time, his attention is also upon the narrative as a meaningful story that he wants to convey to the other person. In other words, the narrative as such is relatively more objectified, and the narrator stands to a certain degree “outside” of the intuited presence, seeking to convey it. For example, from this standpoint the participant’s language and nonverbal

expressions may evince a “searching for the right words” because there is a conscious concern to convey the sense of the story to the interviewer. What I am seeking to designate is that the answers our participants give to us are not given in a way that is abstracted from the lived-experience of the interview itself; such data is embedded in relationality, which is to say in the interview *as its own lived-experience* rather than an experience that itself is psychologically void and entirely transparent to something else, namely the phenomenon.<sup>8</sup>

Interview data would be decontextualized were we to imagine that the account given is an *unmediated* rendering of the present-day meaning the experience has for the participant (even if given in what Husserl termed a natural attitude). In fact, this is precisely where the Husserlian idea of the natural attitude could become problematic, if it is read in a manner that suppresses the way in which *narrating an experience is itself a lived-experience* that has its own structure and meaning. In other words, if we become neglectful of the act of narrating, we might in a certain sense neglect the person, and the meaningful choices s/he makes in giving us his or her account, in order to focus exclusively on the phenomenon itself, as if the phenomenon appears in the absence of people.

The horizon upon which a participant answers the research question is, at minimum, inclusive of the interviewer and his or her embodied presence, the meaningfulness with which the interview situation was constituted, the sense of being understood or not understood during the interview, and perhaps also the further horizon of the possible audiences to whom the research data will be given. This does not negate the meaningfulness of our data; on the contrary, it acknowledges that part of the meaningfulness of that data is precisely its situatedness in a dialogue between the researcher and the participant – even if the researcher is particularly careful to maintain a phenomenological attitude (Englander, 2012; Giorgi, 2009).

Finally, *explaining an experience to the other* occurs when the participant goes beyond merely seeking to

<sup>8</sup> My contention regarding the relational context of the narratives given in interviews is a descriptive claim, not a constructivist or postmodern one. Unlike Kvale (2007), I am not arguing that an interview “is a conversation in which the knowledge is constructed in and through an interpersonal relationship, co-authored and co-produced by interviewer and interviewee” (p. 89), but, rather, that the context for the participant’s constitution of his or her narrative is ineluctably relational.

convey the meaning of what s/he has lived to the interviewer, but seeks to give an explanatory or causal account *of* that experience in a theorizing or quasi-theorizing way. It is this attitude that is, I believe, most often referred to as “self-interpretation” by descriptive researchers who aim to draw a sharp distinction between their method and others which encourage precisely the adoption of a self-consciously interpretive attitude by participants (cf. Applebaum, 2012). A range of types of data are encountered when participants are in this mode, such as: giving their own reflective conclusions about the meaning of the experience they have been invited to describe, attempting to offer a causal explanation of why their experience occurred the way it did, recapitulating an interpretation of the experience developed in dialogue with their psychotherapist over time, or seeking to give an interpretation of their experience with explicit reference to established psychological theory such as Jungian archetypal psychology.

If the guiding interest of the researcher is focused on the phenomenon as passively and actively constituted in everyday life, then data given in an explanatory attitude does not hold psychological interest. It should be noted that, from a Husserlian perspective, the explanatory attitude itself raises interesting psychological questions: for example, is the participant aware that s/he is seeking to explain? Does s/he recognize experientially the difference between speaking in contact with a lived-experience and speaking in a way that eclipses the ordinary meanings of that experience? What is the relationship between this attitude and the speaker’s sense of his or her own body – the body being the home ground of passive intentionality? These questions have clinical, although not exclusively clinical, relevance, but to follow them further is beyond the scope of this paper.

Finally, a recently completed phenomenological research practicum will be cited to exemplify the kind of data that would benefit from an analytical perspective informed by both Husserl’s phenomenology of active and passive intentionality and Ricoeur’s narrative hermeneutics. Zapien (2014) interviewed three subjects on the phenomenon of beginning an affair while married. I will confine my discussion to brief remarks concerning one of the constituents in the psychological structure discovered by the researcher, namely that “Intentionality in the development of the affair is lived passively” by the participants (Zapien, 2014, p. 26). My reading is that, for Zapien (2014),

- (1) Participants’ descriptions of beginning an affair consistently reported having lived through a series of actions and choices in relation to an other prior to recognizing that they had already initiated an affair.

- (2) Participants described the recognition of their having already begun an affair as shocking because it occurred for them in the midst of action, not before acting.
- (3) Participants retrospectively grasped the steps taken in initiating the affair as having been framed by them at the time as in conformity to societal relational norms and relational propriety regarding monogamy; only after an experience of embodied, shared intimacy with the other were they obliged to acknowledge that they had contravened these ethical/behavioural norms.
- (4) Participants' accounts of the affairs reaffirmed the societal/ethical norms that they had contravened by having the affairs; nevertheless, their representations of the phenomenon were characterized by ongoing ambivalence regarding the meaning of their agency and motivations in initiating the affairs. In other words, from the researcher's perspective there was a meaningful gap, unthematized by the participants themselves, between the participants' ethical/normative statements regarding their affairs and the ambivalent way in which the meaning of the affair was still lived by them.

Consequently, Zapien's (2014) findings suggest the following:

- (1) Phenomena that were at least in part passively lived, and, as such, therefore lived in a manner that is psychologically opaque, may retain that ambiguity even when grasped in an actively intentional way. Exploring the meaning of that ambiguity and the implications of passively-lived experiences suggests the relevance not only of Husserl's static descriptive analysis – which can paint a picture of the ambiguity that is present but must pause at this presence – but also of his interpretive genetic analysis, which can probe the meaning of the ambiguity beyond its intuitive givenness.
- (2) Data that conveys both active and passively intended matter, and, even more interestingly, the transition between the two, points to the psychological relevance of experiences lived precisely on the border of the two realms. To neglect the presence of passive content would appear to be unnecessary, particularly in a case like that investigated by Zapien (2014) in which it is precisely the quality of lived-but-not-fully-grasped that makes the phenomenon both psychologically and socially impactful and charged.
- (3) Opening to a genetic analysis in order to consider the meanings of passively-lived phenomena would not render research necessarily idiographic, any more than static analysis is. A genetic reflection could still be conducted

comparatively and need not be envisioned as limited to an individualized or psychotherapeutic context.

- (4) In the case of phenomena such as the beginning of an affair, or the practice of BDSM – both areas in which I am currently supervising studies – acknowledging the charged psychological meanings attached to the participant's act of sharing his or her narrative with the researcher is unavoidable. The lived-experience of the research situation itself, as an encounter, implicates the manner in which the participant represents his or her experience in the interview as a story given to a particular witness and upon the horizon of other potential witnesses. Ricoeur's work on narrative identity is invaluable in remembering the mimetic character of our data, which by analogy could be compared to a painting of an event, rather than a photograph of it. And, while fine photography is deeply artful, I mean this analogy to indicate that, in painting, we are aware of not simply "seeing" the things themselves, but seeing and appreciating the representation of the thing, which simultaneously opens us to the world and the world of the painter.
- (5) The narrative perspective also enables us to thematize a situation like that in Zapien's (2014) study in which a narrative description is being given upon the horizon of other, socially validated narratives – such as, for example, the penitent adulterer who is acknowledging his past ethical lapse.<sup>9</sup> Acknowledging that the meaning of the data is situated within a larger social context enables us to reflect interpretively upon a gap or conflict that can be recognized – once again, in a way that perhaps bridges description and interpretation – between the narrative a participant is seeking to articulate and a range of perhaps contradictory senses that remain inchoate in the narrative.

<sup>9</sup> Narratives are intelligible in part because they speak to normativity. As Polkinghorne (1988), commenting on Ricoeur, notes: "The communal significance of actions confers an initial 'readability' on them. The manners, customs, and other social agreements also supply an evaluation of actions in terms of their conformity to moral norms, and they define which actions are good or bad, better or worse" (pp. 144-145). Part of the horizontal meaning of narratives like those collected by Zapien (2014) is therefore that they are bound either to echo or to challenge conventional expectations regarding infidelity.

## Conclusion

In the present study, varying meanings of *interpretation* were distinguished: (1) interpretation as a constitutive determination of an object in the noetic act, (2) interpretation as the selective process reflecting a position-taking with respect to the object of consciousness, which would include a narrative, (3) interpretation as the mimetic representation of pre-linguistic experiences which, in the case of life narratives, also is an expression of the identity of the protagonist, (4) interpretation as the reflective and sometimes quasi-theoretical conclusions an interview participant has arrived at regarding the meaning of his or her own past experience, and (5) interpretation as

the researcher's application of a specific theoretical lens through which to understand the data.

It was argued that both passive and active intentionality may be implicated in our data; hence the applications of both Husserl's static and genetic analyses in data analysis would be a fruitful avenue for exploration. Likewise, it was argued that Ricoeur's work on narrativity is invaluable for researchers' grasping psychologically revelatory modes of self-interpretation that are present in interview data, as well as in researchers' thematizing of the social horizons and shared stories within which narratives are at once constitutively interpretive and descriptive of lived-experience.

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After majoring in History/History of Culture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Dr Applebaum enrolled at Saybrook University, where his MA and PhD studies focused, under the direction of Amedeo Giorgi, on the descriptive phenomenological method in psychology and the foundations of this approach in the philosophy of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. His PhD dissertation was a phenomenological psychological study of the meanings of leadership-as-servanthood among Muslim civil society leaders and their felt connection with the Prophet Muhammad. His MA thesis was a comparative study of the psychological meanings of intuition in the works of Husserl and Nishida Kitaro, founder of the Kyoto School of philosophy.

Dr Applebaum has published a number of papers, including some in Italian, in the field of phenomenological psychological research methodology. Currently serving on the editorial boards of both the *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* and the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, he is also the founder of the website *PhenomenologyBlog* (<http://phenomenologyblog.com/>).

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