

---

# Phenomenological Narrative in the Art of Autobiography: In Theory and Personal Experience

**Said Tawfik**

Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, Giza, Egypt

**Email address:**

said-tawfik@hotmail.com

**To cite this article:**

Said Tawfik. Phenomenological Narrative in the Art of Autobiography: In Theory and Personal Experience. *American Journal of Art and Design*. Vol. 6, No. 4, 2021, pp. 112-119. doi: 10.11648/j.ajad.20210604.11

**Received:** September 20, 2021; **Accepted:** October 28, 2021; **Published:** November 5, 2021

---

**Abstract:** The main purpose of this essay is to find out some of the fundamental principles and concepts, which constitute the essence of the art of autobiography as a “phenomenological narrative”. It seeks to recognize the common principles of phenomenology in that art, a recognition that it will clarify in theory and practice. Thus, it phenomenologically investigates the art of autobiography as a practice of phenomenology, i.e., as a phenomenological narrative. The introduction starts from the phenomenological tradition, which asserts the intimate relation between artistic vision and phenomenological approach to phenomena. Accordingly, it seeks to prove that autobiography can also be an art which bears the characteristics of the phenomenological approach, and perhaps more strongly than any other art can bear. In what I call “the art of autobiography”, the narrator practices reflection as an act of consciousness, in order to grasp the meaning of his/her lived experiences. In this respect, I can claim that in that form of art, the relation between art and phenomenology is stronger and intensified than in many other narratives. This can be clarified by exploring the main phenomenological concepts, which at work in that form of art, such as reflection, inter-subjectivity and lived experience or the experience of “life world” (*Lebenswelt*). Along with this reflection, which seeks to grasp intentionally the meaning of the experience of the self, “inter-subjectivity” is another phenomenological aspect of narration, which is intrinsic in the essence of this reflection. It is true that narration in autobiography is concerned with personal experiences, but this does not mean that the narrator here is concerned only with his/ or her own experience apart from the others who can share and endure the same experience, even when this happens on the level of imagination. The concept of personal experience as inter-subjectivity leads us to explore the author’s manipulation of his memory in respect to time and space, and, in the end, to lived experience itself. In this sense, we can consider the art of autobiography as a way in which phenomenological approach can express itself in its endeavor to extend to all of our lived experience of our world.

**Keywords:** Phenomenology, Phenomenological Narrative, The Art of Autobiography, Reflection, Inter-subjectivity, Lived Experience, The Subject/The Self, Memory, Time and Space

---

## 1. Introduction

This article investigates, *from a theoretical as well as an applied perspective*, the main characteristics that constitute the essence of autobiography as a narrative art distinguished with phenomenological characteristics. Thus exposed, this objective appears to imply a conceptual and a methodological issue, which raises this problematic question: do we seek here an understanding of an “aesthetics of phenomenological narrative”, or a “phenomenological aesthetics of narrative?” In fact, both questions are involved in the background of this article, as they are in close relation to each other, despite their

different perspectives. So, the question now: whence can we start?

The first instruction derived from the literature of phenomenology is to start from the *noema*, or the intended object of experience itself; for the main principle here, is that experience is adapted according to the nature of its object. We have learnt this lesson from Husserl, i.e., from the starting point of his philosophy: the understanding of “intentionality”, as an experience of something, lies in the intention of understanding it. This instruction was also asserted by Ingarden, the most faithful student of Husserl, in spite of his criticism of Husserl’s transcendental

phenomenology, who exposed his philosophy of literature in two successive works, namely, *The Literary Work of Art*, and *The Cognition of the literary Work of Art*. In this respect, Ingarden says that:

Before proceeding to the description of “cognition” in the broad sense, of the literary work, we must first consider what constitutes the object of this “cognition”. The epistemological investigations which have been carried out by the phenomenologists, since Husserl’s *logical Investigations*, show that between the mode of cognition and the object of cognition there is a special correlation; there is perhaps even an adaptation of the cognition to its object [6].

Duffrene also has learnt these instructions when he exposed his *La Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique* (1953) in two parts: one of them is dealing with the “aesthetic object”, the other with “aesthetic perception.”

Accordingly, to find out the phenomenological characteristic in the art of autobiography, is what can help in any attempt that looks for collaborative efforts for establishing a phenomenological narrative in autobiography. In other words, it can be said that we will make use of some of the main theoretical attitudes of the phenomenological vision, by which we can understand the characteristics of this kind of narrative when it implies this vision; i.e., we will seek to recognize phenomenology as it is practiced and manifested in that kind of art. In this way, this attempt belongs to what is called “phenomenology of phenomenology”. This task, which implies some of problematic concepts, is our concern now on.

## 2. Aesthetic Object in the Art of Autobiography

This is the primary question in approaching the foundation of our inquiry. If the phenomenological instruction that we should always start from the aesthetic object itself, in order to understand the corresponding experience of it, the question which will impose itself: *can autobiography be considered a work of art, which necessarily implies an aesthetic object; so that it will not be counted as a mere work of belles-letters (in the Gadamerian sense)?*

The classification of arts according to its limits and its positions and arrangement in the hierarchy of arts (Hegel and Schopenhauer, for example), is hardly to be accepted as a whole in contemporary aesthetic thought. For the limits and borderlines of the work of art, hence of aesthetic object, have become so wide and intersecting, so that the limits among them are camouflaged or attenuated, and their materials and expressive media are interacted; a fact which holds good to literature that belongs to the works of art. We should notice, however, that putting aside the hierarchy and systematized classification of art does not mean at all putting aside the distinction among the artistic species, including literary themselves. Thus, there is a validity in the distinction between the mere literature and the literary work of art (such as; poetry, novel, drama, for example).

Let us put directly our concern here in this question: in

what sense can we consider autobiography as a work of art? Definition through distinction maybe helpful here; for this question presupposes that we have to make distinction between what I call “the art of autobiography” and the other forms of narrative concerning some self, such as biography, historiography, memoirs and diaries, etc. More important, however, is to be aware of the difference between the art of autobiography and that, which one may call “mere autobiography”. We can make these distinctions, in general, as follows:

- a. The art of autobiography bears some characteristic of the novelistic narrative, which makes use of the aesthetic narrative and the power of imagination in picturing a spatio-temporal world. However, the difference between the art of autobiography and the art of novel lies in the fact that the world, which is depicted by the first is the world of the self itself, whereas in the latter, we find different worlds and different visions of it, as the self of the author interweaves in his work.
- b. The art of autobiography is different from the other narratives in respect of the life of the person. The point of difference lies in the fact that these narratives maybe a mere narration of some historical events concerning the life of the person which, in spite of its importance, remains mere incidents that indicate a certain important historical episode and a sociological aspect concerning the course of life of some person, but are narrated in an abstract form. In this sense, we can make use of the following expression of Arnaud Schmitt of the concept of “abstract narrative”:

If the book cover says “memoir,” for instance, they [the readers] read it as a memoir. And yet, I have also pointed out that when it comes to mentally reenacting the narrative, this does not mean much phenomenologically. I have read so many memoirs, not as fictional narratives but as *abstract* ones: being aware of their referentiality, but with awareness remaining at the abstract level [10].

- c. In spite of the fact that the self or the subject of the author has a peculiar presence in the art of autobiography (an issue which we will clarify later), the subjective aspect, in general, is not what matters here in distinguishing this art from other forms of narrations of the author. For, the decisive characteristic here is what could be described as “a conscious act of reconstructing what is an object for the reflection of the subject,” which is expressed clearly in the following quotation:

It is not always easy to establish a distinction between memoirs and autobiography. In general, we can say that the latter implies the reconstruction of the most intimate personal experience of a person throughout his life, while memoirs have a social and historical perspective [15].

This peculiar aspect of the art of autobiography will be discussed in detail, when we reflect on the meaning of “reflection” as one of the main phenomenological acts, which is manifested in this art. What concerns us now is to assert that the process of reconstruction, mentioned above, is what bestows the characteristic of the work of art on this kind of

narrative. For we find in that narrative a construction of a variety of levels, which was reconstructed by a conscious act. In this sense, we consider a narrative as a “literary work of art”, without being committed to Ingarden’s enclosed structure with its four multi-layers.

The above preliminary discussion is necessary for the possibility of speaking about a phenomenological characteristic of the narrative, which belongs to the nature of work of art. In addition, if Husserl himself has pointed out to the affinity between the phenomenological method and the manner of art, we have to prove that autobiography may also be a work of art whose media intersect with the media of other literary works of art such as novel and poetic writing. The question now: what are the phenomenological characteristics that manifest in that kind of narration in some autobiographies? This is what we have to consider in what follows.

However, before dwelling on our question in the following points, I would like to mention here a personal experience that may be indicative of what I have said and of what follows. In my book on “*The World of Alghitany*” (published in Arabic), and in many discussions about the works and writings of this great Arabic narrator, I described him as “a phenomenological author by nature”, especially in his later writings which belongs to the art of autobiography, and which bears the phenomenological character. [I explained this point, in details, in my essay “La phénoménologie et l’art de l’autobiographie”, in *Frankofoni*, Ankara Univ., 1917), No. 31]. He was so influenced by this discussion that he asked me to provide him with some of the basic writings in phenomenology, so that he may recognize the deep origin in which the manner of his latter writings lies. I myself was influenced in my latest works, which belong to the art of autobiography, by what I have learnt from the phenomenological approach, and what I have learnt from Alghitany and other great philosophers and writers (Bachelard for example) whose writings embodies that approach. Although I was aware of the phenomenological origin of what I was writing then, this awareness, in the end, was not the motivation of it, i.e., this awareness occurs spontaneously in the manner of writing itself.

Accordingly, this private remark may justify our making help of some texts derived from Alghitany’s and from my own writings in this respect, in order to explain the theoretical meanings and concepts which I make use of here. Thus, let us raise again our question: what is phenomenological in that kind of narrative?

### 3. “Reflection” in the Art of Autobiography

It is well known that Husserl described phenomenology in its origin as a description of intentional experiences through reflection, for when we focus our view on our psychological life, this occurs necessarily as a process of reflection ([4], “Phenomenology”). Moreover, Husserl also noticed the

affinity between phenomenology and the manner of art or aesthetic perception, since art can afford us some fruitful examples of the phenomenological *Anschaung* of essences [5]. In spite of the fact that there is a difference between phenomenology and art, in respect of the procedure of reflection, this procedure in both is not a process of induction or inference in understanding. It seeks to grasp the essence of something as it is given directly and corporeally in experience, i.e., as it is manifested in a fact or an event. We should notice, however, that this fact or event is always manifested through its relation to the whole context in which it is given; a context which the “phenomenological subject” seeks to grasp and describe its meaning (as I explained elsewhere in detail).

If the phenomenological experience transfers us from the domain of facts, which occur in our experience to the domain of *eidos*, we should always remember that essences in phenomenology do not live in an independent world of its own, because they could not exist or being grasped except in, and through, facts or events themselves. Therefore, reflection as understood by Merleau-Ponty “... involves a power of reflection, the ability to find the sense of what is lived through by oneself or by another.” [7].

It is an act and not a mere record of internal observation or introspection, but it is the activity of consciousness in his endeavor to understand what is given in the experience. For,

This introspection is supposed to consist in the presence of data internal to the subject, which he observes and which are revealed to him by the mere fact that they are “in him”. This is an internal perception, the noting of an event with which I coincide. But reflection is not at all the noting of a fact. It is, rather, an attempt to understand. It is not the passive attitude of a subject who watches himself live but rather the active effort of a subject who grasps the meaning of his experience”. [7].

Many of Husserl’s followers were aware of his instructions of “reflection” as the focus of phenomenological experience, and they started their philosophies from Husserl’s latter writings on *Lebenswelt*, or the experience of life-world through reflection. Thus, although the concept of “phenomenological reflection” belongs to the early writings of Husserl, it remains present throughout phenomenology in all its phases. Upon this, we can understand the spirit that motivated the philosophies of many phenomenologists, especially those of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.

This “reflection”, as an endeavor to understand the meaning of an experience of something, is one of the main characteristics of the art of autobiography. As an act of consciousness and a practice of phenomenology, it is realized and concretized in that art. The question now: how this phenomenological process occurs in that kind of narrative.

The subject matter of narrative in autobiography is the author’s own life. However, the person’s own life is of no importance, if it does not imply events enriched with deep and fruitful meanings. Thus, not all the events of one’s own life are convenient as a subject matter of narrative, only few of them can imply deep meanings which touch us as readers.

This could occur when these events are subjected, by the author, to the act of reflection through the processes of reconstruction. The following quotation expresses this meaning clearly:

An Autobiographical Text presupposes that the person has developed individuality and consciousness in order to organize his own history from the perspective of the present. Autobiography is, indeed, a rational and elaborated construction. ... This reconstruction does not necessarily have to be complete, nor can it reproduce the individual's whole history, since the author conceives it through an existentially significative interpretation. The reader's attitude has to approach the author's point of view through the structured explanation of his personal construct world. [15].

The facts or events of consciousness that are subjected to reflection through an intentional act are what seize the attention of few writers of autobiography who know how different is the narrative in the art of autobiography, and how it is distinct from other forms of narratives, for example: memoirs and dairies. For, these forms rely upon the act of remembering or mentioning the events serially or in successive order as possible. The narrative in such later cases is not primarily concerned with the meanings of facts or events of life as such and in itself, but as related to his own person. We may note here that the position of the narrator's self is different in both cases. It is true that these events are not neutral in these other forms of narrative, since it belongs also to the narrator as something occurred in his intimate experience, and thus constitutes an important episode of his own life. It is also true that these events may be of great importance in respect of its social or historical significance. However, such significance is not what primarily concerns the narrator in the art of autobiography; for what he is concerned with is what has occurred in his intimate experience as something which he has endured, and which others, as well, can endure throughout their being in the world.

Reflection in the art of autobiography has nothing to do with the cold meditations of Descartes, which preconceive truth as a complete idea that we attain through an artificial rational method. It resembles, instead, the reflections of the phenomenological existentialists, which are derived by the fresh lived experience: an experience in which the author, as a person who asks about the meaning of his life and existence, seeks to capture something of its meaning as it is manifested in its lived context.

From this, we can discern the significance of the art of autobiography to philosophy, and to the manner of philosophizing itself. That is, philosophy in our own time needs to make use of different manners to reveal its codes, and to embody its ways of thinking in a concrete form, even if this comes from the spontaneity of reflection. From this bountiful emanation of reflection comes the narratives of the great works of the art of autobiography, wherein art here expresses vividly the experience of life and existence through the passions, which the text conveys to us. Perhaps this bountiful emanation is derived from an inspiration of reflection on a transient event that may recall the hidden

content of memory, in order to retain it in our consciousness as well as in the consciousness of others. This occurs as a springing forth of a first and direct reflection of something, which motivates then second reflections of its meaning, reflections, which, in turn, enrich the first direct reflection. This what I asserted in my preface of my autobiography.

The purpose of the narrator when practicing this process as a whole, is to emit his reflections on the meaning of his experience to the general reader, and to let who is interested in philosophy understand and reflect upon how phenomenology, as an approach to understand phenomena or experiences, is manifested in the art of literature. It is, perhaps, useful here to the reader, who is interested in philosophy, to refer to the writings of Gaston Bachelard, in which he reflects on the meanings of his experience of something such as; drawers, cupboards, nests, water, and fire, etc. The reader can also refer to the writings that belong to the art of autobiography, especially those writings which imply philosophical views, more overwhelmed by the characteristic of narration in the art of literature, than to be overwhelmed by philosophical narrative. Perhaps the narrator of his biography is aware of this as whole, so that he reflects upon the truth of what he was writing. I may make use here of the following excerpt from the preface of the first work of my trilogy of autobiography:

"What I am writing here is a practical embodiment of Husserl's conception of the intimate relation between art and phenomenology. Accordingly, what I am writing here from a literary perspective, always recalls to us the philosophical meaning included in depth of the phenomena, even if it were transient".....

"I still do not know an exact description of the nature of what I am writing here, but I know at least that it is something that brings together philosophy and literature in one unity, something that can not be described as merely literary or merely philosophical. Though it belongs to literature as fictional narrative in the form of autobiography, it is not without a many of philosophical insight; for, the literary or the aesthetic here is enchanted by an understanding of the meanings of the phenomena, which we undergo in the experience" [12].

If autobiography, in general, is the narration by the author himself of his personal life; *life itself* remains the first and last object of autobiography, even when we are seen as if we were detached from it whence we are contemplating it. In fact, we are not detached from it at all; for we reflect upon it in the same moment in which it is present in our consciousness; that is why we reflect upon it as a continuous presence.

The object of reflection in autobiography is *life itself*, wither it was our own life or the lives of others. This is the main object dominated in the art of autobiography, as well as in phenomenology or the philosophy that is concerned primarily with life itself. This is what A-T. Tymenithca has asserted as a discovery of the task of the present phenomenological research: "the *great question of underlying all phenomenological endeavor has to be the question of life*" [14]. This, in the end, entails that life has

become gradually the main object of phenomenology, and of the art of autobiography as well, i.e., as an art which is concerned already and primarily with life itself. We should remember, however, that our life intended here is not our mere personal life, but it is our personal life which concerns other people who may feel that it is a life which belongs to them as well. This, however, impose here that we are required to consider first the problematic meaning of the concept of the meaning of subject, in its relation to the subjects of others. This exactly is what evoked my following reflection in the last work of my autobiography (entitled in Arabic as: "*Emanations of reflection*") which I mention her for the sake of more explanation of my view:

I have said in the first part of my autobiography entitled "*The Emanations of Reflection: The first meditation of the phenomena of Life and existence*", that "these *Emanations* may not come to an end, and I may not attain in my life what is similar to it. But god endowed me here with the experience which can always help us to understand and learn something more than we have been already taught from it, and which may complete what I have said in my previous work, or add something completely new. Thus, I am writing here what is dedicated upon me by the primary and direct reflections of my experiences, without an intended arrangement. In fact, this arrangement, which includes refinement of the text and putting it in the proper context, always comes later to the first reflections that motivated writing. .... [That which] motivated me to embody the moment of experience in imaginative and pictorial writing. But not every moment we live, deserves writing; for, most of the moments of our life is an ordinary and transient moments which imply no meaning other than the significance of our transient existence in everyday life." [13]

All that is said above about the act or process of "reflection" in autobiography, is just one phenomenological aspect of the nature of narrative in that art. It, however, recalls us to discuss another phenomenological related aspect; i.e., the meaning of the subject and its manner of presence in the reflection practiced here:

#### 4. Inter-subjectivity in the Art of Autobiography

If the previous remarks on the meaning of "reflection" in the art of autobiography have recalled to us the question of the "subject" here; and if there is always a main subjective aspect in any autobiography; the question then is: what characterizes the subject, as a phenomenological subject, in the art of autobiography?

Herbert Spiegelberg discussed the meaning of subjectivity in phenomenology as follows. It does not mean what is merely personal, which is dependent upon a psychological empirical subject, and thus differs from one to another, nor does it mean dependent upon a subject, without respect to the identity of the person or his temperament, which is opposed to the objective that has no relation with any subject. It really

means what is subject- related, without a complete dependence upon the subject; and every phenomenology is "subjective" in that latter sense. [11].

All phenomenologists were already aware of this. Thus, for example, Merleau-Ponty, in his distinction between the empirical subject or self and phenomenological transcendental one, says:

Internal observation is related to the empirical self. But Husserlian "reflection is related to a transcendental subject which is pre-personal, and neutral with respect to the distinction between the empirical self and the other". [7].

The question about the subject has grasped the attention in most of the writings, and even some very recent phenomenological ones. In this respect, one can say, as explained in a recent study:

The autobiographical self is to be found in the relations that weave discrete and disparate episodes of self-understanding into a more or less unified whole: a whole that does not emerge *at* a time (i.e. on a particular page) but *through* time. ... The autobiographical self, as I am calling it, is found in the deeper relations- the laws of principles- implicated in the various ways the self presents itself to itself during the course of lifetim. [9]

However, we should assert that the self (the narrator himself) does not only introduce itself to itself, but also to the others through its reconstruction of its own whole life experience, as we have already seen. Accordingly, we have to remove (at least during our reflections) the concept of "individuality from our understanding of the concept of "subjectivity", but we have really to be conscious of the concept of "universality" as it is manifested here; for:

[The] "Universal" connotes something like that which is accessible to anyone including myself and of which the individuality can also be recognized by other individualities. [8].

Thus, we can say that:

.. individuality is accompanied always by universality which produces communication, and we may note here that "the highly individual mind does not speak or act *in its own name*, as if it were aware in the world, but as a man in general, as the bearer of a "human universality" which makes of man the brother of all men on earth. [8].

In fact, the concept of the "subject" in its relation to the "self", and in its relations to the concepts of the "individual" and the "universal", is a problematic concept in the heart of contemporary philosophy; and especially in the philosophies of the phenomenologists themselves. Thus, while we find in Heidegger the self as the "Da-sein" or the way of being in the world, Ricoeur sees it as "the self which recognizes itself" through its realizations. This recognition, however, is not a Cartesian recognition in which the subject already foresees itself directly in reflection. For;

...The self is not given immediately to itself in a self-perception, but it is grasped through a reflexive mediation in a "re-cognition. For Ricoeur, the subject "returns" to itself, recognizes itself, beginning with its own externalizations, in which obviously the body, the world in the different possible sense are implicated. [3].

How can we apply all this to the art of autobiography? How can we understand the role of the phenomenological subject or the self as manifested in phenomenological narrative, which is a productive practice of the phenomenological vision of the subject's active role in understanding its experience?

If we already know that the phenomenological subject is not a mere personal subject, we should also know that the phenomenological character of this subject is more intrinsic in the nature of the art of autobiography, than in any other forms of narrative; as the presence of the subject is more intimate here to the "I" or the narrator himself. Intimacy in this case, however, does not mean at all that the subject expresses what is merely personal, which may be found, for example, in the memoirs and diaries. It is true that what is merely personal belongs necessarily to me; but it maybe not intimate to myself; and it may even distant from me as if it were abstract fact that occurred in my mental experience; thus, I narrate it from a distance. It is also true that the events and circumstances, which the subject narrates, are of a great importance, only to those who are looking for knowing something social or political in general, etc., or those who are looking for knowing something of narrator's life, if he represents a public person in his/her own time. It is true that these events may have a universal and objective subject, but its meaning is still absorbed in the personal subject, and dependent upon it: the self of the narrator himself.

In addition, what is personal and intimate in this sense, is not belonging to me alone, but it is intended to be common to other subjects; and this is what I mean by "Inter-subjectivity" in the process which the subject practices in its communication with the objective world. Thus, this does not include all what crossed or recalled by the mind, however the importance of its social and historical significance maybe, but is only what deliberately intended to address the other subjects or persons in an intimate experience.

## 5. Lived Experience of Time and Space

These above remarks may recall the question of the role of memory in the art of autobiography, which is common in the current literatures of autobiography. For, the work of memory as that in which we remember events and situations is not what concerns here. What really concerns is the intentional consciousness that is concerned with the reconstruction of the object of memory through an elective process of its elements. It is elective of what is as much intimate to our experience as to the others who experienced it, or as it maybe intimate to them, even though they had not yet undergone; because it is very related to the experience of life in itself and by itself. However, this election alone cannot be sufficient, since it must be subjected to a process of eliminations of the details that are almost of no importance to others, and which are of no value to the process of reflection upon the meaning of the object itself, as an intended object of the subject. In addition, what remains here, after this process of elimination and election, must be subjected to another process of imagination,

which adds much to the essential details of the object of remembrance. These intended details may not have been similarly occurred in reality, and may have been only in the realm of wishing and the kingdom of imagination (a process that makes the art of autobiography related to the nature of the narrative in the great works of novel).

Considering the role of memory here, recalls us to consider the character of time present herewith. For, time here is not the mere past which memory recalls, i.e., the moment that does no longer exist. In fact, the moment has gone, and we can no longer retrieve it; but it is that past which we can be subjected to a process of *Aufhebung* which makes it an ever presence in our consciousness of our lived world, or make it "fused in our horizon" (in the language of Gadamer). What is astonishing, in fact, is that this time itself can be an object for the reflection of the narrator in the art of autobiography. We can find this in many of Alghitany's later works which (according to my view) belong to that art. Here is some of his sayings in these works:

"What remains is lesser than what has gone.

This a certain doubtless truth which I am conscious of, represent it, live it."

"Where yesterday has gone?" [1].

"What is to be, if what is not has been could be."

"That which I have been and no longer be; that which I have been, but we have no longer in touch; what may be related to what I am now? What a sacred kinship." [2].

This vision of time that is fragmentized in the later works of this great writer is the phenomenological vision of the "subject" which can call here for "the phenomenological subject." That is why, in my study of his later writings, I described this great writer as "a phenomenological writer by nature," and, in response, he was always saying that he is indebted to me, because I thus let him see the origin of what he is really writing. Phenomenological spirit, which underlies the narrative of this writer, as well as of many others, is also present in the narrative of my own autobiography (in three works). Although I was conscious, due to my background theoretical knowledge of phenomenology, I did not let this knowledge interrupt the intimacy and spontaneity of reflection in the direct lived experience.

It is worth notice here that narrative is also able of embodying a hermeneutical and phenomenological description of the ways of thinking in human time and space; since time could not really exist apart from a certain space- a building, a street, a house, etc. In this respect, we have to draw a special attention to Ricoeur's claim that "there is something like a mysterious concern of time and space in memory." [16].

The following excerpt from one of my own autobiographies maybe indicative of what I am trying to explain here, and what I have already discussed:

## 6. A Dream

In "Wadi al-Gemal" National Park of nature, located on the Red Sea coast in Southern Egypt, I was gazing, from a boat, at that tongue-shaped, beach-connected island inside the sea. On

the island's shore and in the shallow water grew short mangrove trees, laced with seawater, and characterized by their miraculous ability to resist its excess salinity. The island incubated rare migratory birds at definite times of the year. I asked the sailor of the boat to approach the island. At that moment, something more important than fishing grasped my attention.

As we drew nearer, the charming scene was coming to disclosure: white soft sand diving gradually into the sea, followed by coral reefs whose colors were reflected in the sun light on the shallow water. The color became green, then azure, and then gradually turned into dark blue as the depth increases. On the island was a wicker cottage, in front of which was a permanent trap for catching fish called a "bait", and a small primitive canoe for two people.

Stunningly, I stood. The sailor, intuitively, taking notice of my surprise and confused queries, said:

"This is a hut built by a member of the tribes who lived on grazing near the sea, but who preferred to live here in the fishing life with his wife and children. When he earned a wealth of fish, he sold it to buy one of the simple things he needed; his needs were always reduced to minimum."

When we moved away from the island for fishing in the deep sea, the night was getting darker. However, my eyes occasionally took a glimpse towards the island. The cottage seemed to me as a bright spot in a cosmic space. This light point was shimmering like a flame of fire whose fuel is of firewood. The simple man used it for lighting, and for cooking the food he caught. He would also taste at night, if he wants, the rapture of love with his wife, both saturated with the violence of nature. I contemplated the lives of people who lived in cities wrestling and scrambling every moment for the little things and dying for them, without living life itself, even for a short time. The old wisdom of Stoicism came to my mind: "Live according to nature", that is. Live according to the law of nature.

'How wrecked our lives are in the city! How overwhelmed I was by the passion of living in such a cottage, even for a month every year! I thought and pondered. The dream still haunts me and leads me to escape for little moments from the harsh reality, to the realm of the beautiful imagination that remains present in our unconsciousness, even though in our wishful minds. (*Al-khaterat*, [From a section entitled "fragments from the experience of life"], p. 323) [13].

I may be in here motivated by contemplating my writings, as well as Alghitany's writings, in the art of autobiography. However, the main purpose of all what I have explained is to pursue the traits of the phenomenological nature, which are present, greater or lesser, in that art. In this respect, we have to assert that the research in phenomenological aesthetics must widen its view to encompass this special kind of art, as it was compelled to make room for even what it is not art, like nature itself, and environment in general.

Inter-subjectivity in the art of autobiography is what can make us see clearly the meaning of truth in art, which is completely different from the objective truth, which we attain through a methodological thinking, and which we are claimed to assent. For, the method is not the only way to

attain the truth. In this respect, we have to be defended by Gadamer's hermeneutics.

Upon this relies the claim of speaking about the poetical truth, and the truth in the novel, even in the literature of journey; but above all in autobiography that deserves to possess the "narrative truth", as an aim and content of narrative in the art of autobiography. We may remember here that the main concern of the narrator is to find aesthetic ways of expressing the meaning of his own experience. It is true that the subject (in fact, the person) is present here more fully and truly than in other narratives. Nevertheless, it is not only present for itself, when trying to explain its own experience, but it is also present for others, when it seeks to make the meaning of its experience capable of being undergone in the consciousness of others and their experience, whether in the realm of reality or in the kingdom of imagination and fancy. For, the narrator here presents an aesthetical interpretation of his lived experience, in which others can participate, and can even learn from it.

Because of this all, I think that the research in the field of aesthetics of autobiography may form a new gateway to serious studies in the field of philosophical research of truth, time and memory, in fact, in the philosophy of life itself, which is the main aim of phenomenology, in recent and current studies.

What is more remarkable in what I discussed, is that the art of autobiography itself could be a kind of practicing of phenomenology, when we consider phenomenology here as an *Ursprung* which always flows over it, even when we are not aware of that. In fact, both phenomenology and autobiography spring from the same deeper *Ursprung*: reflection on life itself.

## 7. Conclusion

The above treatment of the thesis is not merely theoretical, but it is also an applied one. The applied aspect makes use of examples and excerpts, some of which are derived from my own autobiography, thus it makes use of personal experience. Overall, the main results of this study are as follows:

- a. The relation between art and phenomenology expresses itself in autobiography, even more intimately and clearly than in other arts.
- b. Not every narrative bears the phenomenological character, but only that which belongs to the art of autobiography, which implies, as a work of art, an aesthetic object. This aesthetic object is the product of the process of the intentional consciousness of author, which operates reflection, and reconstruct the content of his/her memory and imagination, in order that the meaning of the intentional object can be shared by other's experiences.
- c. Since lived experience is the main object of both contemporary phenomenology and the art of autobiography, phenomenological studies nowadays should pay more attention to autobiography as a field of study among other fields in which lived experience, or life world, can manifest itself.

---

## References

- [1] Alghitany, G. (1996). *Khulsat Al Kara* (Surreptitiousness of Slumber), first published in Arabic (Cairo: Sharqia't), p. 9 and 11).
- [2] Alghitany, G. (2005). *Ni'thar Al Maho* (Disseminations of abolition), first published in Arabic (Cairo: Al-shurook for publishing), p. 17.
- [3] Di Martino, C. (2016). "For a Genealogy of Selfhood: Starting from Ricoeur", in Scott Davidson, Marc-Antoine (eds.), *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology in Paul Ricoeur* (Springer International Publishing), p. 63.
- [4] Husserl, E. (1981). "Phenomenology," in *Husserl's Shorter Works*, ed. Peter McCormick and Fredrick Elliston (University of Notre Dame Press), p. 22. (Originally published in *Encyclopedia Britannica*).
- [5] Husserl, E. (1931). *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (London: Allen and Unwin), p. 200-201.
- [6] Ingarden, R. (1973). *The Cognition of literary Work of Art*, translated by Ruth Ann Crowley and Kenneth R. Olson (Evanston; Northwestern University Press), p. 8.
- [7] Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964). *The Primacy of Perception*, translated by James. M. Edie (Northwestern University Press), p. 64 and 65.
- [8] Piguet, J-C. (1990). "Individuality and Universality", in *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. XXIX, p. 58 and 64.
- [9] Rowland, M. (2017). *Memory and the Self: Phenomenology, Science and Autobiography* (NY: Oxford University Press), p. 85.
- [10] Schmitt, A. (2017). *Phenomenology of Autobiography* (Rutledge), p. 134.
- [11] Spiegelberg, H. (1996). "How Subjective is Phenomenology?" in Maurice Natanson (ed.): *Essays in Phenomenology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff), p. 137f.
- [12] Tawfik, S. (2007). "Nasheeg ala Khaleeg: Hikaiaat Wafed ala Belad Alnaft" (Mourning on a Gulf: Tales of a stranger to the Oil-Lands (Cairo: Merit for Publishing), pp. 12-13.
- [13] Tawfik, S. (2020). *Al-Khaterat* (Emanations of Reflection): A Philosophical Autobiography, two parts recently published in one volume, Cairo: Dar Battana. p. 173.
- [14] Tymenithca, A-T, 1990. "Phenomenology of Life and the New Critique of Reason," in *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. XXIX, p. ix.
- [15] Villegas, M., Feixas, G. and Lopez, N. (1990). "Phenomenological Analysis of Autobiographical Texts: A Design based on Personal Construct Psychology," in *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. XXIX (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publisher), p. 408 and 409.
- [16] Umbelino, L. A. (2016). "Memory, Space, Oblivion," in *Hermeneutics and Phenomenology*, op. cit., p. 115.