Phenomenology + Pedagogy: A "Repository for the Romantic and the Nostalgic?"

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As a phenomenological geographer involved in design and architectural education, I am grateful to Jardine's (1988) recent "Reflections" because it provoked thinking about a central issue that all phenomenologists must sooner or later face: Can phenomenological insights contribute to practical change in a modern world so often out of touch with human experience and deeper human needs? In seeking to understand his discomfort with the particular style of phenomenology most often appearing in *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, Jardine explains that a scientific-technological-bureacratic vision of the world is an integral part of modern living and must be incorporated into phenomenological research if it is to have any real-world impact, especially in education. He worries that otherwise phenomenology may become a "repository for the romantic and the nostalgic" (p. 160).

Though Jardine does not describe clearly what he means by this "vague romanticism" (p. 160), his other comments suggest that he refers to any phenomenological explications that explore the pure learning experience and such attendant phenomena as the wish to know, the pleasure of understanding, the aha! experience, the sense of entering into and belonging to a body of understanding larger than oneself—in short, a set of interrelated experiences often given short shrift in modern education, which, as Heidegger (1977) explains, is typically reduced to calculation, cleverness, and domination of the other, whether person, group, animal, or environment.

As I study commentaries on the tension between modernism and postmodernism, I find it intriguing that the same question pointed to by Jardine continually arises: To foster a more humane future do we return to timeless, essential qualities of human life (Jardine's "vague romanticism"), or do we work within the existing social-technological infrastructure and discover lifeways and experiences that cannot presently be imagined (his "other forms of discourse in our lives" [p. 159])? For example, in my academic field of environment-behavior research, this tension penetrates discussions of architectural

design and modern Western landscapes. On one hand, critics emphasizing structural and poststructural interpretations echo Jardine's disquieted side and attack any thoughts of an inescapable existential core marking the heart of people's environmental and architectural needs. A statement by the influential architect and architectural theorist Perez-Gomez (1987) illustrates this postmodern perspective well. He writes that designers must avoid

> pseudo-myths and unauthentic nostalgic attitudes, using easily recognizable and marketable historical forms as ideological signs that support the flight from reality of an obsolete romanticism. [Rather, the architectural need is a] history-theory-criticism, a *mytho-poesis* which incorporates dreams and imagination, allowing for an authentic cultural diagnosis in thought and action. (p. 58)

On the other hand, phenomenological and hermeneutical critics argue that modernity's frequent homelessness, anonymity, and environmental degradation are the result of a loss of rootedness, environmental order, and sense of place (Relph, 1976; Seamon, 1987). These critics argue that the built environment will become more human only when design students realize *self-consciously* the existential significance of at-homeness, dwelling, community in physical propinquity, and so forth and discover how the built environment can sustain (or undermine) these essential lived qualities (Alexander, 1977). These critics speak of a "language" of space and environment that can be experienced and taught. One advocate of this viewpoint is the Heideggerian philosopher Harries (1987), who writes that

> Our greater freedom and mobility threaten to transform us into increasingly isolated, rootless, displaced persons. This loss of place invites thoughts of an architecture strong enough to return to us what has been lost, strong enough to let us understand ourselves as belonging to a genuine community. [There is a] natural language of space ... that has its foundation in the way we exist in the world, embodied and mortal, on the earth and under the sky ... bound up with experiences of rising and falling, of getting up and lying down, of self-assertion and surrender, of shelter and exposure, of height and depth. Systematic exploration of this language and its representation should be part of architectural training. (p. 30)

I believe that, in a similar way, a phenomenology of education should seek to discover a "natural language of learning," which is exactly the aim that many of the articles in *Phenomenology + Pedagogy* strive for—much of the time, I believe, successfully.

Yet it is this very effort and success that make Jardine uncomfortable. Certainly, a phenomenology of education should somehow eventually find use in the practical worlds of classroom, school administration, and teachers' training. But before its applied use can be successful, a phenomenology of education must give its greatest attention to the primary phenomenon—*the experience of learning*. This phenomenon has been the central focus of *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, and the editors should be congratulated for encouraging this work. Education can have no real practical application if there is no accurate understanding of the experience of learning, the kinds of learning, the ways in which the world of learning offers support or detraction, and so forth. *Phenomenology + Pedagogy* is perhaps the only academic journal to provide a place for the discussion of such themes. In this sense, it is unique and invaluable. For me, it evokes a spirit of intuition, creativity, life, and hope not found so consistently in any other professional outlet.

In returning to Jardine's criticism of this spirit, however, one must also point out that phenomenology *can* provide a valuable contribution to applied issues like standardized testing, administration procedures, and so forth. But crucially, this contribution cannot happen through Jardine's implicit suggestion of phenomenology's somehow meeting positivist and bureaucratic outlooks halfway. Rather, the real phenomenological work is marking out and describing phenomena as they happen and unfold in the real world of human experience. For example, we desperately need a phenomenology of genuine change, a phenomenology of relationship, a phenomenology of different worlds becoming one, a phenomenology of power, a phenomenology of agreement, and so forth. After years of positivist science and Marxist history, there is still little awareness of how lasting individual and group change happens, and this lack is more than likely partly because we are still not aware of what Husserl referred to in the statement that Jardine quotes: "The components of the life-world which always exists for us, ever pregiven" (Jardine, 1988, p. 158).

At its best, phenomenology helps us see our world self-consciously, so that through that awareness human life may become better. A phenomenology of education must eventually offer practical help, but it must always be indebted and obliged to those unexpected magical moments when one has suddenly understood something that was out of sight an instant before. These magical moments are the heart of all genuine learning, and they are the anchor for *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*. To lose sight of them would mean to surrender to the "scientific

theories, the curriculum guides, the images from child development, the administrative and bureaucratic forms of accountability"—in short, all the institutionalized educational structures toward which Jardine (p. 159) rightly feels ambivalence.

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