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# Toward a Phenomenology of Transition: E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* and a Child's Process of Reading Herself into the Novel

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This paper brings together phenomenology and a kind of reader-response criticism in order to explicate E.B. White's famous children's novel, *Charlotte's Web*. The paper has three main parts. In the first, the paper highlights some important themes of Edmund Husserl's work – i.e. perception, intersubjectivity, and temporality. In the second part, the paper relates the author's act of reading the novel together with a young child, the author's daughter, and foregrounds her own responses to the text. In the third, the paper presents what the author takes to be a new reading of White's story by means of both the conversation with the child and the previously presented phenomenological concepts. In addition, the paper intersects with insights of the Philosophy for Children movement and with the development of its narrative of a community of inquiry.

**Keywords:** phenomenology, reader-response, Philosophy for Children, Edmund Husserl, E.B. White

## Introduction

In *Philosophy in the Classroom*, Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Frederick S. Oscanyon argue, with a child's moral education specifically in mind, the following (2010: 204, emphasis in the original):

the self at any one time is always in the process of *transition*, contingent upon the means that are available to us to achieve the goals that are sought. Thus, the availability of means conditions and modifies our ideals and objectives, just as, conversely, the ends we have in view control the way we search for means to employ and the selves we are in the process of becoming.

This process of transition is something that the authors note about selves in general – without a distinction between child and adult. Each human self, in this view, is more determined by its *movement* than by its points of departure and arrival. This transitional status of all selves is an important point to be unpacked, and I will spend the rest of this introduction attempting such an unpacking.

As a good deal of current research in children and education and children’s literature shows, children are not little versions of adults. They are not transitional in the sense of lacking development, as being on the way to “us”, as it were. To see children as undeveloped adults would be to commit oneself to the fallacy of developmentalism, more useful for categorizing and disciplining those without immediate credentials to power than to listening, understanding and interacting.

In fact, were we to think of children as undeveloped adults, who were simply making linear moves of transition into adulthood, we would also compromise our own self-understanding. For Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyon (2010), the self is transitional as such. There is no static, developed “self”, no endpoint, that determines adults either. On the contrary, adults cannot authentically maintain a sense of having “made it” or developed sufficiently that can allow them to stop being active, creative readers of each other or texts.

If adults are *certain* that they have fully understood a person or a text without further ado, then they are stuck – not well-developed or mature. For those who are certain, the self-reflection into their own “stuck” process of becoming can only come within the inevitable arrival of a painful, and ultimately *unnecessarily* painful, conflict of interpretations.

We can do real harm, therefore, not only to children but also to ourselves, if we attempt to construe what we experience in terms of an arbitrary, perhaps binary, system of categories. To put this point another way: we can prevent our own “process of becoming” if we do not develop the kind of supple perceptions or acts of reading that answer not to ourselves alone but to the plurality of experiences that demands to be described together with our own.

In contrast with the previous, stuck vision of certainty that I have been describing, stands the possibility of a more flexible perception, the possibility of seeing each self as defined by a process of transition, of evolutionary movement. To see oneself as this “process of becoming” is to liberate oneself for the kind of active,

creative moments of perception or “reading” that can draw a larger community to notice its own plurality and rich possibilities for further, shared work.

How did I miss that interpretation? Who do I have to become in order to hear that text or that music as emotionally moving? – These are the kinds of questions we become open to when we see movement, and not development, as the definition of a self. And thus, to highlight the notion of transition as the metaphysical lynchpin of humanity is productive – it allows us to see how many selves we might call on to help us flesh out our shared world.

To return to the quote from Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyon above, we can see that a focus on transition allows us also to notice the following two things: first, we see that we are already answering to our own multi-dimensional temporal structure. We are not simply on a linear, one-directional timeline. Rather, we are, even now, dwelling within the persons we were and anticipating the persons we will become. We are constantly moving into the past and future, and we are constantly readjusting the way our past and future *selves* define and matter to us now.

We are therefore never really fully or only here and now. We are never fully *this* present self. Rather, we are moving into and out of a plurality of moments, a plurality of selves within the present moment. We are, in effect, always spreading ourselves out backwards and forwards. This means that, far from a simple linear motion, our transitions from present to past and future have the shape of a multi-dimensional zigzag, as we go back and forth from our present selves. Speaking phenomenologically, each self is “ecstatic” in its movement, always moving outside of itself, dancing with other versions of itself, combining with and letting go of them in various styles of living.

Second, we see that our transitional self is precisely capable of – one might almost say *designed* for – attending to our places and possible roles in a shared situation. That is, referring back again to the quote from Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyon, we see that we are *called* to move as transitional selves between means and ends, in a zigzag fashion. We are called, therefore, to negotiate a shared world because each of us is one among many transitional selves who are all confronted together by larger situations with scarce resources. In short, we see that we share the world and each situation of our living with others, and, because of that, we are called to deploy our transitional movement between the means and ends of our own choices.

Our transitional structure thus points us to the inherent morality of shared life. We are a process of becoming. But so is the world, and so are our situations within it. Moreover, these processes (ourselves, the world, situations) gear into one another and require our careful, attentive, moral response. Because we are capable

of multi-dimensional movement, then, we are *also* capable of multi-dimensional perception and action that is called for by this world. We can and (implicitly, since we are always already *in* the world) we *must* deploy our rich selves towards the becoming of the world. We can and we must continuously reconnoitre and redefine both means and ends.

We are a process of becoming, in short, in order to answer to what this world, what this situation, is itself becoming around us. And so the notion of transition is thus triply important: 1) we move within our temporality; 2) we move within the limits of situations in which we find ourselves to be ensconced; 3) the world or the situation itself moves around us as do the others who share it with us. To remain caught in the notion of static development, to refuse to see transition as the key notion to human experience, is to become stuck or lost in oneself or in a situation, in a world, that is changing around us and calling for a changing, supple act of perception, of “reading.”

Indeed, I use that word “reading” intentionally. Perhaps most noticeably we exist as our transitional, moving selves in the act of reading a book – a novel like E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*, say. For in the act of reading we slip from the person who we are into the persons of the characters, into the situations of the book. And so, when reading and responding to texts, we practice a particularly concrete zigzag of self-movement and self-formation.

This act of reading has a typical structure. A particular book like White’s *Charlotte’s Web* moves us, perhaps. We identify with its characters, and we develop a way of processing its key moments. The room has faded in the background, and our bearings have shifted. Where have we gone? Who are we? These questions are difficult to answer when we are ensconced in the book. Afterwards, when we talk about our reading with others, we come to see, perhaps for the first time, who we have been, what we have noticed. We may also see that our reading can come – indeed *must come* – into conflict with another’s.

In the case of such conflict, finding that ours is not the only interpretative stance, we may (productively) feel compelled to return to the text again. We know we *can* do so, since the other person has already done it to a different end, and we may well *desire* to do so in order to become the person who can navigate multiple possible (and actual) responses to this same text. We learn, in the case of such conflict, that we can return to the process of self-formation in reading in order to re-engage the formation of a response.

In our re-vision, we see perhaps what we had not seen before. We see what allowed the other to see the book that way, and we see that the text has a multiplicity of openings to a variety of selves, selves who can each take up the same text

differently as “means to employ” their own action in the description of a larger, shared world.

To re-view what it means to read by reading again is to find oneself in a laboratory, perhaps. A laboratory that demands, as it were, that one be more or less pleasantly engaged with a multi-layered text, a text that seems in the end to be as transitional as oneself is.

This novel, this story, that captured our attention gives its ending to us, perhaps, as a moment of sadness. Who am I leaving behind at the end of the story? Why cannot I continue to be who I was within the act of reading? This text, if it moves us in these ways, does not simply develop or unfold its static self. Rather, it moves (and it *moves us*) in a kind of evolution of interpretations, each of which both preserves and outstrips the others as the text lives its transitional life through us, its readers.

We are transitional selves. We take up a book as one of the means and ends that assist our “process of becoming.” But the text too is transitional. It reads itself into us. It takes us up and encodes our process with its own. Who is thinking in us when we read? The text? Or our own selves? Perhaps it is too binary to try to place the power or the blame on one or the other.

## **Scholarly placement and an outline of the argument**

As may perhaps already be implicit in its introduction, this paper will take up the following research question: How does E.B. White’s novel *Charlotte’s Web* demonstrate a phenomenological account of transition as central to the description of human experience?

Answering this question will involve two main explorations: first, that of Edmund Husserl’s account of transition as an emblematic of phenomenological description of human experience; and second, that of the manner in which one child demonstrated Husserl’s insights within her process of reading E.B. White’s novel, *Charlotte’s Web*. My own comments will be presented as further explications of the child’s insights, i.e. possible expansions on the way the child/reader worked with the novel so as to synthesize the transitional selves *within* the novel (the selves of Charlotte, Wilbur, Fern, etc.) with her own transitional self.

This approach is somewhat new, as I choose phenomenology and a particular child’s reading experience, i.e., that of our then seven-year-old daughter, as the two foci of the paper. But I do this so as to highlight what the Philosophy for Children movement might call the importance of treating children as co-interlocutors along the shared path of meaningful description of experience.

Though I believe the paper's argument is rather novel, I do readily acknowledge that it resonates with (and indeed utilizes) the work of a number of scholars in children's literature, in education, in philosophy for children (as the initial quote from Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyon shows), and in literary theory. I will here try to give a sense of the debt I owe these other scholars and fields insofar as I try to combine our shared commitments to a new reading.

First, I acknowledge a debt to literary theory. In an early text on narrative, Michael J. Toolan argues that "behind their seeming simplicity and playfulness, stories for and by children are, on closer consideration, remarkably complex and an aid to an index of the interactional and cognitive development of the child" (1988: 215). I carry that characterization of stories as "aid" and "index" forward with the description of the self in transition in *Philosophy in the Classroom* (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyon 2010), as I move toward a kind of phenomenological description.

Second, I acknowledge that many educational scholars, such as Sylvia Pantaleo, among others, have already taken children's responses seriously. For Pantaleo, what is at stake in children's reading is not only individual development but "social intertextuality" such that "aesthetic pleasure" in the act of reading, particularly picturebooks, comes hand in hand with "a *sense of agency* as a result of their recognition and application of the sophisticated literary devices they learned about through reading and discussing the picturebooks" (2008: 31, my emphasis). What Pantaleo talks about in picturebooks, I think, can also be extended to children's novels, such as White's.

But this "agency", resulting from the responses generated, it would seem, has its careful delimiters within the discipline of education. Barbara Kieffer, as one salient voice, cautions us that "children no matter what their age will respond to a story on their own terms of understanding" (2009: 53). By mentioning this notion of "on their own terms" she seems to mean that philosophers ought to respect the limits that the child displays: "it does little good (and can be destructive of the enjoyment of literature) if younger children are pushed to try to formulate the abstractions achieved by more mature children" (ibid.). So we should not prompt, not push, the child towards the movement that we call agency.

Of course, what it means to "push" children and what kind of "enjoyment" children might be limited to may be the subject of some debate. The "terms of understanding" that a child evinces may be in fact, and I would argue *are*, able to be altered, fulfilled, drawn out, etc. in the act of talking respectfully with them. The shifting goals and means of a child's reading, then, may not be configured as

“pushing” so much as dialectically unraveling, or philosophically explicating, what is implicit in the child’s own understanding as the child reads herself into the book.<sup>1</sup>

As phenomenologist Richard Lang argues, we all have a responsibility to reflect phenomenologically on our basic inhabiting, our home. This will never be easy: “contemplating the notion of inhabiting discloses our primitive alliance with the world and thereby unsettles the natural embeddedness and forgetfulness of human existence” (Lang 1985: 201). If we are “primitively allied” with the world, we have to move back and forth, transition, from ourselves to the world that has preceded and sustained us. We need to move back and forth from text to reader, from child to adult, from theory to experience.

I use Lang here in order to show that the text is simply a microcosm, a situation, of the world. With the text too we have a “primitive alliance” that needs to be described over and over in order to “disclose” what we would rather forget. We need to be called again and again into describing ourselves as transitional.

It may be, then, that if I am asking our child and asking all of my own readers to reflect on a reader’s relationship to her “home” in books or on books as a phenomenological space of transition, a “door” in Lang’s sense – if I am doing that, then what I am arguing may well put educators in an uneasy mood. As I mentioned above, however, I am not really aligning myself with philosophy for children, with education, or with children’s literature scholars.

The focus of this paper is rather a scholarly explication of the role of transition in the child’s self and the role of transition in this particular novel, *Charlotte’s Web*, and a eulogy for what it offers to younger readers.<sup>2</sup> But I hope also to persuade educators to think again about the ways in which young children might think through their engagements with texts.

The argument of the paper has the following outline: first, I will discuss in Husserlian phenomenology the role of transition in three areas – perception in general, time-consciousness, and the experience of other people. Second, I will discuss our daughter’s reading experience of White’s *Charlotte’s Web*. And third, I will apply phenomenological description to White’s novel in support and expansion of our daughter’s insights.

<sup>1</sup> See David Morris: “what leads to understanding is not a purely theoretical process divorced from its object, but a pre-theoretical need to understand that is satisfied only by taking responsibility for the way in which the object is comprehended, which is possible only if the object itself is responsible to comprehension, if it works in such a way that probing it, questioning it, working with it, provokes responses that fit with our ability to comprehend” (2006: 416).

<sup>2</sup> See especially Murriss’s paper in which she “mobilizes a rethinking of what it means to ‘read’ literature, or what ‘comprehension’ is when including the child’s philosophical voice” (2014: 146).

My intention in this paper is for the reader to notice that even in the introduction and in the material on Husserl I am implicitly discussing the novel. Fern, as the main human character, for example, is precisely the kind of moral self that Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyon talk about in the paragraph initially cited. My description of our daughter's act of reading, as well as that of my own, are meant to show how the act of reading is itself a deployment of transition as phenomenologically conceived.

### **Self as transitional: toward Husserlian phenomenology**

On the one hand, if we go back to the quote from *Philosophy in the Classroom* with which the paper began, we see that the self is transitional because the “means” to be an effective and stable self, the means to reach a set of goals, are limited. We need to wait to see what we will become, in other words, because the means we employ may not become available to us until later, if at all. We are transitional because we are moving between means and ends, like children with an allowance running back and forth through multiple stores for the most we can get for our small sum of money. Sadly, the quote implies, some of us just will not make it to a stable self, or to a satisfactory object of desire, because the means to do so were denied us.

On the other hand, the second sentence of the quoted material declares that, even absent the appropriate means, the self may still participate in its own becoming. And with hope we realize that, even a poor person, even an impoverished self without an allowance, who is bound for death as the spider Charlotte seems to be in the novel, can still legislate the tenor of its transitions. Where does this hope come from? What legitimates it?

For Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyon, I surmise that the hope arises because the self recognizes that the availability or lack of appropriate means can “modify” ideals and objectives but can never fully undo them. There is something irreducible to the power of self-determined ends or goals. Even without the means to support them, our own choices structure our becoming and our very encounter with means as such. Charlotte the spider, for example, cannot accompany her children who are to be born out of her passing. Yet that does not undo her strength in creating her *magnum opus* – the egg sac which she entrusts to Wilbur the pig at the fair, after she has saved him from death one last time.

Like children, like Charlotte, we find out quickly what our allowance will “allow,” and we anticipate ourselves and our desires and disappointments in our response. For example, we may change our minds in terms of what we go to buy with our allowance so that our hearts are not broken. Or we may reckon with small disappointments and refuse to buy anything at all so that we can participate in a process of hoping for later, larger acquisitions. By virtue of our power in making



the move between ends and ourselves then, some of us will achieve moments of satisfaction and stability in terms of self and desired objects by means of changing the definitions of desire, self and stability.

Of course there are no guarantees that satisfaction or stability will ensue when a child receives an allowance. But the ethical tension that the allowance affords, this being in transition with respect to self, means, and ends, is something that phenomenology recognizes as indicating an important, structural truth of the self – namely, that a motion transition occurs within and makes possible all layers or acts of selfhood. Let us now move on to consider three of those layers of selfhood in Husserl’s descriptions: our involvement with things, our consciousness of internal time, and our experience of others.

### Husserl on perception as a transitional zigzag: *noesis* and *noema*

Let us first consider the way the movement of transition is operative within our experience of perceived things. Husserl’s description of experience in his *Ideas* (1999), for example, notes that the perception of a table unfolds between two poles, the acts of perceiving the table (or *noeses*), and the appearances of the object, in this case the table, within those acts (or the *noema*). According to Husserl, then, the perceived table (the *noema*) only gives itself as a meaning we can recognize continuously by means of a never-ending “zigzag”<sup>3</sup> back and forth between *noesis* and *noema*, between the way in which the subject discovers the object and the way in which the object solicits the subject.

In this sense, and perhaps here I take Husserl beyond what he explicitly said, the phenomenological description of experience really is the necessary motion back and forth between the poles that coalesce the self around them. Or, to put it bluntly, phenomenology describes the relationship between object and subject as the very establishment of the self in its ability to declare more or less stable positions.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Though the context of this quote comes from his *Crisis of the European Sciences* and concerns Husserl’s discussion of the methodology of phenomenology as a whole, I think it is apropos to the discussion of intentionality I am discussing here: “Thus we have no other choice than to proceed forward and backward in a zigzag pattern; the one must help the other in an interplay” (Husserl & Welton 1999: 359). N.B.: The source I have used for the citations from Husserl here and throughout the paper is an edited collection of his most important works in English.

<sup>4</sup> The following is from the *Ideas*: “A parallelism between *noesis* and *noema* is indeed the case, but it is such that one must describe the formations on *both* sides and in their essentially *mutual* correspondence” (Husserl & Welton 1999: 99, my emphasis). The transition imposed on the phenomenologist is thus the transition of “first one, then the other” that allows the full description to unfold, even as the *noesis* and *noema* area always already given together. This idea gets further taken up in *Analyses of Passive and Active Synthesis* where Husserl moves on from the necessary movement of explication to the transition within perception itself, the *call* of the object, through anticipation, to the responsive, noetic movement of embodied consciousness. See Husserl & Welton p. 223.

But this correlation between subject and object in perception has deeper roots. Indeed, I believe that it is in Husserl's description of time-consciousness, the second layer of subjectivity that I want to discuss, that he demonstrates how the correlation of our acts of perceiving with our perceived objects is guaranteed, passively, by our self-experience of our internal time.<sup>5</sup>

## Husserl on temporality: time as our process of becoming

The ability we have in the world to move back and forth from the object to our own subjectivity, from *noema* to *noesis* – our ability to notice the way that the object solicits and responds to our acts of perceiving – entails and utilizes the experience of our temporality itself. For it is this primordial layer of our experience, that of our basic or fundamental temporality, that is always unfolding as a transitional movement from moment to moment, a going over from one to the other, that somehow also gives us – in moving from one to the other – a *continuity* of our selves as wholes.

Any continuity in our acts of motion, our “going over” from one thing to another, therefore depends on our enacting a more fundamental transition that is not simply a vacillation from point to point but rather a maintenance of the former within the latter. The flow of perception, the ongoing life we have as one and the same life, thus depends on the flow of internal time as the secretion and continuity of self-hood.

And, in fact, Husserl seems to argue just this in the *Lectures*, namely that we are whole selves *because* we experience ourselves as forming time within ourselves as a kind of passive synthesis. For him, this self-experience is not one of an act we perform consciously. The fact that we “produce” time for our own self-experience is clear. But the *way* we produce time is, in a word, *a secret*. We cannot catch ourselves pushing out temporality in the way we can see a spider spinning a web or in the way we know that we are throwing a ball or walking around a table when we do so. Yet we can experience how this flow of time really is the grounding of the continuity of

<sup>5</sup> Husserl himself notes something of this kind also in the *Ideas*. There, in sections 41 and 42, he describes the way in which the adumbrations or slices of the *noema* (for example, the sides of the perceived table) belong together as a particular kind of multiplicity. But he notes that this adumbrated multiplicity of the table, while complementing and correlating with the *noetic* multiplicity of acts, is a dependent form of unity. The adumbrations in their unity *depend* on time-consciousness and its *different species* of unity in order for the perception of each adumbration to unfold as an adumbration *of* the same table. For the table to be perceived as a whole, therefore, my time-consciousness must contain my multiple acts of perceiving within me in a *different way* than each adumbration sketches out the rest of the table. Two sentences from these sections are helpful to note here. First, this: “A mental process [*Erlebnis*] is not adumbrated” (Husserl & Welton 1999: 73). And then, this: “The perception itself, however, is what it is in the continuous flux of consciousness and is itself a continuous flux; continually the perceptual Now changes into the enduring consciousness of the Just-Past and simultaneously a new Now lights up, etc.” (71).

our experience and how it *must* be we who are doing it: “This flow is something we speak of in conformity with what is constituted, but it is not something in objective time. It is *absolute subjectivity* and has the absolute properties of something to be designated metaphorically as flow [...]. In the actuality-experience we have the primal source-point and a *continuity* of moments of reverberation” (Husserl & Welton 1999: 213, emphasis in the original). We produce a flow of time as a spider does of a web. It is our doing. And yet, we cannot return to the origin of this becoming. There is a limit to our reflection on ourselves. We are simply cast upon the ocean, the flow, of our own becoming.

What we can notice, however, by means of this limitation on our reflection, is that our perceptions of objects, of world, of others, depend on our temporality. The transition from object to object, from adumbration to adumbration, or from object to subject – the “allowance” of our perceptual lives – depends on a transition that underlies it that makes it possible to hold on to what is just past in the passing over to the new. Like a child who receives an allowance from an adult, we receive our allowance as the purpose of our temporality. We move between moments in order to move between objects and ourselves.

By virtue of the transition, the flow, the continuity of time, we are transitional, but not as fish are. We do not make a turn and forget what we have just left behind. Rather, within our transition, the *fact* of our transition *matters* to us. We *live through* our transitions from subject to object, from other to self, because we are always already living through the moments that connect them.

We see, as we move, that what has come before is somehow, to varying degrees and in varying ways, implicit in what is now. Life is the perceptual process of fleshing out what temporality means. To read a book, for example, is to see how the unfolding of a text across the time of reading it becomes possible, desirable, etc. Like the understanding or reading of a text, or even the sides of a house as we walk around it, we too are given to ourselves as the same even as we proceed in transition from moment to moment.

If I can further Husserl’s metaphor on the flow and transition of temporality, I think it is as though each of us were a spider spinning a web from out of herself without being conscious as to how this thread of “absolute subjectivity” or how this continuity occurred by means of our movement. We can sense it. We can experience the ease with which we *make our own* the transition between present perception, memory, expectation, imagination, and so forth. But we do not know how.

With Husserl, then, what we come to see is that, if we were *not* transition with continuity *all the way down* – if our own temporality did not ground and found our perception – well, then no other relationship, and certainly no relationship of

*noesis* and *noema*, could ever emerge.<sup>6</sup> For the very establishing of relationships is predicated on the ability we have to retain some commonality, some common thread, between the poles. This achievement is possible only because of the very fact that the present moment in our self-experience, indeed *any and every moment* no matter what that moment is concerned with in terms of content, is biting onto the just past and the just future.<sup>7</sup>

And, finally, let us consider the motion of transition implicit within the third layer of subjectivity, a motion which intersects with both the motions of perception and temporality. This third layer is that of other people.

## Husserl on the experience of other people

Husserl's description of our experience of others, intersubjectivity, shows how we are paired with others as a passive whole that grounds our differences. Our what he calls "pairing", a reciprocity of multiple acts of perception, allows us to move in a kind of zig-zag, in which each of us within the pair can care how we appear to the other on the basis of our always already pre-given relationship.

This pre-given pairing relationship, which is always already given and established as more than the sum of us as members or parts, thus guarantees, just as the absolute subjectivity of the temporal flow did, the continuity of our experience. Our life with others is given as a continuity; they matter to us and remain with us even as we contemplate ourselves. This continuity, while not removing the anxiety or danger that can confront us within the experience of the other as other, means that our relations with others are capable of revealing more about the world and about our relationship as we transition from self to other, from self to relation, from my view on you to yours on me, etc.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> "The now, for its part, requires its own moment of origin for its constitution. These moments are continuously united in the succession; they 'pass over into one another continuously.' The *transition* is mediated qualitatively and also temporally" (Husserl & Welton 1999: 211, my emphasis). The now is thus able to originate because it is the process of transition towards itself out of the now that it was emerging out of. The now is the gift of a transition that does not pause to admire its handiwork. See also Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (2013: 446ff).

<sup>7</sup> In fact, in *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, Husserl puts the relation between *noesis* and *noema* specifically in terms of transition: "let us now take a look at the formation of unity [...] by examining the *transition* of appearances, for instance, when approaching or walking around an object or in eye movement. The fundamental relationship in this *dynamic transition* is that of intention and fulfillment. The empty pointing ahead acquires its corresponding fullness. It corresponds roughly to the rich possibilities prefigured; but since its nature is determinable indeterminacy, it also brings, together with the fulfillment, a closer determination" (Husserl & Welton 1999: 226, my emphasis). The synthesis of fulfillment is a particular concretion of the synthesis of internal time by means of absolute subjectivity.

<sup>8</sup> "It [the Other person] brings to mind the way my body would look 'if I were there.' In this case too although the awakening does not become a memory intuition, pairing takes place. The first-

It is ironic, in one way, that the relation by which we are paired with others, by which we perceive them, is, like our internal time, accomplished passively. Sometimes it seems so necessary that it be otherwise. We seem so determined to choose reflectively those with whom we would dwell. And yet, as in the act of reading, we time and time again find ourselves committed to others, even to the smallest of gestures, like a smile we return to a smiling face in a commercial, before we realize what we are doing, before we realize the smile is about dish detergent, say.

As far as the pairing with others goes, though, even in the midst of a response that catches us unaware, there is no doubt that the response is ours. We certainly performed it; and we cannot argue the contrary of this statement very confidently: our seeing the other as meaningful is always already at least in part our responsibility.

And yet often we cannot, for all that admission of responsibility, bring to view the moment we “decided” to see another as meaningful. Instead we feel the structural truth that Husserl identifies as the very motion of pairing: “a certain mediacy of intentionality must be present here, *going out from* the substratum ‘primordial world’ [...] and making present to consciousness a ‘there too’ [...]. We have here, accordingly, a kind of making co-present” (Husserl & Welton 1999: 146, my emphasis). Seeing the other as other, then, involves us in a passive transition, a “going out from” and a going across to them, that is “mediated” and yet our own. And this mediated immediacy should recall our own time-consciousness.

In fact, as Husserl discusses in section 51 of *Cartesian Meditations*, our relationship with others, a relationship to which we awaken after it starts, and in which we find ourselves given, is still a “primal form of that passive synthesis which we designate as association” (Husserl & Welton 1999: 148). We do not enact it with our self-consciousness.

There is a transitional motion to our relationships, then, which as passive recalls our time-consciousness, and which we do as if behind our own backs, as it were.<sup>9</sup> Husserl describes this passive synthesis in several ways: on the one hand as “an intentional overreaching” and on the other hand as “living mutual awakening and an overlaying of each with the objective sense of the other” (Husserl & Welton

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awakened manner of appearance of my body is not the only thing that enters into a pairing; my body itself does so likewise” (Husserl & Welton 1999: 151). I have argued elsewhere that the subjunctive nature of the pairing experience makes rather explicit the function of transition within both the experience of pairing and the process of explicating it (Costello 2012). That my whole body, and not just the “take” I have on my body in this or that moment, is involved in pairing with the Other means that I must go forth and seek out the further significances of my always already established involvement with the Other, who has, as if behind my back, already gained access to my own significance.

<sup>9</sup> See also Husserl’s famous discussion of the instructional analogy of intersubjectivity and time-consciousness in section 53: “Somewhat as my memorial past [...] transcends my present, the appresented other being transcends my own being” (Husserl & Welton 1999: 150).

1999: 148). There is both our own responsibility (intentional overreaching) and our passive participation (mutual awakening) in our relationship with others.

The motion and continuity of transition – as demonstrated in both our experience of internal time and of the correlation between *noema* and *noesis* – is therefore given *again* in the face of the other person as *doubled in its totality*. What we noted within our consciousness, we do as a whole with another.

In a sense, then, the other and oneself are transitional moments of a larger time-flow, that of our relationship. We might feel the time of each relationship differently. We might say that relationships take us for a ride or have their plans for us. In saying things like that we mean that the motion of transition that is our *own* is thus situated within a transitional relationship of our whole selves toward those of others.

Because this largest sense of transition, the third and most powerful of this nested series of transitions, is true – because we are transitioning beings that are themselves within a unity of transition with other transitioning beings – we can note with Husserl that every *noema*, and even our selves, are subject to “a mutual *transfer of sense*” (Husserl & Welton 1999: 148, my emphasis).

As phenomenologically initiated into the motion of transition, then, we are given an opportunity to see how we are always in process. We are always between or toward objects, time, and other people. This may mean, if we take Husserl’s descriptions seriously, that it would be worthwhile to look and see if noticing others making transitions made a difference in our own self-process. Perhaps in finding others’ transitional processes we can learn about how to guide ourselves towards means and ends.

## Reading and discussing *Charlotte’s Web* with a seven-year-old

What I’d like to do for the remaining portion of this paper, then, is to build off of this brief introduction of Husserl on the notion of transition toward a reading of E.B. White’s famous story *Charlotte’s Web*. I’d like to do this both as an unfolding of White’s book and as a contribution to a phenomenological description of human experience. For ultimately what I think one finds in the story is an important meditation on how the transitions of selfhood are generative, and grounding, for a more adequate, more explicit life as human experiencers.

In writing this paper, I talked about *Charlotte’s Web* with our daughter, who at age seven was slightly younger than the main character, Fern, at the time of our discussion. I had not divulged what I was thinking about the book with her, even though I was already certain that I would write on transition in the story, specifically with respect to the way in which the webs and the words that Charlotte

wrote in them, occupied a kind of transitional status and space in the experience of those who saw and read them.

I only asked her the question that I ask all of my undergraduate students in upper-division courses in phenomenology: what did you get out of the book?

Our daughter was put off by this question at first, perhaps because of its generality. Instead, she said, she preferred to discuss each of the characters in turn. When I asked her about Fern, the main girl in the book, our daughter said that “Fern was kind in the beginning. But she let it go and wanted someone else. The story shows people can change and not always stay the same. She wanted Henry [the boy she rides the ferris wheel with at the fair].”<sup>10</sup>

I thought for a moment about our daughter’s initial comment. She reminded me that Fern, a girl in some ways like our daughter, does in fact begin the story with what might be called an act of kindness. She prevents her father from killing Wilbur, the runt of a litter of pigs. In return for her generosity, her father provides her with the opportunity for an apprenticeship in care by giving her the very pig himself.

But I was wondering what it meant for Fern to let go of the axe and pick up the pig, and then what it meant for Fern to let go of the project of caring for the pig and start caring for the boy Henry. I wondered where our daughter would go later in her own life, which projects she would let go of. So I followed up with her on this initial offering and asked her what “it” meant when she said Fern “let it go.” Our daughter replied that “Fern learned that she *thought* she’d love the pig forever. But then she learned she changed and didn’t want Wilbur anymore.”

There was a lot to support our daughter’s reading, I realized. Fern’s care very quickly bumps up against its limitations, as Wilbur almost overnight grows too big for the doll’s cradle and carriage that Fern initially keeps him in. When this happens, Fern’s care, at the insistence of her family, becomes a care that is shared with others, especially other animals. Wilbur is placed in a barnyard on her aunt and uncle’s farm some distance away. In fact, I thought, that shift in the site of care for Wilbur might be an important factor in the way Fern relates to her own project of being with him.

Thinking all this, I asked our daughter more about what she saw as the “change” in Fern. What did that mean to her that Fern not only changed but was aware that she had changed. She said she was “disappointed in Fern”, even though she thought that “Fern did some kind, brave, and generous things.”

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<sup>10</sup> The utterances I attribute to our daughter are in fact, and in each word, her own. She has approved them for publication.

I became intrigued again. It seemed to me that our daughter was following the thread of Fern's relationship with Wilbur particularly closely, especially since she had read the book only once and then quite quickly, in one or two sittings. I could not help but notice, however, that she was right. In enacting the move toward Wilbur's new home, Fern herself changed or at least her perceptions did. Her attention to Wilbur became attention to Wilbur's surroundings, his friends, and then the situation in which Wilbur was placed and the relationships he had to the whole community who came to look at him. Being engaged in a project, then, could help Fern project herself beyond herself, much like the act of reading might help young (and older) readers.

I then asked our daughter what the point of doing "kind, brave and generous things" were if Fern changed and stopped doing them. I also rephrased the question after a quizzical look from her and asked what she thought the point of Fern changing was. She replied that "Fern taught the animals that you can't always stay the same. But at the same time she was sort of teaching that to herself."

I was silent a moment. Had Fern "taught the animals"? I remembered the times that Fern listened in the barnyard to the conversations that the animals had with each other, particularly those concerning the attempts at saving Wilbur from becoming so much ham and bacon. But she does not speak directly to them, the way a teacher might do to an ethics class. Could our daughter have been incorrect? Perhaps. But perhaps the "teaching" that Fern did was more about the act of dwelling with the animals, of listening to and perceiving with them. Perhaps Fern's teaching came in the process of moving into and out of the barnyard and the home, setting an example to follow by way of contemplating "some pig."

At this point of our conversation, which was interspersed with some silent reflection on both our parts and which lasted on the whole about 20 minutes, I thought I saw her tiring of her father. So, finally, I asked her what her favorite part of the story was. Our daughter said that her favorite part was "when Wilbur and Charlotte talk to each other in those few sessions, and Wilbur gets more and more disappointed that he would lose his friend in the end. Bitter tenderness."

I had forgotten the intimate conversations that accompanied the three or four times (depending on how one counts) that Charlotte makes webs for Wilbur. I had forgotten how she and Wilbur talked about what she would create for him within them, whether it was a word or a magnum opus. I forgot her engagement with him in the process of writing for and to him. How had I forgotten that, I wondered?

As our daughter was saying all these things, as well as more that I have not woven into this paper, I knew that I had to continue working through the notion of transition in the story. It wasn't just the transitional objects, Charlotte's webs,



that appeared in the story. It was the movement of Fern herself, and perhaps of her family, that needed to be further explicated. It was also the relationships between two communities of philosophical inquiry – the animals and the humans – that needed further explication, and the transitions between them within the story as a whole.

I was intrigued, too, by the way our daughter had referred to Wilbur and Charlotte’s conversations as “sessions”, reminding me of Fern’s mother meeting the psychiatrist, who assured the mother that Fern would change. And so I wondered about how sharing mortality can bring on a transition to “bitter tenderness.”

### **A critical reading of *Charlotte’s Web* in the light of a seven-year-old’s response**

Gareth Matthews (1994) has written about how *Charlotte’s Web* is an important story for children who are facing mortality, either in their own lives or in the lives of the people they care about.<sup>11</sup> One can immediately see the truth of that in the story. The whole reason for Charlotte’s project of writing is to save Wilbur’s life. The threat of death looms over the book from beginning to end.

But there is more than a literal death of an animal to contend with. At the very beginning, Fern grabs her father’s axe and declares that she sees no difference between herself and the pig. Her father’s willingness to kill the one signals the willingness to kill the other. This assertion means a great deal.

It disrupts the normal binary categories. Fern is reading herself into Wilbur’s position, and the axe, as the messenger that we are transitioning from living being to a function of a farm, poises itself as the space between reading and living. The axe, as Derrida (2009) might say, makes a cut.

In disrupting their categories by her reading herself into Wilbur’s situation, Fern forces her family to reappropriate their tradition. How have the boundaries between object and subject, subject and subject, animal and human come to be established? Are they legitimate? How have the boundaries and laws of family life come to be established? Are *they* legitimate? The family must, to paraphrase Augustine, take up the book and read – again. For a new reading is showing itself, one unanticipated within this pre-existing family that thought that all of its members were one and the same in the manner in which their perceptions flowed.

Fern’s act of reading herself into Wilbur, then, means that death, but not only death, looms over this story. Madness does, too; of the kind that always threatens

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<sup>11</sup> “*Charlotte’s Web* [...] enjoys a special place in the lives of many children battling terminal illness, as Myra Bluebond-Langner reports in her pioneering work on leukemic children” (Matthews 1994: 92).

us when we read Derrida's work, particularly *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2009).<sup>12</sup>

In the face of Fern moving toward spending time with the animals in the barn and listening to them, her mother is unsettled. Who is this girl becoming? What is Fern's reading of Fern herself, as she moves into the community of the barn, likely to produce in her, in her mother, in the family? Certainly, Fern's mother becomes unsettled, perhaps in terms of how she perceives the category and essence of "child." And it is thus, in the face of madness, that Fern's mother goes toward a psychiatrist, Dr. Dorian.

But madness does not just end at the bounds of the family farm. Fern's neighbors and friends, especially Lurvy and the pastor, are also unsettled. For them, the unsettling madness occurs by way of Charlotte's webs and the words that are woven into them. The pastor especially is unsettled by the way authorship and writing removes the author from view. And so he and Lurvy together read themselves into the web as into a religious text, moving toward faith in miracles.

Their transitions, which come by means of staring at the web and forgetting the spider, make their act of reading into the web a kind of forgetting. For they forget the difference between nature and culture in their move into the text.

Finally, so unsettling is Wilbur the pig's melancholy and anxiety that the animals who are paired with him in the barn also transition into something a bit maddening. And yet hopeful. For they move toward one another and toward what is peculiarly human – the expression of self by means of exertion and interconnection with others. The animals, ironically, move toward community with one another.

What hangs above all these disruptions and movements, of course, are Charlotte's webs. These are the media by which we are witnessing the motivations and the sites of transition. The novelist, hidden as he is in Charlotte's self-secretions, is able to show us examples of reading, of reading into, of transitioning within a text that inaugurates and reflects our role as readers.

Let us trace out White's webs further. Let us take some time to move toward the webs themselves. Dr. Dorian wondered aloud to Fern's mother why everyone didn't see the webs as a miracle, as opposed to the pig. And indeed I agree.

The webs are as much sites and supports for transition as the infant's interaction with the blanket would be for D. W. Winnicott (1971).<sup>13</sup> The webs are neither objects

<sup>12</sup> See his introduction where he discusses the relationship to animals as a kind of madness. And then this: "nothing will have ever given me more food for thinking through this absolute alterity of the neighbor, of the next(-door) than these moments when I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat" (Derrida 2009: 11).

<sup>13</sup> Winnicott's (1971) descriptions of a transitional object could be paraphrased as follows: with her fingers rubbing the corner of her blanket, the infant started to transition toward an outside world

nor subjects, partaking as they do of both. The webs are spun out of Charlotte's body, out of her own substance, and yet stand on their own. They are temporary, being designed to trap insects that will wreck at least major parts of them, and yet are so settled as to be permanent in their continuity in the barn. Finally, they are designed to be in the background so as *not* to focus anyone's attention on them, as the blanket, for Winnicott, is designed as a site not to be challenged, if it is to provide continuity for the infant's self-experience.

A word or phrase, however, written in the web changes the very ground of our perception of the web. It foregrounds what is not foregrounded. It stabilizes what is temporary. It allows to be challenged that which was intended to be in the background. And it removes from view the genesis of the site as such, in this case the spider and the newsprint or carton from which the words come.

The web as word could not come from excretion or exertion, and certainly not from Templeton's rat-delivered garbage scraps. The web as word is pointing and soliciting elsewhere, towards those who read it, towards the means and ends of their conscientious, practical lives. The web as word allows others to read themselves into its transitional support, and it hides those whose continuity previously depended on it. With a word in it, the web hides Charlotte's body, which would otherwise be laid out in the very patterns of sticky thread, like a Jackson Pollock's painting expresses his arm motions in the play of the paint.

In my view, the webs as en-worded are an invitation toward a phenomenological reduction, or epoché, of sorts. They announce that experience is always described in language. And the very relationship of experience to language is uprooted, interrogated, announced. When one does phenomenology, what does one say about some experience, about some pig? Even to say "some pig", as Charlotte does in the first religious or salvific web, is frightfully difficult.

"Some" surely does not mean an ordinary pointing out. It carries emotional resonance, or it could. And thus the problem begins – how to describe experience in such a way as to be honest and truthful about the indeterminacies, inadequacies, and

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in which there were others who always already held viewpoints on her, who shared projects with her, as in a family life. The rubbing of the blanket meant a growing capacity to access to the fact that she, the infant, did not establish those views, those projects, or that world. And her engagement with the blanket as neither object nor subject was her "allowance," her being on the way toward the means to pursue objects and relationships. It was her transitional situation – her self as a process of transition – that animated the blanket as a space of relief and growth. The blanket seemed to allow her to settle into her patterns of fingering its corner between thumb and forefinger, etc. as if it were meant to do so. From the point of view of Winnicott, though, notably, not from that of the infant, the noematic clue of the blanket, in other words, allowed her and her parents to come to see the growing noetic patterns of her own transitional lived experience. For a wonderful, insightful treatment of transitional objects in relation to children's literature, please see Kirsten Jacobson's 2012 article entitled "Heidegger, Winnicott, and the *Velveteen Rabbit*".

concealments opened up by the words themselves. To start with a word for the web, to start with a word in a web, is to start the problem of how to anticipate and control the way others read themselves into the web. It is to have to do phenomenology about phenomenology or to consider how to enunciate the problem of what counts as the necessary and sufficient language of epistemology.

When Charlotte is going to write “radiant” in her next web, she and Wilbur discuss whether or not that is an adequate adjective. Charlotte is not sure it is the truth. But Wilbur changes his mode of action and announces that he feels radiant. He has made a transition into radiance by means of the word. He has, so to say, read himself into the web. And so Charlotte decides to “go to the limit.”

And, indeed, the webs are all about going to the limit. The webs are designed to be used in their status as transitional space to make a movement toward something else. The webbed words announce for all to see themselves as the possibility of moving into the very interstices between act and thought, word and object, relationship and individual. The webs also thereby announce a way of bringing together a child, her animals, and her adults into a shared situation of transition as the motor of development.

In Charlotte’s discussions with Wilbur, the reader is initiated into a number of other words that do not get written into webs but are nonetheless generative: salutations, gullible, aeronaut, versatile, masterpiece, magnum opus, languishing. In discussing what “versatile” means, Charlotte explains to Wilbur that “I can turn with ease from one thing to another” (White 2001: 116). This being versatile, this ability to make transitions, is something that Dr. Dorian is also certain (and correct) will happen to Fern: “I predict that the day will come when even Henry [Fussy] will drop some chance remark that catches Fern’s attention. It’s amazing how children change from year to year” (111).

Fern, like Charlotte, like Charlotte’s web, like E.B. White, is versatile. Like Charlotte and her web, Fern operates at the limits of institutions and projects (like the barn, like animal husbandry, like the family) that she has not helped to set up. And, like Charlotte, Fern is sedentary, sitting on a stool, and waiting for what comes. Has Fern spun all this story out of her own dreams, her own perceptions? It is not clear. But someone has. Someone who is as much a teacher as an equal. Someone who is as much dependent on children to take on the care of her words, her children, as constructive of those children’s care and safety and enjoyment.

Yes, children are transitional, just as their objects are. So are authors. Or speakers. If we adults have solidified our viewpoints, that is because, perhaps, we have forgotten the genesis of care, of writing, of the way in which childhood versatility is the motor of adult moments of stability. How it comes from the “double

line” of a web in which words announce and hide themselves, in which “humble” means both low to the ground and a lack of arrogance.

The changing, transitional, versatile, attentive child changes *because* she’s attentive. She will pay attention first to spiders and webs. And then to other people. As Dr. Dorian remarks: “Children pay better attention than adults” (White 2001: 110). He works to get her mother to see that it is not Fern who needs help, but the family, the mother, whose anxiety is misplaced. Children announce that we must return to our own versatility, that our salutations of children indicate in advance our own languishing, that we are all low to the ground, waiting for openness to meaning that gives us ballast, that makes us aeronauts.

## Conclusion

Our daughter, in discussing the end of the book, remarked: “I felt sad that Charlotte died but at the same time I felt happy that Wilbur saved her babies and was smart enough to do so. I learned you can change even if you don’t want to change and when the future comes you will change. Kindness, tenderness, loving is the best way to make friends.”

“When the future comes you will change” – the motion of transition for our daughter was so thoroughly learned that she saw that it was a matter of inevitability. And it was tied to her consciousness of time. To make a transition is what we are bound for. We make transitions even if we did not want to. We are the process of our time, our lives, our relationships and then have to take them up in the ways that they demand. Our transition is for the sake of taking care of ourselves and of those with whom we are placed.

With our daughter, I learned, too. I learned again that it is not only that we “will change” but that we are changing all the time, by means of the others with whom we live. I learned that Wilbur learns, and changes, from Charlotte’s acts. I learned to go again and read myself into the text. And there I found, clear as day, that Wilbur learns to save and to care and to change from being saved and cared for and from witnessing the change in Charlotte that is the gift of their friendship. For Charlotte tells him she wrote the words “for you because I liked you” (White 2001: 164). And because the writing helped “lift up my life a trifle” (164). So, in a way, Wilbur learns from Charlotte because they enforce a transitional state upon each other.

But do mothers and fathers, do teachers, do adults, feel their children “lift them up a trifle”? We ought to. And this I take it is the message of the Philosophy for Children curriculum. We can come to see our children as friends that we have unequal responsibilities for if we give up unstable, stuck binary categories of adult and child.

Certainly, with respect to Charlotte and Wilbur, our daughter learned from both of them, as friends who dwelled differently yet together. Reading herself into Wilbur, childlike in dependence, she learned that change is something which desire must reckon with. That tenderness, as bitter as it can be, is a way of navigating it. Reading herself into Charlotte, adult in her responsibility, she learned that care is instructive of desire, that it moves toward stability and growth.

This motion of “reading into” is a kind of passive synthesis of the order of time-consciousness or pairing for Husserl. Becoming ensconced in a novel, or a situation, or the world is not willed, but it is nevertheless something for which we are responsible. This non-willed responsibility is instructive, and it offers us fulfillment, meaning, and danger.

It is my hope that, even with the danger that texts always present, the milk stool of childhood’s attentiveness is never empty. It is my hope that children, like our daughter, do not read themselves so far into the text so as to imitate Fern who becomes “careful to avoid childish things, like sitting on a milk stool near a pigpen” (White 2001: 183). For I think attentiveness and study is the childish character of phenomenology. We are as much children as adults. And in multiple, shifting ways.

However, if and when the stool is left behind, I hope that the chance words dropped by the other people in this world are ones that draw attention and care toward some more adequate grasp of the means and ends within the situations in which we find ourselves. I hope that children, in short, see each other as both means and ends to the process of self-becoming.

### *Afterthought*

As a final note, I would like to point out that it would seem that Fern unites two communities in the novel. The first community is that of the animals. To them, Fern is just one of them, albeit one who sits on a milk stool. And the animals discuss the philosophical problems of animal life (particularly animal life within the context of domestication and culinary arts) with Fern there as a witness.

The second community is that of the family, friends, and townspeople with whom Fern navigates more actively and with a direct, speaking role. To this second community, Fern serves as a moment of transition, as a peculiar sort of motion that challenges the stable, non-moving certainties of human experience.

Playing the roles of transition and of intersection, Fern is in a unique space. On the one hand, Fern’s involvement with the animals suggests that eidetic structures, ideas, are achieved outside of the human world. There is an inquiry that, at best, deserves our silence and our limited participation. On the other hand, Fern’s involvement with the humans around her suggests that eidetic structures, ideas,

are achieved only through rigorous, intersubjective review and challenge. What gets revisited, undone, and created are structures of the most basic recognitions of human life. These are “up for grabs” with Fern, as is the format of the inquiry itself.

As we leave behind the book, it is difficult to say who is teaching whom. Can Fern, can a child, really be said to lead the animals, the adults, and the other children to new insights, meaningful insights? It would seem so. On the other hand, can this child who is herself an animal, perform that leadership role without the unique, active role of animals who are not human, who announce their own struggle to inquire into the limits of categorical intuition?

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### Prema fenomenologiji prijelaza: *Charlottina mreža* E. B. Whitea i proces djetetova samoupisivanja u roman

U radu se povezuju fenomenologija i određena vrsta teorije čitateljeva odgovora u pokušaju tumačenja poznatoga dječjega romana *Charlottina mreža* E. B. Whitea. Rad je podijeljen na tri dijela: prvi dio razmatra neke od važnijih tema u radu Edmunda Husserla, točnije percepciju, intersubjektivnost i temporalnost. Drugi dio opisuje čin autorova čitanja romana s kćeri, postavljajući u prvi plan njezine reakcije na tekst. Treći dio prikazuje novo čitanje Whiteove priče nastalo u razgovoru s djetetom te na temelju prethodno predstavljenih fenomenoloških koncepata. Nadalje, rad se oslanja na uvide pokreta „filozofije za djecu“ i razvoja njegova narativa zajednice istraživanja i propitkivanja.

**Ključne riječi:** fenomenologija, teorija čitateljeva odgovora, „filozofija za djecu“, Edmund Husserl, E. B. White

### Zur Phänomenologie des Übergangs: *Charlotte's Web* von E. B. White und der Prozess des kindlichen Selbsteinschreibens in den Roman

Im Beitrag werden Phänomenologie und eine bestimmte Art der Reader-Response-Theorie zwecks Deutung des Kinderromans *Charlotte's Web* von E. B. White verbunden. Der Beitrag besteht aus drei Teilen: Im ersten werden einige der wichtigeren Themen im Werk Edmund Husserls besprochen, genauer genommen, jene der Perzeption, der Intersubjektivität und der Temporalität. Im zweiten Teil wird der Lesevorgang beschrieben, wie der Roman seitens des Beitragsautors seiner Tochter vorgelesen wurde, weshalb auch die Reaktionen der Tochter in den Vordergrund gerückt werden. Im dritten Teil wird eine neue Lesart von Whites Geschichte dargeboten, die ein Ergebnis des Gespräches mit dem Kinde und der im Beitrag davor vorgestellten phänomenologischen Konzepte ist. Der Beitrag fußt ferner auf den Einsichten der „Philosophie für Kinder“-Bewegung sowie auf der Entwicklung ihres Narrativs in Form einer Forschungs- und Hinterfragungsgemeinschaft.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Phänomenologie, Reader-Response-Theorie, „Philosophie für Kinder“, Edmund Husserl, E. B. White