Ian H. Angus
Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism: Crisis, Body, World
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In an era marked by increasingly intertwined crises – ecological, social, political, and existential – Ian Angus's *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism: Crisis, Body, World* (2021) presents a bold and timely theoretical intervention. At the heart of the book lies the attempt to rethink the connection between subjectivity, the lifeworld (Lebenswelt), and labor through an original dialogue between Husserlian phenomenology and the Marxist critique of political economy.

One of the book's major strengths lies in its ability to bring these two traditions into relation without reducing one to the other, but rather by maintaining a productive tension between them. It is within this space of dialogue that the possibility arises to confront some of the most pressing crises of our time: the environmental crisis, the crisis of labor, and the crisis of meaning.

Angus argues that the crisis of modern rationality and the crisis of capitalist labor should be understood as two expressions of the same fracture – that between lived experience and the abstract systems that shape it, often to the point of erasing its richness and complexity. In this context, the return to the concept of the *Lebenswelt*, as developed by Husserl in *The Crisis of European Sciences*, is closely connected to a distinctive analysis of labor – understood not only as an economic necessity but as a constitutive activity of subjectivity and a privileged site of social transformation.

The book is divided into five parts, each addressing a fundamental dimension of the phenomenological-Marxist project outlined by the author: from the diagnosis of the crisis of modern rationality to the proposal of a planetary and intercultural phenomenology.

This is a dense and richly articulated work, full of references and theoretical insight. Rather than attempting to reconstruct

every aspect of Angus's argument, this review aims to highlight some of its most significant conceptual nuclei, which attest to both the originality and the critical relevance of his approach

The first part of the book, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Modern Reason*, revisits Husserl's reflection on the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) and on *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, focusing on the loss of meaning that stems from the increasing abstraction of scientific rationality from lived experience. Angus shows how Husserl's diagnosis, originally directed at Galilean modernity, remains strikingly relevant for understanding today's dominant forms of rationality, marked by growing formalization, disembodiment, and the neutralization of subjective experience.

Within this framework, science and technology are no longer viewed as simple tools for knowledge, but as symbolic structures that have gradually lost their anchoring in concrete life, contributing to the construction of an objectified world emptied of meaning. As Angus writes, "this is the crisis: reason proceeds without meaning for human life, while value loses its sustenance in reason" (p. 46). It is precisely in relation to this rupture that Angus reclaims phenomenology as a therapeutic practice – a philosophical method capable of interrogating the historical sedimentations of modern thought and reactivating the connection between reason, embodiment, and world.

The reference to the lifeworld thus takes on a double significance: on the one hand, as a critical concept that reveals the loss of meaning produced by abstract rationality; on the other, as a positive, generative principle from which to reconstruct a more grounded understanding of the world – one attuned to lived experience, relationships, and the plurality of contexts. In this sense, phenomenology is not limited to description, but positions itself as a transformative philosophy, oriented toward the recovery of meaning and value.

The second part of the book, *Objectivism and the Recovery of Subjectivity*, explores the impact of instrumental rationality on the lifeworld, bringing Husserlian phenomenology into dialogue with Herbert Marcuse's critical theory. Angus examines how the development of modern science and the rise of digital technologies intensify abstraction and homogenize experience, reshaping the relationship between subjectivity, technology, and the world.

In the framework outlined by the author, the lifeworld tends to be reduced to a merely technical-operational environment, where

relationships and meanings are emptied out in favor of generalized functionality. Contemporary forms of digital mediation, in particular, accelerate experiential time, diminishing the reflective intervals that make meaning possible. As thinkers like Bernard Stiegler also remind us, the loss of these temporal rhythms directly affects the formation of subjectivity, undermining its critical, affective, and perceptual capacities. As Angus writes, "the technical enframing of the world fragments experience, reducing the subject to a function within a system that obscures its own historical and material conditions" (p. 98).

In this context, the phenomenological recovery of embodied and situated subjectivity becomes a crucial tool to resist the technocratic reduction of experience. For Angus, returning to the lifeworld means reopening a space for meaning, for relation, and for transformation – freeing existence from the imperatives of efficiency and performance.

In the third part, *The Living Body and Ontology of Labor*, the analysis shifts to the ontological dimension of labor. Drawing on the phenomenology of embodiment, the book reinterprets the Marxian concept of labor by emphasizing a form of subjectivity that is historically situated and bodily grounded. Rather than conceiving labor as an abstract function within a productive system, it is presented as a constitutive activity of subjectivity — a way of being in the world and relating to others, rooted in lived corporeality.

One of the most powerful conceptual contributions of this section is the notion of fecundity. Human labor – and life itself – always generates something beyond what is required by the functional cycles of capitalist production. This surplus is not merely economic, but also affective, symbolic, and relational. It is "a surplus that cannot be reduced to utility or exchange value – it opens a space for meaning, for care, for the affirmation of life itself" (p. 179).

Such an understanding allows for the emergence of creativity, connection, and meaning – all of which resist being reduced to logics of productivity or performance.

It is precisely here that the transformative potential of phenomenology becomes most evident. Through its focus on lived experience, phenomenology provides access to this excess of meaning, to what abstract systems typically overlook or suppress. It becomes a theoretical and critical practice that brings to light what mechanisms of alienation tend to conceal – the richness of

life, the density of our relationships, and the possibility of shaping our existence around care, interdependence, and the situated depth of embodied subjectivity.

The fourth part, *Transcendentality and the Constitution of Worlds*, broadens the scope of the reflection by adopting a political and planetary perspective. Engaging in dialogue with ecological thought and Indigenous cosmologies, the book challenges the Eurocentrism embedded in certain classical formulations of phenomenology, proposing instead an intercultural rethinking of the concept of lifeworld. The aim is not to abandon the phenomenological tradition, but to radicalize its critical potential by opening it up to the plurality of lived worlds – understood as necessarily situated and historically determined.

Meaning and value, in this context, are not given universally, but emerge through encounters between embodied subjectivities, cultural contexts, and different ways of life – "only through a plurality of lived worlds can we begin to deconstruct the illusion of a single universal world and recover the situatedness of experience" (p. 345). In this light, phenomenology is no longer a centered or neutral form of knowledge, but becomes a practice capable of listening to the margins and questioning the hierarchies that regulate access to speech and recognition.

Within this horizon, the reference to Mariana Ortega's concept of *mestiza consciousness* aligns deeply with the book's overall project. It expresses the kind of plural, liminal, and resistant subjectivity that this phenomenological approach seeks to foreground – one that embraces fragmentation and multiplicity as a source of insight and transformation. Rather than appearing as an external addition, Ortega's work resonates with Angus's call to rethink phenomenology as a space for articulating differences, where it is precisely from the margins that new possibilities of meaning and social change may emerge.

The fifth and final part, *Self-Responsibility as Teleologically Given in Transcendental Phenomenology*, brings to the fore the role of philosophy in confronting the crises of the present, emphasizing the normative and transformative character of phenomenology. Far from being a neutral or merely descriptive account of experience, phenomenology here emerges as a practice of radical questioning, oriented toward action and capable of shaping responsible subjectivities – rooted in their historicity and open to transformation.

Phenomenological responsibility, in this light, does not mean

following a fixed set of rules, but rather cultivating the capacity to question the sedimented assumptions of the lifeworld, thereby opening the possibility for new forms of meaning and coexistence. As Angus puts it, "phenomenology must always return to the world from which it begins, not to contemplate it passively, but to take responsibility for it" (p. 426). This return also entails a renewed engagement with the historical, material, and cultural conditions through which meaning is produced, and a philosophical commitment to mediate between theory and praxis, between embodied subjectivity and systemic structures.

From this perspective, the proposal for an intercultural, ecological, Marxist phenomenology rooted in lived experience is not a break from tradition, but a return to its most critical and hopeful impulses. The book shows that phenomenology, far from being an abstract or detached discipline, has always harbored the potential for a deep engagement with the world – an attention to subjectivity, embodiment, and the fragile textures of meaning. What is needed is not to abandon phenomenology's foundations, but to recover and reactivate them in order to face the crises of our time from the ground of experience.

In conclusion, *Groundwork of Phenomenological Marxism* stands out as an original and courageous contribution, capable of reopening a dialogue between phenomenology and Marxism in a way that has not occurred in quite some time. Ian Angus succeeds in the rare and philosophically significant task of bringing these two traditions into conversation – not through a superficial juxtaposition, but through a rigorous engagement that opens up new theoretical and critical spaces. What distinguishes Angus's approach is not only its conceptual depth and theoretical coherence, but also its commitment to reclaiming the critical potential of phenomenology: the ability to question, from within lived experience, the transformations and contradictions of the present. This is a dense, complex, and systematic work, which resists superficial readings and instead offers valuable conceptual tools for rethinking subjectivity, labor, and the lifeworld in a radically transformative key.

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