

thinking

togetherness

ANDREJ BOŽIČ (*Ed.*)

THINKING TOGETHERNESS

PHENOMENOLOGY AND SOCIALITY

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PHENOMENOLOGY AND SOCIALITY

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Daniele Nuccilli

WILHELM SCHAPP ON THE NARRATOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Abstract: The epistemological structure of the “philosophy of stories” of Wilhelm Schapp can variously be applied to the analysis of intersubjectivity and the experience of alterity. I focus on the hermeneutic/ontological perspective of the human being that Schapp offers through his concepts of “being-entangled-in-stories” and “co-entanglement-in-stories.” I would like to show how this concept, which reflects the influence of the psychological notion of “empathy,” is employed by the philosopher as an epistemic tool to explain the comprehension of alterity. Schapp’s work is effective on a double level: firstly, it brings out the importance of our past stories for the comprehension of others and of our own being in the world; secondly, it offers a solid basis to reverse the relation between stories and narratives, showing how a certain historical or even traumatic event may give rise to multiple narratives that represent different ways, in which the same story emerges from contrasting perspectives.

Keywords: entanglement, intersubjectivity, stories, narrativity, reconciliation.

Wilhelm Schapp’s philosophy of stories is often used in sociological and philosophical studies on narrative and storytelling (Gasché 2018; Mathies 2020). However, beside rare exceptions (Carr 1986; Hilt 2014), there are no reflections on how the problem of intersubjectivity is addressed therein.¹ Yet, the problem of how single stories of different individuals relate and the issue of the formation of a collective identity through shared stories are two major cornerstones of Schapp’s thought. The purpose here is to highlight how the epistemological framework of the “philosophy of stories” is capable of being used for the analysis of intersubjectivity and the experience of alterity. The

¹ On the other hand, some prominence is given to Schapp’s phenomenology of law in the studies on social ontology (De Vecchi 2015; Lasagni 2022, XV).

fundamental concept, upon which knowledge of both the external world and the other worlds is based, is the co-entanglement (*Mitverstrickung*) (Nuccilli 2020). In order to better understand this concept, however, we need to take an in-depth look at two other fundamental mainstays of Schapp's thought, namely the concept of entanglement (*Verstrickung*) and the concept of stories (*Geschichten*). Before delving deeper into these two concepts dependent on one another, I believe it is essential to provide a terminological-conceptual clarification of the term *Geschichten* and explain whether the term is to be understood as what is called histories in English or rather what is meant by stories.

1. *Geschichten*. Stories or histories?

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Since *Geschichten* is the plural of *Geschichte*, which is translated into English as "history," the natural way to translate and understand the term should be "histories." Unlike English, however, the German language does not draw the terminological distinction between history and story. In fact, the same word could be indifferently referred to objective facts or to the narration of facts, be they real or invented. In the technical terminology of contemporary historical narrativism, the concept of story has assumed its own shape and a precise connotation in relation to the problem of historical narrative. Without following either the different perspectives represented therein or the various definitions regarding each concept, it can be said that the conceptual toolkit of narrativism makes a specific distinction between the objective level of facts (history), their re-elaboration on a linguistic level (narrative), and their formation into configurational nuclei of meaning (story) following a specific category of narrative model (plot). Starting with Hayden White's *Metahistory* and his formulation of the concept of emplotment, however, the narratological aspect of story and the fictional dimension of the historical narrative have prevailed over the previous historiographical conception. According to White, stories are no longer understood as something that can be found by historians or that neutrally reflects past events; rather, they become narrative constructs that depend on the plot, by means of which the historian narrates past events (see White 1973, 7).

As I have shown elsewhere, the common root shared by the terms *history* and *story* can be found in the classical conception of “*historía*,” which already incorporates the experience of reality and its transposition into oral form, and which Schapp’s perspective tries to intercept and unfold using a hermeneutic approach (Nuccilli 2018). In his “philosophy of stories,” he aspires precisely to deconstruct and rearticulate the relationship between the objective historical level and the narrative level through the concept of co-entanglement. If the purpose is to pursue a widely accepted and paradigmatic narratological position, Forster’s *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) undoubtedly stands out as an essential contribution to better understand, from the theoretical and literary point of view, the difference between what can be defined as history and what can be defined as story. Here, the author draws a distinction between what is historical, i.e., what “deals with actions, and with the characters of men only so far as he can deduce them from their actions” (Forster 1927, 35) and the story understood as “narrative of events arranged in time sequence” (ibid., 25), in which the plot differs from the story, inasmuch as it is “also a narrative of events” and “the emphasis falling on causality” (ibid., 62). In light of these examples, it can be said that Schapp’s concept of *Geschichte* covers the whole semantic field of history understood as a historical fact (history) and history understood as the content of a narrative (story). Speaking of these two aspects, we can refer to two examples, in order to understand the continuity of these two moments within Schapp’s concept of *Geschichte*. The first example shows the way, in which *Geschichte* can be understood as history. It is reported by Schapp in paragraph 6 of *In Geschichten verstrickt* and describes the episode of Alexander’s helmet narrated by Plutarch in *Life of Alexander*. As a matter of fact, Plutarch relates to Alexander’s refusal to take advantage of his status to the detriment of his soldiers by emptying a helmet filled with water previously brought by a slave. According to Schapp, this episode unveils more about the figure of the king, in command of a thirsty army in the middle of the Balochistan desert, than any military victory or conquest mentioned in history books. This episode reveals an aspect of Alexander’s personality that explains his political and military success in a far more effective way than in-depth analyses of his political choices and military decisions (Schapp 2012, 104). The second example helps us to understand the reason why Schapp’s

concept of *Geschichte* can be understood as story, starting from its connection to the linguistic and propositional dimension. This example goes through the analysis of the proposition “the queen is sick,” which is a statement contained in paragraph 17 of *In Geschichten verstrickt* that somehow reminds us of Forster’s “The king died” (Forster 1927, 61). Even though this proposition refers to something that can be semantically understood, Schapp argues that it will never return an objective givenness, on which we make the intended state of affairs converge. The only way to make the state of affairs clear is to place it in a broader context, that is, in one or more stories. Queen Elizabeth, the “snow queen,” the queen of bees, or the queen of a kingdom who appears to us in a dream may be sick. Only a narrative articulation, a *story*, is eligible to identify the object-related referent, on which a proposition can make the intended state of affairs converge, thus creating the conditions for a judgment on truth and falsity. Schapp’s concept of stories also covers Forster’s concept of plot, and associates fictional stories with those narratives that refer to real facts. Hence, the choice of translating *Geschichten* as stories not only in my previous articles, but also in this contribution. Concurrently, this same translation aims to keep purely historiographic connotations away from this concept. However, the brief remarks offered here also ensure that we do not fall into the trap of opposite misunderstanding and that the concept of stories is not understood solely in terms of fiction.

2. Entanglement and stories

Let us now focus on the explanation of the two elements that make up the concept of entanglement-in-stories: the “entanglement” and the “stories.” We will then require them to introduce the concept of “co-entanglement,” which is essential to understand Schapp’s narratological structure of intersubjectivity. Under the clear influence of Heidegger’s view, Schapp in *In Geschichten verstrickt* defines the fundamental existential condition of man as “being-entangled-in-stories.” The way the concept of *Entanglement* takes shape in Schapp’s prominent work suggests that it has the same magnitude as Heidegger’s being-in-the-world, especially if we meditate on the moment of “thrownness” (Heidegger 1962, 174). Even before their birth, human beings find themselves

entangled in present, past, and future stories. Compared to the Heideggerian reflections, however, Schapp's philosophy wants to free itself from any form of historicism (Nuccilli 2018). According to Greisch, the tripartition of the concept of entanglement provided in *In Geschichten verstrickt*, namely "self-entanglement" (*Selbstverstrickung*), "other-entanglement" (*Fremdverstrickung*), and "shared-entanglement" (*Allverstrickung*), offers a way out of Heidegger's fundamental existential concept of care (*Sorge*) and allows us to understand the historicity of man anew through the *pluralia tantum* of stories (see Greisch 2010, 194).

The entanglement is therefore the precondition for the appearance of stories, and this has epistemological consequences. As Schapp states in *In Geschichten verstrickt*:

The being-entangled refuses to be separated from the story, so that story remains on one side and my being-entangled on the other, or alternatively, so that story in general is still something without the entangled and the entangled is still something without the story. (Schapp 2012, 85–86.)

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Accordingly, the story cannot be traced back to a mere object of knowledge, since it always requires the involvement of the being-in-the-world of the human being as a whole. For this reason, in his work *Philosophie der Geschichten* Schapp defines entanglement as the equivalent concept of Husserl's self-givenness (Schapp 2015, 293). It is only through the appearance (*auftauchen*) of story that the outside world and the other worlds can head our way. However, no story is suspended in the air in this framework. Behind each story, there is always a man being entangled in it. The author points out that each story has a "self" entangled in the story. This self is in turn the meeting point of a myriad of stories, involving other close and distant selves, the surrounding world, and the things and people closest to it (Schapp 2012, 1). Therefore, the stories are the contextual weave, in which the world takes shape, a weave that always wraps itself around a singular or collective subject (Schapp 2012, 196 ff.). Just as every single individual is entangled in stories, so stories, in which other selves are entangled, have to do with us, too. It is in such a mutual connection that we understand our being and

relationship with others and things. In doing so, we shed light on the essential framework of co-entanglement. Humans and things are part of this weave. On the one hand, the former are entangled in “other people’s” stories (*Fremdgeschichten*, as Schapp defines them; see *ibid.*, 120) or co-entangled in our own stories; on the other hand, things are tools or artefacts (“things-for” [*Wozudinge*]; see *ibid.*, 13) with their own stories, which in turn are part of the narrative layer of the stories of human beings who use and produce them.

As in Lipps’s theory of empathy (see Lipps 2018), Schapp raises an immediate problem about the encounter with the other. This problem is linked to the fact that everyone is immersed in their own experience; thus, we know directly our own feelings only. Furthermore, an attempt to compare the level of knowledge of the other’s experience with one’s own experience would be a quite challenging task. In Schapp’s language, everyone is entangled both in their own stories and collective stories related to their culture and religion. The understanding from others does not take place in a neutral and distant way; on the contrary, it always materializes from the stories that entangle us at that moment. It could be said that we all empathize with the stories, in the sense that we feel part of them and project our stories into them. The encounter with the other therefore seems to be constantly mediated by our individual story and its influence on the interpretation of other people’s stories, together with the culture, upon which these stories rest.

In order to overcome this theoretical problem, Schapp resorts to two crucial cornerstones of his concept of co-entanglement. The first one is the concept of horizon inherited from Husserl’s phenomenology (Wälde 1985); the second is linked to the deeper dimension of entanglement and revolves around Schapp’s interpretation of “parables.” Let us now deepen the concept of horizon. According to Schapp, it is completely impossible to isolate a story from its context and identify its beginning and end. Each story always has a pre-story and a post-story (Schapp 2012, 88). This means that each story is linked to a previous story, which in turn is linked to other previous stories that make its horizon, which is the dynamic context of sense where each story acquires its meaning. Each story is therefore like a “drop in a sea of stories” (*ibid.*, 84). In the way they are told or depending on how they arise, the stories refer to events, of which only some aspects are highlighted, while some others

are left in the background. However, if we proceed from the foreground to the background, that is to say, if we move from the first emerging story to the stories that stand behind, we can reach an ever-wider perspective in the horizon of stories, until we meet the great narratives of the past, myths, or narratives, upon which the great religions are based (see Schapp 2015, 193 ff.). In any case, the relationship between the stories of every single individual and these great narratives, in which entire civilizations are entangled, should not be understood in terms of a chronological/linear reconstruction of past events. Quite the opposite, the entangled one remains the starting point for every experience of the past. In *Philosophie der Geschichten*, Schapp points out:

The single entangled is always at the center of our research. Starting from their stories, we advance in all directions as far as we can. That being so, no obstacles stand in the way. We are not only entangled in our stories, but also in all the stories up to the creation of the world, and, consequently, up to the furthest man back in time. (Ibid., 46–47.)

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From an epistemological point of view, the entanglement, of which Schapp speaks, finds nourishment in what the author calls “positive world.” By the expression “positive world,” he refers to the world, to which the entangled-in-stories belongs, built on a universal history that involves an indefinite number of human beings along a timeline that projects itself up to the ancient times (see *ibid.*, 41 ff.). The western positive world is based, for instance, on the universal history of the world’s creation, from Hesiod to Dante (see *ibid.*, 42 ff.). The only access to this world is our entanglement that leads us, then, into the horizon of the positive world, to which we belong, to other stories belonging to individuals entangled-in-stories, with which we come into contact and within which we can, in turn, be co-entangled. The entangled one finds themselves co-entangled within a universal history, which serves as a horizon for the single individual stories. It is precisely that horizon, then, that is located at the center of an endless number of horizons, likewise determined by other universal histories that build the horizon of further positive worlds, within which other individual stories take place (see *ibid.*, 44). We can access those individual stories through the identification of an anchor, set between the

horizon of stories that constitutes their world and the horizon that configures our stories (Schapp 2012, 7). Therefore, every individual is somehow able to find the gateway to understand someone else's story. This leads us now to the second main cornerstone of the concept of co-entanglement. According to Schapp, there are stories, like the parables, that represent the common meeting point between all human beings, as they can co-entangle the most distant earthling in terms of geographical and cultural perspectives into a common story. The parable of the prodigal son is the example that Schapp cites in *In Geschichten verstrickt*. The story of the son who decides to return to his old father's house can entangle any father from anywhere in time and space waiting for their son who emigrated abroad for work reasons. Since this story may refer to the father-son relationship, it does nothing but outline a common story inherent in the entire human race (see *ibid.*, 186). According to Schapp, these stories of the "we," namely *Wir-Geschichten* or "we-stories," are the pivotal moment for every chance of co-entanglement between an individual's own story and the story of another human. The story of death is by all means yet another crucial story of the "we," inasmuch as it goes beyond culture and religion, and easily leads to a certain level of involvement between completely different individuals. If we explore the condition of our own entanglement, we shall then reach those stories that most characterize us as human beings. It is from this perspective that others' stories come together on every level of experience, from our closest stories to those we hear about from newspapers, news broadcasts, and social media. Therefore, the most straightforward way to get to know the other is to dive even deeper into the horizon of stories, in which we are entangled, to discover the section of the horizon that we have in common with their stories, and let the story or stories display the essential elements of the human nature entangled in them. According to Schapp, this can be done, even if we do not share any experience with that human being. From this perspective and following his most well-known sentence, we can therefore say: "The story stands for the man." (*Ibid.*, 103.) This means that we can literally know individuals and the essential core of their nature starting from their story. Schapp provides the example of a lawyer who dines with the defendant of a case that he is evaluating. In his view, the documents relating to the case will likely let the lawyer gain a better knowledge of the nature of the

man than simply spending time eating meals together (ibid., 105–106). This example of co-entanglement has to do with human beings who do not share any past experiences, and therefore refers to a current horizon whose roots are not to be sought in events shared by their stories. However, there are further structural models of co-entanglement, where individuals share past traumatic events. Schapp provides the example of an encounter between two comrades in arms from the same regiment who fought in the First World War. As soon as they meet, even after several years, many memories come back from the past: their comrades, the enemies they killed, the battles they fought, and, finally, the background of the Great War. Starting out from this universal event, their single stories are illustrated along with the causes and effects of such a disaster. This conflict represents the common story shared and experienced by these two men, that is, a catastrophic piece of history that constantly keeps them entangled (ibid., 112–113). Nonetheless, it is a common historical background, where past and future stories take life, regardless of whether they belong to an entire generation of human lives or future generations. There is no discontinuity between the background of the Great War and the dimension, in which the stories of each individual are located that instead interact with one another and, consequently, give life to a permanent feature of human history through their stories, i.e., the condition of entanglement. It is at this point that Schapp's thought deviates from Dilthey's. According to Marquard's concept of the "pluralization of history," human beings are not only "historical" but also "storical" (Marquard 2004, 47). Actually, they embody a tangle of stories, in which the inner remembering experience of mankind emerges.

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3. Entanglement and reconciliation

Now that we have clarified what Schapp means by entanglement and co-entanglement, I would like to mention a possible application of this perspective to an essential concept of reconciliation studies: the concept of "divided memory" (Barkan, Cole, and Struve 2007). For example, let us think about the opposite perspective that the children of the victims and the children of the oppressors may have on a dramatic event, such as a war or a terrorist attack. According to Schapp's framework, we live and grow up in the stories of our ancestors as

we passively go through them (see Fellmann 1973, 136). Actually, the divided memory consists of often-conflicting (see Cobb 2016) “divided narratives” (Ehrmann and Millar 2021). Many recent studies have focused on how, in a conflict or in a post-traumatic situation, the future generations are more likely to grow up listening to narratives that are tied to their faction (see Bennett 2019; French 2018; Müller and Ruthner 2017). Compared to the way the concept of narratives is normally understood in these studies, Schapp’s concept of story offers a different perspective, since he speaks of a story that cannot be reduced to the linguistic level or to the moment, when the story is being told; quite the opposite, it always arises from a horizon, in which individuals are involved in all their spiritual and cognitive dimensions (Schapp 2012, 9). As we have already seen, Schapp points out that this horizon is the hermeneutical plane, within which the stories of individuals bound to a common event intertwine, and from which they unravel in many different directions. All the connections, by means of which the story of each individual binds to the traumatic event, constantly dwell on the horizon and unravel backward to the past and forward to the future through what Schapp calls “previous story” (pre-story) and “subsequent story” (post-story). According to him, such connections are revived through the becoming-known of story (*Bekanntsein der Geschichte*), that is, a story or even an encounter with a commemorative object. The narrative event or the reference to history through the commemorative object are the moments, in which the story emerges, but, despite that, they do not exhaust its factuality. Each story embodies a semantic universe, a narrative heap; therefore, this acts as a source, from which the narrative draws facts and aspects to bring into the foreground. In this way, it is possible to make a “second reduction,” which consists in highlighting the single moment as opposed to the whole; in other words, it emphasizes what is in the foreground of story (Nuccilli 2017, 18). Consequently, each co-entanglement goes through a partial but many-sided access to history and depends on the points of contact, which the stories of each individual find in the stories of others.

In view of what happened at the African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the abovementioned points can be transposed onto a practical level. The purpose of the court was to gather testimonies from victims and perpetrators of crimes committed by both sides during the regime, and, where possible, ask and grant forgiveness for acts carried out during Apartheid. The

aim of these measures was not only to overcome the system of segregation by law, but also to truly achieve a victim–perpetrator reconciliation (see Young 2004). This process was tied closely to the narration of events from different perspectives. As Ceretti points out, the purpose was to “create a story, namely a multicentric narrative that is broad enough to contain the plurality of memories and take them where they can reach a virtuous compromise” (Ceretti 2004, 48). With an encounter of the stories of victims and of perpetrators, along with the rediscovery of our ancestors’ stories, we can rebuild a common horizon linking us to someone else’s stories. As could be seen in the documentary film “Black Christmas,” the perpetrator and the victims can compare each other and build a common story of forgiveness, thus laying the groundwork for their future lives upon this co-entanglement.

In this regard, Schapp’s theoretical framework can be integrated with the recent narratological methods applied in studies on reconciliation, since it does not consider narrative as a mere linguistic tool to reshape memory or construct a collective memory centered around political and social groups on the other side of the fence. Rather, the narrative serves the purpose of rediscovering and reaching the common horizon by means of the shared pool of lived experiences. This common horizon collects in an inextricable but dynamic weave the same lived experiences and stories of each person affected by a traumatic event. In this way, following the Schappian proposal, we can not only reconstruct memory or rebuild a narrative from scratch, but we can also create a form of co-entanglement in a common story projected into the future of a common horizon. The subject should be further explored; nonetheless, it can be said that the concept of co-entanglement, as yet almost unknown in reconciliation studies, can be a valuable contribution to this field and, in wider terms, to the problems concerning intersubjectivity.

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