Editorial Introduction

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We would like to begin this brief introduction by thanking all those individuals who have helped to build PhaenEx—this is its ninth issue—into the innovative publishing venue for interdisciplinary work from existential and phenomenological perspectives that it is today. This has only been possible due to the vision of its founders and the continued hard work of its editorial collective, but no less because of the volunteer hours put in by our anonymous reviewers and copyeditors, our supportive publishers at the University of Windsor, and the excellent work submitted by our authors. Finally, we would also like to extend our appreciation to our readers who continue to provide us with helpful feedback, post links to PhaenEx articles on their blogs and other virtual meeting places, and pass articles they read here on to students and colleagues. We hope to continue to live up to your expectations with the current open issue, and as always, we continue to welcome your feedback.

Icon of phenomenological scholarship Lester Embree opens this issue with a phenomenological sketch of “encountering.” He begins by noting that “There is a difference between the direct and indirect encountering of things.” If traditional direct encountering has been privileged, it is largely displaced by indirect encountering today, and so a reflective analysis of the two kinds of encountering is in order. Embree’s analysis and translation of Husserl’s term Erlebnis as “encountering”—the common translations being “experience” and “lived
experience”—reveals interesting features, leading to a fresh account of especially indirect encountering. Embree works with two examples of indirect encountering—two personal examples, one a memory and the other a pictorial representation—to elucidate these features, and he identifies distinct kinds of “linguistic encountering” and “indicational encountering” along the way, generating a rich discussion of these widespread and vital phenomena.

From encountering as such, and indirect encountering in particular of the sort experienced via pictorial representation, we move to the second investigation in the issue, in which L. Sebastian Purcell attempts to “make good” on a promise once made by Roland Barthes to produce a phenomenology of the photograph. In the process, Purcell is led to reconsider and address some common criticisms of eidetic phenomenology. Working through eight eidetic features of the photograph, Purcell finds himself breaking from phenomenology as “rigorous science,” and reclaiming an eidetic phenomenology of the photograph “in a more Derridian spirit as a way to destabilize consensus.” Among the provocative results of the investigation, perhaps the most provocative is the discussion of the photograph and non-metaphysical time, which refers to the existing form of light art performance photography. It is toward a phenomenology of light that we turn in the next article in the issue.

Nolen Gertz pulls out “common threads” in Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas to move toward a “phenomenology of light.” Gertz argues that Husserl’s phenomenological investigation of light reveals that the perception of light must be deferred to a cognitive dimension. Some perceptual experiences require distinguishing various conditions of luminosity, something not accomplished by perception strictly speaking, but rather by knowing. Gertz then turns to Heidegger’s reading of Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave,” which goes further by presenting light as leading beyond itself to primordial revealing. Essentially unsayable, primordial revealing is
necessarily symbolized by the sun and its light—a symbol of the very source of being and knowing. Finally, Levinas contrasts real darkness and real light and is led to an analysis of light as the “condition of all beings.” In each case, phenomenology begins with the perceptual experience of real light but ends up in distant registers, from extra-perceptual knowing to the condition of all beings. In the end, Gertz returns to Husserl’s investigation of the origin of geometry to argue that we should return to the origin of light and avoid the seductions that have continuously led phenomenology away from the thing itself.

From light as the source of all things we pass to life itself in Katharine Loevy’s investigation of “two radically opposed versions of the human confrontation with natural death” found in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Loevy’s reading draws out Hegel’s contrast between life itself—i.e., the trans-generational life-force that abides below the surface of generational commotion—and the commotion of the actual life of a living being. As she writes, “life in its self-repose is a stillness for which the events that constitute the reality of living things are not eventful.” In death natural individual lives are subsumed by the immeasurably greater movement of living Spirit. However, for self-conscious beings, remembrance of the deceased by “the Family” through burial may transform natural death into an event. Yet, if the funeral may save the individual from oblivion, Hegel’s analysis of “absolute freedom and terror” shows how death may also be used as a “weapon” against individuality. Thus in moving from the trans-generational life-force of Spirit to the life-and-death possibilities of self-conscious individuals, Loevy identifies an ethics of death between appropriate acts of remembrance on the one hand, and threats of “reabsorption into Life as proof of our ultimate irrelevance as unique beings” on the other.
Loevy’s account of Hegel’s account of the possibilities of individual death against the background of impersonal life is paralleled to some extent by the next article in the issue, Claire Pagès’ investigation of Hegel’s account of possibility as “effectivity” against the background of possibility as such. In “Hegel or the Real Possible: Modality In Light of the Critique of Ideals,” written in French, Pagès carefully considers the status of the possible as effectivity, where the latter denotes possibility that is concrete, real, operational (Wirk-lich). Hegel rethinks possibility as what may be actualized, not merely as what is logically possible: the really—not the ideally—possible. Pagès’ reading of Hegel takes us from the background of logically possible ideals and their critique on the one hand, to what is effective with respect to real human action on the other.

Beginning with a phenomenology of indirect encountering, this issue of the journal closes the circle with two PhaenEx Book Encounters, the first one turns to Ellen Feder’s Foucauldian study of the family and the ways that gender and race are deployed within and upon it, with Chloë Taylor as our guide. In the second encounter, Tracey Nicholls discusses Marilyn Nissim-Sabat’s book on the viable possibility of humanization.

Thanks once again to the authors for their diverse and innovative contributions to this open issue of PhaenEx, and thanks to you, the readers, for engaging them in dialogue.