

# PHENOMENOLOGY OF AUDIOVISUAL NARRATIVE FOR AN ETHICAL FORMATION EMPLOYING “ANIME”

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## Fenomenología de la narración audiovisual para la formación ética empleando el “anime”

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### Abstract

Ethic formation faces the challenge of being understandable for students, but, above all, of being expressed in their own ways of understanding and discussing their lives, in order to be relevant. One especially attractive form among children and young people is audiovisual communication, whose formative potential has been usually understood in instrumental terms, when not absolutely denied. This article presents a phenomenological proposal to dialogically elaborate in the classroom the problematization of duty centered ethics, as it is dramatized in two Japanese animation productions (“anime”). In first place, it discusses phenomenologically how to understand the formative potential of the experience of watching an animated narrative. In second place, it claims that the phenomenological reinterpretation of the categorical imperative can overcome its disconnection from the affective dimension of the ethical subject and its factual contexts of action to focus on the caring of the human condition of vulnerability. In third place, it shows how the previous discussions are elaborated in two “anime”, which allow students to experientially involve themselves in these ethical interpellations and offer teachers the opportunity to embrace their student’s insights in a dialogical learning experience understood narratively. It concludes summarizing the opportunities and challenges presented to teachers from this perspective of the meaning of audiovisual creations in the education activity.

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### Keywords

Education, phenomenology, ethics, aesthetics, animation, vulnerability.

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### Resumen

La formación ética enfrenta el reto de ser comprensible para los estudiantes, pero, sobre todo, de formularse desde las formas de comprender y discutir sus propias vidas, para que les sea relevante. Una de esas formas especialmente atractiva entre niños y jóvenes es la comunicación audiovisual, cuyo potencial formativo ha sido comprendido usualmente en términos instrumentales, cuando no negado absolutamente. Este artículo presenta una propuesta fenomenológica para trabajar dialógicamente en el aula la problematización de una ética centrada en el deber, tal como es puesta en escena en dos productos de animación japonesa (“anime”). En primer lugar, discute fenomenológicamente cómo comprender el potencial formativo de la experiencia de ver una narración animada. En segundo lugar, argumenta cómo la reinterpretación fenomenológica del imperativo categórico puede superar su desconexión de la dimensión afectiva del sujeto ético y sus contextos fácticos de acción para centrarse en el cuidado de la condición humana de vulnerabilidad. En tercer lugar, muestra cómo las discusiones anteriores son elaboradas en dos “animés” que permiten que los estudiantes se involucren vivencialmente en estas interpelaciones éticas y que los docentes puedan acoger sus vivencias en una experiencia dialógica de aprendizaje comprendida narrativamente. Concluye recapitulando las oportunidades y exigencias planteadas a los docentes desde esta clave de lectura del sentido de las creaciones audiovisuales en la actividad educativa.

154



### Palabras clave

Educación, fenomenología, ética, estética, animación, vulnerabilidad.

## Introduction

The topic discussed in this article is the ethically formative potential of narratives, considering the different forms it assumes in a given cultural community. The specific object of study is an audiovisual narrative increasingly popular among Latin American audiences and globally: Japanese animation or “anime”. It aims to offer an updated understanding of the ethical potential of this form of cultural consumption, oriented by the pretension of aesthetic enjoyment to strengthen the attractiveness and practical relevance of the formative activities in the classroom.

The research intends to update and strengthen ethical training as one of the most urgent challenges in contemporary societies. It is known in educational institutions that this training is not limited to achieving the understanding of concepts and ethical criteria, but aims to move daily certainties, promote critical dialogs and move to renewed solidarity action (Nava Preciado, 2022). This pretense presupposes that ethical challenges and discussions are already present in that daily life and that one of the roots of the problem is not to notice them. For this reason, Husserl’s phenomenology has been selected as a perspective for this discussion, whose understanding of the relationship between life and ethical reflection will clarify how the aspiration to articulate in a unitary narrative the avatars of personal history can be fed and oriented by immersing oneself

in contemporary audiovisual narratives, such as those considered in the proposed topic.

The main idea to defend is that a pertinent understanding of meaningful narratives for students allows better attuning to how they live their current ethical challenges, making it possible to generate dialogs that allow sharing, enriching and orienting those experiences with the help of the teacher. The importance of the subject is not limited to an opportunistic use of the conjunctural popularity of the consumption of “anime”, but it responds to the attempt to fully understand – both teachers and students – the value of the innovative aesthetic and narrative quality that has reached in productions where relevant aspects of the human experience are captured, while continuing to constitute entertainment products.

In this sense, the current issue is that it is articulated with the broader attempt to pedagogically take advantage of the universe of aesthetic creations – whether audiovisual, literary or scenic – that has fed humanist education in recent centuries and that can continue to do so today, provided that it is understood, along with contemporary creations, from an ethical and aesthetic sensitivity in a dialogic key.

To this end, the descriptive-interpretive methodology of Husserl’s phenomenology has been chosen, because it allows to notice the specificity of, on the one hand, the ethical potential in the experience of seeing these “animes” and, on the other, the formative dialog that can be generated within its narrative articulation. As explained in the following section, the phenomenological perspective places the researcher in the point of view of the subject who lives an experience to describe its structures and dynamics, in which the particular sense of what is experienced is constituted. The aim is to analyze the experience of seeing an animated narrative to specify how it relates to the experience of pretending to give a sense to one’s existence, giving reason to it narratively. The results of the analysis constitute, at the same time, resources for this pretense of ethical maturation: the descriptions and interpretations produced pretend that the experimenting subject recognizes himself in them and can, thus, become more responsible for them. In this sense, as Husserl expressly formulates (2002), phenomenology is understood philosophically as a project of educational and cultural renewal that seeks to incorporate in its critical and creative dialog to ever wider sectors of the human community. Likewise, this article offers, as part of its results, the basic analysis of two “animes”, as a replicable model for the ethical interpretation and discussion of cultural creations. As model examples, they can and need to be enriched by teachers according to the vital contexts

– phenomenologically discernible, as discussed below – in which they develop their activity.

This effort to make ethical training more meaningful by appealing to popular audiovisual narratives faces some starting objections. First, it could be pointed out that it confuses a didactic problem with a properly ethical discussion: it would only be proposing examples closer to the students and, far from recovering the value of narratives, it would be instrumentalizing them. Second, if indeed the questioning and reorientation of life involves an inescapable narrative dimension, it would seem that it compromises the claim of universality of ethical duty and reduces it to the conditionality of practical prescriptions according to the situation. Third, instead of promoting critical thinking, it (mis)treats adolescents and young people condescensively by offering them a simplified ethic that they could consume from the hegemonic media.

The structure of the argument responds, from phenomenology, to these possible objections to show how they can help generate and guide formative ethical dialogs from the discussion of two “animes”. First, it will show the need for a renewed understanding of the relationship between contemporary audiovisual narratives and their audiences. It will phenomenologically base this understanding by exposing how it is rooted in the ability of aesthetic experience to renew the process of formation originating from the personal self and its community integration, committing it ethically. In a second moment, this ethical perspective will be based on the phenomenological interpretation of rationality and the categorical imperative, where the irreplaceable role of affectivity and attention to the factual contexts of action for ethical maturation is recovered. It will clarify how this ethical growth of the self maintains the relevance of duty within the greater horizon of caring for human vulnerability. In a third moment, it will show, through the discussion of two “animes”, how the concepts, criteria and orientations clarified in the previous sections can be worked dialogically in the classroom taking advantage of the narrative space they open. In conclusion, it will summarize what this proposal requires of teachers in the effort to ethically train their students.

## The ethical potential in the aesthetic experience of watching animation

This section starts from problematizing a current understanding of the experience of audiovisual narratives in mass media, to clarify, from a



phenomenological perspective, how it is not limited to a passive reception, but it requires the active participation of its viewers to make sense. After specifying the specific form of participation required by animated storytelling, it will show how the aesthetic character of this experience, by reupdating the ability to learn to perceive the world with meaning, offers an opportunity for personal renewal and, with it, for ethical growth. From this perspective, it is proposed that the relationship between academic research of audiovisual narratives and their training pretensions requires deepening their understanding of ethics.

Research on the power of audiovisual media has produced in the last century illuminating perspectives to better understand the phenomenon of its consumption and its possible influence on the public. A dramatic reference in this research was the propagandistic use of media such as that suffered by members of the Frankfurt school with the rise of Nazi totalitarianism. The attempt to reduce the public to a single ideologized mass was shown, however, as a complex phenomenon. Even before the cultural studies conducted by the Birmingham school highlighted the ability of audiences to resignify the hegemonic communication flow. Authors such as Walter Benjamin (1989) knew how to warn in new audiovisual media unprecedented possibilities for their viewers to generate their own dynamics of recognition and awareness.

Nevertheless, a vulgarization of critical theory persists to this day in a kind of “hypodermic needle theory” that assumes a direct causal relationship between the mass reach of audiovisual media and the behavior of the individual viewer. Researchers who initially started from the idea of causation, such as Harold Laswell or Paul Lazarsfeld, concluded by theoretically and empirically refuting their main assumptions (Otero, 1999). Three of them are especially relevant: that a decodable message can be uniquely identified by the receiver in the same terms as it was coded by the sender; that by studying a presumed effect one can distinguish the media influence from other influences of the environment; and that the viewer’s experience is strictly individual, alien to mediations such as family, local community and other groups of belonging. Despite these clarifications, research is still being read and published today that identifies the consumption of film, television or video games as a direct cause of sexist, racist and, in general, violent behavior. Problematizing this prejudice does not mean denying that there is any influence, but it does mean questioning determinism in its individualistic and passive conception of the viewer. This theoretical and empirical discussion in the communication sciences can be enriched with the phenomenological discussion of the

fundamentals of the experience of seeing an audiovisual narrative and, specifically, of an animation.

Phenomenological methodology requires putting in brackets (*epojē*) the assumptions of theories and beliefs about this experience, placing the researcher in the perspective of the first person who is living it (reduction), to clarify how his object appears and how he apprehends it (Zahavi and Gallagher, 2013). This attention to the appearance (phenomenon) allows us to confirm that the subject of the experience does not seek or care for any supposed message, but is guided by a specific intention to immerse himself in that animated narrative. In phenomenological terms: it is not oriented by a cognitive intentionality, but by an aesthetic intentionality that subordinates it (Casallo, 2021). In this aesthetic attitude, the intention is not directed to the *what* appears but to the *how* it appears sensitively captivating and immersing him in that imaginary world. Other possible attitudes, such as natural-scientific, also address how to appear, but mathematically objectify it, while the aesthetic attitude serves no further interest: it concentrates and surrenders on the enjoyment of appearing sensitive by itself. The aesthetic attitude is then configured around an affective-valuative intentionality, although it also integrates the cognitive and practical.

This configuration takes different forms, depending on whether one listens to an oral story, reads a novel, etc. (Ong, 1996). For the experience of seeing an animation, phenomenological analysis seeks to identify the specificity, both of the appearance of the audiovisual narrative, and the correlative dispositions and capabilities that it activates in the viewer. It is assumed that although we talk about watching an animation, it is a different experience than the daily perception of the objects that surround us. Remaining in mere perception, a photograph could be described as a paper covered with irregular spots, or an animation as pixels whose brightness and color change continuously on the screen; and, however, in the photographic image the portrayed family itself is recognized and in the animated image it is possible to immerse itself in a *cyberpunk* drama. Something is noticeably absent in the picture. Husserl (1980) distinguishes perceptual consciousness from image consciousness, where the latter is directed at the articulation of three objects: the image thing (the photographic paper, the screen), the image itself, and the existing or fictitious referent that the image brings into presence. However, the experience of the photographic image and the animated one assume specifically different forms. Despite being a still image, the photograph of a raging sea or a dancer jumping allows to experience the movement because



visual perception does not involve only the eye activity but the integrity of the living body of the subject. This living corporeality is not only sensitively receptive but capable of movement in relation to the surrounding world. To perceive is to attune bodily to that surrounding world (Abram, 1996) and, in particular, to the portion of the world that is present in the image. If in photography movement occurs in a potential form, in animation the images move effectively and the subject learns to recognize and enjoy three-dimensional scenarios, characters and actions brought to the two-dimensionally presence. He also learns to understand and follow the spatial-temporal continuity articulated through the richness of audiovisual language (angles, planes, camera movements, etc.) with its own narrative possibilities (ellipsis, prolepsis, analepsis, etc. executed through editing) and aesthetics (lighting, photography, actor direction, makeup, characterization, etc.). Unlike other forms of audiovisual storytelling, animation opens from drawing that serves as a material basis for the image thing, world possibilities inaccessible to *live action* productions. Just as one can recognize human characters living through a shocking drama even though their bodies are drawn only with schematic strokes, one can also accept expressions, athletic feats, and deformations – when, say, a stone crushes and flattens a character who then stands up and walks – as plausible, even though they would be impossible in the everyday world.

As Dufrenne (1989) points out, the aesthetic object is given as a world or, rather, as an atmosphere of a world whose incompleteness must be supplemented by the active participation of the spectator. This task, far from taxing the experience, makes it more provocative and enjoyable. In fact, the expressiveness of animation, the more it tends to be schematic and does not care about detail, demands from its participants a greater participation (McCloud, 1994). Although the experience of all audiovisual narration presupposes the entertainment with all the corporality and affectivity (Sobchack, 1992), this participation can be even more intense in certain narratives focused on the body and the action, compared to *live action* productions (Ortega Brena, 2009). A phenomenology of the experience of the animated image escapes the objective of this work, but this brief sketch allows us to warn that the subject is not a mere spectator, but actively participates in the emergence of the animated image in which he immerses himself affectively and valuably. The subject can learn to immerse himself in these alternative worlds of experience because by participating in his constitution of meaning he recovers and reupdates his own process of personal self-constitution in which the everyday world began to appear to him with meaning.

The subject can experience the world with meaning because in his early childhood he was able to learn to perceive it thanks to others with whom he interacted, even before learning to speak. This pre-linguistic intercomprehension is the shared openness to the world, as receptive and creative affectivity that makes possible all forms of experience and knowledge (Gazmuri, 2022). In the strict sense, the newborn is only gradually becoming able to recognize himself as a self as his surrounding world becomes meaningful in its experiential life thanks to the mediation of others. This gradual discovery is not, in this first stage of life, a theoretical task; rather it has a fundamentally valuative and practical sense. The infant discovers desirable, sharp, bitter, bright, unreachable objects, etc. Although he cannot name them as such, he lives them from that feeling that constitutes in him a skill. This capacity of the self presupposes his bodily self-identification: he not only has a body, but is living corporeality (Husserl, 1997). This self-identification is based on bodily interaction with other personal selves. Those who cared for him by cleaning, sheltering and, above all, caressing him, allowed him to differentiate the experiences of being touched and touch, constituting his bodily experience as that of a personal self that waits, grabs, desires, enjoys, fears, etc. in relation to others with whom he shares a world. Learning to experience that world is only possible, from its inception, on an intersubjective horizon.

If in its early childhood the self constitutes itself in its coming out of itself mediated by the others that is discovering a world with meaning, its subsequent personal growth extends this movement of self-decentralization. The surprises, conflicts and failures he encounters in his daily life reveal an increasingly wide and differentiated world that challenges to a lesser or greater extent his self-understanding as a personal self. Thus, the actions and the increasingly complex projects that he can articulate only make sense from an often implicit pretense about who he would like to be and how he would like to live (with). Maturing ethically implies the possibility of giving an integral sense to the history of one's life (Husserl, 2002). This possibility of assuming the whole of what has been lived can be formulated through philosophical discourse or, more usually, captured narratively (Čapek, 2017). On a daily basis, the subject gives reason of himself before others narrating himself; thus, he also occasionally faces situations that question him personally by destabilizing that claim about who he aspires to be. Although one can live by giving scattered answers, it is also possible to mature personally by striving with one's actions to articulate a coherent narrative of one's life—where there can be so much renewed constancy, gradual nuances, or radical changes—in which the



self can recognize itself. To be increasingly able to give an informed account of that narrative is to be able to respond—in actions and words—to oneself and to others for one's life; i.e. to be ethically responsible. Hence the importance of aesthetic experiences in which the self is captivated by other narratives that are confronted with theirs because the ability to live with meaning in the world is put at stake in both.

Likewise, Nussbaum (2010) highlights the importance of the learning experience in the arts and humanities as an ethical culture of leaving oneself to other ways of feeling and understanding the world, without trying to reduce them to a single discourse. He explains, from Winnicott's psychoanalytic perspective, how aesthetic experience updates the childish capacity to constitute a transitional space where the harshness of reality and the desires of the ego can be symbolically mediated. Literature and, in particular, the classical Greek tragedy would be the paradigm of the space where the challenges of human freedom and vulnerability can be contemplated and assumed. Although the audiovisual narratives are not considered by Nussbaum nor by some more recent readings of his proposal (Gazmuri, 2022), the communication dynamics that it generates do offer their own possibilities to address these same challenges.

Literature, like other arts, generates dialogs where the empathic exercise of leaving oneself highlighted by Nussbaum is prolonged. Today, those who enjoy animations communicate more and more intensively thanks to the development of digital media in recent decades. In addition to reviews, recommendations, critiques and discussions, this communication materializes in images, either reproduced or created from the original animation. Thus, the drawings of characters and scenes extend from animation to screensavers, posters, notebook covers, backpacks, etc. In an even more radical sense, *cosplay* is not limited to “disguising” a character, but takes on the challenge of effectively embodying it and showing itself this way to others. As in this bodily entertainment between fiction and everyday life, digital and face-to-face interaction are articulated in meetings such as conventions, fairs or shopping centers where it is found that the consumption of animation, like that of other cultural products, exceeds the merely economic. Research on cultural consumption shows how it is guided by expectations of identity fulfillment and recognition, often because these are not met in the immediate surrounding world (Huber, 2002). Thus, the community of fans of an “anime” can offer an experience of closeness and more satisfactory recognition than *physically closer spaces such as family, neighborhood or school*. The personal participation required by the experience of seeing an animation is socially concrete in

a shared capacity of resignification that is only understood in relation to the local context and, in particular, with its possibilities or limitations for its recognition. On this intersubjective horizon, one can appreciate the relevance of animated adaptations of classics of European or Asian cultural traditions that are now enjoyed by audiences who may not yet have approached their texts (Rosain, 2021). Ristola (2021) shows, on the other hand, how the graphic articulation of certain “animes” of science fiction allows the participation of the public in a critical deconstruction of their narratives. The phenomenological clarification of these possibilities of specific criticism and resignification of the intersubjective nature of the experience of seeing an animation serves as a basis for its research from the communication sciences and, in particular, for its dialog with education, in order to take advantage of its formative potential.

162



Unfortunately, the suspicion or purely instrumental assessment of the audiovisual narratives persists. The reason is not a purely theoretical deficiency. In the last century, Umberto Eco (2006) found in the approach of European academic institutions to the entertainment products of cultural industries a poorly disguised attitude of superiority, both in those who tear their clothes in the face of the degradation of the “true” culture, and in those who, at the opposite extreme, celebrate its dissolution in the rise of popular culture. In reality, by discarding *a priori* the resignification capacity, the public shows that in order to self-affirm their cultural authority, they need to presuppose their position of epistemic and ethical advantage compared to a public presumably unable to clarify themselves about the meaning of their practices (Nugent, 2016). In contrast, research such as Martín Barbero’s (1987) on Latin American soap operas shows the importance of understanding the meaning in which audiences live their experience. From this phenomenological perspective, soap operas do not appear as simplistic products designed to fit an under-educated audience trapped in romantic, macho, racist ideologies, etc. It allows us to appreciate how their narratives offered shared themes and categories to millions of migrants when they needed to establish links of communication and recognition, no longer in their traditional cultural communities, but in large cities. As Nugent (2010) points out:

The mass media have allowed the dissolution of traditional monopolies of knowledge and the legitimization of public opinion. The possibilities for mass participation and the importance gained by persuasion at the expense of obedience have taken place in a context of broadening the coverage of public education services and audiovisual media (p. 60).

Understanding the experience of “anime” requires considering how the theoretical approaches of the researcher or, more specifically the educator, are placed in relation to the ability of the audience to give meaning to their experience, because their understanding of the ethical is also configured to form ethically.

This first section has shown, from a phenomenology of seeing an animation, that animated narratives not only have an instrumental value for training, but, as aesthetic objects, offer the possibility of enriching the experience of the world and the subject as a personal self called to grow ethically. Taking advantage of this training potential requires showing how this ethical perspective can maintain its normative dimension, although it is rooted in the particularity of personal experience.

## Phenomenological recovery of affectivity and practical contexts



This section delves into the phenomenological understanding of rationality and the ethics used above, to show how it allows a reinterpretation of the categorical imperative that, by incorporating the affective dimension and the relevance of the factual possibilities of action, endows the formal duty with guiding content, moving it to its concrete realization. This concretization takes the form of the care of vulnerability, as a founding condition of the ideal self and *telos* of a human ethical community.

The previous section exposed how the personal self is only constituted as such by its gradual integration into an intersubjective community inhabiting a shared world. That world is not, then, a transcendent externality that the subjective consciousness must attain by building knowledge, but the horizon that makes possible every object of experience. To that world of life corresponds then, a subject whose *rationality* “admits no differentiation between ‘theoretical’, ‘practical’ and ‘aesthetic’” (Husserl, 2008, p. 308). This phenomenological understanding of rationality founds its idea of philosophy as science; i.e. as a recovery of the Western project of a life founded on the evidence of reason. The crisis of the sciences that Husserl discusses in the eponymous text consists in abandoning the question for its foundation and meaning to concentrate on the mathematical formalization for pragmatic purposes. To recover for philosophy, which also assumed that reductionist self-understanding, the breadth of the life of reason allows us to clarify how we can understand the possibility of an authentically ethical life. From now on, the un-

derstanding of rationality, ethics and community life exposed by Husserl (2002) in his articles for the Japanese magazine *Kaizou* (“Renewal”) will be taken as a basis. These are gestated within a long process of reflection that began with the clarification of the rational character of ethics as a normative discourse, continued to specify its concretion in the response to a personal call for ethical maturation in the realization of the common good, and culminated in an ethics of openness and self-donation in the absolute values of love (Melle, 2005).

In *Kaizou*, a rational life is a life in shared self-responsibility in an ethical community that is realized in a growing self-decentralization committed to the common good. To be rational is to constantly strive to be more rational. This self-decentralization is only done authentically when it is opened to others as others, instead of reducing them to mere egocentric or ethnocentric projections. Phenomenological ethics presupposes the care of otherness whose mediation allows one to recognize oneself and be surprised in the encounter with others. In this sense, the personal good as an ethical growth is understood on the horizon of the common good, as a possibility that the others can be realized in the effort to be more authentically who they aspire to be. The idea of the ethical person is thus correlated with that of an ethical community. From this phenomenological perspective, two discussions can be raised that allow us to understand the fecundity of the Husserlian reinterpretation of the categorical imperative for ethical formation.

First, Husserl objects to the understanding of duty implicit in the Kantian version of the categorical imperative. Kant (2012) could not admit an affective dimension in the determination of duty, because the particularity of the affections would compromise the unconditionality proper to the moral, only guaranteed by the universality of reason. Husserl (2020) objects that moral concepts such as duty, good and, in general, practical reason only take on meaning from the affective life: action is moved and oriented by a value founded on affections. This objection can maintain the normative force of duty because it clarifies the structure *a priori* in affective life; thus, it is understood that affections are the origin of moral concepts, but that norms are not simply an induction of factual affective regularities (Crespo, 2017). Husserl shows that just as thought can be judged by its logical correctness, affective life entails a normativity of its own that organizes the sedimentation of habits in the self as its personal ways of letting itself be affected by the world. This *a priori* character can be formulated in terms of axiological laws; for example, when the value of one good is added to the value of another (a job is well paid and is personally



satisfying) or when the value of the former is absorbed by the value of the latter (although it does not pay well, it performs the person professionally). Likewise, in contrast to logical laws, there is no contradiction in wanting one good and wanting another simultaneously (two professional options), or in suffering the will and not wanting the same object (because it is pleasurable, but damages health). This *a priori* character of the affectivity that animates practical life presupposes, therefore, not only a desire that triggers and guides action, but also a creatively striving in its deployment to achieve what is desired: to act is to seek a good, attending at every moment what must be done, how and with what resources. A causal relationship is established between the world of goods and the activity of the agent which Husserl (1997) prefers to call motivation, to distinguish it from the causality of physical phenomena. That world is also integrated by the actions of others and the events that occur independently of any human action, conditioning while enabling their skills. As Husserl explains (2013): “My life is nothing to itself, however, it is united with the lives of others, it is part of the unity of community life and reaches, above it, the life of humanity” (p. 302) (the translation is mine).

Secondly, Husserl (2020) argues that it is only possible to perform the duty—and not to remain only in the formal recognition of its obligatorship—if one understands what its fulfillment may consist of, which presupposes knowing how to discern ethically the factual possibilities of action in which the agent finds himself: “In it [the preference made sentimentally in the will], one is not aware of one of the practical possibilities only as a practical good, as well as for the others, but as the best practically and eventually as the due” (p. 235).

In this sense, the axiological material content of the will not only drives the action, but guides it to seek the best possible, given the practical context that is inhabited. This content does not confine ethics to the repertoire of goods or actions legitimized by a particular community because the normative dimension of the axiological sphere requires it to open itself to an increasingly universal horizon. Thus, ethical living is not limited to formal recognition of duty, but also to its timely fulfillment:

But [the Kantian categorical imperative that is the same for all] for each one receives its particular content through material motivational situations, which confer to the acts of the will not only the rationality that is based on the motivation for authentic values and those respectively better, but also the categorical rationality that comes from the categorical “you” that places the will in the universal context of this individual life

and subordinates it to a founder “I want to do good” that encompasses this whole life (p. 255).

For this reason, the person needs to prove his own conception of a good life as the most valuable in the face of questions arising from the practical difficulties for its realization, the objections of others or self-criticism.

The Husserlian reformulation of the categorical imperative of Kant and Brentano in the form of “Do the best in all your practical sphere of influence!” (Husserl, 1988, p. 142, in Cabrera, 2017, p. 32), then involves the responsibility to be permanently clear about the axiologically best and about the best way to realize it. In this sense, phenomenological ethics does not rule out any concern for practical rationality as merely instrumental to emphasize the importance of affective openness to reality, as certain hermeneutic approaches seem to suggest (Gazmuri, 2022). Taking responsibility for action is, simultaneously, committing to personal self-knowledge to grow in self-responsibility. As already noted, this growth has as a condition the openness to criticism, confirmations or novel contributions of others.

This communicational accreditation of rationality is not limited to the need for communication as an instrument of socialization or the other as a mere interlocutor. The very process of self-constitution originating from the self takes the form of a self-decentralization in the other, as one who awakens and orients his incipient skills. In that sense, the other who welcomes and cares is, strictly speaking, the first self (Hart, 1992). That care is experienced by the self in emergency as a grace, in the sense that it does not get it with its effort nor can it yet recognize what it needs. Their skills, in particular cognition, will be built up from the opening of their affective and volitional life to care. As Hart explains (1992): “Because the Other is the first person, the infant knows and is guided by in his capacity as a person, the Other and the measure of the Other is the standard of his value” (p. 200) (the translation is mine).

The recognition of the otherness of the other is not limited, then, to the identification of another subject, but is carried out as the affective entertainment with whom it is possible to live. In this sense, the grace of care has as correlate respect for the other; i.e. not only its irreducibility to the desires of the emerging self, but its model value as that which makes it possible to recognize itself, guiding the growth of its being and act in the world (Drummond, 2006). This feeling of respect for the other as a model that appears for the first time in the caregiver establishes the possibility of respect for the person in general; i.e. the possibility of appreciating



the dignity of human otherness and its ability to be and act authentically, even when it does not always do so and damages itself and others.

This respect for the dignity of the other, then, is understood in reference to the concrete world where their violation is practically and not only as a possibility. In that world, the self appears to others in its human condition of vulnerability, not only in its early childhood but, throughout its life, in the effort to live a full life with them: “It is an asset to make ourselves vulnerable that will allow us to recover the world of life as a peaceful interpersonal world” (Quepons, 2020, p. 9) (the translation is mine). In this sense, the common good is not only a pantry of shared properties, but the life of an ethical community whose origin is love and *telos* (Hart, 1992). Husserl ethically understands love as the personal self-decentralization that grows to be capable of the self-donation that once welcomed him into care. This surrender of oneself so that others can be more and more authentically moves the ethically mature person even when ethical theory cannot formulate more reasons. Husserl (2013) discusses this resolution of ethical life by proposing the image of a mother who, knowing that the destruction of the world is imminent, is committed to take care of her child. Caring for the other in love, when one’s own vulnerability suffers in all its radicality, makes visible the absolute value of ethical life not as superhuman omnipotence, but as a solidarity service open to all suffering. Husserl (1987) refers this ethical realization in love to the model of Christ. From there he was able to recognize during the rise of Nazi totalitarianism the value of the struggle of genuinely ethical people. A century later, we must seek, share and formatively develop our own understandable, questioning and mobilizing models for these new generations.

Drummond (2006) points out that respect for the other as a model of ethical person is not limited to the factually existing neighbors. There may be already deceased people whose presence is still lived in the family or community tradition as a mobilizing inspiration. Moreover, fictional characters can also incarnate these models when the subject, by immersing himself in his alternate worlds, reupdates his ability to learn to perceive his everyday world, as discussed in the first section. Aesthetic objects such as audiovisual narratives and, specifically, animation, involve this ethical dimension that families and teachers can now better understand to take advantage of it formatively:

Public access to an animated fiction offers viewers, who may not know each other, shared ways of narrating themselves: models of person(s), aspirations, adventures, values, etc. It thus helps them to understand and imagine each other who they are and who they would like to be, not be-

cause everyone says or does the same, but because they share a common sense of narrative that allows them to recognize themselves (Casallo, 2023, p. 47).

The “anime”, in particular, thematizes in its plots some of these ethical discussions and the formative pretension itself.

This section has shown how the phenomenological understanding of affectivity and contexts of action underpins a reformulation of the categorical imperative that does not weaken ethical duty, but radicalizes it in love as the requirement of concrete care of human vulnerability. The importance of respect and model figures, even fictitious, in this process of ethical growth allows us to take advantage of the discussions developed in the previous section on the aesthetic experience of animated narratives to show how they offer a scenario and keys to work formatively on these topics with students.

168



## An essay of formative ethical dialog based on two “animes”

This section articulates the preceding phenomenological discussions on ethical living with previous interpretation of formative potential in the aesthetic experience of animated narratives. This articulation will be applied to two “animes” that stage some of the ethical issues addressed in those discussions, to show how a narrative understanding of the educational experience allows teachers to open formative dialogs with students about vulnerability and care.

It is proposed to watch and work in the classroom with: *Psycho-Pass* (Dr. Katsuyuki Motohiro and Naoyoshi Shiotani, 2012-2013, 22 episodes) and *Death Parade* (Dr. Yuzuru Tachikawa, 2015, 12 episodes). Both are accessible in Latin America through paid and free *streaming* services. The issue of accessibility can motivate a preparatory dialog where students share their audiovisual consumption habits—what they see, how often, what they like best, etc.—in contrast to their teachers. This share will show, for example, if they know the proposed “animes”. Intentionally, the most internationally watched ones have not been selected, precisely to encourage participants to generate an original speech. However, those who do not know them are likely to quickly inform themselves online about the plot, criticisms, etc. The teacher does not need to avoid this hermeneutic situation that today involves all subjects—students can quickly find resources on the Internet to complete, question or supplement the

contents and activities worked in the classroom—but to insert themselves into it to show with their questions that the dialog begins with the willingness to learn from others.

Both “animes” transport the viewer to the future. In *Psycho-Pass* we attend a society managed and planned by the Sybil system, an artificial intelligence capable of evaluating in real time the violent potential of each citizen to determine if it is still acceptable for social life or if it is necessary to undergo therapy, jail or eliminate it. Sybil determines this coefficient with scientific objectivity, analyzing each person’s brain activity and dispensing with any consideration of their previous history or particular situation that could affect their impartiality. *Death Parade* takes place in another form of the future: a bar where people who have just died appear to participate in games that must bring out their true moral personality. Players are unaware that they have died and that the referee of the games will decide whether they will reincarnate or disappear in a vacuum; otherwise, they would lose interest in the game. According to the same logic, the impartiality of the referees is guaranteed because they cannot die, feel emotions or exempt themselves from judging. Next, it is explained, as a guide for the teacher to motivate the discussion, how each “anime” problematizes the ethical certainty that implicitly sustains its narrative.

*Psycho-Pass* puts on screen the inevitability of systematic violence when it is intended to suppress all violence. The society managed by Sibyl is not only administratively efficient, but places citizens in a job according to their abilities and expectations, so that at the end of the day they enjoy their private life. While order guarantees peace and security, consumption offers happiness. Sibyl is not a machine, but a system: a set of protocols capable of calculating changes in the forces of the environment to better self-modify and respond. It judges every citizen by what he does, but also by what he might do, even before he decides. For this reason, it also evaluates the victim of a crime, in case the affective *shock* raised his coefficient of violence so much that he should be executed immediately. In Japan, which thrives economically when the rest of the world suffers political and social anarchy, each one deals only with his own affairs and tries to keep the coefficient of violence at sufficiently low levels.

The narrative places the spectators—teachers and students—in a Ministry of Welfare team tasked with intervening in the (possible) crime outbreaks detected by Sibyl’s sensors. Inspectors lead the team’s interventions and make the necessary arrests or executions. They are assisted by executioners, former inspectors who lost their freedom when their coefficient of violence exceeded the permissible. The conflict begins when

a criminal undetectable by the system appears and develops following how Sibyl would respond to this anomaly. This response revolves around Akane, a young inspector who, while scrupulously following the rules, tends to see people beyond them, including his fellow executors and (potential) criminals. Akane’s perplexities transform the police adventure into a *thriller* that reveals the true nature of Sibyl: a network of interconnected human brains capable of processing and resolving conflicts by confronting their different points of view in a strictly logical process. The system is programmed to adapt to the unpredictability of human actions, but can only formalize it in terms of an inadequacy in its analysis perspective. Hence, the only solution is to increase its internal diversity with radically different points of view from the system: to incorporate the brains of the most violent criminals, extracted secretly before their official execution. When Inspector Akane discovers the truth, his confrontation with Sybil narratively embodies the debate between the inhumanity of a duty ethic cut out according to the model of scientific objectivity and the relevance of the agent’s particularity and his vital situation. The system has well-defined rules, but the generality of that definition needs to exclude reference to specific cases. This centrality of the standard reduces its application to a secondary problem that, in the narrative, is technically solved with the algorithm that Inspectors obey when they release, arrest, or execute someone. When Akane demands from the network of brains what order and what society he has built, he is recovering a question about the sense of ethics that, in that imagined world, as in the real world, seems to have no space anymore. Although *Psycho-Pass* stages many other ethical issues in its secondary plots and subsequent seasons, it does not aim to reach a definitive refutation of the pretensions of a deontological ethics. It offers, instead, a narrative horizon from which the teacher can appreciate and welcome the questions and comments of the students, helping them to warn the ethical discussions in which they have taken position by immersing themselves in that “anime”. They can be related, for example, to daily positions on the growth of violence in Latin America, dissatisfaction with state responses, the limits prescribed by law for the use of force, and, finally, the willingness to accept measures that go beyond that legal framework.

*Death Parade* deconstructs, on the other hand, the modern notion of ethical subject and the possibility of judging him. Like Nietzsche, he questions the idea of this unitary and stable subject, as a reassuring construction that presupposes the self-transparency of consciousness, at the cost of suppressing the vital and tumultuous force that animates his



self (Parmeggiani, 1998). Morality and the truth that justifies it would be central tools for such repression. For that reason, in *Death Parade*, the judgment of the referees is necessary: it is assumed that someone's moral personality is more complex than accounting for his good and bad deeds in life. This complexity would only come to light in extreme situations such as games where decisions inescapably involve one's own and others' suffering. Each game is configured according to its participants: whether they win or lose at each stage, they will symbolically and bodily relive the strongest moments of their lives. The conflict begins when a mysterious young human girl appears in the bar of the referee Decim, although she was not on the list to be judged. They will soon begin to question whether games can reveal true personal identity or only violently force one more response, because perhaps there is no immutable central self that underlies all of their acts. The doubt is expressed narratively; for example, in a woman who, despite the mistreatment of her husband during the game when it is revealed that he was unfaithful to her, harms her own score so that she is condemned to the void and he can be reincarnated. When Decim notices the possible error in his judgment, he wonders if every human should not deserve his respect, because it seems to always be an open possibility.

As in *Psycho-Pass*, an intrigue moves *Death Parade*. Decim's boss wanted to prove the correctness of her referees' judgments; so, she made him able to take an interest in human emotions and assigned him to Chiyuki, the mysterious young woman. She poses the final question to the system of games and judges when she finally remembers who she was: a successful ice skater who, after an accident that destroyed her career, could not withstand depression and killed herself. When Decim allows her to see how her family continues to miss her and offers her the chance to revive—in exchange for some other stranger dying—Chiyuki remembers those who tried and declines the offer. Instead of accepting the logic of the games and trying to save herself, she chooses to make peace with herself and her decisions, regardless of her ultimate fate. Decim and her boss know that it is impossible to stop judging—or it would be impossible to orient oneself in acting—but wonder in disbelief if it is not more important, before and after the trial, to understand the person in his reality that he can almost never fully control. *Death Parade* does not abandon itself, then, to the postmodern disenchantment with ethics as normative discourse or to the total dissolution of the modern ideal of an autonomous subject since its self-transparency (Bauman, 2005). Ethical question and judgment remain, even if always interpretable, because

they embody concern about the undeniable *factum* of suffering. Ethics can make sense when it is done, in theory and practice, to care for the suffering human vulnerability.

Although “animes” like *Psycho-Pass* and *Death Parade* do not exhaust the ethical issues they put on the scene, their educational value is not reduced to being an instrument to illustrate them. They demonstrate the ethical importance of human vulnerability in – and not in spite of – their particular circumstances and their expectation of being taken care. This expectation is expressed from the vulnerable body and shared linguistically in the narratives of one’s life, waiting for our response. This sense of welcome and elaboration in dialog is what can be aspired to create in the classroom, as part of the greater horizon of encounters with the other in which the ethical person is maturing. To welcome and share vulnerability through the narrative of one’s own life, claimed by narratives such as those of these “animes” that can open space to trust from the vulnerable being in this shared world:

172



Perhaps the most important dimension of human vulnerability based on other senses of being or feeling is precisely this dimension of becoming vulnerable in trust. While we experience bodily vulnerability as weakness and fragility, dependent on external circumstances or chance, vulnerability in trust is not only recognition, but an active commitment to becoming vulnerable, an act of opening myself to others (Quepons, 2020, p. 8) (the translation is mine).

This openness in trust from vulnerability is not concretized, as Arendt (1998) points out, in the silent force that is imposed on others, but in the power that can welcome in dialog those who are different.

From this phenomenological perspective, ethically training children, adolescents and young people in the ideal of a life in self-responsibility must begin by reflexively recovering their life experiences, without abstracting them from their original condition of vulnerability, to critically enrich them and, above all, take care of them—heal them, as far as possible—through dialog:

Given the right environmental conditions and appropriate interventions, the severity of trauma symptoms can reduce [...], and when teachers fully understand their students’ needs, they can provide them with the physical and emotional space that underpins what researchers call neuroplasticity—or the brain’s ability to rewire itself, forming new neural connections. Thus, although trauma has negative effects on learning,

learning can also undo trauma (Salvatore and Crain De Galarce in Daragh and Petrie, 2022, p. 268) (translation is mine).

These experiences of greater or lesser trauma are collected in narratives where each one can be recognized and aspires to be recognized by others. In this sense, the cultivation of dialog in the classroom aims to articulate these development processes in a common narrative, where the word of the other allows to reimagine the word itself. As Borbar and López (2020) point out:

That thread of voice [generated by sharing life stories] points to that passage between singular and common thinking, which is crossed by those cultural postulates chosen to promote this internal, individual and collective movement, which invites to rethink and re-feel those ideas built previously and that brings new echoes to the conversation, opening itself to the novelty of the dialogued creation (pp. 235-236).

This narrative understanding of the educational experience requires teachers to have a listening ability that is hermeneutically formed by learning to perceive, through the explicit word of the student, the implicit understanding that animates it (Joaqui and Ortiz, 2019). This listening as a welcome is characterized by García and Lewis (2014) as an attitude of phenomenological attention that, instead of concentrating teacher training on the fixation of beliefs or rules, guides the development of a sensitivity that allows tuning into the dialog in class to motivate it, question it and offer possible orientations. Thus, they understand the teacher as:

A tactful practitioner, sensitive and open to the mood of the class, rather than a critical and self-reflective practitioner concerned with appropriate beliefs and practices, [which] means that phenomenology fundamentally challenges the model of excellence endorsed by cognitive psychologists (p. 161) (translation is mine).

As mentioned, this sensitivity can be formed in the cultivation of the arts and humanities, as well as audiovisual narratives. In that sense, to share with the students that culture, for example, watching with them an “anime” in the classroom and then discussing it from how it resonated in each one is to teach performatively that training is a shared activity. Moreover, it demonstrates that ethical training does not require subtracting oneself from a space of artificial learning, but only takes distance from everyday life to deepen it, warning and discussing its present or future crossroads. The presentation in class of the words of the philosophers

of tradition must be able to prove their meaning within that discussion; otherwise, these will only be inert ideas that will most likely be forgotten at the end of the course. As Arendt (2006) points out, “[n]o philosophy, analysis or aphorism, however profound, can be compared in intensity and richness of meaning with a well-told story” (p. 32). In fact, all the knowledge, practices and attitudes that are offered in the learning activities, are made their own by the student when he integrates them into the personal story that he can make depending on his skills to take care of the world in an increasingly lucid and responsible way. There is no human formation without listening, dialog and appropriation in one’s own word.

The preceding discussions about *Psycho-Pass* and *Death Parade* are just one possibility to take advantage of these animations from the perspective of the first two sections of this text. Cuevas (2020) proposes categories and instruments—basically the reading of meaning (the inner sense of the fictional world) and the motivations of the characters (pp. 176-177)—to encourage discussion about film that are compatible with that perspective. The dialog with each particular group will also generate its own questions: why do these “animes” have titles in English, why the bodies of most characters are slender, why happiness in *Psycho-Pass* society consists in no longer having much but being able to consume a lot, how the recent pandemic has made students and teachers think more—or not—about death, etc. Openness to these contributions can open dialog to other worlds of experience that captivate students and in which they actively participate: Korean *pop* music and dance, soap operas from that country, comics from other continents, the youth novel sagas, *fan* clubs shaped around these cultural products, etc. The challenge is to connect them with the training activities in the classroom. There you can share, with knowledge and enthusiasm, the richness that comes from the canonical tradition collected in the official curricula. *Psycho-Pass* allows to easily connect the discussion with novels such as *Un mundo feliz* of Aldous Huxley (2016), the warnings of Kant (1985) about the cost of *La paz perpetua* that seeks to eliminate all conflict or, even, the advances in the development of artificial intelligences. *Death Parade* and its reimagining of death as a revealing situation can pave the way to appreciate the relevance of Heidegger’s existential reading (2005) in *Being and Time*, the sense of psychological accompaniment or, much further back, with the pedagogy of Hellenistic schools. Today, training is required to enable teachers to admire and learn more about this tradition, as well as to admire each other with the students who captivate them so that they can incorporate it narratively into their educational experience:



These fundamental questions (questions that reach the true being of teaching, its meaning, its nature as an official practice) are what will sustain the admiration necessary to make education more than the development of skills or to make teaching more than just a job (García & Lewis, 2014, p. 164) (the translation is mine).

This section has shown how the phenomenological understanding of seeing an animation and of ethical life allows to pose meaningful dialogs within the narrative of two “animes”, without trivializing the importance of ethical discussion or treating students childish.

## Conclusions

The phenomenological discussion shows that the value of audiovisual narratives such as “anime” is not only instrumental, but is based on the potential of aesthetic experience to renew the process of growth of the personal self and its action in the world. Understanding this process is ethically relevant because it allows a stronger foundation of ethical duty when considering its affective dimension and the factual possibilities of action. Thus, duty is radicalized as love in the concrete care of the vulnerability of human life in community. Education participates in this ethical community life by cultivating the formative dialog in which its new members can grow. It has been proposed, as a guide for teaching, how a phenomenological discussion informed within the narrative spaces opened by two “animes” makes possible this form of formative dialogs on relevant ethical issues because it tunes into the questions, intuitions and aspirations of the students.

Assuming these dialogs as a fundamental axis of education is to recognize that its objective is not to reach the silence of a definitive conclusion, but to extend throughout life the interest to continue interrogating and imagining answers to discuss them (Contreras *et al.*, 2019). This task requires academic rigor and admiration, both for the knowledge, experiences and sensitivities that are sought to share and for those that captivate students today. An educational community that shows how this passion for dialog in admiration and rigor presents will respond to the crisis of the current moment, because it is embodying the idea of an ethical community that can renew life in common.

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