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Review of Lawrence J. Hatab, *Proto-Phenomenology, Language Acquisition, Orality, and Literacy: Dwelling in Speech II*

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In the 1920s, while Martin Heidegger was working against a then dominant strain of neo-Kantian intellectualism to provide the grounding ontology of Dasein as being-in-the-world, Soviet developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky was reorienting psychology away from the reductivism that occupied the high court of the post-revolutionary Russian academy. Vygotsky prioritized human consciousness, or the "higher mental functions" (e.g., semantic memory, propositional cognition, numeracy, and literacy), as the main explanandum of psychological science. Allying himself with a Marxian dialectical method, he developed a "cultural-historical" explanation of how higher cognitive functions are achieved and enacted by the transformation of more basic mental capacities through social and artifactual (i.e., semiotic) mediation. The dawning of a meaningful world, and indeed the "cultural-historical subject," was thus for Vygotsky the emergent outcome of diachronically entrenched cultural practices, norms, and institutions, as well as synchronically enacted social and communicative practices—in short, of mediated activity, in ontogenetic, historical, and phylogenetic registers. While it may be the case that in Heidegger's "existential analytic" the breakdown of the tool discloses to Dasein a larger world of social-practical significance, such an occurrence does little to explain how Dasein becomes acquainted with a such a world in the first place. The development of Dasein, then, is something Heidegger seems to take for granted—his account providing a phenomenology only of the "dealings" of a mature subject, one for whom the appropriative aspect of inter-social activity in ontogenesis has long since passed (not that it is ever fully completed). Vygotsky's project can be viewed in sharp relief to Heidegger's insofar as the former attempts to explain how the objective world of significance initially comes to mean anything at all.

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Lawrence J. Hatab's *Proto-Phenomenology, Language Acquisition, Orality and Literacy: Dwelling in Speech II* aims to provide a ("proto-") phenomenology of language acquisition and becoming-literate at both ontogenetic and cultural-historical scales of analysis. This places his project at the intersection of Heideggerian phenomenology and Vygotskian developmental psychology. Indeed, Hatab at times is explicitly committed to the Vygotskian position of sociogenetic development, which explains that cognitive development proceeds according to an "outside-to-inside" model. Further, he maintains this position with a phenomenological attentiveness to certain pre-reflective modes of being-in-the-world.

According to Vygotsky, higher mental functions are the products of the "internalization" of social-practical activity. For instance, Vygotsky describes how indexical gestures scaffold the development of semanticity in infant-parent exchanges (Vygotsky, 1997a). Initially, a child may simply reach for a desired object. But after parental intervention, the reach takes on a semantic dimension as an act of pointing, eventually coming to mean "I want that." For Vygotsky, such semiotic interaction begets a *functional transformation* [*vrashchivanie*, revolution] of the child's cognitive capacities (Vygotsky, 1999, 53). The introduction of symbolic forms of communication into the field of activity does not merely augment or enhance the child's cognitive apparatus, but fundamentally transforms it to something uniquely human (ibid., 36). This notion of transformation, as something other than enhancement, is essential to Vygotsky's project and I will return to it later. For now, we can note that Hatab's goal in this work is to add to Heideggerian ontology a much-needed developmental dimension, one that renders explicit how it is that an individual comes to find herself dwelling in a meaningful world.

The first volume of *Dwelling in Speech* (2017) finds Hatab alongside Heidegger's existential analytic in Division I of *Being and Time*. There he concentrates on "everyday embeddedness in meaningful practices and experiences" (Hatab, 2019, xi) and engages with questions of meaning, knowledge, self, and society as they pertain to the lived—and linguistically constituted—world of practically and socially embedded individuals. Hatab employs a "proto-phenomenological" methodology to account for the world of average-everyday existence as it appears prior to (hence "proto-") any decontextualized understandings that must rely on intentionalistic analyses of subject-object relations. In Volume II, Hatab continues such proto-phenomenology while marshaling an impressive assortment of research in his service, including not only that explicitly associated with Vygotsky's sociogenetic approach, but also 4E cognition, the media ecology of the Toronto School, the literacy studies of Walter Ong and David R. Olson, and an impressive array of empirical studies in linguistics and psychology. To this effect, Hatab's object is not only the world-building character of language, but also the specific effects of literacy for both children and entire cultures.

The book can roughly be divided into two complimentary investigations: the first explores the ontogenetic development of language, the second the cultural-historical development of literacy, though there is some overlap in these dimensions when describing literacy's ontogenetic effects. As such, Chapter 2 deals with the child's preverbal world, while Chapter 3 addresses language acquisition. Chapter 4 describes the transition from orality to literacy in ontogenetic as well as cultural-historical terms, while Chapter 5 examines literacy and philosophy in ancient Greece.

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The last chapter examines the effects of orthographic culture throughout its development in the Western world.

Readers familiar with Hatab's earlier book are encouraged to begin with the second chapter. For the uninitiated, Chapter 1 summarizes the first volume of this work. Here Hatab renders Heidegger's "hermeneutics of facticity" in a clear and straightforward manner, developing a unique vocabulary of "indicative concepts" to performatively reveal what is already implicit in the world of lived factical experience. Taken on its own, this chapter can be a helpful resource to students of Division I of *Being and Time* and early Heidegger in general.

Chapter 2 constructs a phenomenology of pre-linguistic childhood experience (and by extension, pre-reflective consciousness). Hatab bypasses the traditional methodological problems entailed in taking "fringe minds"—the contents of which are inaccessible to first person experience and incapable of being conceptually relayed by the preverbal children in question—as an object of study (Sleutels, 2013). He eschews simply expanding the domain of folk psychological concepts to include children (thereby avoiding the intellectualism that the Heideggerian protests) while also taking care not to embrace any type of eliminative materialism, and does so without relying on any biologically determinative "preformationist" and/or "maturation" theories of development. Hatab's platform here is in essence an application of the main methodological assumptions of cultural-historical psychology, resisting not only (1) mentalism and dualism, but also (2) any reflexology or behaviorism that relegates cognition to a mechanistic "data input" and "action output" model (Leontiev, 2009), as well as (3) an ahistorical biologism which takes development to proceed according to timeless "natural" dictates (Vygotsky, 1997b, 279 & 1999, 3). Heidegger of course was suspicious of the very same models (Heidegger, 1995, 2010), but he avoided the question of development. Hatab corrects this, providing a phenomenological interpretation of Vygotskian ontogeny, where individual development is a product/process of social-semiotic internalization. Engaging with topics such as imitation, joint-attention, and co-affective engagement, this chapter incorporates material that would be familiar to readers of this journal and those invested in 4E cognition and developmental psychology.

Chapter 3 explains language acquisition in neither fully nativistic nor behavioristic terms. Splitting the difference between the nature-culture dichotomy, Hatab admits that "indigenous pre-linguistic capacities … prepare and make possible language development" while also holding that such capacities "presuppose embodied, perceptual, practical, and social aptitudes—which early on display the 'field' character of the lived world" (Hatab, 2019, 104). The discussion is motivated by Hatab's commitment to providing an alternative to representation-centric accounts of language, and it seems that he would well agree with Stephen Cowley's dictum that "phylogenetically, ontogenetically and neurally, language is *dynamic first, symbolic second*" (2008, 500). Hatab accordingly focuses on the linguistically constitutive nature of "world-disclosure" and the collaborative structure of the "personal-social-world" that occasions such disclosure. Enactivist readers and those engaged in the projects of distributed and extended cognition (e.g., Clark, 2006a; DiPaolo et al. 2018; Hutchins & Johnson, 2009) will find Hatab's approach hospitable. However, the discussion follows a path familiar to readers

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of Vygotsky as well: initially, children's language-use is unreflective and externally directed, amidst "affective-conative" inter-social activity (Vygotsky, 2012, 68–9). Such activity acts as "scaffolding" so that socially directed utterances may become self-directed utterances, which themselves scaffold the development of more complex practical competencies. This eventually gives rise to inner-speech, which itself serves to scaffold higher forms of conceptual/propositional cognition. But while Hatab makes frequent mention of Vygotsky's developmental story, his discussion would have benefited from a more sustained engagement with the literature of "cognitive artifacts" and spatially distributed cognition (Hutchins, 1995; Kirsh, 1995; Norman, 1991).

One of the central concerns of the book is the development and constitution of a meaningful world. This could be more comprehensively addressed with an approach contoured to semiotic mediation in general, including in its analyses the meaningful structures of *non-linguistic* objects and/or communicative vehicles that *resist* a symbolic taxonomical status. Consider, e.g., Hutchins' (2005, 2014) account of conceptual "blending," which exemplifies the basic process of attaching meaning and responding to actionable cues in a given material array. The idea of a movie theater, e.g., sets a background for perceiving and conceptualizing a place in which people "line up" for tickets. Obviously cultural context is important here. But there is also a spatial-material basis, or "anchor," for such conceptualization. A conceptual structure—in this case a "trajector" (Langacker, 1987)—is mapped onto the material constituents of the line (individuals linearly arranged in a certain space), and "this mapping of imagined structure onto perceived structure produces a conceptual blend which gives rise to a particularly emergent property: a sequential ordering of the bodies of the individuals in the queue" (Hutchins, 2014, 39). The conceptual blending of the line and trajector is cognitively prescriptive insofar as it "makes possible a set of inferences" regarding *how* one must go about getting a ticket (by waiting until it is your turn) and *when* that might happen (by perceiving the amount of people ahead of you) (loc. cit.). In a sense, then, material and spatial anchors and the conceptual blends they produce can functionally amount to something like "ephemerally emergent artifacts." And like Norman's "cognitive artifacts," such would cue and constrain cognition, leading to both the expansion of the functional capacity of the individual as well as altering or replacing the actions and operations in the activity itself (Norman, 1991, 22). There are many thick philosophical issues to work through in the domain of semiotic mediation, many of which would find resonance with Heideggerian phenomenology—e.g., the semiotics of artifacts and "equipment" as well as the nature of nonartifactual functionality and signification (Sinha, 1988, 2015), the phenomenology of indexical gesturing (Thao, 1986), and so-called "enactive" signification (Malafouris, 2013). Hatab takes some steps in this direction, especially in the next chapter, as his discussion of numeracy demonstrates (and numbers are cognitive artifacts *par excellence*). But on the whole, he avoids such excursions in favor of a more generalist presentation of the child's life-world in development.

Chapter 4 addresses writing and literacy both in terms of their ontogenetic development and their cultural emergence in ancient Greece. Hatab begins by looking at the cognitive and cultural effects of alphabetic script, noting how the shift from

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orality to writing transforms the very manner in which spoken language is understood and experienced (Hatab, 2019, 159). Indeed, one of the larger tasks of this chapter is to illustrate how orthographic comprehension introduces the possibility of decontextualized reflective thinking. Classical philosophical problems such as adequation in perception and reference in semantics, Hatab argues, are reifications made possible by the graphic presentation of language insofar as it severs an individual from her immediate factical concerns. There is indeed an element of truth to such a prospect, and Hatab is correct in claiming that writing and literacy have traditionally been downplayed in philosophy and linguistics. But his framing of the discussion occludes the opportunity to deal with more primary forms of non-linguistic decontextualization. In Soviet philosophy, for instance, productive activity and exchange processes are responsible for the generation of propositional cognition, or "ideal forms of reflection" (Ilyenkov, 1977; Leontiev, 1977). And it has been suggested elsewhere that, in ontogenesis, a normative understanding of an artifact comes prior and possibly as a precursor to language acquisition insofar as its socially imposed semiotic status may "override" the more primary and affordance-based activity of an infant (Sinha & Rodriguez, 2007). Here is a ready site in which to phenomenologically explore the genesis of decontextualization and the primary apprehension of social-practical norms, the latter which surely constitute elements in and of "worlding."

The fifth chapter looks at literacy and the development of philosophy in ancient Greece, while Chapter 6 describes the cultural effects of technologies of literacy, up to and including the development of printing. Both chapters describe the cognitive gains of being-literate, while also highlighting how the explicative and abstract modes of thinking that accompany orthographic competence result in the distancing of more primary and phenomenologically immersive experience. The arc of the discussion will be familiar to readers of Havelock, Ong and Olson, and Hatab excels in performing a critical history of the subject. However, there is something odd in the way these final chapters risk disturbing the presentational balance of the text as a whole. Where the first part of this work justified its phenomenological method insofar as it convincingly dealt with the genesis of a particularly historical and materially contingent type of subjectivity, the Heideggerian appeals in its latter half to a pre-Cartesian *phusis* and the "sacred disclosures" of the ancient Greek world betray a Romantic fixation on a disenchantment motif that is hard to defend, especially when one considers the research of certain new-materialists (Bennett, 2001; Turkle, 2011) and material engagement theorists (Malafouris, 2008, Malafouris & Renfrew, 2010) that analyzes the semiotic and affective capabilities of material objects and artifacts to make a case for just how "enchanted" contemporary life can actually be.[1] Overall, despite some keen references (Hatab, 2019, 267n108), the semiotic and affective import of non-documental materiality falls outside the purview of this work. This is not to say that Hatab's focus on literacy prevents him from occasionally discussing nonlinguistic cognitive artifacts (e.g., maps and mathematical notations). In these instances, however, Hatab does not seem to distinguish between literacy and

[1] This is not to mention the work of Bruno Latour (1993) or of first-wave of Frankfurt School research (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002).

graphism in general, and one is left wanting a clearer explanation of the latter's precise role in development.

But there is a bigger over-arching problem in the second half of Hatab's book, which returns us to our opening theme of "transformation." Chapter 4 has Hatab at his closest alignment with extended mind theory (EMT). By the end of that chapter, the author grants that writing is itself an extended cognitive process: "literacy has a scaffolding effect on expanding human cognition beyond immediate descriptions, conversations, recollections, and anticipations. Whether in rudimentary or refined forms, the labor of writing is itself a process of thinking and not simply an expression of thoughts" (Hatab, 2019, 174). But this focus on writing as *expanding* obscures an important difference between certain 4E applications of Vygotskian psychology and Vygotsky's own claims. Andy Clark, for instance, has long held that the cognitive role of language systems, or more broadly of "material symbols," is more than simply the transmission of content to be realized in a recipient's inner neural code. Rather, material symbols make an ongoing contribution to cognition as coupled resources which "complement the basic modes of operation and representation endemic to the biological brain" (Clark, 2006b, 293). Yet while still opposing strictly internalist accounts of language processing, Clark nonetheless diverges from a transformationalist view that posits that the development of higher mental functions consists in the functional-structural reorganization of neuronal systems (Clark, 1997; see also Wheeler, 2004). Clark, in essence, theorizes the written word as *enhancing* rather than *transforming*. Indeed, early iterations of EMT are concerned with the metaphysical task of expanding the boundaries of the mind beyond traditional internalist and individualist frameworks. Thus, at stake for Clark is not the *functional transformation* of a cognitive capacity but rather the *functionality of a cognitive resource itself*, insofar as that resource may come to realize the vehicle of a particular cognitive state. For Vygotsky, the inward effect of mediation is always something more than the mere enhancement of cognitive hardware; lower mental functions undergo, as Vygotsky says, a *radical reconstruction*. In ontogenesis, even perceptual and motor systems are transformed after habituated engagements with signs and other cultural-psychological tools (Vygotsky, 1999, 31). Dennett more recently defends this view that nonliterate minds involve significantly different representational capacities than those of literate minds (1991, 218–221 & 1998, 291–292; see also Olson, 2016). Ultimately, such differences come to bear on the types of the collective social structures—and indeed "worlds"—available to such minded people.

Hatab finds himself stuck between taking a side on this issue, claiming at once that the artificial character of material signs can "be understood as transformative of human nature, especially when reading and writing become second nature and transmissive of wider horizons, both internal and external" (Hatab, 2019, 266), while noting in the same paragraph that such transformation is not really a transformation, "but simply an amplification of human possibilities" (loc. cit.). Hatab seems to *not* want to say that literate and nonliterate societies (and the world disclosures therein) are different *in kind*, and he reminds the reader that nonliterate societies should in no way be thought of as inferior to literate. This egalitarian urge is understandable, but covers over some important meta-anthropological distinctions that were commonly

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debated in the early twentieth century. Lévy-Bruhl (1985), for instance, defended "primitive" mentality from charges of inferiority that were common in the writings of early anthropologists like Frazer and Tylor. Where the latter championed the Eurocentric and chauvinistic view that "primitive thinking differs only in degree from modern: primitives think less rigorously than moderns" (Segal, 1987, 355), Lévy-Bruhl held that primitive minds function just as intensely as our own, and only differ in their representational constraints. In Vygotsky's application of Lévy-Bruhl, this means that primitive minds are simply ones that have not undergone a literate transformation (Vygotsky & Luria, 2016). The difference between literate and nonliterate minds is thus not one of degree at all—they are fundamentally different in kind, and construct and dwell in *qualitatively* different worlds. Ironically, to cast literacy as an enhancement (or "amplification") is to *quantitatively* reify a literate/nonliterate hierarchy, as though the nonliterate is simply not as enhanced as the literate.

Avoiding a strong stance on the issue of transformation perhaps illustrates a deeper rift between a transhumanist outlook and Heideggerian phenomenology writ large. The ultimate aim of Vygotsky's psychology was to have some bearing on what the human may *become*. For Vygotsky, semiotic mediation serves not only in the deployment or even enhancement of certain cognitive states, but also takes on a fundamentally *generative* role in their development. Who Dasein *is* is always subject to transformation. Proto-phenomenology purports to behold such transformation not just at the level of average-everyday facticity, but at Dasein's developmental crux. It might be time to more fully embrace the radicality of such a project.

Dwelling in Speech II is part of the Rowman & Littlefield "New Heidegger Research" series. For Heideggerians new to 4E cognition, developmental psychology, and literacy studies, this book could be an effective entry into a burgeoning interdisciplinary field. And those already invested in such projects may find inspiration in Hatab's general orientation and the scope of his project. Employing a phenomenological method while pairing ontogenetic and cultural-historical analyses of human development is a grand task, and we should welcome the attempt.

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