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The role of imagination in communication and common world building : A Husserlian Account

Husserl's phenomenological notion of imagination has been constantly investigated in various areas of phenomenological research. However, these discussions take place mostly in relation either to eidetic or to the systematic clarification of intuitive experiences, and it has not been sufficiently addressed what this notion may offer for the understanding of practical life. What I intend to do in this paper is therefore to attempt to show an import of imagination for the practical dimension, on the basis of Husserl's writings. More specifically, I will attempt to present the notion of imagination in relation to how Husserl understood communication and its contribution to communitisation[Vergemeinschaftung].

I will first clarify in what context Husserl has viewed communication as the basic principle of communitisation. Then I will discuss how the account for communication can be reconstructed, on the basis of Husserl's writings on the notions of meaning, expression, fulfilment and especially imagination. Although a comprehensive account for communication was not undertaken by Husserl himself, it is my view that this can be presented based on the careful reconstruction of his ideas. And here imagination will emerge as a kernel element in communication that makes possible the understanding of the other in an authentic way. After discussing the unique experiential structure of imagination and its function in communication, I will conclude by making some remarks on how understanding the role of imagination in communication helps broaden our understanding of the process of common world building.

Section 1. COMMUNITISATION AND COMMUNICATION

The constitution of the one common world for the humanity, for Husserl, takes place through communitisation. Various materials related to this concept can be found in his texts from late 1910s to the 1930s, but I will concentrate on the part where he discusses the notion of the one world in terms of how it is constituted through the encounter between the homeworld and the alienworld. In Husserl's description, communitisation takes place in a manner that is similar to the way a concentric circle expands itself. The subject's surrounding world is firstly experienced as its homeworld. Here every event takes place in harmony with its common system of apperception that determines what is familiar and normal. However, this sphere is experienced as home only with the background of the unknown alien world. Alienworld, as a different world that operates with a nexus of apperception that can be incomprehensible or disharmonious with that of the homeworld, is experienced as a sphere where everything else is "dimmed out[abblendet]" and is "empty" in terms of any practical significance in relation to the homeworld(Held 1991, 308). However, it is through the encounter with this alienworld and the consequent experience of malfunction in the already existing homeworldly system, that the homeworld seizes the opportunity to expand itself. Namely, to move a step closer to the one world, as a higher and more synthesized form of the homeworld. Homeworld has the capacity to accomplish this expansion, as it has a relative perimeter. When the encounter with the alienworld takes place, initially malfunction can be brought about to the pre-given system, but the homeworld can soon encompass modifications

to its system of apperceptions and types. In this way, homeworld is understood as a horizon that is both closed and open, open by the virtue of the possibility of self correction or of the appropriation of the foreign systems of apperception(Hua XV, 205, 219; Held 1991, 311).

Concerning a more detailed way this expansion is realized, Held's insight with regard to Husserl's 5th *Cartesian Meditation* is helpful(Held 1991). He points out the similarity in structure that can be found between the following two: the primordial or the first level transcendence on the one hand, and the transcendence of the second level or the cultural level on the other hand(Held 1991, 307). The latter moves from a given homeworld to the expanded version of the homeworld, namely the world constituted further through the encounter with its alienworlds.

Empathy plays an important role for both levels of 'transcendence.' In the 'primordial transcendence,' where the other subject becomes constituted, Husserl says that the Here of the other body can never become the Here of my body except in the mode of "as if." On the other hand, the clue[anhaltspunkt] in the gestures[Gebaren] observed of the other body provides the basis for constituting the other as a subjectivity and having empathy.

In the process of the second level transcendence towards the common world, firstly the constitution of the alienworld takes place. Here, what becomes the equivalent of the bodily gestures is the conduct of the members of the alienworld or the cultural evidences found in it. These are taken to be direct or indirect references to the generativity that characterizes the alien culture, the spirit of the culture so to speak. They contain, in a hidden form, the history and the contents of the system of apperception of that alienworld. Thus, through these 'clues,' it becomes possible to accomplish a kind of "historical empathy"(Hua XV, 233 footnote).

The term 'empathy' is often used to encompass different levels of intersubjective connection, but for the purpose of this paper, further distinction is necessary, namely the distinction between empathy and communication. According to Husserl, for the expansion of the homeworld to proceed, communication, not just empathy, is necessary. In this context, Husserl writes "communication makes unity"(Hua XIV, 199, from 1918 or 1921), and in the text from 1932, "in speaking and listening to the speaking, I and the other ego arrive at a first level of unification"(Hua XV, 476). In order to grasp Husserl's picture of this progressive expansion of a homeworld into the one world through communication, it is crucial to see how Husserl's notion of communication can be presented.

2. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF COMMUNICATION

Before moving on to discuss the Husserlian notion of communication, I would like to make two preliminary remarks, in order to avoid some misunderstanding.

The first remark is that I proceed with the assumption that there are genetically distinguished levels to what Husserl refers to as the experience of the other[Fremderfahrung](Lee 2014). There are three levels to it, firstly the level of primitive associative experience of the other. Secondly the cognitive experience of the other, or empathy. And finally there is the communicative experience of the other. The focus of this paper is on the third level, which presupposes the previous two. As I have mentioned already, the notion of empathy is often used to encompass all these three levels, but it is important to not conflate these levels(Lee, 2014).

Secondly, the discussion of communication here follows Husserl's methodological strategy of starting from "the most original form of communication"(Hua XV, 222), or a "zero setting"(Alverchi 2018, 5). Husserl's notion of communication is not limited to linguistic communication, but he proposes the idea of the most basic form of communication involving expression, which needs to be analyzed firsthand in order to move onto the more complicated forms that develop from it. This "zero setting" involves two people that communicate face-to-face about one's first-hand experience, using expressions in a sincere and serious manner. This represents a simplified form of the essential structure of communication, which will provide the guide for more complex or limit case analyses.

With these in mind, *Logical Investigations* provides the framework of phenomenologically understanding the essential structure of communication. Relevant materials can be found in various locations, but it can be clearly approached through his ideas on expression and meaning in the 1st *Logical Investigation*, and more importantly, in relation to the notion of fulfillment found in the 6th *Logical Investigation*.

In 1st LU, Husserl says expressions used in communication are signs that refer to the original experience or state-of-affairs from which they stem from. Expressions work by mediation of meaning. The meaning is constituted through a sense-giving act, based on the given expression. However, the meaning itself is an empty intention, which means that it does not deliver the manifested state-of-affair itself in its intuitive form but only hints at it. This is why it requires fulfilling syntheses by intuitive intentional act, if it is to reach the level of authenticity[Eigentlichkeit].

In other words, authentic understanding of an expression is established when the receptor in communication intends its meaning and reconstitutes intuitively the state-of-affair which is hinted at or referred to by the expression. Then there is an "coinciding[Deckung]" or a synthesis between them.

However, this rather simple model of communication, does not immediately make it clear how communication, understood in this form, may contribute to communitisation, especially when we consider the intersubjective condition of communication. Rather, an important question arises. Up to what extent can fulfillment for meanings be successfully reconstituted in its intuitive form, when the participants do not belong to the same experiential horizon? Insofar as the fulfillment has to be drawn from what is readily available in one's experiential horizon, there will be cases where the receptor cannot, or only very partially have the intuitive fulfillment for what is being expressed. Now, with this consideration of the disparity between the experiential horizons, the analysis faces a significant challenge.

In fact, when Husserl's notion of communication is put aside as an account lacking in consideration of social or historical context or intersubjectivity, this is the version that is being criticized. Even those who are more sympathetic towards Husserl's view on communication, point out that Husserl's justification for the possibility of successful communication, especially with regard to the challenge coming from the plurality of lifeworlds, is not convincing enough. Husserl is understood to be relying on the empirical justification through empathy or on the teleological argument through the notion of instinct(Park 2001). However, there are other materials that may guide one to see how communication can proceed despite the aforementioned challenge and be the principle of communitisation.

It may be true that the initial account for communication of shared meaning fails to provide the best view into how communication functions as the principle behind communitisation, especially when plurality and disparity of lifeworlds or horizons have come into the story. Insofar as the analysis of communication is based mainly on the *Logical Investigations*, it is focused more on the essential and ideal structures of the experiential structure of shared meaning, while the factual aspects are abstracted and bracketed from the account. These show characteristics of a static analysis.

In this respect, Husserl's later method of genetic analysis is more promising, as Husserl's conception of the genetic method is an attempt to rescind the three kinds of abstraction that the static applied. As Welton has put clearly (Welton 2003), one sees back in the genetic analysis 1) the monad as a concrete ego, 2) lifeworld with its historic and cultural contents, and 3) the actual time as the inner time consciousness of a monad. Genetic analysis thus opens a space for the clarification of the concrete interconnections of acts, which now includes the concrete lifeworld and meaning horizons. When it comes to communication, the communicating subject, now viewed as an individual unity that carries concrete temporality and history of its own, has its respective lifeworld and horizon, within which communication is to take place.

3. COMMUNICATION AND IMAGINATION

Once the genetic analysis is applied, and the disparity of lifeworlds of plural subjects gets taken into account, one is now in a better place to view the role of imagination in communication. The establishment of authentic understanding through communication is made possible through the bridging role of imagination. The function of imagination becomes crucial as the ability to deliver intuitive contents for the fulfillment, which is required for the authentic understanding of the expression. Along this line, Husserl writes in *Husserliana* volume XV, "one gains an original secondary experience if he, understanding the communication, reenacts[nachvollzieht] it intuitively, thus has intuitively what is communicated thereby, as if he were the other, 'as if' he had seen it." Also he writes that "statements become understood emptily without the coinciding[decking] with the intuitive quasi-execution" (Hua XV, 223).

Unless the communicative situation is the matter of concern, the intuitive fulfillment for a given proposition may be delivered by an act of perception, in which case there will be the highest form of evidence. Even when perception is not available, it may also be delivered by other forms of intuitive acts like memory or even imagination, which are acts categorized as presentifications, constituted on the basis of what is reproduced from the receptor's subjective experiential horizon.

However, when it comes to the authentic understanding of the other in communication, a more specific mode of intuitive fulfillment is necessary. This is because the constitution of the intuitive experience has to take place in a form that belongs to the other ego that has provided the expression. In other words, *I re-constitute its fulfillment in accordance with the expression, but it has to be in such a way that I also know that what is being constituted is not my original experience*. For example, when I hear the expression from a friend that says "I saw a white dog," and try to understand the experience the friend has had, I am not recollecting my perception of a white dog per se, but I am trying to understand the perception

of the dog that took place as the experience of the other. It is only in this form, or specific 'perspective', that the re-constituted fulfillment is valid as the experience that the expression is referring to. And as I will attempt to show in the following, it is imagination, which has a peculiar quasi-egoic structure, that makes this possible.

Husserl's analysis of imagination becomes relevant here as his notion of imagination accounts for precisely how a subject can go beyond its own horizon of experience or have an access to a stream of consciousness that is not actually one's own. His analysis shows that it is made possible thanks to the unique way imagination is constituted, which involves temporal modification and an ego split.

According to Husserl, imagination is a kind of intuitive presentification, but with a special temporal modification. It constitutes the intuitive experience in the mode of 'as-if' or as a 'quasi-experience' (Hua III, X, XXIII) by neutralizing its temporal determination. It draws its contents from the sedimented past in recollection, but then temporal neutralization takes place, so that these experiences lose their location in relation to real time.

In this way the imagined experience forms a separate unity of experiential flow, which does not get integrated into the actual temporal unity of the real ego, while it does have its own temporality (Bernet 2005). Strictly speaking, this unity of the imagined experiences belongs to an imagined ego. The real ego is based on real time, whereas the quasi ego of imagination is based on imaginary-time, and this results in the ego-split between the real ego and the imagined ego (deWarren, 2014).

The imaginary-ego of imaginary-time is not bound to the reality of the real ego, and it is constituted as an ego that can be freely determined through the process of imagination by the real ego. Hereby the imagining subject is able to freely constitute a stream of quasi-experience, which, by the virtue of its very structure, belongs to an ego other than self. And this is the experiential framework that allows the real subject to explore with experiences that go beyond what is actually given in reality, in a mode that gives one a certain distance (Bernet 2005, DeWarren 2014).

This peculiar structure of imaginative constitution accounts for the mode and the configuration of the required fulfilling intention, found in interpersonal communication mediated by expression. Imagination enables a constitution of intuitive 'fulfillment' for the given expression, by making it possible for the subject to constitute it freely. The building blocks are drawn from her own given sedimentation or meaning horizon, but she is nevertheless able to move beyond what the given reality has in stock. (Of course, it has to be pointed out that this fulfillment would possess a different degree of evidence than the one that results in fulfillment by perception, but I think this provides the highest degree of evidence available when it comes to understanding the other through communication.)

Furthermore, through imagination, a possibility opens up for the bridging of the gap between the different lifeworlds. This is because the 'secondary experience' constituted in imagination can then be appropriated into one's experiential horizon in its intuitive form. The experience of the other, which was manifested through expression in communication, and then secondarily experienced in imagination, becomes a sedimented part of one's own experiential horizon as a shared experience.

In other words, using imagination, constituted on the basis of other's expression used in communication, one is able to secure a perspective of another subject, through which one

can see beyond what is available of the world from the given orientation. This access to the 'secondary experiences' means that one now has the possibility of expanding one's world, either in a complementary manner or by making its homeworld subject to further modification. As the communication proceeds in this way, mutual expansion of respective homeworlds can be brought about. One no longer stays within the limits of the homeworld, but can appropriate and seek to incorporate the foreign experiences within its nexus of apperception, engaging oneself with the ongoing process of expansion, which ultimately is directed towards the constitution of one common world.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Through this paper, I have attempted to show, by presenting the unique experiential structure of imagination from Husserlian phenomenological perspective, that Husserl has presupposed a specific notion and a role of imagination, when he takes communication to be the basis for the expansion of the given lifeworld. Viewed this way, imagination becomes a key factor in practical life, not solely for its role of making authentic communication possible, but also for its essential contribution to the implicit expansion of the experiential horizon that leads to the establishment of the common world.

I would like to conclude by pointing out the three aspects of why it is important to address and understand the role of imagination within the process of communication. Firstly, it brings to light how imagination is systematically and concretely involved in the practical dimension of subjective life, namely in the engagement with the other in the process of constituting a common world. Secondly, it clarifies why communitisation requires communication, as distinguished from the immediate perception-like form of empathy, the former becoming crucial when one has to deal with plurality and disparity among the subjects. Thirdly and finally, it shows that the constitution of a common world building is not only the matter of securing a common set of objective knowledge in the form of expressions, but also has to involve the pre-predicative level of subjective life in intuitive forms which provide fulfillment for expressions.

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