Phenomenology of Online Education
The Other's Look (J.-P. Sartre) and Intersubjective Perceptual Phantasy (E. Husserl)

Mindaugas Briedis

Mykolas Romeris University, Institute of Humanities, Ateities g. 20, LT-08303, Vilnius, Lithuania

mbriedis@mruni.eu

mindaugas briedis

Abstract

This article applies classical phenomenological notions for new modes of communication, namely, online learning. It is stated that empirical communication of online learning presupposes a multilayered transcendental intersubjective structure which might be fruitfully approached via phenomenological projects of affection by the Other's look and perceptual imagination. While a number of phenomenologists have contributed to the thesis of the article, Husserl and Sartre are of special importance for

the author. Hence, part of this article focuses on theoretical analysis of some more (the Other's look in *Being and Nothingness*) and less (intersubjective perceptual phantasy in *Husserliana XXIII*) known phenomenological concepts, while the other presents an attempt of actual phenomenology of online education and the unpredictable nature of the internet.

Keywords: phenomenology, online education, the Other, imagination, intersubjectivity.

Fenomenologija spletnega izobraževanja. Pogled Drugega (J.-P. Sartre) in intersubjektivna perceptivna domišljija (E. Husserl)

Povzetek

Članek klasične fenomenološke ideje aplicira na nove načine komuniciranja, in sicer na spletno izobraževanje. Zagovarja mnenje, da empirično komuniciranje znotraj spletnega učenja predpostavlja večplastno transcendentalno intersubjektivno strukturo, ki se ji plodno lahko približamo s pomočjo fenomenoloških razmišljanj glede afekcije s pogledom Drugega in perceptivne imaginacije. Medtem ko so k tezi, ki jo zastopa članek, prispevali številni fenomenologi, sta za avtorja posebnega pomena zlasti Husserl in Sartre. Zato se prispevek, na eni strani, deloma posveča teoretski analizi nekaterih bolj (pogled Drugega v knjigi *Bit in nič*) ali manj (intersubjektivna perceptivna domišljija v zvezku *Husserliana XXIII*) znanih fenomenoloških konceptov, medtem ko, na drugi strani, predstavlja poskus dejanske fenomenologije spletnega izobraževanja in nepredvidljive narave svetovnega spleta.

Ključne besede: fenomenologija, spletno izobraževanje, Drugi, imaginacija, intersubjektivnost.

> *"Every look directed toward me is manifested in connection with the appearance of a sensible form in our perceptive field, but contrary to what might be expected, it is not connected with any determinate form."*
>
> Jean-Paul Sartre: *Being and Nothingness*

Introduction

It is well known that during the 20th century phenomenology established itself as one of the most wide-spread and adaptive methodologies, thus fulfilling the academic dream of its founder Edmund Husserl. On the other hand, the last decades saw a massive sprawl of technological innovations, which eventually transformed virtually every aspect of civilized human existence. Hence, it is not only theoretically tempting but also socially vital to rethink several more or less prominent phenomenological projects in the face of these new horizons of human praxis and interactions.

In the time just after the "existential turn" of phenomenology, the exploration of the Lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) really began to take over almost entire continental philosophy. Initiated by such thinkers as Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and others, it broke with the solipsistic tone of early phenomenology and began to denote the primordial experience in terms of paraphernalia and engagement with tools and purposes (Heidegger) or finding oneself in the instrument-world shaped by the Other's look (Sartre). Despite this shift of paradigm, Husserl's legacy and the initial project of the phenomenological investigation of consciousness as *Wissenschaft* must not be underestimated. On the contrary, today scholars from various disciplines are urging to review and extrapolate some of the most important of Husserl's phenomenological projects such as the constitution of the Other, bodility, memory, imagination, categorial intuition, etc.[1] Hence, these projects gain a new meaning in the light of latest social and technological *phainomena*. On the other hand, technologically conditioned specific givenness of the Other,

---

1 The significance of the finishing volumes of Husserl's writings (*Husserliana*) is also worth noticing in this regard.

fundamental role of images, new forms of coping with paraphernalia, existential spatiality and temporality shaped a wholly new way of communicative being online. Thus, the question is how we are to understand these transformations and what phenomenology has to do with them? In the search for an answer to this question we will analyze and conjoin several phenomenological projects initiated by Sartre and Husserl, which will also reveal the possibility of a fruitful correlation between egologic and existential phenomenology.

The Other's look as basic affection: on the positive side

In his late text *The Phenomenology of a Communicative Community* (1932), Husserl encompasses a wide range of human activities (spoken language, writing, gesture) and states that such an activity founds community and serves as a basic condition for introducing changes and something new into world.[2] In short, without the communicative connection I could not identify the world of another human being, and hence her intentions which otherwise could become the ground for changes and/or learned experiences in my own world. Thus, besides turning to the living world as the ground for phenomenological research, Husserl's late philosophy breaks with the idealist monadic worldview and stresses the positive constitutional role played by the Other.

Despite this widely accepted turn in phenomenology, later developments varied greatly from Husserl's approach, in general, as well as concerning the positive outcomes of the encounter with the Other, in particular. For example, M. Heidegger's existential hermeneutics always oscillated between rather cozy and unavoidable coexistence with others (*Mitsein*) and its threat to one's authenticity (*das Man*); this is also the case with Sartre's Being-for-others (*l'être-pour-autrui*). According to Edith Stein, we are able to reveal the universal properties of the objects given to us by *empathy* (*Einfühlung*).[3] In this way, empathy appears as the necessary condition for experiencing the external (reality) and certain kinds of self-knowledge,

---

2 See in this regard: Husserl 2008.
3 In this context, note that Stein observed that empathetic experiences are founded on direct perceptions of physical bodies *or* imagination. See in this regard: Stein 1989.

including one's bodily nature. Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Levinas, Martin Buber, and others also stated that though being extremely challenging and affective, the Other serves as the necessary condition for the truth of the self. But no one dedicated more attention to the philosopheme "the Other" as Jean-Paul Sartre, French phenomenologist, novelist, and one of the founding fathers of existentialism, did. Needless to say, despite the certain academic and even cultural fame, his account remains somewhat ambivalent.

Though later thinkers, especially postmodern ones, often accused Sartre of creating just another self-centered idealistic philosophy of presence or even being a metaphysical humanist,[4] he himself always believed in the constitutive power of that which we might (very carefully) call "the external reality," manifesting itself in the conditioning by facticity, entanglement with affections, experience of scarcity, pressure of social circumstances, or … other fellow human beings. Actually, this kind of approach became the core of his late philosophy.[5] However, already in his programmatic opus that introduced existential phenomenology, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre presents the view on how we live our lives (which includes also how we change and/or learn in the broadest sense of the word), according to which it impossible to reflect upon my-self, the world, or the Other separately.[6] Consequently, I argue that in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre presents the view that *the Other's look is one of the basic affections* which empirically manifests itself as the experience of shame, and this kind of affectivity for Sartre has a fundamental phenomenological-constitutive meaning. On the other hand, this means that Sartre's notion of the Other's impact on one's reality (and *irreality* in the Husserlian sense) was too seldom oversimplified as being negative and destructive (Zahavi 2010, 211). In the same way we might approach anxiety and accidental nature of being exposed to the Other in virtual reality from the psychological point of view, hence reducing it as an ontic-empirical mark of particular

97

---

4 See, for instance: Derrida 1972, 137.
5 At the end, Sartre argues that philosophy must be practical and by this he means political. See in this regard: Anderson 1993.
6 See: Zahavi 2001.

transcendental structures. Though it is true that Sartre (following Hegel) stresses the connotation of conflict or confrontation in the experience of the Other, there is more to that. Let's take a closer *look.*

One way of presenting the Other's gaze in Sartre's philosophy is to view it as the limiting force of one's transcendence, i.e. freedom. As for yourself, you can drift in the world almost as amorphous and de-substantial as heroes dwelling in the early Sartre's literature, but in the eyes of others you always become solidified into one or another self, which is finalized by being forced into self-reflection. Others become vehicles of self-reflection, and this constitutive moment conflicts with the urge for individuality on both phenomenological and existential levels (a paradox already approached by Husserl in his celebrated fifth meditation). This conflict is accelerated by the empirical nature of the process—usually (empirically) the Other is giving-you-a-self basing her judgments only on a few unrelated cases of your factual behavior, which adds even more depth to the classic existential notion of the absurd. Though Husserl's answer to the existential primacy of Sartre's phenomenology is that "every indeterminacy in the factual domain is determinable before all determining experience, *therefore* determinable *a priori*. This implies that the cognizing subject can decide it only *a posteriori*, on the basis of actual experiences." (Husserl 2005, 624)

The Other, for Sartre, is not just an empirically given other person or self. It is not an object, but a *look*, its being appears as "looking-at-me" (Sartre 1992, 345). According to the phenomenological perspective, Sartre talks, not about inference, but about full-blown experience, hence all knowledge (of the self and/or the Other) comes as a whole (*Gestalt*). For example, the empirical situation of "being almost caught" phenomenologically reconstitutes the whole of your self-interpretation. This is a phenomenologically revealed structural part of existential experience called "being thrown" (Heidegger), which according to Sartre's account presupposes the vital need to decide—will I take the label presented by the Other's look? That is how affection by the Other's look followed by the ontic emotion (shame) provokes the choice which determines my existence. We cannot be alone; we need to compromise. Intersubjectively shared world (Husserl) here becomes the world taken from me and turned

into some kind of object, which presupposes me as a part of it in the eyes of the other. What for me is just an occasion for the Other, becomes my essence.[7] Many thinkers of this kind (Freud, Marx, Nietzsche, and even the postmodernists in a way) thought that it's just a matter of time when "I" will learn to catch myself, i.e. to participate in the objectification of myself according to vast paraphernalia of labels. Hence, "shame manifests our exposure, vulnerability, and visibility and is importantly linked to such issues as concealment and disclosure, sociality and alienation, separation and interdependence, difference and connectedness" (Zahavi 2010, 224). This quote captures well the whole constitutional complexity presupposed by the affection of the Other's look and its empirical counterparts manifested in particular emotions.

In *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (1939), Sartre describes emotional experience as the manifestation of a "magical strategy," whose aim is to transform a difficult situation. What Sartre is trying to show here is that that the maxim "no excuses" is relevant to the affective experience as to any other. It is true that shame experience brings up the ontological modification which affects the wholeness of my being—*I am* this kind of being and I am ashamed of it. But, according to Sartre, even in the face (and because) of this basic affection, we still can choose how to react. In this sense, emotions are series of decisions in correlation with affections. Contra psychic determinism emotion appears as a way of constructing the world.[8] The great insight of Sartre is the emphasis on the Other as the trigger of the most fundamental constitutional points, which rather motivates than causes the world.[9] Because emotions are about the world they also express the existential modality "I can." I *choose* emotion to achieve purpose or, as Sartre usually puts it, to escape (restructure the

---

7 There is an interesting paradox here. It looks like that for Sartre the Other precedes me in giving me a self—a kind of an essence—, though his famous saying states that "existence precedes essence."

8 The postulate that you can act freely even pre-reflectively is one way to see where Sartre opposes Freud.

9 Husserl understands "motivation" as a special structural relation between intentional acts called *Fundierung* avoiding connotations of psychological physical causality.

intentional flow).[10] Sometimes emotional transformation motivated by the Other substitutes action (excuse), but sometimes also initiates it (choice).[11]

Though under the Other's look my original establishment of the relation between things is shattered and, as Sartre puts it, "the appearance of the other is disintegration as decentralization of the whole universe which undermines centralization which I am simultaneously effecting" (Sartre 1992, 343), this also means that seeing the Other amounts to being seen. "Being-seen-by the Other" is the truth of "seeing the other" (Sartre 1992, 257). In the look of the Other my freedom is being taken, but restored by the interpretation, one of which could be decision to agree upon some kind objectivation. Gradually, our expectations embrace the possibility of being-seen, and this possibility affects us in a peculiar way. Refusing to break through these "surveillance" situations, to affirm our ability to choose we transform ourselves from Being-for-itself (être-*pour-soi*) to Being-in-itself (être-*en-soi*; empirically manifested as pride, arrogance, etc.). This turning-of-your-self into a changeless object is the classic example of bad faith, but it is not only for reasons of self-deception, or we should rather say it also manifests itself in the face of the Other's look. Objectivation often was seen as a threat to my personal freedom, but here self-objectivation, deconstruction of the difference between me and a thing, is a major self-defense step. Accepting other's decision to freeze us into facticity as the ground for our choice to stay inert, we are trying to make use from the other perspective. Here again, the other appears as the perspective of self-understanding. In a sense, for itself it finds some comfort in being-taken to be in-itself. Besides being pushed into the in-itself, I also choose to be taken like this; I become someone through those who are looking at me, but I still choose it. Put differently, the affective response to the Other's objectifying gaze makes oneself learn what does it mean to be amongst humans, what kind of possible connections are there, and whether the Others' look is really absolutely uncontrollable. Hence, the affection by the Other's look might turn

100

---

10 For Sartre, emotions have this "escape mode." I choose joy or something else as a means to escape from unpleasant actuality. The degree of this affection may oscillate from slight changes in the mood up till the most brutal mental disorders (see Murakami 2013).

11 Even body is in the context of emotions/affections not about sensations—it is about getting ready for some action.

towards two directions—conformist self-objectivation or freedom of choice, introducing learning as openness to new experiences.

Transcendental structure of online learning: intersubjective perceptual phantasy

In the previous part we defined the Other's look in Sartre's existential phenomenology as *the constitutive affection*, which transcends relations given by direct perception thus making the notion relevant to the sphere of virtual relations. Now, it is time to explore how empiric online relations presuppose transcendental correlation between the affection by the Other's look and the acts of *intersubjective perceptual phantasy* (Husserl 2005, 616).

It was Husserl's understanding of empathy that was taken to be the classic account of the constitution of the Other (the 5th of *Cartesian Meditations*, 1931). Although Husserl battled the analogy argument by stating that precisely because the other I is given to me as person not as merely a moving physical body, I don't infer its subjective existence, but sort of have it in one blow or *in propria persona*, the problem with the notion is that it is still insufficient in those cases when the Other's body as the condition for pairing (*Paarung*) is absent, which is precisely the case of virtual communication.[12] In his study on the transcendental motivation and structural differences of various mental disorders, where the Other's presence is crucial, Yasuhiko Murakami doesn't mention Sartre, but comes close to our analysis when he states that "affection of contact is not limited to eye contact. It is an affection of dynamism that comes from another and aims at my body." (Murakami 2013, 180) Apparently, we are not talking about the physical presence of some persons in online relations as well as physical bodies in phenomenological analysis. On the other hand, shame as the culmination of the affection by the Other's look, strikes even when the affection-experiencing subject stands alone physically, i.e. is not in the direct presence of others, because the perspective presented by the Other is already internalized: Sartre talks a lot about the experiences of being "almost caught"—door creeping, etc.—, despite the physical absence of another human being: "a lot of things support the look" (Sartre 1992, 346). Hence, in order

---

12 See in this regard: Ricœur 2007.

to understand the givenness of a directly absent Other in online learning process we must turn to the very peculiar and multilayered phenomenological project launched by Husserl, that is the consciousness of imagination.

It is true that up to some point we need perceptual *things or contents* to constitute and share any possible experience including online learning environment, but the kind of perception involved here Husserl calls *quasi-perception* and is rather an instance of *imagination*.[13] However, Husserl clearly distinguished between several structures which compose consciousness of imagination as an intentional act. On the one hand, we have *phantasy* or *imagination proper*, which differs from *image-consciousness* (*Bildbewusstsein*) in that it is not rooted in any form of physical substrate, i.e. picture of any kind. Moreover, when we look at the picture, we are "using" image-consciousness to relate two levels of apprehension—*image-object* (image which we perceive) and *image-sujet* (that which serves as the true referent of a picture). Now, it is clear that *phantasy* does not exhibit the structure of double apprehension (Husserl 2005, 25). It is not motivated by a particular image and is thus characterized as free play.[14]

102

This is the more or less generally accepted typology of the consciousness of imagination as presented by Husserl, which was followed by Sartre, R. Ingarden, and many others. But if we take a closer look at some later published manuscripts, for example, from the *Husserliana XXIII* volume, we find that Husserl speaks about some rather intermediate acts of imagination which oscillate between those poles of pictorial and free imagination. Hence, we have the third element of the whole intentionality of imagination—the *perceptual phantasy*, which uses perceptual things to refer to the imaginative environment, but this imaginary environment is not rooted in the physical substratum of particular images. Eventually, we share not the referent of an image and not the image, but the same existential space or setting of a learning

---

13 In his writings on imagination, memory, and perception, Husserl uses the prefix *quasi* many times (quasi-actual, quasi-seeing, quasi-truths, quasi-facts, quasi-experience, etc.) mostly meaning the "as-if" character that is posited by re-presentational positing of the phantasized Ego (Husserl 2005, 124).

14 Note that the ability to deny the object of perception and to posit in its place an irreality belongs to the essence of consciousness. This denial, for Sartre, is constitutive of our freedom (see in this regard: Sartre 2004).

environment. Users can share a scene from a movie, a music piece, symbol, or even a sentence presented in some unusual circumstances to co-constitute the area for the game to happen.

This "kind" of imagination takes perceptual things as vehicles to constitute the imagined space which in turn founds communication (usually, a playful one). It is important that objects of perception do not function as *analogons*[15] here (for example, like abstract chess figures), and images which are constituted by this imaginative consciousness don't necessarily involve sameness for each imaginative ego (player). This means that there is some intersubjective ground for communication even before the empirical transmission of information. Online environment includes many objects for perceiving and/or handling which we "see" *as something other*, some plot or narrative which defines means and goals of this particular class, for example, tour dedicated to Sartre's beloved places at the left bank of the river Seine. Hence, the multilayered structure of online communication-learning process might be presented as follows:

1) intersubjective perceptual phantasy—"transparent" perceptual objects (figments), shared meanings of common activity (game, seminar, quest, etc.) without fixed pictorial identity of the referent, which displace the self in such a manner that brings it into intersubjective imaginary environment;

2) image-consciousness (*Bildbewusstsein*)—images based upon a physical substratum (screen, interface, multimedia, etc.);

3) *Phantasieleib* participation—*Leib* here constitutes and sustains the role according to the particular learning task, hence presupposing certain integration of skills, goals, values, and affections;

4) concepts reflected and propositional knowledge defined.

According to Husserl, "art is the realm of phantasy that has been given form, of perceptual or reproductive phantasy presenting as depicting" (Husserl 2005, 616), though it is very important to capture the difference between perceptual phantasy and pictorial consciousness: "In the case of a theatrical performance, we live in a world of perceptual phantasy; we have 'images' within the cohesive unity of one image, but we do not for that reason

---

15 This is a real physiological or psychological element that is a constituent of the imaginative state.

have depictions." (ibid., 616). The so-called "images" here are produced by the whole range of means (movements, expressions, reactions, etc.), and although Husserl could not apply it to online communication, it is tempting to connect it with the constitutive accomplishments of the affection by the Other's look online. Hence, the first level of online communication does not involve image consciousness:

> When a play is presented, no consciousness of depiction whatsoever needs to be excited, and what then appears is a pure perceptual figment. (Husserl 2005, 617)

> The following is the *difference between figment and image*: the genuine figment (the wax figure) directly appears in the unity of reality, while the image does not genuinely "appear" in that unity but in its own space, which in itself has no direct relation to real space. The genuine figment, or let us rather say the genuine *illusion*, such as the wax figure in the wax museum or the panorama image that "disappoints" us, is the appearance of a thing; specifically, the appearance of reality. (Husserl 2005, 570)[16]

This analogy of ours might be validated only and only if interaction with computer related paraphernalia ("mouse," screen, etc.) rests on the apprehension of a figment not an image in the proper sense, which in turn creates the space of a shared world or rather intersubjectively constituted quest for knowledge. As with the theatrical performance where "the real things called 'scenes,' actual curtains, etc., 'present'; they serve to transplant us into the artistic illusion" (Husserl 2005, 516), the real hardware, furniture, and any other coping is transformed into some scene by the virtual experience. This coping or, as Husserl states, *capabilities* is a unique feature of a physical thing in the realm of imaginations, because, differently as in the case of an image, a sound, or a written text, I instantly

104

---

16 It looks like hardware as the vehicle of virtual reality perfectly fits the criteria for intersubjective perceptual phantasy, i.e. it "directly appears in the unity of reality," has a "direct relation to real space," and "is the appearance of a thing." On the other hand, it perfectly unites signitive, pictorial, and perceptual ways of intending an object.

represent the horizon of possibilities according to these capabilities. Hence, my *bodility* becomes displaced into the imaginary coping.

Every technology, particularly those designed for communication, becomes an extension or our bodies (McLuhan). Even on the level of "motority" (Merleau-Ponty), every new technology demands a mastering of the appropriate system of reflexes, for example, mouse and screen conventions. On the other hand, not only the constitution of perceptual reality is dependent on the experience of bodily movements (kinesthetic experience), but also the unity between the acts which constitute perceptual phantasy are founded (*Fundierung*) in a specific "I can" (Fenige 1991, 78), i.e. on a non-thematic knowledge about the potentiality of bodily movement. Murakami, following M. Richir (who in turn followed Husserl's notion of *Phantasie-Ich*; cf. 2000, 137), suggests to call the body-awareness in the context of imagination the *Phantasieleib*: "Phantasieleib constitutes the core or 'center' of the world of phantasy; it can be regarded as the living body in the world of consciousness which is nonfigurable and non-representable." (Murakami 2013, 184)

105

> In phantasying, I often project myself into the phantasy world in such a way that I phantasy myself as *someone else*. If I call to mind my childhood, I see myself as a child; some image of my corporeal existence as a child plays a part, thrusts itself forward, and becomes the bearer of my experiences. But along with this, of course, I also have a direct Ego-consciousness to which my corporeal existence belongs in direct and familiar form, in which I presently find myself in living reality as having a body. (Husserl 2005, 557)

This is an incarnation of some role or quest identity reviewed by the Other and adapted for coping with specific paraphernalia and space-time of online possibilities. It integrates heterogeneous elements of body postures, motority, interface requirements in order to move (play) in this intersubjectively constituted environment no matter what imaginary form (fantasy world, road story, mysterious palace, sacred book, existential quest, etc.) it follows. *Phantasieleib* presupposes the transcendental possibility of the affection by the Other's look, which exceeds actuality (eye contact, body contact, or

voice) and operates at the level of *perceptual phantasy*. This enables us to creatively conjoin phantasy and perception, otherwise "it remains only a pure Imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) without social context" (Murakami 2013, 193).

Finally, being-for-the-other has another aspect which is very relevant in online relations—one never knows if it is him or his role that is under the gaze of the Other. Only on the fourth level of our structural hierarchy it is possible to evaluate how do the user and his role work together. Hence, the first three levels also exhibit this structure of pure *passivity* of unity, identity towards me, and my online appearance, while the fourth enables to deconstruct and evaluate it. Finally, the fourth level presupposes higher *doxic* forms such as "explication, syntactical judgment and ideation" (Cairns 2013). In short, these forms single out relevant moments out of complex objective sense constituted in pure passivity, confer a formal logical structure upon an it, and grasp the essence on the basis of intending an individual object, "which thereby gains the sense of being an instance of the universal" (Cairns 2013, xv). Active syntactical judgment and ideation "follow" the passively pre-constituted structure of objectivity. Here, all the propositional judgments, mistakes, and eventual evaluations appear. This fourth level brings us back to the actuality as the background of any phantasy: "what we call *judgment pure and simple* is here a distinctive case; namely, the case in which the explication, relation, predication is directed toward what is characterized as 'actual'" (Husserl 2005, 537), moreover: "judgments concerning what is essential are not changed by fiction, as we have already said" (Husserl 2005, 624).

Intersubjective e-topia: interruption, annulation, and authority

According to Gaston Bachelard, individual existence is always encountering what he called "matter," meaning first of all the existentially lived space.[17] Our experience of that space rests on various systems of representation, for example, rows of specific furniture in the libraries, new traffic designs, Google maps, etc. This experience in turn affects our ways of communication, hence

17 Bachelard's materiality is very close to Merleau-Ponty's corporeality or "the carnal." See in this regard: Bachelard 1994.

the designer or just the co-active user of (virtual) space could reveal to our imagination new experiences and reinterpret our relations with reality.

As we learned from the great works of literature, such as the *Bible* or Tolkien's epic tales, in order to learn you must get the whole world to be prepared for you as the context of understanding, hence virtual space is so notorious for the attention to details, everything exists in the state of lovely enchantment, which affects physical surroundings and movements. Reading, browsing, watching, or listening merge with the shared play on the screen; symbols, signs, pathways, and fonts design a certain mood of academic beauty where mystery and challenge dwell, where redundancy is filled with the expectations about what lies behind those names, doors, or audio-visual riddles.[18] It is also the question of comfort, because in virtual reality intimacy and hyper-textual autonomy, speed and variety of informational channels level the static authorities represented by traditional institutions and/or media. Nevertheless, it is still basically the affection by the Other, her presence given by the "look" constitutes the breakthrough with my unreflective and repetitive coping with things (gadgets) towards the intersubjectively constituted quest for knowledge.   107

The above outlined structure of the online learning process shows that communication begins with the communion with the Other not from concepts that I or she are initiating. Good internalization of the affection of the Other's look grants *Phantasieleib* well, hence the possibility of the new (*pour-autrui* or communion with others) rather than repetition (*en-soi* or communion with things). Now it is time to examine how the affection by the Other via perceptual imagery and distant gadgetry also rests on the transcendental moments of interruption, annulation, and authority.[19]

According to Aron Gurwitsch's *field theory*,[20] a lot of things, but first of all my lived body (*Leib*), have the character of balancing on the margin of

---

18 Concerning the relation between imagination, emotions, and new knowledge Husserl writes: "In my *quasi*-being-in-a-mood, I am conscious of the mood of the landscape (as of a *quasi*-mood); and my *quasi*-being-in-a-mood exhibits to me the mood of the landscape." (Husserl 2005, 566)
19 Reading and writing today has lost its Aristotelian linear form, now it is rather interruptive and inter-textual.
20 If all components of the field of consciousness were experienced as equally salient, we would indeed not be able to think and behave appropriately.

consciousness which means that different modes of bodility, i.e. kinesthetic and kinetic experiences, can enter the thematic field (how the main preoccupation of a given moment is presented) and eventually influence or even supplement the apprehension of the initial theme. Being in the midst of one's everyday activities at the same time engaging in online learning while coping with relative media exposes, in comparison with the liturgical order of a real classroom, the body to unorthodox postures (sitting, lying, walking, etc.), spilling coffee, adjusting chair in the park, or noticing the waiter. This could affect the appropriation of the material in many ways as well as totally shut the process down in order to get back to it at the right time. Here class content, such as learning material, units, deadlines, etc., are being affected by initially marginal environment—kinesthetic experiences as well as social and physical realities of the "external" world (flue, time of the day, shopping mall buzz, etc.). Hence, the entering of the body into the online experiential field encompasses wide range of modalities spreading from the innate internal model of the body as the horizon of motor skills (Merleau-Ponty) and the ground zero reference (Husserl), or the narration of the body as the representation of the body stored in long-term memory (Ricœur), to the actual body as visuo-spatial representation of the body, and the conceptual and linguistic representations of the body and its evaluation by a specific culture.

108

On the other hand, being online makes the subordination between theme, thematic field, and margin very mobile. Your attention (or rather *turning toward*, according to Husserlian terms) is provoked to attend to the theme via various kinds of ways—images, language, movies, sounds, and notifications from colleagues and/or teacher.[21] At the same time, social media notifications can enter the thematic field arising from the margin and reshape the initially given material. The problem online is that the same media moderate the thematic field as well as big portion of the margin. All this suggests that online we gradually become aware of a rich "humane plane" of oneself as well as the Other.

---

21 Husserl makes a distinction between *attention* and *turning toward*: "Although attention is interwoven with every turning toward, attention is simple grasping and turning toward is the more universal. For we are turned toward not only in objectivating but also in *feeling and willing*, in every sort of spontaneity (position taking)." (Husserl 2005, 552).

The issue of being interrupted and re-focused by the multi-material authority of a screen[22] presupposes another moment (and modification) in the life of consciousness by which some perceptual *phainomena* (for example, hardware as well as physical surroundings) are annulled. Husserl calls it *the annulling of conflict between perceiving and phantasy* when the perceptual world does not actually disappear, but I "live" in the phantasy world, not in the perceptual world (cf. Husserl 2005, 540). The resolution of such conflict is a transcendental condition for any phantastic experience. Perhaps this is the place to mention that virtual experiences often are taken to be illusory. But structural analysis shows that, in contrast to the form of illusory experience, in the case of the virtual presentation we do not begin with the thesis of the reality of what appears perceptually. On the other hand, conflict exists here, too; however, only the conflict that is there from the beginning and does not become constituted through new experiences later on.

According to one of the most beloved Husserl's pupils, D. Cairns, "phantasy is positing as a fiction against a fictive world background, but with the real world still intended as a background of this fictive one. The full sense of an object is a function of its background (inactual, retained, protended)" (Cairns 2013, xiv). So, the teacher and classmates are given to me "as if" they were real, although this constitutes togetherness of the classroom without the particular image and perception of the classroom. This, in turn, neutralizes (*Neutralität Modifikation*) the physical surroundings, social relations, spatiality, and temporality while coping with gadgets remains transparent.

These kind of phantasies are not freely produced by us, but, rather, have their objectivity, they are prescribed for us, forced upon us in a way analogous to that in which the things belonging to reality are forced upon us by the succession of perceptions emerging in continuous conflict with actual experience or by the succession of spoken or written *words*. For example, various computer fonts presuppose "experiential" apperception of words as material substrate, but *at the same time* this apperception is cancelled, for in the world of actual experience they are printed black figures (on paper or screen) denoting significations that

---

22 Investigations on the "authority" of images and possibilities to manipulate them already have a long and rich tradition; see, for example, *the Kuleshov effect*.

naturally carry that cancellation of actual perceptual experience, hence resting in phantastic experiences; and even the "daily use of language generally presupposes communication in phantasia" (Murakami 2010, 183).

Thus, there are intersubjective quasi-actual experiences that each of the subjects involved produces in such a way that each experiences the others as co-authors or co-players within the frame of its own actual experience: "At the same time each subject then posits something else that is experienced as identical by the experienced other, but vice versa also posits the other as someone who can and perhaps must behave in the same way." (Husserl 2005, 686) This co-phantasied motivation does not point to an identical referent, but rather means that the sameness of the referent (at the first ground level) is very important and specific, because it is shared without specifying its identity. Hence, various paraphernalia of online learning software might create the conditions of participation in the common practice without one definite referent of those objects. If there is some "alfa reference" (expression is mine) made by the authority of a teacher, it occurs only later in the discussion and serves for the purposes of teaching and evaluating (fourth level).[23] But at the start there is no such dominating reference, so the function of this layer is to "agree" or meet or co-constitute the learning environment, using pieces of online paraphernalia without any definite imagery (second level):

> When subjects engage in phantasy but do not phantasy intersubjectively (establish "objective" phantasies in their freedom), their phantasy objects are then restricted to their isolated individual subjectivity. But surely it is agreed that positing a value means the same as simultaneously positing subjects who, in valuing, constitute the value—presupposing only that the value is not itself a subject: Otherwise we have posited a subject anyway. (Husserl 2005, 655)

---

23 There is an interesting structural similarity between several types of otherness, that of the teacher online and the terrifying Other that psychotherapy speaks about. Both are beyond concreteness, although they are distinguished by the powers of surveillance and control. On the other hand, the affection by the Other's look in virtual space may grow into an almost Kafkian anonymous and constant threat to your privacy, etc.

That being said, we must not forget that these processes are inseparable from the interruptions of identity by the power of the Other, later taking the form of online communities rather that institutionalized unities. Today, formal learning is blended with activities, which traditionally were thought to be a part of leisure time, like listening to music, etc. Online technologies thus create a space where you can study the relation to yourself. The later shows contexts that you dwell in, the importance and the preferences that you make and how you express it. Of course, choices are hierarchical and our preferences in turn depend on external classifications. That is how the dialectics between the Other's look and *intersubjective perceptual phantasy* from being an existential one turns into social dialectics.

Conclusions

Phenomenological analysis of online learning environment reveals that it is constituted by the affection of the Other's look (Sartre), coping with paraphernalia (schematized perception), and two intentional structures of imagination—image-consciousness (physical imaging) and intersubjective perceptual phantasy (figment based shared free play of imagination). There is a dialectical relation between perceptual phantasy and the Other's look—while the Other's look constitutes the affection and initiates contact, perceptual phantasy online (contra face to face relations in a classroom) is necessary to create a bond, space, and quest as intersubjective experiences. This represents a transcendental structure behind empirical communication. While proper learning happens on the (fourth) level of reflection, those initial stages show that intersubjective imaginative communication is there even before its expression via propositional forms. The affection by the Other's look constitutes the breakthrough with one's unreflective and repetitive coping with things (être-*en-soi*) towards the intersubjectively constituted quest for knowledge (*l'*être-*pour-autrui*). On the other hand, intersubjective perceptual phantasy encompasses the infinite horizon of conflicting authorities, moments of interruption and annulation, mixes experience, and thus humanizes the learning material and presupposes an autonomous and responsible student.

111

Bibliography | Bibliografija

Anderson, Thomas C. 1993. *Sartre's Two Ethics: From Authenticity to Integral Humanity*. Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.

Bachelard, Gaston. 1994. *Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Cairns, Dorion. 2013. *The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl*. Edited by Lester Embree. Dordrecht, Heidelberg, New York, London: Springer, 2013.

Derrida, Jacques. 1972. *Marges de la philosophie*. Paris: Minuit.

Embree, Lester (ed.). 2004. *Gurwitsch's Relevancy for Cognitive Science. Contributions to Phenomenology. Vol. 52.* Dordrecht: Springer, 2004.

Fenige, Y. J. H., and K. Wiltsche. 1991. "The Body, Thought Experiments, and Phenomenology." In *Thought Experiments in Science and Philosophy*, ed. by Tamara Horowitz and Gerald J. Massey, 69–89. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Gurwitsch, Aron. 1964. *The Field of Consciousness*. Pittsburgh, PA: Dusquesne University Press.

Husserl, Edmund. 2005. *Collected Works. Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898–1925).* Trans. by John B. Brough. Dordrecht: Springer.

---. 2008. *Die Lebenswelt. Auslegungen der vorgegebenen Welt und ihrer Konstitution. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1916–1937). Husserliana. Vol. 39.* Ed. by R. Sowa. Dordrecht: Springer.

Murakami, Y. 2013. "Affection of Contact and Transcendental Telepathy in Schizophrenia and Autism." *Phenomenology and Cognitive Sciences* 12 (1): 179–194.

Richir, Marc. 2000. *Phénoménologie en esquisses*. Grenoble: J. Millon.

Ricœur, Paul. 2007. *Husserl. An Analysis of His Phenomenology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1992. *Being and Nothingness*. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Singapore: Washington Square Press.

---. 2002. *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*. London: Routledge.

112

---. 2004. *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*. Translated by Jonathan Webber. London and New York: Routledge.

Stein, Edith. 1989. *On the Problem of Empathy. The Collected Works of Edith Stein. Volume 3.* Translated by Waltraut Stein. Washington, DC: ICS Publications.

Zahavi, Dan. 2001. "Beyond Empathy: Phenomenological Approaches to Intersubjectivity." *Journal of Consciousness Studies*" 8 (5-7): 151–167.

---. 2010. "Shame and the Exposed Self." In *Reading Sartre: On Phenomenology and Existentialism*, ed. by J. Weber, 211–226. London: Routledge.

113