Phenomenology and Imagination in Husserl and Heidegger

Brian Elliott

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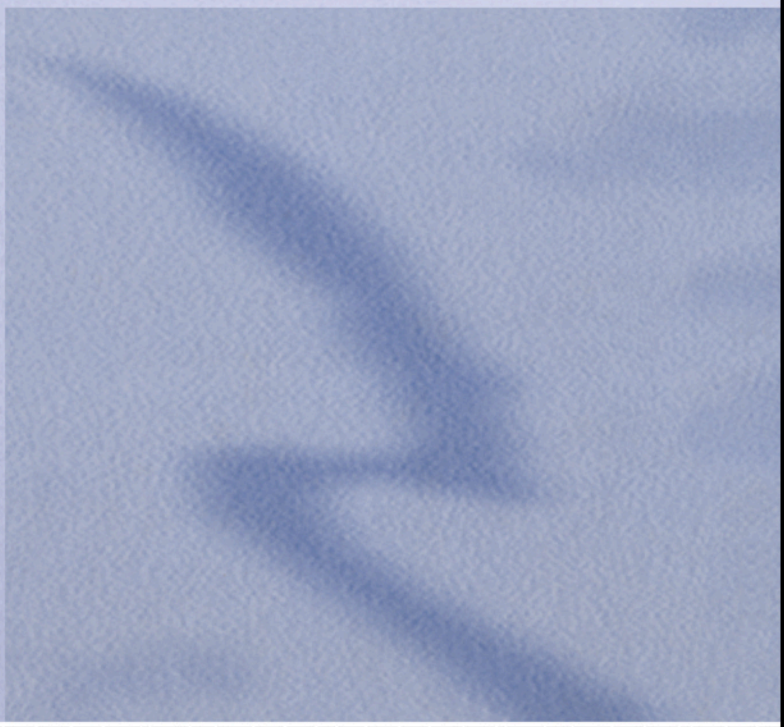

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Of all movements and schools of thought in twentieth-century European philosophy, it is undoubtedly phenomenology that has proved the most pervasive and influential. Following its founding by Edmund Husserl at the end of the nineteenth century, this seminal school of thought was profoundly reformed through the work of Husserl's young assistant, Martin Heidegger. Heidegger sought to transform his teacher's idea of phenomenology as a rigorous science of immediate experience into an analysis of historical human existence. Within this reformulation, the efforts of phenomenology become directed towards art as the pre-eminent sphere of human understanding.

In order to account for this development of phenomenology, this book focuses on the theme of the imagination and attempts to show that it is this power of the mind, rather than any strictly intellectual power, that stands at the centre of both Husserl's and Heidegger's account of human experience. Following this basic claim, Husserl's notion of consciousness as 'intentional' is extensively interpreted in light of his writings on imagination which remained largely published decades after his death in 1938.

Explicitly identifying the imagination as the fundamental power of human understanding in the context of his Kant interpretation in the late 1920s, Heidegger subsequently adopts an explicitly political register within his theory of imagination in line with the mythological constructions of German National Socialism. Brian Elliott suggests that, despite such erring, Heidegger succeeded in pointing the way towards an appreciation of artworks that makes the legacy of phenomenology one of abiding contemporary interest. Beyond this, he also locates phenomenology within the broader context of a philosophical world dominated by Kantian thought, arguing that the positioning of Husserl within the Kantian landscape is essential to an adequate understanding of phenomenology both as a historical event and as a legacy for present and future philosophy.

Brian Elliott completed his doctoral research at the University of Freiburg under the supervision of Heidegger's former assistant, Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann. His thesis on Heidegger and Aristotle, *Anfang und Ende in der Philosophie,* was published in Berlin in 2002. Since 2000 he has taught philosophy at University College Dublin, where he is currently engaged in research on the idea of aesthetic community.

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To the memory of my grandparents, Corella and James Elliott

Dark men in mien and movement, flashing in their mocking mirrors the obscure soul of the world, a darkness shining in brightness which brightness could not comprehend.

James Joyce

Contents

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Dublin, Spring 2004

Abbreviations

Husserl

Hua	*Husserliana* (collected works) edited under the auspices of the Husserl-Archive in Leuven, Belgium (dir. R.Bernet) (1950 ff.)
LU	*Logische Untersuchungen* (1900/1)
Ideen	*Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* (bks. 1–3:1913/52)
VPZ	*Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins* (1905/28)
EU	*Erfahrung und Urteil* (1925/38)

Heidegger

GA	*Gesamtausgabe* (complete works) under the general editorship of Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (1976 ff.)
SZ/BT	*Sein und Zeit* (1927)
KPM	*Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (1929)
H	*Holzwege* (1935/50)
IM	*Einführung in die Metaphysik* (1935/53)

Kant

KRV	*Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Critique of Pure Reason)

Note
Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the German are my own. The pagination of English translations is given only where this is not already indicated in the translations. Significant divergences from published translations are highlighted in the appended notes.

Introduction

The immediate *theme* of the following analyses will be the position and characterization given to the imagination in the phenomenological philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger. The *aim* of the investigation is to show the sense of phenomenology in light of the treatment of imagination by each thinker. In the first part, detailed consideration will reveal that Husserl's concept of imagination and the role it is accorded within the 'economy' of conscious life is far from univocal. In order to account for this equivocal sense of the imagination Husserl's thought will be grasped as a sustained attempt to break down the concept/intuition dichotomy that underpins Kantian epistemology.[1] Accordingly, the supposition underlying the approach adopted here is that Husserl's sense of phenomenology, although certainly not assimilable to contemporary neo-Kantianism,[2] is articulated within a broadly conceived Kantian conceptual terrain. In this way discussion of the role of imagination in phenomenology can be entered into within recognized parameters, something that is of the first importance when dealing with a notion as protean as the imagination.

Approaching Husserl's project of phenomenology as a negotiation with Kantian epistemology also allows for a fluid transition to Heidegger and the significance of the imagination within the phenomenological phase of his thinking. For it is in fact with Heidegger that the Kantian transcendental or productive imagination is explicitly acknowledged as the 'ontologically basic faculty'. While a principal problem confronting the analysis of Husserl resides in the fact that he says comparatively little that allows for situating his sense of phenomenology within a broader philosophical context, the opposite problem faces any interpretation of Heidegger. In his lectures and writings on Kant after the publication of his *magnum opus, Being and Time,* in 1927 Heidegger integrates his philosophy of existence into the Kantian landscape to such an extent that one is often liable to lose sight of the basic strategy of alienation employed. In order to grasp, therefore, the fundamental ideas that Heidegger brings to bear in his interpretation of Kant, his own sense of phenomenology is clarified through consideration of his earliest lecture courses from 1920 to 1924. The texts of these lecture series, many of which have been published in German for the first time within the last ten years, reveal in detail how Heidegger at once appropriated and fundamentally transformed Husserl's idea of phenomenology.

The most conspicuous aspect of Heidegger's opposition to the Husserlian sense of phenomenology is his anti-rationalism. Heidegger rejects neither the intuitionism nor the dynamic dualism of authenticity/inauthenticity central to Husserl's project. In fact, it is not so much anything relating to the detailed analyses offered by Husserl that Heidegger contests, but rather the broader context in which Husserl places phenomenology within his self-interpretation. According to this interpretation phenomenology is scientific, rationalist, idealist and humanist. Though Heidegger often insists on the Kantian notion of recognizing essential limits to human understanding in an apparent opposition to German Idealism, his elevation of the imagination above reason in his reading of Kant

follows the well-established pattern of idealist critiques of Kant in Schelling, Fichte, Hegel and Schiller. The motif of the limit in Heidegger signifies not the confines of knowledge but rather the finitude or mortality of concrete human existence. It will be shown how Heidegger relates the imagination first to time and then more concretely to 'lived time' in the sense of the finitude of human existence.

In the wake of his comprehensive appropriation of Kant Heidegger's efforts to complete the envisioned whole of the project announced in *Being and Time* lead to an abandonment of the transcendental standpoint that at once announces a definitive departure from phenomenology in any genuine sense. With this move Heidegger aligns his thinking with art and poetry rather than the scientific paradigm urged by Husserl. Paradoxically, however, this approach to philosophical poetics is accompanied by the silent retreat of the imagination in Heidegger's thought. The few cursory remarks made by Heidegger in his lectures on the artwork from the mid1930s dismiss the notion of the imagination as irrelevant to the aesthetic ontology he has embarked upon. Contrary to this combination of silence and dismissal of imagination, consideration of his overtly political writings shows that in fact the imagination remains central to Heidegger's thought after the 'turn' of 1930 but is transformed from the transcendental to what I call the 'mythopoetic' imagination.

In a concluding section it is shown to what extent, despite all manifest differences, the senses of phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger coincide, namely, insofar as both hold to a basic regulative idea of *unification* with respect to human experience. Such an idea prejudices their respective concepts of the imagination, such that imaginative activity can be granted positive significance only insofar as it serves to *integrate* experience. For Husserl as for Heidegger, this imperative of unification is applied at the level of concrete individual consciousness and with respect to human community—for Husserl as 'transcendental consciousness' and the humanist project of collective enlightenment, for Heidegger at first as indi-vidual 'conscience' and then later as the mythic community of individual nations. Thus, the treatment of imagination in phenomenology is confronted with a final question that is political in nature: *what is the basis of genuine human community?* Heidegger's transition from the transcendentally aesthetic to the empirically aesthetic consideration of imagination with respect to concrete historical artworks raises the question whether artworks can be effectively understood as operations of unification. What I call the 'ab-sence' of phenomenology is briefly worked out at the end of this study in connection with Foucault's idea of 'heterotopias'. The sense of phenomenology named there is deliberately left as a mere indication. Accordingly, the result of this enquiry must be considered largely negative in character insofar as it attempts to show the inadequacy or at best one-sidedness of the sense of phenomenology in Husserl and Heidegger. The purpose of this negative clarification, however, is to indicate the extent to which the phenomenological project is not simply dead but how it might live on in a vital communication with its own 'image'.

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