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MEANING AND METHOD: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF EDMUND HUSSERL AND EZRA POUND

BY

JESSE NORMAN MAYO, JR.

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The undersigned have read and approved this thesis:

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In his essay entitled "Phenomenology of Reading"
Georges Poulet explains how a "reading experience" is pos-
sible:

> The universe of fiction is infinitely more
> elastic than the world of objective reality.
> It lends itself to any use; it yields with
> little resistance to the importunities of
> the mind. Moreover - and of all the bene-
> fits I find this the most appealing - this
> interior universe constituted by language
> does not seem radically opposed to the me
> who thinks it....In short, since everything
> has become part of my mind, thanks to the
> intervention of language, the opposition
> between the subject and its objects has
> been considerably attenuated. And thus
> the greatest advantage of literature is
> that I am freed from my usual sense of in-
> compatibility between my consciousness and
> its objects.[1]

The dissolution of this subject-object dualism is not the
only factor involved. Poulet shows that reading is "a way
of giving way not only to a host of alien words, images,
ideas, but also to the very alien principle which utters
them and shelters them."

> When I read as I ought, i.e., without
> mental reservation, without any desire
> to preserve my independence of judgment,
> and with the total committment required
> of any reader, my comprehension becomes
> intuitive and any feeling proposed to me

is immediately assumed by me...Reading, then,
is the act in which the subjective principle
which I call I is modified in such a way that
I no longer have the right, strictly speaking,
to consider it as my I. I am on loan to an-
other, and this other thinks, feels, suffers,
and acts within me.[2]

The phenomenological nature of Poulet's essay is seen in
his description of the reader's transcendence of subject-
object and self-other dualisms. Only through such tran-
scendence is understanding and communication possible.

The purpose of my paper is to show how this idea of
transcendence unites two seemingly dissimilar modes of
thought - the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938)
and the poetics of Ezra Pound (1885-1972). Indeed, it is
my thesis that Pound's critical thought reveals a basic
correspondence with the phenomenological method developed
by Husserl. Stated simply, both men follow a process in
which the individual (poet or philosopher) sets aside all
non-essential aspects of a given experience in order to
arrive at an intuitive understanding of that experience.
Since, for Husserl, this understanding is an end in itself,
he studied the act of comprehension and produced an "empty"
(general) method for the study of experience. As a poet,
however, Pound must communicate this intuition. Therefore,
he concentrated upon the act of expression and his ideas
exist in the form of critical observations and poems. It

must be stated that there is no evidence to show that either man had ever heard of the other. Therefore, all conclusions regarding their similarities arise from my interpretations of common meanings and intentions.

Specifically, I will begin my comparisons with a look at their attitudes toward tradition and the individual's role in it. Next, I will introduce Husserl's work, from which I will extract a terminology to be applied to Pound. For example, Husserl's reduction (the aforementioned "setting aside" of non-essentials) is reflected in Pound's own elimination of irrelevant commentary and excessive description. Similarly, Husserl's unique understanding of logic brings to mind Pound's enthusiasm for Ernest Fenollosa's theory of language. I will extend this comparison until I show the point at which phenomenology is no longer adequate to explain the method of poetry.

Both men sought to establish the foundations of their medium and in so doing redefined their respective traditions in a similar manner. That is, both equated tradition with the constant renewal of insight in which the individual arrives at each certainty for himself and in his own manner. Husserl writes: "Wisdom...is the philosopher's quite personal affair. It must arise as his wisdom, as his self-acquired knowledge tending toward universality, a knowledge for which he can answer from the beginning and at each step,

by virtue of his own absolute insights...." In these terms he defines his view of philosophical tradition: "In recent times the longing for a truly alive philosophy has led to many a renaissance. Must not the only fruitful renaissance be the one that reawakens the impulse of the Cartesian Med- itations: not to adopt their content but, in not doing so, to renew with greater intensity the radicalness of their spirit, the radicalness of self-responsibility, to make that radicalness true for the first time by enhancing it to the last degree...?"[3]

For his part, Pound writes: "My pawing over the an- cients and semi-ancients has been one struggle to find out what has been done, once and for all, better than it can ever be done again, and to find out what remains for us to do, and plenty does remain, for if we still feel the same emotions as those which launched the thousand ships, it is quite certain that we come on these feelings differently, through different nuances, by different intellectual grad- ations. No good poetry is written in a manner twenty years old, for to write in such a manner shows conclusively that the writer thinks from books, convention, and cliché, and not from life...."[4] Pound developed a critical procedure which he called "Excernment." This term, first used in The Spirit of Romance, refers to "the general ordering and weed- ing out of what has already been performed. The elimination

of repetitions. The work analogous to that which a good

hanging committee or curator would perform in a National

Gallery or biological museum." He draws a clear distinc-

tion between diluters and inventors. Diluters are "symp-

tomatic" authors who made no real contribution to the art

("the men who did more or less good work in the more or

less good style of a period"), but inventors are those

"donative" authors who seemed to "draw down into the art

something which was not in the art of [their] predecessors."

For Husserl, then, tradition means a certain fresh-

ness of comprehension; for Pound it is a freshness of ex-

pression. Both, however, focus upon the same general ob-

ject. Pound writes: "...the essential thing is that the

poet build us his world"[5] and Husserl states that "the

world [that phenomenology is to study] is not the object-

ive world of nature but the 'environing world' (Umwelt) of

the spiritual subject."[6] The idea of an "environing world"

brings to mind Pound's phantastikon, the poetic (image-

making) faculty involved in such world-building. Pound

explains: [The] consciousness of some seems to rest...in

what the Greek psychologists called the phantastikon. Their

minds are, that is, circumvolved about them like soap-

bubbles reflecting sundry patches of the macrocosmos."[7] In

an original (1917) version of Canto I he uses the term to

describe his own difficulties:

> And shall I claim,
> Confuse my own phantastikon
> Or say the filmy shell that circumscribes me
> Contains the actual sun;
>   confuse the thing I see
> With actual gods behind me?
>   Are they gods behind me?
> How many worlds we have![8]

As a poet Pound must distinguish between those levels

of expression which are derived from "books, convention,

and cliche" and those which refer directly to the environ-

ing world of the artist and, therefore, define his particu-

lar virtú. In an essay entitled "On Virtue" he explains

the term:

> The soul of each man is compounded of all
> the elements of the cosmos of souls, but in
> each one there is some one element which pre-
> dominates, which is in some way the quality
> or virtú of the individual; in no two souls
> is this the same. It is by reason of this
> virtú that we have one Catullus, one Villon;
> by reason of it that no amount of technical
> cleverness can produce a work having the
> charm of the original...[9]

Virtu is the essence of the artist in the expression. It

is the artist as a mode of presentation.

Since the understanding of essence as a mode of pre-

sentation is a fundamental feature of Husserlian phenomen-

ology, a full introduction to the procedure whereby Husserl

arrives at his own intuitions is appropriate. Phenomenology

is a philosophical method which consists of describing phen-

omena - the objects of experience which are immediately giv-

en to consciousness. To do this one must first engage in a

process of phenomenological reduction in which all super-
ficial, irrelevant, or ascribed values of both the subject
and its object are "bracketed," or set aside. For this
reason phenomenology may be set apart from the prevailing
empirical and Kantian thought of the time. Husserl writes:
"A theory of cognition that is to study the relation be-
tween being and consciousness must concern itself with
that being which corresponds to consciousness (ideal being)
rather than with a consciousness that would correspond with
existential being."[10] Phenomenology is not an investigation
of internal or external facts. Any ideas regarding the
"existential" reality, "particularity," etc. of an object
are necessarily products of the intellect and, therefore,
irrelevant to phenomenological concerns. This is especially
true of the Kantian "thing-in-itself." The proper object of
phenomenological attention is essence - the "ideal intelli-
gible content" of the object - seized immediately in an act
of intuition. Husserl states:

> The physical identity of an object is intel-
> ligible only through the acts in which the ob-
> ject is present to consciousness, since it is
> precisely the relation to consciousness (in
> these acts) that makes it an object. Essences,
> then, that belong to the ideal sphere can be
> grasped as immediately in intuition as physi-
> cal reality is in perception - and only thus
> can they be grasped at all. Thus phenomeno-
> logy is a study of essences only, whereby it
> escapes the objections against introspection,
> which is an observation of factual psychologi-
> cal processes and not ideal objectivities.[11]

Husserl feels that a psychological theory of essence would be relative, subjectivist and, therefore, unable to establish an absolute foundation of knowledge.

In order to delineate phenomenology's specific concerns, Husserl developed the idea of *intentionality*. (He is indebted to his teacher, Franz Brentano, for the term and the basic concept). Briefly, it means this: All consciousness is consciousness *of* something. As I.M. Bochenski explains it: "It is the essential quality of certain experiences to be experiences of an object; these experiences are intentionally related to the object....Consciousness is seen as a pure reference point for intentionality to which the intentional object is presented and one sees the object as intentionally given to the subject."[12] Maurice Natanson carries it further: "Perception is not a state but a mobile activity. In its essential dynamic, perception (which we are taking in the widest possible sense) projects itself towards its intended object, but that object is not to be understood as a 'thing' but rather as the correlate of its accompanying act or acts.... What remains is the object as meant, regarded purely in terms of its givenness to the precise extent that it is given and solely in the manner in which it is given."[13]

Husserl introduces the words *noesis* and *noema* to stand for the intending act and the intentional object. As stated

earlier, there is a process of reduction for each. But, as Natanson states, "<u>noesis</u> must be understood in its active relationship to <u>noema</u>. The separation between them is legitimate, necessary, yet artificial - a matter of distinguishing rather than separating. <u>Noesis</u> and <u>noema</u> imply and demand each other."[14] This understanding affirms phenomenology's status as a theory of meaning rather than one of being. It also underscores the character of the "object as meant" - that is, the object as an immediate mode of presentation to consciousness. Essence is seen in its intentional fullness.

One important obstacle to the realization of essence is our ordinary sense of <u>time</u>. Time as we know it in our natural attitude is termed "cosmic time" - the time of science and public reference. We are aware of it as an intellectual product. "Phenomenological time," however, refers strictly to individual experience as given. Husserl writes:

> Through the phenomenological reduction consciousness has forfeited not only its apperceptive "attachment" (in truth only an image) to material reality and its relations in space, merely secondary though these be, but also its setting in cosmical time. The same time, which belongs essentially to experience as such with the modes in which its intrinsic content is presented - and derived from these the modally determined now, before and after, simultaneity, succession and so forth - is not to be measured by any state of the sun, by any clock, by any physical means, and generally cannot be measured at all.[15]

The immediate phenomenological time sense does not depend upon a concept of causality to sustain it. Again Husserl

explains:

> The essential property which the term "temp-
> orality" expresses in relation to experiences
> generally indicates not only something which
> belongs in a general way to every single ex-
> perience, but a necessary form binding exper-
> iences with experiences. Every real experi-
> ence (we ratify this as self-evident on the
> ground of the clear intuition of an experi-
> ential reality) is necessarily one that en-
> dures; and with this duration it takes its
> place within an endless continuum of dura-
> tions - a concretely filled continuum. It
> necessarily has a temporal purview concretely
> filled, and stretching away on all sides.
> And that at once tells us that it belongs to
> one endless "stream of experience." Every
> single experience can begin and end and
> therewith bring its duration to an end...But
> the stream of experience cannot begin and
> end.[16]

By eliminating "beginnings" and "endings" we are able to

establish a still point in which the structural certainties

of experience may be seen. Natanson writes:

> With causation bracketed [i.e., set aside] in
> the reduced sphere, the phenomenological notion
> of origin is free of sequential ordering. In-
> stead, attention is turned to the flow of in-
> tentionality as consciousness reveals itself
> in a multitude of perceptions, judgments, re-
> memberings, and anticipatings. To get at the
> origins of such a flow is to elucidate the
> mesh of acts and syntheses which constitute
> the experiential world.[17]

Experience is thus regarded in "its mode of declaring itself:

...the modus of the actual 'Now'" and, as Husserl states, the

"actual now is necessarily something punctual and remains so,

a form that persists through continuous change of content."[18]

Husserl's "actual now" provides the structure of the experience of time. Pound, too, focuses upon time's mode of presentation in order to realize a critical standard for literature. He writes:

> All ages are contemporaneous. It is B.C.,
> let us say, in Morocco. The Middle Ages
> are in Russia. The future stirs already
> in the minds of the few. This is especial-
> ly true of literature, where the real time
> is independent of the apparent, and where
> many dead men are our grandchildren's con-
> temporaries, while many of our contempora-
> ries have been already gathered into Abra-
> ham's bosom or some more fitting receptacle.[19]

It may be stated that, whereas Husserl's "now" is found strictly "within time", Pound's statements refer to the "now" of the "everpresent," which is "outside" of time. It is my opinion, however, that the importance of both is due to their "rootedness" in the experiential world. Pound's view of time recalls Husserl's "temporal purview concretely filled, and stretching away on all sides": "We do NOT know the past in chronological sequence. It may be convenient to lay it out anaesthetized on the table with dates pasted on here and there, but what we know we know by ripples and spirals eddying out from us and from our own time."[20]

A more specific reference to "what we know" and in what form we know it is found in an essay by Pound entitled "Axiomata"(1921). At the end of a short section on "the intimate essence of the universe" and the limits of con-

sciousness, he states, with characteristic certainty, "God,

therefore, exists." He gives as his reason the idea that,

given man's inability to know for sure, there is no reason

not to say so. He prefers, however, to call this divine

presence Theos and makes it clear that we have no way of

knowing whether this Theos "is one, or is many, or is div-

isible or indivisible, or is an ordered hierarchy culminat-

ing, or not culminating, in a unity...." Moreover, the

Theos may or may not affect the consciousness which, in

turn, may or may not know why, or even if, it has been af-

fected. For this reason Pound, too, restricts his attention

to the immediately given:

> If the consciousness receives or has re-
> ceived such effects from the theos [sic],
> or from something which consciousness has
> been incapable of understanding or classi-
> fying as either theos or a-theos, it is in-
> capable of reducing these sensations to co-
> herent sequence of cause and effect. The
> effects remain, so far as the consciousness
> is concerned, in the domain of experience,
> not differing intellectually from the taste
> of a lemon or the fragrance of violets or
> the aroma of dunghills, or the feel of a
> stone or of tree-bark, or any other direct
> perception....[21]

Pound's statements are not to be taken as an empirical or

psychological theory any more than Husserl's reference to

experience as "a concretely filled continuum." As George

Dekker states, "To the Poundian view of reality, Descartes'

(or any Sceptic's) introspective method of positing the uni-

verse on the basis of his own mental activity is sacrileg-
ious as well as perverse."[22] Similarly, Husserl's willing-
ness to accept the spirit, but not the content, of Iescartes'
Meditations is a way of expressing agreement with the Cartes-
ian method of seeking out and establishing that which is a
certainty, but lamenting the fact that Iescartes could not
develop his own idea beyond a certain psychological point.

Iekker sees Pound's view as a form of "the medieval,
'Ioctrine of Signatures,' which holds that all created
things contain the 'signatures' of divine forms and, as such,
should be respected." He also recognizes the Flatonic qual-
ity of Pound's thought, but points out that "in its arrange-
ment of values it differs radically from Flatonism proper
and from many forms of Neoplatonism (Christian or pagan)
which stress the inferiority of 'created things' and the de-
sirability of turning away from them toward the Prime Mover.
For Pound it is always this world that matters...."[23] In
other words, for Pound (as for Husserl), it is only by view-
ing the given object as a mode of presentation that one may
understand the universal nature of experience.

Closely related to this idea is that stated by Katanson:
"Fhenomenological reduction is concerned with the intersub-
jective impulse hidden in the apparent privacy of perception."[24]
That is, an individual act is seen as a variation of some

universal intentional structure. As such, it may be "re-
duced" to that structure and communicated. This is the
origin of Myth. As Denis de Rougemont states: "Speaking
generally, a myth is a story - a symbolical fable as simple
as it is striking - which sums up an infinite number of
more or less analogous situations. A myth makes it possible
to become aware at a glance of certain types of constant re-
lations and to disengage these from the welter of everyday
appearances."[25] This reference to myth as a summation of
"an infinte number" of analogous situations introduces the
idea of "expression as equation," an idea which Pound will
pursue and develop. He states:

> The first myths arose when a man walked
> sheer into 'nonsense,' that is to say, when
> some very vivid and undeniable adventure be-
> fell him; and he told someone else who called
> him a liar. Thereupon, after bitter experi-
> ence, perceiving that no one could understand
> what he meant when he said he 'turned into a
> tree' he made a myth - a work of art that is -
> an impersonal or objective story woven out of
> his own emotion, as the nearest equation that
> he was capable of putting into words.[26]

Pound's allusions to mathematics ("equations" for human
moods, poetry as "inspired mathematics") are well known, but
Husserl also considers his goal to be the location within
experience of "the kind of necessity which mathematics has,
but a necessity which is a function of our life in the world
rather than the postulations and definitions of an axiomatic
method."[27] In order to achieve this he must re-examine the
nature of logic itself.

In 1900-1901 Husserl wrote his first significant work,
Logical Investigations. As the title suggests, it was an
original study of the foundations of logic and contained a
devastating criticism of the nominalist position which had
dominated the nineteenth century. Stated simply, nominalism
is that doctrine which holds that only particular things are
real. Universals are no more than names with which we form-
ulate general ideas. The nominalist would remark that, al-
though science is about things, logic is not. The task of
logic is this general formulation and, therefore, has no
foundation of its own. It is only the application of a method
and, as such, is dependent upon other sources for its valid-
ity.

Husserl upsets this view by showing that, if such ideas
were true, logic would be nothing more than a system of in-
ductive generalizations - in short, mere rules. But, citing
Brentano's "All consciousness is consciousness of something,"
he reveals that, in fact, logical "laws" do not refer to
"what should be" but to "what is." For example, the logical
Law of Contradiction does not state that "two contradictory
statements are not expressible" or that one must only sur-
mise that one of two contradictory statements is true and
the other one false. Similarly, when two propositions of
the form "All A's are B's" and "All B's are C's" are true,
it is not to be only surmised that a corresponding proposi-

tion of the form "All A's are C's" is true. Such an atti-
tude involves the idea of the "possibility that such a sur-
mise would fail to be confirmed by an extension of our ever-
limited horizon of experience." This notion that a valid
syllogism with true premises may be false runs counter to
the very nature of logic itself. Husserl's reevaluation of
its nature shows that the laws of logic have nothing at all
to do with thought and judgment; they are specified by some-
thing objective. Their object is not the judgment, but the
content of this judgment. Bochenski states:

> Whenever we understand a name or a statement,
> the significance of neither one nor the other
> of these expressions can be treated as though
> it were in any way a part of the corresponding
> act of understanding; it is, much more truly,
> its meaning. What is meant by such expressions
> in relation to the manifold of individual ex-
> perience is an identity in the strongest sense
> of the term.[28]

Even the idea of a universal has nothing to do with a gener-
alized image. For example, it does not matter what one imag-
ines when one thinks of a mathematical proposition because
the universal is an ideal intelligible content. It is not
subject to psychological or accidental influences. It is
an immediately given structural certainty.

Husserl, then, founds the nature (and, therefore, the
language) of logic upon its object, the world as intended.
Pound, too, derives a logic of language from the same found-

ation.   Ernest Fenollosa's essay "The Chinese Written Char-
acter as a Medium for Poetry" may be taken as a primer for
understanding Pound's thought on this theme. According to
Fenollosa, Western thought is dominated by a medieval Euro-
pean logic - the "logic of classification" - which derives
from a weakened language, that is a language based upon the
universal copula "is" (or, as the case may be, "is not").
By its very nature, such a language is unable to deal with
any kind of interaction or multiplicity of function. "Ac-
cording to it," he states, "the function of my muscles is
as isolated from the function of my nerves as from an earth-
quake in the moon."[29] This form of expression, then, does
not accurately reflect the nature of its object.

In opposition to this system Fenollosa presents the
Chinese written character as an expression of an authentic
and, more to the point, fundamentally transitive form. He
states: "The true formula for thought is: The cherry tree
is all that it does. Its correlated verbs compose it."[30] A
true noun, he says, does not exist in nature. A thing is
only a meeting point of actions, a coherence of functions.
But a pure verb, an abstract motion, is equally impossible.
"The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion
in things..."[31]

Language, according to Fenollosa, derives its funda-

mental structure from that of nature. Instead of the weak copula, the transitive verbs are the proper bases of language. They most accurately reflect the dynamic nature of reality. For example, the static form "The tree is green" would be rendered in the Chinese style as "The tree greens (itself)." Furthermore, the sentence form is seen as a reflection of the temporal order in causation: "All truth has to be expressed in sentences because all truth is the transference of power." This transference of power ("Farmer pounds rice") is the distribution of force between things ("things in motion, motion in things"). Indeed, the things are thereby defined. They exist as synthetic unities of force. To reflect this synthetic unity, the Chinese written character consists of a juxtaposition of two or more concrete units. The "meaning" of a character is construed from the pattern of these units (man + fire = messmate). Fenollosa traces even abstract terms back to their roots imbedded in concrete interaction (i.e., "The sun sign tangled in the branches of the tree sign = east,""The sun underlying the bursting forth of plants = spring"). He states, "The greater part of natural truth is hidden in processes too minute for vision and in harmonies too large, in vibrations, cohesions and affinities." These hidden understandings must also be expressed and language does this through metaphor, "the use of material images to suggest immaterial relations." Fenollosa holds that

such a use is valid because of its origin: "The whole deli-
cate substance of speech is built upon substrata of metaphor...
But the primitive metaphors do not spring from arbitrary sub-
jective processes. They are possible only because they fol-
low objective lines of relation in nature herself."[32]

We have seen that the object, existing in an intentional
relationship with the subject, is intelligible only through
the acts in which it becomes present to consciousness. On
the other hand, Husserl's ideas on logic and Fenollosa's
language theory (which Pound accepted and used to justify
his poetic constructions) ground these acts upon the nature
of the object itself. There is, then, an essential corres-
pondence between the act of comprehension (or expression)
and the object comprehended (or expressed). Husserl writes:

> ...the expressing stratum, from the side of
> its thetic character, is completely one in
> essence with that which finds expression,
> and in the covering process absorbs its es-
> sence so completely that we call the expres-
> sive presenting just presenting;...The ex-
> pressing stratum cannot have a thesis, po-
> sitional or neutral, that is otherwise qual-
> ified than the stratum that suffers expres-
> sion, and when the two cover each other we
> find not two theses to be kept separate, but
> one thesis only.[33]

This passage does more than state the essential correspond-
ence between expression and expressed; it also describes a
quality of great poetry. T.S. Eliot, in his introduction
to Pound's Selected Poems (1928), writes:

> People may think they like the form because
> they like the content, or think they like the
> content because they like the form. In the
> perfect poet they fit and are the same thing;
> and in another sense they always are the same
> thing. So it is always true to say that form
> and content are the same thing, and always
> true to say that they are different things. [34]

In order to maintain this correspondence (in either

Husserlian or Poundian terms) we must pay strict attention

to the problems of expression itself. In 1912 Pound writes:

> An art is vital only so long as it is inter-
> pretative, so long that is, as it manifests
> something which the artist perceives at great-
> er intensity, and more intimately, than his
> public....The interpretative function is the
> highest honor of the arts, and because it is
> so we find that a sort of hyper-scientific
> precision is the touchstone and assay of the
> artist's power, of his honor, his authenticity. [35]

Husserl, too, acknowledges the "evidence of the expres-

sion" as "a determining part of the idea of scientific truth."

In fact, he includes it in the formulation of his first meth-

odological principle:

> ...Because the sciences aim at predications
> that express completely and with evident fit-
> ness what is beheld pre-predicatively, it is
> obvious that I must be careful also about this
> aspect of scientific evidence. Owing to the
> instability and ambiguity of common language
> and its much too great complacency about com-
> pleteness of expression, we require, even
> where we use its means of expression, a new
> legitimation of significations by orienting
> them to accrued insights, and fixing of words
> as expressing the significations thus legiti-
> mated. That too we account as part of our
> normative principle of evidence, which we
> shall apply consistently from now on. [36]

Pound's critical works (excluding those which veer in-
to the social sciences) deal primarily with the legitimation
of the expression. In an early essay he writes: "The art-
ist's inheritance from other artists can be little more
than certain enthusiasms, which usually spoil his first work;
and a definite knowledge of the modes of expression, which
knowledge contributes to perfecting his more mature perform-
ance. This is a matter of technique."[37] In "A Retrospect"
(1918) he includes technique in his Credo: "I believe in
technique as the test of a man's sincerity, in law when it
is ascertainable; in the trampling down of every convention
that impedes or obscures the determination of the law, or
the precise rendering of the impulse."[38]

Pound's view of technique as an active encounter with
experience reflects Husserl's understanding of intentional-
ity. Pound writes: "There are two opposed ways of thinking
of a man: firstly you may think of him as that toward which
perception moves, as the toy of circumstance, as the plastic
substance receiving impressions; secondly you may think of
him as directing a certain fluid force against circumstance,
as conceiving instead of merely reflecting and observing."[39]

Husserl, too, understands two modes of experience,
which he calls active and passive genesis:

> In active genesis the Ego functions as pro-
> ductively constitutive, by means of subject-
> ive processes that are specifically acts of
> the Ego....The characteristic feature...is
> that Ego-acts...become combined in a mani-
> fold, specifically active synthesis and, on
> the basis of objects already given (in modes
> of consciousness that give beforehand), cons-
> titute new objects originally... [But] any-
> thing built by activity necessarily presup-
> poses, as the lowest level, a passivity that
> gives something beforehand; and, when we
> trace anything built actively, we run into
> constitution by passive generation.[40]

Active genesis, according to Husserl, is the source of all

"spiritual" or "cultural" characteristics of an object or

experience, all meaning.

Pound, of course, prefers the active conception of

poetry over the passive reception of an impression.   In

Poetry Review (March, 1912) he writes: "...no impression,

however carefully articulated, can, recorded, convey that

feeling of sudden light which the works of art should and

must convey."[41] In this manner Pound distinguishes between

Impressionism and Vorticism.   Impressionism, he says, "sought

its theoretic defense in, if it did not arise from, Berkeley's

theory of the minimum visible, i.e., of the points of light

and colour on the retina." The Impressionist derives his

pleasure "from the stroking and pushing of the retina by

light waves of various colours."[42] The Vorticist, on the

other hand, takes a more active stance. Pound writes:

"Forma to the great minds of at least one great epoch meant

more than dead pattern or fixed opinion. The light of the
DOER, as it were a form cleaving to it meant an ACTIVE pat-
tern, a pattern that sets things in motion."[43]

In order to transcend dead pattern and fixed opinion,
the poet must engage in the literary equivalent of phenom-
enological reduction. That is, he must strip away the non-
essential aspects of the expression. As stated earlier,
there is a corresponding reduction for the intending act
(the subject) and its intended object. Husserl uses the
term "phenomenological reduction" in reference to the former
and "eidetic" (essential) reduction for the latter. Phen-
omenological reduction of the subject, expressed another
way, is the process whereby the transcendental state of
Epoché is assumed. Epoché is, in Natanson's words, "a
restraint or suspension on the part of the philosopher with
regard to his participation or complicity in experience."[44]
Husserl is quick to point out that nothing is "lost" to
consciousness during this state of restraint. On the con-
trary, Epoché is a device whereby complete objectivity is
achieved. He explains:

> [In everyday life]...we assert: 'I see a
> house there' or 'I remember having heard
> this melody.' In transcendental-phenomen-
> ological reflection we deliver ourselves
> from this footing, by universal epoche
> with respect to the being and non-being
> of the world. The experience as thus
> modified, the transcendental experience,
> consists, then, we can say, in our look-
> ing at and describing the particular trans-
> cendentally reduced cogito, but without

> participating, as reflective subjects, in
> the natural existence-positing that the
> original straight-forward perception (or
> other cogito) contains or that the Ego,
> as immersing himself straightforwardly in
> the world, actually executed...[45]

Husserl describes this detachment as a "splitting of the

Ego" into a transcendental "disinterested onlooker" above

the "naively interested Ego."

Pound's own poetic method involves a similar form of

impersonality. It is what Mallarmé called "the elocution-

ary disappearance of the poet, who yields place to the

words." Pound writes: "In the 'search for oneself,' in

the search for 'sincere self-expression,' one gropes, one

finds some seeming verity. One says, 'I am' this, that, or

the other, and with the words scarcely uttered one ceases

to be that thing. I began this search for the real in a

book called Personae, casting off, as it were, complete

masks of the self in each poem."[46] Pound is taking note of

the fact that, as one writes "I am" in a poem, a splitting

of the Ego occurs between the Ego as expressed (the object-

ive ego) and the transcendental (subjective) ego.

Although Pound states that he began his "search for

the real" with Personae, an even earlier essay reveals that

he was aware of the general procedure. He writes in his

introduction to A Lume Spento (1908):

> When the soul is exhausted in fire, then
> doth the spirit return unto its primal nat-
> ure....Mr. Yeats has treated of such, and I
> because in such a mood; feeling myself div-
> ided between myself corporeal and a self
> aetherial,...eternal because simple in ele-
> ments....Being freed of the weight of the
> soul 'capable of salvation or damnation,'
> a grievous, striving thing that after much
> straining was taken from me; as had one
> passed saying as one in the Book of the
> Dead, 'I, lo I, am the assembler of souls,'
> and had taken it with him, leaving me thus
> simplex naturae, even so at peace and trans-
> sentient as a wood-pool I made it.[47]

Pound is describing in other-worldly terms that very state

of Epoché in which the Ego disengages itself from its

"naively interested" form. In such a manner the transcen-

dental Ego (whose "sole remaining interest [is] to see and

describe adequately what he sees") may discern the essential

features of an experience. Hugh Kenner writes of what he

calls Pound's "intaglio method:"

> Pound's impersonality is Flaubertian: an
> effacement of the personal accidents of the
> perceiving medium in the interests of accur-
> ate registration of moeurs contemporaines.
> As we have said, the adoption of various per-
> sonae is for such an artist merely a means to
> ultimate depersonalization, ancillary and not
> substantial to his major work.[48]

In comparing Pound's technique to that of other poets,

Hugh Witemeyer notes that "Pound's personae combine his

concern for revitalizing history with his concern for por-

traying dramatic ecstasy;...in other words, they stand some-

where between Browning's dramatic monologues and Yeats' masks."

Put simply, Browning represents that type of poetry which seeks to establish the essence of a specific figure as defined within the framework of a specific place and time. Yeats, on the other hand, lifts his persona above local reference in order to elucidate its universal nature. Pound develops a method which utilizes both techniques. In a letter to William Carlos Williams in 1908 he writes: "I catch the character I happen to be interested in at the moment he interests me, usually a moment of song, self-analysis, or sudden understanding or revelation...."[50]

Browning's dramatic monologues (for which Pound expressed great admiration) depend upon a particular relationship between the poet and his object. In his Essay on Shelley (1852) Browning explains by drawing a distinction between the "subjective poet" and the "objective poet." The subjective poet, he says, presents primarily his own vision of things - that is, the outside world only insofar as it relates to his own vision. The objective poet, on the other hand, presents the outside world as it is, before it has been distorted, as it were, through a particular vision. It is this kind of poet which produces the dramatic monologue. He effaces himself in favor of his object and the resultant work is "substantive, projected from himself, and distinct...The result...in its pure form, when even description, as suggesting a describer, is dispensed with,

is what we call dramatic poetry."[51] When "description, as
suggesting a describer" is present in a work, there has been
a breakdown in the suspension of the subjective ("disinter-
ested") Ego. The task of the poet is to get at the things
themselves and to present them. Browning states:

> ...the objective, in the strictest sense,
> must still retain its original value. For
> it is with this world, as starting-point
> and basis alike, that we shall always have
> to concern ourselves: the world is not to
> be learned and thrown aside, but reverted
> to and relearned. The spiritual compre-
> hension may be infinitely subtilized, but
> the raw material it operates on must re-
> main. There may be no end of the poets
> who communicate to us what they see in an
> object with reference to their own indiv-
> iduality; what it was before they saw it,
> in reference to the aggregate human mind,
> will be as desirable to know as ever.[52]

Browning, with his emphasis upon the original value of the
objective, displays a strong Husserlian attitude regarding
the ultimate reference of consciousness. Whether the object
is a subjective or objective entity, the poet must describe
it as accurately as possible. In speaking of the art of
Arnaut Daniel and Cavalcanti, Pound echoes Browning in prais-
ing "that explicit rendering, be it of external nature, or
of emotion. Their testimony is that of the eye-witness,
their symptoms are first-hand."[53] In tracing the essential
features of the given experience the poet will present not
only the object but his own virtú as well, the "self aether-
ial" described in A Lume Spento, which is realized when the

"grievous, striving" soul (in Husserlian terms, the "inter-
ested" Ego) is set aside.

Yeats, too, must deal with the various forms of "inter-
ested" Egos. He writes:

> Every now and then, when something has
> stirred my imagination, I begin talking to
> myself. I speak in my own person and dram-
> atize myself, very much as I have seen a
> mad old woman do upon the Dublin quays, and
> sometimes detect myself speaking and moving
> as if I were still young, or walking perhaps
> like an old man with fumbling steps.

From his consciously detached perspective Yeats is able to

bring into relief the particularities of the chosen Ego.

He writes: "If we cannot imagine ourselves as different

from what we are and assume that second self, we cannot im-

pose a discipline upon ourselves, though we may accept one

from others. Active virtue as distinguished from passive

acceptance of a current code is therefore theatrical, cons-

ciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask. It is the condition

of arduous, full life."[55]

"Active virtue" is the quality whereby the poet exercises

his self-responsibility and renews his insight by arriving

at each certainty (in this case, an alter-ego) for himself

and in his own manner.

Throughout Pound's work we find examples of both Brown-

ingesque and Yeatsian influence. Browning is certainly evi-

dent in the early poem entitled "Cino." It is the lament of

a singer past his prime and, through Pound's skillful hand-
ling of several levels of speech, the reader is transported
into the "Italian Campagna 1309, the open road" (as the poem
is subtitled):

> Once, twice, a year -
> Vaguely thus word they:
>
>> "Cino?" "Oh, eh, Cino Polnesi
>> The singer is't you mean?"
>> "Ah yes, passed once our way,
>> A saucy fellow, but...
>> (Oh they are all one these vagabonds),
>> Feste! 'tis his own songs?
>> Or some other's that he sings?
>> But you, My Lord, how with your city?"
>
> But you "My Lord," God's pity!
> And all I knew were out, My Lord, you
> Were Lack-land Cino, e'en as I am,
> O Sinistro.
>
> I have sung women in three cities.
> But it is all one.
> I will sing of the sun.
> ...eh?...they mostly had grey eyes,
> But it is all one, I will sing of the sun.[56]

Although the dramatic monologue is the obvious model, only
the subtitle actually places the event within a specific time
and place. The voice is disembodied and timeless. Thus
Pound achieves his goal of presenting the character in a
moment of "song, self-analysis, or sudden understanding or
revelation."

Similarly, in "Villanelle: The Psychological Hour,"
the poet's tone is cool and abstract:

    I had over-prepared the event,
                that much was ominous.
    With middle-ageing care
                I had laid out just the right books.
    I had almost turned down the pages.

                Beauty is so rare a thing.
                So few drink of my fountain.

    So much barren regret,
    So many hours wasted!
    And now I watch, from the window,
                the rain, the wandering busses.

The poem is melancholic, almost Oriental, and the sudden
reference to the "historical" poet comes as a jolt back in-
to a less reflective and specifically harsher present:

    Now the third day is here -
                no word from either;
    No word from her nor him,
    Only another man's note:
                "Dear Pound, I am leaving England."[57]

    "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" is a virtual sequence of man-
euvers in which the poet is gradually distilled from the
work. The very first section-title is a symbolic removal
of the poet: "E.P. Ode Pour L'Election de son Sepulchre."
After itemizing the degeneracies of his culture and the
treasures of the past and sketching a series of contemporary
portraits, Pound (in John Espey's words) "sings his own fare-
well" in "Envoi (1919)". At this point the figure of Hugh
Selwyn Mauberley appears for the first time. The subsequent
poems take us into Mauberley, into his internal visions, and
to his death. The whole work ends with Mauberley's single

poem, "Medallion." Pound has systematically lifted away all direct reference to his own circumstance.

Due to the intentional character of experience, however, we must recognize that a subjective reduction necessarily refers to a corresponding reduction of the object. In that we are concerned here with "expression," the objective reduction becomes evident only as the very language of the work itself. In all of Pound's work we find reference to "concreteness" as the immediate mode of experience. From his editing of Fenollosa's manuscript to the "Axiomata" passage locating knowledge within "the domain of experience," Pound affirms the value of the natural object as the adequate symbol. In a letter to Harriet Monroe he says: "Language is made out of concrete things. General expressions in non-concrete terms are a laziness; they are talk, not art, not creation. They are the reaction of things on the writer, not a creative act by the writer."[58]

Creativity, then, consists in remaining true to the foundation of expression - the ideal dimensions of the intended object. T.S. Eliot has written that "Pound's verse is always definite and concrete, because he has always a definite emotion behind it."[59] This statement reveals an understanding of the correspondence between the expression and the expressed, in which, according to Husserl, we find not two theses to be kept separate, but one thesis only."

Pound writes:

> As to twentieth-century poetry,...it will,
> I think, move against poppy-cock, it will
> be harder and saner, it will be what Mr.
> Hewlett called 'nearer the bone.'... Its
> force will lie in its truth, its interpre-
> tative power (of course, poetic force al-
> ways does rest there); I mean it will not
> try to seem forcible by rhetorical din and
> luxurious riot. We will have fewer paint-
> ed adjectives impeding the shock and stroke
> of it. At least for myself, I want it so,
> austere, direct, free from emotional slither.[60]

Pound's own work has this austerity and directness. His

poems involve an appeal to the reader's emotions "with the

charm of direct impression, flashing through regions where

the intellect can only grope."[61] All non-essentials are

pruned away, most notably the ornamental adjective. Pound

states that "the only adjective that is worth using is the

adjective that is essential to the sense of the passage, not

the decorative frill adjective."[62] Fenollosa had shown that

adjectives were actually a form of spin-off from the noun

(which, of course, have no counterpart in nature, according

to Fenollosa). They tended to clutter the expression. By

weeding out all non-essential adjectives Pound succeeds in

eliminating emotional slither while retaining the original

contour of the experience. Here, too, we place him between

Browning and Yeats. For example, the following poem demon-

strates remarkably well what Pound considers "essential to

the sense of the passage." Each adjective performs an in-

dispensable function in the presentation. The poem is a translation of "The Beautiful Toilet"(by Mei Sheng, 140 B.C.) and consists of two modes of reference - one being a visual image and the other a succinct statement of circumstance:

> Blue, blue is the grass about the river
> And the willows have overfilled the close garden.
> And within, the mistress, in the midmost of her youth,
> White, white of face, hesitates, passing the door.
> Slender, she puts forth a slender hand.
>
> And she was a courtesan in the old days,
> And she has married a sot
> Who now goes drunkenly out
> And leaves her too much alone.[63]

The second section only serves to confirm the emotion called forth by the image in the first. In this case, each adjective (there are only four) stands out as a concrete unit in relation to the other. There is nothing excessive in the description. W.K. Wimsatt explains the danger of adjectival "slither":

> 'The general direction of philosophy from
> Locke to Kant' leads to 'the valuation of
> qualities over things. When the proper
> names and essences of things had been de-
> prived of any special dignity, the things
> themselves easily became less impressive
> than their definitions, their periphrases,
> their qualitative connotations...'
> Pound had harsh things to say about de-
> scription and explicitly differentiated the
> presentative method from it; for overmuch
> qualification of things by adjectives less-
> ens the sense of reality in the particular
> by placing emphasis on the vague general
> kinds of secondary qualities. No longer
> is it the unique and particular gown that
> matters, but only the kind to which it be-
> longs: 'blue gown.' Such usage only pigeon-
> holes the object instead of truly particular-
> izing.[64]

A striking example of Pound's ability to transmit an
emotion with a minimum of description is best shown in a
comparison of two translations of the same poem. The poem
is entitled "Fan Piece, for Her Imperial Lord" and the
translators are Herbert Giles and Pound. Giles' version
is first:

> O fair white silk, fresh from the weaver's loom,
> Clear as the frost, bright as the winter's snow -
> See! Friendship fashions out of thee a fan,
> Round as the round moon shines in heaven above,
> At home, abroad, a close companion thou,
> Stirring at every move, the grateful gale.
> And yet I fear, ah me! that autumn chills,
> Cooling the dying summer's torrid rage,
> Will see thee laid neglected on the shelf,
> All thoughts of bygone days, like them bygone.

Pound, on the other hand, eliminates almost the entire text:

> O fan of white silk,
>   clear as frost on the grass-blade
> You also are laid aside.[65]

Whereas Giles' "emotion" is made known through explicit
statement and over-statement ("And yet I fear, ah me!..."),
Pound depends upon one quiet simile within an equally quiet
observation. In his reduction of the event he has removed
all but the slightest evidence of a subjective presence and
concentrated attention upon the object. The emotion is im-
plicit in the expression.

A final poem, "The Jewel Stairs' Grievance," by Rihaku,
will illustrate Pound's use of particulars, but, more impor-
tantly, will introduce the idea of interrelationship:

> The jewelled steps are already quite white with dew,
> It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stockings,
> And I let down the crystal curtain
> And watch the moon through the clear autumn.

> NOTE: Jewel stairs, therefore a palace. Grievance,
> therefore there is something to complain about.
> Gauze stockings, therefore a court lady, not a serv-
> ant girl who complains. Clear autumn, therefore he
> has no excuse on account of weather. Also, she has
> come early, for the dew has not merely whitened the
> stairs, but soaked her stockings. The poem is es-
> pecially prized because she utters no direct reproach.[66]

Each concrete particular in the poem is a distinct entity
and, as such, is clearly seen in its relationship to the
others. Pound's concern for hardness, visual clarity and
an exact and diversified terminology stems from his aware-
ness that the particular object is in fact a body of poten-
tialities which is capable of assuming great significance
when set into certain relationships. In his essay on Cav-
alcanti Pound states: "Unless a term is left meaning one
particular thing, and unless all attempt to unify different
things, however small the difference, is clearly abandoned,
all metaphysical thought degenerates into a soup. A soft
terminology is merely an endless series of middles."[67] He
is speaking here of philosophical terms, but the same holds
true for poetry. If metaphor is the fusion of dissimilar
things, then its impact will depend upon the original dis-
tinctness of the terms which it unifies. Pound calls for
that quality of expression

> where the thought has its demarcation, the
> substance its virtu, where stupid men have
> not reduced all 'energy' to unbounded, un-

distinguished abstraction.

For the modern scientist energy has no
borders, it is a shapeless 'mass' of force;
even his capacity for differentiating it to
a degree never dreamed by the ancients has
not led him to think of its shape or even
its loci. The rose that his magnet makes
in the iron filings does not lead him to
think of the force in botanic terms, or
wish to visualize that force as floral and
extant (ex stare).[68]

To perceive the magnetic force-field as a rose is to exper-
ience it as it is given to consciousness. It is also to
illustrate Fenollosa's statement that "primitive metaphors
...are possible only because they follow objective lines of
relations in nature herself." More importantly, it is to
see that force as distinct within the manifold network of
experience.

Pound's mind had always worked in terms of the arrange-
ment of particulars. In a 1908 letter to William Carlos
Williams he described his technique: "I record symptoms as
I see 'em. I advise no remedy. I don't even draw the dis-
ease usually. Temperature 102, pulse 78, tongue coated,
etc., eyes yellow, etc."[69] We see here the basics of his
poetic method - the clear presentation of significant de-
tail in a particular arrangement, thereby suggesting a to-
tality. In fact, Pound's early use of the term "image"
referred to an arrangement of two or more units ("The one
image poem is a form of super-position: that is to say it
is one idea set on top of another.") For this reason

Pound had no need for symbols of fixed value like numbers in arithmetic (1,2,7). The significance of his image was a variable one, like that of algebraic signs (a,b,x). These latter depend upon their relationship to others for their value.

Thus we understand Pound's enthusiasm for describing art in terms of analytical geometry: It is only the difference in subject matter that separates the two. In analytical geometry one may actually create form by referring points to the axes of geometric planes by a series of coefficients. For example, "the equation $(x-a)^2 + (y-b)^2 = r^2$ governs the circle. It is the circle. It is not a particular circle, it is any and all circles. It is nothing that is not a circle. It is the circle free of space and time limits." Pound goes on to explain that art, too, has this ability to create: "Great works of art contain this...sort of equation. They cause form to come into being. By the 'image' I mean such an equation; not an equation of mathematics, not something about _a_, _b_, and _c_, having something to do with form, but about _sea_, _cliffs_, _night_, having something to do with mood."[70]

Causing form to come into being, then, is the immediate purpose of Pound's refinement and arrangement of specific terms. It is the product of "active genesis," in which the poet "directs a certain fluid force against circumstance."

Consider this passage by Husserl:

> We now understand the great tasks of the
> ego's self-explication, or his explication
> of his conscious life, which arise concern-
> ing objectivities posited or positable in
> that life. The heading, true being and
> truth (in all modalities), indicates, in
> the case of any objects meant or ever mean-
> able for me as transcendental ego, a struc-
> tural differentiation among the infinite
> multiplicities of actual and possible cog-
> itationes that relate to the object in ques-
> tion and thus can somehow go together to
> make up the unity of an identifying syn-
> thesis. Actually existing object indicates
> a particular system within this multiplicity,
> the system of evidences relating to the ob-
> ject and belonging together in such a man-
> ner that they combine to make up one (though
> perhaps an infinite) total evidence....[71]

Pound's awareness of the poem as "a system of evidences
relating to the object" led him to experiment with all forms
of poetic syntheses: Anglo-Saxon kennings, haiku, the ideo-
gram. Husserl's statement, however, that multiplicities
"somehow go together to make up the unity of an identifying
synthesis" reveals the inadequacy of his own method to de-
scribe the process of metaphorical thought, the most immed-
iately synthetic of all. It is only in poetic terms that
unities are properly expressed and understood. In metaphor-
ical thought the whole is equal to more than its parts.
Metaphor is, after all, metamorphosis. Pound writes: "The
undeniable tradition of metamorphosis teaches us that things
do not remain the same. They become other things by swift
and unanalyzable process."[72]

The unanalyzable quality of such experience proves to
be the source of its poetic power. Pound often refers to
"that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom
from space and time limits; that sense of sudden growth,
which we experience in the presence of the greatest works
of art."[73] This brings to mind Poulet's description of the
transcendental experience of the reader. That is, the reader
is able to experience such a sense of liberation through a
total dedication to the work. He participates in the pro-
cess of communication by setting aside all aspects of him-
self not essential to the appreciation of the art. The
following poem (which Pound selected as signet poem of all
collections published after Personae) seems to describe not
only this process but also Husserl's method of establishing a
state of Epoche. It is entitled "The Tree" and defines the
unique achievement of Ezra Pound:

> I stood still and was a tree amid the wood,
> Knowing the truth of things unseen before;
> Of Daphne and the laurel bough
> And that god-feasting couple old
> That grew elm-oak amid the wold.
> 'Twas not until the gods had been
> Kindly entreated, and been brought within
> Unto the hearth of their heart's home
> That they might do this wonder thing;
> Nathless I have been a tree amid the wood
> And many a new thing understood
> That was rank folly to my head before.[74]

Footnotes

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32 ibid., p. 377.

33 Husserl, op. cit., p. 321.

34 T. S. Eliot, introduction to Ezra Pound: Selected Poems (London, 1928), quoted by Sullivan, p. 101.

35 Pound, The Spirit of Romance, quoted by Sullivan, p. 38.

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