IMAGINATIVE COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY: THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL-ENACTIVE APPROACH TO THE CO-CONSTITUTION OF PUBLIC PHENOMENA

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ABSTRACT. An ever-evolving phenomenological-enactive perspective can expand our reflection on the entanglement between enactive subjects and their living ecologies. This article applies certain classical phenomenological projects and their enactive extension to public phenomena (objects, spaces, events, etc.). As an instance of the embodied cognition discourse, this research also aims to thematize the enactive, affective, and intersubjective aspects of the relation to the (urban) *Lebenswelt*. This may help in understanding both the potential of the phenomenological-enactive methodology and the processes of an embodied intersubjective co-constitution of a public ethos. Theoretical ideas presented in the article are illustrated with reflections on some concrete public phenomena.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Enactivism, Communication, Embodied Cognition, Perceptual Phantasy, Intersubjectivity, Public Phenomena

Introduction

Public "objects," such as creations of outside art, architecture, urban planning, political or religious events, etc., have not only functional (recreational or representational) value; they also (may) serve as the ground for intersubjective "acts" of synchronization between citizens in enacting experiences that make the living environment cognitively meaningful and affectively adaptable. Moreover, this co-constitution, we argue, does not rest primarily on definite meanings, narratives or depictive representations or verbalizations, but concerns levels of subject-citizen embodied cognition, which rather ground [*Fundierung*] (Husserl, 1973) those mentioned above.

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Enactivism strongly advocates for the multidimensional entanglement between the organism and its environment (Stewart et all, 2010, Gallagher, 2017). This opens up endless possibilities to reinterpret the *Lebenswelt* (Husserl, 1970) ecologies populated by humans. This can include, for example, reading the urban living environment of everyday trajectories by enactive agents by extending such classical phenomenological projects as horizontal intentionality, perception, memory, imagination or intersubjectivity.[3] Here, cognition is understood as a temporally extended dynamic and as an ongoing adaptive regulation. It includes sensorimotor access to external gadgets for extensions. The continuous dynamic of regulating and adapting the body in sense-making also entails a concept of value and situated affectivity (Colombetti, 2017; Gallagher and Varga, 2020). Here purposeful bodily behavior is not based on the contemplative and reflective stance, because skillful situational coping deals with the world given via intuition, not as it is constructed in thought (Gallagher, 2005, 2012, 2017).

However, the importance of enactive agents' skillful coping with the environment would mean nothing without the affordances delivered by the environment (Gibson, 1950). Moreover, differently mediated ecologies (for example, city navigation, images or rituals in public spaces, but most fundamentally, by the lived body) engage us in a different sensorimotor coupling (see further). These couplings enable us to attribute a different system of values to those scenes. With media our bodies extend beyond basic needs and toward modes of self-understanding, encountering both short- and long-term meanings (Schutz, 1967) and the possibility of new experiences. In this sense, mediated ecologies present tools (images, architecture, phatic language, rituals, etc.) in order to extend autopoietic self-regulatory schemas (Maturana and Varela, 1972) to the social.[4] Mediated ecologies thus compensate individual limitations via these extensions and open up spaces for joint action (public).

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[3] Despite it being renowned as a strict scientific discipline (*Wissenschaft*), phenomenology and especially its enactive continuation never neglected the grounding importance of *Lebenswelt*, which in turn presupposes a myriad of ontological regions with their respective empirical appearances. Moreover, both the organism and the environment take on a much greater reservoir of manifolds of appearance when memory, imagination, and anticipation are differentiated from perception.

[4] Autopoietic systems and the metabolism of meaning disclose the very sense of being via their creative projects. For example, in Heidegger (1968, 2008) being, not beings, depends on care (*Sorge*), which again today may be seen as an everyday projecting of humans' embodied strategies in their environment. The embodied projection of this *Sorge* is the ground of *poiesis*, an ontic way of understanding and moving one's own being. Also, it is a possibility to make the environment one's Home. Autopoietic movement may appropriate a public place as one's own, giving it emotional affection and meaningful attachment. A creative relation to the environment opens up possibilities of being-with-others and being otherwise.

On the other hand, the twentieth century in the West saw a certain boom of a new artistic-social forms, which sought to transgress the traditional boundaries of theory and praxis, subject and object, culture and nature, and other binary oppositions. It appears that the enactive approach with its ethnographic potential (Lynch, 1993, Katz, 2003) is a very promising tool for reflecting on these ever-evolving social practices and the reinterpretation of public phenomena in relation to individual and intersubjective intentions.

Another common refrain of twentieth-century reflections on the human condition in the West was that of alienation (a popular theme among Marxists, existentialists, social critics, artists, etc.). Alienation involves such spheres of human activity as religion, work, the environment, our relation to others, etc. This means that an active restructuring of public spaces, as well as an enactive reflection on this issue, may offer an answer to this plague of postmodernity. An enactive approach can move from the sharp, modernist division between the subject and the object and towards a set of meaningful metabolic strategies performed by the organism in a certain environmental ecology which opens up certain affordances for the former, thereby bringing so-called "armchair philosophy" into the everyday world.

This everydayness is not a static structure but an ever-changing social, cultural, economic, and physical horizon, which demands form the organism certain active strategies of adaptation and self-interpretation. Another important factor is that although all human reality in a way is a social image (Mills, 1959) and thus mediates the "natural" world, there is a recurring interest in bringing to light how these natural resources suggest affordances for humans to recreate their environment and eventually their being. One example might be the so-called "Art of the Earth" movement that arose in the USA, which included such works as R. Smithson's "Spiral Jetty" (1970) and E. Sanguinetti's "Alter Ego" (1986). This creative but also socially responsible take on the symbiosis of man and nature sought for an organic whole between the human, creative, projecting impulse and natural landscapes. Moreover, these creations were not taken to be traditional works of contemplative art, because they presupposed changes in the actual living environment. It is not that these sculptures are put into some geometrical space, but rather, conversely, space is defined by its specificities, a view that is in accordance with the phenomenological-enactivist tradition.

Public landscapes of the city should be seen, then, not as merely functional geometric spaces, but as meaningful environments wherein the city landscape is comprised of human everyday projects, memories, and imagination, but it may also be changed by certain enactively-based initiatives. This also presupposes that materials and creative methods that traditionally were not held to be of value, become a basis for this new co-creation of physical-social entanglement. Another

crucial feature here is that these public objects are not easily accessible (at least when compared to their traditional counterparts like galleries), but demand a certain effort or even creative movement to adapt them to everyday needs (to take a rest, to eat, to meet, etc.). Even the weather conditions may become a constitutive factor in the composition of meaningful appropriation here. Finally, these public objects of a new kind exhibit a rather abstract character. And this has a meaning beyond solely aesthetic qualities; it has an intersubjective significance. As mentioned above, these objects are not about fixed historical or political significations; instead, they are defined by creating an open space for "play." The spontaneity of nature and human creation out of the everyday become intertwined. With this in mind, we will now present a rather intriguing project of Husserlian phenomenology, which it is hoped will shed some light on the topic, as well as providing a theoretical basis for some reflections from the field.

Perceptual Phantasie and Public Phenomena

This new attitude towards works of art and other public phenomena may also be read in a more social way as the micro (everyday) protests of marginal individuals to the aesthetic artificiality and institutional officiality of the public world. In order to understand this alternative way in which individuals endeavor to enliven public spaces, we need to turn to the projects of classical phenomenology. Yet, these classical ideas will have to be read anew in an enactive way to accommodate and respond to this new context. The public phenomena under discussion motivate enactive subjects in a unique way and presuppose (instead of direct perception and empirical explanations) such intentional acts as imagination, memory, we-intentions, as well as non-intentional registers of experience such as proprioception and kinesthesis, among others.

Contemporary public objects, events or places often exhibit a non-depictive, non-figurative, abstract character, and yet at the same time they can be affective and suggestive (of some uses). Phenomenologically speaking, these phenomena belong neither to perception or memory, nor to image-consciousness, nor to imagination proper (following the typology set out by Husserl, 2005). Rather they are an instance of so-called *perceptual phantasy*, a structure of consciousness which has a great embodied potential (Husserl, 2005, p.616).[5] In the posthumously published texts of

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[5] For Sartre, the ability to transcend the sensual intuition for some *iireal* positing, is a crucial step in the constitution of the freedom of consciousness (Sartre, 2004).

Hua *XIII*, Husserl mentions this "kind" of intentional act, when directly perceived objects (not images or free-floating imaginative play) condition the transference into the imaginative sphere. The nucleus of this intentionality is the figment of imagination (*Fantasiegebilde*). Husserl gives an example from a theatrical play while stressing the difference between this kind of involvement and images:

> 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)

Murakami provides a handy example in order to understand this complicated structure. Think of children playing, let's say, at a party.[6] In their playing, children usually use natural materials for a number of constituents of the game "party," namely food. Hence, you can have a "mud pie" which at the same time correlates with the enacted experiences of guests or hosts. It is crucial that here the perception of mud goes simultaneously with both the imaginative intentionality of pie and lived body (*Leib*) taking an imaginative role. Moreover, in this case a number of subjects (children) enact and/or experience the same phantasie, although both the concrete depiction (*Bild-Object*) and the referent (*Bild-Sujet*) are missing. Paradoxically, we have a collective experience of the same (food as the organizing principle regarding people's behavior – guests, hosts, etc.), but not the same (depictive, similarity principle) pie. Husserl states that players experience the unique character of a game without identity by similarity and certain disagreements or disappointments between experiences may occur only due to logical, conceptual changes in attitude, that is, modifying the initial experience of a game, which presupposes a shared world of perceptual phantasie. It appears that perceptual phantasie explains a unique experience of the constitution of space by shared phantasie which is founded on perceptually given objects. This includes another specific experiential moment, which Husserl calls "annulling," when the perceptually given world does not disappear, but is instead neutralized while transferring the ego to the imaginative environment.

This also differs from illusions, because in the case of perceptual phantasy, the ego does not take its experience as veridical, true, and then experiences (or not) perceptual disappointment. In perceptual phantasy, the "conflict" between perception and phantasie is resolved right from the start, not by subsequent new info, as in the case of illusions. Moreover, perceptual phantasy always works in the wider context of an immediately given real situation, not via isolated figments.

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6 This shows that communication is not always based in conceptual identity.

So, for example, compare the mannequin we experience in the midst of the wholeness and unity of reality of a situation, with an image that constitutes its own space and has no direct relation to the immediate reality.

> 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)

The image directs us toward the referent beyond or to its aesthetic qualities, while lacking the concordance between the imagination and the perceptually given situation, which is characteristic of perceptual phantasie. If so, perceptual figments of imagination constitute a special region, which also serves as a projective environment for subjects to participate in a special way.

> 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)

One of the most innovative moments of the theory of perceptual phantasy is the modification of embodied cognition in this new time and space, and the normativity designed by this type of imagination. Crucially, not only does the constitution by perception depend on the motoric and kinesthetic abilities, but so too does perceptual phantasie. The unity of action constituted by the latter also, although modified, is founded (*Fundierung*) on a kinesthetic "I can" experience (Fehige and Wiltsche, 1991, p.78), that is usually formed of a non-thematic understanding of the possibilities of embodied action (Gallagher 2017, 2021).

Husserl coined the concept Phantasie-ich or Phantasie-leib to designate that in the case of perceptual phantasy, the body retains all its constitutional importance and yet is modified. As such, once again (as in the case of perception), the body remains hidden and unrepresentable (Murakami, 2013, p.184). This body integrates bodily postures, coping with tools and other situational requirements for us to adequately behave in the world constituted by perceptual phantasy. Most importantly,

it enables us to blend creative imagination with the perceptually given environment, because otherwise only the pure imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) lacking any social context would remain (Murakami, 2013, p.193). Further on, figments of imagination structured by way of perceptual phantasy are not within the complete control of the cognizant subject, but are given to her in a way that is analogous to how perceptual things are given via sequences of perceptual intuition.

As mentioned, perceptual phantasy has many specific structural features, but its intersubjective quality is one aspect that clearly stands out. All the participants in the game, play or city produce figments of perceptual imagination in such a way that they simultaneously experience others as co-creators and vice versa: "those others produce something which is experienced by them parallel to mine (experience)" (Husserl, 2005, p.686). Here we grasp the transcendental intersubjective ground for a certain type of communication even before any empirical exchange has taken place. That is why Husserl calls figments of perceptual phantasy ideal intersubjective objects, because their existence requires others despite the fact that every one of us is able to affirm it as our own (experience, Ricœur, 2007).

> 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)

Communication for Husserl (1932/2008) is not only the basis of community, but also the condition for new phenomena to appear in the individual's ego world. It needs both affordances from the environment and human enactive strategies, otherwise Husserl talks about a certain oblivion in a pure natural environment in nature, where this oblivion deprives as from a subjective perspective, also because here we are not members of the community of egos that have such perspectives. Thus, pure nature without incorporation in human projects stands in contrast to a city, which demands attention, feedback, and ultimately participation. Figments of perceptual imagination also show up as provocations for individuals to work and leave the private realm, to acknowledge the subjective, and for institutions to rethink the status quo of publicity. The city here is disclosed as a field of possibilities for human embodied cognition.

Enactive Strategies in a Mediated Urban Ecology

The city environment could be described as media and as a projection of the kind of social life (Fingerhut, 2021, see also Crippen and Klement, 2020). As such, the city environment should not be (although it often is) taken as being distant from the meaning-delivering strategies of individuals and groups. The city environment structures cognition and actions on a multitude of levels; it affects us continuously across all of our senses from vision to the vestibular, from touch to sound, to higher-order meanings such as identities and values. The modern city is full of examples of such non-direct intersubjective communication, as well as the constitution of public objects, spaces, and events. This process also presupposes layers of self-apprehension and identity (Lavrinec, 2011b, p.67). Embodiment here is seen as immersed in a spatiotemporal multidimensional dis-continuum of a city, but also as an enactive tool to reinterpret and even remodel certain parts of this environment (Lavrinec, 2011a). Let us see how the built environment might have permeated our perceptual and imaginative enactions of relevant experiences and meanings.

One of the signs of an open, public city is its openness to embodied interpretations by its inhabitants. Going back to the most basic form of city knowledge, that is, walking (Certeau, 1988, Lefebvre, 1996), we may extend this stress on the importance of embodied movement to the meanings of history, culture, or identity. Embodied cognition depends on the spatiality of the city which changes, as do public spaces, objects, and events. The body follows an urban syntax. This reading of the city's text is collective, imitating and at times correcting or innovating. The formation of such a collective body may reconfigure the meaning of the public space in order to enact certain meanings. It is interesting that while secular events (a flash mob or civil action) are rather short in terms of the effect, religious rituals have a longer lasting impact.

Everyday places serve as transition zones, whereas religious media ecologies provoke participation and affective relations. According to Marc Augé, "if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (Augé, 1995, pp.77–78). A problem of non-places, which produce an experience of loneliness, reducing social interactions in public spaces to a few scenarios, could be used as a starting point for examining emerging alternative forms of sociality in public spaces. Mediated urban ecologies suggest tactics of making sense of a place (but also culture, history, society), a reorganization of the spatial structures of a public space by installing new objects or processes, which start to

attract city subjects and provoke active interpretation. In this context, performance in public space can be considered an act of "domestication" of non-place or a secular interpretation of that place.[7]

In this case it is useful to apply the metaphor of choreography here, understood as the "interplay between body and everyday settings" (see Lavrinec, 2011b). "Choreography" that is determined by the affordances of religious media and the enactive strategies of participants in creative campaigns differs from that of passers-by, and thus creates conditions for a conscious relationship with one's own bodily experience and enacts affections of personal-social importance. Actions performed in public spaces reveal that a private experience of loneliness and a lack of community feeling is shared with others by disturbing the usual scenarios of being in a non-place and establishing a reflexive distance from the usual choreography of the place in question.

The environment of modern cities is dynamic. The constant change in surroundings requires an intimate relation between body schema and environment. For embodied cognition and communication, feedback is of vital importance and body schema is the ground of this process. Media ecologies (especially religious events) establish the necessary hermeneutic distance between the embodied subject and the city, although this experience is not reflective. The everyday modes of moving and their sacred, ritualized modes are forms of knowledge about the environment and oneself. The position of a city dweller is passively active, wherein the subject surrenders to the temptations of media and submits to the reconfiguration of experiences and, as we will see later, this is how an alternative public is formed.

In this mundane, everyday environment, some media ecologies (for example, murals) appear as part of everyday objects (walls, fountains, barns, plazas, etc.) which, if enacted, reconfigure public space and amplify some socially important experiences. Skills and habits of mastering the effects of media means that one knows how the givenness of an object or affect will progress or diminish after certain moves (embodied cognition). Hidden parts of the media artefacts (both images and rituals) feel present even while being perceptually absent, because the participant has a bodily access to them, not a rational narrative towards them. In addition, the subject is pre-reflectively aware of the horizon of meaning that enables apprehension (and switching apprehensions, see further) of this particular artefact. Hence, the inner horizon of an artefact (images, parts of a mural, a sequence of religious rituals, etc.) is meaningfully rooted in the external horizon of cultural-historical meanings

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[7] "Spontaneous installations depend less on an artistic will than on an urge to express identity. Even though someone decides that such and such looks good (or 'pretty'), their essential motivation consists in transforming garbage into a sign of identification, of belonging" (MacAdam, 2021).

and social relations. We will now illustrate these and other ideas with a famous instance of a public art, namely Diego Rivera's murals.

Diego Rivera's art gives us exactly this kind of media effect. The specific media character of his murals has the effect of: 1) conveying historical and social lessons without a logocentric rational narrative; and 2) creating an environment to bridge the gap between personal and social-cultural dimensions. Here the past and the present, joint social intentions and cultural horizons become accessible to the individual. This is mostly done by correlating media affordances with the embodied possibilities of a specific "Latin body". The enaction of imagination via murals does not concern a fixed story or identity, but delivers messages about social issues via individual incarnations. Rivera's art is full of embodied causal impressions, such as pushing, obstructing, aiming, which found the social cognition of human struggle or oppression, or uprising in the viewer's embodied dimensions. They afford to enact feelings such as unity through the embodied apprehension of concrete, causal, impressional (embodied) relations between the people depicted (muscles, grip of a hand, weapons, clothes, etc.).[8] In this sense we can agree with the idea that Mexican Endurance is kept by imagination (quote). Hence, murals afford to enact a socially relevant imagination. They are also public, easily accessible, and yet demand a certain dynamic effort on the part of the city dweller. They are also easy to share with others and deeply embedded in the living environment (which they are able to re-contextualize with the help of the viewer's enactive strategies).

Public phenomena, as saturated with figments of perceptual phantasie, support an anonymous community of fellow human beings, and via their abstract and non-referential character, they oppose the closed ideological and institutional appropriation of public phenomena and ultimately of community life. As such, public phenomena are closer to the non-formal civil education and acts of disobedience that are often more effective than theoretical discussions and planning of the urban environment (Lavrinec, 2011b, p.71).

Conclusions

The phenomenological description of the body as it figures in our ordinary experience opens a path for an enactive phenomenology of urban mediated ecology, which in turn is founded on the intersubjective enactive nature of the embodiment itself. Specific public phenomena, such as the abstract objects of art, and shared spaces and events, afford experiences of other subjects as co-creators, despite the

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[8] Rivera "defined muralism as a movement based on collective activity, the mural as a model of painting for a mass audience, and artists as workers" (Dickerman, 2011, p.19).

fact that the contents of individual intentions remain indeterminate. In this way, perceptual phantasie, afforded and amplified by a mediated urban ecology, serves as an original ground for joint intentions and actions.

Embodied cognition also demonstrates that at its basis, communication does not rest on conceptual identifications. Here we grasp a transcendental ground of communication, which motivates co-creativity, re-claiming the public to the individual, whose relation to the environment is not one of mere contemplation. This synchronic deconstruction of the routine relation to the living environment, even before any empirical exchange of information has occurred, discloses the intersubjective character of embodiment and communication.

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Vol. 66, No. 3, December 2021