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A PHENOMENOLOGY OF AUTOMATISM. HABIT AND SITUATIONAL TYPIFICATION IN HUSSERL

abstract

This paper tries to document Husserl's reflections on the problem of "situations" in his later manuscripts of the 1930s. These reflections are centered on the phenomenon of "typification", which plays an important part in Husserl's genetic phenomenology. Thus, the paper starts by sketching out a general presentation of "typification" in its relation to expectation and habit. By defining situation as "the intentional living unity of horizontal context and subjective potentiality", the paper then tries to follow Husserl's exposition of three essential aspects of situational typification: a.) the habituality of interest; b.) normality and c.) periodicity.

keywords

Situation, typification, habit, genetic phenomenology, normality

In several of his early Freiburg lectures, Martin Heidegger analysed the concept of “situation” as a basic structure of factual life, claiming that: “The problem of situation was until now never actually posed in philosophical literature without being objectified.”¹ His critique, primarily aimed at Karl Jaspers’ *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, also touched upon his own treatment of the issue in one of his very first lectures, as it ran the risk – in Heidegger’s own opinion – of regarding situations merely as a “spatio-temporal order” to be charted in light of a “typology of situations” (*Typik der Situationen*). Obviously influenced by Heidegger’s early lectures, Günther Anders defended his dissertation in 1923 with Husserl under the title: *Die Rolle der Situationskategorie bei den “Logischen Sätzen”*. The dissertation was, as Anders recalls, driven by the intention to criticize Husserl from a Heideggerian perspective, by focusing on a concept that was ostensibly lacking in Husserlian phenomenology, namely, “situation”. The following paper tries to give a detailed account of Husserl’s attempts to catch up with this phenomenon in his later work of the 1930s. The reference to Heidegger and Anders proves relevant not so much because Husserl might have been directly inspired by them in his treatment of the subject matter, but especially because his analyses focus exactly on the question of “typification”. I will start by offering a general presentation of “typification” in its relation to expectation and habit (1.), then I will try to work out a more comprehensive concept of “situation” based on several of Husserl’s writings (2.), after which I will follow Husserl’s exposition of various aspects of situational typification (3.).

1. Type, Expectation and Habit

“A cognitive function bearing on individual objects of experience is never carried out as if these objects were pregiven for the very first time, as some completely undetermined substrates.”² According to this abrupt statement in Husserl’s *Experience and Judgment*, nothing we encounter in our experience actually presents itself as completely novel, given in an absolute first impression. On the contrary, even if the object is entirely unfamiliar as such, it is always still perceived as *something*, as an individual object, e.g., as a living being or as a strange piece of machinery. It is always experienced in the light of some pre-cognition, while it is precisely this aspect that

1 Heidegger (1993), p. 258 (my translation).

2 Husserl (1999), p. 26 (English translation: p. 31).

Husserl most often addresses with his concept of “typification”. In Husserl’s view, “typification” thus designates the epistemic process by which the acquisitions from prior experience determine our ongoing encounter with things: “With each new kind of object constituted for the first time (genetically speaking), a new type of object is permanently prescribed, in terms of which other objects similar to it will be apprehended in advance.”³ On several occasions, “types” are defined by Husserl as empirical generalities⁴. Also termed as „morphological essences“, such generalities are – already in the *Ideas I* – contrasted to the “ideal essences” of mathematics, stemming from a quite different process of ideation⁵. According to Husserl’s genetic phenomenology, these empirical generalities are fully constituted – as general conceptual cores – only by means of an active performance of judgment⁶, and it is of course only at this superior level of conceptual expression that we actually recognize, for example, a dog as a “dog”, a phone as a “phone,” and a toy as a “toy”. However, this intellectual performance is itself, as Husserl shows, primarily grounded in a layer of passive, experiential *pre-constitution*. To be more precise, types as empirical concepts require as their foundation individual objects encountered in perceptive experience with *typical characters of acquaintance or familiarity*⁷, while in Husserl’s notations these characters are themselves also often referred to as “types”. Thus, we can generally distinguish between a *predicative* and a *pre-predicative* acceptance of “types”, while our following reflections will focus mostly on the latter.

When considered in this primary, experiential acceptance, types are above all a *phenomenon of expectation*. To be typically acquainted with an object thus actually means to anticipate it according to an earlier experience. Therefore, it is precisely in the course of a genetic theory of expectation that Husserl comes to elaborate on the problem of types in his famous lectures on “passive synthesis”⁸. Certainly, in Husserl’s view expectations are not related to future events alone, as they can also refer to aspects of present objects not yet fully given in experience or even to aspects of the past⁹. For instance, when we approach an unknown crossroad, we only see a part of our path ahead, while we do not yet know in detail how the rest will be. However, this unseen part of our path is, as Husserl stresses, anticipated

3 Husserl (1999), p. 35 (English translation: p. 38). For Husserl’s concept of type, see also Lohmar (2003).

4 See Husserl (1999), § 81.

5 Husserl (1976)², p. 155 (English translation: p. 166).

6 Husserl (1999), p. 382 (English translation: p. 386).

7 Husserl (1999), p. 382 (English translation: p. 386).

8 Husserl (1966), pp. 184-191 (English translation: pp. 235-242).

9 Husserl (1966), p. 185 (English translation: p. 235).

in a “typical” fashion: we generally expect there to be houses, roads, cars, people, etc. This “generality” – that motivates Husserl to regard such expectational characteristics of typical acquaintance as “preliminary forms of concepts” – is itself by no means yet of a conceptual nature, as it merely indicates the vagueness of such expectations, i.e., the fact that they can be intuitively individualized with equal justification in manifold variants¹⁰. It is precisely this aspect that Husserl indicates when defining experiential types as open “ranges of manifold possibilities”¹¹. Concepts are in Husserl’s view essentially rooted in the vagueness of our expectations.

On several occasions, Husserl formulates the *a priori* law governing the formation of expectations as follows: “Something similar recalls something else that is similar, but it also allows something similar to be expected in coexistence as in succession.”¹² Due to this “apperceptive transfer,”¹³ every object of our present experience simultaneously 1) recalls similar past experiences and 2) is itself anticipated in analogy with them. This double movement of evocation and anticipation, characterizing our typified experience of objects, is determined by Husserl as an “assimilating apperception”¹⁴ (*assimilierende Apperzeption*). And it is indeed a process of typical assimilation that accounts for the fact that, as Husserl expresses it, “the future always leads us back to the past”¹⁵, since all expectations necessarily echo implicit horizons of recollection. Often enough, Husserl considers this process of passive assimilation to be the most original, experiential form of “induction”¹⁶, while it is precisely at this point in the lectures on passive synthesis that he also establishes an essential connection between typification and habit. For, if the concept of “typification” primarily refers to the inductive anticipations that continuously arise within our ongoing experience determining our recognition of all encountered objects and persons, than these expectations can themselves obviously become gradually stronger or weaker depending on how often they are confirmed or disconfirmed by experience: “the force of this apperceptive expectation increases with the number of ‘instances’ – or with habit [*Gewohnheit*], which amounts to the same thing.”¹⁷ Thus, the problem of typification is generally to be regarded as an integral part of

10 Husserl (1999), pp. 31-32 (English translation: pp. 35-36).

11 Husserl (1966), p. 41 (English translation: p. 79).

12 Husserl (1966), p. 185 (English translation: p. 235).

13 See for instance Husserl (2008), p. 431.

14 Husserl (2008), p. 436.

15 Husserl (2006), p. 285, (my translation).

16 Husserl (1999), p. 28 (English translation: p. 33).

17 Husserl (1966), p. 190 (English translation: p. 240). For a more detailed and contextual reading of Husserl’s conception of habit, see also Moran (2011).

Husserl's theory of habituality: types are the correlates of epistemic habits.

2.
What is a
Situation?

Surely, according to Husserl's use of the term "typification", these observations should apply not only to individual substrates of experience, but also to "situations". But what exactly is a "situation"? In a notation from 1931 – first published under the title "*Die Welt der lebendigen Gegenwart und die Konstitution der ausserleiblichen Umwelt*" – Husserl discusses situations beforehand as *configurations*. The latter are, in short, examples of complex intentional pluralities. Such pluralities were already touched upon in the *Ideas I* as products of an active "articulated" or "polythetic" synthesis, which – as Husserl discovered – was not specific to the sphere of judgement alone, but could also be found in the lower spheres of perceptive, emotional or practical experience¹⁸. Moreover, as Husserl shows in his later genetic work, synthetic articulations already occur in the sphere of passivity, for instance in the primary constitution of the sensuous fields out of which individual objects later on emerge¹⁹. Defined as "configurations of sensual data", these fields are initially produced by means of an "associative genesis" following the similarities (homogeneities) and dissimilarities (heterogeneities) of sensuous affectation. However, in Husserl's view, configurations are not constituted passively on the ground of affective pairing and contrast alone. On the contrary, in the lectures courses on "passive synthesis", their constitution is also linked to the question of assimilative apperceptions and expectations. Thus, the nexus that binds together the terms of a configuration, Husserl here claims, "is not merely a nexus with respect to content [...] but rather apart from affective motivation, which governs selectively in the configuration. (Various figures could have been formed out of the chaos, and could still be formed, but the path of awakening that was privileged favored the path of special unifications of a lower and higher level up to the entire configuration in question.)"²⁰ In Husserl's view, every configuration that was once constituted in our earlier experience motivates us in our ongoing experience to apperceive similar configurations:

If a plurality of data emerge in the same present as it continues to develop, data that can go together with the configuration in question, then the entire configurations in question will be awakened by the awakening that reaches back and that issues from the particularities. And these configurations radiating ahead in a potential-

18 Husserl (1976)², § 118.

19 Husserl (1999), §16.

20 Husserl (1966), p. 191 (English translation: p. 241).

expectational manner will awaken the projected image or model of this configuration, allowing it to be expected, and through this the coalescence of the configuration will simultaneously be favored once more as fulfillment. In this way, the anticipation is at work ‘apperceptively,’ it is co-productive in the configuration of the coexisting objects.²¹

These observations could also be applied to situations which Husserl often addresses as typically repeatable configurative phenomena. However, it is important to notice here that, when generally speaking about the apperceptive recognition of configurations in his *Analyses concerning passive syntheses*, Husserl is referring solely to individual “self-contained configurations given to consciousness”²² – that is: to mere particular sets of objects or data grouped within a wider frame of consciousness – whereas the situation is not an individual configuration among others but a “*Gesamtkonfiguration*”²³, a totality-configuration encompassing the ensemble of a subject’s lived circumstances in a given moment. This totality is often also termed by Husserl as “the living present”. “Each present is a situation”, he claims in his aforementioned notation from 1931, adding just a few lines further down: “all that is experienced together as coexisting in the unity of a living present has as its unity the situation”²⁴. Certainly, such a unity is, as several thinkers have pointed out²⁵, not really “self-contained” (except perhaps in hindsight, when the formerly lived situation is narrated to others as an anecdote), but necessarily elusive and open. Moreover, by generally defining the situation as a “configuration”, Husserl also seems to neglect an important aspect of situations that he himself stumbles upon in a marginal note to his lectures on passive synthesis, i.e., our own freedom of action. In his brief note, Husserl draws attention to the fact that, when analysing the constitution of the “living present”, one should not forget the correlation between a subject’s momentary field of consciousness and his kinesthetic possibilities of movement²⁶. This idea is expanded upon in a brief addendum to the lecture, introducing a significant conceptual distinction between proper “*expectations*” (here defined as the line of prefigurations that follows the trajectory of the subject’s actual kinesthetic movements) and mere “*potential expectations*” (conceived as simple associative intentions that would

21 Husserl (1966), p. 190 (English translation: pp. 240-241).

22 Husserl (1966), p. 187 (English translation: pp. 237-238).

23 Husserl (1946), p. 336.

24 Husserl (1946), p. 334, (my translation).

25 See, for instance, Jaspers (1932), pp. 202-203.

26 Husserl (1966), p. 185, n. 1 (English translation: p. 236, n. 1).

become proper expectations if the subject would assume the corresponding kinesthetic trajectory).²⁷ Thus, if one really wants to discuss situations as apperceptive unities of typification, *it is by no means sufficient to regard them merely as configurative totalities of circumstances, but* – by focusing on the essential connection between apperceptive expectations and subjective potentialities – *one has to correlatively address them as totalities of potentiality.* On several occasions, Husserl touches upon these intuitions in his various writings on kinaesthesia, starting from the lecture course of the summer semester 1907, *Thing and Space*. Most often here, he uses the concept of “kinesthetic situation” to designate the totality of a subject’s momentary possibilities of bodily movement. In this sense, the term “situation” is employed mostly – as becomes apparent in one of the supplements to his 1907 lectures – to designate the practically charged noetic correlate to the noematic “orientation” of objects.²⁸ In the *Crisis*-work, however, Husserl uses the term “situation”, while discussing the phenomenon of kinaesthesia, alternatively, to designate both the noetic system of our kinesthetic possibilities (that is: the “kinaesthetic situation”²⁹) and their corresponding noematic configurations of circumstances (the “situation of appearances” [*Erscheinungssituation*]³⁰, as he terms it). This ambivalence is telling. For, if we consider that, 1) already in his earliest notations on kinaesthesia, Husserl repeatedly draws attention to the “apperceptive unity” (*Auffassungseinheit*) binding together our possibilities of movement, on the one hand, and the corresponding configurations of phenomenal circumstances, on the other³¹, and 2) if we also consider that – while situations are indeed, as “totality-configurations”, products of apperceptive expectations – expectations themselves are, as Husserl shows, functions of our free possibilities of movement and action, then 3) we can legitimately identify precisely in this “apperceptive unity” the key to a more accurate and complete phenomenological concept of “situation”. *A situation would be in this sense the intentional living unity of horizational context and subjective potentiality.* Significantly, this acceptance of the term would not only correspond perfectly to the classical concept of “situation”, as developed later on in “existentialist” and hermeneutic philosophy (by Jaspers, Heidegger, or Sartre), where it is regarded as a unity of subjective and objective elements, but it could actually help give this (often quite vague) concept a more

27 Husserl (1966), pp. 428–429 (English translation: pp. 534–536). Thus, we have actual expectations concerning the content of our mailbox when we reach out to open it, while we have mere potential expectations when we pass it with no intention of looking inside.

28 Husserl (1973)¹, p. 299.

29 Husserl (1976)¹, p. 108.

30 Husserl (1976)¹, p. 109.

31 Cf. Husserl (1973)¹, p. 187 et. al.

precise interpretation. “The situation,” Sartre writes in a famous passage of *Being and Nothingness*, “is the common product of the contingency of the in-itself and of freedom”³². Husserl himself reaches a similar concept of situation in several of his notations of the 1930s, by explicitly conceiving it as the concrete lived “horizon of the practical agent”³³, wherein meaningful circumstances and momentary possibilities of action are concatenated.

3. The Typifications of Praxis and Situational Typification

Now, certainly, there is nothing bewildering in saying that, in our normal practical experience, we encounter typically similar constellations of circumstances, such as the supermarket, the elevator, the postal office, the airport, the hospital, etc. However, if one defines “situations” as functional concatenations of noematic circumstances and noetic potentialities, the idea of a “typification of situations” might appear somewhat more problematic. To this extent, it is crucial to point out that, indeed, in Husserl’s view, the process of typification does not refer solely to objects and configurations, but in a similar fashion also to practical interests, actions and possibilities. In fact, the very genesis of “practical possibilities” – a term Husserl uses to designate the subjective phenomena of the “I can” – is grounded in such a process³⁴. For – as Husserl shows with regard to kinaesthesia, the most elementary potentiality of bodily movement – such possibilities are from the onset formed as acquisitions from prior experience. Every infant has to “learn” not only how to walk, but also how to move his head, hands and eyes, movements that gradually become his “practical possibilities”. In several notations of the 1930s, Husserl discusses the formation of such possibilities by showing how they emerge from a prior stage of merely instinctive, uncoordinated movement. In this context, concepts like “instinct” and “drive” designate a yearning “that still lacks the representation of its target”³⁵, while it is precisely through their crystallisation as practical possibilities that such movements become controllable as actual targets of the subject’s will. Husserl describes this process in more detail by referring to the example of a baby learning to nurse: while the scent of his mother’s breast elicits an “originally adapted kinaesthesia”³⁶, his instinctive movements gradually come to acquire – once they are periodically repeated – “the unity of an oriented intention”³⁷. Husserl offers similar

32 Sartre (1992), p. 488.

33 Husserl (2008), p. 543.

34 With regard to Husserl’s concept of “practical possibilities” see also: Mohanty (1984), Aguirre (1991) and Ferencz-Flatz (2012).

35 Husserl (2006), p. 326, (my translation).

36 Husserl (2006), p. 326, (my translation).

37 Husserl (2006), p. 327, (my translation).

reflections in relation to feet-kicking (*Strampel-Kinästhesen*)³⁸. In Husserl's writings, this entire development is often regarded in perfect *analogy* to the apperceptive typification of objects. For, if epistemic apperceptions are generally conditioned by the repeated encounter of similar objects, practical possibilities are themselves similarly conditioned by the repeated execution of actions and movements. Husserl terms the latter "exercise" (*Übung*), explicitly considering it to be a practical equivalent of association³⁹. Of course, similar processes of practical association also lead to the formation of more complex practical possibilities, while Husserl himself often stresses their contribution to the articulation of kinaesthetic *systems*: "Here, one thinks of the remarkable associations, due to which kinaestheses are 'associated' not as mere immanent data, but as practical potentialities ('I can turn this or that way'), building a practical system."⁴⁰

Processes of typification, on the other hand, do not affect a subject's practical experience only by shaping the possibilities of his free activity out of the "primary passivity" of his instinctive drive responses. On the contrary, they also determine the manner in which this free activity itself constantly lapses back into a corresponding "secondary passivity"⁴¹. The repeated performance of an action, which Husserl calls "exercise", proves central in this respect as well, since, by being repeated as such, an action becomes more than a possible target of free will – it also and necessarily becomes an object of habit, allowing for its merely automatic execution: "Generally, the transformations which occur in the case of repeated actions in relation to repeated goals are the work of exercise and habit. Traditionalising is after all nothing other than a transforming of the originally explicit orientation towards a goal into an implicit one, and of the implicit one into a forgetfulness of the goal."⁴² As is well known, the problem of "habit" was already in Aristotle's view considered indispensable for the understanding of human action. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle claimed that the manner in which a subject acts simultaneously determines his habit to act in that precise manner⁴³, while this habitual side of action was also supposed to account for his ethical behavior in dreams⁴⁴. Similarly, in the second book of his *Ideas*, Husserl claims – while generally designating free acts as "position takings" – that "with each position-taking, there develop

38 Husserl (2006), p. 327.

39 See Husserl (1952), p. 330 (English translation: p. 342); Husserl (2006), p. 328; Husserl (2008), p. 358.

40 Husserl (2008), p. 12.

41 See for this distinction Husserl (1999), § 67 b.

42 Husserl (2008), p. 890, note to p. 527, (my translation).

43 Aristotle (2009), 1103a-1104b.

44 Aristotle (2009), 1102b.

‘tendencies’ to take up the same position under similar circumstances”.⁴⁵ This statement does not refer, as one might think, exclusively to the sphere of judgments, assessing given objects in the light of earlier experiences, but also to practical and emotional acts, as Husserl explicitly speaks of “habits of feeling, desire and will”, especially insisting on the phenomenon of habitual behavior⁴⁶. In Husserl’s view, habitual action is not merely, as according to Aristotle, an action that conforms to the habitual dispositions of the practical agent, but primarily an action that tends to become unfree and “mechanical” by no longer requiring his conscious attention⁴⁷. To designate this specific type of action, Husserl was later on to coin the idea of an “action prior to attention” (*Tun vor der Zuwendung*)⁴⁸, that responds to impulses automatically, in reflex without paying any attention to them. Without yet using this term, Husserl already describes the very same phenomenon on several accounts in his *Ideas II* – in explicit reference to the reflex gesture of lighting a cigarette – by speaking of an “associative” or “reproductive” tendency of action⁴⁹.

Now, while Husserl’s earlier considerations thus regard the habitual typifications of praxis exclusively with regard to the *noetic* possibilities and tendencies of the practical agent, a long series of notations from the 1930s attempts to engage similar reflections by approaching the subject matter from the onset in the broader correlative perspective of a *typification of practical situations*. In the following, I will simply try to map out these considerations by following three key issues which seem to structure these efforts: a.) the habituality of interest; b.) normality and c.) periodicity.

3.a. The Habituality of Interest

If Husserl generally defines “interest” as the practical noetic engagement of the I⁵⁰, his later notations most often tend to approach this phenomenon by regarding practical interests in their correlation to the world as they noematically apprehend it. This correlation is from the onset considered in the perspective of a typical repetition of situations: “Situations repeat themselves as similar, while to the habituality of interests there corresponds the world passively apperceived as structured in significance.”⁵¹ To this extent, Husserl often distinguishes between the particular, momentary

45 Husserl (1952), p. 280 (English translation: p. 293).

46 See Husserl (1952), p. 256 and 277 (English translation: p. 269 and 289).

47 As an excellent illustration of how habitual action is generally performed one can think of the manner in which we normally run through a well-familiar path without paying any conscious attention to our surroundings.

48 Husserl (1999), p. 91 (English translation: p. 85).

49 Husserl (1952), p. 338 (English translation: p. 350).

50 Husserl (2008), p. 589.

51 Husserl (1973)², p. 55, (my translation).

interests of the subject and his universal, habitual interest horizons, illustrating this distinction on the example of professional interest:

During the actual work-life of the businessman ('in the company'), his particular business-interest is momentarily actual, while throughout his momentary interests we constantly find the unity of his "professional interest". The momentarily actual interest designates, in its relation to the grounding world of praxis, the *situation*; this applies for every waking man understood in his own situation, for the clerk in his office, for the member of Parliament in his parliamentary business, for the housewife in her business as a housewife, say on the market in a market-situation.⁵²

According to Husserl, the subject's momentary, particular constellation of interests is constantly determined by his enduring life-interests, be they directed, as in the earlier examples, towards one's profession, or on the contrary, towards one's family, nation and so on. In Husserl's view, interests of this sort are necessarily manifold, thus constituting the different layers of the subject's personality, while to each one of his habitual sphere of interest there corresponds a variety of *goals* (i.e. explicitly shaped out and willfully pursued "practical possibilities"), "more or less completely organised in the unity of one goal"⁵³. Certainly, this latter thesis might be somewhat problematic, but in the view of the present paper it is less important to see whether or not the subject's goals are indeed organized in a coherent fashion, as it is to notice that, according to Husserl's conception, goals are as such generally conditioned by a situation that guarantees their motivational basis: "Goals are goals only with respect to a motivating situation in which they have their apodictic validity."⁵⁴

Moreover, in Husserl's view, goals and interests always have corresponding noematic apperceptions of the world as their necessary correlate object. To this extent, Husserl often distinguishes between the scientific ascertainment of an object "once and for all" and its practical ascertainment, "serving only the purpose of transitory practical goals, in the perspective of a certain situation or a multiplicity of typically similar situations"⁵⁵. Husserl illustrates this by discussing the utility of a tool – apprehended as useful in anticipation of a recurring situation in which it comes handy – but the same also applies for any value-determination in

52 Husserl (1973)², p. 415, (my translation).

53 Husserl (1973)², p. 415, (my translation).

54 Husserl (2008), p. 774, (my translation).

55 Husserl (1999), p. 65.

general: “every ascertainment of values and practical characters of things is relative to the situation in which they are valuable and of practical use.”⁵⁶ Ascertainments of this sort – say, of a joke being funny – are for sure not universally valid like theoretical determinations, but they still transcend the sheer individual moment by referring to a typically repeatable situation of their possible verification. A similar observation is made with respect to significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*): “Characters of significance are habitual apperceptive characters pertaining to objects; they are apperceived enduringly as characters ascertained solely in a certain known context of interest and in corresponding situations, when they manifest this precise practical configuration”.⁵⁷ As the practical agent is thus engaged in his particular practical situation, his surrounding world is noematically apprehended by him, according to Husserl, as a typically prefigured and articulated ensemble of significance, with its different layers of situational circumstances corresponding to his manifold spheres of goals, interests and possibilities. From this perspective, the concrete structure of a practical situation is, in Husserl’s view, essentially determined by “relevance”: “When we speak about the changing circumstances of action and the ‘interests’ functioning within them (in the situations of the practical agent), we think of the agent in his experientially [...] given surrounding world, in which what is practically relevant for his intention is distinctly emphasized.”⁵⁸ This distinction – between what is relevant and what is irrelevant in a certain practical situation – represents an indispensable condition for any conscious human action and reaction within it, while it is precisely because, according to Husserl, such a distinction is essentially grounded on the typical recognition of the respective situation as, e.g., a “market-situation”, an “office situation” and so on, that the question of situational typifications proves central for a phenomenology of action as such. Practical possibilities and typically recognizable situations are co-constitutive phenomena.

3.b. Normality

As is well known, the concept of “normality” is initially used by Husserl in relation to what he terms as “psycho-physical conditionalities”⁵⁹: the conditional correlation between the physiological state of the subject’s body and the constitution of his perceived objects. In this context, Husserl contrasts the case of “ortho-aesthetic” (normal) perception, wherein the subject’s sense organs function concordantly, with the case of an

56 Husserl (1999), p. 65.

57 Husserl (1973)², p. 55, n. 2, (my translation);

58 Husserl (2008), p. 201, (my translation).

59 Husserl (1952), p. 62 (English translation: p. 67). For a more detailed account of Husserl’s concept of normality, see also Gyllenhammer (2009) and Taipale (2012).

abnormally functioning organ. Later on, this model of synaesthetic collaboration also serves Husserl as a paradigm for understanding the more complex processes of intersubjective experiential cooperation, leading to a wider use of the term “normality”. Following this implicit analogy between the synaesthetic and the intersubjective concordance and discordance of experience⁶⁰, Husserl often illustrates the question of normality and anomaly by addressing the intersubjective status of sheer sensory dysfunctions like colourblindness. Thus, he claims that “normality” primarily refers to an “optimal” standard of intersubjective experience and not to the mere contingencies of a statistical majority⁶¹. However, several of his later writings come to challenge this clear cut conception of “normality”, sketching out a more historically relative interpretation. Thus, in a notations from 1931, Husserl explicitly defines normality as “averageness” (*Durchschnittlichkeit*)⁶², while in another text he regards it as a voluntarily assumed “norm”: “Man in his normal existence doesn’t merely behave typically similar under typically similar conditions, like a mere thing apprehended in its empirical, inductive facticity; man lives under a norm, by becoming conscious of that norm. The normal lifestyle as a style of social life is not merely a fact for him, but something that ought to be”⁶³. This normative character of a “normal lifestyle” is, for sure, not grounded in an actual, rationally motivated choice or preference. Husserl himself explicitly refers it, in another note, to *tradition* and habituality⁶⁴, regarding normality in this sense as a correlative concept that comprises both the noetic customs regulating the personal life of the subject as well as the noematic customary determinations of his lived world.⁶⁵ Moreover, by interpreting tradition in general as a “socialized practical habit”⁶⁶, Husserl actually comes to claim that all habits hold as such a “secondary normativity”⁶⁷, since they are not experienced by the subject as plain facts, but on the contrary as actual commitments of the will, even if they are assumed by him only in a passive and unconscious manner. Habits are mandatory, and the “secondary

60 Husserl explicitly addresses this analogy in a notation from 1921, published as *Beilage LI*, under the title „Solitäre und intersubjektive Normalität“ in Husserl (2008), p. 649. The same analogy is also central for Merleau-Ponty’s theory of “intercorporeality”; see for instance Merleau-Ponty (1960), pp. 258-275.

61 Husserl (2008), p. 658.

62 Husserl (1973)², p. 231.

63 Husserl (1973)², pp. 143-144, (my translation).

64 Husserl (1973)², p. 143.

65 Husserl (1973)², p. 144.

66 Husserl (2008), p. 527.

67 “To every habit there pertains a secondary form of normativity [*Sekundärform des Sollens*], so that deviations from it are experienced from the onset as something that ‘ought not be’”. Husserl (2008), p. 527.

normativity” of normality is precisely the secondary passivity of a practical preference in an intersubjective, generative context.

It is precisely this latter acceptance of “normality” that also reoccurs in several of Husserl’s later manuscripts that attempt to address the “typification of situations” in the perspective of intersubjectivity. For indeed, according to Husserl, individual concrete situations are from the onset linked intersubjectively: “All situations stand in an intersubjective nexus, that implies an intersubjective simultaneity and succession, a concrete intersubjective time, understood as a form comprising everything as it is intersubjectively interlaced or better even: interfused.”⁶⁸ Already in his *Ideas II*, Husserl regarded the understanding of others basically as an understanding of their situation⁶⁹, conceiving the latter primarily as the horizon of their determinant motivations. Later notations, from the 1920s and 30s, shift the main point of interest from the empathic givenness of the other’s motivations to the typical similarities between one’s own and the other’s situation. In Husserl’s view, it is precisely this mutual correspondence between our individual situations that generally allows us to access the situation of others and to be grasped in our own by them, thus grounding a specific sense of *social normality*. In his *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, he explicitly considers that “the single subject’s and the community’s entire daily life” is related “to a typical specific likeness among situations [...], such that any normal human being who enters a particular situation has, by the very fact of being normal, the *situational horizons* belonging to it and common to all.”⁷⁰ Therefore, by being apprehended according to a *shared typology*, all normal individual situations are from the onset open to mutual understanding, even if this understanding can become factually problematic. Although Husserl terminologically distinguishes between “private” situations, pertaining to the individual alone, and “common”, social situations, in which “the situations of the participants are synthetically unified”⁷¹, he also illustrates their necessary linkage by again evoking the example of clerks in a company. For, indeed, the individual situations of such employees are, in their own perspective, enclosed in the broader situation of the company itself, while all individual situations finally share as their overarching common horizon the world regarded as the ultimate reference of their intersubjective connection: “The enduring style in which this world exists and its very being itself are actual only in the form of a temporality, in which socialized human subjects live alongside

68 Husserl (2008), p. 197, (my translation).

69 Husserl (1952), p. 275.

70 Husserl (1974), p. 207 (English translation: p. 199).

71 Husserl (2008), p. 196, (my translation).

one another and with one another in situations, each in his own momentary situation as well as in the universal horizon of his life situation” – that is: the world.⁷² Following such assumptions, Husserl sees it as a chief task of phenomenology to explicate “the universal structure of this lifeworld as an invariant form for all”, “as an enduring unity that comprises all situations”⁷³, while the lifeworld is conceived in this context as “the world of normal citizens” [*bürgerliche Normalwelt*]. Within its scope, every other citizen is as such typically predetermined for me:

If I as a citizen [*als bürgerliches Ich*] analyse this situation of mine, it proves to be that of a citizen placed in the unity of a surrounding civil world. Thus the world has this sense as a horizon for me as it does for anyone else pertaining to it as a co-citizen, be it that he is given to me horizontally as someone familiar (my friend, my business partner, my faculty colleague etc.), if I know him individually, or else merely as part of the vast and open horizon of unknown co-citizens. The latter have their own predelineated personal sense of being, belonging just as well, in their own way, to this civil world of mine.⁷⁴

Such normality surely also implies a corresponding typical anomaly, and it is perhaps at this point that Husserl’s reflections become most problematic:

In my normal civil life there is emphasis on a certain style of normal civil life, belonging especially to my class, my profession, as this stands out among other professions of civil life, sharing, in the manner of a different horizon, the same common lifeworld, as one and the same world that is only given in a different mode. This again leads to different types of situations. At their outskirts there is the abnormal, the vagabonds, the rascals and so on, understood as personal types that place themselves outside the normal world.⁷⁵

3.c. Periodicity In several of his notes from the 1930s, Husserl relates the specific time flow of situational life to the manner in which our dominant practical interests succeed each other and interfere with one another⁷⁶. Most frequently, such considerations are illustrated by following the alternation between the

72 Husserl (2008), p. 197, (my translation).

73 Husserl (2008), p. 196, (my translation).

74 Husserl (2008), p. 197, (my translation).

75 Husserl (2008), p. 198, (my translation).

76 Husserl (1973)², p. 174.

professional interest that dominates our “work hours” and other interests – of play, leisure, or spontaneous curiosity – that interrupt and complete it⁷⁷. This alternation is from the onset characterized by a certain typical *periodicity*, a concept that becomes central in several of Husserl’s later, genetic considerations. According to these reflections, the periodicity of practical interests is, on the one hand, linked to the natural periodicities of the surrounding world (the alternation of night and day, of seasons in a year) as it is, on the other hand, primarily rooted in the biological periodicities of instinct. In the periodical succession of sleep and waking, for instance, both aspects – drive and a natural cycle – are obviously intertwined. However, in Husserl’s view, an instinctive drive like hunger doesn’t simply reoccur periodically, but it is also consciously apprehended by the subject in its periodical, typical repetition. By this, the drive itself is modified, remaining horizontally open for further reoccurrences with each of its momentary fulfillments and thus it helps constitute a broader practical horizon of the will: a “synthetic unity of need”⁷⁸. In Husserl’s view, this elementary periodicity of instincts actually represents “the necessary starting point for understanding all goal-orientation of human life”⁷⁹, and it is in such primary horizons of periodical repeatability that the very possibility of “foresight” – that is: of deliberate action and conscious planning – is generally rooted⁸⁰. This very conception of periodicity also becomes central in Husserl’s reflections on the typification of situations. For situations are indeed, above all, finite temporal sequences, subjected to complex processes of time-organisation. This aspect is explicitly sketched out in a manuscript from 1932, addressing situations from the onset in terms of their “normal” typical repeatability. Situations are, as Husserl claims, essentially apprehended as parts of normal, typically repeatable successions of situations, that is, of predictable sequential arrangements. He illustrates this in a striking description of daily *routine*: “I have just woken up, and the day, my day, is already present in front of me, without me having to represent it intuitively as such; the succession of its normal, usual, particular situations already occurs to me in the flow of their being actualized as such: bathing, getting clothed, breakfast, morning work in the office or in the shop, lunch break, afternoon work, evening leisure.”⁸¹ Thus, any normal concrete situation is as such horizontally integrated in a vaster temporal sequence that

77 See Husserl (2008), p. 307.

78 Husserl (2008), p. 581, (my translation).

79 Husserl (2008), p. 583, (my translation).

80 Husserl (2008), p. 585.

81 Husserl (2008), p. 195, (my translation).

predetermines it from the start: “Instead, the particular situation, for instance the situation of a particular morning of the week, already implies, with its mere apprehension as a morning situation, its precise sense as an introduction for the following: the work in the office with its familiar and articulated style, as well as the entire following flow of situations that normally constitute a day of the week.”⁸² Moreover, this entire sequence of situations is itself anticipated as belonging to an even wider timeframe, namely, the overall periodicity of world-time: “But moreover, according to its horizontal sense, the day of the week belongs to the overall order of the days of the week. Therefore, each week already implies, with its end of the week, the following Sunday, as well as the entire periodicity of weeks in a year, etc.”⁸³ Thus, according to Husserl, overarching periodical rhythms of succession constantly define and anticipate our ongoing normal situation in its concrete deployment as such. In this perspective, our practical future proves to be from the onset mapped out not only by our active planning and scheduling, but before all by *passive processes of routine formation* that automatically chart out all our practical intentions. And it is precisely these habit driven situational routines – as specific phenomena of a “typification of situations” – that offer, in Husserl’s view, the necessary experiential background for free, deliberate action and foresight.

4. Situational Automatism

For sure, the concept “situation” is most commonly associated with so-called “existentialist” philosophy, i.e. with the writings of Jaspers, Heidegger or Sartre, who emphatically relate it to the *question of freedom*. According to Sartre, for instance, the situation is “the contingency of freedom in the plenum of being of the world inasmuch as this datum, which is there only in order not to constrain freedom, is revealed to this freedom only as already illuminated by the end which freedom chooses.”⁸⁴ Similarly, Heidegger emphasizes, in *Being and Time*, the fact that a “situation” only persists as such for a subject that is capable of assuming the autonomous state of “resoluteness”⁸⁵. In this context, both Sartre and Heidegger tend to regard the situation as a primary limitation for freedom, in relation to which freedom is always bound to assert itself. As such, it delivers the very material out of which freedom can concretely shape its choices. Thus, Sartre claims: “empirically we can be free only in relation to a state of things and in spite of this state of things. I will be said to be free in relation to this state of things when it does not constrain me. Thus the empirical and practical concept of

82 Husserl (2008), p. 195, (my translation).

83 Husserl (2008), p. 195, (my translation).

84 Sartre (1992), p. 487.

85 Heidegger (1967), p. 300 (English translation: p. 276).

freedom is wholly negative; it issues from the consideration of a situation and establishes that this situation leaves me free to pursue this or that end. One might say even that this situation conditions my freedom in this sense, that the situation *is* there *in order not* to constrain me.”⁸⁶ Similarly, by conceiving the Dasein as a “thrown projection”, Heidegger explicitly regards the situation as an element of determinant facticity, that freedom has to take on: “When Da-sein, anticipating, lets death become powerful in itself, as free for death it understands itself in its own *higher power*, the power of its finite freedom, and takes over the *powerlessness* of being abandoned to itself in that freedom, which always only *is* in having chosen the choice, and becomes clear about the chance elements in the situation disclosed.”⁸⁷

Husserl’s own considerations tend to focus on a quite different aspect of the phenomenon, namely: the inherent unfreedom of freedom itself, as it becomes manifest in the flow of practical situations. No doubt, the specifics of this perspective are already visible in the conception of freedom put forth in his *Ideas II*. For, in spite of Husserl’s recurrent attempts here to establish a clear cut distinction between the free acts of the subject, on the one hand, also termed “*cogitationes*”⁸⁸, and his unfree dimensions of sheer “nature”, as Husserl calls them, on the other hand, among which he also ranks habit, he nevertheless repeatedly arrives at relativising this differentiation, by speaking of the habitual, inertial tendencies that also govern the sphere of free acts. “[E]ach free act has its comet’s tail of nature,”⁸⁹ Husserl claims, and it is precisely in view of this comet’s tail of automatism – their “repetition compulsion” – that his later notes also seem to regard the phenomenon of practical situations by insisting on their typical repeatability. Thus, situations appear not only in view of a “primary passivity” that first challenges freedom, as in Heidegger or Sartre, but also in view of a “secondary passivity”, that affects the very interaction between freedom and its determinant circumstances.

86 Sartre (1992), p. 486.

87 Heidegger (1967), p. 384 (English translation, p. 351f.).

88 Husserl explicitly addresses acts of “striking” or “dancing” as *cogitationes*; see Husserl (1952), p. 218 (English translation: p. 230).

89 Husserl (1952), p. 338 (English translation: p. 350).

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