

Context as a Structure of Emergence.

An Inquiry from a phenomenological point of view

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Abstract. The aim of the present study is to focus on and to reevaluate the notion and the role of *context* as the ontological structured mind-independent dimension that guides our experience. Following the Husserlian and the Heideggerian phenomenology, the *context* can be conceived not simply as a frame which surrounds the objects, but rather as an articulated *horizon* that can be thought as the *a priori* condition of any kind of experience. It is a structured reality, and its role consists in making possible the emergence of the crucial structures which steer both the practical and theoretical experience. The *context*, as an articulated dimension of possibilities, shows itself as already *typified*. By virtue of the notion of *Typus (type)*, the *context* possesses a specific structure which displays regularities and internal consistency and allows the emergence of the experience along with its objects, also the conceptual ones.

Keywords: context, Typus, practice, emergence

1 Introduction

Traditionally, in philosophy, the fact that our experience is *always given in a world* is oftentimes regarded as something philosophically negligible, as a simple matter of fact that defines our natural life. By and large, it is common practice to bracket the fluidity of the experience along with all its features, so as to configure the peculiar space of play needed for the philosophical analysis of the knowledge process. Schematically speaking, in this way the object of the investigation can be isolated from its context and purified from everything that is external to it, as to focus the attention on the single entity that we want to study. **In other words:** the core of the research is a de-contextualized entity.

This kind of negligence about the role of *context* is strictly related to a specific attitude that has qualified the metaphysical and epistemological philosophy. The history of philosophy is characterized by certain theoretical binomials such as universal/accidental, necessity/contingency, primary/secondary qualities, and so forth. We can consider all these distinctions as specific versions of the main dichotomy between the question about *what* and the question about *how*. Usually philosophy has ascribed a role of fundamental importance to the first component of each couple, and only a dependent function to the second one. The *context*, usually portrayed as a secondary component, contingent, possible, fluctuating, has customarily been regarded as subordinated to the inquiry regarding its rooted individualities. In this perspective, first of all, there is the object, the *what* that we want to study, and then the *context*, representative of the *how* in which the *what* is located. So, ordinarily, the *context* has been studied in relation with the epistemological process in which it becomes a co-factor, ineradicable and yet inferior to the general subjects of the inquiry.

2 Objectives

Given these premises, here, I follow the Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology in order to:

1) Analyze and reevaluate the notion of *context* as the ontological structured mind-independent dimension that guides our experience and makes possible the emergence of its objects. The *context* can be thought:

- As a **mind-independent dimension, wherein** our experience is necessarily given, as an *a priori condition* of any kind of experience;
- As a **dimension of open possibilities**, in which takes place the emergence of the crucial structures which steer both the practical and theoretical experience;
- As a **structured reality already typified**, which displays regularities and internal consistency.

2) Recognize *context* as always *typified*, so as to focus the attention on the peculiar notion of *Typus* and its function;

- By virtue of the peculiar notion of *Typus* (*type*), the *context* possesses a specific structure which allows the emergence of the experience along with its objects. This last notion is of pivotal importance when it comes to understand the normativity which shapes the *context* and is, therefore, the very root of the experience, of its objects, and also of the concept itself. **The typified context is the necessary condition of the emergence of the experience.**

3) Move a step further and propose to see the dimension of *practice* as the appropriated space to conceive the specific dynamic of the *typified context*.

Section 6 will be dedicated to the notion of *context*, as presented in Husserl's genetic phenomenology; the Section 7 will be dedicated to the complex notion of *Typus*, as a fundamental structure of the *context*. In Section 8 I would like to move from Husserl to Heidegger, with the intention to consider the practical dimension as the dimension of reference in order to clarify the nature of the idea of the *typified context*.

3 Methodology

In order to narrow the research, I will consider Husserl's *Experience and Judgment* – where the role of *context* is broader compared to previous works [1]-, and Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Following Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenology, it is possible to retrace the elements to conceive the *context* as an articulated dimension.

I intend to conduct the research following a theoretical perspective: the inquiry will be carried out by means of a textual analysis which refuses to be merely historical or exegetical; rather it aims to pinpoint all the theoretical stances that serve to the delineation and interpretation of the notion of *context* and the notion of *Typus*. These two concepts are not explicitly thematized by Husserl, but are functionally present in the text. My intent, therefore, is to give a portrait of the notions, by collecting their characteristics from the text.

Linking these two works I will focus on the ontological side of the question, rather than the epistemological one. This shift is made possible by the affinity between the Husserlian genetic phenomenology and the Heideggerian ontological project.

4 Related Works

In the critical literature about the role of *context* (or *Horizon*) in phenomenology, studies privilege the epistemological side of the question, rather than the ontological one. The *context* acquires its value within the inquiry regarding the knowledge process addressed to the object of perception. In this

respect, the contribution of D.W Smith in *Content and Context of Perception*, in *Synthese, The Intentionality of Mind*, Part. I, 1984, p.81-87, is particularly crucial. In his most renowned work, jointly written with R. McIntyre, *Husserl and Intentionality: A study of Mind, Meaning, and Language*, Synthese Library, Dordrecht, 1982, the author provides an overview of the notion of *context* within Husserl's production, pointing out the multiple roles it assumes. More recently, the role of *context* in the Husserlian work has been studied by S. Geniusas in *The Origins of the Horizon in Husserl's Phenomenology*, Springer, Dordrecht, 2012, where the author also dedicates a paragraph to the *World-Horizon* and to the *Typifying Consciousness*. Other important contributors are: D. Welton, M. Larrabee, A. Steinbock, H. Pietersma.

For the notion of *Typus (type)* is necessary to recall D. Lohmar's important work, especially: *Husserl's Type and Kant's Schemata*, in D. Welton, *The New Husserl. A critical Reader*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2003, and the article *Types and Habits. Habits and their cognitive background in Hume and Husserl*, in *Phenomenology and Mind*, IUSSPress, 2014, p.40-51, where Lohmar confronts the notion of *Typus* with the Kantian and Humean philosophy.

The theme of *practice* in the Heideggerian philosophy has been analyzed by many authors, especially by (neo)pragmatists like: H. Dreyfus, R. Brandom, M. Okrent etc. but as far as I know there are no authors that analyze the idea of a typified *context* in relation to the Heideggerian *practice*.

5 Preliminary conceptual clarification of the vocabulary

I will use *context* as a synonymous with *horizon* (the English translation for the German *Horizont*) which is the proper expression employed by Husserl and as a synonymous of *world (Welt)* used by Heidegger. I would like to record that it has been noticed that in English 'horizon' may have the connotation of something we can expand and go beyond, whereas in German *Horizont* connotes something that sets limits which we cannot go beyond but must remain within. This comment would seem to apply to Husserl's use of *Horizont* as well as Heidegger's [2].

In respect of these last observations, I have to specify that *context*, here, means a **concrete worldly dimension** that has some sort of limits. This **limit** exists but has to be conceived as **flexible** – and changeable, because it is in motion and not defined and fixed once and for all. When I use *horizon*, I will use it with this meaning.

6 Context

6.1 Context as a primal dimension

Let us start by analyzing the notion of *context* [3]. Husserl ascribes a pivotal role to the *context*: it is explicitly regarded as a fundamental component of our experience.

- Husserl states that our experience always occurs in a *given horizon*, which fosters its formation and orientates its sense. Therefore, an actually isolated element does not exist: every object subsists only in connection with the other components and only **within** the *horizon* from which it emerges.[4]. The *context* is the necessary *wherein* of the experience [5].
- The object is not a pure *per se*, but it is always animated by a constant shaping process and inserted in a frame of relations which permeate it. Here the *context* is not a mere frame that surrounds the object. It is the *context* itself that contributes to the specific form and articulation of experience and objects. Hence, the *context* takes shape as the essential *horizon* which allows the formation of the experience and its objects. It is an *a priori* condition of possibility of the experience.
- Moreover we have to highlight that the *context* is, as the **wherein** of the experience, a **primal dimension**, *i.e. it «is always already there without any attention of a grasping regard, without any awakening of interest»* [6]: The *context* is, therefore, a **mind-independent** dimension.

6.2 Context and possibility

The *context* is the mind-independent dimension **from** where the experience begins. However, this independence should not be conceived as something completely unrelated to the experiencing subject.

As the **where-from** [7] of the experience the *context*, as an *always given* dimension, is *known* by means of *familiarity and habitualities*, and at the same time it is an articulated dimension, pervaded by this *familiarity and habitualities* that shape the concrete everyday life in its practical and theoretical activities.

In this regard, *context* becomes a field of possible movement [8]. In this motion innervated by the directives of *familiarity*, the relation between the experiencing subject and the *context* seems to have a circular nature. Every grasp of the object is not transient, but it constitutes the crucial backdrop, contributing to a constant renewal of the forms of *familiarity*, bringing about new features, settling as a trace always prompt to resurface, and open new accesses for the observer.

Familiarity and *habitualities* represent the primary access to the *context*: these forms of relation between the horizon and the experience are not something applied by the constituting subject but plastic forms of conjunctions that contemplate how the structure of the *context* is given and how the experience can move in.

From this perspective the *context* is the **where-from** in which the emergence of the crucial structures, that steer both the practical and theoretical experience, originate. In this regard the *context* is not a collection of mere data [9] and even not only the potential backdrop of the objects of our perception. The ceaseless internal dynamic displays the nature of *context* as a **structured domain of open possibilities** [10].

6.3 Context and structure

Saying that *context* is a dimension of open possibilities means that it is not just a portion of space with a determined number of entities. It is not a perfectly limited set (like a mathematical set) of specific objects, of fixed things that need to be catalogued. This notwithstanding, the possibilities brought about by the *context* are not *ad libitum*; they have to comply with the normativity – although weak – which is inherent in the *context* of experience.

The *context*, indeed, is not an a-logical frame but shows an inner structure. We can read that the *context*:

«is a field of *determinate structure*, one of *prominences* and *articulated particularities*» [11].

Let us recap the features of *context*, expressed in this passage, from a normative standpoint: *context* is a domain which possesses a *determinate structure*, a qualitative depth (*prominences*) which gives rise to individualities, which are in their turn articulated. *Context* is not an homogeneous space, it exhibits a varied qualitative gradation that may be defined as a functional inhomogeneity. These internal variations allow the emergence of multiple individualities, the objects of our experience that are the epicenter of our attention.

Moreover, this formal-qualitative structure of possibilities which is the dimension of the *context* is characterized as always *typified*. In this respect, Husserl claims that the *context* is «already pre-given as multi-formed, formed according to its regional categories and typified in conformity with a number of different special general, kinds, etc.» [12].

In this passage, the *typified context* is depicted as a structured *horizon*, which contributes to form the modalities of experience, as well as the concepts.

7 Typus

This last observation leads us to consider the complex notion of *Typus* (*type*) briefly delineated by Husserl, but of pivotal importance to understand the relation between the *context* as a mind-independent dimension of regulated possibilities and our experience. The *Typus* «turns out to be the basis» [13] for the possibility of our experience (both perceptual and conceptual); it is the pre-conceptual [14] structure that contributes to the pre-characterization of the experience.

The *Typus* is an orienting structure based on the qualitative depth of the *context* that allows the emergence of the objects of the experience. Every object emerges from an already *typified context* and offers itself in a way which is, in its turn, not devoid of pre-characterizations. Before being actively known, it unfolds its own typical (collected from its horizon), its peculiar anticipated *traces*, which prefigure the *style* of its disclosure. Every trace is absorbed by the structure of *context*; it, nevertheless, turns out to be the always-given place of that typification which allows the emergence of a single phenomenon in its pre-identity [15].

The proper dynamic of the relation is circular. Experience is given in a *context* and moves within it thanks to the possible emergence of the *Typus*; but it is also in the experience, that is in the receptive-active process, that «at the same time, is prescribed a *type*, on the basis of which [...] other objects of a similar kind also appear from the first in a preliminary familiarity and are anticipated according to a horizon» [16].

If the steps taken by the active experience reverberate on the objects of the same species and on the *context*, thus creating a *type* that will find its sedimentation in the forms of *familiarity*, it is also true that the latter, with its typifications, makes possible the orientation of experience.

This twofold movement is due to the fact that the *typified context* is an *always open* structure. This “openness” also marks the typicality of object and experience: the sedimentation of the *type* in the folds of the *context* foresees the possibility of anticipation; every normative pre-expectation of the *type* is prompt to receive, within itself, additional confirmations or corrections of the distinctive notes it anticipates. This openness, as that of the *context*, is contingent and modifiable, and yet logical and normative. In this way, the *Typus* fosters the experience, its meaningfulness, its repeatability and regularity, and for this reason the *Typus* also makes possible the emergence and formation of the concept.

- The *Typus* is, therefore, the **median element** between *context* and conceptuality, between world and subject.
- It is the **catalyst** which allows the progress of the experience plunged in an open, contingent, and yet regulated world. The *Typus* adjusts to the contingency that characterizes the forms of the pre-predicative experience and sustains the liberty of conceptuality.
- The *Typus* takes shape as an **osmotic structure**, which traverses the norm of the *context* and turns out to be the basis for the development of conceptual knowledge, as it is its “compass”.
- It possesses a **hybrid plasticity**, as a sort of non-intellectual category, although ingrained in the experience.
- In this respect, the *Typus* can be thought of as a fundamental component of the genetic phenomenology¹; we may assert that it is the *interchange*, the element which connects world and conceptuality.

At this stage of the analysis, I would like to make a further step: if the *context* is always-already experienced in a *typified* manner, then we may suggest the hypothesis that the *context* retains, in itself, a sort of basic conceptuality, which is offered to the operative thought of the subject. The *Typus* is rooted in *context* as a dimension of possibility and at the same time shapes itself as the *trait d'union* between the basic-worldly experience and the sphere of conceptual thought.

8 Context and Practice

The features identified in the notion of *context* and *Typus* can be reconsidered within the structure of the Heideggerian *praxis* (*practice*). Heidegger recognizes that the most basic characteristic of our experience is that it always occurs in the world, namely in a *context*. Accordingly, the most basic modality of the Heideggerian subject, called *Dasein*, is being-in-the-world, namely, being always and necessarily located in a specific *context* [17]. Starting from this fact, our primary access and relation

¹ The aim of the genetic phenomenology is to bring the forms of judgment back to the ante-predicative experience, showing that the latter is already inserted in a worldly logic which inherently has the distinctive structures of category and concept.

to the world is represented by *praxis*. First of all, *practice* is the domain of what we do: when we live in our everyday *context*, we move, we act, we do things, we use tools with some scope, but we also talk and we socialize. *Practice*, in a broad definition, is the previous dimension to any theoretical approach, like the one we maintain in the scientific theorization, where we need a sort of distance from our being in a world.

Practice is where the meaning of *being-in-the-world* is most clear, because in the practical approach the world is closer. Thus, following Heidegger, in the practical approach we can investigate the nature of the *world (context)* and of the “wherein” that characterizes our experience in relation to it. Even though the *world* does not exist without *Dasein*, it is not a mere projection: as the Husserlian *context*, the world is a mind-independent [18] structure, and the human subject establishes an essential and mutual relation with it .

8.1 The notion of world

The notion of *world* has been variously interpreted by Heidegger, but two definitions are crucial here: the world as a *totality of instruments*, and the world as a *consistent totality of assignments* and *source of possibilities* for the experience [19].

Everything we experience, and the modality by which we do that, are ingrained in the *being of the world*, and the latter is, as well as the Husserlian *context*, the *transcendental horizon* [20], namely an *a priori* condition of possibility, which favors the appearance of the entity and the encounter with it. In order for its possibilities to be meaningful, it must comply with a certain order. This order is already *given* in the *world* we experience and know.

Also in Heidegger's thought, the first encounter with the *world* occurs within the coordinates of familiarity and everyday life. *Familiarity* allows the acknowledgment and orientation of *Dasein*; *familiarity* and *habit* are not applied by the subjects on their *context*, but they are already inherent in it, as something which orientates the average experience of *Dasein*. In *Being and Time*, *familiarity* leads to the identification of a primary modality by which we interact with the world; this modality is not the cognitive attitude towards the objects of experience, but a pre-theoretical approach, a practical attitude.

By virtue of this acknowledgment, the *context* in which the experience is given is regarded as a unitary structure, as it is a *totality of instruments*. The notion of *world as totality of instruments* and the notion of entity as means (and not as object of perception or contemplation) imply that nothing purely isolated is given; by definition «to the Being of any equipment there always belongs a totality of equipment, in which it can be this equipment that it is. Equipment is essentially “something in-order-to...”[21]. Thanks to this definition, Heidegger provides the image of a world in which every emergence experiences a constant correlation. We must acknowledge, indeed, that «in the in-order-to as a structure there lies an assignments or reference of something to something» [22]. In order for the structure of the assignments to be substantial, the totality of assignments cannot enjoy an utter logical liberty, but it must be a consistent totality. Accordingly, the world may be defined as the coherent totality of references, namely as a dimension which, independently from the subject, reveals its own norm.

Therefore, Heidegger's *praxis* is bound to a world which shows its own structure and possesses an inner consistency: the practical approach is already inserted into a norm, represented by the non-linear chain of references among the entities. As Husserl would put it, the *praxis* is hooked to the pre-conceptual structure of the *context*: in it, the *praxis* can move not only thanks to the qualitative-material emergencies it is offered, but mostly due to the fact that these emergencies are already invested with meaning. In other words, the *praxis* owes its possibility to the emergence and to the pre-theoretical acknowledgment – which must occur within it – of the *Typus*, not yet expressed by the theoretical approach. What I endeavor to argue is that the *praxis* moves within a world that already shows a weak normativity, in which the structure of the *Typus* intervenes as a connecting component between the forms of the world and their pre-epistemological acknowledgment.

8.2 Typus and practice

The *Typus* can, therefore, be thought of as implicitly grafted into the Heideggerian world, as the fulcrum of the relation between world and conceptuality, as inner motor of the *praxis*. The *praxis* itself enjoys a particular structure, similar to that of the *Typus*; the *praxis* is tightly connected to the *world* that “withstands” it and conveys it, its freedom is not absolute, but is bound to the coherence of the

references offered by the *context* – in which, at the same time, actively develops an experiential increment.

The original practical approach takes place into a *horizon* of meanings, which are due not only to the subject's production, but are offered by the *typified context*: *Praxis*, unlike the theoretical attitude, shows a relation more dependent on the *context* (dependent on the “resistance” of the world) and yet more plastic (does not “fix” the entity in one assertion) and more regulated (it enjoys a relative liberty, always given within the coordinates of familiarity). As the *Typus*, at the border with the theoretical approach, it retains the possibility to introduce new modalities to the experience, which in their turn will affect the open structure of the world and, therefore, that of the *Typus*.

As previously claimed, the Husserlian *Typus* suggests that a certain form of conceptuality already subsists in the *context* and in the ante-predicative experience, an implicit conceptuality prompt to become, thanks to the *Typus*, explicit and/or modified.

Also in the *praxis* the relation with conceptuality is ambivalent. As it is well known, Heidegger distinguishes *praxis* and theoretical, purely conceptual approach, establishing between the two approaches a derivation of the second from the first; still, even though the relation is derivative, this does not mean that the *praxis* does not already retain, within itself, its own conceptuality.

We must, therefore, distinguish a theoretical approach in the narrow sense of the word (the epistemological approach), a *know that*, from a theoretical approach in a broader sense, which possesses a certain conceptuality, that of the *know how*, in which the *praxis* may be included.

The first typology of theoretic conceives the *type* as a concept regarded as a product of abstraction traditionally understood, as something established to an epistemological end; the conceptuality referred to by the second typology is that of the *Typus*, a conceptuality made possible by a structure of articulation (ingrained in the *context*, ready to become explicit and be modified).

The Husserlian *Typus* and the Heideggerian *praxis* (the *know how* dimension we identified as implicitly including the structure of the *Typus*) reveal a plastic structure, and yet regulated and logical, which is tightly connected to the norm of the *context* and retain its own conceptuality which is to be defined.

9 Conclusion

What I meant to do here is to focus our attention on the notion of *context* and the linked notion of *Typus*, so as to underline their importance for the experience and for the emergence of its objects, also of the conceptual ones.

The *context* turns out to be a mind-independent dimension, an articulated *a priori condition of possibility*. Its internal articulation, the *Typus*, turns out to be a “median” structure between worldly normativity and pre-conceptuality. Its role, with respect to conceptuality, is precisely what makes it an extremely crucial (although complex) notion. The *Typus* lies at the crossroad between world and concept as the possibility of their interaction. The insertion of the *Typus* in the *context* of Heidegger's *praxis* could display, more limpidly, the interdependence of world, experience, and concept and how these notions still need to be investigated and defined.

Context as typified and *practice* – as a dimension of experience linked to a *typified world* - show that our experience is related to a dimension of open possibilities (a regulated dimension of *how*) where it is able to move accordingly with the emergencies rooted in *context*.

References

1. Compare in particularity with the role of *context* formulated in Husserl's *Ideas*. For a complete study on the notion of *context* in Husserl's works, see: Smith D.W, McIntyre R, *Husserl and Intentionality: A study of Mind, Meaning, and Language*, Synthese Library, Dordrecht, 1982
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3. The text of reference is Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, Routledge and Kegan, London, 1973
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5. Geniusas S., *The Origins of the Horizon in Husserl's Phenomenology*, Springer, Dordrecht, 2012, p. 198
6. Husserl E., *Experience and Judgment*, p. 30
7. Geniusas S., *The Origins of the Horizon in Husserl's Phenomenology*, p. 177
8. «Every object is not a thing isolated in itself but is always already *an object in its horizon* of typical familiarity and pre-cognizance. But this horizon is constantly in motion. », Husserl E., *Experience and Judgment*, p. 122
9. Geniusas S., *The Origins of the Horizon in Husserl's Phenomenology*, Springer, Dordrecht, 2012, p. 214
10. Husserl E., *Experience and Judgment*
11. Husserl E., *Experience and Judgment*, p. 72 (my emphasis)
12. Husserl E., *Experience and Judgment*, p. 38
13. Lohmar D., *Husserl's Type and Kant's Schemata*, in D. Welton, *The New Husserl. A critical Reader*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2003, p. 107
14. Lohmar D., *Husserl's Type and Kant's Schemata*, p. 105
15. Husserl E., *Experience and Judgment*, § 26
16. Husserl E., *Experience and Judgment*, p. 124
17. The text of reference is Heidegger M., *Being and Time*, Blackwell, Oxford, UK, 2001
18. Heidegger M., *Being and Time*
19. These definitions may be found in Heidegger M., *Being and Time*, and in Heidegger M., *The Origin of Work of Art*, in *Off Beaten Track*, Cambridge University Press, UK
20. See Heidegger M., *On the Essence of Ground*, in *Pathmarks*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1998, p. 19
21. Heidegger M., *Being and Time*, p. 97
22. Ibidem