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The intentional and the non-intentional the stumbling block between Heidegger and enactivism --Manuscript Draft--

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The intentional and the non-intentional:
the stumbling block between Heidegger and enactivism

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AUTHOR NOTE

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The enactivist approach in cognitive sciences can be characterized manifoldly. Usually, it is described with general topics of *embedded* (Ward, Silvermann and Villalobos, 2017, 365), *distributed* (Núñez, Allen, Gao et al., 2019, 784), *situated* (Heras-Escribano, 2021, 338) or *extended* (Robbins and Aydede, 2009, 3) cognition. Within these general characteristics, a special focus may be laid on the integration of perception and thinking into sensorimotor activity (Gallagher, 2009, 38) as well as on the autonomy and unity of organism as a cognitive system (Ramirez-Vizcaya and Froese, 2019, 1–12) or connections of the organism to the environment as the basis of the cognitive functions of the former (de Haan, 2021, 475). An appeal to Heidegger within the enactivist program occurred as early as in the first formulations of the enactivist approach. When discussing the overcoming of connectionist model of consciousness, Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch invoked Heideggerian thought as an alternative way of dealing with consciousness.

The ground that enabled to label all these approaches as something unified was present in the initial oppositions that were drawn by the principal enactivist theorists. One of them, Francisco Varela, was developing his theory of organism as of *cognitive network* (Varela, Coutinho, Duripe and Vaz, 1988, 359–376) as opposed to the framework of *symbolic paradigm* (ibid., 360), or *cognitivism* (Thompson, 2007, 4), which treated consciousness just as information processing. In the groundlaying book *The Embodied Mind* (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1991) Heideggerian was depicted as a theoretical ally of enactivism that would help it to outline its foundations (ibid., 11) and clarify the philosophical standing of the new paradigm (ibid., 19).

However, the initially warm-hearted attitude towards Heidegger changed (e.g in Thompson, 2007) in a critical manner. The goal of this article is to explore the causes of

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such a change. First of all, I track the use and criticism of Heideggerian thought in the enactivist theoretical works and find out the context and ground of the criticism.

Secondly, I regard the appeal to the Husserlian notion of intentionality in the corresponding pieces of works of Heidegger's enactivist critics. Here I demonstrate that the criticism of Heidegger stands here in opposition to prasing those methodological benefits that are expected from the Husserlian notion of intentionality. Then, I try to show how that particular lines of criticism of Heidegger are focused on those features of his philosophy that are objectively inconsistent with the corresponding interpretation of intentionality. Finally, I shall demonstrate that those variations of enactive approach that somehow effectively used Heidegger's concepts were tied to a withdrawal of the paradigmatic Husserlian concept of intentionality.

DIVERGING PATHS

The origins of the interaction of enactivist theorists with the Heideggerian heritage go beyond cognitive science. For Evan Thompson, it was the worldview position that was initially (Thompson, 1986, 235–252) important, the foundation of which could be Heideggerian philosophy. And already here Thompson makes rapprochements, which are key for the subsequent reception of Heidegger.

On the one hand, Heidegger's philosophizing itself as a "displacement" and revision of the Western tradition was seen by him as the most important element in the development of "planetary thinking", which in this development he connected with the modern Buddhist philosophy of Nishitani Keiji (ibid., 235–238). However, the content side of Thompson's comparison of Heidegger's thought and Keiji's thought actually sets in advance the contiguity of functions that the appeal to Buddhism and Heideggerianism will carry for enactivist argumentation. Thus, Thompson compares Heidegger's

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understanding of Nothing as the ultimate possibility of being, insight into which requires an exit from the circle of knowledge determined by the existent, with Nishitani Keiji's idea of overcoming the "field of consciousness" as an opportunity to penetrate into the essence of modern nihilism (ibid., 238–239). The scientific attitude, which Heidegger criticizes as focused on the question of being, is brought closer by Thompson to "illusory" in the Buddhist sense, and the project of fundamental ontology itself is closer to the Shunyavada, which Keiji de facto adhered to (ibid., 240–241). In overcoming the relationship of postava, linking man and technology, as essentially belonging to the "event of appropriation" (event of appropriation), i.e. Ereignis, Thompson sees a "family resemblance" with overcoming the "nihility" (nihility) of modernity on the way to emptiness in Keiji (ibid., 246).

In the book *The Embodied Mind*, other aspects of Heidegger's thought are already emphasized, but here Heidegger and Buddhism are used in conjunction in the context of criticizing Husserl's understanding of consciousness and substantiating the "embodied" concept of consciousness. Thus, Varela and Thompson rely on both Heidegger and Buddhist techniques when they build the concept of "mindfulness/awareness" — both a practice and a state characterized by full awareness of one's own mental events and their connection in a single context (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1991, 25) — as opposed to the *abstract attitude*, which dominates both scientific thinking and everyday perception. According to the theorists of enactivism, Heidegger, who considered the modes of a person's relationship with the world as his own possibilities of his presence, due to the very fact of such a consideration can be used - although rather at a theoretical and rather superficial level - to substantiate a cognitive theory that considers cognition as a continuous interaction of a person with all his bodily aggregates as a single system and its external environment. Here, in principle, there is no question of the adequacy of

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such an interpretation to Heidegger's own attitudes: like Buddhism, Heideggerianism is important for enactivism with tools, and not with a system.

In the most holistic and adequate form of Heidegger's own understanding of his work, the theorists of enactivism used it when criticizing Husserl's phenomenology. The "abstract attitude", according to Varela and Thompson, was also characteristic of phenomenology. Husserl, from their point of view, perceived the Western (in fact, Cartesian for enactivists) philosophical tradition as built around the idea of a pure subject, devoid of individual features and even a body. If the Buddhist techniques of Varela and Thompson were valued for the wealth of methods of meditative building of "mindfulness", then Heidegger was significant as a critic of the insensitivity of Husserl's phenomenology to the cultural and bodily context of consciousness (ibid., 19).

Heidegger also occupied a special place here as a theoretician who radically "embodied" man in the world. "Heideggerian psychoanalysis" (along with Buddhism), as involving a person's awareness of the connection of their states and experiences with a person's disposition in the world, was opposed by Varela and Thompson to Freudianism as a "representationalist" and "cognitivist" approach to consciousness (ibid., 179). A similar strategy of opposing the Heideggerian paradigm of the cognitive sciences and representationalist models was adopted by the American philosopher Hubert Dreyfus (Dreyfus, 1972).

At the same time, the critical attitude of enactivists to the involvement of Heidegger in the enactivist project has already formed here. Varela and Thompson did not perceive, like Heidegger himself, his theory as part of a continuum with practice, which realized understanding as basic existential. They perceived the theoretical nature of Heidegger's constructions as their fundamental shortcoming, which ensured the

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impossibility of considering human experience in its entirety (ibid., 19). The most acute criticism was present in Thompson's *Mind in Life* (Thompson, 2007). First of all, he criticized the disembodiedness of Heidegger's account of *mood*. While Thompson recognized Heidegger's description of mood (*Stimmung*) as of a non-intentional experience that preconditions any intentional relation (ibid., 379), he sees no place for body left in Heidegger's works. Obviously regarding body not just as an organical machinery but as a living body and thus a locus of living experience, i.e. of an intentional relation between the subject and one's own bodily experience, Thompson de facto criticized here the very non-intentional approach of Heidegger. That "strange disembodiedness" correlates with the limitations that are presupposed by Heidegger's Dasein-analytical design. Heidegger, as Thompson confirms, excluded a wide range of different types of human experience that are not characteristic of "a mature and socialized adult form" of human life which was the model for Heidegger's structure of Dasein (ibid., 380). While the Husserlian intentionality presupposed no requirements concerning specific features of consciousness, Heidegger's non-intentional account of Dasein obviously did.

A STUMBLING BLOCK OF INTENTIONALITY

In my opinion, the fate of Heidegger's legacy in Varela's and Thompson's theoretical program is determined by their initial acceptance of Husserl's concept of intentionality and, accordingly, the fundamentally different compatibility of Heidegger's and Husserl's thought with the basic attitudes of enactivist theorists.

The initial understanding of intentionality in enactivism echoes the classical Brentano definition as the relationship of the direction of the mental state to its object (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1991, 49). Adherence to this understanding was

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repeatedly confirmed subsequently (Thompson, 2005, 263; Thompson, 2015, 14).

However, it is Husserl who was initially regarded as the methodological standard with the notion of intentionality (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1991, 15–16). Husserlian approach was recognized as transcending the “abstract” natural attitude of ordinary science in the introspective analysis of mental states (*ibid.*). There were attempts to adapt this understanding of intentionality to Heideggerian thought and also to basic enactivist attitudes about the organism as a dynamic system. Intentionality was understood as such a relation of the system to its objects in which it surpasses itself (not in a spatial sense), and Heideggerian being-in-the-world, in turn, was understood as a relation of this kind (Thompson and Stapleton, 2009, 26).

The attempts to reconcile Heidegger with Husserlian intentionality, however, could not be successful due to the basic, if not complete, then at least significant incompatibility with Husserl's understanding of intentionality, which manifested itself in Heidegger himself. First, Heidegger apparently abandoned the understanding of intentionality, which is addressed to the subjective mental content (Dreyfus, 1993, 20). The relationship of being-in-the-world, which does not imply the relationship of the subject to the object as an intentional object, but embraces them in a single context, which also establishes relationships of the Husserlian intentional type as a certain mode of “care” (*Sorge*) of a person, constitute the only possible kind of intentionality in Heidegger. Heidegger's understanding of intentionality implies not finding the subject in one way or another outside the context of the situation and referring it to it, but the subject's living in this situation and its complete conditioning of all his dispositions (Gurwitsch, 1979, 67).

Even despite the constant emphasis by Varela and Thompson on the contextual conditionality and corporeality of conscious systems, they do not dissolve the subject in

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the environment and do not introduce some general global patterns for this “subjective system” and for the environment. The critique of the “disinterestedness” and incorporeality of the classical philosophical subject for enactivism can be satisfied by Husserl’s analysis of the life world, which shows the flow and growth of contexts within the framework of passive synthesis in the optics of generative phenomenology, but not by such a theory that does not simply introduce certain corrections or add certain plans into the intentional relation of subject and object, but places the subject and object in a single plane. One can try to interpret Heidegger in terms of the cognitive sciences, for example, through the concepts of handiness and availability of things in relation to the unified “machinery” of the body, brain and environment (Wheeler, 2012, 197), but such a reading in any case leaves no room for intentionality as a subjectively representative relationship, albeit correlating with the objective one. the state of the intentional system, at the heart of the research methodology.

Secondly, even if it is recognized that Heidegger does not refuse, but only develops Husserl's concept of intentionality and recognizes Husserl's merit in establishing the inseparability of the connection between the act and the object (Moran, 2000, 39–65), which is revealed in categorical intuition, and continues Husserl's understanding of transcendence as an “intra-subjective” relation (ibid., 55–56), it is impossible to deny that he did not place individuals, but the world as a whole of mutual references, as the principal instance of the hermeneutic study of being (ibid., 56–57). In this Heidegger disagrees with both Husserl and enactivism: for them, the world remains the most important topic, but it does not include or obscure the context of subjectivity that can be set apart from the world.

WAYS OF CONVERGENCE

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“Enactivist Heideggerianism” is possible at least in enactivist conceptions that renounce Husserl’s notion of intentionality, or at least do not emphasize it in one or another aspect of the study. As an example of this approach, we can take a closer look at the already mentioned concept of Natalie Depraz, based on her interpretation of the concept of *Gelasseheit* (detachment).

Depraz introduces “detachment” in the context of developing a universal phenomenology of religion (Depraz, 2002, 25–37). On the whole, here she remains more within the framework of the Husserlian paradigm, developing the categorical layout of the experience of corporeality in Christianity and Buddhism, the phenomenological features of these categories and the attitudes corresponding to them. *Gelassenheit* here is the completion of the Husserlian era in phenomenological experience, which gives access to the categorical grid of religious experience (ibid., 37). The correlative Buddhist practice of concentration here is explicitly aimed at purifying and fixing the intentional relationship that links the subject and the phenomena of religious experience (ibid., 36).

Much more independent of Husserl's notion of intentionality - and moreover balanced by Fink's ideas - was the use of the notion of detachment in the context of the juxtaposition of phenomenological research and religious experience (Depraz, 2003, 503–519). Here detachment was the second feature of the religious-phenomenological reduction along with “sobering up” (*nepsis*, *nepsis*). If the first stage of reduction presupposes the intentional action of the subject, “turning his gaze” into himself, then the second stage of detachment actually eliminates intentionality itself. What is assumed here is not a relation between subject and object, but such a “rest” (*hésychia*), which reveals the receptivity of the subject towards the object on the way to its complete acceptance in itself as an “event” (*avenement*, *Ereignis*) of subjectivity

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renounced by its own power (ibid., 510). This is more than the passivity of the synthesis: the initially active synthesis relinquishes its rights to the object, overturning the habitual “attitude volontaire”, listening and surrendering to the object and renouncing the intentional possession of it in a reflective relation. Gelassenheit, understood in this way, lies at the basis of all phenomenological research in general, and at the same time detachment is the crown of the era: for the sake of detachment as “reflexive conversion” and giving oneself to the object, phenomenological reduction operates within the framework of the religious-phenomenological “prayer of the heart”. It was this understanding of “detachment” that Depraz subsequently developed in the “concrete practice” project of phenomenology (Depraz, 2006).

Another particular case of “non-intentionalistic” enactive approach to Heidegger is that of enactive analysis of selfhood and subjectivity. Here the analysis of peripersonal space (PPS) within the framework of embodied simulation theory (EST) can be cited as an example (Sykes, 2023). In assessing Heidegger’s conception of the “ready-at-hand” (*Zuhandenheit*) (a practical relation of tools to the subject) and the “present-to-hand” (*Vorhandenheit*) (a perceptual relation of tools to the subject). While critically regarding the disembodiedness of Heidegger’s account, John Sykes highly estimates the unintentional character of the “readiness-at-hand” and “presence-to-hand”. According to him, it is Heidegger’s crucial contribution that he realized the co-constitutive character of nearness of objects, which we are not always aware of, in relation to our cognition of space. Yet another example is Miriam Kyselo’s discussion of the minimal self (Kyselo, 2019). She also underlines the “non-intentionalistic” character of Heidegger’s account of subjectivity as absorbed and not usually distinct from the environment (ibid., 214). She openly contrast this conception of subjectivity to Husserl’s

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one as presupposing the “intentional (open) relation to the world” that is characteristic of a delineated subjectivity (ibid., 213–214).

CONCLUSION

As Heidegger was initially regarded by Francisco Varela and Evan Thompson as a “theoretical ally” of the newborn enactivism, the key feature of his legacy that were praised by them (and would be praised later on) was the “worldly” character of his analysis of Dasein. However, with the development of the enactivist program it was getting harder and harder to reconcile Heidegger’s thought with the basic principles that were associated with the Husserlian conception of intentionality. That conception was largely incompatible with Heidegger both as such and in the actual discussion of Heidegger e.g. by Evan Thompson, even though the latter tried to find the ground for the “intentionalistic” approach to consciousness in Heidegger. However, more productive ways of working with the Heideggerian legacy within the enactivist framework were found by those researchers who focused on the “non-intentionalistic” common ground of Heidegger and enactivism.

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