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## ***Fenomenologija in psihoterapija: Uvajanje fenomenološke naravnosti v psihoterapevtskem izobraževanju***

*Phenomenology and psychotherapy:  
Introducing the phenomenological attitude  
to psychotherapy trainees*

### **Abstract**

Instead of focusing on the theoretical issues of phenomenology, the emphasis of the paper is more on the pedagogical aspects of and questions about how to introduce phenomenology into psychotherapy training. For this purpose, I have completed an overview of the existing presentations of phenomenology in introductory literature (books, textbooks and articles available in English). Additionally, I try to show the difficulties that trainees face and relate these to theoretical controversies. Finally, I propose a slightly changed theoretical ground as a general approach for introducing phenomenology and illustrate it with a practical/experiential way of working with trainees.

### **Key words**

phenomenology, natural attitude, phenomenological method, phenomenological attitude, psychotherapy training.

### **Povzetek**

Temeljni poudarek članka je na pedagoških oziroma didaktičnih dilemah uvajanja zahtevne tematike fenomenologije v psihoterapevtsko izobraževanje. Članek se pri tem dotakne tudi teoretskih vprašanj, vendar le-ta niso v ospredju. Ta didaktični vidik uvaja pregled prikazov fenomenologije v obstoječi literaturi kot so knjige, učbeniki in članki v angleščini. S tem pregledom skušam pokazati na težave, s katerimi se ob teh razumevanjih fenomenologije srečujejo edukanti psihoterapije. Te težave povezujem s teoretskimi kontroverzami, katerih razrešitev pokažem v drugačnem teoretskem izhodišču, ki namesto tradicionalnega pojma fenomenološke metode v psihoterapiji izhaja iz pojma fenomenološke naravnosti. Spremenjeno teoretsko izhodišče ima implikacije tudi za pedagoško delo, kjer v ta namen ponujam pristop, ki temelji na izkustvenem učenju in drugačnemu pristopu za uvajanje edukantov v razumevanje fenomenologije.

### **Ključne besede**

fenomenologija, fenomenološka metoda, naravna naravnost, fenomenološka naravnost, psihoterapevtsko izobraževanje.

## Introduction

Phenomenology is one of the most controversial<sup>1</sup> theoretical topics overall but also within psychotherapy. We can find significant differences in interpretation of the basic concepts of phenomenology (Resnick, 1995; Sapriel, 1998), and it is common to encounter strong words such as "confusion" (Crocker, 2009: 18), "inappropriate," "misrepresent" (McConville, 2001: 195) or "confused and misunderstood" (Brownell, 2010). This characteristic of the theoretical area can then be mirrored in the basic introductory literature, which is usually the first encounter for trainees with psychotherapy in general and with phenomenology, as well. My aim in this paper is rather unusual: instead of focusing on the theoretical issues of phenomenology, my emphasis will be more on the pedagogical aspects of and questions concerning how to introduce phenomenology into psychotherapy training. For this purpose, I will perform an overview of the existing presentations of phenomenology in introductory literature (books, textbooks and articles available in English). In addition, I will try to show the difficulties that trainees face and relate these to theoretical controversies. Finally, I will propose a slightly changed theoretical ground as a general approach for introducing phenomenology and illustrate it with a practical/experiential way of working with trainees.

## Existing traditional approaches

A decade ago we had several introductions to phenomenologically oriented psychotherapy which presented the three-step phenomenological method with reference to Husserl. At that time I felt the lack of an appropriate understanding of his method, his approach in general and its relevance for psychotherapy. Furthermore, I thought that there was a need to explore the potential for dealing with phenomenology in psychotherapy training, more specifically, how to introduce the theory of phenomenology and how to relate it to psychotherapeutic practice. The reason lay in that common appearance of a gap between theory and practice experienced by trainees in psychotherapy.

## Approaches to phenomenology in introductions to psychotherapy

Clarkson (1989) considers as a philosophical assumption of phenomenologically oriented approaches to psychotherapy that "my individual and unique experience precedes any attempt at labelling or categorisation or judgement" (p. 13). She later mentions the precedence of description before interpretation and focusing on "experiencing what is obvious in a given situation without prejudgements and expectations" (p. 14).

Clarkson and Mackewn (1993) subscribe to phenomenological method, consisting of three interrelated steps: "1. bracketing or setting aside previous assumptions and biases so as to focus on immediate experience; 2. describing immediate and concrete impressions, rather than explaining or interpreting; 3. equalizing (or initially treating as equally significant) all aspects of the field thus described, rather than assuming any hierarchy of importance" (p. 46). It is worth stressing that the authors take these steps from Spinelli (1989). They also refer to Perls: "I rely upon the patient's detailed descriptions of his experiences and my own observation, and try to use as little

<sup>1</sup>Owen says that, "when Directors of the Husserl Archives do not fully agree on definitions of the terms "reduction," "attitude" and "noema," it gives cause for concern" (Owen, 2007, p. 27-28).

construction and guesswork – for instance interpretation - as possible<sup>2</sup>” (Perls, 1979: 13).

Mackewn (1997) also mentions and describes bracketing, description and equalising as characteristics of the phenomenological method; however, she adds enquiring (p. 60-63). She understands phenomenology as the study of “multiple possibilities of a given field or situation as it is experienced subjectively by the people co-creating it at any moment in time” (p. 58-59). She also refers to Spinelli.

Sills, Fish and Lapworth (1995), on the one hand, follow this approach, offering the three “techniques or attitudes” (epochē or bracketing, description and horizontalism), which are described more practically. On the other hand, they are aware of problems related to the consistency of phenomenology. It is worth emphasising what they say about bracketing:

In practice, of course, it would be impossible to bracket off all our perceptions and judgments. They are too much part of us. But, as Gestalt counsellors, this is what we aim to do. (p. 101)

### **The origins of phenomenologically oriented approaches in psychotherapy**

The question arises, how the founders of phenomenologically oriented approaches to psychotherapy understood the phenomenological method and where these ‘three rules’ came from. In ‘The Four Lectures’ from 1966, Perls (1970) reveals his understanding of a “phenomenological approach which emphasizes the messages that are self-evident – existential in the pure sense – that we receive through the organs of our senses” (p. 14). Perls emphasises the how (instead of why) as a characteristic of his approach. He maintains that “all therapy that has to be done can only be done in the now. ... And the technique that lets us understand and stay with the now is the ‘awareness continuum’” (p. 17). Although Perls talks about bracketing, he refers neither to Husserl nor to his rules. We can assume that he refers to existential phenomenology, but he does not say more. He talks about existentialism, but there is no existentialism as such. In Perls et al. (1951) we do not find special references to phenomenology, since the main concepts are contact and awareness. Exercises usually start with ‘Now I am aware that ...’:

From philosophical point of view this is training in phenomenology: the realization that your sequence of thoughts, your surface experience ... is first of all something that exists in its own right. Even if something is ‘only a wish’, it is something – namely, the event itself of wishing. It is, therefore, as real as anything else. (Perls et al., 1951, p. 82)

In this sense there is a lot of phenomenology in Perls et al. (1951), with an emphasis, however, on awareness and never with reference to Husserl. Stoehr (1994) says that Goodman (a colleague of Perls) “had claimed an ‘affiliation’ with Husserl’s Ideen. By this he meant to suggest a parallel rather than an influence” (p. 104).

References to Husserl and the controversy about ‘the three rules’ of phenomenological method in various introductions to psychotherapy cannot be related to the founders of phenomeno

<sup>2</sup>My emphasis.

logically oriented approaches such as Gestalt therapy, but to later developments. It seems that traces lead to Spinelli (1989).

### Other approaches to phenomenology

In presentations of phenomenology that are more than mere introductions, we can find a more reflective approach, which shows some awareness of the controversial nature of the phenomenological method.

Although Zinker (1977) defines phenomenology as the “uninterpreted study of the ongoing, ever-changing nature of human experience” (p. 83), he describes in more detail how phenomenological principles are considered through sensations, time, space, process, ownership and content validity (p. 77-85).

Yontef defines phenomenology as “a search for understanding based on what is obvious or revealed by the situation *rather*<sup>3</sup> than the interpretation of the observer. Phenomenologists refer to this as a ‘given’... The phenomenological attitude is recognizing and bracketing off (setting aside) preconceptions about what is relevant. A phenomenological description integrates both observed behaviour and experiential, personal reports” (p. 186). He discusses various aspects of the phenomenological approach and also offers a list of its five characteristics, which are not just ‘rules’. Yontef is, therefore, aware of the problems, but he does not question them further. Lolita Sapriel (1998) is one of the authors who see contradictions in a phenomenological approach to psychotherapy – looking at them from an intersubjective approach. Referring to Resnick (Resnick in: Parlett: 1995), who uses the metaphor of a Martian co-therapist to express the phenomenological method, enabling a virgin experience (p. 4), Sapriel claims that, with this ‘presuppositionless’ position and ‘objective interpretation’, “Gestalt therapy adopted Husserl’s notion of ‘transcendental perception’ and thereby paradoxically fell into the very same objectifying trap” (p. 39).

It is interesting that the Polster & Polster (1973) do not include phenomenology in their theory. It seems that their basic concepts of contact, awareness and experiment are sufficient. The Polsters do not talk about ‘underpinnings’ in general or phenomenology as one of them in particular. It seems that they are aware of possible contradictions as a result of referring to doctrines. They do not talk about phenomenology as a doctrine or a method, because the notion of awareness is sufficient. They are interested in awareness; if it is achieved, theorizing about the method is unnecessary (maybe, if it is a doctrine as a possible dogma, it could even be dangerous). The emphasis is, therefore, on awareness as the aim, and the means are techniques of awareness, which can be more or less contactful<sup>4</sup>.

There is another exception that does not mention phenomenology:

Let us remember that the Gestalt method is organised around the work of awareness of phenomena which take place at the contact boundary in order to enable the restoration of the

<sup>3</sup>My emphasis.

<sup>4</sup>I guess a more ‘phenomenological’ attitude would be in their approach called simply as more contactful.

capacity of realising the creative adjustments in the contact with the environment<sup>5</sup>. (Robine, 1998, p. 46)

More reflective approaches indicate that there are problems with phenomenologically oriented approaches to psychotherapy if their authors insist that there can be a consistent phenomenological method. The whole overview shows assumptions or beliefs of the authors that there is a phenomenological method in psychotherapy and that this is based on Husserl. However, the issue of the phenomenological method remains controversial and its relation to Husserl unclear. What and how does Husserl have to do with the phenomenological method of psychotherapy? Can references to Husserl be justified? In order to clarify these questions, I will briefly summarize Husserl's basic position (Husserl, 1970).

### **My first attempt at Husserl's understanding of phenomenology**

At one particular stage of his development Husserl (1970) defines "phenomenology as the general doctrine of essences" (p. 1). Its method has three steps. The first step is about certainty:

"Only through a reduction, the same one we have already called phenomenological reduction, do I attain an absolute datum which no longer presents anything transcendent. ... still my simply 'seeing' reflection on what is given in the apperception of the relevant mental process and on my ego, yields the phenomenon of this apperception; the phenomenon, so to say, of 'perception construed as my perception'" (p. 34).

The distinction is, therefore, between the immanent ("is in me") and the transcendent ("outside of me") (p. 3). The second step is about "pure phenomenon" (p. 5), which leads to "eidetic abstraction" and gives "the objectivity of essences" (p. 6):

"I have a particular intuition of redness, or rather several such intuitions. I stick strictly to the pure immanence; I am careful to perform the phenomenological reduction. I snip off any further significance of redness, any way in which it may be viewed as something transcendent, e.g., as the redness of a piece of blotting paper on my table, etc. And now I fully grasp in pure 'seeing' the meaning of the concept of redness in general, redness in specie, the universal 'seen' as identical in this and that" (p. 44-45).

The third step is about the "correlation between the phenomenon of cognition and the object of cognition" (p. 10) and "how the transcendent real object can be met (can be known in its nature)" (p. 11).

My attempt seeks to explain briefly the main concepts of Husserl's method for pedagogical purposes. His aim is phenomenology as a strict science, which would seek the abstract essences of objects. The means to achieve this end is a phenomenological reduction, which aims to exclude anything transcendent (outside of me), in order to stay only with the immanent (within me), i.e. with phenomena (which are not perceptions or sense data). If the aim is absolute certain

<sup>5</sup>"Rappelons que la méthode gestaltiste est organisée autour du travail de conscience-awareness des phénomènes qui se déploient à la frontière-contact pour permettre la restauration de la capacité de réaliser des ajustements créatifs dans le contact avec l'environnement." (Robine, 1998, p. 46)

ty, only phenomena can offer certainty within consciousness. What is bracketed is the existence of the object and its nature. Any prejudgement is suspended, and pure description of phenomena is practiced. The description of phenomena leads to pure phenomena, seeking for structural invariants. Then comes the insight into the essence or the eidos of the phenomena, which is also the eidos of the object. In this process, apart from the Ego of straightforward experience, there is also the transcendental Ego of reflective experience, who in fact is the subject of this phenomenological reduction.

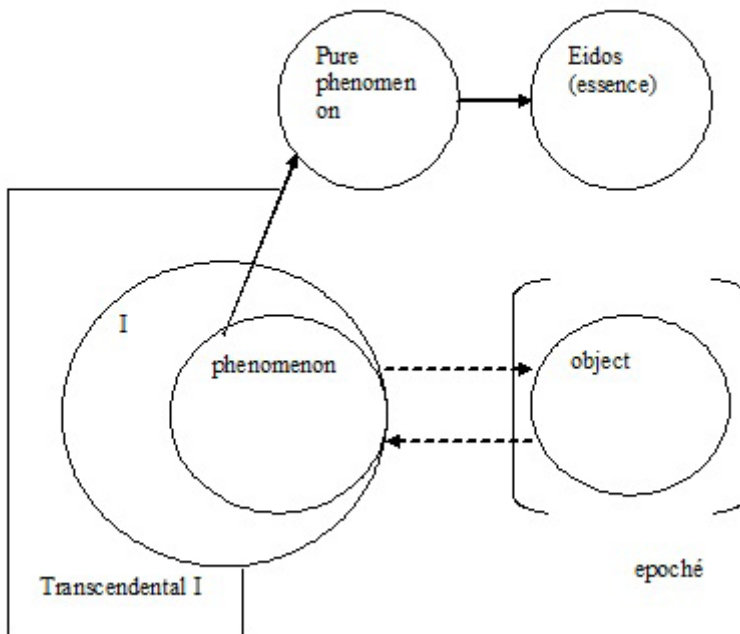


Figure 1: My diagram of Husserl's approach as a didactic tool

If we were interested in exploring the essential and incompatible differences between Husserl's phenomenological method and the principles of phenomenologically oriented psychotherapeutic approaches such as Gestalt therapy, we could find several: e.g., the purely cognitive nature of his phenomenological reduction and its result; proceeding from phenomenon to pure phenomenon and to the abstract essence; the division between subject and object; seeking absolute certainty; the existence of the transcendental Ego, etc. Our question is rather whether there is anything in Husserl's phenomenological method that remains. We could say that it is not the method, but only the main idea of phenomenology as a paradigmatically different approach. This general idea was adopted into phenomenologically oriented psychotherapeutic approaches in a very specific way, whereby Husserl's approach could be treated as merely an inspiration. There are two essential specifics in psychotherapy that have to be taken into consideration. The first is the fact that the work of relational therapists is based on building a relationship with the client, treating him as a person, and not as an object of cognition as in Husserl's approach. A therapist

deals not only with a person's observable behaviour but also with her experiences of herself and her relationship with others, including the therapeutic relationship. This problem can be solved in the approaches of existential phenomenology. The second specific is the psychotherapeutic effect, which is either awareness only or change. This also differs from the approaches in existential phenomenology.

It is necessary to stress that there can be no Husserl's phenomenological method without seeking for universal abstract essences, which is described by Ihde (1977) as the 'fourth rule'. Spinelli (1989), who takes the 'three rules' from Ihde, is silent about the 'fourth rule, and presenters in introductory literature follow him as well.

Although there do exist new texts that show important differences between the phenomenological method in psychotherapy and Husserl's approach, the above section had two aims: one is 'archaeological': to show how Husserl's essences disappeared; the other is pedagogical: to show the presentation of phenomenology in the existing literature, which is still the basis for trainees' first encounters with phenomenology and its unresolved controversies.

### **Recent issues in phenomenologically oriented psychotherapeutic approaches**

In more recent presentations and discussions, there is more awareness of these problems. The issue of the phenomenological method is more emphasised and the problems outlined. McConville (2001) is very clear, and there is nothing to add to his concise explanations of essential aspects of Husserl's phenomenological project and its context in relation to psychotherapy. After presenting the context, he begins from the usually forgotten 'natural attitude' and chooses to explain his view of Husserl's two main discoveries within the reduction "that consciousness could not be conceived as an isolated Cogito" (intentionality) and "that the world always reveals itself to consciousness in profiles, each taken from a perspective and always in a form of standing against a horizon" (p. 98). His conclusion is that "Husserl's reduction needs to be seen fundamentally, not as itself a tool of scientific or psychotherapeutic inquiry, but as what it was for Husserl – a tool of philosophic inquiry" and proposes to base "its application upon the spirit of his project and discoveries, rather than a literal extrapolation of his method without regard to context" (p. 202).

There are other more recent attempts. Crocker (2009) tries to clarify the relation between Husserl and psychotherapy, which is a more detailed explanation of Husserl's concepts from a specific perspective. Bloom (2009) also raises this relation, focusing also on the concept of intersubjectivity. His exploration of Husserl's basic concepts that could be relevant for psychotherapy is detailed and represents an important contribution. However, it would be difficult to imagine this text as an introduction to phenomenology for trainees. There is another point that I find problematic: when Bloom tries to make a link between Husserl's concepts and psychotherapy, I miss the ground for his conclusions. One example is his view of the difference between natural and phenomenological attitudes:

The natural attitude is the domain of ordinary conversation, too. It is the natural world of social banter between the psychotherapist and patient, which must come to an end for the psychotherapy to begin.

Both authors raise important issues that need to be seriously discussed on a theoretical level.

My interest, however, is more limited.

Since I am more interested in the pedagogical perspective, I will just mention another recent introduction, written by Philip Brownell (2010), which seems to be promising for our purpose not only because of the clear presentation of basic concepts (in general) but also because of his questioning of them. He warns against “introjecting Husserl’s philosophical method to suffice for a psychological process” and emphasises that psychotherapists (who work, as he says, within the phenomenal field), are not philosophers (who work, as he says, within the phenomenological field (p. 89). He presents the phenomenological method as an adapted method, indicating the above mentioned difficulties. He (in my view) appropriately explains the features of Husserl’s approach and those of psychotherapy, but from the description I am not sure how they relate to each other, and I guess this could be a problem in understanding for trainees as well, especially when the question arises of what the natural attitude in psychotherapy would be. I have a similar impression of his relevant explanations of hermeneutics (p. 129) and its relation to psychotherapy, where I still miss the connection with Husserl’s general phenomenological approach. As we see, Brownell still believes in the phenomenological method – albeit an adapted version of the method.

Regardless of these clarifications, there is still a need to emphasise the essential or fundamental first step towards the phenomenological attitude, which was present in the whole of Husserl’s work and emphasised in his last work (*The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*). Interestingly, the same emphasis can be found in the last work of Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and Invisible*. This is often overlooked Husserl’s identification of what he called the ‘natural attitude’ of consciousness, which “is the belief in (the taken-for-grantedness of) the existence of the world” (Karlsson, 2010: 7). The reflective approaches to phenomenology draw special attention to this first and fundamental step into phenomenology. It seems to me that this first step is from one particular perspective crucial for grasping phenomenology as part of the hermeneutic tradition which “aims at an understanding of the world not naively linked to the so called objective sciences” (Spagnuolo Lobb, 1998, p.1). This crucial step forms a distinctive boundary between thinkers or practitioners who follow the hermeneutic tradition in phenomenology. My particular interest is, therefore, to explore methods for inducing trainees to become more familiar with that aspect of the hermeneutic tradition which emphasises the fundamental distinction in psychotherapy between explanation and understanding<sup>7</sup>.

### **Alternative approaches**

What I failed to find in phenomenologically oriented psychotherapy literature I have found in two recent books by authors from other orientations. The two different authors Owen (2006, 2007) (integrative orientation) and Karlsson, (2010) (psychoanalytic orientation) arrived at interestingly similar results. The first question about the nature of phenomenology gives a clear message:

Phenomenology is theoretical interpretation within the philosopher’s armchair. It does not propose empirical investigations of any kind (Owen, 2006, p. 86-87).

<sup>7</sup>The understanding of this distinction can have pedagogical relevance later in the discussions of whether psychotherapy can be science or not.

It has important implications for the above discussed controversies about the nature of Husserl's phenomenological method: it cannot be literally applied to psychotherapeutic practice. Furthermore, it requires a much wider approach, starting with very basic principles. Both authors devote significant attention to basic concepts like *natural and naturalistic attitude*, an approach which also has significant further implications. Other authors summarise the idea that natural attitude "first comes with a measure of naiveté that accepts beliefs about the world as given without much question, the chief of which is that the objective world actually exists" (Brownell, 2010, p. 87). Usually they stop at this point, but the continuation that "the world presents itself as a world filled with objects totally independent of the perceiving human being" (Karlsson, 2010, p. 6) has a special significance, because it opens the potential for significant understanding of Husserl by turning attention to the important question of "how it is experienced for consciousness" (p. 7), which requires a "break with our natural attitude". This is achieved by means of the phenomenological reduction, and it is how the phenomenological attitude "aims at making us open to that which is given in and through consciousness" (p. 10). This approach can represent a sensible way to introduce trainees to phenomenology from a theoretical perspective. The importance lies in turning attention from the object to the consciousness and in showing the nature of natural attitude, which is clearly presented by both authors as the key point in introducing Husserl's approach to phenomenology. Why? Because "the naturalistic attitude is not and cannot focus on meaning," and it is meaning that needs to be the major focus of psychotherapy<sup>8</sup> (Owen, 2006, p. 5). This already implies the introduction of the concept of intentionality. More important, however, is its importance and the reason we need to turn our attention to consciousness:

And it is within the phenomenological reduction that we can discover intentionality – that is, the meaning bestowing of consciousness (Karlsson, 2010, p.11). ... The concept of intentionality implies a rejection of the idea that there would be objective facts, independent of a subject/subjective understanding/consciousness (p.12).

As we see, from the very beginning, these two authors pay special attention to basic concepts, which is an essential part of their approach to starting from a careful and profound study of Husserl's texts. This basis allows them to develop the central point of each other's research. Karlsson's central point is the move from a presentation of the concept of natural attitude to a critique of the naturalistic attitude of science in general and further to the problematic aspects of psychoanalysis. Owen's approach, which includes Freud's critique as well, has the broader aim of exploring and presenting the potential of Husserl's approach for psychotherapy in general. For our pedagogical purposes, Owen's presentation (2006) is more interesting because of its special attention to Husserl's method and its articulation. However, instead of the usual three rules of the method, he presents as Husserl's theoretical grounding for empirical work the five essential steps to phenomenology (a need to become self-reflexive about the forms of intentionality; reductions and attitudes; different senses of meaning-objects; eidetic imaginative variations; and finding ontologically more independent qualities and relations) (p. 93) and then explains some of the most basic points in phenomenological philosophy in terms of attitudes. This strategy of attitudes turns out to be much more productive than the controversial method consisting of the three rules.

<sup>8</sup>Let us take a simple example: if a client (patient) is concerned (or anxious) because of his/her pain, and this pain for him/her can have the meaning ("Maybe I have cancer."), a medical doctor can make all the examinations and tests, i.e. everything science can do. However, science cannot focus on this meaning and explore how he/she creates this meaning or s/he usually ascribes meaning to his/her experience. For some people explanation is enough; for others it is enough to be heard (acknowledged) by others, but some people need more, like sharing this concern and getting appropriate personal response, by which the client (patient) feels understood, which is existential understanding. There are medical doctors who are able to respond in this way. However, this may not be because of their scientific background - rather in spite of it.

He explains eight attitudes: the natural attitude, the naturalistic attitude, the personalistic attitude, the phenomenological attitude (developed further in four major ways) - intersubjective attitude, psychological attitude, transcendental attitude and eidetic attitude (p. 101-104). His aim is to show how this strategy of attitudes can be productive for psychotherapy, and the whole project is illustrated by examples to demonstrate 'making phenomenology work' (308-325).

The lesson learned for us is twofold: on the one hand, we have a more successful ground for introducing phenomenology to beginners; on the other hand, the benefit could be mutual: potential dialogue between approaches such as these two and already existing, phenomenologically oriented approaches. The aim of the next section will be to demonstrate an alternative approach.

### **Husserl and psychotherapy – second attempt**

If we return to the previous interpretations of Husserl, we find some important differences. However, instead<sup>9</sup> of searching for misunderstanding or confusion, we can use these differences as an opportunity to illustrate Husserl's approach experientially. As an example I will be using our topic (as a sort of 'experiment' which came out of the presentation), although I am aware that this is not the best example because it is limited only to the cognitive level.

Rather than searching for the 'right' understanding of Husserl, I am interested in the pedagogical issue of how to communicate about the problem and its possible solution. When I say either that there is a misunderstanding, misrepresentation or even confusion, or that "You did not understand me", I could also say, "Our understandings differ". In so doing, I am implying that we have entered into a discussion in an intersubjective field where two experiences meet, and we cannot expect an objective truth, especially if we agree that we are discussing a controversial topic. I am trying to set aside my strong conviction that there is one correct understanding (epochē), while also trying to reduce my experience of understanding to ground that becomes less and less problematic – and becomes a common ground. What is that on which we can agree? It may be just a definition of terms (if they exist), or perhaps the original writer's statements, since I admit that translation is already interpretation. If I pay attention to my consciousness and how my understanding as experience is constituted, I become more aware that there is no objective criterion for correct or absolute understanding of Husserl, especially if we take into account (again) that the "Directors of the Husserl Archives do not fully agree on definitions of the terms "reduction," "attitude" and "noema," (Owen, 2007, p. 27-28).

This way of presenting the topic (as one possible way of illustrating the phenomenological attitude) offers me the possibility to introduce--step by step and experientially-- particular theoretical concepts: the awareness that I have co-created my understanding and my sense [Sinn] of what I was reading (object) helps me to realise that understanding cannot be independent of consciousness (intentionality), so I can be focused on my consciousness and I can explore how I create my sense. The other can realise the same<sup>10</sup> and, rather than on the isolated object, we can focus our attention on the differences of our noemata and explore how these differences happened along the route from Husserl's original sentences or interpretations. I can check for myself whether I had any preconceptions or was insufficiently strict in my bracketing (epochē).

<sup>9</sup>I refer to the authors who use words such as "misunderstanding", "confusion" etc.

<sup>10</sup>If this is valid, then we can understand why Husserl insisted in absolute certainty of these phenomenological, i.e. theoretical, claims about consciousness.

This was an attempt to illustrate the phenomenological attitude instead of the phenomenological method. In the next section I will present two exercises that have the same aim: to introduce trainees experientially to the phenomenological attitude, i.e., so that they can relate this attitude to their own experiences.

The main idea of the first exercise is taken from Judith R. Brown (1996, p. 18-22). Her exercise 'See, Imagine, Feel' as an awareness exercise, is simple but can also be difficult when it is taken seriously and strictly. My aim is not limited to awareness but expanded to be the ground for experiencing and exploring the phenomenological attitude. The instructions for the participants, who can work in pairs or trios, are given in three steps:

- Describe what you notice (e.g., I see...)
- Describe your assumption ( e.g., I imagine ...)
- Describe your inner response (e.g., I feel ...)

An (exaggerated) example to clarify the exercise can be given: 'I notice that you are clenching your fist. I assume that you are angry. I feel fear.' The aim is to notice and to be aware of the difference between what I perceive, what I assume, and further to be aware of my inner response or experience and how it interferes with my perception and assumption. This is the ground for a discussion and reflection, first in the pairs (trios) and later in the whole group. This metaprocessing is then used, step by step, to introduce phenomenological concepts and distinctions. If the trainees have personal experiences that can lead to relevant concepts, it is much easier for them to grasp the theory. In this exercise the difficulty of strict distinction between perception and assumption is already enough for them to start reflecting theoretically upon this distinction. It is also a concrete example of turning attention from the object to consciousness, and consequently to the concept of intentionality. It becomes clearer which phenomenological concepts are more and which less relevant for therapeutic practice and for an understanding of the phenomenological attitude.

While this exercise is basic and introductory, and can also be used in other contexts focused on personal growth, the following one represents the next step in the training, usually in the second year. It is designed as a weekend workshop, which in our institute is called 'Clinical Phenomenology'. Basically it is similar to a 'live supervision' workshop, combined with working in trios. However, the psychotherapeutic work is not followed by supervision feedback but by a discussion of the process. The difference is that we videotape some of the exercises where trainees take on the role of the therapist. There are two main aims. One is related to the professional growth of trainees in developing their ability to relate theory to practice, or more specifically, their ability to conceptualise the therapeutic process and to use such theoretical insight appropriately. Another aim is more specific and related to practice: to reflect upon the phenomenological attitude. In this short description I will focus on the second aim.

We begin with a short videotaped exercise, and after the impressions of 'the therapist' and 'the client', the trainees are invited to describe whatever they have noticed during the work. We write the main points on the whiteboard. Then we watch the video and repeat the procedure. It often happens that we stop the video after a few seconds or one minute and discuss the process of this short time in the following ten twenty or thirty minutes. Careful observation of the process shows that even in that short time many things happen that could be representative of the whole work. When trainees try to describe what they have noticed, they offer new observations, and it becomes interesting how many different observations appear on the whiteboard. It becomes

even more interesting when they try to judge the relevance of particular observations and how to use the concepts of our modality to describe the process. Although we realise that we need more holistic insight and that we need a conceptual framework to overcome the confusion and perplexity, there still remains a fundamental finding. The main problem that usually emerges concerns how to distinguish phenomena that can be described with certainty from ‘descriptions’ that are already our assumptions. (An example of what we do not need to interpret would usually be retroreflection, and then we can learn how to notice it.) We realise further that we have different experiences of the same ‘object’, and this realisation is closer to Husserl’s view that objects independent of our consciousness do not exist. So we can explore how we ascribe meaning to an experience. This is the point where we can notice the advantage of the phenomenological attitude in relation to the controversial three rules of the phenomenological method. As I said, although there are more aims of this exercise, in this short description I have focused on that aspect which offers a possibility for learning the phenomenological attitude.

### Concluding remarks

It seems that new scholarly studies of Husserl (Owen, Karlsson) show that Husserl’s ideas can be relevant for psychotherapy and fruitful in those approaches which so far have not followed phenomenological principles. Is it a paradox that in Gestalt therapy theory, which refers to phenomenology as its methodology, we lack a better articulated and developed methodology? The above presented approaches in the introductory literature show what trainees entering their training can read. If references to the controversial ‘three rules’ are not productive, what would be an alternative, and what is then the methodological ground of Gestalt therapy? Moreover, we can venture to raise the question of whether Gestalt therapy has developed its phenomenological methodology at all. The possible argument for a negative answer would be that Gestalt methodology is based more on Gestalt psychology than on phenomenology. Phenomenologists often make comparisons between phenomenology and Gestalt psychology and try to draw parallels. Owen (1999) says that “[a] truly-Husserlian empirical phenomenology would be like gestalt psychology” (par. 9), and further that “[w]hat Husserl was inventing was an approach to dealing with unities or wholes of meaning in a parallel way to gestalt psychology” (Owen, 2006, p. 92). He is even more concrete:

This makes phenomenology close to gestalt psychology in that both attend to complex wholes of meaning. The “unity of the “expression” and the “expressed” that belongs to the essences of all comprehensive unities” (p. 291)

Ihde (1976) discusses how Husserl’s concept of essence can still be relevant:

Equally or even more effective in discerning structures is the “gestalt” occurrence. It may and often does occur that a single experience will show an essential structural feature. (p. 30) The sampling of some existential possibilities gradually builds up an outline. As gestalt psychologists know, a “mosaic” of dots is often sufficient to display the picture. (p. 34)

What seems to be a disadvantage turns out to be an advantage. Although Owen and Karlsson show the relevance of Husserl for psychoanalysis and psychotherapy in general, they do not pursue consequences as radical as were pursued in Gestalt therapy. Their analysis (especially Owen’s) is probably the most profound analysis of Husserl’s ideas and of their relevance for

psychotherapy. Nevertheless, phenomenology still has its limits in helping the psychotherapist or the analyst to better understand the client and to come to a more accurate interpretation (in cooperation with the client). This is the point where the contribution of the Gestalt therapy theory becomes possible, based on the methodology taken from Gestalt psychology. As a holistic approach, gestalt psychology offered the ground for the development of the Gestalt therapy methodology, aiming at contact and client insight/awareness. Speaking from a theoretical perspective, it seems either that Husserl's approach cannot offer these consequences or that Owen and Karlsson cannot apply them because of their approach. To inquire what can be offered by the approach of Merleau-Ponty would be to open up an entirely new question.

Profound analyses of phenomenology and its importance for psychotherapy show us how these approaches can be successful and how they can be distinguished from others--not by starting with the phenomenological method but by beginning with the phenomenological attitude and by careful analysis of basic concepts of phenomenology and their possible relevance for psychotherapy. The way authors approach concepts such as natural attitude, intentionality and other related concepts is the criterion by which one can distinguish among approaches with greater or less success. There are more successful approaches to phenomenology outside of Gestalt therapy (Owen, Karlsson) and fewer successful approaches like Stern's (Stern, 2004). There are more successful approaches within Gestalt therapy (Robine, 2003 - focusing on the concept of intentionality and its relevance within Gestalt therapy) and some less successful, which I have presented in this article. There is a need for trainees entering psychotherapy training to take something from both successful approaches.

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