

4-3-2009

Dasein as Attunement, and Social Inquiry

Kenneth Liberman

University of Oregon, liberman@uoregon.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://aisel.aisnet.org/sprouts_all

Recommended Citation

Liberman, Kenneth, "Dasein as Attunement, and Social Inquiry" (2009). *All Sprouts Content*. 260.
http://aisel.aisnet.org/sprouts_all/260

This material is brought to you by the Sprouts at AIS Electronic Library (AISEL). It has been accepted for inclusion in All Sprouts Content by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISEL). For more information, please contact elibrary@aisnet.org.

Dasein as Attunement, and Social Inquiry

Kenneth Liberman
University of Oregon, U.S.A.

Abstract

"References to phenomenology are often made, but never quite fully explored and exploited. Collateral aspects are mentioned, such transparency, ready-to-handedness and so on. Yet nobody quotes Section 29 of Being and Time, where Heidegger (1962, pp. 172 â 182) introduces the notion of situatedness (Befindlichkeit), contrasting it with the privileged role attributed then (and now) to understanding, cognition and the purely mental. Lack of proper references to phenomenology while using its ascendance may also induce the reader not versed in philosophy to believe that what these authors say about situatedness is indeed all that phenomenology has had to say on the subject." From Claudio Ciborra, "Getting to the Heart of the Situation,"(2006: pp. 5-6).

Keywords: in situ; Over-conceptualizing; Befindlichkeit; Formal Analysis.

Permanent URL: <http://sprouts.aisnet.org/9-5>

Copyright: [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

Reference: Liberman K. (2009). "Dasein as Attunement, and Social Inquiry ," Proceedings > Proceedings of ALPIS
itAIS, Italy . *Sprouts: Working Papers on Information Systems*, 9(5).
<http://sprouts.aisnet.org/9-5>

Dasein as Attunement, and Social Inquiry

Talk presented to the Alpis Information Systems 2009 Annual Conference
Carisolo, Italy

by

Kenneth Liberman
University of Oregon

Introduction

1. From Claudio Ciborra, “Getting to the Heart of the Situation,” pp. 5-6.
[It could also be titled, “The Transition from *Befindlichkeit* to ‘Situated.’”]:

“References to phenomenology are often made, but never quite fully explored and exploited. Collateral aspects are mentioned, such transparency, ready-to-handedness and so on. Yet nobody quotes Section 29 of *Being and Time*, where Heidegger (1962, pp. 172 – 182) introduces the notion of situatedness (*Befindlichkeit*), contrasting it with the privileged role attributed then (and now) to understanding, cognition and the purely mental. ... Lack of proper references to phenomenology while using its ascendance may also induce the reader not versed in philosophy to believe that what these authors say about situatedness is indeed all that phenomenology has had to say on the subject.”

As a social phenomenologist I can say that I have spent much the past four decades wincing whenever I heard or read sociologists, anthropologists, linguists, etc. use the term “phenomenological.” The thin, shallow use of the term “phenomenology” is probably the principal reason I have rejected manuscripts I review for publication.

So when I was asked to speak to you about phenomenology, I thought than instead of offering more talk about phenomenology, our meeting could be an occasion for reading some phenomenology, and I could think of no better selection from Heidegger than the Section 29 cited by Ciborra.

2. I wish I could have known Ciborra. In reading him, I understand that I missed meeting a good friend. He has that balance of science and humanity that is what is most rewarding about my professional life.

I. What is the big deal about “in situ”?

A. How can something so subjective have had so much influence?

For the significant reason that the way that most of our models represent the world is deeply flawed.

And this is because a good deal of our lives are subjective.

There is no “objective” that is not accompanied by an interpretation; therefore, there exists only a subjective objective and never an objective objective.

B. More importantly, our lives are much more complicated than the purveyors of planful thought and rational choice would have it.

Let me mention just one phenomenon of ordinary life *in situ* renders most modeling of cognitive activity foolish, and that is ***reflexivity of understanding***:

Reflexivity refers to practices that *at the same time* describe *and* constitute a social framework – or rather, the practices constitute the framework as they describe it (i.e., the describing is the constituting). Reflexivity is that feature of comprehending some structure of social action that presupposes, *while it provides*, the conditions that make its own intelligibility reasonable and sensible.

Planful accounts miss the reflexivity, which is the moment-by-moment adjustment and feedback between reflection and situation and is so spontaneous that it cannot be predicted in advance; accordingly, oftentimes planful accounts cannot locate the real problems that people have.

All this was something of an embarrassment to the organization theory of information systems researchers, and so talk of “situated” studies began,

largely led by ethnomethodological research projects that located the “troubles” that were to be found on local occasions, projects that exposed the work of the reflexivity of understanding.

C. Because of reflexivity and other phenomena like it, such as the indexicality of meanings, textbook versions rarely reflect reality.

- > Take the Oregon state highway policy, which puts all good ideas on the back-burner, no matter how brilliant they sound in theory: they have learned, as part of their practical work, never to administer a new policy of lane-painting, sign-posting, signal systems, traffic-routing, etc. without first implementing it on a trial-only basis.

This is for the very good reason that they have had a long experience with unanticipated consequences. There are *so many* of these unanticipated consequences that they have concluded they are unanticipatable.

- > Take the people who write computer programs, who have similarly learned not only that they cannot predict which bugs will occur, they also cannot predict what clever things they have devised, until the people who use the beta versions report back to them. These reports on beta versions even teach them how they should market the programs.
- > Take the man who worked for the 3-M company who invented post-its. He was reading a technical book on an airplane and kept losing the place in the book where the footnotes were. So when he got back to the lab he invented post-its. He didn't have the slightest idea he would change how every office in the world worked; but he is happy to accept the credit for his wonder just the same.

II. The Problem of Over-conceptualizing, and the Limits of *Conoscenza Teoretica*

- A. What Heidegger calls “Attunement” (*Il Trovarsi*) is one of the fundamental three existential facts of life – the other two are “Understanding” and “Discourse.”

Attunement is the name for a *being* more than a *knowing*: attunement does not *know* why (127a) it is ... “Non si *sa*. Sono cose che l’esserci non può sapere” (It 389b/ G 134b)

Derrida is following Heidegger’s lead when he keeps seeking ways to infect his inquiries with non-knowledge.

According to Heidegger, “Discourse does not, as such, mean to be known.” (127b/ G 134c)

And, “The possibilities of disclosure to *cognition* fall far short ...” (1217a)

- B. But at the same time Heidegger sternly warns us against becoming ‘touchy-feely.’ Having taken a stand against common sense as well as against formal theoretical cognition, Heidegger still insists on a *rigorous* attention to the just-what of the actual experience *in situ*. This is what is meant by phenomenology. Heidegger writes (130b),

“We must not confuse demonstrating the existential-ontological constitution of cognitive determination in the attunement of being-in-the-world with the attempt to *surrender science to feeling*.”

This rigor, our rigor, must pay attention only to “evidence” (German: *Evidenz*, Italian *Evidenza*), which is one of the basic notions of Husserl’s program of rigorous inquiry. Formal analytic accounts *miss* this *Evidenz* due to the myopia created by their continuous preoccupation with their theorizing.

C. “Disclosedness does not mean ‘to be known’.”

One must already have found itself in a situation when one commences to know.

And we are not to minimize the *Evidenz* of attunement “by measuring it against the apodictic certainty of the theoretical cognition.” (128b)

Merleau-Ponty expanded these inquiries in his project of nondualistic reflection, what he called *sur-reflection*.

We are catching sight of the necessity of another operation besides conversion to reflection, more fundamental than it, of a sort of *sur-réflexion* [that] would not lose sight of the brute thing and the brute perception and would not finally efface them, would not cut the organic bonds ... [of] our mute contact with the world when they are not yet things said.... It must plunge into the world instead of surveying it. (*Visible and the Invisible*, 38-9)

Heid p. 138: “Theoretical looking at the world has always flattened it down to the uniformity of what is purely objectively present.”

Let’s read the Italian (401): “Lo sguardo teoretico ha già sempre schermato il mondo sull’uniformità del mero sottomano,”

D. But Heidegger is sophisticated enough to recognize that theoretical cognition brings benefits as well as limits:

Continuing the Italian: “...un’uniformità dentro quale, certo, è contenuta la nuova ricchezza di tutto quanto può essere svelato da un puro determinare.”

Or, in English, “... although, of course, a new abundance of what can be discovered in pure determination lies within that uniformity.”

What is this abundance? And way is it that formal reason brings such abundance along with closing us off to the complexity of real events?

Prof. Fele and I are undertaking a study of coffee tasting; that is, how *assaggiatore di caffè* organize the intelligibility of the coffee descriptors they use. The formal terms they have, like “rich”, “medium bodied,” “acidic,” “*rotondo*,” “*fiorito*,” “*vellutato*,” etc. all permit them to locate

tastes and stabilize the intelligibility of their sensory experience. We are doing a real phenomenology of coffee tasting. But we have discovered that alongside making it possible for them to find, purchase and verify shipments of first-rate coffee, these terms close off some tastes, tastes that have a difficult time being noticed.

Italy's principal *assaggiatore di caffè* writes of the tasting card in *both* positive and pejorative terms:

The card certainly plays an important role in guiding the judging procedures that apply. However, we must remember that it is only a tool, and the taster is responsible for recognizing and evaluating organoleptic characteristics ... the second [card] is based on thorough research aimed at modernizing the card by insisting that sensorial analysis is conducted with strict rules.” (Giudo Odello, *Espresso Italiano Tasting*, Brescia (It.): Centro Studi Assaggiatori, 2007, p. 46.

Or, In Italian (p. 47): “Non disigna mai dimenticare che essa è solo uno strumento da capire e da utilizzare, la rilevazione delle caratteristiche organolettiche, la loro elaborazione in giudizi e la successiva espressione è di pertinenza del degustatore che mai potrà scaricarsi di questa responsabilità ... la seconda [scheda], realizzata sulla scorta di una forte ricerca volta all'innovazione e in considerazione delle severe regole dell'analisi sensoriale.”

The seeming contradiction here is not a flaw in the procedure – formal analyses *always* and *necessarily* provide “*elaborazione in giudizi*” while at the same time cannot be made to substitute for the “*responsabilità*” to actually taste. And yet as professional thinkers, we are continually trying to accomplish this very thing.

III. Befindlichkeit

Evidenz demands that we first taste, and Attunement pays respect to an understanding that is more doing than knowing.

Befindlichkeit or Attunement is rendered in Italian as *Trovarsi*, which is a reflexive verb. reflexive verbs are really splendid things, because they

already undermine the human conceit that we are always in control of affairs.

Take a verb like *annoiarsi*, “to become bored.” The logic of reflexive verbs better represents the actual situation than the non-reflective English.

In the case of *Befindlichkeit*, it is a state one finds oneself in without any deliberate doing. As Heidegger (129) tells us, “[Mood] never comes from ‘without’ nor from ‘within,’ but rises from being-in-the-world itself.” Here Heidegger is referring to things like when we grow tired of ourselves, when our being has become manifest to us as a burden, such as when we are bored.

A closely related term that Heidegger uses is *Umsicht*, or “circumspective attention,” “*la circumspectio*” which is not quite “*sapere*,” “*conoscenza*,” or “*conosciuto*.” This is the preliminary taking of bearing that people do to find a context before they settle into a it. It implies a broad sweep, and Heidegger contrast it with the more invasive, paternalist strategies of technological manipulation.

IV. The Limits of Formal Analysis

A. Much of the foundational experience that Heidegger is describing is not subject to formal investigation, at least not without distorting its basic character beyond recognition.

Ciborra (p. 12) writes of Lucy Suchman’s findings:

“Her empirical study confirms that the organization of situated action is an emergent property of the moment-by-moment interactions between actors and their relevant environments. Expert systems are built on a planning model of human action. ‘The model treats a plan as something located in the actor’s head.’”

The proponents of “planning models,” which includes artificial intelligence designers and rational choice theorists but excludes the Oregon state highway planners, try to resolve difficulties by attempting to “*embed into expert systems more and more sophisticated plans.*” (my italics, Ciborra 12)

But this loses sight of Heidegger’s discovery that Dasein finds him/herself in a situation before beginning to reflect analytically, that a world *already* “matters to it” (129b) (“*potere-essere-toccatto*”, It. 399b) before knowing. And this is where occurs most of the confusions of the users of Xerox machines that are documented by Suchman.

Dasein has always found itself “always already” (128a/ *già sempre trovato* It. 391c) in a finding which does not come from a direct seeking (*trovato in un trovare che non scaturisce tanto da un diretto cercare*).

B. The more that formal analytic investigators inspect a situation the less they will see. Heidegger (127c) observes, “The that of facticity is never to be found by looking.”

“Il fatto-che della fatticità non è mai reperibile in un vedere intuitivo.”
(It. 391b)

That is because looking - *un diretto cercare* - is already looking for something; that is, one already has the frame of experience built – one’s mind is so full of what one already knows that one cannot see anything except what one has put into the world oneself. it may be called positive science, but it is deluded, and the Tibetans I lived with have a great name for such delusion: they call it “ignorance” (*ma rig ma*).

For Tibetans it is not what you don’t know that makes you ignorant, it is what you do know. One’s mind is so filled with the certainty of what one

does know that there is no room to learn anything new. Especially, there is no room to learn what one does not already know.

C. There is no better model to be found for the imperialism of planful theorizing than the social theories of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and John Stuart Mill. They offer an extreme rationalism whereby humans are born as separate individuals, come together out of their own free will, and then commence to abstractly negotiate their rights in a social contract. This is nothing more than a “just-so” of the origin of society. People know nothing more than what these rationalist theorists put into their heads. It may be that people do not *know* more, but they *do* more than Hobbes, et. al. are able to account for. And this “more” is fairly well addressed by Heidegger in Section 29.

There is planful action as pre-determined rationalities, and then there is planful action as the actual course of the situated action, as *bricolage*, as *difference*, as reflexivity, and all the other ways we are learning to think – or not to think – about these quotidian activities that are the preoccupation of information system researchers. Theodor Adorno speaks of *mimesis*, a mode of social being that precedes formal reflection as being more critical to understanding than conceptual knowing, and we should note here that Adorno was a sworn opponent of Heidegger for all of his professional life.

D. Heidegger’s recommendation is instead of commandeering events, instead of “staring out at something” (129b)

“*un guardar fiso*”/“*Empfinden oder Anstarren*” (It 399a /G137a), we should regard things in “a circumspectfully heedful way” (*Il pro-curante ... circumspectivo*). In this way we can listen to the phenomena we are studying and not exclusively organize the intelligibility of it.

Conclusion

This does not mean we have to leave off of formal analysis, but it does mean that we must first attune ourselves to what is there, and to the horizons of experience and understanding that are at work there whether our theories are present or not.

A very important question for who wish to work in a phenomenological way is how do we get access to the non-rational? What we have mostly are rational tools, so how can we make them sensitive to the actual “work” that people are doing in their everyday, practical lives?

Conclusion to § 29:

“The phenomenological interpretation must give to Dasein itself the possibility of primordial disclosure and let it, so to speak, interpret itself.”
(131b)

This is another way of reciting the principal phenomenological slogan, “To the things themselves!”

And our work of making social inquiry is not absent, because we have the descriptive task of raising “the phenomenal content of disclosure existentially to a conceptual level.”

“elevare al concetto l’importo fenomenale così dischiuso” (It. 403)

That is, our thinking must be kept appropriate to the events we are describing, and we must avoid submerging those events beneath our brilliant plans and theories.

So now have a serious task – how do we teach each other speak objectively about these things?

Editors:

Michel Avital, University of Amsterdam
Kevin Crowston, Syracuse University

Advisory Board:

Kalle Lyytinen, Case Western Reserve University
Roger Clarke, Australian National University
Sue Conger, University of Dallas
Marco De Marco, Università Cattolica di Milano
Guy Fitzgerald, Brunel University
Rudy Hirschheim, Louisiana State University
Blake Ives, University of Houston
Sirkka Jarvenpaa, University of Texas at Austin
John King, University of Michigan
Rik Maes, University of Amsterdam
Dan Robey, Georgia State University
Frantz Rowe, University of Nantes
Detmar Straub, Georgia State University
Richard T. Watson, University of Georgia
Ron Weber, Monash University
Kwok Kee Wei, City University of Hong Kong

Sponsors:

Association for Information Systems (AIS)
AIM
itAIS
Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia
American University, USA
Case Western Reserve University, USA
City University of Hong Kong, China
Copenhagen Business School, Denmark
Hanken School of Economics, Finland
Helsinki School of Economics, Finland
Indiana University, USA
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium
Lancaster University, UK
Leeds Metropolitan University, UK
National University of Ireland Galway, Ireland
New York University, USA
Pennsylvania State University, USA
Pepperdine University, USA
Syracuse University, USA
University of Amsterdam, Netherlands
University of Dallas, USA
University of Georgia, USA
University of Groningen, Netherlands
University of Limerick, Ireland
University of Oslo, Norway
University of San Francisco, USA
University of Washington, USA
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
Viktoria Institute, Sweden

Editorial Board:

Margunn Aanestad, University of Oslo
Steven Alter, University of San Francisco
Egon Berghout, University of Groningen
Bo-Christer Bjork, Hanken School of Economics
Tony Bryant, Leeds Metropolitan University
Erran Carmel, American University
Kieran Conboy, National U. of Ireland Galway
Jan Damsgaard, Copenhagen Business School
Robert Davison, City University of Hong Kong
Guido Dedene, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
Alan Dennis, Indiana University
Brian Fitzgerald, University of Limerick
Ole Hanseth, University of Oslo
Ola Henfridsson, Viktoria Institute
Sid Huff, Victoria University of Wellington
Ard Huizing, University of Amsterdam
Lucas Introna, Lancaster University
Panos Ipeirotis, New York University
Robert Mason, University of Washington
John Mooney, Pepperdine University
Steve Sawyer, Pennsylvania State University
Virpi Tuunainen, Helsinki School of Economics
Francesco Virili, Università degli Studi di Cassino

Managing Editor:

Bas Smit, University of Amsterdam

Office:

Sprouts
University of Amsterdam
Roetersstraat 11, Room E 2.74
1018 WB Amsterdam, Netherlands
Email: admin@sprouts.aisnet.org