

Phenomenological Alternatives of the Lifeworld: Between Multiple Realities and Virtual Realities

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The concept of “lifeworld” is of high importance in the phenomenological context as well as in the comprehensive sociological theory, continuing to animate contemporary debates. Given the recent development of what is known as ICT (information and communication technologies) and in particular of the virtual reality (VR), the lifeworld configurations changed. The aim of this paper is to show first how the concept of lifeworld has been modified by the presence of ICT and VR. Second it shall be stressed how such instances as subjectivity and intersubjectivity are challenged in their phenomenological consequences by such transformations. In a further step, the discussion of these aspects shall be correlated to the postphenomenological orientation.

I. Introduction

The concept of “lifeworld” has been since long acknowledged as being of high importance in the phenomenological context and it never ceases to animate contemporary debates. In the comprehensive turn in sociological theory, the lifeworld has been already discussed as early as in the writings of Wilhelm Dilthey. However its plenary significance and its definition in relation to the intersubjective sphere was stressed in particular in the late writings of Edmund Husserl. In the phenomenological sociological paradigm, the concept of “lifeworld” has been particularly analysed by Alfred Schutz. His approach is innovative because he tries to orient open the phenomenological discussion towards an action-oriented perspective. In what follows I intend to show how the concept of lifeworld has been modified by the development of what is known as ICT (information and communication technologies) and more precisely by one of their recent outcomes which is the virtual reality (VR). ICT and VR modify both intersubjective relations as well as the social and pragmatic status of the subject and subjectivity. They also challenge the understanding of our relation to the real, qua “paramount reality” (Schutz 1945 [1962]: 226-229) in that such basic categories of experience as temporality and spatiality are reformulated.

Understanding the world as a matrix of meaning possibilities cannot be phenomenologically discussed without a complementary instance, which is that of subjectivity. As it has been often shown (Dodd 2004; Schnell 2007) these two poles that play a crucial role in the construction and constitution of the meaning configurations are interdependent. A discussion on the world and subjectivity cannot omit a third element which is just as important phenomenologically as the first two: intersubjectivity.

Intersubjectivity raised many debates among different schools and led to a proliferation of analyses in phenomenology. Just as the status of the world *qua* lifeworld, to which it is intrinsically related, intersubjectivity is one of the formal structures without which the status of the subject as such cannot be conceived. The recent development of ICT challenges such phenomenological notions as subject, world or intersubjectivity and the role they maintain in the constitution of our meaning possibilities.

Given these transformations, one of the main questions that is raised and that has its full justification for a phenomenologically oriented sociological perspective is how these instances are affected in their procedural position. A second question emerges if one considers the consequences that the new media structures have for a phenomenological understanding of the lifeworld. If some years ago ICT were still a realm of a special type of knowledge, being associated with a strictly specialized field of technology, at present their status changed. Such a redistribution of knowledge and experience requires thus a different understanding of the above mentioned instances: subjectivity, intersubjectivity and lifeworld. In addition, the media raise another problem, which is that of the presence and growth of the VR in the configuration of the everyday structures of the lifeworld. This state requires a further elaboration of such a concept as that of “multiple realities”, discussed by Alfred Schutz. Given the presence of the “virtual” in the paramount reality, one witnesses not only a phenomenological mutation concerning general structures of experience, but also a shift in our conception of the real at a larger scale.

In order to sketch some answers to these issues, I shall consider in a first step classical views on the concept of the lifeworld in phenomenology, namely that of Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz. I will proceed with a discussion of the concept of “multiple realities” as developed by Schutz and further inquire on the pertinence of “multiple realities” when confronted to recent theories on virtual reality (Cogburn and Sicox, 2014) and “technological forms of life” (Lash, 2001). For a phenomenological perspective the main task would be whether such concepts as lifeworld, and its correlated instances, namely subjectivity and intersubjectivity, retain their pertinence in the context of a discussion of the VR and how their transformation may be understood in the light of the new orientation known as postphenomenology.

2. Phenomenological conceptions of the world and the virtual reality

2.1. From Husserl's concept of the world to digital media. Redistribution of the principle of reality

Husserl's late interest in the function of the lifeworld as universal matrix upon which any meaning possibility is realized brought him to a re-evaluation of the topic of eidetics, as well as of the presence and role that the egological consciousness plays in its determination. As many studies in phenomenology have shown by now (Carr 2010; Follesdal 2010; Farges 2006; Bermes 2004) the concept of lifeworld has a cardinal role in the Husserlian phenomenology and in the phenomenological debates tout court. What is important to retain for the present demonstration is the Husserlian idea according to which the lifeworld represents the background of any experiential possibility and of any practical and praxeological project. As Husserl argues in *The Crisis of European Sciences and the Transcendental Phenomenology*, "the lifeworld [...] is always there, existing in advance for us, the "ground" of all praxis, whether theoretical or extratheoretical. The world is pregiven to us, [...] always somehow practically interested subjects, not occasionally but always and necessarily as the universal field of all actual and possible praxis, as horizon. To live is always to live-in-certainty-of-the-world" (Husserl 1936 [1970]: 142).

The lifeworld is the milieu where the subjectivity situates its specificity and also a common structure which the subject shares with other subjects. As experiential and intersubjective background the lifeworld has therefore a crucial role in that it legitimates any intentional and sub-intentional projects, holding a primordial originarity and originality in relation to the egological sphere (Husserl 1954: 469-470). It is in the lifeworld that the subject acquires experience. Further, through the structures of the lifeworld (Schutz and Luckmann 2003) new layers of knowledge and praxis become imaginable. The lifeworld is the level of the doxa which represents our possibility for further interrogations and constitutes the departing point qua epistemological separation for any scientific project. Actually the role of the lifeworld is crucial for the understanding of two types of knowledge in the Husserlian view: on the one hand, as it is argued in the *Crisis*, the lifeworld is the universal matrix of any experience and conditions the scientific stance (Follesdal 2010: 43-44). On the other hand the lifeworld is also the condition for the performance of the transcendental reduction, since originally the experience starts at the mundane level and acquires its transcendental status only in a second step, precisely through the realization of the reduction.

The reality of the lifeworld affects also the production of the scientific knowledge in itself and conditions the very result of the phenomenological

method in that the results acquired in the transcendental sphere can only be achieved by the presence of the mundane sphere. Thus, it justifies all possibility of meaning constitution and construction initiated by the subject, including her own subjective institution. Therefore, as Husserl notes, “we shall come to understand that the world which constantly exists for us through the flowing alteration of manners of givenness is a universal mental acquisition, having developed as such and at the same time continuing to develop as the unity of a mental configuration, as a meaning-construct [*Sinngebilde*] – as the construct of a universal, ultimately functioning (*letztfungierende*) subjectivity. It belongs essentially to this world constituting accomplishment that subjectivity objectifies itself as human subjectivity, as an element of the world” (Husserl 1936 [1970]: 113).

If the general mundane frame remains a constant presence, regardless any cultural and social variations, with the development of the ICT the redistribution of main meaning configurations; such as our representations of time and space, challenges the phenomenological status of the lifeworld. The VR produced by means of digital media has a strong impact on the practical principle characterizing the lifeworld and at a larger scale on the constitution of intersubjectivity. For if the Husserlian phenomenological conception of mundanity expressed in the *Crisis of European Sciences* stresses a form of generality, the quality of being virtual introduces a redistribution of the semantic consistency in the worldly horizon to which we have access.

The VR was often understood as an alternative of the real concrete world (Wittel 2001) and shares principles of functioning with the world of life. It has similar inner horizons of meaning and provides in its turn a formal unity requiring from all the subjects participating to its creation and maintenance an analogous relation, despite any cultural or contextual differences. Actually it is precisely this levelling created by the existence of the network qua network that reinforces the similarity between the VR and the world of the everyday life.

For sure, at the level of the everyday world of life, the social and cultural structures introduce differences in the meaning that the subject realizes, and given these differences, the subject’s place and her capacity of giving account of the relation to different experiential spheres may change. By their generalization and use digital media introduce a redistribution of the principle of reality as well as that of world/ worldliness, precisely by the semantic parallel they induce to many structures of the lifeworld.

Digital media are similar to any other technological products. They accompany and transform the articulation of the lifeworld. But their development and the way their functions are constantly redefined lead to hypothesize something new: despite their understanding in terms of a parallel reality, they have become a part of the everyday life itself. By this process

through which they colonize the structures of the lifeworld, digital media do not operate anymore in terms of a subtraction from the basic principles that constitute the paramount reality. They become the everyday life, offering the preliminaries for a new phenomenological approach to the lifeworld itself. Therefore the principle of generality which has been previously evoked and which characterizes the world as a constant presence is a characteristic that digital media and VR hold. Such a transformation has major consequences for the understanding and the role of the subject, of intersubjectivity and for the role that technology plays in configuring meaning.

ICT questions the status of the world as primary background of meaning and intrinsically the status of reality. Being responsible for the VR, digital media challenge the idea of a unique and unified mundane principle, as defended in the Husserlian perspective (Husserl 1936 [1970]: §37).

This transfer between the everyday world of life and the virtual reality is based on a meaning reorganization, which revises the status of the real and the virtual. Phenomenologically, the presence of digital media and their outcome in the support of the virtual reality reinvest as well the principle of intentionality. Such a transformation is related in Don Ihde's view to a more general principle of technology. Thus according to him, "technologies can be the means by which 'consciousness itself' is mediated. Technologies may occupy the 'of' and not just be some object domain" (Ihde 2009: 23).

This change modifies our experiential background and our relation to basic structures of the lifeworld since in many aspects, the virtual enhances the real. As Steve Woolgar argues, taking the classical example of a paperless office, "the new forms of electronically mediated communication sit alongside the continued use of memos, notes and so on. This gives rise to interesting forms of interrelationship between the virtual and the real, and the modification of both modes of communication" (Woolgar 2002: 16-17). The Husserlian principle of originarity of the lifeworld gains new facets precisely by the integration of new aspects coming from the virtual world.

2.2. Schutz's concept of the lifeworld and the multiple realities

Being interested in the continuation of Husserl's phenomenological project on the status of the lifeworld and on intersubjectivity, Alfred Schutz proposes a new perspective, which is necessary to mention in order to understand our experience of virtual reality. In a classical text, he defines the lifeworld as follows: "Our everyday world is, from the outset, an intersubjective world of culture. It is intersubjective because we live in it as men among other men, bound to them through common influence and work, understanding others and being an object of understanding for other. It is a world of culture be-

cause, from the outset, the lifeworld is a universe of significations to us, i.e., a framework of meaning (*Sinnzusammenhang*) which we have to interpret, and of interrelations of meaning which we have to institute only through our *action in this life-world* (emphasis added)” (Schutz 1940 [1962]: 133).

In one of his famous articles, namely *On Multiple Realities* (1945 [1962]) Schutz evokes a few characteristics that give even more importance to the lifeworld and confirm it as a paramount reality. This perspective is parallel to the Husserlian view according to which the lifeworld is the main ground for any experiential project that we may elaborate; it is our originary horizon of experience and is characterized by an ideal unity (Husserl 1936 [1970]: §38). The originality of Schutz’s perspective is that he acknowledges the importance of the lifeworld as being the matrix of our existence and the background for our pragmatic engagement. Thus, says Schutz “the world of daily life shall mean the intersubjective world which existed long before our birth, experienced and interpreted by Others, our predecessors, as an organized world. [...] All interpretation of this world is based upon a stock of previous experience of it, our own experiences and those handed down to us by our parents and teachers, which in the form of ‘knowledge at hand’ function as a scheme of reference” (Schutz 1945 [1962]: 208).

The analytical importance of the world of daily life is major both because it stresses its position in the forming of our experiences and our concrete engagement with one another, more precisely, our possibility to accomplish actions. Further, the lifeworld is understood as the basic reality from which any type of knowledge and any type of intentional project shall be justified. In his intention to refine the phenomenological project, Schutz uses the concept of the lifeworld in order to complement the Husserlian idea of epoché. Actually, when discussing the relation that we have with the paramount reality, Schutz argues that the “man within the natural attitude also uses a specific epoché [...]. He does not suspend belief in the outer world and its objects, but on the contrary, he suspends doubt in its existence. What he puts in brackets is the doubt that the world and its objects might be otherwise than it appears to him” (Schutz 1945 [1962]: 229). It is by this operation that what Schutz names “the epoché of the natural attitude” is achieved.

What is also necessary to recall in Schutz’s theory of the lifeworld is that the concept of everyday life and the natural attitude are strongly related to the concept of reality, which can be declined as it shall be shown in many layers according to a specific principle: that of meaning bestowing (Schutz 1945 [1962]: 230). The process of meaning realization is in its turn legitimated starting from the property of attention. It is attention that individualizes different realms derived or based on the principle of reality. Schutz names these realms “finite provinces of meaning” (Schutz 1945 [1962]: 230) or multiple realities.

These provinces of meaning are qualified as “finite” because, as Schutz argues “[...] all of them show a specific cognitive style and are – *with respect to this style* – not only consistent in themselves but also compatible with one another. [...] To the cognitive style peculiar to each of these different provinces of meaning belongs, thus, a specific tension of consciousness and, consequently, also a specific *epoché*, a prevalent form of spontaneity, a specific form of self experience, a specific form of sociality, and a specific time perspective” (Schutz 1955 [1962]: 230; 232).

Among these “finite provinces of meaning” Schutz mentions the following: first, the world of *phantasms* (where he includes the day-dreams, the reality of playing, that of fiction, the fairy-tales and the myths), second, the world of *dreams* and third, the world of *scientific theory* (Schutz 1962: 234-246; 340-347). It is also important to mention that even the paramount reality is considered according to Schutz in terms of a “finite province of meaning”. However, one needs to note that the number of the “finite provinces of meaning” is not restricted only to the Schutzian typology. This concept of “finite province of meaning” may for sure refer to other experiences of the human mind and can therefore be extended. The VR for instance can also be included among these “provinces of meaning”.

Another characteristic of the provinces of meaning is that, despite an experiential congruence, they display a certain complexity. One may experience different meaning organizations and thus different layers within the same province. According to Schutz, one has access to these provinces of meaning by means of a “shift” or “leap” which marks the change in the attitude of the subject and imposes the organization of a new “cognitive style”. The cognitive style contributes to differentiate provinces from one another, and from the lifeworld.

The VR like the experience of other finite provinces of meaning, imposes a particular *attention à la vie*, a concept initially developed by Henri Bergson and often evoked by Schutz. The virtual reality is an imagined construction that detains a particular status in relation to the everyday world of life. If one takes the example of the video games, or of such metaverses as Second Life, they fall under a special category of narrative construction which is parallel for instance examples as the world of myths or fairy-tales. The status of being “finite” of the virtual reality starts to be strongly challenged by the development of the social networks and the new modes of communication and sociality that emerged. In this case, the pragmatic principle is redefined and we experience a transposition of the paramount into the virtual and vice versa. The emergence of VR questions the project of separation between the paramount reality proper and the virtual realm as such.

Similarly to other finite provinces of meaning, the VR of digital media plays highly upon a representative function. In relation to a literary work of art or to

a painting, our faculty of representation detains a certain degree of freedom, usually generated by an *aesthetic attitude* that is acknowledged by the reader or the person who is the addressee of the work in question. It is this attitude that contributes to what Schutz names “shift” of meaning from the “paramount reality”.

In the case of the virtual experience one is engaged in a *representational transposition* that does not involve aesthetics, although it may, as the example of video games or of Second Life shows. However, other aspects and functions of the VR influence our pragmatic engagement with one another and therefore our “belief”. The status of the virtual integrates and is in return integrated by the structures of the lifeworld. Moreover, as Steve Woolgar argues, “not only do new virtual activities sit alongside existing ‘real’ activities, but the introduction and use of new ‘virtual’ technologies can actually stimulate more of the corresponding ‘real’ activity” (Woolgar 2002: 17).

The Schutzian conception of provinces of meaning helps to understand our relation to the VR in terms of a change of cognitive style having an own specificity. But this needs a conceptual clarification. If on the one hand the cognitive style that characterizes the VR is understood as derived and therefore in terms of a “shift” from the paramount reality, on the other hand the VR is at present a clear structure of the lifeworld. As a consequence, the virtual world holds phenomenologically a double position: it remains partly factual by the consequences it has on our actions and activities in the everyday life, legitimating a praxeological aspect. And still, its virtual character individualizes it as a specific realm in itself, with own rules and possibilities.

Schutz’s theory of multiple realities helps in such a context to understand virtuality in terms of a characteristic common to any use of technology developed and used all along the history of mankind. In order to exist, the VR depends on technology. Its possibility comes to fact as mediation. Similarly to such technological devices as glasses or pencils, computers, tablets and I-phones, which support materially experiences, the existence of the VR confirms actually an intrinsic modification of the structures of the lifeworld from a “non electronically mediated” (Woolgar 2002: 18) moment, often identified with the real, to a mediated perspective of the real, which becomes actually real by its consequences. In this context a new question arises. Does the passage to the virtual world question the validity and the status of its being a finite province of meaning? And if so, how?

In the Schutzian discussion on multiple realities the possibility of a special epoché in the context of the transition from one reality to another is also evoked. The passage to the virtual reality imposes a bracketing. And yet, by the pragmatic implications it has within the lifeworld, the virtual, unlike the realm of art or of scientific theory, holds a special status. As Don Ihde evokes when referring to the quality of our body to incorporate different techno-

logies, the same relation can be transposed to the case of the two types of worldly configurations (paramount and virtual) that are here discussed. What is suggested is that the relation between the paramount reality and the VR is one of incorporation. If as Don Ihde argues “embodiment or bodily intentionality extends through the artefact into the environing world in a unique technological mediation” (Don Ihde 2009: 36), the structures of the lifeworld are also extended by means of the virtual world.

In the Schutzian and Husserlian phenomenology, the primordial role of the paramount reality has been steadily highlighted. With the development of new digital technologies and of the virtual reality, one is confronted though to a crucial change. It is precisely by those mechanisms in which former functions and structures of the lifeworld migrate and transform themselves within the VR, that the digital media confirm their new status as a part of the real. As a consequence, our stock-of-knowledge at hand and our typifications are strongly affected.

Furthermore, communication which is one of the basic elements through which intersubjective processes are established and maintained is fundamentally influenced by the development of the VR. We assist therefore to a redistribution of the principle of reality which is highly important in the discussion of the status of the lifeworld but also of the principle of intersubjectivity. The latter is phenomenologically and sociologically just as important in the context in which both experience and social structures are reformulated due to the existence of the VR. Such transformations would lead implicitly to another understanding of what Don Ihde defined as “interrelational ontology”¹.

3. Virtual reality and technological forms of life: a phenomenological reconsideration

As Cogburn and Silcox note in a recent article (2014), the term “virtual reality” comes from an artistic field, namely theatre. It is Antonin Artaud who was the first to propose this concept long before its actual use to describe the reality constructed by the ICT. Artaud defined virtual reality as the reality displayed by a theatre play. In his view “virtual” is equivalent to “fictional”, since, so he argues, “[...] the theatre [...] is developed from a certain number of fundamentals which are the same for all the arts and which aim on the spi-

¹ See Don Ihde, *Postphenomenology and Technoscience*, Albany: State University of New York, 2009, p. 23, where the term “interrelational ontology” refers to the fact that “the human experiencer is to be found ontologically related to an environment or a world, but the interrelation is such that both are transformed within this relationality.”

ritual and imaginary level at an efficacy analogous to the process in which the physical world actually turns all the matter into gold” (Artaud 1958: 48). With the development of the digital media and more recently of the social networks, the status of the VR changed from the fictional-like to a specific form of reality in itself, which is borrowing characteristics from both the paramount reality and fictional realm. However, by the concrete impacts it has, the VR intrudes in the lifeworld and modifies it. It is not a reality in itself to which one may have access to by means of a shift, as the Schutzian theory promotes, but it is a form in which the lifeworld presents itself.

As Thomas Sutherland argues, “technology is never neutral – in utilizing various technologies [...] that very experience becomes a property of the technology itself” (Sutherland 2013: 6). This view comes to reinforce the postphenomenological position defended by Don Ihde, according to whom “technology [...] becomes quasitransparent [...] and thus the technology here is not “object-like”. It is a means of experience, not an object of experience in use” (2009: 42). Under such circumstances, Schutz’s division between paramount reality and multiple realities is strongly challenged, precisely because the experiential and cognitive shift that was evoked as a main mechanism for the transition from one realm to another does not function anymore. It is because technologies are responsible for different shifts that such a process – in as far as the status of the VR is concerned – does not rely on a separation mechanism, but rather on a connecting mechanism.

Thus, when discussing the status of the lifeworld in the context of the development of digital media one is confronted to a crucial challenge: that of the consistency and coherence of the worldly character in which our experiences are embedded. It is precisely the constant transition, the fluidity of these new everyday life configurations, their liquidity, as Zygmunt Bauman mentions (Bauman 2000) that challenges the idea of a separation between worldly levels, between multiple realities and paramount reality. Such a characteristic destabilizes basic parameters that ground experience, as time and space or the combination of the two, our timescape as Barbara Adam names it (Adam in Sutherland 2013: 6). By influencing time and space, flow and liquidity modify the consistency of our experiences and our intersubjective relations.

In Alfred Schutz’s phenomenology, the lifeworld is strongly connected to the *intersubjective* presence. This association between lifeworld and intersubjectivity is not a completely new principle in phenomenology, since Schutz relies on a former discussion developed by Husserl on this theme in *The Crisis*. However, the originality of the Schutzian theory relies in his temporal stratification of intersubjectivity. According to him, there are three intersubjective layers which can be individualized, namely predecessors (*Vorwelt*), contemporaries

(*Umwelt*) and consociates (*Mitwelt*), and successors (*Folgewelt*)². Contemporaries and consociates are differentiated according to a spatial principle since both belong to the temporal layer of the present. Consociates are those individuals who are spatially closer to the subject, and belong to the same *Alltagswelt*, to the same context and with whom the subject may establish a face-to-face relationship. The intersubjective relation they facilitate is of a deeper consistence than that with contemporaries.

The development of the VR challenges precisely these relations *in presentia*, since contemporaries may become consociates, and face-to-face relationships are replaced by mediated relationships which exist via internet connections and through interfaces. These new infrastructures acknowledge a new understanding of the worldly principle in terms of a complex of “technological forms of life”, as Scott Lash names them (Lash 2001). Lash borrows this term from Ludwig Wittgenstein and he understands this concept in the sense of “an empirical ‘way-of-doing’, and has to do with how a society accomplishes things” (Lash 2006: 327).

According to this author “in technological forms of life, we make sense of the world through technological systems. As sense-makers, we operate, less like cyborgs than interfaces. These interfaces of humans and machines are conjunctions of organic and technological systems. [...] We do not merge with these systems. But we face our environment in our interface with technological systems. [...] As technological nature, I must navigate through technological culture. And technological culture is constitutively culture at a distance” (2001: 107). The challenge that the VR addresses to the Schutzian understanding of intersubjectivity is precisely this culture of distance, in which the distinction between consociates and contemporaries becomes very fluid, in which time and space as categories of experience gain new representational forms. For sure technologies have always influenced the development of our actions and interactions with one another. And yet the digital revolution has consequences that are unique in the cultural history of the mankind. Especially their influence on the representation and living forms of temporality has major consequences.

In the world of life, history and the face-to-face relationships are characteristics which deeply influence the configuration of our experiential flow. In the VR and in technological forms of life, interactions are reduced to the very moment. The meaning that constitutes a principle of congruence for our being with one another and for our actions is influenced by the contingency of the networks and by their fluid character. It becomes a deeply “empirical

² For a detailed description of this stratification, see Schutz’s main work, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*, Konstanz: UVK, 1932 [2004] especially the fourth chapter.

meaning”, to quote once more Scott Lash. In his view, “empirical meaning is neither logical (as in classification) nor ontological, but everyday and contingent” (Lash 2001: 109). The effacement of the borders between the real reality and the VR results precisely from this characteristic of fluidity and sharpened contingency.

The empirical meaning is also characterized by a special form of temporality. “In this empiricist phenomenology” so he argues, “sense-making loses its interiority. There is a flattening of the interiority of the subject. The expressive subjectivity of the artist, the analysand, the philosopher, the interiority of proletarian is eroded” (Lash 2001: 109). What the VR imposes upon the lifeworld is a dissolving of the individual stance into the flux, into the network. “In technological forms of life, sense-making is for others” (ibid.: 110). Being defined initially as the originary soil of our experiences, and connected to our use of cultural and action typifications in the Schutzian perspective, the lifeworld is being challenged by the development of the VR and of the technological forms of life precisely in its being a field of originarity.

Technological forms of life and their implementation have strong phenomenological consequences in that they play upon both the construction of meaning and on the configurations of our experiences. It is in such a context that classical notions elaborated in the social phenomenology of Alfred Schutz need further definitions. Lifeworld, paramount reality, multiple realities, or the above mentioned classification of intersubjective layers are at presented redistributed by the presence of the VR, which as Andreas Wittel claims is not a reality separated from the real reality, but it has become an important component of it. Some examples that Wittel mentions to defend his thesis are emails, online chat, or web surfing. These says he “are very real experience for the people utilizing them” (Wittel 2001: 63). They are real in their impact on our concrete life and they are real in the manner by which they condition our interactions and their meanings.

4. Conclusion

Considering the existence of the ICT and of the VR under a phenomenological perspective is certainly a provocation for both phenomenologists and social scientists. In the first case it is difficult to defend a phenomenological position in which technology is reconciled with the lifeworld if one sees it as a result of a positivistic implementation. This view is questionable because as James Dodd claims, “phenomenological philosophy itself is understood by Husserl as an expressive of this universality of the idea of science, one that recognizes the dependency of any sense of the universal on the historicity of thinking” (Dodd

2004: 211). Dagfinn Føllesdal argues as well in the same direction: “according to Husserl, the lifeworld and the sciences are intimately connected” (Føllesdal 2010: 43). To support the embedding of these worldly structures, namely the scientific/technological and the natural attitude, such philosophical and epistemological programs as the one developed by Don Ihde show that phenomenology is not a discourse that closes and separates, but rather it evolves with the structures of the world which it precisely questions. These interrogations are in the end crucial for the main phenomenological topic, which is meaning.

Given the presence of the virtual reality(es) and their impact on the lifeworld, one could admit that meaning is not annihilated but transformed. Meaning “becomes informational” (Lash 2001: 110). Individuals have learnt to use this new form of communication and social connection and their lifeworldly horizons have been modified accordingly. For sure the new structures of the lifeworld resulting due to the VR are part of former stocks of knowledge and they should not be considered only as pure results of a present devoid of historicity. They influence intersubjective relations and the emergence of these relations, and they modify simultaneously the rhythm and the consistence of the real. The present implications of the VR confront us therefore with a new perspective on the foundations and functions of the worldly horizon, requiring a supplementary reflection on the active instances that are at work behind it (namely subjectivity and intersubjectivity).

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