

# *Ontological Foundations of Imagination and Image-Communication*

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**Abstract**—The article is devoted to the study of spontaneous imagination role in the process of image-communication. The modern cultural situation is characterized by the increasing role of figurative elements in the processes of transmission and information exchange. This is particularly evident in Internet human communications. The concept of “image-communication” that emerged in the information age, on the one hand, means processing of visual signals and the exchange of images between communicants on the formal and technical level. But, on the other hand, it can be understood as a special existential channel of essential human communication. This channel is no less significant than verbal communication. According to M. Heidegger, spontaneity is a key existential characteristic of the human ability of imagination. The problem of spontaneous imagination is not limited only to an epistemological aspect but refers to ontological mode of human existence. This problem manifests itself in the phenomena of spontaneous images cooperation and competition that is independent of the subject in the context of the imaginary ontology. These processes are the imaginative factors for the intensification of cultural communication between different traditions.

**Keywords**—*ontological foundations, spontaneous imagination, image communication*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Imagination is an essential cognitive ability, but it is also an existential characteristic of the human being in various areas of life in both natural and cultural dimensions. Therefore, it is a subject of attention of not only epistemology, but also ontology. Imagination plays an important role in human communication. Epistemological interpretation of the imagination turned out to be more developed due to certain historical and philosophical reasons. As a result of it, various cognitive features of this ability were revealed [1]. At the same time, some conditions arose for the possibility of raising the question of the ontological and communicative aspects of the imagination problem at the beginning of the twentieth century. It caused a serious discussion on this issue among philosophers and representatives of various sciences [2]. From this moment to the present time, there are mutual transitions

between the gnoseology of imagination and the imaginary ontology in the literature in the context of the certain philosophical problems solution [3]. What are the signs and criteria for distinguishing between these aspects of the problem? Or which properties of imagination can be attributed to the cognitive or existential? These questions have been actively raised over the past hundred years, but this has been especially acute in recent times [4]. Before answering the above question, we must emphasize that at least two characteristics of imagination were identified in the philosophical context that can be interpreted as its ontological properties – these are spontaneity and elementarity. What are these qualities? And what is the connection between them? The study of these properties has its long history. We need a serious historical-philosophical analysis and genetic conceptual reconstruction of these categories to reproduce it. It is also relevant for this study to summarize the achievements of various philosophical schools and directions in this area, which is very difficult due to the fundamental difference between the languages of description and discursive practices.

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Imagination is the subject of many philosophical studies, both classical and modern. Ancient and medieval philosophers considered the imagination along with other cognitive abilities. For European philosophy before D. Hume, the imagination was understood as the subjective creation of disembodied images. D. Hume expanded the problematics associated with the imagination pointing out its role as a specific basis for the unity of consciousness. It was developed by I. Kant at the transcendental-idealistic level in the first edition of “Critics of Pure Reason” and later was ontologically interpreted by M. Heidegger in the book “Kant and the problem of metaphysics”. Heidegger's interpretation was preceded by E. Husserl's phenomenological analysis of imagination. A separate layer of works relating to the problem of the imaginary ontology is associated with numerous studies of myth in the XX century. Among the authoritative experts in this field, we can mention A. Losev, Y. Golosovker, F. Cassidy, M. Eliade, K. Hübner and many others.

This problem is not the prerogative of philosophical Eurocentrism. Eastern philosophers of different epochs and periods were also interested in the problems of imagination. But imagination for them was one of the means of meditation

or a condition of most contemplative practices that required the construction of possible mental entities. In particular, there was a technique of meditation on the elements in their various manifestations in these traditions. There are works on the cross-cultural analysis of these traditions in the literature. However, we must recognize its insufficiency.

With a sufficiently large amount of literature on the problems of imagination, it should be noted that the issues of the imagination spontaneity were addressed to a lesser extent than other aspects. At the beginning of the twentieth century, K.G. Jung was one of the first who paid attention to this issue in his doctrine of archetypes and the collective unconscious. The development of his ideas in this direction was continued by G. Bashlyar who attended Jung seminars, as well as a number of well-known French philosophers. In particular, J. Durand created a well-known concept of the so-called *imaginaire* which provoked creative discussions. It was one of the first attempts combining the epistemology of imagination and the ontology of the imaginary [5; 6].

The theme of imagination spontaneity declared by I. Kant was revived by M. Heidegger in his theory of the paradoxical spontaneous receptive nature of imagination [7]. The opposition of M. Heidegger was represented by E. Cassirer in this matter. The names of G. Bashlyar and M. Heidegger, as well as their followers, are connected with a historical transition to an ontological interpretation of imagination activity and its results. In the sphere science of P. Sloterdijk, who developed the ideas of M. Heidegger and G. Bashlyar and proposed their specific synthesis, the fundamental project of the imaginary ontology is presented [8]. The image of the sphere is the archetype of the integrity of knowledge and being. The functioning of spheres in the collective imagination of human culture is determined by the phenomenon of spontaneity as the ontological property of imagination.

### III. PURPOSES OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The aim of the research is the semantic analysis of spontaneity as a property of imagination, which is not only reduced to epistemological characteristics, but also has ontological significance for the human mode of existence as well as for the possibility of image-communications. For achieving this goal, we need to solve the following tasks:

1. To trace the evolution of ideas about the category of spontaneity in the history of philosophy and science.
2. To determine the functions of spontaneity in the process of imagination at the anthropological, social and cultural levels.
3. To analyze the methodological features of the imagination spontaneity study in the transition from epistemology to ontology and communication theory.
4. To identify the historical and theoretical foundations for the developing the concept of spontaneously elemental imagination as a theoretical basis for studying communicative processes through images.

The object of the research is imagination as a cognitive, existential and communicative ability. The subject of research

is the spontaneity and elementarity used as the ontological properties of imagination, which determine its creative direction and communicative effectiveness.

The works of Russian and foreign scientists who are engaged in theoretical and practical issues of the imagination process formed the theoretical and methodological basis of the study basis. The study is based on historical and philosophical, social and cultural material which includes the fundamental ontological principles, categories and methods, such as dialectics, phenomenology, hermeneutics, comparative studies, structural analysis, etc.

### IV. MAIN RESULTS

A complex definition of imagination based on the analysis of the available interpretations is proposed: imagination is the ability to create, contemplate, experience, think, construct and deconstruct images; in the act of imagination, the presence of the object is optional; it is the mediating link between sensuality and reason. In this consolidated definition, there are ontological, existential, epistemological and communicative aspects.

In the concept of "social imagination», the aspect that it cannot be reduced only to an individual subject is emphasized. The concept of "collective imagination" is justified by the intersubjective nature of the imaginative ability functioning in modern literature. From this point of view society itself can be understood as a special area of the imaginary. The ability of imagination plays an important role in the media sphere in which mass consciousness is constructed. In the context of anthroposociogenesis conception, it is precisely the presence of creative imagination that the human way of being differs from the animal. For the same reason man became the creator of the cultural world and the consumer of its artifacts.

The problem of the relationship of imagination and desire is considered in the psychoanalytic tradition. Will and desire are the fundamental characteristics of a human being, therefore, it is important to understand how the imagination is connected with them. On the one hand, imagination affects desire, creating images of the desired; on the other hand, desire participates in the launching of a spontaneous act of imagination. This interaction is not limited only to the gnoseological aspect, but is determined by the specific ontological foundations of human communication.

The recognition of the imagination creativity means the recognition of its ontological status. Although the opinions of philosophers are fundamentally different on this fundamental issue. The ontological interpretation includes aesthetic-phenomenological and hermeneutic methodologies. The artist realizes his potential in the concepts and images of his own creativity. In this sense, it belongs to a certain ontological paradigm very often without realizing it. The being of the creator is to stay in the act of creative imagination which is realized in the artworks.

A.V. Koneva who studies the philosophy of social imagination noticed that imagination was considered in a social aspect by B. Anderson ("Imagined Communities") for the first time in the context of the study of nationalism and

through the prism of the concept “imagined communities”. Some researchers began to use the concept of social imagination after Anderson, but predominantly it was used as a synonym for “ideology”. Topological and temporal relations arise in the collective consciousness. A.V. Koneva enumerates specific qualities of these relationships [9]. Another important aspect of the social imaginary is its symbolic-sign structure, which is revealed through ideas about the possible things.

Language as a social form of communication is associated with imagination. If language structures are based on imagination, then all communication is built on it. As a result, imagination becomes an essential determinant of the social sphere. At the same time, language is relatively independent of the functioning of the imagination having other forms of its own manifestation.

It can be argued that social imagination is the basis of human culture as a whole. Y. Golosovker wrote that entire spiritual culture can be considered as part of imaginative activity. This once again emphasizes that the society is imaginary. Y. Golosovker convincingly proves the imaginary nature of culture, but not only he addresses this issue. A significant number of specialists establish a link between culture and imagination. Culture is a part of society; moreover, it is recognized as a formative part of it by many specialists in the theory of culture.

The dynamic nature of the functioning of the social imaginary can be characterized by the concept of spontaneity which is particularly clearly represented in contemporary visual types of art. Media easily operates with spontaneous material and presents it to its viewers who are often may be children or teenagers. Since the early childhood, people interact with spontaneous themes and fantasize on its basis. In this regard, G.R. Khaidarova is considering a new type of media wars based on the struggle for the imaginary [10]. Media philosophy allows us to call modern society virtual and virtuality implies an imaginary foundation. Imagination is the basis for the formation of media reality.

We consider the problem of the creative potential of imagination in art as an illustration of the previous reasoning. The greatest and indisputable significance of the imagination is precisely in artistic creativity. If in the context of the theory of scientific knowledge imagination can be viewed not only as its source but also as the main obstacle. Then in the context of creativity imagination occupies a definite leading position. Creativity and productive imagination are two closely related abilities that cannot be considered separately.

Let's turn to the hermeneutic aspects of art. V. Dilthey focused on the fact that imagination plays an important role in the spiritual activities of the poet. It is also stated in the hermeneutics of art that there is no artist without a highly developed empathic ability. A new result cannot be obtained without it in the sphere of creative activities. The intersubjective nature of the imagination manifests itself in the phenomenon of empathy as well as its connection with the desire of the poet. All this taken together is a condition for the opportunity to explore the imagination from a communicative point of view. M. Heidegger sees the relationship between hermeneutics and imagination through which he introduces the

subject of imagination into an ontological context. Hermeneutics as the art of interpreting works of art is simultaneously a method of identifying the intersubjective nature of imagination.

Modern philosophy considers art as a process and the result of imagination creating a special ontological reality which is not a direct reflection of the surrounding empirical reality. Creating possible worlds in virtual reality is the realization by man of his life needs and ideas about the ideal world. Fantastic worlds arise as the phenomena of the author's imagination and find their expression in the text. On the other hand the independence of fantasy emphasizes their spontaneous character typical of any creator. Imaginary worlds being created begin to exist independently of the author's will. When it comes to inspiration it is worth talking about the creative use of spontaneous imagination.

Let us give one representative example of spontaneity - the functioning of the imagination in a fairy tale. A well-known specialist in this field - V.Ya. Propp - argued that the author of the tale has a certain degree of freedom in choosing the mode of expression and language means. As you can discover freedom is a necessary attribute of spontaneous imagination. The author of the tale can choose a variety of ways to depict events. A fairy tale is constructed according to the laws of imagination as well as any other story.

We also pay attention to the close and at the same time contradictory connection of philosophy and art. J. Habermas emphasized the dialectical nature of this relationship. Dialectical contradiction is an indicator of ontology. Philosophy, science and art very often follow one another because the solution of their problems is impossible without a definite ontological basis. The recognition of the creativity of the imagination means the recognition of its ontological status. Although on this fundamental issue the opinions of philosophers differ dramatically. The ontological interpretation includes aesthetic-phenomenological and hermeneutic methodologies. The artist realizes his potential in the images of his own creativity. In this sense he belongs to a certain ontological paradigm often without realizing it. The being of the creator is a situating in the act of creative imagination. Awareness and understanding of this fact is possible as an ontological reflection of the process of imagination and the analyst of its product - the sphere of the imaginary. The ontological approach to the imagination implies the unification of all possible ways of understanding the nature of imagination, manifested in various areas of human activity and communication.

Imagination in the theory of knowledge, sociology, psychoanalysis, science and creativity are quite traditional topics both for philosophical classics and for modernity. The ontology of imagination is a relatively new topic, critical questions arise regarding it. The main features of the ontological interpretation of the imagination emerged in the philosophy of M. Heidegger and G. Bashlyar in the philosophy of the twentieth century. Although from a historical point of view it is already possible to find in D. Hume philosophy the fixation of those attributes of imagination that make him an ontological ability. However as

the initial premise can be considered the Platonic doctrine of the ontological status of *eidos*.

The definition of imagination adopted since the time of I. Kant as the representation of a thing in its absence contains not only a gnoseological aspect but also an ontological aspect which is characterized by paradoxicality: to imagine a thing is to comprehend its present absence. Due to this natural paradox imagination can be interpreted not only as a cognitive but also an existential ability of a person. As a consequence of the previous reasoning in the act of imagination a person manifests himself not only as a subject of knowledge but also realizes his human essence both in natural and cultural terms. For the same reason a man became the creator of the world of culture, society and the consumer of its artifacts which is the ontological basis of human communication.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Imagination is by no means the simplest subject for the research, primarily because it is at the basis of myth-making, the attitude to which in the scientific field and in everyday social communication is rather ambivalent and often critical. This is due to the paradoxical nature of the “dark” human ability itself (according to the characteristics of I. Kant). This work had several goals. First of all, it was necessary to determine the methodological approach in the study of imagination, whereby it would be possible to formulate its generalized definition on the basis of a comprehensive analysis of the philosophical interpretations available in the literature. Despite the diversity of original concepts, there is still no philosophical theory of imagination.

As the historiography of the issue, as well as a general review of modern literature on this topic, shows that the concept of spontaneity turned out to be the most loaded by ontological meanings in applying them for describing the properties of imagination [11]. Therefore the main task of the research was the semantic analysis of this concept as an attribute (that is, essential and inalienable) property of imagination not reducible only to epistemological characteristics, but having ontological and communicative significance for human existence. Another important result is the historical and philosophical reconstruction of various approaches from the dialectical, phenomenological and hermeneutical points of view on the applied material from various areas of cultural creativity [12].

The complex definition of imagination includes all the fundamental qualities that the researchers usually attribute to imagination. However this should not be the mechanical sum of particular sentences expressing the vast breadth of the subject matter. A complex definition begins with a specific listing of features, but it is not reduced to it. Both positive and negative characteristics present in this consolidated definition, which suggests the application of the dialectical method to resolve the self-contradictory nature of imaginative activity. As a result we can conclude that imagination is a spontaneous productive force which generate self-acting images: on the one hand, dependent, and, on the other, independent of the control of the human mind and will. The paradox of imagination lies precisely in this dependent / independent character of it [13].

The dialectical method makes it possible to consider the integrity of imagination activity as well as the integrity of the imaginary sphere as its expedient resultant but only through the prism of the law of unity and struggle opposites.

In the epistemological project presented in the first edition of I. Kant's “Critics of Pure Reason” and interpreted by M. Heidegger from the ontology point of view, the ability of imagination is qualified as an intermediary link between sensuality and reason. Imagination contains the opposite qualities (the activity of mental design and the passivity of sensual perception), which indicates its dialectical nature. It is through this ambivalence that imagination can perform the function of mediation between sensuality and mind. This idea became the cause of sharp debates between M. Heidegger (ontology) and E. Cassirer (epistemology).

The ideas of M. Heidegger and G. Bashlyar are developed in the spherology of P. Sloterdijk and their dialectic synthesis is proposed, which continues the fundamental project of the imaginary ontology [14]. The image of the sphere is the archetype of the integrity of knowledge and being. P. Sloterdijk continued the development of the ontological interpretations of the imagination of M. Heidegger and G. Bashlyar giving them new meanings within the framework of the spherological approach. Moreover he managed to synthesize in a certain way the ideas of the German and French philosophers creating the original concept of spontaneity and elementarity of the imaginary sphere as an authentic way of being, which is the space and time of interaction and communication of private things and creatures of various images [15].

#### **Acknowledgment**

The study was supported by a grant from the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, project No. 18-011-00753a “The Reception and Transformation of Martin Heidegger's Ideas in the Russian Philosophical Thought”.

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