

Hume and Husserl – The Problem of the Continuity or Temporalization of Consciousness

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Revised Version

Abstract: This paper examines Husserl’s fascination with the issues raised by Hume’s critique of the philosophy of the ego and the continuity of consciousness. The path taken here follows a continental and phenomenological approach. Husserl’s 1904/5 lecture course on the phenomenology of immanent / internal time-consciousness is a phenomenological-eidetic examination of how the continuity of consciousness and the consciousness of continuity are possible. It was by way of Husserl’s reading of Hume’s discussion of “flux” or “flow” that his discourse on temporal phenomena led to the classification of a point-like now as a “fiction” and opened up a horizontal approach to the present that Hume’s introspective analyses presuppose but which escaped the limitations of the language that was available to him. In order to demonstrate the radicality of Husserl’s temporal investigations and his inspiration in the work of Hume, I show how his phenomenological discourse on the living temporal flow of consciousness resolves the latter’s concern about the problem of continuity by re-thinking how, in the absence of an abiding impression of Self, experience is continuous throughout the flux of its running-off impressions.

1. Looking for the Self: The Ego that cannot find itself

Whenever I return to David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (a child stillborn from the Press)¹ my admiration for the conscientiousness, rigor, courage, and radicality of his investigations increases exponentially. The essay "Of Personal Identity" shakes the whole foundation of everything that precedes and works up to it (particularly his own discourse on association). Hume's Appendix to the *Treatise* gives us an honest declaration concerning the limits of his investigations. His problem was twofold in that he considered...

*...that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences. Did our perceptions either inhere in something simple and individual, or did the mind perceive some real connexion among them, there wou'd be no difficulty in the case. For my part, I must plead the privilege of a skeptic, and confess, that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding. I pretend not, however, to pronounce it absolutely insuperable. Others, perhaps, or myself, upon more mature reflection, may discover some hypothesis, that will reconcile those contradictions.*²

Thus, Hume claims the 'privilege' of a skeptic" without committing himself to full-blown skepticism. His philosophical writing embodies an extremely rare combination of startling intellectual brilliance, methodological rigor (without doing away with risk), and genuine humility. He skillfully employs the full armory of the techniques of empiricism and makes it dance at the very limits of exhaustion. Although Hume is an empiricist from a methodological point of view, his investigations are not in the service of an empiricism. Thus, he is able to show that empiricism itself always rests on certain metaphysical presuppositions.

But, what legacy remains regarding the issue of the Self? Hume's introspective analyses, which upset the basis of Cartesian certainty and the primacy of the Ego, have not done away with the Self. Rather, his rigorous investigations have re-situated it within a horizon in which it is no longer the master.

¹ David Hume. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Analytical index by L.A. Selby-Bigge. Second Edition [1742] with text revised and notes by P.H. Nidditch. Oxford University Press. Henceforth referred to as [*Treatise*].

2. The Problematization of the Self / Ego as the Starting Point of Philosophy: The Mind as Flux

What ‘constitutes’ the Self, if it is no longer to be considered as that which always already lies behind each act of consciousness as its primordial and monolithic core (the *res* of the *cogitans*)? Does this suggest a dimension of inquiry that is actually inaccessible to thought? How can we speak of continuity, motivation, memory, association, judgment, etc., without having recourse to a continuous and monolithic ‘I’ – the ‘I’ that motivates, the ‘I’ that remembers, the ‘I’ that associates, or the ‘I’ that judges?

Of course, the anxiety stems from the concern to grasp one’s own ‘I,’ ‘Self,’ or ‘Ego’ – the particularity of that which is one’s own in each instance. This is a legitimate concern, but it does not begin with the beginning. To turn to the issue of the constitution of the Self, which is at once both transcendental and genetic, is not to plunge into the issue of the constitution of what is peculiarly my own – my personality. It is to gesture toward the conditions of possibility of any Ego per se: the structuralization that is universal to any *possible* Ego.

This is one of the primary methodological motifs in play in Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology in its ‘eidetic’ mode. The constellation of issues raised by his lectures on internal time-consciousness is borne out of an effective response to the set of problems handed down from Hume.

² Hume. *Treatise*, Appendix, p.636.

3. Edmund Husserl's *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*

Hume's 'introspective' inquiry into that which we call the Self (in the study, "Of Personal Identity" – *A Treatise of Human Nature* [*Treatise*]) leads to the claim that there is no impression of the Self that is "constant and invariable."³ He maintains that the mind is "...nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement."⁴ At no time, however, does he ask about how there is *consciousness of* such movement, change, succession, etc. In other words, he does not inquire into the possibility of 'introspection' itself *as an 'extended' consciousness* or project that is somehow coextensive with itself. Hume's investigations start out as a quest for the legendary Self and it is a limitation that blinds him to a deeper dimension. He does have the key, but the original question obscures the door that is to be unlocked.

Husserl, in his preface to Boyce-Gibson's English translation of *Ideen 1*, suggests that Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* "...gives the first systematic sketch of a pure phenomenology."⁵ This is clearly true, but when Hume maintains that "...all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences,"⁶ it can also be argued that his analyses get stuck in the sphere of

³ Hume. *Treatise*, p.251.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.252.

⁵ See p. 16 of Edmund Husserl's *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson. Collier/Macmillan. [first translation 1931] Original German text – 1913. *Hua III.1: Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie: Erstes Buch*. Edited by Karl Schuhmann. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976.

All references to *Ideas 1* / *Ideen 1* are to the classic translation by Boyce Gibson. I developed a particular fondness for this translation (published in 1931) after reading extracts from Boyce-Gibson's journal where he re-counted his close association with Husserl during his visit to discuss the issue of translation. Husserl's introduction is clearly influenced by their meetings. For further details on this text in German and the more contemporary translation by Fred Kersten, see the bibliography.

empirical phenomenism. The principally psychologistic orientation of his studies only gestures toward a more profound phenomenological field, which his language and orientation cannot actually penetrate. Hume is unable to explain continuity or *consciousness of change* within what is fundamentally a 'diachronic' flux of discrete existences. It is significant that this viewpoint, which is caught up in the thought of time as mere linear successivity, cannot actually account for Hume's determination of mind as a 'bundle' of impressions. It disregards the question of the meaning and possibility of the kind of co-existence or simultaneity that must always already be implicated in the capacity to juxtapose and concatenate various different sequential / successive moments within a single grasp. Despite the fact that it can be said that these past 'impressions' no longer exist as such, they are, in an extremely important sense, still retained. This must be so as a matter of principle if there is to be the consciousness of a flux of differences in the first place. It is in response to this issue that Husserl's discourse on retention in the lectures on time-consciousness [*PCIT*] addresses the question of the possibility of the unfolding of continuity that produces the *registration of difference*.

Husserl writes...

...every act of apprehension is itself a constituted unity of duration. During the time that it is built up, that which it is to make into an Object is long since gone by and would be – if we did not already presuppose the entire play of primal consciousness and retentions – no longer accessible to the act at all. However, because primal consciousness and retentions are on hand, the possibility exists in reflection of looking to the constituted lived experience *and* the constituting phases, and even becoming aware of the differences which exist, for example, between the primordial flux as we are conscious of it in primal consciousness and its retentive modifications.⁷

Husserl's discourse on the temporalization of consciousness, which is nothing other

⁷ Edmund Husserl. *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*. Henceforth referred to as [*PCIT*]. Appendix IX: Primal Consciousness and the Possibility of Reflection. p. 123-24. Translated by John Barnett Brough. Kluwer Academic Publishers. 1991. Based on *Hua X: Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)* – The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966 – as edited by Rudolph Boehm. This is the most current translation of Husserl's phenomenology of time consciousness, which covers a more extensive period of his temporal analyses while also duplicating, in full, the order of the lecture notes [1904/5] and appendices [1910] of the original publication of 1928 (as edited by Edith Stein and introduced by Martin Heidegger).

than its 'intentionality,' also leads to the thought of 'flux.' However, this is not an empirical flux of a Humean order. It is more primordial in that it addresses the structurality of the Living Present (what Husserl later calls: *lebendige Gegenwart*) of presencing – the structurality of the flux (or flow) itself rather than its contents. It is earlier than, but constitutive of the presence of an Ego. Husserl's discourse shows how the 'now' is intrinsically spanned within itself as the locus of an inter- / intra-play of intentionalities: retentions, primal impressions, and protentions. This flux or play of interpenetration is not originally that of a successive order, but rather it names a certain kind of simultaneity at the heart of the present and presence. Hume cannot explain simultaneity on the basis of succession, for he surely relegates simultaneity to a secondary position in relation to his flux of psychological succession, since he seems to have lost sight of their interdependency. For Husserl, simultaneity and succession are inseparably constituted together. Although Hume is concerned to find that which abides – that which is simultaneous with itself – throughout an order of succession (objective, real time flux), he is blinded by that which is fleeting, that which runs off without being able to see that such a movement of surpassing has to be *registered*. He does not inquire about that which actually 'gives' surpassing or that which travels with or through these running-off impressions, not monolithically, to be sure, but that which also undergoes change – an interdependent structure of surpassing and reappropriation (where the 're' should not be assumed to designate a recuperation that follows 'after' a more originary dispersive flow) which gives continuous alteration / successivity.

Hume supposes originary discreteness and that discrete impressions are only brought into continuous relation through laws of association in empirical time. However, association is irreducible to that which comes 'after' the fact. Association is not simply about bringing disparate moments together. It is also that which holds such moments apart – the condition of

possibility of the differentiation that we call succession. It is the condition of the possibility of Hume being able to observe a flux in the first place.

The Husserlian flux is irreducible to an objective flow of successions. It refers to a structurality that is always already implied by the consciousness *of* successivity. This temporalizing interplay of intentionalities originally permits consciousness *of* unity and difference as the condition of any possible impression – whose ‘lived’ content is already the product of sedimented contents that have been retained and which are motivated by a consciousness that is always already surpassing itself in the bodying forth of that which is anticipated by means of such retention. Retention gives the passing over of the present into that which is no longer (pastness), while protention fills the present with the anticipation of that which is not yet (the pre-expectational horizon of open futurity). There is also a second intentionality (*Längsintentionalität* – longitudinal intentionality⁸) of retention, which *gives the flow itself* (where *pastness* is always already a constant background to the flux). Therefore, what is given is a continuum.

Husserl's lecture course on the phenomenology of time-consciousness is, in large part, an extremely effective response to Hume's problem regarding the issue of continuity. It opens a deeper dimension to the study of time, which is no longer restricted to the aporetic limits of

⁸ I prefer J. S. Churchill's translation of this term: "*Längsintentionalität* = *longitudinal intentionality*" rather than J. B. Brough's "*horizontal intentionality*" because it does not restrict itself to the two-dimensional limits of Husserl's 'diagram' of time-constituting consciousness – where the flow of consciousness in its givenness to itself is represented as a *horizontal* line and the "*Querintentionalität* = *transverse intentionality*," is that which cuts through this line. With respect to the phenomena themselves, given the context of Husserl's discourse on "The Double Intentionality of Retention and the Constitution of the Flow of Consciousness" (sec. 39, p.84), this particular assignment of horizontal and vertical axes to the two intentionalities of retention are arbitrary in their designation. One must not confuse the map with the phenomena. There are independent reasons for demonstrating that *Längsintentionalität* expresses more of the vertical than *Querintentionalität*; e.g., since the latter is directed towards the immanent temporal object, while the former actually *gives* its extendedness within the flow – retentionally sedimented chains of continuity – its duration as *depth*. It should be noted that Husserl is explicit about the "metaphorical" aspects of his use of the expression "flow" earlier in section 36 (see the quotation in endnote 9, below). It is a mere habit of thought to restrict the sense of "flow" to a horizontal plane. This problem is exacerbated in German because the word for horizon – a field whose extendedness combines both distance *and* depth / the horizontal *and* the vertical – is "*Horizont*."

Hume's investigations. However, this presents a whole new set of puzzles, since the absolute or *Primordial Flux / horizon* (or *Ur-region*) of the lectures on immanent time consciousness is a field of investigation for which, as Husserl says "...we lack names."⁹ This horizon of "Absolute Subjectivity" is irreducible to the logic / language / names of the Self or Ego precisely because it actually refers to something earlier / pre-egological: the "Time-Constituting Flow" that makes such an *entity* – both ideally and factically – possible.¹⁰

⁹ Husserl. *PCIT*, sec.36, "The Time-Constituting Flow as Absolute Subjectivity." Husserl writes,

"Time-constituting phenomena, therefore, are evidently different from those constituted in time. They are neither individual objects nor individual processes, and the predicates of such objects or processes cannot be meaningfully ascribed to them. Hence it also can make no sense to say of them (And to say with the same signification) that they exist in the now and did exist previously, that they succeed one another in time or are simultaneous with one another and so on. But no doubt we can and must say: A certain continuity of appearance – that is, a continuity that is a phase of the time-constituting flow – *belongs* to a now, namely, to the now that it *constitutes*; and to a before, namely, as that which is constitutive (we cannot say "was") of the before. But is not the flow a succession, does it not have a now, an actually present phase, and a continuity of pasts of which I am now conscious in retentions? We can say nothing other than the following: This flow is something we speak of *in conformity with what is constituted*, but it is not "something in objective time." It is *absolute subjectivity* and has the absolute properties of something to be designated *metaphorically* as "flow..." (p. 79).

¹⁰ It may be suggested that Aaron Gurwitsch's appropriation of phenomenological *methodology* finds its beginning point here. He adopts the pre-egological orientation on intentionality that can be found in Husserl's later discourse (*Ideen* and after) on the intentional parallelism of noesis and noema – an ideal methodological orientation that makes the sensationalist thesis of *hyletic* data (literally: *stuff* of sensation) in his lectures on time-consciousness redundant. *Hyle* are considered to be just parts of the *noetic* dimension of intentionality that fulfills itself in the *noematic* configurations of meaning with which it is intrinsically intertwined (e.g., the desired of the desiring). The lectures on time-consciousness are seminal exercises in the eidetic reduction of consciousness to its essential structures of continuous-alteration and so they precede the issue of egology, while unearthing the conditions of its possibility. In this regard, Gurwitsch was also inspired by Jean-Paul Sartre's pre-egological perspective on intentionality, which maintains that the ego is always already a *de facto* (transcendent) ego-out-in-the-world and that it does not depend on a transcendental original lying at the heart of consciousness. The ekstastic structurality of consciousness; its *intentionality* – the play of immanence and transcendence that already operates at the core of the noetic-noematic parallelism – is the pre-egological condition of the *possibility* of Selfhood. In existentialist writing, we are all in hot pursuit of our unrealized selves, which always remain in the realm of *possibility* since they cannot be actualized in life. Natural consciousness – what Sartre calls *Être pour soi* (Being-for-itself) – seeks to become in-itself-for-itself, but the desire can never be fulfilled. The closest that any individual can get to this totalized state of being is 'death' – where the for-itself does indeed become an *in-itself*, but only *for-Others*.

4. Primary Impression

Hume's discourse on impressions does not take into account the question of how they can be stretched-out in their running-off. His emphasis on their discreteness has the unfortunate effect of presenting the image of a corpuscular or atomic consciousness – discrete moments inexplicably held together in the flux. If every consciousness was actually like this, where would we find the 'unity of the life' of consciousness, which Hume must already presuppose, although without apparent foundation, when he speaks of the mind as a 'bundle of impressions'? Rather than speaking of the *continuity of a life-process*, we would have to speak of such a life in terms of a synthetic connecting together of discrete existences.

It is vital to understand that Husserl's concept of primary impression, as adumbrated in his lectures on time consciousness, departs from the Humean idea of impressions. For Husserl, Hume's discrete impressions can be nothing more than abstractions / idealizing *fictions*, which are constituted through a form of narrative return that forgets its own conditions of possibility. There must be extendedness.

In section 41 of *PCIT*: "Evidence Pertaining to immanent Contents. Change and Constancy," Husserl writes,

If one speaks of the evident givenness of an immanent content, then of course the evidence cannot signify indubitable certainty respecting the being of the tone at a single point in time; I would consider such an evidence so conceived...to be a fiction.¹¹

In order for perception to occur – here, we speak of the *appearing of sense* – that which is given up through primary impression must first 'be able to return upon itself' (Husserl was not by any means the first to recognize that cognition was primarily a matter of *re-cognition*). The structural possibility of return – which permits the 'I can do so again' –

¹¹ Husserl. *PCIT*, sec 41, p. 89.

precedes the issue of personal identity as the condition of its possibility. Husserl describes this recursive structuration in terms of a Primordial Flux: an inter-play or intra-play of intentionalities (which must necessarily precede and condition a flux of a Humean order). According to his phenomenological viewpoint, the meaning of Primordial Flux is not to be understood on the basis of primary impression as its actual *starting-point*. The discourse on flux is that which originally explains the opening-up of the Living Present in which primary impression serves in the form of a specific intentional index in a *tri-horizonal* interplay. It is this *folding-unfolding* of the 'horizon' of the present that produces unity and distanciation / continuity and surpassing.

The Living Present (*lebendige Gegenwart*), as a longitudinal and transversal play of intentional relations, is an open / extended / extending matrix 'constituted' through a retentive and protentive flux in which primal impression is the spacing of their negotiation. From the standpoint of the Living-Present, this inter-play is actually an *intra-play*. It is not a question of external relations between individual nows strung out side by side, but of an intra-relational matrix at work within the present. For Husserl, the 'now' is grasped on the basis of the original possibility of such an inter- / intra-play within the heart of itself. This means that the very possibility of the present and the continuity of presence rests on the possibility of return / repetition. It is the structuralizing possibility of return – *returnability* – that produces a continuum.

As David Wood writes in *The Deconstruction of Time*, "Husserl's real achievement is to have supplied an answer to the problem of continuity through time."¹² The main reason for this is that Husserl's writing on temporality and presence demonstrates that the present is principally a horizontal form and not an object or some kind of content. Far from participating

¹² David Wood. *The Deconstruction of Time*, p.72.

in the history of the thought of the now as being point-like, Husserl shows how the present is “...a form that persists through continuous change of content.”¹³

In sum, Husserl's lecture course on the phenomenology of internal (or immanent) time-consciousness is a rigorous response to (and an effective resolution of) the problem of 'association' that plays such a crucial role in Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*. Hume was the first to acknowledge that the problem of association could not be addressed with any sort of adequacy (let alone explained) on the basis of his description of the mind as a stream of discrete impressions. This latter view makes it impossible to take into account the structuralization of the unfolding of a continuum – for what is lacking is the pre-impressional matrix of intentional threads through which all impressions are always already interconnected. Consciousness or 'mind', when thought in terms of a 'bundle of impressions' – a succession of fleeting and distinct present perceptions – does not give us continuity. The *life* of consciousness cannot be made up of discrete packets of perception or time as if they popped in and out of existence from moment to moment. The consciousness of sameness and difference must, in some sense, extend itself beyond the limits of such an atomic model of the mind (as a running-off of discrete impressions and point-like 'nows') if there is to be the possibility of 'association.' Here, we speak of a *bringing-together* whose meaning cannot be reduced to a movement of homogenization, since it also includes, in an original manner, the bringing-together-of-differences *as differences* – a weaving of temporally disparate moments within a quasi-simultaneous web of juxtaposition. This cannot be taken into account within the logical bounds of a mere 'order of corpuscular successions.'

¹³ Husserl. *Ideen I*, sec. 81, p. 218.

5. Intentionality – The Play of Unity in Difference and Difference in Unity

Hume's empirical-psychologistic standpoint barred him from access to a transcendental plane of orientation on the question of 'unity,' and thus the possibility of 'association.' This is ironic, in view of the weight of significance that the concept of association has for the theoretical structure and methodology of his *Treatise of Human Nature* – which is actually one of the reasons why Hume's writing is so admirable. He develops the theory of association only to see the grounding ripped out from beneath it when he reviews the issue of continuity upon which it depends. Hume not only climbs a ladder and kicks it away; he is also prepared to fall back down and to begin anew. Perhaps it is this conscientious *rigor* of Hume's analyses of experience that Husserl admires most of all – given that his own phenomenological enterprise is continually defined as 'a perpetual return to beginnings.'

It was the development of the theory of intentionality by Brentano and Husserl that allowed a new orientation on the problem of continuity. In phenomenology, consciousness is defined in terms of a transitive movement. It is literally nothing without such transitivity: its *directedness-towards* something. The concept of the 'outside-itself' movement of consciousness is the principal theoretical foundation upon which existentialism depends.¹⁴ This is the basis of Heidegger's meaning in the expression Dasein (Being-there) and Sartre's 'for' in Être pour soi (Being for itself). The 'towards,' indicated by the preposition 'of,' is the essential determination of the meaning of consciousness.

In these terms, the *consciousness of* similarity and difference necessarily implies a stretched-out consciousness that is irreducible to a flux of 'atomic' impressions. Impressions

¹⁴ It should be noted that the existentialists refer to this dynamic *outside-itself* thrust of consciousness as its *ekstatic* structurality (see footnote 10 above).

cannot be discrete consciousnesses or point-like presents, since this would imply something like percepts without perceiving, meaning without reference, foreground without background, presence without horizon, situation without relation, position without movement,¹⁵ etc. The *life* of consciousness cannot be a mere aggregate either – the sum of a collection of impressions, which are said to pass-away with 'inconceivable rapidity.' Without continuity – a continuum that has past and futural horizons – how could we speak of the mind as a 'collection' or a 'bundle'? In the case of the mind *as a whole*, these expressions have to be applied to a form of non-linear / hologrammatic co-extension or quasi-simultaneous structurality (note: the latter can be thought in a 'virtual' sense without necessarily invoking the language of presence in Derridian terms), which not only retains the impressions that pass-away, but is also already at work anticipating their arrival. Both of these performances constitute the *consciousness of transition* itself. Without the structurality that is constituted by such performances, it is not even enough to say that we would be unable to grasp the same impression twice. We would not be able to grasp it even once.

Hume's introspective narrative gives us a purely linear order of successions that cannot actually account for the consciousness of 'duration' – a consciousness which must, in some way, be coextensive with itself through change as *consciousness-of-change*. Consciousness has to exceed its various moments if there is to be the registration of difference. Running-off impressions must somehow be able to 'express' the *duration of their running-off*.

Therefore, to speak in terms of a flux of impressions that successively flash in and out of existence (remember that for Hume, perceptions are 'distinct existences') already presupposes a 'stretched' consciousness, which, in some sense, precedes and outlives the impressions that pass-away. What has to be taken into account is the 'continuing-through' or

¹⁵ One is reminded here of the wave / particle complementarity thesis and Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty.

'living-through' of temporal movement. Discrete consciousnesses could never register 'transition.' Therein lies the paradox, such a form of successivity as that expressed by Hume would literally never *give* succession.

The thematization of motion / change in terms of 'phases,' 'passing-over,' 'passing-away,' 'running-off,' etc., speaks of the *consciousness of* duration, change, modal variations, etc. These transitions cannot be given in a point-like impression or a mere collection (in the case of the latter we would still need to inquire into that which permits such a synthesis). Therefore, we find that the collecting together of a series of different temporal points would not give time in much the same sense that a collection of spatial points would not give motion.

This is where Husserl's expression running-off-phenomena (*Ablaufphänomene*) comes into play since it does not so much name impressions that are shading off as the *consciousness of the shading off* itself. This is why he is also very careful when he speaks of 'appearance' (a term which seems to act as a generic leveler in Hume's 'impression' centered analyses).

We would prefer to avoid, then, the use of the word "appearances" for the phenomena that constitute immanent temporal objects; for these phenomena are themselves immanent objects and are "appearances" in an entirely different sense. We speak here of the "running-off phenomena," or better still, of the "modes of temporal orientation"; and with respect to the immanent objects themselves, we speak of their "running-off characters" (e.g., now, past). We know that the running-off phenomenon is a continuity of constant changes. This continuity forms an inseparable unity, inseparable into extended sections that could exist by themselves, into points of the continuity. The parts that we single out by abstraction can exist only in the whole running-off; and this is equally true of the phases, the points that belong to the running-off continuity. We can also say of this continuity, with evidence, that in a certain sense it is immutable; that is, with regard to its form.¹⁶

The lectures on time-consciousness explore the question of the primordial possibility of an *extending* consciousness which, when understood in intentional terms as a *transitive*

¹⁶ Husserl. *PCIT*, sec. 10: "The Continua of the Running-Off Phenomena. The Diagram of Time," p. 29.

consciousness of something, gives duration. Without duration there cannot be change, without an enduring (temporalized / temporalizing) consciousness there cannot be consciousness *of* change. Hume's narrative forgets its own condition of possibility, beyond the 'corpuscular' schema that it thematizes. Narratives report duration precisely because they have duration, or, rather, they are forms of duration. Association, is a kind of narrative return – an unfolding of structure, the writing of con-texture, which, in a peculiar sense, combines instantaneity and duration, differentiation and concatenation.

In Section 38: “The Unity of the Flow of Consciousness and the Constitution of Simultaneity and Succession,” Husserl writes...

...simultaneity is nothing without temporal succession and temporal succession is nothing without simultaneity, and consequently simultaneity and temporal succession must become constituted correlatively and inseparably.¹⁷

Such structuration emerges out of the possibility of comparison as a kind of compression of 'lived-time.' This compression is structurally identical to the process of idealization – which rests on *returnability*. The opening-up of structure, then, points to a general structurality that first permits such an opening. It prescribes the possibility of association. One can still respect Hume's observation that we do not perceive any 'real connexion among distinct existences,' when it comes to questions of causality, but the issue of 'relation' is irreducible to these terms.

Husserl's theory of intentionality emerged out of a maneuver of suspension that bracketed questions of causation – whose source of inspiration, as his introduction to Boyce-

¹⁷ Husserl. *PCIT*, Sec 38. p. 82. Husserl continues,

“We can differentiate terminologically between the retentive being-all-at-once of fluxions [*fluxionalem Vor-Zugleich*] and the impressionable being-all-at-once of fluxions [*impressionalem Zugleich von Fluxionen*]. We cannot call the one or the other being-all-at-once a being simultaneous. We can no longer speak of a time that belongs to the ultimate constituting consciousness. The simultaneity of a color and of a tone, for example – their being in an “actually present now” – originally becomes constituted with the primal sensations that introduce the retentive process. But the primal sensations are not themselves simultaneous, and we can no more call the phases of the retentive being-all-at-once of fluxions simultaneous phases of consciousness than we can call the succession of consciousness a temporal succession.” *Ibid*, p.82-3.

Gibson's English translation of *Ideen I* (1931) appears to show, can be found in the encounter with Hume as a rigorous response to the aporetic moments that announce themselves at the limits of his investigations. For Hume, our notion of causality is not derived from the perception of real connections among distinct existences, but from 'habitual association' – which, as we have already seen, cannot actually be explained by his schema concerning the corpuscular temporalization of experience[s]. His dissatisfaction with this state of affairs is well known. It is in the Appendix to the *Treatise* that Hume confesses...

...all my hopes vanish, when I come to explain the principles, that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness. I cannot discover any theory, which gives me satisfaction on this head.¹⁸

The theory of intentionality, when considered from the point of view of the temporalization of consciousness, explains continuity in terms of *returnability*. It is the retentive and protentive extending of return that gives the 'possibility' of habituation and association – which, in turn, permits the idea of causality.

This brings us back to a fundamental question that Hume has overlooked. Why does he assume that perceptions are actually 'distinct' *existences*? Is there not a certain degree of uncritical hypostatization going on here? For Husserl, "...no concrete experience can pass *as independent* in the full sense of the term"¹⁹ Consciousness, or experience (in the most general sense), when understood according to the logic of intentionality, is a transitive upsurge, a unity of a projection, a comportment-towards – which is precisely a 'stretched' consciousness: the extended / extending of a history. Hume's overturning of the primacy of the Self as the starting-point of philosophy is a radical departure from the tradition, but there is still a residual and problematic trace of corpuscular thinking in his definition of existence.

Existence, when thought in terms of its phenomenological relation to that which is expressed by the Greek word *ekstaston*: to-stand-outside-itself – expresses emergence, self-

¹⁸ Hume. *Treatise*, Appendix, p.635.

differentiation, spatialization (kinesthesia), temporalization (history). These are essential dynamical structures that are always already implied by the 'phenomenon' *as that which shows itself from itself*. In these terms, that which stands-outside-itself implies a whole matrix of referential differences (that must in some sense *register* themselves as such) from which no ekstatic node can be *absolutely distinct*. Distinctness arises out of the possibility of the *consciousness of* difference. Therefore, consciousness, in its time, is essentially *spaced-out*. We should say, in consonance with Husserl, that these moments are not 'distinct existences,' but rather phases, modes, threads, or streams of *one* 'unity of lived-experience.'

In the section entitled, "Intentionality as the Main Phenomenological Theme" of *Ideen I*, Husserl writes.

It is intentionality which characterizes *consciousness* in the pregnant sense of the term, and justifies us in describing the whole stream of experience as at once a stream of consciousness and unity of *one* consciousness.²⁰

It is important to remember that in Husserl's phenomenology the question concerning the unity of the consciousness of time – as consciousness through time – is not restricted to (understood on the basis of) a mere expression of Self or personal identity, which Hume targeted for critique. The unity about which Husserl speaks indicates something earlier and pre-egological: temporalized / temporalizing consciousness (the a priori condition of possibility of what we would normally name as the Self or Ego); a retentional and protentional tracing of a projection – a reflexive unity of a history.

The *life* of consciousness (as a whole) is another name for the *intentionality* of consciousness. It is by means of the thesis of intentionality that Husserl effectively tackles the paradoxes that arise through Hume's 'discretist' perspective, in which the primary components of perception are presented as corpuscular impressions. Husserl's theory of intentionality provides a careful response and overturning of this thesis precisely because it permits the

¹⁹ Husserl. *Ideen I*, sec.83, p.221.

description of the interweaving of the 'intentional' threads of experience according to laws of association that are already presupposed by the very possibility of Hume's analyses, although the latter is unable to take them into account.

6. The *Living-Through* of the Extending / Extendedness of the Present

Unlike Hume, Husserl does not give privilege to discrete or point-like impressions in his discourse on perception / experience – since this would be like treating the present of presence and the presence of the present as an instant / point. As we have seen, for Husserl, such a present / now / instant could never be more than an abstraction from a *flux* (a *Primordial flux*, *Absolute Flow*, *Ur-region* that precedes and constitutes the purely successive flux in Hume's account).

There is an important difference that must be taken into account: any consideration of the meaning of living presence must attend to the question of its unfolding or constitution as a *unity of duration*. The internal dynamics – which trace out both dispersion and recuperation in flux – are those which also open up the 'Living Present.' In its very principle, the now cannot be a point-like moment or presence. As we have seen, an atomic or corpuscular now, within the context of Husserl's phenomenological orientation, could never be anything more than an idealization, a fiction. A now-point can be nothing for itself. It is a fundamental law of experience that the now is intrinsically transitive. Every time has a before and an after. As the

²⁰ Husserl. *Ibid*, sec.84, p. 222.

lectures on time-consciousness unfold, it becomes clear that this is not a simple external relation, but that the past and the future are necessarily embodied 'within' the present.

There is a certain 'virtuality' expressed by the Living Present in that it is not a presence in the sense of an objective appearance, but is the opening and the depth of any possible mode of 'appearing.' As a horizon, it recedes before that which stands out or comes to presence. In this sense, it is pure transcendence. Deferring and surpassing trace out the structure of its performance *as opening*.

There is also another sense in which it expresses a fundamental form of immanence. For Husserl, the structurality of the opening-up of the Living Present is precisely *flux* – through which the *giving* of temporal objects is *lived*. The thought of the Living Present is irreducible to the boundaries of any meta-general form of discourse on presence, since it is the *opening* of presencing itself.

For Hume, immanence is tied to appearance and thus the more sophisticated phenomenological orientation on immanence could only seem paradoxical. For although the Living Present does not actually appear it is not a pure absence. It is, in a vital phenomenological sense, *immanent in its transcendence*. Like the Earth as ground-horizon (the from-which), which is immanent and yet unseen, in that it is not principally an object, that which is closest to us recedes from our noticing grasp. In other words, the *lebendige Gegenwart* is not present *to* consciousness in any 'objective' sense *as an appearance*, but is the present *form* of consciousness in its directedness toward something.

It must be noted that we are indifferent as to whether such 'directedness' is an orientation toward the now, the past, or the future. Both the horizons of pastness and that of futurity already inhabit the Living Present (as interplaying fringes of the now) in that retention and protention are present modes of consciousness, e.g., retention is not a past moment as

such, but a present consciousness (a retaining) *of* the past – giving pastness within the present.

Note: retentions embody retentions within themselves – they are continua of continua.

To reiterate a most essential point, retentions are not simply retentions in an 'objective' sense i.e., specific contents of apprehensions that have been retained. Retentions retain other temporal orientations – 'of' or 'toward' objects. These temporal orientations are not objects 'for' temporalizing consciousness (although they can be made to appear as such at a higher level of reflection), but are orientations of consciousness in its changing 'modes' of directedness-toward temporal objects. Retended orientations retain previously retended *orientations* within themselves. Each retention bears within itself a history of continuous modification of orientation – where the continuous modification means a certain holding-back / delay, which produces a sinking-down of experience into the past. In other words, retention is the extension of a continuum that is embodied within itself.

Such a retentional tracing of modification or 'continuous alteration' always already precedes the apprehension *of* any temporal object – for this shifting of orientation is the originary illumination of any content. In a sense, the content is the same, but delayed in its givenness with reference to the present. It is *given* in different lights (the same, but non-identical) – beacons, signs of the unfolding of its duration.

Husserl writes,

As a matter of principle, any phase of a change can be expanded into a rest, and any phase of a rest can be carried over into a change.

Now, if we consider the *constituting* phenomena in comparison with the phenomena just discussed, we find a *flow*, and each phase of this flow is a *continuity of adumbrations*. But as a matter of principle, no phase of this flow can be expanded into a continuous succession; and therefore the flow cannot be conceived as so transformed that this phase would be extended in identity with itself. Quite to the contrary, we necessarily find a flow of continuous “change”; and this change has the absurd character that it flows precisely as it flows and can flow neither “faster” nor “slower.” If that is the case, then any object that changes is missing here; and since “something” runs its course in every process, no process is in question. There is nothing here that changes, and for that reason it also makes no sense to speak of

something that endures. It is therefore nonsensical to want to find something here that remains unchanged for even an instant during the course of its duration.²¹

Of course with this orientation, the usual dyadic categories that delimit discourse on the static and evolutionary, space and time, continuity and alteration, genesis and structure, etc., are quite insufficient. They are inadequate to the task of grasping the structurality of such dimensions. Whereas Hume's flux is in process, the Primordial Flux about which Husserl speaks falls outside such a determination and bears little in resemblance to that which can be adumbrated by any traditional discourse on time. It also upsets the specific form of the primordial / constituted disjunction that is generally in operation in classical modern thought, i.e., with respect to the way in which the static is set up in opposition to the genetic – a form of bi-polar thinking that also carves up the world into such apparently distinct opposites as structure contra alteration, rest contra movement, passivity contra activity, etc.

At the level of Husserl's temporal analyses, where it is disclosed how time constituting consciousness is none other than its own temporalization, we become aware of the intertwining of passivity and activity in the interaction between different levels or modes of intentional consciousness: activity, in its directedness towards the future, establishes its focus by simultaneously being informed [passivity] by the past – while at the same time reorganizing (in other words, acting / working upon) the significance, structural presentation, and thus the meaning of the past. In Husserl's phenomenology, the reproductive (presentificational rather than presentational) correlates to retention and protention are known as secondary remembrance and expectation. These are generally active, whereas the former intentionalities are, to a certain extent, passive. It is the difference between an 'act of evocation' and the tracing of a past horizon that *extends itself to* such an act – a horizon that always already precedes a reflective performance *as a remembering*. Primordial flux is the name of that which constitutes this horizon. At this primal depth though, we have to accept

²¹ Husserl. *PCIT*, sec 35. p. 78.

that we cannot rigidly separate passivity from activity (although there is no actor as such). Here, we find that there is always activity in passivity and passivity in activity.

In sum, the Living Present is a tri-horizonal nexus of interplaying orientations: retention, primary impression, and protention. Each orientation is a 'present' form of consciousness with a unique 'intentional' index. These related issues are partly inspired by Augustine's problem in section 20 of Book XI of the *Confessions* where he ponders over the question of whether we can speak of the future or the past as actually existing. Augustine decides that we can only do so if we speak of the future as a presently occurring anticipation and the past as a presently occurring act of remembering.

The now is the fulcrum of 'existence' or being for Augustine. However, it is the basis of a 'cosmology,' not a phenomenology. He oscillates between the two orientations (a symptom of Aristotelianism) without realizing that he is doing so – beginning in a cosmology and ending with a singularly phenomenological orientation. "It seems to me," Augustine writes, "that time is merely an extension, though of what it is an extension I do not know. I begin to wonder whether it is an extension of the mind itself."²²

The operative schema that determines Augustine's thought on time is one in which the now or present is *not* extended – even though his speculation about the possibility of time being an extension of the mind problematizes such a viewpoint. He never actually raised this as a problem and did not really explore the question of the structure of the now itself.

Husserl's discourse on the now does not determine its being in terms of such an extensionless point, but as a stretched horizon that is protentionally stretching ahead of itself – likewise, with respect to the constitutive role of retention. Husserl demonstrates that when we speak of retention it is not as a 'past' consciousness, but as a 'present' consciousness *of* the

²² Augustine. *Confessions*. Book 11, sec.26.

past: it is the *giving of having-beenness*. The retained is that which is given up by the present retention as that which is no-longer.²³

The lectures on time-consciousness can be seen to provide an extraordinarily sophisticated and yet radically clear elaboration of Augustine's meditations; the phenomenological description of what must necessarily be entailed in the constitution of the past as present-recollection and the future as present-expectation. However, unlike Augustine's discourse on the non-extension of the now, Husserl shows how it necessarily must be a *field*. Augustine makes the mistake of hypostatizing the mathematical point-system by which duration is measured and confusing it with the structure of the now itself.

Primary impression is the boundary to retention and protention. It marks the point at which they pass over into one another. Such a point is ideal of course. Another way of looking at primary impression is in terms of a boundary that has no thickness in itself / on its own. The sense of this is to be found in Husserl's agreement with the radicalization of the concept of the 'boundary' (*Grenze*) in Brentano's philosophy – which specifically rejects the notion that it is composed of two adjacent points. In the same terms, retention and protention are not adjacent to one another in the sense in which they could be said to either lie alongside one another (touching without blending) or that they are separated by primal impression as a substantive divide or gap. Boundary is pure transition. There is not a strict divide between retention and protention, for that division to which the concept of primal or primary impression refers is more a kind of zone of transitional smudging – a blending and a bleeding of one into the other. Boundary, here, signifies a nexus of 'play' where the Living Present is precisely a spacing of negotiation between the three intentional dimensions of temporalization / ekstases.

²³ Husserl is also careful to distinguish between retention as primary memory and its representational modification. The former *gives* the just-past, whereas the latter merely *re-presents* it. "Retention constitutes the living horizon of the now; in it I have a consciousness of the "just past"" (*PCIT*, sec. 18, p.45). Here, we find different modalities of 'present' experience in the 'ways' in which pastness is given.

What is given through this movement is the unfolding of a horizon, not discrete things. The thought of the boundary as a dividing line without thickness or as a point is, once again, merely an ideal limit – an idealizing fiction.

There are multiple ways in which we might understand this play or interplay. Firstly, in the sense in which there is an absence of rigidity – unfixity. This kind of play occurs through erosion; a loosening that comes with the passage of time. The now is always protentionally ahead of itself while being the cutting edge of a train of retentions. This brings us to the following sense: it is a perfect metaphor for the open-endedness of the present – the retentional and protentional interplay that gives the play of the now – its unfolding. It is a kind of blurring of edges. The Living Present is a horizon with fringes (as opposed to the common notion of boundaries), which extend on both sides of itself. These fringes (or overlapping zones) are not merely external supports to the present, but constitute its extendedness from *within* itself. Therefore, the intentional interplay, once again, is in a very fundamental sense, also an *intra-play* (Primordial Flux / Flow).

The idea of primary impression brings with it the all-important phenomenological concepts concerning apodicticity and adequacy and the play between fulfillment, non-fulfillment, and degrees of fulfillment. Primary impression is the fulfillment of what *was* a protention. The movement gives, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty, the germination of what will have already been given. Primary impression is the present actualization of what *was* futural. This is the fold of a structure of negotiation that originally permits us to distinguish between phantasy and the real.

At a 'higher' level, an example of this would be when a figure, perhaps shrouded in darkness, may seem familiar, but when it is approached (on the basis of the apprehension of familiarity), it turns out to be someone (or even something) quite different in actuality. What signs itself here is the moment at which a determinate expectation, whose material is

delivered up from the past (through memory), is forced to undergo adjustment on the basis of a present consciousness (primary impression) of something with which the expectation does not correspond. As the protention passes over into retention the content of expectation is annulled and retained only as unfulfilled and mistaken. Primary impression marks (to speak metaphorically) the 'point' at which expectations are fulfilled or otherwise. It is the spacing through which existence pours in, disrupting imagination (phantasy) and ideality.

Therefore, it is important to understand that the term primary impression (or now-consciousness) is not synonymous with the meaning of the expression *Living Present*. It refers to only one present form of 'orientation' that articulates the way in which retention and protention (as present modes of orientation *of* that which is no-longer and that which is not-yet) pass over into one another in the constitution of the ever-flowing present. The Living Present itself, far from being point-like, is a tri-horizonal 'field.' Along with Merleau-Ponty, we may describe it as a 'bulb' made up of indeterminately extended fringes stretching into the past and the future.²⁴

The Living Present (*lebendige Gegenwart*) is a waiting-towards presence. It is not so much the present (in an objective sense) as the *living through of presencing*, since the consciousness of continuous alteration / temporalization is none other than its own temporalization.

²⁴ See Merleau-Ponty's essay, "The Primacy of Perception" (published in *The Primacy of Perception* – edited, with an Introduction by James M. Edie, Northwestern University Press, 1964) and his last, unfinished manuscripts of 1959-61: *The Visible and the Invisible* (see bibliography).

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