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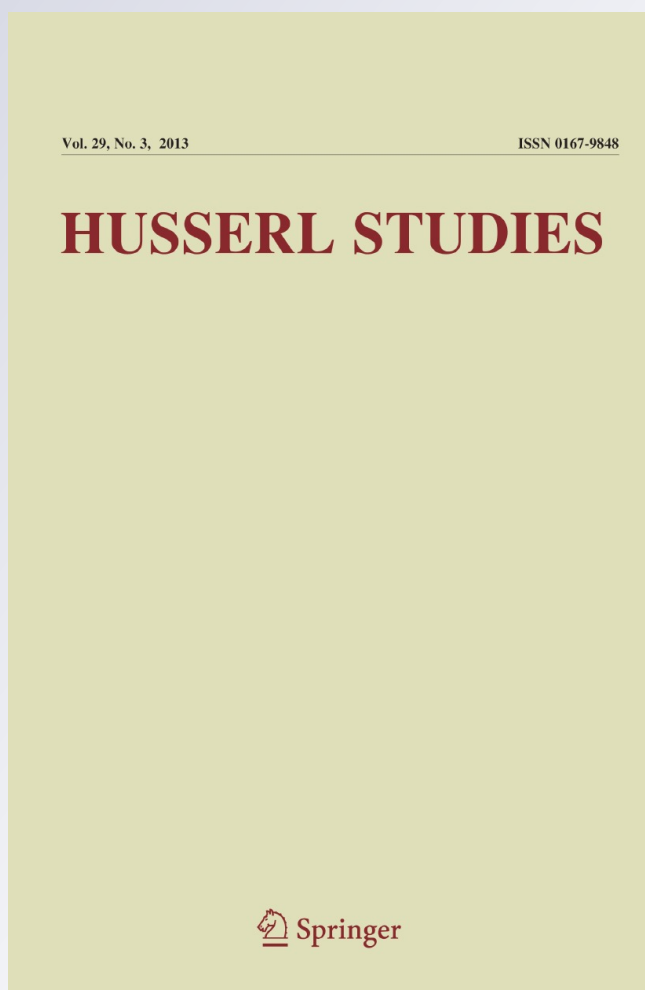
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The Phenomenologizing of Primal-Phenomenality: Husserl and the Boundaries of the Phenomenology of Time

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Abstract This paper focuses on the methodical disclosure of the lowest level of the constitution of time in Husserl's phenomenology of time (especially in the C-Manuscripts), following this leading question: is it at all possible to disclose phenomenologically the primal-phenomenal constituting stream of consciousness? First, I address the different levels of constitution in order to focus on the ultimate level. Second, I analyse the “intentionality” of the primal-stream, by means of differentiating it from act-intentionality. Third, I outline the methodical function of the reduction and of the phenomenologizing ego. Fourth, I present *Abbau* as the methodical possibility of reaching primal-phenomenality. Fifth, I address the problem of grasping the primal-phenomenal dimension in its originality. I will argue that we can grasp this fundamental dimension by means of a “phenomenological deconstruction” of constituted experience and at the same time by putting this dimension in an intentional relationship with the phenomenologizing ego.

1 Introduction

The phenomenology of time was always an intellectual challenge for Husserl, one which he was never able to resolve to his satisfaction. This dissatisfaction is evidenced, for example, in his reluctance to publish the “Time-Lectures” of 1928;¹ these were the only texts on time he released for publication, and he always

¹ The “Time-Lectures” (*Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*) were based on the fourth and last part of the lecture *Hauptstücke aus der Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, held by Husserl at the University of Göttingen in 1904–1905, and also on many other research manuscripts (up until 1917). The final draft was organized by Edith Stein in 1917, and was finally published by Martin Heidegger in the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*

regretted his decision.² There are many reasons for this, but perhaps most important is the fact that a complete, satisfactory account of time is arguably the most difficult of all phenomenological problems (cf. Hua XXXVIII, p. 4; Hua X, p. 276). Despite his many efforts over many decades of intensive research on this issue, the project of a systematic phenomenology of time remained incomplete and plagued by many unsolved aporias.³

In this paper I do not intend to address the manifold problems which arise in Husserl's phenomenological analysis of time. My aim is simply to focus on one issue, which constitutes one of the most (if not *the* most) fundamental problems in Husserl's phenomenology of time, since it concerns its very foundation: namely the problem of the phenomenological access to the ultimate level of the constitution of time, i.e., to the level of the "absolute flow" (*absoluter Fluss*) of consciousness, also known as "primal-process" (*Urprozess*) or "primal-stream" (*Urstrom*). It is well known that Husserl differentiates between levels of constitution, and that these levels are founded upon each other, each of them being higher accomplishments founded upon one ultimate level that is "absolute", since it does not presuppose any other underlying level. This absolute level is not something phenomenal, but the very source of constitution of every phenomenon. Thus, the central issue of this paper is the problem of the very possibility of a phenomenological disclosure and analysis of this ultimate dimension, and the leading question is: how do we bring this lowest level of constitution to intuitive appearance? Or, using concepts from Husserl's last manuscripts, how do we phenomenologize (*phänomenologisieren*)⁴ primal-phenomenality (*Urphänomenalität*)?⁵ In other words: is it at all possible to phenomenologically disclose the most fundamental level of experience, namely the *pre-phenomenal* constituting primal-stream (*Urstrom*) of consciousness? I will attempt to outline a possible answer to this question by means of a circular interplay between the deconstructing *Abbau* and the descriptive glance of the phenomenologizing ego. Nevertheless, at the same time I will present this circularity as an inherent problem of the phenomenology of time, one which appears at the very

Footnote 1 continued

(Volume IX) in 1928. The text was also re-edited by Rudolf Boehm in 1966 in Volume X of *Husserliana*, and in English by John Brough in Volume IV of the *Collected Works* in 1991.

² Husserl made several statements that indicate he regretted the publication of this book (cf. Husserl 1994a, p. 182; Cairns 1976, p. 28).

³ Although Husserl intended to publish his investigations on time (including his first manuscripts, the *Bernau Manuscripts* and the later *C-Manuscripts*) in two volumes to be edited together with Eugen Fink (cf. Husserl 1994b, pp. 33, 39, 319), he never managed to complete this project.

⁴ In general, I understand the concept of "phenomenologizing"—which Husserl never defined in an explicit way—as the methodical disclosure and thematizing of the different levels of constitution. There are many passages in his last manuscripts where the term "phänomenologisierend" appears (e.g. Mat VIII, pp. 26, 126, 157, 269, 347; Hua XXXIV, pp. 89, 90, 98, 122, 175, 181, 184). "Disclosure" (*Enthüllung*) is also an operative concept for Husserl, which I understand as a reflexive act that makes accessible the constitution of already-constituted unities.

⁵ Since "phenomenality" refers to the way something appears, namely the constituted experience as it appears, I call—following Husserl—"primal-phenomenality" (*Urphänomenalität*) the peculiar manner of appearance of that which is constitutive of what appears, and which therefore makes up the ultimate level of constitution (cf. Mat VIII, pp. 1–2, 6, 93, 145; Hua XXXIV, pp. 180, 298).

moment of methodical disclosure (and subsequent description) of the most fundamental level of constitution. In this paper I am going to concentrate mainly on Husserl's late C-Manuscripts (Mat VIII), since in those manuscripts the problem reaches a more explicit consideration.⁶

First, I will outline the fundamental difference between the levels of constitution, concentrating on the lowest level, namely, the primal-stream (*Urstrom*), by means of which every temporal unity is constituted. Second, I will focus on the special "phenomenological status" of the primal-stream, which does not "appear" as a phenomenon but only as a sort of primal-phenomenon (*Urphänomen*). In this sense, I will refer to "primal-phenomenality" (*Urphänomenalität*). In order to show this, I will address the peculiar "intentionality" of the primal-stream as "stream-intentionality" (*Stromintentionalität*), by differentiating it from "act-intentionality" (i.e., the intentionality of acts) and by differentiating the most original constitutive accomplishments of the stream itself from that of act-constitution as well. Third, I will point out the meaning of the methodical procedure of the reduction and of the transcendental dimension, in order to show the conceptual difference between "transcendental" (as "constitutive" moment) and "phenomenologizing" (as methodical, descriptive moment). In this context, I will outline the methodical function of the phenomenologizing ego as the highest form of phenomenological self-consciousness, namely, the consciousness which discloses its own constitutive accomplishments, the phenomenologizing consciousness which brings the anonymity of the natural attitude to the reflexive (self) awareness of the transcendental attitude. Fourth, I will address the sense of *Abbau* as a special methodical reduction, namely as the "unbuilding" of higher-level *constituted* accomplishments in order to reach the most elemental *constituting* level. Fifth, based on an analysis of some of Husserl's last manuscripts on time, I will focus on the problems and limits of the methodical disclosure of primal-phenomenality in its originality and discuss some dilemmas we face when we try to disclose this original dimension intuitively. Sixth, I will explain how these manuscripts present us with a circularity implied by the disclosure of this primal-dimension itself: the phenomenologizing ego discloses that which is always presupposed (i.e., the most original source of the constitution of time), and by bringing it to its givenness, objectifies its pre-ontic character. Seventh, I will present an account that articulates the activity of the phenomenologizing ego as a never-ending task of "deconstructing" constituted unities. In conclusion, I will show that Husserl remains as close as possible to that which is intuitively given. This leads him to disclose the primal-phenomenal dimension by means of a "zigzag movement" between that which is constituted and that which is constituting—i.e., a kind of phenomenological "deconstruction"⁷ or "unbuilding" appropriate to the elusive nature of the ultimate levels of constitution. I will point out that this procedure should by no means be understood as a theoretical construction. At the same time, I will argue that the thematizing grasp and description of this primal-

⁶ In a less explicit way, Husserl addresses this problem in several other texts, mainly in his earlier texts on time. For a more detailed consideration of this issue, see Niel (2011, chapters 4.4 and 6).

⁷ Since I do not want to suggest a straightforward parallel with the philosophy of Jacques Derrida—something I cannot address here—I will use the inverted commas in order to avoid any hasty attempt to "over-interpret" this concept.

phenomenality can only be accomplished by putting this lowest and most original experiencing in an objectifying intentional relationship with the phenomenologizing ego and its reflexive glance in a never-ending task of building and unbuilding that which is given in the phenomenological description.

2 The Different Levels of Constitution and the Disclosure of the “Absolute Flow”

Experience is for Husserl a structure (*Aufbau*) of different constitutive levels, i.e., of different accomplishments by means of which different objectivities appear. So, for instance, reality is constituted in many layers (i.e., through many different constitutive performances), such as perception, language, the relationship to others, etc. For example, the reading of a book implies a manifold of constitutions in different levels: there is a symbolic level of interpretation (of the meaning of what is written), a perceptive level (the seeing of the printed pages), a fantasy level (if I imagine something through some mental images), and so on. The task of phenomenology consists in the disclosure of this complex structure of constitutive levels.⁸ In the case of time there are also different levels, depending on whether we consider, for example, a quantitative form of objective time or the subjective experience of it. In Husserl's analysis on time, e.g., in the “Time-Lectures” (1928), we find an explicit differentiation between three levels of constitution of time, depending on the corresponding constitutive accomplishments in our experience of time. We have: (1) things of empirical experience in objective time; (2) immanent unities in pre-empirical time; (3) the absolute time-constituting flow of consciousness (Hua X/CW IV, § 34).⁹ We can find this distinction not only in some early texts on time from 1907, and in the *Bernau Manuscripts* (1917/18) (cf. Hua XXXIII, pp. 104, 110, 184) but also in several passages from his later manuscripts (cf. Hua XXXIV, pp. 115–116, 118–119, 180 footnote; Mat VIII, pp. 4, 297) confirming the phenomenological importance of this differentiation throughout his work. But what is the relevance of this differentiation?

In the first place, it points out the *structure* of our experience of time, which is based on different constitutive accomplishments depending on whether we consider time as something objective, as something subjective, or the very same *experiencing itself* (the absolute flow).¹⁰ In the second place, it shows how objective time (the time of clocks, quantifiable time, etc.) is based upon the subjective experience of time, and how all this rests ultimately on a certain pre-phenomenal dimension which is not itself in time. We should take an attentive look at these different levels. (1) The first level is our usual meaning of time, i.e., everything we can measure in a

⁸ “Das große Thema der Transzendentalphilosophie ist das Bewusstsein überhaupt als ein Stufenbau konstitutiver Leistungen, in denen sich in immer neuen Stufen oder Schichten immer neue Objektivitäten, Objektivitäten immer neuen Typus konstituieren” (Hua XI, p. 218).

⁹ The text is probably from around 1907–1909 (Hua X, p. 432), since it is related to the manuscripts grouped as Text 40 (cf. Hua X, pp. 286–288). See also Hua X, pp. 73, 76, 357, 371.

¹⁰ I give a more detailed account of the difference between “experience” (*Erlebnis*) and “experiencing” (*Erleben*) in Niel (2011, chapter 3.3).

quantitative temporal way (in seconds, minutes, hours, etc.). We can also consider here not only the natural sense of time as the time of clocks, but also for instance time in the context of the sciences, e.g., in physics. (2) The second level is our subjective experience of time. Even if (at least in a certain way) it is not a form of objective time, but the time of my experiences, as Husserl himself states, it is indeed a form of time, since the mere succession of hyletic data as a diachronic sensual flowing implies some sort of temporality. Therefore, Husserl calls this dimension “pre-empirical time”. (3) The third level—which is the main focus of this paper—is the absolute dimension of the “absolute flow”,¹¹ which is not something in time but which is precisely the source of constitution of every form of temporality. What exactly is this absolute flow?

The absolute flow is what we find when we cease considering temporal unities and we focus on the experiencing itself of consciousness, i.e., not these experiences (as unities *in time*), but rather the *experiencing* by means of which these experiences are constituted as temporal unities. Since everything that appears in my field of experience is a constituted temporal unity (even ideal objects as “super-temporal” objects), the experience of time itself is not in time; it is what makes time possible (i.e., what constitutes time). It is not a temporal consciousness, but *time-consciousness*; as such, the “absolute flow” is not *in time* but rather constitutes time, i.e., it makes up the ultimate level of the constitution upon which every form of temporality is constituted.

Considering all this, it is obvious that manifold problems arise in the analysis of this “absolute flow”, since in our experience we are always dealing with temporal experiences and not with the flow itself.¹² Thus we can only outline what this flow is by contrasting it with what it is not, i.e., constituted unities in time (whether subjective or objective). Thus, according to Husserl, “[t]he flow is something we speak of *in conformity with what is constituted*” (CW IV, p. 79; Hua X, p. 75). In that sense, there is not only a difference between things in general in objective time and subjective experiences in pre-immanent time, but we should also stress an important differentiation between the flowing of experiences in subjective time and the absolute flow of consciousness—that is, between subjective experiences (acts, hyle, etc.) in their temporal, diachronic succession and the absolute *experiencing of* all diachronic events. This absolute experiencing is not itself in time, since it is the *unmodalisable actuality* from which time itself gets its sense and its point of reference.

The modus of the absolute flow is the *pure actuality of the living present* in the steady actuality of the primal-now (*Ur-Jetzt*) (cf. Held 1966).¹³ By experiencing the

¹¹ Over the years, Husserl used many metaphors to refer to the “absolute flow” of time-consciousness, such as “primal-process” (*Urprozess*) or “primal-stream” (*Urstrom*). Cf. the Introduction to Hua XXXIII, p. XXXV.

¹² Unfortunately, I cannot address this issue here in extenso. For a more detailed account of the absolute flow see Niel (2011, chapter 4.4).

¹³ In many of his late manuscripts on time, Husserl considers the methodical relevance of the reduction to this absolute sphere of actuality of the living present, where the primal-temporalisation (*Urzeitigung*) is performed: “Es ist die Reduktion auf die Sphäre der Urzeitigung, in der der erste und urquellenmäßige Sinn von Zeit auftritt [...]. Alle sonstige Zeitlichkeit, ob nun subjektive oder objektive [...] erhält aus ihr ihren Seinssinn und ihre Geltung” (Hua XXXIV, p. 187).

continuous flowing and succession of hyletic data and by means of its original threefold intentional structure (primal impression, retention, and protention), the absolute flow constitutes time, i.e., it makes time conscious. Since the topic of this paper is not the flow itself, but rather how it is phenomenologized, I will just outline briefly some features of this absolute original source of constitution, stressing its difference with the subjective sphere of acts.

3 Act-Intentionality and Stream-Intentionality

“Act-intentionality” is the usual concept of intentionality, namely, the directedness of some experiences (like perceptions, recollections, etc.) toward their objects. We have an intentional relation, for instance, when we perceive an object through our subjective acts. Thus when Husserl speaks about “intentionality” as what characterises consciousness (“consciousness of something”), e.g., in *Ideas I* (cf. Hua III/1, pp. 187–188), he is usually referring to the idea of act-intentionality.

“Stream-intentionality” is a concept that designates the peculiar “intentionality” of the absolute flow.¹⁴ (I use scare quotes here in order to avoid any interpretation of the term in the sense of act-intentionality.) It is a sort of “directedness” of consciousness to itself, i.e., to its own experiencing; or, in other words, the self-directedness of consciousness through the structure of its “phases” (as “tensions” of consciousness, referring etymologically back to *tendere* as “stretching”). Thus, we can designate through this concept the “intentions” of the “phases”¹⁵ of the absolute flow. These are primal-impression, retention and protention, as the original stretching and openness of consciousness that constitutes the most elementary temporal field (*Zeithof*). None of these “intentions” should be called “acts”: acts, as temporal unities, could begin, could be interrupted, and so on,¹⁶ unlike the steady absolute flow, which provides the most elemental constitution of time upon which every act takes place. The “phases” we mentioned above belong to the steady structure as dependent moments of the absolute flow, i.e., to the synchronic actuality of subjective life, before (in the phenomenological sense of “prior”) the accomplishments of acts. It should be clear by now that “stream-intentionality” can only be called “intentionality” in a sense analogical to that of act-intentionality, since by the former we do not find any accomplishment of an act nor anything like

¹⁴ Although the concepts of “Aktintentionalität” and “Stromintentionalität” appear, for the most part, explicitly in the late manuscripts (e.g., Hua XXXIV, p. 183), Husserl was tacitly aware of this difference in earlier texts. For example, the concept of “longitudinal intentionality”, which plays an essential role in the “Time-Lectures” (cf. Hua X, § 39), clearly refers to the intentionality of the flow, which is not reducible to any form of act accomplishment.

¹⁵ The “phases” of the flow should not be understood in a temporal way, as the concept of “phases” itself may suggest; the phases of the flow are rather synchronic—that is, they all belong to the steady actuality of the living present.

¹⁶ Acts imply a succession. Therefore, they should also be considered as constituted temporal unities. So, for instance, a perception is made up of the succession of moments (p1, p2, p3, p4 and so on). For this reason Husserl considered acts to be “temporal-objects” (cf. Hua XXXIII, Text Nr. 6). This position has been criticized many times by Dan Zahavi (see Zahavi 1999, chapter 5, or Zahavi 2004), a position he identifies with the interpretations of Robert Sokolowski and John Brough. Cf. Niel (2011, chapter 3).

an objective correlate of intentionality, but rather the basis upon which this intentional correlation could appear.

There are two essential aspects of the flow we should underline: (a) this absolute flow with its peculiar intentionality occurs *even without the accomplishments of acts*, i.e., it steadily constitutes time in a passive way; (b) since this flow is neither an act nor an intentional object but the ultimate source of constitution, it is quite problematic to consider its “appearance” as the appearance of a phenomenal object, since this account would not respect its very “nature”. Its “way of appearing” (i.e., its phenomenality) is not like the appearing of acts or objects. To consider the flow as a phenomenal appearance (like that of acts or objects) would imply that it appears as something constituted in time, which in turn would presuppose a constitutive source in order to appear, and by appearing would appear as something phenomenal, and so on *in infinitum*. For that reason, we differentiate between the “phenomenality” of act-intentionality, as the way of appearing of acts and objects to me, and this peculiar “appearance”, which is neither the appearance of an object nor of an intending act, but of the ultimate experiencing of consciousness itself. Since the way of appearing of the latter is not that of a phenomenal correlation between acts and objects, but the ultimate constitutive source of them, Husserl calls the way of appearing of this original dimension “*primal-phenomenal*” (*urphänomenal*) (cf., e.g., Mat VIII, pp. 1–2, 6, 58, 76, 93, 145; Hua XXXIV, pp. 98, 171, 175, 180). Occasionally—mainly in the earlier texts—Husserl refers to it as “pre-phenomenal” (cf., e.g., Hua X, p. 83). But here our leading question arises: how can we “get” *phenomenologically* to this pre-phenomenal dimension? Can we reach this primal form of phenomenality without turning it into a phenomenal something? Is it possible to “phenomenologize” this sphere of the absolute flow? Before answering this question we must first address the methodical concept of reduction and that of the phenomenologizing ego.

4 The Phenomenologizing Ego as the Performer of the Reduction and Its Absolute Phenomenological Self-Consciousness

The well-known concept of reduction plays an essential role within Husserlian phenomenology. It is a very complex concept, due, on the one hand, to its evolution throughout the development of Husserl’s thought,¹⁷ and, on the other hand, to its manifold methodical applications.¹⁸ I cannot address here this complex issue of the reduction but will instead look briefly at the general meaning of the transcendental reduction in order to reach the notion of the phenomenologizing ego.

The transcendental reduction is a methodical procedure by which we put existence into brackets and open a transcendental field of experience. In more

¹⁷ Lavigne (2005) carefully traces the evolution of the concept of reduction from the period that covers the first edition of the *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901) through *Ideas I* (1913). Of course, if we also consider the period from 1913 until Husserl’s last years, the scene is even more complex.

¹⁸ Lohmar (2002) stresses the many different applications of the concept of reduction, such as “reduction to the real components”, “transcendental reduction”, “primordial reduction”, etc., depending on the aspect of the field of experience it is focused on.

technical terms: the *epoché* leaves aside the question of the positing of being (*Seinssetzung*), and that means that everything—i.e., both the world with its objects and my experiencing subjectivity—is no longer taken as existent entity, but only as phenomenon. Thus, the *epoché* reduces reality to *phenomenality*. That means that in the methodical frame of the reduction everything, including myself (as empirical ego), should be taken *for me* (as phenomenologizing ego, i.e., the one who performs the reduction) as a phenomenon. By performing this reduction I disclose the transcendental dimension of the intentional correlation between givenness and way of givenness (to me). “Transcendental” just means, in this context, the pure dimension disclosed by the reduction.¹⁹

We should take care to avoid misunderstandings here. The point of departure is the “natural attitude”, which is the everyday attitude in which we deal with existent things, with a reality independent of us, etc. Even in the frame of sophisticated forms of scientific discourse we are still within the natural attitude, since we are still considering reality as something in itself. The phenomenological reduction implies a step forward in order to consider everything from the standpoint of my own experience: everything is considered as phenomenal in *its way of appearing to me*. I do not consider myself as a natural person, but as transcendental subjectivity; that means that after the reduction, I appear to myself as a transcendental I who constitutes every appearance. The disclosure (*Enthüllung*) of this constitutive dimension of subjectivity is what Husserl calls the “transcendental attitude”. In other words, the “transcendental attitude” is a methodical perspective through which we become aware of the subjective constitutive dimensions of reality. But the question is now: who performs this reduction by means of which we can get to the transcendental attitude?

It took Husserl years to arrive at a treatment of this question. Even if we can see some early references to the “phenomenological” or “phenomenologizing ego”, it is in his late manuscripts that we find a more detailed description of it and of the conceptual difference between “transcendental” and “phenomenologizing”.²⁰ The “phenomenologizing ego” is the ego who performs the phenomenological reduction, i.e., who brings the natural attitude to the transcendental attitude. “The world *for me*” means “for me *as a phenomenologizing ego*,” as the ego that “sees” the way experience is (being) constituted. The “phenomenologizing” activity refers therefore to the *disclosure* of the transcendental, constitutive dimension of experience.

Considering this conceptual demarcation, we should not confuse the concept of transcendental ego and that of phenomenologizing ego. Although there is an identity between them, since it ultimately always concerns my own and same I,²¹ from a

¹⁹ “Transzendental [...] soll vorweg nichts anders besagen, als was theoretisch setzbar und gesetzt ist in der phänomenologischen, selbst transzendental genannte Reduktion” (Hua XXXIV, p. 90).

²⁰ The concept of “phenomenologizing ego” of course brings to mind the work of Eugen Fink (cf. Fink 1988). Since the philosophical relationship between Husserl and Fink is a considerable research field in itself—cf. the exhaustive works of van Kerckhoven (2003) and Bruzina (2004)—we will deliberately leave aside Fink’s account of this issue and focus only on Husserl’s own writings.

²¹ This is precisely Husserl’s point, when he criticizes Fink’s extremely strong polarity between the constituting (transcendental) I and the phenomenologizing I (cf. Fink 1988, p. 183). For an excellent account of the phenomenologizing I, see Taguchi (2006, chapter IV.3); see also Niel (2011, chapter 11.2).

methodical point of view there is an important distinction between the two ego concepts.²² Within the natural attitude, we are not aware of ourselves as transcendental-constituting sources of the world; nevertheless, we cannot say there is no constitution in the natural attitude at all. The reduction only makes us *aware* that we are indeed the source of every constitution; that is, it brings us to the insights (*Einsichten*) of transcendental constitution. That is precisely the meaning of Husserl's idea of "disclosure." Husserl uses the concept of "anonymity" to name the "*unawareness*" or the "*blindness*" of the transcendental dimension, i.e., of the constitutive accomplishments of the ego (cf. for instance Hua XXXIV, p. 160; Hua I, pp. 84–85; Zahavi 2005, p. 52; Niel 2011, chapter 13.2.3). The phenomenologizing ego brings this anonymous transcendental ego (in the natural attitude) to its disclosure (in the transcendental attitude). Thus, the natural ego appears *as* transcendental ego in its transcendental constitution by means of the reduction performed by the phenomenologizing ego.²³

To summarize: we have the natural ego, which is the ego in the natural attitude, anonymous and unaware of its own transcendental accomplishments. This does not mean that it is not self-aware but rather that it is not aware of itself as transcendental constitutive source. We also have the phenomenologizing ego, which is the ego who, by performing the *epoché*, discloses the transcendental dimension of the natural ego; the phenomenologizing ego discloses *itself* as the transcendental constituting source of reality, namely, as transcendental ego. The phenomenologizing ego therefore "brings" the *natural dimension* (i.e., the stating of what is as *realitas*, as something being in itself) to a *phenomenal dimension* (i.e., the consideration of this reality only as it appears, as what it is for me). "Phenomenality" only means the pure field of my transcendental experience in its correlation: what appears to me, the appearance itself, and even myself as experiencing pole of what appears (cf. Hua I, § 31).

Considering all this, we can see that the phenomenologizing ego, by disclosing the transcendental dimension of experience, reaches a higher form of phenomenological self-awareness, namely the awareness of itself as being the transcendental source of constitution—or, in other words, the awareness that as transcendental subjectivity *I* am the source of the constitution of everything. This should not be understood as an extreme case of subjective idealism, as if everything was ontologically subjective, but rather in the sense of a phenomenological transcendental idealism: everything refers intentionally to my experiencing subjectivity. The result of this phenomenologizing reflection is an active, transcendental form of self-

²² "Scharf unterscheiden muss man das phänomenologisierende, das in phänomenologischer Epoché eingestellte Ich, und das durch dessen neue Einstellung zum Thema gewordene transzendente [...] Ich, wenn auch sich zeigt, dass das Ich in phänomenologischer Einstellung sich selbst als transzendentales findet, wenn es auf sich reflektiert" (Hua XXXIV, p. 90, see also pp. 98, 113).

²³ Thus we find a twofold distinction: on the one hand, considering the *attitude*, which is changed through the reduction: "Wir müssen unterscheiden: (1) das transzendente Ich (allgemeiner, die transzendente Subjektivität) in der natürlichen Einstellung und das transzendente Ich (die transzendente Subjektivität) in der phänomenologisierenden Einstellung" (Hua XXXIV, p. 157). On the other hand, considering the *constitutive performance* (i.e., either as constituted or as constituting): "Andererseits unterscheiden wir (2) natürliches Ich (Ich, der Mensch), transzendentales Ich (das alle Objektivität transzendental-konstituierende)" (ibid.; see also Hua XXXIV, pp. 176–177).

awareness (cf. Hua XXXIV, pp. 98, 193; Mat VIII, p. 126; Hua VI, p. 275). By means of this transcendental awareness, the *abstraction* of natural existence reaches the *concretion* of transcendental subjectivity.²⁴ Therefore, we should not make the mistake of considering the phenomenological reduction as a sort of abstraction. Nothing is being cut off from its concreteness. Quite the opposite: the phenomenological reduction overcomes the abstraction of the natural attitude by disclosing the absolute concreteness of subjectivity, which is the full awareness that everything intentionally refers to me as transcendental source of constitution. Yet our leading question remains: through this reduction and the following phenomenological display of subjectivity as constitutive source, do we also reach the primal-phenomenality of the ultimate source of constitution, i.e. of the absolute flow?

5 The *Abbau* of Higher Constituted Unities and the Way to Primal-Phenomenality

We have already briefly pointed out that there is a general sense of the reduction (as a phenomenological reduction), but there are also some other particular “reductive procedures” (such as the reduction to primordially, the reduction to pre-predicative experience, etc.). For us, it is important to outline what Husserl calls the “radicalized reduction” as a specific methodical procedure of “unbuilding” (*Abbau*). The function of this “unbuilding” is to “deconstruct” the *constituted* unities (i.e., all the constitutive “results” of the manifold syntheses performed by subjectivity) in order to reach the *constituting* source of these unities. Through this methodical procedure we can leave aside not only the intended objects but also the accomplishments of acts, and focus on the ultimate subjective source of these temporal unities. Husserl speaks of this “radicalized reduction” as “the reduction to the sphere of primal-temporalization [*Urzeitigung*] [... where any] temporality, either subjective or objective [...] gains its sense of being and its validity” (Hua XXXIV, p. 190). Thus, this reduction should lead to the lowest primal-accomplishments (*Urleistungen*) of experience, namely, to the primal-temporalization where every constitution of time (objective/subjective) finds its ultimate source.

According to Husserl, this primal-temporalization “appears” as a sort of ultimate primal-phenomenon (*Urphänomen*) and makes up the ultimate source of constitution (cf. Mat VIII, p. 1). Referring to the ultimate origin of constitution, Husserl speaks about a “primal-level” (*Urstufe*), which is the “primal-ground” (*Urboden*) “upon which all other higher [constitution] levels are founded” (Mat VIII, p. 4). We can read this last sentence in the following way: if we consider both the level of objective time and the level of subjective time, we are dealing in either case with time-extended unities, and thus with “something” *constituted*. Thus, at both levels

²⁴ “Das natürliche Dasein in der synthetischen Leistung des vordem verborgenen [...] Lebens ist dann in der Konkretion der transzendentalen Subjektivität eine abstrakte Schichte” (Hua XXXIV, p. 198). “Die Epoché und Reduktion ist die Einstellungsänderung, die das natürlich dahinlebende Ich [...] thematisierend zurückleitet auf die konkrete Subjektivität, in der diese Welt von ihrer verborgenen Abstraktion befreit wird und ihren wirklich konkreten Sinn als konstituiertes Sinngebilde in ursprünglicher Erfahrung ausweist“ (Hua XXXIV, p. 224, see also pp. 200, 245–246).

we find temporal constituted unities, yet none of them are *the experiencing itself in its absolute actuality*, i.e., the constituting source of every temporal constituted unity, whether objective or subjective. This constituting source is not something “phenomenal” (like the constituted unities), but rather something “primal-phenomenal” (*urphänomenal*). But what exactly is this “primal-phenomenality”?

Occasionally, Husserl speaks about a primal-“immanence” (*Ur-“Immanenz”*) as a constituting source of every primal-unity (*Ureinheit*) (cf. Hua XXXIV, p. 385). The scare quotes (in the original text) around “immanence” mean that we are not speaking about immanent subjective experiences in the usual sense of the word. Every experience appears to me, in its phenomenal temporal dimension, as a succession of moments forming a temporally constituted field. By unbuilding all constituted unities, we can turn the phenomenologizing glance from the temporal *constituted* unities to the absolute *constituting* flow. Husserl in fact takes these further steps and shows that the primal-temporalization (*Urzeitigung*) is a primal-experiencing of hyletic multiplicity. Thus, the flow is “intentionally” directed in a pre-objectifying way (in the sense of stream-intentionality, i.e., before any act-accomplishment) towards an ongoing hyletic multiplicity. We have “there” (namely, in the absolute flow) the most original form of intentionality as a stream-intentionality, namely, as an “interplay” of primal-impressional hyle, and empty retentions and protentions. This “primal-immanence” of the absolute flow is a kind of original “*intentional net*” (i.e., it is stream-intentionality made up of primal-impressions, retentions and protentions), by which hyletic multiplicity is constituted as the most elemental form of succession, namely, subjective time. But our topic is not the constitutive result (subjective time), which is something phenomenal, but rather the constituting source itself (the process itself of primal-temporalization), which shows itself as something “primal-phenomenal”.

After having sketched what the field of primal-phenomenality *is* (the *Urzeitigung* as *Urphänomen*), we should now dwell on the question *how it appears*. Since phenomenality is that which appears to me in my field of experience, it appears to me as a temporally constituted unity. By unbuilding the constituted unities we should reach the constituting primal-temporalization (the absolute flow). This flow, which primarily constitutes the hyletic multiplicity as the first and the most elemental form of phenomenal temporal unity, is not itself a phenomenal appearance. If the flow appeared as something phenomenal to me, then it would be a constituted unity in time. That would lead us back to asking once again about its constituting source, and ultimately to a form of *regressus ad infinitum*. Thus we finally come back to our point of departure: how is it possible to phenomenologize primal-phenomenality? In other words: how is it possible to get to an intuitive insight (*anschauliches Einsehen*) of what is not constituted but the ultimate source of constitution, namely, the absolute flow of consciousness? How can we *speak* about this original source at all, without turning it ipso facto into a temporally constituted unity?

6 The Possibilities and Limits of Phenomenologizing Primal-Phenomenality

Thus the central problem is how we attain a phenomenological grasp of this primal-phenomenal dimension (the primal-temporalization of the hyle), upon which we can

build up our phenomenological description. In order to describe this ultimate level of constitution Husserl avoids the use of concepts that pertain to a higher level of experience, e.g., “constitution”, “temporalization”, “intentionality”, or even “consciousness” in the usual sense of the word.²⁵ Instead he proceeds carefully by using analogical terms such as “pre-temporalization” (*Vor-Zeitigung*), “stream-intentionality” (*Stromintentionalität*), “primal-consciousness” (*Urbewusstsein*), etc. With the help of these conceptual tools he tries to avoid a sort of *metabasis eis allo genos*, i.e., the inaccurate use, at this lowest level of primal-phenomenality, of concepts that belong to other levels of constitution. Yet, despite these methodical precautions, is it possible to speak about this “other intentionality” in its primal-phenomenality?

This is one of the leading questions in some of Husserl’s C-Manuscripts, where it seems that Husserl reaches certain limits in the phenomenological analysis of the ultimate origins of experience. Yet while Husserl considers both intentionalities—namely, that of the primal-stream in its self-temporalization (the original life), and act-intentionality as consciousness-of (the actual temporalization) (cf. Mat VIII, pp. 119–120)—he ends by asking whether it makes sense to continue speaking about this “other intentionality” and this “other temporalization”.²⁶ In other words: can we *speak about* a primal-temporalization or a passive original intentionality (of the absolute flow) without considering them ipso facto within the frame of an actual temporalization and an actual intentional relation, and so appearing as something phenomenal?²⁷

Along with Husserl, we should try to outline the actual meaning of this “other dimension” of the absolute flow in its primal-phenomenality. As we said, Husserl attempts to outline this primal-sphere by using “alternative concepts” like “pre-being” (*Vor-Sein*) or “pre-time” (*Vor-Zeit*). After describing the experience of (constituted) time, he continues to “unbuild” or “deconstruct” these constituted unities in order to differentiate the primal-sphere from the constituted unities, the former being the constituting source of the latter.²⁸ But the problem remains, since even by means of these “undoing abstractions” and careful “analogical concepts” this pre-phenomenal dimension of the absolute flow (or the primal-stream) is

²⁵ This is precisely Husserl’s project in many of his research manuscripts on the ultimate source of time constitution, e.g., in many texts of the *Bernau Manuscripts* and the later *C-Manuscripts*. Husserl’s use of “analogical concepts” belonging to higher constitutive levels to describe the most original pre-phenomenal sphere is perhaps the primary cause of many misunderstandings in the interpretation of these research manuscripts. I address this problem at length in Niel (2011).

²⁶ “Aber ist das nicht Schein, diese zweierlei Intentionalität? Ist die angebliche Selbstzeitigung des Strömens überhaupt Selbstzeitigung? Was ist wirklich Selbstzeitigung?” (Mat VIII, p. 120, footnote).

²⁷ In the C7 manuscripts Husserl asks: “Aber ist das Impressionale [i.e., the primal-stream] nicht schon apperzeptive Einheit, ein Noematisches vom Ich her, und führt die Rückfrage nicht immer wieder auf (eine) apperzeptive Einheit?” (Mat VIII, p. 118). “Leitidee, dass in der Tat der Urstrom meines Ich bin selbstzeitigend ist, aber nur durch Erinnerungsbewusstsein als Bewusstsein-von, als Intentionalität, eigenes Sein als zeitlich existierend zustandekommt” (Mat VIII, p. 119).

²⁸ “Das urtümliche Strömen ist ständiges urtümliches Konstituieren; darin ist konstituiert der ‘Bewusstseinsstrom’ in seiner urtümlichen Zeitlichkeit. Freilich ist das wohl zu verstehen: Es ist eine Vor-Zeit, die noch keine Form von Gegenständen ist für das in diesem Bewusstseinsstrom lebenden Ich, von ihm nicht als ein Zeitstrom, was besagt, eine gegenständliche kontinuierliche Sukzession” (Mat VIII, p. 269).

something we can only “exhibit” in an objectifying way. Thus, this pre-phenomenal dimension “can be brought to exhibition by means of a peculiar abstraction and [by means of] an identification established by it [i.e., the describing, phenomenologizing ego], which subsequently [*nachkommend*] produces the objectivity. As pre-being it is unexperienceable [*unerfahrbar*] and unsayable [*unsagbar*]; as soon as the unsayable or the unexperienceable becomes exhibited, and so experienced and subject-matter of a statement, it is precisely ontified” (Mat VIII, p. 269).

Thus this primal-phenomenal dimension seems to be a sort of “underlying something” that cannot be experienced or expressed *in its originality*. By doing a phenomenological description, we can make a methodical complex abstraction and un-build every higher layer of constitution, and somehow, following Husserl, we would reach a sort of exhibition (*Aufweisen*) of it. But the question is still whether this constituting source as such, i.e., in its primal-phenomenality, could be really exhibited, since its exhibition necessarily ontifies it: “[A] topic is always something already constituted [...]. Therefore, the primal-stream as such [...] is always beyond thematization [*außerthematisch*], excepting for the phenomenologist, who precisely *from that pre-being makes a being*” (Hua XXXIV, p. 183, my emphasis). The difficult point Husserl is trying to explain here is that this absolute primal-dimension “is” not at all, and that means: *is not a being*, since that which it is, is always something constituted, something phenomenal. The surprising conclusion is therefore the following: the dimension of primal-phenomenality (e.g., the absolute flow) only “is” as long as the phenomenologizing ego reflects upon it.

Since the phenomenologizing ego turns this pre-being into a being and into appearance, how can we posit something as primal-phenomenal at all? Does primal-phenomenality presuppose the phenomenologizing glance in order “to be”? If only the phenomenologizing ego makes up the being of primal-phenomenality, what comes first: the primal-phenomenality or the phenomenologizing ego? Before giving a hasty answer to this last question, we should think carefully about it, since the problem is not as easy to solve as it initially might seem. First of all, in doing phenomenology we should not forget that the point of departure is precisely that which appears to me, that which I can “see”. *I* (as phenomenologizing ego) begin with the field of my experience as it is given *to me*. We do not find at this level anything like the constituting source in its primal-phenomenality. Only after performing many complex methodical procedures, “descending” into the ultimate levels of constitution and leaving aside that which is constituted—i.e., the higher layers and syntheses of constituted experience—can we (supposedly) get to this constituting origin itself.

We then realize that there is no (constituted) being of primal-phenomenality but merely a sort of “pre-being.” That is, the constituting source is not itself some being but is rather that which makes possible the constitution of every being. However, despite the status of pre-being of primal-phenomenality, Husserl presses on with his research. The aim is to somehow reach and speak about the sphere of “pre-phenomenal pre-being”, but *only* through the reflective activity of the phenomenologizing ego, which makes possible the peculiar “appearance” of primal-phenomenality. So, at least in a certain way, we can notice a phenomenological “*previousness*” (*Vorangehen*) of the phenomenologizing ego: “The I-think, I-reflect

[*besinne*], I-identify [...] that precedes the determined being is the determining, performing I [...This I] itself displays that which makes possible the determination, pre-being” (Hua XXXIV, p. 175).

But at this point we should ask the question again: how does primal-phenomenality “appear”? It always appears *as being*, i.e., the phenomenologizing ego turns the primal-phenomenal pre-being into a phenomenal being. With this answer, we realize that our leading question still remains open: what happens with the primal-phenomenality *as such*, namely in its original constituting dimension, with its peculiar stream-intentionality and its pre-temporalization? Can we say with certainty that it is *anything at all*? The question itself seems to lie at the limit of phenomenological explanation, as does Husserl’s answer to it: “After later clarifications (1932) I came to the conviction that in the genuine sense there is no twofold intentionality and therefore in the genuine sense no pre-temporalization. The real temporalization, which is presupposed and executed in the evident temporal givenness of the stream of experiences [*Erlebnisse*], is that of the transcendental-phenomenologizing I. By doing this originally, it has the evidence of the temporality of experiences” (Hua XXXIV, p. 181).

We can read this passage in the following way: when we disclose primal-phenomenality, we are dealing with the description of something which is brought to phenomenal description, i.e., with something that has already been brought to the sphere of actual temporalization and thus is constituted as some being. Apparently, we face the following dilemma: either we can simply deny this original constituting dimension in its primal-phenomenality and remain only in the frame of that which is already constituted (phenomenality), or we can consider it as something we simply posit, i.e., something we know “is there” but which is elusive to grasp. When we consider the last citation above, Husserl seems to choose the former option. Even if there may be good *methodical* reasons for doing this, this option does not provide a solution, since it merely denies the problem. Yet the second option does not help us either, since it leads to a further dilemma: if we presuppose something that is by definition elusive, something which is really never reached in itself by the phenomenological description, then either we must speak about “conditions of possibility” of experience (not without certain Kantian problematic implications which I cannot address here), in which case we are hardly reaching the pre-phenomenal source *itself* but are rather only *inferring* it based upon that which actually appears; or we face the danger of positing something beyond any form of givenness, which might be nothing more than a theoretical construction.

Despite some current positions that defend a type of “phenomenological construction” at this level,²⁹ I have found no texts by Husserl that could directly support such an interpretation. Besides, to consider a conceptual construction as the description of the very foundation of experience seems to lead phenomenology to the domain of metaphysical posits, something Husserl would have certainly rejected. Nor would Husserl accept the idea of positing a theoretical construction, due to his lifelong commitment to givenness, which led him to manifold and

²⁹ This view is held by Alexander Schnell, among others (cf. Schnell 2004 and Schnell 2007). Unfortunately I cannot discuss in detail the implications of such an interpretation in this context.

heterogeneous research on the passive motivations of actual experience. But this prompts the following question: how do we know that this entire description of the primal-phenomenal dimension is not in fact a mere theoretical construction? Is there any solution to this problem?

7 The Circularity Implied in the Disclosure of the Primal-Phenomenal Dimension

I believe Husserl does not have a definitive and explicit answer to this question, which leaves room for interpretation. My proposal is that we should think about the disclosure of the primal-phenomenal dimension as a combination of the disclosing activity of the phenomenologizing ego and the procedure of unbuilding constituted unities. This should not be understood as a “construction” performed by the phenomenologizing ego but as a description based on the “de-construction” of constituted unities. Since the deconstructive disclosure itself brings the “pre-being” into “being”, and therefore implies a certain form of objectivation, the descriptive task of the phenomenologizing ego must be understood as a steady unbuilding of the constituted unities given through these deconstructions. This descriptive procedure affords us a conceptual grasp—since it is indeed a conceptual account through new descriptions, diagrams, analogical depictions, etc.—although, due to the very nature of its peculiar “object”, the description can only be understood in the context of a never-ending task of unbuilding the resulting constituted unities.

This solution cannot avoid a certain form of circularity, which I find to be coextensive with the problem of the disclosure of primal-phenomenality itself. On the one hand, we cannot deny that phenomenological description should always begin with some constituted givenness (my experience) which refers back to some constituting source. This entails an ultimate constituting source (the absolute flow) in its primal-phenomenality, where the most original constitutive accomplishments that enable every kind of phenomenality take place. On the other hand, we can only consider this primal-source by means of the accomplishments of the phenomenologizing ego, i.e., it is only “constituted” through appearing at a phenomenal level through its phenomenological disclosure. Prior to these accomplishments, we cannot even consider it as something constituted in its being.

We see here a necessary consequence of the phenomenological method: when we want to speak about this ultimate source of constitution, we can refer to it, or say something about its “being”, solely by phenomenologizing it, since in the field of our experience we deal only with things or experiences in time, never with the constitution of time itself. This pre-phenomenal dimension only has a “being” through the accomplishments of the phenomenologizing ego (cf. Hua XXXIV, p. 183).³⁰ The phenomenologizing ego is what makes possible the appearance and

³⁰ We can see here a connection with the well-known “problem of reflection”: reflection represents by changing what it describes, i.e., it “distorts” or fails to grasp adequately that on which it reflects. Nevertheless, I think that we are dealing here with a far more radical version of this problem, since at other levels of constitution it is indeed possible to say that reflection deals with “the given thing itself” as “being there”, intuitively given prior to reflection. But in the case of the primal source, the “object” that

the being of primal-phenomenality in the first place, yet the ego that discloses the constituting processes of reality *presupposes* precisely that which it finds as some sort of constituting source of itself, namely the ultimate constitution of time in the absolute stream. In Husserl's words: "The stream is to be temporalized *a priori* by the ego. This temporalization is itself [something] streaming; the streaming is incessantly in advance. But the I is in advance as well, it is as awake I (transcendentally-phenomenologically awake) constantly consciousness-I" (Hua XXXIV, p. 181).³¹ Thus, at the ultimate levels of the constitution of time we arrive at this circularity, which seems to be essentially bound to the phenomenologizing activity itself.

8 The Never-Ending Task of "Deconstructing" Constituted Givenness

We can summarize the insights gained so far as follows: (a) the ultimate source of constitution is a "constituting pre-being" (the absolute flow) and not a "constituted being"; (b) when we describe this "pre-being" we turn it into a "being" (i.e., something already constituted in time); (c) for this reason, something can be grasped at this ultimate level of constitution only based on the results of a description of what is *constituted*: in its originality the primal-phenomenal dimension cannot be grasped or described directly; and (d) this "indirect" description can only be performed through a complex process of deconstructing these constituted unities. This leads us to the following conclusions: (i) this description is indeed an actual phenomenological description of what is given through these deconstructive procedures, since we always start with the givenness of constituted unities and then deconstruct them; but (ii) *at the same time*, due to its very nature, the "constituting pre-being" is something elusive, something the phenomenologizing ego cannot fully grasp, since—as said above in b and c—the ultimate constituting level can only be described in terms of what is constituted, and that means that what we describe is the deconstructed constituted unities rather than the constituting source itself.

I think Husserl was fully aware of the difficulties of speaking about a "genuine givenness" whenever he was actually describing this primal level. We find some hints of this already in his early texts on time (cf. Hua X, § 36). As we have seen, the main problem lies in the peculiar manner of givenness of the ultimate constituting source. Is this primal-sphere of constitution *actually* given?

The answer is yes and no. In order to avoid a formal contradiction, we can explain this as follows: the phenomenologizing ego does not encounter the ultimate level straightforwardly but only *describes that which results from the process of deconstructing* what is constituted. This allows us to specify our previous

Footnote 30 continued

is described is not even a "being" in any way. It is a "pre-being", i.e., there is no being prior to the phenomenologizing glance.

³¹ "Der Strom ist *a priori* von dem Ego zu verzeitlichen. Dieses Verzeitlichen ist selbst strömendes; das Strömen ist immerzu im Voraus. Aber auch das Ich ist im Voraus, es ist als waches Ich (transzendental-phänomenologisch wach) immerfort Bewusstsein-Ich" (Hua XXXIV, p. 181).

conclusion (c): there is no straightforward givenness (i.e., in the usual sense of the concept of “givenness”) of the constituting source, but there *is* an “indirect givenness” based on the results of a zigzagging, unbuilding description of what is intuitively given. We start with constituted unities and deconstruct them, thus gaining new insights which must again be deconstructed in order to overcome their conceptual positing as something constituted. This kind of phenomenological description must therefore be understood as an essential tension between the disclosing activity of the ego and its most original constituting source. It is thus a *never-ending phenomenological task*. We can glimpse the last source of constitution, but we are always going to get (at most) an analogical depiction of it. Nevertheless, by means of these continuous and never-ending descriptions we can indeed reach new phenomenological insights, as evidenced, for instance, by Husserl’s phenomenological investigations on time.

Of course, there are objections we might consider in order to break this “circular tension”. First, one might object that our interpretation implies that this primal-phenomenal “something” already underlies every accomplishment of the phenomenologizing ego—since our field of experience is always within constituted time—and that we should be able to get to this primal-sphere (*Ursphäre*) (cf. Hua XXXIV, p. 386) retrospectively through a phenomenologizing, grasping (*erfassende*) activity. In other words, there is an actual beginning, and this is the constituting accomplishment of the absolute flow. But this seemingly obvious objection highlights the problem: it may be true, but how can we *know* it? We can do so only by grasping this primal-phenomenal dimension and making it phenomenal, i.e., turning its pre-being and pre-time into phenomenal being and time and therefore relating it to the intentional disclosing activity of my phenomenologizing ego. Thus this objection leads to the same conclusion, namely, that there is no way out of the circle between the phenomenologizing ego and the primal-phenomenal dimension of the ultimate constitution of time.

Second, in order to avoid this circle we can also reconsider the possibility of construction: we eliminate the very idea of description and givenness at this constituting level³² and replace it with a theoretical model constructed upon that what we think it must be like. We then posit this construction as the “primordial source”. As I already mentioned, I do not believe there is enough evidence in Husserl’s texts to support this interpretation. On the contrary, even while acknowledging that I am interpreting a large group of unsystematic manuscripts and thus making hermeneutical choices (for instance, about which texts to cite as evidence, what to emphasize, and so on),³³ I believe the texts analyzed in this paper present substantial support for the conclusion that Husserl at least tried to describe these “border phenomena” as far as intuitively possible. At the same time, we would miss the point if we reduce this problem to a mere philological issue rather than focus on the phenomenological spirit that guided Husserl throughout his work.

³² If we admit some sort of givenness of the primal-source within this constructed model, we are once more in the midst of the problems addressed by our account.

³³ Furthermore, we must keep in mind that we are working with insights from Husserl’s unpublished manuscripts. These do not constitute a complete philosophical theory, but rather reflect an incessant thinking-process.

In this sense, the intricate and often unexpected itinerary of his last manuscripts on time corroborates my account.

9 Concluding Remarks

It is impossible to speak of an actual givenness in the context of the ultimate constitution of time without simultaneously considering the objectifying glance of the phenomenologizing ego. Nevertheless, it is possible to infer from Husserl's research manuscripts that Husserl actually describes this primal-phenomenal field, despite its elusiveness and the inevitable presence of the phenomenologizing glance.

In spite of the circularity and the elusiveness found at this ultimate level of constitution, I believe Husserl remained faithful to his phenomenological convictions and was impelled by his respect for what appears and the way it appears. One consistently finds Husserl trying desperately to describe this elusive primal-phenomenal (constituting) sphere, using any hermeneutical tool that does not take him too far from intuitive givenness and transposing these conceptual tools from the phenomenal sphere to the ultimate source. He pushed phenomenological method to its boundaries by trying to preserve the non-ontic and non-phenomenal character of this *no-thing* that is the ultimate origin (*Ursprung*) itself.³⁴ Moreover, after reaching this point, it seems that he realised that even if the phenomenologizing ego necessarily presupposes a certain constituting “something”, it is always precisely *this* ego that makes up this dimension, i.e., “constitutes” as “something being and appearing” that which formerly *stricto sensu* was not a dimension at all. Indeed, Husserl can remark that this primal-level (*Urstufe*) is “actually no level at all” (Hua XXXIV, p. 386). Only by disclosing it—temporalizing it and making it an intentional object—do we turn it into a phenomenal being. And on my interpretation of such “description,” there is no way out of the methodical circularity between the “givenness” of this ultimate dimension and the reflective role of the phenomenologizing ego that deconstructs the constituted experience and discloses this dimension by turning its glance to it.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this paper, we need not over-interpret the concept of “deconstruction.” It is nothing but the constant “doing and undoing” of phenomenological description, phrasing and rephrasing it from different angles, i.e., the “zigzag” between constituted and constituting. We cannot deny that, with this complex deconstructive procedure, we risk getting lost in a field of nonsensical descriptions. I believe this is the price we have to pay if we want to address “border phenomena” such as the ultimate constitution of time. But it is precisely here that the attentive phenomenologizing ego should come to the fore in order to try to avoid every kind of phenomenological excess.

Concerning the role and function of the phenomenologizing ego, one might raise the question of whether this is a legitimate way of doing phenomenology. I would rather reformulate the question: do we have some other way of doing phenomenology

³⁴ “Der Urstrom der lebendigen Gegenwart ist die Urzeitigung, in welcher der letzte Ursprung der raumzeitlichen Welt und ihrer Form der Raumzeitlichkeit liegt” (Mat VIII, p. 4).

that does not imply the reflective glance of the phenomenologizing ego? Can we somehow avoid this phenomenological stance? If we accept phenomenological principles, then the answer is no; and if that is so, it must affect our consideration of the ultimate level of the constitution of time, where there is not even a constituted phenomenon to describe, where we somehow have to “constitute” its being out of its pre-being. It is *precisely* by analyzing this ultimate level that we can see the essential function and role of the phenomenologizing ego. “There”—i.e., where there is no (constituted) being or time, but (constituting) pre-being or pre-time, namely, the *Ursprung* itself—we cannot say anything that does not already imply the intentional stance of the phenomenologizing ego. This is merely to acknowledge that only out of the *intentional relation* between me, as phenomenologizing ego, and my own field of experience am I aware of myself as being the ultimate source of the constitution of time.

Despite the insights we may have gained, I do not want to deny that obstacles remain in this interpretation of the ultimate phenomenology of time. In this context I think we must, with Husserl, pose the following question: when we reach such aporias, paradoxes, and circularities, should we stop doing philosophy? I think Husserl’s answer to this question is clear. Even when considering “the most difficult of all phenomenological problems,” he never stopped pursuing the infinite task of doing phenomenology.

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