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## The Husserlian Doctrine about the Modalities of Attention

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**Abstract:** In this paper, I address Husserl's theory of intentionality focusing on the problems of attention. I claim that without phenomenological reduction the specific phenomenological content of modalizations – in intentional acts – would be hard to explain. It would be impossible to understand why constant external factors (for instance, variations in the intensity of a stimulus) are accompanied by fluctuations in attention. It would also be impossible to understand the reasons why only the lived experience of causality – which I sharply distinguish from causality in the psychophysical sense of the term – transforms attention into a factor that allows the understanding of a situation by the subject who lives that experience. I claim at last that only the genetic analysis of Husserl's late Freiburg period, with its distinction between primary and secondary attention, gives a full account of the relation between the thematic object, focused on an intentional attentive act, and the horizon that surrounds the object and gives it its ultimate meaning.

**Keywords:** Attention; Horizon; Static and genetic phenomenology; Marginal consciousness.

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It may seem too small a task, not worthy of a centennial, to analyze a single theme in *Ideas I* and, in particular, this one –attention – to which Husserl dedicates only a small number of pages in this work. However, in a note to § 92, Husserl characterizes attention as *eine Grundart Intentionaler Modifikationen* (Husserl, 1950: 232) – that is, a fundamental type of intentional modification. That is why the small number of pages dedicated to the theme in the 1913 work is in itself also a problem. On the other hand, from *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, published in 1891, to the many manuscripts concerning the analyses about active and passive synthesis (stemming from Husserl's later Freiburg lectures in the 1920s), including the lecture in 1907 on *Thing and Space*, but also that essential text that is the 1904-05 lecture about “Phenomenology and Theory of Knowledge”, the prob-

lem of attention never ceased to worry Husserl. Moreover, Husserl addresses it in an intense controversy with other conflicting theses on the same issue, particularly by Wilhelm Wundt, Theodor Lipps, Alexander Pfänder, and William James.

The course I will follow in this paper will be divided into three steps. First, I will try to summarize what Husserl says about attention in *Ideas I*; secondly, I will present the results of some of Husserl's investigations on the matter prior to *Ideas I*, highlighting aspects of those investigations which were only restated in an abridged fashion in the work published in 1913; finally, in the third step, I will approach Husserl's position on this issue in the texts from the 1920-21 and 1925-26 *Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, published in Volume XI of the *Husserliana*, along with other related manuscripts, under the generic title *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Syntheses*. In my opinion, the approach to the problem of attention in the static analyses of *Ideas I* and in subsequent genetic analyses, as well as the fact that attention is articulated on three distinct levels (negative attention, primary attention, and secondary attention) and, lastly, that attentiveness is a path towards higher-order active intentional achievements, make the lack of a unified theory on this matter (which Husserl never provided) particularly sensitive.

### **1. The treatment of attention in *Ideas I***

I will now indicate some technical expressions I will use in this paper and also make some preliminary conceptual distinctions. As it is well known, in *Ideas I* Husserl defends not only that each type of intentional act, considered as an intentional unit, has its specific correlate, but also that this relation is addressed from a phenomenological standpoint insofar as we take it as a pure lived experience and not as a sheer psychological connection (Husserl, 1950; 80). The phenomenon of attention, consisting of a widening or narrowing of our awareness of a stimulus (within a certain amplitude and according to a legality I will discuss afterward), will be analyzed in the following pages according to the principles of intentional analysis. This means I will take into account the definition of intentionality Husserl provides in § 36 and 37 of *Ideas I*. Consequently, all the analyses of the peculiar modalities this phenomenon displays in the context of the noetico-noematic correlation have, in this work, an eidetic character and not an empirical one (Husserl, 1950; 231).

Regarding conceptual distinctions, I would like to mention three. First, the distinction between the Ego and the *cogito* (Husserl, 1950; 81-82). This distinction, which does not seem very important for a broad understanding of the nature of the *cogito*, just like the one presented in § 28 of *Ideas I*, where it is identified as the multiple and changing spontaneities of the vigil consciousness, will acquire some importance in § 37. If the Ego is a unity of acts, the *cogito* represents a specific conscious way of life, which is not merely facing its noematic correlate but rather maintaining some particular kind of relation with it. According to § 37, attentive perception takes place in the *cogito*, which is nothing more than the primitive mode (*Urmodus*) of perception, the one through which the intended object is grasped “in person”.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, attention is, first of all, an active realization of consciousness that singles out and arranges its theme starting from what Husserl calls a *Hintergrund*, a background.

A second distinction, which is a consequence of the first, is between just “being directed towards” (*gerichtetsein auf*) an object and the grasping of that object; although in a wide sense these two can be identified as the same kind of act, grasping only really happens when the “being directed towards” is accompanied by attention. The grasping is, therefore, a special kind of act, despite the fact that it is the kind that any act can have if it does not possess it yet. There is, however, a third distinction that Husserl mentions briefly in § 37 of *Ideas I* although he does not analyze it thoroughly, and that is important to highlight now, bearing in mind what I will state later. I will put it first in German: on the one hand, *speziell aufmerksam sein*, and on the other *nebenbei beachten* (Husserl, 1950: 82). These are two modalities of *Aufmerksamkeit* or, as Husserl also claims, of *auf-etwas-achten* – that is, “to notice something” – and in both cases, a grasping occurs. Yet, if the first of these two expressions does not raise any special difficulties in translation and interpretation – it means “to be particularly attentive” – the same cannot be said about the second. For the latter, I believe there are two possible translations that may not have exactly the same meaning: “to notice incidentally” or “to notice simultaneously” (the difficulty resides, clearly, in how to translate *nebenbei*.) I do not think Husserl gives us sufficient reasons, in this passage of § 37 of *Ideas I*, to fully understand what he had in mind, but if we choose the second version of the translation, we will face a very interesting question that will cause huge difficulties because it implies there are two levels of attention occurring simultaneously. It would also mean there is a possibility of interference of

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<sup>1</sup> “In person” will be my translation of the well-known phenomenological term *Leibhaftig*.

the lower with the higher level. If I understood correctly, it is one of the dimensions of the problem that Aron Gurwitsch will later refer to with the expression “marginal consciousness”. As far as I know, this expression does not occur in Husserl, although he does give us the opportunity of thinking about what it points to in a passage of § 92 in *Ideas I*. I will, for this reason, return to this question further ahead when analyzing that paragraph.

Many of Husserl’s analyses since *Logical Investigations* (in which the reference to attention has played some role) seem to point to this phenomenon of a marginal consciousness, connecting it to an analysis of attention. This is what happens, for example, in § 19 of the 5<sup>th</sup> Logical Investigation. Husserl notices that the acts directed towards an expression – for example, to a set of lines drawn in black on a white sheet of paper – are subordinated to the acts directed towards the meaning of the expression because it is on the meaning that our main interest is primarily focused (Husserl, 1984: 419-420). In other words, we do not live in the acts which constitute the expression as a physical object, but rather in the acts Husserl calls meaning-giving, that is, the ones that constitute the appearing object. Attention is, therefore, an achievement with noematic character, it belongs to the acts as intentional lived experiences, and it is in this way that we pay attention to its correlates.

I think Husserl is also dealing with the marginal consciousness phenomenon when addressing the notion of the horizon. The attention that is focused on an object is, at the same time, a concomitant acknowledgment of a set of other objects surrounding the first; in the same way, for understanding what an object is, all knowledge resulting from previous intentional acts are gathered according to its relevance<sup>1</sup>. It is for this reason that Husserl stresses, in § 47 of *Ideas I*, that the possibility of experiencing a thing is not merely a logical possibility but, above all, a possibility always motivated by previous experiences. Therefore, these constitute a horizon for the concomitant experience, which, although indeterminate at the beginning, is nevertheless determinable according to certain orientations. The relation between an intended objectivity – that we may call the theme – and the others, to which it redirects us, is not only possible because I can freely move my eyes from that objectivity to others surrounding it. To limit ourselves to this perspective of the situation would be tantamount to not noticing that it is only thanks to its fringes, to the evanescent boundaries of its internal horizon, that an object redirects us to others in whose wider or narrower context it appears.

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<sup>1</sup> See Husserl, 1950: 112; Husserl, 1999: 85.

This phenomenon becomes even clearer if, instead of objects, we think of words we read or hear. The power they have of evoking other words – first, those of the sentence they are in, always making our attention turn to the words that will come after – is due to a similar phenomenon (Gurwitsch, 1957: 253). Something identical also happens when the permanence of a certain theme is accompanied by variations of the thematic field; our attention, directed towards a person, may at one time be focused on her/his way of dressing, at another on character features, later, on a specific event of the speaker's life, etc. As we will see further ahead, the entire Second Section of the 1904-05 Lesson, where Husserl revisits some of his texts from as early as 1898, is remarkably rich in descriptions of this issue, in particular the “*Abhandlung über Aufmerksamkeit als Interesse*” (Husserl, 2004: XXXIII).

After what was said in § 37 of *Ideas I*, the issue of attention is taken up again in § 92 under the label “modifications of consciousness”. It is, claims Husserl, a phenomenon that crosses over all other types of intentional achievements and therefore constitutes an entirely universal structure of consciousness. This phenomenon can have other labels, and so Husserl had already figuratively (*im Gleichnis*), as he puts it, spoken about a “spiritual vision” or a “visual ray” of the Ego, with its “turning towards...” and its “moving away” (*Abwendungen*). Whenever we talk about modes of attention, we are, first, talking about these types of modifications. Since these modifications accompany other phenomena, Husserl's aim in this paragraph is to study them by clearly distinguishing these modifications from other phenomena.

Just like perception can be accompanied by variable degrees of attention to that which is perceived, the same is true in the case of remembrance in relation to what is remembered, or fiction in relation to what is imagined, without changing the noematic achievements as such. However, they are modifications of the *total* lived experience according to its noetic and noematic sides. In the already mentioned § 92 of *Ideas I*, Husserl continues the analyses he simultaneously carried out in numerous texts, namely, what he had written in a manuscript dated January 13, 1912, which was entitled by the editors of the volume XXXVIII of *Husserliana* “*Die Richtung der Aufmerksamkeit*” (Husserl, 2004: 379-394), on what he calls an alteration of the subjective point of orientation. The analysis of § 92 goes as follows: inside the total given field of potential noeses, namely, noematic objects, we sometimes look towards a totality; for example, a tree is sometimes perceptively present while, at other times, our attention focuses on a particular part or moment of the tree; afterward, we look at a thing that is nearby, be it due to a simple movement

of the eyes, or small modifications of our body in space. In other cases in which it is the object that changes places – an aspect already highlighted in the 1912 manuscript – attention will be focused on its identity. In addition, in the cases where the object changes regarding its content, attention can be focused on that alteration or, at other times, only on spatial configuration and its fulfillment. In any case, attention can be successively directed towards different determinations of the same object.

On the other hand, we can also direct our attention to an object experienced in the past and that now “comes to our mind”. Instead of going through the perceptive noesis, which permanently constitutes for us, in a unitary although variably articulated manner, the world of appearances, we look through a remembered noesis towards a world of remembrance; we wander through it, we move to others more deep recollections, or to mere fantasy worlds, etc. That which is valid for perception is, consequently, valid for memory or fiction. I can pay attention to the tree I see or the sound I hear, as I can pay attention to the tree or sound I remember. The phenomena that have just been described obey their own legality and refer to a characteristic of intentional consciousness which I believe following Wundt and James –who dedicates a part of the chapter about attention in his work *Principles of Psychology* to this issue – Husserl calls “the narrowness of consciousness” (*die Enge des Bewusstseins*) in § 23 of the 1904-05 Lesson. What is meant by this expression is the impossibility of simultaneously seizing, with the same degree of attentiveness, a relatively high number of objects. We could say that the interest in each singular object is inversely proportional to the number of objects, in the cases where all other conditions remain the same (Husserl, 2004: 99) (for example, where the luminosity or distance I am from them remain equal). This issue was not very developed in *Ideas I*, although it had received some attention in the years prior to the work’s publication, and it is already possible to find references to it – directly or indirectly – since *Philosophy of Arithmetic*. In the latter, the distinction between proper and symbolic representations established in chapter XI, on the basis of which Husserl explains that collective combinations and, in general, all representations of quantity can enclose more elements than those it is possible to perceive, refers in good measure to the issue of *Enge des Bewusstseins*. This idea is confirmed by what is said in § 23 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Logical Investigation, where Husserl observes that the phenomenon of attention includes all spheres of thinking, independently of whether thinking is intuitively founded or purely symbolic (Husserl, 1984: 167).

There is still another interesting aspect Husserl does not appear to take into account here: the fact that the object on which our mental activity is focused – that is, the object we are paying attention to, or constitutes our theme – can be related to words, phrases or images that come to mind and are connected to it. William James called that which, in a weaker or stronger manner, is related to the object that is our theme the fringes of the object. These fringes correspond to mental states of lower intensity. For this reason, when our attention drifts from the theme to the objects surrounding it, we feel we do it by continuous transition, insofar as our attention moves in a direction that is indicated by those fringes (Gurwitsch, 1957: 246-54).

Of course, we must not forget that this entire analysis had its place in the context of static phenomenology and that all genetic considerations that would be possible to make here must be, for now, withheld. Nevertheless, only a strict articulation between all the phases of attention allows for the same noema to be constituted along a unitary synthetic process, and for a certain tendency to identify it as the same, enabling the tendency (once initiated) to identify it as the same to expect new intuitive fulfillments. This idea, which will appear in full force in §§ 18 and 19 of *Experience and Judgment*, is not developed here (Husserl, 1999: 84-91). The passage of *Ideas I* I was discussing is not yet about constituting the identity of an object, but rather, considering it already constituted, about how to verify how identity is maintained despite possible modifications in attention. Let us suppose I am paying attention to a book I am reading but, suddenly, I feel something on my left leg caused by the brushing of my pants' cloth. This sensation, which I can pay more or less attention to, is an integrated element of my global situation as a reading subject and of the understanding I have of it, even though it is irrelevant to my theme, i.e., the book and its content.

Husserl was getting ready to analyze – although he did not do it in great depth – the phenomenon of background interference (*Hintergrund*) with the horizon. To better explain this, I will take up my previous example again. Other books I own about the same theme belong to the horizon of the book I am reading now, the pen and paper I am using to write my notes, the lamp on my desk that may be on or off, etc. But what certainly does not belong to its horizon is the pants I am wearing and the sensation they cause on my legs. Nevertheless, this *Hintergrund* can interfere with the horizon in such a way that sometimes something originating from the *Hintergrund* can become the theme – for example, a certain fold in the left leg causing a feeling of discomfort – so that the *Hintergrund* itself acquires the characteristic of a horizon from that moment on. This is an issue

that, in my opinion, is one of those themes in *Ideas I* that can only be fully investigated in all its dimensions by genetic phenomenology. I will return to it later.

Attention is characterized by certain essential mobility, by the permanent possibility of a change in theme, by the fact that, to use William James' terminology from chapter XI of his *Principles of Psychology*, apparently there only is the possibility of a constant oscillation between substantive and transitive states (James, 1915: 209-210). This fluctuation occurs when attention moves from one singular thing to another, and the transitive state is marked by a non-continuity in interest. This can only be overcome by establishing an objective connection that brings together all those things in an interest that is articulated, according to Husserl's own terms, in an organic fashion.

Husserl dedicates some pages to the analysis of this oscillation even before *Ideas I*. For example, in § 41 of *Thing and Space*, he says that although the distinction between what is perceived in an authentic sense and what is intuited at the same time, but is not truly represented, belongs to the essence of perception, it is no less certain that my attention can shift from the first to the second, making what was initially only part of the perceptive field into a theme. In intuiting a tree, my attention can shift to the field where the tree is, or to the flowery hill up ahead; yet, this is not the same as shifting my attention from the tree to the appearing of the tree. That shifting occurs, as we will see further ahead, according to its own legality, just like the transformation of an element in the field into a theme can only be achieved under certain conditions. On the other hand, when we pay attention to the object's emergence, a new attitude is adopted, and the theme in-relation-to-which the Ego is directed is the appearance and its profiles. In any case, it is clear that attention works here in a completely different way and that if we intuit the field or the flowery hill, as in the first example, we will be faced with a different type of object than what appears to us when we intuit the profile the tree offers us (Husserl, 1973: 147).

I will return, once again, to § 92 of *Ideas I*. It is clear that a great variety of modifications of lived experiences is, ideally speaking, possible; Husserl calls these "mere modifications in the dividing of attention and its modes" (Husserl, 1950: 229). It is also clear that, with it, the *noematic* content of the lived experience remains the same whenever it can be said that it is the same objectivity continuously characterized as existing "in person", in the same modes of appearing, the same orientations, and showing the same appearing characteristic notes; we are aware of it, in the same modes, in an indeterminate indication and in an intuitive co-presentation of this or that situation of content, etc. According to Husserl, the modification will only entail the fact that in one case a certain

objective moment is highlighted while in another it will be a different moment, or in the fact that at one time one and the same object is “primarily noticed” and, at another time, only secondarily, or only in the mode that “was just simultaneously noticed” (*mitbemerkt*); still in other cases, it is “completely unnoticed” although continuously appearing. There are, precisely, modes that belong as such specifically to attention. With that, we separate the group of *modes of actuality* from the group *modes of inactuality*, i.e., of what we would simply say “we are not paying attention to” and of which we possess, so to speak, a dead consciousness.

## 2. Attention before *Ideas I*

So far, Husserl seems to be taking up a theme already developed in the 1904-05 Lecture about “Phenomenology and Theory of Knowledge” (Husserl, 2004: 89). There, he established a distinction between *unbemerkt* and *nicht bemerkt*. *Unbemerkt* is everything we do not notice and that, nevertheless, is perfectly visible; for this reason, I will not say I do not notice an object behind me for although it is visible, it is not in the same visual field as the objects in front of me. But the most interesting thing is the fact that Husserl included what he calls *mitgesehen* in the *Unbemerkt* category, that is, what is seen at the same time, but not, however, seen for itself. At least momentarily, this is something that we do not notice, although, implicitly, it is visible. That is what happens with the parts of an object that are not explicitly perceived but can at any moment constitute the theme of my attention. To put it more precisely: they are perceived without constituting the theme of a perception that is directed towards them as parts. In the same way, I can notice a book on top of a table and not the table itself or notice the book and not the objects around it on top of the table. In a general way, I will say that I just cannot notice what, in one way or other, is perceivable. That is the reason why I cannot be inattentive to infra-red radiations since they are not perceivable by me.

Yet, there is something else about this issue in *Ideas I*. Husserl recognizes that the attention modifications, already referred to, do not only affect the lived experiences in their noetic content but also their corresponding noemata, in spite of the noematic nucleus remaining the same. That is what the example of the light cone means, in the same § 92. If we consider that the attention focus corresponds to the lighted area of the object, then the modifications in attention do not change anything in what appears, regarding their

own meaning. However, the concrete noemata are changed, without extrinsic elements having aggregated themselves to the identity pole constituted by the noematic nucleus. This is because the noeses themselves are conditioned by the modes of attention; the realization of a doubting, predicative, evaluative, or any other type of act supposes positive attention or an actual adoption of a position regarding something (Husserl, 1950; 230).

In chapter XIII of *Principles of Psychology*, William James established a distinction between voluntary and spontaneous attention that will be of great importance for Husserl. In the 1904-05 Lecture, Husserl establishes a gradual shift from the second to the first, which anticipates many of his later analyses about passive syntheses. Let us see for example § 22 of the aforementioned Lecture, where many relevant distinctions are made in order to understand the issue. For instance, distinctions in the presentifying function (*präsentierende Funktion*) of sensible content, that is, distinctions in the intensity degree of a sensation; or distinctions regarding greater or smaller proximity or distance to the stimulus; or even distinctions regarding the awareness of the stimulus by those who grasp it. All these distinctions are articulated, as it often happens with Husserl, around an axis constituted by the normality of the perceptive field, but also by the normality of the conditions in which a subject perceives<sup>1</sup>. We have, then, the domain of what Husserl calls “hard to perceive” and which attention turns to or not depending on a varying number of empirical conditions, pertaining to the object or the subject. Let us note, however, that with what was just said, we are still not properly talking about the phenomenon of attention, of what allows a thing to be noticed (what Husserl calls its *Merklichkeit*), so that we can pay attention to it (*aufmerksam sein*) (Husserl, 2004: 96). Now, since it is possible to distinguish between a greater or lesser degree of clarity, both in the perceived object as well as in the act of perceiving, the peculiar function of attention is to give the latter the desired degree of clarity (Husserl, 2004: 97).

The abovementioned problem of the “narrowness of consciousness” (*Enge des Bewusstseins*), or of attention, is connected to this issue; we will see it in Husserl’s texts in close relation, once again, with what William James says on the same issue in chapter XIII of *Principles of Psychology*. However, we are only not speaking of phenomena such as the number of objects that can be perceived simultaneously, or the relation between an increase in the number of perceived objects and the decrease in the degree of clarity with which we perceive each of them (Husserl, 2004: 98). The 1904-05 Lecture addresses still

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl makes a brief reference to normal perceptual conditions in “Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis” (Husserl, 2004: 93).

another problem, namely the higher or lower level of concentration of attention on a singular object due to the impossibility of attention to focus on all its moments or parts, often fluctuating from some to others and, finally, concentrating only on the object as a whole. It is true that if we think that these analyses, given the date they were developed, are undertaken in a regime that is not yet the regime of phenomenological reduction, we will find a strange closeness between Husserl's and William James' language. Husserl, though, explicitly calls our attention to the following fact: In the analyses that were accomplished, it was not the objective characteristics of things that were at stake, but what is given from them to the subject and the manner (*das Wie*; underlined in the original) the latter receives this givenness (Husserl, 2004: 93).

Of course, we can always return to the old issue of knowing what the scope of the reduction is, i.e., what we do or not do with it if we do not accomplish it. Regarding the matter I am discussing here, the answer seems particularly simple. If we do not accomplish the phenomenological reduction, all our analyses will depend one way or another on worldly causality; the phenomenon of attention shall, then, be explained in relation to two factors that will have to vary simultaneously: The intensity of the sensory stimulation and the capacity of the subject to be affected by it. It will be hard to explain why constant external factors are accompanied by fluctuations in attention, and it will be impossible to understand why only the lived experience of the relation of causality – and not causality in the psychophysical sense of the term – transforms it into an element of understanding of a situation by the subject who lives that same experience and, in some cases, determines the very phenomenon of paying attention.

Finally, before moving on to the genetic analyses, I want to mention one last occurrence of the term *Aufmerksamkeit* in § 97 of *Ideas I*, which is dedicated to the study of real moments (*reelle Momente*, or *reelle Bestandstücke*) of lived experiences and their relation with non-real or noematic moments. Setting aside the main difficulties when interpreting this paragraph, we will instead focus only on the reference to attention from an example provided by Husserl himself. The color of the trunk or of the foliage of a tree belongs to the noema “tree”, but the colored sensation, the hyletic or material moment (*stofflich*) that outlines each concrete lived experience does not. Now, when we reflect on this situation, we realize that the fixed color of a thing and the various tonalities it takes on are related to each other as the unity of a continuous multiplicity (Husserl, 1950: 243). The question is: what is the instance capable of generating this continuity? It is here, once

again, that the *Aufmerksamkeit* intervenes, now in a peculiar way. Each tonality corresponds to its own objective element; in what concerns the appearing of each tonality, attention oscillates, keeping itself successively in each of them, but, at the same time, keeping the previous tonalities it was paying attention to before, ordering them in a series wherein the totality corresponds to the noematic color. For example, the green of the tree's foliage appears a bit lighter at one time and darker at another, depending on the line of sight or exposure to light.

### 3. Attention in the framework of genetic phenomenology

Genetic analyses brought a new impulse to phenomenological investigation regarding the theme of attention. Before returning to it after 1920, Husserl seemed to almost identify attention with the concept "consciousness of...". This identification will always have to be maintained. However, when the notion of "consciousness of..." goes beyond the strict scope of the static analysis of the noetic-noematic correlation, and the notions of "interest" and "turning towards" (*Zuwendung*) are enriched with fresh contributions, phenomenology will no longer be, as it seemed in *Ideas I*, the description of subjective activity necessary to the appearance of the object as a unity of meaning. It is on the lower levels of this subjective analysis, where the Ego is awakened by processes of stimulation (for instance, a very bright light, a contrast between light and darkness, or an intense smell), that attention is no longer dependent on the initiative of the Ego.

What becomes immediately clear is that the concepts Husserl uses in the 1920-21 Lecture on Transcendental Logic, and which are recovered in *Experience and Judgement*, are not substantially different from those he had already used in *Ideas I* and in the previous set of analyses, labeled static by Husserl himself. *Zuwendung*, *Erfassung*, *Explikation*, *beziende Erfassung* and so many other terms any attentive reader of *Ideas I* has become familiar with appear once again in the context of genetic phenomenology. We should take into consideration the fact that at least since 1898 but probably already before, the term *Aufmerksamkeit* frequently appears as a synonym of those I have just referred to as well as of some others; the old Husserlian project of elaborating a "phenomenology of attention" is the leading guide to many analyses conducted under other labels.

What leads me to approach some themes of genetic phenomenology in regard to the issue of attention in the first place has to do with something Husserl says almost at

the end of § 28 of *Ideas I*. It is a well-known issue and, ultimately, completely uncontroversial. Husserl says I can live in the world of arithmetic by solving arithmetic problems without ever quitting the world of natural attitude, since the latter is always there for me while the first only exists as part of a specific attitude. The world of natural attitude constitutes the *Hintergrund* – the background – of the scientific attitude, the mathematician can always return to it or, more correctly, probably he never left it. However – and Husserl places considerable emphasis on this point –, the world of the natural attitude is neither the horizon of the world of arithmetic nor of the arithmetic problem that has to be solved (Husserl, 1950: 61); the horizon of the problem is constituted by all the laws of arithmetic that can be called forth to solve it. The mathematician’s attention can focus now on some of these laws and then on others in order to choose which of them is more adequate to solve a problem.

Nevertheless, the mathematician’s attention can equally be roused by a stimulus originating from the *Hintergrund*, such as, for example, a low-intensity sound. Nonetheless, it can also not be roused, even when that sound goes beyond a certain limit at which point it is considered an acoustic stimulus that should be heard. The relation between the intensity of a stimulus and the response it brings about is a problematic issue, as we will see in a moment, and what can be said from a phenomenological perspective about it is that there is no constant relation between them. In other words, the increase or decrease of one does not cause a directly proportional increase or decrease in the other.

Let us suppose, however, that attention is roused by that stimulus (we will find ourselves in the presence of what Husserl calls *ein weckender Reiz*). This new “turning towards” draws a direction or a line of orientation and gives rise to a tendency to identify a unity of meaning, a tendency that awaits as it moves forward to the next phase, new fulfillments (Husserl, 1999: 85). If, for example, the line of orientation followed since the beginning of the “turning towards” tends towards the recognition of a unity of meaning I identify by the term “automobile”, I will wait for new acoustic stimuli (the ongoing engine sound, braking or accelerating sounds, honking) to confirm it. In § 19 of *Experience and Judgement*, Husserl establishes a continuity between the initial “tendency towards” – which he calls *Abzielung* – and the final realization – the *Erzielung* – of that tendency (Husserl, 1999:88; Muralt, 1957: 306). My thesis is that, according to Husserl, without the permanence of attention, we would necessarily have a solution of continuity and the Ego could not, as Husserl himself states, live in this tendency toward identification.

I believe having correctly summarized what Husserl says about this issue. However, I am not certain that Husserl's position is entirely satisfactory, and I even believe that the analysis would have to be continued, although, obviously, in the direction indicated by the author. The example I gave above – a sudden noise when someone is absorbed in solving a mathematical problem – was very basic on purpose. We must think about more complicated situations in which at least two factors I did not consider earlier would intervene.

1. First situation: the stimulus cannot be identified only by appealing to the sense of hearing, but also implies the intervention, for example, of sight, or touch. What are these modalities of attention from which the coordination of information – that may come from two, three, or more different origins – should occur?
2. The second situation is more complicated and has to do with what Husserl, at the beginning of *Active Syntheses*, calls secondary attention (Husserl, 2000: 4). (Primary attention is what is given in cases like the one I presented: after all, it is not very important whether the sound came from a car or a motorcycle since after a few seconds the interest directed towards the mathematical problem will make my attention refocus on it). This case is the one where something emerges progressively from the *Hintergrund*, in such a way that, after only being noticed in simultaneity at first, comes to take center focus.

The *Analyses for Passive Synthesis* gives us some suggestions for the treatment of these and other difficulties, even without an explicit reference to the issue of attention. Just like in static phenomenology, attention can be present under different names. It would be necessary to explore some of Husserl's precious indications, of which, of the dozens of texts of different importance and length that make up this *Husserliana* volume, I would highlight, provisionally, only three.

The first indication is contained in a 1920 text that was probably reformulated in the following years, which the editors called "*Bewusstsein und Sinn – Sinn und Noema*". In section 10 of this text, Husserl refers to the general structure of perception, according to which the momentary phases of a perceived objectivity constitute a continuous unity of sensorial layers of phases that have already flowed and of upcoming ones that can be induced from the first (Husserl, 1966: 318-320). This observation, which initially appears insignificant, is fundamental to understanding the development of the free variations method and the role imagination plays in it. It is true that while conducting imaginative variations I must pay attention to what I imagine, but attention to what is perceived means I am compelled by it to maintain the unity of the perceptive process (Gurwitsch, 1957:

170) and that, for example, what has once been perceived and identified as a cube can only consist of flat surfaces and not curved ones. In addition, while nothing prevents me from imagining a curved surface behind the three flat surfaces I now see of what seems to me to be a cube, once I imagine a curved surface, the necessary respect for the unity of the perceptive process leads me to one of two things: either I admit it is not a cube, or that those two irreconcilable appearances correspond to two different objects.

The second indication, in § 30 of the version of the Lecture on Transcendental Logic read in 1925-26, refers to what Husserl calls the “law of the procedure of intentional awakening” (Husserl, 1966: 151), which regulates the relationship between affection and its developments, namely attention, grasping, acquisition of knowledge and explanation. Yet, in a condition of passivity, as is the case of the ones taken as the object of our current analyses, the distinction between affection and attention is difficult. Probably due to this same reason, in the previously mentioned passage of *Active Syntheses*, Husserl does not distinguish between them, encompassing both under the common designation of *negative attention*.

Finally, the third indication can be found in § 35 of the abovementioned Lecture (Husserl, 1966: 167). Husserl discusses the gradual disappearance of a stimulus from the range of attention (*Rayon der Aufmerksamkeit*), its step-by-step decrease in intensity, until the *Nullpunkt* when it no longer affects the subject. We should introduce two questions here. The first, regards the other end in this sequence, i.e., the beginning of affection: in what modalities does the awakening of attention occur? Or, in other words: what is the relation between the intensity of the stimulus and the beginning of attentiveness? The second question concerns the other end of the sequence, but its perspective is different. Husserl, discussing *Nullpunkt*, says it is not a nothing: *das Null bezeichnet keineswegs ein Nichts*. If any conscious achievement disappears completely, could anyone start from nothing? I believe I have now left enough questions for future research.

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