17

GENESIS

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17.1. The first characterizations of phenomenology: descriptive psychology and transcendental philosophy

As is well known, in its global development, phenomenology underwent several metamorphoses. It began as a “descriptive (eidetic) psychology,” later becoming a “transcendental phenomenology.” When Husserl used the label “descriptive” in 1901 to classify the kind of psychology that was at issue, the term had a clear Brentanian resonance. For Brentano, a descriptive psychology, or psychognosy, was opposed to a “genetic” psychology, which would have a physiological basis and would explain the laws of “generation, coexistence, and succession” of mental phenomena (Brentano 1995, 9). In contrast to the hypothetical character of genetic psychology and its dependence on a still embryonic physiology, the first part of the system of a full-fledged psychology would be a description, based on inner perception, of mental phenomena as they are present to the mind. Descriptive psychology “does this by listing fully the basic components out of which everything internally perceived by humans is composed, and by enumerating the ways in which these components can be connected” (Brentano 2002, 4). For Brentano, such a descriptive endeavor does not depend on any genetic investigation; there is only a relationship of mutual help, even though “the services which psychognosy provides to genetic psychology are incomparably more valuable” (Brentano 2002, 10). As a matter of fact, for Brentano, “psychognosy is prior in the natural order” (Brentano 2002, 8), so that the explanation of the occurrence, coexistence, and succession of mental phenomena in the stream of conscious life enters neither into the pure classification of these phenomena nor into the determination of their internal laws of connection (for instance, how a presentation motivates a judgment, and so on). Indeed, as descriptive, psychology would prepare the way for a future explanatory theory of the psychic realm.

Now from Husserl’s point of view, this Brentanian independence of description from a causal explanation will have an even more radical consequence: for Husserl, such independence will allow the emergence of a purely descriptive theory that would be free from any connection with naturalistic investigations of the genetic, physical, and physiological origins of mental phenomena. In a sense, from the Brentanian title “descriptive psychology” Husserl retained the idea of description while extricating it from the framework of a full scien-
tific psychology, where description precedes, prepares, and then gives way to explanation. Husserl’s first debt to Brentano was thus the rejection of “genesis” and “explanation” in favor of a pure and independent descriptive approach, whether or not this is still to be understood as a variety of psychology.

The turning point in this somewhat unstable first characterization of phenomenology was the great discovery that the radical science of consciousness is not a kind or a modification of psychology, but rather a transcendental philosophy. In 1906, Husserl drafted a letter to Cornelius where he declared that “I grossly misunderstood myself when I identified phenomenology and descriptive (immanent) psychology.” He then continues, “For four or five years now, I have constantly warned my students against this big mistake” (Hua XXIV, 441).

However, the introduction of the transcendental reduction in the first five lectures of the Thing and Space course of 1907 (published as The Idea of Phenomenology) and then in Ideas I in 1913 clarifies the whole issue. By means of the method of reduction, phenomenology will consider “purified phenomena,” now free from any mundane apperception, and will develop as an eidetic theory of the region “pure consciousness and its lived-processes” (Erlebnisse), along with its noematic correlates. The noetic–noematic correlation will be the field of phenomenology from now on. Relations of foundation between intentional acts and their correlative objects will accordingly be exhibited; key descriptive concepts such as “horizon,” “actuality,” and “potentiality,” “ego-polarization,” “mode of givenness,” and “doxic character” (and its modifications) will be introduced; and finally, the whole endeavor will assume the form of a doctrine of object-“constitution,” while the self-constitution of consciousness as a stream will be announced but not addressed. As Husserl famously says in Ideas I, “Luckily, in our preparatory analyses we can dispense with the enigma of time-consciousness without jeopardizing their rigor” (Hua III/1, 182).

Despite its Brentanian inceptions, then, phenomenology was not a psychology, but a transcendental philosophy, and rather than being a matter of empirical (immanent) research, it was instead an eidetic theory. Roughly speaking, by choosing the side of a descriptive psychology, Husserl rejected any genetic approach and explanatory investigation from the very outset; moreover, by later rejecting the label psychology, Husserl put his descriptive endeavor in an entirely new realm: the non-natural region of pure consciousness and its intentional correlates.

17.2. The move toward a genetic phenomenology: the concept and the program

A “genetic” (genetische), “dynamic” (dynamische), or “explanatory” (erklärende) phenomenology is the final version of Husserl’s theoretical project, put forth in the Freiburg years, especially from the 1920s onward.

How can one understand this sudden return of such concepts as explanation and genesis, concepts against which phenomenology has defined itself? Indeed, what will a genetic phenomenology (or perhaps a phenomenological “description” of genesis with an “explanatory” import) add to the apparently self-contained field that emerges from Ideas I as a realm of “absolute being”? Where does genesis stand in the realm of consciousness? How is it traceable and brought to “evidence”? Is not the phenomenological system already complete with a taxonomy of intentional acts, several ontological regions (along with their relations of foundation), and a doctrine of object-constitution? What is still missing? In a nutshell, doubts arise whether genetic phenomenology is a necessary complement for the completion of the system, or whether it is the expression of another point of view and another approach to pure consciousness.

Some of Husserl’s most general statements provide some guidelines concerning the nature and scope of genetic phenomenology:
1. The first version of transcendental phenomenology was merely “static”;
2. The most universal form of static phenomenology is the type ego-cogito-cogitatum, where the unity of the object intended functions as an ontological “transcendental leading clue”; 
3. In contrast, the most universal form of phenomenological genesis is the self-constitution of immanent temporality;
4. Intentional genesis concerns the self-constitution of the concrete ego as a “monad” in the unity of a history;
5. The key concepts for the self-constitution of the monad are the concepts of motivation, original institution of sense, and sedimentation (habituality);
6. Genetic phenomenology is a phenomenology of the several forms of “apperceptions,” or of the several processes according to which consciousness arises out of consciousness;
7. For the highest general eidetic form of a genetic phenomenology, there are no objectivities of whatever type (natural, intersubjective, social, cultural—in short, a world) given in advance (hence no “transcendental leading clues”), since the self-constitution of one monad in a space of varying possibilities of the ego is at the same time the constitution of a corresponding world with several kinds of objectivities;
8. Here there are only systems of composable and incomposable types of formations of consciousness, eidetically arranged as sets of pure possibilities linked by systems of motivations in their order of coexistence and succession—however, the huge transcendental problem within a genetic framework is the constitution of the individuality of the monad itself (of its “facticity”);
9. A phenomenology of genesis thus understood is an explanatory phenomenology, in contrast to a merely descriptive and static one, so that there are three levels comprising a universal theory of consciousness: 1) general theory of the structures of consciousness, 2) constitutive phenomenology, and 3) phenomenology of genesis.

What is truly new in this project? There are both points of continuity and points of cleavage, so that doubts about the relationship between the two versions of transcendental phenomenology are not immediately decidable. More precisely, the issue is whether the new version is a continuation of the former program, or whether it must be understood as a kind of transcendental recovery and reinstatement of an approach that phenomenology initially left aside in the process of its own formation: that is, a transcendental explanatory theory of the very genesis of consciousness in its factical stream of lived-processes, now reinstated as a self-constitution.

Indeed, from now on the central theme is the transcendental subjectivity that has constituted itself, by way of primal institutions of meaning and sedimentations, as a concrete monad “in the unity of a history.” Genesis is now a transcendental concept, and points to the most fundamental (or “concrete”) part of phenomenology itself. As Husserl surprisingly declares to Paul Natorp in 1918 (surprisingly, if we take into consideration Husserl’s long-standing refusal of the very idea of genesis from the Logical Investigations to the Ideas), “For more than a decade [sic], I have already overcome the stage of static Platonism and have framed the idea of transcendental genesis as the main theme of phenomenology” (Hua-Dok III/5, 137). For Husserl, and contrary to Natorp’s concept of a “genetic theory” as developed in the latter’s Allgemeine Psychologie (see Natorp 1965), the genetic self-constitution of transcendental subjectivity is only comprehensible as based on an ultimate self-temporalization, so that the monad is conceived as a “unity of becoming.” In a strong sense, the initial description of noetic–noematic structures gives way to a dismantling (Abbau) of experience in its formative elements of sense, and then to a post hoc reconstruction of these elements. Instead of disclosing relations of foundation among strata of sense in a “static” way, this procedure is tantamount to bringing to light relations of derivation
linked by motivational connections. The most basic strata are no longer seen as providing an ultimate foundation of validity (Geltung), but function instead as an effective origin according to essential genetic laws that must be brought to light. In a way, as Steinbock has emphasized (Steinbock 1998, 133), with its descriptions of structures guided by ontological clues, static phenomenology is now the leading clue for genetic phenomenology itself. This is so because the latter opens a systematic regressive questioning (Rückfrage) into the origin (Ursprung) of the structures that static phenomenology encounters as ready-made. As Husserl points out, the general task of genetic inquiry is to illuminate (aufzuklären) “every given formation according to its origin” (Hua XI, 339).

The reconstruction of such a genetic process would thereby have a real explanatory significance: it will not simply describe what is but will show how and why it is so. Since both descriptive and explanatory investigations are directed to the exhibition of eidetic laws, it follows that laws of foundation, relative to validity and static constitution, would be overdetermined by laws of derivation, relative to origins and genetic constitution. The very concept of “constitution” will be split into two strata. In this regard, the further elaboration of the concept of constitution—a genetic one and a static one, or rather, the move from a static to a genetic constitution as “the constitution of this [i.e., the static] constitution” (Hua XXXV, 407)15—would be where the static and genetic dimensions of phenomenology intersect. Indeed, as early as 1916 or 1917, while determining the several senses of the phenomenological concept of origin (Ursprung), Husserl sketched the double orientation of this constitutive research. He writes:

Sense of the questions concerning the origin: 1) What I elsewhere also (inappropriately) named static phenomenological constitution: the “object” in the how of its original modes of givenness, as a noematic unity of original-noetic multiplicities. The a priori necessary system of appearances in which its unfolded perception consists. 2) A first go at the doctrine of genesis according to general principles. Genetic constitution. (Hua XIII, 346n)

17.3. Pondering the novelties: the reference to Brentano

It is open to debate whether this transition from static to genetic phenomenology is tantamount to an unbroken addition of elements that were already pre-contained (but provisionally left behind) in the first transcendental approach to pure consciousness. Moreover, every one of the words that characterize this final version of phenomenology—explanation against description, genesis against being, dynamic against static—recalls authors that belong to Husserl’s milieu, along with the corresponding theoretical debates he had with them. This suggests a complex move that combines both the internal development of the initial point of view and the inclusion of new themes, or better yet, a development by inclusion that does not leave its very starting point intact. Indeed, when one puts these concepts in their proper Husserlian framework, Natorp, or even Dilthey, not to mention Brentano once more, are unavoidable references. Thus, Husserl’s concept of a genetic phenomenology will best be understood when it is also set against the backdrop of these authors and doctrines. The coherence of Husserl’s own theses and their internal development can certainly be understood by themselves. Nevertheless, it is helpful to pay attention to the oppositions, debates, and criticisms by which concepts like “genesis,” “explanation,” or “dynamism” were brought to the forefront in Husserl’s thought. A zigzag between systematic and contextual elements is therefore the best way to shed light on Husserl’s project of a genetic, dynamic, or explanatory dimension of transcendental phenomenology.
For example, one can wonder about the connections that this new point of view has both with the preceding version of phenomenology and with Brentano’s program of a “genetic, explanatory psychology.” Viewed against the initial Brentanian framework, will not a genetic phenomenology be the transcendental recovery of a genetic psychology, that is, of the quest for the laws that underlie the “generation, coexistence, and succession” of mental phenomena? However, the recovery in question institutes a non-naturalistic concept of genesis (non-physiological, and in fact constituting the physiological) after having developed a non-naturalistic concept of description.

The very first symptom that Husserl’s final move was more than a simple continuation of the former program of the Ideas, since it amounts not only to an addition of something new but also to a self-transforming assimilation, is the fact that it is hard to see a strict continuity in the central theme of phenomenology. First of all, intentional structures were initially abstracted from the complexity of the flow so that they could be described as essential morphological types (“perception,” “judgment,” and so on), regardless of their intricate and fused instantiation in a concrete, factual life. Now, however, it is the Strome itself in its complexity and in the very process of its becoming that is brought to the fore. Accordingly, instead of Bewusstsein-von, Husserl will increasingly speak of subjetivues Leben.

One can argue that this transition can be construed as a passage from an abstractly isolating approach to a concrete approach, or from the “simplest” to the “most complex” descriptive themes. But Husserl’s move amounts to a reversal of the relationship between static and genetic approaches. It is now the genetic analyses that provide a leading clue for the formation and then description of structures. In addition, it also amounts to a change in the focus of phenomenological analysis. The “abstraction” in which phenomenology remained was not an arbitrary one; it was necessary in order to circumscribe its very theme. Just as the descriptive psychologist abstracts from the concrete, natural genesis and becoming of subjective life, so also the phenomenologist puts into brackets the concrete, subjective stream of life in its causal insertion into nature, for the sake of the pure description of the structures of the consciousness of objects and their respective modes of givenness. Additionally, abstracting from the complexity of the concrete, factual stream is not incompatible with a description of the constitution of immanent time. Indeed, the description of time-consciousness—which was done by Husserl in a rather “static” way—is one thing; investigating the material concretion of the stream—returning to its supposedly most elementary elements, which are not given by themselves, and reconstructing the processes of its formation and the growth of its complexity—is quite another thing. In other words, this field of inquiry into limit-phenumena that are not given by themselves but are only accessible by a method of dismantling (Abbau), a field that was initially left behind, now returns and assumes the place of a leading theme. Certainly, in a transcendental stance, the dependence of the stream of a concrete subjectivity on physiological and physical bases is put into brackets, instead of serving as a passage (as in the scientific-psychological stance) from descriptive to genetic-causal research. However, in my view, this move is not suspended, but is simply reformulated. The reinstatement of such naturalistically oriented research in a transcendental theory will now assume the form of a regressive inquiry aiming at the “reconstruction” of the complex processes through which subjectivity “constitutes itself for itself” as an individual monad, processes arising from the depths of its “unconscious” and “passive life.” Indeed, if we look, for instance, at the fundamental concepts of passive and receptive genetic constitution, we find Husserl going beyond the structural opposition between intentional morphe and sensual hyle. He talks about awakenings, sensible prominences, stimuli, affections, and so on. And he describes them from the side of transcandental consciousness, as noetic processes only, putting methodologically into brackets
the natural-causal mechanisms that are the determining factors within a psychological genetic approach. What is at stake from now on is a *phenomenological* description of the self-arising and self-growth of consciousness according to the internal, “material laws” that sustain both the *concrete unity* of the stream and the increase of noetic complexity that comes with the corresponding noematic constitution of higher orders of objects. The exhibition of these basic internal laws of the self-unity of the flow (for instance, that one affection motivates another affection, or associatively recalls a former one, and so on), in the very place where the psychological approach only saw the intersection between the psychological and the physiological, will be one of the great discoveries of the genetic approach. There is an internal “because” (*weil*) for the factual being of the stream, one that was hidden by investigations of its physiological underpinnings under the heading “genetic-causal psychology.”

Indeed, in a research manuscript about the senses of the concept of phenomenological origin, Husserl distinguishes “psychological” and “phenomenological” origins. Psychological origin is conceived in terms of the ancient problems of genetic psychology. Then he analyzes the connection between both concepts, and in a later revision, he symptomatically replaces the term “psychological origin” with the term “genetic origin.” The former opposition between the psychological and the phenomenological concepts of origin accordingly becomes the opposition between “genetic origin and phenomenological-static origin,” a distinction that is now internal to transcendental phenomenology inasmuch as it absorbs the theme (but not the method) of genetic-psychological inquiry (the search for what he names the *Werdenfaktoren* of the stream). The last section of the manuscript, initially titled “Psychological and phenomenological origin,” will consequently be amended to “Thoughts for a genetic phenomenology” (Hua XIII, 354). The crucial point is that in this passage Husserl begins to understand that “the *a priori* lawfulness of genesis, the reference of any present experiential motivation back to a past consciousness to which it is related as the origin of its being [Seinsursprung], hang together with reason [Vernunft],” so that “consciousness is not an arbitrary flux of facts that could arbitrarily be different: the earlier consciousness motivates possibilities for the later one *a priori*, in such a way that the latter […] in its facticity, is necessarily motivated through the corresponding earlier consciousness” (Hua XIII, 357).

This has two important consequences:

1. From a naturalistic stance, the layer of sensibility cannot be construed as a simple causal interaction between a physical reality and the mind: the mental has internal laws of organization, even at the passive level—laws that are almost always associative laws—along with patterns for the internal configuration of the sensible fields (fusion, prominence, and contrast stand at this basic level).

2. The principle of a strong connection among lived-processes is expanded to all layers of objective constitution, either “horizontally,” i.e., among lived-processes of the same layer, or “vertically,” i.e., as motivations that go from the lower strata to the upper strata (or vice versa: for instance, a practical or cognitive interest motivates a selection of affections in the receptive field).

Hence, as well as being seen as an internal development of the former program (the filling in of “a big gap”—Hua I, 100), Husserl’s move to a phenomenological theory of genesis focusing on the self-unity of the *Strom* can also be construed as a more complex *absorption* of a set of problems that phenomenology (and Brentano’s descriptive psychology) had necessarily left behind in presenting itself as a *descriptive, eidetic* theory of the non-natural region “pure consciousness and its intentional correlates.” And this absorption entails more than an extension. It is tantamount
to redefining the leading theme of transcendental phenomenology: the self-constitution of the monad in its autarchic unity. As Husserl emphasizes,

There are also laws that positively prescribe what necessarily belongs to the formal structure of a monad, and that moreover prescribe what must become when a certain individual content is already there. Thus, the primal law of genesis is the law of original time-constitution, the laws of association and reproduction, the laws through which the monad constitutes itself for itself as a unity, and so on.

(Hua XIV, 39)

17.4. Still pondering the novelties: the monad has “windows”

As another symptom of the complexity of the transition, it must be observed that eidetic laws of foundation and eidetic laws of origination do not inevitably overlap, forming a coherent system of complementation and mutual reinforcement.

As Husserl puts it, static phenomenological constitution is the quest for the validity (Geltung) of objectual formations. This entails the search for their original modes of itself-givenness as being-there in the flesh (leibhaft da); for the corresponding modifications; and for the relations of foundation on other layers of objectual formation. This threefold investigation circumscribes the concept of static constitution. The leading vectors are the inquiries into origin and foundation: more precisely, into validity-origin (Geltungsursprung) and validity-foundation (Geltungsfundierung). Here the prototype of itself-givenness is the apodicticity of the self-presence of the ego in the living present, while the global issue is the clarification of the whole-structure of the experience of a world. As Lee has pointed out, the validity-structure is non-temporal (Lee 1993, 24). The founding strata are not earlier than the founded ones, and they cannot be spread over time as a process of becoming, as if they could account for the history of a living monad. Rather, they are an ideal architecture of layers of sense in the constitution of objects. Husserl stresses this very point with great clarity when he writes that “with the verification of validity-foundation, it is not the genesis of the higher senses of being that is in question—namely, as if the founding senses in subjective-immanent temporality would have awakened the founded ones” (Hua XV, 615). Thus “to pursue the constitution is not to pursue the genesis” (Hua XIV, 41).

However, the quest for validity is not abandoned in genetic constitution, nor is the guiding principle according to which experience (Erfahrung), in the broad sense of original givenness, has a privileged status (Husserl writes that this principle encompasses both static and genetic constitution—Hua XVII, 317). They are nevertheless thrown into a different framework. Searching for origin is now tantamount to searching for a first beginning (Anfang); searching for foundation is tantamount to establishing temporal relations of “earlier” and “later,” establishing a relationship of consequence (more precisely, of motivation, as the “causality” proper to conscious life) in the constitution of objectual formations. The new framework is subjective life as a unity in becoming, or the temporal self-constitution of the monad in its concrete life. The experience that serves as a leading clue for the investigation is now traceable in a concrete subjective life as an original institution of sense (Urstiftung). And validity now refers back to the motivations according to which, in subjective life, something is posited because something was posited in the present or in the past of the life-stream. Genetic foundation (Genesisfundierung) and genetic origin (Genesisursprung) are therefore different from the concepts of foundation and of origin in static phenomenology, for they point in a different direction. Ultimately, the genetic approach tends to absorb the static approach by transferring the problems of validity and original givenness into another framework.
For measuring to what extent the genetic approach is an ordered, internal development of the static approach on the one hand or an expansion entailing a new formulation on the other, one traditional thesis must be briefly examined—namely, the view that for moving from static to genetic phenomenology, what is needed is only the addition of the time variable.

In his classic study, Antônio Almeida states that “the theme of static phenomenology is, materialiter, the same as that of genetic phenomenology” (Almeida 1972, 7). According to him, the theme of phenomenology simpliciter would be the stream of lived-processes (Erlebnisstrom), and this will then furnish the objectum materiale, so to speak, of both the static and genetic versions of phenomenology. They would be distinguishable by means of the “formality” under which their unique material object would be considered. As Almeida points out, static phenomenology would be like a cross-section (Querschnitt) of the stream, while genetic phenomenology would be like a longitudinal section (Längsschnitt) of the very same stream. Both analyses display “a complex system of syntheses” (Almeida 1972, 7). However, in focusing only on a punctual moment of the stream, static phenomenology would not be able to consider the “processual character” of intentionality and would be led to a final opposition between sensual content (Inhalt) and sense (Sinn). In contrast, genetic phenomenology would consider the very “lawfulness” (Gesetzmässigkeit) that underlies the production of content—namely, the depths of time-constitution—and on that basis will be able to account for the institution of sense as a dynamic “subjective power” of an “active, productive subject.” Sokolowski’s account goes slightly in the same direction when he says that “once [Husserl] adopts this theory of genetic analysis, reconciliation of temporality with objective constitution becomes possible” (Sokolowski 1964, 183).

More recently, Donn Welton has used a rather similar (albeit more complex) explanatory model for capturing the difference between static and genetic analyses (see Welton 2003, 263). His point is that the difference between static and genetic analysis cannot be construed simply as a contrast between synchronic and diachronic analysis,” as the metaphor of the cross-section and longitudinal section of the stream would suggest, because static analysis “also has a diachronic side” (Welton 2003, 263–264). Nevertheless, he concludes that the transition from static to genetic accounts is based on deepening the analyses of time. In other words, the analyses evolved from a (static) concern with the “temporal form” of the constitution of objects to an account of the internal streaming of the living present that encompasses the production of content.

However, pace Almeida, we have argued that the self-temporalization of the stream as the fundamental theme of phenomenology is an achievement of genetic phenomenology. The transition cannot be accounted for by means of the too simple difference between punctual and processual analyses. As Welton points out, issues of “time-form” and “time-syntheses” also enter static analysis. In addition (here too borrowing from Welton’s later explanations), the crucial point is that the direction of the phenomenological inquiry underwent a dramatic change. As he put it, “genetic analysis deals not with the distinct temporal character attending various modalizations of different types of experiences, for this is handled in constitutive analysis, but with the becoming of the horizon itself. In the final analysis, it accounts for the historicity of intentional life” (Welton 2003, 277, my emphasis). I believe that this is the key issue. In a well-known text, Husserl characterizes the specificity of the genetic inquiry. It is worth quoting it here:

*Genetic intentional analysis* is directed to the whole concrete nexus [Zusammenhang] in which each particular consciousness stands, along with its intentional object as intentional. Immediately the problem becomes extended to include the other intentional references, those belonging to the situation in which, for example, the subject exercising the judicative activity is standing, and to include, therefore, the immanent unity of
the temporality of the life that has its “history” therein, in such a fashion that every single process of consciousness, as occurring temporally, has its own “history”—that is: its temporal genesis.

(Hua XVII, 316)

More than time alone, the genetic point of view also entails the following:

1. The consideration of the whole nexus in which each lived-process stands;
2. The consideration of all of the intentional references that belong to the situation in which the subject stands;
3. The consideration of the temporal unity of life, to whose internal development the whole situation refers back;
4. The recognition that every single lived-process is now explained in its occurrence as the carrier of a sense having a historical density; and
5. The recognition that to pursue this history is to question genetically.

Where does this regressive questioning lead? The key to the bewildering unity of Husserl’s genetic inquiry, regardless of its apparent dispersion throughout disparate themes, depends on a clear answer to this question. First, it leads from the intentional act to its receptive and ultimately passive, pre-objective dimensions. This “downward” inquiry gives rise to the project of a “transcendental aesthetics.” The interplay between acts and their foundations in pre-predicative experience opens the task of phenomenological research into passive and active syntheses. Second, it leads to horizons of progressively unclear and eventually obscure life, horizons that surround the intentional acts of the ego-form. These horizons are contained in the subject’s present situation and point back to its past life, be they prior achievements that remain productive under the unclear form of habituality and sedimentation, or earlier experiences expressly evoked in a clear remembrance, or finally, primal institutions that are now lost in a forgotten past. This paves the way for a phenomenological theory of “unconscious” life. Third, taking a step forward, such inquiry leads to ultimate questions of birth and death, which Husserl calls “generative problems” (see Hua XV, 171; Hua XLII, passim). Last but not least, it leads to the transcendental horizons of intersubjectivity—of community—and to the historicity of the monad in its living with others. It leads to ultimate questions of birth and death, which Husserl calls “generative problems” (see Hua XV, 171; Hua XLII, passim). Last but not least, it leads to the transcendental horizons of intersubjectivity—of community—and to the historicity of the monad in its living with others. Suddenly, but not incomprehensibly, the pursuit of the history of sense within one monadic life also leads to original institutions that transcend this very monadic life and can only be explained within the broader horizons of community (Gemeinschaft) and of historicity (Geschichtlichkeit), with its modes of institution, transmission, and re-institution of sense (Urstiftung, Nachstiftung—Hua IX, 212). As Husserl writes,

every present of life stands in its historical nexus, which is partially open, partially concealed. It has “historical presuppositions” that one can pursue in a regressive questioning, in a pure turning inward, in a pure reflective direction of the regard to concrete life and to what has sense and validity from tradition.

(Hua XXIX, 344)

These ultimate original institutions must be reinstated by means of a reconstructive historical anamnesis. This, however, does not have a factual, empirical significance. Just as in the theory of genesis in general, factual historical genesis and phenomenological historical genesis certainly have complex relationships, but are not definitively the same. The history of sense develops in the realm of idealities and is grasped by means of eidetic laws; from this point of view, empiri-
cal facts, by themselves, are only instantiations of eidetic possibilities. Husserl has offered three splendid applications of this method in his essays concerning the sense-origins of Galilean science, geometry, and Europe as a spiritual phenomenon (Hua VI, 20–60, 365–386, 314–348).

Yet is this final part of the genetic-historical inquiry, working out the inter-monadic horizons of community and historicity, just an internal development of the static phenomenology of Ideas I?

Regarding this ultimate horizon of a transcendental theory of inter-monadic community and historicity, I believe that instead of being a merely linear development, it is not only an ordered self-transformation of phenomenology itself, but a complex assimilation of Dilthey’s project for a descriptive and analytic psychology as a foundation for the human sciences, as put forth in his Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliederte Psychologie from 1894 (see Dilthey 1924). Indeed, I believe that it was an attempt Husserl made in order to include a domain that had remained at the margins of transcendental philosophy as long as it developed as a “Cartesian” theory of an isolated transcendental subjectivity. The double step forward was first to come to intersubjectivity as the absolute subject of world-constitution, and then, by means of the theme of the historicity of inter-monadic life, to replace the flawed psychological foundation with a transcendental account of the historical world.

As a matter of fact, Husserl expressly stresses that as compared with Brentano’s descriptive psychology, Dilthey’s most important advantage consists “in having, from the very outset, his regard stretched beyond the single subject of historical life, and having been directed to historical life itself, [which is] in each human being inwardly unitary, and yet trans-individual.” This puts at the forefront the “personal subject in communal life, and this in its unitary history, which is naturally a communal history” (Hua IX, 355). In a further contrast, Husserl emphasizes that, contrary to Brentano’s concern with isolated lived-processes, Dilthey always looked at “the wholeness of the stream of lived-processes, and in general, at the concrete whole of the pure psychic subject” (Hua IX, 355). Dilthey’s concept of an Erlebniszusammenhang (rather than a sheer, abstracted Erlebnis) has not only an individual dimension, but communal and historical dimensions as well, so that the self-remembering of the monad is like an open window to dimensions that transcend it, while constituting it in its very individuality. Thus, for Husserl, the attention paid to the “interior-exterior sphere” (Innen-Aussen Sphäre—Hua IX, 361), to the intertwining between subjectivity and the intersubjective, communal, and historical, marks the superiority of Dilthey’s descriptive psychology over Brentano’s.

However, Dilthey’s psychological foundation of the historical world was just a first attempt. He remained at the level of an unresolved opposition between explanatory and descriptive or analytic psychology, tributary of a dualistic naturalism. For Dilthey’s approach, explanatory methods are “only possible in psychophysics,” while descriptive psychology based on inner perception reaches no more than an understanding of individual types in the framework of their communal and historical horizons. Thus, “according to Dilthey, a descriptive and analytic psychology is not different from, and should not and could not be more than a descriptive natural history of human psychic life, of the ‘developed typical human being’” (Hua IX, 16). For Husserl, the point is to employ an eidetic approach to the internal laws of streaming, historical life in order to reach essential necessities that overcome the level of empirical generalities and inductions. This was Dilthey’s “radical lack” (Hua IX, 13). And this is, for Husserl, the point where Dilthey’s psychology must be absorbed into and transformed by a transcendental phenomenology that for its part has transformed itself, thereby receiving its theoretical legacy. At the transcendental level of a phenomenological genetic approach to inter-monadic, historical life, the reconstructive understanding of individual life under essential laws is the complete comprehension of its being, and this complete comprehension is tantamount to a full explanation of it.
Thus, in the end, a full-fledged transcendental phenomenology takes the form of an explanatory theory. Nothing more is left over as a residuum of opacity, because “to understand a historical nexus is its unique meaningful explanation” (Hua IX, 10, my emphasis). In a manuscript where he considers the opposition between home-world and alien-world, Husserl goes so far as to risk speaking of understanding our world “genetically-historically” (Hua XV, 214).

17.5. By way of a conclusion: Husserl’s contribution and some glimpses beyond

Putting it all together, I would say that the initial project of a transcendental phenomenology as presented in *Ideas I* underwent two dramatic reformulations. These two changes were strategic moves to absorb issues that the earlier phenomenology—now conceived as “static”—necessarily left behind in order to delimit its own field of investigation. However, these changes cannot be conceived as a simple ordered extension of the initial project.

First, there was the issue concerning the factical stream of subjective life. Following Brentano’s distinction between two types of psychology, this required inquiring into the genesis, coexistence, and succession of lived-processes understood as the theme of a genetic-causal approach, a psychophysics, which should be left aside in a purely descriptive psychology. Husserl’s great discovery was that the stream had internal laws of unification, so that a phenomenological account of the processes through which it constitutes itself as a unity is now the new horizon of phenomenological inquiry. The first layer is the very process of self-temporalization. Now, however, this layer is not simply formal: it is closely connected with the constitution of primitive content by means of basic noetic processes such as configurations of the sensible fields, stimuli, and affections. Starting phenomenologically at the very level where the old division had located the field of a genetic psychology, the new endeavor assumed the form of a genetic phenomenology. It developed as an investigation into passivity, receptivity, and the spontaneity of judgment—in short, as an inquiry into passive and active syntheses. This was the very core of genetic phenomenology, and it entailed not only an extension, but a reorganization of the initial project.

Second, since his demolishing critique of “historicism” as a variety of relativism in his *Logos* article from 1911, history was for Husserl a distant, even forgotten continent. However, Dilthey’s project for a descriptive psychology as opposed to the emerging psychophysics, which he called “explanatory,” was the promise of a psychological foundation of supra-individual dimensions of subjectivity, such as the various forms of “objective spirit” and ultimately the very historicity of life. Husserl’s account of intersubjectivity could not embrace this domain. The leading clue for an extension of phenomenology to this entire domain was the concept of the historicity of meaning and its reference back to an original institution. The processes of institution, tradition, and reinstitution of sense now appeared, in this new light, as the fundamental form of the “a priori of historicity” and as the clue for researching the communal and historical dimensions of monadic life. Although it was proposed, this new dimension of phenomenology was only sketched in Husserl’s works, in contrast to the genetic investigation of passive and active syntheses within the framework of the project of a transcendental logic. Nevertheless, even if this may be a controversial view, I believe that this final dimension—that of the communal and the historical—still falls within the scope of the concept of a genetic phenomenology.

The issues concerning this final part of Husserl’s inquiry were isolated by Anthony Steinbock under the Husserlian title of “generative phenomenology” as a “transcendental phenomenological philosophy of the social world.” As Steinbock puts it in his book *Home and Beyond*, a generative phenomenology “means both the process of becoming—hence the process of “generation”—and a process that occurs over the “generations”—hence specifically the process of “historical” and social becoming” (Steinbock 1995, 3). The views Steinbock has developed concerning the opposition
between the experiences of the “home-world” and the “alien-world,” of “normality” and “abnormality,” along with other related issues, are borrowed from Husserlian concepts and themes, but do constitute in and of themselves a fresh and very interesting extension of Husserl’s ultimate legacy.

Finally, it is worth pointing out an interesting project for an “experimental phenomenology” that crosses the bridge between description of mental phenomena and observation of psychophysical events, instituting a profitable dialogue between the two branches of psychology that Brentano (and Husserl too) distinguished. This project (developed by Liliana Albertazzi and others) roughly coincides with Husserl’s “passivity–receptivity” domains, and for now, it is almost exclusively centered on the study of visual phenomena. As Albertazzi stresses, the basic tenet of “experimental phenomenology” is the exclusion of any “reduction of phenomena to physical or neuronal correlates” (Albertazzi 2013, 6). In keeping with one of Husserl’s results emphasized above, she expressly declares that “qualitative phenomena are irreducible to stimuli” (Albertazzi 2013, 8), so that the description of the qualitative aspects of experience opens a “science of appearances” that correlates them with, but never reduces them to their neural and physical underpinnings. While inspired by Husserl’s views about the autonomous configuration and meaningfulness of the sensible fields, this “experimental phenomenology” also opens a new and interesting expansion of Husserl’s legacy of a genetic phenomenology.

Notes

1 The contrast between the notes in section 6 of the Logical Investigations is a clear expression of how Husserl’s characterization of phenomenology shifts. In 1901, Husserl wrote: “Phenomenology is descriptive psychology. Epistemological criticism is therefore in essence psychology, or at least only capable of being built on a psychological basis.” However, by 1913, the text was replaced by the following: “If our sense of phenomenology has been grasped, and if it has not been given the current interpretation of an ordinary ‘descriptive psychology’, a part of natural science, then an objection, otherwise justifiable, will fall to the ground, an objection to the effect that all theory of knowledge conceived as a systematic phenomenological clarification of knowledge is built upon psychology. […] We naturally reply that […] phenomenology is not […] empirical, scientific description” (Hua XIX/1, 23). Note that in some cases I have relied on published English translations of Husserl’s works, albeit with occasional minor modifications; all other translations from Husserl are my own.

2 In the same note of section 6 quoted above, Husserl even rejects the title of “psychology” for his descriptive approach. The text reads as follows: “It is not the full science of psychology that serves as a foundation for pure logic, but certain classes of descriptions which are the step preparatory to the theoretical research of psychology. These, in so far as they describe the empirical objects whose genetic connections the science wishes to pursue, also form the substrate for those fundamental abstractions in which logic seizes the essence of the ideal objects […] Since it is epistemologically of unique importance that we should separate the purely descriptive examination of the knowledge–experience, disembarrassed of all theoretical psychological interests, from the truly psychological researches directed to empirical explanation and origins, it will be good if we rather speak of ‘phenomenology’ than of descriptive psychology” (Hua XIX/1, 24, my emphases).

3 Both the difference from Brentano’s understanding of description as a preparatory step and the difference between description qua psychological and qua phenomenological (eidetic) are clearly stated by Husserl in his Urteilstheorie of 1905 (Hua–MatV, 43–46).

4 “The phenomenology developed at first is merely ‘static’; its descriptions are analogous to those of natural history, which concern particular types and, at best, arrange them in their systematic order” (Hua I, 110).

5 “The most universal type within which, as a form, everything particular is included is indicated by our first universal scheme: ego–cogito–cogitatum. The most universal descriptions […] which we have attempted in a rough fashion concerning intentionality, concerning its peculiar synthesis, and so forth, relate to that type. In the particularization of that type, and of its description, the intentional object (on the side belonging to the cogitatum) plays, for easily understood reasons, the role of ‘transcendental clue’ to the typical infinite multiplicities of possible cognitiones that, in a possible synthesis, bear the intentional object within themselves (in the manner peculiar to consciousness) as the same meant object” (Hua I, 87).
Genesis

6 “The universal essential form of intentional genesis, to which all others are related back, is the constitution of immanent temporality” (Hua XVII, 318).

7 “The ego constitutes itself for itself in, so to speak, the unity of a ‘history’” (Hua I, 109).

8 “The eidetic laws of compossibility (rules that govern simultaneous or successive existence and possible existence together, in the fact) are laws […] of motivation in the transcendental sphere” (Hua I, 109); “In all phases, we also have the sedimented history of these respective phases, in each one the monad had its concealed ‘knowing,’ its habitual structure” (Hua XIV, 36); “Experience is the primal instituting of the being-for-us of objects as having their objective sense” (Hua XVII, 173).

9 “Thus, it is a necessary task to establish the universal and primitive laws under which stands the formation of an apperception arising from a primal apperception, and to derive systematically the possible formations, that is, to clarify every given structure according to its origin. This ‘history’ of consciousness (the history of all possible apperceptions) does not concern bringing to light a factual genesis for factual apperceptions or factual types in a factual stream of consciousness […] Rather, every shape of apperception is an essential shape and has its genesis in accordance with essential laws; accordingly, included in the idea of such apperception is that it must undergo a ‘genetic analysis.’ […] Thus, the theory of consciousness is directly theory of apperceptions” (Hua XI, 339).

10 “Transcendently he finds himself as the ego, then as generically an ego, who already has (in conscious fashion) a world of our universally familiar ontological type, with Nature, with culture (sciences, fine art, mechanical art, and so forth), with personalities of a higher order (state, church), and the rest. […] This, moreover, is a necessary level; only by laying open the law-forms of the genesis pertaining to this level can one see the possibilities of a maximally universal eidetic phenomenology. In the latter the ego varies himself so freely that he does not keep even the ideal restrictive presupposition that a world having the ontological structure accepted by us as obvious is essentially constituted for him” (Hua I, 110–111).

11 “The phenomenological eidetic reduction places me on the footing of a possible monad in general, but precisely not of a monad thought as individual and identical and under the charge of circumscribing the individual identity according to its possibilities and necessities. But I can also set this new task, and of course do so by using the doctrine of the essence of acts, of structures being constituted, etc. One can even say that I can also describe individuated geneses and laws of genesis without systematically tackling the problem of the universal genesis of a monad and the nature of its individuality. […] Finally, we have the phenomenology of monadic individuality, including the phenomenology of a genesis integral to it, a genesis in which the unity of the monad arises, in which the monad is by becoming” (Hua XIV, 37–38).

12 “Phenomenology: 1) universal phenomenology of the general structures of consciousness; 2) constitutive phenomenology; 3) phenomenology of genesis. […] In a certain way, we can therefore distinguish ‘explanatory’ phenomenology as a phenomenology of regulated genesis and ‘descriptive’ phenomenology as a phenomenology of possible essential shapes […] in pure consciousness and their teleological ordering, in the realm of possible reason, under the headings ‘object’ and ‘sense.’ In my lectures, I did not say ‘descriptive,’ but rather ‘static’ phenomenology” (Hua XI, 340).

13 For a survey of the improper senses of genesis Husserl used up to the time of Ideas I, see Bernet, Kern, Marbach 1996, 182–184.

14 In his response to Husserl’s letter, Natorp comments, perhaps ironically, that he is happy with the fulfillment of his “prediction” (Hua-Dok III/5, 139). Natorp is referring to his former statement (in his review of Husserl’s Ideas, published in the journal Logos, 1917/18) that Husserl’s eidetics in Ideas is only a static “classification,” in a somewhat Aristotelian vein, of the sciences according to separate “regional ontologies.” Instead, he affirms that what must be promoted is their “logical genealogies” (Natorp 1973, 45). He then expresses the wish that Husserl’s “defects will be corrected, in whole or in part, in the later implementation.” The statement I quoted in Husserl’s letter is a direct response to Natorp’s criticism about a static comprehension of the Platonic “doctrine of ideas” in Ideas I. Here I cannot explore the profound impact Natorp had on Husserl’s idea of a genetic, reconstructive theory. This is a complex issue that deserves an independent treatment. See Kern 1964, 321–374; Welton 2003, 266–270; Staiti 2013, 71–90; Luft 2016, 326–370.

15 “With this, the static is here described as what has become an as-always in the ‘history’ of the ego, a firmly-formed habituality, and a type of perception associated with it, a type of apperception. The genetic analysis is the comprehension and elucidation of the genetic constitution, i.e., the constitution of that constitution” (Hua XXV, 407).

16 In the passage in question, Husserl characterizes the issues of psychological origin as follows: “The question concerning psychological origin is related to mental acts, states, living-processes, capabilities, and
other real properties, in a word, to real mental events of all types and levels of complication, thus especially to 'presentations,' living-processes of consciousness in which 'objects' are conscious. This is the question of how, in the 'life of the mind' [Leben der Seele], i.e., in the real becoming of this life—which integrates itself into the world's becoming—they have arisen, and especially the question concerning from which psychic factors of becoming [...] they arose. [...] The idea of a psychological origin has its determinate sense: it is a causal question related to the 'reality' of the psychic” (Hua XIII, 346).

17 The title “Zusammengang zwischen psychologischem Ursprung und phänomenologischem Ursprung” is rewritten as “Zusammenhang zwischen genetischem Ursprung und phänomenologisch-statischem Ursprung” (see Hua XIII, 351–352n.).

18 Thus Husserl writes, “Gedanken zu einer genetischen Phänomenologie” instead of “Psychologischer und phänomenologischer Ursprung” (Hua XIII, 354).

19 Lee puts this even more strongly in speaking of the “supra-temporal structure of validity-foundation.”

20 I do not subscribe here to Steinbock's thesis according to which these issues are not conceivable as genetic because genetic issues are, he says, restricted to individual monadic life and to a synchronic intersubjectivity. Accordingly, he isolates them under the title of “generative phenomenology.” For instance, “In distinction to a genetic analysis that is restricted to the becoming of individual subjectivity as founded in an egology, generative phenomenology treats phenomena that are historical, geological, cultural, intersubjective, and normative from the very start” (Steinbock 1995, 178).

21 For a detailed discussion of the “historical turn” within genetic phenomenology, see Ferencz-Flatz 2017.

References


