

Chapter 2

Originary Passivity

§2.1 Association as a Topic of Phenomenological Inquiry

In the First of the *Logical Investigations*, Section 4, the theme of association is brought up in the context of a discussion of the phenomenon of indication. The starting point of this short but dense section is the view according to which association refers to situations in which a content of consciousness *reminds* one of or *calls up* another content of consciousness. Seemingly straightforward, this statement does, in fact, raise many problems. Consciousness associates A with B because A *points to* B and somehow *belongs* to it. As Husserl says, “we feel their connection forcing itself upon us” (LI 1. 274). The relations of “pointing” and “belonging” are at the core of Husserl’s theory of parts and wholes, which informs his account of perceptual experience. It is not because A and B coexist or succeed one another that consciousness associates them; rather it is because association has already established their mutual *pertinence* that contents are experienced as either successive or simultaneous. Associative syntheses confer “a new phenomenological character” upon distinct or discrete contents; inasmuch as the latter appear as sides or profiles of the same intentional object, associations bring about new intentional unities. Jay Lampert notes that, in Husserl’s conception, association is a “double constitution of unit and unity.”¹ The association of A with B presupposes that consciousness *extricates* a part from the whole to which it belongs while passing over the borders of that part toward other parts belonging to the same whole. From the perspective of the whole, independent objects of consciousness *exceed* themselves in the sense that they carry along implicit differentiations that pass unnoticed in the actual perceptual now. From the perspective of the part, non-saturated contents of consciousness *pass over* into their perceptual contexts in relation to which their position within a whole is determined. But if consciousness were to connect a sense datum with any other sense datum, nothing would prevent associations from collapsing into unruly plasticity and arbitrary flexibility instead of providing

¹Lampert, Jay. 1995. *Synthesis and backward reference in Husserl’s logical investigations*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, p. 41.

a basis for coherent perceptual experiences. If concrete intuitions are to fulfill objective meanings, then there must be rules limiting the range of sense data any given datum can associate with.²

Although the “nucleus of genetic phenomenology” (EJ, 75) is already manifest in Husserl’s reflections on association in the *Logical Investigations*, it is only in the lectures on transcendental logic, published under the title of *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Syntheses*, that the theme of association becomes the subject of systematic inquiry. Division 3 of this work starts off by pointing out that, phenomenologically, association is “a form and a lawful regularity of immanent genesis that constantly belongs to consciousness in general” (APS, 162; also EJ, 74). To clarify this definition, I will underscore three points.

1. Given that the genesis of ideal objects, such as numbers, sets or states of affairs, is active whereas that of sensible configuration is passive (APS, 630–632), it is only natural to expect that some associations be pursued actively and others be formed passively. For example, the constitution of universals requires acts of comparison based on active associations while judgments about individuals require associative awakenings based on the transference of affection from one objective moment to another.
2. Even the passive associations between sense unities do not produce just any kind of random bond. Instead of arbitrarily connecting whatever sense contents happen to coexist or succeed one another in the streaming life of consciousness, associations unfold according to transcendental laws.³ Husserl appropriates the concept of association from the sensualistic psychology dominant in nineteenth century Germany and grants it transcendental dignity much in the same way Kant attributed a transcendental role to the British empiricists’ notion of association.
3. To further distance himself from the empiricist tradition, Husserl makes it clear that what associations associate are not things or bits of physical reality but rather *immanent* phenomena. The general tendency of empirical psychology is to apply to the mind laws similar to the laws of nature. Modeling the laws of the human mind on the laws of Newtonian mechanics, David Hartley accounted for

²Jay Lampert calls attention to the double meaning of the notion of *Wechsel* which explains the relation between intention and fulfilment. *Wechsel* means both bank draft and fluctuation. On the one hand, meaning-intention takes account ahead of time of its intuitive fulfilment in the same way the drawing of a bank draft precedes its being cashed. On the other hand, intuitions must first fluctuate before abstract meanings can be exposed through them. See Lampert (1995, 39–40).

³Husserl follows Kant’s point about *affinity* as “the objective ground of all association of appearances” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 122). Husserl holds in high regard the Kantian transcendental deduction as presented in the first edition of the *Critique* and he likens his concept of passive synthesis to the Kantian *synthesis of productive imagination* (APS 410). Though he admires Kant for his account of the apodictic lawfulness of subjective life, Husserl complains about the insufficient development of the transcendental motif (APS, 165, 410). In particular, Kant’s interest in the condition of possibility of external physical objects led him to overlook the constitution of the immanent stream of lived experiences where associations reveal their true import (APS, 171).

associative phenomena by hypothesizing “vibratory” motions of infinitesimal “medullary particles” roaming through the pores of the brain.⁴ Extending the analogy between mind and nature, J. S. Mill observed that ideas and impressions associate with one another according to a kind of “mental chemistry.”⁵

Husserl does not question the validity of the empirical laws of association but stresses that phenomenology and empirical psychology belong to altogether different domains. While empiricism equates associations with a kind of ‘intrapsychic gravitation’ (CM, 81), phenomenology includes them in the class of intentional phenomena. Husserl regards associations as motivational forces and sets them in contrast with motivations of reason (Ideas II, 234). Motivations of reason require the accomplishments of the *ego cogito*. Belonging to this category are motivations involved in logical grounding (the premises motivate the conclusion) and also valuing motivations (a value judgment motivates a practical decision). Associative motivations form the infrastructure of acts of belief or position-takings. On what levels of conscious life are associations effective? Are there different types of associations and if so how are they interrelated? What is it that gets associated in associations? The answers to these questions are sketched in Section 26 of the lectures on transcendental logic where Husserl provides the clearest overview of the scope of the phenomenology of association. It is here that the distinction is first made between two categories of associative motivations: associations between current lived experiences and similar sedimented lived experiences and associations between passively pre-given sense contents belonging to the sphere of the present.

First and foremost, associations concern those situations in which present experiences call up or bring to life past experiences. More or less flexible chains of recollections link up with and eventually fulfill the empty retentions hanging off from the now phase of intuition. The link between present and past consciousnesses is said to be established through *reproductive associations*. Closely related to reproductive associations but oriented toward the future are *inductive associations* or *expectations*. A characteristic of both reproductive and inductive associations is their participation in the constitution of the objective identity as correlate of the intentional consciousness.

In contrast with associations in the common sense, *original (Ursprungliche)* or *primordial associations (Urassoziation)* cover the combinations established within the living present among simultaneously apprehended hyletic data.

All objects being constituted from original passivity (without any participation by the active ego) arise “associatively” (that is, according to the rules of this sub-personal, purely immanent causality); arising “associatively” are all objects pre-given to the personal ego (possibly already on its lowest level of personality), above all, objects foreign to the ego, thus first and foremost all those objects that do not refer back to an “intervention” on the part of the ego in structuring their intentional constitution. (APS, 478)

⁴Hartley, David. 1967. *Observation of man, his frame, his duty, and his expectations*. Hildesheim: Georg Olm Verlagsbuchhandlung, p. 11.

⁵Stuart Mill, John. *A system of logic*, Book VI Ch. 4 §3.

It is through abstraction that the formations of sense-unities within the living present can be disclosed (APS, 198; EJ, 177). In Husserl's account, the hyletic data are not the ultimate composite elements out of which the ego builds mental representations but rather nodal points in a dynamic relational system underlying the formation of perceptual sense. Original associations make it such that the sense-fields appear as spaces always already structured into meaningful sensible configurations. Being carried out independently of categorial acts of the ego cogito, original associations belong to the sphere of passivity.⁶

The investigation of the phenomena of association aims first at establishing the laws and regularities of passive syntheses in which acts of judgment are grounded. More generally, associations are supposed to explain how it is that consciousness can undertake the transition from particulars to multiplicities, from parts to wholes, from singularities to their internal and external horizons. In its broadest sense, association accounts for "the unity of the whole of the ego's life" (APS, 508) in that it offers "the conditions of possibility of subjectivity itself" (APS, 169). Without an account the phenomena of association in all their forms, the "universal theory of the genesis of pure subjectivity" (APS, 163) would be inconceivable. Whether they refer to emerging configurations of hyletic data or to rememberings and expectations, associations reverberate through the entire life of consciousness conferring a historical cohesion upon the life of the subject.

§2.2 Primordial Associations

As "a science of a new beginning" (Ideas II, 407), phenomenology has the ambition of rethinking the fundamental tasks of philosophical reflection. Husserl's numerous methodological revisions attest to a general preoccupation with the problem of beginning. Finding an adequate starting point is also a preliminary undertaking in the particular context of the phenomenology of association. The fact that recollections and anticipations appear as the most common examples of association may recommend an exposition that would start off by explaining the workings of reproductive associations and would continue with the discussion of original associations. Facing the demand to "forge a beginning" (APS, 175) for the study of associations, Husserl conjures up the Aristotelian distinction between what is first for us and what is first in itself. We first become acquainted with phenomena of reproductive and inductive associations, which are easily graspable as part of everyone's ordinary experience. Nevertheless, it is primordial associations that count as what is first in itself.

The phenomenological study of original associations raises yet another methodological question. If original associations dispense with the participation of the

⁶Without labouring this issue too much, Husserl adds that drives, instincts, and feelings, such as the feeling of pain, also belong to this sphere (APS, 198).

ego cogito, it is not clear whether it still makes sense to qualify all associations as accomplishments of consciousness. Moreover, original associations do not directly manifest themselves in common experience. As passive motivations, associations often remain hidden in the “unconscious.” If it is to gain access to the domain of primordial associations, phenomenology must have recourse to a special regressive method.

Let us remain in the continual synthetic unity of a streaming present; let us initially not draw upon any of the functions of remembering that we should only take into account later regarding their genesis and new accomplishment, and let us make just as little use of the functions of bringing the future to intuition, the expectations that spring ahead beyond continual protection. We even leave out of play all types of phantasy, all types of conceptual acts, valuing and willing activities without prejudicing the case concerning their indispensability or dispensability for subjectivity. (APS, 174)⁷

The method of reduction reveals the original field of passivity by peeling off successive layers of complex sense-giving operations, be they rememberings, habitual expectations, imaginings, judgments, valuings and so on. This abstractive procedure discloses the dynamic formation of sensorial complexes within the living present. Original associations come into view as phenomenological residua, as what remains after familiar conscious accomplishments have been set aside. However, it is important to note that original associations manifest themselves as having been operative in consciousness *all along*. The ego catches sight of original associations only *after* the shift from the natural to the transcendental attitude has been operated. Yet the ego becomes aware of associations as having been already effective *before* the theoretical regard turned toward them.

Husserl defines primordial associations as pertaining to the level of “systematic or systematizing affective awakening that makes possible the objectlike structure of the living present” (APS, 230). The role of original associations (*Urassoziation*) is to organize the manifold of affective tendencies belonging to the hyletic core of the living present into meaningful unities. It is because associative syntheses are already at work here that the living present expands into a “small circle” (APS, 230) whose circumference reaches as far back into the past as the still living retention.

Most importantly, the associative syntheses operating within the domain of the living present challenge the distinction between activity and passivity. The fact that objects are pre-given to the ego does not simply mean that the ego is being acted upon. The phenomenological reduction makes it evident that the formation of sensorial complexes in passive receptivity is an achievement (*Leistung*) of consciousness which joins passive and active components. Phenomenological reflection

...finds in acceptance of the pre-given, in contemplative apprehension of it, an element of activity and, as a result, must obtain a *more radical conception of passivity* than that entertained by naïve consciousness. This conception is that of *pure affective pre-giveness*, of *passive belief in being*, in which there is nothing yet of cognitive achievement. (EJ, 60)

⁷See also Section 16 of *Experience and Judgment* which begins with a perfectly similar methodological set up.

When Husserl qualifies as passive the affective pregivenness uncovered through phenomenological reduction, he does not mean to equate affections with automated responses elicited in the sensorial apparatus by the impact of physical stimuli. Primordial associations do not yet constitute objective identities, but they essentially contribute to the overall phenomenological project of providing an account of judicative evidence. However far back one attempts to trace the origin of judicative evidence, one can never reach the level of pure sensation. The objective meanings, of which evident judgments are the expression, have their source in more elementary formations of sensible unities rather than in pure sense data. Nevertheless, affections and their original associations do belong to a realm that is relatively independent of valuing and theoretical acts.⁸ “Passivity is the soil upon which the activity of the ego moves and without the knowledge of which the higher accomplishments of this activity must remain for us completely unintelligible” (APS, 386). The syntheses operative on the pre-predicative stratum of consciousness owe nothing to acquired habitualities, judicative evidences or cultural sediments. On the contrary, the latter are founded on the former.

§2.3 Similarity and Contrast as Conditions of Possibility for Hyletic Unities

When questions regarding the criteria and modes of operation of associative syntheses come to the fore, Husserl does not strike particularly original points. Sense unities having already been set off in relief enter into associative relations on the basis of *similarity* (*Ähnlichkeit*), *contrast* and *contiguity*. However, owing to the specific methodological constraints mentioned above, similarity does not concern, as common sense would advise, objects having some kind of *real* physical commonality. Phenomenological reflection suspends the participation in the positing belief in the existence of real commonalities between physically connected things. As Husserl observes, association is not to be taken as a form of “psychophysical causality” (APS, 162). In its proper sense, association is a unifying principle of immanent phenomena. Instead of relating physical entities, associations connect experiences of objects. On the one hand, association links “intimately inherent” (*reell*) components of experiences, such as the manifold of hyletic data. On the other hand, association unifies different present perceptions with various presentifications of the same thing, thus contributing to the constitution of intentional objects as ideal (*irreell*) noematic unities. Therefore, association cannot be considered a *real*

⁸In a different sense, theoretical acts can also be considered pre-given. For example, if asked, I could state Pythagoras’ theorem without necessarily knowing its proof. I remember the theorem but I cannot justify it by inferentially relating it to other mathematical truths familiar to me. Sinking into the past, the theorem becomes sedimented and remains partially at my disposal. In this sense, theoretical accomplishments are pre-given to me. I will return to this sense of the concept of pre-givenness in the following two chapters.

relation (APS, 54, 488–489). This is why Husserl repeatedly cautions the reader not to take literally terms such as “motivation” or “causality” in the context of an account of associative connections. The latter misleads one into thinking that associations belong exclusively to the psychophysical domain. The former is not entirely appropriate because motivation in the proper sense refers to complex egoic acts, such as rational decisions, judgments and valuations. To understand how original associations work, forays into the “sub-personal” psychical interiority are required (APS, 478).

The important distinction between *non-integrally cohesive* and *integrally cohesive* intuitions can clarify the role of primordial associations (APS, 482). Intuitions belonging to the same sense-field are integrally cohesive. Intuitions belonging to heterogeneous sense spheres are non-integrally cohesive. Both come to form unitary wholes out of more or less prominent parts but they do so in different ways. What is it that differentiates them? It all comes down to the kind of overarching unity holding together the parts. In the case of integrally cohesive intuitions there is a *continuous* unity running through the parts. In the case of non-integrally cohesive intuitions there is a unity “*of a higher order*” (APS, 483) which unifies separated consciousnesses of unity. To put it differently, what brings about unity or wholeness is distinct in each case. Associations of homogeneity unify integrally cohesive intuitions. Non-integrally cohesive intuitions are unified as distinct phases of the same object through syntheses of identification. These syntheses occur on a higher level because they bring about the perceptual meaning as identical object pole (APS, 484).

Original associations of *integrally cohesive* data necessarily presuppose similarity. Color-data in the visual field, haptic data in the tactile field and so on are homogeneous by virtue of their being part of a given sense-field. A unity of kinship becomes established between concrete homogeneous hyletic data belonging to the same living present. This is a kind of unity that has little in common with the resemblance between particular instantiations of the same concept. Unlike Kant, for whom the sensible manifold is unified by being subsumed under concepts, Husserl stresses that sensuous data do not form a manifold of separate units but manifest themselves as points in the already unified structure of sense-fields.⁹ Naturally, the associative articulation of sense-fields can only be established abstractly by bracketing not only the sediments of previous experiences but also all active (categorical) sense-giving operations. For instance, while the natural attitude apprehends colors as qualities of physical objects, phenomenological reduction allows them to be taken as primary contents. That is why a ‘colorless’ perceptual experience makes little sense. The fact that perception can function in the dark does not show that colors are just secondary qualities for black and gray are themselves colors. Whatever physical objects come into view are apprehended as colored. Yet, an

⁹ While the question of the nature of synthetic activity in Kant is important in its own right, it cannot be adequately treated here. However, it can be safely asserted that Husserl takes aesthetic synthesis as being to a large extent independent of categorical activity, whereas Kant believes that sensuous synthesis could only result from the organization of the sensible manifold by means of schematized categories.

abstractive regard directed toward colors as *manners of appearing* can bring to light the kind of synthetic operations unifying visual data as primary contents.

Is similarity the cause of association or is it rather the reverse that is the case? On closer examination, it becomes evident that similarity has to be at least relatively independent from association. Manifestly, it is possible for there to be similar sensible unities that are not consciously associated. Conversely, there could be cases of non-similar sense unities consciously associated. Mediated associations involve more or less complicated chains of bridging terms (*Brückenglieder*). The more complex the chain of intermediate members, the stronger the incentives the ego has to skip over some of them (EJ, 75). As a result, the end terms of an associative relation often appear dissimilar. However, cases where similarity either goes unheeded or diminishes as bridging terms are passed over concern only reproductive associations. For primordial association to occur, conditions of similarity must be fulfilled.

In associative relations there occurs an overlapping (*Überschiebung*) between the consciousnesses of the associated terms. Obviously, not all hyletic configurations manifest the same degree of homogeneity. It is such a difference in degree that distinguishes similarity (*Ähnlichkeit*) from uniformity (*Gleichheit*). Uniformity requires *congruence* or complete coincidence whereas similarity requires only *partial coincidence*. The apprehension of similar features crosses over a distance (*Abstand*) and establishes coincidence in some respects and conflict or contrast in other respects. In the apprehension of congruent features, the transition from A to the uniformly related B discloses a repetition of the same content. Husserl also refers to this complete coincidence with the term ‘fusion’ (*Verschmelzung*). In the case of similar objects, a new content does not replicate a previous one. Rather, “the kinetic regard” (APS, 176) passes from one term of the associative relation to another and in so doing it establishes a partial sameness in which agreement and conflict combine. Similarity is always an admixture of two ingredients: commonality and repression (*Verdrängung*). Despite its Freudian overtones, repression just means that, from among qualitatively conflicting contents, some become concealed whereas others are raised into prominence. The examples illustrating this point appeal to geometrical figures: (i) a red square given together with a blue one coincide with respect to shape but clash with respect to color (APS, 176) and therefore are in a relation of similarity; (ii) a red triangle inserted in a series of differently colored geometrical figures (APS, 177) can enter into different relations of similarity depending on the selected bridging term (*Brückenglied*). The red triangle enters into a relation of uniformity with respect to the color moment with all the other red geometrical figures and into a relation of uniformity with respect to form with all the other triangles. The fact that syntheses of homogeneity involve both moments of uniformity and moments of contrast determines Husserl to assert that in all syntheses of homogeneity there is a “fusion in distance”, a “coinciding *par distance*” (APS, 177) or a “distant affinity” (APS, 178).

Syntheses of similarity can be regarded as either compositions or divisions. This fundamental distinction is suggested in an important note where the aesthetic synthesis of *separate* elements is opposed to the *continuous* synthesis or fusion (Ideas II, 21). As compositions, the syntheses of similarity explain why primary contents given

either simultaneously or sequentially come to be perceived as unified configurations. As divisions, they reveal that every unarticulated singularity is the product of a unified plurality even if it is not given to consciousness as such. This is a consequence of Husserl's conception of sense-fields as continua.¹⁰ As a result of the accomplishment of syntheses of similarity, every consciousness is consciousness of unified pluralities or of plural unities.

Although they apply universally to all levels of consciousness, similarity and uniformity are originally "operative in sensibility prior to any apprehending of particulars and bringing them into relation" (EJ, 189). Passive syntheses of similarity lay the ground for higher intentional acts that explicate wholes into independent parts and extract commonalities by actively comparing those parts.

§2.4 Order Versus Confusion: The Problem of the Lawfulness of Associations

In Husserl's apt formula, "external perception is a constant pretension to accomplish something that by its very nature it is not in a position to accomplish" (APS, 39). As the gap between appearance and that which appears can never be closed, perception always demands *more* perception. A profile apprehended in the 'now' phase of perception would have no meaning were it not integrated into a "system of referential implication" (*System von Verweisen*) (APS, 42). Co-given with every perceptual object there is a horizon of "determinable indeterminacy" and any perceptual apprehension running through this horizon can only reach temporary stopping points. The driving force of this process is the empty intentions' demand for intuitive fulfillment.

The accomplishment of this original sense-giving is never finished as one expanse of perception progresses to another and so forth in whatever manner the process of perception may advance. This accomplishment does not simply consist in bringing to intuition something new in a *fixed pre-given sense*, as if the sense would already be prefigured in a *finished* manner from the very beginning; rather in the process of perceiving, the sense itself is continually cultivated and is genuinely so in *steady transformation*, constantly leaving open the possibility of new transformations. (APS, 57, my emphases)

But if perceptual meanings are in constant transformation rather than fixed and finished, what guarantees that appearances pass over into one another (*ineinander übergehen*) concordantly? This concordance is all the more problematic on the level of affective givenness. In the natural attitude, perceptual experience

¹⁰ Perhaps the prominence of the concept of continuum derives from Husserl's early study of mathematics. If there is an analogy between the set of real numbers and the sense-fields, then the defining characteristic of the former – the possibility of the whole set being mapped onto one of its proper subsets – also applies to the latter. The set of real numbers is equipotent with – it has the same 'density' as – any of its subsets. Likewise, a 'slice' of the visual field is as dense as the visual field itself and as such is infinitely divisible. "Every prominent datum ... has in itself an inner synthetic structure and in particular is in itself a continuity of sequence" (APS, 187).

consists in acts of recognition that match present percepts with sedimented perceptions of the same or similar things. By filtering out the familiarity and trustworthiness of normal perception, phenomenological reduction claims access to a primitive level of sense experience preceding all egoic sense-giving operations. Pure affective pregivenness does not yet concern *objects* in the proper sense, for objects can only come into being through objectifying acts here bracketed. Along with the continuously varying distribution of affective forces among sense unities comes the great risk that hyletic articulations could simply be too fluid. In view of their alleged independence from higher categorial acts, can primordial associations, based only on similarity, give rise to something even remotely close to stable and regular sensuous configurations?

Claiming to establish the lawful regularities overseeing all associative connections, phenomenology cannot accept the arbitrariness of primordial associations, although it concedes that they eschew the ego's control. However, it would be a mistake to expect the laws of association to pick out the particular contents of consciousness that would fit into associative connections with a presently given content. Why a given consciousness associates with no other than this consciousness is a matter of empirical observation. The phenomenological argument for the lawful character of association is indirect.

On several occasions, Husserl entertains the hypothesis of complete sensible heterogeneity (APS, 509, 515; EJ, 192). What would it be like to have a disorderly sense experience? Would a sensible experience be possible which would consist of qualitatively heterogeneous primary contents 'shapelessly' distributed? A good candidate for such an experience is the case of a blind person regaining her vision due to medical intervention. Husserl only mentions this example in passing and tentatively suggests that the blind person's first visual experience would be nothing but a chaos of visual impressions (APS, 515).¹¹ In the absence of established dispositions and without enough time to distinguish similarities, the incipient visual experience would be dominated to such an extent by contrast that no binding unity could balance out the opposing affective tendencies and their correlative apprehensions. In such conditions, stable configurations of visual data could hardly emerge. Nevertheless, Husserl quickly rebuts this hypothesis.

First, as soon as one conceives of the living present as "devoid of system" (APS, 517), one surrenders the possibility of understanding temporal syntheses. Every present now would be just as different from its predecessor as a tactile datum is from a visual datum. If all conditions of fusion remain unfulfilled, no enduring object could be constituted. Associations of simultaneity build wholes by connecting parallel series of retentive modifications belonging to separate impressional moments into one single "now." This does not mean that A associates with B just because they appear at the same time or in sequence. Rather, temporal syntheses allow contents to fall into patterns through resonance and rhythm.

¹¹ Discussed for the first time in the correspondence between Molyneux and Locke, this example was the subject of heated philosophical debate throughout the eighteenth century. However, Husserl does not acknowledge his predecessors' contributions regarding this issue.

Second, spatial contiguity offers another formal ground for the lawful regularity of associative sensorial complexes. The thesis is that the structure of sense-fields can be studied independently of the constituted perceptual objects belonging to them. Restricting the discussion to one paradigmatic case, the visual field is a field in which external objects appear to us as having different shapes, sizes, volumes, and colors. In the natural attitude, we do not see colors as such but colored things. However, a change of attitude is always possible that would allow us to make colors themselves thematic. When this happens, color ‘data’ reveal a sort of connectedness that has nothing to do with a gathering together of separate elements. Colors are unified not as thing-qualities but as primary contents of the visual field.

The local order of coexistence characteristic of the visual field does not depend on the particular color contents filling particular locations. Husserl turns to the example of “a bunch of spots in a visual field that is otherwise uniform” (APS, 180) to prove that primary contents are always *relatively* organized. The visual field is a field of ordered loci distributed along multiple lines: left-right, above-below and so on. The system of local positions is of course flexible in the sense that the same local position can be apprehended as part of multiple lines. All this has nothing to do with the content presently filling local positions. No matter how randomly they are distributed, specks of color automatically fall on *some* lines of location independently constituted. Whatever their location is, the spots, as spots of the visual field, come to form *some* spatial shapes.

So far it looks like Husserl’s explanation of the orderliness of primordial associations merely updates the Kantian theory of time and space as a priori forms of intuition. In fact, Husserl subscribes to the alternative view according to which orderliness, instead of being a formal framework, implies interaction both between the body and its environment and between contents belonging to different sense-fields.

The series of sensation must actually arrive in a certain way in order for the apprehension of a thing to be experienced according to the kinaesthetically aroused predemands, and in order for the consciousness of an existing thing to be maintained. If the sense-data were suddenly to begin appearing in a muddle, if our visual field were suddenly to be filled with a *confused muddle of colors*, the kinaesthetic motivations would lose their force. (APS, 152)

The argument is not that discordances do not occur. Rather the bodily capacity to “orchestrate” the course of the appearances of things ensures that, when they do in fact occur, discordances can be corrected. Without awareness of bodily movements, such as the movement of the eyes, head and limbs, objects could not be constituted in external perception. The flow of movement sensations does not “run parallel” to the flow of appearances, although it is “totally different” from it (APS, 51). Husserl calls these two flows “dependent systems.” For appearances to pass over into one another, similarity of content is not enough. Neither can the formal order of loci in the visual field ensure concordance. What is needed on top of these conditions is the sense of continuity provided by the consciousness of the lived body’s potentiality for movement.¹²

¹² Dan Zahavi argues in support of this position in *Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 98–100.

To perform the phenomenological reduction means to remove successive layers of sense-giving accomplishments in order to grasp sensible configurations in the making. This gesture could be interpreted as an attempt to put oneself in the situation of the blind man gaining vision. After all, assuming the phenomenological attitude is like experimenting with one's perceptual capabilities by looking at the world as if it were the first time it appeared to consciousness. Yet the findings of phenomenological investigations prove untenable the hypothesis of purely intuitive experience as "swarm of data" or "pure chaos" (EJ 72).

Had Husserl considered the case of the blind person gaining vision more carefully, he would have discounted it as example of impressional chaos. The blind person's perceptual experience of the world is already structured according to the regularities of tactile similarity and contrast. It is quite possible to imagine a kind of transference of structural connections from one sense field to another. For example, the lines of orientation such as right-left or above-below are indeed conditions of spatial perception but, ultimately, they are tied to possibilities of bodily movement and therefore they also inform tactile perception. We gain our sense of above-below direction from the upright bodily posture which impacts visual and tactile perception alike. Equally important for the structure of the tactile field is the mobility of the hand as an instrument of perceptual exploration. To prove that primordial associations are lawfully organized, Husserl relies on intermodal forms of perception. His argument is based on the idea that the series of a thing's profiles *depend* on the series of movement sensations. It would be consistent with this account to reject the thesis, which Husserl sometimes defends, according to which sense-fields are self-enclosed systems of heterogeneous data only formally unified through temporal and spatial syntheses. Through the mediacy of bodily posture and bodily movement, there is established a communication between sight and touch. In the case of a blind person who has just recovered her vision, the organizing schemes of tactile perception may be too poor to accommodate the full wealth of visual content that has suddenly become available. However, a minimum transfer can at least provide rough common coordinates.¹³

¹³ In Chapter 7 of *How the Body shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 2005), Shaun Gallagher reassesses the Molyneux problem in the light of recent experimental research on intermodality. Taken as an *empirical* question, the Molyneux problem can be definitely answered in the negative on the grounds that congenital blindness entails irreversible deterioration of the visual cortex and therefore makes full vision recovery impossible. However, the Molyneux problem, taken as an *in-principle* question, can be answered positively. Gallagher cites Melzoff's experimental findings on neonate imitation and intermodality. Melzoff showed that newborns can transfer visual information (adult facial expressions) into somatic proprioception (reproduction of the same facial expressions). Other experiments also confirmed tactile-visual cross-modal perception. Newborns that tactually explored differently shaped pacifiers with their tongue were able to recognize them visually. Research on newborn perception, taken as an imperfect simile of a Molyneux patient's first vision, shows that first perception is relatively structured and that sense modalities communicate and educate one another naturally. I believe Husserl's account of perception is consistent with the positive answer to the Molyneux problem.

The rejection of the hypothesis of absolute heterogeneity indirectly validates the thesis of lawful regularity overseeing associative connections. There is no reason to suspect that perception is merely a chaotic assemblage of atomic data. But why cannot perception be an experience of absolute homogeneity interrupted by no discontinuities?

What rules out this assumption is the fact that contrast is just as primordial a phenomenon as similarity and uniformity. An example as simple as that of colored spots on a white background shows that in all forms of perception, including the most elementary, there takes place an association among *already prominent* discrete contents. Conscious awareness of sense unities involves *raising particular objects to prominence, setting them in relief or lifting them off (abheben)*. Bringing particular sense unities to conscious awareness means sorting out the system of associative links within which they have already been integrated.

Already given prominences constitute the starting point of phenomenological analysis. A thematic conversion shifts the focus of the phenomenological investigation from *what* is prominent to the *manners of givenness* of the respective prominence. As the manners of givenness are always multiple, a prominence appears as *one* only in so far as it is the result of a synthesis of fusion. All particular objective unities are the expression of a melding together of pre-objective phases.

If two similar elements occur in a present, it is not the case that they first exist [separately] and then their synthesis follows; rather, we call "similar" what occurs in such a synthesis as coexistent. Being in a togetherness, the founding and the founded are inseparable, they are necessarily one. (APS, 494)

The inseparability of the founding and the founded implies that one and the same apprehension of a particular can be described either as (i) the fusion of multiplicity into unity or as (ii) the diffusion of unity into multiplicity. On the one hand, through the synthetic unifying of the manifold of manners of givenness, there arises the consciousness of a particular unity. The fusion of different simultaneous or successive elements exercising a unitary affection produces a homogeneously unitary datum. Thus, homogeneity results from the homogenization of heterogeneity. On the other hand, a particular becomes prominent not as an indecomposable unity but as potentially divisible into a manifold of constituents. What catches the attention as uniformly homogeneous is subsequently apprehended as implicitly differentiated.

To clarify this point, Husserl brings up again the example of geometrical figures.

A white square, which is in itself completely and homogeneously white without any specks and so forth, becomes prominent as a single square, and many like squares as a multiplicity of particular ones. But however much every square is given as a unity, and given as a unity that is undifferentiated in itself, it is indeed our view that each one can be divided in a number of ways; to our mind each one is indeed a continuum of white whose phases are just not prominent for themselves. Naturally, this is not an arbitrary interpretation but one that has a phenomenological basis. (APS, 166)

In the case of a series of white squares, there occurs a fusion of multiplicity into unity. All the members of the series exhibit commonalities with respect to shape as well as color and in this sense they form a unity of a higher order. In general,

through associations, consciousness arrives at groupings and wholes that are formed by the fusion of particular elements. But this process runs both ways from parts to wholes as well as from wholes to parts. In the case of the single white square becoming prominent there occurs a diffusion of unity into multiplicity. The consciousness of singulars passes as consciousness of unity only because associations already performed are not heeded by the ego. What makes this example particularly relevant is that it goes against the traditional vocabulary of sense-data according to which sense unities are supposed to be built up starting from indivisible non-diffusional elementary particles of sensation. Against this atomistic position, Husserl prefers to talk about a continuum of folded phases of objects. Objective phases are not prominent in the sense that they are not noticed by the ego because the ego has not yet turned its attention toward them.

These reflections on the manifold of potentially prominent phases of the white square invite comparison with the aesthetic explorations characteristic of monochromatic painting. From Kazimir Malevich through Gerhard Richter to Robert Ryman, plastic artists have found in monochromatism a painterly means of calling into question the nature of painterly representation. Malevich's monochromes inspired attitudes ranging from utter embarrassment to open dismissal. What irritated viewers the most was the impression that there was *nothing* to be seen in canvasses uniformly covered with the same color. The painting entitled *Suprematist Composition: White on White* seemed to have delivered a *coup de grace* under the weight of which pictorial representation reached its end. Such alarmed responses fail to register that *Suprematist Composition: White on White*, far from purporting to spell the end of the art of painting, documents the way shapes and forms are born and brings about a painterly reflection about the emergence of the plastic space of representation.

There is a certain affinity between Husserl's call for a transformation of the natural attitude into a phenomenological one and the demand Malevich's painting addresses to the viewer. In the absence of an attitude change, one is unable to see anything in the canvas because in the natural attitude one is accustomed to seeing objects. A viewer who approaches Malevich's work with the expectation to see objects depicted in the canvas will most certainly have those expectations frustrated. It is the switch from the natural to the phenomenological attitude that brings about the subject's attentiveness to the manner in which pre-objective hyle continuously enters into variable sensible constellations. Malevich's painting elicits a transformation of natural vision into non-objective vision that mirrors Husserl's pre-predicative experience. It is through a subtle concretion that the white, already pregnant with potential forms, discloses rudimentary sensible configurations hidden in its apparent nothingness. The white comes apart into a square shape that recedes into the background and another square shape whose slightly different hue brings it into the foreground. For non-objective vision, the seemingly complete homogeneous unity of whiteness is only a temporary resolve of an uninterrupted tension of objective phases. The unstable relation of phases accommodates multiple bifurcations and concatenations that give rise to different apprehensions not necessarily compatible with one another.

Malevich confines his reflections on the heterogeneity of white to the pictorial surface clearly delimited by the painting's frame. Robert Ryman takes these reflections

a step further by creating works that self-consciously blur the borders separating/ uniting the pictorial space from its non-pictorial surroundings. The *Surface Veil* series of white monochromes establish a dialog between the white of the gallery walls and the white paint applied on the canvas. The absence of traditional frames and also the fasteners that attach the paintings to the gallery walls seem to suggest that the paintings count as paintings only in so far as they draw into their own space of representation adjacent bits of blunt physical world. Such an assemblage confronts the viewer with the challenge of establishing associative chains that cross over the border of pictorial space and reach out into the space extraneous to the painted surface. The associative chains connecting the phases of white increase in complexity in proportion to the materials used, becoming more and more diverse. The white paint acquires new valences as it interacts with materials ranging from metal plates and corrugated paper to fiberglass and plastic panels. All these procedures show that the ‘undifferentiated unity’ of white is in fact the result of bringing together shifting and displaced sensible meanings.

§2.5 Passivity and Affection

Having discussed the types of regularities that govern the associations of already prominent contents, Husserl prepares the way for “another direction of research” (APS, 196). Now the investigation focuses on the question of how sense unities achieve prominence in the first place. In order to answer this question, Husserl appeals to the notion of affection and its cognates: affective *tendency*, affective *awakening*, affective *force* and affective *relief*.

We can secure decisive insights into the essence of association when we comprehend the lawful structure pertaining to the function of affection, its peculiarity, and its dependence on essential conditions. (APS 211)

Husserl’s use of the notion of ‘affection’ is idiosyncratic. Unlike the traditional ‘*affectus*’,¹⁴ Husserl’s affection does not refer to strivings, desires and emotions. When talking about feelings such as joy or sadness or about states of mind such as fear or anxiety, Husserl prefers the term *Gemüt* to *Affection*. To be sure, affections together with drives, strivings and instinctive preferences belong to the “lowest genetic level” of the life of consciousness. As pleasure and pain often accompany impressions, one could say that some feelings are ‘co-original’ with affections (APS, 198). However much feelings can either sharpen or muffle the setting off in relief of particular data, affections operate in accordance with a mechanism independent of feelings.

¹⁴ Although Spinoza’s ethics and Husserl’s phenomenology are worlds apart, both philosophers have contested in their own ways the established opposition between passivity and activity. Making active joy the central piece of his theory of passions, Spinoza shows alternative ways of thinking about passivity that do not restrict it to the fact of being acted upon. For his part, Husserl thinks of passive affection as a prelude for activity.

There are two structural components to affection: (i) that which exercises the affection or the affectant and (ii) the actual affection or the state of being affected by something.

§2.5.1 *The Affectant*

That which affects the ego is a prominence (*Abgehobenheit*). Prominences are intentionally constituted and presently available sensible unities (APS, 527). As the German word suggests, a datum cannot be prominent in isolation. A prominence succeeds in making an impression on the ego only when the latter has lifted it off and separated it from other co-given prominences (APS, 498), which means that prominence directly depends on hyletic contrast and conflict (APS, 196–197). Moreover, under conditions of fusion with respect to content, prominences are leveled out and withdraw into non-prominence. Husserl employs a host of terms such as prominence, sense-data, impression and stimulus (*Reiz*) to refer to that which affects the ego. Although borrowed from empirical psychology, the term *Reiz* here refers not to a physiological event but rather to a motivational factor. The suggestive translation of *Reiz* by ‘allure’ has the merit of calling attention to what distinguishes Husserl’s theory of affection from data sensualism.¹⁵

The stimulus or the allure exercises an “affective pull” of a variable force over the ego. Depending on its strength, a given *Reiz* sends an “affective ray” (APS, 196, 512) that may succeed in awakening the ego’s attention or may only make it to the “antechamber of the ego” (APS, 215). According to the antechamber metaphor, the affectants behave like solicitors waiting to be received by an ever busy high-ranking bureaucrat. Those whose urgent petitions allow for no postponement receive immediate consideration; some linger in the antechamber and knock at the ego’s door (APS, 512); still others are unable to awaken the ego’s attention in any way. This metaphor is not entirely adequate insofar as the ego, unlike the bureaucrat who can reconfigure her busy daily agenda in response to changing priorities, is not in a position to re-organize at will the structural relations among affectants. While the ego does grant consideration to those affectants that win over the contest unfolding in its antechamber, the contest itself unfolds independently of the ego’s control. It is not in the ego’s power to determine in advance which allures will receive full attention and which ones will be ignored. All this depends on the relative distribution of affective forces among the allures.

Prior to an actual affection taking place, there arises “a tendency toward affection” (APS, 196). The affective tendency manifests itself as attraction (*Zug*) exercised by

¹⁵In the introduction to his translation of *Analyses of Passive and Active Syntheses*, Anthony J. Steinbock comments on the origin of the term *Reiz* in the German medical, psychological and physiological literature (APS, XLV). For the naturalistic position adopted by authors such as Herbart, Lipps, Fechner and Wundt, the concept of *Reiz* meant either muscle contractions or stimulation of nerve endings. To avert any confusion between the mechanistic and the motivational or intentional views of *Reiz*, Steinbock translates this term by the more suggestive ‘allure’.

the given on the ego. Sometimes Husserl compares the ego with a light source and intentionality with light rays. Given its “orchestrating” power, the ego pole directs different intentional rays at variable object poles. But upon hitting an object’s surface, actual light rays travelling away from their source are reflected back in directions that may or may not coincide with the direction they came from. In some passages from *Ideas II*, Husserl pushes the analogy further indicating that intentional rays might get reflected in the same way. The ego is not only a radiating point (*Ausstrahlungspunkt*) but also a point of convergence (*Einstrahlungspunkt*) for the affective rays sent by the given to summon the ego’s attention.

The Ego is the identical subject functioning in all acts of the same stream of consciousness; it is the center whence all conscious life *emits* rays and *receives* them [...] Often, if not always, we find here, properly spoken, *two-fold radiations*, running ahead and running back: from the center outward, through the acts toward their objects, and again returning rays coming from objects back toward the center in manifold changing phenomenological characters. (*Ideas II*, 112)

However, to qualify as intentional the affective rays sent by the given would be an obvious abuse of the phenomenological conceptual framework. Of course, the affective allure is not intentionally directed toward the ego but rather awakens the ego’s explicative perceptual process.¹⁶

§2.5.2 *The State of Being Affected*

An actual affection occurs when the affectant triggers a counter-pull from the ego that balances out the initial pull exercised by the given. The defining feature of an actual affection is the ego’s turning toward (*Zuwendung*) the object. To maintain the symmetry with the above description of the affectant, one can say that before being affected the ego tends to let prominences make an impression upon it. The tendency toward affection corresponds, on the side of the ego, to those allures that are on the verge of becoming affective. Even though they have not yet generated an affection, the allures lingering below the threshold of perception in the “antechamber of ego” do inform the sensible configurations currently taking shape in consciousness. Suitably described as *pre-affective* lived experiences, these affective tendencies occur prior to any active intervention of the ego.

In contrast, the state of being affected involves a minimal active *turning toward* prominences that have arisen from syntheses of homogeneity and heterogeneity. Accordingly, being affected is an example of “passivity in activity” (EJ, 108) or a preliminary phase in the becoming active of the cogito. By turning toward something, the ego makes a transition from slumber to wakefulness. Affection awakens either impressions belonging to the horizon of the living present or recollections submerged into the sphere of the distant past.

¹⁶ See Bruce Bégout’s reservations concerning the idea of “reversed intentionality” in Bégout (2000), p. 175.

The reference to pre-affective lived experiences leads to a broadening of Husserl's analysis of association in the direction of "a phenomenology of the so-called unconscious" (APS, 201). It would be a mistake, however, to assimilate the distinctions between affection and affective tendency to that between ordinary and subliminal perception. Fechner's approach to the problem of absolute perceptual thresholds below which stimuli cannot be perceived was based on purely quantitative methods.¹⁷ Husserl also acknowledges that contrasts of intensity and quality constitute decisive factors in determining which affective tendencies gain dominance and generate actual affections and which fade away. But if that were the whole story, Husserl's position would hardly be different from that of empirical psychologists.

The idea of contrast between stimuli of different intensity provides a necessary but insufficient explanation of how it is that affective tendencies become actual affections. This is clear from the fact that the same contrast sometimes awakens the ego's attention while sometimes it does not. Naturally, a stimulus whose intensity is extremely high obscures all the other affective tendencies and comes abruptly to prominence. A philosopher working at his desk is pre-affectively submerged in a rich hyletic landscape: the sound of a passing car, the colored surfaces of the objects laying on the desk, the song resonating from a neighboring room are all accompanying the philosopher's thematic intellectual effort. But all of a sudden, there comes the violent blast of an explosion that drowns out or suppresses all the other more or less obtrusive allures (APS, 197).

Nonetheless, such examples of extreme contrasts are not particularly instructive when it comes to ordinary perceptual situations. It is not only the intensity of the stimulus that determines what impact the affective allure has on the ego. For Husserl, a perceptual threshold is a function not of the intensity of the stimuli but of the incessantly variable configuration of all the affective allures that fill up the present now. The force that turns an affective tendency into an actual affection depends on the shifting distribution of relative contrasts, intensities and concrescences that make up a living present.¹⁸ Thus, affective transference can offset the diminution of affective force: in a melody, even a very soft tone can be maintained

¹⁷ To be fair to Fechner, his studies concern not only absolute but also differential thresholds. Unlike differential thresholds determined by the measurable increment of stimuli, the affective relief includes a system of drives, preferences and interests which contribute to the selection of significant allures. For a discussion of perceptual thresholds see Theodor Fechner, Gustav. 1966. *Elements of Psychophysics*, 199–209 (trans: Helmut, E.). New York: Adler, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

¹⁸ In a very informative study, Aaron Mishara insists upon those aspects that set apart Husserl's phenomenology of association from the empirical psychology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The allure (*Reiz*) does not generate automated, reflex-like egoic responses. Rather, it is through a process of comparison and contrast that the allure gets its strength from within the context of a given perceptual situation. That being said, it is worth noting that phenomenology and empirical psychology may address the same problems, e.g., perceptual thresholds, with different methods. See Mishara, Aaron. 1990. "Husserl and Freud: Time, memory and the unconscious". *Husserl Studies* 7: 29–58.

into prominence if it is qualitatively similar to louder prominent tones (APS, 200). Accordingly, the investigation should focus on the ensemble of the favorable or unfavorable conditions on the basis of which the affective force gets transferred from one hyletic datum to another.

Let us rehearse Husserl's argument. The descent to the lowest level of genetic phenomena consists in the removal of successive layers of sense accomplishments. This abstractive procedure brings into view the sphere of the pure impressional present that comprises affections and affective tendencies along with drive-related preferences and rudimentary feelings, such as pleasure and pain, all of which operate independently of cognitive, practical or evaluative accomplishments (APS, 198). The most distinctive characteristic of this impressional sphere is "the relativism of affective tendencies" (APS, 197). Husserl shares with Gestalt psychology an emphasis on multiplicity over unity and on interdependence over singularity. Within the impressional sphere, a multitude of affective tendencies strive to gain dominance and compete to awaken the ego. The same allure can awaken a range of similar and contiguous affections or suppress a range of rival ones. Out of this bundle of conflicting affective tendencies, the living present emerges as a unified multiplicity or as a multiplied unity. Seen abstractly as a 'moment', the living present is but a singular slice of the continuous stream of lived experiences. But the living present can be separated neither from its train of living retentions nor from its protentions; it is an overall affective relief rather than an individual hyletic datum that fills up the living present.

Hyletic data transcend consciousness while being at the same time immanent in it. On the one hand, hyletic data represent something not constituted by the ego and therefore foreign to it.¹⁹ In this sense, the hyletic sphere is a sphere of radical passivity or a realm of *pure affective pregivenness* (EJ, 60) over which the ego exercises no control. However, even the most passive life of the ego, while independent of cognitive activity, still includes a form of *doing*. Prior to the production of an actual affection, the ego opens its field of receptivity, tends toward affection or lets the affection arrive. On the other hand, the hyle is a *subjective possession* of the ego (Ideas II, 226) and not some inert stuff in itself devoid of meaning. In other words, the sphere of passivity is labored by intentionalities through and through.

The important Section 22 of *Experience and Judgment* identifies three stages in the dynamic of perception, the first of which is the passive-active *simple apprehension*. The simple apprehension is passive insofar as it takes up a pregiven object that allures the ego. But complying with or yielding to the allure is in some sense an egoic accomplishment and that means that simple apprehension is also active.

¹⁹ As "ichfremde Kern der konkreten Gegenwart" [MsC6/4b quoted in Montavont (1996, p. 219)], the hyle marks the ego's dependence on alterity. What makes hetero-affection passive is the ego's lack of control over the hyletic field. Although it is usually a sign of vulnerability, the lack of control is also, in some sense, that which makes possible a dimension of openness and surprise. Incapable of fastening its grip on that which now affects it, the ego must open the horizon of the present toward that which exceeds anticipation.

Simple apprehension would be impossible without a *turning toward* the allure. Moreover, simple apprehension constitutes enduring objects by “retaining in grasp” the impressional content of the now. While retention is a passive sinking into the past of objective contents, the retaining in grasp actively interrupts the submersion of contents into the background consciousness. Accordingly, unlike the passively unfolding retentions, simple apprehension is an activity of a lower level (EJ, 76, 108). *Explicative contemplation* further extends the thematic interest by exploring the object’s internal determinations. Ordinary contemplation rests content with the vague and general determinations an object presents as an instance of a familiar type. Explicative contemplation breaks down the object into parts and moments and explores all internal determinations systematically. *Relational contemplation*, the last stage of perceptual experience, inserts the perceived object into external perceptual horizons and aims at identifying the object’s relational determinations. But the thematic interest is already aroused by simple apprehension.

§2.5.3 *The Propagation of Awakening Affections*

To every living present there belongs a characteristic rivalry of affective tendencies. However, conditions of contrast and similarity rule out a draw-game between competing affective tendencies. *Some* sense unity must win out in the affective conflict. Awakening means raising a particular into prominence. As soon as it is awakened, a prominent datum will tend to propagate its affection, provided favorable conditions of contrast are being met. If prominences lose the affective force, they vanish out of the sphere of attention. Of course, other data associatively awakened immediately replace the previous prominences. Propagation is a process of *transference of affective force* from one datum to similar ones. Without laboring this point very much, Husserl notes that affective propagation is bi-directional. The present impression propagates its affective force forward in the immediate future as well as backward in the immediate past.

The temporal form of the living present, the structure, the sense-fields and the laws of similarities and contrast provide mere conditions of possibility for the formation of unities (APS, 201). In order to explain how unities actually emerge in consciousness, deeper forays into the mechanism of affection are needed. What exactly is the role of affection in the coming to prominence of hyletic groups and configurations as wholes? Must each member of a group exercise an individual affection in order for the group to become unitarily prominent? Is it possible for hyletic unities to be formed prior to or independently of any affection? Does prominence depend on affections of which the ego is not aware?

These unities could only be there for us either as *given directly* in the scope of attentiveness, or through the fact that we grabbed hold of unities *subsequently* by reaching back into the past horizons of a sphere of attentiveness; these unities were given to us *without and prior to our becoming attentive*, and yet, they had at least affected us *to some degree*. (APS, 201, my emphasis)

This passage presents two alternatives. If consciousness apprehends unitary wholes in one swoop, then synthetic operations must have been carried out in the hyletic sphere without any conscious egoic intervention. If consciousness responds first to separate individual affective unities, then the apprehension of wholes requires the propagation of affective force from the currently affective individual member to similar and contiguous members of the same whole. On the latter account, the accumulated affective force of separate affective unities makes possible a retrospective view of some specific hyletic configurations. This description of the becoming prominent of a sensible configuration will not hold in cases of extreme contrast or intense pain (APS, 514) where the formation of unity is obviously independent of the propagation of affection.

Even ordinary perceptual experiences, when closely examined, cast serious doubts on the plausibility of the idea that sensible unity formation depends on affective transference or propagation. Wandering about in Freiburg's hilly surroundings, an evening stroller suddenly notices a string of lights somewhere in the distant Rhine valley (APS, 202). How does the perceptual experience unfold in this case? The series of lights manifests itself as "an articulated unity in an unarticulated affection." The affection is unarticulated because the string of lights becomes affective "in one stroke." Even though it exerts a unitary affection, the string of lights is an *articulated* configuration, a Gestalt structure whose members (*Gliedern*) can be more or less salient qualitatively. However, the string as a whole has a stronger affective allure which gives it priority over the individual lights. As a unitary objectlike formation, the row of lights detaches itself from its perceptual surrounding. In general, prominences (*Abgehobenheiten*) come into relief by having their ties with the hyletic neighborhood severed. One could say that *affective tendencies* propagate or circulate from the whole string to the individual lights as well as among the members of the string. However, the ego is by no means aware of this circulation which plays no role in the lifting off of the whole and can only be explicated after the string has been raised to prominence.

Another example illustrates the same point with reference to syntheses of successive hyletic data. Let us think about a person so engrossed in reflection that she does not notice at all the piano music reverberating from a neighboring room. All of a sudden, an especially mellifluous sound or a peculiar musical phrase brings the entire melody to her attention (APS, 203). As in the previous example, the sonorous configuration becomes prominent as a melody in one stroke. The melody must have been organized pre-affectively in order for it to be aroused as whole. If the tones had not been pre-affectively organized into a melody the backward radiating affection would awaken only its neighboring tone and not the entire melody. Despite the difference in emphasis on coexistence and succession of hyletic data respectively, both examples support the same conclusion: objects must be given as wholes beforehand in order for their parts to be apprehended (APS, 204).

Husserl concedes that one could modify the example of the string of lights so as to illustrate the opposite view according to which the givenness of the parts precedes the givenness of the whole. Were the lights turned on one after the other, there would be no perception of a *string*, at least not before the third light was switched

on. However, this does not invalidate the principle that the perception of a whole is the perception of a certain *relation* among the parts rather than the perception of all individual members actually forming a configuration.

§2.5.4 *Prominence and Affection*

The notions of affective propagation and awakening have an important bearing on the difficult problem of the relation between prominence and affection. An explicit formulation of this problem occurs in Section 34 of the lectures on transcendental logic where Husserl wavers between two alternative and seemingly contradictory accounts of the conditions under which prominences affect the ego.

The first hypothesis states that every formation of unity (*Einheitsbildung*) owes its existence to affection. On this account, the similarities and contrasts within the living present are established among objectlike formations that have already come into relief. Actual prominent objectlike formations must be already given if perception is to be possible at all; an experience that has not yet discerned actual prominences would not be a perceptual experience.

The second hypothesis states that some formations of unity occur prior to and independently of affections. The reference here is to “unconditionally necessary fusions” (APS, 207) that provide the formal conditions of homogeneity. The temporal syntheses, the syntheses of local field and the synthetic unity of sense-fields in general belong to the sphere of pre-affective fusions. Like the Kantian ‘figurative syntheses,’ such fusions are supposed to operate independently of actual affective prominences. Actual affections can propagate and awaken similar affections only if they fulfill these conditions of homogeneity. “Hyletic fusion must be carried out in the fixed necessity of temporal constitution, a hyletic fusion arising from original continuity as successive fusion, and again without any accomplishment from affection” (APS, 208).

Soon after he formulates the first hypothesis, Husserl begins to suspect it might be “untenable” (APS, 209). He is also apprehensive about the accuracy of the second hypothesis only “tentatively” advanced here. In spite of these hesitations and aware of the “risk” of overgeneralization, Husserl leans toward the first hypothesis and concludes that “affective unities must be constituted in order for a world of objects to be constituted in subjectivity at all” (APS, 210, also 213). Husserl arrives at this conclusion by reexamining the relation between the *passive pre-givenness* of affective allures and the *passive givenness* of the allures with which the ego has already complied by turning toward (APS, 210). The claim that the ego already performs pre-affective syntheses even *before* being affected is mistaken because prior to affection there is nothing the ego can perceptually attend to and therefore nothing to synthesize. The variable shape of the affective relief of the living present is such that many unnoticed allures surge into the foreground and many affective unities already prominent lose their force and sink into the background of consciousness. What seems hard to accept is “that something should gain an affective

force at all where nothing of the sort was available; that something which was not there at all for the ego, a pure affective nothing, should become an active something for the first time" (APS, 211).

Prominence depends on affection, however weak the latter may be, because the lifting off of affective unities is what gets perception off the ground. Nevertheless, this result makes the account of the constitution of perceptual sense vulnerable to the charge of circularity. Of this charge Husserl was certainly aware.

The wakeful life of the ego is such that the ego is explicitly affected, affected by special unities that are, precisely through this affection, given to, graspable or grasped by the ego. But does affection not also presuppose here the work that is accomplished, to wit, the special fusion that necessarily ensues when the formal and material conditions are fulfilled? (APS, 208)

If sense-constitution presupposes affective prominence and if all prominence must be charged with sense in order to become affective then constitution is trapped in a circle.²⁰

Husserl can defend himself by clarifying the sense in which the formation of sensible unities precedes affection. The precedence he has in mind here is logical not temporal. The ego is first and foremost affected by objects that are already prominent. Yet objective singularities only exist as syntheses of objective phases corresponding to a multitude of affective forces that compete to awaken the ego's interest. Pre-affective sense-unities are not unities that take shape *in advance* of all affection but rather unities whose formation integrates low-intensity affective allures operating below the level of perceptibility. True, the force of an affective allure fluctuates constantly and therefore weak affections can become strong just as easily as a strong affections can become weak. But the gradation of affective force does not serve well the purpose of backing up the idea of pre-affective syntheses. Sensible unities whose affective force waned to the zero level do not necessarily become completely null but can remain part of the affective topology of the living present where the quality and intensity of the allures are always in the process of being redistributed. Since it is always an actual affection that sets in motion this redistribution, talk of pre-affective synthesis seems to be misleading.

Husserl's frequent reference to the becoming unconscious of affective tendencies should not be taken as a sign of his debt to or approval of psychoanalytical terminology.²¹ For Husserl, the unconscious is not a reservoir of urges, feelings and

²⁰ Steinbock (1995, p. 155) frames the objection of circularity in these terms. Bégout (2000, pp. 189–198) and Montavont (1999, pp. 222–229) have also considered this important issue. Steinbock stresses that no constitution of sense can dispense with affection and claims that the graduality of affection spares Husserl the trouble of becoming entangled in a vicious circle. Both Montavont and Bégout acknowledge that Husserl's last word on this issue is to posit affection as condition of prominence. But Bégout insists on the distinctive nature of zero-degree affections and commends Husserl for bringing forward the idea of "affective instinct" in order to better explain the pre-affective sphere containing sense unities independent of the ego.

²¹ Forcing a comparison with Freud, one could say that Husserl's "unconscious" corresponds to Freud's "pre-conscious."

ideas repressed because of their ties to anxiety, conflict and pain. Neither do contents “repressed” into the unconscious undergo complicated symbolic metamorphoses. Repression is a by-product of the affective relief in virtue of which some allures sink into “the background or sub-soil of non-vivacity, of affective ineffectiveness” and eventually reach “the zero degree of affection” (APS, 217). Phenomenology works with an image of the living present that may be compared with the image of sea floors constructed by oceanographers with the help of the sonar. The living present is an “affective unity” whose “relief of salience” (APS, 215) contains more or less prominent affections as well as *potentially* noticeable object phases. As a result of the passive combination of contrasts and similarities distributed along a continuum, affective tendencies form a variable hyletic pattern in which the peak of vivacity corresponds to momentary primordial impressions. Through a process of affective transference or propagation, primordial impressions awaken other data and this determines the constant variation of the affective strength of the ensemble. Depending on the hyletic setting to which it belongs, an allure with a low level of vivacity can maintain a certain degree of effectiveness even if it not yet noticed by the ego.²² But the allures not yet noticed are there at all for the ego only because an already prominent allure has propagated affective force to its hyletic neighborhood.

Nevertheless, the constitution of sense is in a certain sense inescapably circular. The distinction between an active constitution, which is exclusively the work of the ego cogito, and a passive pre-constitution, which engages the ego as subject of self-temporalization and of affective tendencies prior to the triggering of attentive attitude serves not to avoid but to emphasize the circle of constitution. The question regarding the ego’s power to register pre-affective sensible unities that have not yet awoken the ego’s interest fades away if pre-affective syntheses are to be equated not with concrete hyletic configurations but rather with the formal conditions of possibility of affection like the temporal form and the local field. But now the circle appears all the more clearly, for only an attentive study of the syntheses of contents can disclose the formal conditions of affection and only a close examination of the formal conditions of homogeneity and contrast can explain why affection propagates as it does in concrete perceptual experiences. Husserl concludes the important Section 34 with a remark concerning the dual character of constitutive syntheses. The pre-affective formations of unities and affection itself go together in every constitutive synthesis. Only by descending from the level of ready-made evidences to the hyletic core of the living present can one disclose this dual character as “enigma of association” (APS, 214).

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²² Anthony J. Steinbock analyses two similar forms of passive attentiveness “dispositional orientation” and “passive discernment.” Passive attention allows affective unities to emerge in accordance with a “system of preferential structures” which selects and combines affective formations without requiring the ego’s turning thematically toward objects. See “Affection and attention: On the phenomenology of becoming aware” in *Continental Philosophy Review* 37: 28–31, 2004.

Original associations distribute affective tendencies according to the prevailing intensities and contrasts of the allures and establish the “affective relief” of the living present. The passivity of original associations can be interpreted in two ways. First, original associations operate independently not only from categorial activity but also from reproductive associations and therefore do not require the ego’s participation (*Ichbeteiligung*). Second, original associations regulate the propagation of affective awakenings. As such, they determine the way the ego passively re-acts or responds to the affective pull of what is foreign to it. This reaction or response is not purely passive. Rather, the ego continuously labors at opening its horizon of receptivity.

Husserl’s account of original associations implies that passive phenomena such as affective propagation and affections with zero-vivacity are part of the life of consciousness while not being orchestrated or controlled by the ego. If phenomenology interpreted the “sheer nightfall” (221) of the unconscious as a site of burgeoning instincts, it would abandon description in favor of speculation. Cases where intuitability drops to zero while affections still make an impact on the ego are difficult to account for on the level of original associations. To explain why affective forces diminish and how they can be reactivated, Husserl needs a theory of memory. Allures lose their affective force by receding into the past and by being “clouded over.” Primordial impression turns into fresh retention which becomes empty retention. All these modifications are required by the “structural typicality” or the “rigid form” of the living present (APS, 223). But even the empty retention is given affectively, although without intentional differentiation. If complete non-differentiation is reached, then affection becomes powerless. Yet the emptying process concerns the modes of givenness of the datum rather than the datum itself. Special affections merge into a general undifferentiated affection which is the unarticulated horizon of the past. To the zero degree of affection there corresponds the completely emptied retention, the lack of differentiation. In the next chapter, I will show that the affective force of objective moments can be recovered because memory guarantees the identity of objective sense.

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