

CHAPTER XVI

INNER (TIME-)CONSCIOUSNESS

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Abstract. The aim of the article is to examine the relation between Husserl's notion of inner consciousness (self-consciousness) and his theory of inner time-consciousness. Not only will it be argued that the distinction between reflective and pre-reflective self-consciousness is crucial if we are to understand Husserl's analysis of time, but it will also be argued that the latter analysis contains Husserl's most profound contribution to an understanding of the pre-reflective self-manifestation of subjective life.

In the introduction to *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, Husserl remarks that “we get entangled in the most peculiar difficulties, contradictions, and confusions” (Hua X, 4) the moment we seek to account for time-consciousness. I think most scholars of Husserl's writings on these issues would agree. Attempting to unravel the inner workings of time-consciousness can indeed easily induce a kind of intellectual vertigo. Let us consequently start with some of the basic questions that motivated Husserl's inquiry.

I. EXPERIENCED TIME

If we look at Husserl's early writings on time-consciousness, Husserl insisted on the difference between directly experiencing change and duration and merely imagining or remembering it, and he explicitly advocated the possibility of an intuitive presentation of succession, change and persistence. We can hear an enduring tone or a melody, just as we can see an immobile pyramid or the flight of a bird. But how is this possible? Husserl's well-known thesis is that a perception of a temporal object as well as the perception of succession and change would be impossible if perception had only been conscious of that which exists right now. Since we are obviously conscious of succession and duration, we must acknowledge that our consciousness, one way or the other, can encompass more than that which is given right now. But although we can be co-conscious

of that which has just been, and that which is about to occur, the crucial question remains: *how* can we be conscious of that which is no longer, or not yet, present to our consciousness? One obvious suggestion might be that we simply need to recognize that our perceptions (auditory, visual, etc.) are themselves temporally extended processes. The perception of the melody starts when the melody starts, and comes to an end at exactly the same moment as the melody ends. Unfortunately, however, things are not quite that simple. If a perception has duration and temporal extension, it will contain temporal phases of its own. But on closer inspection, it is obvious that a mere succession of such conscious phases will not as such provide us with the consciousness of succession. For that to happen, the succession of these phases must somehow be united experientially. The decisive challenge is then to account for this unification without giving rise to an explanatory regress, i.e., without having to posit yet another temporally extended consciousness whose task is to unify the first-order consciousness, and so forth *ad infinitum*.

In his 1905 lectures, Husserl argued that our experience of temporal objects involved the animation of non-temporal (*unzeitliche*) contents by means of time-constituting apprehensions (Hua X, 417). Whereas the present phase of a temporal object is perceived by way of a present apprehension of a non-temporal content, the past and future phases of the object are co-perceived by way of present apprehensions of modified and thereby no longer sensuously given nontemporal contents. In short, whereas the perception of the now-phase of the object would be constituted through the animation of a certain sensory content by means of a “now-apprehension” (Hua X, 230), this perceptual consciousness would be accompanied by retentive and protentive apprehensions of modified content thereby providing us with consciousness of those phases of the object that were no longer or not yet present.

The weakness of this account is obvious. The manifold of contents and apprehensions are all part of the actual phase of consciousness. But, as Husserl himself was eventually to ask, how can a manifold of co-existing contents provide us with awareness of succession (Hua X, 323)? How can a present apprehension of a non-temporal content provide us with intuitive awareness of something just-past? Husserl eventually realized the deficiencies of his own early model and instead started to emphasize the *width of presence*. According to Husserl, the basic unit of

temporality is – to use Jamesian terms – not a “knife-edge” present, but a “duration-block”, i.e., a temporal field that comprises all three temporal modes of present, past, and future. Husserl employed three technical terms to describe this temporal structure of consciousness. There is (i) a “primal impression” narrowly directed toward the strictly circumscribed now-phase of the object. The primal impression never appears in isolation and is an abstract component that by itself cannot provide us with a perception of a temporal object. The primal impression is accompanied by (ii) a “retention”, or retentional aspect, which provides us with a consciousness of the just-elapsed phase of the object thereby furnishing the primal impression with a past-directed temporal context, and by (iii) a “protention”, or protentional aspect, which in a more-or-less indefinite way intends the phase of the object about to occur thereby providing a future-oriented temporal context for the primal impression.

The concrete and full structure of all lived experience is consequently *protention-primal impression-retention*. Although the specific experiential contents of this structure change progressively from moment to moment, at any one given moment this threefold structure is present (synchronically) as a unified whole:

In this way, it becomes evident that concrete perception as original consciousness (original givenness) of a temporally extended object is structured internally as itself a streaming system of momentary perceptions (so-called primal impressions). But each such momentary perception is the nuclear phase of a continuity, a continuity of momentary gradated retentions on the one side, and a horizon of what is coming on the other side: a horizon of “protention,” which is disclosed to be characterized as a constantly gradated coming (Hua IX, 202).

According to this account, retention is not a particular thing in consciousness that we perceive; rather we hear the just-past tone as just-past because it is retained. There is no simultaneity between the retentional aspect of consciousness (which is present) and that which is retained (which is just past). The just-past tone doesn’t remain present in consciousness, like some reverberation; rather it is presented to consciousness as just-past, or as Brough has put it: “Retention does not transmute what is absent into something present; it presents the absent in its absence”.¹ The retention does not retain real contents (the just-past tone is not physically present); rather, consciousness retains it as an intentional content. It retains the sense of what has just consciously passed.

Thus, retention must be appreciated as a peculiar form of intentionality. Unlike the primal impression, the retention intends the *past*. As Husserl writes, “retention is not a modification in which impressional data are really [*reell*] preserved, only in modified form: on the contrary, it is an intentionality—indeed, an intentionality with a specific character of its own” (Hua X, 118). Being retentionally aware of the just-past phase of the object or event consequently doesn’t entail having the just-past phase sensuously co-present in some strange distorted way.

Let us consider a concrete example: If we look at a pedestrian who is crossing the street, our perception will not be restricted to capturing the durationless now-phase of his movement. Perceptually, it is not as if the pedestrian suddenly appeared as out of nowhere; and further, we do not have to engage in an explicit act of remembering in order to establish the temporal context of his current position. Nor, however, will it be the case that all the previous phases of his movement are perceptually present in the same way as his current position. If that were the case, the pedestrian would perceptually fill the entire space he has just traversed. But we also have to avoid the idea that the past phases of his movement remain visually present in some vague ghostly manner. Temporal “fading” into the past is not equivalent to the fading of a fading image that remains perceptually present. Retention retains the sense of my just-past experience of seeing the pedestrian, but it does not do so by keeping a faded image in consciousness. Rather, the basic idea is that whatever we perceive will necessarily be embedded in a temporal horizon. Its meaning will be influenced by what went before, which is still intentionally retained.

Rather than being a memory that re-presents the object in question, retention provides us with an *intuition* of the just-past sense of the object (Hua X, 41). This is precisely what is required if perception of succession is to be possible. Husserl would agree that the mere succession of conscious states doesn’t guarantee consciousness of succession, but this doesn’t entail the impossibility of a perception of duration and succession unless one also accepts the idea that perception is reduced to the grasping of a mere now-point, and that is precisely the idea that Husserl rejects. A perception cannot merely be a perception of what is now; rather any perception of the present phase of an object includes a retention of the just-past phase and a protention of the phase of the object about to occur (Hua XI, 315). Phrased differently (noematically), perceptual presence

is not punctual, it is a field in which now, not-now and not-yet-now is given in a horizontal gestalt. This is what is required if perception of an enduring object is to be possible.

But is consciousness of a temporal process, on this view, itself temporally extended? This is a deceptively simple question. And it is a question that Husserl answered differently at different stages of his thinking. In 1904, Husserl's answer was straightforward. As he writes in text nr. 21: "I see with evidence that the consciousness of a time itself <requires> time; the consciousness of a duration, duration; and the consciousness of a succession, succession" (Hua X, 192. Cf. Hua X, 22). But of course, if the protention-primal impression-retention structure has a duration of its own, if it contains temporal phases of its own, how then are these different successive phases synthesized in such a manner as to allow for an experience of succession? Are we then not forced to posit yet another form of time-consciousness to account for the givenness of this duration and unity, and so forth *ad infinitum* (Hua X, 80)? Husserl eventually became aware of these problems, and as he writes in text nr. 50:

Is it inherently absurd to regard the flow of time as an *objective movement*? *Certainly!* On the other hand, memory is surely something that itself has *its now*, and the same now as a tone, for example. *No.* There lurks the fundamental mistake. *The flow of the modes of consciousness is not a process; the consciousness of the now is not itself now.* The retention that exists "together" with the consciousness of the now is not "now," is *not simultaneous* with the now, and it would make no sense to say that it is (Hua X, 333).

Husserl would consequently reject the suggestion that there is a temporal match between time-consciousness and the temporal objects and events of which it is conscious. The relations between protention, primal impression and retention are not relations among items located within the temporal flow; rather these relations constitute the flow in question. To put it differently, it is for Husserl absolutely mandatory to distinguish sharply between the primal impression, retention, protention, i.e., the non-independent structures of inner time-consciousness, on the one hand, and the now-phase, the past-phase, and the future-phase, i.e., the phases of the temporal object, on the other hand. The primal impression, retention, protention are not related to each other as present, past, and future. Rather it is their conjunction which makes possible the senses of present, past, and future. In his writings, Husserl occasionally speaks

of absolute time-constituting consciousness as an unchangeable form of presence (as a *nunc stans*) (Hua XXXIV, 384). But it is noteworthy that Husserl explicitly denies that this standing presence is to be understood as referring to merely one of the three temporal modalities (Hua XXXIV, 384). The presence in question is not the “now”, is not the “Gegenwart”, if one by Gegenwart means *Gegen-wart*, that is, a now that one stands over against (Hua XIV, 29). Inner time-consciousness is a field of experiencing, a dimension of manifestation, which encompasses all three temporal modes. And while it from a first-person perspective certainly makes sense to say that I had an experience of joy, or a perception of a flower, and that these experiences endured and have now ceased and become past – after all, otherwise it would hardly make sense to say that I can remember a former experience – the very dimension of inner time-consciousness with its threefold structure of protention-primal impression-retention, the very field of experiencing that allows for presence and absence, cannot itself become past and absent *for me*.

It was reflections like these that eventually made Husserl distinguish three different layers of temporality: the objective time of the appearing objects, the subjective, immanent or pre-empirical time of the acts, sensa, and appearances, and the absolute, pre-phenomenal flow of time-constituting consciousness (Hua X, 73, 76, 358). But how should one understand Husserl’s distinction between the subjective time and the absolute flow? As will become clear in a moment, the precise relation between the two has been a matter of controversy.

As far as I can judge, in order to make full sense of Husserl’s distinction, one must relate it to his analysis of the relation between *reflective* and *pre-reflective* self-awareness, that is, to the relation between the kind of self-awareness that comes about as a result of an explicit, thematic, objectifying reflection, and the kind of implicit self-awareness which characterizes all of our experiences and is a condition of the possibility for reflective self-awareness.

II. SELF-AWARENESS

According to Husserl, to be a subject is to exist for-itself, that is, to be self-aware. Thus, rather than being something that only occurs during exceptional circumstances, that is, whenever we pay attention to our

conscious life, self-awareness is a feature characterizing subjectivity as such, no matter what worldly entities it might otherwise be conscious of or occupied with. In Husserl's words:

To be a subject is to be in the mode of being aware of oneself (Hua XIV, 151).

An absolute existent is existent in the form of an intentional life—which, no matter what else it may be intrinsically conscious of, is, at the same time, consciousness of itself. Precisely for that reason (as we can see when we consider more profoundly) it has at all times an essential ability to *reflect* on itself, on all its structures that stand out for it—an essential ability to make itself thematic and produce judgments, and evidences, relating to itself (Hua XVII, 279–280 [transl. modified]).

[E]very experience is 'consciousness,' and consciousness is consciousness *of*. . . But every experience is *itself experienced* [*erlebt*], and *to that extent* also 'conscious' [*bewußt*] (Hua X, 291 [transl. modified]).

For the latter [the life of consciousness] is not only a lived-experiencing continually streaming along; at the same time, as it streams along it is also immediately the consciousness of this streaming. This consciousness is self-perceiving, although it is a thematically executed awareness on the part of the ego only in exceptional circumstances. Belonging to the latter is a reflection that is possible at any time. This perceiving that presents all lived-experiencing to consciousness is the so-called inner consciousness or inner perceiving (Hua XI, 320).

In the last quote, Husserl speaks alternately of tacit self-awareness as both an inner perceiving and as an inner consciousness. The later Husserl increasingly opted for the latter expression and much misunderstanding might have been avoided if he had always distinguished as clearly between the two as he did in *Ideen II*, where he equated "inner perception" with reflection, and "inner consciousness" with a non-thematic kind of self-awareness that precedes reflection (Hua IV, 118).²

When Husserl claims that subjectivity is per se self-aware, he is not advocating a strong Cartesian thesis concerning total and infallible self-transparency, but simply calling attention to the intimate link between experiential phenomena and first-personal givenness. In his view, the subjective or first-personal givenness of the experience is not simply a quality added to the experience, a mere varnish as it were. On the contrary, it is something that essentially characterizes experiential life. It is something the experiences cannot lack without ceasing to be experiences. It constitutes – to use a Sartrean expression – the very mode of being of the experience. In contrast to physical objects, which can exist regardless of whether or not they *de facto* appear for a subject, experiences are

essentially characterized by their subjective givenness, by the fact that there is a subjective “feel” to them. To undergo an experience necessarily means that there is something “it is like” for the subject to have that experience.³

On Husserl’s account, an act of reflection is a *founded* form of self-awareness in the sense that it relies upon a prior, tacit form of self-awareness. To utilize a terminological distinction between perceiving (*Wahrnehmen*) and experiencing (*Erleben*) dating back to the *Logische Untersuchungen*: Prior to reflection one perceives the intentional object, but one experiences [*erlebt*] the intentional act. Although I am not intentionally directed at the act (this only happens in the subsequent reflection, where the act is thematized), it is not unconscious but conscious (Hua III, 162, 168, 251, 349, IX, 29), that is, given in an implicit and pre-reflective manner (Hua IV, 118). Indeed, reflection is often taken to be a thematic, articulated, and intensified self-awareness, initiated in order to bring the primary intentional act into focus. However, in order to explain the occurrence of reflection it is necessary that that which is to be disclosed and thematized is (unthematically) present, otherwise there would be nothing to motivate and call forth the act of reflection. As Husserl points out, it is in the nature of reflection to grasp something which was already given prior to the grasping. Reflection is characterized by disclosing, not by producing its theme:

When I say “I,” I grasp myself in a simple reflection. But this self-experience [*Selbsterfahrung*] is like every experience [*Erfahrung*], and, in particular, every perception a mere directing myself towards something that was already there for me, that was already conscious, but not thematically experienced, nor noticed (Hua XV, 492–493).

Whenever I reflect, I find myself “in relation to” something as affected or active. That to which I am related is experientially conscious, it is already there for me as a ‘lived-experience’ in order for me to be able to relate myself to it (Hua Mat VII, 196).

In short, reflection is not an act *sui generis*, it does not appear out of nowhere, but presupposes, like all intentional activity, a *motivation*. According to Husserl, to be motivated is to be *affected* by something, and then to respond to it (Hua IV, 217). I can thematize myself because I am already passively self-aware, I can grasp myself because I am already affected by myself (Hua VI, 111, XV, 78, 120).

When I start reflecting, that which motivates the reflection, and which is then grasped, has already been going on for a while. The reflected experience did not commence the moment I started paying attention to it, and it is not only given as still existing, but also and primarily as having already been. It is the *same* act which is now given reflectively, given to me as enduring in time, that is, as a temporal act (Hua III, 95, 162–164). When reflection sets in, it initially grasps something that has just elapsed, namely, the motivating phase of the act reflected upon. The reason why this phase can still be thematized by the subsequent reflection is that it does not disappear, but is retained in the *retention*, for which reason Husserl can claim that retention is a condition of the possibility for reflection. It is, as he writes, due to the retention that consciousness can be made into an object (Hua X, 119). In other words, reflection can only take place if a *temporal horizon* has been established.

This brings us back to the issue of temporality. In order to understand Husserl's investigation of inner time-consciousness it is indeed crucial not to overlook that his analysis is supposed to serve a double purpose. It is meant to explain not only how we can be aware of objects with temporal extension, but also how we can be aware of our own stream of experiences. To put it differently, Husserl's investigation is not only meant to explain how we can be aware of temporally extended units, but also how consciousness itself is temporally unified. Indeed, as Husserl wrote in the beginning of *Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein*, consciousness exists, it exists as a stream, and it appears to itself as a stream. The enduring question is how the stream of consciousness is capable of being conscious of itself; how it is possible and comprehensible that the very being of the stream is a form of self-consciousness (Hua XXXIII, 44, 46)?

III. THE INTERNAL OBJECT ACCOUNT

One possibility is to employ the previously mentioned distinction between three levels of temporality. Level one would be the region of transcendent temporal objects such as trains, houses, and symphonies. Level two would be the region of experiences (*Erlebnisse*), and would include the intentional acts aimed at the objects on level one, and also the different immanent sensory contents. Level three would be the experiencing

(*Erleben*) of the unities on level two. Just as we must distinguish between the constituted transcendent objects and the constituting dimension that permits them to appear, we must distinguish between the constituted acts and the constituting dimension that permits them to appear. The acts are temporal objects existing in subjective or immanent time, but they are constituted by a deeper dimension of subjectivity, namely, by inner time-consciousness. Thus, according to what might be termed the *internal object* interpretation, inner time-consciousness makes us aware of the acts or *Erlebnisse* as temporal *objects* in subjective time.⁴ This view has been the reigning interpretation for a while, but I find it quite problematic.

In the *Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein* (originally written in 1917–1918) one can indeed find texts wherein Husserl defends such a view. In text number six, for instance, which carries the title “Acts as objects in the ‘phenomenological time’,” Husserl argued that one should distinguish between the perception of a tone, on the one hand, and the original or inner consciousness in which the perception is constituted as a temporal unity on the other. Every perception is what Husserl called an act-object (*Aktgegenständlichkeit*). Every perception is itself something that is constituted as an object in original time-consciousness (Hua XXXIII, 107–109). Similar statements can be found elsewhere in the volume. In text number seven, Husserl wrote that it is a necessary fact that every experience in the course of streaming life is constituted as an immanent temporal object (Hua XXXIII, 128). In text number eighteen, he wrote that every concrete experience is a unity of becoming and is constituted as an object in inner consciousness. Experiences are, in fact, simply objects in inner consciousness; objects in which further objects are constituted (Hua XXXIII, 318).

One way to understand Husserl’s assertion is to see it as amounting to an endorsement of a view also found in Brentano’s *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* according to which an act is conscious not by being taken as an object by a further act, but by taking itself as object. Thus, every conscious experience has a double object, a primary and a secondary. In the case of the hearing of the hum of a refrigerator, the primary and thematic object is the hum; the secondary and unthematic object is the hearing. The focus of attention is on the primary object, and our consciousness of the act itself is normally secondary and incidental.⁵ That

Husserl might have been tempted by such a model is clearly expressed in the following passage:

Consciousness is not merely object-consciousness, consciousness of its 'primary' object, but also 'inner' consciousness, consciousness of itself and its intentional process. Next to its primary objects, it has its 'secondary' objects (Hua XXXIII, 42).

In my view, however, this view is fundamentally mistaken. Before I proceed to show that Husserl also defended an alternative and more convincing account, let me briefly outline why I believe the *internal object* to be wrong.

It is relatively, but not completely, uncontroversial to concede that we, under certain circumstances, are aware of our own experiences as immanent objects, namely, whenever we reflect. If I reflect on my current perception of my laptop and reflectively try to discern and articulate the different structures of this perception, I do seem to be confronted with a rather peculiar immanent object. In the *Bernau Manuscripts*, Husserl called these objects of reflection "noetic objects" (Hua XXXIII, 449). The crucial question, however, is whether our experiences are also given as *objects* in inner time-consciousness prior to reflection. Is their primary givenness a form of object-manifestation? This is what the *internal object* account claims, but is it true? Not only do I think it is wrong from a purely descriptive point of view – in my everyday life, I am absorbed by and preoccupied with projects and objects in the world, I am not aware of my own stream of consciousness as a succession of immanent *objects* – but I also think that such a view is theoretically misleading.

The central question is obviously whether it is appropriate to interpret the way in which the experience is conscious as a form of object-consciousness. Is the experience originally given to us as an object? In some places, Husserl suggests that such a view would lead to an infinite regress:

Every act is consciousness of something, but there is also consciousness of every act. Every act is "sensed," is immanently "perceived" (inner consciousness), although naturally not posited, meant (to perceive here does not mean to grasp something and to be turned towards it in an act of meaning). [...] To be sure, this seems to lead back to an infinite regress. For is not the inner consciousness, the perceiving of the act (of judging, of perceiving something external, of rejoicing, and so forth), again an act and therefore itself something internally perceived, and so on? On the contrary, we must say:

Every “experience” in the strict sense is internally perceived. But the inner perceiving is not an “experience” in the same sense. It is not itself again internally perceived (Hua X, 126–127 [Translation slightly altered]).

In this quote from *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* Husserl is obviously denying that inner consciousness amounts to an ordinary form of object-intentionality. If we for a moment return to one of Husserl’s earlier writings, namely, *Logische Untersuchungen*, we will encounter a similar view. As Husserl writes in the 1st Investigation: sensations are originally simply lived through (*erlebt*) as moments of the experience; they are not objectified or taken as objects. This only happens in a subsequent psychological reflection (Hua XIX, 80). This assertion is then followed up in the 2nd Investigation, where Husserl writes:

That an appropriate train of sensations or images is *experienced*, and is in this sense conscious, does not and cannot mean that this is the *object* of an act of consciousness, in the sense that a perception, a presentation or a judgment is directed upon it (Hua XIX, 165).

Obviously, the central word is the term “conscious”. For Husserl the sensations are conscious, that is, experientially given, when they are lived through and, as he makes clear, this givenness does not come about as the result of an objectification or because the sensations are taken as objects by an (inner) perception. The sensations are given, not as objects, but precisely as subjective experiences. The very same line of thought can be found in the 5th Investigation. There Husserl writes that the intentional experiences themselves are lived through, but he denies that they appear in an objectified manner; they are neither seen nor heard. They are conscious without being intentional objects (Hua XIX, 395, 399). This is not to deny that we can, in fact, direct our attention towards our experiences and thereby take them as objects (Hua XIX, 424), but this only occurs the moment we reflect upon them. As he explicitly stated in the 6th Investigation: “Experiential being is not object being [Erlebtsein ist nicht Gegenständlichsein]” (Hua XIX, 669).

This is also the result that Husserl reached in his 1906/1907 lecture course *Einleitung in die Logik und Erkenntnistheorie*. He began by observing that we are aware of the perceptual object when we are engaged in a perception. But what about the sensations and the perceptual experience itself? They are also conscious, but are not given as perceptual

objects; they are not perceived. What does it mean to be conscious, if not perceptually given (Hua XXIV, 242)? Obviously, the experiential components do not form part of the objective background of the perceptual object. The perceptual object, say a house, is always situated in a perceptual field. The house is located right in the middle of a multitude of other objects, and obviously the perceptual experience itself is not to be found among these objects, as if it was located a few centimeters to the left of the wall. As Husserl then continues,

One should not mistake the consciousness of the objective background [gegenständlichen Hintergrund] and consciousness understood in the sense of experiential being [Erlebtseins]. Lived-experiences [Erlebnisse] as such, do have their own being, but they are not objects of apperception (in this case we would end in an infinite regress). The background, however, is given to us objectively; it is constituted through a complex of apperceptive lived-experiences. We do not pay attention to these objects [...], but they are still given to us in a quite different manner than the mere lived-experiences themselves [...]. The attentional consciousness of the background and consciousness in the sense of mere experiential givenness must be completely distinguished (Hua XXIV, 252).

We know that we can turn our attention away from the perceptual object and towards the perceptual experience. In this sense, it is possible to reflect upon the experience. To repeat the question, how is the perceptual experience given prior to reflection; how is it pre-reflectively present (Hua XXIV, 244)? In 1906/1907 Husserl answered the question by distinguishing between consciousness in the sense of experiential being and consciousness in the sense of intentionality. Whereas the latter involves directedness towards an object, i.e., object-consciousness, the former does not. As Husserl explicitly wrote: “‘experiencing’ does not mean the having of an object [Gegenständlich-Haben], nor to be ‘related’ to the object in this or that way and to take a position to it in this or that way and whatnot” (Hua XXIV, 247).

The attempt to model pre-reflective self-consciousness on marginal object-consciousness by suggesting that our pre-reflective experiences remain in the background as potential themes in precisely the same way as, say, the hum of the refrigerator, might be tempting, but is ultimately misleading since it remains stuck in the subject-object model. It remains committed to the idea that our experiential life must either be given as an object or not be given at all and lets the only allowed variable be whether

the object is given thematically or only marginally. This line of thought is flawed, however, since it erroneously assumes that there is only one type of givenness or manifestation, that of object-givenness. Had that, in fact, been the case, self-awareness *sensu stricto* (understood as an awareness of oneself as subject) would have been impossible.

It is true, of course, that the plausibility of the claim that self-awareness and awareness of something as an object are mutually exclusive modes of awareness to a large extent depends on what we mean by "object". In order to understand the phenomenological point of view it is at this point crucial not to conflate issues of ontology with issues of phenomenology. The claim is not that the object of experience must always differ ontologically from the subject of experience, as if the subject and the object of experience must necessarily be two different entities. Rather, the claim is simply that the experience itself is not pre-reflectively *experienced* as an object. On this understanding, for something to be an object is for that something to consciously *appear* in a specific manner. More specifically, for x to be considered an object is for x to appear as transcending the subjective consciousness that takes it as an object. It is to appear as something that stands in opposition to or over against the subjective experience of it (cf. the German term *Gegen-stand*). When we are absorbed or immersed in our daily concerns and simply live through the experiences, they are not given as objects, they are not something we observe from a distance and they do not stand opposite us. This, however, is precisely what can happen when we reflect. In reflection, we can place ourselves in contrast to a part of our own experiential life. We can distance ourselves from an experience and seize it as an object. If I reflect upon my present perception, it is given as that which remains identical across the respective differences of pre-reflective and reflective givenness, i.e., it is given as the *same* as what was previously experienced unthematically. But whereas we in reflection are confronted with a situation involving two experiences, where one (the reflected upon) can appear as an object for the other (the reflecting), we are on the pre-reflective level only dealing with a single experience, and one experience cannot appear as an object to itself, cannot be experienced as transcending itself, cannot stand opposed to itself, in the requisite way.

An additional argument (found already in several of the post-Kantian German philosophers) for why an experience cannot pre-reflectively be

given as an object, if, that is, the experience in question is to be considered *my* experience, was more recently revived by Shoemaker. He has argued that it is impossible to account for first-personal self-reference in terms of a successful object-identification. In order to identify something as oneself one obviously has to hold something true of it that one already knows to be true of oneself. This self-knowledge might in some cases be grounded in some further identification, but the supposition that *every* item of self-knowledge rests on identification leads to an infinite regress.⁶ This holds even for self-identification obtained through introspection. That is, it will not do to claim that introspection is distinguished by the fact that its object has a property which immediately identifies it as being me, and which no other self could possibly have, namely, the property of being the private and exclusive object of exactly my introspection. This explanation will not do because I will be unable to identify an introspected self as myself by the fact that it is introspectively observed by me, unless I know it is the object of *my* introspection, i.e., unless I know that it is in fact *me* who undertakes this introspection, and this knowledge cannot itself be based on identification, on pain of infinite regress.⁷

Is there any alternative? The obvious solution is to accept that we are aware of our own experiences in an immediate, pre-reflective, and non-objectifying manner. Prior to reflection, experiential states do present themselves, but not as objects. Metaphorically speaking, experiential states are characterized by a certain self-luminosity; they are self-intimating or self-presenting. Thus, the first-personal givenness of experience should not be taken as the result of a higher-order representation, reflection, internal monitoring or introspection, but rather should be treated as an *intrinsic feature* of experience. It is precisely because consciousness is characterized by such a non-objectifying self-awareness that it is possible to avoid an infinite regress:

The flow of the consciousness that constitutes immanent time not only *exists* but is so remarkably and yet intelligibly fashioned that a self-appearance of the flow necessarily exists in it, and therefore the flow itself must necessarily be apprehensible in the flowing. The self-appearance of the flow does not require a second flow; on the contrary, it constitutes itself as a phenomenon in itself (Hua X, 83).

To sum up, I do not think the account offered by Husserl in the *Bernau Manuscripts* is systematically satisfactory.⁸ However, as I

have already indicated, I also believe that it is a view that Husserl himself, for the most part, rejected. This is so not only in *Logische Untersuchungen* and *Einleitung in die Logik und Erkenntnistheorie*, but also in *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*. Let me end by proposing an alternative interpretation of Husserl's account of inner time-consciousness that explicitly links it to the notion of pre-reflective self-awareness

IV. INNER CONSCIOUSNESS AND INNER TIME-CONSCIOUSNESS

To speak phenomenologically of the temporality of consciousness is to speak of the temporal givenness of consciousness. To speak of the temporal givenness of consciousness is to speak of its temporal self-givenness. To suggest otherwise is to reify consciousness. Why speak of *self-givenness*? Because whereas in the case of the givenness of an object, we have to distinguish the object that is given and the subject to whom it is given, this distinction is no longer appropriate when it comes to the givenness of our experience. The experience is given in and through and for *itself*. What this means, however, is that it would be a mistake to conceive of the relation between inner time-consciousness and the intentional experience as if it were an objectifying relation between two distinct dimensions of consciousness. When Husserl claimed that the experience is constituted in inner time-consciousness, he was not saying that the experience is brought to givenness by some other part of subjectivity, as if one part took the other as its object. Rather, to say that an experience is constituted in inner time-consciousness means that it is brought to awareness by its own means. It is called *inner* time-consciousness because it belongs *intrinsically* to the *innermost* structure of the experience itself. On this reading, the stream of consciousness is not illuminated by a separate spotlight, rather the stream is self-luminous. To put it differently, when Husserl discusses *inner consciousness* and when he discusses *inner time-consciousness* he is not discussing two different issues. Rather Husserl's investigation of the structure of inner time-consciousness (protention-primal impression-retention) must be seen as an investigation of the (micro)structure of inner consciousness. Indeed, Husserl's investigation of inner time-consciousness must precisely be appreciated as a profound

contribution to an understanding of pre-reflective self-manifestation of our experiences.

Where does the interpretation I am offering stand in regard to the distinction between three different layers or levels of temporality: The objective time of the appearing objects, the subjective, immanent or pre-empirical time of the acts and experiences, and finally the absolute pre-phenomenal flow of inner time-constituting consciousness (Hua X, 73, 76, 358)? It accepts the tripartition, but simply denies that the acts are given sequentially as temporal objects prior to reflection and recollection. In short, I am certainly not denying that there is a crucial difference between analysing consciousness in terms of different intentional acts, such as acts of perception, judgment, imagination, etc., and analysing consciousness in terms of the structure of inner time-consciousness. If we take three different experiences, say, a visual perception of a bird, an anticipation of a forthcoming holiday, and a rejection of the claim that Earth is the largest planet in our solar system, these three experiences obviously have different intentional structures. But the self-manifestation of the three experiences does not have a different structure in each case. On the contrary, we are faced with the same basic structure of inner time-consciousness. If that is the case, however, we do need to distinguish the experience and its self-manifestation. Whereas we live through a number of different experiences that arise, endure, and become past, the structure of protention-primal impression-retention might be considered an invariant field of presencing, or even better as an unchanging field of presencing (primal impression) and absencing (retention-protention).⁹ To use a striking image from James, the latter stands permanent like a rainbow on a waterfall, its own quality unchanged by the events that stream through it.¹⁰ Simply to collapse these different levels into one involves an oversimplification that is detrimental to a correct understanding of consciousness. As Husserl wrote in a manuscript dating from the fall of 1930:

This streaming living Presence is not what we elsewhere have designated transcendental-phenomenologically as stream of consciousness or a stream of lived-experience. It cannot be depicted as a "stream" in the sense of a special temporal (or even spatio-temporal) whole that has a continuous-successive individual being consisting in the unity of a temporal extension (individuated by this temporal form in its distinguishable stretches and phases). The streaming living Presence is "continuous" streaming-being, and yet it is

not a separated-being, not a spatio-temporal (world-spatial) being, not an “immanent-temporal” extended being; not a separation [Außereinander] that implies a succession [Nacheinander], a succession in the sense of a punctual-separation taking place in time properly so called (Hua XXXIV, 187).

In other words, it is highly appropriate to distinguish the singularity of the *lebendige Gegenwart* from the plurality of changing experiences. And of course, to claim that the two levels can be distinguished is not to claim that they can be separated or dissociated. We are not dealing with a pure or empty field of presencing-absencing upon which the concrete experiences subsequently make their entry. Inner time-consciousness has no self-manifestation of its own, but *is* the very non-objectifying, pre-reflective self-manifestation of the experiences. Incidentally, this should also make it clear why one must reject a claim made by Husserl in the *Bernau Manuscripts* according to which the truly constituting foundation is made up by inner time-consciousness, whereas the intentional experience is not itself constituting in the full sense of the term (Hua XXXIII, 108–109). This view must be rejected since it mistakenly posits inner time-consciousness as an independent constitutive dimension, rather than seeing it as a core feature of the experience.¹¹ This is presumably also why Husserl at several places in *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* wrote that perceptual consciousness rather than being a constituted temporally unity is a moment of the time-constituting absolute flow (Hua X, 75–76, 333–334). It is only due to a special apprehension, namely, when we thematize the acts, that they are constituted as enduring objects in subjective time. As Husserl also writes, our experiences appear in subjective time with duration and temporal location *qua objects of reflection* (Hua X, 285, Hua XIV, 29). Prior to reflection there is no awareness of internal objects and there is no distinction between the pre-reflective givenness of the experiences and inner time-consciousness, since the latter is simply a new term for the former.

Furthermore, it also makes good sense to preserve the difference between level 1 and 2. Pre-reflectively the stream of consciousness is given to us as a flowing unity. Originally, consciousness does not appear to itself chopped up into bits. As Husserl writes, “consciousness is a unity. An act is nothing on its own, it is a wave in the stream of consciousness” (Ms. L I 15 2b. cf. Hua XXIX, 194).¹² The relation between two consecutive experiences must rather be likened to the relation between

two waves in the same stream than to two wagons in the same train. Whereas the duration of lunar eclipse can be measured with the time of the clock, it is quite doubtful – as many phenomenologists have pointed out – whether this form of temporality does justice to lived time. To mention just one simple example: Think of the way in which the experience of time (for instance the interplay between the three different temporal dimensions) is differently articulated in such diverse states as hope, anxiety, insomnia and boredom. Think of the way in which the “same” 30 min can be experienced differently depending on whether you are anxious, bored, or captivated. This is not to say that a stop clock cannot measure something, but the question is what precisely it is that is being measured. It is certainly possible to transform our experiences into mental objects and to posit or inject them into the clock time. But is this serial time a form of temporality that is native to the experiences in question or is it rather derivative, i.e., the result of a subsequent objectification?

V. CONCLUSION

In Heidegger’s lecture course *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* from 1925, Heidegger writes that Husserl operated with a too narrow concept of Being. Due to his exclusive interest in intentionality, Husserl identified the Being of consciousness with the Being of objects, and consequently failed to uncover the unique mode of Being characterizing intentional subjectivity itself. Heidegger ultimately argues that a more radical phenomenology is called for. This phenomenology has to return to the original givenness of subjectivity, and should not merely consider it, as Husserl did, insofar as it is a (potential) *object* of reflection.¹³ This is an objection that has been repeated frequently by Heideggerians ever since. The persisting claim has been that Husserl despite his recurring emphasis on the cardinal difference between reality and consciousness never really understood that this difference amounts to an ontological difference, a difference in Being; rather he consistently took consciousness to be a region that could be objectively determined and failed to realize that its mode of Being differs radically from the mode of Being of worldly entities. Indeed the problem with Husserl’s transcendental methodology is that it remains too narrowly focused on the givenness of objects.¹⁴

As I have tried to show, this criticism doesn't do Husserl justice. In *Ideen I*, Husserl confined himself to an analysis of the relation between constituted objects and constituting consciousness. He accounted for the way in which the givenness of objects are conditioned by subjectivity, yet apart from stressing that experiences are not given in the same (perspectival) manner as objects, he did not pursue the question concerning the givenness of subjectivity itself any further. As Husserl himself was quite aware, however, such a silence was *phenomenologically* unacceptable, and he explicitly admitted that he thereby left out the most important and fundamental problems, namely, those pertaining to *time-consciousness* (Hua III, 182). To put it differently, any serious attempt to gauge the radicality of the Husserlian enterprise must necessarily discuss Husserl's writings on the deepest layers of constitution. In particular, it must discuss his writings on time, since it is these writings that contain Husserl's most extended analyses of the non-objectifying mode of Being of consciousness.

NOTES

1. John B. Brough: *Husserl's Phenomenology of Time-Consciousness*. In: *Husserl's Phenomenology: A Textbook*. Ed. by J.N. Mohanty and W.R. McKenna, Washington, 1989, 276.
2. Husserl's use of the term "inner consciousness" is clearly indebted to Brentano's discussion in *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, though I would argue that Husserl's construal of inner consciousness ultimately differs significantly from Brentano's.
3. See Thomas Nagel: *What is it like to be a bat?* In: *The Philosophical Review*, 83 (1974), 436.
4. This interpretation has been advocated by Brough (John B. Brough: *The Emergence of an Absolute Consciousness in Husserl's Early Writings on Time-Consciousness*. In: *Man and World* 5 (1972), 308–309) and Sokolowski (Robert Sokolowski: *Husserlian Meditations*. Evanston 1974, 156–157). For an extensive discussion and criticism, Dan Zahavi: *Self-awareness and Alterity: A phenomenological investigation*. Evanston, 1999.
5. Franz Brentano: *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt I*. Hamburg 1973, 179–180.
6. Sidney Shoemaker: *Self-reference and Self-awareness*. In: *The Journal of Philosophy* LXV (1968), 561.
7. Sidney Shoemaker: *Self-reference and Self-awareness*. In: *The Journal of Philosophy* LXV (1968), 562–563.
8. Perhaps it could be argued that in text number six (and elsewhere) Husserl was simply playing with certain ideas in an attempt to see where they would lead him. If this charitable interpretation is correct, which it very well could be, one might wonder whether the text really deserved to be published. For a more extensive discussion of the *Bernau Manuscripts*, cf. Dan Zahavi: *Time and Consciousness in the Bernau Manuscripts*. In: *Husserl Studies* 20/2, 2004, 99–118.
9. Fink spoke of retention and protention in terms of an "Entgegenwärtigung" (Eugen Fink: *Studien zur Phänomenologie 1930–1939*. Den Haag 1966, 22).
10. William James: *The Principles of Psychology I*. London, 1890, 630.

11. Another reason for rejecting the claim is that it by mistakenly severing inner (time-)consciousness from intentionality (rather than seeing them as interdependent) sets the stage for a quite problematic understanding of the nature of transcendental subjectivity. But as Husserl himself were to write in *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*, taken on its own inner time-consciousness is a pure but *abstract* form. And he further characterized the phenomenology of inner time-consciousness as an abstractive analysis which has to be complemented by a phenomenology of *association* dealing with the fundamental laws and forms governing the syntheses pertaining to the *content* (Hua XI, 118, 128, Hua I, 28). To put it differently, *in concreto* there can be no inner time-consciousness, no pre-reflective self-awareness, without a temporal content. Time-consciousness never appears in pure form, but always as a pervasive *sensibility*, as the very sensing of the sensations: "We regard sensing as the original consciousness of time" (Hua X, 107). Basically, this is the reason why Husserl would eventually insist upon the *inseparability* between *Quer-* and *Längsintentionalität*: "Consequently, *two* inseparably united *intentionalities*, requiring one another like two sides of one and the same thing, are interwoven with each other in the one, unique flow of consciousness" (Hua X, 83. Cf. Hua XI, 138).
12. "Bewußtsein ist eine Einheit. Ein Akt ist nichts für sich, er ist Welle im Bewußtseinsstrom." I am grateful to the previous Director of the Husserl-Archives in Leuven, Prof. Dr. Rudolf Bernet, for permitting me to consult and quote from Husserl's unpublished manuscripts.
13. Martin Heidegger: *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*. Frankfurt am Main, 1979, 143, 152.
14. Jean-Luc Marion, *Reduction et donation: recherches sur Husserl, Heidegger et la phenomenologie*. Paris, 1989, 77, 187–188, 304.