

## **Husserl and Freud: Time, memory and the unconscious**

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### **1. Husserl and Freud – Historical influences on their respective theories of the unconscious**

The work of Husserl and Freud had common sources in the philosophy, psychology and physiology of the nineteenth century. Herbart, Brentano, Helmholtz, Fechner, Wundt and Mach were among the towering figures in their common background who had influence on their respective work.<sup>1</sup> Although contemporaries who had little concern for the other's professional interest, Husserl and Freud nevertheless struggled with some common problems. One of these is the relationship of sensation to memory and to the experience of time. The concepts of sensation, memory and time were, in fact, artifacts which the empirical methods of nerve-physiology, the psychophysical testing of sensory thresholds, as well as the metaphysics and positivism of the late nineteenth century had left them.

In what follows, I will compare Husserl's and Freud's theoretical accounts of memory and "the unconscious" as they were developed from these common artifacts.<sup>2</sup> I hope thereby to show that some contemporary readings, especially by Derrida and Bernet, have unfairly given emphasis to the Freudian "trace" theory. By using only selective texts of Husserl, they have overlooked the full implications of Husserl's conception of the relationship between "retention" and the "unconscious," particularly as he developed it in later stages of his thought. I will only comment on Derrida's and Bernet's positions, however, insofar as they have bearing to the present topic. The aim of the present essay is to discuss certain untranslated and neglected texts of Husserl, the *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*, in terms of their significance for a phenomenological theory of the unconscious.<sup>3</sup>

It is to be recalled that Freud, following Breuer, had developed two separate systems to explain the relationship of sensation to consciousness and the trace that it evokes in the perception of an object. Sense-perception must be able to receive continually new excitations without retaining any

qualities which would impede further perception. A mnemonic system, on the other hand, must have the capacity to become “permanently altered” by the occasion of a single stimulus. Freud felt that these functions, although interrelated, must be mutually exclusive and he posited two different kinds of neurones in his “Project” (1895), and his letters to Fliess at the time. He introduced a third kind of neurone for (1), the becoming conscious of the perceptions as combined sensations and memory traces, and (2), the becoming conscious of the memories in their own right. The receptive neurones do not have “any direct connection” with the conscious “perceptual processes.” Any received stimulus must first pass through the mnemonic sector before becoming “discharged,” (not unlike a reflex arc), in the conscious processes. These originally neurological distinctions were nevertheless retained in his metapsychology as three separate systems of the “mental apparatus” in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), and in his later “Note of the Mystic Writing Pad” (1925). He felt that the receptive and mnemonic systems must exclude each other in order to function in an unimpeded manner.

In Freud’s account, the sensation is initially presented to a receptive sensing system and then, to a separate mnemonic system as a permanent unconscious trace. The entire process at first eludes consciousness altogether. The consciousness of the perception, therefore, is *nachträglich*, subsequent, belated. It is the result of delay and deferral to what the sensation awoke associatively in the unconscious mnemonic system. It is for this reason that Derrida writes about Freud’s theory, “everything begins with reproduction.”<sup>4</sup> Derrida, in his appropriation of the Freudian theory, concludes that “the concept of trace (*Spur*), of facilitation (*Bahnung*), of forces of facilitation are, as early as the conception of the *Entwurf* (the 1895 Project), inseparable from the concept of difference .... There is no facilitation without difference and no difference without a trace.”<sup>5</sup>

I will not elaborate on the Freudian unconscious here. Much has been written about the Freudian theory as it developed from a neurological model.<sup>6</sup> Nor will I pursue Derrida’s appropriation of it as “radical alterity.” For our present purposes, it is enough to present a rough outline of the Freudian theory in order to contrast it with the Husserlian account.

The unconscious had been a fashionable topic in the nineteenth century. This was not only due to the metaphysics of a Schelling, a Schopenhauer, a Carus, or a von Hartmann. It was also present in the rationalist psychology of Herbart as the successor to Kant’s chair at Königsberg. In addition, there were the attempts, later in the century, to establish an empirical physiological psychology of “unconscious inference” in perception by von Helmholtz and Wundt.<sup>7</sup> The unconscious was a part of the *Zeitgeist* and, no doubt, a hotly debated topic in both Freud’s and Husserl’s student days.

In contrast to Freud's account, Husserl, as we shall see, allows for both the sensing and retentive functions to occur in consciousness. They do so without impeding each other in that the retention becomes, or is rather replaced by what Husserl calls the "empty presentation" (*Leervorstellung*). The retention, then, vanishes into the "night" of the "unconscious." It is unchanged in content, nor does it lose its potential "affective force" when "reawoken" in an act of recollection. The recollective act intuitively reproduces the retention in a new present which itself runs off as retention, depositing a new layer of "sedimentation" in the unconscious. By means of the concept of "empty presentation," Husserl, as will be shown below, is able to keep separate the related functions of retention, the apperception of present objects which is based on the passing retentions, and the recollection of past objects or events as they emerge from the unconscious.

Many authors, who compare Freud's and Husserl's work, concede that Husserl brought to articulation and phenomenologically expanded those areas of mental life which Freud called the "conscious" and "preconscious" in his own concepts of thematic and pre-thematic, or marginal consciousness, i.e. what is *able* to become conscious in a further act of thematizing, or recollection.<sup>8</sup> It is not frequently acknowledged, however, that Husserl himself directly approaches the problems of the unconscious, and even repression with respect to 'dynamic' forces, during various stages of his thought.<sup>9</sup>

In what follows, I will treat Husserl's approach to the unconscious in terms of only one phase in the development of his thought on the problem. During the latter part of his years as Ordinarius at Freiburg, Husserl approaches the problem of the unconscious in terms of a phenomenological analysis of memory and association in a lecture course entitled "Association." This was held during the Winter Semester of 1926. It will become apparent that Husserl has an alternative account of repression (for Husserl, *Deckung*, or *Verdrängung*). He has a concept very near to Freud's own "screen memory" (*Deckerinnerung*) in his account of the "illusory image" (*Scheinbild*), a conglomerate image of a past which has never itself really occurred.<sup>10</sup> The issues of trace, perceptual presence, delay or deferral (*Nachträglichkeit*, Freud, Derrida), and temporality as "spacing" will be reexamined in the light of Husserl's findings. Finally, I will attempt to reply to Bernet's objection that "Husserl's theory of the retention of the present ultimately makes incomprehensible how one can at all forget a past present."<sup>11</sup> It will be shown that Husserl presents viable accounts not only for remembering, but for forgetting as well.

## 2. Two kinds of association: The need for a “deeper,” more radical reduction beneath “time”

Husserl raises two fundamental questions in the phenomenological investigation of memory: (1) how is an individual specific recollection possible over against a background of indefinitely many possible memories? (i.e. how is memory possible?) (2) How does an impressional present pass from the present and its living retention over into the “realm of the forgotten”? (i.e. how is forgetting possible?) (Hua XI, 123).

The problems of how memory and forgetting are possible have been addressed by Freud’s neurological model. Freud ascribes the perceptual and mnemonic functions to separate, mutually exclusive systems. Husserl, however, sees the questions of remembering and forgetting as related, as two sides of the same problem: how does something pass from awareness into the background and finally become completely unconscious (i.e. forgetting); and then, how does it again become conscious in a recollection from its unconscious state over against this same “background of the past” (i.e. remembering)? Only by addressing the transcendental conditions of forgetting and remembering can Husserl hope to answer the larger issue of how it is possible that subjectivity is able to become conscious of “having” a past. “The pure egoic consciousness has an endless field of past experiences or mental processes as that which it has behind itself.” This field of past experiences is behind the pure ego as “a unity of past life in the form of time as one unity ... which is to be reawoken (through remembering) in its being a self (*Selbstsein*).” Husserl writes: “It is actually a question of the fundamental problem of explaining the basic-essential laws of subjectivity itself.” (Hua XI, 124 f.).

Husserl states that the phenomenon of association is at the root of remembering. At first, his account of associative memory begins fairly simply. An impressional content or presentation in the present, “A,” recalls by association from the past a similar content “B.” Most cases, however, are far more complicated. Husserl gives the following example. He describes having a conversation with an acquaintance when suddenly he is distracted by the memory of a beautiful lake-side landscape. This scene seems to emerge on its own, coming out of nowhere. Husserl senses, however, that it has somehow emerged from the present conversation. In a subsequent reflection, he discovers that a certain turn of phrase used by his acquaintance triggered a recollection of a similar turn of phrase uttered at a conference the previous summer. This conference was held near the beautiful scene of the lake-side seashore which now occurs to him. In the recollection of its attractiveness, he is momentarily distracted from listening.

This phenomenon can be described in the following manner: a certain

term “A,” here the turn of phrase in the present conversation, can elicit a certain train of associations by similarity, which can be called “B1, B2 ... Bn.” These could be, for example, the prior similar turn of phrase, the person who spoke at the time, the building of the conference, and so on, ad infinitum, until the final term, “C,” the beautiful sea landscape which is so striking in itself that it momentarily diverts the interest of the conscious focus. “The end term (*Endglied*) gives itself to us as a something coming to mind (*Einfall*) for itself.” (Hua XI, 122). It appears at first to have no relationship with the term initiating the association, “A.” Husserl notes that an entire chain of associations can “run its course” in the field of consciousness “without being noticed (*verlaufen unbemerkt*).” (Hua XI, 122).

A mediating series or chain of associations, connected by similar features between its terms, can therefore run its course in the background of the field of consciousness without being directly noticed. The final term of the series is so attractive in itself that it momentarily exerts a stronger affective “pull” on the attention than the preceding members of its associative series which had not been conscious. It can also exert a stronger attractive force than what had presently been occupying the attention at the present moment. The attention suffers a momentary interruption by the background association which overshadows the present interest in the conversation.

A “subsequent” (Husserl uses the word, “*nachträglich*”) reflection can reconstruct the course of the series of unnoticed, mediating associations by recovering their passing retentions, so far as this is possible. The reconstruction may remain fragmentary or incomplete, however, depending on how many of the passing, unnoticed associations can be recovered as retentions before completely passing outside of the field of awareness. As Husserl deepens his phenomenological analysis of the separate, but related functions of retention and recollection, it becomes evident that the retentions which have just passed from the field of awareness are still to a large extent recoverable from an “antechamber (*Vorzimmer*),” before “sinking” into the unconscious.

Husserl’s initial description of the phenomenon of association in remembering does not bring him very much closer to the related problems of remembering and forgetting. This description nevertheless betrays that there can be mediating members or terms which can function covertly, i.e. “*unbemerkt verlaufen*” in the selection of similar associations from the unconscious. Husserl calls these covert mediating terms “*Brückenglieder*,” a technical term for the floating bridge of a floating pier. In other words, the covert, mediating associations function as bridging terms which float on their own in the stream of consciousness. “Every association requires a bridging term (*Brückenglied*) which may proceed unnoticed.” (Hua XI, 123).

In addition, Husserl concedes that the phenomenology of the consciousness of the past encounters further problems. There is what Husserl calls:

the phenomena of the splitting of recollections (*Spaltung der Wiedererinnerungen*) into (other) recollections. These have shoved themselves entirely through one another (*durcheinander geschoben*) in such a way that the memory images of separate pasts have fused into the unity of an illusory image (*zur Einheit des Scheinbildes*).

An “illusory image” of a past is produced from several, various past events which, in itself, has, in fact, never occurred. This leads to the related problem:

how far mere fantasies themselves may lead back through their intentional analysis to recollections, (and may) themselves be the products of recollections. (Hua XI, 119).

Husserl, therefore, intends to address the question of how it is possible that memory, as it emerges from the unconscious, is able to be erroneous. In other words, he wishes to find out how it is possible that an illusory image of a past which has never really occurred, or for that matter, a spontaneous phantasy-image, may be composed of many separate recollections which subsequently have “split” open and become “fused” unconsciously.

He decides to probe more deeply into the problem of association than we normally understand it from the natural standpoints of everyday life or the classical, mechanistic psychology of association. Husserl’s methodology includes phenomenological reduction, description and eidetic variation. He nevertheless realizes that his hitherto developed ‘arsenal’ of methods will be unable to address the problems of forgetting and remembering on the level of “depth” they require. He must develop a method which is able to follow the retention into its “dark sphere,” into what Husserl calls the “night of the unconscious.” This method must also make accessible the process by which the retention is recovered again from this night in the form of a recollection by means of a mediating bridging term which functions in concealment.

The subject matter requires a far more radical and deeper kind of reduction in order to suspend (*ausschalten*) associations as we normally understand them, and as they have been interpreted in classical psychology. This is performed by the most “radical” form of re-duction, literally a ‘leading back’ (from the Latin *re + ducere*), the reduction to the ‘living present’. This can only be undertaken by means of an ‘abstractive’ method of removing or suspending in *epoché* those layers of experience, which are more conscious, or genetically subsequent, in the constitutive activity of

consciousness and its underlying layers of passive synthesis.

Through this abstractive method, Husserl discovers another, deeper “type” of association than what we identify as association in everyday experience. Husserl calls this deeper kind of association, the “originary association (*Urassoziation*) of the living present.” *Urassoziation* is genetically prior to all other association and makes all other association possible. It is the genetic condition for associations as we normally understand and experience them in the natural attitude. Husserl classifies these latter associations, those which we normally identify as associations, into two kinds: “reproductive” and “anticipatory.” These associations rely on the becoming conscious of the past or the future. In the reduction to the living present, temporalizing itself is suspended and the more surface associations, relying on temporality in their ‘reproductive’ or ‘anticipatory’ functions, are suspended as well.

We are not directly aware of the *Urassoziation* of the living present which is “prior” (in a genetic sense) to temporalizing. We, therefore, experience only the wake of its effects. Conceived as an abstract “point,” the living present moves so elusively and suddenly that we are unable to seize it directly. Bernet writes that it is only “with the help of the retention that we are able to grasp it.”<sup>12</sup> Any reflective experience of it is already retention, an attempt to grasp it by the ‘comet’s tail’ it leaves behind. Reflection, “is itself constituted in immanent time.”<sup>13</sup>

How, then, do we phenomenologically grasp a phase of experience which is itself genetically prior to experience and temporality? That is, how do we perform a reduction to the *Urassoziation* of the living present? Husserl writes:

In our consideration of the lowest genetic level or phase (*unterster genetischer Stufe*), we pose the problem as an abstraction which is necessary for systematic genetic analysis: we proceed as if the world of the ego were only the impressional present and as if nothing of the apperceptions ..., the cognitions obtained in worldly life, nothing of the aesthetic or practical interests, evaluations and so forth played a part in this. (Hua XI, 150).

It is important to remember that the abstractive reduction to the living present as the deepest, most universal layer of experience is an “archaeological effort.” It requires a phenomenological prospecting, a digging into the depths, as Husserl says, “*eine tiefschürfende phänomenologische Forschung*” (that is, a research which discloses by ‘digging, prospecting, the uncovering of a mine’) (Hua XI, 125). In both Husserl’s phenomenological analyses of the ‘living present’, and the associative memory of the past in its covert ‘bridging’ function which, as we shall see, is developed from his understanding of the living present,

Husserl employs images of the unconscious which he borrows from other traditions. Husserl, like Freud, but to an even greater extent Kafka, relies on the German Romantic literary tradition with its metaphorical images of the unconscious as “night” or “mine (*Bergwerk*).” These images rest, in turn, on the descriptions of visits to the underworld in classical Greek and Latin literature. It is this underworld, or mine, which is to be explored by a mining activity, an “archaeology” of the self.<sup>14</sup>

Although Husserl suspends time in its “formal character” in his abstractive reduction to the living present, he is unable to thereby separate the “impressional present” from the “retentional horizon” which “attaches itself without hesitation (*unweigerlich*) to each impressional present.” (Hua XI, 73). We need not adopt Derrida’s and Bernet’s positions to account for this. Their arguments rest on Freud’s concept of “deferment, delay, deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*)” in regard to time-consciousness. Bernet asks whether it is not so that the retention in some way precedes the living present in that the “grasping (*Erfassung*) of a present now is only possible in interconnection with the subsequent (*nachträglich*), retentional grasping of this now as past now?”<sup>15</sup> Bernet concludes that “the now only first becomes conscious in the retention, that is with delay or subsequently (*nachträglich*) as a temporally already other.”<sup>16</sup>

In the Husserlian account, however, one is unable to detach or separate the retention from the primal impression because the retention belongs to the structure of the living present itself. This is not to say that the protentions do not also ‘unhesitatingly’ attach themselves to the living present, but they do so as a genetically later phase. They emerge only on the basis, as we shall see, of the retention and the empty presentation which replaces it.

It may be objected by some that it is paradoxical that only an abstract reduction can access that phase of experience which is the deepest and most universal source of all apodictic certitude in conscious life, the living present. It is after all the “factor of presence,” which Derrida calls “the ultimate court of appeal in (Husserl’s) discourse.”<sup>17</sup>

In the “apodictic” reduction to the “living present,” Husserl systematically removes the phases of complete objects in their constitutive meaning, starting with the most conscious ones first, as if one were peeling the layers of an onion to see what layers remain underneath. These layers, or genetic phases, which become separated “abstractly” in reflection do not, however, necessarily exist on their own. Husserl considered these problems in a 1931 conversation with Dorion Cairns and Eugen Fink. Cairns recorded the following conversation in his journal:

Again he (Husserl) recalled the importance of bearing in mind the fact that one is always confronted with an experience wherein the world is fully constituted, and that it is difficult to isolate a lower level of that



constituted phenomenon .... Here the earlier stages are not *originär zugänglich* (originarily accessible), and must accordingly be termed constructions, though as constructions they are still not arbitrary.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, Landgrebe writes of the reduction to the fundamental level of the “primeval, streaming, living present”:

the “depth dimensions” of the process of constitution cannot be obtained by the phenomenological reflection,<sup>19</sup>

that is, on its own. We must, rather, resort to an abstractive/constructive method which predisposes essential insight towards seeing lower “abstract” genetic layers, or phases.

### 3. Abstractive reduction to the “living present” and the problem of the unconscious

In what, then, does this ‘abstract’ living present consist which, paradoxically, is supposed to supply the “material conditions” for the fulfillment of temporality “in its formal character”?<sup>20</sup> How are we to visualize this lowest, most universal layer of constitution, which is accessible only through an ‘abstractive’ method of removing subsequent layers in reflection? In his apodictic re-duction to the living present, Husserl allows only the following elements to be present as a genetically first stratum of experience: (a) hyletic data, identified by classical psychology as “sensations,” as they first emerge in their respective sense fields; (b) *Urassoziation*, that is, the originary association within the impressional sphere of the living present, which functions according to passive syntheses of “similarity, continuity, and contrast” among the coexistent hyletic data given in the sense-fields; and finally, (c) “feelings of sensual preference” for the hyletic data already grouped together by the above mentioned passive syntheses. These feelings of sensual preference (what Husserl calls “*Wollust*”) are for the surface-aspects of hyletic data, which are already “raised into saliency” (*Abgehobenheit*) by the syntheses of similarity and contrast in the impressional present. They are dictated by instinctual drives given endogenously to the sense-fields and not by any activity of the ego (Hua XI, 150).

In short, what we have left over is the body, but not the body as we normally experience it. It is rather the body as an abstraction: (1) the sum total of the hyletic activity of the collective sense-fields which are continually presenting ever fresh impressions, and (2) the instinctual preferences which the body imposes on these sensory impressions. It is the body as the ‘activity’, or ongoing stimulation, of the sense-fields in the ‘living present’. This occurs without, as yet, a distinction between inside

and outside, the simultaneous apperception of self and others as intersubjective, or a past and future in terms of immanent temporality. All these genetically later phases of constitution have been abstractively removed in *epoché*.

*Urassoziation* is the originary association of coexistent hyletic data in the living present. It takes place according to the passive syntheses of similarity, continuity and contrast, 'prior' to their becoming temporalized and then, available to associations in the more conscious sense. He therefore opposes, as we have seen, an originary association in the living present to the genetically later associations in reference to which we normally think of association.

Just as Husserl has divided the latter group of associations into "reproductive" and "anticipatory," he distinguishes in the *Urassoziation*, "pre-affective" from "affective" syntheses or associations. Preaffective syntheses of hyletic data remain "unconscious." Affective syntheses, on the other hand, are conscious, or on the way to becoming conscious.

Husserl defines preaffective syntheses as the structural interconnection of the living present which serves as the "material substratum" or foundation (*sachliche Unterlage*) which underlies the affective relief structure of the present at any given moment (Hua XI, 168). In order to understand what Husserl means by the "preaffective fusion (*Verschmelzung*)" of hyletic data into unities as an unconscious process which then, in turn, *affects* consciousness, we must first understand what Husserl means by the affective relief structure of the living present.<sup>21</sup>

Husserl attributes to the "affective syntheses," or "affection," a very specific function. Every sensory stimulus as it enters the field of the impressional present exerts an attractive force or pull on the ego in a "tendency" to be noticed. Husserl calls this "affection." This affective "pull (*Zug*)" can only be subsequently neutralized by the ego's "turning towards" (*Zuwendung*), adverting its glance, to the affecting stimulus. The ego thereby exercises, as it were, a "counter-pull (*Gegenzug*)" which balances the original force. When the stimulus passes out of the living present, it no longer exerts the same affective force, but diminishes in its potentiality to affect the ego.

Affection "awakens" the ego, stimulates the ego into activity. The ego turns, or "adverts" itself, towards the hyletic stimulus which the affection announces. It is important that it is not the stimulus itself which determines the magnitude of attractive force it exerts on the ego, but rather its "relative" height of contrast with respect to the other hyletic stimuli present in the field at any given moment. That is, preaffective difference is more fundamental than the syntheses of similarities between coexistent hyletic data into homogenous unities in determining, on a first level of organiza-

tion, which unities ultimately will become conscious. Husserl therefore speaks of a “relativism of affective tendencies” (Hua XI, 150).<sup>22</sup> On this lowest level of preaffective originary association, there is a certain genetic priority of plurality over unity, of difference over sameness.

Husserl sees the “relativism” in the continuous “strife” or warring between contrasting affective forces in topological terms as an ongoing pattern of “affective relief structures” of the impressional present. The affective structures present a unique pattern which makes up the topological surface of the living present from moment to moment. A cross-section of this surface reveals that each impressional present could be mapped topologically, charted or graphed, with respect to its own unique affective relief pattern of relative contrasts. In terms of a geological metaphor, these could be charted as so many peaks and valleys, with one prevailing or towering apex, or peak, at each moment. “Affective” syntheses are those that reach consciousness, “penetrating” the topological surface as the highest peaks of the relief structure. “Preaffective” syntheses are those which, at any given moment, do not “penetrate” to egoic awareness. They form the valleys and the background relative to the “raised saliency” (*Abhebung*) of the more prominent figures.

It is significant that it is not the syntheses of similarity between the coexistent hyletic data that exert the affective stimulus on the ego. It is rather the syntheses of contrast relative to each other that determine which hyletic shapes, already synthesized as homogeneously similar, enter into awareness and which ones do not. Husserl writes that affection is above all a “function of contrast” (Hua XI, 149). Even on a more conscious level, we are able to see that contrasts first attract our attention, but it is not the contrast upon which we focus or direct our regard, but rather what the contrast brings into relief, the *Gestalten*, in the field of awareness.

The ego is awoken into its noticing activity of turning towards by the affective force of the greatest prevailing contrast value relative to the others in the sense-fields. When the ego is first awoken by a contrasting affective force, it is at the mercy of the hyletic forces. Just as the Freudian ego is not master of its own house, so “the ego is not master of its own field. It can be completely overpowered by it,” as in traumatic experiences of sudden physical or emotional pain.<sup>23</sup> It is attracted or repulsed by the “instinctual preferences,” or sudden contrasts, in the very process of becoming conscious of them. The first relationship of the ego to its field is neither neutral nor voluntary, but one of exposure and vulnerability. Husserl does not see the relationship between the hyletic stimulus and the ego’s initially involuntary response in terms of a neurological reflex, for example, Pavlov’s so-called “orienting reflex.”<sup>24</sup> He sometimes describes the relationship between awakening hyletic forces and the ego’s response of advertence in

dialogical terms, as a form of “address” from the stimulus and “form of answering of the ego (*Antwortform des Ich*).”<sup>25</sup>

The entire field of the impressional present divides itself into what is noticeable and what remains unnoticed. The topological relief structure of competing affective surface contrasts bring about a relationship of foreground and background. Husserl distinguishes between “affection” and “affective tendency.” The affective tendency remains in the background of the momentary relief structure. It is not conscious but has the potentiality to become conscious in that the threshold of what is conscious is momentarily defined by the prevailing strongest contrast.

It seems that Husserl wants thereby to depart from the classical definition of an “absolute threshold” in psychophysics. The latter is thought to be determined by the smallest amount of stimulus energy necessary for an observer to detect a stimulus in an experimental situation. The “absolute threshold” is determined by quantitatively reducing the stimulus until the experimental subject is no longer able to detect it. The result becomes an artifact of the physiological recording instruments: what is the lowest intensity of the stimulus that needs to be applied to a certain sensory tissue surface to obtain an observable response, i.e. a reflex.

For Husserl the threshold between what is conscious and unconscious fluctuates relative to the unique pattern of contrasting affective forces at any given moment. Husserl gives the following example:

There are some colored figures, elevated into enough saliency to affect us. At the same time, there are some sounds: wagon wheels, tones of a song, as well as some salient odors, and the like. All this is going on at the same time, but the song prevails in that we are turned solely towards it, absorbed in listening. Everything else, however, still has stimulating effect, [i.e. the other ‘local sense-fields’ are still ‘active’ in the background with fresh, incoming hyletic stimuli, insert by the present author]. If suddenly a powerful crash, as from an explosion, interrupts, not only does it extinguish the affective particularities involved in the listening, but also those of the other sense-fields as well. What was otherwise addressing us, however little we may have been listening, (e.g. the wagon wheels) (Hua XI, 150),

that, also, is no longer able to penetrate to consciousness.

The above example shows that the threshold between what is conscious and what is not fluctuates relative to the greatest affective contrasts in the impressional present, but it still does not provide any evidence for the unconscious activity of the preaffective syntheses of hyletic unity which are thought to underlie all affective contrast.

Husserl then turns to the following example:

During an evening walk which ascends into the Loretto Heights, a row of

street lamps is suddenly illuminated below in the Rhine Valley. It thus elevates itself all at once into a unity, without it being the case that the stimulus thereby necessarily leads to any attentive noticing or advertence (on the part of the ego). The fact that the series of lights is affective as a whole in one swoop (*mit einem Schlag*) evidently lies in the pre-affective conformity to laws of the formation of that unity; the fact that there may be other unities of lights affectively there as elevated individual unities also rests on this (Hua XI, 154).

What this example shows is that an affection can arise on its own from any point in a sense-field and spread or propagate itself (what Husserl calls the "propagation," *Fortpflanzung* of its affective force) as an already articulated unity, a *Gestalt* with surface contours, prior to becoming conscious.

If the propagation or spontaneous spreading of the affection from a new "local" surface point in the sense field accumulates enough affective force relative to the other surface contrasts, it will awaken the ego to a corresponding kinesthetic activity of noticing. It does so according to laws of ordinary association with respect to the pre-affective, or unconscious, formation of hyletic unity according to underlying syntheses of similarity, continuity and contrast. This occurs prior to becoming conscious, that is, prior to awakening the ego to activity with its affective force. Husserl writes that in this example:

... there is therefore an articulated unity (*eine gegliederte Einheit*) [that is, a unity already segmentally organized into parts, insert by present author] in as much as it already has materially particular saliences segmentally arranged into parts within itself, becomes conscious in a non-articulated, or non-differentiated affection .... It is certainly convenient to designate such cases of unawoken affection nevertheless as awakenings, but as the null-instance in a similar way that the mathematician still includes zero in his computations as the negative of the cardinal numbers. (Hua XI, 154)<sup>26</sup>

Husserl's choice of example seems to almost play, in an overdetermined sense, on his metaphorical understanding of the living present as a topological structure with a relief of affective surface contrasts. In the example, Husserl, like the ego which is affected by Gestalt-contours raised into saliency by contrasts, is looking down from the Loretto heights into a valley of contrasting surfaces below. In conformity with this metaphor, we can say that the unconscious is the furthestmost background from which the relief emerges at its lowest point forming, as it were, its very lining. This is not to say that the unconscious is therefore not anything at all. Husserl writes:

the unconscious ... designates the null, or zero point, in the life of consciousness, but, as it will soon show itself, it is in no way a nothing. It is a nothing only with respect to affective force and thereby with respect

to those achievements which presuppose precisely an affectivity with positive values (i.e. beyond the null point). It is, therefore, not a question of a null which is determined according to the intensity of qualitative moments, for example, that of the intensity of a tone which has ceased altogether. (Hua XI, 167)

It seems that Husserl wants to distinguish his unconscious as the “null point in the life of consciousness” from the absolute threshold of classical psychophysics. In the latter case, a stimulus is stated to no longer affect the experimental subject when its intensity is decreased below a certain degree of intensity. This degree of intensity is thought to mark an absolute threshold which determines what is conscious and what never reaches consciousness. Fechner believed that “unconscious sensations” existed beneath this threshold and could be assigned negative numerical values.<sup>27</sup>

Husserl, on the other hand, wants to say that the threshold fluctuates situationally according to the relative magnitude of the surface contrast values in the overall impressional affective relief structure.<sup>28</sup> As a result, those affective tendencies with a null-value which do not “penetrate” far enough to reach the egoic pole, nevertheless, have obtained, in their potentiality, a preaffective organization of the underlying hyletic data into an articulated totality, a Gestalt with surface contours, even prior to becoming conscious. The potential to be awoken as an affective tendency is preserved below the threshold of consciousness. But how does Husserl know this? His example of the lights is not convincing. It could be explained that the hyletic data (e.g. the row of lights in the example), have become organized and fused into hyletic unity only subsequently to their being noticed by the ego. There would be no way of telling that they had been organized beforehand.

It is only by turning to the auditory sense-field that Husserl is able to find evidence for the unconscious, preaffective syntheses of hyletic unities. The auditory sense-field is particularly geared, as we shall see, to exhibiting successive relationships between hyletic data. It is only through the successive syntheses of hyletic data that Husserl is finally able to demonstrate the prior existence of the preaffective organization. In the following example, a melody is playing in the background without exercising any affective force on us. We are busily concerned with something else so that the melody could in no way be called a “disturbance.” Husserl then writes:

There now comes an especially languishing or melodious tone, a tone which especially stimulates sensual pleasure or displeasure. This individual tone does not bestow affective life merely on itself, but rather the entire melody is all at once elevated into saliency, so far as it is still alive within the field of the present; the affection therefore radiates backwards into the retentions, effecting at first a unitary elevation (of the

melody as it passes) and at the same time supplying to the individually raised saliences, that is, the individual tones, particular affection (*Sonderaffektion*). (Hua XI, 155)

The tones must have already been organized pre-affectively into articulated parts with respect to each other from their null-point of affective awakening in the field before they are recovered by a backward radiating affection spreading from the one salient tone onto the passing retentions.

Husserl is quite clear in stating that the preaffective formation of the hyletic unities does not as yet involve objects but only hyletic phases of those objects. The scope of the present essay does not allow a discussion of how Husserl's insight has been confirmed by subsequent empirical research in infant and adult perception.<sup>29</sup>

Husserl also discusses the problem of repression. He writes, for example, in a *Beilage*, "in the strife between affections ... the victorious one does not destroy the others. It simply suppresses them." Husserl uses the word, "*hinunterdrücken*". He then makes a brief aside that this may also occur in the sphere of feelings, drives, valuations, or strivings. He continues that there is beneath the suppressing, a "persevering" of the repressed affective force. He writes, "there can be ongoing affection from the unconscious, but suppressed." He gives the example of intense concentration where there can be a suppression of affections of interest which differ from the present interest. Husserl concludes: "In the present which is always mobile, something comes to the benefit of the repressed (*Unterdrückten*) and awakens it." (Hua XI, 415-6).<sup>30</sup>

Now that we have established the role of unconscious synthesis in the fusion of hyletic data into preaffective articulated totalities as well as in their possible repression, we can turn to the problem of the unconscious in the phenomenology of remembering and forgetting.

#### **4. Husserl's journey to the underworld: The phenomenology of the unconscious in forgetting and remembering**

After describing the topological relief structure of the affective and preaffective syntheses of the living present in apodictic reduction, Husserl writes poetically that he is now equipped with "phenomenological lights." He is now able to penetrate into the "night of the unconscious," in order to examine the further problem of reproductive recollection. (Hua XI, 154). I wish to show that Husserl, thereby, also develops a viable account of forgetting as well. As in the "night" of German Romanticism, there is an ominous suggestion of the underworld in the darkness of Husserl's unconscious night.

I will turn first to the problem of forgetting. For Freud, forgetting is not a problem. The system “perception consciousness” is permeable or transparent. Experience simply flows through it without retention or trace. The function of retaining and remembering is attributed to a separate mnemonic system which functions unconsciously. The function of the forming of the mnemonic traces as “a grooving or *Bahnung* of transmission pathways in the nervous system”,<sup>31</sup> does not interfere with the receiving of fresh impressions of the perceptual system. As was stated above, the perceptual impressions are subsequent, *nachträglich*, to the operation of the other systems.

In the Husserlian account, both the sensing and retentive functions occur within consciousness. How is it then that the retentions do not simply accumulate and burden, or overshadow the receiving of fresh sensory impressions? Husserl is able to keep the two contradictory functions separate within consciousness. His distinctions between “originary impression,” retention, and empty presentation enable him to account for how this is possible.

I will first discuss the distinction between the originary impression and its retention and the ability of consciousness to distinguish between them. Husserl writes that “the original source of all affection lies, and can only lie in the originary impression (*Urimpression*).”<sup>32</sup> An originary impression always has more affective force than its retention. As the retention passes out of consciousness, it gradually loses affective force. It does not follow, however, that a *recollection*, or a fantasy produced from the unconscious fusion of recollections, is unable to momentarily overpower the present theme of consciousness. Husserl’s initial example of the sudden recollection of the beautiful lake-side shore which overshadows a present conversation with its greater attracting affective force shows that this is possible. Retention and recollection are two different functions; the intuitive reproduction of the lake-side scene as a recollection itself undergoes retentional modification as it passes out of the present. What Husserl intends to state, rather, is that consciousness is able to distinguish the original impression from *its* retention because of the latter’s diminishing affectivity. The disappearing of the retention, however, is not to be equated with complete loss of affective force which is still preserved minimally, as we shall see, in the empty retention, or “empty presentation (*Leervorstellung*),” which replaces it.

Retention attaches itself to each fresh *Urimpression*. The retentional process is a process of continual modification with respect to the primal or originary impression, undergoing the ongoing “modal” transformation of becoming “ever more past.” Husserl writes:

Every concrete datum of the sphere of the living present sinks as we



know into the phenomenal past. It underlies (*unterliegt*) the retentional transformation and thereby leads necessarily to the affectively null region into which it incorporates itself (*einverleibt*) and in which it is not nothing. Thus, we must reckon for the living present in general an affective null horizon which is constantly fluctuating (*sich beständig wandelnden affektiven Nullhorizont*). (Hua XI, 167).

Husserl describes the retentional process as a process of *Vernebelung*, a process of becoming clouded over. This retentive process can itself be divided into phases. The Urimpression “constantly passes over into a stretch of fresh retention.” This stretch can itself be viewed for a time as “temporally extended” as it passes. As it passes, however, it loses ever more of its affecting surface contours, its elevation into saliency and internal differentiation into parts. Husserl writes that

with the becoming null of its intuitability, the affective force does not become null. The stretch of fresh retentions constantly passes over into a stretch of empty retentions. (Hua XI, 169).

The empty retention is the genetically original form of the empty presentation. He writes:

Nevertheless, this affective force [of the empty retention, insertion by the present author] continually recedes. Its objective sense becomes ever more impoverished in its inner differences and thereby empties itself in a certain manner. The end is an empty presentation which presents its presentified material (*Vorgestelltes*) fully without distinction or differences. It has lost the entire wealth of its inner elevated saliencies which the *Urimpression* had originally instituted. (Hua XI, 170)

The empty presentation is a clouding over or cloaking of the retention as it “dies,” cloaking it with the mist of the “horizon of clouding over (*Vernebelungshorizont*)” into which the retention passes. Here, the surface contours of the retention are at first slightly discernable beneath the cloaking and then disappear altogether.

Underneath the cloaking, the empty presentation briefly preserves the affective force of the retention so that the retention can participate in the ongoing identity syntheses underlying apperception.

Husserl attempts to elucidate this difficult concept with an example of two consecutive hammer strokes. These are staggered in successive time and only subsequently organized into an ideal unity. In the example, there is a background sound, a hammer stroke, which the subject does not bother to identify. In fact, the subject need not have consciously heeded it. An indefinite period of time elapses before a second hammer stroke is heard. This indefinite period of time exceeds the presence of the retention of the unheeded stimulus in the present field of consciousness, what Husserl calls

“the extremely narrow sphere of successive and actual intuition.” On the other hand, the duration is not to be so great that the first retention, although unheeded, becomes altogether unrecoverable from its marginal realm. With the occurrence of the second hammer stroke, the subject heeds it and is able to identify this and the previously occurring strokes as the blows of a hammer. Thus, we have two successive hyletic data which are at first not identified by a higher order activity of the ego. It is only by being brought into relation with each other in a backwards radiating identity synthesis that each of the two terms becomes identifiable. Further, the two terms are equated ideally as belonging to the same class of things, “hammer strokes.” Husserl poses the problem as follows:

It is clear that an awakening of the concealed plays its role here across gaps or distances (*Weiten*) of successive syntheses, even if these distances may not be arbitrarily great. When the second hammer blow falls, how does the synthesis with the first one come about, when the first one is, in the meantime, intuitively emptied, or has already become entirely empty? (Hua XI, 176)

The prior hammer stroke has already passed outside of the field of awareness. It is no longer materially present and had not been directly heeded by the ego. It is in “concealment.” What makes its recovery in terms of its morphological and ideal structure possible? The two strokes had not been joined into an identity synthesis by successively proximal retentions. This would have been the case with an object which the subject views or experiences continuously from its various sides or aspects. The retentions of the two hyletic stimuli were separated in terms of an indefinite ‘*space*’ of their non-occurrence. There is discontinuity, or a gap of indefinite, though “not arbitrary duration,” between successive syntheses across which an awakening, the becoming conscious of their relationship, must leap.

He initially attempts to answer this question by stating that a “backwards radiating affective awakening (*rückstrahlende affektive Weckung*)” proceeds from the second hammer blow to the first in an unifying operation. This operation treats the two terms as equal in their ideal sense, despite their somewhat variant morphological structures and uniqueness of position within successive time. Nevertheless, the first hammer stroke is no longer materially present within the present field as either primal impression, or as fading retention. It is “clouded over (*vernebelt*). It has more or less forfeited the effectiveness of the particularity of its content.” (Hua XI, 176) How, then, is it recovered from unconsciousness?

Husserl has already established that each retention passes out of the field of awareness and sinks into a horizon of forgetfulness. It does so in terms of an empty retention which replaces the fading retention. The empty retention “shrouds” the retention by progressively diminishing its raised surface

aspects or contours. It is by virtue of such an empty retention that the retention of the initial, unheeded hammer blow is awoken in backwards radiating affection. What is awoken is not the material content of the already faded retention which has sunk into unconsciousness but rather its structural sense which is preserved in the “empty presentation.”

Although the retentive process “is a process of identifying synthesis across and through which passes the selfness of the objective sense,” (Hua XI, 171), Husserl is careful to state that “retentions” as they first emerge “in their originality, have no intentional character.” (Hua XI, 77). The empty presentation functions as a kind of ‘pivot’ just beyond the fringe of consciousness in what Husserl calls “an antechamber of the ego (*Vorzimmer des Ich*).” It has the ambiguous function of being simultaneously present and absent to consciousness. It is present to consciousness in preserving momentarily the affective force of the passed retention in its felt sense, and yet absent in retentive content. The “tip of the tongue” phenomenon is an example of “empty presentation.”<sup>33</sup> It thereby enables the provisional recovery of a retention which has just passed outside of the field of consciousness in backwards radiating affection which can leap by associative similarity across distances or gaps in successive time of undetermined duration. This is what occurs in the above example of the two consecutive hammer blows.

Husserl paradoxically describes the functioning of the empty presentation as a “non-determinate determinacy.” This enables the recovery of recent retentions, as well as more distant recollections buried in the past. It also gives protention its directionality in provisional anticipation. The anticipation is provisional in that it is open to subsequent verification or cancellation by the experience which it anticipates.

The sensing and retentive functions occur in consciousness without impeding each other precisely because there is forgetting. The retention becomes or, rather, is replaced by an empty presentation while vanishing into the night of the unconsciousness. It is unchanged in content, nor has it lost affective force when “reawoken.” Husserl does not require two mutually exclusive systems as does Freud to explain the relationship of perception to memory. This is the case because he recognizes that consciousness has a perspectival relationship to its own horizon of the past. The vanishing of the retention into the empty presentation does not indicate an actual loss. At the same time, it does not interfere, but rather contributes to the apperception of present and future objects. This is so because Husserl states that this perspective is first of all “an affective perspective.” (Hua XI, 172)

As retentions pass off, they lose their inner articulation and crowd into each other before disappearing altogether. Husserl writes:

The phenomenon of the perspectival closing together is explained by the fact of a falling back of the manifoldly articulated impressional present into the flowing off past which is ever less differentially articulated and always more crowded together. It is a question here of the perspectival phenomenon which belongs to the living present and its retentional streaming off itself. We understand this not as a phenomenon of actual loss of objective differences, but in first line affective: the perspective is first of all an affective perspective! (Hua XI, 171-2)<sup>34</sup>

After an indefinite period of time, the retention disappears altogether into the obscurity of the unconscious night:

And if nothing from the different objects, nothing is any longer affective, these very same objects plunge into a single night, having become unconscious in a special sense. (Hua XI, 172)

Having rendered a viable account of forgetting, Husserl is now in a position to address the other side of his initial problem: how memory is possible as a selective process of association over against the background horizon of the past. The reproduction of recollections in intuition is only possible because the empty presentation has functioned as the covert mediating term which selects beneath the threshold of consciousness among similarly associated memories, which are sedimented past presents.

Husserl writes that “recollections can only spring forth from the awakening which issues from empty presentations.” (Hua XI, 181) Further this “awakening is only possible because the constituted sense in background consciousness (*Hintergrundbewusstsein*) in its nonliving form, which is there called the unconscious, is actually implied.” (Hua XI, 179)

The topological relief structure of each impressional, living present sediments beneath the present one as a kind of “dead” geological layer. It is to this underworld or subterranean region of sedimented layers ordered by their successive occurrence that the affective awakening of the empty presentation must proceed in order to surface recollections. It does so in a leaping or springing (*sprunghaft*) manner, by leaping across layers of the buried, sedimented past presents. In Husserl’s “underworld of memory (*Gedächtnisuntergrund*),” deceased retentions dwell as shades cut off from the light of consciousness and all life, only to be momentarily stirred by an empty presentation for brief appearances on the stage of consciousness.

Husserl explains that an illusory image of the past, or phantasy, can emerge by means of a similar process of associative recollection. In the case of the production of an illusory image of the past, similar pasts “split” up and “fuse” in the very process of being summoned to consciousness by the empty presentation. It sometimes happens that a certain impression or recollection in the present, “A,” awakens two similar recollections from the

past simultaneously from their different sedimented sites or layers in the unconscious underworld of the past. Insofar as they are awoken with approximately equal strength, they will compete with each other until one of the two recollections prevails and in its becoming conscious suppresses the other.

It is also possible, however, that one of the recollections is unable to suppress the other. In this case, the two memories may join in unconscious “fusion (*Verschmelzung*)” in the very process of becoming conscious. The conscious ego treats the image if it were a single recollection and is deceived by the illusory image of the past event (*Scheinbild*) which, in fact, never did occur. Spontaneous fantasies, reveries, or dreams are similarly constructed. When the revery or dream is given or recollected to a fully awake ego, there is a “neutrality modification” which “suspends” the “doxic” character of belief in the image as presuming to be real.<sup>35</sup>

Husserl’s account bears some similarity to Freud’s account of the screen memory (*Deckerinnerung*), particularly with respect to the ideas of repression (*Deckung*), overlapping displacement (*Verschiebung*), and the fusion of significant and less significant parts of separate recollections. These themes cannot be pursued here, but only briefly indicated. As stated above, the similarity between the two accounts is to be attributed to common nineteenth century influences, particularly the Herbart School, rather than any direct influence between the two thinkers.

## 5. A brief reply to some objections by Derrida and Bernet – The unconscious of the living present

Bernet writes in “Differenz und Anwesenheit,”:

Just as the present now is not an originary source point, but rather the trace of its own past, so the sign also takes the place of meaning (*Bedeutung*) which still does not yet exist. Language and time are intermingled with absence.<sup>36</sup>

That is, Bernet opts for the Derridean accounts of temporality as “spacing,” and “meaning” as the “play” of signs or “traces” over the corresponding Husserlian explanations. This is because language and time are themselves already “intermingled with absence.” He continues:

Presence is nothing apart from the distinction of absence. It is nothing without the delay or deferral which comes with this distinction, that is, without the play of ‘differance’.<sup>37</sup>

Husserl has demonstrated, however, that the living present is already

pervaded by absence and difference. For the becoming conscious of any sensation whatsoever, there must first be differentiation in the *Urimpression*. Husserl concedes that preaffective passive syntheses of “heterogeneity,” or contrast, provide originary differences which enable sensations to become conscious in terms of competing affective forces. These forces are indeed prior to the emergence of figures. The latter become raised into saliency in the present through their “affecting” the ego and in turn, by being noticed by the ego.

The living present is composed of a fluctuating threshold determined by the competing affective forces emerging from the relative contrasts of the field. It is already divided into a conscious and an unconscious, a relationship of foreground and background with a topological relief structure which is shaped from moment to moment by the competing contrasts.

There follows the surprising implication that Derrida’s own ‘notion’ of “différance” as “spacing” or “arche-writing” is anticipated by Husserl’s account of the movement of the living present. We have seen that the unconscious as the outermost, or deepest background of the relief structure of the topological surface enables differences among emergent *Gestalten* of the simultaneous hyletic data within the living present itself. We have also seen that difference is marked by the successive duration of “stretches (*Strecke*)” of coexistent hyletic data in their ceasing to be. There are gaps of discontinuity which are inserted before “backwards radiating” affection ‘leaps’ over them, enabling syntheses of identity. This was the case in the above example of the two consecutive hammer blows. Further, these stretches and their gaps are of arbitrary duration, and their ‘marking’ or formation is “pretemporal.”<sup>38</sup> They are “genetically prior” to the genesis of temporality “in its formal character” which relies on the hyletic data of *Urassoziation* for providing the material conditions of its fulfillment.

The passive syntheses of similarity or homogeneity, in turn, need not adhere to association by proximity, or contiguity, but are able to traverse distances between homogenous hyletic data in both coexistence and in the successive continuity/discontinuity of the data in their awakening force. Husserl calls this “awakening from a distance (*Fernweckung*),” so that the “propagation (*Fortpflanzung*)” or spreading of affective force may leap from one continuous grouping of homogenous data, linked by passive syntheses of similarity, to another. Husserl states that passive syntheses of heterogeneity, or contrast, and syntheses of homogeneity, or similarity, function simultaneously to contribute to the first pre-affective patterning of the *Urimpression*. In the becoming conscious of the originary impression, however, the syntheses of heterogeneity must take priority because they enable the affection of the ego.

The affection “skirts along (*entlang gehen*)” the topological surface of

the incoming sensations. (Hua XI, 164) The hyletic material thereby fulfills conditions of *Urassoziation* posed collectively by the sense fields: there must be stretches of simultaneously enduring coexistence of various, but arbitrary durations. These are formed, or 'marked', by simultaneous contrasts relative to other figures in the field. They are further marked by the separation which comes with the discontinuity of any stretch so that 'spaces' insert themselves between the hyletic patterns or shapes prior to their becoming conscious in experience. The syntheses of similarity need not merely adhere to association by proximity or contiguity but may traverse both simultaneous and successive distances in their awakening force by means of *Fernweckung*, thus leaping over the first spaces marked by the discontinuous separations.

The Derridean notion of 'spacing' was anticipated by Husserl in that difference in the passive synthesis of heterogenous coexistent and successive hyletic data is genetically prior to their becoming conscious in time-consciousness. That is, "spaces" must be inserted not only in the lowest points of the relief structure of the living present, but also after the duration of each stretch of "fresh retention" of the homogeneously grouped coexistent data. There are ruptures, gaps, but also resumptions, which enable time-consciousness.

The formation of the "empty retention" is not the inscribing of a trace, but something like a disappearing 'trick' in which an original impression is replaced by its "empty presentation."<sup>39</sup> It seems that Husserl thinks of the disappearance of the originary impression and its retention in forgetting in 'optical' terms. The retention "vanishes" into a "horizon of the past," losing ever more of its articulated surface detail. As retentions pass into this horizon, they "crowd" each other. They become "clouded over" and "sink" into unconscious oblivion. As they pass into the underworld of the unconscious, they are no longer "constitutively living." They suffer a death, obscured by a shrouding or cloaking function of the empty presentation.

It is as if the empty presentation functioned by means of a "revolving door,"<sup>40</sup> which is connected to an adjoining, preconscious "antechamber of the ego (*Vorzimmer des Ich*)," as Husserl calls it. As the originary impression disappears, becoming ever more "impoverished" in its material content, its affective force and structural sense are preserved in concealment in terms of the empty presentation. Husserl has demonstrated the ambiguous function of the empty presentation as simultaneously absence and presence to consciousness in both the processes of forgetting, and of associative recollection of already sedimented retentions from the unconscious.

Towards the end of his life, Merleau-Ponty attempted to reconcile contemporary movements in psychoanalysis and structuralism with a

Husserlian approach to the unconscious. Consciousness opens up onto a field of raised figures or *Gestalten*, which has already been organized in terms of the differences, or “spaces” between them. He writes in the “working notes” to *The Visible and Invisible*:

This unconscious is not to be sought at the bottom of ourselves, behind the back of our ‘consciousness,’ but in front of us as articulations of our field. It is ‘unconscious’ by the fact that it is not an *object*, but it is that through which objects are possible .... It is between them as the interval of the trees ....<sup>41</sup>.

The unconscious may be initially thought in Husserlian terms as the bottommost, or deepest, parts of the affective relief structure, which enable differences between coexistent and successive *Gestalten*. Husserl anticipated Derrida’s ‘concept’ of “spacing.” The “unconscious” is the spacing of the living present which is genetically prior to temporalizing.

## Notes

1. For Freud’s relationship to Fechner and Mach, see his letters to Fliess in *The Origins of Psychoanalysis, Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887–1902*, ed. M. Bonaparte, Anna Freud and Ernst Kris (New York: Basic Books, 1954), pp. 244, and 322. Mary Henle, the perceptual psychologist and historian of psychology, states that Freud’s views on perception are essentially “Helmholtzian.” She writes, “... Freud learned his Helmholtz and took it as true or representing the state of knowledge at the time,” in *1879 and All That, Essays in the Theory and History of Psychology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 58. In her classic work, Maria Dorer argues that many of Freud’s concepts have their origin in Herbart’s psychology. See her *Die historischen Grundlagen der Psychoanalyse* (Leipzig, 1932). Manfred Sommer writes of the relationship between the development of Husserl’s early thought and his “positivist” contemporaries Avenarius and Mach in *Husserl und der frühe Positivismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985). For Husserl’s relationship to Avenarius, see John Scanlon’s “Husserl’s *Ideas* and the Natural Concept of the World,” in *Edmund Husserl and the Phenomenological Tradition*, ed. R. Sokolowski (Catholic University of America Press, 1989). Elmar Holenstein describes the influence of the “Herbart School” and Wilhelm Wundt on the development of Husserl’s approach to association in *Phänomenologie der Assoziation* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972).
2. Husserl must first “suspend” time-consciousness in epoche in order to examine the “deeper” functioning of the “unconscious” in the grouping of sensations in what he calls “the living present.” Only then is he able to turn to the related problems of unconscious association in memory, and the “material fulfillment” of time-consciousness, or temporality, in its “abstract character.” The latter occurs by means of the sensations which have already been grouped as



*Gestalten* in the living present. This will be discussed in more detail in Section 2, below.

3. Hermann Drüe attempts to develop a phenomenological theory of the unconscious from Husserl's work in a chapter entitled "Genesis des Unbewussten," in his *Edmund Husserls System der phänomenologischen Psychologie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986), pp. 307–315. The phenomenological analysis of the "constitution of the unconscious" has been suggested by Elmar Holenstein in *Phänomenologie der Assoziation*, p. 38, and by Thomas Seebohm in "The New Hermeneutics, Other Trends, and the Human Sciences from the Standpoint of Transcendental Phenomenology," in *Continental Philosophy*, ed. John Sallis, Thomas Seebohm and Hugh Silverman (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), p. 85. It has not, as yet, been elaborated, however, how a phenomenological theory is to be developed from Husserl's concept of passive synthesis. William McKenna is currently translating the *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*. All translations from the German in this essay, however, are by the present author unless stated otherwise.
4. Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 211.
5. *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 149.
6. Mary Henle writes that even the editors of the *Project*, "remark correctly, I think, that it contains within itself a nucleus of a great part of Freud's later psychoanalytic theories (I:290)," op.cit., p. 51. See also, for example, Peter Allmacher's *Freud's Neurological Education and its Influence on Psychoanalytic Theory* (N.Y.: International Universities Press, 1965).
7. As Robert J. Richards states, however, Wundt later abandoned his view, adopted from Helmholtz, that "the unconscious construction of perception is the fusion (*Verschmelzung*) of the elements bound through the colligation into a unified whole (Wundt, 1862, p. 443)" as not being "empirical" enough, in "Wundt's Early Theories of Unconscious Inference and Cognitive Evolution in their Relation to Darwinian Biopsychology," *Wundt Studies, A Centennial Collection*, ed. W.G. Bringmann and R.D. Tweney (Toronto: C.J. Hogrefe, Inc., 1980), p. 51 and p. 61.
8. Paul Ricoeur writes in *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation* that "the unconscious of phenomenology is the preconscious of psychoanalysis" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 392. I cannot attempt to explain here the reasons why Ricoeur abandoned his earlier position that phenomenology was able to account for the disclosure of unconscious processes in psychoanalytical "technique." In the earlier work, *Freedom and Nature*, Ricoeur writes: "we can assume that the interpretation of the relationship of the unconscious and conscious proposed here not only is compatible with the reversal which takes place in the analytic cure, but also accounts for it better than [the Freudian, inserted by the present author] realism of the unconscious" (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), p. 391. J.N. Mohanty writes about Ricoeur's earlier work, "Ricoeur is one of the few phenomenologists who have taken the Husserlian notion of the *hyle* seriously, and have sought to accommodate the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious within a phenomenological theory of consciousness" (*The Concept of Intentionality*, p. 145). Husserl's concept of *hyle* in regard to the unconscious will be discussed below.

For Lacan, the Freudian unconscious is formed in terms of “primal repression” (*Urverdrängung*). Hermann Drüe proposes that a transcendental account of the “genesis” of the “habitual, individual unconscious” can be given in terms of the habitual sedimentation of “subjective accomplishments in which the monad functions non-egoically.” (op.cit., p. 307). “Primal repression” is to be seen as a response issuing from the entire hyletic field rather than as an act accomplished from the ego. Thomas Seebohm elaborates on Drüe’s effort to give a transcendental phenomenological account of the constitution of the unconscious in terms of the phenomenological thesis of a non-egoic repression: “Repressions that constitute an unconscious are not intentional acts of the ego but something that happens to it. They are founded on traumatic experiences. .... The ego is not master over its own hyletic field. It can be completely overpowered by it.” (op.cit., pp. 85–86). In these phenomenological accounts of the Freudian theory, however, the unconscious is derivative of consciousness. It is not an inalienable part of subjectivity itself, which, as will be argued in this paper, is there from the very beginning as its most fundamental layer in the organization of meaning. The correlative argument for the inalienability of the subject in the conception of the unconscious for “phenomenological-anthropological” psychology and psychiatry is presented in my dissertation, “Phenomenology and the Unconscious – The Problem of the Unconscious in the Phenomenological and Existential Traditions: E. Husserl, V. von Weizsäcker and L. Binswanger” (The Pennsylvania State University, 1989). The phenomenological-anthropological contribution to current debate in cognitive and clinical psychology, including the artificial intelligence approach, is that the unconscious ultimately should not be “thought” apart from the subject. On the other hand, the subject should not be thought apart from the unconscious. This, of course, is not the unconscious of the Lacanian subject which is “split” by a dialectics of desire.

9. Derrida acknowledges that Husserl addresses the problem of the unconscious in his “Introduction to the ‘Origin of Geometry.’” He cites Husserl’s mention of the unconscious in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*: “‘Far from being a phenomenological nothing’, ‘the so-called unconscious’ or ‘universal substratum’ ‘where sense is deposited, is limit-mode of consciousness’ (*FTL*, p. 18).” *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavy, Jr. (Stony Brook: Nicholas Hays, 1978), p. 93. Rather than developing Husserl’s own account of the unconscious in terms of a genetic approach to passive synthesis, however, Derrida refers the reader to “Fink’s appendix on the Problem of the ‘Unbewussten’,” in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 385–387. This appendix written by Fink in 1936 for the *Crisis*, states that the “problematics of the unconscious” is to be thought in phenomenological terms as a “problematics of intentionality.” Fink’s text, taken by itself, is misleading. Husserl’s methodological point of access to the unconscious is not intentionality. It is the present author’s argument that Husserl suspends intentional functioning in a much more radical reduction to the “originary association” of the passive synthesis of the “living present.” Husserl is then equipped to carry out the further phenomenological analyses of the unconscious in associative memory. Although Husserl, at times, suggests the possibility of the existence of “unconscious intentionalities,” (see, for example, *Crisis*, p. 237), his methodological access to the unconscious is pre-

intentional. Fink's reading, and Derrida's reliance on it in his criticism of Husserl, emphasize the phenomenological analysis of intentional consciousness as the "point of departure for a science of the 'unconscious,'" (ibid., p. 386). These later readings thereby 'veil' Husserl's own attempt to 'excavate' the unconscious in terms of the genetic analysis of passive synthesis.

Fink and Derrida both overlook the fact that intentionality is genetically a much 'later' problem than passive synthesis and affords, by definition, no direct access to the unconscious.

10. Although Husserl's approach to the unconscious is much later than Freud's and shares some fundamental assumptions with the Freudian theory, it is unlikely that Freud had very much direct influence on Husserl. As Elmar Holenstein notes, only two brief works were found in Husserl's private library: *Über Psychoanalyse* (1909), and *Selbstdarstellung* (1936). Neither book shows any signs of being read. Husserl did, however, underline his copy of C.G. Jung's *Versuch einer Darstellung der psychoanalytischen Theorie* (1913), particularly those passages with the "representation of the experiment in association to be helpful in disclosing the repressed unconscious." (op.cit., p. 321). Association and repression are precisely the areas through which Husserl himself attempts to approach the unconscious in the *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*. Any resemblances between the Freudian and Husserlian theories are more likely due to the common nineteenth century influences which helped shape their respective approaches to the problem. The most significant of these influences stems from the "Herbart School," which had become a prevailing approach in the latter part of the nineteenth century and had been responsible for some of the textbooks, such as Gustav A. Lindler's *Lehrbuch der empirischen Psychologie nach genetischer Methode* (Graz: Wiesner, 1858), which were widely used in Germany and Austria at that time. Traces of Helmholtz and Fechner may be found in Husserl's theory, but as will become clear below, Husserl wants his approach to stand in contrast to the mechanistic psychology and physiology of these latter thinkers.

For Husserl's much earlier scepticism regarding the concept of the unconscious in his *Philosophie der Arithmetik*, see Dallas Willard's *Logic and the Objectivity of Knowledge* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1984), pp. 50–51.

11. Rudolf Bernet, "Differenz und Anwesenheit: Derridas und Husserls Phänomenologie der Sprache, der Zeit, der Geschichte, der wissenschaftlichen Rationalität," *Phänomenologische Forschungen* 18 (Freiburg: Alber, 1986), p. 94.
12. Bernet, "Differenz und Anwesenheit," p. 81. Manfred Sommer writes about the "suddenness" of the "moment (*Augenblick*)" in *Evidenz im Augenblick. Eine Phänomenologie der reinen Empfindung*, that the person "for whom it (the moment) suddenly flashes up, has no knowledge of it, no 'consciousness', no intentionality ..." (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987), p. 207.
13. Ichiro Yamaguchi, *Passive Synthesis und Intersubjektivität bei Edmund Husserl* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), p. 25.
14. In the writings of E.T.A. Hoffmann, Novalis, Tieck, Jean Paul, and others, the image of prospecting a mine simultaneously served the function of referring back to visits to the underworld in classical mythology, and to the 'modern' attempts to explore the 'depths' of the self through artistic activity. Cf. Gerhard Kurz's discussion of the romantic tradition of the "*Bergwerk*" image in his *Traum Schrecken, Kafkas literarische Analyse* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche

Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1980). Even if the analysand is lying prone on a couch in traditional psychoanalysis, the descent into the self is seen as predominantly vertical, requiring the temporary, ascetic renunciation of horizontal, worldly encounters.

15. Bernet, "*Differenz und Anwesenheit*," p. 79. My translation.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
17. *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 9.
18. Dorion Cairns, *Conversations with Husserl and Fink* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), pp. 24–25.
19. Ludwig Landgrebe, *World and Consciousness*, trans. and ed. Donn Welton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 52.
20. Landgrebe states that the constitution of time-consciousness involves "concepts of mere forms of functions that ... then need a given content before they come into play" (*ibid.*, p. 57). Husserl writes, "mere forms is admittedly an abstraction, and thus, the intentional analysis of time-consciousness and its achievement is from the beginning an abstract one." (Hua XI, 128).
21. Holenstein correctly asserts that the "theory of the constitution of the 'unconscious' as a "theory of preaffective constitution" must "take its point of departure" from the evidences offered by those unities and pluralities which have already become conscious affectively. Otherwise, it would not be a "phenomenological" theory, *Phänomenologie der Assoziation*, p. 38. That is, one must start with genetically later, or higher phases of constitution, before preceding back to deeper, more original ones by abstractively removing layers of constitution.
22. Cf. Derrida's citation of Deleuze on Nietzsche, "Quantity itself is not separable from the difference in quantity. The difference in quantity is the essence of force, the relation of force with force," *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 148. The competition or "strife" of contrasts relative to each other in the hyletic field determines for Husserl the affective magnitude of any momentarily prevailing force in the field.
23. Thomas Seebom, *op.cit.*, p. 86. It is noteworthy that during such moments of intense physical or emotional suffering, the ego is unable to "transcend" the living present and remains, as it were, 'entrapped' within it. Binswanger has found a similar loss of temporal perspective during psychotic episodes in both schizophrenic and manic-depressive psychoses in his phenomenological descriptions of the transformations of the world-designs (*Weltentwürfe*) of these patients. See the present author's "The Problem of the Unconscious in the Later Thought of Ludwig Binswanger – A Phenomenological Approach to Schizophrenic Delusion in Perception and Communication," in *Analecta Husserliana*, Volume XXXI (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990).
24. Cf. E.H. van Olst's *The Orienting Reflex* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1971).
25. Cf. Yamaguchi, *op.cit.*, p. 59.
26. Although Husserl does not name his source, it is clear that he is, in part, responding to Fechner's attempt to quantify "unconscious sensations" in terms of negative numbers. See following note, below.
27. Manfred Sommer cites Fechner in his *Evidenz im Augenblick*, p. 57: "Insofar as we name sensations, which are roused by a stimulus, but not sufficiently to affect consciousness, unconscious sensations, and those that affect consciousness, conscious sensations, then the unconscious sensations would be represented by negative values, and the conscious ones by positive values

- according to our formula." *Elemente der Psychophysik* (Leipzig, 1860). M. Sommer continues, "Thus, Fechner believes that his psychophysical plumbline is able to measure into 'the depths of the unconscious' and to mark the 'degree of unconsciousness of a sensation' on a scale with negative values."
28. Cf. Viktor von Weizsäcker's concept of the situational lability of sensory thresholds, "Schwellenlabilität," in *Der Gestaltkreis, Theorie der Einheit von Wahrnehmen und Bewegen* (Stuttgart: Thieme Verlag, 1940).
  29. For example, T.G. Bower's experimental work with infants suggests an initial tendency to perceive pluralities over unities. See his "The Object in the World of the Infant," *Scientific American*, October 1971. Experimental work concerning the adult perception of subliminally and supraliminally presented stimuli discussed in *The Roots of Perception*, ed. Uwe Hentschel, Gudmund Smith and Juris Draguns (North Holland: Elsevier Science Publishers B.V., 1986), suggests isolatable "microgenetic" phases of both "conscious" and "preconscious" perceptual processes. See my "Phenomenology and the Unconscious."
  30. Compare what Henri E. Ellenberger writes about Herbart's concept of repression: "Herbart thought of the threshold as a surface where an everchanging multitude of perceptions and representations constantly fight against one another. The stronger ones push the weaker ones down under the threshold, the repressed representations strive to remerge, and for that reason, often associate themselves with other representations." *The Discovery of the Unconscious, The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), p. 312.
  31. K.H. Pribram, "The Foundations of Psychoanalytic Theory: Freud's Neuropsychological Model," *Brain and Behavior, Vol. 4: Selected Readings* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 400. Pribram writes that Freud had adopted "the now well-worn, though still unsupported, idea that receptor excitation repeatedly transmitted through the nervous system lowers synaptic resistance."
  32. "Die Urquelle aller Affektion liegt und kann nur liegen in der Urimpression." (Hua XI, 168)
  33. I am indebted to Elmar Holenstein who suggested this example during a conversation.
  34. Similarly Merleau-Ponty writes in his working notes to *The Visible and Invisible*, "... understand perception as differentiation, forgetting as undifferentiation. The fact that one no longer sees the memory = not a destruction of a psychic material ..., but its disarticulation which makes there be no longer a separation (*écart*), a relief. This is the night of forgetting." (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 197. Merleau-Ponty's text surprisingly echoes the Husserlian metaphors discussed in this paper.
  35. Cf. Husserl's *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Section # 111, "The Neutrality Modification and Phantasy," trans. Fred Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), pp. 260-262.
  36. "Differenz und Abwesenheit," p. 82.
  37. *Ibid.*
  38. Klaus Held writes, for example, that the "pre-temporal streaming (*vorzeitlichem Strömen*) of the living present contains a manifold of phases which is still not able to be (called) the course of a time series," in *Lebendige*

*Gegenwart. Die Frage nach der Seinsweise des transzendentalen Ich bei Edmund Husserl, entwickelt am Leitfaden der Zeitproblematik* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), p. 115.

39. Husserl writes, "There corresponds to each intuition its empty presentation, insofar as each intuition does not disappear after its course 'without a trace' (*spurlos*) .... Every such empty presentation is retention and its necessary annexing itself onto prior intuitions is a fundamental law of passive genesis." (Hua XI, 72). Husserl does not thereby mean, however, that the empty presentation is a 'trace' of the intuition which it replaces.
40. Cf. Viktor von Weizsäcker's presentation of the "principle of the revolving door" (*Drehtürprinzip*) in *Der Gestaltkreis*.
41. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and Invisible*, p. 180.