

The Future of Husserlian Phenomenology:

Time and Epoché

Louis N. Sandowsky

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Haifa University

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1. The Intertwining (*Ineinander*) of Time and Epoché

To ask about the future of Husserlian Phenomenology at this time is actually quite a natural gesture – caught up, as it is, in the anxiety wrought by the difficulties that come with the beginning of a new millennium and the malaise of the post-modern. Though, it must be borne in mind that it is a gesture that simultaneously puts the sense of ‘naturalness’ into question. It answers to a conscientious zeitgeist that seeks to catch itself in mid-act (between breaths) – as an attitudinal re-orientation, break, or moment of suspense – in order to find its bearings and to re-discover its responsibility as a *rigorous* philosophical praxis. And, as it does so, the history of the movement of phenomenology exemplifies nothing other than the constant re-iteration of this turn to momentarily step outside its history (or, at least, a naïve, un-reflective attitude to it) in order to re-turn to itself with greater clarity and precision. This is the *epoché* at the heart of phenomenology as it *unfolds* in time. Thus, in order to re-gather itself and to re-establish the sense / significance of its time / history so as to forge ahead, phenomenology must perpetually return to its beginnings. This is, arguably, the essence of the meaning of phenomenology as an ‘infinite task.’

This infinite task is none other than an infinite *re-iteration* of phenomenological questions that always remain open to further analysis. Such is the thought of a ‘phenomenology of phenomenology,’ which traces itself throughout Husserl's work.¹

To ask about the future of Husserlian phenomenology already problematizes the idea of a ‘terminus.’ If this elicits panic and alarm in certain philosophic and scientific domains then this is only the effect of an orientation that has not grasped the meaning of epoché. It is a question of a change in consciousness itself – a transformation of the manner of waiting-towards the not-yet. The apparent pointlessness of what seems to be nothing other than a Sisyphean task is actually the sign of a naïveté that requires examination. Of course, the issue of ‘how’ this critique might be conducted is a question that remains left over – thus inspiring hope at the very same time that it undermines it. The method or way only resolves itself in the doing. The movement of unfolding the question, if conducted conscientiously (with rigour), brings with it the true sense of what it is to ask about the future of Husserlian phenomenology and to what extent it may retain its Husserlian trace.²

To this end, which must not be confused with a terminus, *Time* and *Epoché* must be thought together.

As I prepare this writing for the submission date of February 2007, what is foremost in my mind is that it marks the centennial of the lecture course (of 1907) in which Edmund Husserl first introduced the working method of phenomenological reduction / epoché (later published as *The Idea of Phenomenology*³). Developmentally, it owes a great deal to the remarkable series of lectures that he presented at Göttingen in the winter semester of 1904-5 on the phenomenology of the consciousness of immanent / internal time.⁴ Though the reduction is not thematized in the time-lectures *as such*, its trace is operative throughout the analyses.

Dorion Cairns reports in his journal of 1931:

“Husserl said that at the time of the 1905 time-lectures he had not yet come upon the phenomenological reduction, but that these lectures were what urged him on to think of the phenomenological reduction.”⁵

With the publication of Husserl’s *Ideen I* in 1913, there ‘began’ a systematic account of the method of *epoché*, whose elaboration gradually turned into the most fundamental task of phenomenology.⁶ Though the question of temporal constitution took a backseat during this middle-period of Husserl’s writing further application and development of the epoché inevitably led to questions of genesis, thus bringing time back into the foreground of his philosophy. It is the interwovenness of the themes of time and epoché that dominate his later and more mature transcendental phenomenology.

2. The Time of the Epoché

Existentialism (existential-phenomenology) and deconstruction have had a considerable effect on how Husserlian phenomenology is re-read today – particularly in regard to the themes of time and the epoché. It is important to note that Husserl’s egological investigations and the method of phenomenological reduction have been severely criticized by other phenomenologists, e.g., Aron Gurwitsch and Alfred Shutz,⁷ including the existential phenomenologists, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre, on the basis of a common misunderstanding. Allegedly, both elements in Husserl’s phenomenology disregard the intersubjective pre-conditions of their possibility. For Shutz and Gurwitsch, the phenomenology of the Other / social

existence / intersubjectivity – as exemplified by Emmanuel Levinas’s discourse on alterity and the primacy of ethics, Martin Heidegger’s thematization of the fundamental role of ‘Mitsein’ / ‘Being-with’ in the constitution of Dasein, or Martin Buber’s ‘I-Thou’ relation, etc. – takes precedence over an egological route of inquiry into the constitution of the one shared Lifeworld. It is further claimed, according to a purely solipsistic interpretation, that the method of epoché – particularly the transcendental reduction is counter to the whole concept of the Lebenswelt. This is brought out famously in Jean-Paul Sartre’s early work *The Transcendence of the Ego*,⁸ which argues against the notion of the transcendental Ego and the suitability of the epoché by emphasizing that the structure of the ego always already implies the Other, not the other way round.

In essence, it may be true that alterity is always already implied by discourse on the ego (from the standpoint of the Lebenswelt) but, at the beginning of the philosophical turn toward a truly phenomenological orientation on this question, it is not so ‘self-evident.’ For it is always ‘I’ the meditator / practicing phenomenologist who must first take this step, even if the outcome – after rigorous examination – should be the phenomenological-eidetic-deconstruction of my particularity to the general (communal / intersubjective) structures that permit the possibility of any ego. The author may lose its ontological priority by such a movement, but it wins back its existential authority – in constitutional terms – through that which is disclosed by this activity. The interplay of time and epoché is the unfolding of the alterity that lies at the heart of the shared Lifeworld to which I belong. It is in me just as I am inside it. This interpenetration is vertical as well as horizontal. There is no hint of solipsism here – which has always proved to be an impoverished determination of the meaning of epoché. Of all Husserl’s disciples, Eugen Fink (and perhaps Ludwig Landgrebe) probably came closest to understanding the intrinsic complementarity of egology (which is only one of the turns taken by the phenomenological reduction) and discourse on alterity in Husserlian phenomenology. This is evident in Fink’s fascinating *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: the Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method*, as endorsed and annotated by Husserl himself.⁹

The all-embracing theme that binds these issues together is temporality. Jacques Derrida’s various deconstructive re-readings of Husserl’s phenomenology of immanent time consciousness will, I believe, have a profound impact on how his discourse on time will be engaged by the most ‘careful’ philosophers over the next few decades. It is the theme of time itself that is, perhaps, the most outstanding problem of phenomenology – to the extent that it is a horizon of research that is inextricably linked to the problem of the unfolding of phenomenological methodology itself. On the one hand, Derrida’s deconstructive critiques demonstrate that time and its articulation are irreducibly tied to metaphysical conceptuality, while realizing that Husserlian phenomenology in its very ‘aim’ – through the continuous implementation of the methodological epoché – transcends or transgresses this limitation. Then again, every time that time is subjected to an epoché (in its many similar but non-identical forms of suspension, neutralization, bracketing, etc) there is still the *time of the epoché*.¹⁰ This is nothing other than the most primordial dialectic operating at the heart of temporality, Being, and the relationship between phenomenology and itself.

Some commentators consider this kind of formulation to be philosophically absurd. Many phenomenologists – and I am forced to use this expression loosely since the practice of ‘phenomenology’ has come to signify a number of fashionable, but fundamentally incorrect determinations of its meaning (the same could be said of deconstruction) – dispute the relevance or correctness of Derrida’s deconstructions of

Husserl's work. I would like to see more readers in the 'phenomenological camp' re-read both Husserl and Derrida more carefully.¹¹

With respect to the theme of time and the relations between epoché and temporization, I believe that the question of the future of Husserlian phenomenology is intertwined with that of the future of Derridian deconstruction. This is where the line between the past and futurity finds itself smudged again and again as phenomenology must return to the question of the task that lies *before* it *after* deconstruction.¹²

3. Time as Epoché

Despite the importance of Husserl's 1905 lecture course on the *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness* – which radicalized Western philosophical discourse on time as much as Einstein's theory of relativity (spacetime)¹³ revolutionized the way in which objective time came to be thematized in the physical sciences – the text is not well known, especially in the English-speaking world.

Husserl's phenomenological meditations on temporality are elegantly complementary to those of Einstein and certainly just as significant philosophically, scientifically, and above all historically. Einstein's papers of 1905 that introduced the Principle of Relativity (or the Special [Specific] Theory of Relativity), which first thematized the exotic forms of temporal dilation that occur at velocities close to that of light – thus refuting the classical concept of Absolute time – were published in the same year that Husserl presented his lecture course on the phenomenology of the consciousness of internal time. When taken together, their different orientations – Husserl's 'subjective' discourse and Einstein's 'objective' account – fulfill one another in exquisite harmony. This is even more markedly the case with the addition of Einstein's General theory of relativity (1915/16). Husserl's phenomenological discourse on Primordial Flux expresses the fundamental interplay of temporalization and spatialization – where successivity and simultaneity must be thought together. Heidegger's concept of time-space surely finds its inspiration here as does Merleau-Ponty's concept of chiasm. In extension, Derrida's use of the neologism *différance* – which equiprimordially combines space and time as difference *and* delay – is probably his greatest contribution to phenomenological thought on time and the epoché as *temporization*.

In every case, the traditional disjunction between time and space has been problematized. Temporalizing and spatializing cannot be articulated adequately within the bounds of the classic dyad. The twentieth century stands out as the epoch that truly radicalized discourse on the interrelated themes of spatialization and temporalization – through the many strands of thought that deconstructed the differences that have traditionally 'separated' the treatment of time (as an order of successions) from that of a spatial order (as an order of coexistences). In contemporary terms, it is rather a question of intertwining (Ineinander). For example, the conceptual framework of Einstein's theory of relativity is such that space and time should be treated as one word: spacetime.

Einstein's Special theory of relativity demonstrates that it is no longer possible to speak of an Absolute time irrespective of an observer and their particular frame of reference while Husserl's phenomenological investigations of temporal awareness

demonstrate the primordial intentional / temporal conditions of possibility by which there can be such a thing as an observer.

Einstein's post-Copernican reversal in astronomy, which ostensibly places the measuring observer at the centre of the universe, raises the problem of instantaneity / intersubjective contemporaneity – an issue that remains unquestioned in Newtonian theory. Due to the finite velocity of light (by which things make their appearance) anything that is at a distance from the observer actually lies in the past – including other observers. The classical substantive distinction between space as an order of coexistences and time as an order of successions breaks down here. For both Einsteinian cosmology and Husserlian phenomenology the perennial distinction between *things as they are* and *things as they appear* owes its intelligibility to a certain temporization / delay. The possibility of the measurement of this delay requires a radical re-situation of the meaning of the present and the notion of intersubjectivity since the rhythms of objective spacetime do not keep pace to a single universal beat.

The suspension of the idea of Absolute time – along with the suspension of Absolute contemporaneous space – has the extraordinary effect of bringing into the foreground the lived temporal-spacing through which they are already interwoven in manifold complexes of different frames of reference: fields of relativity. The methodological correlate to this suspension in phenomenology is the epoché.

It is fundamental to remember that phenomenological reduction is irreducible to doubt and the solipsism that seems to follow from the scepticism that it would otherwise engender. It is rather a question of the 'suspension' of a thesis – a 'deferment' of judgement. The issue of the *solus ipse* takes on quite a different meaning in phenomenology – and likewise, when considered according to relativity – since reality is certainly *not* reduced to a 'point.'

The temporization announced by temporalization and its various cognates – e.g., 'extension' in the sense of 'postponement' as well as to 'stretch-out' – performs as the common tie between time and epoché. Such expressions of temporization as 'to-suspend' and 'to-put-off-until-later' articulate the 'how' of the reduction. To echo Derrida: it is a question of *différance* – where difference of a spatial order and deferral in temporal terms are inextricably intertwined.¹⁴

This is where the significance of Husserl's analyses of immanent time-consciousness stands out with respect to the future of phenomenology itself. His richly descriptive discourse on the longitudinal and transversal intentionalities in play in the temporalization of consciousness provides us with the material to re-think the meaning of the *future* of Husserlian phenomenology in full regard to the rigour of the praxis that it names.

In the lectures on immanent time consciousness the route of inquiry is not strictly linear. Husserl actually spends far more time talking about the essential interplay of the now and the past (primal impression and retention) when describing the constitution of the ever-flowing present. The reader has to wait quite a while before the signifier of the future is uncovered. It is understandable that some readers have arrived at the conclusion that the givenness of futurity is somehow less original in Husserl's phenomenology. This is by no means the case! Interestingly, the reader has to wait for its signification to arrive through the very theme of *waiting* itself. It is in part 26, "Differences between Memory and Expectation," of the time lectures that it is revealed how expectation, as the futural correlate of reproductive (secondary) remembrance, points to a more primordial form of anticipation: 'protention.'

At first, it seems rather strange that it took Husserl so long to get round to the question of the originarity of protention, but if we look at his writing retroactively from the point of view of existentialist discourse on anxiety, then the detour that he takes through reproductive memory before disclosing the primordially of protention makes perfect sense. Since Husserl is concerned to show how objectivities are given – that is, to demonstrate the experience of the *giving* of the *given* – then protention announces the problem of the *giving* of that which does *not give* itself. This is not to confuse such a lack of givenness with the sense of re-presentation that merely reproduces / substitutes without giving, since it points to a more primordial lack of givenness that originally motivates it. The original coming toward us of futurity is a waiting toward possibility, which is intrinsically discomfiting. Unlike expectation, which fills the futural space of uncertainty that is disclosed by the originary intuitive openness of anticipation with familiar repetitions of an objective order that create the illusion of determined limits / certainty, protention is open and, in a peculiar sense, objectless. Husserl's own narrative strategy and his route of inquiry had to proceed by way of the same unremitting tendency of consciousness to focus on the given. However, since his analyses traverse the path that leads to the question of the 'giving' of the given, the giving of that which does *not give* itself (objectively) is finally permitted, somewhat belatedly, to announce itself – even though it is, in a certain sense, more primordial.

Unlike expectation, which projects determinate (objective) phantasies that await their fulfillment in a future now (which is a kind of extension of memory into the not-yet), protention is actually open. It first unfolds the not-yet as the site in which we may project futural possibilities. This restores the future ekstasis to what is none other than the tri-partite union (triumvirate) of past, present and future in what Husserl comes to name as the Living Present (*lebendige Gegenwart*) – which literally means 'waiting-towards.'

Since expectation is a kind of memorial projection into the not-yet where futurity expresses itself as an extended act of foreclosure – initiated and maintained in the ever-flowing present – we are to understand that it is to wait for *something*: to await the fulfillment of an *objective*. Protention, in contrast to the former, is openness upon an ever receding futural *horizon* of possibilities whose essence as 'surprise' exceeds any expectational delimitation. The articulation of this horizon of excess first makes room for that which would be projected into it, often flaunting its transcendence in the face of any naïve hopes of fulfillment. Protention names a dimension of intentionality where expectation is built upon a more primordial form of anticipation as the condition of its possibility.

Protention is the originary opening upon the fissure of the not-yet through which anxiety pours in as the prime indicator of what it is to exist or to be-thrust-into-the-world. Its objectlessness is what most significantly differentiates it from fear, which always has some kind of object. Protention correlates with anxiety as the horizontal opening through which one may first be motivated by one's expectations – fears and hopes. It opens the lived-space of *waiting-towards* – that self-transcending sense of intentionality that is intrinsic to the structurality of the Living Present (*lebendige Gegenwart*).

The movement of phenomenology is an unfolding of 'depth.' It aims at fleshing out the whole. But, this holistic telos is actually an 'infinite task' – of foundering – which is irreducible to a *foundationalism*. Husserl's implementation of the epoché, in its many different phases (all of which invariably involve an eidetic component of fictionalizing) expresses the fundamental importance of a form of

recuperation through distanciation – for distanciation, also read transcendence as it announces itself through delay and duration. It also expresses a certain kind of open-endedness with regard to possible modifications in orientation – which may free the 'depth' of the 'whole' from the 'shallow' limits of any totalizing grasp. In the case of protention, the movement is that of 'opening' rather than that of the 'closure' of expectation. The *epoché* is a rip in the fabric of lived experience from which pours forth the very structure of its own possibility – the opening-up of structurality. It is a movement of dehiscence. In these terms, it is the methodological analogue to the retentional and protentional interwovenness of time in its spacing – where retention passively provides the Other face of a transformational return, which is to be distinguished from memory as an act of evocation, through which active expectation *as foreclosure* answers to the primal and passive call of protention *as opening*.

The temporization in the play of epoché expresses the profound temporal resonance of what it is to postpone taking up a position / to defer metaphysical speculation. Everything remains left over, though a certain delay is in play with respect to any judgement concerning actuality or non-actuality (putting into suspense the two extremes of doubt and certainty). It is a question of working towards freedom by restoring the *openness* of protention as distinct from the *foreclosure* (constraints) of expectation. And, it is precisely through the temporization / deferral of that which would otherwise beguile us with the promise of completion / totalization that it becomes possible to deconstruct our prejudices; to entertain the hope of achieving true philosophical rigour, thereby extending toward that which is most Husserlian in the future of phenomenology.

Notes

¹ See, in particular, the Conclusion ('conclusion' being somewhat of a misnomer in this context) to Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*. Trans. Dorion Cairns. Martinus Nijhoff. 1960. [Original German text – 1929]. *Husserliana I [Hua]: Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*. Edited by S. Strasser. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963. 2nd ed.

Also, see Husserl's fascinating remarks about a "...phenomenology of the phenomenological reduction" in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (Crisis, Part III B, sec.71, p.247)* – which translates as a 'reduction of the reduction.' *Hua VI: Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften und die Transzendente Phänomenologie*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962.

² The movement of Husserlian phenomenology carries the implicit invitation "to go with Husserl beyond Husserl" – as Donn Welton puts it in his introduction to the collection of essays by Ludwig Landgrebe, entitled: *The Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl*. P. 30. Edited by Donn Welton (various translators). Cornell University Press. 1981.

³ *The Idea of Phenomenology*. Trans. W.P. Alston and G. Nakhnikian. Martinus Nijhoff. 1964. [lectures of 1907]. See also, E. Husserl, *Collected Works VIII: The Idea of Phenomenology*. Trans. Lee Hardy. Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999. *Hua II: Die Idee der Phänomenologie*. Edited by Walter Biemel. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950.

⁴ *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*. 1928. Edited by Edith Stein and Martin Heidegger. Trans. J.S. Churchill. Indiana University Press. 1964. [Lectures of 1905 and appendices of 1910]. See also: *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*. Translated by John Barnett Brough. Kluwer Academic Publishers. 1991. *Hua X: Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)*. Edited by Rudolph Boehm. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966.

⁵ See *Conversations with Husserl and Fink*. (1931-1932). Edited by the Husserl-Archives in Louvain, with a Foreword by Richard M. Zaner. Martinus Nijhoff / The Hague / 1976 [*Conversations*]). (p. 38. XXIV: *Conversation with Husserl and Fink, 9/11/31*).

⁶ In XXVII: *Conversation with Husserl and Fink, 20/11/31*, Dorion Cairns reports that...
“[I]t is his [Husserl’s] conviction that the most important thing about his whole philosophy is the transcendental reduction. He repeated what Fink had told me before, that the phenomenological reduction is something which must be continually repeated in phenomenological work” (p.43, *Conversations*).

⁷ *Philosophers in Exile: The Correspondence of Alfred Shutz and Aron Gurwitsch, 1939-1959*. Edited by Richard Grathoff; translated by J. Claude Evans; foreword by Maurice Natanson. Indiana University Press. 1989.

⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre. *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick. Octagon. 1972. [Original French text: *La Transcendance de l’ego*. 1936-7].

⁹ Eugen Fink. *Sixth Cartesian Meditation: the Idea of a Transcendental Theory of Method* – with textual notations by Edmund Husserl. Translated with an introduction by Ronald Bruzina (1995). Indiana University Press. Published in German as Eugen Fink, *VI Cartesianische Meditation*. Teil I. 1988. Kluwer Academic Publishers B.V.

¹⁰ See Derrida’s M.A. dissertation (1953-54): *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl’s Philosophy* – particularly, pp. 66 and 91). Translated by Marion Hobson. The University of Chicago Press. 2003. *Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl*. Presses Universitaires de France. 1990.

¹¹ Other than a few texts by such authors as Rodolphe Gasché, David Wood, Claude Evans and, in particular, Leonard Lawlor, there is a huge degree of misunderstanding in the literature regarding the theoretical, strategic, and methodological relations between phenomenology and deconstruction.

¹² It should be noted that, along with Merleau-Ponty, Derrida distinguished his position on Husserl’s philosophy from the ‘French’ phenomenological scene of the early 1950’s by re-reading the history of phenomenology through Eugen Fink’s writing collaboration with the old master. In this regard, see Derrida’s M.A. dissertation 1953-54: *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl’s Philosophy*. Ronald Bruzina (who translated Eugen Fink’s *Sixth Cartesian Meditation* into English) has produced a fascinating article entitled, “The Transcendental Theory of Method in Phenomenology; the Meontic and Deconstruction” (*Husserl Studies* 14: 75–94, 1997. Kluwer Academic Publishers) which equates Fink’s logic of ‘founding’ as distinct from ‘foundationalizing’ with the most radical form of epoché in Husserl’s phenomenology and demonstrates how it functions in Derrida’s deconstruction as writing under erasure (*sous rature*).

¹³ Albert Einstein. *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*. © 1920 (written in 1916 – this revised edition: 1924). Translated: Robert W. Lawson (Authorised translation). First Published: December, 1916. Methuen & Co Ltd.

¹⁴ See Derrida’s extraordinary essay, “Différance.” *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. The Harvester Press. 1982. *Marges de la Philosophie*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit. 1972. And, for a detailed examination of the various senses of delay implicated by the operation of the epoché, see *Edmund Husserl’s “Origin of Geometry”: An Introduction* by Jacques Derrida. Translated with a preface and afterword by John Leavey, Jr. University of Nebraska Press. 1989. Copyright 1962 by the Presses Universitaires de France.