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The Origin of the Phenomenology of Attention

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Abstract

This paper accomplishes two tasks. First, I unpack Husserl's analysis of interest from his 1893 manuscript, "Notes Towards a Theory of Attention and Interest" to demonstrate that it comprises his first rigorous genetic analysis of attention. Specifically, I explore Husserl's observations about how attentive interest is passively guided by affections, moods, habits, and cognitive tensions. In doing so, I reveal that the early Husserl described attention as always pulled forward to new discoveries via the rhythmic recurrence of tension and pleasure. Second, I demonstrate that "Notes" is the germ of Husserl's mature genetic phenomenology of attention. The 1893 analysis provides Husserl with all of the philosophical reasons and tools for the construction of his genetic account of attention in his late works. I then discuss how the disclosure of this novel subterranean link can prompt a rethinking of the development of phenomenology.

Keywords

affection – tendency – instinct – habit – feelings

1 Introduction

Edmund Husserl's genetic study of consciousness reveals that I am not entirely free in the directing of my attention. He observes that attention is not a merely egoic or spontaneous activity. Attentive turning-towards (*Zuwendung*) is situated in a nexus of passivity that exceeds the power of the active ego. My attentive consciousness is embedded in a passive storm of stimuli and tendencies,

which precede active attention and help to determine it. The attentive activity occurs as a part of a dialogue with the fields of experience. It is entrenched in a passively constituted or experienced “call,” to which the activity of turning-towards is a “response.”

Recently, Husserl’s genetic insights about the passive regulation of attention have justly received a great deal of consideration from scholars in both phenomenological¹ and neuroscientific circles.² Yet, it is a central contention of this paper that the inception and trajectory of Husserl’s genetic philosophy of attention has not been properly addressed. Scholars have studied Husserl’s theory of attention by focusing their analyses on his writings from the 1920s and 30s, and this is because they believe that it is only in those mature works that he develops his first systematic genetic account of attention. For example, Bruce Bégout argues that it is only “in his last works, since 1920, Husserl attempts to introduce new elements in his phenomenology of attention ... [where] affection and interest play a significant role.”³ Matthew Bower also asserts that Husserl only rigorously outlines his account of the relationship between affection and the subjective conditions towards attention in the 1920s.⁴

In distinction from that contemporary trend, this paper closely examines and critically engages with Husserl’s early writings to demonstrate that he develops a robust genetic theory of attention at a much earlier date than previously recognized. Specifically, I will disclose that Husserl’s often overlooked 1893 manuscript, “Notes towards a Theory of Attention and Interest” (Hereafter,

1 Diego D’Angelo, “The Phenomenology of Embodied Attention,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 19 (2020): 961–978; Hanna Jacobs, “Husserl on Reason, Reflection, and Attention,” *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 46, 2 (2016): 257–276.

2 Richard Abrams and Blaire Weidler, “Embodied Attention,” in *The Handbook on Attention*, eds. Alan Kingston, Jon Fawcett, and Evan Risko (London: MIT Press, 2015), 301–325; Sven Arvidson, “A Lexicon of Attention. From Cognitive Sciences to Phenomenology,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 2, 2 (2003): 99–132; Andy Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty: Prediction, Action, and the Embodied Mind* (Oxford: Oxford, 2015).

3 Bruce Bégout, “Husserl and the Phenomenology of Attention,” In *Rediscovering Phenomenology*, eds. Luciano Boi, Pierre Kerszberg, and Frederic Patras (New York: Springer, 2007), 13–32, reference on page 27.

4 Matt Bower, “Husserl’s Theory of Instincts as a Theory of Affection,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 46, 2 (2014): 133–147. See specifically 133–135. See also, Nam-In Lee, *Edmund Husserl’s Phänomenologie der Instinkte* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1993), see page 55.

“Notes”)⁵ represents his first attempt at a genetic philosophy⁶ of attention.⁷ I will show that Husserl’s 1893 elucidations of the passive elements of consciousness involved in attention are of historical and philosophical importance for two interconnected reasons.

First, clarification of Husserl’s 1893 descriptions of attention will prompt a shift in the current historical interpretation of his early philosophy. Because there have been no rigorous attempts to unpack Husserl’s relevant insights about the passive regulation of attention from “Notes,”⁸ the extent to which

5 Edmund Husserl, “Noten zur Lehre von Aufmerksamkeit und Interesse,” in *Hua = Husserliana* 38. *Wahrnehmung und Aufmerksamkeit*, eds. Thomas Vongehr and Regula Giuliani (New York: Springer, 2005), 159–189. Throughout the text, I provide references to corresponding English translations where available, following a slash after the German pagination.

6 As is well known, Husserl’s analyses at the start of his philosophical career were already of a genetic nature. See, for example, Elmar Holenstei, *Phänomenologie der Assoziation: Zur Struktur und Funktion eines Grundprinzips der passiven Genesis bei E. Husserl* (New York: Springer, 2013); Tetsuya Sakakibara, „Das Problem des Ich und der Ursprung der genetischen Phänemologie bei Husserl,” *Husserl Studies*, vol. 14 (1997): 21–39. However, Husserl only later reflectively caught up with his own descriptions. As Anthony Steinbock puts it, it was only in the 20s that Husserl recognized that “he had undertaken genetic analyses implicitly without phenomenology having been explicitly cognizant of itself having this genetic methodological dimension.” (Anthony Steinbock, “Genetic Phenomenology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Phenomenological Psychopathology*, ed. Giovanni Stanghellini (Oxford: Oxford, 2019), 286–311, reference on page 226.) As such, it is in his later texts that Husserl *abstractly* distinguishes genetic phenomenology from his static analysis and then systematically outlines its method and results.

7 To be noted is that Husserl’s genetic study of attention in his dissertation, *Concerning the Concept of Number and Philosophy of Arithmetic* is different in both substance and goals from his study of attention in “Notes.” In the former, he executes a genetic examination of how I can direct my attention to different items before executing an act of a higher order, which gathers them together as an *Inbegriff* (Edmund Husserl, *Hua 12, Philosophie der Arithmetik*, ed. Lothar Eley (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 64–76 / Edmund Husserl, *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, trans. Dallas Willard (Dordrecht: Springer, 2003), 67–80. See also, Carlo Ierna, “The Beginnings of Husserl’s Philosophy, Part 1,” *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, vol. 5 (2005): 1–56. Thomas Byrne, “Husserl’s Early Semiotics and Number Signs: Philosophy of Arithmetic through the Lens of ‘On the Logic of Signs (Semiotic);’” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 48, 4 (2017), 287–303.) Only in the latter does Husserl first dedicate himself to unpacking the passive regulation of attentive consciousness.

8 On the one hand, some thinkers simply mention a few of Husserl’s conclusions from “Notes”, without going into any deeper analysis of the manuscript. For example, Maren Wehrle sometimes cites “Notes” when reconstructing Husserl’s genetic theory of interest, despite never explicitly mentioning that text (Maren Wehrle, “Feelings as the Motor of Perception? The Essential Role of Interest for Intentionality,” *Husserl Studies*, vol. 31 (2015): 45–64. See specifically 51.) She instead focuses her analysis on an 1898 manuscript and Lectures from 1904/05.

Husserl develops a genetic philosophy of attention in his very early works has gone obscured and underappreciated. By executing a close reading of “Notes,” I will disclose that Husserl there presents a surprisingly sophisticated account of the passive management of attention. In particular, Husserl describes how three different components of consciousness passively regulate attention in distinct ways. In the following three sections of this paper, I individually unpack Husserl’s discussion of each of these three passively regulating components. In section two, I explore Husserl’s observation that prominent contents, which arise in the field of experience, exert a stimulus or motivational solicitation to become attentive to them. In the third section, I outline Husserl’s discussion of the three different subjective conditions – groundings, moods, and habits – that passively guide perception and organize the experiential field into a background and foreground. Finally, in the fourth section, I sketch

Wehrle’s choice of addressing Husserl’s theory at this stage unfortunately handicaps her investigation. By 1898, Husserl had already adopted his theory of content and apprehension, where this leads Wehrle to describe Husserl’s account by writing, “Conceptually, Husserl tries to stick with his schema of sensual content and mental apprehension (*Auffassung und Inhalt*) ... But descriptively the dynamic of the phenomena exceeds the static conceptual frame and thus betrays its own limits” (Wehrle, “Feelings as the Motor,” 47.) As Husserl had not, in his very early years, developed a rigorous account of the apprehension of content, he is not in part bound by the limits of that framework in “Notes”. He is thus able to develop his theory of affection and conditions in a more free and compelling manner. Another example can be found in Thiemo Breyer’s 2011 book (Thiemo Breyer, *Attentionalität und Intentionalität* (Berlin: Fink Wilhelm, 2011).) There, Breyer only once mentions the 1893 manuscript in a brief, but insightful footnote (Breyer, *Attentionalität und Intentionalität*, 156, n. 31.) On the other hand, even in those cases where scholars do briefly address elements of Husserl’s account from “Notes,” the results are often less than accurate. For example, even though Natalie Depraz only discusses “Notes” on one page of her 2016 article, she makes the claim which is – as shall become clear below – rather misguided, that in “Notes,” “Husserl will replace the Stumpian energetic and bodily tension/relax model by the intention/fulfilment model, that is, formal intentionality” (Natalie Depraz, “Where is the Phenomenology of Attention that Husserl intended to Perform?,” *Continental Philosophy Review*, vol. 37 (2004): 5–20, reference on page 16.) For another case of this trend, despite the fact that the stated goal of Elizabeth Behnke’s article is to examine “Notes”, she only discusses the contents of that manuscript on two full pages of her work, which contain too many errors to be discussed here (Elizabeth Behnke, “Husserl’s Protean Concept of Affectivity: From the Text to the Phenomena Themselves,” *Philosophy Today*, vol. 52 (2008): 46–53. See 47–48). Finally, I must note Ullrich Melle’s examination of this 1893 manuscript. Melle certainly provides a rigorous outline of many of the ideas found in Husserl’s “Notes” (Ullrich Melle, „Husserls deskriptive Erforschung der Gefühlserlebnisse,” in *Life, Subjectivity & Art: Essays in Honor of Rudolf Bernet*, ed. Roland Breuer and Ullrich Melle (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012): 51–99, see specifically 58–62.) Yet, because of the goals of Melle’s text, he correctly focuses his study on Husserl’s early theory of emotions, to the exclusion of an analysis of Husserl’s comments about interest and attention.

out Husserl's conclusion, that there is a passive component of consciousness that always pushes my attention forward, which he calls "tension." During this examination, Husserl comes to claim that there is an emotional system built into consciousness, which rewards discovery and punishes indifference.

The second critical reason why Husserl's description of attention from "Notes" should garner an important place in his *oeuvre* is because it serves as the embryo of a central strain of his thought; "Notes" is the germ of Husserl's mature genetic phenomenology of attention. This 1893 analysis provides Husserl with all of the philosophical reasons and tools for the construction of his genetic account of attention in his late works. To disclose how this is the case, in the fifth section, I juxtapose "Notes" to Husserl's mature genetic study of attention as it is presented in *Experience and Judgment* (Hereafter, *EV*),⁹ *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis* (Hereafter, *APS*),¹⁰ and other manuscripts. I show that Husserl's conclusions from "Notes" about obtrusions, subjective conditions, and tensions are also rigorously worked out in his final writings. While the young Husserl naturally could not have formulated his insights about the passive regulation of attention in the same terms or with the same nuance that he does in his mature writings, I reveal that the central pillars of his late genetic phenomenology were already well developed in 1893.

Before beginning this analysis, I highlight one terminological difficulty. Husserl only infrequently employs the term "attention" throughout "Notes" (he only does so when critically engaging with Carl Stumpf's theory of attention), instead opting to call attentive turning-towards "interest" (*Interesse*). In "Notes," Husserl most often defines interests specifically as attentive intellectual acts, which include objectifying intentions¹¹ and thereunder, theoretical acts.¹² As such, in what follows, I discuss Husserl's insights about the passive regulation of *interest*, where these observations serve as the foundation for his late genetic theory of *attention*. Obviously, this entails that Husserl's

9 Edmund Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil. Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik*, ed. Ludwig Landgrebe (Academia Verlag: Prag, 1939) / Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, trans. James Churchill (Evanston: Northwestern, 1975).

10 Edmund Husserl, *Hua n. Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*, ed. Margot Fleischer (Den Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966) / Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, ed. Anthony Steinbock (Dordrecht: Springer, 2001).

11 While Husserl only utilizes the term "objectifying intentions" in later works, his description of interest in "Notes" largely aligns with his subsequent definition of those acts. In this manuscript, Husserl concludes that, in interest, "we turn towards the thing and purely observe (*betrachten*) it; we are turned to it with theoretical or better objective interest ... We 'objectively' face the object (*Wir stehen den Sachen 'objektiv' gegenüber*), we intuit it or take it as the point of departure for distinctions and comparisons" (Husserl, "Notes," 167).

12 Husserl, "Notes," 166.

understanding of the term interest in “Notes” and *EU* are fundamentally different, as he defines interest as the striving towards a new consciousness of an object in that late text.¹³ These terminological circumstances consistently held in mind, there is no danger of confusion for the reader.

2 Obtrusion

In “Notes”, Husserl develops his account of what he will later call affection, by discussing how *one, many, and finally, all contents in the field of experience can obtrude on me and thereby passively solicit my interest*. To clearly elucidate how contents obtrude and demand my intellectual interest, Husserl begins with the simplest possible case, where *one* prominent content strongly contrasts with all others and draws my interest to it. His first example, which he will continue to employ throughout the rest of his career, is where I hear the shrill whistle of a passing train. While Husserl entertains different ways to understand this experience, he ultimately concludes that the sound of the whistle obtrudes on me and solicits my interest, because it contrasts with the other contents in my field of experience. Its prominence or contrast obtrudes on me and demands my interested turning-towards. Even when the shrill sound hurts my ears, thus motivating me either to run away from the train or to place my hands over my ears, Husserl affirms that an interest in the sound of the whistle is still aroused because of its contrast with other contents.¹⁴

Husserl recognizes in “Notes” that the experience of obtrusion is not this simple. I never have an experience where just *one* content obtrudes on me and I turn my interest towards it. Instead, *many* prominences can compete with each other for my interest and they can be ascribed certain weights. Husserl elaborates upon this experience of different concurrent obtrusions by discussing the subjectively-oriented “intensity” of interest.¹⁵ Intensity concerns my capacity to maintain the focus of my interest on a primarily noticed content, even when other contents obtrude on me and solicit my interest. Husserl writes that when I attempt to remain interested in one content and another content calls for my interest, there is “the more or less lively feeling of inhibition that accompanies such distraction, the feeling of resistance

13 Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 87/*Experience and Judgment*, 82. Husserl is also here using the term ‘interest’ in a different manner from Brentano. See Franz Brentano, *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte* (Leipzig: Dunkler & Humbolt, 1897), 263.

14 Husserl, “Notes,” 162.

15 *Ibid.*, 171–172.

to be overcome, inhibited force.”¹⁶ If I execute one interest, which is high in intensity, I will be able to withstand this solicitation of another content and maintain focus. In contrast, when my act of interest is low in energy, “The interest is easily distracted and often enough actually diverted” by the obstruction of another content.¹⁷

Husserl further develops his observations about different obtrusions and the intensity of interest during his discussion of the “focalization” and “diffusion” of interest.¹⁸ During this analysis, which is certainly inspired by insights Husserl arrived at while composing *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, he claims that an interest is focalized when directed at one singular content and that it is diffuse when directed at a group of many. When my attentive interest is diffuse, the different contents in this multiplicity can more or less strongly obtrude on or solicit me, such that there is “the fluctuation in the intensity of the individual acts, the mutual tension in which they stand, the preference now for this, now for that object.”¹⁹ This is to say that, at one point in time, a single object of the group may solicit my intellectual interest, while at another time either a second object of the group or the group as a whole obtrudes on me. When I am interested in this group, not only are there obtrusions from the different members of the group and the group as a whole, but there is also a competition of weights between them.

Finally, Husserl concludes that the competition for my attending interest is not just between this and that obstruction or between a multiplicity of obtrusions in a group. Rather, he indicates that *all* contents that are in my field of experience obtrude on me and call for my interest. The whole of my “everyday surrounding” (*alltägliche Umgebung*) and the prominences in it strike me and demand my interest to greater or lesser degrees.²⁰ Husserl observes that even when I am carelessly looking around, the contents in my field do – even if only nominally – obtrude on me; they all arouse attending interest. He writes that, “the wandering eye clings to this, now to that object, with interest that is minimally aroused.”²¹ Moreover, he emphasizes at different points in “Notes” that even when I take myself to be “un-interested” in my surroundings, contents still obtrude on me and are thus arousing and competing for my interest.²²

16 Ibid., 171.

17 Ibid., 167.

18 Ibid., 173.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 167.

21 Ibid., 167.

22 Ibid., 167, 172–173.

3 Subjective Conditions and Tendencies

In 1893, Husserl recognizes that his examination of the obtrusion of content characteristics is an abstract study, which cannot fully address the concrete experience of attentive interest. He sees that interest is not exclusively motivated from the top down, by objective obtrusions of contents, nor just determined from the bottom up, via subjective conditions. Rather, both passively work together in such a way that it is impossible to establish any concrete dividing line between them. As such, throughout his 1893 manuscript, Husserl outlines the subjective conditions that regulate interest, by discussing how they are entangled with the objective obtrusions that solicit interest. His investigation of these conditions thus augments his descriptions of the obtrusions. In what follows, I discuss Husserl's analysis of three different subjective conditions – groundings, moods, and habits – which passively orient my interest to 'select' or attend to this over that content.

First, Husserl investigates what he calls the "grounding" (*Begründung*) of interest. He states that my interest in one content can "arouse or ground" my interest in another content.²³ For example, when my interlocutor utters the words, "the king," my interest in those words grounds or motivates my attentive interest in the words that my interlocutor will express next, that is, my interest in what the speaker will tell me about the king. Husserl writes that when I hear 'The king', "further interest immediately arises (What about the king? The king is going where? To A? etc.)"²⁴ In other words, one could say that Husserl describes this grounding as the establishment of a tendency to be interested in the subsequent expression concerning the king's travels.

Husserl advances his account of the grounding of interest in a sophisticated manner, which prefigures his theory of time consciousness. He emphasizes that this grounding process is normally not punctual, where one interest in an object would arouse or ground another totally different interest and that this second interest would then ground still another distinct third interest. Rather, grounding can be a continuous synthetic process, such that a unified interest endures throughout a temporally extended experience. Husserl writes that, "Each interest here is the foundation for another interest, and within this sequence there is a unified interest ... Each act grounds the following act, but not in such a way that it establishes a new act that has nothing to do with it, but rather that it gives it something of its soul, if I may express myself that way."²⁵

23 Ibid., 174.

24 Ibid., 174.

25 Ibid.

Via grounding, a single unitary interest, provided that it possesses a sufficient intensity, can predominate during the duration of my experience.²⁶ Husserl emphasizes that the unity of this interest is not another act and that it is not established externally. The unity is “not something next to the series, but rather something running through this series, something identical in all of the acts, that is, something continuous.”²⁷ To further clarify this point, Husserl employs the example of a melody, which – as is well known – will be frequently used in his later works to explore time consciousness.²⁸ Specifically, Husserl observes that grounding allows for a unitary and enduring interest in a whole melody. My interest in the first note does not just ground my interest in the second note and then the third, and so on, where I would have a radically distinct and temporally separate interest with the playing of each new note. Rather, via grounding, an internal unitary interest in the melody persists while it plays.²⁹

Second, Husserl demonstrates how subjective moods help regulate interests, because they are self-reinforcing. He claims that self-promoting moods occur when feelings, “go over into a disposition” or “transition into an aroused disposition.”³⁰ Of importance for the following discussion is Husserl’s conclusion – from the first half of the manuscript – that feelings are intentional, while moods are, strictly considered, not directed at a particular content.³¹

26 Even though, via grounding, a unitary interest can endure, this naturally does not exclude the possibility that my interest can be interrupted. Husserl writes that, “Acts of interest can follow after one another without any relationship to each other” (Husserl, “Notes,” 174). In EU, Husserl further develops this idea, when discussing the concept of “theme.” See Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 92/*Experience and Judgment*, 86. See also, Bégout, “Husserl and the Phenomenology of Attention,” 28.

27 Husserl, “Notes,” 175.

28 Edmund Husserl, *Hua 10. Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, ed. Rudolf Boehm (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 38–40 / Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, trans. John Brough (Dordrecht: Springer, 1991), 40–42.

29 Husserl, “Notes,” 175.

30 *Ibid.*, 176.

31 It is worth mentioning that Husserl observes – again, in the first half of the manuscript – that feelings are not directed at the same kind of contents as interests, but are instead directed at contents of a “second-order” (Husserl, “Notes,” 165). In his *Lectures on Ethics and Value Theory*, Husserl also concludes that feeling intentions are directed at “second-order” objects. In contrast to “Notes,” however, Husserl works out his understanding of second order objects in a more substantial manner in those lectures. Concerning Husserl’s later analysis of these second-order objects, see Steven Crowell, “Phenomenology, Value Theory, and Nihilism,” in *Edmund Husserl: Critical Assessment of Leading Philosophers*, ed. Rudolf Bernet (New York: Routledge, 2005), 95–118, see specifically 104–108; Sonja Rinofner-Kreidl, „Husserls Fundierungsmodell als Grundlage einer intentionalen Wertungsanalyse,” *Metodo*, vol. 1, 2 (2013), 59–83. While I will not discuss this here, as Melle

Instead, Husserl suggests that moods can (but do not always) color all objects of my interest.³² Even more significant is that Husserl asserts that moods, via their own promotion, motivate certain attentive interests over others. He employs numerous examples to outline how this occurs. For one instance, he discusses how, when I am experiencing the feeling of sadness because a family member has died, this feeling of sadness can go over into the mood of grief. While the object of my sad feeling is the death, the resultant dispositional mood of grief is not directed to a particular content.³³ Instead, the mood passively regulates interest by motivating me to be interested in displeasing contents, which will continue and augment the grief. The mood involves a tendency to be interested in contents that will prolong my grief, as they will displease me. Husserl writes that, because of the mood, “He [the griever] does not grieve the objects he is looking at now, yet he may now be inclined to notice what is wrong with them and anything that is suitable for nourishing (*nähren*) his grief.”³⁴ Another example he employs to clarify how subjective moods motivate my attending interests in these or those contents is the case where I am initially angered by the fact that my research is not progressing and this anger transitions into the mood of frustration. The mood of frustration also involves the tendency to find displeasure in the contents of my surroundings. Once this mood has taken hold, “I am inclined to be frustrated about other things: about the grey sky, the frolicking of the children on the street, etc.... [T]here is the disposition, reinforced by ‘anything and everything’, that is, to receive new stimulation and new grounds [for the mood].”³⁵

Finally, Husserl examines the subjective condition that he at one point calls habit.³⁶ Specifically, he discusses how a subject can acquire and nurture ingrained tendencies to be interested in these over those contents. Husserl primarily employs two examples to flesh out this insight. First, he examines the capacity or acumen to genuinely observe and enjoy a work of art. He affirms

has addressed it at length (Melle, “Erforschung der Gefühlserlebnisse,” 60–61), I should also point out that, in a section from the second half of the manuscript, Husserl tests out the possibility that a limited class of feelings might be non-intentional (Husserl, “Notes,” 179–182).

32 Husserl, “Notes,” 166. Husserl echoes this point frequently in his later works. See Wehrle, “Feelings as the Motor,” 59.

33 *Ibid.*, 176.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*, 177.

36 Despite the fact that Husserl discusses habits at different points in “Notes,” both Bégout and Wehrle assert that he only first investigated that topic at a much later date. See Bégout, “Husserl and the Phenomenology of Attention,” 30; Wehrle, “Feelings as the Motor,” 53–54, 60.

that when I am confronted with a painting, I cannot gain genuine aesthetic enjoyment by staring blankly at the painted canvas. Rather, I must be interested in certain characteristics and qualities of the work to properly appreciate and enjoy the experience. He writes that, "Attention to the content, arousal of interest in the objects depicted, excited thoughts, etc., is a prerequisite for aesthetic enjoyment."³⁷ The tendency to be interested in the relevant contents; however, does not arise naturally. Rather, I can undergo training or education, which will allow for me to acquire "the habit of analysis of intuition, observation, comparison, and so on."³⁸ Those who have undergone aesthetic education do not simply naively enjoy the work of art,³⁹ but rather have gained the appropriate habits, such that they now have the relevant ingrained tendencies to be interested in and analyse these or those features of the work of art in a way that allows for genuine aesthetic enjoyment. Once I have gained this habit, Husserl writes that, "the critical interest – by means of its accomplishment, through the thoughts, which it creates, by means of the contrasts, which it mediates – can increase aesthetic enjoyment and it [the critical interest] is often a prerequisite for the full enjoyment intended by the artist."⁴⁰

The second example Husserl examines is how, as a result of divergent habits, eating is different for the slob and the connoisseur. The slob, Husserl claims, devours his meal and merely gives into the pleasure of eating, without being intellectually interested in the qualities of the food at all. The connoisseur, in contrast, is so trained that he has the habits or ingrained tendencies to pick out and be interested in the subtle tastes and textures of the food. Husserl writes, "One can say of the connoisseur that he eats with interest (with 'reason'), insofar as he does not blindly indulge in pleasure and is absorbed in it, but notes the taste sensations and the excited sensual feelings."⁴¹ By actively nurturing his habits and abilities, the connoisseur has developed the tendencies "to observe, to compare, distinguish and reflect," where this allows for him to gain genuine pleasure from eating.⁴²

37 Husserl, "Notes," 163.

38 Ibid.

39 Husserl thus concludes that, "Naive aesthetic enjoyment is rarely found in educated people" (Husserl, "Notes," 176).

40 Husserl, "Notes," 163.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., 163. See Heath Williams, "Is Husserl Guilty of Sellars' Myth of the Sensory Given?," *Synthese* 2021. DOI: 10.1007/s11229-021-03073-z.

4 Tension

In “Notes”, Husserl discovers one last subjective condition, which is responsible for passively guiding attentive interest. He observes that there is a certain tension inherent to interest, where this tension pulls interest forward. More specifically, this tension draws interest towards ever new observations and cognitions of contents. Husserl recognizes that interest is always tensed or pulled to inspect more, to see more, to compare more, and to know more. For example, when reading one particular sentence in a book, this experienced tension pulls my interest towards the next word and the next sentence. Or, when observing one side of a cube before me, the tension of interest draws me to perceive the other sides of the cube.⁴³ Husserl thus concludes that, “In each case of an intention, we have a feeling of being-tensed, which is forward-looking; an interest, which looks beyond the given.”⁴⁴

On the one hand, Husserl concludes that a *particular* tension can be loosened or satisfied. A single tensed interest, like a spring, normally does not rest, but pushes forward into the world. And just like the spring, when interest reaches out, the tension dissipates. When I do read the next sentence or turn over and observe the other side of the cube, the tension that I initially experienced to read that sentence or see that other side is satisfied. Via those observations, the original pull is met and the tension is loosened. Husserl writes, “In the transition from tension to loosening, there occurs a cognition ... the loosened interest is thus the cognition itself.”⁴⁵

On the other hand, the tension of attentive interest *as such* cannot be eliminated. Throughout “Notes,” Husserl discusses how, when *one tension is satisfied, a new tension arises*. When I do read the next sentence in my book, although the previous tensed pull to read that sentence is satisfied, yet another new tension is experienced. I now feel a tensed pull to read the next sentence and so on. Husserl writes that during our continuous discovery, “our interest is always tensed, in order to satisfy itself again and again.”⁴⁶ For Husserl then, interest

43 Concerning how Husserl develops his theory of perceptual occlusion, here, the awareness of the backsides of the cube, see Thomas Byrne, “Husserl’s 1901 and 1913 Philosophies of Perceptual Occlusion” *Husserl Studies*, vol. 36 (2020): 123–139; Thomas Byrne, “A ‘Principally Unacceptable’ Theory,” *Studia Phaenomenologica*, vol. 20 (2020): 357–378; Thomas Byrne, “Smashing Husserl’s Dark Mirror,” *Axiomathes*, vol. 31, 2 (2021): 127–144.

44 Husserl, “Notes,” 187. In “Notes”, Husserl writes at length about the relationship between the tension of interest and temporality. In the end, he claims that tensed interest, while related to what is currently present, is also oriented toward the future, that is, to the object as I will explore and intend it in the next instances (Husserl, “Notes,” 183).

45 *Ibid.*, 159.

46 *Ibid.*, 183.

does not just happen to be tensed or loosened in this or that factual situation. Rather, tension and loosening are essential structures of interest. I always experience the tense pull of interest; I am always pulled to cognize more, where what varies is what object I am pulled towards. This structure further creates the situation where interest is experience as an ebbing and flowing. There is a “rhythm” (*Rhythmus*) to attentive interest, where I experience a tension then a release and again a tension.⁴⁷ Interest always continues in this tense up and release down rhythm, as is necessitated by its structure.⁴⁸

Husserl makes an important addition to these conclusions when discussing the relationship between this tension and feelings. Specifically, he claims that the loosening of tension is experienced as pleasurable, while contrarily, the tensing of interest is displeasurable.⁴⁹ For example, when looking at the cube, the tension of interest, which pulls me to inspect the other side of the cube, is displeasurable. After I do turn over that cube and see its other side, the releasing of this tension is experienced as pleasurable. As just stated, this is not the end of the experience. Rather, another tension – to turn the cube to another side – immediately arises, where I again experience the tension as displeasurable. In other words, my interest not only rhythmically cycles through tensing and loosening, but also respectively through displeasure and pleasure. Husserl thus writes that there is “a rhythm of tension and loosening. And this rhythm itself grounds pleasure. That is ... the pleasure in tension and release.”⁵⁰

This conclusion means that an emotional system is built into the very structure of attentive interest. This system not only rewards discovery – I feel pleasure when I see the new side of the cube – but also punishes a lack of observation – I feel displeasure when I do not turn the cube over – where this punishment *motivates me* to execute ever new inspections of contents. These insights entail that Husserl – even at this early date – recognizes that feelings both cause and are the result of this rhythmic process of interest.⁵¹ Husserl is thus concluding in a surprisingly sophisticated form that the feelings of pleasure and displeasure function as a motor of interest and thereby of objectification as a whole.

47 Ibid., 160.

48 This conclusion is related to both Husserl's observation from *Thing and Space*, that perception is experienced as a rhythmic increase and decrease in fulfilment, and his insights from the Bernau Manuscripts, concerning the rhythm of time. See Michaela Summa, *Spatio-temporal Intertwining* (London: Springer, 2014), see specifically page 21.

49 Husserl, “Notes,” 159.

50 Ibid., 160.

51 See Melle, „Erforschung der Gefühlserlebnisse,“ 58.

5 Mature Genetic Phenomenology

I conclude this essay by briefly demonstrating that Husserl had already, in “Notes”, arrived at many of the central conclusions of his mature genetic phenomenology of attention, as it is found in *EU* and *APS*; His insights from the former are the germ of the latter. Specifically, I will show that the late Husserl rigorously works out the conclusion he first came to in 1893, that three conditions – obtrusion, subjective conditions, and tension – passively manage my turning-towards. I individually examine the link between Husserl’s early and late descriptions of each of these conditions, before showing how the results of this paper challenge the historical reading of Husserl’s philosophy.

First, the mature Husserl also concludes that prominences exert a stimuli or motivational solicitation to become attentive to them. He writes in *EU* that, “We say, for example, of that which, in its non-similarity stands out from a homogenous background and comes to prominence, that it ‘strikes’ us.”⁵² Husserl states that such a stimulus is, “The obtrusion on the ego, the attraction which the given exerts on the ego.”⁵³ In contrast to his early writings, Husserl calls such obtrusions, “affections.”⁵⁴ Critically, just as he did in 1893, the mature Husserl also describes how *one* or *many* prominences can affect me and then clarifies that the *whole* field of experience affects me. When discussing the simplest case, where one prominence solicits my attention, Husserl employs the same example of “the whistle of a locomotive which passes in front of us.”⁵⁵ The contrasting prominence of the sensuous sound affects me and solicits my attention. To examine how many different affections compete with each other, Husserl once again claims that obtrusions can have different intensities and he discusses the intensities of affections in almost the exact same terms, as he had in 1893.⁵⁶ Finally, the mature Husserl reiterates that the *whole* field of experience can affect me. In his late manuscripts on the life-world, Husserl advances this insight by claiming not only that the whole experiential field solicits me, but that this is the precise way in which the field is present to me.⁵⁷ At the same

52 Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 79/*Experience and Judgment*, 76.

53 Ibid., 81–82/78. See also Anthony Steinbock, “Affection and Attention: On the Phenomenology of becoming Aware,” *Continental Philosophy Review*, vol. 37 (2004): 21–42, see specifically page 24.

54 In “Notes”, Husserl uses the term affection to discuss the experiences of what would be called feelings in common parlance.

55 Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 81/*Experience and Judgment*, 78.

56 Ibid. See Steinbock, “Affection and Attention,” 25.

57 Edmund Husserl, *Materialien 8. Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution*, ed. Dieter Lohmar (New York: Springer, 2006), see pages 350–352. See also Bower, “Husserl’s Theory of Instincts,”

time, it is important to note that Husserl did make many important changes to his theory of soliciting obtrusions. The most important shift is his conclusion that the solicitation of attention occurs on the level of sensations that flow in the stream of consciousness,⁵⁸ and only during the very core of the living present or the “now” point of experience, which Husserl calls the primordial impression.⁵⁹

The mature Husserl also recognizes that passive affection is not the sole determiner of my active attention. Rather, he maintains that affections work together with subjective conditions and tendencies, because he still asserts that they are co-enmeshed with each other and that their passive regulation cannot be concretely differentiated.⁶⁰ Indeed, when examining the case of the train whistle, Husserl still claims that, “such a mode of givenness need not by itself bring about a turning-toward of the ego.”⁶¹ Rather, there is additionally required, “From the side of the ego, the tendency to give way, the being-attracted, the being-affected, of the ego itself.”⁶² In addition to discussing the general role this tendency plays in managing attention, Husserl develops his conception of the subjective conditions of moods and habits in much greater detail, as he not only claims that, but also elucidates how these regulating conditions are both social and individual and both cultural and corporeal.⁶³ He also greatly expands the concept of habit, concluding that habits are regulative not only at the level of attention, but also at the level of judgments as

136; James Mensch, *Husserl's Account of our Consciousness of Time* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010), see specifically pages 231–232.

58 Husserl, *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*, 148–151, 159–165 / *Analysis*, 196–198, 207–214.

59 See Summa, *Spatio-temporal Intertwining*, 195–200.

60 See Steinbock, “Affection and Attention,” 32; Summa, *Spatio-temporal Intertwining*, 223–225; Wehrle, “Feelings as the Motor,” 57–58.

61 Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 82 / *Experience and Judgment*, 78. See Jacobs, “Husserl on Reason,” 187–188.

62 Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 82 / *Experience and Judgment*, 78.

63 Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 171–174, 229–230 / *Experience and Judgment*, 145–148, 194–196. Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana 4. Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch*, ed. Marly Biemel (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952), see 201–207, 253–257 / Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), see 211–219, 266–269. See also Dermot Moran, “Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology of Habituality and Habitus,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 42, 1 (2011): 53–77, see specifically, page 61.

convictions,⁶⁴ at the level of embodied experience,⁶⁵ and in attitudes that we live through.⁶⁶

Finally, Husserl's conclusions about the tension of interest play a critical role in the evolution of his late philosophy. In *EU*, Husserl re-terms tension as "interest,"⁶⁷ claiming that with my turning-towards there "is awakened an interest", where this interest is a "striving toward a new consciousness," which seeks, "the enrichment of the 'self' of the object."⁶⁸ Just like the tension Husserl introduced in 1893, this interest is, "an intention, which goes beyond the given and its momentary mode of givenness and tends (*tendiert*) towards a progress *plus ultra* ... in the form of an interest in the 'self' of the object, which is forthcoming *eo ipso* with the prolongation of the apprehension."⁶⁹ Importantly, in his final manuscripts, Husserl observes that the continual pull of consciousness towards new discoveries is best understood as the original instinct, "curiosity."⁷⁰ The concept of curiosity plays a much more central role in Husserl's mature analysis than tension does in the 1893 manuscript. Bower aptly explains Husserl's emphasis on curiosity, writing that, for the mature Husserl, curiosity is "the primitive way in which the subject comes into contact with what is 'alien to the ego'. There is no simpler way for the subject to be affectively present with the field of experience than in its instinct of curiosity. For that reason, Husserl calls curiosity the lowest, all-founding instinct."⁷¹ In addition to these changes, in his writings about attention from the 20s and 30s,

64 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, ed. Stephan Strasser (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 100–102 / Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht: Springer, 1960), 66–67. See also, Thomas Byrne, "Husserl's Genealogy of the Number System," *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy*, vol. 2 (2019): 402–429.

65 Edmund Husserl, *Hua 15. Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Dritter Teil*, ed. Iso Kern (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 330. Edmund Husserl, *Materialienband 8. Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution. Die C-Manuskripte*, ed. Dieter Lohmar (New York: Springer, 2006), 226, 326–327.

66 Edmund Husserl, *Hua 25. Aufsätze und Vorträge*, ed. Thomas Nenon and Hans Rainer Sepp (Den Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 8–9, 31, 48.

67 As stated in the last paragraph of the introduction, Husserl's understanding of "interest" in his late writings is not at all equivalent with his conception of that term in "Notes." I again emphasize this distinction to ward off possible misinterpretations, which could easily occur, because this one term is being used in two very different ways in the distinct time periods.

68 Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil, 87/Experience and Judgment*, 82.

69 Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil, 87/Experience and Judgment*, 82.

70 Husserl, *Mat 8. Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution*, 107–114, 257, 323–325.

71 Bower, "Husserl's Theory of Instincts," 141. See also Lee, *Edmund Husserl's Phänomenologie der Instinkte*, 109. To be further noted is that one can even argue that curiosity is the first motivation for doing philosophy. On this topic, see Witold Plotka, "Reduction and the

Husserl famously again takes up the idea that intentionality is driven by feelings and develops it in a much more robust way. He outlines in detail how feelings function as the motor of interest on the passive levels of consciousness.⁷²

This executed comparison of texts reveals Husserl's observations about interest from "Notes" as the seed of his late genetic phenomenology of attention. The 1893 descriptions are reworked by the mature Husserl to develop his theory of the passive regulation of attention. The disclosure of this subterranean link challenges the current understanding of the historical development of Husserl's philosophy. Simply stated, while other scholars frequently claim that Husserl revolutionized his theory when he executed his systematic genetic study of the passive regulation of attention in his very late works,⁷³ this paper has shown that this is not the case. Husserl had, at the very early stages of his career, realized that my active turning-toward is passively regulated by the affection of stimuli on consciousness, my ingrained tendencies and habits, and by the innate pull of consciousness itself.

As "Notes" is an exceptionally rich text, there are many other insights to be found in that work that are revamped by Husserl in his late writings. A comprehensive examination of the influence of "Notes" on the whole of Husserl's evolution; however, would be the task of a much larger project. It was rather the modest goal of this paper to provide a focused sketch of Husserl's account of interest from "Notes" and thereby to reveal – in contrast to current interpretations – that Husserl's insights from that manuscript are the germ of his genetic phenomenology of attention.

Question of Beginnings in Husserl, Fink and Patočka," *Human Studies*, vol. 41, 4 (2018): 603–621, see specifically 605–610.

72 Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 91–93/*Experience and Judgment*, 85–86. See also Summa, *Spatio-temporal Intertwining*, 231–232; Wehrle, "Feelings as the Motor," 58.

73 For example, Bégout, "Husserl and the Phenomenology of Attention," 24; Bower, "Husserl's Theory of Instincts," 133; Depraz, "Where is the Phenomenology of Attention," 16; Lee, *Edmund Husserl's Phänomenologie der Instinkte*, 55; Wehrle, "Feelings as the Motor," 53–54, 60.