



The Origin of the Phenomenology of Instincts

Thomas Byrne¹

Published online: 15 November 2022
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Abstract

This essay accomplishes two goals. First, I explore Husserl’s study of “tension” from his 1893 manuscript, “Notes Towards a Theory of Attention and Interest,” to reveal that it comprises his *de facto* first analysis of instinct. Husserl there describes tension as the innate pull to execute ever new objectifications. He clarifies this pull of objectification by contrasting it to affective and volitional experiences. This analysis surprisingly prefigures a theory of drive-feelings and anticipates the idea that consciousness is both teleological and autotelic. Second, I show how Husserl’s *de facto* account of instincts from 1893 inspires his robust philosophy of instincts from *Studies concerning the Structures of Consciousness* and other late manuscripts. While Husserl maintains many 1893 insights, he now claims that the instinct towards objectification comprises affective and volitional moments. Finally, I demonstrate that Husserl’s analyses of instincts throughout his life are united by the idea that consciousness possesses an essential structural lack.

1 Introduction

Nam-In Lee’s 1993 *Edmund Husserl’s Phänomenologie der Instinkte* and James Mensch’s 1998 “Instincts – A Husserlian Account” famously explore Husserl’s theory of instincts. While there are many differences between their interpretations, they both agree that the late Husserl considered instincts to be inborn impulses or behaviors, which proceed to their goal without the help of training or experience. Instincts are the original universal drives, which arise in the body. They are the striving towards concealed goals, such as nourishment, reproduction, self-defense, and so on. Lee and Mensch’s analyses have proven critical as they challenge the accepted interpretation of Husserl as one committed to a Cartesian model of consciousness.

✉ Thomas Byrne
T.byrne3@gmail.com

¹ Department of Philosophy, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China

Since Mensch and Lee’s watershed works, the role of instincts has been recognized as an important issue in phenomenology and Husserl’s examinations of instincts have been widely discussed in the literature. At the same time, it is my contention that the origin and evolution of Husserl’s theory of instincts has not yet been fully investigated. Mensch and Lee both primarily (but not exclusively) study Husserl’s philosophy of instincts by examining his manuscripts from the 1920s and 30s (see Lee 1993, 10, 55; Mensch 1998, 219; Mensch 2010, 224–225; see section five below). Following Mensch and Lee, most contemporary phenomenologists also execute their scholarship on instincts by investigating Husserl’s mature works.¹

In contrast to that general trend, this essay executes a close reading of and critically engages with some of Husserl’s earliest manuscripts to reveal that he offers an inchoate philosophy of instincts at a much earlier date than recognized. Specifically, I will show that Husserl’s often ignored² 1893 manuscript, “Notes towards a Theory of Attention and Interest” (Husserl, 2005b, 159–189; hereafter, *Noten*)³ represents his earliest (and embryonic) philosophy of instinct. I will demonstrate that Husserl unknowingly develops an account of the “tension” [*Spannung*] of “interest” [*Interesse*] as an instinct. He describes the tension of interest as the inborn impulse or drive to explore and cognize. While Husserl never uses the term instinct in *Noten*, by describing tension as the unacquired and innate energy of interest, he *de facto* defines tension as an instinct. By taking Husserl’s study of tension as an incipient investigation of an instinct, I show that Husserl—already at this early date—understands the motors of intentionality and cognition in surprisingly sophisticated ways. Of importance is that I will also disclose how Husserl develops and works out his theory of tension by contrasting its function to that of feelings and the will. Via his extensive study of tension, feelings, and the will, Husserl arrives at insights, which represent important contributions to the philosophy of affection and volition.

¹ See Ales-Bello (2000, 249–250), Bower (2014, 133), Khalilzand (2016), Nakamura (2017, 139), Pugliese (2009, 141–143), Summa (2014, 229), Sweeney (2000, 287–288), Williams (2021). Of note is that both Wehrle (2015) and Bernet (2006) have also traced out Husserl’s earlier discussion of instincts. While Wehrle does discuss an 1898 manuscript and a lecture from 1904/05, she goes on to claim that Husserl only properly develops his theory of drives and instincts in *Experience and Judgment* and subsequent manuscripts (Wehrle, 2015, 54–57). Bernet instead expertly outlines Husserl’s theory of instincts, as it is found in *Studies Concerning the Structures of Consciousness* (Husserl, 2020), and further points out exciting comparisons between Husserl and Freud. The author of the current work is indebted to Bernet’s insights.

² Even in those cases where scholars do happen to address elements of Husserl’s account from *Noten*, their studies are often brief or partially inaccurate. For example, even though Natalie Depraz only discusses *Noten* on one page of her article (Depraz, 2004, 16), she makes the claim which is—as shall be demonstrated below (see footnote six)—rather one-sided, that in *Noten*, Husserl rejects Stumpf’s theory of consciousness as tensing and relaxing. Denis Fisetle also discusses Husserl’s insights from *Noten*, but does so sparingly, because his article is dedicated to examining Husserl’s overarching account of feelings and moods (Fisetle, 2021, 226–228). Similar to Fisetle, in his 2012 work, Ullrich Melle only briefly focuses on *Noten*, because he also seeks to elucidate the whole evolution of Husserl’s philosophy of feelings (Melle, 2012, 59–62). Ignacio Quepons Ramírez provides a more extensive investigation of *Noten* (Ramírez, 2015, 95–98). Yet, his analysis of the 1893 manuscript primarily serves as an introduction to his more robust examination of Husserl’s later account of moods. Finally, Antonio Ziri6n Quijano’s succinct analysis of *Noten* is helpful (Quijano, 2018, 43–45).

³ Before the German pagination, I provide references to the corresponding English translation where available. Quotes from the *Logical Investigations* always come from the first edition.

To properly clarify the origin and trajectory of Husserl’s philosophy of instincts, the following discussion is divided into four further sections. In the second section, I introduce the basics of how Husserl inchoately describes the tension of objectifying interest as an instinct. Following the hierarchy of acts, I then investigate Husserl’s observations about how tension relates to and is distinct from feelings in the third section and the will in the fourth section.

This paper is not limited to a historical study of the young Husserl. Instead, in the fifth section, I advance beyond and demonstrate the importance of my dense technical analysis. I discuss how Husserl’s 1893 observations concerning the tension of interest can be seen as the seed of his genetic phenomenology of instinct, as it is developed in his 1909–1914 *Studies Concerning the Structures of Consciousness* (Husserl, 2020; hereafter, *Studien*), the 1939 *Experience and Judgment* (Husserl, 1973/1939; hereafter, *EU*), and other of his late manuscripts. He appears to work out the insights he first presented in 1893 to develop his genetic theory of the instinct that he calls, “curiosity” [*Neugier*]. Matthew Bower explains the gravity of Husserl’s mature descriptions of this instinct by writing that, “curiosity alone provides the subject with an articulated, familiar present ... Curiosity not only engages the subject with its present surroundings, but may also drive the subject to return to its retained prominent encounters” (Bower, 2014, 141). By executing this study of the evolution of Husserl’s account, I reveal novel subterranean links between his early and mature thought. This analysis of section five ends with an examination of what unites Husserl’s theory of instinct over the course of his life. I argue that Husserl always executed his study of instinct in line with the idea that consciousness, at its core, possesses an essential structural lack, where this lack is characterized by Husserl as a perpetual dislocating.

2 Tension

In *Noten*, Husserl claims that tension is not something that can be concretely considered on its own. Rather, tension pertains to interest as one of its two possible modes. Husserl claims that interest can be tensed [*gespannt*] or loosened [*gelöst*] and relaxed [*entspannt*] (Husserl, 2005b, 159). To be emphasized here is that Husserl’s definition of interest in this manuscript is fundamentally different from his conception of it in his mature writings (see section five below). In 1893, Husserl most often defines interests as attentive intellectual acts, which include objectifying intentions and thereunder, theoretical acts (Husserl, 2005b, 166).

The tension of interest, as the word suggests, is a kind of pull on interest. More specifically, tension pulls interests towards new observations of objects. Tension impels me to direct my objectifying interest beyond my current perspective; it pushes me to look forward, to look beyond the given (Husserl, 2005b, 187). It pulls me towards enrichment of my experience of the object, which occurs with continually more observations of it. For example, when I observe the box before me, I experience a tension that pulls my interest to observe the other sides of the box and perhaps to open the box and look inside of it. Or when reading one particular sentence in a book, this experienced tension pulls my interest towards the next word and the next

sentence. Additionally, tension can pull my interest to other objects or contents in my fields of experience. Rather than being tensed to perceive more of the box in front of me, I could be pulled to inspect the painting above the box or the sounds coming from the street (Husserl, 2005b, 171–172).

Importantly, this tension may or may not become loosened or relaxed in different ways. On the one hand, Husserl concludes that particular tensions can be loosened or relaxed via a new observation or cognition. When I turn over the box or move around it to observe its other side, the tension that I initially experienced to perceive that other side is relaxed. I no longer experience a pull to observe that other side, because I am now doing so. Or when I read the next sentence of my book, the previous tension is loosened. Via these new objectifying interests, the original pull is met and the tension is loosened (Husserl, 2005b, 159).

On the other hand, the tension of interest *as a structure of consciousness* cannot be permanently relaxed and thereby eradicated. Throughout *Noten*, Husserl discusses how, when *one tension is relaxed, a new tension arises*. When I do observe the other side of the box, although the previous tensed pull to perceive that side is loosened, yet another new tension is experienced. I again feel a tensed pull to observe yet another side of the box and so on. When I do read the next sentence, whereby my tensed interest is loosened, my interest is immediately again tensed to read the next and the next sentences. Husserl writes, “Once the loosening of a tension occurs, there is again the new, which arouses a new interest, and a new tension of that interest” (Husserl, 2005b, 183). For Husserl then, interest does not just happen to be tensed or loosened in this or that 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 or property I am pulled towards.⁴ On the basis of these insights, Husserl claims that interest is experienced as an ebbing and flowing. There is a “rhythm” [*Rhythmus*] to interest, where I experience a tension then a loosening via cognition and then again a tension. Interest always continues in this tense up and release down rhythm. He straightforwardly writes that there is “a rhythm of tension and loosening” (Husserl, 2005b, 160).

Husserl clarifies, if not radicalizes this observation—that tension is the consistent pull on consciousness towards novel discovery—by stating that tension is “the origin of cognition or observation” (Husserl, 2005b, 159). This is to say that without tension there would be no (pull to) observation or cognition at all. Husserl writes, “Cognition [is] the primary result of tensed interest” (Husserl, 2005b, 159). In fact, Husserl goes so far as to draw from Aristotle (Aristotle 1984, 1154–1155), when he concludes that tension could be understood as *admiratio* (Husserl, 2005b, 187), that is, our *innate* natural wonder in the world, which first inspires the project of philosophy.

⁴ The cycling of a ‘single’ interest through tensing and loosening—which is Husserl’s topic of examination in this manuscript—is an abstraction from concrete consciousness. As a presentation is a mixture of signitive (inauthentic) and intuitive (authentic) partial intentions, the overall character of experience is a complex mixture of both tensings and loosening. One is incessantly experiencing overlapping tensings and loosening of interests, as more of certain objects are revealed, while others are concealed (compare Husserl 1970, 238–241/1984, 614–616). Concerning Husserl’s theory of inauthentic and signitive intentions, see Byrne (2017a, 2017b, 2020c).

By more closely examining Husserl's description of tension as a rhythmically experienced pull on interest towards new discoveries, a central claim of this paper can begin to be substantiated. Namely, I can initially argue that Husserl describes tension as *unacquired* and as *innate*, such that it can be concluded that he is (unknowingly) describing tension as an instinct. On the one hand, the idea that the tension of interest is unacquired is indirectly corroborated by contrasting Husserl's account of tension to his discussion of moods and habits. In *Noten*, Husserl claims that moods and habits can passively pull interest in a similar way to how tension does so. Moods are self-reinforcing, such that a positive mood will pull me to be interested in objects and characteristics that will have a positive effect on me (Husserl, 2005b, 176). Habits also regulate my interest in these over those characteristics. Husserl uses the example where a food critic has the habit to be interested in the particular smells and flavors of the food. By actively nurturing his habits, the food critic has developed the tendencies "to observe, to compare, distinguish, and reflect" (Husserl, 2005b, 163). Yet, Husserl emphasizes that moods and habits are gained and lost over the temporal duration of a person's life. A mood arises when I first experience a feeling and that feeling, "goes over into a disposition" or "transition[s] into an aroused disposition" (Husserl, 2005b, 176). A habit is also gained and nurtured over time (Husserl, 2005b, 163). This acquisition of moods and habits stands in stark contrast to the primordially of tension. The tension of interest is not gained or lost depending upon circumstances but is instead always ongoing in its rhythmic movement of tension and release (compare Bower 2014, 141, where Bower examines this same argument, as it is articulated by the late Husserl). Husserl accordingly concludes that tension is a permanent and essential structure of interest (Husserl, 2005b, 163). My interest is not just sometimes tensed, nor do I acquire this tensing. Instead, Husserl writes that, "our interest is *always* tensed, in order to relax itself again and again" (Husserl, 2005b, 183, emphasis mine). With this quote, Husserl is further affirming that the rhythm of tension and loosening necessarily recurs; after loosening, interest is *always* re-tensed and so on. On the other hand, Husserl concludes that tension, as an energy, is innate to interest. He writes that tension is "not something running next to interest, but is rather something innate to it [*sondern ein ihm Innewohnendes*]" (Husserl, 2005b, 172).⁵ In sum then, even though Husserl never uses the term instinct in *Noten*, by describing tension as the unacquired and innate energy of interest, he has *de facto* defined tension as an instinct, and namely, the instinct towards observation.⁶

⁵ In his mature works, Husserl defines instincts as a vital power to pursue something and to behave in a certain way (Mensch, 1998, 220, 222). Similarly, in the 1893 manuscript, Husserl describes tension as an essential variable energy or power, which is the continual push of interest towards observation and the ability to overcome distractions. He writes that, when we turn our attention towards something to loosen tension and overcome other distractions, there is "a feeling of exertion of power, of a certain work, of an activity" (Husserl, 2005b, 184. See also Husserl 2005b, 172). I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for bringing this point to my attention.

⁶ These insights held in mind, I can now clarify why Depraz' central claim is one-sided. She writes that, in *Noten*, "Husserl will replace the Stumpian energetic and bodily tension/relax model by the intention/fulfillment model, that is, formal intentionality" (Depraz, 2004, 16). While Husserl understands full intentional acts as capable of fulfillment, a primary goal of his 1893 study is to describe the tensing and relaxing of interested acts. Further, as discussed in the just above footnote five, Husserl elucidates tensed intentionality by using the model of energy (Husserl, 2005b, 172). This is to say that Husserl does

3 Feelings

While Husserl concludes that tension and relaxation pertain to objectifying interested acts and not to feelings, he does assert that tension and certain kinds of feelings have an essential connection to each other. Specifically, he claims that certain feelings always accompany the tensing and relaxation of interest. While the loosening of tension is accompanied by the feeling of pleasure, the tensing of interest is accompanied by the feeling of displeasure, which is not merely a lack of pleasure, but rather a positive phenomenon in itself (Husserl, 2005b, 159). To employ the above example, when looking at a box, the tension of interest, which pulls me to inspect the other side of the box, is experienced with the feeling of displeasure. After I do turn over that box and see its other side, the releasing of this tension is given with the feeling of pleasure. Yet, as discussed, this is not the end of that experience. Rather, another tension—to turn the box to yet another side—immediately arises, where I again experience this tension with a displeasurable feeling. 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” (Husserl, 2005b, 160).⁷

This conclusion suggests that a system of feelings 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 box—but also punishes a lack of observation—I feel displeasure

describe intentionality via the energetic and bodily tension/relax model throughout the entire manuscript in an unambiguous and rigorous manner. In line with this, it is important to highlight that many of Husserl’s 1893 conclusions result from his engagement with Stumpf and Brentano. Indeed, Husserl develops some of the core tenets of his theory of tensed interest, by revising (Husserl, 2005b, 168–171) Stumpf’s definition of attention—as pleasure in noticing—from his 1890 *Tonpsychologie* (Stumpf, 1890, 170–185). And by disputing (Husserl, 2005b, 161–162) Brentano’s broad definition of the third class of psychic phenomena from his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (Brentano, 1874, 262–263). For a broader examination of these important relationships, I recommend Baumgartner (2002), Rollinger (1999, 40–43, 83–89, 106–107), Rollinger (2004, 264–266).

⁷ Husserl’s 1893 account of the relationship between tension and loosening—and—displeasure and pleasure is more muddled than I am presenting it here. On the one hand, under the influence of Brentano and Stumpf, Husserl makes many assertions, which suggest that pleasure and displeasure are not distinct from, but rather characteristics of (or perhaps even equivalent with) the loosening and tensing of interest. Husserl writes, “Loosening has a decisive pleasurable character, tension has a displeasurable character” (Husserl, 2005b, 159). And at another time, he states, “Tension and loosening themselves obtain great pleasure” (Husserl, 2005b, 187). On the other hand, as I emphasize here, Husserl also frequently states that loosening is distinct from pleasure. He comments that pleasure is grounded in or results from the loosening of tension. Husserl writes that loosened interest, “has a certain similarity to pleasure, but is not to be identified with pleasure” (Husserl, 2005b, 167). Of note is that Husserl would continue to equivocate on this point in his subsequent writings. In his lectures from 1904/05 and even in the mature 1939 EU, Husserl is often unclear about the relationship between the instinctual rhythmic pull and release of consciousness and the drive feelings of displeasure and pleasure. Sometimes Husserl appears to claim that they are identical, while at other times, seems to assert that they are different (see Husserl 1973, 85–86/1939, 91–93; see also Summa 2014, 231–232 and Wehrle 2015, 52, 58–59). This ambiguity has a further parallel in Husserl’s discussion—from his mature analyses of passive synthesis—of affection and tendency, which are roughly equivalent with tension and the pleasure experienced from loosening; Husserl again blurs, if not erases the division between these two (Husserl 1966, 148–156). I am thankful to one of the anonymous reviewers for bringing this last point to my attention.

when I do not turn the box over—where this punishment motivates me to execute ever new inspections of contents. From this, it can be concluded, as Wehrle writes, “perception and cognition not only have an emotional side, but rather have to be emotionally structured from the beginning” (Wehrle, 2015, 48).

The importance of these straightforward insights about the relationship between tension and feeling can be further disclosed. Via closer inspection, it can be shown that Husserl’s observations *de facto* comprise an inchoate drive-dynamic theory of consciousness. Because of the way that Husserl describes these rhythmic feelings of pleasure and displeasure, one cannot conclude that they are full-blown feeling acts. Rather, they must be understood as drive-feelings.⁸ As this interpretation appears anachronistic at first glance, I substantiate it by outlining three differences between Husserl’s descriptions of these rhythmic (drive-)feelings and his observations about feeling acts from *Noten*.

The first important difference echoes a point made in section two. Similar to the tension and release of interest, these rhythmic feelings of pleasure and displeasure are essential, if not innate to interested consciousness. The up and down rhythm of pleasure and displeasure persists despite circumstances. In contrast, feeling intentions naturally change with regards to the situation and over the course of time. While I may execute this or that feeling act at different times and in different places, rhythmic feelings remain in their back-and-forth pattern of pleasure and displeasure. Husserl describes this continual rhythm of pleasure, writing that, “Tension is loosened in the pleasure ... only for it to again become tensed” with accompanying displeasure (Husserl, 2005b, 186). Indeed, in contrast to Stumpf, who believes that, “There can be noticing without pleasure” (Stumpf, 1890, 279; Husserl 2005b, 170), Husserl asserts that interested consciousness, in its down and up rhythms of tension, is essentially “bound with pleasure ... [or] equally so with displeasure” (Husserl, 2005b, 171).

Second, the two kinds of feelings differ with regards to their objects and their activity. On the one hand, Husserl asserts in the 1893 manuscript that feeling intentions are active and that their objects are thematically presented (Husserl, 2005b, 177).⁹ On the other hand, a rhythmic feeling is not an affirmation or negation of the value of a thematically presented object. Instead, rhythmic feelings both motivate and respond to the tensing and relaxing of interest, which are not themselves thematically intended, but are rather modes of interest itself (Husserl, 2005b, 159). This point has important and complex implications, which Husserl did *not* systematically outline until later in his career. Namely, rhythmic feelings, which are not directed at

⁸ Husserl was often unable to clarify or maintain the distinction between drive-feelings and feeling acts in his later works. Even in EU, as Wehrle writes, “Husserl seems to talk about feeling in this context in quite a naïve way. He does not differentiate explicitly between different senses in which he refers to feelings ... Husserl does not further elaborate on the different notions of feelings in use here and leaves us in uncertainty” (Wehrle, 2015, 52). However, it is critically important for any phenomenologist to clearly distinguish between drive-feelings and feeling acts, for fear of mixing up the passive unthematic with the active thematic, as Bernet demonstrates in his 2006 work (Bernet, 2006, 46–48; see also Summa 2014, 230).

⁹ In a passage from the second half of the 1893 manuscript, Husserl does test out the possibility that some feelings might be non-intentional passive undergoings [*Erleiden*] (Husserl, 2005b, 179–182). He writes, “The pleasure ... fills my soul, which occurs passively [*passiv*], not actively, receptively, not presentively [*gebend*]” (Husserl, 2005b, 179). I discuss this conclusion at length in Byrne 2022.

thematic objects, are not actively executed by the subject (they are not egoic acts), but are instead passively undergone. These feelings can accordingly be understood by us today as drive-feelings. To understand the intentionality of these rhythmic drive-feelings then, the meaning of the term intentionality has to be extended to encompass receptive and passive forms of positioning towards objects and the world. Instead of being active and thematic, these rhythmic drive-feelings are operative, as Wehrle writes, “in a passive and implicit way” (Wehrle, 2015, 57).

Finally, the two kinds of feelings can have different effects on interest. Via rhythmic drive-pleasure, I experience rewards, which aid my continual discovery of the world. In contrast, the pleasure of feeling intentions can at times hinder cognition. Even though the feeling *act* of pleasure—in moderation—is necessary for interest (Husserl, 2005b, 169), when it becomes too strong, it can detract from my concentrated interest. For example, when reading one of Husserl’s manuscripts, I could become so overwhelmed with joy at his piercing insights, that I would no longer be able to concentrate. The feeling act would obstruct my ability to continue reading. Husserl writes that for focused objectifying interest to continue, pleasure “should not dominate, it must recede from interest, it must not ‘overwhelm’ us” (Husserl, 2005b, 169).

4 Volition

Having outlined the connections between the tension of objectifying interest and feeling, in accordance with the hierarchy of acts, this essay now turns to Husserl’s investigation of the relationship between tension and the will. More specifically, I explore his analysis of the relationship between tension and acts of volitional striving.¹⁰

To begin, Husserl initially observes that tensed interest is very similar to striving. In fact, he even goes so far as to question, “should we call the tension of interest a striving?” (Husserl, 2005b, 183). In particular, Husserl observes that the tension of interest shares two similarities with volitional striving. First, he claims, in *Noten*, that tension and striving are both oriented towards goals (Summa, 2014, 225). More accurately stated, the tension of interest orients interest towards the next cognition. Tension “points” or “drives” interest towards the back side of the box or towards the next sentence on the page. Striving is self-evidently also oriented towards its goal (Husserl, 2005b, 184). Second, in both tensed interest and striving, I feel a certain exertion, or I have the feeling that I am expending some psychic power or energy (see note five above). In parallel to the feeling of the struggle of striving, I feel strained when overcoming the tension of my current interest by executing the next novel act of interest. Husserl writes that, “Striving has a similarity to tensed interest. In both cases, we have a feeling of exertion of power, of a certain work, of an activity; we feel ourselves strained” (Husserl, 2005b, 184).

¹⁰ On the one hand, Husserl claims that striving is distinct from the will, because, “We speak of the will primarily when we are convinced that we can achieve the goal, [whereas] we speak of striving (seeking), where full conviction is lacking, potentially the mere possibility suffices” (Husserl, 2005b, 184). On the other hand, Husserl defines striving as a kind of willing, writing, “Simply stated, when we speak of striving, we are exclusively talking about willing and nothing further” (Husserl, 2005b, 184).

Despite these similarities, Husserl ultimately recognizes that tension is not a kind of striving or act of will. Instead, he claims that a tense interested act is the grounding for a volitional striving. Husserl writes, “The tension of interest underlies striving and essentially so. However, this does not mean that the tension of interest is striving” (Husserl, 2005b, 184). While tensed interest can persist without an accompanying striving, “there is no striving without tensed interest ... where there is the former, the latter is fused with it” (Husserl, 2005b, 184). Husserl outlines this relationship more clearly by concluding that my tensed interested act presents that which I will strive for—that is, the goal of my volitional act—and that it can present the accomplishment of that goal (Husserl, 2005b, 184). He further recognizes that the tension of interest and striving are distinct because they can have different intensities. For example, while I may have a strong will to execute a goal, my interest, which is concerned with the achievement of the goal, may be minimally tensed. Husserl describes the converse situation by writing, “I want to see something from the other side, which interests me very much. However, the strength of the will is minimal” (Husserl, 2005b, 184).¹¹

Having outlined Husserl’s core conclusions about the differences between the tension of interest and striving, I can now show that—upon closer inspection—these observations have important ramifications for the overarching phenomenological understanding of the *telos* of consciousness. On the basis of Husserl’s cleavage between tension and striving, one *can* also distinguish two different kinds of goals: first, the objectives, which volitional striving is aimed at, and second, the “goals,” which tension orients interest towards. To be clear from the start—although the following ideas are implicit in Husserl’s 1893 theory—he himself never draws them out in the manuscript.

As is self-evident, volition is directed at a thematic and oftentimes clear goal, which I can strive towards. I can have the goal of learning more about a relevant issue and strive towards that goal by reading the paragraphs found in the germane Husserliana. I can have the objective of making sure that the box isn’t tampered with or broken and then achieve that goal by willing myself to look at all of its sides. If interested consciousness only ever had such an external practical goal, which is set by the will, then once that *telos* is realized, there would be no reason to continue to interestedly perceive or inspect the object. My pragmatic objective would be met and I could move onto the next task.

Yet, the goals set by volitional consciousness are not the only kind of goals I can have. Rather, Husserl’s discussion of tension and striving opens up another possible way to think about the objectives of interested consciousness. While Husserl does not explicitly develop this idea in *Noten*, it is clearly prefigured and accordingly worthy of mention. As outlined in section two, when I perform an initial objectifying interest, I feel the pull of tension towards novel interested experiences of the object, and then I feel pulled again and again to execute ever new interested discoveries of the

¹¹ As the reader may have noticed, Husserl describes the tension of interest by analogizing and contrasting it to other structures of consciousness, while not providing an entirely positive account of the tension itself. A positive characterization of this tension is elusive in the 1893 text. In fact, in his mature writings, Husserl still struggled to provide a positive description of the instinct towards discovery and its affective character (see footnote eight above and section five below).

world. Tension *always* and *recurringly* orients my interested consciousness towards new interested objectifications of objects and properties, as the goals that—when achieved—will loosen this tension. Otherwise stated, my tensed interest has the goal of executing another act of interest; its objective is the continued activity of interest itself. As such, interest is not just teleologically oriented towards external goals set by volition, but is also an autotelic process, that is, a process that has its purpose in, and not apart from, itself.

I attend to objects and learn more about the world not just because I want to achieve my own externally imposed goals. Rather, I also discover for the sake of discovery itself; attentive learning and discovery are internal or innate goals of interested consciousness as such. This objective of discovery is always being accomplished with every next act of interest, which loosens the tension of interest. Yet, because tension can never be conclusively relaxed, this goal can never be completed once and for all. Interest always has the unfinished objective of the next new discovery. In sum then, Husserl's analysis clearly prefigures the idea that interest is an infinite process, where its goal of novel interested cognitions is always already and never complete.

5 Reconsideration

To conclude this paper, I demonstrate why Husserl's insights from *Noten* are helpful for understanding the trajectory of his phenomenology of instincts. I reveal how his 1893 descriptions of tension inform his theory of instincts in his later *Nachlass*. As stated in the introduction, Husserl's mature theory of instincts has been discussed rather extensively in the recent literature, such that my goal here is not to provide a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of Husserl's views about instincts. Instead, I point out a few important new links between Husserl's early and mature writings. I execute this study in two steps, where I examine how Husserl's inchoate ideas from *Noten* were reworked by the mature Husserl in two distinct ways. This discussion is also divided according to the primary sources investigated. The first transformation that I will explore is from the 1909–1914 *Studies Concerning the Structures of Consciousness* and the 1939 *Experience and Judgment*. The second alteration, which I investigate, is found in other late manuscripts.

Before beginning this analysis, one introductory point should be highlighted, which can help ward off misinterpretations of what follows. While I do—in this section—examine the relationship between the 1893 manuscript and Husserl's mature writings, this methodology is by no means meant to suggest that Husserl ignored the topic of instincts in the intervening decades. Instead, the issue of instincts played a central role in the development of his theories of feelings and perception during the subsequent and middle periods of his thought. For just one example, in the Fifth Logical Investigation, Husserl introduces two distinct ways to think about instincts, where this division also informs his mature phenomenology of instincts. Specifically, in 1901, he descriptively examines the cases where an experienced desire seemingly does not have “conscious reference to what is desired,” or, “we are moved by obscure drives or pressures towards unrepresented goals” (Husserl 1970, 111/1984, 409). On the one hand, Husserl states that I could here be experiencing feeling sensations,

which are simply un-apprehended and thus entirely lacking in intentional reference. They persist, as Lee writes, “as a mere state of sensations, that is, as a non-intentional experience” (Lee 1958, 43). On the other hand, I may here be experiencing apprehended feeling sensations, whose presentation, however, lacks a determinate objective direction (Husserl 1970, 111/1984, 410–411; see Lee 1958, 43–45).

Keeping this important historical point in mind, I now turn to examine how Husserl’s investigation of tension from *Noten* serves as foundational for his analysis of instincts in *Studien* and EU. To begin, I emphasize that while the late Husserl is still studying the same moment—the pull to observation—he uses his terms in vastly different ways in these mature works. Rather than calling this pull “tension,” he instead terms it—unfortunately for the discussion of this paper—“interest,” which he now classifies as a “tendency” [*Tendenz*].¹² Despite this change in terminology, his mature description is largely attempting to zero in on the same structure. In a similar way to how the early Husserl asserted that tension is a “pull” on consciousness, he now claims that interest is the instinctual tendency to execute further objectifying (or rather, egoic) acts. Husserl writes, in EU, that 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” (Husserl, 1973, 82/1939, 87).¹³

The one impact of *Noten* on Husserl’s late theory of instincts from EU and *Studien*—that I will examine here—concerns the relationship between the instinctual pull towards observation and the will. We remember that, in *Noten*, Husserl struggled with determining if there is a distinction between the tendency of interest (previously, tension) and the will. Even though Husserl ultimately decided, in 1893, that tension is different from volitional striving, he presented descriptive analyses that revealed how they are similar to each other. In the mature writings, Husserl capitalizes on those latter insights to arrive at a different conclusion: He asserts that the tending interest (previously, the tension of interest) is itself volitional. Husserl *tentatively suggests* that the instinctual pull on consciousness towards novel discoveries should be conceived of as a kind of volitional striving in several of his manuscripts that can be found in *Studien* (Husserl, 2020, 308–314, 346–354; see Melle 1997, 191–192). He then fully commits to that idea and systematically works it out in EU. He there plainly asserts that interest is a “striving toward a new consciousness” (Husserl, 1973, 82/1939, 87). At another point in EU, he writes that interest is “a striving towards realization, a doing which includes different forms of discontinuance and completion ... It constantly strives for new alterations of appearance in order to bring the object to givenness from all sides (Husserl, 1973, 83/1939, 89).

To be sure, Husserl’s conclusion—that the tendency towards discovery is volitional—parallels many parts of the 1893 manuscript. One might even consider this shift to be a loosening of his previous terminology. At the same time, by explicitly

¹² The notion of *Tendenz* first received systematic treatment in the 1913/14 Revisions to the Sixth Logical Investigation. See Husserl (2005a, 90, 204), Byrne (2020a, 2020b, 2021a, 2021b), Melle (2002).

¹³ For what follows, the reader should note that, as Melle writes, “Husserl himself often uses the expressions ‘drive’ and ‘tendency’ as synonyms” (Melle, 2002, 191).

concluding that intentionality, with its tendency to discovery, is volitional, Husserl has altered a core tenet of his philosophy. This shift represents, as Bernet writes, “Husserl’s most important contribution to the philosophical problematic of drives” (Bernet, 2006, 39). This is for three reasons. First, on the basis of my own phenomenological reflections, I take Husserl’s mature conclusion to be more phenomenologically accurate; drives and instincts are experienced as qualified kinds of willings or doings. Second, this decision brings Husserl closer to Freud, allowing for fruitful comparisons between the two (see Bernet 2002, 2006, 39–42). Finally—and this is critical—this observation means that, for Husserl, all objectifications possess a volitional component. When it is revealed that the late Husserl concludes that—like tension—interest is an innate structure of objectification, then it becomes clear that Husserl’s decision—that interest is a striving—means that objectification essentially involves a striving.

Otherwise stated, by claiming that the tendency of intentionality is volitional, he also is asserting that there is no such thing as pure objectification. Perception, thought, imagination, and so on, would have to be considered partly volitional. Instead of the stratified tripartite model of consciousness, where objectifications can be strictly separated from feelings and volitions, Husserl here recognizes that objectification is permeated by striving (see Melle 1997, 192; Summa 2014, 225–230). On this basis, Husserl now reconceives of perceptual possibilities as “practical possibilities” (Husserl, 1973, 83/1939, 88) and objectifying perceptions are taken to be “‘activities’ in a certain sense” (Husserl, 1973, 84/1939, 89), although not voluntary achievements like full acts of the will. While these insights were prefigured in *Noten*, it was only when Husserl fully embraced the idea that interest is a striving, that he became capable of presenting a rigorous account of consciousness that is not constricted by that sharp tripartite distinction between acts, which was inspired by Brentano (see Brentano 2009, 152–155/1874, 260–264).

Husserl’s second reconceiving of his theory of the innate and recursive pull towards discovery can be found in different manuscripts from the 20 and 30 s. In these mature writings, Husserl is likely influenced by his 1893 descriptions of tension as “the origin of cognition” (Husserl, 2005b, 159) and as similar to *admiratio* (Husserl, 2005b, 187; see section two above). The mature Husserl appears to work from these ideas when he describes this same instinct, but again introduces a new term for it, namely, “curiosity.” Similar to *Noten*, Husserl describes curiosity as the innate pull toward further observation (see Mensch 2010, 230–235). He writes that, “Curiosity as interest in the unknown, in that which comes to cognition, has the ego adhere to the object, which is a force that is attractive and motivates holding-on and which can; however, be overcome by other stimuli” (Husserl, 2020, 476). At another point, he claims that the instinct to turn towards the object is guided by curiosity (Husserl, 2020, 476–477; see also pages 480–481). Finally, in further agreement with his early discussion, the mature Husserl describes curiosity as distinct from, but the source of theoretical reason and thus also philosophy (see Deodati 2011, 69–71; Plotka 2018, 605–610; Summa 2014, 227).

While Husserl’s theory of curiosity parallels his 1893 account of tension, he develops his ideas in new important ways. For example, Husserl claims that the instinct of curiosity is—along with some other instincts—located on the hyletic level (but

not only on the hyletic level). This class of instincts, which are in part located on the hyletic level, are understood by Husserl as “responses” to hyletic data. More specifically, Husserl takes these instincts to be responses to—as Mensch calls it—the values of sensations—the pleasure or displeasure of the sensations. Mensch writes, “For Husserl, there are no ‘value free’ mere sensations or sensible objects. On the contrary, nothing can be given that cannot move the feelings” (Mensch, 1998, 221). When the ego is moved by the pleasure of a sensation, it can turn to that sensation. This turning is a striving and this striving is the instinct of curiosity. This (volitional) striving, in contrast to full acts of volition, has no currently given goal or object. The objective of the instinctual striving is instead only revealed in the realization of the instinct itself (see Bower 2014, 138). For the late Husserl, curiosity is our first contact with and first interest in hyletic data. It is our striving towards sensorial data and our striving towards the objectification of that data. In the end, curiosity is the primordial instinct to grasp a unity through the temporally flowing fields of sensations (see Mensch 1998, 223; Husserl 2006, 325).

In sum, by adapting his *de facto* theory of instincts from *Noten*, the mature Husserl has explicitly developed the idea that objectification essentially involves affective and volitional instinctual components. With these descriptions, he is claiming that there is no such thing as pure theoretical objectification, which would ground the altogether “impure” and “alien” acts of feeling or willing. He is rejecting any phenomenology (or descriptive psychology), which would seek to keep these kinds of experiences cleanly cloistered from each other. Rather, the affective address of the hyletic data is a unity with the volitional striving of the ego, where both are essential moments of objectification. While Husserl recognized in *Noten* that rhythmic feelings motivate objectification and while he claimed in EU that objectification is a striving, only in these late manuscripts does he synthesize those insights to systematically describe how objectification itself involves affection and volition.

While this brief historical overview has revealed how Husserl’s theory of the instinct towards discovery *changed* over time, to conclude this essay, I highlight that Husserl’s analysis of instincts is—regardless of which time period one looks at it—often guided by the *same* foundational insight, which he first discovered in *Noten*.¹⁴ I contend that, over time, more of his account of instincts stays the same than changes. Specifically, Husserl’s analyses are executed in line with the idea that consciousness, at its core, possesses an essential structural lack.

For example, in the case of a simple perception of a sensuous object, it is clear that this perception is never final or complete; it is always lacking, there is always more to perceive. On the one hand, this incompleteness concerns the inadequate givenness of all external objects. On the other hand, this deficit belongs to consciousness itself (see Summa 2014, 232; Wehrle 2015, 48). Instinctually, consciousness possesses the structural dislocating pull towards the next and the next observation, where there is no terminal observation where it could finally rest. There is no discovery that could stop the incessant rending of this instinctual pull. Regardless of how many times I discover something new and thereby satisfy that instinct, my consciousness is perpet-

¹⁴ Regarding how Husserl maintains and develops this insight in *Studien*, see Bernet (2006, 41); in EU, see Wehrle (2015, 48); and in other late manuscripts, see Bower (2014, 139–140).

ually dislocated once more; I am always pulled, pressed, and forced forward towards new observations. In sum, throughout his life, Husserl saw that a fundamental and defining feature of consciousness is this instinctual lack,¹⁵ which could never be completely eradicated by any fulfillment or release.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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¹⁵ By remembering Husserl’s conclusions from *Noten* about rhythmic drive-feelings, one can read the early Husserl as claiming that life is essentially unpleasant. Despite the drive-feeling of pleasure, which is experienced with the loosening of the tension of interest, I am drawn back again and again into displeasurable tension.

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