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Schelling and Husserl on the Concept of Passive Synthesis¹

Abstract

Both Schelling and Husserl reveal that any attempt to ground objective cognition in subjectivity would encounter the problem of constitution of original experience. They also endorse similar solutions to this very problem. The constitution of original experience is depicted as passive synthesis, i. e., it is the pre-conscious activity of the original 'I' (*Ur-Ich*). However, unlike Schelling's interpretation of passive synthesis, understood as a theory of quasi-conscious willing (*Wollen*), Husserl relocates passive synthesis in the transition from instinct to habituality. The constitution of original experience, as well as the activity of the original 'I', uncovers the dynamic structure of Being. Owing to this, transcendental philosophy must become a transcendental ontology.

Keywords: Schelling, Husserl, Passive Synthesis, Original Experience, Willing, Habituality, Transcendental Ontology

Introduction: Passive Synthesis as a Basic Problem of Transcendental Philosophy

Since early modern philosophy, the problem of consciousness has been thematized, and the intentional connection between subject and object construed as its structural foundation. The conceptual reflection of this intentional connection is a prime example of conscious activity. By verifying our available knowledge of intentional objects, our conceptual reflection (or *noesis*) enjoys direct certainty and foundational epistemic status. However, as is challenged by post-war German philosopher Hans Wagner, what is achieved through our intentional acts is merely an outcome (*Ergebnis*) of cognition, *viz.* a noema. Here, only the achievement of subjectivity (*Leistung der Subjektivität*) is verified, while access to the events preceding objective conditions is not yet achieved.² A direct answer

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² Hans Wagner: *Philosophie und Reflexion*. Hans Wagners Gesammelte Schriften 1, edited by Bernhard Grünewald. Paderborn 2013, 17.

to this challenge shall be another conceptual reflection, which regards the available outcome of our cognition, *viz.* a noematic reflection (*noesis noematos*), which reduces the outcome to the most “original” objectivity. This argumentative strategy, as pointed out by Hans Wagner, would unfortunately fall into the “darkness” (*Dunkelheit*).³

The aim of the following discourse, therefore, is to find and present the structure of these “dark intentions” (*dunkle Intentionen*). The arguments for this can be formulated in the following three steps:

1. If the object, as is claimed in the tradition of modern philosophy, is merely an outcome of the subjective construction, then there must exist further preceding conditions that make the subjective construction *itself* possible, lying before any conscious intentionality,⁴ namely, in the “dark” sphere of pre-consciousness (*Vorbewußtsein*), or pre-conscious experience.
2. Correspondingly, the access within experience to pre-consciousness must, moreover, be non-conceptual and pre-reflective.
3. The connection between original subject-object (*Ur-Subjekt-Objekt*) achieved in pre-consciousness is no longer consciously intentional. Rather, it becomes a structure of original pre-conscious experience, being able to illustrate the preceding conditions that make the subjective construction *itself* possible.

According to Ludwig Landgrebe, since the structure already belongs to the “deep dimension” (*Tiefendimension*)⁵ of the constitution of consciousness, the cognitive subject cannot access its dark intentions by means of reflection. Due to this fact, the pre-constitution (*Vorkonstitution*) of consciousness is not an achievement of the cognitive subject. Thus, it must be a *passive* pre-constitution. It is furthermore grasped as a *passive synthesis*, through which the undetermined material can be embraced into the original ‘I’ (*Ur-Ich*),⁶ that is, as reality. This proves that the original ‘I’ forms the “source” (*Quelle*) of all conscious phenomena. As its final “source,” the original ‘I’ must be able to provide the necessary conditions of possibility (transcendental), as well as sufficient grounds (ontological), for all phenomena at the same time.⁷ Thus, taking the passive synthesis of pre-consciousness as its deepest concern, transcendental philosophy must be

³ Ibid., 47.

⁴ In this essay, the term “intentionality” as well as its adjective form “intentional” is used in its weakest sense, namely, indicating a consciously mental action initiated by the subject to establish connection between the subject and the external object. The use of this term does not carry any further theoretical meaning in other philosophical traditions.

⁵ Ludwig Landgrebe: *Faktizität und Individuation. Studien zu den Grundfragen der Phänomenologie*. Hamburg 1982, 73.

⁶ In this essay, the terms “original I” (*Ur-Ich*) and “original subjectivity” (*Ur-Subjektivität*) are used in the same way, indicating the subject (*Träger*) who bears the activities of pre-consciousness.

⁷ Landgrebe: *Faktizität und Individuation*, 74.

“anchored” in a transcendental ontology,⁸ which transcends the bounds of spatio-temporal cognition, incorporating both epistemological (transcendental) and ontological aspects,⁹ and furthermore attempting to relocate, as well as present, the basic structure of consciousness in virtue of passive synthesis. It is also the anchoring-point where Schelling and Husserl, the two great transcendental philosophers, coincide.¹⁰

The central thesis of this paper is that any theoretical attempt to ground transcendental subjectivity requires us first to clarify the foundation (or the original subjective construction) of objectivity itself, not as an intentional object, nor as an existing actuality, but as “that it is” (*das, was ist*) in pre-consciousness.¹¹ The latter is necessarily conceivable by illustrating the dynamic structure of *Being* itself, namely, the final foundation of original subjectivity. Therefore, transcendental philosophy must become transcendental ontology, in the sense that the deeply foundational dimension of consciousness must be revealed in virtue of a transcendental explanation instead of reflection.¹²

⁸ The term “transcendental ontology” is largely indebted to another post-war German philosopher, Wolfgang Cramer. It focuses on the possibility of a transcendental explanation in the original constitution of reality, *viz.* that of original experience. Cf. Wolfgang Cramer: *Das Absolute und das Kontingente. Untersuchungen zum Substanzbegriff*. Frankfurt am Main 2019, 7: “the transcendental philosophy is to be anchored in a transcendental ontology. The thought ‘I think’ is an original transcendental and ontological thought, which gives a transcendental legitimation to the subjectivity as well as an ontology of the conditions of subjectivity” (unless otherwise indicated translations are mine, NY).

⁹ Transcendental ontology, understood as the integration of German Idealism and phenomenology, has become a topic in recent phenomenological research, e.g., Alexander Schnell: *Was ist Phänomenologie?* Frankfurt am Main 2019, 84 f.: “the conditions of possibility [epistemological aspect] are at the same time the conditions of possibility of the objects of experience [ontological aspect].”

¹⁰ One of the anonymous reviews of this essay questions why Schelling’s early philosophy is chosen as an example of transcendental idealism. The choice of Schelling’s early philosophy as the main object of this essay is largely justified by the fact that Schelling might not be the only one among German Idealists who thematizes the problem of original experience, but he is the most distinguished among them. Moreover, as shown in the following argumentation, Schelling treats this problem with clarity and coherence.

¹¹ In the same anonymous review, it is also questioned that it is not even necessary to march beyond transcendental subjectivity because the transcendental philosophy has already made all objective cognition possible, otherwise the attempt of this essay might fall into the paradox of “dogmatic ontologism.” The attempt to find and depict the deeper structure of original pre-conscious experience might not apply to the “classical” transcendental philosophy along Kantian lines. However, this attempt marks the very point where the Post-Kantian Idealism as well as the genetic phenomenology of later Husserl (both as “new” transcendental philosophy) essentially differ from the Kantian transcendental philosophy.

¹² The problem of the original temporal constitution (*Ur-Zeitigung*) is also of vital importance in helping us better understand the structure of the original pre-conscious experience. However, this essay is focused on depicting the general genetic mode of the original pre-conscious experience as passive synthesis, the further clarification of the original temporal con-

This essay focuses on a possible answer to this problem, as offered by Schelling and Husserl, according to their respective undertakings in transcendental philosophy. In section 1, I explain Schelling's theory of "original sensation" (*urprüngliche Empfindung*) and "productive intuition" (*produktive Anschauung*) in *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800). I show that any inquiry into the foundation of transcendental subjectivity would be retrospective with regard to the elements of "original subjectivity," as already implied through acts of sensation. These acts constitute original experience, and necessarily consist in passive synthesis, which is the distinctive mode of subjective activities in pre-consciousness. In section 2, I proceed to examine Schelling's theory of "willing" (*Wollen*). I will point out that Schelling interprets the concept of willing as a quasi-intentional act that constructs original experience. Nevertheless, there consequently emerges a structural tension between this quasi-intentional act and passive synthesis. Section 3 turns to Husserl's plausible and progressive understanding of passive synthesis, which is based in theoretical resources drawn from his later 'genetic' phenomenology. On Husserl's view, passive synthesis (taken as the constitution of original pre-conscious experience) could only be located in pre-consciousness, functioning as the transition from instinct to habituality. In conclusion, the projects undertaken by both philosophers will be integrated to provide a general answer to the problem of the structure of original pre-conscious experience.

1. Schelling's Concept of "Productive Intuition" and the Passive Synthesis

The problem of objectivity and the constitution of original experience lie at the centre of German Idealism. However, its early development did not truly remove the trap of the subjective perspective. Since the relation between subject and object is always taken as intentional, objectivity becomes the vassal of subjectivity.¹³ Its central thesis holds that the principle of subjectivity bears the

stitution as the instantiation of passive synthesis would be too long to fit into this text. I will discuss the problem of temporal constitution in more detail in a separate article. Cf. Ni Yicai: "Selbstgefühl als lebendige Gegenwart. Husserl und Schelling über die ursprüngliche Zeitkonstitution." In: *Annales de Phénoménologie* 19, 2020, 25–43.

¹³ Fichte's case is much more complicated than the author's claim here. Fichte's transcendental-philosophical project is entwined with the subjective perspective until 1801. Nevertheless, we still find Fichte's concern about the problem of constitution of original experience in pre-consciousness even in his very early piece *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794/95). In fact, in his discussions about "feeling" (*Gefühl*) and "drive" (*Trieb*) in the later chapters of *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794/95), Fichte has already developed a theory of passive-synthesis which cleaves close

common ground of the certainty of human cognition as well as its activity. However, at the same time, the principle immediately establishes the boundary of transcendental philosophy, thereby leaving the deeper grounds of objectivity in darkness.

Schelling's early philosophical project is indeed greatly influenced by the "critical philosophy" (*Kritizismus*) of Kant, Reinhold, and Fichte, although he moved beyond the subjective perspective from the beginning of his philosophical career. His *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) marks his departure from the tradition of critical philosophy.¹⁴ At the beginning of *System*, the problems of objectivity and the constitution of original experience are raised to the same foundational level as subjectivity. The mutual relation between subjectivity and objectivity constitutes the "absolute identity" (*absolute Identität*), which forms the foundation of transcendental philosophy. According to Schelling, the key to solving the problem of objectivity is to explain how, "[...] when the objective is made primary, [...] a subjective is annexed thereto, which coincides with it."¹⁵ That is to say, while Schelling still admits the subjective construction of objectivity in pre-consciousness, the construction *as such* cannot simply amount to regular conceptual reflection. For, to "explain" just means to reveal the dynamics that turn the "un-conscious" thinking activities of pre-consciousness into consciousness itself.¹⁶

The third part of *System*, entitled *System of Theoretical Philosophy according to the Principles of Transcendental Idealism* (*System der theoretischen Philosophie nach Grundsätzen des transzendentalen Idealismus*), is intended to resolve the foregoing problem. Following Kant's approach in the first *Critique*, Schelling divides this part into three "epochs" (*Epochen*): the first epoch moves from original sensation (*ursprüngliche Empfindung*) to productive intuition (*pro-*

to that of Schelling and, later, Husserl. See Johann Gottlieb Fichte: *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794). Hamburg 1997, 208–238.

¹⁴ In the late 1790s, Fichte already began to question Schelling's program of transcendental philosophy, even though Schelling was still highly influenced by Fichte. After the publication of *System* in 1800, the disagreement between the two became insoluble.

¹⁵ Cf. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling: *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), trans. by Peter Heath. Charlottesville 2001, 5 (= *System* (E)); translation modified where necessary); *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* (1800), edited by Horst D. Brandt and Peter Müller. Frankfurt 2000 [= *System* (D)], 9.

¹⁶ It is notable that here Schelling's term "unconscious" merely indicates the difference between modes of thinking activities in pre-consciousness and consciousness respectively. The mode of thinking activity in pre-consciousness is not intentional. Still, we might be going too far in treating Schelling's "unconsciousness" as the same concept of "unconsciousness," as it appears in the later psychoanalytic tradition. Otherwise, it might lead to a severe misunderstanding of Schelling's own transcendental-philosophical project. An example of such a misreading can be found in Matt Ffytche: *The Foundation of the Unconscious. Schelling, Freud and the Birth of the Modern Psyche*. Cambridge/New York 2012.

duktive Anschauung); the second, from productive intuition to reflection (*Reflexion*); and the third, from reflection to the absolute act of will (*Willensakt*). The problems of objectivity and the constitution of original experience that this paper stresses are primarily concerned with the first two epochs, which deal respectively with the central concepts of “original sensation” and “productive intuition.”

A prerequisite of the problem of objectivity is to clarify the possibility of the object itself. Like Kant, Schelling also invokes “sensation” as our prime mechanism for receiving data from the world beyond subjective cognition. Unlike Kant, however, Schelling does not restrict sensation merely to receptivity. He instead endows it with “active” elements from the very beginning. As Dieter Jähnig rightly interprets the German term ‘*Empfindung*’: “I experience what I find as something that is not produced by myself. The feature of the givenness of something is included in the act of ‘finding’.”¹⁷ Here, there are at least two dimensions at work in understanding Schelling’s original sensation. First, “original sensation” implies that the subject has already engaged with some heteronomous material in pre-consciousness, and, as mentioned above, such engagement is certainly not intentional. Second, the original sensation constitutes the original experience of the cognitive subject, the content of which is the material mentioned in the preceding dimension. On this account, while Schelling does not try to go further along the Kantian line (i. e., the “thing in itself”), thereby depicting the cognitive subject’s “inner structure,” he nevertheless manages to characterize the *mode* of the subject-object relation in pre-consciousness as preceding any involvement with conceptual reflection. As Schelling claims, the material (*Materie*) of original experience is merely the expression (*Ausdruck*) of thinking activities in pre-consciousness: “All stuff is simply the expression of an equilibrium between opposing activities, which mutually reduce themselves to a mere substrate of activity.”¹⁸ This is to say that original experience is essentially determined by the preceding subjective activities (*die vorhergehend subjektiven Tätigkeiten*). Thus, the constitution of original experience is nothing more than structural. In order to investigate the structure of subjective activities in pre-consciousness, it is necessary to introduce the non-conceptual and pre-reflective subjective modes of comprehensive pre-consciousness. Schelling classifies such modes as “productive intuition,” through which he develops the identity between the structure of material and the structure of “original subjectivity” (*Ur-*

¹⁷ Dieter Jähnig: *Schelling: Die Kunst in der Philosophie. Erster Band: Schellings Begründung von Natur und Geschichte*. Pfullingen 1966, 59: “Was ich finde, erfahre ich als nicht von mir gemacht. Im Finden ist der Charakter des Gegebenseins von etwas enthalten.”

¹⁸ *System* (E), 51; *System* (D), 69.

Subjektivität), or, more concretely, what he calls “an essential relation” (*Wesensverwandtschaft*). Such an essential relation is *de facto* a determining self-reference (*Selbstbezugnahme*) of the original subjectivity: a self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*).¹⁹ As Schelling writes: “Thus, it is obvious that the I, in that it constructs the matter, is in truth constructing itself [...] by means of which the I as sensing becomes an object to itself.”²⁰ In the sphere of consciousness, self-determination is different from self-consciousness. In the relational mode of self-determination, the ‘I’ as sensing “becomes” (*wird*) the object of the original ‘I’ (*Ur-Ich*). “Become” means “initially is not,” so the self-reference indicated by the self-determination is not intentional. It is instead a more foundational mode of relation that makes intentional connection possible. As Jähnig explains, the core argument of Schelling’s theory of objectivity in *System* is to reveal that the objective experience itself is only explicable in terms of “a subjective activity” (*eine subjektive Tätigkeit*).²¹ As mentioned above, to “explain” means that the connection between subjective activity and the objective experience is not a normal, intentional connection.

Nevertheless, Jähnig’s insight can only cover the first half of our argument. While we have reduced original experience to the activity of original subjectivity, we still have to establish its connection with those “conscious” thinking activities in the sphere of consciousness. That is to say, the “unconscious” and “dark” foundational relation must be brought into consciousness. This is, moreover, Schelling’s focus in the second epoch, “from productive intuition to reflection.” He writes: “The question as to how the I recognizes itself as productive is thus the same as asking how it is able to tear itself free from its production and to transcend the latter.”²² However, tension remains within the aim of the argument in the second epoch. On the one hand, the original experience itself is an activity of our subjectivity in a preceding, given world. On the other, it is required by transcendental philosophy that the world (i.e., the totality of objectivity) is rooted in our self-consciousness (the subjective principle). Obviously, while the original experience does not function as a cornerstone for the world, it nevertheless depicts the subject-object relation in pre-consciousness. If we insisted on the “claim” from the side of subjectivity, then we would inevitably apply the conscious mode within the sphere of pre-consciousness,

¹⁹ The author uses “self-determination” rather than “self-consciousness” here to designate the mode of self-reference of original subjectivity in order to mark a clear and rigorous difference between the two modes of thinking activity in pre-consciousness and consciousness, respectively.

²⁰ *System* (E), 91; *System* (D), 121.

²¹ Jähnig: *Schelling*, 67.

²² *System* (E), 94; *System* (D), 124.

thanks to which the original subject-object relation would emerge as intentional. Thus, reflective elements would attend thinking activity in pre-consciousness much earlier than they ought. However, following this strategy, the spontaneous elements in the conduct of original subjectivity, which is stressed by the term “become,” would get completely ignored. These spontaneous elements, *viz.* spontaneous self-determination in the essential relation of productive intuition, cannot be depicted in reflection. This point is rightly stressed by Schelling in the introduction of *System*: “Through this constant duplicity of producing and intuiting, something is to become an object, *which is not otherwise reflected by anything*.”²³ The “object” in the quoted text indicates an outcome of an original subjective construction in pre-consciousness. The meaning of the term “productive intuition” then becomes even clearer: “productive” means that the objectivity of pre-consciousness always stays within the “becoming” process (*Werden*) of superficial intentionality. The process is dynamic and cannot be depicted by any stable reflection. Schelling furthermore reveals the essential character of the constitution of original experience in pre-consciousness: the original subject-object relation is a *passive relation* constituted by original sensation, contrary to superficial intentional relations, which constitute the active relations projected by the cognitive subject. Moreover, in the second epoch, Schelling clarifies the passive subject-object relation in pre-consciousness:

So in sensation the concept of an action [*Handlung*] is nowhere thought, but only that of a suffering [*Leiden*]. In the present moment, the I is *for itself* merely the sensed.²⁴

This intuition, which reconciles the unlimited I with the limited, was the act of sensation, though for reasons given, all that remains of this in consciousness is the mere vestige of a passivity [*Passivität*].²⁵

In the first quotation, Schelling uses the term “suffering” (*Leiden*) to explain the passive element of the constitution of original experience. Contrary to subjective activity, the sensation of suffering is in fact a passive activity (*eine passive Tätigkeit*). As stressed above, Schelling’s concept of sensation comprises both passive and active characteristics. When the original ‘I’ (*Ur-Ich*) passively receives affection from material in the external world, it simultaneously begins to intuit worldly material, thereby producing it as an object in virtue of the dynam-

²³ *System* (E), 13; *System* (D), 20. Here, the term “duplicity” means that the productive and intuiting activities of original subjectivity affect each other dynamically.

²⁴ *System* (E), 60; *System* (D), 80. There is a similar expression in Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794/95), cf. Fichte: *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), 56: “The opposite of activity is called *suffering* [*Leiden*]. *Suffering* is a *positive* absolute negation, and is insofar opposite to the merely relative one.”

²⁵ *System* (E), 61; *System* (D), 81.

ical structure of the essential relation. Therefore, the productive intuition is an original synthesis of original subjectivity, and the material, *viz.* the original object (*Ur-Objekt*), is properly the outcome, or “expression,” of this original synthesis. Hereby, a preliminary conclusion is achieved: the constitution of original experience in pre-consciousness is an activity of original subjectivity, while the latter is necessarily a passive synthesis. As Schelling points out in the beginning of the third part of *System*: “The I (of self-consciousness) is thus itself a compound activity, and self-consciousness itself a synthetic act.”²⁶ The phrase “the I of self-consciousness” here indicates nothing more than the original experience itself in pre-consciousness. The “I” is jointly posited by both “limited activities” (self-determination of reality, or construction of material) and “limiting activities” (self-determination of ideality, or the constitution of the original ‘I’). Simultaneously, the material is “fixed” in virtue of the passive synthesis. Schelling’s “self-consciousness” here could never be understood as a *noesis noeseos*, namely, an objective self-consciousness in the sphere of consciousness. Instead, it is here equal to “original subjectivity,” which is not as yet apparent but already functions within pre-consciousness.

Thus, we have achieved a basic insight into Schelling’s transcendental philosophy. The subjective principle of transcendental philosophy requires objectivity as its *substrate*, meanwhile the constitution of objectivity must be traced back to the constitution of original experience in pre-consciousness. The latter is *de facto* the “unconscious” construction of the original ‘I’ in pre-consciousness, which is “unconscious” and therefore necessarily non-conceptual, pre-reflective, and non-intentional. This is to say that it can only be a productive intuition, in other words, a passive synthesis.

However, Schelling’s insight is not clearly exhibited in *System*. As some researchers have noted, what Schelling presents in the following parts of *System* is an attempt to depict the original subject-object relation in pre-consciousness following a “quasi-intentional” model.²⁷ Therefore, in the second part of our argument, we shall examine Schelling’s theory of “willing” (*Wollen*) and its corresponding “quasi-intentional” model for original experience. I shall argue that such a quasi-intentional structure fails to explain the general mode of thinking activities of pre-consciousness.

²⁶ *System* (E), 44; *System* (D), 60.

²⁷ Cf. Stefan Lang: “Schelling’s Concept of Self-Consciousness in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800).” In: *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 55, 2013, 165–180, here: 168–177; Sebastian Schwenzfeuer: *Natur und Subjekt. Die Grundlegung der schellingschen Naturphilosophie*. Freiburg/München 2014, 58–74. Both researchers try to construct an original subject-object relation from the concept of objective activity.

2. “Willing” as the Quasi-Intentional Structure of the Original Experience

As discussed in the first part of this paper, passive synthesis in pre-consciousness is a key transitional mechanism that turns original experience into consciousness. However, the theory of passive synthesis only stresses the “process” of such a mechanism, and fails to explain how the object of consciousness (*Bewußtseinsobjekt*), understood as the “result” of such a process, is possible. If the original experience is to become the object of consciousness, then the activity of the original ‘I’ must simultaneously become the general representation (*Vorstellung*) in consciousness. That is to say, these “unconscious” activities in pre-consciousness must become “conscious” *in concreto* in order to turn its structure into an intentional structure, directed towards the object of consciousness. Therefore, the productive and spontaneous elements at work in the activity of the original ‘I’ must be “cancelled” (*aufgelöst*). Schelling’s terms for these two successive steps are “absolute reflection” and “absolute abstraction.”²⁸ Thus, for any activity, “becoming conscious” must be intentional, and capable of being reflected. As Schelling states in his first proposition in the fourth part of *System*: “Absolute abstraction, i. e., the beginning of consciousness, is explicable only through a self-determining, or an act of the intelligence upon itself.”²⁹ The process of absolute reflection can be divided into two dimensions. First, any activity of “becoming conscious” must be intentional, so the original ‘I’ must also become a conscious act upon itself. Second, any activity of “becoming conscious” can of necessity be reflected, meaning that the conscious activities of the original ‘I’ upon itself can likewise necessarily be reflected. Therefore, the conscious act upon itself must become self-determination. In the first dimension, the original ‘I’ is restricted to being present as an objective (intentional) self-consciousness in the sphere of consciousness. In the second dimension, however, such intentional self-consciousness is redefined as self-determination, which means that intentional self-consciousness is not only a formal intentional self-reference, but also an act capable of affording “real” determinations. The conscious act in the second dimension is designated by Schelling as “willing” (*Wollen*), with a somewhat controversial definition:

That self-determination of intelligence is called *willing* in the most general meaning of the word. That there is a self-determination in every will, that it at least appears as such, everyone can prove to himself by *inner intuition*; whether this appearance is true or deceptive is not our concern here. Nor do we speak of a certain *willing*, in which the concept of an object already precedes, but of the transcendental self-determining, of the original act of

²⁸ *System* (E), 193 f.; *System* (D), 170 f.

²⁹ *System* (E), 155; *System* (D), 202.

freedom. But what this self-determination may be is inexplicable to anyone who does not know of it from his own intuition.³⁰

Schelling's further definition highlights a tension within the concept of willing. On one side, willing as transcendental self-determination could be verified through "inner intuition," *viz.* the productive intuition, or the activity of the original 'I'. On the other, to make consciousness possible, willing must become a quasi-intentional action towards an outer object. In the first dimension, willing has already become an act depicting the original subject-object relation, insofar as it has participated in the constitution of the "original object," *viz.* the original experience, albeit still in pre-consciousness. In the second dimension, the willing must become "intentional" once again, redirecting itself towards a concrete object in the outer world, thereby making possible a transition from the activity of the original 'I' to the conscious act. How, then, do we resolve any remaining tensions? To paraphrase Schelling's query in "Problem E" (*Aufgabe E*) from the fourth part of *System*: how does willing once again become objective for the 'I'?³¹

There is yet another significant difficulty here. For, in the first part of the above definition, if the willing has already achieved the "quasi-intentional" orientation (*Richten*) between the original subject-object, then how could the essential difference between passive synthesis in the pre-consciousness and the intentional relation in actual consciousness be possible? In the fourth part of *System*, in virtue of the concept of willing, Schelling attempts to establish a "quasi-intentional" original subject-object relation in pre-consciousness, making the transition (*Werden*) between the original experience and the object of consciousness possible. Owing to this, the subjective comprehension of pre-consciousness becomes possible.

Here, we should take a break to review the argumentative strategies of the two foregoing sections. To summarize, Schelling's arguments concerning the problem of objectivity are developed along two parallel lines:

Line 1: Schelling begins from a constitutive problem of original experience, offering thereby a transcendental explanation of the relation between sensation and the structure of material, moreover reducing it to a self-determination that constructs the original 'I' itself (activity of the original 'I'), of which passive synthesis is the defining quality.

Line 2: Schelling tries to reveal the foundation of our consciousness through transcendental reflection (in Schelling's own expression, it is to unveil the "transcendental past of the I"). Transcendental reflection enables Schelling to enter

³⁰ *System* (E), 156; *System* (D), 203.

³¹ Cf. *System* (E), 175; *System* (D), 227.

the sphere of pre-consciousness from an intentional perspective. He attempts to explain how the intentional mode of consciousness applies to original experience in pre-consciousness. By building a mode of absolute reflection – willing – Schelling establishes a “quasi-intentional” self-reference as the form of the original ‘I’ in pre-consciousness, which applies to the activity of the original ‘I’, and self-determination as well. That is to say, the fundamental self-determination must likewise be quasi-intentional.

We can clearly see that the conclusions of Schelling’s two lines of thought conflict with one another, and neither of them can be reduced to the other. The central difficulty here lies in the fact that, in line 2, Schelling tries to investigate the thinking activity of pre-consciousness following the epistemological mode (intentionality of consciousness). This derangement of perspective leads to an offsetting of the entire argumentative structure, in addition to its outcome. Hereby, we can claim that the sphere of pre-consciousness is already that of transcendental ontology, whereby only a genetic aspect could be adopted in order to depict the activities of thought. By contrast, the transcendental reflection at work in line 2 inevitably leads to an infinite regress.

Therefore, the two parallel dimensions are intertwined with each other in Schelling’s theory of willing. Indeed, as Jähnig explains: “What appears in the willing is the foundational act of cognition and correspondingly, according to the postulation of the ‘parallelism,’ the willing is also the essential feature of the existence [*das Seiende*] in the whole.”³² According to Jähnig, the foundational act of cognition is the essential feature of the existence of the whole. Thus, the constitution of the original pre-conscious experience is, at the same time, the construction of the original ‘I’. In order to depict the essential feature of existence in the world, we have to apply a perspective of transcendental genesis, namely to give a transcendental explanation of the varied process of the structure of *Being*. To this end, the only available starting point we have is the original experience, or the original sensation. As Schelling stresses in his later *Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809), “*Being* [*Sein*] becomes aware of itself only in becoming [*Werden*].”³³ Therefore, when we interpret the “material” as “the expression of an equilibrium between opposing activities” of the original ‘I’, we have already taken the material as the expression of the dynamic structure of *Being*. Returning to Jähnig, in pre-consciousness, this process is rightly construed as self-determination. The identity of these two

³² Jähnig: *Schelling*, 79.

³³ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling: *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*. Trans. by Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt. Albany 2006, 66; *Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freibeit* (1809). Edited by von Thomas Buchheim. Hamburg 2011, 75: “*Das Sein wird sich nur im Werden empfindlich.*”

is captured in Schelling's (seemingly ambiguous) term "subject-object" (*Subjekt-Objekt*).³⁴

As an interim conclusion, then, Schelling's theory of "willing" in *System* fails to capture the genetic structure of original experience. Nevertheless, his theory of willing enables us to glimpse an essential ontological dimension concealed within transcendental philosophy. Part of Schelling's quotation here, hailing from his later, mature masterpiece *Freedom-Essay* (*Freiheitsschrift*), can be construed as his conclusion to his less-mature project from 1800:

*Willing is original Being [Ursein] to which alone all predicates of Being apply: groundlessness, eternity, independence from time, self-affirmation. All of philosophy strives only to find this highest expression.*³⁵

Thus, Schelling's theory of willing reveals the ontological dimension of transcendental philosophy.³⁶ This does not mean, however, that willing is the sole concept with which to broach transcendental ontology. The concept of willing is, at most, one passive synthesis of the original 'I', with other variants of unconscious thinking activities being possible. Besides willing, there exist many other "dark intentions" (*dunkle Intentionen*), such as instinct, drive, and desire. Schelling unfortunately offered us no further usable resources for dealing with these concrete activities of the original 'I'. For this, we must turn to Husserl. Indeed, by introducing theoretical resources from Husserl's later transcendental phenomenology of genesis, *viz.* the orientation and analysis of the original 'I', as well as passive synthesis, the foundational dynamics of transcendental ontology can be brought to completion.

³⁴ Cf. *System* (E), 156; *System* (D), 204.

³⁵ Schelling: *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 21 (translation modified). Vgl. Schelling: *Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809), 23. "Wollen ist Ursein, und auf diese allein passen alle Prädikate desselben: Grundlosigkeit, Ewigkeit, Unabhängigkeit von der Zeit, Selbstbejahung. Die ganze Philosophie strebt nur dahin, diesen höchsten Ausdruck zu finden."

³⁶ Schelling's concept of willing in the *Freedom-Essay* bears further concrete ontological meaning as "the first potency of Being" (*Potenz A'*). However, Schelling's metaphysical project in 1809 is noticeably different from that in 1800, and might lead to quite different interpretive strategies (e.g., Heidegger's first interpretation of Schelling's *Freedom-Essay* in 1936). Cf. Martin Heidegger: *Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809). *Freiburger Vorlesung Sommersemester 1936*. Gesamtausgabe XLII, edited by Ingrid Schüßler. Frankfurt am Main 1988. Therefore, the quotation here is merely used to demonstrate the ontological dimension inside the concept of willing, which was already revealed in *System* (1800).

3. *Passive Synthesis in the Context of Husserl's Genetic Phenomenology*

Running through Husserl's entire transcendental corpus is the theme of the activities of thought at the level of pre-consciousness. In the two central parts of his later transcendental phenomenology of genesis, *viz.* phenomenology of instinct (*Phänomenologie der Instinkte*) and phenomenology of habituality (*Phänomenologie der Habitualität*), passive genesis, as well as passive synthesis, are notably thematized. For this reason, my argument in this section will be divided into two parts. First, I will endeavour to construct Husserl's own "semantic groups" for the concept of passive genesis, as well as passive synthesis. I will do this via a proleptic textual analysis of Husserl's four most salient texts to this end: 1. *Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis* (1918–1926); 2. *Active Synthesis* (1920–1921); 3. *Cartesian Meditations* (1929–1931); 4. *Limit Problems of Phenomenology* (*Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie*, 1908–1937). Second, based on the concept's semantic groups, I shall endeavour to analyze and orient the notion of passive synthesis alongside Husserl's theories of instinct and habituality drawn from his later manuscripts in the *Grenzprobleme*.

By the end of the First World War, Husserl's focus moved from the construction of temporal intentions to the investigation of thinking modalities in pre-consciousness, *viz.* the so-called 'genetic' phenomenology. By contrast with his earlier 'static' phenomenology, which focused upon the analysis of representations, Husserl's subsequent genetic phenomenology highlights the "history of self-consciousness" (*Geschichte des Selbstbewußtseins*, in a Schellingian sense).³⁷ Generally speaking, Husserl's concept of genesis is concerned with the spontaneity of "longitudinal intentionality" (*Längsintentionalität*), which connects the spheres of pre-consciousness and consciousness.

Husserl's first manuscript concerning the "instinctive act" (*instinktives Tun*) is *Text No. 5* in *Grenzprobleme*, completed in 1916–18, the period during which

³⁷ Schelling's use of terms such as "epochs" and "transcendental past" already implies a "history of self-consciousness" from which the formation of subjectivity must be understood as a dynamical and developmental (even teleological) process. Jürgen Stolzenberg and Stefan Lang further define the term as the common commitment of early German Idealism, which, as Stefan Lang claims, should become an "ontology of the subjective action of the consciousness statuses" (*eine handlungstheoretische Ontologie des Subjekts der Bewußtseinszustände*). Cf. Jürgen Stolzenberg: "Geschichte des Selbstbewußtseins. Reinhold – Fichte – Schelling." In *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus* 1, 2003, 93–113; Stefan Lang: "Fichtes Programm einer Geschichte performativen Selbstbewußtseins." In: Christian Danz, Jürgen Stolzenberg (eds.), *System und Systemkritik um 1800. System der Vernunft – Kant und der deutsche Idealismus*. Hamburg 2011, 29–45, here: 29–33. It is clearly the same concern shared by the genetic phenomenology. As Ludwig Landgrebe writes: "the I firstly discovers itself in the transcendental genesis as transcendental history" (Landgrebe: *Faktizität und Individuation*, 86).

the transition took place. Here, Husserl focuses on the instinctive act as the most foundational substrate of consciousness in the pre-conscious. This instinctive act is purposeless (*zwecklos*), and can only be depicted through “dark” (*dunkel*) and “undetermined” (*unbestimmt*) representations. Thus, in terms of its phenomenal contents, the most foundational instinctive act indicates nothing other than a total homogeneity of original materials, and makes no difference at the level of meaning.³⁸ The “blindness” (*Blindheit*) of instinct is characterized by Husserl as “the dark horizon of a filling-up matter-of-factness [*Sachlichkeit*], empty and undetermined at the beginning.”³⁹ By depicting instinct as the original horizon of facticity, Husserl intends to reveal that the instinct constitutes the formative process of matter-of-factness (Schelling’s “material,” or *Being*). The process points to the most foundational, dynamical structure of consciousness, which cannot be determined by any intentionality. The process by which matter-of-factness “fills up the horizon” is designated by the concept of drive (*Trieb*). Drive remains on the dark horizon, but nonetheless plays the role of an original, longitudinal intentionality, that is, as the “satisfaction” (*Befriedigung*) of the “dissatisfaction” of an empty matter-of-factness. Indeed, drive, as the original longitudinal intentionality, only transpires when the matter-of-factness is empty. Thus, drive is *passive*. However, being a drive, it contains active characteristics within itself. Unfortunately, in *Text No. 5*, Husserl does not offer any further depiction of the mechanisms or functions of drive. Thus, it is our task here to explore and develop the concept of drive by working with Husserl’s supplemental texts.

Chronologically, Husserl’s subsequent text is *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis* from the late 1910s and early 1920s. In a supplementary text completed in 1920/21, Husserl attempts to use “the passive process of experience” to depict the constitution of the original experience in pre-consciousness:

We can characterize all these processes of the passivity of cognition as processes of passive experience, on the one hand, as processes of expanding, verifying experience, but also as processes of experience that determine more closely, and on the other hand, processes of bracketing intendings of experience that are unfitting, processes of rectifying experience.⁴⁰

³⁸ Edmund Husserl: *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie. Analysen des Unbewußtseins und der Instinkte. Metaphysik. Späte Ethik. Text aus dem Nachlass (1908–1937)*. Husserliana XLII, edited by Rochus Sowa and Thomas Vongehr. Dordrecht 2014, 85.

³⁹ Hua XLII, 85.

⁴⁰ Edmund Husserl: *Analyses concerning Passive and Active Synthesis. Lectures on Transcendental Logic*. Trans. by Anthony J. Steinbock. Dordrecht 2001, 386 (translation modified); *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis. Aus Vorlesungs- und Forschungsmanuskripten, 1918–1926*. Husserliana XI, edited by. Margot Fleischer. Den Haag 1966, 252.

In this quotation, Husserl stresses that passive experience is a passive cognition, which is nonetheless capable of rectifying the experience *actively*. This is to say that *passivity* is able to rectify the original experience *actively*. Husserl intends to highlight the active (or spontaneous) elements in passivity. In another text from this time, Husserl defines the activity as the ground of “consciousness of object” (*Gegenstandsbewußtsein*), and passivity as “under-ground and pre-constituted objectivity” (*Untergrund und vorkonstituierte Gegenständlichkeit*). Compared to the active consciousness of the object (intentional consciousness), passivity is necessarily within pre-consciousness. Passivity as pre-constituted objectivity stresses two points: 1. the original experience is *constituted*. Therefore, there must exist a source of its constitution and its constitutional form; 2. the constitutional form of the original experience is passivity, or, passive synthesis.

In Husserl’s later programmatic text, *Cartesian Meditations* (1929–1931), the dimensional difference between passivity and activity is clarified. In § 38 entitled *Active and Passive Genesis*, passivity is formally defined as “passive synthesis”: “Thanks to the aforesaid *passive synthesis* (into which the performances of active synthesis also enter), the I always has an environment of ‘objects’.”⁴¹ Thus, passive synthesis provides (*beistellen*) all material, incorporating objects into a unified objectivity (“environment,” or original experience). The spontaneous characteristic of passive synthesis is highlighted here: it is not only passive *receptivity*, but also the apperception of the original ‘I’ under affection in pre-consciousness. Correspondingly, in § 38, the activity is defined as “sociality” (*Sozialität*), or a transcendental intersubjectivity. From here, Husserl begins to depict the imprecise realms between pre-consciousness and consciousness (the point at which Schelling’s theory of willing had failed). By introducing transcendental intersubjectivity, Husserl attempts to depict the imprecise realms with the concept of “habituality” (*Habitualität*), otherwise understood as the sedimentation of original “dark intentions.”

Thus far, we have painted a general picture of Husserl’s orientation of passive synthesis in pre-consciousness, drawing on his later genetic phenomenology. As a final step, then, let us return to the respective theses of instinct and drive, which can be understood as the most foundational “dark intentions” of consciousness in *Grenzprobleme*. In *Text No. 6*, completed in 1930, Husserl clarifies the basic theoretical structure of pre-consciousness as follows: “pre-consciousness (instinct, drive, and dark intentions) → habituality (sedimentation of

⁴¹ Edmund Husserl: *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Trans. by Dorion Cairns. The Hague 1960, 79 (translation modified); *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*. Husserliana I, edited by. Stephan Strasser. Den Haag 1973, 113.

activities of the original I, longitudinal intentionality) → consciousness (superficial representation, transversal intentionality),” which thereby completes his systematic orientation of the passive synthesis of the original ‘I’.⁴²

As revealed in the title of § 1 of *Text No. 6* (§ 1 *Instinktive Triebe und Habitualität. Willenspassivität als intentionale Modifikation von Willensaktivität*), the instinctive act and habituality are juxtaposed, while the “passivity of will” (*Willenspassivität*) is taken as the “intentional modification” (*intentionale Modifikation*) of the “activity of will” (*Willensaktivität*).⁴³ The term “intentional modification” pinpoints the fact that the respective passivity and activity of the will form two separate but successive layers (pre-consciousness and consciousness). Whereas habituality forms the “imprecise realm” between the two. The instinctive act is the longitudinal intentionality that connects the two layers at the level of habituality. In the *Text No. 6*, Husserl elaborates on the theme of drive as the process of matter-of-factness in *Text No. 5*, furthermore defining matter-of-factness as habituality itself. Thus, habituality, understood as the sedimentation of original dark intentions, is involved in a dynamic process as well, thereby becoming a “habituality of development” (*Entwicklungshabitualität*).⁴⁴

⁴² There has been a longstanding controversy regarding this framework amongst Husserl scholars. Proponents of this interpretation include Ludwig Landgrebe and Nam-In Lee. Lee takes the structure of sensational material as the *noematic* moment constituting consciousness, and introduces the Aristotelian concept of “kinetic observation” (*kinetische Betrachtung*) to help analyze the structure of passive synthesis. By contrast, Landgrebe focuses on interpreting the passive pre-constitution of habituality from an embodied and kinetic perspective. Cf. Nam-In Lee: *Edmund Husserls Phänomenologie der Instinkte*. Dordrecht 1993, 98–107; Landgrebe: *Faktizität und Individuation*, 78. On the contrary, Elmar Holenstein, Ichiro Yamaguchi, and Shigeru Taguchi are against such an interpretation. Generally speaking, they prefer to understand passive synthesis as the constitutional part of time-consciousness. Yamaguchi even construes this passivity as “pre-given objectivity of time-consciousness” (*vorgegebene Gegenständlichkeit des Zeitbewusstseins*). Taguchi’s point is somewhat different. He interprets the habituality as “intersubjective pluralization of the original I” (*intersubjektive Pluralisierung vom Ur-Ich*). Cf. Elmar Holenstein: *Phänomenologie der Assoziation. Zu Struktur und Funktion eines Grundprinzips der passiven Genesis bei E. Husserl*. Den Haag 1972, 35–46.; Ichiro Yamaguchi: *Passive Synthesis und Intersubjektivität bei Edmund Husserl*. Den Haag 1982, 26–30; Shigeru Taguchi: *Das Problem des “Ur-Ich” bei Edmund Husserl. Die Frage nach der selbstverständlichen “Nähe” des Selbst*. Dordrecht 2006, 90–93. Hegel’s concept of “habit” (*Gewohnheit*), from his *Philosophy of Spirit* (1830), is also of concern here. In Hegel’s project, habit forms a critical transition from original sensation, self-feeling (*Selbstgefühl*), to self-consciousness, especially the intersubjective recognition of self-consciousness (*intersubjektiv anerkennendes Selbstbewusstsein*). However, it remains a problem to solve, regardless of whether the concept of habit indicates any “original intersubjectivity.” Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse, 1830. Dritter Teil: Die Philosophie des Geistes, mit den mündlichen Zusätzen*. Edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl M. Michel. Frankfurt am Main 1986, 160–192.

⁴³ Hua XLII, 93.

⁴⁴ Hua XLII, 94.

Habituality, understood as such a dynamic development, becomes the “object” of drive itself.⁴⁵ The “object,” which is not as-yet a true object of consciousness, is designated by Husserl as *Hyle*.⁴⁶ The structure of the to-be-shaped *Hyle* is, at the same time, the structure of the habituality of the original ‘I’, while the latter is, at the same time, the structure of drive. In habituality, drive is still passively directed at the “object,” insofar as the direction of drive is dependent upon the direction of the development of habituality itself. Therefore, drive becomes an embodied process of activity (*leiblicher Betätigungsprozeß*), namely, the original experience: “Each conscious drive belongs to a dimension of drive, a constituted and lasting direction of the I, towards the necessary satisfaction of needs.”⁴⁷

At this point, we complete the analysis, as well as the orientation of *drive*, understood as passive synthesis in Husserl’s framework. The drive *qua* passive synthesis constitutes the longitudinal intentionality that connects two different spheres of instinct (pre-consciousness) and consciousness. Habituality, which is the successive transitional moment from instinct to consciousness, becomes the horizon of drive. Drive is directed to the primal object in the dynamical development of habituality, making itself into an embodied, original experience of passive genesis. It is also at work in the dynamic development of habituality, thanks to which the objective connection between drive and *Hyle* becomes distinct, and from which the characteristics of consciousness gradually emerge and original experience in pre-consciousness completes its transition into consciousness.

Conclusion. The Ontological Dimension of Transcendental Philosophy

This paper began with the problem of objectivity and the constitution of original experience in transcendental philosophy, which aims to construct a non-intentional relational mode between the original subject-object in pre-consciousness, through a non-reflective methodology.

I first examined Schelling’s hidden insight in *System*, namely that transcendental philosophy must take the issue of objectivity – as well as the constitution of original experience – as its basic problem. The answer to this problem necessarily leads to

⁴⁵ Hua XLII, 93: “*Das Erfüllende ist der ‘Gegenstand’, worauf er [der Trieb] gerichtet ist.*” The term ‘object’ (*Gegenstand*) here is within quotation marks because habituality still constitutes the transitional moment between pre-consciousness and consciousness. The objective mode of consciousness cannot be applied directly in habituality. However, the term ‘object’ still indicates that the drive has obtained a (longitudinally) intentional character.

⁴⁶ Husserl’s *Hyle* can be equally understood as Schelling’s *Materie*, which betrays the undetermined status of an original materiality.

⁴⁷ Hua XLII, 95.

an inquiry into the mode of activity of the original 'I' in pre-conscious experience. In the third part of *System*, the mode clarifies itself as the passive synthesis of the original 'I'.

Second, by exposing the failure of Schelling's theory of willing in the fourth part of *System*, I have shown that a genetic account of transcendental ontology must instead be introduced when considering the problem of the constitution of original experience in pre-consciousness, as opposed to a perspective that foregrounds transcendental reflection, or indeed any such quasi-reflection. The constitution of original experience, as well as the activity of the original 'I', is in an essential relationship with the dynamical structure of Being itself. Thus, a genetic construction of the structure of original experience, as well as the activity of the original 'I', at the same time constitutes a transcendental explanation of the dynamical structure of the variation of *Being*.

In the final part of this paper, I introduced Husserl's later phenomenology in order to refine the aforementioned structure, and moreover to help relocate passive synthesis. Husserl offers a distinctive theoretical framework, which consists in the following consecutive, developmental process: "pre-consciousness (instinct, drive, and dark intentions) → habituality (sedimentation of activities of the original I, longitudinal intentionality) → consciousness (superficial representation, transversal intentionality)." Habituality, understood as a transition from pre-consciousness to consciousness, becomes pivotal. Habituality is interpreted as a dynamic development, in which the drive, understood as embodied, original experience, functions as the passive synthesis. Altogether, this "longitudinally" connects the dark instinct of pre-consciousness, habituality (as a dynamical, transitional moment), and intentional consciousness in superficial cognition with one another.

The overall argument of this paper has been directed towards the following, final claim: attempts from transcendental philosophy to resolve the problem of objectivity, as well as the constitution of original experience necessarily lead to an inquiry into the dynamical structure of Being. As a result, transcendental philosophy must become a transcendental *ontology* in the sense of genesis, which provides the common ground for both German Idealism and Husserl's phenomenology. Passive synthesis is properly the indispensable key to this, as Schelling writes in his *Stuttgart Private Lectures* (1810):

Passive limitation is indeed imperfection, is relative lack of power; but it is the highest power and perfection, to limit oneself, to lock oneself up in *one* point, to hold the point tight with all powers, and not to give up.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling: *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen (1810)*. Edited by Vicki Müller-Lüneschloss. Hamburg 2016, 12.