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INTENTIONALITY AS A SHADOW OF DESIRE

The Role of Drive in the Constitution of Husserl's Concept of Intentionality

Abstract

Although there are many reflections and studies on Husserlian intentionality, the textual investigations aimed at recording the presence of an instinctual root in the first formulations of this concept (1887-1893) are meagre and negligible. Apart from episodic investigations and circumstantial findings, the most advanced research has been offered by Jocelyn Benoist, who, in *Intentionality and drive (The Bounds of Intentionality)*, suggests an examination of texts prior to 1894. The scope of the article is therefore to work on the writings of the period 1887-1893 and to extend the Benoist repertoire through the inclusion of unexamined texts.

Keywords: Benoist, Drive, Husserl, Intentionality, Tension

1. *Defining the Problem*

The gesture is forcefully made in the *Logical Investigations*. For the constitution of the concept of intentionality, the operation of purification carried out by Husserl plays a decisive role. In the *Fifth* of the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl did refer to the model of 'interest', but only to define intentionality as opposed to it. Interest and expectation, things that in other words are related to drive, in this investigation are considered intentional forms that represent only particular cases of intentionality. They are by no means a logically prime model of it. To put it roughly in the terms of Husserl himself, desire and expectation are two types of intentionality founded on the primacy of an even more basic intentionality. They seem to us emblematic cases of intentionality only because in them the 'tension', in which we think the property of intentionality resides, becomes particularly manifest. However, Husserl warns us against this type of error. Intentionality is not reduced to the forms of tension for the object of desire, expectation, and interest. Intentionality is more general, and above all neutral. Desire by no means provides a good model for this. Indeed, the opposition to desire can be said to represent the very condition of the constitution of the concept of intentionality.

In the *Fifth Investigation*, Husserl begins by dissociating intentionality from intention. The goal is to reject the quick equation of one class of phenomena with another, dissolving every act in the horizon of affectivity. This notion, Husserl writes in § 13 of the *Fifth Investigation*, belongs only to some types of intentionality and therefore cannot be used to define the concept in general. What we commonly call

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‘intention’, and which is distinguished by the purpose, by having a goal¹ (*Ziel*), constitutes only one aspect of intentionality. It also seems that intentionality can also exist without ‘fulfillment’, regardless of the expectation that should arise from past phenomenal progressions.

For Husserl, the fundamental character of intentionality does not consist in intending (in the presumed form) more than what is explicitly understood in any single moment. The sensation, for example, when glimpsing part of the table, does not refer to the other sides that are not actually given. Not all intentional acts depend on the structure of fulfillment. This is undoubtedly what Husserl wants to highlight by exposing his concept of intentionality at the beginning of the *Fifth Investigation*. On a conceptual level, Husserl wishes to separate from the beginning the concept of intentionality from the concept of intention and from any finalistic structure focused on the identification of a goal. Contrary to drive, intentionality does not have a goal. Here is a truly decisive gesture in terms of the purification of the concept from what is not legitimately associated with it.

When, in the *Sixth Investigation*, he returns to those intentionalities which are also intentions, Husserl will specify another decisive aspect. He will then insist on the fact that, while it is true that many perceptions are teleologically structured intentions, it is nevertheless not legitimate to assimilate them to a certain psychological feeling of expectation.

When I see only a portion of the table in front of me, my mind does not anticipate the part that remains hidden. The subject is not directed towards something before it manifests itself. The psyche does not go towards what is about to come forward, it does not welcome it in the way of fulfillment, neither does it intend to confirm an expectation that it does not have. Nor is the intention oriented towards its own future realization.

Except for particular cases, I am not in need of it, I am not oriented towards it, and I do not desire it. What Husserl proposes is intentionality without tension. In this intentionality, the act, although dependent on the logical structure of the object, must nevertheless be recognized as lacking a particular tension towards this goal. Even if in no way everything is given at the same time as perception, this does not mean that it is ‘aimed’ at its own completion. Therefore, the problem for Husserl is always the same: to make the tension disappear from the intention so as to derive intentionality. That Husserl was aware of this is demonstrated by what he wrote about the ‘rupture’ which in 1894 had led him to identify his own concept of intentionality (‘rupture’ triggered by Frege’s negative review of his *Philosophy of arithmetic*²): «Beaucoup

1 S. Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, 18 voll., S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt a.M.; trad. Eng. by James Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, The Hogart Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London 1957, pp. 121-122.

2 E. Husserl, *Philosophie der Arithmetik I: Psychologische und logische Untersuchungen*, (1891) Lothar Eley, in *Husserliana*, vol. XXII: *Aufsätze und Rezensionen* (1890-1910), M. Nijhoff, L’Aja 1979; tr. eng. by Dallas Willard, *Philosophy of Arithmetic: Psychological and Logical Investigations with Supplementary Texts from 1887–1901*, Kluwer Academic Publishers (now New York: Springer), Dordrecht and Boston, Massachusetts 2003.

plus grande encore est la tentation d'identifier l'intérêt (*das Interesse*) et l'intention percevante (*die wahrnehmende Intention*), et c'était là de fait ma première conviction. C'est la raison pour laquelle j'ai dû interrompre mes premiers travaux sur la question (voir l'article dans les *Philosophische Monatshefte*, XXX), qui me conduisaient vers cette décision»³.

To make space for intentionality, for perception, and for the liberty offered by the objective world, all that remained was to dissociate intentionality and interest, removing intentionality from any association with a form of 'tension'. This is the gesture made with force in the *Logical Investigations*. The phenomenological-Husserlian concept of intentionality was therefore extricated thanks to the exclusion of any drive concentration relating to the sphere of 'tension'. This was the price paid to guarantee access to the concept of intentionality understood in its widest possible extent, as a principle to be distinguished from the concept of intention.

The lesson of the famous 1933 outline, *Universal Teleology*. In the subsequent interpretation of intentionality, however, Husserl found several elements in common with drive. Significantly, this type of intentionality is recognizable in the course of the philosophical-genetic analysis, where, as long as this makes sense, one could speak of intentionality without an object: of an instinctive intentionality before any intentionality directed towards something. It is no longer a question of understanding why a world appears, but of an ontological reconsideration of intentional correlation.

The sphere in which the theme of the instinctual character of intentionality emerges in Husserl's thought is that of the internal consciousness of time, the frame of a phenomenology of structures that are at the same time more universal (therefore formal) and more original (therefore rooted in matter itself of consciousness, in the *iletic* data) of consciousness⁴.

If we examine intentionality in general, regardless of any particular relationship and type of object to which it aims, there remains that temporal structure thanks to which every experience sinks into the immediate past of retention. Past perceptions are there for us because they are held back by consciousness. Even if they are no longer 'impressionally' present, we continue to be aware of them in the form of retention. Furthermore, every intentional understanding, every perception, contains indications and interpretative advances still to be confirmed. The retentions, therefore, constitute the horizon of the present sense. This expectation, in the specialized language of his philosophy, is defined by Husserl as 'protention'. During this pause, the subject is directed towards something before it manifests itself. Protention is therefore the germinal element of the intentional act because through it the sense in which the phenomenal course must be understood is pre-defined.

3 K. Schuhmann, *Husserl Chronik*, M. Nijhoff, Den Haag 1977, p. 41; quoted in J. Benoist, *Les limites de l'intentionnalité. Recherches phénoménologiques et analytiques*, Vrin, Paris 2005, p. 149.

4 Other work that takes the theme of genesis as a determining motif is that of Derrida. See J. Derrida, *Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1990; tr. eng. by M. Hobson, *The Problem of Genesis in Husserl's Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2003.

Now, it is to qualify this intentionality and to solve the enigma of the passage from moment to moment, by virtue of which the present collapses under the weight of consciousness sinking into the past, that Husserl speaks of drive (*Trieb*⁵).

Dürfen oder müssen wir nicht eine universale Triebintentionalität voraussetzen, die jede ertümliche Gegenwart als stehende Zeitung einheitlich ausmacht und konkret von Gegenwart zu Gegenwart fortreibt derart, dass aller Inhalt Inhalt von Trieberfüllung ist und vor dem Ziel intendiert ist, und dabei auch so, dass in jeder primordialen Gegenwart transzendierende Triebe höherer Stufe in jede andere Gegenwart hineinreichen un alle miteinander als Mondän verbinden, während alle ineinander impliziert sind-intentional?⁶

Having started an examination in reverse, a phenomenological analysis that is characterized as an archeology of transcendental subjectivity, we are therefore led back to an arch-original transcendence of consciousness that explains the way in which consciousness is made. It is a phenomenological analysis of the processes through which the body comes to produce a consciousness. On what basis can consciousness, from the minimum of elements from which an ecological life and a representation of the world can develop, can come out of itself and extend itself for what it is, thus reaching the point of forming the temporal dimension? (With this question we reach the most primal level in the constitutive process). Husserl's answer on this point is very clear: through drive. If we want to identify a factor that, by placing the instinct-affection as what projects consciousness beyond itself, allows the passage from present to present, this drive is obtained.

It is an intentionality that precedes the formation of consciousness and that is present in us as instinctive intentionality, and instinctual intentionality. The mature phase of Husserl's thought was therefore expressed in a doctrine – that of the instinctual character of intentionality – which inspired the works of Merleau-Ponty⁷, Didier Franck⁸, and Rudolf Bernet⁹. The vector of intentionality – the operator who, in the production of temporality, makes it be in continuous recovery of itself beyond itself – is the original drive (*Ur-Trieb*). This is the lesson of the famous 1933 sketch, *Universal Teleology*. In this

5 J. Laplanche, J.B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1967, pp. 360-361.

6 E. Husserl, *Universale Teleologie*; (Ms. E III 5), in *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Texte aus dem Nachlass. Dritte Teil, 1929-1935*, ed. by I. Kern, *Husserliana*, vol. XV, M. Nijhoff, Den Haag 1973, p. 595.

7 M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Gallimard, Paris 1945; tr. eng. by C. Smith, *Phenomenology of perception*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, New York 1995; Id., *Le visible et l'invisible*, tr. eng. by C. Lefort; *The Visible and the Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1968.

8 D. Franck, *Chair et corps, sur la phénoménologie de Husserl*, Éditions de Minuit, Parigi 1981; tr. eng. by J. Rivera, S. Davidson, *Flesh and Body. On the Phenomenology of Husserl*, Bloomsbury Academic, London 2014.

9 R. Bernet, I. Kern, E. Marbach, *Edmund Husserl: Darstellung seines Denkens*, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 1989; tr. eng. by L.E. Embree, *An Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1993; R. Bernet, *Pulsion, plaisir et déplaisir: Essai d'une fondation philosophique des concepts psychanalytiques*, in «Philosophie», 71, 4, 2001, pp. 30-47; Id., *Désirer connaître par intuition*, in «Revue Philosophique de Louvain», 94, 4, 2001, pp. 613-629.

manuscript, Husserl returns to the intentionality that was originally constitutive of the flow of time, an intentionality that moves forward as protention and changes towards the past as retention. Now, the new interpretation leads him to hypothesize a drive intentionality that pushes from present to present, in such a way that every content is contained in the drive ‘fulfillment’. The term drive¹⁰ is here traced back to its etymology and it is the latter that allows us to recognize the driven character of the intentional structure (the reference to fulfillment and above all its reinterpretation in terms of drive will be noted in this regard).

2. *Driven intentionality?*

Are there any structural reasons that may have led Husserl to recognize a form of drive in the primitive and still larval manifestation of intentionality? If the original intentionality can be defined as driven, it is because in the intentionality there may already be some elements of analogy with drive. The reasons for hypothesizing this parallelism are numerous: in the concrete *ego* an intentionality of drive is manifested, a certain *conatus*, a teleological orientation that according to Husserl exists even beyond the object or when one no longer has any connection with the intentional referring to an objective pole.

Intentionality without tension is not conceivable, so it seems, but it is on the contrary in this derivation that the tendentially instinctual sense of every type of intentionality would reside (being the instinct itself something that is destined to be resolved once the own balance). This kinship would find its legitimacy in the fact that theoretically the best model of intentionality, and undoubtedly its historical source, seems to be the model of ‘desire’. In fact, how can we speak of intentionality if not in terms of the ‘intention of’?

From this point of view, there seems to be a very interesting verification to be made: reconstructing the way in which the concept of intentionality originates in Husserl by borrowing a series of determinations that originate from the sphere of desire, or at least interest, but are left aside later following an initial movement of transposition and then of subtraction and cancellation. Intentionality, therefore, is a shadow of desire or desire from which the propulsive thrust would have been removed.

The intention of this article is therefore to initially work on the texts prior to the ‘rupture’ of 1894 and to extend Benoist’s repertoire through the insertion of unprecedented reading options.

Such an analysis obliges us to ask a question of a conceptual nature: following the disqualification process, which aspects of ‘tension’ still remain in the concept of intentionality? In fact, it should be pointed out that in the second volume of *Logical Investigations*, published in 1901, Husserl, especially in the *Sixth Investigation*, is in a position to partially re-evaluate the investigations of the *Philosophy of Arithmetic* and to re-dimension his critique of psychologism. Not everything that was then defined as psycholo-

10 J. Laplanche, J.B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, cit., pp. 360-361.

gism will turn out to be such in a reflection that has in the meantime been enriched with original points of view. In § 10 of the *Sixth Logical Investigation*, Husserl, in particular, reintroduces a dimension of ‘intention’ into intentionality:

When, e.g., a familiar melody begins, it stirs up definite intentions which find their fulfilment in the melody’s gradual unfolding. The same is the case even when the melody is unfamiliar. The regularities governing melody as such, determine intentions, which may be lacking in complete objective definiteness, but which nonetheless find or can find their fulfilments.¹¹

It is therefore possible that in the subsequent concept of intentionality there remains the testimony of the original nuance of the term ‘intentionality’ as an ‘intention to’ and ‘desire to’. To ascertain this, it would be advisable to carry out checks starting from the *Sixth Logical Investigation*.

The aspect in which the framework of intentionality is influenced by the model of desire, and therefore the aspect in which it is possible to grasp the presence of drive in intentionality is quite evident, one could hypothesize that it is a transposition. Intentionality seems to share with what we, like Husserl call ‘interest’; the fact of having a direction and of ‘striving for’. This is an idea that we basically find unchanged in the notion of ‘aiming for’.

What does it mean to aim for, if not to desire? This rootedness of aiming at desire is something that may not be immediately evident, being precisely what Husserl wanted to cover up at all costs (and possibly even reporting some success).

There is then a question that arises spontaneously: by formulating such reservations with regard to the model of desire, is there not a risk of eliminating that ‘tension’ that seemed so necessary to constitute intentionality? Furthermore, by constructing the idea of an intention without tension in this way, does it not result in a kind of logical monster, a ghost of a concept used beyond its limit, a deformed concept?

Husserl’s problem in the years of formulating his own concept of intentionality, therefore, seems to have always been this: how to assume the ‘tension’ (of which the tension of desire provides us with the first model) and then modify it in certain aspects? This is the constitutive contradiction of Husserl’s concept and this model does not necessarily succeed in supporting it.

To accompany this criticism with adequate references, in the last six months of the second year, reconnaissance should be carried out starting with *Logical Investigations*.

In the peculiar definition of Husserl’s intentionality, desire is all the more involved as it is not simply a matter of ‘representing’ the object to oneself; it is nothing less than a tension towards a certain type of possible ‘acquisition’ of the object. Aiming at the object always means imagining possessing it (we do not consider here the case of intentionality that cannot be reconciled with the material aspect of the world). ‘Having

11 E. Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, I ed., vol. X, 1900; vol. II, 1901; tr. eng. by J.N. Findlay, *Logical Investigations*, vol. I-II, Humanities Press, New Jersey 1982 (2nd ed.), p. 700.

intention', therefore, seems to mean 'anticipating the data'. Otherwise, this terminology would no longer be understandable. Husserl himself writes it in the *Sixth Logical Investigation*: «We have dealt with this point previously, and delimited a class of intentional experience under the more pregnant name of 'intentions': their peculiarity lies in being able to provide the basis for relations of fulfilment»¹².

With these final considerations, we intend to emphasize, once again, for the Husserl's version of the concept, the reinterpretation of the terms of drive, fulfillment, and the similarity between the latter (*Erfüllung*) and intentionality. There would be no intentionality, it seems, without a certain predisposition for realization.

Fulfillment seems to be an intrinsic and general property of intentionality, a property that extends to all its possible modalities. Indeed, it reflects an essential structure of perception that it proceeds by 'overshadowing'¹³. That is to say that in perception there is something probably never given, either absolutely or completely. There is always something that still has to be given. Every perception, as far as it is intentionality, probably includes 'void' components. They must be 'filled' in and the original intention postponed to a possible fulfillment that as such still defines it as 'void' and 'lacking'.

12 *Ibidem*.

13 E. Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, I: *Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, *Husserliana*, voll. III/1 e III/2, by K. Schuhmann, Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag 1976; Nachwort, in *Die Phänomenologie und die Fundamente der Wissenschaften*, *Husserliana*, vol. V, by M. Bimmel, Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag 1976; tr. eng. by F. Kersten, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague, Boston and Lancaster 1983, p. 361; Id., *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, II: *Phänomenologie Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*; III: *Die Phänomenologie und die Fundamente der Wissenschaften*; tr. eng. by R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht, Boston and London 1993, Section One., Chapter One, § 10.