

# Introduction: Notes on a Troubled Reception History

Christian Ferencz-Flatz<sup>1</sup> & Andrea Staiti

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According to a widely spread narrative, the historical development of the phenomenological movement was marked by two major ruptures. The first rupture is usually termed the “Great Phenomenological Schism” and was triggered around 1913 by the publication of the first book of Husserl’s *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* and by the refusal of the so-called realist phenomenologists to follow Husserl’s turn toward transcendental idealism. The second rupture is the so-called “Existential-Phenomenological Divide,” which occurred after the publication of *Being and Time* with Heidegger’s departure from Husserl’s ego-centered version of phenomenology in favor of a hermeneutic, historicist and existential version thereof. According to some accounts, there are essential elements connecting these two divides.<sup>2</sup> Strikingly, however, in neither of these narratives, Husserl’s later turn to genetic phenomenology seems to play any relevant part at all. On the contrary, as a quick historical overview easily shows, the advent of genetic phenomenology did not mark any discernible schism, didn’t cause any upheaval and was neither challenged emphatically nor adopted enthusiastically, to the point that for decades it was almost completely ignored or taken for granted in the broader picture of Husserl’s philosophical legacy. What follows is an attempt to sketch out a few hypotheses and reflections to account for this conspicuous situation.

## I

Why is it then that this important turn in Husserl’s later philosophy passed so discretely? For there can be no doubt that, despite his later attempts to downplay its magnitude, this was indeed a major shift in Husserl’s conception

<sup>1</sup> My work on this issue was supported by CNCS-UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2016-0307, PNCIDI III (CFF).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for instance Heffernan 2016.

of phenomenology. To this extent, it suffices to consider that since the very beginning, Husserl indeed conceived phenomenology in a stark contrast to genetic procedures. This comes to the fore in the *Logical Investigations* with their strong opposition of phenomenological description and genetic explanation, although the two are here nevertheless viewed as generally compatible under the broader umbrella of psychology. Instead, already in the first book of *Ideas*, Husserl explicitly stressed that “the investigation of pure consciousness by pure phenomenology does not and need not impose any problems other than those of a descriptive analysis which can be solved in pure intuition,”<sup>3</sup> whereas, as a consequence thereof, genetic tasks are rejected outright on several occasions. One of the most striking passages stipulates from the very onset: “No stories will be told here. Neither psychological-causal, nor historical-developmental genesis need be, or should be, thought of [...]”<sup>4</sup> If one explicitly considers such passages, however, the contrast to his later genetic positions becomes evident. For, even though Husserl continued to demarcate his genetic phenomenology from all that pertains to a sheer psychological or developmental, in brief: empirical genesis, it is nevertheless certain that his earlier emphasis on a “purely descriptive” approach could hardly have accepted “explicative” genetic procedures in phenomenology without some significant shift. And this is precisely why Husserl’s ongoing attempts to dedramatize his genetic turn, by simply presenting it as just the coherent continuation of his prior positions without any explicit acknowledgement of a revision, are in fact so puzzling.

In tracing the reasons for this obvious neglect of genetic phenomenology during the first decades of phenomenological scholarship, one could of course simply point to Husserl’s self-interpretations of the evolution of his thinking. By contrast to, say, Heidegger, who even stylized his break with his earlier philosophy as a key notion of his later thinking (the so-called *Kehre*), Husserl always tended to soften breaks by insisting on continuities and gradual transitions. This is for sure the case already with the introduction of the “phenomenological reduction,” or with the interpretation of phenomenology as “descriptive psychology” in the *Logical Investigations*, such that one could presume that the ongoing discussions about the precise origin of certain methodological procedures or topics in Husserl’s thought: transcendental reduction, intersubjectivity, the life-world etc. offer some support to this perspective. In any case, it is this same attitude which also applied in the case of Husserl’s self-interpretations of his genetic turn, arguing for a seamless continuity between genetic and static phenomenology while lending itself to similar discussions concerning the precise dating of this turn.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl 1983: 136.

<sup>4</sup> Husserl 1983: 5, n. 2.

On the other hand, the particularly unsharp distinction between the so-called static earlier phenomenology and genetic phenomenology proper could also be explained by the very slow and hesitant development of that distinction in Husserl's thought. Thus, it is clear from the onset that, in its initial conception, which was eventually dubbed "static," phenomenology was indeed explicitly contrasted to genetic explanations, and this is precisely why genetic phenomenology could obviously only have been conceived under the most serious resistance.<sup>5</sup> One can sense this resistance in going through some of the earliest notes on the subject matter, where—in delineating what would become genetic phenomenology from causal-genetic psychological considerations—Husserl still constantly lapses back into what can only be seen as positions of static phenomenology.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, once the legitimate sense of genetic phenomenology was relatively settled, Husserl obviously began pondering whether this move, in reverse, still allowed for the preservation of static phenomenology as such<sup>7</sup>, while several key concepts of his earlier static phenomenology like "constitution," "foundation" or "motivation" acquire an explicitly genetic meaning. Thus, one could concludingly note that the entire development of genetic phenomenology, with its two contradictory sides—on the one hand, the fact that the initial concept of static phenomenology excluded the very possibility of genetic phenomenology, and on the other hand, the fact that genetic phenomenology tended to dismantle at least certain positions of static phenomenology—makes the task of properly grasping the significance of genetic phenomenology particularly difficult. But this is, for sure, just a very superficial view on what determines its poor reception within the phenomenological movement and beyond.

## II

A more in depth explanation would have to take into account how Husserl's genetic turn affected the way in which his phenomenology was perceived in relation to certain tendencies in pre-phenomenological philosophy, most notably Neo-Kantianism. To this extent, for instance, it is striking that Adorno bluntly regarded Husserl's later genetic or dynamic phenomenology as nothing but a relapse into "Neo-Kantianism plain and simple"<sup>8</sup>. For sure, such a

<sup>5</sup> Hua Dok III/2: 25-28.

<sup>6</sup> Thus, for instance, one of his early notes on genesis ultimately regard the endeavour of establishing the phenomenological origin of a specific type of object as one of showing "wie das gebende Bewußtsein von Gegenständen [dieses Typus aussieht]". Hua XIII: 351.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. for instance Hua XIII: 346.

<sup>8</sup> Adorno 2003: 447.

judgement may appear as an oversimplification, but it is by no means to be dismissed outright. Recent scholarship has repeatedly indicated Natorp as the main influence on Husserl's transition to genetic phenomenology.<sup>9</sup> This is not the place to expand on Natorp's approach to subjectivity as developed, for instance, in *Allgemeine Psychologie*. In very brief compass, Natorp thought that we cannot access subjectivity qua lived experience directly through reflection. This is because if we reflect on our subjective life, we transform it into what it is not, namely, an object. For Natorp, in order to grasp conceptually living subjectivity we need to deploy a reconstructive method that moves from the objectifications of subjective life back to subjective life as such, which escapes a reflective gaze. The conceptual determination of subjective life is an infinite task that belongs to a "critical" psychology and not to a simple phenomenological analysis. What commentators seem to suggest is that, like Natorp, Husserl at some point came to realize that there are layers of subjective life that are not accessible to simple reflection and therefore introduced a genetic, viz., reconstructive method modeled on Natorp's. While this suggestion is intriguing and does have some historical plausibility, there are much more direct sources that can be seen as forerunners or inspirators, back to whom the problems of genetic phenomenology can be traced, including Husserl's mentor in Halle, Carl Stumpf. Natorp's role in this matter is certainly not negligible, but it shouldn't be overstated, as scholarship has been inclined to do thus far. A helpful way to shed some light on this intricate issue is to approach it by distinguishing in the concept of genetic phenomenology (1) the content (i.e. what it is about); (2) the methodological outlook (i.e., how it works); (3) the label (i.e., why Husserl came to designate it as "genetic" and how he came to believe that a specific designation for this group of analyses was necessary in the first place).

If we start with (3), we can, indeed, argue that a decisive moment for Husserl's introduction of the label "genetic" was Paul Natorp's review of *Ideas* in 1917.<sup>10</sup> Natorp praised Husserl's eidetic approach to consciousness, but he saw him as standing "firm on the ground of Aristotelianism"<sup>11</sup> and thus failing to do justice to "Plato's deepest discovery: that of the kinesis of the *eide*."<sup>12</sup> In other words, Natorp is accusing Husserl of describing consciousness in terms of a plurality of self-standing essences that have no ostensible relationship to one another. To borrow a metaphor from Husserl's student Gerda Walther, the essences of Perception, Recollection, Empathy, Judgment as described in Husserl's early work look like "poor butterflies on needles [...] in the glass box

<sup>9</sup> See for instance Welton 2003: 267; Luft 2009: 62.

<sup>10</sup> Natorp 1917/18: 319–338.

<sup>11</sup> Natorp 1917/18: 325.

<sup>12</sup> Natorp 1917/18: 325.

of a collector.”<sup>13</sup> To this charge, Husserl replied in an oft-cited letter to Natorp: “I overcame the stage of static Platonism already more than one decade ago and have framed the idea of transcendental genesis as the main theme of phenomenology,”<sup>14</sup> thereby foreshadowing the idea that a “static” approach to the essences of consciousness is something that needs to be (and purportedly has been) overcome. Since Husserl doesn’t explain what exactly he means by saying that he overcame static Platonism ten years earlier, we can only speculate that he is implicitly referring to his analyses of time-consciousness, which were, indeed, presented for the first time to the public in the famous lecture course of 1905. Indeed, once the temporal dimension of consciousness is taken into consideration, a new task arises for phenomenology. Besides distinguishing different classes of conscious acts in terms of their essential features, an account of how conscious acts of different classes emerge, co-exist and develop in the concrete stream of a subject’s life is called for. Such stream “is not a random flux of facts, which could randomly be otherwise,”<sup>15</sup> i.e., the account of how conscious acts of different classes emerge, co-exist and develop in consciousness cannot be left to natural-scientific investigation. It is phenomenology’s task to tackle the question: “How does experience ‘emerge,’ ‘originate’ (the complete experience of a thing, of a self, of another self)?”<sup>16</sup> and thereby identify “laws of genesis” qua “laws of the succession of singular occurrences in the stream of experience” and qua “laws that regulate the formation of apperceptions.”<sup>17</sup> Such laws, which correspond to the laws of time-consciousness and the laws of association, are themselves eidetic, i.e., they express essential connections holding among those essences of different classes of conscious acts that “static” phenomenology first investigated as such. In this sense, there is, indeed, some sort of *kinesis* of *eide* going on in genetic phenomenology, as Natorp would have it, but it is hardly the *kind* of *kinesis* he likely had in mind. As Burt Hopkins perceptively argues, “the acceptance of [Natorp’s] critique would not lead to Husserl’s genetic phenomenology, as some have argued, but rather to a casting aside of the Aristotelian priority of the *tode ti* as an implicit ‘guiding clue’ for phenomenology’s eidetics.”<sup>18</sup> Following Natorp’s Platonic motif, the paradigmatic object of eidetic research should no longer be a “singular” essence conceived as one, “individual” ideal object (*tode ti*), but a network of relations that have their ground in highest genera, which are, in turn, an interdependent nexus rather than singular idealities. *Pace* Natorp, there is and cannot be

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Parker 2017: 50.

<sup>14</sup> Hua Dok III/5: 135–136.

<sup>15</sup> Hua XIII: 357.

<sup>16</sup> Hua XIII: 351.

<sup>17</sup> Hua XI: 336.

<sup>18</sup> Hopkins, unpublished paper. Accordingly, Alan Kim’s recent claim that Husserl’s eidetics ultimately comes close to Natorp’s genetic idealism is puzzling (see Kim forthcoming).

anything like that in Husserlian phenomenology.<sup>19</sup> On this count, Husserl is not *influenced*, but rather *spurred* by Natorp, who forces him, as it were, to come up with a new label for a distinctive group of phenomenological analyses that are the opposite of static, hence, “genetic”.

As far as the method (2) is concerned, there is a clear sense in which genetic phenomenology does not depart from the eidetic approach to consciousness that characterizes Husserlian phenomenology as a whole. The laws of genesis mentioned above are through and through eidetic, rather than factual laws.<sup>20</sup> The life of consciousness studied by genetic phenomenology is not the factual life of this or that individual, but the life of *a* consciousness as such, which this or that factual life merely exemplifies. Nonetheless, there is at least one methodological aspect of genetic phenomenology that is new vis-à-vis the early static analyses. The identification of laws of genesis, in both the associational and temporal sense, requires that the analytic gaze of phenomenology delve into very basic and, as Husserl calls them, pre-egological layers of consciousness. While the fully constituted *Erlebnisse* of static phenomenology are available to reflective scrutiny and readily lend themselves to the operation of eidetic variation, genetic phenomenology sets out to account for how such *Erlebnisse* are constituted as unities in the first place. This task involves, among other things, an investigation of the “raw” sensory materials (*Ur-Hyle*) that the laws of time and association weave together into meaningful, pre-objectual wholes prior to any egological activity. The problem with this kind of investigation is that we never have a direct reflective access to such basic phenomena, in other words, we never “experience” them. Note the proximity to, but also the distance from Natorp. Like Natorp, Husserl is grappling with dimensions of subjective life that are not accessible to simple reflection. Unlike

<sup>19</sup> One could perhaps envision something like a Natorpean genetic idealism with regard to exact essences as opposed to purely descriptive (morphological) essences (see Husserl 1983: §74). Exact essences can be formalized and derived from one another in a way that morphological essences intrinsically cannot. Exploring this topic, however, by far exceeds the scope and purpose of this introduction.

<sup>20</sup> In this sense, Alexander Schnell’s claim (which he attributes to a group of French phenomenologists) that “delving into constitutive spheres or levels prior to intentional consciousness brings to light pre-intentional appearances or givennesses [*Gegebenheiten*] to which no eidetic structures necessarily correspond anymore” (Schnell 2008: 9) is highly problematic from a Husserlian standpoint. If this were indeed the case, then we should have to raise a question about the epistemic register of the analyses devoted to such pre-intentional appearances. If the epistemic register of analysis is no longer eidetic, then we should conclude that it is empirical-inductive (assuming, obviously, that deduction has no place here), but if that is the case, then the natural sciences, rather than phenomenology, are best equipped for the investigation of pre-intentional appearances. It is hard to see how a self-styled phenomenologist could drop the eidetic status of her analyses and yet claim to be doing phenomenology, rather than empirical science, a kind of research for which phenomenologists usually lack the proper training and toolkit.

Natorp, however, Husserl does not believe that *the whole of* subjective life qua lived experience is impervious to reflection. By contrast, he considers reflection the only form of access we can possibly have to subjective life. The chapter of *Ideas I* where Husserl rejects H.J. Watt's skepticism about reflection<sup>21</sup> could have been written identically as a polemical rebuttal of precisely Natorp. The whole of genetic phenomenology is carried out in a reflective register; only, reflection is enhanced by additional methodological devices and considerations. In order to generate genuine eidetic intuitions at this level, phenomenology cannot simply rely on reflection and description. It has to deploy abstractive and reconstructive strategies that might be perceived a *prima facie* un-phenomenological, since they do not operate at the level of simple "givens," but speculate, as it were, about how the simple given comes to be given to begin with. Genetic phenomenology requires an intellectual un-doing (*Abbau*) of the syntheses that hold together our conscious life, in order to investigate the very fabric of this life. Whether the eidetic intuitions that we attain through such procedures are *genuine* eidetic intuitions or merely conceptual constructions that are passed as intuitions is (and has been) a matter of considerable scholarly debate. In a recent contribution Steven Crowell has gone as far as to argue that Husserl's genetic phenomenology, with its pretension to access a pre-egological realm of "pure" data, might amount to a seductive form of naturalism, indeed, a transcendental naturalism<sup>22</sup> that posits a pre-personal level of experience in order to "explain" the personal. One way to counter the charge that genetic phenomenology is ultimately un-phenomenological is to show that there are, in fact, experiences of, say, hyletic data standing in describable relations that are more basic than our full-blown, intentional experiences of objects.<sup>23</sup> If that is the case, then the items described by genetic phenomenology are accessible to experience, after all, even though access in this case requires a good measure of phenomenological effort. Another strategy would be to concede the point about the impossibility of experiencing directly the domain of inquiry of genetic phenomenology, but to argue that its phenomenological legitimacy consists in the fact that on the basis of genetic analysis we can *make better phenomenological sense* of the things we directly experience. Therefore, while we will never *see* hyletic data coalescing together in a sensory salience (*sinnliche Abgehobenheit*) according to the laws of association in the same sense in which we see a desk in perception or the perception of a desk in reflection, our understanding of direct experience becomes more fine-grained if we supplement our static analyses with genetic considerations of this kind.

<sup>21</sup> Husserl 1983: §79.

<sup>22</sup> Crowell 2012.

<sup>23</sup> For an effective example, see McKenna 1982: 53–54.

This last point leads us straight into the *content* of genetic phenomenology. Its most characteristic domain of inquiry includes, as mentioned above, basic phenomena such as sensation, instinct, association, affection etc. but it also includes work on how low-level types of experience create the conditions for and “call forth,” as it were, higher-level types of experience. This is, for instance, the thrust of the most complete of Husserl’s writings on genetic phenomenology, *Experience and Judgment*<sup>24</sup>. One question that readers familiar with Husserl’s earlier work cannot avoid asking is the following: how is it possible that Husserl, the staunchest enemy of the “mental chemistry” model of subjectivity, now admits in his phenomenology the epitomes of empiricism, e.g., sensation and association? And is he now trying to derive classes of experience from one another, which the strictly descriptive approach of static phenomenology clearly prohibited? Is this even remotely compatible with phenomenology as we know it from his published work? Recall that the “mental chemistry” model of mental life (the phrase “mental chemistry” is associated with the work of J.S. Mill) posits basic psychological atoms, i.e. sensation and sensation-like feelings, and argues that all of mental life can be explained in terms of aggregation and disaggregation of such atoms according to rigid “mechanical” laws.

There is no doubt that in genetic phenomenology Husserl receives and recasts creatively the research program of British empiricism, which he had inherited from his teachers Brentano and Stumpf, who, in turn, carried forward a tradition that in the German-speaking world goes back to Lotze, and, most prominently, Herbart before him. It was Herbart who first argued against Kant that the materials of experience need not be entirely inchoate. On Herbart’s account, there are forms of organization of the sensory materials of experience that are not imposed on them by the intellect and that the intellect finds as “givens,” so to speak. Similarly, R.H. Lotze argued that sensations do not present themselves in consciousness in isolation. Rather, they come forward as groups whose principle of unity is a very basic, pre-conceptual or “first” dimension of generality (*das erste Allegemeine*)<sup>25</sup>. In *Zur Einteilung der Wissenschaften*, Carl Stumpf projected a general theory of relations, arguing that basic relations holding among the data of experience “are co-perceived, they impose themselves on us; we witness their presence [*konstatieren*], but do not create them”.<sup>26</sup> Commenting on this lineage of thinkers, Max Frischeisen-Köhler (an unduly forgotten student of Dilthey) writes: “The ‘passive’ sensations contain also those relations that, of course, thinking alone is able to develop, but that thinking does not create. [...] These relations can be only experienced

<sup>24</sup> For a more detailed presentation see, Staiti 2018.

<sup>25</sup> See Lotze 1887 (1874): §14. See Staiti 2016a on Lotze’s theory of first generality in its relation to Husserl.

<sup>26</sup> See Stumpf 1906: 37.

alongside with sensations, albeit not as independent sensations in addition to the former.”<sup>27</sup> Husserl’s genetic phenomenology should be read primarily as a creative continuation of the philosophical tradition briefly identified with the foregoing remarks, rather than an effect of Natorp’s influence. What makes Husserl’s contribution a *creative* continuation of this lineage, rather than a mere repetition, is the insight that the forms of organization and unity to be found among sensory givens prior to the active work of the intellect is nonetheless a form of *synthesis*, i.e., that the relations correctly pointed out by the likes of Herbart, Lotze, and Stumpf are not simply “there”; they are the result of very basic processes of constitution that are themselves *operations* of consciousness, albeit not active ones. The oxymoronic phrase “passive synthesis” that Husserl chooses to designate the work of time-consciousness and association is meant to mark the distance from both a form of active idealism *a là* Fichte and a naively “empiricist” conception of consciousness. The syntheses that organize and make possible our consciousness of a stable world are not steered by an active *ego*, they are also not mechanical happenings of nature leaving their indelible traces on the blank page of consciousness. The passive syntheses studied by genetic phenomenology follow laws that are entirely eidetic and intrinsic to the domain of subjectivity, which, in Husserl’s own words, is “a sphere of understandability that stands under pure eidetic laws, and thus has a completely different sense than natural causality and natural conformity to a law”.<sup>28</sup> Thus, mental chemistry is not defeated by denying the phenomena that the best empiricism had brought to philosophical attention for the first time or by generically denouncing them as “naturalistic.” Rather, it is Husserl’s merit to have “saved” these phenomena and thereby preserved the genuine philosophical meaning of empiricism, but also to have recast them in a different framework, one that effectively dispels naturalistic misinterpretations and opens up a new research perspective on the most basic dynamics of our conscious life.

### III

Another determinant factor for adequate understanding of genetic phenomenology and the particularities of its reception could be found in the specific situation of the phenomenological camp during the 1950s and 60s. Thus, if one quickly sifts through some of the key positions and debates during this period, one immediately senses that the question of genetic versus static

<sup>27</sup> Frischeisen-Köhler 1912: 91. For a discussion of Frischeisen-Köhler’s work in its relation to phenomenology see Staiti 2016a.

<sup>28</sup> Hua XXXVII: 333.

phenomenology was by no means among the decisive points of interest and dispute. Why is that? To answer this question, it suffices to consider any of the theoretically more ambitious overviews of Husserl's philosophy from this time, which were not constricted to mere exegesis, but attempted to also discern what that philosophy still had to say to contemporaries, as are for instance Walter Biemel's, Eugen Fink's or Alfred Schutz's papers at the 1957 Royau-mont symposion<sup>29</sup>, or, similarly, several of Hans-Georg Gadamer's papers on Husserl from the 1960s and 70s<sup>30</sup>. Browsing through these papers, one can easily see that the main question of interest was rather whether Husserl himself moved from his own earlier transcendental position towards at least finally accepting a version of "mundane phenomenology"—i.e. a phenomenology that dispenses with the transcendental reduction and places itself on the ground of natural world experience—as was considered at the time the most advanced position in contemporary phenomenological research. While both Biemel and Gadamer try to reflect Husserl's legacy in a broader perspective by also questioning his ongoing actuality, both similarly arrive at anchoring their presentations primarily in Husserl's late engagement with history and the life-world in the *Crisis*. Thus, Biemel writes: "To properly understand what is really new here, it doesn't suffice to only look at what Husserl says, but one also ought to look at what he does. And that is Husserl's attempt to interpret history and at the same time his confrontation with history."<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Gadamer—who at the same time expresses doubts, whether this is truly a "turn" in Husserl's philosophical position—stresses that "the appearance of a certain mutation in the position of transcendental self—grounding of phenomenological philosophy stems, as we all known, from the theme of the life-world."<sup>32</sup>

What these examples make clear is that, in the broader perspective of the phenomenological camp, the methodological intricacies of genetic phenomenology initially don't even come to view as such, while, if they do at all, they are only brought up quite marginally and unsharply as arguments for either sustaining or rejecting the so-called mundane or historic turn in the later Husserl. Thus, Gadamer, for instance, explicitly points out in his aforementioned paper that the problems of history and the life-world are best seen only as objections, which Husserl himself raises against his own project in the *Crisis*-work only to immediately reject them by finding their specific "systematic place within an order of genetic-constitutive foundation,"<sup>33</sup> which he obviously interprets here as an argument against accepting the idea of a "mundane"

<sup>29</sup> Cahiers de Royau-mont 1959.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. for instance Gadamer 1987: 160–171.

<sup>31</sup> Biemel 1996: 91.

<sup>32</sup> Gadamer 1987: 160.

<sup>33</sup> Gadamer 1987: 162.

turn in the later Husserl. On the contrary, in a similar vein, Merleau-Ponty tendend to salute Husserl's genetic turn as a step towards a more adequate philosophy of history:

What makes Husserl's career interesting is that he never ceased to question his demand for absolute rationality and never stopped interrogating himself about the possibility, for example, of that "phenomenological reduction" which made him famous. He kept getting a clearer and clearer picture of the residue left behind by all reflexive philosophy and of the fundamental fact that we exist before we reflect; so that, precisely to attain complete clarity about our situation, he ended by assigning, as the primary task of phenomenology, the description of the lived world (*Lebenswelt*), where Cartesian distinctions have not yet been made. [...] Thus it was that, having started with a "static phenomenology," he ended with a "genetic phenomenology" and a theory of "intentional history"—in other words, a logic of history. In this way he, more than anyone else, contributed to describing consciousness incarnate in an environment of human objects and in a linguistic tradition.<sup>34</sup>

#### IV

The significant advances in Husserlian scholarship in the past decade or so has rightfully dismissed both aforementioned interpretations as reductive. But what they show above all when considering the reception of genetic phenomenology is that, if Husserl's genetic turn was not explicitly acknowledged and thematized as such, this is the case mostly because that turn was simply either saluted as a late concession made by Husserl in the dispute between mundane or existential phenomenology, on the one side, and transcendental phenomenology, on the other, or simply interpreted as a further proof of Husserl's ongoing adherence to his transcendental claims, and thus as something that at bottom doesn't bring anything new to the dispute. However, in spite of this guiding framework, which, one could say, necessarily hampered a proper and consistent assesement of genetic phenomenology, one can nevertheless also identify a deeper and more significant heritage of genetic phenomenology in its subterranean influence on the works of other phenomenologists, among whom we can only briefly expand on Eugen Fink and Martin Heidegger.

As for Fink, it is remarkable that he himself doesn't explicitly address genetic phenomenology in any of his more detailed retrospective accounts of Husserl's philosophy written from the late 1930s onwards, such as "Das Problem

<sup>34</sup> Merleau-Ponty 1992: 135.

der Phänomenologie Husserls” (1939)<sup>35</sup> or “Die Spätphilosophie Husserls in der Freiburger Zeit” (1959)<sup>36</sup>. While his depictions of Husserl’s method and intentions in these papers certainly don’t reduce phenomenology to its static version, they normally try to phrase their comments in such a way, that the distinction between the static and the genetic phenomenological method is simply obscured. To this extent, for instance, “Das Problem der Phänomenologie Husserls” explicitly concludes with a brief description of “intentional analysis” which is seen as the key methodological element of Husserl’s philosophy, while the treatment thereof tacitly blends together aspects of static phenomenology and genetic motifs.

Although Fink, as Husserl’s private assistant, was certainly best acquainted with the intricate problems of genetic phenomenology, he initially seems to have had only little interest in pursuing those paths in his own thinking. Thus, his early dissertation on “presentification and image consciousness” is ostensibly free of genetic considerations, while nevertheless hinting at the need to eventually also expand the research towards a genetic account of phantasy, which would have interestingly had to trace its “origin in impressional consciousness”.<sup>37</sup> Such small hints aside, however, Fink’s most consistent and insightful contribution to genetic phenomenology is no doubt to be found in his revision proposals to Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*, as well as in his own *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, which, as is well known, attempts a methodological systematisation of Husserl’s phenomenology. In this context, Fink explicitly distinguishes static and genetic phenomenology, while he generally tends to see the former as referring to the description of the flux of the subject’s actual living present egological world-experience, while the latter addresses the sedimented acquisitions of his experience, pointing at a “transcendental past”.<sup>38</sup> Thus, genetic phenomenology is defined from the onset as a “transcendental criticism of past-consciousness,”<sup>39</sup> whereas Fink seems to assume two main stages in the treatment of this subject matter: a first stage, which is meant to generally lay bare subjective habitualities as final products of genetic processes, i.e. as taking place within immanent temporality, and a second stage, which Fink also terms as “the genesis of genetic processes”<sup>40</sup> and which refers to the originary constitution of temporality itself. However, while thus indeed taking into account the difference between static and genetic phenomenology, Fink also tends to relativize this distinction, by ascribing both to what he terms as

<sup>35</sup> Fink 1966: 179–223.

<sup>36</sup> Fink 1959: 205–227.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Fink 2006: 322.

<sup>38</sup> Fink 1988/1: 54.

<sup>39</sup> Fink 1988/1: 55.

<sup>40</sup> Fink 1988/2: 240.

“regressive phenomenology,” in contrast to “constructive phenomenology”<sup>41</sup> and by regarding this latter distinction—and not that between static and genetic phenomenology—as the crucial one. Thus, in Fink’s view, both static and genetic phenomenology involve a reflective questioning of the processes, to which our given transcendental sphere owes its constitution, while as such both still remain within the sphere of the intuitively given. In contrast to both, then, Fink conceives constructive phenomenology as referring to essential problems which arise within regressive phenomenology but are no longer solvable in the sphere of the regressively given alone instead demanding a specific procedure of theoretical construction. In Fink’s view, this latter approach is motivated by the fact that the immanently given is as such engulfed in the worldly givenness of the subject for himself, which essentially leads to a number of key “limit problems of phenomenology,” concerning birth and death, early childhood, or aspects of worldly and historical totality.<sup>42</sup> These aspects, which were for sure also considered as “limit-problems” (*Grenzprobleme*) by Husserl himself, are in contrast to Husserl not considered by Fink as merely marginal, secondary paradoxes on the phenomenological agenda, but instead they are invested with a central philosophical interest. Thus, one could say that Fink’s later contrast between sheer intentional analyses, as performed by phenomenology, and speculative thinking, which he comes to see as the chief device of philosophy understood as metaphysics, is already prefigured by his earlier distinction between regressive and constructive phenomenology<sup>43</sup>, which in any case tends from the onset to obscure and relativize the chiasm between static and genetic phenomenology.

In what concerns Heidegger, the issues are somewhat more complex. For, while, on the one hand, Heidegger’s early works indeed make extensive use of concepts like “genesis” or “genetic,” a strict distinction between static and genetic considerations does not seem to have been operative for him at all, and is not tackled in any way in his thinking throughout. One can, for instance, easily take note of this indistinction when considering several of the earliest versions of his (implicit or explicit) criticism of Husserl, wherein initially static theories of Husserl are plainly interpreted as genetic and rejected as such. This is, for instance, most notably the case with his criticism of Husserl’s interpretation of cultural objects as objects of a “founded intentionality”. As is well known, Husserl at least in his earlier writings shares the common traditional view according to which “cultural objects” are at base objects comprising a primary layer of natural thing-reality and a secondary, subjective layer of value or meaning, whereas this secondary layer is considered to be founded on the

<sup>41</sup> Fink 1988/1: 62 f.

<sup>42</sup> Fink 1988/1: 64 f.

<sup>43</sup> Fink 1976: 139–157.

former.<sup>44</sup> Although Husserl's concept of "foundation" is to a certain extent ambivalent in itself, as it encompasses both static and genetic suggestions,<sup>45</sup> it is clear that his theory of value as founded in doxic objectivity is initially not understood in a genetic perspective. Instead, Heidegger's own criticism of this thesis in his early lectures obviously resides on a genetic interpretation of this relationship of foundation. This is already apparent in his lecture course from 1919, "Die Idee der Philosophie und das Weltanschauungsproblem". For, while Heidegger from the onset shows a certain skepticism regarding the concept of foundation as such, his reflections, concerning for instance the famous example of the lectern, undoubtedly envisage a genetic relationship: "In pure experience there is no 'founding' interconnection, as if I first of all see intersecting brown surfaces, which then reveal themselves to me as a box, then as a desk, then as an academic lecturing desk, a lectern, so that I attach lectern-hood to the box like a label."<sup>46</sup> The argument goes much the same line in the lecture course of the winter semester 1921/22: "Therefore it is not the case that objects are first present as bare realities, as objects in some sort of natural state, and that they then in the course of our experience receive the garb of a value-character, so they do not have to run around naked."<sup>47</sup>

While, in such contexts, Heidegger even comes to explicitly use specific concepts of genetic phenomenology like *Sinn genesis* or *sinngenetischer Zusammenhang*, his reflections generally take such specifications as self-understood, making no reference whatsoever to the possible tensions between a genetic and a static phenomenological approach. However, in order to establish a wider ranging connection between his philosophical project and genetic phenomenology, it suffices to even briefly consider the odd internal structure of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Heidegger starts out here by delineating several key features of his so-termed "existential analytics" in what obviously appears to be some version of a structural, static phenomenology. Instead, the entire strategy of his work actually consists in that, finally arriving at the question of temporality as the grounding structure of existence, the second section of the book then repeats most of those initial structural analyses in a temporal perspective. Thus, there is here, no doubt, at least a certain resemblance intended to Husserl's own reworking of some of his earlier phenomenological analyses in light of his later reflections on the constitutive layer of time-consciousness. Of course, one might argue that this "existential-temporal" reinterpretation of the primarily static existential analytic in the second section of *Being and Time* doesn't necessarily amount to a genetic perspective proper, but only, so

<sup>44</sup> Cf., for instance, Husserl 1983: 275 f.

<sup>45</sup> Cf., for this, Ferencz-Flatz 2011: 111–131.

<sup>46</sup> Heidegger 2008: 57.

<sup>47</sup> Heidegger 2001: 69.

to say, a “dynamic” perspective, in showing how existential categories like understanding or discourse are concretely performed temporally. Instead, this perspective also leads Heidegger, at several points in the second section of *Being and Time*, to considerations which are explicitly termed as genetic, as is the case most notably in the chapter concerning “the existential genesis of science”<sup>48</sup>, which aims to prove specifically how the theoretical attitude “originates” in the attitude of everyday praxis. In this context, Heidegger regards his own concept of “ontological genesis” as centered on the problem of “which of those conditions implied in Dasein’s state of Being are existentially necessary for the possibility of Dasein’s existing in the way of scientific research,”<sup>49</sup> a task which he delineates from the mere question regarding the ontic origin and evolution of science in much the same way as Husserl himself would later on do in his famous reflections concerning the origin of geometry. The aforementioned phrasing of course entails a certain ambiguity, insofar as the mere “conditions of possibility” of scientific research don’t necessarily involve a temporal relation of genesis, which Heidegger clearly has in mind here not only on account of the temporal ring of most of the concepts he brings into play—most ostensibly that of “origin”—but moreover on account of his explicit intention: that of showing how the attitude of everyday preoccupation “changes over” into the theoretical attitude and what modifications thereby occur. Unfortunately, a more detailed account of how this analysis implicitly or explicitly touches upon and completes Husserl’s own genetic reflections concerning the relationship between predicative judgment and pre-predicative experience cannot be pursued in this introduction. What is in any case certain is that, while Heidegger himself explicitly sets this process apart from an actual history of science, on several accounts in *Being and Time* this dissociation of ontological genetic analysis from historical considerations proper nevertheless tends—as happens with Husserl’s own endeavour in the “Origin of Geometry” as well<sup>50</sup>—to get blurred. This is already the case for instance, in the aforementioned paragraph, when Heidegger considers the rise of mathematical physics—which is, of course, also the central issue of the “Origin of Geometry”—as the “classical example for the historical development of a science and even for its ontological genesis”<sup>51</sup>, or similarly, in an earlier passage, when he retraces (again: as Husserl does) the existential genesis of the theoretical attitude and of science to the Greek world and to Aristotle’s reflections in particular<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> Heidegger 1962: 410.

<sup>49</sup> Heidegger 1962: 408.

<sup>50</sup> *Cf.*, for this, also Ferencz-Flatz 2017: 99–126.

<sup>51</sup> Heidegger 1962: 413.

<sup>52</sup> Heidegger 1962: 215.

For sure, these latter ambiguities may make the methodological rigor of Heidegger's so-called "existential" or "ontological" genetic considerations appear rather questionable. At the same time, however, they also allow us to acknowledge another important link to genetic phenomenology in a key aspect of Heidegger's early methodology, namely his notion of "phenomenological destruction". Famously, this concept was first introduced by Heidegger in his early lectures on Aristotle and, as such, one could point out that, it shows striking resemblances to Husserl's own genetic-historic treatment of mathematical objects in the "Origin of Geometry". In these early lectures, Heidegger sees the main task of phenomenological research in outlining a "hermeneutics of factual life". To this extent, he shows that any such hermeneutics takes its departure from a specific present situation defined by a certain prior interpretedness of its object. This pre-interpretedness, however, is anchored in "basic concepts, [...] questioning approaches and [...] tendencies of explication that have arisen from experiences of objects, experiences that we today no longer have available to us."<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, these concepts, questions and tendencies still carry a certain "character of origin," that is: "a part of the genuine tradition of their original meaning, insofar as there is still detectible in them the direction of meaning that goes back to their objective source"<sup>54</sup>—and this Heidegger tries to show specifically with regard to how modern conception of factual life and consciousness refer back to theoretical accomplishments first discussed in the context of Greek ethics. The method employed to this purpose is explicitly defined by Heidegger as a "dismantling return toward the primordial motive sources of explication" (*abbauender Rückgang zu den ursprünglichen Motivquellen*), and while most of the concepts engaged in this effort—that of "indication" and "motivation" above all—recall procedures central for Husserl's genetic phenomenology, one could also show how Heidegger's own conception of "destruction" evolves in a similarly ambiguous relationship to concrete history as the one put forth in Husserl's "Origin of Geometry". For just as Husserl is not interested in concretely documenting the invention of geometry, but only in establishing its necessary "experiential origin," while still nevertheless taking Ancient Greece as a vague historical reference, Heidegger's own genetic considerations permanently move between concrete historic reflections concerning, say, how conceptions of human life evolved throughout modern history and interrogations like the ones professed in the "Origin of the Work of Art," an essay which similarly discriminates between an inquiry into the sheer historic origin of art and what is there termed the ontological "origin of essence": "Origin means here that from where and through which a thing is what it is and how it is. That which something is, as

<sup>53</sup> Heidegger 2009: 55.

<sup>54</sup> Heidegger 2009: 55.

it is, we call its essence [*Wesen*]. The origin of something is the source of its essence. The question of the origin of the artwork asks about the source of its essence [*Wesensherkunft*].”<sup>55</sup>

## V

For sure, these questions would require a more extensive and in-depth analysis, which cannot be provided in this introduction. However, it is precisely one of the main motivations behind the present issue of *Studia Phaenomenologica* to open up such questions to debate. Among the papers gathered here, some offer extensive analyses on intricate points in Husserl’s own understanding of genetic phenomenology; several others instead also investigate how genetic motives come to the fore, for instance, in Roman Ingarden’s thinking, or in that of Merleau-Ponty. Further inquiries could certainly develop the topic not just with regard to Fink or Heidegger, as suggested in the present introduction, to Alfred Schutz, for example, who on several occasions emphatically opposed a “structural” and a “genetic” account of the socialization of knowledge, or similarly, of course, to Jacques Derrida, whose conception of deconstruction could be said to have evolved out of a thorough confrontation with Husserl’s genetic phenomenology.<sup>56</sup>

What is in any case certain with regard to the aftermath of genetic phenomenology, which we attempted to briefly outline here, is that the initial lack of critical response noted beforehand doesn’t necessarily entail that Husserl’s genetic turn wasn’t at least implicitly influential within the broader spectrum of the phenomenological movement. Thus, it remains a necessary task for further research to explore both the full extent of these tacit influences and reappropriations and the motifs that finally led to the critical revival of genetic phenomenology in contemporary scholarship following the works of Holenstein, Welton, Steinbock or Lohmar.

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<sup>55</sup> Heidegger 2002: 1.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Derrida 2003.

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