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Husserl's Theory of Instincts as a Theory of Affection

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Husserl's theory of passive experience first came to systematic and detailed expression in the lectures on passive synthesis from the early 1920s, where he discusses pure passivity under the rubric of affection and association. In this paper, I suggest that this familiar theory of passive experience is a first approximation leaving important questions unanswered. Focusing primarily on affection, I will show that Husserl did not simply leave his theory untouched. In later manuscripts he significantly reworks the theory of affection in terms of instinctive intentionality and a passive experience of desire aimed at satisfaction and enjoyment. This paper will show that the theory of affection and the theory of instincts in Husserl are really one and the same, differing only in the superior theoretical apparatus with which Husserl treats the phenomenon in his more considered theory of the instincts. I demonstrate the connection between the two theories by showing how what he generically calls "affection" in earlier texts is the same phenomenon he calls "curiosity" in later texts. The connection is further supported by the way curiosity does the same work as affection in its function within Husserl's theory of association, serving as the basic connective tissue linking diverse experiences. In closing, I deal with the problem of how to integrate the experience of the body into the theory of instincts, displaying in another way how Husserl improves his theory of affection by making it more concrete when he recasts it as a theory of instincts.

I. Introduction

Husserl's theory of passive experience first came to systematic and detailed expression in the lectures on passive synthesis (partially recapitulated in *Experience and Judgment*) from the early 1920s, where he discusses pure passivity under the rubric of affection and association. And it is in this form that his theory is most familiar to us. In this paper, I suggest that this familiar theory of passive experience is a first approximation. In many ways Husserl's theory of affection and association from around that time is rudimentary, leaving important questions unanswered. Focusing on his theory of affection, I will show that Husserl did not simply leave his theory untouched. In later manuscripts he significantly refashions his theory of affection to be more concrete in terms of instinctive intentionality and the passive experience of desire aimed at satisfaction and enjoyment.

In the lectures on passive synthesis, Husserl already points ahead to this development when he mentions in passing the possibility of analyzing certain "originally instinctive, drive related preferences" for responding to sensory data.¹ Subsequently, the affection Husserl introduced in the

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early 1920s that simply takes for granted a tendency for turning toward (*Zuwendung*) what is prominent in a given experience becomes one form of instinctive desire among others, among which Husserl includes instinctive drives related to bodily movement, nourishment, sexuality, and self-defense. Nevertheless, Husserl grants a primacy to the kind of affection familiar from the lectures on passive synthesis, which he comes to call the instinct of “curiosity” (*Neugier*).

While this relation between affection and the instincts has not gone unnoticed in the literature, I do not believe the connection has been adequately and clearly expressed. This is evident if we look to the two most thorough treatments of the subject to date. James Mensch recognizes that the theory of instincts “leads, ultimately, to a transformation of Husserl’s conceptions of affection and association.”² Nam-In Lee has likewise observed the close relation, when he paraphrases a remark made by Husserl more than once identifying the instincts with a so called “original affection” (*Uraffektion*).³ Both accounts, despite the outstanding work they have done to advance our understanding of Husserl’s theory of the instincts and how they roughly gesture to the relation between affection and the instincts, are far from clear about what exactly that relation is.

The main goal of this paper, then, is to explain what the relation is between affection and the instincts. My claim is that Husserl’s theory of affection is the same as his theory of the instincts, or, to put it slightly differently, that the two theories are concerned with the same phenomenon. This identification is not an obvious one. That is in part because Husserl simply did not write at length on the topic to systematically connect the dots. Rather, he treats it in a piecemeal fashion and with great brevity in manuscripts scattered throughout his *Nachlass*. The ambiguity also stems from the fact that Husserl himself only occasionally makes the connection, indicating the progression from the *prima facie* disparate theoretical apparatus of his early inquiries into affection and that of his more considered reflections on the instincts.

There are several ingredients to the project carried out in this paper. After reviewing the essentials of Husserl’s theory of affection from around the time of the lectures on passive synthesis (Section II), I introduce Husserl’s concept of curiosity as a basic kind of instinct and argue that curiosity takes the place in Husserl’s very late work of what he simply calls “affection” without qualification in works like the lectures on passive synthesis (Section III). I will point out both how instincts have all the same features as affection and how Husserl goes beyond those details by clarifying affection as an experience of desire and pleasure. Additionally, I indicate how the instinct of curiosity relates to Husserl’s theory of association. This is a necessary step toward showing the identity of affection with instinct because the theory of association appeals to the lived-experience of affection as *the* connective tissue linking together or “associating” diverse items of experience. If the instinct of curiosity cannot do that work, then the theories of affection and instincts do not coincide. But, as I show, Husserl provides an explanation of how curiosity does in fact do that work.

The final task of this paper will be to pose and attempt to resolve a problem with Husserl’s theory of instincts that has not been raised or dealt with in the literature (Section IV). One of the most exciting features of Husserl’s theory of instincts is how much more concrete it is than its theoretical predecessor to the extent that these instincts are forms of *embodied* experience. The problem is that the experience of the body seems different in kind from the sort of experience engendered in instinctive

¹Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, Trans. Anthony Steinbock (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), p. 150/198. This text will be hereafter cited as APAS.

²James Mensch, *Husserl’s Account of Our Consciousness of Time* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010), p. 224. Mensch’s translation. This text will be cited hereafter as HACT.

³Nam-In Lee, *Edmund Husserl’s Phänomenologie der Instinkte*. (Dordrecht: Springer, 1993), p. 166. This text will be cited hereafter as EHPI. See also Mensch, HACT, pp. 229–30.

curiosity. I conclude by explaining how Husserl integrates the experience of the body into his theory of instincts or affection, suggesting that Husserl may even have good grounds for taking the experience of the body to be the genetic ground level of perceptual experience.

II. The nature of affection

We cannot understand the relation of affection and the instincts without first saying something about Husserl's earlier understanding of affection as we know it from texts he wrote in the early twenties. Affection is understood there as the immanent passive phenomenon of the subject being stimulated or excited by phenomena – originally, by “hyletic” or sensory data, but just as much by objects and the like in more complex forms of experience – so that it takes notice of them.⁴ Affection is what originally motivates the subject's attention toward sensory data. Even prior to the initiation of an intentional act the subject responds after a manner to the experiences it undergoes.⁵ The key difference between the two kinds of response (i.e., passive or active) is whether there are stringent norms (epistemic, practical or ethical) at the subject's disposal governing what counts as the fulfillment of the experience. “Passive”ⁱⁱⁱ experience lacks these norms informing its response. At the most basic level of pure passivity, the response merely consists in the sensory data catching the subject's attention, motivating it to take the sensory data in view.⁶

There are important qualifications that must be added regarding how the sensory data exert this affection on the subject. Husserl wants to make a distinction between the way we sometimes think, or at least the way *he* sometimes does, about how feelings take place and the way affection occurs. Often we think of feelings occurring subsequent to the presentation of an object. For instance, I see photograph and then have a nostalgic feeling about the photograph. Husserl argues that this is not how affection works. It is not as though the sensory data are first presented to the subject and later on engender an affection in the subject. The affection is what first motivates the subject to engage with the sensory data.⁷ According to Husserl, “one cannot say: The hyletic datum exists prior to the turning toward and has a pleasant characteristic by virtue of which it [subsequently] awakens my curiosity.”⁸

Rather, he maintains that “the ego is affectively present with [*bei* [...] *ist das Ich fühlendes*] every content in the nexus of content and with the entire nexus of content.”⁹ Affection differs from the familiar understanding of feeling because affection is supposed to be the very condition for the subject taking notice of something, making it impossible to imagine sensory data first appearing and then taking on an affective value.ⁱⁱⁱ That is the point Husserl makes when he describes affection as “an affective presence [*fühlendes Dabe-Sein*] of the ego with” something.^{10,iv}

⁴APAS, pp. 148/196.

⁵Edmund Husserl, *Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution (1929–1934): Die C-Manuskripte*, Dieter Lohmar (ed.) (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), pp. 341–2, 350. This text will be cited hereafter as Hua Mat VIII. All translations of this text are my own, unless otherwise noted.

⁶APAS, pp. 84–5/127–8; Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, Trans. James S. Churchill, Karl Ameriks and Lothar Eley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), p. 22. The latter text will be cited hereafter as EJ.

⁷Hua Mat VIII, p. 319.

⁸Hua Mat VIII, p. 324. He goes on in that passage to say: “The datum is present for me before that [*vordem*] [i.e., before the subject's curiosity is awakened] precisely as affecting”.

⁹Hua Mat VIII, p. 352.

¹⁰Hua Mat VIII, p. 351.

The intimate character of this relation is obscured in Mensch's interpretation of affection, and, hence, of instinct. The point is so fundamental, it should be addressed at the outset. The problem lies in his artificial separation of instinctive striving from affection,¹¹ a distinction that Husserl does not make in the remark Mensch bases his interpretive claim on. When Husserl says "The 'address' of the content is not a call to something, but rather a feeling-being-there of the ego,"¹² the "address" (affection) and the "feeling" relation of the ego (instinct) are meant to refer to the same thing. The confusion is only compounded by the fact that Mensch recognizes an "identity" between the affection and the instinct, but immediately continues to separate them with his analogy of the lock (instinct) and key (affection).¹³ There is a subjective pole (the ego) and an objective pole (a sensation, an object) that are brought into contact by this phenomenon, but that does not mean the phenomenon that makes up that contact itself has two components.

The seamless affective relation of the subject and content of experience implies, moreover, that affection is not first of all the isolation of some particular sensory datum or group of sensory data. The subject is affectively related to the whole field of sensory data; that is how the field is present for it. That observation requires us to differentiate the affection pertaining to the whole field of sensory data and the affection of the particular sensory datum and groups of sensory data. At the limit, we can conceive of a "primal affection" (*Uraffektion*), as Husserl calls it, an experience of the field of sensory data in which nothing stands out and the subject "still has no 'interests.'"¹⁴ In that case, the subject is affectively related to an undifferentiated whole of sensory data.¹⁵ Such an affection has a "null of alluring force [*Reizkraft*]," one that doesn't provoke the subject to any kind of response.¹⁶

Out of this limit experience, particular affections emerge, to which the subject pays heed. This occurs when a "prominence" (*Abhebung*) arises in the sensory data and stands out affectively from the other data. The prominent sensory formation exerts a more powerful affective allure that actually catches the subject's notice due to its contrast in relation to other sensory data. Husserl illustrates this by referring to cases of a sudden flash (e.g., lightning) or a loud noise (e.g., thunder).¹⁷ In both cases a certain prominence in the visual or acoustic field immediately attracts one's attention.

It is important to note that it is not the mere "material" features of the data that cause the affection, since, as I have already remarked, we are always related to data through affection and affection is never simply added to material that is already there. Neither the flash nor the boom inherently requires one to pay heed to it. It is on the basis of a change of affection and the affective interrelations of these prominent sensory formations with the other sensory data that the affection

¹¹Mensch HACT, pp. 231, 235. See also Julio Vargas Bejarano, *Phänomenologie des Willens: Seine Struktur, sein Ursprung und seine Funktion in Husserls Denken* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang 2006), pp. 235–6.

¹²Hua Mat VIII, p. 351, cited in Mensch, HACT, p. 231.

¹³Mensch, HACT, 232.

¹⁴Edmund Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt: Auslegungen der vorgegebenen Welt und ihrer Konstitution, Texte aus dem Nachlass (1916–1937)*, Rochus Sowa (ed.) (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), p. 483. This text will be cited hereafter as Hua XXXIX. All translations of this text are my own. See also Hua XXXIX, p. 422: "We therefore have to distinguish between the ego prior to any apperception (a limit-idea), the ego that stands at the beginning of genesis, and the ego of apperception of various levels". Among these apperceptions he includes even the simplest case of "turning toward" (*Zuwendung*).

¹⁵Roberto Walton, "The constitutive and reconstructive building-up of horizons", in Pol Vandavelde and Sebastian Luft (eds.), *Epistemology, Archaeology, Ethics: Current Investigations of Husserl's Corpus* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), pp. 137–8.

¹⁶Hua Mat VIII, p. 191.

¹⁷APAS, p. 150/197.

is motivated. It is the flash in an otherwise dark sky or the boom in an otherwise quiet night that engenders a truly compelling affection. The dark sky has little allure in itself. As Husserl says, “the single datum is dependent upon the others for its affective force.”¹⁸ The sound of rain at night also gives little to attend to, and tends to be experienced as ambient noise. On the other hand, the new occurrences, against those backgrounds and their “background affection,”¹⁹ have the greatest motivational force.^v

There are two related distinctions operative in these observations about affection. First, there is a distinction between actual affection and the tendency toward affection.²⁰ One prominent sensory formation actually catches my attention and affects me in the strict sense, while I ignore the other sensory data. They, however, still have an affective force, only a weaker one. Once the boom of the thunder has passed, one becomes occupied with less alluring sensory data present in the field. At a given moment, one is prepared to engage with one’s surroundings in numerous ways besides the way that one is fully given over to at that moment. One is affectively attuned to one’s surroundings. Those mere tendencies to be affected, given the right alteration in circumstances, comprise a sense of readiness, which is perhaps felt more palpably in the smooth transition from moment to moment despite differences of interest, of the particular matter with which one is affectively engaged.

Second, within affective tendencies, we have to distinguish various gradations of affection. It is not the case that affection breaks down into that which catches my attention and an undifferentiated background. The background itself is a mass of sensory data with varying degrees of affective force, which leads Husserl to attribute to it “a relativism of affective tendencies.”²¹ In the case of lightning in the night sky, the sky is populated with data of very differing affective value, ranging from the extreme of the lightning flash, to the moon, the stars, the passing clouds, the black sky itself, etc.

III. Instinctive desire and the instinct of curiosity

When he recasts the discussion of affection in terms of instinct, Husserl means to advance the view that the fundamental form or forms of affection are experiential rock bottom. This means both that there is no more basic way of relating to sensory data and that this form of experience is not acquired. Husserl thus speaks of them as “inborn” or “innate” (*Angeboren*).^{vi} The first positive gain of reworking the theory of affection into a theory of instincts is to concretize it, to give it a determinate place in the finite life of the subject. To talk about affection as an instinct is to give it a systematic value, to locate it at the limit of conscious life,^{vii} whereas affection as treated in the lectures on passive synthesis could just as well be an abstraction from any point in conscious life and have essentially the same value.

Thus, cashing out the theory of affection in terms of instinct and desire is no merely trivial development. It is a necessary development not only because of its systematic intent, but, furthermore, because it clarifies an inherent ambiguity and insufficiency in the theory of affection from the lectures on passive synthesis. In that context, affection is supposed to explain how the subject is passively related to sensory data quite generally and how it is led to respond to the sensory data in certain ways, i.e., by noticing them for themselves or “turning towards” (*Zuwendung*).

¹⁸APAS, p. 150/197.

¹⁹Hua Mat VIII, p. 340, Hua XXXIX, p. 42.

²⁰APAS, pp. 148–9/196. At APAS, p. 162/210, Husserl maps this distinction onto that of givenness and pre-giveness.

²¹APAS, p. 150/197.

While there is something obvious about this conception of affection, it nevertheless demands more intense scrutiny and questioning. Why does the subject respond in this way? What exactly is involved in this response of noticing? Is there only one kind of noticing, or are there many? Are there other kinds of affective engagement the subject has with sensory data besides noticing? These questions are not addressed in Husserl's initial discussions of the theory of affection. As we examine his reinterpretation of affection as instinct, it will become clearer how instinct preserves the fundamental traits of the earlier theory of affection and helps to answer such questions.

Let us begin by considering instinctive desire prior to the formation of prominence. At first, "the ego at the primal level is the ego of instinct with undisclosed [*unenthüllten*] instinctive goals."²² "[O]riginal affection," Husserl says, is an "instinct, thus a kind of empty striving still lacking the 'presentation of a goal.'"^{23,viii} This means that the subject has a desire, but is not conscious of, does not present, any particular satisfaction for that desire. This may seem to be, however, a considerably strained conception of desire. Any and every sensory datum is necessarily related to this desire. Desire ordinarily refers to experiences where we want something and know specifically what we want.

Nevertheless, there are ways to make this kind of desire intelligible. If episodic instances of desire are not a good model, conceiving of the instincts as functioning like habitual desires fares much better. Indeed, Husserl thinks that any particular occurrence of affective experience is rooted in the presence of the instinct as a disposition. In this sense, instinctive responses to situations, just like habitual ones, are blind, and yet they color the way we see and interact with things, issuing only in certain appropriate responses and behaviors as determined by the instinctive disposition. That is, in ordinary life, experiences and behaviors "unconsciously" appear desirable or undesirable, tending to solicit or inhibit responses on our part, due to our habits, without our having to take special notice.

What further justifies the language of desire is the way Husserl concretizes the affective relation the subject stands in with the sensory data. He claims that every sensory datum is present to the ego at the outset either in a feeling of pleasure or one of displeasure (*Lust* and *Unlust*, respectively). And this is not merely a matter of individual data and their affective links to the subject. The whole group of sensory data itself, as a "total" impression, appears to the subject in a mood (*Stimmung*), and the particular sensory data are always affective precisely as parts (i.e., every part is a "*gefühlsmässig Teil*").^{24,ix}

Just as Husserl distinguishes the affective tendency from the actual affection in which the turning toward occurs, he makes the same distinction when he separates "pleasure-allure" from "pleasure-enjoyment."^{25,x} The feeling in which the sensory data are present functions either to "attract" or to "repel" the subject. In that sense, the field of sensory data is one of relatively attractive or unattractive sensory data, and so they are necessarily present as making a claim (however weak) on the subject's will, its desire, to issue an appropriate response.

What all this should make very clear is that the subject comes to the field of experience with certain general "preferences"^{xi} (i.e., for pleasure, for avoiding displeasure)²⁶, although it is entirely unaware of them at first, and that what stands out in this field is only what accords with these preferences to the greatest degree. Thus Husserl speaks of a "passive preferring"

²²Hua Mat VIII, p. 253.

²³Hua Mat VIII, p. 326.

²⁴Hua Mat VIII, p. 351.

²⁵Hua Mat VIII, p. 319.

²⁶Hua Mat VIII, p. 340: "Desiring life positively directs itself out [...] toward pure enjoying [...]. Desiring negatively directs itself against all breaking in of what is negatively pleasant [*Negativ-Lustigem*], against all decreases, disruptions".

that occupies itself exclusively with one thing it deems “important” while it “passively runs roughshod over another.”²⁷ To illustrate this idea, Mensch has used the analogy of a lock and key.²⁸ The subject is only interested in the sensory data that “fit” (although this is certainly a matter of degree, contrary to the metaphor), and the others are relatively immaterial. Such sensory data in their pleasure-allure are relevant to the extent that they immediately give rise to or suggest the possibility of a focused pleasure-affection, which is functionally equivalent to the turning toward considered above.^{xii}

We can now take this sketch of how instinctive desiring works as a framework for examining particular instincts. While there are many instincts that Husserl speaks of, e.g., having to do with bodily movement, eating, breathing, sex, self-defense, etc., he does not believe that the instincts emerge in the life of consciousness in just any order. Each instinct has its own place in the developmental unfolding of conscious life. They are not simply present all at once, each affectively coloring the field of experience in its own way and distributing its own affective values thereupon. A clue for this is the way more familiar instincts unfold in the course of life. Instincts pertaining to food, breathing, and sexuality each have their own proper timing, their own “rhythm” or “periodicity,” a systematic organization.²⁹ This clue indicates that there is an orderly and perhaps even systematic way in which each of these instincts arises in us and brings its preferences to bear in the present while they nevertheless have very different rhythms and compel us to see the world in light of different preferences.

The very first, most original instinct, according to Husserl, is not one of these familiar types. It is, instead, the instinct of curiosity. It may sound strange to speak of an instinct of curiosity at all, let alone to suppose that it has a privileged position in the ordering of the instincts. But the claim makes more sense when one considers how much is presupposed for instincts like those pertaining to food and sexuality to be able to function at all. In fact, the world, transcendent reality and the experiential structures bringing us in contact with it, must already be developed. The instinct of curiosity is more basic than these, and does much of the work that is presupposed by the higher-level instincts.

The central place of instinctive curiosity within my interpretation of Husserl’s theory of affection or instincts distinguishes my view from that of Lee and Mensch. Lee, for instance takes the survival instinct to be what unites every instinctive lived-experience.³⁰ While that is an important point, and one that sheds light on how the theory of the instincts relates to the theory of association, it fails to deal with the kinship of the various instincts in other more fundamental aspects of their functioning that can only be grasped by taking the instinct of curiosity as the basic model that every instinctive lived-experience resembles. Lee does come close when he claims that the reverse side of the instinct for self-preservation is an “instinct of worldliness” leading the subject to experience the world.³¹

But on Lee’s view, Husserl has the instinct of curiosity playing only a partial role that leaves out the experience of value (*Wert*).³² As have already seen, the pleasure inherent to affection, and, hence, the experience of curiosity as well, already suggests that this separation is untenable. Furthermore, although I will not dwell on this point, the experience of values as constituted, e.g., the experience of an apple explicitly as something I want to eat (as opposed to the experience of values as constituting, in the way that pleasure as affection facilitates the constitution of

²⁷Hua Mat VIII, p. 39.

²⁸Mensch, HACT, p. 232.

²⁹Hua XXXIX, p. 585, Hua Mat VIII, p. 328.

³⁰Lee, EHPI, p. 168.

³¹Lee, EHPI, pp. 169, 175–80.

³²Lee, EHPI, pp. 108, 180.

objects without necessarily presenting them as valuable), is simply a more complex form of objectification that shares the basic structure of curiosity in simple perceptual experience more generally. For Husserl, there is a strong structural parallelism among the basic forms of intentionality, i. e., intentional acts of positing objects, willing, and valuing.³³

Mensch makes a similar error with his distinction between objectifying and non-objectifying instincts,³⁴ which has the same effect as Lee's marginalizing of the instinct of curiosity by placing it on equal footing with instincts related to value.^{xiii} According to Mensch, some instinctive experiences are affective experiences that do not present an object or that are not episodes of thematic awareness of something. For others, the opposite is true, and they are characterized by complex structures such that an object comes to be given through the synthesis of a manifold of appearances without affection.³⁵ The former instincts, then, are non-objectifying and the latter are objectifying. My account of curiosity will show that Husserl does not divide instincts in this way, breaking them down into heterogeneous types, some mapping onto the theory of affection and others not.

All instincts have the same basic affective form, curiosity being the simplest instance of that form, *pace* Lee and Mensch. In fact, the instinct of curiosity is both non-objectifying, as a blind preference that the ego is not aware of, and it is objectifying, as a preference that specifies certain thematic episodes of experience precisely as fulfillments of the instinct. And this is a structure that is shared by all forms of intentionality, with curiosity as its simplest exemplary instance. Any separation is artificial and unsupported by Husserl's manuscripts on the issue.

Curiosity is, as I have already mentioned, equivalent to the kind of affection Husserl elaborates in the lectures on passive synthesis.^{xiv} We may sometimes think of curiosity as an aloofness from the pressing cares of life or as a luxury good to be enjoyed only after more exigent matters are taken care of. Husserl overturns this way of thinking when it comes to our instinctive curiosity. Curiosity is far from superfluous. It is the first desideratum, the first interest we have in the sensory field as a whole and in its details.

We need not go into all the details again of how affection plays out in the form of curiosity, since we have examined the phenomenon of affection in sufficient detail above. Here it will be enough to integrate curiosity into the framework of instinctive desiring provided above. First, then, we have to be clear about what this instinctive desire aims at. According to Husserl, this instinct is interested in the "original affection that emanates from prominent 'contents.'"^{36,xv} The "hyletic what" itself is what interests the subject. Further, because this affection has to count for the subject as desirable, Husserl says, "we take 'curiosity' to be a feeling of pleasure."^{37,xvi}

This consists, on the one hand, "in being-involved [*Dabeisein*], so to speak, in the condition of enjoyment," which corresponds to the pleasure-affection that Husserl identifies in this case precisely as turning-toward, the simple experience of attentively noticing something. But even prior to that, on the other hand, sensory data are already present as affective, as "appealing to me" as relevant or irrelevant to my interest in the pleasurable experience of turning toward, as possibly satisfying my curiosity or not.³⁸ Although he only comes to speak of an instinctive curiosity relatively late, Husserl already at the time of the lectures on passive synthesis speaks of an instinct or

³³Hua XXXVII, pp. 260–1.

³⁴Mensch, HACT, pp. 231–5.

³⁵Mensch, HACT, p. 233.

³⁶Hua Mat VIII, p. 323.

³⁷Hua Mat VIII, p. 324.

³⁸Hua Mat VIII, p. 324.

“primal tendency” with just these features, features ultimately aimed at “constitution that is of thematic unities, unities of ‘existing’ objects.”³⁹

If any instinct is worthy of the title “instinct,” taken in its systematic connotation, it is curiosity. Curiosity *must* be an “inborn” or “innate” instinct. It would be entirely senseless to, from the egological perspective, conceive of the subject acquiring this instinct like a habit in the course of experience. Curiosity cannot be acquired in experience because it is the fundamental form of consciousness, the primitive way in which the subject comes into contact with what is “alien to the ego.” There is no simpler way for the subject to be affectively present with the field of experience than in its instinct of curiosity.^{xvii} For that reason, Husserl calls curiosity “the lowest, all-founding interest.”⁴⁰

This last quotation indicates another aspect of the systematic value of the instinct of curiosity. Not only is it the initial, most original interest the subject has in the contents of sensory experience. As “all-founding,” it continues to play a role throughout the development of conscious life. All of that is the consistent following through of the affective desire encapsulated in the instinct of curiosity, in the preference for the experience of prominent sensory data. That means curiosity alone provides the subject with an articulated, familiar present, with some typical expectations pertaining to the future, and with a rich past filled with passively retained prior encounters with prominences. Curiosity not only engages the subject with its present surroundings, but may also drive the subject to return to its retained prominent encounters. All the associative mediations that come about are only so many means to the end of experiencing prominent proto-objects, that is, of satisfying the subject’s instinctive curiosity. Developing such details would amount to a reformulation of Husserl’s account of association from the lectures on passive synthesis within the framework of the theory of instincts developed here.

It is important to understand exactly why all the apperceptive or associative results just mentioned follow from the instinct of curiosity. The move, first of all, from the simple experience of noticing something in the impressional present to an associative connection in the direction of the past is inherent in instinctive curiosity. Husserl makes this claim when he says that this “[i]n instinctive drive of objectivation” can take the form of a “[p]leasure in recognizing [*Wiedererkennen*] what is the same.”^{41,xviii} Husserl’s claim is that curiosity also covers the experience of recognizing, that simplest form of associative experience where some past prominent experience is assimilated into a present experience in such a way that it affectively reinforces the present experience. That is the case because the coincidence of the retained past with features of the present makes those features of the present stand out more, therefore appealing to the preference for what is prominent, that is, to instinctive curiosity. Recognizing would not play the fundamental role it does in conscious life if the subject were not already affectively attuned in this way.

There is another way of understanding this tendency inherent in instincts to not simply repeat and function constantly in an identical manner, but to develop, improve, and take on greater complexity in the course of experience.^{xix} It is in reference to this tendency that Husserl calls the instincts “immortal.”⁴² There is one component in this process that he introduces in his later work on instinctive desiring that especially contributes to their developmental character that I have mentioned but not yet explained, namely, the fact that when a pleasure-allure passes over into a pleasure-affection, a focused enjoyment, the instinct itself – its goal and the path, if

³⁹Hua XXXIX, p. 17.

⁴⁰Hua Mat VIII, p. 325.

⁴¹Hua Mat VIII, p. 331.

⁴²Hua Mat VIII, p. 258: “Every instinct is immortal, it simply exists in different modes of actualization”.

there is a path involved, to the fulfillment of the goal – is revealed or disclosed.⁴³ With every fulfillment (*Erfüllung*) of an instinct, there is a disclosure (*Enthüllung*) of it as well.^{xx}

The disclosure is the proper basis for the development of an instinct. When the instinct is disclosed in enjoyment, the goal is experienced as a goal and is prominent as such. Before the satisfaction of the instinct, the instinctive desire is blind. After some particular satisfaction emerges, the subject has a defined, focused desire.^{xxi} That immediately makes it possible for the subject to experience other similar prominences as repetitions of that goal, as familiar according to that type,^{xxii} and subsequently to even expect the particular prominent proto-object in the future and to intervene to produce it as a “good.”⁴⁴ This process gradually alters the instinctive activity to look more and more like an intentional act, which is why Husserl says an instinct is an “ability [*Vermögen*] [that functions] as the equipment for the cultivation of abilities in the proper sense.”⁴⁵

Based on this, we can also understand the sense in which other instincts besides curiosity are in a sense “founded” in it, and why Husserl conceives of curiosity as a “general” affection or striving in which other “particular” affections or strivings are founded.⁴⁶ According to Husserl, each “particular instinct has its specific direction, its specific character of enjoyment,” and this differentiation is based on the instinct’s direction to some “hyletic” datum or some type of sensory data “as the core of quality.”⁴⁷ If that is the case, then, just as Husserl imagines that desires for particular foods are specifications of a general drive related to nourishment, so also the drive for food can be seen as a kind of specification of the instinct of curiosity, where, of course, not just any prominent objectivity satisfies.^{xxiii} The other instincts, therefore, presuppose the instinct of curiosity and are diverging offshoots from it that preserve its basic character.

IV. Instincts and the lived-body

It is not necessary to discuss all of the instincts that Husserl deals with. In an account pursuing the most important contours of Husserl’s theory, however, it would be a major oversight not to treat the instincts pertaining to the lived-body. Like the simple experience of turning toward or noticing to which we are inclined thanks to our instinctive curiosity, the lived-body plays a pervasive role in our experience, and not occasional or episodic in the way that the instincts pertaining to food, sex, and the like are. The instincts pertaining to the lived-body have nearly an equal primacy to that of the instinct of curiosity, and accordingly Husserl gives them disproportionately great attention in the manuscripts.

While Husserl undoubtedly maintains that there are instincts related to the lived-body, they are not as simple to understand as other instincts, like the instinct for nourishment. Experience of the lived-body is different in kind from the experience of objects and states of affairs. Whereas the latter have the sense of possible or actual prominent formations, the lived-body does not function that way primarily in developed experience, since it usually does not call for our focused regard. The sensations that make up the experience of the lived-body, the kinaestheses, do not present the lived-body itself as prominent. Their purpose is not to stand out in their own right for us to pay attention to. Rather, what kinaestheses do is work “in the background” in relatively complex experiences in which something else becomes prominent and does so because of their contribution.

⁴³Pugliese “Triebphäre und Urkindlichkeit des Ich”, *Husserl Studies* 25(2), pp. 148–9; Mensch, HACT, p. 224.

⁴⁴Hua Mat VIII, p. 333.

⁴⁵Hua XXXIX, p. 483.

⁴⁶Hua Mat VIII, p. 324.

⁴⁷Hua Mat VIII, p. 257.

An example will make this clear. When I use my hand to feel the texture of an object, I discover, for instance, that it has a rough texture. Necessary in this discovery is the fact that I move my hand and, more specifically, that there are sensations of moving my hand that come along with and that guide the motion through which the texture of the object is revealed. The kinaesthetic sensations that comprise the lived-body have this essentially peripheral character. They are not what is of interest in this experience. What interests me is the texture. But the kinaesthetic sensations do participate in this experience. They occur as “circumstances” whose complex organization guides this experience. There is a typical order and organization to the kinaesthetic sensations of my hand, arm, and, perhaps, shoulder as I go through the motion in which I experience the texture.

But if, as we have seen, instincts are desires guided by pleasure and aimed at enjoyment of something prominent, one justly wonders how the lived-body can fit in this framework and not be merely an accessory. Given that the kinaesthetic sensations of the lived-body are only accoutrements for essentially heterogeneous enjoyments, it is hard to see how there could be any instinct pertaining to the lived-body that would not call for fundamental revisions in our concept of instinct. Indeed, Husserl speaks in just this way, construing the kinaestheses as ancillary, when he refers to the original experience of the lived-body as “a unitary goal-less ‘doing’” – thereby invoking them as instincts – in which “[t]he waking ego is originally directed [...] to the total, undifferentiated *hulē* in the form of ‘pure’ kinaesthesia.”⁴⁸

In another manuscript, Husserl says almost the same thing, but with an important difference: “Should I say that this original willing has the form of a total-kinaesthesia being discharged, being discharged in kinaestheses that are still uncontrolled [...], whereby the field-data are varied and sporadically [varied]?”^{49,xxiv} The inconclusiveness of this remark already casts doubt on the essential subordination of kinaesthesia to heterogeneous experiential elements (like the “field-data” or the “undifferentiated *hulē*”).

Husserl seems also to employ this model – in which kinaesthetic data function peripherally – in his “construction” of the infant’s experience of nursing and the role of kinaesthetic sensations leading up to nursing.⁵⁰ Yet, here the matter is not so clear. What tends to come to mind when we think of food is certainly the taste, which is a key motivational factor for eating. But to say that experiencing taste is the goal of eating is surely not right, or, at least, it is just one part of the story. Eating involves much more. Chewing, swallowing, and, as Husserl has it, “bodily complacency”⁵¹ (we might say, “being full”) are all aspects of enjoying food. Perhaps, then, the lived-body plays a fundamental role in the instincts pertaining to eating, and does so as an instinct in the strict sense, the enjoyment of which consists at least in part of kinaesthetic experiences.

But the lived-body is more than a factor in the experience of eating. Can we say that it has other more fundamental properly instinctive aspects? I think we can make headway in this direction by considering Husserl’s appeal to the “kicking-kinaestheses” exercised by the infant and the fetus. While we cannot recall our own experiences of this or take recourse to the testimony of another who can, we can empathetically conceive roughly what the infant or the fetus undergoes when it flails. Indeed, it is perhaps the most overt form of a typical trait belonging to instincts, namely, as goalless behaviors. The fetus or infant does not wave its arms and legs to do something apart from executing those very movements.

⁴⁸Hua Mat VIII, p. 226.

⁴⁹Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität: Texte aus dem Nachlass, Dritter Teil (1929–1935)*, Iso Kern (ed.), (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 330. This text will be cited hereafter as Hua XV. All translations of the text are my own.

⁵⁰Hua Mat VIII, p. 326.

⁵¹Hua Mat VIII, p. 327.

If there is an instinct related to kinaesthetic movement itself, then the execution of this goal-less activity would reveal the goal. This is exactly what Husserl seems to suggest happens when he speaks of a “‘joy of kicking’, of bodily movement in limb movement.”⁵² The first movements, then, would be utterly purposeless, but in those first movements the subject would discover a pleasure peculiar to those movements.^{xxv} Thereafter, the movement is desirable and enjoyable in its own right, and it is then something to be further explored by the subject, and, importantly, a force to be harnessed for more refined enjoyment. As Husserl says, “[t]he kinaesthetic movement [...] can become ‘thematic’ for itself, the ego being awake to it and initially having its pleasurable satisfaction in the passage [of the kinaesthetic movement], it itself being the *telos*.”⁵³ We might think of such experiences along the lines of the satisfying feeling of stretching or cracking one’s knuckles.

These sorts of inherently enjoyable bodily movements could then be taken to be the precondition for the experience of the lived-body being subordinated to other instinctive enjoyments, while remaining wholly consistent with them. Interestingly, Husserl does claim that the lived-body is involved in the “first affection.”⁵⁴ Yet what he does not consider is that it may even be that this enjoyment of the lived-body itself is the same as the enjoyment of curiosity’s original occurrence in this “first affection.” This is obscured by the fact that we tend to focus on visual experience, but earliest experiences of the fetus are not visual. Given that, it may very well be that the first turning toward, the first noticing the fetus experiences is of its own movement.

Notes

- i. J. Keeping has recently developed a concept of instinct very much akin to this, drawing partial inspiration from Husserl’s theory of affection from the lectures on passive synthesis. See Keeping, “How does the Bird Build its Nest? Instincts as Embodied Meaning”, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 5(2), pp. 171–95. As he understands it, “it is the instinct itself that determines what shall be a trigger for it. In other words, the trigger only exists as such because the instinct itself makes it meaningful as a trigger” (p. 183).
- ii. In some ways, the term “passive” is misleading. It should not be taken to mean either that there is no accomplishment in a “passive” experience (i.e., that nothing is carried out) or that the experience is guided by some force external to consciousness, as the term readily suggests. These claims will be borne out in what follows. The importance and value of the term “passive” is mainly to separate this kind of intentionality from the intentionality of a proper *action*. An action is, as already mentioned, guided by consciously possessed norms of success and failure. Further, an action is selectively chosen, includes awareness of the goal and of the means toward the goal, and presupposes a resolve to pass over to a state of having satisfied the goal in question. Negatively put, the less resemblance an intentional experience bears to an action, the more it qualifies as passive. It is more *undergone* (a venerable semantic possibility stemming etymologically from the Greek root term *paschein*) than performed by the subject, even if it is still the *subject’s* undergoing. Given these considerations, I believe it is best at least in this context to stick to Husserl’s terminology of “passivity” despite its ambiguity. The remainder of this paper will, I hope, make clear what such a passive undergoing consists of positively.
- iii. Husserl wavers on this point. This is evident both in APAS (§§32–5) and in *Hua Mat VIII* (pp. 188–9), where he is explicit about having considered both options. But, as James Mensch has argued in *HACT* (pp. 216–9) in the case of APAS, Husserl ultimately prefers the view that nothing is constituted prior to affection. Anthony Steinbock, the translator of the English version of *Hua XI*, seems to concur. See Steinbock, “Translator’s Introduction” to APAS, xlvii–xlix, and *Home and Beyond* (Bloomington: Northwestern University Press, 1995), pp. 153–5. See also Victor Biceaga, *The Concept of Passivity in Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Springer 2010), pp. 38–41. In *Hua Mat III*, he

⁵²Hua Mat VIII, p. 327.

⁵³Hua Mat VIII, p. 328.

⁵⁴Ms E III 9, 23a–23b. Cited in Mensch, *HACT*, p. 232.

- parenthetically says he had held the opposite view (“We would have said there [that] not every prominence is affective”) at the time he was writing the Bernau manuscripts, but can no longer hold to it (all of “[s]treaming life [. . .] is subject to [. . .] primal association as ‘passive’ temporalization”, or, shortly before this parenthetical remark, “affection is not externally superposed [*aufgelagert*] on the particular preont[ic] experiencing [*Erleben*], but [occurs] as its egoic mode” (p. 189)). Husserl is perhaps referring to his remarks in the Bernau manuscripts in Edmund Husserl, *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein (1917/18)*, Rudolf Bernet and Dieter Lohmar (eds.) (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), text No. 15. For a clear statement of the alternate reading of APAS, an admittedly very complex and meandering reflection, see Joseph Kockelmans “Association in Husserl’s Phenomenology,” in Brice R. Wachterhauser (ed.), *Phenomenology and Skepticism: A Reconsideration for the 21st Century* (Bloomington: Northwestern University Press), pp. 76–7.
- iv. Cf. Hua Mat VIII, p. 273, where Husserl speaks in passing of the subject’s relation to the sensory field as “the unity of a conscious possessing with feeling [*gefühlsmässigen Bewussthabens*]”.
 - v. Cf. Hua Mat VIII, p. 351: “[T]he particular content as part of the whole hyletic-imminent (the constituted) sphere is also an affective [*gefühlsmässig*] part. The part is prominent and [is prominent] as the component part of a fusion and a particular configuration therein. If the configuration is different, then the same part also has a different part-characteristic, relation-characteristic”.
 - vi. The non-acquired character of instincts is true from the perspective of the individual subject, but not from the perspective of generative subjectivity. In the latter point of view, instincts are indeed acquired and handed down. The details are extremely sketchy, but Husserl had started to work out a conceptual apparatus for handling this problem. See, for example, Hua Mat VIII, pp. 438–9.
 - vii. As will become clear, instincts are not exclusively limit-phenomena. They have a development, and they carry over into more advanced stages of conscious life, even spanning the whole of conscious life.
 - viii. Cf. James Mensch, HACT, pp. 231–4. I do not follow Mensch entirely on this point, as I will further explain below. I think the objectivating/non-objectivating distinction applied to instincts is more complex than Mensch presents it. For Mensch, objectivating instinct is a separate instinct from other non-objectivating instincts (or, perhaps, the one objectivating instinct), and the latter pertain only to complex appresentational experiences (i.e., those involving appearances-of). As I see it, this is not entirely true. Every instinct has both a non-objectivating and an objectivating moment, it seems. The instinct is blind, but it aims at a fulfillment, a focused “thematizing” consciousness, in which the instinct actually becomes disclosed for the subject, as Mensch recognizes. Perhaps in a somewhat loose sense, then, every instinct becomes objectivating once it gives rise to an actual instinct-affection, a focused experience of enjoyment. In a narrower sense, there is also an objectivating instinct, which I believe, for Husserl, is the same as the instinct of curiosity. And, while at higher levels this instinct, as we shall see, is a complex appresentational experience, it begins like all other instincts as blind or non-objectivating and its first activation is not appresentational, but is, I will show, the immediate “turning-toward” aimed at immediately present sensory data in the impressional field. Lee, EHPI, p. 108) also interprets Husserl’s scant references to an instinct of objectivation in terms of his similarly infrequent references to an instinct of curiosity.
 - ix. Cf. Nam-In Lee, “Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenology of Mood,” in N. Depraz and D. Zahavi (eds.), *Alterity and Facticity: New Perspectives on Husserl* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1996), especially pp. 113–6.
 - x. See Rudolph Bernet, “Zur Phänomenologie von Trieb und Lust bei Husserl,” in Dieter Lohmar Dirk Fonfara (eds.), *Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven der Phänomenologie* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006). According to Bernet, Husserl already makes this distinction in his earlier manuscripts on drive collected in the unpublished *Studien Zur Struktur des Bewusstseins (1909–14)*. As he says (pp. 41–2, my translation), “Husserl thereby distinguishes still more precisely between the drive as impetus [*Antrieb*] and its realization in a doing [*Tun*]. The distinction is terminologically fixed by him as the difference of ‘drive-impulse’ and ‘drive-movement’ (or ‘drive-action’)”. To this distinction there also corresponds the distinction between “drive-pleasure” (corresponding to the “movement” or “action”) and “sensation-pleasure”, “which encompasses, besides pleasure in sensations, drive-pleasure as well” (pp. 45–6). However, it is not clear whether this is yet a foreground/background distinction, as it clearly is in Husserl’s later writings on instinct.
 - xi. Cf. Hua XXXIX, p. 471, where Husserl breaks down “primal affection” of the total impressional present into a “preferred, overpowering affection” and a “less preferred [affection]”, and Hua Mat VIII, p. 253, where Husserl equates affection with a “subjective preference”.

- xii. Husserl quickly sketches this whole framework in one manuscript (Hua Mat VIII, pp. 340–1) as follows: “The being-affected of the willing ego, the desiring, desiring-being-related-to and now being-with [something] (in feeling) in turning-toward [*Hinwendung*], appropriately [*zuständlich*] being-firmly-gripped by it in pleasure as enjoyed pleasure; a) affection as background-affection that attracts the ego; b) affection as affection in the mode of being-with, [and,] further, gradation of affection already prior to and up to the turning toward [*Zuwendung*]”.
- xiii. It should be noted that Lee’s distinction between instincts related to curiosity leading to presentations (*Vorstellungen*) of objects and instincts related to values is also a distinction between objectivating and non-objectivating instincts, respectively. Although Lee and Mensch use the same terms in the same context, they have very different meanings. Lee is drawing on Husserl’s use of this language in his theory of “doxic” versus valuing intentional acts. See, for instance, Husserl, Edmund, *Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre (1908-1914)*, Ullrich Melle (ed.) (The Hague: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988), pp. 317–28). Mensch is drawing from Husserl’s use of the same language in a very different context in the *C-Manuskripte* (Hua Mat VIII, p. 258).
- xiv. Cf. Lee, EHPI, p. 108, where this connection is also made.
- xv. Cf. Hua Mat VIII, p. 319: “What is the willing-toward and the willing in being ‘attracted’ and ‘repelled’? Is it not in the primal sphere an original being-affected by something that is for itself, desiring the hyletic, the prominent?”
- xvi. Cf. Hua Mat VIII, p. 340: “The primal what [*Ur-Was*], the primally pleasant (and unpleasant), the hyletic as primal core present everywhere”.
- xvii. In fact, the relationship between subject and what is “alien to the ego” at this bottommost level is so close that they are not even separate, but are like two sides or two functional aspects of the same thing. Cf. Hua Mat VIII, p. 351–.
- xviii. Cf. Hua XXXIX, p. 17, where Husserl also includes the intentional characteristics of recognizing in his conception of the “primal tendency” aimed at object-constitution.
- xix. Cf. Lee, EHPI, p. 109: “The original instinct of objectivation forms the driving force [*Triebkraft*] of the constant transition of the lower[-level] into the higher[-level] unity of passive synthesis”.
- xx. Cf. Hua Mat VIII, p. 253: “Instinct passes through various modes, it is fulfilled, and now the goal of attainment exists patently and as attained in its patent sense in a process [*Weg*] that has [also] become patent”. Cf. Hua Mat VIII, p. 253: “In the ‘beginning’ [there is an] instinctive striving in the first directions of fulfillment, whereby it discovers what kinds of goals it has and cultivates goal-directed activity”. See also Hua XXXIX, pp. 317–8.
- xxi. At Hua Mat VIII, p. 258, Husserl illustrates this with the example of food: “[T]he ego itself gains experience of the various foods, [and] based on that hunger arises for a [particular] food, a hunger ‘for’ this or that kind of food”.
- xxii. This is what Husserl seems to mean at Hua Mat VIII, p. 253: “The interest-unities newly acquired through constitution are primally instituting by virtue of essential repetition through simultaneous and successive association on the basis of the ongoing validity [*Fortgeltung*] that has not disappeared by ‘receding’, together with its goal-process-sense [*Weg-Ziel-Sinn*]”. Cf. Hua Mat VIII, p. 274.
- xxiii. This isn’t meant to completely explain the emergence of particular instincts, but I think it explains how, once they emerge, for whatever reason, they are able to and necessarily must fit in with the basic character of instinctively desiring life. Nevertheless, Husserl does assert in particular that the desire for food is founded in the desire of curiosity: “[T]he original desire for food, desiring the satisfaction of hunger, is founded in primally experiencing desiring (curiosity)” (Hua Mat VIII, p. 332).
- xxiv. Cf. Hua XXXIX, p. 433: “Kinaesthesia as primal form of act [...] The kinaesthesia passes, although not yet egoically to a presented ‘end’.”
- xxv. Cf. Hua Mat VIII, pp. 272–3: “The original and instinctive striving that streams in the kinaestheses is generally indeterminately [and] immediately directed to such fulfillment (the fact that it passes through this still further, that is, the fact that it can attain only a relatively final satisfaction is not yet conscious here, has not yet become sensible [*empfindlich*] and patent)”. See also Hua Mat VIII, p. 326.

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