

CHAPTER I  
SUBJECTIVITY AND THE UNITY OF  
CONSCIOUSNESS:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

1. The phenomenological notion of subjectivity:  
Unity and heterogeneity

There are at least two different ways of approaching subjectivity in contemporary philosophy. In its narrowest definition, subjectivity concerns the so-called phenomenal quality of human experiences, which presupposes that mental phenomena, along with being defined as such or such (thoughts, memories, feelings, and so on), have an additional quality experienced by their owner, accessible to him or her from the unique first-person perspective—namely, the “what it is like” character, which cannot be shared with anybody else (Nagel 1974). Based on this position, consciousness is understood in essentially qualitative or phenomenal terms. For instance, John Searle and David Chalmers claim that the problem of consciousness is identical with the problem of qualia (Searle 1998; Chalmers 1996). Michael Tye underlines that phenomenal consciousness necessarily involves experiential first-person perspective which is further clarified as the immediate subjective “feel” or experiential quality (Tye 1995). Similarly, Owen Flanagan speaks of self-consciousness in the weak sense of the word: “[...] all subjective experience is self-conscious in the weak sense that there is something it is like for the subject to have that experience. This involves a sense that the experience is the subject’s experience, that it happens to her, occurs in her stream” (Flanagan 1992, 194).

For the sake of discussion, I suggest distinguishing this narrow meaning of subjectivity in terms of phenomenal qualia from the broader meaning which belongs to the continental, especially to the phenomenological, tradition. In this latter sense, subjectivity encompasses, not

just a certain quality, but rather the totality of human mental life as an *open unity of subjective experience*. Experience in this sense refers to everything that is lived by a subject in the world, everything that happens in his or her field of awareness. Such an experience cannot be restricted to the present moment, but also includes in itself the past and possible future—the unity of history and becoming of one’s life. Moreover, essential to the phenomenological idea of subjective experience is its situated, embodied, intentional and intersubjective character—its relation to the interpersonal world of shared meaning. In this regard, it is clear that in the phenomenological tradition subjectivity designates not merely the “what-it-is-like” character of experiences, but rather the multidimensional unity of one’s experience as a whole. And since the phenomenological notion of subjectivity refers to the *totality* of experience and not just to its *quality*, the principle of unity clearly plays a crucial role for the very definition of subjective experience.

There is no doubt that Husserl referred to what he called “transcendental subjectivity” or “pure subjectivity” in this more encompassing sense and not in the mentioned narrow sense of the word. According to Husserl, “subjectivity” and “mind,” while both originating from the Cartesian discovery of the *cogito*, represent its different interpretations and consequently different philosophical traditions, namely the tradition of transcendental philosophy and the Anglo-American philosophical tradition of empiricism.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, it is important to note that the meaning of subjectivity in these two respective traditions essentially depends on whether it is taken as a certain quality subordinated to the larger notion of the mind, or whether it is taken as a notion describing the whole of subjective experience. In the last sense, subjectivity is analogous to the mind and not subordinated to it. The choice to turn to the investigation of transcendental subjectivity and its further development, which Husserl states as the main task of his philosophy (transcendental phenomenology in this sense is itself a science of transcendental subjectivity), presupposes its radical differentiation from the naturalist account of the

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<sup>15</sup> “Descartes “Doubting” first disclosed “transcendental subjectivity,” and his “Ego Cogito” was its first conceptual handling. But the Cartesian transcendental “Mens” became the “Human Mind,” which Locke undertook to explore; and Locke’s exploration turned into a psychology of the internal experience” (Husserl 1997, 187). Moreover, as Husserl underlines, the double sense of “subjectivity” finds its roots in the same distinction, one leading to psychological and the other to transcendental clarification.

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mind. In contrast to any distinction between mental and physical reality (mind and nature) or to the statement of their unity (mind in nature), phenomenology seeks to understand the correlation between subjectivity and the world as essential and constitutional for the both its parts, united in and through the experience.<sup>16</sup> One of the main implications of this view consists in claiming that subjectivity, as the central characteristic of an individual being, cannot be deduced from the naturalist understanding of mind and hence cannot be naturalized.

The notion of subjectivity in this larger sense rests upon the major assumption that the totality of mental life is thematizable only in so far as its subjective and experiential character are made an explicit object of investigation. This implies that the task of phenomenology is to uncover the basic structures of subjective experience as well as the main principles of its organization. The full notion of subjectivity, therefore, is dependent on the way we understand its experiential organization. For example, if it was claimed that subjective experience can be sufficiently clarified through its cognitive structure (such as the cognitive correlation between the subject and object of cognition), then a notion of subjectivity as an essentially cognitive phenomenon would ensue. Similarly, if one would rather insist that subjective experience should be clarified through its embodied and embedded dimensions, which thereby are taken as necessary conditions for anybody to have experience, then the very idea of subjectivity would change and it would be considered as essentially embodied.

In my view, within the current theoretical state of affairs the crucial point in understanding subjectivity is to assume what I shall call the *heterogeneity* of subjective experience. This implies that all mentioned modifications in our understanding of mind and subjectivity and the corresponding changes on the conceptual level cannot be seen as mere transitions from one conceptual framework to another. It is neither merely a shift from cognition to affection, nor from the mind as reduced to the brain towards the mind as enacted and embodied. I would rather

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<sup>16</sup> An analogy to the distinction between “mind” and “subjectivity” would be the one between “nature” and “world,” which one finds in Kant, Husserl and also in contemporary phenomenological metaphysics (Tengelyi 2014): while “nature” represents “einer Einheit des räumlich zeitlichen Seins nach exakten Naturgesetzen” (Husserl 2009, 9-10), the idea of the “world,” on its turn, enclose in itself its necessary correlation with subjectivity, the world is what we experience: “[...] die Existenz einer Welt undenkbar ist ohne Mitexistenz eines Subjekts ihrer möglichen Erfahrung” (Husserl 2003, 167).

say that we need to envisage a transition from a uniform approach to the definition of the human being towards a mainly heterogeneous approach. This means that there is no single quality which can sufficiently define our mind or subjectivity. We have to assume subjectivity as an essentially multidimensional phenomenon which cannot be restricted neither to the neuronal structures inside the head, nor to its behavior or cognitive processes, nor to its embodied and affective being in the world. Accordingly, my claim is that any consistent scientific approach to the mind and subjectivity in both respective traditions has to account for the principal heterogeneity of its object.

Thus, I take the *heterogeneity* or multidimensionality of the constitutive experiential dimensions of subjective experience as one of the two basic principles defining subjectivity in its phenomenological understanding. By heterogeneity I mean the mentioned feature of subjective experience as not bound exclusively to the “I think” or cognitive dimension, but including all experiential diversity, such as affectivity, embodiment, and intersubjectivity.

The other essential principle of the phenomenological approach to subjectivity is the principle of *unity* of subjective experience. This implies that, first, subjective experience is intrinsically characterized by its coherence and preference for consistency and, second, that it is experienced as such a unity from the first-person perspective. As a result, the ownership of experience can be regarded as crucial in order to understand why the mental sphere is not a collection of random experiences and why it manifests itself in a coherent and unified way.

The phenomenological approach to the unity of consciousness traditionally emphasizes the role of the self and of pre-reflective self-awareness as central to the understanding of the unified character of experience (Zahavi 2005, 2011). This implies that the self is not taken as an abstract ego, which unites separate experiential parts in the whole, but rather as an experiential dimension. According to this perspective, the unified character of subjective experience is closely related to the minimal sense of “mineness” and “is constituted by first-personal character” (Zahavi 2011, 329). Moreover, the pre-reflective self-experience and first-personal givenness are further understood as essentially constituted through such dimensions as self-affection, corporeity, and inner temporality. The basic conditions of subjectivity and its self-identity are thus seen as related to the temporal continuity of consciousness and the bodily background feeling of “being alive” (Fuchs 2012c, 889). A differ-

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ent direction in the phenomenological understanding of the unity of subjective experience is closely related to the one described above, but instead of placing most weight on the self, it emphasizes the synthetic function of consciousness. Despite being somewhat less prominent in the contemporary phenomenology, it has a primary role in the tradition of transcendental and phenomenological philosophy to which Immanuel Kant and Edmund Husserl belong.

It is one of the aims of this chapter to highlight the importance of the synthesis-based model of consciousness for the phenomenological clarification of the unity of consciousness. In order to do so I will (1) outline the problem of the unity of consciousness in the tradition of transcendental philosophy, namely in David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Edmund Husserl; and (2) compare the synthesis-based model of consciousness, as stemming from the tradition of transcendental philosophy and phenomenology, with the qualia-based model of consciousness prominent in the non-reductionist versions of the philosophy of mind.

Before entering into a more detailed account on this topic, there is another important point regarding the phenomenological idea of unity of subjective experience that should be made clear. As we have seen, subjectivity in the phenomenological tradition cannot be reduced to phenomenal consciousness or to “what-it-is-likeness” of experiences, but rather refers to the totality of experience. This implies that the investigation of the experiential unity in phenomenology cannot be restricted to the synchronic unity of phenomenal consciousness, but it has to take into account also the temporal continuity of experience. The understanding of the unity of one’s experience as an open totality extended in time makes it clear that the problem of the unity of consciousness should be regarded as closely related to the problem of personal identity. Even though the specific nature of this relation is controversial, the connection of the two topics cannot be left unnoticed.

I take the problem of experiential unity (in both perspectives: unity of consciousness and personal identity) as central to my account of subjectivity within the phenomenological perspective. Hence, the main part of the first chapter is dedicated to the following questions: what does it mean that our experience is unified? And how can we understand connectivity of subjective experience within the perspective opened by the tradition of transcendental and phenomenological philosophy?

## 2. Connectivity of subjective experience and unity of consciousness: Exposition of the problem in Hume, Kant, and Husserl

Most contemporary discussions on the issue of personal identity revolve around more or less the same historical pattern, having the source and the beginning of their account in Locke's first disclosure of what a person's identity should be.<sup>17</sup> However, the history of ideas does not write itself on its own; it is always a reflection of the position of the narrator. And such a position stresses the first part of the formula, the "person" part, the one that presupposes an individuality in the foreground of debates. It is, indeed, Locke who motivated this kind of interest, especially thanks to his distinction between the identity of a man and a person (Locke 1975).

A person's identity, according to Locke, depends on one's reflective and reason-oriented capacity to be conscious of who he or she is. And such an understanding does not refer to a merely formal determination of the subject, but to a whole personality, one with a particular rationality, a past, a life story and its related responsibility.<sup>18</sup> Behind this scenery made of persons and their lives lingers an open question concerning a specific aspect of the "identity" issue, namely the question of unity. Upon first deliberation, one would definitely deny equality between these two questions: "what makes me the same person throughout the constant changes of a lifetime?" and "what unites all of my constantly changing and manifold experiences?". These questions are obviously different, and this difference is one of importance. We consider our personal being (for now, regardless of what exactly it consists in) as what matters and what should be preserved in the course of time. In this regard, the identity of myself, as this concrete individual, is a very personal problem: it is crucial for my life to be able to rely on my self-identity and continuity, even if in a finite perspective only. When no question is asked, this identity is not ruled out, but rather simply taken for granted.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See a wide discussion on the personal identity in the analytic philosophy: S. Shoemaker, D. Parfit, E. Olson, M. Schechtman, J. Whiting and others.

<sup>18</sup> It is quite remarkable to notice that Parfit's view that it is mental connectivity and not numerical identity what really matters in issue of personal identity (Parfit 1984) follows directly from Locke's definition of a person.

<sup>19</sup> At least, in the dominating western kind of culture and society. Though, the universality and seeming self-evidence of this statement should be relativized, especially when taking a multicultural perspective.

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The question of unity, on the face of it, does not tell much about self-identity. It introduces instead a special problem concerning the connections bringing different states of our mind or distinct kinds of experiences together, inasmuch as they might compose a coherent whole, instead of a disconnected chaos of impressions. But does this coherence or connectivity of our experience, which comes here into question, have something to do with our being the same person in the course of time?

There is no univocal solution to this matter. On the one hand, in this perspective, two parts of the identity-problem are kept apart: the issue of pure continuity of experience, regardless of its content, and the issue of personality (in the sense: what it means to be a person). Distinguishing one from the other allows us to avoid the traps of psychologism as well as any commitment to the natural illusion of the hypostatized self-consciousness, from which Kant prevents us in his Third Paralogism.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, by focusing solely on the problem of mind's connectivity, one may seem to ignore Locke's achievement, which consists precisely in separating different kinds of identities (of substances, man and person) and revealing the different entities responsible for their sameness through time. In other words, the problem of personal identity is apparently altogether ignored and replaced by another problem, that is that of subjective unity. In fact, I take this contradiction between personality and pure subjectivity of experience to lie at the very center of the identity-problem, glaring in both main approaches (transcendental and empiricist) and their variations throughout the history of philosophy.

By following this lead, a somewhat different story may be outlined, and this story starts with another illustrious thinker in modern philosophy, David Hume. It would be my claim, which I will try to confirm, to say that Hume was the first to see the core of the identity problem in the connections between different mind states. Indeed his focus was not so much on the issue of why we think of ourselves as one same person (at the end, it all may be just a matter of habit). What was really crucial for Hume was to determine what "gives us so great a propensity to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves

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<sup>20</sup> According to Kant, from such a unity of experience would not necessarily follow any continuous personality. Thus, in *Paralogisms*, he claims that in the empirical subject as such "there may, after all, have occurred such variation as does not permit us to retain (the claim to) its identity, although we may still go on to accord to this subject the homonymous *I*" (Kant 1996, A363). More on this matter in what follows (§ 2.2.b).

possest of an invariable and uninterrupted existence through the whole course of our lives?" (Hume 2003, 181). The main point here is precisely the accent on the unity of successive perceptions, which represented such a great and almost insuperable problem for Hume that he himself had to admit it in the famous Appendix to *A Treatise of Human Nature*. He also admitted in the same place that however promising the theory of personal identity as arising from consciousness may be (a clear reference to Locke), it could not convince him at all when it came to the issue of unity and connections between distinct perceptions. As we shall see, this problem was of great importance within Kant's and Husserl's enquiries concerning the experiencing subjectivity, and eventually led to what might be called the synthesis-based model of consciousness. As for now, in the following section, I shall first outline an approach to the issues of personal identity and the unity of consciousness based on the perspective opened by the question about mind's connectivity.

## 2.1. Hume: The labyrinth of the self

I find myself involved in such a labyrinth [...] (Hume 2003, 450).

All my hopes vanish, when I come to explain the principles that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness (Hume 2003, 452).

Hume was deeply concerned with understanding the self and personal identity. He found himself in the middle of many vivid discussions concerning these issues, which were inspired equally by the metaphysics of substances and its aspiration to account for the soul's immortality, as well as by the relatively new and historically significant scientific will to locate the human being in the objective order of nature. Nevertheless, the problem of personal identity only truly imposed itself as a problem concerning the unity of subjective experience when Hume submitted it to his radical self-skepticism and finally admitted the impossibility of providing any convincing solution, which would either render a philosophical account of the self consistent or eliminate it completely. The core of this philosophical problem should then be detected neither in the pure affirmation of some immutable fact (be it empirical or metaphysical), nor in the simple and well-grounded skepti-

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cism about it (which would be then equal to the dissolution of the problem), but rather in the paradox, that is to say in the theoretical impossibility of either accepting or rejecting.<sup>21</sup> Thus, our story starts with a paradox, with David Hume finding himself in the labyrinth of the self.<sup>22</sup> Let us have a closer look at his steps in this labyrinth.

The introduction of the problem, or the first step, is provided by Hume's skeptical approach to the self, as presented in the part of *Treatise* entitled "Of personal identity." Here, he famously denies the existence of any self or substance because there is no impression or idea derived from the original impression, which could correspond to it. Thus, he claims, "we have no impression of self or substance, as something simple and individual. We have, therefore, no idea of them in that sense" (Hume 2003, 451). What we have or perceive by means of the inner sense are only distinct perceptions, and of these we indeed have impressions and correspondent ideas (which, for Hume, differ only in intensity, not in principle). From this point follows a correlative claim, which is also widely known as the bundle-theory of the self: we are "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement" (Hume 2003, 180). And later on in the Appendix he adds: "I never can perceive this *self* without some one or more perceptions; nor can I ever perceive any thing but the perceptions. It is the composition of these, therefore, which forms the self" (Hume 2003, 451).

As we can see, in both the original section on personal identity in Book 1 and later in the Appendix, Hume advocates two related positions: (1) "there is no self or substance" and (2) "the mind is just a composition of different perceptions." More difficult is for him to explain the principle of connection which binds together such distinct perceptions. This issue is, in my view, the most crucial in regard to his approach to the problem of personal identity. I would indeed argue that Hume's second step, which truly entices him in the self-labyrinth and influences no less than the subsequent tradition of transcendental phi-

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<sup>21</sup> Probably, it is for the similar reasons that the problem of personal identity receives so much attention in the contemporary thought, in which the remarkable rise of self-sceptics corresponds to the no less impressive request for plausible solution to the "hard problem" of consciousness.

<sup>22</sup> "But upon a more strict review of the section concerning *personal identity*, I find myself involved in such a labyrinth, that, I must confess, I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent" (Hume 2003, 450).

losophy, is an attempt to account for the connection between different perceptions, the *connection which, even in the absence of the self-principle, brings distinct pieces of our mind together*. It is precisely concerning this issue that he admits his previous account (in Book 1) to be defective. In order to understand the significance of this step, it is worth quoting his position in its integrity:

If perceptions are distinct existences, they form a whole only by being connected together. But no connections among distinct existences are ever discoverable by human understanding. We only *feel* a connection or determination of the thought, to pass from one object to another. It follows, therefore, that the thought alone finds personal identity, when reflecting on the train of past perceptions that compose a mind, the ideas of them are felt to be connected together, and naturally introduce each other. However extraordinary this conclusion may seem, it need not surprise us. Most philosophers seem inclined to think, that personal identity *arises* from consciousness; and consciousness is nothing but a reflected thought or perception. The present philosophy, therefore, has so far a promising aspect. But all my hopes vanish, when I come to explain the principles that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness. I cannot discover any theory, which gives me satisfaction on this head.

In short there are two principles, which I cannot render consistent; nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz. *that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connection among distinct existences*. Did our perceptions either inhere in something simple and individual, or did the mind perceive some real connection among them, there would be no difficulty in the case. For my part, I must plead the privilege of a sceptic, and confess that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding. I pretend not, however, to pronounce it absolutely insuperable. Others, perhaps, or myself, upon more mature reflections, may discover some hypothesis that will reconcile those contradictions (Hume 2003, 452).

What we see in this text is an extraordinarily condensed train of thought that leads to the acknowledgment of a true and, for the time being, unsolvable problem concerning personal identity. First, he claims that the whole of our mind consists of distinct perceptions, which do not cause each other's existence and which are nonetheless somehow connected while preserving their independence. They do not represent a whole as something simple and individual, but, for sure, there exists some whole of all our perceptions, even though in the vague form of a "bundle." And that means that even if there is no self, who is responsible for binding the perceptions together, they are nonetheless somehow connected. However,—and here comes the problem—our human understanding cannot see any *real connection* between these distinct percep-

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tions, we can only *feel* the connection. It would be misleading to suppose then that there is a kind of a *felt connection* in the mind. What Hume actually means could be phrased as follows: in our perceptions as such we cannot find anything that would imply they are necessarily connected to each other. For example, our perceptions of a sunny day and of smiling faces do not, in any part, produce a perception or feeling of happiness. The same perceptions could as well be connected in our mind to a feeling of sorrow and vainness of all being. The connection is simply not there; it is not *real*. It is, continues Hume, a connection we make in our thought: “the thought alone finds personal identity, when reflecting on the train of past perceptions that compose a mind,” (Ibid) and by this thinking (or habit of imagination, as Hume will write in *An Inquiry Concerning the Human Understanding*) we come to feel the connection between mind-states.<sup>23</sup>

This might be an “extraordinary” conclusion, as he points out, and it is also remarkably close to Locke’s position about consciousness, from the reflective operations of which what we call self-identity arises. Seen from this angle, self-identity is thus in no way real, but only an identity established by thinking about oneself. Therefore, it can only prove that my thoughts about myself in different moments are thoughts about the same thing, which is the self. But such an idea does not answer Hume’s question about the connections that *unite* our mind, or, in his own words, about “the principles that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness.” According to him, this is precisely the question one should be able to answer if one hopes to understand how personal identity is possible, and, for that matter, how Locke’s identical self-consciousness is possible, since *any possible thoughts or memories of oneself should be connected in the first place in order to produce any kind of personality*.

Thus far, we have tackled Hume’s aporia about self-identity, which is at the same time his greatest difficulty and greatest contribution to the problem. The aporia consists of the following dilemma: on the one hand, we have a bundle or a whole of distinct perceptions and among

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<sup>23</sup> The meaning of the felt connection can be elucidated by the following passage from the *Inquiry*: “It appears, then, that this idea of a necessary connection among events arises from a number of similar instances which occur of the constant conjunction of these events [...] This connection, therefore, which we *feel* in the mind, this customary transition of the imagination from one object to its usual attendant, is the sentiment or impression, from which we form the idea of power or necessary connection” (Hume 1854, 85-86).

them there is none which would give us an idea of an identical self, but all the distinct perceptions constitute a certain unity, or we should, at least, perceive them as such a unity. On the other hand, we have no means of explaining how these different perceptions are connected to each other or to the whole, or, in Hume's words, "*the mind never perceives any real connection among distinct existences*" (Hume 2003, 452). One should not forget that Hume was an empiricist and that he considered experience to be the only source of certainty and of all our ideas. Thus, from this perspective, we may reach the conclusion that Hume actually demonstrated that there is nothing in the experience we have of ourselves and nothing in the reality of this experience that can be held responsible for the connections between its distinct parts.

To conclude with Hume's contribution to the problem, I would like to emphasize another consequence of his account of personal identity. As previously made clear, it is the issue of connections between different mind states that determined his main perplexity concerning self-identity. But besides the question of *how* these states or perceptions are connected, there is another crucial point to which one should pay attention, and it is the very introduction of "connection" as the essential characteristic of our mind. According to Hume, the mind is not only about the whole or the composition of multiple perceptions (impressions and ideas); rather, the workings of the mind consist in seeing connections between these things, and representing itself as some sort of interconnected unity.<sup>24</sup> This point is constantly present in Hume's enquiries, as we can see him struggling to firmly determine the principles regulating these connections, principles that he calls associations of ideas. And it was this point, namely the formulation of the main problem on the level of connections and the unity of mind, that the subsequent tradition, beginning with Kant, took on and attempted to solve.

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<sup>24</sup> It is reflected in the very development of the *Inquiry* and the *Treatise*, where, after the basic distinction between impressions and ideas, one finds question concerning associations of ideas, or of those principles of connection between different perceptions which constitute mind's life. Though I hold this thought as determinative for Hume's philosophy, it is not his exclusive possession. One finds the idea of "relation" between ideas also in John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. The difference which matters in this context concerns first of all the source of these "relations" and "connections" between distinct perceptions and ideas. While Locke was of opinion that relations are real and can be perceived by us (Locke 1975, Ch. XXV-XXVI), Hume was convinced of exactly the opposite.

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The decisive step in elaborating this topic comes with Kant's critical turn. In Kant, we find Hume's question elevated to a completely new level and framed as the general problem of *synthesis*. For Hume, the problem of connections refers to both objective connections (be it matters of fact or relations of ideas) and connections between mind-states. In fact, these two moments are not that different in his view, since all connections are, essentially, connections in the experiencing mind (not discoverable *a priori* nor by means of reasoning, but only by experience). This is why the problem of self-identity is so closely related to the problem of causation, especially on the level of argumentation. Strikingly similar arguments are given, in fact, in his analyses of the "necessary connection" between cause and effect (*Inquiry*, VII) and of the "real connection" between distinct mind-states (*Treatise* 1.VI). In this regard, one can argue that the problem of causation and self-identity are just two distinct instances of the more general problem of "connections" in the mind.

Kant also first formulates the question of synthesis in the general context of objective cognition. He asks how the connections that our mind sees in nature (and that cannot be derived from our notions of things analytically) are generally possible and objectively valid. In other words: how are synthetic connections in our cognition possible, if they are not derived from experience? This question seems to follow directly from Hume's conclusion. Kant accomplishes a crucial step following Hume's conviction that synthesis is not only a problem of the objective order of cognition, but rather lies in the activity of our mind, and that mind itself can be understood only as a synthetic unity. This conclusion is only implicit in Hume's work but it clearly presents a problem that Kant took up to explore.

In spite of some vagueness concerning the level of Kant's acquaintance with Hume's work, it has been convincingly shown that he read at least a brief exposition of the *Treatise* in the German version of James Beattie's *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth*.<sup>25</sup> It means that he was at least familiar with the first step of Hume's account of personal identity; however, he apparently knew neither about the relation between the self and passions<sup>26</sup> nor about Hume's dissatisfaction with

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<sup>25</sup> See: (Kitcher 1982).

<sup>26</sup> We may name this relation between the self and passions a *third step*, which came before Hume's dissatisfaction with his account of personal identity. It represents a sort of alternative to this problem, not touched by his own critique. According to Hume, there is distinction between "personal identity, as it re-

the hard question of connections between distinct perceptions, which had brought him such despair. But, at the same time, we have seen that the problem of personal identity, as it was formulated by Hume, represents only a particular case of the more general problem of connections in the mind, which is central to both the *Treatise* and the *Inquiry*, and which is definitively central for Kant in his exploration of the problem of *synthesis*. In her article, *Kant on Self-Identity*, Patricia Kitcher argues that Kant should have seen the problem of the real connection in Hume not only in regard to objective synthesis and causality, but also to its subjective side and the question of self-identity. According to this point, she proposes to understand the *Subjective Deduction* as a reply to Hume's skeptical account of the self, with the result that its "real argumentative goal" would be in that case "to justify the imputing of existential connections<sup>27</sup> among mental states" (Kitcher 1982, 50).

## 2.2. Kant: Synthetic unity of consciousness

Only because I can combine a manifold of given presentations *in one consciousness*, is it possible for me to present the *identity itself of the consciousness in these presentations* (Kant 1996, B133).

While introducing the central question of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, concerning the possibility of synthetic judgments *a priori*, Kant mentions Hume as the one who "came closer to this problem than any other philosopher" (Kant 1996, B19). As Graciela De Pierris and Michael Friedman claim in their article, *Kant and Hume on Causality*, Kant's approach to Hume's problem concerning the relation between cause and effect is essentially marked by his understanding of it in terms of *synthesis* (De

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gards our thought or imagination, and as it regards our passions or the concern we take in ourselves" (Hume 2003, 181). Though this particular moment concerning Hume's account of self-identity does not play a crucial role in our present story of personal identity, as based on the quest for unity of consciousness, it will nevertheless be of importance than it comes to the limits of the formal theory of subjective unity.

<sup>27</sup> By existential connection, Kitcher means Hume's real connection, interpreting it in terms of existential dependence between distinct mental states, so that one cannot exist without the other (Kitcher 1982, 46). Kirchner's claim in this article is that "if Kant can defend the idea of existential connection among mental states, he will have countered Hume's skepticism about personal identity".

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Pierris and Friedman 2013). We could bring this argument a step further and say that, in the first *Critique*, Kant elevates the problem of the connections between distinct perceptions (that is, the relation that cannot be explicated analytically) to the level of the universal problem of synthesis *a priori*. Concerning our specific problem of subjective connection, it would mean that we are no longer searching for any “given” real connection in experience (which Hume discovered to be absent), but rather, we are asking (along with Kant): what kind of synthetic activity is responsible for connecting the manifold in our mind?<sup>28</sup>

Kant starts where Hume sees an insuperable problem, namely: if identity consists of having the same consciousness of the self in different moments of experience, if, so to speak, it “*arises* from consciousness” (Hume 2003, 452), then one should try to understand how it is possible that at different moments in time one has precisely the same consciousness and not a plurality of them. Accordingly, even if we were to accept that there is a plurality of consciousness at different moments of time, then how exactly is this plurality related to the same self or subject? Hume would have argued that there is no way to explain it or find any self at all. However, he also showed that if we do not want to give up on this matter, then we would have to explain, first, how one consciousness of something is connected with another and, second, how they are all connected together. These questions remain valid, even if one is not willing to recognize any self-principle in experience.

The crucial step Kant undertook to solve the paradox of connectivity was to introduce a distinction between *sensibility*, as pure receptivity (only the form of which would be given *a priori*), and *spontaneity*, as an active power of understanding, responsible in the first place for the combination of the manifold of intuition and the whole experience in general: “[...] among all presentations, *combination* is the only one that cannot be given through objects, but—being an act of the subject’s self-activity—can be performed only by the subject himself” (Kant 1996, B 130). Thus, combination, which Kant also calls *synthesis*, is defined as an act of understanding prior to any experience, and as what allows the presentation of the manifold in the first place. However, Kant does not content himself with the simple indication that the combination of experiences is due to the *a priori* spontaneity of understanding. His crucial point consists in

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<sup>28</sup> The change of terms from “connection” to “synthesis” may also indicate Kant’s refusal to understand principles of connections as depending ultimately on the empirical laws of associations.

revealing that such a combination is possible only because of what he calls the “synthetic unity of apperception” or “the transcendental unity of self-consciousness” (B132), or, simply, thanks to an identical subject of experience to whom all multiple presentations belong. In clearer terms: for Kant, as for Hume, there is, strictly speaking, nothing in the experience we have that would allow us to infer any necessary connection between its distinct parts; the only connection one is allowed to state is that all presentations and intuitions I have are *mine*. The self is thus elevated (or cut down) from a bundle of perceptions to a mere principle of identity and—most importantly—of unity. Nevertheless, between the statement, “all experiences are *mine*,” and the principle of unity of distinct experiences there is, to say the least, a conceptual gap, which we should now attempt to clarify.

If one were to define what exactly “unity of consciousness” means for Kant, one would have to start with an important distinction between (1) the original unity of apperception, i.e. unity as it concerns the pure form of understanding; (2) unity as it concerns the synthesis of the manifold of subjective experience (understanding combined with intuition); and, (3) unity as it concerns the identity of a person.<sup>29</sup> This distinction does not mean that there are different kinds of unity, but rather that there are different implications of the first principle of the synthetic unity of consciousness on separate levels of inquiry (respectively: on the level of pure thought; on the level of thought as combined with the manifold of intuition, that is of experience as possible *a priori*; and on the level of psychological inquiry about a subject’s persistence over time). The first two moments are discussed in the chapter *On the Deduction of the Pure Concepts of Understanding*. The third moment is dealt with in the *Paralogisms of Pure Reason*. We shall then proceed further according to this division.

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<sup>29</sup> I must underline that this distinction does not concern the objective unity, i.e. the level of application of the synthetic unity of apperception to the cognition of an object.

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### a) *The original unity of apperception and the synthesis of the manifold in the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories*

The first form of unity is the original unity of apperception<sup>30</sup> or the transcendental unity of self-consciousness, which stands for two basic principles: analytic and synthetic unity. The first is the pure and simple *analytic* principle of identity, according to which all kinds of experiences share the same condition—being *mine*. It is to this kind of unity that the judgment *I think* “capable of accompanying all my presentations” (B132) corresponds:

[the proposition *I think*] says no more than that all *my* presentations in some given intuition must be subject to the condition under which alone I can ascribe them—as *my* presentations—to the identical self, and hence under which alone I can collate them, as combined synthetically in one apperception, through the universal expression *I think* (B138).

As Kant clearly stresses in the second Paralogism, the proposition *I think* itself is not an experience, but merely a form of apperception (A354). Wilfred Sellars writes in this regard that the unity of apperception merely enables what can be called the *analytic* unity, namely: “The I which thinks *a* is identical with the I which thinks *b*” (Sellars 1970, 7). Kant himself declares the same thing: “it is true that this principle of the necessary unity of apperception is itself merely an identical and hence an analytic proposition” (Kant 1996, B135). Thus, although this first principle of unity is synthetic, in itself it provides *only* an analytic kind of subjective identity, and in no way represents an actual self-experience. Through this simple presentation nothing manifold is given (B135) and no experience is lived by the *I* or the “transcendental subject of thoughts” (B404). This also presupposes an atemporal character of this subject, since time is understood as a form of intuition and this latter as essentially an experiential feature.

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<sup>30</sup> In Kant, the term “apperception” (*lat.* Ad (to, toward)-percipere (perceive)) refers to self-conscious perception, but with a strong emphasis on the consciousness of oneself or self-consciousness (B68) and with less emphasis on perception. Thus, the original synthetic unity of apperception is the same as the transcendental unity of self-consciousness. Husserl’s use of the term “apperception” underlies the conscious character of intentional acts. For example, in *Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis* he explains it as follows: “Apperceptions are intentional lived experiences that are conscious of something as perceived [...] Defined in this general way, apperception is a concept that encompasses every self-giving, thus every intuitive consciousness” (Husserl 2001a, 624-625).

Nevertheless, by stressing the analytic nature of the judgment *I think*, we should not forget that Kant insisted that this *analytic* unity (or identity of consciousness in different presentations) is strictly dependent on the *synthetic* unity of apperception. As he writes in § 16, the subjective unity consists not in a mere accompanying of each presentation with consciousness, but rather in “my *adding* one presentation to another and being conscious of their synthesis. Hence only because I can combine a manifold of given presentations *in one consciousness*, is it possible for me to present the *identity itself of the consciousness in these presentations*” (B133). And a little bit later: “The thought that these presentations given in intuition belong one and all to me is, accordingly, tantamount to the thought that I unite them, or at least can unite them, in one self-consciousness” (B134). Thus, we must distinguish this transcendental subject, who actively unifies all presentations, from the analytic identity (the one of the *I think* accompanying all my presentations) which it enables. I assume that it is precisely this idea of synthetic activity that allows us to see Kant’s conception of transcendental subject as an example of an egological theory of consciousness. Nevertheless, it is also theoretically possible to see Kant’s idea of transcendental apperception just as “the requirement that any cognition must be represented in a unity,” without insisting on the existence of some independent self (Ameriks 1982, 141).

Then, a clear distinction should be taken into account between this primordial unity of apperception (in its synthetic and analytic meanings) and the synthesis of the manifold in thought and intuition (i.e. in the experience as possible *a priori*), which this unity enables. The challenge faced by Kant in this context can be summarized as follows: granted that the presentation of the synthetic original unity of apperception is only a thought and not an intuition, and that our experience is always subjected to the limiting conditions of intuition and is as such a combination of both (thought and intuition), then how exactly can one proceed from the original unity of apperception and the identity of the *I think* to the unity regarding the experience and the identity of the self as a subject of this experience? How can one deduce this kind of unity and identity, given that experience itself does not provide any? The solution Kant proposes lies in the combination of the unifying principle provided by the understanding with the form of time as a universal form of the inner sense:

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[The pure thought or intelligence] is conscious solely of its power of combination. But as regards the manifold that it is to combine, this intelligence is subjected to a limiting condition (which it calls inner sense). As subjected to this condition, it can make that combination intuitable only in terms of time relations, which lie wholly outside the concepts of understanding, properly so called (Kant 1996, B159).

When it comes to the experience, the pure principle of identity has to be subjected to time relations; the self-consciousness must descend from a pure thought to the cognition, and, moreover, it must descend to the intuition of oneself, as it appears to itself, and not as it is in itself (B156). It is through experience that the first distinction of the self from itself is given. This distinction is rooted in the fact that in the inner sense “we are inwardly affected *by ourselves*” (B156) and, therefore, can intuit ourselves and possess an actual self-experience and not merely a tautological thought. In the experience I am “conscious of myself as I appear to myself” (B157), I am therefore conscious of this difference of the self from itself, which is presented clearly as a difference between my different states in time and as a difference between the I “who thinks” and the I “that intuits itself” (B155). On the theoretical level, this difference creates a problem of self-identity. But, for Kant, this problem, *even if engendered on the level of self-experience, cannot be solved on this level*. In other words, the identity of the self in the manifold of experience remains dependent on the original synthetic unity of apperception. It implies as well that this identity of the self in time is not due to the temporality of the inner sense. Time is only an experiential condition, to which the unified activity of the transcendental ego is applied: “By no means does the understanding already find in inner sense such a combination of the manifold; rather, the understanding produces it, inasmuch as the understanding affects that sense” (B155).

What is important to underline here is the idea that self-identity *over* time or *in* time remains, strictly speaking, an identity of the thought of oneself, a thought accompanying temporally extended experiences. The sameness of a subject in time, as well as the sameness of a subject “who thinks” and “who intuits,” is still a *formal* sameness of analytic kind and does not enable any necessary connection on the level of the content of the subjective experience.

Thus far, one may conclude that for Kant identity is always a function of original unity: the identity of the *I think* is functionally dependent on the synthetic unity of apperception; and the identity of the consciousness of the self at different times results from the combining of

the original synthetic unity with the pure form of inner sense. The question to account for now is: Would personal identity also follow from the unifying activity of the transcendental subject?

*b) Personal identity in the Paralogisms of Pure Reason*

When it comes to the question of personal identity, in the sense of the numerical identity of oneself as the same subject in time, Kant acts very cautiously. He makes sure to prevent his reader from giving in to the natural illusion of taking the purely *subjective unity* of the *I* (of that which can only be a subject) as an intuition of an object. In other words, he sets a clear limit to our use of the principle of unity, from which the numerical identity of a person and a soul's persistence over time does not follow. His main point being the following:

[...] the identity of the consciousness of myself in different times is only a formal condition of my thoughts and their coherence, but does not prove at all the numerical identity of myself as subject. In this subject—regardless of the logical identity of the *I*—there may, after all, have occurred such variation as does not permit us to retain [the claim to] its identity, although we may still go on to accord to this subject the homonymous *I* (A363).

As previously explained, the problem of self-identity initially arises from the distinction between the *I* as a pure (logical) subject of apperception and the *I* as an object of inner sense—the distinction first appearing in the experience, in which the pure principle of the synthetic unity of apperception is subjected to the conditions of the intuition. Thus, contemplating myself in the form of inner sense, I always find myself *in* different times or as an object in time (Kant also calls this object of inner sense a soul [A342]). In each moment of time there is a different state of this *I*-object and thus its identity could be naturally regarded as a numerical identity of the self *in* the time-change. That is precisely the conclusion that Kant wants to question, as it follows from *mistaking two ways of representing itself for two ways of objective being*. It means that the distinction between the *I* as a logical subject of thought and the *I* as an object of inner perception is in no way a real or an objective one, but merely a twofold manner of self-representation (Kant 1798/2007,7:134). Thus, this difference is valid only subjectively—that is, for the subject of the experience. Consistently, he states in the

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third Paralogism that “in my own consciousness, identity of the person is unfailingly to be met with” (Kant 1996, A362), and subsequently comes up with an argument “from a standpoint of a stranger,” which, as I see it, does not presume an actual reference to intersubjectivity. Differently, Kant argues that a numerical identity of myself in time is given *only* from “inside” my own perspective, since only I can have myself as an object and as a subject simultaneously.

As soon as the application of the principle of self-identity is extended to the object of inner sense as such, we inevitably fall prey to the misuse of the transcendental concept of subjective unity or, as Kant calls it, the natural illusion of the hypostatized self-consciousness.<sup>31</sup> Such a hypostasizing of one’s own self-representation is what gives rise to an idea of the soul as an objective entity capable of persistence in time. However, this idea, according to Kant’s argument, directly follows from the attempt to find personal identity in the wrong place—in the inner sense and, therefore, in time—while it can only be met on the side of purely formal subjective unity. An identical self, as Ameriks points out, can be regarded as a mere “reference to the unity of apperception” (Ameriks 1982, 142). The main point of Kant’s critique of the misuse of the transcendental concept of apperception in the third Paralogism consists, then, in separating the claim of self-identity as a mere principle of the unity of consciousness from the claim that there is a personal identity over time based on this unity. Probably one of the clearest explications of this idea can be found in Ameriks’s interpretation:

Kant’s premise is not that my consciousness really *is* in these various times but only that there are various times ‘in my consciousnesses.’ My consciousness is ‘identical’ then not in any numerical-persistent sense, but only in the sense of being a unified awareness directed to a plurality of times (Ameriks 1982, 134).

Therefore, according to Kant’s argument, an attempt to qualify personality as a subject in time would be just an unnecessary duplication of the self, which, moreover, can lead to ambiguous consequences, such as, an idea of the soul’s immortality or, simply, an affirmation of personality as a distinct kind of ontological entity. In the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic*

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<sup>31</sup> “Nothing is more natural and tempting than the illusion of regarding the unity in the synthesis of thoughts as a perceived unity in the subject of these thoughts” (A402).

*Point of View*, Kant goes back to this argument and stresses an apparent theoretical ambiguity lying at the center of the identity problem:

To ask, given the various inner changes within a man's mind (of his memory or of principles adopted by him), when a person is conscious of these changes, whether he can still say that he remains *the very same* (according to his soul), is an absurd question. For it is only because he represents himself as one and the same *subject* in the different states that he can be conscious of these changes. The human "I" is indeed twofold according to form (manner of representation), but not according to matter (content) (Kant 1798/2007, 7:134).

Though Kant clearly opposes the idea of personal identity, which leads to the affirmation of a soul's persistence over time, he does not reject that there is a personal identity based on the unity of consciousness. For example, in the *Anthropology*, he claims that one is a person precisely because of the unity of consciousness, which allows him to stay the same through all change: "Because of this [the I] he is a *person*, and by virtue of the unity of consciousness through all changes that happen to him, one and the same person" (Ibid, 7:127). Now, having in mind Kant's reasoning for being against personal identity in the third Paralogism, should we regard this statement as a contradiction or rather as an elaboration of the same thesis? I would be inclined to accept the second option, that Kant does not reject the idea of personal identity altogether, but rather rejects its variation as advocated by what he calls rational psychology (in our days, one would classify it in the frame of the "psychological approach" to personal identity<sup>32</sup>). This means that he, first of all, rejects the very idea of personal identity as a numerical identity of a persistent subject *in* time, and, secondly, the corresponding hypostasizing of such a subject and respectively of a soul as an independent ontological entity, and finally, also the very possibility of accounting for it *a priori*. Conversely, he does assume the concept of personality as what remains the same through the time-changes, but as valid only subjectively and, mainly, for practical uses (Kant 1996, A366), and not for "our self-cognition through pure reason" (Ibid).

In his lectures on the First Critique, Theodor Adorno emphasizes that the unity of personal consciousness can only mean identity in the

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<sup>32</sup> See for example an article of Eric Olson on personal identity in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, in which he distinguishes between the psychological and somatic approaches as representing two main ways of accounting for personal identity in the contemporary philosophy (Olson 2010).

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most abstract sense, repeating Kant's own words that the singularity of the *I* of the subjective identity cannot explain the identity of the person. Adorno claims this to be the liberation from the mythology of the soul's identity and a reduction of such an identity to something purely apersonal, so that "when we think of ourselves as having a permanent identity, we mean something so formal that, actually, we do not mean anything at all" (Adorno 2001, 199).

Nevertheless, such liberation may eventually face the paradox of individuality, namely: if the unity of consciousness and one's own identity can be reduced to something so formal, how can we account for the individuality of consciousness at all? How exactly can one subject be distinguished from another? If the unity of consciousness as such has nothing to do with personality, how can we account for the individuality of a concrete subject of experience? Obviously, according to Kant, it can be done only on the level of empirical observation and cannot lead to a science of subjectivity. But, at the same time, as Adorno points out, we are able to come up with the problem of our own subjectivity, concerning the connections in our mind, and eventually the original unity *a priori*, only insofar as we experience ourselves as individual persons (Adorno 1995, 139). Thus, Adorno points to a radical problem which stands behind Kant's attempt to account for the original unity of consciousness and consequently for personal identity, without falling into the paralogue of rational psychology:

I would add only that the problem of which subject is under discussion is in no way resolved, since the critique of reason has made it its task to ground empirical facts and not to presuppose them. This means that the empirical self, the individual person that everyone in this room is, cannot be taken for granted. On the other hand, the assumption of a specific individual consciousness which is able to unify disparate perceptions is absolutely indispensable for the Kantian critique. We thus find ourselves confronted by a contradiction [...] that, on the one hand, the concept of subjectivity cannot be conceived of without the personal subject from which it has been derived; but that, on the other hand, the personal subject has first to be constituted and so cannot be presupposed in advance. Kant, however, could not bring himself to stop worrying away at this contradiction [...] (Adorno 2001, 90).

This is clearly a perfect example of what I earlier referred to as the contradiction between personality and the pure subjectivity of experience, which lies at the heart of the identity-problem. This contradiction first appears in Locke's formulation of the problem of personal identity, when he presents

a human personality as dependent on the sameness of the self-consciousness one has of his present and past experiences. The subsequent tradition, which I prefer to call transcendental philosophy, took up the task of exploring and criticizing this contradiction, which led to an affirmation of the unity of consciousness as its central problem. As previously discussed, Hume discovered that the principle of connections between distinct perceptions (or simply, the principle of unity) should underpin the principle of identity. Kant then developed this idea of Hume and postulated that there should be an original and *a priori* principle of unity, making the whole of experience possible and enabling the self-identity of the subject through manifold experiences. At the same time, Kant restricted the principle of unity as responsible only for a certain kind of subjective identity (that of the self-consciousness), from which the numerical identity of a person does not ensue (as Locke had hoped it should).

In spite of the clear opposition against the psychological account of subjectivity, which claims that identical self-consciousness enables an identical personality (including its psychological characteristics) through time change, Kant could not avoid the challenge of individual consciousness. We have seen that the main issue in Kant's approach to subjective unity concerns a certain conflict between experiential and pure (*a priori*) levels of inquiry: on the one hand, the original principle of apperception, which grants unity to the experience, allows the statement of *only* a formal and analytic kind of identity (the sameness of the subject of thoughts). Even though transcendental self-consciousness is considered the ultimate source of any synthetic activity enabling the manifold of experience to be unified in one consciousness, the subject as such stays, so to speak, beyond or above its own experience, since through the "*I think*" no experience is lived. On the other hand, this transcendental subject comes to be inevitably involved in the experience and thereby subjected to the conditions which the inner sense, in the form of time, imposes on it. It becomes, therefore, a subject of self-experience, in which it can only cognize itself as it appears (and not as it is). A new problem of subjective identity appears, indeed, concerning the subjective experience in its temporal extension. This problem concerns a constitutive difference affecting the subject of this experience, namely the difference between the subject as such and the way it appears to itself. Kant prefers not to solve this issue on the experiential level. Although I can only notice it in passing, this problem was of great importance for the subsequent tradition of German Ideal-

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ism and, notably, for Hegel, who took the experiential dimension, in its inner dialectic, to be constitutive for subjectivity as such. But what is even more relevant to this exploration of unity as a central characteristic of subjectivity is the development of this problem in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl.

### 2.3. Edmund Husserl: Formal unity of time-consciousness

One of the main challenges Husserl encountered in his philosophy was precisely the question of how to conceive of subjectivity as not being separate from its experience, but as, essentially, being constituted in and through its inner temporality. Thus, we could say that Husserl undertook the task of accounting for subjective unity at exactly the level where Kant left it unresolved—that is, at the level of manifold temporal experiences.

This task in the context of the present inquiry represents an alternative way of solving Hume's problem of connections between distinct mind states—namely an alternative to Kant's approach, which assumes that the principle of connection cannot be found in the experience itself, but rather on the side of the synthetic activity of the transcendental self-consciousness. We have seen that this idea eventually led to a separation between abstract and pure subject of thoughts and the experiencing subjectivity, which was left outside any possible transcendental explication. As for Husserl's phenomenological project, his work can be seen as an attempt to account for subjectivity in the framework of an essentially experiential field, while, at the same time, overcoming psychologism which inevitably endangers any experience-oriented inquiry into subjective phenomena. Thus, seen from the perspective of the preceding tradition of transcendental philosophy, Husserl's phenomenology tends to solve the Kantian dilemma<sup>33</sup> (between the unifying subject of thoughts and of experience) without falling for psychological explications.

Since I take the problem of connections formulated by Hume to be crucial for the understanding of subjective unity, I will continue using it

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<sup>33</sup> Pointing out this distinction nevertheless cannot conceal the fact that Husserl himself eventually came to the conception of a unifying ego-pole, which is indeed highly comparable with Kant's theory of transcendental unity of apperception. Relationship between ideas of temporal unity of consciousness and of unity as based on the ego-pole inside Husserl's project are quite ambiguous. In the later texts, both seem to coexist not excluding one another.

as a guiding thread to lead us through the labyrinths of Husserl's contribution to the topic. Indeed, I will try to present what could otherwise be the subject of a long and possibly contradictory story (evolving from Husserl's early view of the egoless conscious unity through absolute time-consciousness to the later remarks on the I-pole, personality, and monadological subjectivity<sup>34</sup>), only as far as it may suggest a solution to the initial question of this part of the chapter, namely: what is the nature of the connections which enable distinct experiences to compose the whole we call "subjectivity"? Thus, we shall proceed with Husserl's most significant—and for the time also quite original—contribution to the problem, namely his idea that the form of time can be seen as a principle of subjective connection.

*a) Early Husserl: Form of time as a real (reell) connection*

A first attempt to account for subjective unity can be found in Husserl's early work, *Logical Investigations*. In the 5<sup>th</sup> investigation, *On intentional Experiences and their "Contents,"* he applies the results of the part-whole analysis in order to comprehend the unity of consciousness and to formulate how different experiences are unified in the frame of one temporal stream.

According to Husserl's argument in this text, phenomenological consciousness can be identified as an interconnected unity of all experiences (*Erlebnisse*) (Husserl 1970b, 541). It is important to note that, at this stage of his thought, Husserl held the opinion that there is no need for a transcendent ego-principle which would be responsible for the unified character of conscious experience: "The phenomenologically reduced ego is therefore nothing peculiar, floating above many experiences: it is simply identical with their own interconnected unity" (Ibid, 541). The "experiencing consciousness" is therefore defined not as an independent subject, but as a totality of experiences, whose unity is viewed as a relationship in which each part of the whole (single experience) stands for the whole itself. Any reference to the unity of consciousness would then imply that different experiences or even kinds of

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<sup>34</sup> An influential account of the development of the problem of the *I* in Husserl's phenomenology can be found in Eduard Marbach's *Das Problem des Ich in der Phänomenologie Husserls* (Marbach 1974) and in his contribution to the seminal book *An introduction to Husserlian phenomenology* coedited together with Rudolf Bernet and Iso Kern (Bernet et al. 1993).

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experiences coexist as parts within one totality. The main task, then, is to understand the nature of the bond bringing these different elements together. In concrete terms, the question is: how are our perceptions, bodily sensations, emotional feelings, thoughts, and memories connected to compose a coherent unity of experience? Husserl's answer can be found in § 6 of the aforementioned 5<sup>th</sup> investigation:

When I say here “continuously cohering with it in unity” I mean the unity of the concrete [phenomenological] whole whose parts are either [dependent] *moments*, mutually founding and requiring each other in their co-existence, or [independent] *pieces* that, through their own nature in their co-existence, found forms of unity, real forms which actually belong to the content of the whole as internally indwelling moments. These unities of co-existence pass continuously from moment to moment into one another, constituting a unity of change [of the stream of consciousness], which, for its part, demands the continuous persistence or, at least, continuous change of a moment essential for the unity of the whole and, thus, inseparable from it as a whole. This role is played by subjective time-consciousness [...].<sup>35</sup>

In order to understand this fragment, we have to return to § 17 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> investigation, where Husserl distinguishes between two basic types of the concept “part,” namely “moments” and “pieces.” He defines moments (*Momente*), or abstract parts, as inseparable from one another and relatively non-independent on the whole: “These parts permeate one another in such a way that one cannot be given unless the others are also present” (Sokolowski 1968, 538). Pieces (*Stücke*), however, do not require each other for their co-existence and hence are independent from the whole they comprise (Husserl 1970b, 467). Different and independent pieces can have a common identical moment, on the basis of which they compose a certain unity, while this moment would be as such abstract and dependent on the whole, like a form requiring its content.

What happens then when Husserl applies this distinction to consciousness? He suggests that the unity of the whole conscious experience depends on the form of time, which defines distinct parts of the experiential whole. Thus, distinct pieces (different experiences) are taken to share a common formal element, which allows them to be unified on the basis of this similarity. However, the resulting “forms of

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<sup>35</sup> I quote this fragment based on Donn Welton's translation, given in his book “The Other Husserl” (Welton 2000, 212). In my view, it grasps Husserl's thought more clearly than the published translation of the *Logical Investigations* provided by J. N. Findlay (Husserl 1970b, 545).

unity,” which these independent pieces found through their co-existence, are themselves *moments* of the conscious stream, and hence dependent parts constituting the totality of experience in time.

Thus Husserl opts for a kind of unity that, although it consists of independent pieces (different experiences), also requires some formal element inherent to each experience establishing its belonging to the whole. He claims that this element is the form of subjective time-consciousness, through which the whole is constituted as a coherent unity of experience, that is, as a stream of consciousness,<sup>36</sup> but which, as such, is non-existent outside this stream. Therefore, the here outlined concept of subjective unity is founded on the common essence or formal identity of each experience and of consciousness itself, which is performed by subjective time-consciousness. As such, this unity does not require any transcendent ego-principle, but rests upon the fundamental insight that time is a general form of subjective experience. As a non-reducible moment of experience, temporality defines *the way* in which all the elements compose a whole, so that this whole becomes a stream, conscious and temporal in each phase and overall.

Although understanding the form of time as a principle of subjective connection and unity of consciousness is indeed an elegant solution to our problem, it poses some theoretical difficulties. An important question to account for is the following: provided that the form of time is the principle of connection between distinct experiences, then what kind of connection is it? How does it bring distinct experiences to temporal unity? In other words, should we understand time as a real moment of experiences—that is as something in each experience that connects it to all the others?

First of all, it should be remarked that, in the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl operates with a notion of consciousness itself as a “*reell-phänomenologische Einheit*,” which also presupposes that the whole stream of consciousness and its individual parts (be they abstract moments or independent pieces) are already understood as real contents and real parts (*reell*) of the whole. The idea of the “*reelle Inhalt*” (real content) refers to the *experiential* side of intentional acts, thus being distinguished from the *intentional content*. Parts and moments of the unified stream of consciousness are experienced, lived through (*erlebt*),

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<sup>36</sup> “Each phase of the stream of consciousness [...] possesses a form overreaching all its contents, which remains the same form continuously, though its content steadily alters” (Husserl 1970b, 545).

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and thus they belong to the real contents of consciousness, while intentional objects of these experiences are not experienced (*erlebt*) in the same sense, but are rather intended. Simply put, we do not live through tables, unicorns and symphonies, but we do live through perceptions, phantasies and sensations of those things, in which they are seen, imagined or heard.<sup>37</sup> While tables or unicorns can be wooden or pink, our perceptions and phantasies cannot have either horns nor rustic design. Objects appear to us, but appearances themselves do not appear, they are experienced: “Die Erscheinungen selbst erscheinen nicht, sie werden erlebt” (Husserl 1984, 362).

This clarification allows us to claim that the form of time at this stage of Husserl’s thinking was indeed considered as a real (*reell*) moment of experiential unity, as an abstract, i. e. non-independent, part of experiences. This point may also be confirmed through the reference to the so-called schematic interpretation, which, according to Rudolf Bernet and John Brough, dominated Husserl’s early theory of time-consciousness (Bernet 1985; Brough 1972). Schematic interpretation is understood as the schema “apprehensions – contents of apprehension” endorsed by Husserl until approximately 1907, according to (Brough 1972), and which, with regard to the issue of temporality, was based on understanding time-apprehensions as real (*reelle*) parts of conscious experiences animating temporally neutral sensations.

Hence, the initial approach to understanding temporal connection and unity of consciousness in Husserl’s work rests upon the idea that the form of time belongs to the real part of experiences (*Erlebnisse*). Nevertheless, how the form of time belongs to the real component of experience is admittedly different from how the ever-changing contents of sensation do (i.e. as a formal moment). The problematic character of time’s “real containing” became apparent quite soon and, as Brough argued, eventually led Husserl to abandon the schematic interpretation and reconsider the very idea of temporal consciousness (Brough 1972, 331). The main issue was the impossibility of comprehending how consciousness of succession could be constituted through a series of temporal apprehensions. If temporal apprehensions are understood as a real

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<sup>37</sup> “[...] truly *immanent contents*, which belong to the real make-up (*reellen Bestände*) of the intentional experiences, are *not intentional*: they constitute the act, provide necessary *points d’appui* which render possible an intention, but are not themselves intended, not the objects presented in the act. I do not see color-sensations but colored things, I do not hear tone-sensations but the singer’s song etc.” (Husserl 1970b, 559).

part of each experience (making the originally neutral content of sensations be experienced as “now”), then, following this logic, they should either disappear with all the rest of the content when the temporal phase flows away, or stay somehow present in the new now-phase. The last option leads to a clear contradiction, namely, to the real containing, in the actual phase of the experience, of both past and present moments. The first option (i.e. the disappearance of the past content in the actual phase) puts the very idea of temporal connection into danger, as it fails to explain the experience of temporal continuity between past and present moments.

Much later, in *Erste Philosophie* (1923/24), Husserl underlined precisely the point that is here at stake: “jeder *Teil* eines Erlebnisses verschwindet mit ihm selbst, und kein neues Erlebnis kann einen *Teil* mit dem vorigen reell identisch haben” (Husserl 1956, 105). If that is so, then the focus on time’s real containing in Husserl’s early approach to time-consciousness was indeed misleading. Furthermore, it is clearer now why he eventually conceived of the temporal unity of consciousness as not pertaining to the real content of experience. As Brough points out: “The implication of such real containing in truth, however, is that consciousness of elapsed objective phases—in effect, consciousness of succession—would be impossible” (Brough 1972, 311). However, the opposite of such real containing would imply that we cannot prove the existence of any real connection in experience and hence should opt either for some kind of transcendent unifying principle (be it the transcendental ego or something else) or temporal connection should be conceived of on another level. In Husserl’s case, both options were eventually developed and seemed not to contradict one another.<sup>38</sup>

As for the constitution of temporal succession and unity of consciousness, Husserl finally endorsed the idea that temporal connection and time-consciousness cannot be seen as a real part of experience. This refers to the famous distinction of the level of constitution between the enduring content of consciousness (immanent temporal unities or distinct enduring experiences, such as perceptions) and the level of an absolute, time-constituting stream of consciousness (Husserl 1991).

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<sup>38</sup> As Eduard Marcbach argued, reference to the ego-pole in Husserl’s phenomenology finds its motivation in the intersubjective problematic, which allowed him to consider the issue of the unity of consciousness not merely in regard to “a continuously *temporal* interconnection of immanent experiences” (Bernet et al. 1993, 206) but to question of how one stream of consciousness can be delimited from another.

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I will not go into the various possible interpretations of this decisive step in Husserl's thinking, but rather simply focus on the definition of this distinction regarding the whole idea of subjective unity and the issue of connectivity.

### b) *Inner time-consciousness: Temporal connection as a universal structure of consciousness*

The proper place of consciousness is the “in-between” of the present and the past; it apprehends itself as being what it has already ceased to be (Bernet 1993, 4).

Nothing less than the definition of consciousness is at stake here. Already in the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl distances himself from Brentano's conception of inner consciousness as a pre-reflective inner representation accompanying mental experiences (Brentano 1973). Such a view entails a certain duplication of representational consciousness (as an inner representation of intentional representation) and, despite the attempts to avoid the problem of infinite regress, still relies on subject-object relations between two sorts of acts (intentional experience of an object and the inner consciousness of this experience). At the beginning of his phenomenological enquiry, Husserl endorses neither Kant's idea of the transcendental unity of apperception accompanying experience, nor Brentano's psychological definition of consciousness as the unity of intentional representations accompanied by an internal representation. For Husserl, the question about what consciousness is has been, from the very start, more a question of “how are real contents consciously experienced?” than “how are real contents made objects of inner consciousness?” As previously argued, certain theoretical problems forced Husserl to review his theory of consciousness and to look for an alternative to the “inner consciousness” as advocated by Brentano, as well as to his own early view on consciousness as “*reell-phänomenologische Einheit*.”

As Husserl writes in his lectures on time-consciousness: “Every act is consciousness of something, but there is also consciousness of every act” (Husserl 1991, 130).<sup>39</sup> Given that the idea of inner presentation relating to the manifold of experiences in an objectifying way is already out of ques-

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<sup>39</sup> “Jeder Akt ist Bewusstsein von Etwas, aber jeder Akt ist auch bewusst” (Husserl 1985, 126).

tion, what can this “being conscious” of experiences possibly mean? Is this a certain extra quality that defines experiences alongside other characteristics? (As, for example, one could say “my experience of a red apple is perceptive, intentional and, alongside that, also conscious.”) To what does this distinction between an “act as consciousness of something” and “consciousness of this act” really point? In truth, we will not come nearer to the answer if we do not consider what brought Husserl to establish this difference, and consequently to elaborate further on the whole conception of absolute consciousness and transcendental subjectivity.

For this purpose, let us return to Husserl’s objection to his older theory of real temporal connection between the present and the past moments of experience. He was facing nearly the same problem as Hume, when he asked whether there is any connection between distinct existences (experiences, in our terminology). Empirical evidence suggests that no such connection can be ever discovered by human understanding. Nevertheless, we do perceive our experiences as not only composing a whole, but also as composing it in a certain way, namely as succeeding “each other with an inconceivable rapidity, [...] in a perpetual flux and movement” (Hume 2003, 180). But as we have seen in Husserl’s own theoretical enquiry, it could be misleading to comprehend this temporal connectivity of our experience as a real connection, because this interpretation can only identify a temporal form inherent to each experience, but fails to explain the very idea of succession and the constitution of a unitary stream of experiences, and hence the very idea of temporal connection.

Let us linger on a simple example: after hearing the phone ringing, answering it and consequently hearing someone saying “Hello,” I perceive these as connected events, succeeding each other in exactly that order (and therefore do not consider the possibility that my phone itself unexpectedly said “Hello”). One could say that, along with experiencing each of these intentional acts (hearing the phone ringing, picking it up, and hearing someone say “Hello”), I also experienced their succession, that I was conscious of them as successive experiences. One could not claim, however, that this experience of succession would be an additional experience because, in that case, it must also be experienced and hence to form part of an experiential succession. That would create the famous “infinite regress” problem, of which Husserl was perfectly aware and which he wanted to avoid at all costs. To this end, he suggested abstaining from interpreting this second-degree experience of

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succession in terms of subject-object relations, for instance, as “internal representation” or as any kind of “accompanying” consciousness.

Although the plausibility of the “internal representation” view is unconvincing, the alternative view is not an obvious one. To begin with, it consists mainly in claiming that pre-reflective awareness is inherent to each intentional act or experience, namely, that along with being conscious of something, we are also pre-reflectively and in a non-objectifying way conscious of the experiencing itself (Zahavi 2003). This simply implies that our experiences are *conscious* experiences, and that this *being conscious* is supposed to add something not only to the description of our experiences, but also to their constitution.<sup>40</sup>

Returning to our example of the temporal connection between two parts of the same enduring experience or between two successive experiences, we might say that what is added to this pre-reflective conscious experiencing is precisely the *connection* between them, this latter understood as a consciousness of temporal change itself. Husserl calls this consciousness of temporal connection between present and past moments “retention.” As John Brough pointed out in his article “The Emergence of an Absolute Consciousness in Husserl’s Early Writings on Time-consciousness,” after abandoning the schematic interpretation and focusing on inner time-consciousness, Husserl starts using such terms as “primal impression,” “retention,” and “protention,” referring to them as to the “three fundamental forms of inner time-consciousness” (Brough 1972, 314–315). So, retention would correspond to the *consciousness* of the just elapsed experiential phase, while the immanent temporal object itself (by temporal object he means an experience, such as perceiving or remembering) would be experienced as “now” or as “just past.”

This idea brings us to the following important point: Husserl has attempted to understand the form of time as a form of consciousness, and not only as the form of enduring immanent objects (experiences). Only as such can time fulfill its function and constitute consciousness of succession, thereby unifying enduring objects as well as constituting its own unity. Two main components in Husserl’s time analysis, (1) retentional consciousness and (2) reproductive consciousness, contribute to this idea.

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<sup>40</sup> For Husserl, exploring this new constitutive dimension of inner consciousness does not only add something to the already given bundle of experiences, but rather it opens up a whole new experiential field, a new dimension of “absolute time-consciousness.” He was convinced enough of the explanatory force of this inner consciousness dimension to make it a main topic of the entire transcendental phenomenological investigation.

*Retentional consciousness* (as a consciousness of a just elapsed phase) allows for an explanation of how the last phase of a musical tone (or any other continuously perceived object) stays co-present even if it has already vanished and is not really present anymore. Husserl repeatedly underlines that the phase of the melody which has just elapsed in no way makes “real” part of the present (impressional) phase of the experience: “The retentional tone is not a present tone but precisely a tone “primarily remembered” in the now: it is not really (*reell*) on hand in the retentional consciousness” (Husserl 1991, 33).<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless it is still “there,” in our retentional consciousness of the tone: the past tone is retained, not on the level of its content, but as a modified consciousness of the past.<sup>42</sup>

Thus the first important point is that retention represents a temporal connection between two parts or phases of the experiential flow. The second point is that this connection is not neutral in terms of the experiential character of conscious acts, but is essentially a *retentional modification* which constantly modifies not only the original impression but the whole retentional continuum as well. Husserl describes retention as a continuous modification which transforms present impressions into past in an uninterrupted modificational flux. What is equally important to note here is that understanding retention in terms of *modificational connection* forms part of Husserl’s definition of inner consciousness itself. In this regard, Rudolf Bernet proposes the most revealing interpretation:

At each moment consciousness is conscious both of the present moment and of the elapsed moments of the same “flux of consciousness.” In leaping over the gap between the now and the not-now, in associating them in an “indissoluble” manner, the present moment of consciousness is conscious of the temporal duration of consciousness, i.e., of its continuous change and unitary flux. Present consciousness is aware of its own renewal as well as of its being dispossessed of what was its own. The proper place of consciousness is the “in-between” of the present and the past, it apprehends itself as being what it has already ceased to be (Bernet 1993, 4).

This “proper place of consciousness,” as Bernet outlines, is not found on the level of the real or intentional content in experiences. It rather manifests itself in the way these contents are experienced in connection

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<sup>41</sup> “Der retentionale Ton ist kein gegenwärtigen, sondern eben im jetzt ‘primär erinnertes’, er ist im retentionalen Bewusstsein nicht reell vorhanden” (Husserl 1985, 31).

<sup>42</sup> “Die Retention ist keine Modifikation, in der impressionalen Daten reell erhalten blieben, nur eben in der abgewandelten Form: sondern sie ist eine Intentionalität eigener Art” (Husserl 1985, 118).

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with each other. Husserl's "absolute" or inner consciousness finds its place or function in the "in-between" of distinct experiences by bridging the gaps amidst them. Consciousness, in this perspective, is not an additional quality of "what it is like," nor is it a representation or inner perception accompanying intentional acts. Inner consciousness is itself a modificational connection. Inner consciousness can be seen, at this point, as not that distant from Kant's idea of synthetic activity of apperception, from which it should nevertheless be distinguished as principally *experiential* consciousness (and thus not distinct from our manifold experiences). Returning to Hume's perplexity, we could say that even if the mind never perceives any real connection among distinct experiences, those distinct experiences are always experienced as being connected. Connection belongs not to their being "perceptions" or "phantasies," nor to their being "perceptions of horses" or "phantasies of centaurs," but to their "experiential character," i.e. to their being consciously lived experiences.

Husserl's idea of *reproductive consciousness*, which is supposed to explain the possibility of recollection (*Wiedererinnerung*), is another example showing how the inner time-consciousness theory contributes to our understanding of the temporal connectivity of subjective experience.

Let us consider an example: I am now sitting in the library and remembering a story I was told last week. This act requires two experiences: (1) perceiving the story and (2) remembering the story I was told last week. What do these two experiences have in common? Based on Husserl's distinction between intentional content and real content, we could argue that both experiences have the same intentional object—the story—but, concerning the experience itself (perceiving and remembering), they share nothing (or no real content), which means that these are two different acts occurring under different circumstances. So, again, they share the same intentional content, but no real content. It is clear that the sameness of the object cannot explain the possibility that something will be remembered, it can merely confirm that we are indeed talking about a memory of the same thing and not of different things. The question then becomes: how can I remember something I have once perceived if there is nothing between these two experiences that brings them together or makes one (recollection) connected to the other (perceiving)? Any attempt to understand the original act of perceiving as somehow being part of the act of recollecting will inevitably reach a contradiction:

while I am remembering hearing a story I am also hearing it, which is obviously false. Memory has no capacity for resurrecting past experiences as such, it can only bring some objects of past experiences to present awareness by presentifying them (Husserl uses the term *Vergegenwärtigung*). As in the case of retention, Husserl's solution suggests that we should look for an answer "in-between" the acts, that is, in the realm of our inner consciousness of these acts. He proposes understanding recollection as a reproduction of the original perception, not by reproducing its real content, but by being a reproductive modification of the original impressional consciousness (of the perceiving act in question). Temporal consciousness once again is proved to be required in order to activate the link between past experiences and the present acts of remembering.

The inner consciousness of a memory is therefore not an impressional consciousness of a perception but a reproductive consciousness which bears within itself the earlier perception in the manner of an intentional implication (and not as a real (*reell*) component). [...]

As reproductive consciousness, inner consciousness is thus the consciousness of a modificational connection between two acts and not the consciousness of an act that directs itself towards another act (Bernet 2002, 337-8).

On the basis of these two major examples from Husserl's time-analysis and Bernet's ingenious interpretation, it becomes clear that understanding inner consciousness as a temporal and modificational connection cannot be reduced merely to particular cases of retention or recollection. It is the matter of a universal structure of consciousness which comes into question, here. This structure receives its especially pregnant expression when Husserl links these retentional and reproductive accomplishments to the constitution of the unitary stream of consciousness.

As Husserl claims in the § 39 of the *Lectures on time-consciousness*: "There is one, unique flow of consciousness in which both the unity of the tone in immanent time and the unity of the flow of consciousness itself become constituted at once" (Husserl 1991, 84). Husserl's answer to the condition of possibility of such a unity of the stream of consciousness lies in his idea of the double intentionality of retentional consciousness: the transverse intentionality (*Querintentionalität*) and the horizontal or longitudinal intentionality (*Längsintentionalität*). The first is directed to temporal objects (such as the tone in its duration) and serves for the constitution of object's duration in the present consciousness. The second is directed to the modification itself and is constitutive of the unity of expe-

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rience in the flow (Husserl 1991, 85, 390). Longitudinal intentionality of retention concerns consciousness of the continuity of retentions in the flow of constant modifications. By means of this double intentionality consciousness comes to be conscious of itself as a continuity and a process of constant change and fulfillment.<sup>43</sup>

From this moment onwards, Husserl's view of this structure as being essentially temporal remained unchanged. According to his final idea, consciousness is understood as a continuous connection of experiences, so that we always have (1) consciousness of a present experienced moment with its temporal horizon (moments which have just passed and those which are to come) and (2) consciousness (not distinct from the first one) of the whole of experience, including distant past and possible future. A single experience does not exist outside the whole, just as the whole cannot exist without single experiences.

Before concluding this section, two important points should be underlined. First, it is worth emphasizing that Husserl conceived of the unity of subjective experience as accomplished in the form of the stream of consciousness. This suggests an essentially dynamic view on consciousness and its unity. The phenomenological idea of the unity of consciousness therefore relies on the idea that, foremost, to experience means to experience certain continuity and, moreover, that this continuity always presupposes an open, horizontal structure of conscious experiencing. In this perspective, any idea of synchronic unity can be seen only as an abstraction and by no means as representative of the conscious experience.

The second point concerns the indicated synthetic function of consciousness, which was present already in Kant, but has been transformed by Husserl in application to experiential consciousness. Synthetic consciousness in Husserl is originally explicated through the connecting form of time, which allows him to define inner consciousness as time-consciousness. This idea, presented in the *Lectures on the phenomenology of the consciousness of internal time*, is confirmed in several later works. For

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<sup>43</sup> In *Analyses concerning Passive Synthesis*, as Lanei Rodemeyer argues, Husserl extended these two aspects of intentionality and framed them under the terms of “near” and “far” retention. According to this interpretation, near retention contributes to the constitution of the living present and of the unities of particular objects. Far retention, on the other hand, is made responsible for the continuity of the retentive flow as a whole, it “is my retention of these phases in their relation to each other as a unified whole, even after their experiences are no longer in my present, active consciousness” (Rodemeyer 2006, 89). This shows an important link between Husserl's idea of the horizontal structure of consciousness and of the unitary character of conscious experience.

example, in the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl calls synthesis “the primal form belonging to consciousness” (Husserl 1960, 39) and maintains that time should be understood as a fundamental form of synthesis. A new aspect of this theory belongs to the genetic phenomenology which explores affectivity and associative syntheses.

### 3. Synthesis-based model of consciousness vs. Qualia-based model of consciousness

In our days, the previously outlined phenomenological approach to synthetic consciousness provides an interesting alternative to the prominent theory of consciousness as qualia as formulated in the realm of the philosophy of mind. In what follows, I will not analyze the idea of phenomenal qualities as such. Others have already contributed substantially to this discussion, providing interesting arguments both for and against the existence of qualia. Far from being merely critical, my aim here is rather to situate this phenomenological theory in the context of the contemporary debates on the nature of consciousness and its unity. In order to do so, I will concentrate on two important consequences of the theory of qualia upon our understanding of what consciousness is and then approach them from the phenomenological perspective.<sup>44</sup>

*The first theoretical claim* advocated by the supporters of qualia consists in identifying phenomenal qualia with consciousness. Many contemporary philosophers support this idea. For example, John Searle insists that “the problem of consciousness is identical with the problem of qualia” (Searle 1998). David Chalmers claims that “a mental state is conscious if it has a *qualitative feel*—an associated quality of experience” and consequently that “the problem of explaining these phenomenal qualities is just the problem of explaining consciousness” (Chalmers 1996, 4).

*The second theoretical claim* or implication of the qualia-based model of consciousness concerns the problem of the unity of consciousness, which, according to qualia proponents can also be understood in quali-

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<sup>44</sup> I am aware how extensive and profound debates on the nature of consciousness are in the field of the philosophy of mind. In this part, I have made a difficult decision not to go into depths of the analytic argumentation, but rather to concentrate on the general view on consciousness and its unity, which the qualitative theory of consciousness suggests.

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tative terms (Bayne and Chalmers 2003; Bayne 2010). Whenever addressing the unity of consciousness, this approach applies the idea of phenomenal qualia to the unified experience, claiming that “there is something it is like” having different experiences at once (Bayne and Chalmers 2003, 28), or even having a phenomenal conjunctive state which “subsumes all of the phenomenal states of a subject at a time” (Ibid, 33). Tim Bayne formulates what he calls the unity thesis by making appeal to the idea of phenomenal unity: “what it is for a subject’s consciousness to be unified [...] is for the subject to have a single conscious state—a total conscious state—which subsumes each and every one of the conscious states that they enjoy at the time in question” (Bayne 2010, 19).

In this part of the chapter, I will question the plausibility of what I call the qualia-based model of consciousness by analyzing these two main claims and consequently by contrasting this theory with the phenomenological idea of consciousness, which I call the synthesis-based model of consciousness.

#### 3.1. Is the problem of consciousness identical with the problem of qualia?

The identification of subjective awareness and qualia is rather a novelty within the framework of the hard, but old, problem of consciousness. Introduced into philosophical vocabulary by C.I. Lewis<sup>45</sup> in 1929 (Crane 2000), *qualia* originally were meant to describe subjective, ineffable, directly given properties of our sensory experience, such as the immediacy of redness or loudness (Lewis 1929; Keeley 2009). Although the origin of the notion of “quale” is an interesting topic, what is most important for the current inquiry is how having phenomenal qualia came to be identified with consciousness and *vice versa*. Arguably, before a certain point in the intellectual history of the twentieth century, consciousness and qualia enjoyed a certain independence: while qualia were primarily referred to by psychologically-oriented theories in order to describe sensory data, consciousness was a general term for mental awareness—and, as such, for the most basic and essential characteristic

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<sup>45</sup> In his article “The early history of the *quale* and its relation to the senses,” Brian Keeley proposes an alternative exploration of the history of the notion of quale, pointing out the use of quale by C. S. Peirce in about 1866 (Keeley 2009).

of the human mind. Consciousness played a crucial role in many philosophical theories long before and without any consideration of qualia or anything similar.

However, the situation has changed drastically. Even a brief look at contemporary theories of consciousness in philosophy of mind shows the “what-it-is-like” agenda to be almost unavoidable. Consider the following statements:

The problem of consciousness is identical with the problem of qualia, because conscious states are qualitative states right down to the ground. Take away the qualia and there is nothing there. This is why I seldom use the word “qualia,” except in sneer quotes, because it suggests that there is something else to consciousness besides qualia, and there is not. Conscious states by definition are inner, qualitative, subjective states of awareness or sentience (Searle 1998, 1938).

[...] a mental state is conscious if there is something it is like to be in that mental state. To put it another way, we can say that a mental state is conscious if it has a *qualitative feel*—an associated quality of experience. These qualitative feels are also known as phenomenal qualities, or *qualia* for short. The problem of explaining these phenomenal qualities is just the problem of explaining consciousness (Chalmers 1996, 4).

[...] fundamentally an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to be that organism—something it is like for the organism. We may call this the subjective character of experience (Nagel 1974, 436).

The transition from accepting qualia as properties of subjective experiences to the identification of qualia and consciousness is anything but obvious, yet it is usually stated as if it were self-evident. On the one hand, thematization of qualia rehabilitated the problem of consciousness in the context of contemporary cognitive science and overcame the reductionist position by postulating an “explanatory gap” (a term due to (Levine 1983)) between subjective experience itself and some functions of matter by means of which a conscious experience happens. On the other hand, however, the central assumption that consciousness can be identified with qualitative feelings or phenomenal properties of mental states was largely taken for granted and, arguably, maintained its implicit reliance on the psychological theories of sensory qualia. As Austen Clark points out, sensory qualities (such as sensations of colors or pain) were taken by philosophers as paradigmatic states of consciousness (Clark 2008, 445). But the transformation of “sensory” qualities into “phenomenal” qualities,

### 3. Synthesis- vs. Qualia-based model of consciousness

which were taken to describe not merely sensations, but any kind of conscious, subjective experiences, has occurred without due clarification.

There are many ways to define qualia. They may be understood as *phenomenal properties* of mental states; they can be also described in terms of “how it feels,” so that qualia become qualitative *feelings* (Chalmers 1996, 4); qualia can be further explicated as related to the *subjective character* of experiences (Nagel 1974), namely to “what-it-is-like” to experience something from the first-person perspective.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, it seems to be almost unanimous that qualia refer to the subjective character of mental states and to the what-it-is-likeness of experiencing something from the first-person perspective. However, this first-personal ownership is further linked to the phenomenal or experiential *properties* or qualitative *feelings*, so that the latter become responsible for the conscious or subjective character of mental states. Thus, the link is established between subjectivity and consciousness, on the one hand, and qualia or phenomenal properties, on the other. Whether this link as such can have an explanatory force largely depends on the question of how exactly such qualitative or phenomenal properties bring mental states to awareness.

One way of approaching this question would be to interpret qualia as distinct phenomenal feelings or sensations that accompany each mental state and which, thereby, make a mental state conscious. It is then presumed that a mental state not accompanied by such a feeling cannot be called conscious. Formulated this way, this theory might appear as a new version of the so-called higher-order accounts of consciousness. Even if qualia are not said to relate to mental states in a conceptually-objectifying way, they are nevertheless claimed to be inner (high-order) perceptions of the first-order senses: the latter become phenomenally conscious by means of the former.<sup>47</sup>

According to Carruthers’ systematization of higher-order theories, this one falls into the category of inner-sense theories, which understand higher-order awareness as essentially perceptual (as opposed to

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<sup>46</sup> See also: (Clark 2008, 1996; Tye 2013).

<sup>47</sup> In Carruthers’ explication this argument (which he does not share himself) goes as follows: “In short, it is by virtues of perceiving our own percepts that the latter become phenomenally conscious. Hence the awareness in question is similar to the sort of awareness that I have of the redness itself—by perceiving the redness I am aware of it, and by perceiving my percept of redness, I am aware of *it*; and it is the latter awareness that renders the former phenomenally conscious” (Carruthers 2008, 278).

conceptual or propositional) (Carruthers 2008). Thus, what distinguishes qualia-based models of consciousness from the traditional versions of the higher-order accounts of consciousness is mainly the emphasis on the qualitative character of the accompanying states, which qualifies them as subjective feelings or sensations rather than as thoughts or mental representations.

Another way to address the problem would logically be to avoid taking qualia as distinct mental states associated with intentional mental states and to proceed on the level of first-order theories of consciousness. For instance, one can define qualia as phenomenal, nonrepresentational properties of mental states. As a result, they would count as a distinct class of mental phenomena, which are not intentional or representational states and, therefore, cannot objectify the experiences they accompany or with which they are associated.

If, as in the first case, one is inclined to see qualia as distinct mental states, then, as in most cases of higher-order theories of consciousness, the risk implied is either that of an infinite regress (if qualia are understood as conscious mental states) or that of the no less difficult issue of how to make sense of non-conscious (qualitative) mental states that make other non-conscious (intentional) mental states conscious. If, on the other hand, one understands qualia as non-intentional or non-relational phenomenal features of experiences (to be distinguished from their intentional features), then this leaves the following question unanswered: How, exactly, can a “property” enable a state to change its phenomenological meaning—from being unconscious to conscious? Either way, understanding qualia as distinct mental states or avoiding such a position, whenever philosophers accept qualia as necessary for the conscious experience, they inevitably face the problem of explaining how exactly qualia and consciousness are connected.

By pointing out the difficulties accounting for the precise relation between qualia and consciousness or to prove their identification, I did not intend to provide an exhaustive critic of the qualia-based theories, but rather to highlight the obscurity of their basic assumptions. There is seemingly no theoretically clear way to prove whether to be conscious of an experience is the same as experiencing the what-it-is-likeness associated with it and whether this what-it-is-likeness can be explained by means of qualitative properties. The fact that our conscious experience can be described in qualitative terms does not necessarily entail that this is its fundamental definition. There might be different qualities

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associated with manifold experiences, but, until proven otherwise, none of these qualities is identical with the consciousness of those states, even though it is only by means of consciousness that all qualities (including what-it-is-likeness) can be experienced. Thus, my claim is that the awareness of a mental state and of all its qualities does not entail that this “being aware of” is qualitative by nature. One might as well argue that the nature of consciousness is indifferent to the qualitative character of our experiences: it certainly feels different to see the sky from the window of a prison cell or sitting on the beach on the Atlantic Ocean coast, however both experiences may be conscious in just the same way. In other words, what makes an experience conscious is not necessarily the same that gives it a certain qualitative feel.

At the very least, these remarks indicate that qualia-based theories of consciousness face serious difficulties in what concerns (1) the assumption that consciousness and qualia can be easily identified and (2) that such identification can be productive in order to provide clues for other related issues. One of these is the problem of unity of consciousness.

#### 3.2. What is it like to have a unified consciousness?

What it means for consciousness to be unified depends on how the relations or connections within conscious experience are understood. Proponents of the qualia-based model of consciousness tend to see these relations as essentially attached to the “conjoined experiential character” of simultaneously lived mental states (Bayne 2010, 10). This entails that, for instance, there is not only something it is like to feel angry and something it is like to listen to the news, but there is also something it is like to feel angry while listening to the news. Hence, Bayne and Chalmers claim that to have a unified experience consisting of two perceptions would mean to experience that “there is something it is like to be in both states at once” (Bayne and Chalmers 2003, 28). On the larger scale, this leads to the assumption that to have unified consciousness means to have a phenomenal conjunctive state which “subsumes all of the phenomenal states of a subject at a time” (Ibid, 33). Such a single state of consciousness encompasses all of a subject’s experiences and is conceived of as an experience of its own. As Tim Bayne points out, “it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that there is a single encompassing state of consciousness that subsumes all of my

experiences: perceptual, bodily, emotional, cognitive, and any others” (Bayne 2010, 501).

In my view, there are two major difficulties which this theory fails to take into account. The first one concerns the already mentioned obscure status of qualia. It is already rather unclear how exactly qualia can be responsible for the conscious character of mental states, and things are even more unclear when it comes to the unified qualia or what-it-is-likeness of experiencing several mental states as parts of one total conscious state. The assumption of existence of qualitative feelings associated with each and every conscious mental state might already be considered a case of reduplication of subjective experience. Now, any assumption concerning the what-is-likeness of conjointly experienced conscious states leads to an infinite multiplication scenario: what-it-is likeness of seeing a black book and what-it-is likeness of seeing yellow letters on it, and hearing car noises and writing this text, and then what-it-is likeness of seeing a black book while hearing car noises, which is not the same as what-it-is-likeness of seeing a book and hearing cars while writing this text and thinking of infinite qualia multiplication on top. Bayne’s idea about a phenomenal conjunctive state presumes that there is always an end to such a multiplication. Nevertheless, it is not quite clear how this conjunctive state is related to particular phenomenal unities supposedly subordinated to it.

The second problem concerns the self-imposed temporal limits of the phenomenal unity claim, which only accounts for simultaneously occurring conscious states as being phenomenally unified by a subject’s total conscious state. The thus formulated unity thesis fails to explain how different experiences, which do not occur at the same time, are unified. Bayne claims that in that case they are just not phenomenally unified (Ibid, 18). Indeed, my experiences of writing this text and hearing car noises outside are phenomenally unified with each other (they are both parts of my present conscious state), but they are not phenomenally unified with my intention to write this paragraph which I formed earlier this morning. This means therefore that I have a series of unified phenomenal states, each of which is a phenomenal unity at one time. However, such an idea of phenomenal unity can by no means provide an answer on how all my experiences (occurring this morning, 10 minutes ago, right now or a year ago) are connected to each other. Not to mention the very fact—to which phenomenological philosophy was always very attentive—that also all the experiences belonging to an

### 3. Synthesis- vs. Qualia-based model of consciousness

actual field of awareness are necessarily experienced as continuous and following one another. In other words, the phenomenal unity claim is only able to explain the synchronic unity of consciousness, but not its diachronic unity (Brook and Raymond 2014), and it also fails to account for experiential continuity, which is instead a key feature of phenomenally conjoined experiences. The theory is, therefore, incomplete and, most of all, misses out on one of the central questions concerning the unity of consciousness.

Bayne is not ambiguous about this issue, since he takes his task to be exclusively the explanation of the phenomenal unity of consciousness, which, he claims, concerns simultaneously experienced states. Moreover, after reducing the problem to some sort of “‘instantaneous snapshot’ of a subject’s experience,” he also claims this amounts to be free from any “naively static metaphysics of experience” (Bayne 2010, 17). Nevertheless, as he takes such a snapshot as representative for subjective experience, his account faces inevitable limitations with regard to the diachronic continuity and unity of consciousness.

After having presented some problems involved in understanding consciousness on the basis of its “what-it-is-likeness” or qualitative character, I shall now return to the alternative account of consciousness provided by Edmund Husserl and especially to the idea of the *synthesis-based model of consciousness*.

#### 3.3. The synthesis-based model of consciousness

It is my view that the phenomenological approach to consciousness and its understanding in terms of synthesis provides a promising alternative to the previously discussed theory of consciousness as qualia. Even though, quite often, qualitative feelings or qualia are seen as phenomenological features, one should not confuse them with the phenomenological theory of consciousness—at least, not with the one advocated by Husserl.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, according to the phenomenological perspective, subjectivity cannot be reduced to a certain quality of experience; subjectivity rather describes the totality of experience. The unity of subjective experience therefore acquires a different meaning: through this concept one should not only be able to account for the synchronic phenomenal unity of conjointly experienced mental states and their what-it-is-likeness, but one should rather be able to explain how different, successive, and not-simultaneously lived

experiences are connected so that they are experienced as a whole, as an open totality.

The phenomenological approach to consciousness requires consciousness' unified character to be seen as its essential feature and function. Based on Husserl's account, the connectivity of subjective experience is not simply associated with consciousness; it is rather seen as what consciousness is essentially about.

The understanding of consciousness through its synthetic function does not belong exclusively to Husserl's phenomenology, as it originates in the wider tradition of transcendental philosophy. One of the aims of the present chapter was to show how exactly this idea has been forged in the tradition of transcendental philosophy. As Hume formulated the problem of connections, Kant made the most remarkable contribution, namely he proposed to see synthesis as an essential feature of consciousness itself, claiming that the unity of apperception is what makes experience possible as such. Therefore, combination is not only something that is enabled by the spontaneity of understanding; rather, combination (or synthesis) is its core and most essential function. Husserl further developed this synthetic principle by applying it to experiential consciousness. The idea of synthetic consciousness within the development of Husserl's thought is closely related to his idea of inner time-consciousness. Furthermore, it presents a viable alternative to Brentano's concept of inner consciousness understood in terms of accompanying inner representation.

The idea of synthesis in its application to consciousness finds its confirmation and further development in the *Cartesian Meditations*, where Husserl claims synthesis to be "a mode of combination exclusively peculiar to consciousness" and thus explicitly calls synthesis "the primal form belonging to consciousness" (Husserl 1960, 39). Consistently with his previous theory, he designates time as the fundamental form of synthesis responsible for "a connectedness that makes the unity of one consciousness" (Husserl 1960, 41).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> By acknowledging synthesis as central element for the theoretical explication of consciousness, one does not reject the claim concerning the pivotal role of intentionality within consciousness. In Husserl's words: "Only elucidation of the peculiarity we call synthesis makes fruitful the exhibition of the cogito (the intentional subjective process) as consciousness-of that is to say, Franz Brentano's significant discovery that 'intentionality' is the fundamental characteristic of 'psychic phenomena' and actually lays open the method for a descriptive transcendental-philosophical theory of consciousness (and naturally also for a corresponding psychological theory)" (Husserl 1960, 41).

### 3. Synthesis- vs. Qualia-based model of consciousness

An important consequence of understanding consciousness in terms of synthesis or connectivity is that the main character of consciousness is thereby envisaged as dependent upon the principles of connection. It is my view that, in Husserl, different theories of consciousness can be found that are grounded upon different approaches to the understanding of the several kinds of connections constituting the unity of subjective experience.<sup>49</sup>

The first kind of connection would be, as it has been already argued, *temporal*. Based on temporal connection inner consciousness is grasped under the title of *time-consciousness*. Conscious unity is thus approached under formal conditions, since temporal connection represents only a general form of consciousness. For example, temporal connection constitutes the experiential order of succession or simultaneity, and, on the highest level, the unity of the whole temporal stream.

The second type of connection is *associative or affective*. Contrary to formal temporal connections, associative syntheses relate experiences to one another on the level of content. Examples of associative connectivity are: (1) affective connections between past and present experiences, and (2) the connections organizing the actual field of perception by uniting sensory data according to principles of contrast and similarity (Husserl 1973a, 73). This type of connectivity is constitutive of the pre-cognitive, affective level of subjective experience. One may call such consciousness, performing connections on the basis of associative syntheses, *affective consciousness*. This definition is only preliminary and should be further clarified in the following chapter.

This latter type of connectivity, constitutive of unified subjective experience, is the most difficult to explore. Indeed, because of its non-formal character, it presents us with connections that are difficult to generalize. However, Husserl attempts to provide an account of the principles of such connections in his *Analyses concerning Passive Synthesis*. This account and its consequences for the phenomenological theory of consciousness and subjectivity will be the main topic of the second chapter of this work.

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<sup>49</sup> However, this by no means suggest that there are two different types of consciousness in one's experience, but rather that there are two different constitutive aspects of the same consciousness. As distinguishing between active and passive constitution does not imply that consciousness becomes divided and disunified within itself, in the same vein, our distinction between time-consciousness and affective consciousness intends only to point out the difference in rules according to which subjective experience and its unity/unities are constituted. In this sense, both temporality and affectivity describe fundamental dimensions of consciousness and subjectivity.