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# Phenomenology of the Future

The temporality of objects beyond the temporality of inner-time consciousness

By

Tina Röck and Daniel Neumann

**Abstract:** Based on a creative use of the phenomenological method, we argue that a close examination of the temporality of objects reveals the future as genuinely open. Without aiming to decide the matter of phenomenological realism, we suggest that this method can be used to investigate the mode of being of objects in their own temporality. By bracketing the anticipatory structure of experience, one can get a sense of objects' temporality as independent of consciousness. This contribution adds a further voice to the current realism versus idealism debates, but it does so without taking sides. The starting point is neither an analysis of pure consciousness, nor attempts to describe objects in-themselves, but the idea that things can be phenomenologically grasped through the difference between their temporality and our own. By being methodically "open to the future," one can become aware of the *sui generis* temporality of objects as different from the temporality shaped by our anticipation.

**Keywords:** phenomenology, Husserl, time consciousness, futurity, protention

## Introduction

In the following, we argue that the future is genuinely open. This speculative claim is supported by an original use of the phenomenological method, which proceeds in two steps. In the first, it is shown that if we examine in detail Husserl's intentional correlation as a correlation between the *appearing phenomenon* and its *manner of existence*, the phenomenological perspective allows for a form of realism. As such, it enables us to make some specific claims about the nature of reality. It is not our intention here to determine whether phenomenology in general or Husserl's phenomenology in particular are actually realist: we merely use the phenomenological method in a creative and novel way to test whether it can lead to some form of realism. We also do not wish to imply that the phenomenological method on its own implies full-fledged realism: we merely use it to show that the future is genuinely open. The novelty of this approach also explains why there is little previous research that could be cited. While there

has been a recent increase in interest in historical figures of phenomenological realism, few researchers have engaged with the question of realism in a systematic way.<sup>1</sup>

The distinct temporality of objects is used as our starting point on this path. We suggest that to get a sense of objects' temporality as independent of consciousness, one ought to bracket the anticipatory structure of experience. By focusing on how the observed object does not cease to appear, we can describe how it is structured by our experience, which raises the issue of the object's own temporality. Further, we argue that in this realist phenomenological sense, the object can only appear when we are genuinely open to the future as opposed to merely anticipating future events based on the present impressions. In the second step, we show that objects are temporal in a way that does not fully depend on the internal structures of our time consciousness. The claim made here is that this temporality does not correlate with the structures of consciousness, nor is it merely imagined or subjective. This temporal givenness of the object may thus be indicative of the external object's mode of being. To develop this idea, we start by discussing how Husserl thought of the temporality of objects as being accessible through its relation to consciousness. To make this argument, we shall focus on Husserl's allusion to the temporality of things in his Thing lectures, which is developed further in both a theoretical and phenomenological sense.

## 1 Phenomenological realism

Whether phenomenology is a realistic or an idealistic enterprise is still a contentious topic. Husserl's texts do not answer this question either way. Consider the following statement Husserl made regarding the status of phenomenology:

I may not here neglect, however, to declare expressly that I retract nothing whatsoever as regards transcendental-phenomenological idealism and that I still consider, as I did before, every form of the usual philosophical realism nonsensical in principle, no less so than that idealism which it sets itself up against in its arguments and which it "refutes." The objection of solipsism would never have been raised, given a deeper understanding of my presentation, as an objection against phenomenological idealism itself; the objection would only be against my incomplete presentation of it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. several volumes on Edith Stein, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, and Gerda Walther in the Springer series *Women in the History of Philosophy* (<https://www.springer.com/series/15896>). For a systematic approach, see Daniel Neumann, "How Does the Future Appear in Spite of the Present? Towards an 'Empty Teleology' of Time," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 54, no. 1: 15–29. 2023. Or, Tina Röck, "Dynamic Realism. Uncovering the Reality of Becoming Through Phenomenology and Process Ontology" (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Husserl, Hua IV. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, book 2, (tr.) A. Schuwer and R. Rojcewicz (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), 418; Epilogue 5. The German original is published on page 560 of the postscript to the *Ideas* as Edmund Husserl, "Nachwort zu meinen 'Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie,'" *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und*

Husserl clearly rejects the “usual” realism and “usual” idealism, claiming that phenomenology is *transcendental idealism*, but in a fundamentally new sense.<sup>3</sup> Phenomenology thus does not fit into the traditional distinctions of realism, idealism, or transcendental idealism. It is a form *sui generis* that is—as the quote above seems to suggest—the closest to transcendental idealism. What the phenomenological method shares with transcendental idealism is its focus on givenness and experience as well as the examination of what conditions must hold for this experience or givenness to be possible. What sets phenomenology apart from transcendental idealism is that its aim is not to derive absolute categories of thought: it focuses on describing the structure of the intentional correlation. Therefore, while this paper is intended as a contribution to the debate, its goal is not to decide whether Husserl’s philosophy is ultimately a realistic or idealistic enterprise—nor is it, in our view, necessary to take a stance regarding this point. We believe that Husserl’s phenomenology offers a third way, a meeting point between realism and idealism that can be interpreted in terms which are more realistic or more idealistic depending on the phenomena investigated. All experience is co-constituted by consciousness and phenomena, and all experience therefore involves both the mind and the given. In analysing whether this structure is realistic or idealistic, it should be considered whether the subject of the phenomenological description is a spatiotemporal object in its appearance or the structures of consciousness which allow it to appear this way. Both are legitimate ways of using the phenomenological method, and both have been employed by Husserl. In this contribution, we want to shed light on the realistic impetus present in this form of transcendental idealism, where the object of investigation is the thing and its temporality.

The “realist” moment that guides us is rooted in phenomenology’s focus on intentionality and the *a priori* correlational structure that shapes all of experience:

The first breakthrough of this universal a priori of correlation between experienced object and manners of givenness (which occurred during my work on the Logical Investigations around 1898) affected me so deeply that my whole subsequent life-work has been dominated by the task of systematically elaborating on this a priori of correlation.<sup>4</sup>

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*phänomenologische Forschung*, vol. 11 (1930): 549–570. Generally, Husserl is quoted with reference to editions indicated here. We reference first the English translation (where available), while the second number refers to the pages of the relevant German volume of the Husserliana, where they are available or correspond (leading to a form pp/pp). For ease of checking, we have always tried to add the relevant paragraph (leading to the final form pp/pp, §). Where we refer to a whole paragraph, we did not add page references. For brevity, only the English translations are referenced in the bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Husserl, Hua I. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, (tr.) D. Cairns (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1960), 86/118, §41.

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Husserl, Hua VI. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, (tr.) D. Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 166/170, §48

As this quote shows, all of Husserl's work rests on the idea of an *a priori* correlation between the object of experience and its forms of givenness. While traditionally, this is understood as allowing for insights into a correlation between an object (via its form of givenness) and the consciousness the object is given to, this structure can be expanded. One can focus on different aspects of the correlation, including the structures of consciousness which are revealed in this relation. But it is equally well possible to focus on the object of the correlation, that is, the other side of the relation. Yet regardless of whether one focuses on the structure of the phenomenon (in realist phenomenology), the structure of the ego (in transcendental phenomenology), or even the constitution of either (in genetic phenomenology), the *a priori* correlation itself remains unchanged. Only the focus of the investigation changes.

In the *Thing and Space* lectures, Husserl himself provides a version of this argument. He notes that his exclusive attention on the thing should not make us think that other elements of the investigation, such as the cogito or the horizon, have become irrelevant. He simply does not address these aspects in the present discussion.<sup>5</sup> All of these aspects ultimately play a role in the factual reality of givenness—they just cannot all be addressed to the same depth at the same time. The focus on one element at a time, for example on the transcendental structures of the ego or the correlation between the *cogito* and *cogitatum*, does not negate the object-oriented or more realistic aspect of the correlation. They are simply not the focus of the present investigation.

But what if we focus on the more realistic aspects of phenomenology? Let us begin with Husserl's own arguments. First of all, we should note that Husserl rejected the idea of phenomenon as a representation of the "true reality out there" and with it, he rejected the distinction between a mere "copy for me" corresponding to an in-itself thing out there. For him, a phenomenon is not a copy, a mere appearance or image. In other words, Husserl rejects what he calls the "Bildertheorie" of cognition. One of the many arguments he provides for this stance is based on our ability to distinguish between the experience of something given as real ("reell gegeben") and the experience of an image (Hua 16, 19/21, §8). Husserl argues that we seldom confuse the experience of an apple with the experience of an image of an apple. While we might mistake one for the other on occasion, a further inquiry—especially in the case of direct interaction—will usually dispel this misunderstanding.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Edmund Husserl, Hua XVI. *Thing and Space: Lectures of 1907*, (tr.) R. Rojcewicz (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997), 9/10, §2.

<sup>6</sup> This rejection of the idea that sense experience is a form of image-consciousness is one of the fundamental convictions that Husserl never abandoned, not even during his so-called transcendental phase; see Vittorio De

In sensory experience, we thus experience what there is:

That perceptions are self-giving is quite familiar to you and should not give you any difficulties. Phenomenologically, "self-giving" means here that every perception within itself is not only, in general, a consciousness of its object, but that it gives its object to consciousness in a distinctive manner. Perception is that mode of consciousness that sees and has its object itself in the flesh. To put it negatively, the object is not given like a mere sign or a likeness; it is not grasped mediately as if the object were merely indicated by signs or appearing in a reproduced copy, and so on. Rather, it is given as itself just like it is meant, and it stands there in person, so to speak.<sup>7</sup>

The "as it appears" is therefore the real world and this real world is constituted for us in *sense experience*: "It is therefore fundamentally erroneous to believe that perception [...] does not reach the physical thing itself."<sup>8</sup>

Based on the claim that there is a correlation between physical things and perceptions and that we have access to the physical thing itself through perception, Husserl gives the first example of how one can move from phenomenological descriptions to claims about the way things exist. When discussing spatiotemporal objects, he argues that the things of this world are not mysterious: the fact that objects are only partially knowable correlates with the *kind of being* they have.<sup>9</sup> Things exist in a way that does not allow the kind of absolute or full knowledge we can have of a logical relationship or an ideal geometric figure. To demand this kind of knowledge of spatiotemporal objects would show a misunderstanding of what a thing is. Things cannot be fully known but that, according to Husserl, does not mean that some of their aspects are in principle unknowable or hidden by an impenetrable veil, or that things are somehow mysterious. Rather, it just means that things exist in a way that makes a full determination or complete knowledge of them impossible. This epistemic humility, that is, the acknowledgement that there is always more to discover, further aspects to consider, and we can never generate a full description of any phenomenon, seems to be the reason why phenomenology cannot be considered a traditional form of realism. Still, a partial perception is not the same as the perception of a copy or of a subjective construction. Even if we only grasp the object partially, it does not mean that we do not perceive the object as it is.

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Palma, "Phänomenologie und Realismus. Die Frage nach der Wirklichkeit im Streit zwischen Husserl und Ingarden," *Husserl Studies*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2017), 1–18, or Sophie Loidolt, "Transzendentalphilosophie und Idealismus in der Phänomenologie. Überlegungen zur phänomenologischen 'Gretchenfrage'," *Metodo. International Studies in Phenomenology and Philosophy*, Special Issue no. 1 (2015), 103–135.

<sup>7</sup> Edmund Husserl, Hua XI. *Analyses concerning passive and active synthesis. Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, (tr.) A. J. Steinbock (Carbondale: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 140.

<sup>8</sup> Edmund Husserl, Hua III.1/III.2. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, (ed.) D. Moran, (tr.) W. R. Boyce Gibson (London: Routledge, 2012), 92/79, §43.

<sup>9</sup> Edmund Husserl, Hua XIII. *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Erster Teil 1905–1920*, (ed.) I. Kern (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973), 10.

What is relevant here is that in this account of the object, Husserl moves from the way something is *given* to the way it *actually exists* when he claims that our inability to know things entirely is rooted in the way actual objects exist and not in some epistemic failure on our part (Hua 13, 10). This inherent incompleteness that is given discloses the mode of existence of things—and the mode of existence of things correlates with our experience. If the way a phenomenon can be given is grounded in how it exists—which is a rather intuitive, even if speculative, step—it seems legitimate to assume that there is a correlation between how a *phenomenon appears* and its *manner of existence*. That, in turn, allows for specific, albeit limited, conclusions about its being.<sup>10</sup> The move from describing *how things are given* to giving an account of *how they exist* is thus still grounded in phenomenology.

## 2 The temporality of changing things

So far, we have outlined Husserl's arguments for phenomenology as a method that is open to realism. In what follows, we use Husserl's arguments to go beyond his own words and argue that the temporality of changing things<sup>11</sup> is not grounded in the layers of subjective temporality but in changes in the things themselves.

What does Husserl say about the changes in things and the resulting temporality? Generally, for Husserl, the objective thing “remains what it is even if changes occur in my subjectivity and, dependent on it, in the ‘appearances’ of the thing” (Hua 4, 82/77, §18e). The objective thing is therefore objective precisely because it shows itself in the mode of (continuing) fulfilment, while the change it undergoes (if it changes at all) is a merely secondary aspect.<sup>12</sup> To gain a better insight into this temporality, we must make do with the few hints Husserl made throughout his lectures.

A terminological remark is here in order: in the following, we consider temporality (i.e., duration) and change to be coextensive. We assume this based on the fact that we have no

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<sup>10</sup> While this move is thoroughly criticized by thinkers such as Roman Ingarden, *Schriften zur Phänomenologie Edmund Husserls, Gesammelte Werke IV* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998), 189. We believe it is a viable option if one wants to use phenomenology as a starting point for speculations about reality.

<sup>11</sup> Husserl considers change to be the mode of duration of that which is in time; see Edmund Husserl, Hua X. *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)*, (tr.) J. B. Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), 117/113, Appendix VI.

<sup>12</sup> Husserl starts to deal with time only in the last twenty pages of the *Thing and Space* (Hua 16). He discusses the regularities that underlie our perception of change under the heading “The constitution of objective changes,” where he focuses on the laws governing the experience of continuous and regular change. In doing so, however, he uses a significantly reduced understanding of change as meaning a shift in (accidental) properties or movement, thus ignoring some more fundamental changes, such as becoming or perishing of qualities or entities.

awareness of time, no experience of duration or temporality, independently of the experience of some change, be it an experience of flow, movement, or property alterations.<sup>13</sup>

The focus of the Thing lectures on space alone—although Husserl aims to investigate *spatiotemporal* things—amounts to a complete disregard of temporality. It is quite surprising, especially given that temporality is fundamental to spatiotemporal things and that it plays an important role in many other investigations. In §19 of the Thing lectures, Husserl acknowledges this shortcoming and briefly discusses three layers of temporality involved in the perception of things. He distinguishes *objective time*, *subjective time experience*, and *pre-phenomenological temporality*.

The first layer, namely worldly or “objective time,” refers to the measurable time of the appearing objects, the “dingliche Zeit” (Hua 16, 52/62, §19). The second layer mentioned in the *Thing and Space* is the *subjective time experience* or “personal time,” the immanent or pre-empirical time of intentional acts, *sensa*, and appearances (i.e., the experienced duration). Husserl insists that although these two layers are foundationally related, one ought to differentiate between them and not confuse them with the experience of change. On the contrary: these flows of experience and the resulting modes of appearance constitute the unity of the perceived object (Hua 1, 42/80, §18). Therefore, in any conscious process in which “a worldly object appears as cogitatum, [...] we have to distinguish the *objective temporality that appears* (for example: the temporality of this die) from the ‘*internal*’ *temporality of the appearing* (for example: that of the die-perceiving). This appearing ‘flows away’ with its temporal extents and phases, which, for their part, are continually changing appearances of the one identical die” (Hua 1, 41/79, §18). Finally, the third layer of temporality is the *pre-phenomenological temporality*. Husserl describes it as the whole of the temporal extension, the stretching of the thing and all its components through time (Hua 16, 53/63, §19), calling this temporal extension “a sibling of the spatial”<sup>14</sup> extension (Hua 16, 55/66, §20).

These three layers of temporality stand in a foundational relation: we can only measure objective time against the succession of mental states (i.e., subjective time), which is in turn in our consciousness of succession founded in the pre-phenomenal flow of the “now” moments.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> This does not mean we cannot conceive of time without change: we clearly can, as demonstrated by Sidney Shoemaker’s thought experiment. Our claim is that we cannot experience such a state of affairs.

<sup>14</sup> Literally “*verschwistert mit der Räumlichen.*”

<sup>15</sup> In Husserl’s lectures on internal time consciousness, we find many more details regarding the various levels and the close interrelation between these levels of temporality. For instance, looking at the pre-phenomenal flow of time-constituting consciousness, we can see an unchanging passage of now moments that characterises the living-present. It is a two-sided time-constituting phenomenon: the living-present is at the same time non-temporal and a continuous progression of now moments, a standing stream (Hua 10, nos. 39, 50, 54). This dual nature of the



In the following, we refer to these layers in sum as the layers of inner temporality to distinguish them from the temporality constituted by things changing.

Husserl himself hints at a suitability of such distinction between the temporal life of consciousness and the temporal change of things at the beginning of *Thing and Space*. He states that “we must not mingle together what concerns the consciousness which constitutes the givenness and what concerns the object itself. Thus, we must not interpret into the object the flux, the changing, and the articulation of the giving consciousness” (Hua 16, 31/37, §13). We ought to differentiate between the flux, changes, and articulations of the giving consciousness and characteristics of the thing. The flow and structure of the consciousness that constitutes the givenness is distinct from the flow and structure of the object given in consciousness, but the changes to which the object is subjected also must not be reduced to the flow of temporality.

Husserl does not discuss either claim in much detail, but the way he treats the temporality constituted by change throughout his lectures clearly indicates the possibility of such a distinction. For example, Husserl time and again explicitly advises his readers to focus on an object of perception that is free of change to investigate more easily other moments, such as qualities and identity: “consider some outer perception, e.g., that of a house, and let us specifically take up perceptions which contain no change whatsoever” (Hua 16, 37/42, §14). In §19, he goes even further in excluding change from his investigations:

Our previous analysis privileged certain of the most simple cases. It did not relate purely and simply to all perceptions but was restricted to perceptions of unchanged objects, whereby these perceptions were taken in turn as completely unchanged in themselves. That might be an abstract fiction,<sup>16</sup> but it could not shake the evidence of our analyses, insofar as this evidence adhered to moments which remain unaffected by possible factual variations of perception. (Hua 16 1997, 60/61, §19)

The idea that one can investigate things as if they were unchanging without affecting the investigation reveals an implicit assumption, namely that change is secondary when it comes to our perception of things. In Husserl’s view, things are first and foremost spatial entities, which is why we can perceive them as unchanging, bring them to mind as unchanging, and investigate them as unchanging. And while Husserl admits the fictive nature of this presupposition,<sup>17</sup> in discussing change he immediately returns to the question of how a thing can remain identical (i.e., essentially unchanging) through change. The change is once again

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pre-phenomenal flow of time-constituting consciousness as (a) *timeless* allows us to account for the unity of temporal experiences, while (b) the fact that it is also continually *changing*, forming a stream of now-moments, allows for a constitution of the other levels of temporality.

<sup>16</sup> The German original is clearer when stating that “fiction” applies mainly to the fact that perception is never fully static, i.e., that the term ‘fiction’ does not seem to apply to the thing. “... wobei diese Wahrnehmungen selbst als in sich völlig unverändert angenommen wurden. Das letzte mochte eine abstraktive Fiktion sein.”

<sup>17</sup> “Wir haben bisher eine absolut ruhende Dingwelt fingiert” (Hua 16 1997, §78).

treated in relation to identity, not as a *sui generis* fundamental aspect of reality.<sup>18</sup> This presupposition regarding the secondary nature of temporal change is further evidenced by the comparatively few remarks Husserl makes about the temporal dimension of spatiotemporal things.

The layer of temporality of changing things (temporality of the changing phenomenon itself) thus cannot be foundationally related to the internal structures of time consciousness in the same way as the layers of inner temporality are.<sup>19</sup>

The argument goes as follows: If the changing temporality of things were part of the *a priori* structure of (time) consciousness, we could not bring the perception of static, unchanging objects to the mind as present (“anschaulich gegeben”), just as we cannot bring to mind as present (“anschaulich gegeben”) a spatiotemporal object that is in no way temporal or durational. This latter is impossible because the temporality of perception is based on and correlates with the temporal structures of consciousness. One cannot bring to mind as present a perception that is neither in time (objective time), nor temporally extended (subjective time). Similarly, one cannot bring to mind as present a consciousness that does not involve the continuous flow of now moments (time-constituting consciousness). These layers of temporality are integral to the *a priori* correlation between perception and perceived object. There is no perception of spatiotemporal phenomena that is not characterised by layers of inner temporality.

Things are, however, different in the case of temporality of the changing phenomenon itself. Clearly, we can bring the perception of static objects to mind. The time constituted by changes in which the changing things are involved therefore need not be considered part of the foundational structure of internal time consciousness. It is thus possible that it *is not* part of the structure of the *a priori* correlation. Nonetheless, things do change and, at least sometimes, we experience this change. Where does this change and the temporality it constitutes come from? It cannot be part of the layers of inner temporality because it does not stand in an *a priori* relation to them. But since change takes time, it must constitute a temporality and this temporality is quite distinct from the layers of temporality described by Husserl.

What do we know about the temporality of a changing phenomenon itself so far? We know that it is distinct from the layers of our inner temporality but given as embedded in them.

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<sup>18</sup> Die “neue Grundfrage ist: Wie konstituiert sich das Ding als Identisches der Veränderung und näher der qualitativen Veränderung? [...] wir nehmen auch wahr, dass Dinge sich qualitativ und nurqualitativ ändern. [...] Die Dinge bleiben also dieselben. Sie ruhen noch immer” (Hua 16, §78).

<sup>19</sup> This excludes the cases of merely apparent change that is the result of body movement or another kinesthesia. Husserl views the possibility of perceiving movement in the objects while it is actually the corporeal subject that moves as an extreme form of kinesthesia; cf. §83 of *Thing and Space* (Hua 16, §83).

The temporality of change is thus nested within these inner temporality layers but is not part of their foundational hierarchy. While these layers of inner temporality constitute a precondition for the possibility of appearance of temporality of the changing thing (because they are the precondition of any experiential appearance), the temporality of change cannot be grounded in the structures of consciousness.<sup>20</sup>

In the appearance of the changing thing, we can thus reveal and distinguish two distinct flows: one of the levels of the inner time and one of the changing object. How is that possible if we have the experience of just one thing, albeit a changing one? We believe it is due to the nature of correlation between our perception and the object. Let us take the changing thing. One can focus on investigating which of our conscious structures correlate with changes in the thing. If there are no correlating changes in the structure of perception—which, we will argue, is what Husserl believed—then a change in the thing cannot be part of the *a priori* correlation between perception and the perceived object. It must be of a different origin. This approach reveals the strange status of temporality of the changing thing itself. In particular, it shows that the temporality of changes in the thing does not exert the same influence on the essential *a priori* structure of perceptual givenness as the other levels of temporality do. Regardless of whether the thing changes or not, structurally it continues to be given in the same way:

The thing is [...] identical only in constantly becoming otherwise [...].

[Still,] [t]he lawful manifold of the fulfilling perceptual nexus, i.e., of the nexus which produces, or would produce, the unfolding givenness of the thing, remains, on the whole, the same. It is just that one feature, resident in certain appearances, is corrected or else is affected anticipatorily by the correction of the apprehension. For instance, if the colour of a certain surface area is other than it was assumed to be in the first apprehension, then the correction only affects all the images that present this part of the surface. Furthermore, it thereby affects precisely only the presentation of the colour, not that of the form of this side of the Object and a fortiori not the manifold of images pertaining to the remainder of the thing. (Hua 16, 247/286, §84)

Therefore, a change in the thing does not fundamentally change its perceptual givenness, because the correlational structure between the *appearing phenomenon* and its *manner of existence* remains essentially unchanged regardless of whether we look at an object in

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<sup>20</sup> To add another layer of support for my argument, let us note that Husserl considers time in general to be part of the form of objectivity—not of consciousness. Time is thus a property of the object, not the subject. There is something in the nature of objectivity, in the content of experiences, that is itself temporal: “And nevertheless, it is misleading to say that time is a form of consciousness, for time is first constituted in synthesis, and without synthesis, only the possibility of the objectifying consciousness of time obtains, but not the reality. The actual experiences, the contents per se, have their objective time positions, temporal orderings, temporal extensions, etc. [...] Time is not a form of consciousness, but the form of every possible objectivity, and only inasmuch as contents can also be constituted as objects in perceptions and other objectifying acts do they also have their time” Edmund Husserl, Hua 24. *Introduction to logic and the theory of knowledge. Lectures 1906/07*, (tr.) C. Ortiz Hill (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 270/273, §43f.

movement or in apparent stasis. The temporality of change seems to have no bearing on the essential correlated structures. While change does present a difference in the concrete phenomenon, this difference according to Husserl does not translate into correlated changes on the structural or essential level which phenomenology investigates. Even worse, as in the example above, a change in the thing is often presented and discussed in analogy to the changes present to us in a sequence of perceptions we experience when looking at one object from different sides.

In the quotation above, Husserl seems to go so far as to argue that just like the adumbrations give just one object, so change, too, merely gives the thing. But these two kinds of experience (the object in its adumbrations and the changing thing) present themselves as entirely different kinds of phenomena. The most fundamental and noticeable difference seems to be the following: In change, there is a temporality and progression (the actual duration of the change and progression of the change) that is in no way dependent on the perceiver, while temporality, like the progression of investigation of the different sides of one thing, is open to a degree of manipulation by the perceiver.

Having thus clarified to what extent we think Husserl can be of help in constructing the temporality of the object itself, our discussion will now turn away from Husserl's texts and towards a phenomenological mediation led by a reflection on encounters with objects. This is not to be understood as an application of Husserl's phenomenology in any strict sense of the term. Yet insofar as our aim here is to elucidate the evidence that lies in the phenomena themselves, the following considerations may still be viewed as proceeding in a Husserlian spirit.

### 3 Temporality of the object and the temporality of consciousness

Having taken onboard the preceding, how should we phenomenologically address the temporality of the changing phenomenon itself? The main challenge is that if we want to describe the phenomenality of change of objects, we end up with a description of the changing phenomenon as it is given to our consciousness. Based on Husserl's ideas on this topic, we were able to elucidate in the preceding the distinction between temporality of the object and temporality the perceiving subject implicated in the experiencing. The lectures on the Thing suggest that the reality of the object is in terms of its temporality not *a priori* correlated to consciousness and to the structure of subjective time. In the following, we take up this idea and develop it further, in a way more loosely based on Husserlian phenomenology. In the discussion above, it turned out that the temporality of objects constitutes—from a transcendental idealist

standpoint—a “limit phenomenon” insofar as the objectual process of change appears to us as a series of subjective intuitions (“Auffassungen”), while not coming into view as such.

In the remainder of the paper, we will try to consider this limit phenomenon differently, namely by investigating how we can become aware of change as being independent of us. If we focus on the present alone, the temporality of a changing object cannot be perceived because it is interpreted through the *a priori* structure of our time consciousness, which reduces it to a spatial phenomenon. Our proposed solution is that to grasp change, we must be *open* to the future. In phenomenological terms, it means that our protention of the future should not be based on our current perception. It must be, as it were, “emptied” of any anticipation. If we anticipate the future based on the present, a change in the object will be perceived as a modification of our current intuition. If, on the other hand, we cease anticipating, the object itself as changing might become phenomenologically accessible.<sup>21</sup>

Before demonstrating this using an example, a methodological remark is in order. In terms of Husserlian phenomenology, one should strictly differentiate here between protention and anticipation. While protention refers to the structure of time consciousness or the fact that we in a sense always look ahead, anticipation is concerned with the concrete things and events we are “protentively” aware of. An emptying of protention would thus mean that we do not anticipate anything in particular. But this introduces a problem: while it makes an intuitive sense to say that I do not expect anything in particular—for instance because I reflect on something and am not attentive towards my surroundings—when I *am* attentive there *is* something that occupies my consciousness. In this sense, being open to the future could be simply understood as *indeterminately* attending to the present without anticipating how possible encounters with any objects of experience might further unfold.

To give an example: Suppose I see a painted glass sphere, suspended from the ceiling and rotating around its axis. The side that faces me now shows a pattern of vertical black and white stripes. In the usual anticipatory mode, I would apprehend the regularity of the pattern and expect the turning sphere to reveal a succession of black and white stripes identical to what I am witnessing now. What would it entail for my present perception of the turning sphere if I were to suspend my expectation in the vein suggested above? What would it be like to be genuinely open to the future, in this case to the autonomous unfolding of the object? Would it

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<sup>21</sup> Although Husserl speaks of empty protentions or an “empty horizon of protentions” (in Hua 33, 4–14), my suggestion goes in a different direction because this proposal involves not merely an empty horizon that is continuously actualized with new *full* protentions, but a change in our protentive comportment altogether; see Edmund Husserl, Hua 33. *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein (1917/18)*, (ed.) R. Bernet and D. Lohmar (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), 4–14.

amount to expecting nothing? But that surely cannot be, because the minimal condition for my continuous perception is that my present continues.

One way of tackling this dilemma would be to describe openness to the future in terms of a “displaced” surprise. While frustration in the usual sense would refer to the occurring experience not meeting my expectations (the black and white sphere keeps turning only to unexpectedly reveal one red stripe in-between all the others), a displaced surprise would amount to being surprised by the unfolding encounter with the object at *each and every moment*. Here, one can sense that “surprise” intuitively suggests too much of a disruption of anticipation. What these descriptions aim at is no “constant amazement” but rather a disinterested (in the sense of anticipation-free) observational stance.

To better see what this entails, let us consider the role of apprehending in my perception of the sphere: naturally, as soon as I apprehend the regularity of the striped pattern, I expect it to continue to appear with the turning of the sphere. My surprise by the single red stripe is due to my apprehension failing me: I did not—and could not—expect this change based on what I came to know about the object. The surprise here is related to my *apprehension* of things. Think about what being open to the future would mean in terms of apprehending: I would not stop making sense of the objects I perceive. Naturally, I would still notice that black and white pattern. But when I would see the red stripe, I would not be “surprised” because I would not have observed the object primarily in relation to me but rather as an autonomous thing. In other words, I would not expect it to conform to my prior cognition of it. From an “open” standpoint, there is no reason to expect the pattern to continue just because of its appearance at the moment. Importantly, this does not mean that I could not be surprised or amazed in my encounter with objects. Quite the contrary: when I see the red stripe, I *am* surprised—but not because of me but because of the object itself. This is what being open to the future means: letting objects appear to us as existing on their own.

A further example further illustrates what this means: When I watch a pot of water come to the boil, the even surface of the water at first does not allow me to anticipate the changes which will take place once the water reaches a certain temperature. Let us assume I am a naïve observer with no knowledge of the physical properties of water. The first visible changes will be astonishing: once the first bubbles appear, I will have to readjust my expectations of the continued perception of the water. For instance, I might expect the bubbles to grow, stay the same, or vanish altogether. In all these scenarios, my current perception is accompanied by a specific expectation and change is therefore reduced to a modification of the presently perceived object. But when I simply continue to observe the water without expecting for

instance the number of bubbles on the surface to continue to increase, my whole experience of the process changes: it is the water itself that appears to undergo ever more agitated motions. When we do not anticipate the future, we can get a sense of the observed object as changing independently of us, as having its own future. To be able to phenomenologically address an object's temporality, we must allow for our surprise to be displaced, not aligned with any expectations. In short, the difference is between being surprised by *our perception* of the object or by the *object itself*.

Therefore, the temporality of the changing object may become accessible if our protentions remain empty or when we cease to anticipate a continuation of the present state of affairs. In the case of the boiling water, instead of anticipating a particular future behaviour or a further visible change, we can focus solely on what unfolds before our eyes. Details may gain a new significance because they are not immediately aligned with the context of previous perceptions. The changing object may, in its change, interrupt the continuity of my perception. This interruption could be understood as a more pronounced version of what was described above as the temporality of the object being "nested" in my time consciousness. In other words, the idea is not to leave Husserl's phenomenological framework behind, or—in some mysterious fashion—to dispense with the immanence of consciousness. The gist of our suggestion is in focusing on how the very structure of consciousness allows for the appearance of something that is not *of* this consciousness, in this case an object that appears to us as a real entity. To be open to the future then means allowing these changes to take place: not as quasi adumbrations, not as objects showing me their heretofore invisible aspects whose invisibility is always already related to what is visible. Being open to the future amounts to openness to the object in its existence and persistence in time that is not the time of my internal consciousness.

When apprehending, in the way suggested above, various object-involving processes (such as water coming to a boil), we are not moving towards an impressional consciousness that only ever lasts less than the blink of an eye. That would make the experience of an objective temporality basically unintelligible. The continuous nature of time consciousness presupposes, to use a Kantian term, a unity of apperception—and this is not lost when we follow the unfolding impressions we receive from objects instead of anticipatorily relating to our future knowledge of them. But how our continuous experiencing of reality retains its consistency despite the constant displaced surprise is a matter that requires further comment.

The question is: What is the difference between the experience of the unfolding of an object *tout court* and the experience of the object that is guided by one's apprehensions and expectations? The discussion suggests that we must consider here two distinct forms of

continuity. First of all, there is the continuity of my experience in the form of unceasing expectation of further aspects of the object coming into view, that is, a continuity of constant anticipation and its fulfilment (or frustration). Secondly, there is a continuity that seems grounded in the autonomy of the object which I apprehend without expectation. To give another example, this time of an object at rest: If I look first at the neck of a bottle and then down to where it meets the table, I will not have viewed different parts of the same bottle. Instead, the features my vision rests on themselves dictate how they appear. The overarching sense of what I see is not guided by the categorical intuition of seeing “a bottle.” Instead, I will be attentive to the surprise I feel every time I move my eyes ever so slightly, bringing a new feature into view. Thus, although I somehow irrevocably know that what I see is a bottle, and although I intend it, what I actually see is not predetermined by any foresight or anticipation. The color and brilliance of the glass surface remain strange, almost seeming to stare back at me, instead of aligning themselves with my expectation. But I can only experience this if I stop anticipating, resist the inclination to take the continuation—of the movement of things or the movement of my own gaze—as a matter of course.

To resist this inclination cannot mean that one should somehow stop or alter the stream of experience. Rather, it amounts to noticing and perceiving the constant appearing that takes place in it. Nevertheless, this idea of “constant appearing” is still reminiscent of the constancy in which our perceptions are protentively informed by anticipation, and it is this continuity that threatens to conceal the continuity of the object. It may thus be better to think of it in terms of “unceasing appearing” which, in the example of the bottle, means being unceasingly surprised (in the sense discussed above) by what I see.

What this reveals is the potential of reality to go beyond all of our expectations. From an anticipatorily stance, it may seem that—in the example of the boiling water—the water changes its state abruptly, with a sudden appearance of bubbles and the almost imperceptible emergence of steam. And no matter how much we anticipate these changes based on prior experience, current perceptions, or knowledge of physics, if we try to grasp this process from the continuity of our experiencing, we will always be too late. In other words, we cannot anticipate the exact moment when the water starts changing its state: we can merely note *that* we have observed it once the change was perceived. Insofar as we expect some future continuation of the present, the change originating in an actually existing object that becomes visible to us makes itself felt retroactively, after being noticed.

If, on the other hand, we are open to the future and to the unceasing appearance of what we perceive, this moment when the change in the behaviour of water takes place may be



experienced differently. It will align itself with our perception *because* we did not expect it. But for it to be so, this moment cannot have been anticipated. When we are attentive to the unceasing appearance, what we perceive is not motivated and associated by the teleology of our interest. When letting oneself be guided by the object's temporality, a different sense of continuity can make itself felt, one that hinges on giving one's full attention to the object's temporal unfolding.

#### 4 Conclusions

One pressing question that may arise from our discussion is what we actually learn about the object by trying to disclose its objective temporality. Is the bracketing of one's own anticipatory stance of any scientific interest? Would not the changes observed in the boiling water be better understood in an experimental framework? What is gained by looking at the water as opposed to measuring its temperature or determining the point when it changes its state? These questions raise a valid point and allow us to reflect on the kind of objectivity involved in our present discussion of temporality and reality. The water that unceasingly appears to me is not a scientific object in the sense being an object whose properties can be described for instance in chemical terms. By looking at water as we do when open to the future, we learn nothing about it in this sense because we have no specific epistemic interest in mind. There is no question to be answered by the changes we observe. But that does not mean that being open to the future and epistemically invested observation *a priori* exclude one another. On the contrary, what we know about water might be considered differently when we openly observe it. For instance, our intuitive idea of a boiling point may be different when we observe water being heated and *anticipate* it starting to boil versus when we simply observe *without anticipating* the features associated with the change of water's state.

One could also object that we have ignored relations among objects. The temporality investigated here is only that of a single object whereas in being open to the future, we would be confronted with many different temporalities, not just one, that of the object before us, be it a pot of water or a bottle. It is thus important to ask: What would being open to the future entail in case of a multitude of different objectual temporalities? While we cannot fully develop this important issue here, the discussion above has a few implications for this subject. In particular, possibly the most pressing question would be whether, when being open to the future, we experience different temporalities as distinct and if so, how we do it. Taking the example of the boiling water, if we add some sugar while the water is being heated, we would have two processes: the gradual dissolution of the sugar which will accelerate with rising temperature

rises and the heating of the water itself. Being open to the future in this case would mean, at a minimum, that we would not correlate these two events as we would naturally tend to because in our subjective time they co-appear. Instead, we would have to grasp them as independent processes: not independent in a physical sense but independent of the fact that we are observing them simultaneously. Doing so means that the boiling of the water and dissolution of the sugar would constitute two distinct temporalities because we are open to them as two separate, unpredictable unfoldings. Similar to the discussion of the last paragraph, this would not run counter our common-sense knowledge. Rather, we would get a new sense of how the objects interact *without this depending on our observation*. What we do when we are open to the future of multiple temporalities can thus be summed up by saying that we abstract away from the intuitive idea we have of interacting objects insofar as they simultaneously appear to us. Their co-temporality is independent of our subjective time consciousness and observation of this independence might reveal different aspects of experiences, even those as mundane as watching a pot of water coming to the boil.