

# INTENTIONALITY: A FUNDAMENTAL IDEA OF HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

"He devoured her with his eyes." This expression and many other signs point to the illusion common to both realism and idealism: to know is to eat. After a hundred years of academicism, French philosophy remains at that point. We have all read Brunschvicg, Lalande, and Meyerson. We have all believed that the spi-dery mind trapped things in its web, covered them with a white spit and slowly swallowed them, reducing them to its own substance. What is a table, a rock, a house? A certain assemblage of "contents of consciousness", a class of such contents. O digestive philosophy! Yet nothing seemed more obvious: is not the table the actual content of my perception? Is not my perception the present state of my consciousness? Nutrition, assimilation! Assimilation, Lalande said, of things to ideas, of ideas by ideas, of minds by minds. The corpulent skeletons of the world were picked clean by these diligent diastases: assimilation, unification, identification. The simplest and plainest among us vainly looked for something solid, something not just mental, but would encounter everywhere only a soft and very genteel mist: themselves.

Against the digestive philosophy of empirico-criticism, of neo-Kantianism, against all "psychologism", Husserl persistently affirmed that one cannot dissolve things in consciousness. You see this tree, to be sure. But you see it just where it is: at the side of the road, in the midst of the dust, alone and writhing in the heat, eight miles from the Mediterranean coast. It could not enter into your consciousness, for it is not of the same nature as consciousness. One is perhaps reminded of Bergson and the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*. But Husserl is not a realist: this tree on its bit of parched earth is not an absolute which would subsequently enter into communication with us. Consciousness and the world are given at one stroke: essentially external to consciousness, the world is nevertheless essentially relative to consciousness. Husserl sees consciousness as an irreducible fact which no physical image can account for. Except perhaps the quick, obscure image of a burst. To know is to "burst toward", to tear oneself out of the moist gastric intimacy, veering out there beyond oneself, out there near the tree and yet beyond it, for the tree escapes me and repulses me, and I can no more lose myself in the tree than it can dissolve itself in me. I'm beyond it: it's beyond me.

J.-P. Sartre, "Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's Phenomenology", trans. Joseph P. Fell, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 1970, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 4-5.

Do you recognize in this description your own circumstances and your own impressions? You certainly knew that the tree was not you, that you could not make it enter your dark stomach and that knowledge could not, without dishonesty, be compared to possession. All at once consciousness is purified, it is clear as a strong wind. There is nothing in it but a movement of fleeing itself, a sliding beyond itself. If, impossible though it be, you could enter "into" a consciousness you would be seized by a whirlwind and thrown back outside, in the thick of the dust near the tree, for consciousness has no "inside". It is just this being beyond itself, this absolute flight, this refusal to be a substance which makes it a consciousness.

Imagine for a moment a connected series of bursts which tear us out of ourselves, which do not even allow to an "ourselves" the leisure of composing ourselves behind them, but which instead throw us beyond them into the dry dust of the world, on to the plain earth, amidst things. Imagine us thus rejected and abandoned by our own nature in an indifferent, hostile, and restive world - you will then grasp the profound meaning of the discovery which Husserl expresses in his famous phrase. "All consciousness is consciousness of something". No more is it necessary to dispose of the effeminate philosophy of immanence, where everything happens by compromise, by protoplasmic transformations, by a tepid cellular chemistry. The philosophy of transcendence throws us on to the highway, in the midst of dangers, under a dazzling light.

Being, says Heidegger, is being-in-the-world. One must understand this "being-in" as movement. To be is to fly out into the world, to spring from the nothingness of the world and of consciousness in order suddenly to burst out as consciousness-in-the-world. When consciousness tries to recoup itself, to coincide with itself once and for all, closeted off all warm and cosy, it destroys itself. This necessity for consciousness to exist as consciousness of something other than itself Husserl calls "intentionality".

I have spoken primarily of knowledge to make myself better understood: the French philosophy that has moulded us understands little besides epistemology. But for Husserl and the phenomenologists our consciousness of things is by no means limited to knowledge of them. Knowledge, or pure "representation", is only one of the possible forms of my consciousness "of" this tree; I can also love it, fear it, hate it, and this surpassing of consciousness by itself that is called "intentionality" finds itself again in fear, hatred, and love. Hating another is just a way of bursting forth toward him; it is finding oneself suddenly confronted by a stranger in whom one lives, in whom one suffers from the very first, the objective quality "hateful".

So it is that all at once hatred, love, fear, sympathy - all these famous "subjective" reactions which were floating in the malodorous brine of the mind - are pulled out. They are merely ways of discovering the world. It is things which abruptly unveil themselves to us as hateful, sympathetic, horrible, lovable. Being dreadful is a *property* of this Japanese mask, an inexhaustible and irreducible property which constitutes its very nature - and not the sum of our subjective reactions to a piece of sculptured wood.

Husserl has restored to things their horror and their charm. He has restored to us the world of artists and prophets: frightening, hostile, dangerous, with its havens of mercy and love. He has cleared the way for a new treatise on the

passions which would be inspired by this simple truth, so utterly ignored by the refined among us: if we love a woman, it is because she is lovable. We are delivered from Proust. We are likewise delivered from the "internal life": in vain would we seek the caresses and fondlings of our intimate selves, like Amiel<sup>2</sup> or like a child who kisses his own shoulder, since everything is finally outside, everything, even ourselves. Outside, in the world, among others. It is not in some hiding-place that we will discover ourselves: it is on the road, in the town, in the midst of the crowd, a thing among things, a man among men.

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### Notes

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- 1 Translation by Joseph P. Fell of "Une Idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl: l'intentionnalité", in *Situations I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947). This essay first appeared in *Nouvelle Revue Française*, LII, January 1939. [Tr.] We are indebted to Editions Gallimard, to whom the copyright belongs, for permission to print this translation.
- 2 Henri Frederic Amiel (1821–1881). Swiss philosopher and author of *Journal intime*. [Tr.]

## THE TRANSCENDENCE OF THE EGO

For most philosophers the ego is an "inhabitant" of consciousness. Some affirm its formal presence at the heart of *Erlebnisse*, as an empty principle of unification. Others – psychologists for the most part – claim to discover its material presence, as the center of desires and acts, in each moment of our psychic life. We should like to show here that the ego is neither formally nor materially *in* consciousness: it is outside, *in the world*. It is a being of the world, like the ego of another.

### i The I and the me

#### A. The theory of the formal presence of the I

It must be conceded to Kant that "the I Think *must be able* to accompany all our representations." But need we then conclude that an *I in fact* inhabits all our states of consciousness and actually effects the supreme synthesis of our experience? This inference would appear to distort the Kantian view. The Critical problem being one of validity, Kant says nothing concerning the actual existence of the *I Think*. On the contrary, he seems to have seen perfectly well that there are moments of consciousness without the *I*, for he says "*must be able* to accompany." The problem, indeed, is to determine the conditions for the possibility of experience. One of these conditions is that I can always regard my perception or thought as *mine*: nothing more. But there is in contemporary philosophy a dangerous tendency [. . .] which consists of making into a reality the conditions, determined by Criticism, for the possibility of experience. This is the tendency which leads certain writers to ask, for example, what "transcendental consciousness" can *be*. [. . .] For Kant, transcendental consciousness is nothing but the set of conditions which are necessary for the existence of an empirical consciousness. Consequently, *to make into a reality* the transcendental *I*, to make of it the inseparable companion of each of our "consciousnesses,"<sup>1</sup> is to pass on *fact*, not on validity, and to take a point of view radically different from that of Kant. [. . .]

If we reject all the more or less forced interpretations of the *I Think* offered by the post-Kantians, and nevertheless wish to solve the problem of the existence *in fact* of the *I* in consciousness, we meet on our path the phenomenology of