



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Phenomenology of death: subjectivity and nature in Husserl's genetic phenomenology

Vecino, M.C.

Citation

Vecino, M. C. (2021, December 2). *Phenomenology of death: subjectivity and nature in Husserl's genetic phenomenology*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3246992>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3246992>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Chapter 3: Limit-cases in Husserl's work

In this chapter, I present an exegetic view of Husserl's treatment of limits in general, and death in particular, following Husserl's different philosophical stages (static, genetic, generative) and his usage of different methodological tools (description, reduction, reconstruction). The paradoxical character of death is further clarified in terms of the constitution of time from an egological perspective, and immortality gains a new dimension through intersubjectivity. I will address the different problems that arise with each approach, and show that throughout them all and until the end of Husserl's philosophical career, death continued to be a problematic issue, and Husserl's desire for resolution shows him pushing towards a stronger and more questionable type of idealism. Indeed, what is common to these different attempts to find a definitive answer to the problem of death is that they remain, in the end, subjected to the first-personal perspective in a somewhat crippling way. This is true even in the case of those texts that take a generative (intersubjective and historical) approach. Although being respectful of Husserl's methodological principles —first-personal evidence and intuitive givenness— is a requirement I have set for myself in this research, the question of limits faces us with a choice when it comes to interpreting and balancing those principles. This allows different paths to open up in front of us. This chapter aims to identify Husserl's own path(s) and their limitations, in order to clear the way to our own possible solution.

3.1 Introduction

As long as phenomenological inquiry is rooted in first-personal evidence, limit-cases (*Limesfälle*) or limit problems (*Grenzprobleme*) as Husserl calls them remain enigmatic and problematic. They are, in fact, not referred to as *phenomena* since they are not given to intuition and thus they are not proper objects for reflection; not, at least, in their true meaning as moments of passage to or from consciousness. So the question arises of how, if not through intuition, we can ascribe a meaning to them. “*Can ‘thinking’ bear the cost of this constitution?*” [kann das „Denken“ für diese Konstitution aufkommen?] (Hua 42, 427). Birth and death

will gain their sense through other paths, namely through an indirect constitution that requires abandoning a purely solipsistic realm by considering the experience of others as a type of evidence. Yet even when we step beyond the personal Ego as a source of evidence, Husserl strives to maintain it as a point of departure, to which we can still, through a longer route, go back to. This is what the reconstructive method, that works through intentional modifications of non-present experiences, relies on to obtain a valid phenomenological account of limits. Whether he achieves this or not is a point of contention between Husserl scholars and the phenomenologists that followed; and a key to understanding if his general project holds.

In a broad sense, limit-cases refer to everything that cannot be given as content of a present experience but rather as a modification of one; this means that not only birth and death as the limits of our own existence fall under this category, but also sleep, the unconscious, the other (and especially 'abnormal' cases like mentally ill people and infants). Additionally, the animal and time can be treated in the same way, since in all these cases we are working at the limits of sense-constitution. However, birth and death are liminal in a double sense, because they also represent the limits of our own ego-centred existence, and for this reason they concern us in a special manner: "*once knowledge of death has been acquired, it enters into the horizon of all experience*" (Schutz & Luckmann 1983, 127). Alongside these, sleep is usually treated by Husserl as an analogical case to make sense of them, although this doesn't make it less enigmatic.

The paradoxical conception of death that we presented previously marks the spirit of Husserlian reflection on limits, and Husserl will often start by presenting them as events in the constituted world, and posing the question of their transcendental meaning and relevance. Husserl scholars (Geniusas 2010, Fraccaroli 2013, Steinbock 2017) have generally identified two different approaches to the question of birth and death in Husserl's work: the first, "genetic/egological" approach analyzes limits "from within" the egological perspective, focusing on temporality and the contradictory experience of subjective and objective time. There, birth and death are seen as ideal limits that we make sense of through analogy with other experiences such as sleep, sickness and

aging. The second, “generative/intersubjective” approach focuses on limits from the perspective of the intersubjective community. This perspective broadens the scope of analyses beyond the egological realm and allows for limits to become proper objects of transcendental inquiry. In this context, birth and death are seen as necessary features of worldly experience and the unconceivability of our own finitude from an internal perspective is contrasted with their newfound transcendental necessity. However, generativity does not undermine the results given by the first approach about the immortality of the subject, but in fact supports them through a new route, since Husserl will speak of the immortality of the constituting community and the sedimentation of individual accomplishments in the unity of tradition.

I will begin this chapter by briefly describing Husserl’s methodological development in general, the different stages in his work as well as the methodological tools that correspond to each of them. The classification I propose here does not intend to be exhaustive or final, but simply a guiding scheme that attempts to show the methodological advances made by Husserl regarding his first, canonical formulation of the phenomenological method, the basic principles of which, nevertheless, he always stays faithful to. The deepening and broadening of Husserl’s method is what allows for questions regarding limits to be posed in the first place, and for their reflection to become richer and richer; while at the same time, the need to address these and other issues is what motivates Husserl to expand his methodological horizons. I will then present Husserl’s account of limits from a genetic and a generative perspective, as they lead to certain *aporiai* that cannot be settled in their own context. In the genetic-egological perspective, death exhibits the paradoxical character that I presented in the previous chapter, insofar as it is transcendently “impossible” yet undeniable.²³

²³ The different approaches to death in Husserl’s work that I assess in this chapter can all be framed in the context of his genetic phenomenology. Another alternative account, however, can be found in the discussion around Monadology in chapter 5, where I consider the possibility that the eternal character of the flow of experience is given as a *Kantian idea*. In discussion of subjectivity as process in chapter 9, I briefly discuss the possibility of thinking of a subject independently of the world. In both cases I conclude that this may offer an account of immortality, but not of death. Both of these sections analyze the issue from the point of view of eidetic phenomenology. I do not go into this as a separate heading, however, because it does not constitute a separate approach to the question of death but could rather be thought of as

3.2 Methodological stages in Husserl's work

There is a well-established (Biemel 1958) division of Husserl's work into static and genetic phenomenology that he himself points to as he makes his turn towards genetic questions (Following Walton 2015, 47 we can trace it to Hua 1, 110 ff.; Hua 11, 336-345; Hua 14, 40 ff.; Hua 15, 613-618; Hua 17, 315 ff.). While static phenomenology characterizes his first works, genetic phenomenology is developed around the year 1917 as a new type of perspective that goes beyond the static analyses and inquiries about the genesis both of objects and of the constituting subjectivity²⁴. As far as objects go, Husserl finds that any present perception is partly shaped after previous ones and that past intentional acts contribute to our general way of experiencing the world by configuring a horizon of anticipation involving a system of remissions through passive associations. This means that a static account of perception is simply not enough to explain the different "layers" (Hua 13, appendix XLV) that are involved in the perception of something, and thus it is necessary to enrich those analyses by taking time into consideration. On the other hand, regarding the genesis of subjectivity, the possibility for these past experiences to be brought back is given because they remain a part of the I, they constitute a sedimented ground of habitualities that give each I their own personal style. Contrary to a static account, which considers a pure ego facing an objective pole in a present moment, genetic phenomenology thinks of the ego as affected by the sum of its past acts:

But it is to be noted that this centring Ego is not an empty pole of identity, any more than any object is such. Rather, according to a law of "transcendental generation", with every act emanating from him and having a new objective sense, he acquires a new

underlying many of Husserl's insights as they are presented in the context of this dissertation. Indeed, a possible way of framing the problem of death would be to consider it as constituting a frontier between the eidetic and the existential "sides" of subjectivity, which I attempt to reconcile.

²⁴ Although the standard classification points to the Bernau manuscripts on time as the first set of texts where Husserl applies a genetic methodology, in the forthcoming Husserliana volume on *Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins* which dates back to 1908 there seems to be already a genetic enquiry at play. I thank Zachary Hugo for pointing this out to me.

abiding property. (Hua 1, 100; Husserl 1960, 66).

Husserl defines genetic phenomenology as a “*phenomenology of the monadic individuality*” (Hua 14, 34), taking up the Leibnizian legacy and characterizing the monad as a transcendental subjectivity with a particular sedimented history, that is to say, as a substrate of habitualities and predispositions that mark a unique style of performing acts.

These habitualities configure a particular horizon for experience that differs in each case and is permanently under modification, having an objective correlate in the empirical types that organize the experience of transcendent objects. For both sides of the correlation, genetic analyses take time into consideration and focus on the becoming of the subject and the world. In this sense, it is not casual that it is in the Bernau manuscripts on time that this perspective is first developed extensively. Husserl comes to realize that his previous reflections on the subject of time retain too much of a formal character and fail to account for the *content* of what lasts in time, that is, of anything given to consciousness in a given time all the way to the perception of the originary impression and the living present. When confronted with the question of the origin of these contents, Husserl concludes that through this system of associations and remissions consciousness constitutes itself, making the topic of self-constitution into the main focus of genetic phenomenology.

Regarding the problem of limits, one of the main consequences of the implementation of genetic analyses is that thanks to its ability to spread over time it allows one to take into consideration certain events where consciousness seems to be interrupted such as sleep, fainting, certain bodily inhibitions, etc., that static analyses couldn't take into account. These phenomena will serve Husserl to speak in an analogic way of birth and death, mostly paired up with sleep.

The most decisive contribution, however, of genetic phenomenology to the study of limit-cases, is the transformation of the notion of consciousness through the inclusion of a sphere of passivity. While static phenomenology thinks of consciousness as pure activity, genetic phenomenology unveils a different dimension underlying conscious activity and making it possible to tie different experiences together through a common aspect in a spontaneous, pre-intentional

way. This idea of a passive ground of subjectivity will later reach new depths in what Husserl calls an “unconscious” (*Unbewusstsein*), characterized as that which remains during sleep, before birth and after death, a minimal form of consciousness that serves as guarantee for the possibility of keeping these phenomena within the realm of subjective constitution.

After static and genetic phenomenology, generativism is sometimes used to characterise the third stage in Husserl’s work. It is developed in the 30s and it deals with intersubjective, historical, social and normative phenomena that involve collective sense-institution and transmission which cannot be reduced to individual constitution. Some authors like Anthony Steinbock consider that generativity is an autonomous sphere of reflection that surpasses both static and genetic analyses, and that it is the only way to fully account for limits (Steinbock 2001 in his introductory study to Husserl 2001, xxxiv). However, generative analysis remains tied to the first person as a starting point, and it is developed following the concerns that lie behind the genetic turn. This gives us more reason to think of it as a radicalization, but not an abandonment, of genetic phenomenology (Walton 2002; Bower 2014).

On top of this first classification which focuses on the types of phenomena under examination, it is possible to apply a different kind of classification, one that focuses on the specific methodological tools that Husserl uses throughout the different stages of his thought. In this second classification belong the constructive or reconstructive method, which is of great importance for the topic of limits. Constructive phenomenology is defined against the previous methodology as the way to address anything that is not given to intuition. In this sense, reconstruction can be distinguished in the first place from phenomenological description, tied to static analysis, and from a regressive analysis that goes from a lived experience to its conditions of possibility in subjectivity (active and passive). While the former tries to account for a present lived experience in a direct manner; the latter starts with the constituted objects and takes them as leading clues to move to the constituting realm through the performance of the *epoché*. According to the scheme Eugen Fink presents in the *Sixth Cartesian Meditation*, transcendental phenomenology is composed of i) a transcendental theory of elements, divided into

regressive phenomenology (transcendental analytic and aesthetic) and constructive phenomenology (transcendental dialectic); and ii) a transcendental theory of method. Fink stresses the deconstructive character of regressive phenomenology (*Abbau-Analyse*) that goes from the constituted object to constituting subjectivity, as opposed to constructive phenomenology (*Aufbau-Analyse*) that doesn't have a constituted object. This classification, inspired by the organization of the Kantian system in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, would assign to constructive phenomenology the role that the transcendental dialectic plays for Kant, dealing with what is not given. Remarkably, Fink speaks of birth and death as exemplary cases for constructive phenomenology to be put to work on. Reconstruction would allow to, so to speak, pick up where regressive analysis leaves off, i.e. the examination of the sphere of primordially and the unfolding of primal temporalization. In Husserl's work, developments on limit-cases would be the only example of what a constructive methodology would look like.

Now, even in the cases where we have to do without constituted phenomena as leading clues to go back to the way they are constituted, reconstructive analysis is not, according to Husserl, a matter of mere speculation. Reconstruction is often described by Husserl as a kind of analogic process where we take the experience from others as a type of leading clue, and apply it to the obscure regions of ourselves such as our childhood. In this sense, reconstruction relies heavily on generativity and is intimately tied to it:

So, after all, isn't this whole distinction between direct and indirect path inappropriate, and dictated by the whole state of affairs as the only direct way to unveil world constitution in the primordial ego the following way?

- 1) The disclosure of the constitutive structures that belong to the "human" ego until early childhood, as far as it can be known; while*
- 2) starting from there the path goes through other humans and the generative connections experienced from the outside. (Hua 39, 482)²⁵*

²⁵ Also ist doch diese ganze Unterscheidung zwischen direktem und indirektem Weg nicht schließlich unangemessen, und durch die ganze Sachlage vorgeschrieben als einzig direkter Weg zur Enthüllung der Weltkonstitution im primordialen Ego (der folgende Weg)?

1) Der der Enthüllung der konstitutiven Strukturen, die zum „menschlichen“ Ego bis zur frühen Kindheit, soweit sie erkennbar ist, (gehören); während

Because we are necessarily and originally immersed in an intersubjective community, we can trust others' experience to provide the answer for the questions lying beyond our individual intentionality. But even when Husserl is claiming here that the division between the two paths is "inappropriate" (*unangemessen*), he still regards this reconstruction as relying on experience "from the outside" (*von Außen*), thus opposing it to direct first-personal reflection. In the case of limits, both these paths are explored, although in a simultaneous and sometimes competing manner. Unlike in the case of my childhood, where I wouldn't doubt the testimony of others about the existence of my own early years, or my own experience of others developing from babies to children in the world; in the case of limits, experiencing the birth or death of other people still does not provide an insight into the transition from consciousness to unconsciousness, since something like this could only be experienced in the first person (that is, if it wasn't in principle impossible to live through). We will now explore Husserl's dealing with birth and death from a genetic and a generative perspective in order to see how these different approaches are put into play.

3.3 Genetic approach to limits

In appendix VIII of volume 11 of *Husserliana* on passive synthesis (1922) we can find one of the first formulations of the strongest argument in favour of the immortality of the transcendental subject, namely the one that rests on the study of temporality. Husserl develops there an analysis of remembering (*Wiedererinnerung*) whose end is to demonstrate that memory is a valid source of certainty and as such represents a possible access to past transcendental life. The importance of this demonstration consists in the possibility of stepping out of the momentary cogito, of the "*absolutely sterile 'I am'*" (Hua 11, 366; Husserl 2001a, 452) in order to add another temporal dimension to immanent perception, that will imply analogically its extension towards the future. Through the idea of the double

2) von da der Weg über andere Menschen geht und die von außen her erfahrenen generativen Zusammenhänge

reduction that takes place in remembering, Husserl asserts that even when we could have doubts about the content of our past experiences, we cannot doubt that they belong to us, that is, to our past ego. Now, just like in a present perception, every memory has a protentional tendency to continue the sequence of memories as they happened originally. This has to do with the temporal dynamic of consciousness according to which every present moment arises from a previous anticipation that turns into a present impression giving place to a new anticipation, etc. Having this dynamic in mind, Husserl concludes that

(...) the structure of the progressing time-consciousness and the structure of the constitution of new presents is certainly a fixed necessity. This implies that the process of living on, and the ego that lives on, are immortal –notabene, the pure transcendental ego, and not the empirical world-ego that can very well die. (Hua 11, 378; Husserl 2001a, 467)

The same thing happens regarding the past with the retentional forms that precede every present moment, having as a result an eternal ego in both ways. In this sense, Husserl argues that even if it was possible to imagine an undifferentiated void prior to birth or posterior to death, the very idea of something prior or posterior presupposes already applying these temporal categories, and the thing we imagine is not nothing but rather something obscure that takes place in time. To put it otherwise, any projection of this nothingness-stage implies that I would be there as a spectator to testify to it, which results in the impossibility of imagining my own death (De Warren 2009, 197). Of course, the necessity of this dynamics doesn't entail that the ego has or is able to retrieve an eternity of memories; rather, Husserl infers that beyond the limit of what can be remembered, the transcendental ego has "*a mute and empty life*" (Hua 11, 380; Husserl 2001a, 469) similar to a deep slumber in which there is no subjective activity.

A similar case is made in appendix XX of *Husserliana* 14, also from 1922, where Husserl stresses the impossibility of stepping out of the temporal dynamic by showing that there can be deception of a particular anticipation but it is always

within the boundaries of temporality, therefore it only affects the content and not the form of time. There can be change but every change needs the perpetuity of the flow to exist. In the same way, Husserl will say that I can conceive myself as being different in some way, but I cannot conceive of myself as not being at all.

Finally, the argument is repeated in manuscript n° 21 of the C-group, of the year 1930. There are a number of writings that address birth and death amongst the C-manuscripts, mostly from a genetic perspective. Written between 1929 and 1934, these texts deal with matters related to the flow of consciousness, the constitution of the world and the search for the absolute; and they focus on the notion of living present as the last level of temporalization and its relation to the Ego. In this particular one Husserl states that it is conceivable to think of every possible change in experience and even of a radical transformation of the form of world-experience, but it is not possible to think of my ending as a transcendental ego, since the form of the temporal flow admits of change only within the flow (Hua/Mat 8, 97). Along with the thematization of the living present, Husserl reflects on the notion of primal Ego (*Ur-Ich*) as the subjective pole of this stage of time. This notion, that has come up already in the context of the paradox of subjectivity, is key to understanding the limitlessness of consciousness. As a description of the origin of temporalization, the living present, and the primal Ego operating in it, are not themselves in time, but in a way are “*supratemporal*”. At this elemental stage, the constituting and the constituted coincide: the primal Ego turns to primordial *hyle* and thus temporalizes itself by transforming an impression into a retention. Before this, there was no Ego; but once there is, we have to say it was there all along, because without it there would have been no subject to be affected by the impression, and thus no time. Since we can only grasp it in a retrospective way, the ego in its original functioning remains *anonymous*. If we could experience the primal Ego as we do any object, it would mean that there is another, more originary form of the time-flow, in which this Ego is given as an objective pole, which would lead to an infinite regress. I will go into more detail about this in the next section, but it is understandable that in this context the functioning Ego should be, in a way, eternal, since it appears on scene already with a past-horizon and it can only be grasped in a retrospective mode, thus hindering the possibility of setting a starting

point or experiencing an ending point. At this point, it should be noted that several notions relating to time might risk getting conflated in our account. The idea that the flow cannot reach its beginning or end point is for Husserl an indication of an aprioristic feature of temporalization rather than of the de facto limitlessness of time. If the latter was the case, we would be talking about the immortality of something like a soul, that is to say, of an infinite endurance of our psyche *in* eternal time. This can't be the case here since such talk of immortality already presupposes the existence of an objective time where this endurance would take place. Since the subject that is at stake here is precisely the one who constitutes time—since she is, so to speak, at the edge of time—her immortality is not of this kind, but rather is closer to a kind of a-temporality or supratemporality, which would be the reason of her “eternal” character.

However, we do represent death to ourselves in some way, and according to Husserl this is not only because I experience other people dying. It actually happens prior to this. Although he refers to the death of another as “*the first constituted death*” (Hua 42, 3), if we abstract from others and remain in the sphere of ownness we could still make sense of death as an ideal limit. In manuscript n° 43, which he refers to as the best account of limits (Hua/Mat 8, 159) he sets out to reflect on birth and death as they are seen “from within”, that is, as they are constituted by the individual subject without considering intersubjectivity, mainly through an analogy with sleep. In the case of birth, Husserl thinks we reach a necessary beginning of conscious life by going back to past experiences and noticing the increasing impoverishment of the Ego which points to a limit in which we must have had a “first awakening”. In the case of death, we represent it by taking a clue from sleep, on the one hand, and from experiences of sickness and aging, on the other. We can imagine that the loss of control over our bodies that we go through occasionally would turn, in death, into a complete absence; and that the loss of connection to the world during deep sleep that we retrospectively find when we wake up, would never cease. The idea is that, even if we didn't know about birth and death as worldly events, just by the mere fact that we regularly fall asleep and wake up we tend to imagine a first awakening and a last sleep as possibilities for ourselves.

Is this, however, enough to account for our understanding of limits? The insights presented here are the product of the performance of a primordial reduction, which differs from the phenomenological reduction in that it does not just highlight the way in which experience unfolds, but involves the imaginative exercise of leaving aside everything that is intersubjective, including things like language: “*we disregard all constitutional effects of intentionality relating immediately or mediately to other subjectivity and delimit first of all the total nexus of that actual and potential intentionality in which the ego constitutes within himself a peculiar ownness*” (Hua 1, 124; Husserl 1960, 93). One can wonder if the results gained by the performance of this reduction are valid; or if it’s at all possible, since it seems an experience without any involvement of another is simply not something we could grasp. What Husserl claims here is that we could understand sleep even in isolation; this is theoretically possible insofar as, even if we cannot experience anything during deep sleep, we wake up with the feeling of having spent time sleeping while we corroborate that the world remained the same way. However, two issues can be raised here. One is the objection made to the primordial reduction in general: ultimately, we cannot know what “sleep” would be in a world without language, or what experience would be in general for that matter. As we saw in the previous chapter, Husserl recognized a fundamental intertwinement of the human, the world and language. Although this did not mean for him that consciousness was dependent on these, the notion of a worldless consciousness clashes with these types of considerations. This notion is intimately related with the idea of primordially Husserl has in mind: if reaching a primordial solipsistic dimension of the subject is possible, it is because constituting consciousness does not need to be in the world in an essential sense. As will become clearer in the following sections of this dissertation, the fact that intentional experience requires an egological and a non-egological dimension for there to be experience at all does not automatically mean that subjectivity is in any way bound to the world, although it can become a clue leading us in that direction.

The second objection is that, even if we accept the validity of this reduction, it only proves a certain necessity when thinking about birth but leaves death as a possibility: I *might* fall asleep and not wake up again, but there is nothing in the

primordial sphere indicating the fatality of death. This, of course, contributes to creating for Husserl the paradox between the certainty of death and the experience of a potential limitlessness. Now, acknowledging the inevitable presence of others in the most fundamental core of experience should at least serve to soften the claim that such an experience of limitlessness exists and can be discerned. This is important because the purity of the first person is tied to the possibility of isolating this primordial sphere where something can have a different and even opposed meaning to the one it has in the lifeworld.

The radicalization of the genetic question that leads to the generative approach will, among other things, stress the importance of senses that are passed on through generative ties, and help us respond to the two issues raised before. By going beyond the egological sphere, it will provide a way of understanding death as a transcendental element of experience, although this will not modify the first perspective but rather complement it from a different angle.

3.4 The Generative approach

Death is not an occurrence in the “I am” of the transcendental Ego, but an event in the human world [Tod ist kein seiendes Vorkommnis im „Ich bin“ des transzendentalen Ego, sondern ein Ereignis in der Welt des Menschen] (Hua 42, 78). Husserl is still presenting matters in this way in 1934, although he is at the same time making his way to the recognition of limits as transcendentially relevant, as he begins to adopt a generative perspective. Because “*a world and humans without birth and death are unthinkable*” [eine Welt und Menschen ohne Geburt und Tod undenkbar sind.] it seems that they cannot be mere factual occurrences but rather essential parts (*Wesensstück*) of the constituted world (Hua 15, 172). From the perspective of generativity, it is possible to step beyond the egological and focus instead on the intermonadic community of which every man is a part of—so much so that everyone is born with certain inherited traits and dispositions. In this approach, the birth of every new man is not an absolute beginning but an awakening to the community, and death a separation or an elimination from that community that doesn’t cease to exist when a member dies (Hua/Mat 8, 442). This understanding of my own death as a constituted phenomenon that doesn’t entail

the ending of the world comes from the empirical experience of the death of others, and becomes transcendently relevant by considering these others as transcendental subjects like myself, which means they will continue being constituting subjects even if my own experience comes to an end. In the brief appendix VIII to *Husserliana* 15 from the year 1930 Husserl stresses the importance of these limit-phenomena for the constitution of the world as we experience it:

Now, birth and death enter the scene in a new way in this stage of experience: they are formative of the meaning of men and the world. The certainty of my own being regarding the future, as a man living in the world amongst other men, and that of the being of each one admits an insurmountable limit, and the same thing happens, correlatively, with the certainty of memories of the past human and of men living in the world. (Hua 15, 171)²⁶

It is the notion of reconstruction through empathy that works as the condition of possibility of the adoption of this perspective:

Building the operation of empathy as the experience of others and of myself amongst others, the effective and possible foreign experience is presented immediately as a way of presentification that possesses a validity of being, and as a modified experience in relation to my originary primordial experience (Hua 15, 171)²⁷

Now, the generative bond requires there exist a mutual implication of monads that allows each personal experience to contribute to the historical sedimentation, which is transmitted from older to newer generations. The endlessness of the generative process marks another form of immortality for the transcendental subject, that lives on in the community through what Husserl calls the “*unity of the*

²⁶ Nun tritt aber in die Erfahrung dieser Stufe neu ein als sinnbildend für Menschen und Welt der Tod und die Geburt. Die Zukunftsgewissheit vom eigenen Sein als weltlebender Mensch unter Menschen und vom Sein eines jeden Anderen bekommt eine unüberschreitbare Grenze und ebenso korrelativ die Erinnerungsgevvissheit vom menschlichen Vergangensein und Menschen in Weltleben.

²⁷ Im Aufbau der Leistung der Einfühlung als Erfahrung von Andern und meiner unter Andern weise ich zunächst fremde wirkliche und mögliche Erfahrung auf als eine Weise der Vergegenwärtigung, die Seinsgeltung hat, und eine abgewandelte gegenüber meiner primordial-originalen Erfahrung.

tradition” (Hua/Mat 8 438). It is in the context of ethical concerns that Husserl will usually raise generative issues, including birth and death seen from this perspective. There is a kind of comfort found in the face of death when we know we belong to something larger, and that acts as a moral incentive. Remarkably, Husserl gives the example of the loss of a child during war, which is what had happened to him with his son, and underlines the asymmetry of that loss from a personal perspective or from the perspective of the community: even if for the parents it is something unbearable, the nation requires these sacrifices (Hua 42, 400-401).

One of the latest texts in which Husserl deals with death is a manuscript from 1936 entitled “Die anthropologische Welt” (Hua 29), where he speaks of space and time as a “superficial” *a priori* of the world of experience. The structure of the *Lebenswelt* and its requirement that everything real has to be corporeal indicates that in order to have a world, men have to fulfil certain empirical conditions such as possessing a body and “reigning” over it. In this scenario, death – defined as the breakdown of our bodies and as the loss of the ability to experience- appears as an anomalous experience that challenges the normality of the perceived world, for how could we make sense of it if when we die we can no longer experience anything? Indeed, death is absurd or “has no meaning” for the transcendental subject. But if we go one step beyond the empirical laws of the *Lebenswelt* we will find that the true transcendental *a priori* structure of the world involves intersubjectivity, and with it, generativity. This means that the death of others has a transcendental value that can be transferred to my own experience, although it is not the experience of the end of transcendental subjectivity or life but that of my exit as personal ego from the community. At this point Husserl mentions Heidegger and what he considers to be his excessive stress on death, which “*in the authentic phenomenology founded on the transcendental reduction (...) consists in separating the transcendental ego from its self-objectification as a man*” (Hua 29, 327)²⁸

²⁸ in der Phänomenologie aus den absoluten Evidenzquellen (in denen alle objektiven Evidenzen zu Gegenständen absoluter subjektiver Evidenz werden) ist der Tod das Ausscheiden des

From this perspective, death is revealed as a transformation of the body that suppresses the conditions of possibility for empathy and stops expressing a psychical being. But because it affects only the empirical subject and not the transcendental, Husserl reaches the same conclusions as before, only this time he talks about transcendental “life” as the ultimate ground in which the generative movement of birth and death is given:

Humans can't be immortal. Humans die necessarily. A human has no mundane pre-existence, in the spatio-temporal world she wasn't anything before, and she will not be later. But original transcendental life, the life that in the end creates the world and its ultimate I, can't come from nothing and return to nothing, it is "immortal", because dying has no meaning here, etc. (Hua 29, 338)²⁹

How exactly can we describe this transcendental life and how does it differ from transcendental subjectivity? If we consider life to be the pure givenness of conscious experience, of course it does not make sense to say it can be born or die; rather, humans are born and die and during their time on Earth they are part of a world-constituting community that will outlive them indefinitely. Each individual monad has a beginning and an ending (an awakening and a falling asleep), so they are finite “in the simultaneity”, but the monadic whole always continues, so they are immortal “in the succession” (Hua 42, 23)³⁰. One could ask, as Husserl himself does, what might happen if every human being in the world were to die:

But if all human beings were to die now, I would see that the transcendental subjectivity that makes a future world possible is extinguished. The future being is open. Certainly, but only if people live and not all die. But is the death of a human being death of his

transzendentalen Ego aus der Selbstobjektivation als Mensch.

²⁹ Der Mensch kann nicht unsterblich sein. Der Mensch stirbt notwendig. Der Mensch hat keine weltliche Präexistenz, in der zeit-räumlichen Welt war er früher nichts, und wird er nachher nichts sein. Aber das transzendente urtümliche Leben, das letztlich weltschaffende Leben und dessen letztes Ich kann nicht aus dem Nichts werden und ins Nichts übergehen, es ist „unsterblich“, weil das Sterben dafür keinen Sinn hat etc.

³⁰ Meine Stromzeitlichkeit hat Anfang und Ende und so jeder Monadenstrom. (...) Aber die Totalität der Monaden, kann sie anfangen und enden? (...) Könnte nicht in der Simultaneität Endlichkeit bestehen, aber in der Sukzessionszeit Unendlichkeit?

*transcendental monad? What could one really develop from constitutive phenomenology? (Hua 42, 431)*³¹

Here we find again the tension between an empirical account of consciousness and a transcendental one: if constituting subjectivity was nothing more than an empirical product, that is, the result of a contingent natural development, then in the unlikely event of a complete destruction of humanity, subjectivity and the world would vanish forever. If this is not the case, then transcendental “life” should somehow be independent of its own objectification. But does this mean life is something *beyond* the intersubjective community, in the sense that it could be conceived without it—as the absolute consciousness could exist independently of the world? And if so, what then does the necessary character that Husserl had ascribed to birth and death mean?

Husserl seems to be aiming during this period at broadening the scope of the transcendental sphere in order to accommodate intersubjective phenomena (perhaps due to the influence of *Lebensphilosophie* and *Existenzphilosophie* that were current during this time), but if we take as an indication the case of death we can see that, even when he claims death is part of the *a priori* structure of any world—and so in a way it could be considered transcendental—, in another more fundamental sense, it is not. Husserl retains still the notion of a primal Ego or life that is timeless, and so it becomes a task to understand what this timeless life could be. Before closing this chapter and moving to the next section, where I will reflect on this issue further, I would like to briefly address Anthony Steinbock’s interpretation of generative phenomenology. Because in Steinbock’s account, generativity is more fundamental than the self-temporalization of the subject. It is a path, as he claims, that would allow for an account of birth and death as transcendental phenomena. However, because it strays from first-personal evidence, it might not be an entirely valid path.

³¹ Aber wenn alle Menschen jetzt stürben, so sähe ich doch, dass die transzendente Subjektivität ausgelöscht wäre, die eine künftige Welt sein lässt. Das künftige Sein ist offen. Gewiss, aber doch nur, wenn Menschen leben und sich nicht alle den Tod geben. Aber ist der Tod eines Menschen Tod seiner transzendentalen Monade? Was könnte man aus der konstitutiven Phänomenologie wirklich erschließen?

3.5 Anthony Steinbock's Generative phenomenology

At this stage, one may wonder why a solution of the type proposed by Steinbock shouldn't be endorsed. Let me take a moment to address this possibility. In his book *Home and Beyond. Generative phenomenology after Husserl* (1995), Steinbock interprets generative phenomenology as an entirely different stage in Husserl's philosophy that becomes independent from genetic analysis. He presents a non-foundational reading of Husserlian phenomenology that takes the dyad homeworld/alienworld to be the true constitutive condition for the emergence of sense and subjectivity. It is non-foundational insofar as it rests in the co-foundational structure of this pair, and not in the constituting activity of an individual subject: "*A generative phenomenology does not begin with individual sense consciousness to reach a universal We, but takes as its departure the generative structure homeworld/alienworld from within the homeworld.*" (Steinbock 1995, 269). Insofar as Steinbock is looking to take off the weight of constitution from the individual Ego, his attempts at developing a "heretic" phenomenology beyond Husserl are in line with some of the proposals I will develop in this dissertation. However, as it happens with many post-Husserlian accounts, especially those inspired by Merleau-Ponty and the French tradition³², the abandonment of the Ego as the foundation or final ground for constitution comes at the cost of abandoning the first-personal attestability of the enquiry, which might not merely be going beyond Husserl but, in an important sense, going beyond phenomenology. In any case, it involves violating the rules of the game as set by Husserl and as I endorsed them earlier. In the case of Steinbock, without the abandonment of such principles, Generativity could not become an independent type of research, because it would

³² In "Le sens du sensible. La question de la hylè dans la phénoménologie française", Bruce Bégout speaks of the importance given in French post-Husserlian phenomenological tradition to the question of *hyle* and the attempt to find "*an absolute foundation for the appearing that is not the Husserlian transcendental subject*" [la quête d'un fondement absolu de l'apparaître qui ne soit pas le sujet transcendantal husserlien] (Bégout 2004, 35). If something like a general character of French phenomenology can be discerned, I relate it to this general spirit that in the previous section I also referred to as a turn towards metaphysics.

need to remain tied to the evidence provided by the individual Ego that is conducting the research.

On the other hand, even if this methodological approach was correct (or appropriately phenomenological) we could even dispute, as Ronald Bruzina (2001) does, that the pair homeworld/alienworld be seen as truly fundamental, since this structure concerns “*coherent systems of in-the-world events, things, values, institutions, etc.*” but does not deal with the constitution of the world-horizon as such. (Bruzina 2001, 372), and therefore “*The problem [of limits] is not superseded but only set aside by moving to a “generative” account of historical, communal, and intercommunal constructions of cultural “sense”.*” (Bruzina 2001, 375). A truly fundamental enquiry about limits would entail elucidating the relationship between the world-constituting process that is constituting “subjectivity” and the human being as natural. I will come back to this throughout the rest of this thesis.