



## ASTRAY SONS OF TIME. IDENTITY AND TEMPORALITY IN GURWITSCH

Filhos desgarrados do tempo. Identidade e temporalidade em Gurwitsch

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Hijos extraviados del tiempo. Identidad y temporalidad en Gurwitsch

**Abstract:** The article deals with the split proposed by Gurwitsch between temporality and identity in the constitution of the thing according to his phenomenology. It recovers the notion of thing as noema, already developed by Husserl, and investigates to what extent his successor is able to reformulate it in one of its fundamental aspects: that it has a timeless and, nevertheless, phenomenological dimension. It evaluates the controversial thesis that time is a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition for the description of the relationship between the one and the multiple, culminating in a primitive and irreducible idea of identity that must be conceived by itself and constitutes both the originality and one of the greatest advances of Gurwitsch's thought.

**Keywords:** Aron Gurwitsch; Edmund Husserl; phenomenology; identity; temporality; Gestalt

**Resumo:** O artigo trata da cisão proposta por Gurwitsch entre temporalidade e identidade na constituição da coisa em sua fenomenologia. Recupera a noção de coisa tal qual noema, já trabalhada por Husserl, e investiga até que ponto seu sucessor é capaz de reformulá-la em um dos seus aspectos fundamentais: o de que ela possui uma dimensão atemporal e, não obstante, fenomenológica. Trata-se de avaliar a polêmica tese de que o tempo é condição *necessária* embora não *suficiente* para a descrição das relações entre o uno e o múltiplo, culminando numa ideia primitiva e irredutível de identidade que deve ser concebida por si mesma e constitui tanto a originalidade quanto um dos maiores avanços do pensamento de Gurwitsch.

**Palavras-chave:** Aron Gurwitsch; Edmund Husserl; fenomenologia; identidade; temporalidade; Gestalt

**Resumen:** El artículo aborda la escisión propuesta por Gurwitsch entre temporalidad e identidad en la constitución de la cosa en su fenomenología. Recupera la noción de cosa como noema, ya trabajada por Husserl, e investiga hasta qué punto su sucesor es capaz de reformularla en uno de sus aspectos fundamentales: ella tiene ahora una dimensión atemporal y, sin embargo, fenomenológica. Se trata de evaluar la controvertida tesis de que el tiempo es condición *necesaria* pero no *suficiente* para la descripción de las relaciones entre lo uno y lo múltiple, culminando en una idea primitiva e irreducible de identidad que debe ser concebida por sí misma y constituye a la vez la originalidad y uno de los mayores avances del pensamiento de Gurwitsch.

**Palabras Clave:** Aron Gurwitsch; Edmund Husserl; fenomenología; identidad; temporalidad; Gestalt

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## Introduction

Is not surprising to the reader minimally familiar with Gurwitsch's texts the relevance he gives to the question of the noema. Even after Husserl explicitly addresses questions considered of first order, such as temporality and the living present, to which the role of the sense genesis is attributed, in genetic phenomenology, as well as that of intersubjectivity in the constitution of the objective world, Gurwitsch attentive to these questions still insists on considering identity as the major phenomenological problem. Like the primacy of the transcendental Ego and its monadological concreteness (Husserl, 2013, §33, p. 106; §41, p. 124), or time as the "ultimate and true absolute" (Husserl, 2006, §81, p. 185), "*identity is to be acknowledged as a fact irreducible to any other*" (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 150) and, at least at first sight, amenable to being described in its true sense without the recourse to the passive and problematic genesis of a fundamental order that was once believed to be responsible for it. Which seems a backward step, when we think the whole elaboration of the genetic phenomenology of the 1920s and the investigations of the deep and original strata of phenomena in time, but that constitutes an advance in the eyes of the attentive researcher and phenomenologist, since the fact of identity is "*no less authentic and no less fundamental than temporality is*" (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 150).

For him, already in 1940, "no mental state should be conceived solely and exclusively as a real and temporal event in the flow of consciousness, without reference to a meaning", that is, without reference to the objectivity that correlates to it. Which seems obvious, although Gurwitsch adds that "this reference is overlooked in the traditional conception" (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 150) of consciousness. If it can be described in its own terms and, more than that, constitutes an irreducible fact and therefore only describable in and for itself, this means that the noema constitutes both an autonomous and specific object of study of phenomenology and one of its fundamental themes.

An echo *avant la lettre* of those passages of *Theory of the field of consciousness* that promulgate that temporality is a "necessary" condition of the lived, although it is not "sufficient" for their existence (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 336-338). It seems then that in the answer to the question of identity, following the properly Gurwitschian formulation of noema, we will find a relief for the unease caused to more traditional phenomenologists, who are shocked by the fact that time is not "sufficient" for the presentation of things. This is why we must follow it in all its elaborations and in all its consequences. One after the other, they constitute the steps taken in this paper, in order to understanding that there is a process inside the noema and that it is not operated by time or by syntheses of another kind - of identification, of transition -, capable then of sustaining identity and of placing it in the foreground of description. Identity comes to inhabit the zone of the originary. But how is Gurwitsch able to sustain this self-organization pertaining to the noema, independent of temporality, and thus re-found the philosophical relations between the one and the multiple?

## Versions of the Thing

In the phenomenological jargon introduced since the project of *Ideas I*, certain idiomatic expressions stand out, which were absent in Husserl's previous studies, such as *hyle*, *morphè*, *noesis*, and finally *noema*. In order to dispel certain misunderstandings, the recovery of the Greek terms would serve to describe the processes and elements involved in consciousness, already purified as lived intentionality, without falling back into traditional dualisms whose philosophical dispute was still undecided at the time - and even until today. To say the least, the noema is the object or objectuality each time apprehended - which can be "thing" or "state-of-thing" - but precisely *insofar as it manifests itself to consciousness*. It is the thing in the measure in which it is apprehended, thing for the consciousness, in its pure giving without the need to decide about its extra-phenomenological reality, as a thing of the world, material, physical, psychic thing, etc. In the same way, the act that apprehends the noema, purified as noesis, no longer has to do with an alleged psychological interiority or even with an idealism of a subjectivist type. It is a matter of considering the "meaning" that the act of, for example, perceiving, as well as its correlate, the perceived object, possess in themselves, without appeal to any metaphysical commitment. Leaving aside the first pair of terms (*hyle/morphè*), with respect to which he adopts a critical stance, Gurwitsch believes that in the second, noesis/noema, it is possible to advance many of the intuitions and conceptual gains already initiated by Husserl. Mainly with respect to the notion of noema, as we will see.

The author defines noema as "perceptual sense" (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 148) or the perceived object as such, as tree-perceived, ashtray-perceived, table-perceived, and so on, and which is to be described in this perceptual enchainment from whose sense we finally apprehend the "thing".



These perceptions enter into a synthesis of identification with one another, and it is by, and in, this synthesis and the parallel synthesis among the corresponding noemata that what appears successively constitutes itself, for consciousness, into this real thing which it is, one and identical as opposed to the multiple perceptions and also to the multiple noemata. (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 148-149).

Now, this implies that the noema or object as perceived involves both a perspective and an identical thing to which these appearances refer. If the “real object ought not to be confused with a single noema” (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 149), we are led to understand the synthesis and unification it implies so that, after all, we perceive it. But let us put this question away for the moment, one of the most difficult questions, to say the least, and continue with the characterization of the noema.

We said that it has a double character of presenting a thing itself from a perspective or a profile of it - and the emblematic return to the things themselves, already enacted since the *Logical Investigations*, seems to be fulfilled when we think of a properly phenomenological notion of thing, not only of the immanent aspect each time contained in its perspectival appearance, but of the transcendence to which this aspect points in the very scope of its appearance. Now, this is only achieved with the notion of noema or with a notion of transcendence that is not real, but intentional, together with a notion of immanence that is not equally real, but as self-giving in evidence (the argument is present in *The Idea of Phenomenology*; Husserl, 1907, pp. 35-36).

Thus, the noema is not only distinct from the real object, although an essential contribution to it, but it is also distinct from the act, characterized as noesis, and that although apprehended along with the noema, it should not be confused with it. Husserl establishes that noesis, together with sensory and material data, belong to the “real moment” [*reel*] of what is lived (Husserl, 2006, § 88, p. 203), its intentional counterpart being, precisely, the noematic moment. This intentional correlate is the “noematic correlate, which here is called ‘sense’ (in a very expanded signification), *exactly as it is* contained in an ‘immanent’ way in the experience of perception, judgment, pleasure, etc., that is, as it is offered to us by it, *if we interrogate purely this experience itself*” (Husserl, 2006, § 88, p. 204).

The transcendence of the thing, which remains the same in the multiple acts that apprehend partial aspects of it, is described by the noematic moment, because the noema allows the thing to be precisely the “same itself” or, as we will resume, a “same” thing. To understand how a perspective multiplicity is organized around an identical or common pole, Husserl explains that the noema has a “nucleus”. Thus, no matter how immediate and concrete its appearance, the noema is endowed with its own structure, and we need to go a little further in understanding it, or we will rest on the mere definition or wordplay of noema *qua* meaning in phenomenology or noema *qua* object as apprehended by consciousness. Even if it is not incorrect, the simple equivalence between terms is quite inaccurate to explain their own transcendence and their constitutive identity, for just as it is not enough to define consciousness as “intentional” - “Consciousness of something’ is thus something quite obvious, and yet it is at the same time highly unintelligible” (Husserl, 2006, §87, p. 202) - the same occurs with the noema, which is not only the object as perceived. Therefore “in our phenomenological orientation, we can and must ask the following question of essence: *what is the ‘perceived as such’, what eidetic moments does it harbor in itself as this noema of perception*” (Husserl, 2006, §88, p. 205). The lived involves processes and structures worthy of an in-depth understanding.

For Husserl, the noeme has a central and a peripheral layer, the first one being respective to its nucleus and the second one to the so-called “noematic characters”. Thus, in a second definition, it is not enough to say that it is equivalent to “meaning” (nor that noesis is equivalent only to the “donation of meaning”), because the noema consists of a “complex of noematic moments” (Husserl, 2006, §90, p. 207), and in this complexity meaning derives only from its nuclear layer. Although the notion of noema brings along with it that of the object *while it is* apprehended and *in the limits in which it is* apprehended, one must distinguish therein the partial perception and, nevertheless, completely adherent to it - say, when a tree is perceived, imagined, described in verbal language, remembered etc. - as related to its “noematic characters” and the tree itself which is at each moment apprehended differently. The distinction, in simple terms, is between *how* and *what*, the characters describing *how* the object is apprehended, and the noematic nucleus designating the object *that is* apprehended. Thus, the layers of apprehension “reunite around a central nucleus, around the pure objective sense” (Husserl, 2006, §91, p. 210). Thus, to perceive something it is necessary to learn it always from a profile, but that having its own characteristic points along it to a corresponding objectivity that remains the same. It remains identifiable (in identification syntheses) because the noema has a nucleus responsible for this referentiality, for this designation, even if it may perhaps be unsuccessful (in deception syntheses) since in the experience we must always rest on the effectiveness of the present position, guarantees that an objectivity is already aimed at the basis of every intention.

The reference as “signification”, *Wortbedeutung*, is only a possible unfolding (Husserl, 2006, §124) of this nucleus present in every content apprehended as noema. Thus, there is a aimed and apprehended identity in every intentional experience. “*The phenomenological problem of the reference of consciousness to an objectivity has, first of all, its noematic side. The noema possesses objective reference in itself*” (Husserl, §128, p. 286), so that “every noema has a ‘content’, that is, its ‘sense’, and refers through it to ‘its’ object” (Husserl, §129, p. 287), in line with the distinction already mentioned between the *how* and the *what* given together in the noema. To



this quality and content (*Im wie*) of the apprehended object also corresponds the matter or object (*was*) itself; “the matter, which is each time the ‘what’, which receives from the ‘quality’ the positional characteristic, now corresponds to the ‘noematic nucleus’” (Husserl, §129, p. 288).

This distinction between noematic core and noematic characters will be taken up and developed as the distinction between “theme” and “thematic field” by Gurwitsch. What is important to note right away is the requirement of a core for all noematic characters to be characters of the same noeme, and for the profile to be, finally, a profile of the same object. Gurwitsch wants to advance this understanding when he explains that “the perceptual process is thus a process of gradual determination. At any phase of the process, that given in the privileged mode of actual sense-perception forms a certain nucleus surrounded by a broad zone of indeterminate references” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 207). If this core were not an integral part of intentionality, but a contingent construction or derivation of it, the phenomenon of identity would not be necessary and could be fundamentally delimited or destabilized. Thus, it is necessary to maintain the referentiality constitutive of every perception, albeit by imposing advances on what is understood as its own operation. “Every object”, whether a perceived objectivity, imagined objectivity, value objectivity, and so on, “is an identical correlate with respect to multiplicities of acts and processes of consciousness, properly organized and systematized” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 214). The material object or the real world, Gurwitsch further says, are also correlates in these acts of consciousness, so that all objectivity, whether thing or state-of-things, must impel us to the consideration of these acts that apprehend them, that is, to the description of the giving of meaning. With this the famous “principle of principles” seems here recovered, insofar as “to every truly existing object, corresponds the idea of a possible consciousness functioning as primordial apprehension and genuine presentation of the object” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 214). One need only compare to see how this passage recovers Husserlian intuitionism:

No imaginable theory can mislead us as to the *principle of all principles: every original giving intuition is a source of legitimation of knowledge, everything that is offered to us originally in the “intuition”* (so to speak, in its flesh-and-blood effectivity) *must simply be taken as it gives itself, but also only within the limits in which it gives itself.* (Husserl, 2006, §24, p. 69).

*As it gives itself and within the limits in which it gives itself*; that is, all objectivity is by principle correlative of an apprehension, remaining outside this intuitionist clause that founds phenomenology any kind of entity that cannot be given to a possible intuition, even if it does not involve in itself a logical contradiction - the thing in itself, substance, among many other figures of traditional metaphysics. We know that this principle is verified until the famous position of the universal *a priori* of correlation, in the last writings of the *Krisis* (Husserl, 2012, §46, p. 129). This is how, for Gurwitsch, “phenomenologists deal with *transcendental problems*” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 215): because the thing, the world, and being itself must be apprehended in their *meaning*, and this implies transcendental reference to consciousness. None of this is empirical or contingent, for even an alleged “divine sight” would keep this reference and would need to see through profiles.

To account for the relation between the necessity of the self-donation and the constitutive variability of all experience Gurwitsch takes up here the coherence intrinsic to the donation insofar as it is cast as an idea to infinity. As a regulative idea it is possible to reconcile its partial aspect with its possible completion, and this presumption of adequacy cast to infinity relates not only to the “*idea of a perceptual and adequate apprehension*”, but to the very notion of noematic correlate, so that “*the material thing is the very idea of an infinite system or continuum of appearances as realized in actual sense-experience*” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 219).

Although the relation between part and whole resumes here the internal consistency of the series of appearances already launched by Husserl (Cf. 2006, pp. 160; 188; 290-291)<sup>1</sup>, it will be operated in a specific way with the notion of *Gestalt*, when Gurwitsch understands that each noema expresses in its own way the totality of the noematic enchainment. It is possible to advance that the *continuum of sensible experiences*, in fact, refers to perception, and that perception is the broad term from which we do not apprehend only what is currently given - that is, the profile - but the thing itself - and this through other profiles retained from past experiences and protended from future experiences. Perception *has* a sense and, therefore, sends from the profile and *with* it to the object in its fullness. It is this sense that makes perception a perception of a thing - as in the case of a construction or a building, of which we see not only “pictures” or “images”, but “sides” and “facades” of the construction itself. Now, if the profile does not represent, but presents the object in its plenitude, this is because we perceive a *sense*, and that this perceived sense is what we call the noema. The materiality of this sense, which makes the noema the correlated thing or state of things of the consciousness, is what we now consider.

<sup>1</sup> “To every ‘truly existent’ object corresponds by principle (in the *a priori* of the unconditioned eidetic generality) the idea of a possible consciousness, in which the object itself is apprehensible *originally* and, moreover, in *perfect adequacy*” (Husserl, 2006, §142, p. 316). From this expansion of the principle of principles and its transcendental legitimation, every finite aspect of a thing is apprehended together with a rule that allows to think its transcendence to the infinite, as a regulating idea of this same co-apprehended “X”. Even if transcendental objects cannot be given “in any closed consciousness, in complete determinacy and in equally complete intuitiveness”, “nevertheless, *the perfect given is nevertheless prescribed as an idea* (in the Kantian sense) - a *continuum of appearances* determined *a priori*, with all different but determined dimensions, entirely governed by a firm eidetic legality, is prescribed as an absolutely determined system in its eidetic type of infinite processes of the continued appearance or as a field of these processes” (Husserl, 2006, §143, p. 317).



## The Thing Themselves and the Same Thing

The importance given to the question of identity authorizes here the inversion of the factors without altering the product: the “things themselves” are and must be, immediately, the “same things”. To follow the phenomenological motto - *Zu den Sachen Selbst* - we must add that this obstinate return to the things themselves holds in its most intimate meaning a return to the same things, because the question of identity becomes as fundamental as that of temporality, which occupied its founder for so many years. Thus the things themselves we find in the phenomenological attitude are the same things, as much as they are temporal entities in the sense of the *Zeitobjekte* of which Husserl speaks. Moreover, identity is as important as it is unsuspected, since we do not ask ourselves about it in things, just as we do not ask ourselves about the nature of time and why it flows after all. “That identity is a fundamental fact in conscious life does not signify a permanent explicit awareness of it” (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 151).

Maybe in this they meet: because identity is as mysterious as time. And it is really about “mystery” - in the sense that Gabriel Marcel, a friend of Gurwitsch, gave to it about time, when he wrote that it is so obvious that there are systems of rhythmization of our experience, as well as of numeration and measurement of time - clocks, hourglasses, calendars, rites, festivals, etc. - and that there is always an answer to the questions “what time is it?”, “what year is it?”, “what month?”. Because such questions constitute “problems”, with a single and objective answer virtually contained when the question is asked, even if we don’t know it at first - “it’s eight o’clock”, “the month is May”, “the year is 2022”. Now, all this obviousness is overturned when, after observing our daily and unthinking use of chronological instruments, someone wonders why time exists, why it passes, and in what consists its own astuteness of passing, passing, and passing without, however, ever getting lost in chaos. A question that can never be explained by metric systems and answers that have been repeated for so long. Because it is a “mystery”, for which the “solutions” and the objectivity of a true judgment do not fit - such as “S is P”, “it is X hours now” and “the time is...” -, but that does not throw us into quietism or into the always suspicious narratives of mystical experience. No: because philosophy is interested in mysteries, such as “who am I?”, “what is the meaning of my action?”, “why does being exist?” and it is only these that interest it.

The problem is something that meets, that stands in the way. It is completely in front of me. The mystery, on the other hand, is something in which I find myself engaged, whose essence consists, therefore, in not being entirely before me. It is as if, in this zone, the distinction between the *in me* and the *before me* loses its significance. [...] It seems to me, in effect, that between a problem and a mystery there is this essential difference: a problem is something with which I find myself; something that is entirely before me, but which I can by itself identify and reduce. On the other hand, a mystery is something in which I myself am engaged and which, consequently, is thinkable as a *sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its significance and its initial value*. Whereas an authentic problem is justifiable by a certain appropriate technique in function of which it defines itself; a mystery, by definition, transcends every conceivable technique. (Marcel, 1935, pp. 145; 169-170)<sup>2</sup>

Identity is such an obvious and unsuspected question, and it can lead us to real impasses, or even to true existential crises. For routinely we are not aware of what serves as our guide, “so that we can behave, and in fact we do, without necessarily apprehending identity explicitly, although all our behavior is constantly guided by it” (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 151). It is in front of us, in things, and it is congenital to life that we rightly see things and not complexes devoid of meaning and that mean nothing. This is also why it normally passes to the condition of question only in those experiences in which it is ruined and, therefore, scandalized. When Roquentin in *Nausea* can no longer see things or attribute meaning to what he sees. When, in experiments described by Merleau-Ponty, a patient loses perceptual constancy and cannot perceive objects, just as another subject in experiments with the lenses of inverted vision or seeing through oblique mirrors suddenly loses the system of references, coordinates, and positions in space (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 282-291). In a more positive way, when Husserl is surprised by the fact that the flow of the lived possesses a unity and that, despite all the multiplicity and richness of appearances, the *logos* reigns over the chaos and something appears. Moreover, Gurwitsch seems to have taken the true dimension of the problem.

*To be aware of an object means that, in the present experience, one is aware of the object as being the same as that which one was aware of in the past experience, as the same as that which, generally speaking, one may be aware of in an indefinite number of presentative acts.* Identity in this sense is, no doubt, constitutive of objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*). (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 140)

<sup>2</sup> In the same tone, and also clearly influenced by Marcel, Merleau-Ponty writes at the beginning of his *Phenomenology of Perception*: “Rationality is not a *problem*, there is no unknown quantity behind it that we must determine by deduction, or, beginning with it, demonstrate inductively. We witness at every moment this prodigy of the connection of experiences, and no one knows better than us how it is done since we are this knot of relations. The world and reason do not represent problems; let us say, if we like, that they are mysterious, but this mystery defines them, there could be no question of dissipating it by some ‘solution’; it is beyond solutions” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. xv-xvi).



If identity is a crucial fact that must be described and understood by itself, why still describe it here in temporal terms? If it is promised that identity is a fact as irreducible as any other phenomenologically, and this makes us suspect that time would be one of them, how would we be able to think of identity by itself, without the necessity of time (of permanence in succession), even though we can always add to it the character of having a duration? Identity is that which endures and persists, in time, the *idealiter* character of an objectivity that remains present and presented. It would have to do with the possibility of “repetition”, as Derrida writes in his study on how temporality and presence, precisely as temporal presence, are the indispensable assumption of phenomenology when it defends its character of philosophy, capable of reconciling the one and the multiple by allocating them in a proper territory of sense, the phenomenality, and where things present themselves for the first time and repeat themselves through their identity.

[...] there is always a blindness before the authentic mode of *ideality*, that which is, which can be *repeated* indefinitely in the *identity* of its *presence* by the very fact that it *does not exist*, is not *real*, is *unreal*, not in the sense of fiction but in another that may receive various names, of whose possibility it will be possible to speak of the non-reality and the necessity of the essence, of the noema, of the intelligible object and of non-worldliness in general. [...] In order that the possibility of this repetition may open *idealiter* to infinity, it is necessary for an ideal form to ensure this unity of the *indefinitely* and the *idealiter*: it is the present or the presence of the *living present*. (Derrida, 1967, p. 4)

Thus, identity is connected with repetition to the same extent that it is connected with the possibility that something is present, and present again at this point in the temporal present that renews itself each time. It is in presence for consciousness, without the need of the world, that the possibility of repetition and identity - as much as that of presence itself and consciousness itself - can be verified. This is not just any redundancy, since it is precisely the notion of presence that is self-sufficient and capable of generating the necessary self-reference to a territory that has its own sense and so is autochthonous. But here presence is still an accomplishment of *temporal* presence, so that presence, present, and repetition are intimately linked.

On the other hand, when Gurwitsch seems to distance himself from that primacy (and privilege) accorded to temporality one wonders at least two things: first, whether identity is capable of being conceived without the fundamental recourse to time. And, if so, whether the primacy of presence that accompanied that of time is somehow reformulated or, on the other hand, relativized. Leaving aside Derrida's critique of how this notion is at the center of Western metaphysics, it is already possible to advance that the answer to the second question is *no*. But this is because the answer to the first is *yes*; and because if Gurwitsch develops and reassumes this presence at another level, he does not do so at the level of the temporal present, but at the level of the noema and the thing that to some extent are atemporal.

## Noetic Temporality

To understand how “we become aware in an originary way of the noema and of its identity, as distinct from, and opposed to, the multiple acts to which it corresponds” (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 151) it is necessary to go back to the theoretical framework that appears in Husserl's lectures on time and founds a whole critical fortune concerning phenomenology.

For Gurwitsch the description of how temporality functions and unifies itself addresses *only the acts* that apprehend the thing and give it an eminently temporal value. Thus, the temporal orientation fundamental to the phenomenon of identity is a property of the acts, which necessarily apprehend something that lasts, and not of the noema or the thing itself as a correlate of these acts. Therefore time is fundamental, although the temporality described in the lectures appears here as a temporality that we might call a *noetic temporality* rather than a noematic temporality (on this there could be a dissent between Gurwitsch and other various readings, such as those of Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, and, more recently, Schnell).

Temporality is a property of the act that apprehends the thing, rather than of the object perceived as such. In this way, the diverse temporal ek-stases (past, present and future), as well as their passage one into the other, are much more related to the form of the consciousness than to a property of the thing considered as a fundamental correlate of this form, which is temporal. As we know, past, present and future are united by an eidetic legality, just as the present can intentionally modify itself in retention and, then, modify the future protended a moment ago into a new present without the chain ever being broken. This was really the prodigy of time, which also reveals that of Husserl, when he notes that although multiplicity occurs in an incessant flow, this flow has a form, and that the present that remains and the one that passes do not fight each other, but make the concrete and fluent totality of the life of consciousness<sup>3</sup>. There is *Logos*, the profiles are linked to present things, and it should be noted that although the content of Heraclitus' river is always different, its form remains the same and makes it, precisely, a “river”. What Gurwitsch seems to add to these analyses, which remain essential according to him, is the understanding that the dimensions of time belong to presen-

<sup>3</sup> On this relation between *nunc stans* and *nunc fluens* check the classic study by Pedro Alves. (Alves, 2003, p. 117-121).



tational acts and not to what is presented in these acts. There is a direct consequence of this: temporality is not sufficient to engender object's identity, and although "conscious life being in incessant variation, at every moment one set of such act-impulses would be displaced by another one, without any intrinsic refer-ence between them" (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 153), and "were there nothing identical standing before con-sciousness, awareness of temporality would no longer be possible" (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 153)<sup>4</sup>.

A curious inversion, as if it were not enough to dismantle the exclusivity of time as the genesis of meaning and of the referentiality constitutive of consciousness, because to a certain extent it is now the consciousness that depends on the noema. Without something identical there would be no consciousness of temporality. It is the identical reference then that allows temporal understanding, and not the time that is responsible for the referential aim and its unity. "With identity hypothetically omitted [...] there could be only a set of punctiform act-impulses" that would "remain in isolation from one another" (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 153). It is the identity that makes the distinct punctual acts come together in an act that lasts and that acquires its temporal value, as an act that apprehends the present thing and that takes place next to the thing seen a moment ago, even yesterday, even a long time ago, and that is expected to remain the same in the near or distant future. It would lack this "intrinsic relation to connect them to a unitary act", which unity "is possible only with regard to something identical whose appearance may assume different temporal phases" (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 153).

This sets Gurwitsch's further analyses against those of his predecessor. And he seems to be right, when he opens space for a consideration of identity as a timeless element aimed by the acts that have a duration. Now, restricting temporality to the real moment of the lived, which we know to be that of the noesis, is the noema that describe the intentional moment<sup>5</sup>. Perhaps this is why Gurwitsch believes that the distinction between the two types of aim present in this appendix - the aim at the object that lasts and the aim of at object as identical - leads to a more crucial distinction, between a *noetic temporality* and a *noematic identity*. Returning to his text, written back in 1940, wasn't it precisely the distinction between noesis and noema that he was proposing to advance in some way? "Taking the noesis-noema doctrine into consideration from this point of view, we shall proceed beyond what was explicitly formulated by Husserl himself" (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 147)<sup>6</sup>. Ahead, this is exactly the answer we will find in an opposition between the poles of temporality and identity, which does not annul their correlation, but allows us to understand them after all: "this is indeed the nature of the duality to which Husserl's noesis-noema doctrine leads" (Gurwitsch, 2009, p. 154).

## Noematic Identity

We already advanced the thesis that temporality is a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition of the perceptual sense, which causes more strangeness than an elucidation of this restriction imposed by Gurwitsch. It is enough to come across, for example, the *Notes de lecture et commentaires sur Théorie du champ de la Conscience*, written by Merleau-Ponty between 1959-1960 and available today, which can then throw more wood on the fire already started between the two authors. In these notes, the latter is surprised by the fact that "the temporality of the acts of consciousness and the atemporality of the noemata and contexts are correlative and not contradictory", which he considers insufficient to demarcate their difference and their relation: "this eidetic analysis of the correlations remains profoundly unintelligible" (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, p. 334)<sup>7</sup>. Let us try to explore it on our own.

4 Gurwitsch relies here on appendix 11 of the lessons for *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*. He does not develop in his text how this grounding occurs, but we can pursue it in Husserl's own text. In the appendix in question, we read that our perception can be guided in two ways: i) either by the object that lasts, ii) or by the object that remains the same. In the case of a melody, i) by the sound that increases or decreases in intensity, or ii) by the "C" note sound that lasts there, "which is one and the same in the temporal flow, always the same in all phases of the flow" (Husserl, 1994, p. 150). We know that it is only possible to give meaning to variation from the point of view of permanence, as well as permanence while resisting variation. The sounding of the note "C" is a temporal phenomenon, but the C note in its identity is a phenomenon distinct from time. The identical immediately given is the "bearer of change or persistence" (Husserl, 1994, p. 151) and, "in speaking of 'substance', the gaze is directed toward the identical, as opposed to the temporal content which, sometimes the same, sometimes different, changes from phase to phase in the temporal flow" (Husserl, 1994, p. 151). This appendix comments the inadequacy of all kinds of perception, whether because of the fluency of time or the impermanence of the identity of the thing. Nevertheless, it opens the possibility of thinking about the phenomenal identity without necessarily resorting to time and, furthermore, as verified beyond temporal modifications.

5 Husserl even writes that "only in the first kind of perception is the object a real constituent [*reelles*] of the perceptual phenomenon [...]. On the contrary, the identical in the temporal flow [...] is certainly something that can be adequately seen in the second type of perception, but which is not to be designated as a real moment or element [*reelles*] that was in it" (Husserl, 1994, p. 152-3)

6 And it is possible to distinguish here the direction given to these analyses either by Gurwitsch or by Merleau-Ponty, since both focus on the noematic intentionality. Gurwitsch, on the one hand, understands that temporality refers to apprehension (immanent) and, therefore, that identity (transcendence) proceeds from deeper analyses of what would be the noema. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, expands and reformulates the conception of temporality to the noema and believe it is also responsible for its transcendence. Thus, it ceases to be the "form of consciousness" (in a still quite Kantian motif, clearly taken up by Husserl) to be the "measure of being" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 381; that owes more to Bergson than Merleau-Ponty admits). Therefore, a reading more heterodox than Gurwitsch's, and that among its consequences allows us to contrast the authors. For while Gurwitsch continues elucidating the notion of consciousness, with his *Theory of the Field of Consciousness* (1957), Merleau-Ponty already sought in the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) to substitute consciousness by the notion of lived body, as the passage point of meaning and intentionalization, which is then temporalized just like the world and the thing.

7 Notes written already in the core of his last ontology, from which it is not fortuitous when we read that "before the 'correlation' unveiled by the eidetic consciousness", a correlation between temporal acts and atemporal noems, "there is then an inheritance that founds it, and which is the belonging of the two series to the being" (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, p. 334). A separate study is needed to know how much the reformulation that Merleau-Ponty made of the donation and carnal apprehension owed to this critical re-reading of Gurwitsch, as well as his declared abandonment of the noesis-noema schema.



In 1957, Gurwitsch takes up many of the theses already present in his writings, regarding how perception essentially takes place through profiles, although it also presents the thing perceived in its identity through each of these profiles. It is “by virtue of an eidetic necessity” that the thing is apprehended “through a multiplicity of adumbrational appearances or perceptual noemata” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 197). The question that must be asked, again, but fully developed here is whether “the consciousness of the identity of the perceived thing is conveyed by special and specific acts pertaining to the system of perceptions or rather by a certain organizational structure” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 196), and the author already anticipates that the answer will come by the second alternative.

Each “singular perception” presents then only one aspect of the thing, although it also makes reference to the totality of it. Now, this relationship between part and whole forces us to understand the profile already as a “phase” in the middle of a process (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 200). Obviously the constantly renewing profiles do not serve only to confirm the presence of the thing, in its identity, but also to infirm it if this is the case. It is possible to be wrong as well as to reiterate the confirmation of what we see. What is important here, however, is that *both* possibilities *aim at identity*, and that in both cases, in error and in success, it is a matter of maintaining this horizon of identification as an eidetically guaranteed possibility. Because regardless of the profile that will be discovered by perception, of which we can always be wrong in particular, it will always be a profile of X, as Husserl wrote, a profile of a totality, as Gurwitsch retake, and about this we are not wrong in general: every perception aims at the totality and adequacy of the transcendent object that it apprehends, along with its partiality and constitutive inadequacy.

In order to the partial acts apprehend the profiles as profiles of the same thing, of an identity that accompanies them, there must be some kind of “harmony” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 202), of coherence, of consistency among the multiple acts through which it is perceived. But not only of the acts, but of the series of noemata to which they are directed, so that there is a harmony proper to the notion of noema. It is this coherence of the noematic enchainment that makes it properly an “enchainment”, with its own kind of identity, which seems to take place in the thing itself, and not only in the acts that identify it as the same. How? It is here that the notion of *Gestalt* becomes urgent, and if before it was clarified as noema, as “sense”, it is now responsible for taking the noematic analyses beyond their traditional formulation. “By virtue of complementing and continuing one another, the single perceptual noemata organize themselves into a coherent systematic group whose unity rests entirely upon the intrinsic relationship of con-sistency, harmony, and accordance” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 204).

As expected, this organization that takes place in the *noemata* and their series must not only be distinguished from the unity of the acts, but is even responsible for them, since “*the coalescence of single perceptual acts into one perceptual process depends exclusively upon the grouping of the correspond-ing noemata into a coherent system*” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 204). Let us underline the force of the term “exclusively”, which impels us to noematic analyses, from whose clarification can then derive that of the acts considered objectifying. In simple terms, it is because the thing or state of affairs is continuously verified and remains the same that we can then consider that the distinct singular acts refer to them. And here again appears the distinction launched decades earlier regarding temporality and identity, since “it is again confirmed that the unification in question does not depend upon temporal relations between the acts” and that “it rather concerns what the acts yield, that is, the noemata corresponding to, and actualized by, the acts” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 204). It seems then that, from the noetic point of view, there is an anticipation and a recollection essential to every kind of perceptual act. But the objectivity to which these acts aspire when they are modified into identifying acts, depends on an identification or identity pre-delineated by their noematic correlates, an identification that will have to be described and understood in terms of coherence, context, harmony, etc.

In the first place, the unification promoted by the notion of form prescinds from a “specific unifying agency or principle” (Gurwitsch, v, p. 210), which means that the various *Gestalt* laws described since at least Goethe and Ehrenfels launch us to a specific logic, autochthonous, operating in visuality and perception in general. Coherence and harmony must then be sought first in this autochthony, which is capable of integrating the similar and pushing away the dissimilar without the need for a synthesis that is extrinsic to it. Thus, the phenomenon of organization is intrinsic, it does not come from the organization of a multiple that is firstly deformed or disconnected in order to then organize itself in determined ways (even if this were immediately realized, as would be the case in the synthetic unity of apperception described by Kant or in the passive associations and syntheses described by Husserl).

Therefore, because it is primary we must be careful when describing this “organized” character of perceptual data, since they do not in any way derive from an allegedly disorganized multiple. “Appearances immediately present themselves as forming a system” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 210), and this curious intersection between phenomenology and *Gestalt* psychology should make us stop considering the unity of the world and the thing (of *Logos* in general) as a kind of miracle that survives and emerge against nothingness and against sensible chaos. We speak of “organization” and “disorganization”, “integration” and “segregation” as a congenital tendency in the perceptual enchainment that already appears as “something”; in a primitive identity, therefore. The reasoning is consequent: i) Everything demands the necessity of donation, of being perceived through a profile. It is, therefore, noema. ii) The noema is understood as *Gestalt*, and then comes to possess its own dynamics of organization. iii) Identity must be understood as a first, primitive and definitive phenomenon.





From this phenomenon of primary organization, which leads us to place a type of identity at the base of all intentionality, it is possible to understand why “each single perceptual noema realizes in its own specific manner the whole noematic system” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 211). And, furthermore, why there is no unifying principle. If we see things, and not molecular sensations; if being is taken as identity, this does not remove its own dynamism and its constitutive indetermination, because now it is identity that becomes the principle from which we understand variation. We need to understand in depth the fact that it is for the same reason that my perception is limited to a point of view and that it is open to the rest of the world and, in the last instance, to being. “To perceive a building from a certain side is not to see that side as in a drawing, or as a wing on a stage, or a silhouette. The building itself is given through any single perception, though it appears from a particular side” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 211).

Hence, “any single perceptual noema must be characterized as the perceived thing itself appearing in a one-sided manner” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 211), and the profiles refer back to each other in the experience of the thing, as things refer back to each other in the experience of the world. A question that can still be made is the following: where does the understanding of the noematic system as “whole”, as subject (though not always possible) to totalization comes from? In any case the answer must lie in the notion of noema, and it is from this that the consistency of these analyses derives.

## Necessity and Sufficiency

The field of consciousness is organized in three domains or dimensions, relative to the theme, the thematic field, and the margin. To arrive at them, it is necessary to return to the notion of noema, so important to the author.

It should be noted that the noema has “unseen” components (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 228) and that these essentially contribute to the meaning of each perception in particular and to the thing perceived in general. It rests on the “horizon”, which refers both to the unfinished character of each perception and to the fact that they aim at a presumptive completion of what is perceived through them. It is not possible to think of a table, a building, or a person by completely abstracting their contextual characters - of this table by the window, which I use for breakfast, or in front of me, on which I lean to work; of this building that is only one in a metropolis, or unique in a rural landscape; or of this person for whom I may have some particular feeling, or even indifference, but who is nothing outside of his behavior and observable behaviors<sup>8</sup>. By this we mean the external horizon of each perceived datum, which not only *contributes* to qualifying it, but *essentially determines* its value. Nothing is outside this horizon, so that the context is as primordial as what is contextualized. Nothing survives the context, nor precedes it, and the phenomenologically purified vision needs the horizon to operate, as much as the thing to show itself. “No perceptual appearance of a material thing can be altogether devoid of references to aspects other than that actualized at the moment” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 229).

Husserl also described an “inner horizon” (Husserl, 1970, §8, p. 36-38), concerning the indeterminacy of the thing with respect to the internal possibilities of always discovering new facets, aspects and qualities about it through perceptual exploration. Gurwitsch does not criticize or consider wrong the description already made by his predecessor, but to some extent incomplete, since it retains a “merely negative meaning” concerning the indetermination that the notion of horizon brings to the sense of the thing perceived. More than that, Gurwitsch believes that the inner horizon is that which ensures the possibility of continuing the perceptual exploration, which prescribes a well-defined typicality or style, and which confers on it the “condition of being a *realization of this determined type*” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 234). The internal horizon not only places an indeterminacy in the thing, factually and in a merely negative sense, but immediately provides certain possible lines of continuation and delineation. This is where the interpretation of indeterminacy in terms of “ambiguity” comes from, for however ambiguous the meaning of the particular thing that is perceived may be, its modes of proceeding are not. The example used is that provided by Stuart Mill, of the navigator encountering a strip of land that remains indeterminate as continent or island, but already perceived as necessarily having to be followed as a strip of land, in its unmistakable style and typicality. Although not incorrect, this is why the emphasis on indeterminacy does not seem sufficient to characterize the inner horizon, since it is rather what ensures beforehand the identity of the style and type of thing or state of affairs that is perceptively explored: “In conformity with the strictly descriptive orientation of phenomenological investigations, the inner horizon pertaining to a given perception must be taken exactly as it is experienced in the case under discussion” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 235) and this implies that “Husserl’s theory of the inner horizon [...] must be reinterpreted in *Gestalt* theoretical terms” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 264).

As for the question raised, regarding identity, it is necessary here to add that the inner horizon throws light on the aspects by which it is described. Namely, coherence, concordance, harmony, etc., since “*with the phenomenon of the inner horizon we are at the phenomenological origin of this condition*” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 236),

<sup>8</sup> This seems to give a new meaning to the eidetic approach, since even “the freedom of imagination is not totally and completely unlimited, insofar as *freedom must be confined to the very range of the open possibilities*” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 238) and this, in turn, is predetermined by the horizon and the context.



namely, of the *a priori* condition of the possibility of the material thing. Here “reference is rather to the architectural configuration as a whole” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 266), so that each item belonging to the inner horizon makes reference to the others and all qualify each other without being able to be taken separately (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 269). A spherical object of orange color appears as a fruit, together with a texture and the more or less sweet taste, just as a piece of iron appears together with its hardness and its coldness sensitive to touch and with the muffled sound it would make before a stroke; it is impossible to separate each of these qualities without undoing the thing, since they are not predicates but properties of the total configuration that defines it. Such is the Gestaltic-coherence that Gurwitsch speaks of throughout his work (Cf, pp. 130; 134).

The relation between part and whole, as between profile and noema, must be taken here in *Gestalt* terms - whose possible translations involve that of “configuration” and “structure”, and not just “form” - that is, as *pars totalis*. Each aspect not only indicates the thing, but *is* the thing itself, since the notions of aspect, part, profile have been diluted and reformulated. Each noema, likewise, expresses the entire noematic chain; “each single appearance thus realizes in its place the entire system” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 281).

The nexus, understood now from the context, and not from the past recovered or future projected, makes evident why temporality is a necessary but not sufficient condition of the acts of consciousness. For it is capable of describing the *possibility*, but not the *actuality* of the perceived object. Thus, while the temporality of immanent acts serves as a *necessary transcendental condition* of the perceived objects, the mutual confirmation between their aspects, in a word, their identity, serves as their *sufficient transcendental condition*. Everything leads us to the true consideration of “context”, since identity is not bestowed on the thing by some kind of special act, but given immediately as a crucial fact by the mutual confirmation and corroboration among multiple perceptions. The unity that context promotes is the unity of the thing itself, for the “*unity of context is unity by relevance*” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 332), so that relevance complements what concerns the determined context, that which is important – or relevant – to it, in a practical, critical or even vital point of view. It is relevancy that illuminates the context and elucidates why such thematic field is important to such theme and, otherwise, why such theme concerns this thematic field. In this sense, relevancy and context are correlated concepts (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 332).

In this recovery of Husserl’s analyses about the horizon, this is still incomplete, because this notion has not yet been described in its proper sense, next to the *Gestalt*. But it is possible to say already that, in synthesis, this means that the context necessarily accompanies identity, while consciousness seems to be responsible for duration (for remembering and anticipating of identifying fulfillments). Because while time involves all perception and confers a durable character to everything that is perceived, necessarily apprehended with things, it is through the concatenation of its appearances that it actually appears as a thing. Thus, although “the transition from T1 to T2 also exemplifies phenomenal temporality”, it does not explain the possible permanence of the theme and the identity between the two; “the experience of mutual pointing reference between T2 and T1, of their material relationship, of the concern of the one to the other overshadows phenomenal temporality” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 337). It is through the perceptual concatenation (the noematic enchainment) that the aspects can agree or disagree with each other and provide the sufficient condition for the thing to actually appear. Thus, the *theme* is this internal and primary unity of the perceived as such, which makes each of its aspects, precisely, its “aspects”, that make reference to it. Which makes that “any quality, property, or determination [...] is not made a theme in itself, but is taken as a moment of the theme” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 284).

If the phenomenological notion of inner horizon is unfolded positively through context and as thematic field, it is necessary to extend the “unity by relevance” of context to the thematic field, claiming that this “may be defined as a *domain of relevance*” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 332). And temporality is no longer a sufficient, though necessary, condition for the reference implied in each phenomenon. For although the presence of the thing in an anticipated or retained present is necessary, it is not this temporal presence that makes its identity. It “*is not a sufficient condition of relevancy*” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 338) and what makes the context of *this* theme in question continue to designate it.

The opening to this notion of theme requires further deepening. The theme already carries in itself a (thematic) field, as the “totality of items to which a theme *points* and *refers* in such a manner” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 312; emphasis mine). It takes the emphasis on the operations of pointing and referring, insofar as this field does not refer to any and all data copresent to the theme, for example, in the “mere copresence” of simultaneity (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 334), but only to those intrinsic to the theme. As a theme, the meaning of a theorem does not change whether it is read on a blank page, in the sand, uttered in a class, or just imagined. In a more imprecise example the result is still the same, and nothing interferes with the theme of a novel when I read it by day, by night, at home or in the park. Although present and phenomenologically verified, these are “marginal data” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 335) and irrelevant to the theme at hand<sup>9</sup>. But it is clear that the events and

<sup>9</sup> Therefore, saying that the noeme expresses the entire noematic chain may seem intuitive, although it is not as simple as it seems, since according to the author there are three types of conjunctions or connections between the elements or components that form the experiences (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 343): i) conjunctions between elements of the theme, determined by gestalt laws such as that of the ground-figure, of the supersoma, of the proximity, of the continuity, etc.; ii) conjunctions between the theme and the thematic field, as well as between elements of thematic fields, which are given by the unity of context or of relevance already mentioned; and, finally, iii) conjunctions between theme and thematic field, on the one hand, and marginal data, on the other, which from the noematic point of view here we know also refer to temporality. This schematism, which we do not develop in its detail here, attests once again to the dissolution between temporality and identity in his phenomenology.



information referenced in that part of the book that I already know contribute to the one I am reading at the moment and, therefore, are part of its thematic field. It is even thanks to this data that my consciousness can live, even for a brief moment, in the “world” of the novel and not in the one I am situated with my body now.

While contextual, it is proper for thematic fields to change all the time without necessarily changing the theme (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 311). If, in the same example, I stop living and thinking about the narrative in order to think about the place of this particular novel in the history of literature, or even in the history of my personal readings, I completely change the thematic field without, however, changing the theme in question - which is the same novel. At each moment and each time it ceases to occupy the same place; in its own history, in the collective historiography and in that of my memories, it ceases to have the same meaning and the same value, but it retains its identity as a theme. It is the *same* novel; it is the *same* thing.

Thus, it is through the relation between theme and thematic field that the phenomenon of identity occurs, and not through the variation of temporal ek-stases, past, present and future. For the difference to be philosophically relevant, it is necessary that the first relation brings with it what we call the identity of the theme, and not the conservation of its original impression (of its present and its presence) in the temporal act. “The phenomenon of context does not depend upon whether theme and thematic field assume the same mode of presentation” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 315). Although the idea still does not seem very intuitive, we will propose another example trying to make it more palatable.

Let’s think about the character of “transposability” of forms, described in *Gestalt* theory, according to which a form conserves its meaning when the relations between its constitutive elements are conserved. The meaning comes from *the relations*, and *not from the elements* considered in themselves, so that the conservation of this structure, even in the modification of each of its material elements, does not alter its intentional meaning. Just think of a melody that retains its musical meaning regardless of the pitch in which it is performed. All the notes have changed, materially, but the meaning, intentionally, has not. It remains one and the same, and we can even make the example more concrete by noting that when a melody persists in our “head”, we can hum it even if in another pitch and without even realizing that. Identity depends on the conservation of the structural whole, on the constancy of a certain relationship between elements, because none of the sounds and notes are the same. Therefore, it depends on the repetition of the form (law of transposability) and not on the memory (according to time). It is not time that is recovered here and produces cohesion and identity, either in retention or in remembrance, but the thematic field in its structural sense. The background, which becomes what defines the figure in *Gestalt* theory, is not a temporal phenomenon, but a structural and contextual property, so that the structure composed of theme and thematic field is irreducible and *sui generis* (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. 316).

This is why the thematic context can define the theme in Gurwitsch’s theory. Although temporality is necessary for the flowing life of consciousness, it is not sufficient to explain the identity of what appears. It is not sufficient for the noema, which receives an unprecedented signification with respect to its initial formulation in the *Ideas*. The noema has an attemporal dimension, because the connection between something present and something past does not necessarily refer to something that endures and remains identical - and, therefore, does not *designate* something as the same theme. If I divert my attention from this text to a noise that catches my attention, the sentences of the text are still retained, but they do not inform or contribute to the identity of the theme that begins to be perceived (the identity of the sound heard). Although necessary and present at every moment of conscious life, temporality is not sufficient to describe the material identity of the theme each time it is perceived. And this is why the noema possesses an attemporal aspect and must possess it, because correctly considered it can elucidate the phenomenological identity and the mystery of the thing.

## Conclusion

Through these analyses, it remains curious the fact that only the multiple confers unity to the uniqueness of the thing that appears, since it is always an ensemble that we perceive, endowed with its own architecture, context, and ensemble properties. Nevertheless, this occurs because the multiple has already been reformulated in gestalt terms, as a possible conformation and unification between profiles, parts and phases of the same thing. The step that frees identity from the transcendental condition of time is taken next to the one that frees it from empirical construction and thus allows reformulating it in its own phenomenological terms. As Gurwitsch himself pointed out in the preface to his major work, the intention was not to make “a book about phenomenology”, but “a phenomenological study” that would allow “to advance certain phenomenological problems” (Gurwitsch, 2010, p. vii), among them, notably, that of identity.

As Gurwitsch pronounces it, the marriage between phenomenology and *Gestalt* theory attests to the power of identity and reference - and even to a certain obsession with it - because it is precedent to the temporal acts that unify it and the acts that deliberately position it. It is always there, already given, in a primitive consciousness of itself, older than time itself. Definitely here time does not devour its own children.



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