



REFLECTIONS ON NORMALITY AND ABNORMALITY IN EDMUND HUSSERL

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Abstract: In a crisis, the world on which we base our basic beliefs becomes problematic. We feel disoriented and lost and look for a radical “solution”, in order to survive. The world is felt and lived, more than thought, as something irrational. Our beliefs do not adhere to it and it does not seem to give rise to the fulfillment of our expectations. Ultimately, the familiar becomes threatening, what seemed safe becomes dangerous. The expression “we lack the soil” reflects the feeling of living in a crisis. These ideas, which we can find in the Husserlian texts on the problem of the crisis, arose, for the first time, in a reflection on culture, but they can have other applications. Our paper, by means of an analysis of the First Part of William Faulkner’s novel *The Sound and the Fury*, aims to investigate the relevance of Husserl’s analysis for the understanding of the psychic crisis.

Keywords: crisis, normal, abnormal, time-consciousness.

Resumo: Numa situação de crise, o mundo em que assentamos as nossas certezas básicas torna-se problemático. Sentimo-nos desorientados e perdidos e procuramos uma “solução” radical, em ordem à sobrevivência. O mundo é sentido e vivido, mais do que pensado, como algo de irracional. As nossas crenças não aderem a ele e ele não parece dar lugar ao cumprimento das nossas expectativas. Em última instância, o familiar torna-se ameaçador, o que parecia seguro torna-se perigoso. A expressão portuguesa “falta-nos o chão” traduz a sensação de se viver numa crise. Estas ideias, que podemos encontrar nos textos husserlianos sobre a problemática da crise, nascidas, em primeiro lugar, numa reflexão sobre a cultura, podem ter outras aplicações. O nosso ensaio, por meio de uma análise da Primeira Parte do romance de William Faulkner *O Som e a Fúria*, procurará investigar a pertinência da reflexão husserliana para a compreensão da crise psíquica.

Palavras-chave: crise, normal, anormal, consciência do tempo.

Resumen: En una situación de crisis, el mundo en el que basamos nuestras certezas básicas se vuelve problemático. Nos sentimos desorientados y perdidos y buscamos una “solución” radical para sobrevivir. El mundo se siente y se vive, más que pensado, como algo irracional. Nuestras creencias no se adhieren a ello y el no parece dar lugar al cumplimiento de nuestras expectativas. Finalmente, lo que era familiar se vuelve amenazante, lo que parecía seguro se vuelve peligroso. La expresión “perdimos el suelo” refleja la sensación de vivir en una crisis. Estas ideas, que podemos encontrar en los textos de Husserl sobre el problema de la crisis, nacidas, en primer lugar, en una reflexión sobre la cultura, pueden tener otras aplicaciones. Nuestro ensayo, a través de un análisis de la primera parte de la novela de William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, buscará investigar relevancia de los análisis husserlianos para la comprensión de la crisis psíquica.

Palabras-Clave: crisis, normal, anormal, conciencia del tiempo

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Introduction

Intentionality, said Martin Heidegger, in his short introduction to the Husserlian *Lessons on Time-consciousness*, is the name for a problem. And this problem results from the fact that consciousness is not just one thing among things - a mundane object, similar to so many others -, but the condition of possibility for things to appear and for the world to be able to manifest itself. For this reason, to extend the intentional analysis to areas little explored, but not at all ignored, by its genius founder, like the abnormality and the life of consciousness in situations of psychic crisis, may shed a particular light on what is, after all, proper to consciousness and which Husserl designated by the well-known expression “meaning bestowing”. The first thesis that I will try to defend here is that situations of abnormality or crisis can be explained on the basis of what I will call “distortions in the awareness of time”. To this aim, I will begin this paper, not with a real case, but with a fictional case. I chose the famous novel by William Faulkner, published in 1929, entitled *The Sound and the Fury*, which I think everyone is familiar with.

The entire first part of Faulkner's work, by means of the narrative of Benjamin Compton, tells the events of April 7, 1928, the date of his thirty-third birthday. Benjamin, usually addressed by the diminutive Benjy, is mentally handicapped, although it is difficult to say for sure which pathology he suffers from, but certainly one of a neurophysiological nature. Thus, in this narrative, centered on the events of a single day, appear pieces of events that occurred 28 years earlier, but which, for Benjamin, seem to have the same time-likeness as those he witnesses. The temporal structure of his consciousness is profoundly altered, the associations of events are at odds with their context in the order of time, people and objects appear and disappear regardless their respective horizons, internal and external. The illness that Benjamin Compton suffers is not one that the psychiatrist or the psychoanalyst can handle. However, the distortions suffered by his time consciousness, as well as his associative mechanisms, are too similar to those found in psychiatric disorders - but also, *mutatis mutandis*, in normal individuals - for us to take Faulkner's novel as a means to understand what happens in them.

The second thesis that I will defend, more briefly than the first, is that an analysis of these distortions in time consciousness that we can notice in individuals that we call “abnormal” requires us to pay attention to the reformulations to which Husserl subjected one of his fundamental ideas at the time he wrote *Ideas I*. This was the idea that in all intentional acts there is a component devoid of intentionality, which he called “hyletic data”. These reformulations were partly motivated by the study of what Husserl called “anomalous cases”, although not always in the pathological sense of the term. Husserl therefore understood the deviations from the normal intentional relations that occurs in the awake adult person. Thus, the anomalous, in his sense, included, among others, the child or the half-asleep adult. However, I believe that an approach to pathological cases will confirm the reasons that led Husserl to proceed with the aforementioned reformulations.

1. The stream of consciousness and its disturbances

The narrative of any series of events in this first part of *The Sound and the Fury*, even if arbitrarily chosen by the reader, seems to make sense and, in a way, it does. But if the reader isolates the excerpt on which his attention focuses from the contexts that immediately precede and succeed it, he will never notice three things. 1) That in the course of Benjy's narrative events related to two different moments and temporally very distant from the life of the characters (separated, in fact, for 28 years, as I said) can be intertwined). 2) That these actions only seem sequential because they could be phantasmatically experienced as such, on the part of the narrator, Benjy, thanks to an extraordinary and abnormal process of association, which takes place apart from the connection that is ordinarily established between the different moments, or phases, of the same stream of consciousness. 3) And that one character can immediately summon the presence of another in Benjy's mind, thanks to the similarity between the names and the situations they experience; consequently, for example, an unprepared reader may take some time to realize that, in Benjy's narrative, the same name, Quentin, can refer both to his uncle and to his niece.

In normal life, the intentional relations that we establish with things obey to a specific legality. Even if our perception of current events is interfered by a sudden recall of a past perception of something similar to what we now see, or of something that has already occupied the perceptual space that is now occupied by something else, or even if a simple empty place reminds us of something that has already been there, all these processes do not interfere neither with our belief in an existent reality - even if we may be distracted from it for a moment - nor with the distinction between what is perceived in the present “now” and what was perceived in a past “now”. This is not the case with Benjy, in *The Sound and the Fury*.



Benjy's case is very interesting, because Faulkner doesn't just describe someone who has some difficulties in "adhering" to reality. Benjy lives in two realities that are temporally different for us, he has an overlapping lived experience of time, and what we may call his perpetual oscillation between heterogeneous moments in the temporal flow is, after all, a profound distortion in his inner time-consciousness. Two processes that Husserl carefully distinguishes, the *Wiedererinnerung* (or iterative recollection) and the retention, that is, the permanence in the current "now" of a "now" that has just passed, interfere and are intertwined. As Husserl says in his *Lessons on the Inner Time-consciousness*, in iterative recollection the past is made present as past, there is a clear awareness of the succession of past events and their phases, and of the distance that separates the past from the present (Husserl, 1966a). As Faulkner presents Benjy's narrative, the confusion between those two processes resulted in a blur of the distinction between the perceived reality and a reality that is simply hallucinated. As we will see a below, without retention it is impossible to constitute the identity of an intended objectivity. I will try to explain this a little better using a brief quote from Husserl, which I take from the aforementioned *Lessons on Time*. In a text dated from 1917, Husserl states:

Let us consider (...) the reproductive modification [of perception], namely, iterative recollection. I "repeat" the awareness of this succession, I present it by remembering it. I "can" [do] this and certainly as many times as I want. The presentification of an experience is *a priori* in the domain of my "freedom" (Husserl, 1966a, p. 42)

Now, Benjy is devoid of this freedom that Husserl speaks of - the "I can do this", as the text says -, a little like someone who dreams does not command the associations that spontaneously arise in the manifest content of his dreams. For also in a dream - and this is very clear in the process that Freud calls condensation -, a temporal phase just passed may be connected, not to what would be, for an awakened conscience, the next temporal phase of the same lived objectivity, but instead to one completely different and apparently arbitrary. And if, in the dream, one thing turns into another, that event does not follow the normal process in which an expectation does not receive confirmation, or in which, hoping to perceive one thing, I encounter another. The noematic nucleus of the intended objectivities are permanently destroyed and reconstructed, according to a logic that does not correspond to that of the awake consciousness.

We will say, then, that Benjy is an abnormal, that his past and his present can be confused due to an uncontrolled associative process, and that, consequently, his awakened conscience is incapable of enduring the proof of reality. To use Donald Winnicott's words, I would say that Benjy is unable to recognize that an object is always more than his own projection, but, quite the contrary, is found there for himself and also for others (Winnicott, 2005). And it is true that with Benjy, things go this way. In his famous paper about Faulkner's novel, Jean-Paul Sartre argues that according to Faulkner's metaphysics of time man's misfortunes lie in the fact that he is time-bounded (Sartre, 1966, 87). Now, Benjy is not time-bounded like normal people, but Faulkner doesn't portray him as being happier than normal people. He is, so to speak, lost in time and unable to put together in a rational order the fragments of time that come to his mind.

However, Benjy is an abnormal that behaves, in its abnormality, in a way that still has some similarities with the way we experience things. Benjy respects, like all of us, some principles that govern the association between phenomena, namely, the principles of similarity and contrast. I know that this is a fictionalized case, but I believe that the observation of many real pathological cases would provide an identical conclusion, which I would formulate like this: there is still a logic underlying the hallucinatory processes that, in their most general and most basic structure, is not very different from the one that a normal person follows. This seems to confirm a well-known Portuguese popular saying that a madman is someone who has lost everything but reason. Thus, an empty spot on the wall of a room can remind us, by association, of the mirror that once hung there. But what happens to Benjy - and what Faulkner's art suggests to us more than it properly says - is the existence of an extraordinary affective charge that accompanies the associative process, or, perhaps better, commands it and, so to speak, disturbs the most expected associations. Let's look at the following passage:

We went to the library. Luster turned on the lights. The windows went black and the tall, dark spot appeared on the wall, and I went over and touched it. It looked like a door, but it just wasn't a door. The fire appeared behind me and I went towards the fire and sat on the floor, holding my slipper. The fire got louder. He went towards the cushion in mother's chair (Faulkner, 1977, p. 60).

In Freud's terminology, we would say that, in Benjy's case, the primary processes permanently interfere with the secondary processes, so that perception and hallucination are almost the same (Brudzinska, 2012, p. 35). If, on the one hand, hallucinating can be a normal behavior - because, after all, in front of a tall, dark place on the wall of a room, anyone can make some phantasies about the object that once occupied that place and left a mark on it -, it will no longer be normal to do so, *sit venia verbo*, "normally". This is what happens with Benjy. On April 7, 1928, whose narration occupies, as I said at the beginning, the entire first part of *The Sound and the Fury*, its past was not subject to the process that Husserl calls "sinking" (*versinken*). Between this



sinking and the "I can" (*Ich kann*) just mentioned there is a profound correlation. In fact, it is, in principle at least, in my power, as a normal subject, to present what has "sunk" into the past and perceive it as something in the past. The ability to carry out freely this type of acts escapes Benjy; actually, his actions are not carried out normally. Hence, this strange feeling of immobility that the reading of the first part of Faulkner's work awakens in the readers. In fact, for there to be a sensation of movement, something must have passed and be acknowledge as a past event.

2. The correct determination of the intended object

In a 1910 text, published in volume XXIII of the *Husserliana*, Husserl addresses the problem of the intentional nexus that connects the perception of a certain object located "here" to all others that make up its horizon, as well as the "now" in which it is perceived to all the "now" that preceded or will succeed it (Husserl, 1980, p. 262). Just as in the experience of apprehending a "primary content" - an expression with which Husserl, on that date, designated sensations - all other concomitant primary contents are also involved, each of them constituting "rays of apprehension" towards others, also memory allows the connection of a present "now" to all previous ones. We cannot, however (and this seems to me to be the decisive point), separate these connections from the intentional activity in which they originate. I return to the situation of Faulkner's novel I mentioned above: the fire of a stove that Luster lights on Benjy's back. From this situation, I believe it is legitimate to draw two conclusions:

1. The current perception of a fire can evoke the recall of a similar previous experience that is, so to speak, in its range of apprehension.
2. This fact, in normal subjects, is accompanied by a clear distinction between two distinct moments of time.

These rays of apprehension seem to obey to their own legality, to which Benjy's memory escapes. This legality allows the constitution of an intersubjective experience in which the identity of the perceived object - or, at least, of its noematic nucleus, which guarantees that everyone sees the same - is acknowledge. And this happens despite the particularities resulting, either from the meaning with which each one looks at the object, or from the perspective in which he perceives it, or even from individual recollections that can give it a different affective coloring. In a text in volume XIV of *Husserliana*, Husserl states:

It's proper of the world that it not only presents itself systematically in this or that way in my original constitutive system, in relation to my bodily conditions, but also the fact that it presents itself to each person in different ways, and it is the unity of such actual and possible presentations. Again, to this belongs the idea of a correct determination, which we can all achieve together. However, this is not an intuition for everyone (*Aber eine Anschauung ist das nicht mehr für einen jeden*) and *a priori* the fact is open that new subjects enter into this connection and still bring to the experience something new about things (Husserl, 1973b, p. 122).

Now, as Husserl also mentions in a 1921 manuscript, almost contemporary with the excerpt I just read, a subject always perceives within a community of subjects, at least in the sense that affirming the validity of a perception can only mean that it must be confirmed by other subjects (Husserl, 1973b, p. 92-93).

In the case of Faulkner's novel, things are not exactly like that with Benjy's narrative. In the first place, nothing truly new happens: the similarities between the places, the names or the faces of the characters, and the situations experienced, do not allow him to distinguish the old and the new. It is true that, as Husserl noted in the 1905 *Lessons on Time-consciousness* (Husserl, 1966a, p. 86), the awareness of change always presupposes a continuity in the temporal stream of consciousness. The discontinuity in the contents of the stream - i.e. the fact that what I see or hear now does not agree with what I saw or heard earlier, or, at least, when it comes to the same object, it no longer corresponds to what my perspective of it let me expect I would see now - supposes that same continuity of the stream. However, in the case of Benjy, we can ask whether he has an effective awareness of changes. In fact, Benjy seems to be constantly looking at new things as being the same things that he just perceived, without the awareness that they are no longer the same. Sometimes he makes successive, but temporally distant, acts of perception and of recollection of the same thing as if the time that took place between them did not make it change, or as if those changes were irrelevant to the affective meaning they carry with them.

Certainly, a lived experience of time that is not a shared or shareable experience is barely accessible to phenomenological description. In such cases, there is probably a limit that even a fictional narrative cannot overcome. What we can acknowledge is that the immobilized time, in which Benjy seems to live, introduces inevitable distortions in the fundamental process of constituting objectivities as such, that is,



as units of meaning. The whole process that Husserl calls “synthesis of identity” is altered. To explain all this a little better, let me quote from §42 of *Experience and Judgment*, Husserl's work published by Ludwig Landgrebe in 1939. Husserl describes, of course, the normal procedure:

“When, for example, while I perceive the things that are in my surrounding space, a case of remembrance assaults me and I turn to them, this world of perception does not disappear; however much he loses his “actuality” and “moves away from me”, he remains perceptively there, perceived in the broadest sense. The memory in which I now live offers me, for the thing remembered, a time that is implicitly oriented towards the present of perception” (Husserl, 1999, p. 205).

In order to try to understand all this a little better regarding the case of Benjy, I will introduce a concept, which seems appropriate to me, from Ludwig Binswanger: the concept of self-overcoming, or self-transcendence (*sich übersteigen*). In my opinion, what Binswanger means by this is very close to what Husserl calls the perception by sketches or profiles (*Abschattungen*). But it also reminds us of the notion of horizon intentionality and even of the idea of transcendental intersubjective constitution. In a quick presentation of this theme, but sufficient for our present purposes, I would say: for phenomenology, the constitution of a perceptual noema depends on a multiplicity of views, the overlapping of former views and the current ones and the expectation of confirmation by future ones. It also depends on the relationship between the object in question and the concomitant objects and, finally, on the confirmation of the intended meaning by the agreement between subjects committed to the constitution of the same noema. It is here that the concept of *sich übersteigen* comes into play: in one intentional act, the subject who seeks to transcend itself real or imaginatively to all possible acts, does not look at his partial view as the complete noema. A fundamental characteristic of the intentional relationship is that it has a public character. The *sich übersteigen*, which guarantees this publicity, seems to be lacking in some pathologies, particularly in psychoses, or, perhaps better, its lack constitutes itself a pathology (Mishara, 2012, p. 174). Benjy, in Faulkner's novel, also lacks this ability.

Fragments and partial aspects of the intended objects are not temporalized, that is, they are not integrated into the stream of consciousness. As in the excerpt quoted above, the fire lit by Luster in the library stove – the action takes place in 1928 – and whose light is reflected in the cushion of his mother's chair, is, for Benjy, indistinguishable from the other fire that heated his sick mother's room when Benjy was 5 years old. Coincidences replace the living stream characteristic of normal states of consciousness. I have already said that an essential characteristic of noemata is their public character, that is, the fact that they are units of meaning that are intersubjectively shared. In the case of Benjy, this cannot be the case. On this topic, Winnicott makes an interesting distinction between what he calls object-relating and object-usage. What Winnicott argues is that the normal relationship with an object does not depend only on the fact that a certain meaning is projected on it, but above all, on the fact that it is part of a shared reality (Winnicott, 2005).

Two neurologists from the beginning of the last century, Henry Head and William Rivers, proposed a distinction between what they called “protopathic enervation” and “epicritic enervation”, which seems to me to be very pertinent to the understanding Benjy's clinical picture. These two English authors defended that the first type of enervation – the protopathic one – is responsible for the discrimination of the sensations (the heat, the cold, the pain, etc.), while the second type allows a judgment on those sensations (Mishara, 2012, p. 180). Now, it seems that Benjy's pathology manifests itself at the level of epicritic enervation. Phenomenologically, Head and Rivers' hypotheses are very interesting. We will see, later, that they also allow us to understand what happens during a psychic crisis. Epicritic enervation gives an act its specifically intentional character, makes possible its intuitive fulfillment, allows the overcoming of the experience of disappointment and lets the noema be intersubjectively shared.

3. The world of experience and its constitutive system.

An intersubjectively constituted world presupposes normality. However, the perception of a normal subject does not necessarily correspond to a clarity about the meaning of the concept. In a 1930 or 1931 text, inserted in volume XV of the *Husserliana*, Husserl states: “Abnormality is a modification of the normal, stands out from it and accompanies it as an event that necessarily arises under accidental, possible and recognizable circumstances” (Husserl, 1973c, p. 154). There are two complicated terms in this text. The verb *herausheben*, which I translated by “stand out”, but which literally means “to leave...”; and the verb *beifügen*, which I translated by the verb “to accompany”, but which can also mean “to join...”. But the text immediately raises a set of questions. Do deviations from normality also contribute to the process of constituting a common world or not? And if they do, what kind of contribution is this? What type of constitutive activity do these cases of modification of normality have that Husserl singles out in the child, in the madman, in the mentally handicapped, or simply in the half-sleeping person? Benjy's case may help us to answer these questions. First, however, I must ask another question.



When, for Benjy, the fire that Luster has just lit and the fire in his mother's room are intertwined, will the abnormality be in the properly intentional components of the intentional act, or will it already affect the apprehension of the *hyletic* data? Or, to put the question in a slightly more technical way: is it legitimate to conceive of a certain type of noematization of *hyletic* data, or should they be conceived as a formless matter? We will see that, depending on how this question is answered, we will understand differently the so-called "abnormality" and the factors that can trigger a psychic crisis.

Husserl, after having given an unsatisfactory solution to this question, in *Ideias I*, will resume it in his writings of the 1920's, in particular in the texts now gathered in volume XI of Husserliana, entitled *Analyzes on Passive Synthesis*. The problem that Husserl addresses can be formulated in the following manner: what is it that transforms the simultaneity and succession of different sensible data into unity and homogeneity? (Husserl, 1966b, p. 138). In the excerpt from Faulkner's novel that I quoted above, the room whose lights Luster turns on, the black space on the wall that makes someone remember the mirror that hung there, the fire that Luster ignites behind Benjy and whose flames go on growing in intensity, all belong to the same unitary framework. In this picture, a series of events unfold in time (for example, Luster turns on the lights before lighting the fire) and a set of objects coexist in space. This development and this coexistence are usually accompanied by the belief that things are just like we see, hear or touch them.

I think that we must draw a conclusion from this that may look at first sight paradoxical: it is not so much the hallucination as the absence of belief that accompanies most mental disorders and situations of psychic crisis. In a way, all of us - normal or abnormal - hallucinate: saying that the sun will rise tomorrow is not so different as trying to see something on the wall of a room that is no longer hanging there (Mishara, 2012, p. 185). But, for hallucination to be pathological, or for a psychic crisis to be triggered, two conditions are necessary: 1) that beliefs have ceased to function, so that anything can happen, even what is not expected; 2) that the noematic nuclei lose their fixity, so that something can become its opposite, or receive, without apparent reason, contradictory predicates.

To recapitulate, we can say that, in a normal experience, each sensory field is a unitary field and that its homogeneity results, both from the degree of homogeneity of its elements, and from the living presence of all in the same retentional space. At the same time, the heterogeneous elements (for example, a visual sensation and an acoustic sensation) can belong to the same unitary field, synthesized thanks to the temporality of the living present (Husserl, 1966b, p. 138). However, I believe that we all reckon that this explanation is still not enough, if we want to understand abnormal cases like Benjy's, as well as the triggering of certain forms of psychic crisis. The actual intentional content of the acts appears as if blocked by its exposure to *hyletic* data that are associated in a disordered way. If we look at this issue from a transcendental point of view, that is, from the point of view of the constitution of the world and the objectivities that are part of it, but, above all, if we see it from the point of view of the intentional activity of subjects intersubjectively engaged in this process of constitution, the conclusion that we have to draw does not seem to be very problematic. The abnormality can only be constitutive of the meaning of a world characterized by a relative and subjective being. The true objective being of the actually existing world (Husserl, 1973c, p. 155) presupposes normality. In other words, the abnormality - whether it is only temporary, as in the case of a subject in crisis - does not constitute the world as normal people do. In fact, the world in which abnormal subjects live is an anomalous world, founded on a private experience and, at the limit, incommunicable. The therapeutic relationship with persons suffering from some form of abnormality, if we look at this relationship from a transcendental point of view, can only consist of the set of procedures capable of bringing such subjects to the intersubjective process of constituting a common world. We can easily understand the difficulty in dealing with abnormality. In some way, it remains closed to us, just as it remains closed to the abnormal subject. We do not have a language that can say it, although the language of abnormal subjects can be very expressive regarding their private sufferings.

4. Normal and abnormal

We have already observed that an identical noematic meaning can only be constituted by normal subjects. Severe neurophysiological pathologies, altered mental states, as in the case of psychosis, situations of a more or less prolonged psychic crises, or with a recurring character, prevent the constitution of a universe of possible mutual understanding (Husserl, 1973a, p. 105). These situations are very interesting, since, constituting what Husserl called *anormalen Lebensstrecken* (anomalous pieces of life), they also allow us to understand the reestablishment of the normal stream of consciousness (Husserl, 1973c, p. 135). Abnormality means, ultimately, the impossibility of constituting a common horizon. Two problems arise here, the second clearly stated by Husserl in a text collected in volume XV of the Husserliana, and the first somewhat elliptically stated, in volume XIV.

1. The first problem has to do with the possibility of constituting the identical object itself in an intersubjective relationship, in which one of the subjects is affected by an abnormality.
2. The second problem is the problem of a satisfactory definition of what "abnormality" is, since, until now, we have mainly depicted its effects. Husserl, although referring exclusively to normal



perception (and the problem is obviously much wider), says that normality exists between two or more subjects who share a common world when the formal outline (*Formvorzeichnung*) of the experience remains identical for them over time (Husserl, 1973c, p. 136).

A very interesting text by Freud may help us a little now (Freud, 1992, p. 213), especially with regard to the second problem, which Husserl, as I said earlier, calls the “formal outline of the experience”. Freud speaks about the case of a young woman who, leaving the apartment where she had just had intimate relations with her boyfriend, finds, at the bottom of a staircase, two men exchanging words in a low voice and one of them holding what seems to her to be a package containing photographs. This moment is the beginning of a psychotic crisis that will lead her, later, at the suggestion of her lawyer, to consult Freud. What I will say next is the outcome of a reconstitution of a flow of events whose temporal order, as well as the importance, will only be known during the treatment. Now it turns out that in the preliminaries of the intimate relationship with her boyfriend, the young woman had heard a noise coming from an indeterminate place of the apartment where she met her boyfriend, probably from behind a thick curtain. Just to reassure her, the boyfriend told her that it was the noise caused by the clock mechanism on a nearby table. There is nothing to suppose that this is not the true explanation for what happened. Let us see, however, how the two events (the meeting at the bottom of the stairs and the noise) are, according to Freud, linked together.

1. Let us first look at the remembrance of the noise heard when the patient in the room with her boyfriend. The moments of pleasure could have erased the memory of this episode; but it was also not impossible for it to be remembered as an amusing episode, motivated by the unfounded fear of being discovered a relationship that she would like to keep secret. In this case, however, her recollections of the episode would probably be voluntary, it could be recollected as many times as she wished it, and it would probably fall into oblivion later. This voluntary recollection constitutes what Husserl calls, as I mentioned above, *Wiedererinnerung*.
2. Now, we easily realize that this is not what happened in this case. The recollection of the noise previously heard, its interpretation, by the young woman, as coming from the shooting of a camera, was not the result of a voluntary activity. This kind of passive recollection, however, is profoundly different from that which, according to Husserl, characterizes retentional processes. There is passivity in retention insofar as a “now” that has just passed is connected to the current “now”, being, like the last one, intuited, although, so to speak, *in absentia*. We therefore need a new concept of passivity, which, incidentally, we also find in Husserl, in order to understand an intentional activity of this kind.
3. Thirdly, one must realize that the involuntary recollection of the noise - which was actually heard, but which could have sunk into oblivion immediately afterwards - follows the encounter at the bottom of the stairs. That is, the oldest event was as if waiting for another more recent one to be able to come to consciousness.

This short episode is important to see how the distinction between *hylé* and *morphé*, in *Ideas I*, cannot be maintained exactly as Husserl presented it. If the sensory experiences were totally devoid of intentionality, if no direction towards an object already guided it, the relationship between the sensory experience and conceptual thinking would be totally arbitrary (Zahavi, 2003, p. 107). Was by chance the noise heard by the young woman that of a clockwork mechanism or that of a camera? Of course, doubt is possible, even in normal situations. However, normal doubts can be solved by analyzing the situation in question, the initial hypothesis may be subjected to the proof of reality, in minor cases the investigation does not even begin, nor does the doubt return obsessively. Now the phenomena of a more or less prolonged psychic crisis change this situation. There seems to be a certain arbitrariness in the way the *hyletic* data are invested by the acts’ intentional layer. The fact that a small noise, coming from an uncertain place, may be interpreted as the shooting of a camera is nothing entirely arbitrary. But we face an arbitrary interpretation in the case of Freud’s young patient and it is all the more so since she refused the much more plausible explanation provided by her boyfriend.

Final remarks

I come now to my final remarks. First, I want to underline the conclusions that seems to me must be drawn from this Freud’ clinical case: the sensations are already imbued with meaning (Landgrebe, 1963, p. 120). In his *Logical Investigations*, Husserl called what an experience is made of the matter of an intentional act (Husserl, 1984, p. 425), and underlined the fact that what is experienced in an act is always experienced or qualified in a certain way. But these qualifications do not just depend, in a normal experience, on spontaneity and, therefore, on a certain arbitrariness of the conscience that makes the experience. We may find an example of this arbitrariness in a passage of the *Quixote* of Cervantes, where Don Quixote sees a



Membrino helmet in a barber's basin. In normal perception, hyletic data must already guide the process of meaning bestowing - therefore, they cannot be completely devoid of intentionality - otherwise there would be no way to decide whether the barber is right or Don Quixote. The Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset refers somewhere to this passage from Cervantes' book, to emphasize that what Don Quixote does abnormally corresponds to what we all normally do: we bestow meaning to what we perceive.

The manifestation of a crisis - the fact that we can call it a crisis in the true sense that Husserl gave to this word - occurs when no reorientation of judicial activity is possible. For example, in cases of psychosis, it is not possible to argue with the patient that a certain threat does not exist; or, in the cases that Freud called melancholy, that a life that appears meaningless is, after all, full of meaning, being enough to focus on life's positive aspects or on the victories won in the past. In these cases, what works with normal subjects doesn't work anymore.

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Received July 18, 2019 – Accepted December 14, 2019