

'Passing, Swirling, Spinning':

A Brief Note on Stiegler's Post-phenomenological Account of Mediated Experience,
at

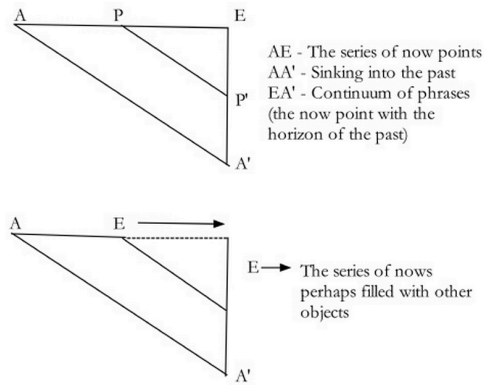
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There is limited possibility of giving a satisfactory account of the key elements of Stiegler's account of cinema, an account which develops a post-phenomenological modification of Husserl's propositions concerning internal time consciousness. [People could consult the latest issue of *New Formations* for accounts, including my own, which provide adequate summations of this]. Instead, I offer here this short commentary on a section from *Technics and Time 2's* final chapter, 'Temporal Object and Retentional Finitude' in which Stiegler engages in a lengthy meditation on Husserl's account of primary and secondary retention—a meditation which forms the platform for Stiegler's subsequent account of cinema and cinematic consciousness in *Technics and Time 3*. This section—whose title 'Passing, Swirling, Spinning' also emboldens me to offer an audiovisual 'channel' to the 15 minutes of re-temporalising spatial artefacts available to me—discusses Husserl's efforts to diagrammatically represent his account of the relation between the continuously passing present of consciousness and its retention of the past present moments in an extended present of perception. I think (I hope) that the combination of these two re-temporalisations—of text and video—does indeed look sideways not only toward the issues raised in my abstract, but to the very conditions of mediation in which 'we' here find ourselves, today, at Birkbeck College, the home of our kind hosts, and the crossing point today of its rich scholarly heritage with the latest technocultural tendencies traversing what Stiegler has called the 'pharmacological' conditions of the globalisation of scholarship.

'Passing, Swirling, Spinning': on Diagrams, figures and motion.

The diagrams:



These diagrams are offered by Husserl in the *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness* to illustrate his propositions concerning the relations between the impressional consciousness of or at each present moment and what is retained of (and in) the continuity of perceptions. They attempt to represent Husserl's account of the relation between the continuously passing present of consciousness and its retention of past present moments. Husserl's chief example for this is how consciousness constitutes a song or melody as a discrete temporal object: consciousness operates a process of 'primary retention' most evident when considering the consciousness of phenomena like a melody or song which take time to be constituted as a discrete object of perception—this is what he terms a 'temporal object'. This primary retention is different from the memory of a song that is recalled to consciousness after having been heard ('secondary retention'). Indeed it is primary retention that makes possible the very constitution of such unitary phenomena from out of the permanent flux of the consciousness of time as continuous flowing of momentary perceptions. Through primary retention, each moment of the hearing of the song—which Husserl characterises as each *note* of the melody, a reduction in Stiegler's view of a much more complex phenomenality which reduction is already symptomatic of the limitations of Husserl's nonetheless important 'discovery' of primary retention—each moment of this hearing is retained in modified form across the duration of the song, the retained moments accumulating in a developing sense of and anticipation (or 'protention') of its eventual constitution as a complete(d) object of consciousness.

As other commentators have noted (Paul Ricoeur, David L Thompson), these diagrams have tended to raise more questions than they have answered. Stiegler, citing Ricoeur, locates the fundamental problem with them in the impossibility of these spatial forms to adequately represent a 'recurrence that does not only operate within the limits of graphic figuration' (TT2, 214).

Even in their necessary, inevitable failure, however—and this is to prefigure my conclusion—and just as I and we all inevitably fail today to properly circumscribe and

account for the 'conditions of mediation' on the basis of our texts, powerpoints and videoclips, these diagrams opened up the possibility of what Husserl in 'The Origin of Geometry' called Rückfrage, the 'further inquiry', the critical reconsideration via collective "consultation" (Stiegler calls this 'reactivation'), from which other figurings of time have developed, including Stiegler's own. Stiegler for his part acknowledges the singular contribution made to the thinking of the experience of time by Husserl's positing of the 'longitudinal intentionality' of primary retention in its difference from the secondary retention of past perceptions.

What, then, is this 'recurrence' Ricoeur and Stiegler argue 'does not only operate within the limits of graphic figuration'? These limits are spatial and this is what is meant by Ricoeur; that the diagram cannot represent the temporal character of the fundamental conception of 'retention' elaborated in Husserl's analysis of the way consciousness composes a temporal object in the course of its *longitudinal* intentioned perception of a phenomena. (For Ricoeur, the diagram does not figure retention in its specific figuration of the relations between the continuous flow of the present moments of intentional conscious perception (A-E) and the descent of these into the ever-deepening depth of consciousness' archive of experience along the diagonal line A-A' – for Ricoeur retention has to be understood as what is indicated by the combination of the three lines A – E, A – A', and E – A'. But this is in effect to state that retention is everywhere but nowhere in the diagram, and must be inferred in a kind of scanning look that 'animates' the static simultaneity of the relation between the lines of the descent, the continuation and the return of 'nows'.

But even this retemporalizing is not adequate to the most complex thought of the dynamic modification primary retention enacts in its process of both reducing and maintaining the 'just-past nows' within the bounds of the temporal object 'under construction'. Inadequate but inevitable ('essential' even) retemporalizing: this is how Stiegler understands the process and power of what he calls mnemotechnical artefactuality, such as writings, notes, diagrams, graphics, statues, monuments, but also photos, films, video files

[START VIDEO GoPro Aikido <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDHsJ47Ba9U>]:

Of writing, for instance, Stiegler says 'when a reader reads a text, the spatial object is thereby re-temporalized. Reading is the transformation of space back into the time of reading' ('Organology of Dreams'). Exceeding the reach of his diagrams, Husserl's written characterisation of the ongoing dynamic of primary retention approaches in Stiegler's view the crucial theme of heritage that his student Heidegger will later seize upon, but in error (with disastrous consequences; but that is for another 15 minutes). This theme is nonetheless at the heart of the issue of the human

experience of/in time as necessarily and *artefactually, technically*, inherited. Husserl, Stiegler says, '*speaks* of heritage, but cannot *think* it' (214).

In short, (as time is short) there is a contradiction between Husserl's account of the dynamic, janus-faced retentional/protentional process and his ambition to separate primary from secondary retention, that is, perception from the workings of memory and imagination upon our experience of exterior phenomena.* Husserl seeks to ground phenomenology's study of the objects of intentional consciousness as 'original', untainted by subjective colouring, unequivocally witnessed as such and not selectively constituted through subjective predisposition.** This leads him to assert the absolute character of the beginning of the temporal object, a 'primal impression' (Husserl) that 'transmits its absolute nature to a retention even while assigning its limits' (212). This absolute beginning cuts off present perception of the phenomenon from the workings of the ever-deepening continuity of memorious consciousness. Husserl's account of primary retention, even as it accounts for the complex dynamic through which the flow of present perception is able to extend itself into a 'large now' through a process Stiegler thinks is better figured as a whirling, spinning, vortexual flux (without venturing his own diagram, 211), nonetheless posits an impermeable wall between the moment prior to the start of the temporal object and the first sounding of the melody. This constitutes an 'open unity of phenomena' for study, including temporal phenomena, but without considering the inevitable, and constitutive complicity of retentions, secondary and primary, always already in play at each moment of perception, always janus-faced, retaining and anticipating, constituting the present on the basis of retained experience, and modifying the sense and significance of the past in the present encounter with the perceived.

'The ear is originally musical', says Stiegler (210) and the 'eye is originally cinematic' one might add. How can one see this video, constitute it as a unitary phenomenon, but differently, according to one's experience and anticipation of cinema and video, within a wider spiral of retained experience? To note the most obvious conditions of constitution of this temporal object, experience and anticipation of an experience of Youtube's storehouse of the individual 'amateur's' virtual community co-production, of GoPro first person perspective footage on Youtube, of Bruce Lee/martial arts films, of martial arts/'physical cultural' practice, of the experience of the difference between 'embodied' actions and their audiovisual representation (my particular motive for making this video), experience and anticipation of self absorbed academics with anecdotes and idiosyncratic means of inflating the significance of their personal pastimes?

If primary retention cannot be kept completely free of the influence of selection criteria synthesised from out of the ongoing workings of secondary retention in the

continuous modification of consciousness, that is not to say that perception is the same as memory or imagination. Different, but not opposed, hermetically sealed off from it. And, as we have just seen, as secondary retention is of experiences so many of which are of media, and of mnemotechnical forms more generally (eg. of martial arts/physical training which is 'essentially' technical, and only 'spiritual' on the basis of a technical substrate), then what Stiegler calls 'tertiary retention' in his supplementing of Husserl's categories of retention is of central importance to thinking the phenomenality of phenomena in their essentially technical conditions of psychic and collective mediation. Tertiary retention: spatialised, materialised artefactuality that conditions the first two interior retentional dynamics through its retention and rendering transmissible, or inheritable, experiences that living consciousness did not itself live. Tertiary retention 'fixes' materially the conditions of inheritance but does not determine it. Framed, funnelled, enabled, the movement of passing, swirling and spinning is constitutively uncertain in its retemporalisation of this heritage; all the more reason to formulate a proper critical assessment of its pharmacological character and potential.

NOTES

*Retention is dynamic, says Husserl; the previous notes in the melody are not reduced into a modified form once and for all and retained in that form across the continuous passage of the melody like a growing wagontrain. Rather, they undergo continuous modification at each moment of the melody: 'retention of retention' (Husserl p.31). Each new 'now' of impressional consciousness modifies its retention of the previous note's modification of the prior notes, based on the sounding of each new note and how it modifies the ongoing experience of and anticipation of the melody as completed phenomenon. In analysing this complex of protentional and retentional dynamics within primary retention, Husserl speaks of the 'continuous modification [of what is retained] that carries with it, so to speak, the heritage of the past in the form of a series of adumbrations' (215). It is the effort to delimit this complexity either side of a borderline between primary and secondary retention that Stiegler argues prevents Husserl from fully developing the implications of using this term, heritage, at this point.

**cf Husserl's contesting of the position of Franz Brentano that 'perception is misception', 'against' whose work on intentional consciousness Husserl formulated his 'pre-psychologist' method to avoid the traps of subjectivism).