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# PHENOMENOLOGICAL HABITUS AND SOCIAL CREATIVITY\*

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## abstract

*How is social creativity linked to habitual dispositions?*

*This paper critiques Bourdieu's answer to this question, which is related to his theory of habitus, against the background of its phenomenological evidences. His concept of habitual dispositions seems to be linked both to an internalisation of the performativity of habits as a form of Kantian schematism (in Husserlian terms: 'noetization'), and to a static concept of the social environment, which is never analysed in its own dynamic structural relation to the life of the bearer of habits.*

*Through the genetic-phenomenological distinction between habits as noetic dispositions and types as noematic schemes, the paper seeks to show that the social environment cannot be presupposed as a given field of social objectivities and norms that are stabilized by internalized habitual dispositions, but should instead be seen as an enactively framed habitat. When we further distinguish between passive and active habitualities, their intertwining comes to the fore, showing how in taking a position in relation to its own cultural environment the subject finds in the hiatus between disposition and the disposed leeway for a relative framework of spontaneity and personal cultivation, a space allowing for individual and, ultimately, social creativity that is absent from Bourdieu's account.*

*\*Translated by Jacob Martin Rump (Emory University)*

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## keywords

*Habit, types, Bourdieu, creativity, Sartre*

*To Alice and Marie, my daughters*

Connected from the outset both to habits and routine, at once the support and the vehicle of this myriad of actions undertaken by the human being in a kind of reckless spontaneity, habitus seems to be the antagonist of social creativity, of the deliberate emergence of new configurations and new opportunities. It is in this sense, that, for Bourdieu, habitus is a system of dispositions, “the principle of the continuity and regularity which objectivism sees in social practices without being able to found it in reason, at the same time as regulated changes and revolutions”<sup>1</sup>. Habitus, as the generative scheme of practices adapted to objective circumstances of social context, “generates dispositions objectively compatible with these circumstances and in a way pre-adapted to their demands. The most improbable practices are therefore excluded without examination as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable”<sup>2</sup>. Habit so conceived seems capable of supporting only the reproduction of acquired conditionalities, incorporated into a second nature which retains nonetheless the virtue of making its requirements “reasonable”<sup>3</sup> in the eyes of common sense: the behavior which it befits each to adopt, according to her condition (i.e. her social position). Habitus would thus be reduced to the *modus operandi* of a *modus vivendi*.

One can grant that habits and routines obviously structure a great number of our banal and everyday activities. If it were only a matter of producing yet another theory of social reproduction, no one could find any fault in this. But Bourdieu puts at the heart of a theory of action a principle that accounts more for that which is likely for the action than that which is possible for it, something worse than having linked the likely and the possible, such that one is the exact correlate of the other. It is this that leaves us puzzled<sup>4</sup>.

To understand the issue, we must remember that the challenge for Bourdieu consists in being able to give an account, on the one hand, of the regularity of social configurations and lifestyles *without* reverting to a soulless mechanism, and on the other, to do justice to a certain creativity in social interactions *without* reference to a subjective power whose rationality

1 Bourdieu (2000), p. 277, and Bourdieu (2012a), pp. 91-92 [Bourdieu (1990), p. 54].

2 Bourdieu (2012a), p. 90 [Bourdieu (1990), p. 54, translation modified].

3 Cf. Bourdieu (2012a), p. 93 and note 15 on p. 104 [Bourdieu (1990), 55f and note 10 to p. 62].

4 See on this subject Haber (2004).

would be able to escape from the reproduction of social structures. And indeed, neither the referring of social change solely to the movements of the structures of society, nor the artful disappearance of the weight of the structure and conditionings in current social interactions will allow us to meet the requirements of a theory of collective action. But the determining of habitus as an operative passivity, as a disposition endowed with a plasticity of adjustment *by analogy*, by which it *schematically* cuts out all objective context in order to extract the recognized elements necessary for its own reiteration and its own strengthening, was destined to fail to account for elements of social creativity<sup>5</sup>. From a purely epistemological point of view, it is because:

The habitus fulfills a function which another philosophy confines to a transcendental consciousness: it is a socialized body, a structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that world—a field—and which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world<sup>6</sup>.

that Bourdieu's project cannot effect a *final* synthesis between the objectivism of structuralism and the subjectivism of interactionism. Indeed, habitus as a structured *body*, makes the disposition out to be a milieu immediately *comprehended and included* [*compris*] in the worldly context, a milieu which is only transcended through the analogical transfer of the schemes of a previous situation to a relatively new one. In its blind spontaneity, habitus suffers from a lack of distance or difference from itself, and perpetuates itself only according to its pre-disposition, purely and simply, without social and contextual evolution, and in principle always slowly and imperceptibly.

To formulate the critique in Husserl's terms, the incorporation of habitus is overcompensated by its predominant use of the Kantian transcendental schematism of the imagination, that is to say by a *noétization* of the operative mode of habitual disposition. The habitus is structured as body, and structured-structuring as schema, which is why, in spite of its agility and flexibility, it ballasts everything present with the “disproportionate weight” of the past<sup>7</sup>. But this is not all: because its schematizing anticipation is presented in a context of conditions favorable to its own renewal, habit is blind to those possible other conditions which contain the situation, and which could themselves initiate a new given.

5 Bourdieu (2000), pp. 261-263.

6 Bourdieu (2012b), p.155 [Bourdieu (1998), p. 81, translation modified].

7 Bourdieu, (2012a), p. 90. [Bourdieu (1990), p. 54].

This brief detour through Bourdieu's concept of habitus allows us to bring out more deeply the conditions of possibility and, in return, of impossibility, of a theory of habit capable of supporting social creativity without relying on an all-powerful subjectivity whose specter causes the sociologist to flee.

We propose in this essay to draw the outlines of such a theory by taking up and extending Husserl's theory of habituality. This will involve demonstrating:

- 1) The practical and ethical reworking of the correlational a priori to show that to habitus as subjective disposition there always responds a typical<sup>8</sup> dis-position of the world which constitutes its objective correlate. Man is not habituated only to a world which he finds already structured by innumerable rules; he is not acquainted exclusively with a space composed of ways of doing and being. The world is also given to him as a space he has to in-habit [*habiter*], that is to say, to which he must give an inhabitable [*habitable*] form, typical of his way of living [*manière de l'habiter*]. This inter-implication of habituality and the typical is at the basis of the dynamism of meaning [*sens*<sup>9</sup>] and action.
- 2) One thus cannot understand the operativity of this "inhabiting" exclusively through the habituality which is passive, embodied, and which disposes us constantly to the familiarity of the world so that we do not have to begin again every morning like unfortunate Pénélopes; carnal links that unite us with the world, spatio-temporal structures, relations of similarity and dissimilarity, etc., extending all the way to the social relations that underlie everyday life. To grasp this operativity, one must also study the active habituality through which we conform, our lives, and the world of life—our life, our world—as the space that we wish to in-habit according to a certain style through those material correlates we have created to make it inhabitable: tools, works of art and institutions.
- 3) This is why, for Husserl, active habituality and passive habituality maintain relations of intertwining and implication and not of opposition or antagonism: the passive does not constitute an opacity or a heaviness that would have to be overcome in a resounding effort of self-transparency necessary for becoming *truly* self. Instead, active habituality, that is to say deliberate habituality, rests upon and plays from this fundamental

8 ["Typical", "typification", etc. are used throughout in the sense of Husserl's "theory of types". -Trans.]

9 [The French *sens*, like the German *Sinn*, corresponds to English's *sense* and *meaning*. It is translated both ways in this essay in accordance with idiomatic English usage, but this double-connotation should be kept in mind for both words throughout. -Trans.]

disposition to iteration in order to establish a personal or intersubjective style of life and, correlatively, to create concrete material devices for the reiteration of position-takings, that is, institutions.

4) The constitution of material devices of reiteration constitutes the terminal point of Husserlian ethics. That is why we turn to the Sartre of *Search for a Method* [*Questions de méthode*] and the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* for support to develop, in conclusion, a brief analysis of the institution as material device for the incorporation of ends.

**1.**  
**The Practical**  
**Reworking**  
**of the**  
**Correlational**  
**A Priori:**  
**Habituality and**  
**Type**

The correlational a priori is a foundational thesis of Husserl's phenomenology, at first glance quite simple or seemingly obvious: all consciousness is consciousness of something which that consciousness is not. The immediate consequence of this is that without something it would be the consciousness of, consciousness is not, and vice-versa: without a consciousness that is aware of it, the something is not, i.e. it has no meaning. Static phenomenology—which interrogates neither the genesis of the stream of consciousness nor its potential generativity in order to confine itself to the constitution of sense in the present—could consider the correlational a priori to be a simple correspondence, an eidetically necessary correlation both for the determination of consciousness and for that of its “correlate,” the objective phenomenon. With the development of genetic phenomenology in the 1920s, especially in the *Passive Synthesis Lectures* [*Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*], this correspondence which was inclined toward the noetization of the intentional field is literally invalidated. Husserl shows that the correlation does not express a characteristic of the essence of consciousness, which could be taken up a priori by examining the formal structures of the pure ego as the center of operation, but instead manifests a relationship of consciousness to the world that requires the analysis of subjective experience insofar as it is in-formed [*Einbilden*], formed from the inside by that which is not it, and more rigorously, which is not from it: alterity.

From a formal standpoint, the correlational a priori instead defines a relationship of consciousness to the world through reciprocal implication. In its dynamism, the liveliness of sense is enhanced by the event of experience that consciousness undergoes [*ce dont la conscience fait l'épreuve*]. The “self-production” of the life of consciousness—“self” because this production is not the result of an external impact or stimulus that arouses the consciousness from its drowsiness in order that it make sense—is immediately affected by its production itself, by its *being toward* alterity.

The original position-taking of life as life involved in alterity, the inter-implication of life and the world, consists of nothing other than that *Urdoxa* given to us under the repeated evidence of an everyday occurrence, the knowing of the constant conjunction of human life and the lifeworld [*Lebenswelt*] in which it lives. One of the tasks addressed to genetic phenomenology is precisely to reveal the eidetic lawfulness that underlies and deepens the phenomenological investigation of the constitution of meaning in the direction of its genesis.

To do this, Husserl makes use of the double reduction, initiated in the lecture course *Fundamental Problems of Phenomenology*<sup>10</sup> through which the phenomenological field is expanded to non-present [*inactuel*] lived experiences of consciousness and opens up to the indefinite horizon of past and future by breaking the artificial restriction that prevailed in static phenomenology. The double reduction in this way frees “the endless temporal stream of life”<sup>11</sup> of consciousness taken in its ongoing development and allows for reflection on non-present lived experiences in the background of consciousness, since they are not given absolutely as is the case with present lived experiences, but nonetheless *implicated* in any current lived experience as sedimented in it. This allows for a major shift in phenomenological reflection, which in turning away from the present actuality of the act of consciousness, accesses the transcendental field of lived experiences, a field which is made up not only of lived experiences but also of things, the world, as the intentional correlate of these experiences. In this way phenomenological reflection can now avail itself of an intentional field that allows for the description of both the directedness of consciousness and the object that it aims at as its correlate, so that within this field, the directedness of consciousness and object to which it is directed are presented as equal and simultaneous.

This co-location in the temporal stream of the life of consciousness proves to be fundamental: from the noetic point of view, it allows us to account for the structuring of the intentional field and its unification while from the noematic point of view it allows us to account for the role of alterity in the structuring of this field, that is to say, to explain the immanent operativity of alterity in intentionality.

The opening of the intentional field thus presents a double implication: the implication of alterity in intentionality and the implication of non-present lived experiences in present lived experiences. In the temporal genesis of the stream, these refer respectively to transversal intentionality

10 Husserl (1973b), pp. 177f.

11 Husserl (1959), p. 152.

(relating to the temporal object) and to longitudinal intentionality (relating to the phases of the stream)<sup>12,13</sup>. If, however, the correlational a priori manifests the inter-implication of the life of consciousness and its world in the order of genesis, in return, in the order of becoming, it is the co-genesis, that is to say, the common becoming of subjectivity (and subjectivities) and of the world that phenomenology brings to light. It is demonstrated through the original correlation of these two vectors of sedimentation, that is to say of intentional implication, which are noetic habituality on the one hand, and the noematic type on the other<sup>14</sup>. It is through the correlation of these two vectors that to the “becoming me in the unity of history”<sup>15</sup>, to the individuation of transcendental subjectivity soon rethought under the Leibnizian concept of the monad, there always corresponds on the noematic plane a typical configuration of the world, understood beginning in *Ideas II* as the “secondary individuation of the opposite”<sup>16</sup>. The correlation thereby founds, in the immanence of the genesis, and according to a lawfulness that we will present in detail, this immediate familiarity with a world that presents itself from the outset with its typical shape, as our habitat. But a habitat that, if it is at the origin of the dynamism of meaning as something already there, is also at its end: the world is not only a given, it is also a task and a responsibility. And the sense that it reveals, good, fair or cruel, democratic or authoritarian, is revelatory also of us.

### Passive and Active Habituality

The correlation of habituality and type is part of a geneticization of phenomenology that will change Husserl’s original project and lead him to develop a concrete universal ontology that requires taking up the concept of the monad. By this concept, Husserl understands, as Leibniz before him, the power that possesses the principle of its absolute individuation and the principle of its temporal/contingent individuation. It allows him to resolve the tension between the identity-permanence of the pure ego—

12 For detailed and precise analyses of these fundamental points, only briefly sketched here, see Kokoszka (2004).

13 This is the reason why genetic phenomenology cannot content itself with the notion of time as the necessary form of all genesis, but must equally do justice to the fact that temporality finds itself in a “continual, passive, and completely universal genesis.” Husserl (1973a), p. 114 [Husserl (1999), p. 81].

14 Husserl outlined the operativity of this habituality/type correlation following a specific genetic sequence: a) genesis of passivity, b) the participation of the me and relationships between activity and passivity, c) active genesis, d) formation of monadic individuality, e) genetic relationships between individuated monads, f) possibility of undertaking the absolute consideration of the world, a “metaphysics.” Husserl (2001), pp. 342-343 [Husserl (2001), p. 631].

15 Husserl (1973c), p. 36.

16 Husserl (1971), p.301. [Husserl (1989), p. 315].



substrate of habituality—and the contingency of the self<sup>17</sup>, the substrate of habits in which phenomenology remained imprisoned, preventing it from accomplishing the becoming-self of the ego, and, correlatively, the becoming-my-world of the world. Although it is a configuring power, both genetic and generative, habituality is nothing like the mysterious faculty that a suspect metaphysics would attach to a no less contentious transcendental subjectivity. It simply consists in the disposition of the pure ego (as center of the functioning of acts) to the iteration of its acts which are sedimented and grounded in habit. These habits constitute the having [*Habe*] of a self, its reservoir of experiences. Between the ability to iterate that governs the fusion of acts in habits, and the acts founded in habits, lies the entire gap that separates the disposition from that which is disposed. This gap opens an *internal* distance, absent in Bourdieu, that the me is able to mobilize to create itself in the unity of a “personal” style, *idealiter*, in that which Husserl calls vocation.

But before addressing this point, we should briefly sketch the basic features of passive habituality and its role in passive genesis. This is based primarily on association, of which Husserl distinguishes two forms. The first is association as a principle of the formation of a unity, of the configuration of different moments, whether simultaneous or successive, within the *same phase of presence*. It is accomplished by means of a reciprocal associative awakening, through which the data are synthesized, homogenized, and fused remotely on the basis of contiguity, similarity and contrast. As the passive engine of “universal unification of the life of an ego” and correlatively of the unity of the field of consciousness<sup>18</sup>, the associative awakening puts in play a persistence of interest, a “consequence” in which both the life of consciousness and its worldly field are unified. “[T]he life of consciousness here, like everywhere, is subordinate to the grand principle of iteration,” says Husserl<sup>19</sup>. Iteration or habituality, at the most originary passive level, is neither a pure repetition of the initial position-taking nor a purely causal attainment: if the interest persists, if the consequence governs the synthesis of data without there being a voluntary and determined orientation of consciousness, it is only that the associative awakening is made dynamic, on the noematic side, by the “resonance” of data that echo each other, recall each other, infringe upon each other, attract or repel each

17 [The interpretation of Husserl presented here relies on a distinction between the transcendental ego as “Funktionzentrum”, pure activity *qua* passive structure conceived as bare substrate and the “me” as the active ego *qua* person or self. The former has been translated by “ego” and the latter as “the me,” “the self,” etc. throughout. –Tran.]

18 Husserl (1966), pp. 405–406 [Husserl (2001), p. 505].

19 Husserl (1966), p. 409 [Husserl (2001), p. 510].

other to form unities of the similar and the dissimilar.

The second form of association appears in Husserl as the principle of the apperception of objects in cases where they already have a determined meaning. It is built up through the apperceptive awakening of previous experiences and through the resultant analogical recollection. At the heart of longitudinal intentionality, apperception is essential to the thought of a stream of becoming in which the becoming is not an anarchic surfacing of data, but a regulated relationship: “*The stream of consciousness is a stream of a constant genesis; it is not a mere series, but a development, a process of becoming according to laws of necessary succession in which concrete apperceptions of different typicalities (among them, all the apperceptions that give rise to the universal apperception of a world) grow out of primordial apperceptions or out of apperceptive intentions of a primitive kind*”<sup>20</sup>. There is therefore a double consequence to the work, horizontal and longitudinal, through which the correlative individuation of the subjective life and the world occurs. If the life of consciousness is originally an awakening, a life directed toward the “encounter,” this awakening is never a pure repeated spontaneity to which only a worldly chaos could respond on the noematic plane. On the contrary, it is a life that is configured in undergoing the event of experience [*en s'éprouvant via ce dont elle fait l'épreuve*] and which configures in return by means of the typical eidetic forms “human being”, “world”, “body”<sup>21</sup>.

Typification thus constitutes a major process of the pre-predicative sphere since it is only through it that the world is given in a coherence where everything that happens is anticipated according to the mode of familiarity. The correlational a priori thus translates, in the very individuation of the life of consciousness, as the correlation between typical generality (noematic) and habituality, such that the production of the coherence of experience is rooted in the unceasing reiterated interaction of a life that habitualizes interests and motivations and applies itself to the inhabiting of a mode that constantly presents it with a familiar sense-type.

However, in reinforcing the consequence of the life of consciousness and the familiar coherence of the world, do we not risk falling into a cohesion at this point so smooth or perfect that no incoherence can break through its sense, can provoke surprise or refusal, interest or aversion: a world constantly adapted for those who inhabit it, who in return would only have to let it live? What place remains then for the will, for freedom, for life-projects? If worldly coherence is linked to the usual consequence of the monad, this consequence is always imperfect, partly due to unnoticed or unrepeated resonances, partly

20 Husserl (1966), p. 339 [Husserl (2001), p. 628].

21 Husserl (1966), p. 341 [Husserl (2001), p. 629f].

because of the opacity of interests and motivations that are recombined over time. But that which radically prevents the world from being exclusively “my world” in a perfect match between my consequence and its coherence, is precisely that it is not only mine. The world of experience as it is given to me is already piled with sediments and objective deposits of which I am not the author. Other subjectivities deposit them, according to their interests and to their most original motivations; the fruits of a coherence that is not mine alone. It is thus literally the concrete encountering of the other in empathy that returns subjectivity to itself not as a life directed toward the “encounter” in its native innocence, but as a power-to-be, an “I can” which has to deliberate for itself in order to be achieved. In other words, to preserve and develop its consequence and the coherence of “its” world, subjectivity must reiterate its position-taking in the world according to its values and convictions, this time decisively and voluntarily. Since convictions and values are not held in an apperceptive unity passively formed by association, subjectivity must unify these values and beliefs, arrange and order them in a higher unity, that of the personal self, by which it can achieve its selfhood and be reconciled with itself. Because being “me” is not only letting the self be, submitting to encountered norms, to structures that govern the being of the group, in short surrendering the self and the world of common purposes to the exteriority of the norm<sup>22</sup>. To be me is to be faithful to my-self, to claim to be a self in the integrity of personal values and convictions, in the unifying unity of a life that gives a form which Husserl conceives, *idealiter*, as vocation. Vocation indeed consists in the unification of life according to a direction, a meaning, a purpose that corresponds for each of us to the anticipation of a possible style of existence in which it fulfills its “meaning of life”<sup>23</sup>, its “will to be a self”<sup>24</sup> which remains stable and persists when affected [*dans les épreuves*] without losing its meaning or its hold, and retains its form. This possibility of living in the development of a typical and personal style of existence depends upon the ego’s ability to reiterate its position-takings, to habitualize its effort, its tension towards an objective or an end<sup>25</sup>. Active habituality, plays, so to speak, on the disposition to fuse effort into habit, so that the choice that the me makes for itself persists without its having to constantly revalidate all of its motives, equipping itself with a base for flourishing and progressing

22 Cf. on this subject the critique of “*faulen Vernunft*” in Husserl (1973c) p. 231. If Bourdieu feared an all-powerful transcendental subjectivity in the manner of Sartre’s “for-itself”, we must also do justice to that which Husserl and Sartre themselves feared: the laziness of the reason that complies with the *ordo ordinatus* and steps down from being *ordo ordinans*: the subsumption to the given order exactly as it is.

23 Husserl (1976), *Beilage XXIV*.

24 Husserl (1976), *Beilage X*.

25 Cf. Husserl (1966), p. 360 [Husserl (2001), pp. 443-444].

in what it is and what it aims for. This possibility is obviously not without setbacks or complications: condition of creating and maintaining a form of life that modalizes and unfolds according to that which it encounters and undergoes [épreuve], habituality can also serve to support rigidities or opaque automations. To be free, to draw its own destiny, to equip itself with a sense of life, flourishing and achieving it in any situation, is a task that falls to a constant willing, not to sporadic good action.

**Intersubjective  
Habit and  
Social  
Creativity**

The world in its familiar typicality of meaning is configured by sediments of meaning, social structures, arrangements of signification deposited there by past generations and by contemporaries. If it is on the basis of this initial configuration that the self chooses for itself, the form for which it decides already no longer depends completely on it alone because of its dependence on other selves. From the outset, every self undergoes in experience [*fait l'épreuve*] the passive inter-implication of monads: common meaning comes precisely from the original interweaving of these subjective lives. However, these subjectivities can decide to voluntarily and actively form the community they are always already forming passively, can choose to inter-implicate their position-takings to configure the world, to give it the manifest form of the “to us” in an *ars vivendi* wherein being and values are reconciled. Here is the radical responsibility that results from the project of a universal ontology of the lifeworld: the making constant of our world, the concrete holding place of our values. Husserl situates the operativity of this configuration in the voluntary inter-implication of monads, which inter-orient their actions, embody and synthesize their purposes to constitute “personalities of higher order”, that is to say community institutions such as associations, parties, the university, the state. As material devices, such institutions are tasked with the incorporation, maintenance, conveyance and sedimentation of purposes ordered according to the values that govern those who invest them with their projects. Personalities of a higher order are thus only legitimately institutionalized provided that they concretely use the material devices of the embodiment and iteration of the purposes of a community of action, i.e., of a community that takes its destiny in hand and concretizes its values in the world.

Just as at the personal level, habitual sedimentation runs the risk of rigidifying material structures, the particular perversion of which Sartre would demonstrate in *The Search for a Method*: the empowerment of institutions with respect to purposes pursued by the social body as a whole. In this frequent imperfection, institutions become incapable of allowing themselves to invest in the logics of the actions of the members of a society,

incapable of letting themselves incorporate the goals of individuals. So empowered, these collective units then appear to pursue, uncontrollably, goals and purposes without authors and without leaders. The degeneration of social vehicles for the realization of ends in material devices of social reproduction is such—and this is the radical perversion—that one almost forgets that they were not instituted all and only to reinforce social domination, but also *to achieve goals, to transform the real, to concretize an art of life*. The emergence of new collective units (associations, NGOs, committees for literacy, etc.) thus must overcome the shortcomings of older devices until they in turn fall into disuse or disinheritance, in a constant struggle not of being against value, but of letting-be against the achievement of a worthwhile world<sup>26</sup>.

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26 Sartre (1960), p. 226.

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