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DOES THE I HAVE A HISTORY?
THE PROBLEM OF CONSTITUTION
OF THE PURE I

Abstract: This paper examines some issues in the constitution of the pure I and, to that extent, its historicity. At places, Husserl holds what would seem as contradicting views regarding the constituted nature of the I, describing it as both unconstituted transcendence within immanence and as continuously self-constituting. This is further complicated by the paradoxical status of the I as the identical subject of its own self-objectification, presupposing itself for its constitution. Through the concepts of I-pole, substrate of habitualities, *Deckungssynthese*, character of *nunc stans*, and self-temporalization, I aim to investigate the constituted character of the I. In the end, I argue that these frameworks fail and that the actual, living I-subject of the immediate presence cannot be regarded as constituted or having a historical dimension.

Keywords: the I, constitution, history, habituation, temporality, *nunc stans*

“What has history to do with me?
Mine is the first and only world!”
(Wittgenstein 1961, 82e)

Husserl presents conflicting claims regarding the constitution and historical dimension of the I. In *Ideas I*, he states that the I is an element of the pure structure of consciousness, “one which is not constituted” (1983, 133). Conversely, in *Cartesian Meditations*, he asserts that the I or ego is “*continuously constituting himself*” (1960, 66). This discrepancy is further complicated by the notion that this constitution

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of the I occurs for the I or that the I is “constituting itself”, an idea continued in *Crisis* (1970, 172). Additionally, in *Phenomenological Psychology*, Husserl writes:

“The I has its history and on the basis of its history it creates [schafft] an I which persists for it habitually as the same I.” (1977, 161)

This is echoed in *Cartesian Meditations*:

“The ego constitutes himself for himself in, so to speak, the unity of a ‘history’.” (1960, 75)

These statements suggest the existence of two I’s: the constituting and the constituted. What would the relation between the original and the created I consist of? Is the first I also created or constituted? Is the I constituting itself or a *new* I? Furthermore, they also allude to the interrelation between constitution and history.

In this paper, I will analyze this issue through the idea of the I’s constitution, focusing on its role as a substrate of habitualities, its unchanging nature, and the self-temporalization of the living present. Consequently, we will be faced with the dialectic of the changing and unchanging I, its temporal and atemporal character, and the question of whether the I has a history.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE I

Everything within consciousness is constituted. Constitution is the result of its intentionality. Objects do not merely exist; they are experienced by consciousness through predefined modes of conscious acts, which are closely interrelated. Each objective region is constituted in a manner peculiar to consciousness, with different layers of constitution (1983, 355). For instance, a material thing is perceived in profiles or adumbrations [*Abschattungen*], never “all-sidedly” (8). Moran summarizes Husserl’s concept of constitution as follows:

“[Constitution refers to] the manner in which an object is formed and given its particular structure and attributes by certain a priori acts of consciousness [...] from the activity of the conscious subject apprehending them. [...] Husserl speaks of the constituting subject as giving an object its ‘sense and being’”. (Moran and Cohen 2012, 71)

In a 1920 manuscript, Husserl equates constitution with “what *Kant* obviously *had in mind* [...] *synthesis*”.² It is a passive genesis in which both the I and its world are constituted. Taken as such, constitution involves time and distinct elements or moments.³ It is a process of developing and disclosing the object for the subject, rather than outright creation.

If the I’s history is founded on constitution, then the I ought to be constituted. However, this is met with several difficulties. Firstly, the I is never an object but rather a subject of consciousness, for whom everything else constitutes an object. Thus, the I “cannot itself be a content”, as to be an I means “to be something opposed to all objects, for which they are objects” (Natorp 1888, 11). In *Ideas I*, Husserl adopted this position claiming that the I “is not something taken *for itself* and which can be made into an Object” (1983, 191). However, in *Ideas II* he moderates, writing:

“everything that is objective, in the broadest sense of the word, is thinkable only as [...] referable to a pure Ego. This holds for the pure Ego itself as well. The pure Ego can be posited as an object by the pure Ego which is identically one with it.” (1989, 107)

Each object is an object for the I, which is the subject of all objects, including *itself*. Reflection, for instance, “makes me objective – objective for me” (1977, 159). If the I can be posited as an object for the I, we end up with two I’s, the subject for which the second I is posited as an object. I shall refer to them as ‘I-subject’ and ‘I-object’ respectively. Although the I can be posited as an object for itself, it can never truly *be* an object. Ontologically, it cannot become an object, but epistemologically, it should be able to posit itself as an object for itself. This implies that the original, living, and functioning I-subject remains *unposited*. On paper, the I-subject should be “identically one with” the I-object, but in practice, there exists an asymmetry between them.

Later on, Husserl states that the world, objects, and the I are all constituted *for* the I:

“The Ego [Das Ich] is itself *over and against itself*, is itself for itself, is constituted in itself [...] it is also constituted precisely for itself and

² As quoted in (Mensch 2010, 141).

³ In the broadest sense, whether over time or within inner time-consciousness, there is a succession of experiences, appearances, or adumbrations and an overlapping of constitutive layers.

has its constituted surrounding world as non-Ego [Nicht-Ich], as mere ‘Objects’, which exist only as constituted for an Ego and never as constituting themselves, as Ego. [...] the pure Ego must indeed be designated the subject of all Objects.” (1989, 331)

A Fichtean relation is evident: the I is for the I and constitutes itself as such. While all objects are simply constituted, the I is constituted *as* constituting.

“The ego is himself *existent for himself* in continuous evidence; thus, in himself, he is *continuously constituting himself as existing*.” (1960, 66)

Constitution concerns how objects are formed in experience. This is straightforward for all objects except the I because the I is posited as an object for itself; it is, at the same time, an object and a subject for whom it is an object. Therefore, the constitution of the I in its self-objectification becomes problematic, as it presupposes the achievement of the constitution. Ferrarin formulates this paradox as follows:

“it seems to me that there is a tension in this conception which Husserl cannot solve [...] the difficulty is the double requirement that the ego be the identical subject of its *Erlebnisse*, and that it be the object of its concrete self-constitution in a history. If it has to constitute itself, it has in fact to be the subject of its self-objectification – in which case it has to presuppose itself for its constitution of itself.” (1994, 655)

If the I is (self-)constituted for itself, it must already exist. However, if the I already exists, it cannot constitute itself *as* existing. If x is constituting itself as x , it either is not x initially (constitution as production) or x is not constituting itself, merely a representation of itself, i.e. I-object (constitution as self-manifestation). Either way, the I presupposes itself as its own condition of possibility, leading to Munchausen’s paradox.⁴ We shall revisit this shortly.

Secondly, the I is not given in adumbrations. In *Ideas II* Husserl writes:

“The Ego, however, does not appear, does not present itself merely from a side [...] Instead, the pure Ego is given in absolute selfhood and in a unity which does not present itself by way of adumbrations”.

(1989, 111)

4 It is interesting to note that Fichte’s concept of the I was also equated with the adventures of the Baron by Madame de Staël (Wood 2012, 16).

It does not appear to itself in adumbrations, as each would presuppose the I for which it appears. The I is not an appearance at all; it is not grasped on the object-side, but on the subject-side, as the subject for whom appearances appear. The pure I is given in immanence. Therefore, Husserl continues,

“the pure Egos must be drawn, originarily and in absolute selfhood, out of the originary givenness of each cogito in which they function”. (118)

Thirdly, and based on this, we can differentiate between self-consciousness and self-knowledge.

“In order to know what a human being is or what I myself am as a human personality, I have to enter into the infinity of experience in which I come to know myself under ever new aspects [...] in order to know that the pure Ego is and what it is, no ever so great accumulation of self-experiences can profit me more than the single experience of one sole and simple cogito.” (111)

To answer the maxim ‘know thyself’, I must experience myself in time, echoing Kant’s idea that in inner sense I cognize myself only as I appear to myself. This entails adumbrations: new experiences, properties, and insights, in a word, history. This quest can be infinite, ever more perfected. Thus, the maxim pertains to the empirical and concrete ego, i.e. *me* as this human person. Conversely, I can grasp myself as the pure I in “one sole and simple” cogito, making self-knowledge temporal and self-consciousness atemporal.⁵

To summarize, the I is the subject of all objects, including itself. It is not an object of intentional consciousness but a precondition for any constitution. The I does not appear one-sidedly; rather, it is grasped in immediate intuition. Already it becomes difficult to see how this I-subject could belong to the domain of constitution.

5 An illustrative example is King Oedipus. He discovered a certain truth about himself, namely, that he had killed his father. As an object, he was given to himself in adumbrations, adding another layer of ‘the one who committed patricide’. However, Oedipus did not discover that he is *himself*, which is a prerequisite for all self-knowledge. In other words, for knowledge to be *self*-knowledge or for a discovered property to be recognized as mine, I have to be aware that the object of cognizing is I, myself. This parallels the doctrine of the essential indexical ‘I’ and the example of amnesiac Rudolf Lingens (Perry 1977). One can learn everything about a person named ‘Rudolf Lingens’, but he will not learn that it is *he himself* he is learning about.

 THE UNCONSTITUTED I-POLE

Let us return to the difficulty that the I is both the identical I-subject of lived experiences within the egoic structure of consciousness and the object of constitution in its history. Husserl characterizes the I as the center or pole of consciousness. *Cogitationes* are polarized on one end by object-synthesis, which directs them toward identical objects, and on the other end by second polarization or “*second kind of synthesis*” which collectively embraces all *cogitationes* “as belonging to the identical Ego” (1960, 66). This I is a “necessary *terminus a quo*, the Ego-point, from which [acts] irradiate” (1989, 112); it is the “center of functioning” of consciousness (111). Akin to the object-pol, it is “a center of an identity” and “center for affects and actions” (324). Therefore, the I-pole is the “unique center of the entire pure subjectivity”, the “point of origin” of all constitutions and objectivizations (1977, 161); the singular point of “all-inclusive synthesis” that permeates the whole streaming conscious life and all existence constituted in it (159). The I is the primary referent for all contents, *cogitationes*, objects, and every synthesis or constitution, similar to how a circle is internally determined by its center. Furthermore, this I is empty:

“the ‘Ego’ is completely empty of essence-components, has no explicable content, is undescrivable in and for itself: it is pure Ego and nothing more.” (1983, 191)

In *Ideas II*, Husserl reiterates this idea:

“[The pure Ego] has no innate or acquired traits of character, no capacities, no dispositions, etc. [...] it does not harbor any hidden inner richness; it is absolutely simple and it lies there absolutely clear.” (1989, 111)

Husserl even asserts that the I is the I-pole – “the Ego-Center, or, the Ego itself” (112; 103).

Portraying the I in this manner makes it difficult to understand how something absolutely simple, devoid of content or components, and indescribable could be constituted in any sense. Consequently, when Husserl first introduces the pure I in *Ideas I*, he states the following:

“If we retain a pure Ego as a residuum after our phenomenological exclusion of the world and of the empirical subjectivity included in it

[...] then there is presented in the case of that Ego a transcendency of a peculiar kind – one which is not constituted – a *transcendancy within immanency*”. (1983, 133)

This is, again, reaffirmed in *Ideas II*:

“the pure Egos [are] *incapable of and in no need of constitution through manifolds*”. (1989, 118)

Not only is the I is not constituted, it is incapable of and does not require constitution. No manifold could ever constitute the I. However, it is still given, in consciousness. Therefore, it is a transcendence *within* immanence.

This notion appears almost paradoxical. The I is a transcendence, yet it is *not* eliminated by *epoché* that brackets all transcendencies. Transcendence of the I is not transcendence of a physical thing, as it is not constituted in the same way as an object is. It is inherent in each lived experience, placing it within immanence; however, it is neither a lived experience nor a part of it, thus it is not immanence in the strict sense. The transcendence of the I consists in the fact that it transcends individual mental acts, enduring the change of each *cogito* of which it is the subject; it remains, persisting and abiding. In other words, the I transcends each thought and all thoughts. By uttering ‘I’, I do not refer to a concrete experience or part of it, but to the subject that *has* different experiences. Neither is I limited to this individual experience nor the present experience. As they imply a synchronic and diachronic transcendence of the I, “there is obviously a certain transcendence of the ‘I’ with regard to individual experiences” (Fasching 2009, 134). Transcendence thus means a “transtemporal identity” of the I. The I “affirms its permanence beyond this consciousness and all consciousnesses” (Sartre 1991, 50). Husserl himself states that “the I is not to be found in the real stream of lived experiences” (1977, 159), thus transcendence means that the I is “*beyond* the immanent stream” (Embree 1973, 27). It surpasses the current, individual *cogito* and the stream of consciousness as the subject of background mental acts as well, akin to Kant’s ‘I think’ which accompanies all presentations (Husserl 1983, 132–33). The transcendence thus lies in its existence as the subject of absent mental states when it is presented immanently as the subject of present mental states (Priest 2000, 16). It is that which is necessary for the stream of consciousness and experiences to be *mine*.

If the I were an experience, a part of the experience, or a content of consciousness, which come and go, “then over any period of time you would have as many pure egos as you have experiences” (Shim 2020, 169), i.e. “I would have as multicolored, diverse a self as I have representations” (Kant 1998, 247). Furthermore, the I is “absolutely identical throughout every actual or possible change in mental processes” (Husserl 1983, 132). While an object is a constituted ‘unity of sense’, established as one-in-many experiences, the I is absolutely simple. The adjective ‘pure’ in pure I should signify precisely this independence on experience. Consequently, it cannot be constituted by the manifold of experiences (Mensch 2010, 139).

Now, Husserl states that,

“What is lacking is, for instance, an understanding of the relationship between the ‘pure Ego’, earlier taken as a structural moment of all cogitations and afterwards still very much utilized, and the Ego as person”. (1989, 331)

This understanding involves the “insertion into space and time” of this I. In other words, I am this particular human person with a name and history, existing as an *object* in the world and nature. Simultaneously, I am (or this I in “I am” is) the functional I-pole, a structural element of my egoic consciousness, the *subject* of all objects, including this body, and this “human being as Object”. A person is *not* the subject of all objects because it is itself an object for the pure I.

THE I AS THE SUBSTRATE OF HABITUALITIES

Husserl later revised his view, critiquing his earlier position that the I is “pure I and nothing more” (*cf.* 1970, 155). Instead, he consistently emphasized throughout his work that the I is more than an I-pole and is constituted through the sedimentation of habitualities, serving as their underlying substrate. In *Phenomenological Psychology*, he states:

“But this pure I – which plainly Kant had in mind, as he spoke of the I of transcendental apperception – is not a dead pole of identity.” (1977, 159)

Similarly, in *Ideas II*:

“The Ego, however, is not an empty pole but is the bearer of its habituality, and that implies that it has its individual history.” (1989, 313)

Again, in *Cartesian Meditations*, he adds:

“But it is to be noted that *this centering Ego is not an empty pole of identity*, any more than any *object* is such. Rather, according to a law of ‘transcendental generation’, with every *act* emanating from him and having a *new objective sense*, he acquires *a new abiding property*.” (1960, 66)

Finally, in *Crisis*, he concludes:

“Concretely, each ‘I’ is not merely an ego-pole but an ‘I’ with all its accomplishments and accomplished acquisitions, including the world as existing and being-such.” (1970, 183)

Kant, before Husserl, fell victim to the discrepancy between the transcendental I, conceived as logical and functional, and the empirical I of real subjects. Husserl was well aware of this and could have faced the same problem with the I-pole and the living ego in the world (Ferrarin 1994, 656). To avoid this, he introduced the idea of self-constitution of the I, which involves the concretization or mundanization of the pure I into a real or personal ego in time. The I is no longer empty, simple, and indescribable; it possesses properties, including the achievements of the constituted objects and the world. Husserl states that it is “an essential property of the ego, constantly to have systems of intentionality” (1960, 65). The I continually constitutes itself as existing in time – with each emanating act it “acquires *a new abiding property*”, thus “*I am abidingly the Ego who is thus and so decided*” (66). In this way, the I becomes the bearer of its “Ego-properties” (1989, 324).

Sedimentation refers to the process by which new experiences, judgments, and decisions settle or solidify into lasting habitual convictions. These form a cognitive outlook or integrate into actions, shaping one’s character and individual style, becoming part of the I’s unconscious background (1973a, 279). This cumulative process, a part of passive synthesis, complements the spontaneity of the I. It also pertains to the constitution of objects and the world. Intentional acts, by living through them, leave tendencies and patterns on the I. When an object is constituted, its existence and mode correlate with “the habituality constituted in the Ego-pole himself by virtue of his position-taking” (1960, 68). This constitutive activity establishes a habitus in me, through which the object appears as enduring. The constituted object,

so to speak, leaves a habitual mark on the I that constituted it. Thus, through their constitution, the I habitually persists as the same I.

These habitualities are not merely added or acquired; they are “dispositions which accrue to [the I] by a genesis” as it performs the activities. Thus, we become “progressively acquainted” with the I (1977, 161). Through habitualities the I undergoes genesis, self-constitution, and it “has a history because it accumulates properties; the property of having been subject of act 1 at t_1 , of act 2 at t_2 ” (Priest 2000, 16). As Zahavi notes,

“[Pure] ego develops into a personal ego with a history in so far as sedimentations accrue and enduring habits are established”. (2014, 82)

The pure I *develops* into a personal or real ego.⁶ Once I decide, the act of deciding passes, but the personal ego is determined as the one that decided thusly. As a result, the I constitutes itself “as a ‘fixed and abiding’ *personal Ego*” with a personal character (Husserl 1960, 67). If I change my beliefs, I change myself because “Every change of conviction is a change of the I” (1977, 164).

Therefore, Husserl rejects his previous idea the idea that I-pole is I:

“The I-pole is not I. I am in my habitual convictions. I maintain my one and same I”. (Ms. A VI 30, S. 54b)⁷

The I is more than the I-pole, as it encompasses accomplishments and acquisitions, constituted objects, and the world. As this person, I am not merely a structural I-pole but exist within habitual convictions.

THE UNCHANGING I

This appears to be the final word. However, the ambiguity resurfaces as just one paragraph later Husserl continues:

“To change the conviction is to change ‘oneself’. But throughout change and unchange the Ego remains identically the same precisely as pole.” (1989, 324)

6 For clarity, I use the term ‘I’ to refer to the pure I and ‘ego’ to denote the constituted I-object or person. Husserl only later in his life distinguished between the transcendental ego and the pure I (*cf.* 1970, 184).

7 As quoted in (Kern 1964, 289).

Throughout all ‘change and unchange’, self-objectification and flux of lived experiences,

“what changes phenomenologically is not the Ego itself, which we grasp and have given in reflection as absolutely identical”. (109)

Elsewhere, he states,

“The I has its mode of continuing through time as an enduring I amid the fluctuation of its acts, and thus of its convictions, its decisions.” (1977, 164)

The change of convictions is a change of the I, but the I also endures through these decisions. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Ideas II*:

“[The pure Ego] is changeable in its practices, in its activities and passivities, in its being attracted and being repulsed, etc. But these changes do not change it itself. On the contrary, in itself the pure Ego is immutable. [...] It is not changeably related, in real properties and states, to changing real circumstances” (1989, 110–11)

The I is changeable, yet these changes do not change the I itself, as it is *immutable*. This seems contradictory. How can the I be changeable, yet still remain “identically the same”? One possible explanation is that Husserl uses the term ‘I’ in two distinct senses: the I in a broader sense, as a monad, and the I in a strict sense, as the I-pole. Ricoeur recognizes this ambivalence in the concept of the I, which “is at once both pole of acts and concrete monad” (1967, 55). However, this does not explain how can a monad be the pure I – if it has properties and determining content, then it cannot be “pure”.

As van Peursen explains, this I-subject in I-structure,

“This is the transcendental or pure Ego, which is not itself a real part of psychical experiences, but which is the invariable structure”. (1959, 34)

I can imagine myself in a fantasized world or as another person, but this world and experiences still belong to me (Husserl 1989, 127). Mental acts and lived experiences fluctuate – one moment I am perceiving, then remembering, and then reflecting on something else. Yet, the perceiving, remembering, and reflecting I are *one and the same* I. In all these instances, the I remains identical, invariable, and immutable element of the egoic structure of consciousness. It appears static within the stream. What is crucial for this unchanging nature of the I

and its character of transcendency within immanency is precisely its *numerical identity*.

“the pure Ego [is] something absolutely identical throughout every actual or possible change in mental processes”. (1983, 132)

It is important that this I-pole “is numerically and identically the same” center of all subjectivity (1977, 161). In *Ideas II*, he explicitly asserts:

“The pure Ego is, to emphasize it expressly, numerically one and unique with respect to ‘its’ stream of consciousness.” (1989, 117)

Numerical identity renders it transcendent to each individual *cogito*. There is no multitude of I’s in consciousness, each tied to a different *cogito*, similar to how a circle cannot have more than one center. Instead, the formula is: “*One* pure Ego – *one* stream of mental processes” (1983, 196), and this I is grasped in a “sole” *cogito*.

Recall the earlier quote that the I, as a structure, is “afterwards still very much utilized” in the real ego. This I remains functional within the mundanized, personal ego. It becomes evident that the I not being an empty I-pole means that, like the pole of *cogitationes*, it is also a *pole of habitualities*.

“[The I] is not an empty ideal polar point [...] it is also a pole of corresponding habitualities.” (1977, 161)

As Kockelmans observes,

“[The pure I] is the pole of ever increasing habitualities”. (1977, 273)

This has important further implications. First, the I acts as the core around which ‘ever-increasing’ sedimentation occurs through both passive and active genesis. This I is still being utilized in real egos, as each real ego, or human person as a monad, has a pure I as its center, its “apperceptive nuclear content”. The world has “the same number of pure Egos as there are real Egos” (1989, 117). Hence, the I does not truly ‘develop’ into a personal ego, as it remains unchanged. Instead, the real ego is a self-objectification of the pure I, which serves as a substrate for its habitualities, as everything followed by the same identical I belongs to a single monad (118). Thus, “the *ego-pole* – continuously carries out a retaining function” (1970, 171), and is the “*identical substrate of Ego-properties*” (1960, 67). Much like an oyster deposits

layers of calcium around an irritant, the I, as the I-pol, constitutes a personal ego within its history.

Secondly, thus described, “the pure ego does not maintain its self-identity the way the real ego does” as it lacks changeable traits, abilities, or properties (Kockelmans 1977, 273). The I as the I-pole, serving as the identical substrate of sedimentation, *retains its identity* as the unchanging pole of growing habitualities.

“as the I, that I now am [...] I do not change by taking on new decisions [...] Rather, as this I, I am only the same in the constant acquisition of new determinations.” (1973b, 352)

In another place,

“[The identical pure Ego’s] identity is an identity throughout this immanent time. I am and I was the same, I who endure and ‘hold sway’ in this or that conscious act”. (1989, 109)

The I is self-identical both “formally”, as the I of each *cogito*, and “materially”, in each decision taking, as the same I through habitualities. It is unnecessary to differentiate between the I that observes a tree and the I that feels pain, or between the I of this decision and in that belief. This indicates the I-pole is numerically identical across all consciousness, habitualities, and throughout constitution. Husserl equates the I-pole to the object-pole, which likewise maintains its numerical identity while “being determined ever anew by ever new objective constituents” (1977, 161). The I develops its identity through the continuous acquisition of new determinations, while remaining self-identical and unchanged in them and throughout its constitution. Therefore, the identity of the I is twofold, reflecting a dual self-grasping:

“The identity of the pure Ego does not only reside in the fact that I (*sc.* the pure Ego), with regard to each and every cogito, can grasp myself as the identical Ego of the cogito; rather, I am even therein and a priori the same Ego, insofar as I, in taking a position, necessarily exercise consistency in a determinate sense”. (1989, 119)

I am both the self-identical pure I in each *cogito* and the same constituted I-object with persistent thema. This duality corresponds to the (numerical) self-identity, where the I grasps itself immanently as the same I, and (personal) identity, where every position assumed leaves its lasting consequence. There exists a kind of dialectic of self-identity

and personal identity: the I acquires its identity and history while remaining unchanged, i.e. the I finds its identity in the changing ego, but the ego finds its self-identity in the unchanging I.

Thirdly, this clarifies how the I creates an I which persists *for it*, as the same I. We are again reminded of the fact that all achievements of constitution are for the I. Personal or “*real Egos, as well as realities in general, are mere intentional unities*”, constituted as transcendent objects in relation to a pure I given immanently (117–18). Everything the I could ‘develop into’ is for the I-pole, including a constituted human person – this person, as an object, is the object for the pure I as the subject.

“what is the pure Ego’s [is] the whole world with all it contains [...] including that man whom I also designate as I, as Ego, namely I, the man called so and so and characterized as such and such”. (116)

That objective I-man, which I discover in the world, is for me, me as the I-subject. I am the subject of myself as an object. The personal ego is constituted in its history *for* the I. By constituting this I-object, the I acquires itself for itself, i.e. it attains *a* Self – a constituted and temporal object, a fixed and abiding personal ego. Through sedimentation, it further acquires its history and identity. However, this history is simultaneously for the I as its own. My history is an object for me; it is part of *me* and for my *I*. This explains how the I has its history but is not the object of it; rather, it is the created I-object in which all of the I’s history is “stored”. The I-subject does not possess any kind of history because it has no content and is immutable. Nonetheless, it remains numerically identical and unchanged throughout history, as a continuous subject of consciousness. I can grasp myself as the pure I (103). Nothing changes in this grasping, nor will it ever change – I will always grasp myself as a self-identical I of the actual *cogito*, as the I of grasping.

This parallels the earlier example of Oedipus. As a concrete person with a history and experiences in the world, Oedipus is a constituted real ego, an object. However, as the immutable and identical I-subject of all objects and acts of his consciousness, he is an unconstituted pure I. Thus, the act of patricide is a constitutive part of Oedipus’ person in the world, not of his pure I. Although Oedipus’ personal ego was constituted progressively over time, his pure self-consciousness remained un-

changed; he stayed the same in the “acquisition of new determinations”. Nothing in his pure self-consciousness changed, nor could it change, after discovering his patricide. Neither did his use of the first-person indexical ‘I’ or first-person perspective change. In all these statements – “I am searching for King Laius’ murderer”, and later “I have killed my own father”, and even if Oedipus had been assaulted, suffered amnesia, and said “I cannot remember anything” – he would still, by uttering “I”, correctly refer to himself *as* himself, as the subject. Despite later Oedipus’ accumulated layers of experience, habitualities, attitudes, beliefs, worldview, and personal ego constituted in time, when he uses ‘I’, he still refers to himself as before. His pure I remains immutable throughout his life, regardless of any changes in his concrete person. The Me (I-object) undergoes alterations, not the I (I-subject). Experiences do not change the I. Moreover, the prophecy that he *himself* would kill his father led him to leave Corinth. In other words, the oracle did not prophesize that someone named Oedipus would kill his father, but that *he* (using indexicals) would do so. Another pure I could identify with that objective person, but not with his pure I.

Even if so, one might ask why this matters. Husserl stated that I am not merely the I-pole but exist in my habitual convictions. As a person, I am more than just the egological element of my consciousness. This, however, is not entirely accurate. When I say, “I am John”, I am not John in that situation; instead, I am always “standing” on the standpoint of the I-subject. In other words, the “place” from which one speaks is not the described I-object. I could have also said “I am Oedipus” or “I am I”. When I stand in front of a mirror, I am never what I see but always *that which sees*. I am the eyes that witness, the disinterested spectator on this side of the mirror. I do identify with the reflection, but I can never become it.⁸ Over time, what changes is what I see, not that which sees. There is a fundamental phenomenological asymmetry between myself and others – I see, others are seen; others have faces, but I do not. The subject is faceless. Thus, our place or point of view lies always from the I-pole, in the self-identical I as always-subject, not in the acquired, historically constituted I-object.

8 Here lies the core issue of consciousness: how does the I-subject recognize and identify itself with the I-object? Much like in the mirror test, how do I, as the faceless observer, identify with the reflection or face that I see ‘over there’?

Accordingly, Van Cleve critiques Hume's claim that he cannot find the I in introspection, only perceptions:

“one might say that the empirical self is that upon which Hume stumbled, while the transcendental self is that which did the stumbling.” (2009, 605)

The I is not an object to be found. Hume could not find it because he *was* it, though unaware. As Husserl notes,

“In truth, of course, I am a transcendental ego, but I am not conscious of this”. (1970, 205)

In the natural attitude, I am “given” to the mundane. Or, as explained in *Ideas II*:

“I take myself as the pure Ego insofar as I take myself purely as that which, in perception, is directed to the perceived, in knowing to the known”. (1989, 103)

I *am* the pure or transcendental I, but seldom am I conscious of myself as such. I grasp myself as the pure I when I consider myself solely as the subject of the act. Thus, in stating “I am John”, I am *the subject of stating*, not John. As a personal ego, I could have been anyone, constituted in any combination of compossible types. However,

“It would be countersensical to claim that I, the pure Ego, actually am not or am something altogether different from the Ego functioning in this cogito.” (111)

Husserl equates himself in the first-person with the pure I – one grasps oneself purely as I, in a single instance of *cogito*, and is nothing more than this I functioning within this actual *cogito*. What I am, as the pure I, is precisely *this* I in *this* present *cogito*.

The question remains: is this I-subject constituted and does it have a history?

DECKUNGSYNTHESE: THE CONSTITUTION OF THE PURE I-SUBJECT

Although scarcely, Husserl does mention the constitution of the I-pole itself. We have seen that the I belongs “to ‘its own’ stream of lived experience”. This relation is described as follows:

“The one pure Ego is constituted as a unity in relation to this unity of the stream, and that means that it can, in the course it takes, discover itself as identical. [...] a ‘steadfast and persistent’ Ego could not be constituted if a steadfast and persistent stream of lived experience were not constituted”. (119–20)

The I-pole is constituted as a unity. However, as previously mentioned, the I is a “unity which does not present itself by way of adumbrations”. – What, then, is it a unity of? To be constituted as a unity means that the I can, when looking back on previous mental acts, *discover itself as identical* “and become conscious of itself as the subject of these remembered cogitations”. This ensures the consistency of the I.

“The I-pole is constituted in the I-synthesis, which consistently and without any identifying activity brings all actual and potential acts into a unified coverage [Deckung] [...] The wakeful I [wache Ich], taken concretely, is the wakeful I-pole, that is the I-pole constituted in current identity coverage [Identitätsdeckung], with the lived experiences, i.e. the consciousness ‘of’”. (1962, 481)

In Husserl’s philosophy, *Deckung* or coincidence/covering refers to an act of fulfillment or agreement between intentionality and the given; “a synthesis in which what was meant coincides and agrees with what is itself given” (1960, 11). It involves recognizing the “found” as the intended one, i.e. discovering itself as identical. In the case of the I, this means that the I is a *unity of coincidence* (*Deckungseinheit*) or “synthesis of coincidence” (*Deckungssynthese*) between the two I’s, an identity in difference (Cavallaro 2020).

This unity implies a kind of *overlapping* (cf. Mensch 2010, 149). If I perceive *x*, as the pure I, I am the subject of the perceiving, the perceiving I. When I reflect upon my perceiving, I am the reflecting I, whilst the perceiving I, the subject of the previous act, slips into the object of reflection becoming the reflected I. These layers of experience overlap; the reflecting I coincides with the reflected I, and the I-pole “shines through” or “stands out”. There is an identity between the I now evidently given and the I as posited or intended. Thus, the I of the current mental act “discovers” and “identifies” itself with the I of the absent. Husserl also uses the term “finds”.

“I find [transcendental I] as the continual *Ego* in the ‘I now experience this thing, I remember, I expect’, and so on, be it (as the I) of the re-

spective individual experience, be it in a thoroughgoing (continuity) in the transition of one to the other [experience]”. (2019, 562)

Likewise, in *Cartesian Meditations*:

“I can [...] find myself as the Ego who *is* convinced, who, as the persisting Ego, is determined by this abiding *habitus*”. (1960, 67)

This recognizing feature of *Deckung* enables me to know that, when I remember seeing a house, it was indeed *me* who saw it – ‘me’ meaning ‘I who now remembers’, the remembering I. This applies to every other I in the egoic life of consciousness. Ultimately, I realize “*that this and the other pure Ego are in truth one and the same*” (1989, 108), and that all these I’s or “‘many’ act poles are in themselves evidently the identical I [...] an all-overlooking I” which identifies all (2019, 294).

This ‘all-overlooking I’, as ‘steadfast and persistent’ unity of ‘many act poles’, could not be constituted without a ‘steadfast and persistent’ stream of consciousness. This stream is unified, and based on this unity the I-synthesis constitutes the I of the living present as continuous and unchanging. As noted earlier, each lived experience carries within itself “two poles of identity”: the object-pole and the I-pole (1962, 481; 1960, 66), polarized on both ends by object-synthesis and subject-synthesis or I-synthesis. The former directs them toward identical objects, while the latter embraces all *cogitationes* “as belonging to the identical Ego” or I-pole (66).⁹ Therefore, as in the case of sedimentation and ‘habitual mark’, we encounter a mutual or reciprocal constitution [Mitkonstitution]:

“by his own active generating, the Ego constitutes himself as *identical substrate of Ego-properties*, he constitutes himself also as a ‘fixed and abiding’ *personal Ego*”. (67)

In constituting the “fixed and abiding” personal ego, the I, *in turn*, constitutes itself as a “steadfast and persistent” I. Likewise, the I is constituted as a unity through its constitution of the world – the conviction of the world’s permanence is necessary for the unity of conscious life

9 If ‘x is round’ and ‘x is red’ constitutes x as ‘is round *and* red’ (and x itself as an identical object across different *cogitationes*), then it follows that ‘I am perceiving’ and ‘I am remembering’ constitutes the same I in ‘perceiving *and* remembering’. This idea echoes Kant’s notion of the transcendental unity of apperception. However, to the best of my knowledge, Kant does not propose the synthesis of the transcendental I itself.

(Ferrarin 1994, 650). This all leads to the conclusion that the ‘unity’ of the I is derivative, constituted based on the unity of consciousness or consistency of the world.

Several issues arise with this position, and I will highlight only a few since a comprehensive analysis would exceed the scope of this paper. First, *Deckung* pertains to the character or identity of the I rather than the I itself. It establishes the I *as* enduring or *as* the same I in both perceiving and remembering. Second, the I cannot be constituted through this identity, as it must already be present in each *cogito*. This leads to the third and main issue: the ‘all-overlooking I’ of the entire stream is identical to the individual I in the *ego cogito cogitatum* structure of each experience. – *What exactly is the I unity of?* As Fasching points out,

“If the transtemporal identity of the subject consists in some ‘unity relation’ between ‘subject-stages’ – then what is such a ‘subject-stage?’” (2009, 142)

If each experience has its I-pole, we can represent it as I_1 of act_1 at t_1 and I_2 of act_2 at t_2 , where I_1 and I_2 are, for instance, perceiving and reflecting I. I-synthesis unifies I_1 and I_2 into a single, same I of both act_1 and act_2 (see Husserl 2019, 291). How, then, does this unified and constituted ‘The I’ differ from the “small” I’s or I-stages? Is it reducible to the relation between these elements? Is I_1 not the all-overlooking I and, *vice versa*, is not the all-overlooking I again just another I_n in the continuity of the stream? It is difficult to see how these I’s “should fuse into *one*” through *Deckung*, as a unity confronting the unity of the stream (*cf.* Fasching 2009, 143).¹⁰ Husserl himself claims that the I is “*incapable of and in no need of constitution through ‘manifolds’*”.¹¹ A ‘manifold’ need not be an adumbration of an object; it could also mean *cogitationes*, any instance in the stream. In brief, the I *does not*

10 Castañeda offers an interesting illustration of the synchronic unity of the overlapping I’s through Friedrich’s bee-watching example. He differentiates between the I “of the interval” and the I as “the reflexive subject of the maximal co-conscious integration of experiences”, essentially the I of the stream of consciousness, and concludes that “I is a unit built up from the subjects of the sub-experiences” (1988, 226–27).

11 Similarly, Fichte argues that the I emerges not through “synthesis whose manifold could be further dissected, but through an absolute thesis” (1982, 73). We cannot “blithely piece together” the I from the manifold of “I, who think D, am the same I who thought C and B and A”. I cannot become “I for myself” based on this identity in manifold (49). However, person or individuality does arise through this type of synthesis.

require a plurality of any kind, including the self-integration of I_1 and I_2 .¹² Moreover, as Kant pointed out, if the I were part of the experience – such as the ‘reflecting’ or ‘remembered’ I – we would have as many “multicolored” I’s as we have experiences. If the all-overlooking I were not already present and presupposed in each *cogito*, independent of synthesis or constitution, then no “accumulation of self-experiences can profit me”. Husserl does not speak about grasping the “small” I_1 or I-stage, but rather “that the pure Ego is and what it is” – emphasizing the “numerically one”, self-identical and unchanging I, not its instances or iterations in individual acts. There is no need for layers to coincide, as everything there is to the I is graspable in a single layer, in one “sole and simple cogito”.¹³ The I has to already be present before *Deckung* takes place. Therefore, *Deckung* appears to be a case of *petitio principii*, presupposing the I whose constitution it seeks to explain.

Thus, Husserl himself states that

“[This] pure Ego is established by means of a cogito determined in any way whatsoever. It extends itself therein onto the total sphere of what is”. (1989, 127)

The I, established in a single *cogito*, “extends” across the entire stream of consciousness. Additionally, all unities “are unities in reference to the pure Ego [...] as whose ‘possessions’ they are constituted”, including the whole stream (126). The form of the stream “*necessarily comprises all mental processes pertaining to a pure Ego*”, and there is only *one* all-overlooking I per consciousness (1983, 196). Consequently, the I cannot be constituted as a unity with reference to the I (as in the aforementioned paradox), nor from individual elements of the stream, as the elements that the I egologically shapes “do not constitute it” (Mensch 2010, 147).

The core issue is how something pure – *a priori*, independent of experience, absolutely simple and empty, self-identical, numerically one, invariable and immutable, and fully given in a single *cogito* –

12 If I were to “add” an I to the I, it would remain the same I – like adding zero to a number, there is no change in value. Likewise, the fact that two and two equals four is not the achievement of each individual addition.

13 Husserl claims that “a shift of focus is possible” by which the I can grasp itself as the I of the current act *during* that act, as a “self-perceived actual presence” (1989, 108). This requires no higher I-reflection.

can be constituted. If we view the I as a first-person perspective, it becomes clear that it cannot emerge through the integration of various lived experiences given “first-personally”, nor does it change through them. We can also draw a parallel between the I and the Now, which is not constituted through synthesis “between nows”, because there is “no now that could be synthesized with another now which would not already be in itself the momentary taking place of temporal transition” (Fasching 2009, 145). There is no need for *Deckung* of distinct ‘nows’ from various time experiences in order to constitute a “unity” that would be the Now; it is “given” in a single instance. It is impossible to see how could I even grasp what the Now is based on past experiences – which are, by definition, *not now* – and their coinciding with the “current” ‘now’, which I am trying to grasp. Just as the Now is not constituted by passing moments, but is rather their dimension or “place” of streaming, the I cannot be constituted through the passage of lived experiences, as it is the dimension of permanent change of experiences, “and as such does not itself change with the contents” (146).¹⁴

Thus, it seems more accurate to conclude that the I is “consequently not constituted by the self-integration of the stream of consciousness” (138). Synthesis necessitates more than time-consciousness, it requires

14 Another sense of constitution briefly mentioned is mutual constitution through contrast or relation. Husserl states that “lasting and remaining primal now constitutes itself in this streaming [...] as a fixed form”, implying that ‘fixed’ is “always co-constituted [Mitkonstituierte]” with ‘streaming’ (2006, 8). The I manifests as enduring against the backdrop of changing experiences. Mensch explains this through self-locating: “situated between my retained past and anticipated future, I find myself at a temporal 0-point”, concluding that “the content that I retain positions me”, both spatially and temporally, in the ‘primal now’ and ‘primal here’ (2010, 147, 155). However, it is unclear how the Now can be constituted through streaming. The content itself lacks any inherent determinacy – nothing about 5 p.m. makes it ‘now’ unless *now* is 5 p.m. Likewise, contrary to Mensch’s claim that “‘here’ is defined by the perspectival unfolding of the objects that surround me”, ‘here’ is *not* defined by content, merely determined. ‘Here’ is defined in relation to the I as ‘the place where I am’ and becomes determined as a location through this unfolding. The Now is not a “middle point” squished between the past and future; rather, it defines them. Furthermore, the I is constituted as ‘fixed’ in contrast to the streaming of consciousness, while streaming is (constituted as) such in contrast to the unchanging I. This creates a paradox of mutually dependent constituting. Either something must be initially unconstituted and *given*, or we ought to already have the complete dyad, as in the case of opposites. In other words, just as ‘left’ and ‘right’ define each other and cannot exist independently, a fully formed consciousness must exist from the beginning, which defeats the point of constitution.

“a subject of the activity for which *Erlebnisse* have meaning”. This subject cannot be time-consciousness itself

“because consciousness of the succession *presupposes* the persistence of the subject in time and requires the possibility for an *identical ego* to recognize and describe something as belonging to its past”. (Ferrarin 1994, 657)

There can be no present experience without “my abiding through the permanent streaming of the experience [...] this abiding of presence cannot be thought as a case of the (constituted) persistence of an enduring object” (Fasching 2009, 145). While an object is constituted as enduring in time consciousness, the abiding I – for the I is not an object – “is not constituted by temporal phases, but is rather their *generation*”. Therefore,

“the very nature of experience implies a non-constituted synchronic and diachronic transcendence of the experiencing ‘I’ with regard to its experiences, an ‘I’ which has a purely subjective being and defies any objective characterization.” (131)

For there to be orientation within consciousness, a “stable point” is necessary – a permanent I that remains constant amid the fluctuations of lived experiences, similar to how the first-person point of view or pure self-consciousness persists throughout conscious life, as in Oedipus’ example. The transcendence of the experiencing I implies that the I is a *witness of consciousness* and its flow.

THE I OF *NUNC STANS*

We have reached a crucial moment in the concept of I’s history: the Now. Although having a history implies a temporal dimension, the I remains permanent and unchanging. Sartre likens this type of existence to that of eternal truths, as the I “affirms its permanence” beyond this and all acts of consciousness (1991, 50). This indicates that the I is atemporal, “outside” of time. While subjective experiences are constituted in immanent time, “not everything subjective is temporal”. The I-pole, to which the entire stream of consciousness is related, is not in this stream. The I “itself is not temporal” because it is “the pole of all temporal series and, as such, is necessarily ‘super’-temporal [‘über’-zeitlich], the I for which time is constituted” (Husserl 2001b, 277). It

cannot be constituted within time, since all temporal moments exist for the I. It does not share the same temporalization as something temporal; it is “extensionless” and identical throughout objective duration.¹⁵

The I is “always now and remains now”, *permanently now* (2006, 202). Hence, this “standing and lasting I” [stehende und bleibende Ich] appears *static* within the stream, as the I of *nunc stans*. Kockelmans notes:

“Husserl came to determine the being of the ego as the living present of all presentification [...] [it] manifests itself, on the one hand, as something permanently flowing and streaming whereas, on the other hand, it appears to have the character of a *nunc stans*.” (1977, 284)

Nunc stans translates to “now standing” and describes the idea of something existing independently of time. Derrida explains the Now as follows:

“[Time] has for its existence – the *v̄v* [...] The *v̄v* is the form that time cannot escape, and under which it cannot not be given; and yet the *v̄v*, in a certain sense, is not. [...] The now presents itself both as that which *no longer* is and as that which is *not yet*. [...] the now is not a part; time is not composed of *v̄v*. [...] The *v̄v* as an element of time, would thus not be in itself temporal. It is temporal only in becoming temporal [it is] a non-temporal nucleus of time: a nucleus that is not modifiable by temporal change, an unalterable form of temporalization.” (1970, 62–63)

The Now is unchanging and enduring, an ‘unalterable non-temporal nucleus of time’. It resembles the source or the origin point of time (*cf.* Husserl 2006, 8). Time flows through the Now, but the Now itself remains constant. It has no beginning, duration, or end because the Now is not in time; it will not pass in a few seconds or later on. The Now cannot pass at all, as it is not a consciousness of successive moments, t_1 and then t_2 , as having passed, which would make it static. Instead, it is the consciousness of transition, *streaming* itself (Fasching 2009, 144). However, the Now appears to stand still because it is always Now and never ceases to be Now. Whenever I refer to it, it *is*. Whenever I am self-conscious, when I self-consciously refer to myself, it is Now, and whenever Now is, I am self-conscious. The I is *always* Now, it always

15 It is interesting that Wittgenstein also defines the I as a “point without extension [ausdehnungslosen]” (2001, 70).

finds itself in the present. They are so intimately linked that they are one in actuality.¹⁶

The I of the living present thus exhibits a dual character of both permanently streaming and *nunc stans*. Husserl describes it as “standing-streaming” [stehend-strömende] (2006, 124, 145) or “flowingly-statically present” [strömend ständig gegenwärtige] (1970, 185). This paradoxical description reflects the ambiguous duality in self-grasping:

“The ego [Das ego] grasps himself not only as a flowing life but also as I [als Ich], who live this and that subjective process, who live through this and that cogito, as the same I. [...] I exist for myself and am continually given to myself, by experiential evidence, as ‘I myself.’” (1960, 66–68; cf. 1989, 118–19)

This view amalgamates Husserl’s concepts of the I as the stream of experiences from *Logical Investigations* with the I as the I-pole from *Ideas*. The ego, as a streaming life, is temporal; yet as the I for itself, it is an unchanging, atemporal ‘I, myself’. Empirically, I grasp myself in the inner sense as a flowing life, as ‘this person’ with this history and character, and purely, in self-consciousness, always as ‘I, myself’.¹⁷

The I persists in the stream not as a metaphysical atemporality but as transcendence in immanence. It is immune to the temporality and

16 Husserl also makes interesting claims about the transcendental I being immortal and eternal. Every human ego harbors *its* transcendental ego: “I am now, and belonging to this Now is a horizon of the past that can be unraveled into infinity. And this means precisely, the ego was eternal [...] and this does not die and does not arise; it is an eternal being in the process of becoming” (2001a, 469–71). Wittgenstein similarly claims that “a man lives eternally if he lives in the present” (1961, 75e). While intriguing, this topic is beyond the scope of this paper.

17 This enables Oedipus to grasp himself in two distinct ways: first, he recognizes that he/Oedipus and Laius’ murderer are *one* and the same person, and second, he is aware that this identity refers to *himself*, not some other person named Oedipus. Rudolf Lingens lacks this second mode – he knows the biography he is reading is about Rudolf Lingens but not that it is about himself, that *he* is Rudolf Lingens. These modes align with Kantian inner sense and transcendental apperception. In inner sense, I am given to myself in time or how I appear to myself (including history). In transcendental apperception, however, I am conscious “only *that* I am” (1998, 259). Inner sense presupposes transcendental apperception, that I myself am the subject of the maxim ‘know thyself’, making self-knowledge temporal, as “I have to enter into the infinity of experience”, while self-consciousness is immediate. If I am the pure I, as the subject of the actual *cogito* (Husserl 1989, 103), then ‘I am’ or ‘I, myself’ is timeless, always in the Now.

change of experiences; if it were temporal, it would simply be a content of consciousness. The I of the Now is temporal only insofar as it *becomes* temporal by temporalizing itself. In two illuminating passages from *Crisis*, Husserl explains:

“[To] what is recollected, what is past (which has the ontic meaning of a present having passed) there belongs also a past ‘I’ of that present, whereas the actual, original ‘I’ is that of immediate presence; to this presence, recollection belongs as a present experience [...] Thus the immediate ‘I’ performs an accomplishment through which it constitutes a variational mode of itself as existing (in the mode of having passed). Starting from this we can trace how the immediate ‘I’, flowingly-statically present, constitutes itself in self-temporalization as enduring through ‘its’ pasts.” (1970, 185)

Earlier in the text:

“[The] most general aspect of the ego’s form, namely, the peculiar temporalization by which it becomes an enduring ego, constituting itself in its time-modalities: the same ego, now actually present, is in a sense, in every past that belongs to it, another – i.e., as that which was and thus is not now – and yet, in the continuity of its time it is one and the same, which is and was and has its future before it. The ego which is present now, thus temporalized has contact with its past ego, even though the latter is precisely no longer present: it can have a dialogue with it and criticize it, as it can others.” (172)

It has been pointed out that Husserl emphasizes the numerical identity of the I. There is only *one* – all-overlooking, self-identical, unchanging, unconstituted through manifolds, and grasped that it “is and what it is” in a single *cogito* – I per consciousness, much like a circle only has one center. This “one true” I is the I-subject of the actual *cogito*, the I of the Now, this actual and original I of the immediate presence, flowingly-statically present, which I always am as ‘I, myself’. It is “countersensical to claim that I, the pure Ego, actually am not or am something altogether different from the Ego functioning in this cogito”. Everything that I am is given in the Now, and whenever I grasp myself, I do so as the I of this *cogito*, *the I of grasping*.¹⁸ It is

18 Even if the I began its existence within this *cogito*, where it refers to itself, everything would remain the same. All life and past until now could have been constituted from false memories, yet even if the entire previous history were a lie, the ‘I am’ would

always Now and always this *cogito* when I grasp myself. ‘True’ here means that the apodictic evidence ‘I am’ or ‘I think’ is actually and intuitively given in the first-person for this I. This does not apply to the constituted past I, the reflected I, or the *alter ego*. The validity of ‘I am’ holds only in the present and the first-person; ‘I am’ means ‘I am now’ or ‘I, the I of this self-grasping, am now’. Other I’s are not true precisely because they are “no longer present”, they are “not now”. Only the living I of the Now is ever actually present at any given time – if all I’s were present and valid at once, it would result in a schizophrenia of consciousness. Therefore, there is only one actual I, the I of the living present, for which ‘I am’ is valid, while all other I’s are merely postulated, I’s in a derivative sense.

Furthermore, “the capacity for this constitution, this temporalization, belongs to the living present and its actually living I [aktuell-lebendigen Ich]” (1973b, 347). In other words, not just any I can constitute or temporalize itself, only the actual I of the Now. This atemporal I, flowingly-statically present, temporalizes itself into the past and future by constituting “itself in time”. The I-now achieves this by varying itself into I-not-now or I-having-passed; it “depresentifies” [Ent-Gegenwärtigung] and alienates itself from itself. This past I is “another” for the present I, and has become “copresent” (1970, 185). Thus, in the present act of remembering, the I remembers and identifies itself with that past I. Through this process, the I “extends” its being from the present into the dimension of the past and future, thereby acquiring its history and character “as enduring through its pasts”.

This “contact” between these I’s implies *Deckungssynthese*, discovering oneself as identical in one’s past. The actual I, by identifying with the past I, recognizes itself as “one and the same” – an all-overlooking I “which is and was and has its future before it”. However, this only enables self-temporalization, not *the constitution of the I of the living presence itself*. The I “becomes an enduring ego” but *does not become itself*. If the I is “numerically one”, then distinguishing the reflecting and reflected I, or *Deckung*, becomes meaningless. The I

still be true. This is evident in the everyday use of the first-person pronoun ‘I’, which refers to the subject of the utterance of ‘I’. It means that “All determination refers back to a here and now and consequently to some subject” (1989, 315). Ultimately, everything refers back to the I-subject of the living present as its *origo*.

does not change throughout temporalization; it is simply temporalized while remaining the same. In self-temporalization, the I is both atemporal and historical. Although the I is empty, it acquires its historical life through constitution and temporalization, making it ‘this’ and not ‘that’ ego (cf. Mensch 2010, 146); and is always already given to itself as itself, as ‘I, myself’, which remains identical.

CONCLUSION

Does the I have a history? That answer depends on our understanding of ‘the I’, as its history and constitution are intertwined. The I acquires its history through constitution, as the I-pole accumulates habitualities. Based on this history, the I “creates” a fixed and abiding personal ego. Therefore, as an I-object, the I certainly has a history. This process can be seen as the development and enrichment of another aspect of the ego – the Me. Additionally, there is a sense in which the I’s identity and character are constituted ‘as enduring’ or ‘as same’ through changes. However, as an I-subject, the I remains unchanged throughout consciousness and constitution. While the I is constituted for itself, the I itself appears unconstituted. Husserl’s description of the I as *unchanging*, absolutely simple, self-identical, numerically one, fully given in a single *cogito*, unobjectifiable subject of all objects – further complicates the idea of how such an I could be constituted as a unity or have a history. These notions imply processuality, time, genesis, development, sedimentation, succession of experience, and layers, among others. Furthermore, if the I is “stuck” in the present, it becomes impossible for the I to have a history in any meaningful sense – history is the content of time, while the I is *nunc stans*. Even if considered as a ‘stable unity’ (ignoring the issue of how something simple and numerically one can be a ‘unity’), each instance of unifying I-stages would again presuppose the I.

The constitution of the I-subject is problematic because it is already presupposed in previous constitutions of both the I-object and the I’s character. Husserl claims that the issue of the I’s “constitution for himself” includes “*all constitutional problems without exception*”, and coincides with phenomenology as a whole (1960, 68). Ultimately, phenomenological constitution pertains to the constitution of an object, whether viewed as the production of the I or its self-manifestation (cf. Cavallaro 2020, 130). Anything can be considered constituted as an ob-

ject of consciousness. Even the *eidōs ego* we reach is not constitutive consciousness but a constituted one (Ferrarin 1994, 655); temporality itself is a *cogitatum* (Ricoeur 1967, 97). There is no evidence vouching for transcendental subjectivity or intersubjectivity either – while the I is given in intuition as an “apprehension of fact”, the doctrine of transcendental subjectivity is a result of phenomenological theory, a philosophical system (*cf.* Sartre 1991, 43). Anything beyond this actual, living I of the immediate presence, which intuition alone guarantees, can be dismissed as postulated. If the I were a constituted object, it would be an epiphenomenon of transcendental consciousness, lacking the ‘I am’ evidence and the capacity to designate oneself purely as oneself without any identifying property. The necessity and objectivity of the I would be a constituted contingency. Moreover, as a product of synthesis and unity, it would be unable to ground anything. This would undermine the fundamentality of the transcendental I, implying an even more original “synthesizer ‘behind’ the I”, which, if also a unity, would be founded on an even more primary process, *in infinitum* (Priest 2000, 27).

The I is not merely an object of consciousness – it is also always the subject. As the unposited I of the actual *cogito*, it lies “outside” of it. It is “floating above all temporality”, “entering into time” only in order to grasp itself (Husserl 2001b, 287).¹⁹ Wittgenstein aptly notices,

“The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world.” (2001, 69)

The I dances on the fringes of consciousness. As an element in the egoic structure of consciousness it remains static throughout one’s life, identical against any background. It cannot be willingly modified by actions or experience. No amount of education, meditation, practice of ‘ego death’, or limit situations [Grenzsituation] can change it. The I is independent of me and could not have been different. Likewise, the I does not belong to history nor is not changeably related to it; rather, it is *a limit of a history*. It can distance itself from its history or lose it, as an amnesiac, while still retaining its first-person perspective. In the end, we are on the standpoint of this I – I am not this person, but

19 For Husserl’s idea of the nameless and “living, functioning I” as the limit of consciousness, see (2001b, 278, 286–87; Mensch 2010, 144).

the I observing this person. As the original, unchanging I of the living present, I am the disinterested spectator, the *witness* of my own history and my persona in the world.

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DA LI JA IMA ISTORIJU? PROBLEM KONSTITUCIJE ČISTOG JA

Sažetak: Ovaj rad razmatra neka pitanja vezana za konstituciju čistog *Ja*, a utoliko i za njegovu istoričnost. Na nekim mestima, Husserl zastupa stavove koji bi se povodom konstituisane prirode *Ja* činili protivrečnim, opisujući ga kako kao nekonstituisanu transcendenciju unutar imanencije, tako i kao ono što stalno konstituše sebe. To se dalje komplikuje paradoksalnim statusom *Ja* kao identičnog subjekta vlastite samoobjektivacije, koji pretpostavlja sebe za svoje konstituisanje. Posredstvom pojmova *Ja*-pola, supstrata navika, *Deckungssynthese*, *nunc stans* karaktera, kao i samotemporalizacije, cilj mi je da istražim konstituisani karakter *Ja*. Na kraju, tvrdim da ovi okviri nisu adekvatni, te da zbiljski, živi *Ja*-subjekat neposredne prisutnosti ne može biti smatran konstituisanim, niti da ima istorijsku dimenziju.

Ključne reči: *Ja*, konstitucija, istorija, navika, temporalnost, *nunc stans*

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