

Subject and Passivity in Husserl and Deleuze.  
A Debate around the Contemporary Reception of Kant's Doctrine of the Productive Imagination

Andrés M. Osswald

"I am, I exist, this is certain. But for how long?"

Descartes

Although Edmund Husserl's and Gilles Deleuze's theories on passivity are mostly independent, both philosophers share a common background: they find in Emmanuel Kant not only the most relevant influence for their own thought on this matter but also a designated target for their criticism. It is very unlikely that Deleuze was aware of the publication in 1966 of *Analysen zur Passiven Synthesis* and therefore that the 11th volume of *Husserliana* has been a major source, if any at all, for the elaboration of *Difference and Repetition*, appeared in France two years later. In general terms, Husserl does not play there a major role; he is only mentioned sporadically regarding other issues relating foremost to the *Logical Investigation's* period<sup>1</sup>. By contrast, Husserl is a more prominent reference in *Logic of Sense*, published in 1969. But in that work Deleuze tends to present Husserlian phenomenology as an eminent representative of contemporary subjectivism and thus as one of his conceptual opponent.

However -and despite the relative distance between the two philosophers- I believe that they share a common intention to overcome the rigid opposition between synthesis and passivity inherited from the Kantian philosophy. In such a context, I propose to analyse, in first place, the critique interpretation that both philosophers made on the role that imagination plays in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In this sense, I claim that the main hermeneutic difference has to be found, on the one hand, in the strong distinction that Deleuze traces -following Kant- between sensibility and understanding in his theory of passive synthesis and, on the other hand, the Husserlian reading that tends to blur such rigid difference between the faculties. In terms of the distinction between activity and passivity, consequently, the Deleuzian interpretation separates the orders, that Husserl thinks as non-independent parts of a continuum (1. Synthesis of imagination). A general consequence for a theory of the subject could be drawn from the foregoing: if activity and passivity are heterogeneous

---

1 It has to be mentioned in first place the positive appraisal of Husserl's treatment of the concept of 'multiplicity' in the IV Chapter of *Difference and Repetition* (Columbia University Press, Trad. Paul Patton, 1994, p. 182)

realms, the subject has to be necessarily divided; if it is not the case, a subject entails a unity which extends without a break between passivity and activity, The first option -that Deleuze seems to make his one- can be traced down in the so-called 'paradox of inner sense' (2. Self-knowledge). The second alternative is embraced by Husserl, who claims that passive syntheses -in particular, the synthesis of immanent time- are a condition of possibility for the unity of subjectivity and, by doing so, a general condition for activity (3. Self-appearance). Furthermore, the debate around the subjective unity and the character of the relationship between activity and passivity implies also consequences for transcendental philosophy. If the subject is unrestricted identified with active processes -a Cartesian Ego- and with the vague concept of 'person', then it has to be conceived in metaphysical terms as an 'effect' of a transcendental field defined by the notes of passivity, a-subjectivity, neutrality and productive. The continuity between active and passive processes, by contrast, allows to think that the Ego is also a founded level of subjectivity but by virtue of passive syntheses that are subjectives as well (4. Transcendental philosophy and subjectivity).

#### 1. Synthesis of imagination

One of the key distinction that Kant made in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is the one that separates sensibility and understanding and, correspondingly, associates passivity with the former and activity with the latter. Kant's rigid differentiation among faculties responds ultimately to his attempt to base knowledge in sensory representations. Such goal would be strengthened by the limitation of understanding to 'produce' its objects by its one. That is to say that understanding receive its material from a pure receptive sensibility, which Kant calls 'passive' because its lack of productivity. One immediate consequence of this topology of concepts is that the origin of the sensory representation should be located beyond the realm of sensibility. Again, if sensibility were able to produce its own material, it would be problematic to insist on maintaining that the subject do not give itself its own object of knowledge. In other words, the pure receptivity of sensibility implies the distinction between 'phenomenon' and 'thing-in-itself' - which affect us and is the cause of the affection of sensibility<sup>2</sup>-. It is also clear that in Kantian terms the notions of 'synthesis' and 'passivity' are mutually exclusive; otherwise, the very distinction between knowing and thinking would collapse.

Nevertheless, Husserl finds some signs of distention in the inflexible opposition between passivity and synthesis in the role that Kant assigns to productive imagination in the Transcendental Deduction of Categories -above all in the first edition of the *Critique*<sup>3</sup>-. Husserl writes in *Analyses of passive Synthesis*: "But, in our view, that [in reference to 'productive imagination'] is nothing

---

2 A 190, A 387

3 Husserl, E., *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis. Lectures on Transcendental Logic*. Trans. Anthony J. Steinbock, Dordrecht-Boston-London, Kluwer, 2001, 410

other than the team-work (disclosable by our phenomenological method) of the constantly higher developing intentionalities of passive consciousness (...).”<sup>4</sup> In fact, if the imagination could assemble the sensitive material in the immanent time, thus, it would be appropriate to consider here a spontaneity essentially different from the one that operates in understanding -hence the former synthesizes intuitions and the latter concepts-. Such syntheses oriented to sensations that flow in time gather the two main syntheses that constitute for Husserl the passive life of consciousness, namely the formal synthesis of time and the associative synthesis of sensations, which is also the leading theme of the *Analyses*.

In Husserl’s terms, thus, the Kantian’s doctrine of productive imagination shows a gradualness between sensibility and understanding instead of a radical opposition. However, Husserl himself has a fluctuating position on this matter. In *Logical Investigation*, for instance, he defines ‘sensibility’ as simple intuition and reserves for ‘understanding’ the active role of synthesis. In that context, activity is identified with judgment in a broad sense: It is not only related to the predicative synthesis of proposition (judgment in narrow sense) but also with the position (*Setzung*) entails by perception. That is, Husserl considers that the being-character of perceptual objects depends of judgment<sup>5</sup>. Around 1909, however, this early position starts to be relativized and he begins to consider the relationship between sensibility and understanding as more fluent, as if they were not really two separate spheres but moments of a more deeply unity<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, Husserlian phenomenology allows to think a concept of passivity that differs from mere receptivity by means of a double procedure: On the one hand, by the abandonment of the rigid opposition between sensibility and understanding and, on the other hand, by the extension of the domain of intentionality. In other words, Husserl must abandon the idea that only the acts of the ego possess an intentional character. As a consequence, he has to admit that some levels of consciousness are intentional even though they do not emanate from an attentive-ego and, correspondingly, they are not directed towards a thematic objectivity.

The Deleuzian interpretation of the role of productive imagination in Kant’s philosophy moves in the opposite direction. In his lecture on Kant at the University of Paris VIII in Vincennes he affirms:

---

4 Idem, 411 / Hua XI, 275-76

5 Cf. Kern, I., *Husserl und Kant. Eine Untersuchung über Husserls Verhältnis zu Kant und zum Neukantianismus*, Den Haag, M. Nijhoff, 1964, p. 63

6 This Husserlian thesis is not new though. In fact, a similar interpretation can be traced back to the early reception of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In his 1789 *Versuch über die Transcendentalphilosophie*, Salomon Maimon – whom Deleuze has in high regard- asserts: “Kant claims that sensibility and understanding are two completely different faculties. But I argue that an infinite thinking being must think them as one and the same power [*Kraft*] despite the fact that we must represent them as two different faculties in I us, and that for us sensibility is incomplete understanding.” (Maimon, S., *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*, Trans. by Nick Midgley, Henry Somers-Hall, Alistair Welchman and Merten Reglitz, New York, Continuum, 2010, p. 181)

“The big problem that Kant discovers is the nature of the relation between the form of determination, or activity, or spontaneity, and on the other hand the form of receptivity, or form of the determinable, time. If I shift slightly, I would no longer say the form of determination and the form of determinable, but: two types of determination which are heterogeneous.”<sup>7</sup> Such heterogeneous character of spontaneity and receptivity expounds not only the mediator role of imagination in Deleuze’s account of Kant but also the nature of the relationship between activity and passivity. Furthermore, the french philosopher finds in this distinction a key element for his theory of subjectivity. In effect, the difference between the determination and the determinable introduced here explains both the contrast between the Cartesian and the Kantian cogito and the novelty involved by the transcendental character of time.

## 2. Self-knowledge

As has been frequently noted, it exists a hiatus between the certainty of the Cartesian cogito -if I think, I must exist necessarily- and the determination of being as substance – I am a thing that thinks-. Deleuze returns to this subject and claims: “It is as though Descartes's Cogito operated with two logical values: determination and undetermined existence. The determination (I think) implies an undetermined existence (I am, because ‘in order to think one must exist’) - and determines it precisely as the existence of a thinking subject: I think therefore I am, I am a thing which thinks.”<sup>8</sup> According to this, Descartes would move too fast when he tries to define an undetermined existence -I am- by means of a determination that reveals as indubitable to intuition – I think- because he does not explain how thinking determines being; he just considers that each act of thinking is an attribute of the substance that I am. In other words, from the act of thinking it does not follow that only a substance can think. By contrast, Kant would provide an appropriate solution to the Cartesian precipitation through the introduction of a mediating element between being and thinking. Deleuze writes:

(...) my undetermined existence can be determined only within time as the existence of a phenomenon, of a passive, receptive phenomenal subject appearing within time. As a result, the spontaneity of which I am conscious in the 'I think' cannot be understood as the attribute of a substantial and spontaneous being, but only as the affection of a passive self which experiences its own thought -its own intelligence, that by virtue of which it can say *I [je]* - being exercised in it and upon it but not by it.<sup>9</sup>

---

7 Deleuze, G., (1978, March, 28), *Cours Vincennes*. Retrieved from <https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/68>

8 Deleuze, G., *Difference and Repetition*, p. 85

9 Idem, p. 86

The subject determines itself by way of an inner splitting: On the one hand, an active ego -i.e. the 'I think' or *je-*, on the other hand, a passive ego identified with mere receptivity -the *moi-*. In Kantian terms this means that understanding must affect sensibility in order to give me as a phenomenon to myself. Besides that, Kant distinguishes two kinds of self-awareness: On the one hand, the pure awareness of the unity of consciousness -i.e. the transcendental apperception- and, on the other hand, the empirical consciousness that takes place in the inner sense. Only the latter brings knowledge in strict sense as long as it faces the subject with the phenomenon of itself. And giving that here is knowledge involved, some kind of empirical intuition must be taken into account. Therefore, in the same way that external affection is the cause of sensation, the cognitive experience of myself implies a self-affection<sup>10</sup>. However, and by contrast to external affection, the empirical self-awareness entails a denaturation of its object. In effect, the so-called 'paradox of the inner sense' refers to the impossibility that the transcendental subject, as a constitutive agent and, consequently, as a general condition for all possible experience, reveals itself as such to intuition. Between the transcendental and the empirical subject intermediates time, which at the same time that makes possible self-knowledge divides subjectivity in two: a constitutive and unknowable 'I think' and a phenomenal and knowable empirical I. Such insuperable gap in the inner of subjectivity constitutes for Deleuze a main legacy of Kantism to Western philosophy, inasmuch it realizes for first time the Artaud's statement "I is an other"<sup>11</sup>. In this sense, Deleuze claims: "The alienation of the subject in Kant is precisely this fact that it is as if torn by the duality of the two forms, each of which belongs to it as much as the other, form of receptivity and form of spontaneity."<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Self-appearance

In his reading of Kant, Deleuze emphasizes the empirical self-manifestation – or self-knowledge – because he finds there a topology of concept that defines activity and passivity as separated realms. That division founds in turn the splitting of subjectivity in two unresolvable dimensions. Husserl, by contrast, underlines the transcendental dimension of self-manifestation, which although does not bring knowledge in itself, it constitutes the more profound dimension of subjectivity and establishes, by extension, the ultimate condition for all possible knowledge. In a passage of the *Analyses* Husserl points out:

---

10 Cf. Jáuregui, C., *Sentido interno y subjetividad. Un análisis del problema del auto-conocimiento en la filosofía trascendental de Kant*, Buenos Aires, Prometeo, 2008, p. 73

11 Deleuze, G., (1978, March, 21), *Cours Vincennes*. Retrieved from <https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/67>

12 Ibidem

In his nearly overwhelming genius (...), Kant has already sketched out an initial system of transcendental syntheses in the transcendental deduction of the first edition of the *Critique*. But unfortunately, he only had in mind there the higher lying problem of the constitution of a spacio-worldly object, of an object that transcends consciousness. Thus, his question is only this: What kind of syntheses must be carried out subjectively in order for things of nature to be able to appear, and thus a nature in general. But lying deeper and essentially preceding this is the problem of the inner, the purely immanent objectlike formation and the constitution, as it were, of the inner-world, that is, precisely the constitution of the subject's stream of lived-experience as being in itself, as a field of all being proper to it as its very own.<sup>13</sup>

From a Husserlian perspective, Kant would subordinate the constitution of the inner world to the problem of the experience of the outer world. Therefore, he could only think the immanent constitution as an inner image of the transcend objectivity. In effect, if the self-affection of subjectivity is interpreted as an immanent reflection of the transcendental constitution of the outer world, thus self-awareness would entail some kind of objectivization of the temporal flow of consciousness. Claudia Jáuregui shares Husserl's appraisal of the Kantian theory of the inner sense: "Far from being the beginning of a possible experience, the inner sense reveals, in the light of the doctrine of self-affection, certain secondary character."<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Husserl sees in this subordination of immanence into transcendency the main reason for the lack of a proper theory of subjectivity in the *Critique*. In other words: ¿Is the subject for itself merely a psychological reflection, the impression that the outer world produces in immanence; or, on the contrary, it is necessary to recognize also a transcendental synthesis of immanence? He writes:

Since the spatial world is constituted through consciousness, since it can only be there for us as existing and can only be conceived at all by virtue of certain syntheses carried out in immanence, it is clear that the constitutive problems of the world presuppose the doctrine of the necessary, most general structures and the synthetic shapes of immanence that are possible in general.<sup>15</sup>

Not only the intentional operations of constitution of worldly objectivity but also the sensations that serves as material for the operation of that syntheses posse for Husserl a temporal existence that is

---

13 Husserl, E., *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, p. 171

14 Jáuregui, C., *Sentido interno y subjetividad*, p. 87

15 Husserl, E., *op. cit*, p. 171

independent and prior to the objectivization operated by reflection acts<sup>16</sup>. In phenomenological terms, immanent time does not reflect the order and unity conferred to external objects -what Husserl calls 'objective time'- but it constitutes in first place the originary synthesis of consciousness. And giving that such syntheses produce the stream of consciousness, they are the universal condition of possibility of the experience in general. In other words, the transcendental constitution of immanent time is presupposed by the syntheses of the external world carried out by the acts of the I. Now, if the activity of the I is allowed by time, thus temporal synthesis must be defined as a passive operation of consciousness.

The theory of the double intentionality of time consciousness seeks to explain how is synthetized, at the same time, the unity of immanent experiences -which are temporarily constituted insofar they last- and the unity of the 'absolute consciousness' -which does not last and is thus constituent-. In this respect, Husserl affirms in his *Lectures on time*: "There is one, unique flow of consciousness in which both the unity of the tone in immanent time and the unity of the flow of consciousness itself become constituted at once. As shocking (when not initially even absurd) as it may seem to say that the flow of consciousness constitutes its own unity, it is nonetheless the case that it does."<sup>17</sup> And a little further: "The flow of the consciousness that constitutes immanent time not only *exists* but is so remarkably and yet intelligibly fashioned that a self-appearance of the flow necessarily exists in it, and therefore the flow itself must necessarily be apprehensible in the flowing."<sup>18</sup> In short, Husserl not only gives a transcendental role to time -related to the syntheses that unify consciousness and make possible its self-appearance- but he also finds that this two phenomenon are founded in an originary coincidence between the constitutes and the constituted in the deeper level of temporal consciousness. Such transcendental coincidence ensures, by its part, the unity of subjectivity.

#### 4. Transcendental philosophy and subjectivity

The Husserlian position can be expressed as follows: from the acknowledgment of a passive dimension it does not follow necessarily the splitting of subject. Taken by itself, the concept of passivity only puts into question the traditional identification among I, subject and activity but it does not prescribe neither the nature of the relationship between activity and passivity nor the unity

---

16 In recent years, an intense debate on the objective character of immanent time has taken place among the Husserlian scholars. See: Dan Zahavi's *Self-awareness and Alterity. A Phenomenological Investigation* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1999) and John Brough's *Notes on the Absolute Time-Consciousness* (in Lohmar, D. y Yamaguchi, I, (Comp.), *On time- New Contribution to the Husserlian Phenomenology of Time*, Dordrecht, Heidelberg, New York, Springer, 2010). There is also a special issue of *Husserl Studies* on this subject: Volumen 27, N° 1 (2011).

17 Husserl, E., *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, Trans. By Barnett Brough, Norwell, Kluwer Boston, 1991, p. 84

18 Idem, p. 89

or division of subjectivity<sup>19</sup>. While Deleuze privileges in his reception of the Kantian doctrines of productive imagination the splitting that time would produce into the subject, Husserl draws an opposite conclusion based on the same premises: time is the ultimate subjective syntheses by virtue of the coincidence, in deeper passivity, of the constitute with the constituted. In this regard, it is particularly clarifying how Deleuze emplaces his own philosophical path in the history of philosophy. In *Logic of sense* it can be read:

What is common to metaphysics and transcendental philosophy is, above all, this alternative which they both impose on us: *either* an undifferentiated ground, a groundlessness, formless nonbeing, or an abyss without differences and without properties, or a supremely individuated Being and an intensely personalized Form. Without this Being or this Form, you will have only chaos...In other words, metaphysics and transcendental philosophy reach an agreement to think about *those determinable singularities only which are already imprisoned inside a supreme Self or a superior I.*<sup>20</sup>

According to the French philosopher, both traditional metaphysics and transcendental philosophy are characterized by the subordination of all entities to a guiding principle that transcends the whole of entities. Such separation between the guiding principle and the entities ordered by it implies, in classic metaphysics, the transcendence of the principle, which is emplaced beyond the world. However, such transcendent principle must be embodied either by an impersonal entity (as the Aristotelian essence or the Platonic Idea) or a personal entity (as the Christian God, for instance) in order to operate in immanence. Transcendental philosophy, by its part, would introject in immanence the transcendent principle by way of the identification of the principle with some aspect of subjectivity, namely its productive aspects. While the transcendental subject is a pure, immanent and constituent structure, empirical subjectivity is worldly and constituted. Given its essential heterogeneity, no interaction is possible between these two unbridgeable dimensions of subjectivity. In this sense, the radical splitting that Deleuze finds in Kant is not a fortuitous event. But this emplacement of subject as a metaphysical principle is contaminated by a fatal prejudice, whereby the transcendental could only be conceived as a form of the empirical subject; that is, a Person. Therefore, a transcendental subject would be just a purified image of the empirical one. In other words, the fundamental dimension would be a mere imitative repetition of what it seeks to found. In the light of the above, the author concludes: “(...) transcendental philosophy chooses the finite synthetic form of the Person rather than the infinite analytic being of the individual; and it thinks

---

19 See, for instance, Osswald, A., *La fundamentación pasiva de la experiencia. Un estudio sobre la fenomenología de Edmund Husserl*, Madrid, Plaza y Valdez, 2016, pp. 33-56

20 Deleuze, G., *Logic of sense*, Trans. By Mark Lester, London, Athlone Press, 1990, p. 106

natural to determine this superior I with reference to man and to enact the grand permutation Man-God which has satisfied philosophy for so long”<sup>21</sup> Concurrently, sense would express in transcendental philosophy always an order articulated by the guiding principle. Outside the scope of the principle thus, nonsense would possess only a negative character: beyond the order stays an undifferentiated depth, an abyss without properties, an uninformed nonbeing.

By contrast, Deleuze tries to characterize nonsense positively and that means that he must avoid in first place the dead-end that both transcendental philosophy and metaphysics would lead. Only then, nonsense would be less an uncrossable boundary for thought than precisely what is has to be thought. If from a static point of view is easy to establish a clear distinction between the order of sense -and with it the metaphysical essence and the transcendental subject- and nonsense -the undifferentiated depth-, a genetic perspective shows not only a progressive relaxation between the realms but, even more important, it brings to the foreground the productive character of nonsense. Moreover, and giving that the genetic question reveals transcendental subjectivity as a mere image of thought of the empirical subject, a proper transcendental perspective could only be maintained by means of the abandonment of the subjective anchoring. That is, transcendental philosophy has not been able until now to leave behind the tendency of common sense that tends to trace the empirical level on transcendental structures. Deleuze points out: “What is evident in Kant, when he directly deduces the three transcendental syntheses from corresponding psychological syntheses, is no less evident in Husserl when he deduces an originary and transcendental ‘Seeing’ from preceptual ‘vision’.”<sup>22</sup> A transcendental field purified of all subjective remains becomes an impersonal, neutral and dynamic space dwelled by singularities:

“We can not accept the alternative which thoroughly compromises psychology, cosmology, and theology: either singularities already comprised in individual persons, or the undifferentiated abyss. Only when the world, teeming with anonymous and nomadic, impersonal and pre-individual singularities, opens up, do we tread at last on the field of transcendental.”<sup>23</sup>

At this point, we can ask: What does mean to be a subject in *Logic of sense*? Firstly, it has to be mentioned that Deleuze does not carry out here his theory of subject but he uses the concept to characterize the position of his conceptual adversaries. In this sense, he tends to identify without further restriction the notion of subject with the concepts of consciousness, I, Ego, human person

---

21 Deleuze, G., *Logic of sense*, p. 106

22 Ibid, 98

23 Ibid, 103

and cogito<sup>24</sup>. However, in his own theory of the subject -mostly developed in the second chapter of *Difference and Repetition*-, the author acknowledges that this higher dimension of subjectivity (assimilated here with the active Ego of a human person) is founded on passive syntheses that ultimately depends of temporal syntheses<sup>25</sup>. Despite the apparent proximity with Husserl's own appraisal on the fundamental character of temporality, the Deleuzian temporal syntheses plays in that context a quite different role. For Deleuze, indeed, time not only does not provide a transcendental unity for consciousness -as a matter of fact, the 'synthesis of the future' blocks any chance of subjective unification<sup>26</sup>-, but also the subjectivity in itself is conceived as an effect of syntheses instead of its agent. The french philosopher writes: "There is a self [*moi*] wherever a furtive contemplation has been established, whenever a contracting machine capable of drawing a difference from repetition functions somewhere. The self does not undergo modifications, it is itself a modification -this term designating precisely the difference drawn."<sup>27</sup> In other words: if an Ego exists, that is because there are syntheses and not the other way round. In this context it has to be taken the skeptical appraisal of the Sartrean attempt to nihilise the phenomenological consciousness:

"This field [regarding the transcendental field] can not be determined as that of a consciousness. Despite Sartre's attempt, we cannot retain consciousness as a milieu while at the same time we object to the form of the person and the point of view of individuation. A consciousness is nothing without a synthesis of unification, but there is no synthesis of unification of consciousness without the form of the I [*Je*], or the point of view of the Self [*moi*]."<sup>28</sup>

Two general conditions of the Deleuzian description of classic subjectivity can be drawn from this passage: (i) A subject entails a synthesis of unification and (ii) a subject always imply a point of

---

24 With regard to the identification between cogito and consciousness: "We cannot think of the condition in the image of the conditioned. The task of a philosophy which does not wish to fall into the trap of consciousness and the cogito is to purge the transcendental field of all resemblance." (*Logic of sense*, 123); on the identification among person, consciousness and subject: "(...) an impersonal transcendental field, not having the form of a synthetic personal consciousness or a subjective identity -with the subject, on the contrary, being always constituted" (ibid, 98/99); and, finally, with respect to the human character of subject: "As for the subject of this new discourse (except that there is no longer any subject), it is not man or God, and even less man in the place of God." (ibid, 107).

25 It is important to notice that Deleuze use the personal pronoun 'je' [I] to refer to the active dimension of subjectivity and reserves the term 'moi' [Self] to indicate the passive ones.

26 See in this volume Verónica Kretschel's '...'

27 Deleuze, G., *Difference and Repetition*, p. 78-79

28 Deleuze, G., *Logic of sense*, p. 102.

view. Deleuzian philosophy, by its part, could be negatively described as an attempt to abandon this two conditions in the definition of the transcendental field. On the one hand, while a subject unifies the transcendental field around a central element -the I or *je-*, Deleuze wants to think a transcendental field without a center, dwelled by nomadic singularities that organize themselves in series by means of an “auto-unification”<sup>29</sup>: a synthesis does not need an agent separated from the elements -an I, for instance. On the other hand, if the subject is completely constituted -that is what means to be ‘an effect’-, the transcendental field must lack any privileged point of view or, positively speaking, it has to be neutral. Neutrality and impassiveness defines the Event that happens beyond the subject. Therefore, the subjective perspective entails a denaturation of ontology. Following the appendix of *Ethics I*, Deleuze writes: “To grasp whatever happens as unjust and unwarranted (it is always someone else’s fault) is (...) what renders our sores repugnant -veritable *ressentiment*, resentment of the event.”<sup>30</sup> Summarizing, if the subject is only an effect, then it necessarily lacks of any productive potency -everything what constituted its reality was created behind its back- or, conversely, the transcendental synthesis is not subjective.

The unrestricted identification between, on the one hand, subject and person and, on the other hand, transcendental field and passivity, is not valid for Husserlian phenomenology. The genetic inquiry conducts Husserl to deepen the notion of subject by means of the acknowledges of passive dimensions of subjectivity. In such a context, activity -associated with the superior levels of consciousness- and personal existence are also founded in syntheses that do not emanate from an awoken I -and this is precisely what defines them as passive-, but this does not entail, in Husserl’s terms, the splitting between subjectivity and transcendental field. Such a conclusion only could be reached if beforehand it has been artificially opposed passive productivity and subjectivity. Hence, the anti-subjectivism defended by Deleuze is less rather a result of the analysis than more a departure point of it and, therefore, it constitutes his own image of thought.

From my understanding, here also lies the key of the dispute over the Cartesianism: while Deleuze can only think that the cogito is an empirical phenomenon -i.e. a form of self-knowledge-, Husserl holds that the self-appearance of consciousness is not primarily empirical. If that were the case, that is, if a subject only could be self-aware of itself by means of an explicit act of reflection, then self-appearance would lead inexorably to an infinite regression. In effect, the act of reflection can only make conscious an elapsed and objectified consciousness, while the present act of reflection would remain unconscious. Such reflective act would become aware retroactively insofar is intended by a new act of reflection and so on. In temporal terms that implies to say that the present of consciousness is unconscious. But Husserl rejects explicitly such possibility: “It is just nonsense to

---

29 Ibid, p. 103

30 Ibid, p. 149

talk about an 'unconscious' content that would only subsequently become conscious. Consciousness is necessarily *consciousness* in each of its phases."<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, a pure empirical interpretation of self-awareness would become unthinkable reflection itself. That is, inasmuch reflection is an act, it lasts -i.e. it involves a certain amount of time- and thus an infinite number of acts would involve an infinite time as well. The very possibility of reflection involves therefore a pre-reflective and passive self-awareness, that Husserl finds in the ultimate coincidence between the constitute and the constituted in the absolute flow of time. According to this, a subject is not only (i) a synthesis and (ii) a point of view but this two conditions depend of a third one: (iii) a subject should experience itself pre-reflectively. Against Kant, Husserl does not believe that the possibility of experience a representation as our own depends on the syntheses of consciousness but, on the contrary, he thinks that those syntheses presuppose the self-appearance of subjectivity in the stream of immanent time. In technical terms, that means that the transcendental apperception entails a passive cogito. Deleuze, as Kant and the early Husserl, would remain blind to such originary self-experience and consequently he would try to define subjectivity from a third person perspective, as if a subject were just a thing among things, "like a house or a tree"<sup>32</sup>. In this regard, the french philosopher asserts: "The universal Ego is, precisely, the person corresponding to something = x common to all worlds, just as the other egos are the person corresponding to a particular thing = x common to several worlds."<sup>33</sup> According to this, a particular subject could be defined as the individual case of the set of all properties that only belong it and, correspondingly, the universal subject -the transcendental Ego- would be the intersection of the set of the whole of subjective properties. In such topology of concept, the relationship between universal and particular would be ensured *a priori* by the general character that properties posses by essence. From this point of view, therefore, self-appearance only could be apprehended as an abstract phenomenon that no one experience, instead of the unique and radically singular experience that everyone has of oneself, whether it be active or passive. Between these two positions hangs the alternation between Cartesianism and Anti-Cartesianism.

## 5. Conclusions

While Deleuze finds in the discovery of passivity not only the main reason for the fragmentation of subjectivity but also a key argument for the abandon of the subjective character of the transcendental field, the Husserlian passivity ensures at the same time the unity of subject and gives a transcendental role to self-experience. Regarding the former, the splitting of subject reflects the classical opposition of transcendental philosophy between the constituted and the constitute within

---

31 Husserl, E., *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, p. 123

32 Hua XIX (1), p. 363

33 Deleuze, G., *Logic of sense*, p. 115

subjectivity. Such a conclusion is a corollary of the broader critique of modern subjectivism, which would have fallen into the trap of understanding transcendental subject as a purified double of a concrete, empirical subject. Consequently, this modern image of thought would confuse personal subjectivity -defined as human, rational, transparent and reflective- with the transcendental field. In order to remedy this misunderstanding, the transcendental field should be purified of all subjective remains or, positively stated, it has to be defined as impersonal, neutral (without any privileged point of view), productive and virtual. Deleuze affirms, in turn, that between the virtual and the actual there are no similarity or opposition but difference and, therefore, its synthesis is asymmetrical. Husserl, on his behalf, critiques also the modern identification between subject and person and, just like the french philosopher, rejects the personal character of the transcendental subject. A person is a worldly object and, as such, a constituted phenomenon. However, this ascertainment does not imply the disengagement between subjectivity and transcendental field but, on the contrary, it leads to a deepening of the notion of subject. The Husserlian enlargement of the concept of subjectivity cover not only human but also animals and plant life.<sup>34</sup> Husserl defends in this regard a gradualness of subjective immanence that although is passively founded, it has also recognize the productive role of activity: categorial objects, by instance, are the correlative object of an active, categorial intuition. On the contrary, Deleuze seems to draw an uncrossable border between activity and passivity that marks at once the limit between the empirical and the transcendental. Due to all the above, I think that the Deleuzian criticism of Husserl in *Logic of sense* must be taken cautiously because it based on a false premise, namely that subject is always a human person. From that image of thought Deleuze seems to remain conditioned.

Despite their differences, Husserl and Deleuze share a fundamental insight over the relevance of Kant's doctrine of productive imagination in the contemporary theory of passive synthesis. They also agree that the modern theory of subjectivity must to be surpassed by a comprehensive analyses of the passive dimension of the subject and the ontology. Both philosophers also show that a thought of passivity entails to offers new answers to the question: What is a subject?

---

34 See Osswald, A., "Sobre la subjetividad animal o de la animalidad del sujeto: un recorrido por la reflexión husserliana sobre los animales". *Anuario Filosófico*. 45 (3), 2012, 589 -614