

## Identities in Manifolds: A Husserlian Pattern of Thought\*

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There are three formal structures which run through Husserl's work: the contrast between parts and wholes, the contrast between absence and presence or empty and filled intentions, and the contrast between identity and manifold. We will explore the third of these, to show the force it exercises in Husserl's thought and to show how awareness of the structure can simplify Husserl's descriptions.

### §1. THE MATERIAL THING AS AN IDENTITY IN MANIFOLDS

It is a commonplace in phenomenology that a material thing is the identity within a continuous flow of profiles. But this mentions only one of the manifolds in which a thing appears. Many others must be listed if we are to be precise.

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Part of the essential sense of a thing is its causal interconnection with other things and with its environment; a thing is “what is identical in the bond of causal dependencies. It is something that can live only in the atmosphere of causal lawfulness” (*Ideas III* § 7, p. 30). The qualities and states of a thing undergo changes in function of changes around it, and after due attention we can predict which changes will follow which. A thing is not just a synthesis of various characteristics, but is ruled by certain causal laws that make predictions possible for that particular kind of thing: “To be acquainted with a thing is to know in advance how it is going to behave causally. . . .” (*PP* § 13, p. 102).

So one level of unity within a manifold is the thing as a subject of potentially infinite changes in function of what happens around it; in a thing there is “no change without a cause, and no change of state without identity of the thing” (*Ideas II* § 16, p. 49). Even when something seems to change without an apparent external cause, when a substance loses its elasticity or when water evaporates, the change is due to commerce with the environment and could be expressed functionally if the appropriate factors are determined.

If we abstract from the moment of causality we are left with what Husserl calls a “phantom,” something that fills space but is impervious to causes and brings about no effects (*Ideas II* § 10, pp. 21-22; § 15b). Husserl claims there is a phantom-level in the object of each sense; let us consider the visual phantom.

One of the moments of the visual phantom is a “side,” like the front side of a book or the southern side of a building. A phantom has, essentially, many sides, so it is a unity within them. But each side is also a unity within many “aspects” or views. If the front side of this book is rectangular, it still presents many aspects that are of various shapes—trapezoidal from one angle, square, rhomboid, or practically a line from others, distorted and irregular in certain mediums, like a point at a great distance, and actually rectangular from one “normal” viewpoint which presents it “optimally”—but all of these are aspects of a rectangular side (*PP* § 28, pp. 157-59). We confuse an aspect with a side if we say that a coin is not round because it looks like an ellipse from some angles, or that a square tower is not square because it looks round at a distance.

Between sides and phantom we have another moment which Husserl calls an *Apparenz*, and which we can translate “apparition.” A sequence of sides, and consequently a sequence of aspects, that can actually be experienced is an apparition. The apparition of the Empire State Building we are