

# Sync-Ing in the Stream of Experience

## Time-Consciousness in Broad, Husserl, and Dainton

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COMMENTARY ON: Dainton, B. (2000). *Stream of Consciousness: Unity and Continuity in Conscious Experience*. London: Routledge.

ABSTRACT: By examining Dainton's account of the temporality of consciousness in the context of long-running debates about the specious present and time consciousness in both the Jamesian and the phenomenological traditions, I raise critical objections to his overlap model. Dainton's interpretations of Broad and Husserl are both insightful and problematic. In addition, there are unresolved problems in Dainton's own analysis of conscious experience. These problems involve ongoing content, lingering content, and a lack of phenomenological clarity concerning the central concept of overlapping experiences.

## 1. Introduction

Barry Dainton provides a detailed and fascinating analysis of the temporal structure of consciousness and the "specious present" in Chapters 6 and 7 of *The Stream of Consciousness* (2000). As he rightly notes, in agreement with Husserl, this is one of the most fundamental problems for a phenomenology of consciousness. Trying to sort it out has been a difficult and sometimes exasperating challenge for a series of philosophers and psychologists, including (to name only a few from what we might call the classical period in this regard) Lotze (1887), James (1890), Stern (1897, 1898), McTaggart (1908), Brentano (1911), Broad (1923, 1938), and Husserl (1927). Running alongside of these

original analyses there have been numerous scholarly commentaries that, although sometimes helpful and important, often misconstrue and confuse the issues. For example Mabbott's (1951) critique of the specious present, Mundel's (1954) defense, and Plumber's (1985) rejoinder. I will argue that Dainton's Chapter 6 belongs to this line of scholarly commentary, and that it is in some respects helpful and in some respects confusing. I will also suggest, however, that Chapter 7 should take its rightful place in the line of original analyses. Like most of these, however, it is also problematic.

## 2. Dainton's Analysis of Broad

The majority of theorists that I listed above have wrestled with two propositions that Lotze (1887) took as basic assumptions. To introduce them, I'll call them Lotzean Assumptions, and I'll abbreviate them as LA1 and LA2.

LA1: The perception of succession requires a momentary and indivisible, and therefore durationless act of consciousness.

Dainton points out, for example, that Broad rejects LA1 in his early account of the specious present, and maintains that an act of awareness, and not just its speciously present contents, has some short duration. In his later account, however, Broad accepts LA1 and treats an act of awareness as momentary. Closely tied to LA1 is a second assumption.

LA2: A sequence or succession is represented by persisting sensations or memory images that are simultaneous in present consciousness.

Taken together these two assumptions inform William James's analysis of the specious present. According to James (1890, p. 622), an act of awareness is discrete and momentary (LA1). He also accepts LA2, although to make sense of it he leaves the realm of phenomenology and explains it in terms of brain processes: "the brain-processes of various [successive] events must be active simultaneously, and in varying strength, for a time-perception to be possible" (1890, p. 633n). It would be interesting to discuss James's view in light of contemporary research by people like Libet (1985, 1992) and Pöppel (1994, 1988), but Dainton wants to stay with phenomenology, so we'll do the same.<1>

On the phenomenological level there seems to be a problem with the specious present, although James actually takes it as a solution. Lotze had already recognized the problem. To be aware of *successive* objects consciousness needs to compare the earlier and later objects in an operation that makes the earlier and later *simultaneous*. The problem is how simultaneously presented objects can be sensed as successive objects - how can they be both simultaneous and successive? Elsewhere, and for reasons I won't rehearse here, I've called this problem, which can be traced back as far as Augustine, the "cognitive paradox" (Gallagher, 1998). Lotze decided to avoid this paradox by proposing a theory of temporal signs according to which sensed content contains markers derived from their

objective temporal order. So although the sensed content is simultaneous with the act of awareness, it is marked in some way as belonging to the past. This, however, would not be a direct perception of succession, and many of the psychologists that James cited (for example, Herbart, Ward and Volkman ) recognized this paradox as a difficulty for any theory of the direct perception of succession. James himself nonetheless takes this paradox to be the solution, and in fact, an expression of the specious present. As he later put it, "earlier and later are present to each other in an experience that feels either only on condition of feeling both together" (1894, p. 77).

Broad's account of the specious present also depends on the two Lotzean assumptions. Even though Broad rejects LA1 in his early account, he begins by accepting it in order to define the specious present, and then later drops it. LA2, however, acts as an assumption throughout Broad's account. Dainton's interpretation of Broad overlooks an important point about this assumption. It has to do with the nature of the contents that according to Broad and LA2 continue to persist even after the event to which they correspond. Specifically, Broad maintains a sense-data theory of consciousness, and he maintains LA2 precisely in terms of sense-data that, taken together, constitute a sensory field. Within a sensory field temporal change takes place, but "the qualitative differences between its earlier and its later sections will be sensed together ..." (Broad, 1923, p. 352). In effect, actual sense-data, generated in a past experience, persist in present consciousness along with actual sense-data generated in present experience. This is why Broad, in contrast to James, limits the specious present to past and present and excludes the future - the future has not yet generated sense-data, so there is no content to the future. Past and present sense-data have some existential value. They are really there in the sensory field.

Any account of the specious present that includes LA1 and LA2 will run into an array of problems, many of them identified by Mabbott (1951) and taken up by Dainton. For example, if one starts by defining the specious present in terms of LA1, a momentary act of awareness, and then relaxes that assumption, one is led into the absurdity that "the specious present of an act of awareness varies inversely with the duration of the act" (Mabbott, 1951, pp. 158-159). Dainton refers to this as the "ballooning of content" (p. 140). Another problem, mentioned by Mabbott and analyzed in detail by Dainton, is the problem of repeated contents. Given an overlapping of specious presents, as Broad's theory entails, if at  $t_1$  in an act of awareness  $e_1$  I hear a tone A, and if in the specious present associated with the next act of awareness  $e_2$  at  $t_2$  the sense datum for A is still present, then I hear A again. On this model we seem to experience the same events multiple times. Another problem that troubled James and Mabbott, but is only mentioned by Dainton, concerns empirical evidence that the length of the specious present may vary across different sense modalities. In other words, the specious present for vision may be different than that for audition. Thus, if I am watching a ballet, the music should appear to be out of sync with the dancers' movements. The dancers would always be a little behind or ahead of where I think they ought to be.

Are these problems resolved in Broad's later account? Broad fully embraces LA1 - the idea that acts of awareness are momentary - in his later model. He also adds the idea that

contents have different degrees of "presentedness," although this concept remains without clear explanation. A lesser degree of presentedness had by a content in the specious present means that it is already past to that degree. Dainton construes this to mean that the content has a different phenomenal characteristic (p. 145). Nonetheless, the content, even with a lesser degree of presentedness, is still present, and this implies that LA2 is still in effect. Maintaining LA1, however, resolves the problem of ballooning contents, since there are no shorter or longer acts of awareness.

Dainton also argues that the problem of repeated contents is avoided by Broad's later account. Even though a particular content is sensed by a succession of momentary acts (and since we still have overlapping specious presents), each successive instance of it appears with a gradually diminishing degree of presentness. "Although every content is apprehended by uncountably many different acts, no content appears in two different acts under the same mode of presentation. So we do not experience one and the same content repeated over and over; we experience a single content sinking smoothly into the past" (p. 146). It is not clear to me, however, why this is the case. For example, if a sense-datum for tone A at t1, when it is sounded, falls into the specious present of an act of awareness e1, and we thus hear tone A at t1, and then at t2 the same sense-datum for tone A, now with a diminished presentedness, persists in the specious present of an act of awareness e2, do we not hear it again, this time, however, as a kind of weaker reverberation from the past? As long as Broad conceives this in terms of sense-data that are really present in consciousness, the phenomenology would seem to involve hearing a tone and then continuing to hear its reverberation, even as new tones are sounded. A clear resolution to this problem would involve giving up the old theory of sense-data in consciousness, and clarifying the concept of presentedness. Ultimately this problem is responsible for sinking Broad's account.

Let me note one final aspect that comes into Dainton's interpretation of Broad. Dainton defines 'phenomenal content' to include both phenomenal objects (parts of experience) and phenomenal properties (features of phenomenal objects) (p. 24). The term 'experience', of course, remains somewhat ambiguous. Part of what is at stake in Dainton's work is to clarify some of these concepts. I assume, however, that phenomenal content is not equivalent to the notion of sense data as Broad used it. [3](#) In the context of Dainton's discussion of temporal experience, and in the context of what he calls the 'A theory' (which is not to be confused with McTaggart's A-theory), I understand 'phenomenal object' to mean something like *the object* (e.g., a musical tone) *as I experience it*, rather than the sense data that stands for, represents, or in some way participates in the generation of the appearance of the object (musical tone). Dainton acknowledges something like this in his analysis of the later Broad insofar as he takes issue with the latter's anti-realism. To make sense of presentedness, Dainton suggests that "instead of successive acts being apprehensions of numerically identical contents, successive acts must be apprehensions of representations of contents" (p. 147). Dainton, however, thinks this is a change from Broad's earlier theory. The notion of presentedness is certainly new, but Broad, insofar as he thinks of phenomenal content as sense-data, is what Dainton defines as an anti-realist in both his early and late accounts. Dainton,

however, does not seem to notice an important difference in this regard between accounts given by Broad and Husserl.

### 3. Dainton's Interpretation of Husserl

Dainton may have been influenced in his reading of Husserl by Miller's (1984) interpretation. He appeals to Miller's "Principle of Simultaneous Awareness" (PSA). It is possible, however, to distinguish between a strong version of PSA and a weak version. The strong PSA is specified as involving LA1 and LA2, the two assumptions that define the cognitive paradox and that, as Husserl notes, derive from Herbart and Lotze, and turn up again in Brentano's analysis. The weak PSA lacks this specification. For example, Dainton offer a weak formulation of PSA: "If we are directly aware of the immediate past, this awareness is located in the present" (p. 133). Although Miller declines to give a clear formulation of this principle, he considers a strong version of PSA on the basis of Husserl's description of Brentano's position that he (Husserl) wanted to reject. Husserl formulates these assumptions in the following way.

In order to grasp a succession of representations (a and b for example), it is necessary that the representations be the absolutely simultaneous objects of a knowing that puts them in relation [= LA2], and that embraces them quite indivisibly in a single and indivisible act [= LA1] (1991, p. 21).

Husserl goes on to explain that for Brentano LA2 requires LA1. Notice, however, that Husserl's formulation also describes Broad's later theory. It is important to see that Husserl rejects Brentano's theory in a way that implies that he would also reject Broad's theory. Specifically, he rejects LA1 on phenomenological grounds and (although he must struggle to do so) he also rejects LA2. In doing so, Husserl rejects the strong version of PSA.

Both Miller and Dainton, however, suggest that Husserl accepts the strong version of PSA, that is, Brentano's version. Miller writes: "Like Brentano, Husserl regards PSA as a necessary condition for temporal awareness" (1984, p. 120).[4](#) Dainton associates Husserl with Broad, and makes the same claim: "Broad and Husserl both subscribed to certain assumptions - specifically, a combination of an awareness-content model and the Principle of Simultaneous Awareness, PSA - and both found it hard to develop an unproblematic account of temporal experience within this framework" (p. 136). Specifically both Miller and Dainton claim that Husserl (like Brentano and Broad) accepted LA1. But this is simply not true for either Husserl's early or later accounts. He had rejected LA1 under the influence of Stern and in working out his critique of Brentano. In 1905, and thus as part of his early account, Husserl states unequivocally:

It is certainly evident that the perception of a temporal object itself has temporality, that the perception of duration itself presupposes the duration of perception, that the perception of any temporal form itself has the

phenomenological temporality that belongs to its irreducible essence. (1991, p. 24).

I would argue that Husserl accepts the weak PSA, and specifically as it is nicely and precisely formulated by Miller. "An awareness of succession derives from simultaneous features of the structure of that awareness .... A *continuous* awareness of a tone as enduring must involve an awareness of (at least) some temporally extended part of the tone at any given *instant* of that awareness" (Miller, 1984, p. 109). This describes Husserl's position correctly. One should note that awareness is continuous rather than momentary (versus LA1), and that, most importantly, what is simultaneous has to do with structural features of the act of awareness, rather than with the contents being experienced (versus LA2). Husserl, in contrast to James, Broad, and other theorists of the specious present, finds the answer to the problem of temporal awareness (and an answer to the cognitive paradox), not by accepting the present simultaneity of successive sensory contents, but by affirming a retentive-protentive structure of awareness. For him, the answers to all the problems associated with the specious present are to be found by looking not to content but to noetic structure (that is, the structure of the act of awareness). Of course this means that Husserl still maintains the awareness-content model, but the complexity introduced by retention and protention is on the side of awareness rather than on the side of content.

It would be inappropriate here to try to present in all its detail Husserl's complex analysis of time-consciousness, and my intention is not primarily to defend Husserl's analysis against Dainton's critical reading of it. Indeed, there are a variety of problems with Husserl's analysis that I've addressed elsewhere (Gallagher, 1979; 1998). But I do think Husserl has some important insights to offer, which Dainton's presentation missed. To sort this out as efficiently as possible, I'll briefly discuss three points.

### 3.1 Early Versus Late Accounts

Dainton is right to distinguish between Husserl's early and late accounts of time-consciousness. But he offers a misleadingly neat story about the relationship between early and late accounts in Broad and Husserl. He contends that Broad's early view is equivalent to Husserl's later view, and Broad's later view is equivalent to Husserl's early view. But this schema doesn't hold up if we consider that Broad maintained LA1 in his later account whereas Husserl consistently rejected it and maintained that the act of awareness is itself extended in time. Broad also maintains LA2, specifically the idea that successive sense-data are presented simultaneously, whereas Husserl attempted to work his way free of this idea. This is one of the main differences between Husserl's earlier and later accounts. In 1905 Husserl agreed with Stern's rejection of LA2, but it took him several years to figure out how to break away from the strong current of this assumption. The solution was implicit in his early theory, but he still held to a conception of consciousness that he had developed in his *Logical Investigations* (1970, original 1900-

01). This conception of consciousness requires that we distinguish between at least two types of content.

### 3.2 Two Kinds of Content

There are two kinds of elements in consciousness, according to Husserl: real (*reell*) elements and intentional elements. For example, I see the cat. The fact that I am perceiving is something that is really happening and as such it is a real event of my consciousness. The cat, however, as Aristotle and the medieval theorists of intentionality assure us, as if we needed assurance on this point, is not *really* in my consciousness. The cat remains out there on the mat. The cat is an *intentional*, but not a real, content of consciousness. The cat that we see is the cat that is out there in the world. The cat that we imagine or remember may not be out there in the world, but neither does it have any *real* existence in my consciousness. In all of these cases it has only an intentional status. But Husserl also thought that there is *real* content that materializes in consciousness as part of the process of perception. He started out calling this 'sensation', but in the end settled on the term 'hyletic data'.<sup><5></sup> Hyletic data are the pure uninterpreted sense impressions (of color, shape, smell, etc.) that inform perception. According to Husserl, we are not normally aware of hyletic data, but we can become conscious of them in phenomenological reflection. When I perceive something, hyletic data are processed in a nonconscious way in what Husserl calls the "apprehension - content schema." So when I see the cat, I am aware of the cat (the intentional content of consciousness), not the hyletic data, but this awareness is generated on the basis of a processing of real (hyletic) content of which I am not ordinarily conscious.

In his early analysis Husserl thought that the retentive aspect of consciousness, which retains the just past moment of consciousness in present experience, involved this apprehension - content schema. In other words, retention depended upon something like a current micro-processing of hyletic content that originated with the past event but was in some way simultaneous with the current processing. In that case, however, LA2 was still in effect. Some real content from the past was still persisting in consciousness. Husserl finally came to reject this idea, and it was this rejection that marked his move to the later account. It is also this rejection that distinguishes his account from accounts given by James and Broad. In 1909 he writes:

*Do we have a continuum of primary[hyletic] contents simultaneously in the now-point and, in addition to this and simultaneous with it, a continuum of 'apprehensions'? ... [C]ertainly everything that 'really' [reell] belongs to this consciousness exists in it simultaneously - that is to say, exists in it 'now' ... The primary contents that spread out in the now, are not able to switch their temporal function: the now cannot stand before me as not-now, the not-now cannot stand before me as now. Indeed, if it were otherwise, the whole continuum of contents could be viewed as now and*

consequently as coexistent, and then again as successive. That is evidently impossible. (1991, pp. 334-35).

Retention, according to his later theory, does not retain real contents; it retains intentional contents. It retains the sense (the meaning content) of what has just consciously passed. Although there is this change in the status of the content that retention retains, it is important to note that the structural status of retention does not change. More generally, for understanding Husserl's analysis, it is important to know that retention and protention, as they perform their respective functions of retaining the past and anticipating the future, are not contents themselves, either real or intentional. Rather, they are part of the noetic structure of the act of awareness. Retentions fall on the side of awareness, not on the side of content. This point is often confused by commentators. Plumber, for example, who takes retention and protention to be temporal intervals, suggests that Husserl's concept of the specious present is similar to one proposed by James and Broad, and involves "an *instant* flanked by intervals of 'retention' and 'protention'" (Plumber, 1985, p. 21n3). In other words, he understands retentions to be part of what we are aware of, rather than part of the structure of awareness. Dainton does something similar. He equates retentions with a sequence of representations which we simultaneously apprehend (p. 151). But retention is not something that is apprehended; it is part of the structure of apprehending, if by that we mean awareness. Even the notion of a retention of retention does not mean an awareness of a previous retention or a real sequence of retentions existing in the now of consciousness. We do not hear the retention of a previous note, for example, we hear the present note as following the previous one. The specious present, which for James and Broad consists of a set of simultaneous sense-data paradoxically laid out in a successive order, is for Husserl an intentional structure in which the just-past is virtually (not really) retained. As we noted, Broad excluded the immediate future from the specious present precisely because he thought one needed an existing sense-datum to apprehend, and future sense-data (or sense-data of the future) do not yet exist. Husserl includes protention (anticipation) of the just-future, because protention does not depend on the apprehension of non-existent sense-data. Rather it is part of the structure of consciousness that makes it anticipatory.

If we understand retention and protention in this way the problems of lingering contents and the problem of the "clogging of consciousness," as Dainton identifies them (p. 156), do not apply. It's not that we continue to *hear* the past note reverberate as the present one is sounded (that would soon become an auditory jumble); we hear the present note as following the one we have just heard and as preceding the one we anticipate. Dainton writes: "If I snap my fingers, I hear the sound of the snap and it is gone. The snap-sound does not linger on in my immediate experience" (p. 156). Husserl's concept of retention, in contrast to Broad's account, does not imply such lingering. Rather, what is retained is the sense that I have just snapped my fingers. Dainton writes: "If I turn my head to the right I will eventually lose sight of the coffee cup to my left. But I do not experience the cup *fading into the past*, rather I experience it moving to the left .... When I lose sight of the cup, I do so completely and all at once. The only 'fading' that occurs is due to the blurring of perception at the peripheries of the visual field" (p. 156). But this is not an objection to Husserl's concept of retention. It confuses retention with some kind of faded

image that supposedly would linger on in consciousness, as if I were still seeing the cup but somewhat out of focus. Retention retains the sense of my just-past experience of seeing the cup (and just as clearly as I saw it), but it does not do so by keeping a faded image in consciousness. The fading aspect of a fading image is not equivalent to a temporal "fading" into the past.

If retention is thought to depend on the presence of sense-data, as in Broad, and we add the complexity of Husserl's retentional-protentional model, then it is understandable how one might think that consciousness would be clogged with real content (Dainton, 2000, p. 157). In contrast, on the purely intentional model of retention that Husserl finally develops, there is no clogging of the works. What is "in" consciousness in an intentional manner corresponds precisely to what we experience in our temporal awareness - and nothing more than that. Even if I am listening to a very fast melody I do not complain that the notes are clogging my consciousness, at least in the sense that Dainton suggests. Retentions do not get locked in some kind of traffic jam of the present. The retentional aspect of consciousness at any one moment opens up a unitary access to our just-past experience. Even if the just-past is articulated into a specific sequence, retention provides access to that temporal articulation without showing itself to be articulated. Husserl's own phrases are sometimes misleading in this way. When he speaks of a retention of a retention, and so on, this may lead the reader to think that what we experience is a series of retentions, and that all of these retentions are clogging things up so that it is difficult to find the experience of the temporal object itself. This issue leads directly to an important point that Dainton helps to bring out.

### **3.3 Phenomenological Description and the Problem of Reification**

Dainton points out the importance of Husserl's notion of the double intentionality of retention. Retention is first of all an intentional awareness of the just-past moments of consciousness (Husserl calls this its "longitudinal" aspect), and secondly, on that basis, an awareness of the just-past object (an indirect or "transverse intentionality"). Its primary target is my just-past experience of the object, not the persisting or changing object itself. Since my just-past awareness had been an awareness of the just-past object, retention allows for the continued awareness of the object, as just-past. The intentionality of retention, which some phenomenologists refer to as functional intentionality, is not the same as act-intentionality. It does not thematize its object, as does a full-blown intentional act (e.g., perception or memory). It functions more on the order of working memory, not just in terms of its short-term reach, but in terms of how it "keeps hold of" the just-past (Husserl, 1966, p. 118).

This solves a problem that Broad had left unresolved. Mundel (1954) posed the question in just the right way in regard to Broad's analysis. If awareness is itself spread out in its own duration, and therefore contains phases of its own, how are these phases synthesized to allow for the continuity of experience? Husserl had asked precisely the same question against Stern, approximately fifty years earlier. Stern, like the early Broad, had

maintained that the act of awareness, and not just the speciously present content, is itself extended in time, but left this insight unexplained. Husserl's notion that retention has a double intentionality is an attempt to explain it, and in effect, to explain the unity of consciousness and the fact that the stream of consciousness is self-aware.

Dainton raises a very good question about all of this: "is it possible to detect in our own experience the postulated complexes of retentions, primal impressions, and protentions performing their intricate dance? It is by no means obvious that we can" (p. 156). He suggests that such things are part of "a purely theoretical construction going far beyond the phenomenological data" (p. 159).<sup><6></sup> Husserl claims to be doing phenomenological description, on the basis of direct intuition; but if we look closely at our own experience, we do not find retentions, primal impressions, or protentions swimming around in the conscious stream. We can push this a bit further. Husserl talks of momentary cross-sections of consciousness that are structured by retentions, primal impressions, and protentions. Do such cross-sections actually exist, or are they simply abstractions, theoretical entities, posited by Husserl? Indeed, this abstraction is precisely what leads many commentators, including Miller and Dainton, to think that Husserl retained LA1: the momentariness of the act of consciousness. As we have seen, Husserl rejects LA1, but nonetheless (in a way that is similar to Broad, and similar even to Dainton's attempt to map out his own overlap theory) insists on analyzing things in terms of momentary cross-sections.

On the one hand, this problem, which is what Husserl calls the problem of reification, reflects what Dainton identifies as a point made by G. E. Moore. "[... T]he moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness, and to see what, distinctly, it is, it seems to vanish" (Moore, 1922, p. 25; cited by Dainton, p. 43). This diaphanous nature of consciousness is something that phenomenologists have to deal with if they are to say anything other than consciousness is diaphanous. One of the major (hermeneutical) objections to Husserl's notion of phenomenological reduction is that in formulating descriptions we are forced to use language. But language is not purified of theoretical constructs (which, of course, were meant to be bracketed by the reduction). Even if we could purify language in the right way, it would still contain nouns (e.g., 'phase', 'retention'), which, in reference to the stream of consciousness, might imply substantive parts rather than transitive parts. Reflection itself may introduce distortions into what we see in phenomenological intuition, as Husserl warns specifically in regard to time-consciousness.

We must therefore distinguish: the prephenomenal being of experiences, their being before we have turned towards them in reflection, and their being as phenomena. When we turn towards the experience attentively and grasp it, it takes on a new mode of being; it becomes "differentiated," "singled out." And this differentiating is precisely nothing other than the grasping [of the experience]; and the differentiatedness is nothing other than the being-grasped, being the object of our turning-towards. (Husserl, 1991, p. 132).

Elsewhere he advises that "One should not reify the structure of consciousness, one should not falsify the modifications of consciousness into modifications different in principle, etc." (1991, p. 337, translation revised).<sup><7></sup> Lotze (1887) had warned against the kind of reification of experience that takes the form of spatialization (also see Dainton, pp. 18ff). Husserl points out that reflection tends to freeze the flow of consciousness and to set it out in discrete parts.

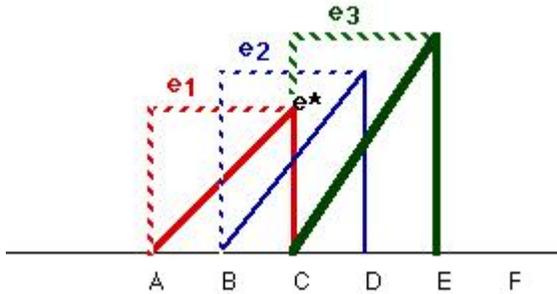
To say that Husserl recognizes the problem is not to say that he avoids it in all cases. To sort this out I propose that we distinguish between a *descriptive abstraction* and a theoretical account. Given the task of describing the stream of consciousness, a certain way of expressing it either captures it or does not, sinks or swims, so to speak, and this is something to be worked out, in part, in an intersubjective way. I think the notion of retention is a phenomenologically legitimate descriptive abstraction rather than a theoretical solution. The phenomenology of listening to a piece of music is such that when a series of notes in a melody are played, for example, I hear the melody and not just one note and now another, and now another, etc. Previously sounded notes are retained in the intentional experience so that as I hear the note that is now being sounded I hear it as part of a continuity of notes. This happens without persisting sense-data (or hyletic data) and without my having to activate a memory of previous notes. We find, in Husserl's texts, phenomenological descriptions of just such experience, which seem to be very much on the mark. Based on the experience and the descriptions of it, Husserl proposes the idea of retention as an attempt to characterize just such aspects of experience. It's a descriptive abstraction, and the only relevant question for the phenomenologist is whether it is close enough to the experience or introduces any distortions. I think Husserl does sometimes describe things in a way that is too reified - the cross-section of consciousness, and retentions and protentions as if they were elements that we could directly experience. In such cases the task is to try to pull such abstractions back closer to the experience by finding a more appropriate way of putting it, or by introducing various qualifications. This might be the beginning of a theorizing process, but it is one that is phenomenologically generated. In any case, Husserl always intended phenomenology to be an intersubjective enterprise, open to corrections. In that spirit, he would welcome any improvements.

#### **4. Dainton's Own Account and the Principle of Presentational Concurrence (PPC)**

In the spirit of an intersubjective project, then, I would like to consider Dainton's own account, which he calls the *overlap model*. Given his critical remarks on Husserl, I will assume that he intends for this not to be a theoretical model but a phenomenological account that is close to experience.

The overlap model seeks to improve on Broad's account. As Dainton points out, Broad fails to consider what happens to the specious present when the act of awareness is taken

to have its own duration. Like the early Broad, and following John Foster's model, Dainton begins with the supposition of a momentary cross-section of consciousness.<8> To resolve Broad's problem of repeated contents in the overlapping specious presents, Dainton appeals to Foster's solution: allow for an overlap in the acts of awareness (which Foster terms 'presentations'). Dainton provides a detailed analysis, summarized in *Figure 1*.



**Figure 1.**

#### **Dainton's overlapping model**

In the diagram  $e^*$  represents an abstract momentary act of awareness, and the solid lines of  $e^*AC$  represent the momentary act with its specious present as Broad conceived it. The innovative part of Dainton's account is the idea of extended, overlapping acts of awareness. So  $e^*$  is extended as  $e_1$  (with the specious present of A-C). It overlaps with  $e_2$  and any other act in between. It is not a necessary requirement that all acts (or all specious presents) have the same duration, but whatever duration acts of awareness have, their specious presents have proportional durations. Dainton actually makes this claim stronger by defining the proportion as one of simultaneous equality. He adopts the view "that acts of awareness and their contents exactly coincide in time; they run concurrently" (p. 166). This is what, following Miller, he calls the Principle of Presentational Concurrence (PPC). Acts of awareness and their contents share the same temporality - there is no temporal discordance between acts of awareness and phenomenal contents. Furthermore, Dainton, following Foster, suggests that this common time can be matched to objective time (p. 165).

PPC with overlapping awareness solves the problem of repeated contents. But as it does so, I suggest, it generates a new problem - *the problem of ongoing contents*. The same continuous content is seemingly present across a number of overlapping acts. If content C is presented at the end of  $e_1$ , it is speciously present throughout  $e_1$ . Unless Dainton appeals to some notion of protention, however, C's presentedness throughout  $e_1$  is supposedly at a constant level, even though C does not objectively occur until the end of  $e_1$ . C is also speciously present throughout  $e_2$ , but unless we say first as protended, then in a primal impression, and finally as retended, C will be heard, not only throughout  $e_2$ , but from the first moment of  $e_1$  until the last moment of  $e_3$ . Dainton, however, does not appeal to protention or retention to sort this out, and I think the problem of ongoing contents remains unresolved. If, as he contends, the common time of the act of awareness and its content can be clocked with objective time, then consider what happens if  $e_1$  is 2

seconds long. Two seconds before C occurs, I become aware of C. My awareness of it continues up until C actually occurs and for two seconds after C occurs. If we assume C is a momentary event (e.g., the quickly dampened sounding of a musical note), or that it lasts for approximately .5 secs (or any duration less than 4 secs), unless we have some way to distinguish between our anticipation and retention of it, then it would seem to last for 4 secs, it would be heard before it actually sounded, and it would continue to be heard after it was no longer being sounded (the problem of lingering contents once again). Even if this is consistent with the logic of PPC, it is not consistent with our phenomenology. What is missing here is some account corresponding to what Husserl described as the retentive and protentive structure of consciousness. Overlapping, by itself, just doesn't capture the nuances of anticipation and retention in experience.

As we see from the diagram, Dainton's analysis starts out by positing overlapping contents and overlapping acts of awareness. I don't think he actually means overlapping contents (p. 164). An example of an overlapping content would be if I am looking at someone as they tell me their account of consciousness and the phone rings. I see them, I hear them, and I hear the phone. This kind of thing happens constantly and is phenomenologically unproblematic, although it may be pragmatically problematic. It's not just one damn thing after another (as Whitehead once said in regard to experience) it's too many damn things at once. Rather than overlapping contents, I think Dainton means overlapping specious presents, as we find them in Broad's diagram, or more precisely in Mabbott's interpretation of Broad's diagram (looking at the same diagram, Mundel, for example, doesn't find these overlaps at all). Overlapping specious presents in Broad's model lead to some of the problems that Dainton attempts to solve with overlapping acts of awareness.

What exactly are overlapping acts of awareness, however? The problem here may be just mine. I'm not sure what overlapping acts of awareness could mean for an individual subject. I can conceive of a temporal overlap of two or more acts of awareness in the following way. I'm sitting in my office looking at the ringing phone, for example. You walk in, hand me a piece of paper, glance at the ringing phone, and walk out. Your awareness of the ringing phone temporally and temporarily overlapped with mine. Can something like this overlap happen in one individual? For example, I am aware of the computer screen in front of me and at the same time I am aware of the phone ringing on and off. I would say this is just a phenomenologically unproblematic overlapping of content, or with Dainton, this is a case of co-consciousness, but not that I have two separate acts of awareness going at once. In the end, trying to decide this for acts of awareness may be irrelevant since Dainton wants to give up the A-thesis, which distinguishes between acts and contents. Are these problems resolved by what Dainton calls the *Simple Conception*?

If we give up the act-content schema, as Dainton wants to do, and adopt the Simple Conception, this does not solve the phenomenological problems. In fact, it makes things worse by adding a conceptual problem. It robs PPC of any meaning. PPC states that "acts of awareness and their contents exactly coincide in time" (p. 166). The Simple Conception allows the distinction between acts and contents to dissipate. Yet Dainton

wants to maintain PPC - "although I shall still refer to PPC, the latter principle should no longer be taken to imply the validity of the act-object model" (p. 166). It is difficult to understand what PPC could mean in this case.

The Simple Conception involves overlapping experiences or phases of experience. Experiences in the stream of consciousness are not to be individuated in terms of subjects (pp. 25, 220). Dainton suggests we individuate experiences by differences in intrinsic or exact phenomenal character (e.g., if one is of pain and the other is of smell), differences in their time of occurrence, and/or differences in their physical basis (p. 25). To stay with the phenomenology we can leave physical basis aside. We can also eliminate differences in time of occurrence, since we are trying to understand what overlapping experiences are, and during the overlap period there is no difference in time. That leaves exact phenomenal character as the criterion of individuation.

In this regard we run into another problem. If exact phenomenal character refers to "what the experience is like, exactly like, phenomenologically" (p. 23), this can change from moment to moment, and experiences might seem to be momentary. More importantly, phenomenal character seems to involve a holistic aspect of experience. Dainton writes: "If my visual field were in any way different, it would have a different phenomenal character. If my visual field had a different phenomenal character, my overall consciousness would also have a different character" (p. 24). This understanding of phenomenal character helps to individuate experiences, but it undermines our ability to speak of overlapping experiences. If e1, an ongoing experience, is suddenly overlapped by e2, then my overall consciousness would have a different character and it would not be a case of e2 overlapping with e1, but e1 being *replaced* by e2 (the effect of combining e1 and e2). That is, a new experience rather than two overlapping experiences would occur, because overlapping experiences cannot retain their individual phenomenal characters. When two experiences are in sync, that is, when they overlap, one sinks into the other and something new surfaces.<9>

Let me conclude by considering the phenomenological adequacy of the Simple solution to the problems of time-consciousness.<10>

There are two aspects of temporal experience that need to be explained: the flow of temporal passage and the temporal order of appearances. For Husserl the retentional-protentional structure of conscious acts explains our temporal experience - the fact that the flow of experience flows in a continuous fashion and that things appear in their proper sequential order. I suggested that we may still need retention and protention to solve the *problem of ongoing contents* in the overlap model. Dainton, however, cannot appeal to retentional-protentional structure since he pursues the Simple Conception and abandons the notion of conscious acts. Rather, he proposes to solve all problems by appealing to experiential content.

On Dainton's view, the flow of experience is no problem at all since experience is intrinsically organized as a flow. This is not primarily an ontological claim; it's a phenomenological claim. Consciousness just is a flow of experience because it appears to

be - and in phenomenology appearance is all that counts. Content is not momentary, it endures, and then it flows into the next content in a unidirectional fashion. My experience of the content flows in sync with the content, and there is no lack of coincidence between awareness and contents to worry about. Furthermore, the phenomenal content of experience has an intrinsic temporal pattern that presents itself as this unidirectional flow. Thus, the problem of temporal order is also easily resolved. In the overlap model, some element of content appears in two overlapping phases of experience. In the first phase it is sequentially related to other content in that phase which is not contained in the following phase (e.g., B follows A), and in the second phase it is related to content in the that phase which is not contained in the first one (e.g., B precedes C). These relational differences make all the difference needed for temporal order. Temporal order is a reflection of the relational properties of these contents (Dainton, pp. 173-77).

One begins to wonder why Broad and Husserl were so exercised. The way things seem to be is just the way they are. The flow of experience is explained by the flow of experience; the temporal order of experience is explained by the temporal order of overlapping experiences. The problem of time-consciousness, as it was understood by James, Broad, Stern, Husserl, and others, dissipates once the A-thesis is abandoned and the Simple Conception is adopted.

Yet, as I have tried to show, there are some problems with the overlap model that are left unresolved. Although logically and diagrammatically we might be able to make sense of an overlap model, if I try to find overlapping experiences phenomenologically, it seems just as problematic as trying to find reified retentions and protentions appearing in the flow. Dainton's criticism of Husserl seems to apply equally to his own analysis in this regard. Perhaps my defense of Husserl would work equally as a defense of Dainton: overlapping experiences are simply descriptive abstractions. In contrast to Husserl's description, however, according to which I can say that when I hear a piece of music my experience is that I seem to retain the sense of previous notes in the melody and anticipate what is to come next, I find it difficult to say that when I hear a piece of music the current note seems to overlap with previous and future notes. In the overlap model, for example, it's not clear why, in a sequence of auditory experiences (or phases of experience) a1- a2- a3-a4, the fact that experience a3 is just prior to a4, or that there is an overlap between a2- a3 and a3- a4, explains or describes anything about the phenomenal character of anticipating the continuing melody at any moment of the experience.

As Dainton works out his overlap version of PPC, his phenomenological account relies, at first, on the awareness-content model, the A-thesis. As I have pointed out, overlapping acts of awareness are phenomenologically suspect. One possibility is to think of this as overlapping content of which one is co-conscious - I hear the phone ring at the same time that I am looking at the computer screen. But overlapping content doesn't explain the temporality of experience. Even if we consider the notion of overlapping acts of awareness as a form of descriptive abstraction, represented in the diagram (fig. 1) for example, the question is then what happens to this notion in the Simple model. Consider a diagram of the Simple model (fig. 2).

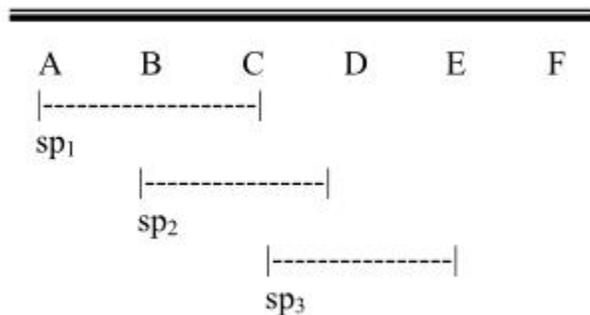


Figure 2.

**Simple model of time-consciousness.**

The overlapping acts of awareness seemingly sink into the overlapping specious presents (sp1 overlapping with sp2, etc.) of content. One needs to ask what work is being done by the notion of overlapping acts of awareness in the first place, if that work can be taken over by overlapping content. Furthermore, exactly what does a temporal overlapping of content or experience mean in the absence of awareness? Is it a real (*reell*) overlap or an intentional overlap? Or is it something different? If it is an intentional overlap, how can this be explained without noetic acts or the structural features of retention-protection? If it is not an intentional feature, and it depends on the real presence of overlapping content, then we are back where we started, with Broad. Or worse, since if experience is now simply running along the same line as the content, there is no good way to explain what exactly the overlap is. Unless these issues are resolved, the overlap model just won't float.

## Notes

<1>. Dainton does introduce Pöppel's analysis in Chapter 7, but only briefly. For more on the relation between the phenomenology of the specious present and the evidence from neuroscience, see Gallagher (1998).

<2>. Mundel (1954) defends Broad against this charge, maintaining that, for Broad, the duration of the specious present remains constant.

<3>. I'm not sure about this, however. Dainton lists sense data, along with phenomenal objects and qualia-patterns, as things that a phenomenologist might encounter (p. 19).

<4>. Miller goes further and is more specific. He cites Stern's rejection of "the dogma of the momentariness of a whole of consciousness" (LA1) and "the necessary isochronism

of its members" (LA2), which he calls "a rough formulation of ... *The Principle of Simultaneous Awareness*, or PSA" (1984, p. 165). According to Miller, Stern rejected the strong version of PSA for two reasons. He considered LA2 to be an "artificial" assumption, but a necessary component of the principle. Stern also rejected LA1 and introduced the notion of a *Praesenzzeit* - an extended act of awareness as more realistic. Miller then goes on to claim that although Husserl rejects LA2, he nonetheless maintained PSA. But this is not quite the weak version of PSA since Miller thinks that Husserl still maintained LA1 (and Dainton follows this reading). Miller writes: "Stern's main reason for rejecting PSA is that the latter involves the postulation of *instantaneous states of awareness* ('the dogma of the momentariness of consciousness') [LA1], and he maintained, it seems, that there are no such states of awareness. This objection, if sound, is as much an objection to Husserl's theory as it is to Brentano's" (1984, p. 165). But this is clearly not an objection to Husserl's theory, since Husserl, following Stern, rejected LA1. If anything, Husserl had difficulty freeing himself from LA2, although he always meant to do so.

<5>. In the phenomenological tradition there is a huge controversy over the status of hyletic data, with people like Sartre and Merleau-Ponty rejecting the very idea for different reasons. See Gallagher (1986) for more detail on this.

<6>. I appreciate Dainton's suggestion here. I have raised similar concerns (in Gallagher, 1998, pp. 64ff) and I have also made the same suggestion, that retentions, etc. may be theoretical constructs that attempt to answer the question: What must the structure of consciousness be like if it is to produce the kind of experience that we have? I did this in a paper that I presented to an audience that included Natalie Depraz and Francisco Varela. They raised convincing objections to this suggestion, and I have revised my view accordingly (see below).

<7>. He also suggests that it would be absurd "to doubt whether in the end, the experiences [*Erlebnisse*], which pass into the [reflective] glance, are not changed, precisely through that [glance] into something totally different" (1962, par. 77).

<8>. Since Dainton appeals to diagrams throughout his discussion of Broad and Husserl, and he doesn't raise objections to their attempt to diagram their accounts, I find it a bit disappointing that he doesn't offer a diagram of his own account. So I'll try to provide one (see fig. 1). At the start of his analysis, however, as I understand it, his diagram is identical to Broad's.

<9>. We could pursue this further by considering "phenomenal interdependence" and Dainton's final two chapters, but that would involve a much larger discussion. One might contend that there is a way to work out the logic of overlapping experiences, distinguishing sub-parts of total experiences and sorting through the complex kind of analysis Dainton performs in these later chapters. The results might show that there is no logical contradiction in this notion. What remains unclear, however, is the phenomenology of overlapping experiences. In this case we end up in a position similar

to the one Dainton criticizes in Husserl. To what extent have we reified consciousness, or to what extent have we substituted theory for phenomenological intuition?

[10](#). There are other interesting issues that one could pursue. Here are several examples. First, is Dainton's critique of the A-thesis adequate? I can think of versions of the A-thesis he does not consider in section 2.6 - e.g., versions that do not begin with what he calls the "common option" but nonetheless resemble the S1 A-theory, and that can successfully satisfy Dainton's objections. Second, if we abandon the A-thesis, and thereby abandon the notion of acts, how do we handle the individuation of what Husserl calls "act-characters" - that is, what one might call attitudinal distinctions between perceptual experiences, vs memory or imagination, judgment, belief, emotion, etc.? Third, how does the Simple Conception explain the phenomenal slowing or speeding up of our experience of time, mentioned by James and many others? Related to this is a question about the effect of content on temporal form, an issue pursued by Merleau-Ponty and others. Dainton, in a complex and extremely fascinating analysis of temporal modes of presentation, suggests that "the temporal context of an experience *does* impact on its [phenomenal] character, and so its identity" (p. 230). One could ask if this could go the other way: could the phenomenal character of content impact on the temporality of experience? Dainton points out that a change in a later experience (e.g., a substitution of e4 for e3) could impact on the phenomenal character of an earlier experience (e1) even if that later experience is not part of the specious present of the earlier one. But he then suggests "this result only arises when a particularly stringent mode of individuating experience is adopted" (p. 232). This implies that it's possible in theory but perhaps not often (if ever) encountered in experience. There are, however, actual empirical-phenomenological studies that show that phenomenal character and experienced temporal order can vary as an effect of variation in phenomenal character. For example, if in a series of auditory tones ABCDEF, the phenomenal qualities of later auditory tones, e.g., E and F, are changed from a higher to a lower specific frequency, the tones that precede E and F, e.g., CD, although objectively unchanged, may be perceived in a different temporal order, e.g., ABDCEF, or may become phenomenally indistinguishable, depending on the change in frequency (see Bregman and Rudnick, 1975).

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