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Toward a Husserlian Foundation of Aesthetics: On Imagination, Phantasy, and Image Consciousness in the 1904/1905 Lectures

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ABSTRACT: While it is true that Husserl did not write systematically about aesthetics, it is not only possible and legitimate but also necessary to inquire how a Husserlian aesthetic consciousness could be understood. A closer consideration of the aesthetics that can be gleaned from the passages in which Husserl explicitly refers to artistic experiences shows a limitation of the aesthetic field to figurative art. To widen and enrich the aesthetic field beyond the experiences that such an aesthetics would account for, a shift of perspective is required. But to allow this change without leaving Husserl's phenomenology, I consider in this article the outcome of analyzing this field of experiences from phantasy's perspective instead of that of image consciousness.

KEYWORDS: imagination, phantasy, image consciousness, aesthetics, Husserl

> Monotheism of reason & heart, polytheism of imagination and art:
> That is what we need!
> —"THE OLDEST SYSTEMATIC PROGRAMME OF GERMAN
> IDEALISM"

Even today aesthetics is not considered among Edmund Husserl's main interests. It is true, however, that there are many other phenomenological approaches to aesthetics among his "heretic" disciples, as Ricoeur (1986, 156) calls them. I am thinking here especially of Sartre's *L'Imagination* (1936) and *L'imaginaire* (1940), Roman Ingarden's *Untersuchungen zur Ontologie der Kunst* (1962) and *Das literarische Kunstwerk* (1931), and Mikel Dufrenne's *Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique* (1953). Nevertheless, it may be objected that in regard to Husserl's work in aesthetics, research has been, at times, limited or simplified. Though interest in phantasy and imagination has increased in the past few years, most of the attention is still directed toward the role of eidetic variation in knowledge and, mainly, toward Husserl's descriptions of experiences of pictorial works of art—such as the famous passage of *Ideas I* in which Dürer's engraving is mentioned. So, even in this analysis, aesthetic consciousness seems not to be the main concern.

Thus, this article is motivated by the idea that it is not possible that a philosophy that inquires, above all, about the relationship between consciousness and the world would have omitted the question of aesthetic experience. Although Husserl's references to art and aesthetics do not allow us, quantitatively, to reverse the idea that aesthetics is not to be found among his main interests, qualitatively his philosophy motivates this article's main inquiry: How can a phenomenology of aesthetic consciousness be founded from a Husserlian point of view? As Husserl writes in his article on "phenomenology" for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*: with phenomenology "all rational problems, and thus also those that traditionally are in some special sense . . . philosophically significant . . . are first able to obtain their genuine formulation and feasible means for their solution" (Hua IX, 299). I take this to mean that a phenomenological foundation of aesthetics not only is feasible but may even be interpreted as a requirement of the system itself. Even if this question does not appear explicitly, it would be faithful to Husserl's work to pose the question in order to enable a systematic response—a task that may exceed the purposes of the present work.

Having said that, the next section presents some nuclear aspects of what I would like to call *Husserl's phenomenology of aesthetic consciousness* by focusing on volume XXIII of *Husserliana*, which is dedicated to the experiences of phantasy, image consciousness, and memory. I will show why the image consciousness heuristic model is too limited to account for aesthetic experiences, and I will argue, in contrast, that another heuristic model, that

of phantasy, appears more appropriate to account for more complex and diverse aesthetic phenomena.

1. The Aesthetic Consciousness According to Husserl

There are three possible directions in which to start looking for a Husserlian aesthetic: (1) One can inquire about the work of art, which would lead to an *ontological* approach; (2) one could take the artist-genius-creator's point of view, resulting in a *psychological* approach to the subject; or (3) one could address the receiver or spectator, to get a phenomenology of aesthetic *experience*. For several reasons this third direction promises to be a better starting point. On the one hand, it is more faithful to the sense that the discipline of aesthetics had during its rise with Baumgarten and with Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, that is, as a branch of gnoseology. On the other hand, to favor the spectator's approach to the aesthetic problem means also to be faithful to the key issue of Husserl's philosophy, which is to say, the problem of the correlation between consciousness and the world.[1] While an ontology of the artwork would lead us to an *objectification* of the problem, and a psychology of artistic creation would only give us a *subjective* answer to the problem, an inquiry into reception, I believe, incorporates both dimensions.

If we take phenomenology to be our method, we should take *imagination* to be our subject. Since imagination is usually considered to play a main part in the aesthetic field, it is reasonable to claim that it is so in Husserl's analysis as well. But, then, I have to ask which of the experiences studied by Husserl corresponds to the historical aesthetic concept of "imagination": Is it image consciousness (*Bildbewusstsein*) or phantasy (*Phantasie*)? Or is it both image consciousness and phantasy as two modes of one and the same imagination (*Imagination* or *Einbildungskraft*)?

2. Imagination, Image Consciousness, and Phantasy in Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology

It is not clear how to determine which kind of consciousness of those studied by Husserl best corresponds to the imagination concept, because Husserl, too, is an heir to a common Western oversight. This is the conflation of the concepts of "imagination" and "phantasy." But it should be

remembered that from an etymological standpoint, the word *imagination* seems to express an almost purely visual sense, since it contains the root *imago*—that is, image. In comparison, the Greek word φαντασία, from which the Latin words *phantasia* and *imaginatio* come, refers not only to visual appearances but also to appearances that differ from perceptive senses, such as mystic or oneiric experiences.[2]

However, in *Ideas I* imagination and phantasy are decidedly distinct. On the one hand, phantasy is considered a simple presentification, an inactual form of consciousness, a form that gives the object itself, though not in the flesh. On the other hand, image consciousness is considered a *complex* type of presentification, giving its objects in a mediate way, by similarity, as in pictures, statues, or photographs. Now, is the aesthetic experience a case of phantasy or a case of image consciousness?

If we look at §70 of *Ideas I*, we find hints that suggest that art belongs in the domain of phantasy. The most famous of these passages concludes that thanks to the freedom of phantasy, "if one is fond of paradoxical phrases, one can actually say . . . in strict truth, that *'feigning'* [*Fiktion*] *makes up the vital element of phenomenology as of every other eidetic science*" (Hua III/1, 160). But the paradox is that the example of aesthetic experience given by Husserl in §111 is that of Dürer's engraving *The Knight, Death, and the Devil*. With this example, Husserl shows how image consciousness works, not phantasy (Hua III/1, 260–62).

3. Aesthetic Consciousness in the Prototranscendental 1904/1905 Lectures

It is to be expected that an inquiry into the differences between image consciousness and phantasy will enable us to retrace where the crystallization of aesthetics as a case of image consciousness began. In this respect, volume XXIII of *Husserliana*, entitled *Phantasie, Bildbewusstsein, Erinnerung. Zur Phänomenologie der Anschaulichen Vergegenwärtigungen. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1898–1925)*, is of great relevance, especially its first text, *Phantasie und Bildbewusstsein*. This corresponds to the third part of the lectures, *Über die Hauptstücke aus der Phänomenologie und der Erkenntnistheorie*, of which the most famous part is the fourth and last one: *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*.[3]

Thereupon, in this third part of the 1904/5 lectures, *Phantasie und Bildbewusstsein*, Husserl has two main aims. The first is to establish the differences between perception and everything that is not perception: "We have been occupying ourselves up to this point with the phenomenology of perception. We cannot attempt to carry out a phenomenology of perception in a fully adequate way and complete it on its own account without taking into consideration the phenomena closely related to perception. By taking these phenomena into consideration in the analyses to which we now turn, what we have learned thus far will be freshly illuminated, supplemented, and enriched. Our immediate aim is the phenomenology of *phantasy*" (Hua XXIII, 1). The second goal is to differentiate between types of presentifications. As a result, by the end of the lectures on phantasy and image consciousness, we find an outline of the experience scheme of *Ideas I*.

If we stay with the first aim, that is, to differentiate perception from nonperceptive consciousness, then the so-called *unitary* or *synthetic* point of view of imagination prevails (chapters 1 to 4 of the lectures). This is because, in contrast with perception, both image consciousness and phantasy represent or bring to presence something that is *not* present to the eyes or in the flesh. But as the differences between phantasy and image consciousness become more and more established—that is, when Husserl goes on to develop the second goal—these two modes of consciousness are revealed to be irreducible to one another. Thus, at the end, the *discriminative* point of view of imagination prevails (chapters 4 to 9 of the lectures).

The first interpretation of how the relation among phantasy, image consciousness, and imagination should be understood—the *synthetic* interpretation, as Dubosson (2004) calls it—is held, for instance, by Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Ricoeur, and Maria Manuela Saraiva, all of whom did not have access to the lectures taken into consideration here.[4] But the other interpretation, the *discriminative* one, is relevant because, contrary to the idea that it appears for the first time in *Ideas I*, Husserl already considers image consciousness and phantasy to be irreducible to one another in these *pre*- or *proto*transcendental lectures.[5]

Having said that, we can no longer understand aesthetic consciousness as linked to imagination in general. We must then ask: Does the aesthetic inquiry belong in the field of image consciousness or to phantasy's field? And regardless of Husserl's answer, what would be the advantages and disadvantages of thinking aesthetics from each perspective? To answer

these questions, I will first summarize the main features of both types of consciousness in question, as Husserl describes them.

4. Differences Between Image Consciousness and Phantasy and Their Consequences for Aesthetics

Until around 1909 Husserl had two models to account for the consti-
tution of experience: the *Bildtheorie* and the *Repräsentationstheorie*. The
Bildtheorie (or image theory) ended up being discarded because of the prej-
udice of presence, as Brough argues in his introduction to volume XXIII of
Husserliana; such prejudice refers to the idea that for an image to become
conscious, it has to have some sort of existence or reality *in* the mind or
outside of it, an idea that Husserl considers an inadmissible psychological
prejudice. The second, the Schematic theory or the theory of representa-
tion, was also discarded around 1909 for the analyses of presentifications,
but Husserl keeps it to account for presentation in *Ideas I*, where it appears
as the difference between *hýle* and *morphé*. However, by the time of the win-
ter semester of 1904/5, Husserl still describes types of consciousness with
the Schematic theory, which considers objectifying acts in general as acts of
apprehension or interpretative acts. Therefore, it must be asked how image
consciousness and phantasy differ from each other from this theory's point
of view. The well-known and aforementioned answer is that phantasy rep-
resents *immediately* and image consciousness achieves representation in a
mediate way, that is, through a representative image of the represented or
intended subject. But this is something Husserl came up with at the end
of these lectures after several attempts—related to the primacy of each of
the two main goals mentioned above—to classify these presentifications
according to their essential phenomenological features.

    Thus, the six main features of image consciousness that Husserl finds
may be summarized as follows. First, image consciousness is an act with
a *three-dimensional structure*, constituted by three "overlapping" acts and/
or images: a physical image (the perceptive materiality), an image object
(the image that arises), and an image subject (the intended or represented
subject in the image).[6] Second, *image consciousness is dependent upon per-
ception and physical reality*. This is because, to get an image, I need to
"borrow" perception's sensuous content and to reinterpret that content as
something else, that is, as the absent subject I am bringing to a new kind

of presence (the kind of presence of an image). So, to reapprehend that sensuous content, it is necessary (and, then, involuntary and spontaneous) to *neutralize* the first act, that is, to *neutralize* the perception from which the content is being taken. But, though neutralized, this remains as the physical materiality of the work of art, to which I can turn my attention: the suspension of silver halides on gelatin in a photograph, the canvas of a painting, the marble of a statue, and so on. And this, too, explains why Husserl sometimes refers to image consciousness as *physical imagination*. Consequently, third, image consciousness is an act with a *figurative function*: it *must* point toward something else that is not present, that is, the image subject. Fourth, this figurative function is achieved by means of an *immanent similarity* among the three different dimensions involved (unlike *symbolic* consciousness, which points to a transcendent direction, as in the case of writing or that of a flag that represents a country). Husserl gives the example of a child's photograph, whose image "on the whole does indeed resemble the child," but "it is not the child itself, but his photographic *image*" (Hua XXIII, 20).

But the main key to understanding image consciousness is its necessary *failure* (Hua XXIII, 20), for if representation were perfect and absolute, then we would not be able to distinguish the photographed child from the child in the photograph. On the contrary, if representation did not have any similarity with what is represented, then we would not reach a clear consciousness of an image either. It is then a question of fine balance: On the one hand, an absolute coincidence would fall into illusion—sometimes even hallucination—as in the wax figurines or the mannequin mentioned by Husserl (Hua XXIII, §19) or as is the case in Bioy Casare's *Morel's Invention*.[7] On the other hand, if the semblance were too weak, then we would not have enough sensuous elements for any image apprehension to succeed, as pointed out by Sartre in *L'imaginaire* (1948) regarding a too-lightly drawn pencil portrait that barely suggests similarity with what it represents. Husserl's description of the act of image consciousness corresponds, then, to a usual phenomenological practice: what is described is the purest act of a kind, but there are still some gradual, possible marginal experiences between the core act of a kind of consciousness and its fading into other kinds of acts. Fifth, that is why, in order to represent what the image object is pointing at, image consciousness needs to *conflict* with the actual present, that is, I must be aware that what is represented is not what I have physically in front of me. Furthermore,

this conflict should be understood not only in a spatial way but also as a *temporal* conflict:

> The image object, however, . . . bears within itself the characteristic of *unreality, of conflict with the actual present*. . . . So we have appearance here, sensuous intuition and objectification, but in conflict with an experienced present. We have the appearance of a not now in the *now*. "*In* the now," insofar as the image object appears in the midst of perceptual reality and claims, as it were, to have no objective reality in its midst. *"In the now"* also insofar as the image-apprehending is something temporally now. Yet, on the other hand, a *"not now"* insofar as the conflict makes the image object into a *nullity* that does indeed appear but is nothing, and that may serve only to *exhibit* something existing. (Hua XXIII, 51)

So finally, sixth, the *ontological status* of the image object is, as Husserl points out, a *quasi* existence, a *non*existence, simply *nothing*: "[An] image object truly does not exist, which means not only that it has no existence outside my consciousness, but also that it has no existence inside my consciousness; it has no existence at all" (Hua XXIII, 23).

In contrast, phantasy is simple. It does not depend on a physical motivation, and that is why this kind of presentification's main features are *freedom*, *independence*, a certain *arbitrariness*, and, thus, also *creativity*. These features make phantasy an act of great importance not specifically for aesthetics, according to Husserl, but for eidetic phenomenology, that is, for the Imaginative variation (which is a process actually led by *Phantasie*).

Besides its independence from perception, phantasy is distinguished from both image consciousness and perception in that its underlying sensuous materiality is of a different kind: it is not *sensation* but *phantasm*. Against Brentano, Husserl claims that, in addition to the differences between types of acts, the differences at the content level must be kept in the analysis in spite of how complex, challenging, and disappointing such research may be.[8] Hence, one must pay special attention when dealing with phantasy. Its freedom very quickly turns phantasy into an ungraspable phenomenon that slips away from even the sharpest phenomenological regard. But the difficulties of this theory (reminiscent of Kant's first *Critique*) in accounting for presentifications have less to do with the

apprehension acts than with the contents that are being interpreted. This is because it is not clear whether the nonactual feature of presentifications should come out of the act itself—if the act is present, where does it get a nonpresent power?—or whether it should belong to the content itself. The latter possibility gave Husserl further trouble, since considering presentification contents as sensuous *phantasmata* again raises the difficult question of where these *phantasmata* get their nonactual feature from. This is probably one of the main reasons why Husserl abandoned the Schematic theory.

5. Limits and Insufficiencies of Husserlian Aesthetic Consciousness as a Case of Immanent Physical Imagination

In §17 of *Phantasie und Bildbewusstsein*, aesthetic consciousness, aesthetic contemplation, and aesthetic creation are explicitly considered from the perspective of the image consciousness heuristic model. More specifically, aesthetic consciousness is considered as a case of *immanent physical imagination*, which is one way of referring to image consciousness as opposed to the transcendent physical imagination (symbolic consciousness): "Only the consciousness that belongs to the immanent imagination plays a role in the aesthetic contemplation of an image" (Hua XXIII, 39).

However, it cannot be said that there is absolute identity between immanent image consciousness and aesthetic consciousness. We may say that all aesthetic consciousness is, or involves, image consciousness, but not all image consciousness implies an aesthetic experience. First, this is because image consciousness, experienced as aesthetic contemplation of a picture, must involve a *change in attitude*—a *shift of attention*—from the subject represented to the image object that represents the intended subject. Second, image consciousness and aesthetic consciousness should not be equated, because aesthetic contemplation also involves *pleasure*, which is not a condition for all image consciousness to occur. In appendix VI to §17 of *Phantasie und Bildbewusstsein*, we can find a fine description of these two aesthetic conditions: pleasure and a particular disinterested attitude that Husserl seems to assume for aesthetics. An affinity with Kant's aesthetics cannot be overlooked in this passage, even if researchers seem to agree that Husserl did not read

Kant's *Critique of Judgment*: "In the aesthetic attitude . . . I am not in a theoretical attitude in which I am directed toward 'being' (true being), perhaps in order to describe it, or even, in a practical attitude, to transform it, to claim it as my own, to desire it, to take delight in it as something actual. The pleasure here [in the aesthetic attitude] leaves existence out of play and is essentially determined by the modes of appearance" (Hua XXIII, 168 n. 1).

If we believe that Husserl's aesthetics must be understood in such a way that it is restricted to his explicit examples, then we must assume that Husserl takes art to be almost exclusively figurative, in the sense that images arising in contemplation must always point to something beyond themselves, something real in some way, something meaningful. This may be due to various reasons that are not entirely relevant here (his disinterest in aesthetics and an inattentive assumption of the image-rooted word for "fine arts" in German, *Bildendekunst*, may be some of these reasons). Still, it is problematic if we can only deduce a figurative aesthetic from the image consciousness model; this would suggest that art can only be visual and mimetic—a kind of art that, through imitation, becomes merely technical and loses the possibility to be as creative and productive as it can. For what should be said of music, live performances, abstract art, indefinite forms, or even experiences that are not immediately related to outer *stimuli*? Such an aesthetic would be restrictive not only from the receiver's point of view but for creation as well.[9] Hence, while Husserl's idea of art appears to be a classic, idealistic, Platonic one, I believe that it is possible to extend the sphere of aesthetic experiences in two main directions drawing from Husserl's work: first, toward experiences that not only are visual but draw from the other senses as well and, second, toward experiences not directly attached to or dependent upon perception, such as ecstatic, oneiric, dreamlike, and phantasmatic experiences[10]—that is, toward experiences that reflect the other meanings of φαντασία left aside by the Latin tradition and thereafter.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that it is possible to achieve the enrichment and widening of the aesthetic field, sought above, and thus a more appropriate foundation of aesthetics, by taking up phantasy's heuristic

model. Moreover, image consciousness may be understood as a complex kind of consciousness constituted by two interwoven apprehensions: one of perception and another of phantasy. In this case, phantasy's freedom would be its main contribution to aesthetics. As such, it not only would be essential to image consciousness experiences but would allow other experiences to arise regardless of whether a perceptive apprehension has taken place. Nevertheless, further consideration must be given to the idea that phantasy's freedom may simultaneously be the *poison* due to which Husserl did not consider this heuristic model in the first place. It is even possible that Husserl favored the model of image consciousness because it provides more *evident* and *clear* cases for phenomenological reflective analysis—in contrast to those resulting from the extremely fluctuating and highly unstable phantasy. In fact, Husserl discovered this fluctuating, vague, constantly changing feature as early as 1898, when he referred to this feature of phantasy as *Proteusartig*.[11] But this marginal characteristic of phantasy—upon which, I believe, an aesthetic could begin to be founded— should not deter us from the phenomenological task of building a richer and broader aesthetic, one that may even encompass image consciousness and other presentifications. Most of all, this calls for a new field of research: the field of the temporal constitution of experience in general and of marginal experiences in particular.

NOTES

1. See Walton 1993.

2. See Marcos and Díaz 2009.

3. This is not the place to develop the relationship between the different parts of these lectures and the fact that the analysis of phantasy concludes with one of Husserl's most serious remarks on the temporality of consciousness, but I find this topic of great interest, and it is one of the key points of my present research.

4. Saraiva suggests that there is a generic imagination (*Bildvorstellung* or *Imagination*) that should be divided into two subtypes according to the classic distinction between mental and physical images. Thus, she (1970, 21–22) argues that Husserl was the first to absorb these two species of images.

5. In his work *L'imagination légitimée*, Dubosson argues that the distinction of imagination into two forms, *Phantasie* and *Bildbewusstsein*, is what has *progressively legitimized* Imagination—a legitimacy that crystallizes in *Ideas I*. That means that these lectures serve as a precedent for imagination rising as the "canonical way of intentional consciousness," which, for Dubosson (2004, 10), means to be

objectifying, a title that describes only three kinds of acts: perception, imagination, and meaning.

   6. See Hua XXIII, §9.

   7. "Reality and semblance playing hide-and-seek with each other, as it were—is the most extreme antithesis to aesthetic pleasure" (Hua XXIII, 44).

   8. See Hua XXIII, §§46–48.

   9. We can verify these limitations. For example, in appendix IX to §17, §25, and chapter 6 of *Phantasie und Bildbewusstsein,* in order to maintain the validity of the image consciousness model for aesthetics, Husserl argues that in a Beethoven sonata there would be an original Beethoven sonata that serves as the ideal against which the listener compares particular performances. Different interpretations by different musicians should, then, be taken only as degraded copies of the sonata meant by Beethoven (although it is not clear how we have access to this ideal).

   10. To account for the latter, a phenomenology of pleasure in general, and a phenomenology of aesthetic pleasure in particular, should be elaborated.

   11. See Hua XXIII, §29.

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