

Fantasy as an Attitude

On the Concept of “Perceptual Fantasy” in Edmund Husserl’s Phenomenology of Image-Consciousness

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As philosophers and art historians have recognized, ‘image’ is a broad concept that assembles many different objects, on different grounds, and by no common recognizable property. ‘Image’ could be, for instance, a mental representation of a fictional character, a photograph of my best friend, or an abstract expressionist painting. The notion is also applied to people (‘she is the image of her mother’), a popular opinion (‘the negative image of the USA in Latin America’), or a figure of speech. And once differences among languages are considered, the concept appears to be even more fluid (see Mitchell 1984).

In this paper, I propose to consider only figurative pictures, such as paintings or photographs.¹ Assuming a phenomenological perspective, the objective will not be that of describing the technical procedures, the historical context or the aesthetic value of pictures. It is to describe how we experience them, from a transcendental perspective. I use the Husserlian concept of “image-consciousness” (*Bildbewusstsein*) to refer exclusively to the experience one has in front of figurative pictures, namely objects that

1 To restrict myself to the Husserlian perspective, I will exclude digital versions of pictures and photographs.

exist in front of us, but nevertheless put us in a perceptual relationship with something else.

In the first section of the paper, I introduce the problem of the dual character of pictures. I argue that it represents a main difficulty for image theories, since it brings together a perceptual and an imaginary aspect. In the second section, I turn to Edmund Husserl to deepen the kind of experience that makes this dual character possible. There, image-consciousness is described as a threefold intentionality. Finally, in the third section, I propose that fantasy can be understood as an attitude, a mode of performing certain experiences. From this perspective, it is possible to postulate a “perceptual fantasy” without falling into a contradiction in terms. Thus, it becomes possible to account for the dual character of pictures, by acknowledging image-consciousness as a threefold perceptual fantasy.

The Dual Character of Pictures

Let me use a broad provisory claim, inspired by the philosophical tradition, as a starting point: fantasy or imagination is the faculty, kind of experience, or mode of experiencing that puts someone in relation to something which is not actually there. Under this rough definition, the scope of fantasy seems to be immense. A past event is not there anymore when we recollect it in our memory. Fictional worlds of literary works are not actually there waiting for us to explore them either, even when we think of them as possibilities (as when we ponder alternatives to a present, past or future situation). The correlate of visually-assisted fantasies, such as paintings or theater plays, are also objects which are not actually there: the animals depicted in caves by our ancestors are (and were) not in the caves, and Antigone is not actually in the theater, at least not in the same way that the actress playing her is.

The broadness of this preliminary definition calls for many restrictions. However, showing a certain commonality among these different experiences has also some advantages. On the one hand, it gives us a clue about the origin of some confusions, like considering that every conscious act of something that is not actually there, such as imagining and remembering,

must involve “mental images” as intermediaries.² On the other hand, it shows to what extent image-consciousness can be considered to be a specific kind of fantasy (in an initial manner and without claiming anything yet about the structure of this experience). In this paper, I propose to follow the second path.

One of the most remarkable traits of pictures is their dual character. From a certain point of view, a picture is a perceptual object, with the characteristics that a perceptual thing entails. It appears in a determinate space and time, surrounded by other perceptual things that may or may not causally affect it. Given the appropriate conditions, it is perceivable by any person in front of it, even by more than one at the same time. In this sense, Édouard Manet’s *The Races at Longchamp* (1866) is an oil on canvas painting of 44.0 cm x 84.2 cm, to be found now in the Art Institute of Chicago. I shall refer to a ‘perceptual aspect’ of the picture, grouping these and similar characteristics.

The Races at Longchamp is not a simple perceptual object. Its peculiar way of representation allows us to see something else in it, the ending of a horse race on the outskirts of Paris in the 19th century. We are aware that, contrary to the picture, the Longchamp Racecourse is not in the Art Institute of Chicago. Keeping in mind my preliminary definition of fantasy or imagination, I shall use the term “imaginary aspect” of the picture to express this attribute.

Trying to grasp the kind of mediation that makes this dual character possible, one could compare pictures with windows.³ Under this perspective, the beholder of *The Races at Longchamp* has an experience similar to that of looking through a window at the horses and jockeys running towards her. However, this metaphor has at least two problems. For one, the analogy between windows and pictures depends strongly on the so-called naturalistic resemblance supported by geometrical perspective, an idea rebutted in the sixties by Nelson Goodman (1968). Secondly, this metaphor ignores the most relevant feature of the dual character of pictures: the interruption of the regular perceptual horizon.

2 Regarding the ambiguities behind this traditional idea, see Sartre’s critique of the “illusion of immanence” (Sartre 1940: 14–18).

3 Leon Battista Alberti was the first to theorize this description in his *De Pictura* in 1435.

A regular perception of a horse race drives us to expect additional complementary experiences. Even when we restrict ourselves to the static visual experience, artificially setting aside other fields of sensation as well as our expectations regarding time, the experience of seeing the race in the picture is abnormal. Experience has taught us that a regular perceptual volumetric object has other sides that can be seen by means of a variation in our perspective or the position of the object. This is not the case when we face *The Races at Longchamp*. No matter how I move, the horses do not have a back or lateral side. If I approach the painting, I might be able to observe the paintbrush technique in detail (among other characteristics of its perceptual aspect) but the blurriness of the grandstands will not diminish. By standing closer to the right side of the painting, I will not gain a full sight of the woman in blue dress in the left-hand corner of the picture, as would be possible if I were to be in front of a window. There is no communication between the depicted event and the regular perceptual world. This means that were we able to jump through a painting the same way we can jump through a window, then it would be more adequate to think of it as a sci-fi portal to another dimension, for there is no continuity between our world and what is depicted.

Thus, it might be more appropriate to claim that in front of *The Races at Longchamp*, it is as if we are in front of the horses, but merely *as if*. It is similar to daydreaming about being somewhere else: we can 'see' something without that something actually being there. Because of this, some authors emphasize the imaginary aspect of image-consciousness (Gombrich 1961; Walton 1990). According to them, we see the colorful stained fabric and we imagine a horse race. This perspective raises some difficult questions regarding the meaning of imagination or fantasy in this specific case (does the concept merely make explicit the absence of the object depicted?) and its relationship with perception (how can it still be a kind of seeing? Is it an additional experience attached to the experience of seeing?). And, more importantly, it seems to be describing another kind of experience.

There are several experiences that we could categorize as products of imagination that are fundamentally different from image-consciousness. For instance, I could pause my work at the library and imagine that I am taking a sunbath by the Caribbean Sea. The imaginary change of space is so radical and independent of my actual sensations that it is easier to perform

if I close my eyes and stop writing. It is evident that perception does not have the same role as in the case of looking at pictures. In this sense, imagining to be in the racecourse is a different experience from seeing the horse race in Manet's painting.

What if, to enrich my imagination about the Caribbean Sea, I lie on the floor? What changes in the experience? As a broomstick for a hobbyhorse, lying on the floor seems to be an aid to the imagination. It is not the center of my experience, nor the object of my attention. If I focus excessively on the coldness and hardness of the floor, it will be difficult to imagine the warm sand. Therefore, lying on the floor seems to be merely a physical assistance, different from seeing the oil on canvas painting. This example can tell us something about the way our fantasies are embodied, but does not seem to keep up with the essence of image-consciousness either. Even when we are deeply immersed in a picture, we do not lose sight of its perceptual traits. On the contrary, perceiving them seems to be a condition for becoming immersed in the world of the picture.

Given these problems of the approaches that emphasize the imaginary aspect of image-consciousness, other theories pay attention to the perceptual aspect of looking at pictures, while keeping some of the duality that it entails. Richard Wollheim, for example, defends the notion of *seeing-in*. He argues that in order to experience a pictorial representation, there has to be visual awareness of the depicted object or event as the conclusion of a two-fold experience. According to Wollheim, looking at a picture entails both seeing the depiction or configuration on the surface and visually recognizing the depicted object or event. These are not two simultaneous or successive experiences, but two aspects of one and the same experience (Wollheim 1980).⁴

Despite its merit of acknowledging the perceptual aspect of image-consciousness, there is something unsatisfying with Wollheim's account. His theory does not fully explain the difference between what is "perceived" in the case of image-consciousness and what is perceived in regular experience. Both are different not only regarding the structure of aware-

4 In the first edition of *Art and its Objects* Wollheim argued that the access to the represented object was by means of a *seeing-as* experience, a regular perception, according to his Wittgensteinian reading. For the second edition, in 1980, he amended this theory and developed an explanation in terms of *seeing-in*.

ness (in Wollheim's terms, the former is twofold, and the latter is single-fold) but also in what Edmund Husserl calls "quality" or "positing" (*Setzung*) of the experience (Husserl 1970: 159–162). In other words, it is intuitive to claim that the object of image-consciousness has a sort of imaginary or fantastic character, and twofoldness is not enough to account for it. The Husserlian concept of perceptual fantasy (*perzeptive Phantasie*) presents us with an alternative to solve this apparent dilemma (e.g. Husserl 2005: 606–607), which originates both in an inaccurate description of image-consciousness and in an imperfect account of fantasy.

Image-Consciousness as a threefold seeing in

The phenomenological principle of correlation between experiences and their objects, and the subsequent attempt to describe objects as they are experienced (Husserl 1983: §§86 and 153; Husserl 1960: §41), constitute a methodological advantage for the cases of fantasy and image-consciousness. On the one hand, the research about images is especially sensitive to this correlation. As many scholars in the interdisciplinary field of Visual Studies have argued, the variety of images renders sterile the attempt to identify general objective properties that would appertain to every image as such (see García Varas 2011; Wiesing 2010). Instead of this, a detailed description of how images are experienced and produced is needed. The phenomenology of image-consciousness is sensitive to the first of these concerns.

On the other hand, it would be unfruitful to engage in an investigation, the result of which is already presupposed in its ontological assumptions. For it is generally the case that ontologies are set up from natural sciences or written languages; they do not suit fantasy and image experiences or subject them to essentially different experiences. Phenomenology does not take a traditional subject vs. object metaphysical stance, which frequently leads to realistic or idealistic ontologies in their conventional variants. Since its commencement, phenomenology has recognized the role of consciousness in the appearance of a meaningful object, therefore considering that subject and object "are always already intertwined" (Zahavi 2016: 293). On methodological grounds, it proposes to postpone the discussion about ontology. Husserl argues that only the transcendental clarification of

the nature of experience (i.e., how experience is possible) lets us gain the field of metaphysics (i.e., what is being) (see Husserl 1983: §149). Of course, given the immensity of such a program, it is developed in different layers that get feedback from each other (Steinbock 1995: 1–15).

The first achievement of the Husserlian theory of imagination was the distinction drawn between image-consciousness and other kinds of representation (*Vorstellung*).⁵ A long tradition in philosophy assumed that mental images were mental objects by means of which a representation could reach its perceived, remembered, or imagined object. This view received a new impetus during the 19th century in Vienna, in the context of a discussion about representations of non-existing objects.⁶ Broadly speaking, the argument states that contradictory objects such as “golden mountain” or “round square” could be represented only because *every* representation is performed by means of an immanent content, which functions as the ‘representant’ of the intended⁷ (external) object. This immanent content “represents” things as an image does, “in a sense similar to that in which the picture is the copy of the landscape” (Twardowski 1977: 16). Thus, representations like “round square” are only composed of the image-like mental content, since objects bearing contradictory properties could not exist (Twardowski 1977: 22–26).

Edmund Husserl got rid of this presumption of the psychology of his time, after identifying what image-consciousness is like, and why it is inconsistent to generalize it to every form of representation (*Vorstellung*).⁸ In

5 To avoid confusion between representation (*Vorstellung*), presentation (*Gegenwärtigung*), re-presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung*) and representation (*Repräsentation*), I will keep the German term next to its translation.

6 The origin of the Viennese debate is a problem stated by the philosopher Bernard Bolzano (2014: 220–222. See also Rollinger 1999: 139–153).

7 In this essay, “intended” qualifies any object of intentional experiences or representations (*Vorstellungen*). It is important not to reduce this technical use to the specific experiences dependent on willful purposes.

8 It is important to notice that Husserl addressed these questions differently during the years between 1894 (when his studies on Twardowsky’s theory of intentionality motivated his first analyses of image-consciousness) and 1938. His opinions in some relevant matters evolved, as well as some of the broader frameworks that enclosed his ideas about fantasy. Most of what I claim in this paper about image-consciousness remained fundamentally the same. However, there was an important displacement of the early concept of ‘conflict’

Husserl's words, the generalization of image-consciousness to any kind of representation,

overlooks that the phantasy content must first become the representative image of something, and that this pointing-beyond-itself of the image, which is what first makes it an image and what differentiates it from the mere content that we take intuitively as it is, is something additional which must essentially be noted (Husserl 1999: 253).

The core of Husserl's argument consists of considering that being an image is not a real property of a certain object, but a kind of relationship between consciousness and its object. This experience is founded or dependent on intentionality; therefore, it cannot be the explanans of representation (*Vorstellung*) in general, at risk of falling into an infinite regress. In Husserl's words: "A painting only is an image for an image-constituting consciousness, whose imaginative apperception, basing itself on a percept, first gives to its primary, perceptually apparent object the status and meaning of an image" (Husserl 1970: 125–126; translation modified).

Regardless of resemblance, what determines an image as such is how someone is able to perceive an object, and by means of this perception, refer to another. Image-consciousness is not a simple representation (*Vorstellung*), but a mediated one. Thus, for Husserl, image-consciousness is a pictorial re-presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of something, an image-subject, *by* means of something else, an image-object. The way something is apprehended—this kind of intentionality—and not some specific sensible property, is what makes that thing an image. This requires further elaboration.

Previously, I claimed that the inscription of the image in the perceptual world, its perceptual aspect, is what makes image-consciousness a unique type of fantasy. This means that every picture is a real physical object (the canvas, wall, or photographic paper), which functions as a surface where a configuration appears. We could be aware of that physical object only, and perceive it, in the same way that we perceive other things. As a matter of fact, we do so in specific circumstances, for example, when we collect our

(*Widerstreit*). For some of the details of this process and its implications, see Ferencz-Flatz (2016: 36–43).

posters or paintings to wrap them carefully before moving to another apartment. In this case, the way we handle the pictures is indifferent to the configurations appearing on them; and precisely because of that, we do not have images in front of us. Image-consciousness takes place only while being aware of the depiction or configuration on the surface, what Husserl called the “image-object.”

In this sense, as Husserl noticed, the concept of image is ambiguous. It can mean the picture, as a common, physical thing, or the image-object, the configuration or depiction as it appears. The latter is

the appearing object that is the representant [*Repräsentant*] for the image subject. For example, there lies before us a photograph exhibiting a child. How does it do this? Well, primarily by sketching an image that on the whole does indeed resemble the child but deviates from it markedly in appearing size, coloring, and so on. Of course, this miniature child appearing here in disagreeably grayish-violet coloring is not the child that is meant, not the exhibited child. It is not the child itself but its photographic image (Husserl 2005: 20; translation modified).

Thus,

[t]he photograph as physical thing is a real object and is taken as such in perception. [...] [The image-object], however, is something appearing that has never existed and never will exist and, of course, is not taken by us for even a moment as something real (Husserl 2005: 20-21).

Even though the image-object is not something real, it has a sort of intermediate status. It is not to be confounded with the physical object, but is fixed to it. Given this relation, it visually appears, is intersubjective and stable. Following some rule or convention, the configuration can be seen by any of us (see Husserl 2005: 65–66). But it is not submitted to causality in the same way that the image thing is. Lambert Wiesing has expressed this as follows:

When we are dealing with an image of a house, this exclusively visible house is removed from the laws of physics. The depiction of the house does not age insofar as the house displayed does not age, even if the image carrier does of course age, like any other physical object in space and time. Anyone who looks at an image from the

side nonetheless does not look at the depiction from the side; even though light falls onto an image, the object displayed in the image is not lit up. These criteria for the determination of a depiction are as simple as they are decisive (Wiesing 2010: 17).

This has driven Wiesing to explain the Husserlian concept of image-object in terms of an “artificial presence” (*artifizielle Präsenz*). As visible, he claims, it is indeed an object (instead of a content or a sense, which are non-visible). However, as Husserl stated, it is not a *real* object. It is merely visible (cannot be heard or touched) and it is indifferent to the laws of physics. Thus, an image-object is present without having material substance; it is artificially present (Wiesing 2010: 19–20, 51).

With the explanation of this two-fold structure, the description of the structure of image-consciousness is not yet complete. According to Husserl, image-consciousness occurs only when the image-object refers to something else which does not appear—the image-subject. This third object can either be fictitious or real; while the image-subject of my best friend’s photo is herself, a witches’ sabbath is the image-subject of Goya’s homonymous painting. The pictorial relation is indifferent to the existence of its subject. What matters is the kind of relation experienced by the beholder, a representation (*Vergegenwärtigung*) “of what does not appear in what does appear” (Husserl 2005: 32).

This peculiar relation is not that of a sign and its reference.⁹ Husserl argues principally that image-consciousness is an intuitive experience proximate to that of seeing: “We look into the image object, we look at that by means of which it is an image object, at these moments of resemblance. And the subject presents itself to us in them: through them we look into the subject” (Husserl 2005: 33). To stress the difference between signs and images, he claims that image-consciousness is “immanent,” because the image-subject is seen *in* the image-object.¹⁰ On the contrary, sign-consciousness is “transcendent,” because it refers to something beyond or besides itself. Since anything can work as a sign of something else, an image-object can do so too; a common example is a picture on the road which refers to

9 In this point, Lambert Wiesing takes distance from Husserl’s position.

10 By turning to the concept of *seeing-in* some authors have defended the proximity of Wollheim to Husserl. To a certain extent, such proximity is undeniable (see Brough 2012; Mion 2014).

the proximity of the next gas station. However, since it is the kind of mental act that matters, first when the image-subject is *seen in* the image-object, (i.e., when the image-object does not function as a sign) image-consciousness, properly speaking, occurs (Husserl 2005: 38).

This difference is fundamental in the framework of Husserlian phenomenology, since only through seeing the image-subject in the image-object, the experience of image-consciousness, contrary to sign-consciousness, is an *intuitive* re-presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung*). Moreover, Husserl considers that the aesthetic contemplation of an image is possible only for immanent image-consciousness: "In aesthetic contemplation, we immerse ourselves in the image; our interest belongs to it, we see the subject in it. The image obviously does not have the mere function of awakening a presentation of the object [image-subject] that would be external to the image" (Husserl 2005: 39).

Having reached the components of image-consciousness as a threefold intentional experience, it is adequate to bring the discussion back to the metaphor of the window, to reveal an aspect pending solution. I will use Husserl's setup of the problem:

The frame [of the picture] is in the visual field. It frames the landscape, the mythological scene, and so on. We look through the frame, as if through a window, into the space of the image, into the image's reality. [...] The objects seen and the objects quasi-seen, the image objects, enter into relationship. But why do they not in fact produce a coherent whole of objects, and, more precisely, a perceptual coherent whole? A single cohesive present (Husserl 2005: 50)?

The threefold intentionality of image-consciousness entails an intertwining of intentions. The whole act groups within it the intention to the physical object and the fusion of the appearing image-object with the non-appearing image-subject. Using Husserl's terms, this supposes that there is an intrinsic relationship between the objects seen and the objects quasi-seen. Or, according to our initial setup of the problem, between the 'perceptual aspect' and the 'imaginary aspect.' However, this relationship, evident after an analysis of the elements of the act of image-consciousness, leads to problems when assuming a more comprehensive view. In regular experience, our acts conform to "a coherent whole of objects", as mentioned in the previous quotation: my perception of the desk where my laptop lies,

and my perception of the surrounding objects integrate harmonically. Seeing the desk, I can tell if I can move my laptop; hearing a ceramic sound, I am aware that I have hit a cup forgotten behind the screen of the computer. If I hit it hard, I would expect that it spills the old coffee that I remember I left there this morning, and so on. Nothing of what appears in the imaginary aspect of the image integrates in this nexus in the same way.

Even when image-consciousness reveals a unique re-presentational structure of *seeing* an image-subject *in* an image-object, and thus renders its matching with perception inappropriate, an account of the “quasi” character of what is seen is missing. Fantasy, understood as an attitude differing from regular experience, will prove to be fruitful in solving this problem.

Image-Consciousness as *Perceptual Fantasy*

Unlike traditional idealisms and realisms, Husserl also applies the correlation principle to the core of reality itself. While describing the components of every experience directed toward an object, he identified that the *actuality* (*Wirklichkeit*) of an intuited thing is the correlate of the belief or *positing* (*Setzung*) of an experience, and not an independent or objective property of the world ‘in itself.’¹¹ After explaining the elements of this correlation, I will argue that the Husserlian understanding of positing and actuality, when applied to image-consciousness, brings a new perspective to the

11 Two things that I cannot further develop in this paper must be kept in mind. First, the concept of *Wirklichkeit*, which is difficult to translate. In its looser use, it means the same as (natural) reality. Nevertheless, Husserl extended the concept to include ideal objects (see Husserl 1983: §22). ‘Actuality’ is a common translation into English; however, it must not be understood as a synonym of empirical reality or facticity in the empirical sense. Second, it is not the case that the mere positing of something is enough to have that something as actual, as if it were enough to think of something for that something to be real. Husserlian phenomenology is not classical idealism; the positing is always dependent on its accreditation in intuition and the nexus of experience (see Palette 2010: 318–320).

relationship between fantasy and reality. This allows us to talk about image-consciousness as *perceptual fantasy*.¹²

A basic claim of Husserl's phenomenology is that intentional objects are given with a certain meaning. When I look in front of me, I do not merely perceive some warm colored light rays bouncing on a convex ceramic surface, but I also see my favorite cup, the one I have been using for the last two years to have my coffee at work. Moreover, according to Husserl, intentionality also entails a correlation between the meaning of each object and the specific experience that performs the intention. Besides perceiving my favorite coffee cup, I could remember it, see a picture of it, or imagine it in my future apartment. Phenomenologically considered, each of these entails a change in the meaningful object. Moreover, the relation of this experience within a broader context also determines the meaning. For example, my experience will differ if I use the cup as a paperweight, a mere souvenir or an example for the design of new coffee cups. I will see it, grab it or value it differently. Different properties of the object will be more relevant than others according to the specific situation that gives rise to the experience, and the individual acts (seeing, grasping, smelling, measuring, etc.) will be organized differently, given the specific task that I am performing. In other words, a subjective attitude also informs the meaningful object. Finally, some aspects of the meaning of the object may vary across experiences, but a 'core' of it remains the same (as expressed when we claim that *the same* cup is remembered, seen in a picture or perceived). Therefore, phenomenology must provide the tools to analyze the different characters or layers of both the experience (noetic pole) and its object (noematic pole) (Husserl 1983: 221–222).

Husserl's example of different experiences addressing the same blossoming tree reveals one of the most important characters, the character of belief or positing:

12 In this paper, I utilize the terminology established by the official English translation of Husserliana 23 to translate the Husserlian concept of *perzeptive Phantasie*. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that Husserl distinguished *Wahrnehmung* from *Perzeption*, both translated as "perception" in English. While *Wahrnehmung* is always a positing experience, *Perzeption* is a perception deprived of its positing character. Only *Wahrnehmung* takes part in regular experience, the mark of which is precisely its positing character (see Husserl 1983: 558, 584).

In every case it may be a matter of the blossoming tree, and in every case this tree may appear in a certain way such that the faithful description of what appears as it appears necessarily results in the same expression. But for that reason the noematic correlates are still essentially different for perception, phantasy, pictorial representation, remembering, etc. At one time what appears is characterized as “embodied actuality” [*leibhafte Wirklichkeit*], at another time as fiction, then again as memory re-presentation, etc. (Husserl 1983: 221; translation modified).

Among the characters which are grouped in the conformation of the whole meaningful object (the noematic correlate), a character of belief or positing of each experience determines the difference between seeing something as actual, dubious, probable, or as fiction, as Husserl describes in his example.

Regularly, the experiences of perceiving and remembering have the belief character of certainty and their objects have the character of actual existence. When we perceive the objects around us in our morning walk to work, the people, the vehicles, the buildings, etc. are experienced as being actually there. However, experiences are dynamic (extended in time) and objects appear in a context-dependent meaningful manner. Thus, Husserl also considers rejections and improvements, dependent on a broader experiential horizon:

The pathway of factual as well as ideally possible cognition leads through errors [...]. Thus the perceptual flows, in which partial ruptures of harmony occur and in which the harmony is to be preserved only by means of “corrections,” are to be systematically characterized [...]: apprehensional alterations, peculiar positional processes, the transvaluation and devaluation of what was apprehended before, e.g., as “semblance,” “illusion,” the transition to a “conflict” unresolved here and there; and so forth (Husserl 1983: 364; translation modified).

It is easier to reflect on what Husserl has in mind here by means of a familiar example. At night, as I lie on my bed, I open my eyes after hearing an unknown noise. I look at the chair positioned next to my bed. Unexpectedly, instead of the chair, I see a huge black dog. It is a vivid perception; I can almost feel it breathing next to me. I recall the sound that woke me up. Was it a growl? For an instant, I am sure it was. I remember that I closed the door of my bedroom, and I notice that it remains closed. I start doubting my perception. Before assuming that it is an illusion, I confer the dog with

the character of a (mere) possibility. I consider this possibility, as well as the alternative possibility that it is my usual chair. I perceive watchfully and realize that the dog does not breathe, its legs do not quiver, and its mouth looks very much like a piece of black fabric. My perception cannot stand such inconsistencies. I progressively calm myself until suddenly seeing it: it is not an enormous, rabid dog—it is my jacket hanging on the chair!

This example shows how perception is a process of change and adaptation according to a specific situation. During this process, things that take part in what we consider to be our regular experience seek harmony, as Husserl claims, within a nexus conformed by multiple experiences. The verification of the actuality of perceptual things depends on an endless continuing experience which “has the form of a harmonious synthesis” (Husserl 1960: 62).¹³ The illusion of the dog that lasted a few seconds is the case of an apprehension of something, which undergoes a change of positing (‘no, that cannot be, it is not actual’) and a replacement by a new apprehension (‘it is not a dog, it is just the chair’). This latter is more coherent with my past and present experiences, as well as with my expectations: I remember that the door of my bedroom was closed, and I know that dogs do not materialize out of nowhere; given my past experiences with dogs, I expected it to make some noise, and so on. This entails that the experience is dynamic, but it also means that the criteria for including or excluding something from the nexus of actual experience, the so-called “harmony,” comes from within experience itself:

[T]his rational positing within perception is not an absolute positing; it is like a force that can be overwhelmed by strong counterforces. Experience [*Erfahrung*] is the force which guarantees the existence of the world, and it is a force which constantly draws new force from itself and continuously integrates this new force into itself (Husserl 1997: 251).

13 It is endless since perception gives always only one side of an object. As harmonious and endless it is, for Husserl, an “idea,” a concept taken from Kant’s practical philosophy to express how the object of perception, as well as the field where it takes place, is “an absolutely determined system of endless processes of continuous appearings” (Husserl 1983: 342).

Regular experience (*Erfahrung*), guided by our belief in the actuality of the world, is determined by consistency or harmony and ‘realistic’ resolutions of conflicts between the perceived object and its surroundings. As a nexus, it is not the product of a single act, not even of a single species of acts. Regular experience obtains its force from past and present perceptions, memories and anticipations of possibilities, which mutually support themselves. Rather than being an act or a group of them, regular experience is an *attitude*.

As I claimed before, the appearance of meaningful things entails their being dependent on contexts and attitudes. A cup is commonly experienced as an artifact for drinking warm liquids, but it can also be a paperweight or a souvenir. Another way of putting this is by claiming, with Husserl, that life is a life of interests (Husserl 2019: 299). I could be interested in the aesthetic value of my coffee cup or in its functionality. According to this, the acts performed will confer a different meaning to the object. But there always has to be an interest or attitude driving the manifold of acts. Every specific act is surrounded by an attitude, with an open “style,” which promotes accordance and harmony within itself, but is not closed to modifications and expansion:

The attitude is like a halo (or an aura) around a certain act of interest. Being in the attitude of the businessman [selling a house], let me call it the “business attitude,” my intentional rays of interest will be carried out according to this attitude. Likewise, I can shift to an aesthetic attitude and view the selfsame thing, the house in my example, as a work of art. Strictly speaking, my active life is always carried in a certain attitude of which there are many, some of which may still be unknown to me (Luft 1998: 157; see also Staiti 2009: 226 and Luft 2002).

For the sake of our everyday life coherence, objects under certain attitudes are always in a referential relationship with other objects, forming “a nexus of meaning” (Luft 1998: 156). While considering the beauty of my desk, I will probably not pay attention to the functional shape of the boiler, but to the relationship of its colors with the color of my coffee cup. On the other hand, if I wanted to have a cup of hot water, the color of the boiler or the cup will matter little, and its shape would call my attention first when it fails to accomplish its function. In these examples, only a couple of objects seem to be involved. However, attitudes are not restricted to a certain

number of entities. An attitude has “an open horizon of possible entities” (Luft 1998: 157) as a correlate, what Husserl also calls a “special world” (*Sonderwelt*). Just like the interests, attitudes are multiple. They acquire new determinations according to the specificities of the interests involved. An attitude guided by practical interests can assume a more specific character as the attitude of a businessperson, even more specifically as the attitude of a real estate agent. From this follows that attitudes relate between themselves too: “The special horizons that correlate these attitudes are not separated worlds, limited within themselves, but they referentially imply each other, ‘touch’ each other or maybe overlap” (Luft 1998: 158).

For Husserl, regular experience proceeds from the broadest of all attitudes: the natural attitude. Every further attitude depends on this first condition: that things are actual (*wirklich*), that they are given as actually being there, that “the world exists.” Modifications, alterations, denials, and suspensions can be made subsequently, but the basic substrate of our everyday life is the reality of the things we deal with, reinforced by consistency with the nexus of experience. It is not the case that the world of the natural attitude is characterized *only* by being a world of mere existent objects; on the contrary, the objects in the natural attitude are always embedded with values and goals, and the people are there with further characteristics: “they are my ‘friends’ or ‘enemies,’ my ‘servants’ or ‘superiors,’ ‘strangers’ or relatives,’ etc.” (Husserl 1983: 53). The point Husserl makes is that the natural attitude is marked by the basic *positing* of the things of the world—what he called the general positing:

I continually find the one spatiotemporal actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] to which I belong like all other human beings who are to be found in it and who are related to it as I am. I find the “actuality,” the word already says it, as a factually existent [*daseiende*] actuality and also accept it as it presents itself to me as factually existing. No doubt about or rejection of what is given belonging to the natural world alters in any respect the general positing which characterized the natural attitude (Husserl 1983: 56–57; translation modified).

By recognizing the character of the natural attitude, the exceptionality of fantasy comes into sight. As our familiarity with fiction tells us, exceptions to the harmony of actual positing can be made by will, thus leaving the nexus of concordance towards the positing of regular experience. Many of

our fantasies occur under circumstances similar to those of the illusory dog: we 'perceive' something that is not coherent with the nexus of the experience. Experiences like these are, for example, seeing dragons and ships in the clouds, or a rabbit in the moon and also beholding a painting, a fresco, a theater play or a movie. All these are experiences that rely on the 'perceptual' apprehension of something that is non-consistent with the nexus of experience. Husserl calls these "perceptual phantasies," to differentiate them from other experiences, similar to daydreaming, which he calls "reproductive phantasies" (Husserl 2005: 605).

The peculiarity of perceptual fantasies is that, while we experience them, we are not deceived, and we do not correct our perception either. It is as if we would maintain the apprehension of the rabid dog, despite noticing that it is a jacket. However, if the mark of regular experience is actuality reinforced by harmony and agreement, it seems difficult to have the possibility of doing this. For Husserl, the solution is to postulate a change of attitude, a different mode of performing experiences beyond the regular positing of actuality, in the mode of *as-if* (*als-ob*):

we would not get beyond an accomplished [...] consciousness of nullity [...], if a new attitude were not possible that did not permit the contesting experience to win acceptance [...]. The change of attitude [...] is precisely the shift from actual experience [*Erfahrung*], or, as the case may be, from the negation of actual experience, into phantasy, into the peculiar consciousness of the as-if (Husserl 2005: 614–615).

Fantasy, as an attitude, is not a specific experience, but a special mode of performing experiences ("perceptual," like image-consciousness, or "reproductive," like daydreaming). This mode of performing experiences can also be understood as disinterested or playful, in the sense that the person having the fantastic experience is indifferent to the connection of the object with the realm of the natural or real world, and with the upcoming and previous experiences: "We are, of course, actually experiencing, but we are not in the attitude of actual experience; we do not actually join in the experiential positing. The reality changes into reality-as-if for us, changes into 'play'" (Husserl 2005: 615). This means that instead of being driven to a conflict between one apprehension or another as in the case of a visual illusion (it is either a rabid dog or my jacket hanging on the chair), the change

of attitude conceals the regular perception and allows the experience of something which is not actually there to dominate.

Consequently, when looking at Manet's painting in the gallery, I conceal the coherent apprehension and instead of a stained canvas, I see a horse race. But I know¹⁴ that this perception is not actual; I do not have to take the people and horses to be actual, but actual *as-if*. Covering the field of regular perception, without eliminating it, the people and horses exhibited on the canvas appear as if they were real. It is not the case that reality is radically replaced, not even in the purest cases of fantasy, such as dreams or fairy tales. The actual reality is always already there in the background, only partially concealed by fantasy by means of a modification of interests. What is relevant here is that instead of a disagreement between conflicting apprehensions, as in the case of illusions, in the case of fantasy, the regular experience is merely covered to allow the appearance of the abnormal apprehension:

the situation is not what it is in the case of an illusion, in which we place ourselves on the ground of actual experience and take sides with what is experienced against what is illusory, which we actively negate, cancel. [...] [Rather,] we have from the beginning only the artistic "image"; and what is real that functions as exhibition, what is actually experienced without modification is continuously concealed [*verdeckt*] (Husserl 2005: 618).

Thus, the fantasied experience covers the regular nexus of experience, giving its objects the characteristic of *as-if*. While fantasizing, instead of performing experiences with a positing character, we "live in neutrality; we do not carry out any actual positing [*wirkliche Position*] at all with respect to what is intuited" (Husserl 2005: 617). Because of this, fantasy is an exceptional attitude. It is not a mere change of positing, which takes place in the nexus of regular experience, like when we consider something dubious or nullify an apprehension to replace it by another one. To emphasize this, Husserl called the nexus of the natural attitude "regular experience" (*Erfahrung*), and that of fantasy "quasi-experience" (*quasi-Erfahrung*). Correspondingly, while actuality is a character of the objects intended in the natural attitude, an "actuality *as-if*" is the positing character of objects in-

14 In a proto-conceptual manner.

tended in the attitude of fantasy. In fantasy, “we are not simply conscious of an intuited object as actual, as present, past, and so on; on the contrary, we are conscious of it together with its content ‘as if’ it were present. For us it is actuality ‘as if’ [*Wirklichkeit ‘als ob’*].” (Husserl 2005: 605–606) The concept of “hovering” (*schweben*), occasionally used by Husserl, can be useful to understand this: fantasied objects hover above the nexus of objective space and time, but do not find a place in the real world, with the change of attitude guaranteeing a sort of “non-interference” (cf. Dufourcq 2011: 82–85). But this independence is merely partial: given the emplacement in the actual world of any fantasying embodied consciousness, this world always remains as the point of reference of any hovering object.

When describing perceptual fantasies, Husserl takes into account two kinds of experiences: the spectating of theater plays and image-consciousness. Both share the concealment of a perceptual apprehension, but unlike theater representations, pictorial representations are beheld by means of a threefold intentionality, as described in the second section of this paper. In other words, in image-consciousness, there is an intention towards an image-object (the depiction or configuration), where an image-subject (the depicted object or event) is seen. However, this is possible only because the “perception” is performed in the attitude of fantasy: the nexus of regular experience is concealed and the depicted object or event is seen, even though it does not ‘fit’ within this nexus. It is thus seen with the character of actuality as-if.

The correlation principle that guides Husserlian phenomenology drives us to recognize our experience as a multi-referential, meaningful nexus. That meaning takes part in our everyday existence entails that the raw, causal connection between objective properties and sensation fails to give a sufficient account of human experience. Phenomenology presents us with an analysis that assumes the methodological importance of such a claim. In the case of perceptual fantasy, it drives us to shift our focus towards the way in which this experience is lived. The special relation with the experiential nexus reveals that fantasy can be understood as a special attitude, by means of which its intended objects hover above the objects of actuality, conforming a quasi-experience. Different experiences can be performed within this attitude. Husserl divides these in two groups: perceptual and reproductive fantasies. The dual character of pictures, when considering image-consciousness as a perceptual fantasy, can be finally understood as a

concealed perceptual aspect wherein an image-subject is seen, as hovering above the nexus of regular experience.

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