

Phantasy, Picture–Consciousness, and the Phenomenological Method

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So kann man denn wirklich, wenn man paradoxe Reden liebt, sagen und, wenn man den vieldeutigen Sinn wohl versteht, in strikter Wahrheit sagen, daß die „Fiktion“ *das Lebenselement der Phänomenologie, wie aller eidetischen Wissenschaft, ausmacht*, daß Fiktion die Quelle ist, aus der die Erkenntnis der „ewigen Wahrheiten“ ihre Nahrung zieht.

E. HUSSERL, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, erstes Buch, § 70

ABSTRACT: The paper deals with questions related to the method of Husserl’s phenomenology. It is argued that Husserl’s analysis of different kinds of intuitional consciousness (*anschauendes Bewusstsein*) should be regarded as functional towards the elaboration of the method of phenomenology as a science of essences. The paper especially focuses on Husserl’s analyses of phantasy — and picture — consciousness and highlights the specific relevance of such analyses for the phenomenological method.

KEYWORDS: Phenomenological method, phantasy, *Bildbewusstsein*, neutrality modification, eidetic science.

Introduction

In this essay, I undertake an examination of Husserl’s concept of neutrality modification, with an emphasis on the implications of this modification for the method of phenomenology. In *Ideas I*, the only place in which the concept of neutralization finds its systematic treatment, Husserl characterizes the neutrality modification by a *via negativa* against possible equivocations of this modification. In doing so, Husserl is following a specific dialectical procedure. According to this procedure, the peculiar characteristic of

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each kind of intuitional consciousness, such as perception, memory, etc., is unveiled only in contrast with parallel kinds.¹ Therefore, in Husserl's dialectical strategy, the *contrastive* or *negative* way of approaching a new kind of consciousness aims at its *positive* characterization. As Husserl writes in his lectures of 1904–'05 on *Phantasy and Picture-Consciousness*,

every motivation, every psychic total situation that stimulates neutrality, also gives to the neutrality a characteristic. The suppression of a positionality, understood as abstention, is a characteristic, just as the playfulness of 'free' phantasy is. On the other hand, it is precisely the neutrality that must be marked out that which is fundamentally and essentially common to all the forms and connects them.²

As regards neutrality modification, the possible equivocations taken into account by Husserl in *Ideas I* are, respectively, the *epoché* (§ 109), supposing/ assuming and thinking (§ 110), phantasy (§ 111). It is significant to note that all these modifications play a role in the elaboration of Husserl's phenomenological method. In this essay, I therefore claim that the analysis of neutrality modification in Husserl's system can be read and understood in the framework of Husserl's self-critical elaboration of the method of phenomenology as eidetic science of pure experiences. In my essay, I especially focus on Husserl's contrastive analysis of neutrality modification in connection with phantasy. It is in this context that Husserl also discusses another form of neutrality consciousness, namely that of picture-consciousness. Through a concrete examination of Husserl's analysis of these two forms of neutrality consciousness, phantasy and picture-consciousness, my aim is to show how their characteristic moments, taken together, delineate the concrete articulation of the phenomenological method.

The essay is articulated in different sections. In the first section I introduce the doctrine of the neutrality modification that Husserl lays out in *Ideas I*. Then I will briefly characterize the two determinate forms of neutrality modification of phantasy and picture-consciousness. Finally, I will work out their methodological import for Husserl's phenomenological project.

1. Cf. BERNET, KERN and MARBACH 1993: 143. The authors quote a passage from Husserl's *Ms. A VI 11 I*, 67b [1911-'12] as evidence of Husserl's own proceeding in the analysis of different kinds of consciousness.

2. *Husserliana* XXIII, 578 (695). Forthwith, all textual references to the volumes of the *Husserliana* (abbreviated as *Hua*) will indicate the number of the volume, the number of the page of the German edition, followed by the number of the page of the English translation in brackets.

1. The doctrine of neutrality modification

In *Ideas I*, the “neutrality modification” is introduced by Husserl in terms of a most important (*höchst wichtige*) modification, “which occupies a completely isolated place” with regard to the modifications occurring within the sphere of belief.³ Husserl introduces the term “belief” (*Glaube*), or its synonym “doxa,” in Section 103. With this terminology, Husserl aims at providing a more complete characterization of the noetic–noematic parallelism, which his descriptions established as the basic structure of any lived experience whatsoever.⁴ Husserl describes consciousness as “living;” consciousness is for him essentially “activity.”⁵ The complex structures of consciousness’ life are summarized by the expression “intentionality.”⁶ Consciousness always intends something, it is always engaged with something, it is essentially interested, that is, committed to, involved in something with something (e.g., in a present perception with the perceived object). It is with regard to this fundamental state of affairs of consciousness that Husserl falls back upon the expression “belief.” With this expression, Husserl attempts to describe consciousness’ engagement with its object. In its living relation to its object, consciousness believes in it, the object “exists” for it, the object is experienced by it as “certain” or “actually” existing, “possibly” existing, “probably,” “doubtfully” or “questionably” existing, even as “non-” existing. These so-called doxic modalities (*Glaubensmodalitäten*), correlated to what Husserl designates with the expression “being-modalities” (*Seinsmodalitäten*), are interpreted as modifications of a primary state of belief that posits its object as being actually there in certainty.⁷

Husserl’s term “positing” (*Setzung*), understood in the broader sense of any modality of belief whatsoever, describes the original character of consciousness which is discoverable in reflection.⁸ With the introduction of the neutrality modification of consciousness, Husserl is able to further articulate the intentional character of lived experience as it can be exhibited

3. Hua III/1, 222 (257).

4. Cf., for instance, the following statement from § 93: “Thus the eidetic law, confirmed in every case, states that there can be *no noetic moment without a noematic moment specifically belonging to it.*”

5. For a more precise determination of the “life” of consciousness, see in particular Section 92 and its description of the *characteristic of subjectiveness* of experience. In this section, Husserl is specifically addressing the attentional aspect belonging to every experience. Cf. Hua III/3, 192 (225–226).

6. Cf. *Ideas I*, § 36.

7. For this characterization of the modalities of belief and their correlated being-modalities, see § 104.

8. For Husserl’s definition of “positing,” cf. *Ideas I*, § 106. For the discovery, by means of reflection, of the primordial character of consciousness as positing, cf. *Ideas I*, § 77: “At the basis of reflection there is an unreflected and unmodified lived experience.”

in the analysis of consciousness. In Section 113, Husserl fixes the distinction between *actual* and *potential* positing under the general title of positing consciousness. As Husserl remarks, this distinction is certainly related to the distinction between the modes of *attention* and *inattention* discussed in previous sections.⁹ Yet the introduction of the concept of neutrality adds some complications that do not allow for a perfect matching between actual and potential positing with the attentional modes. The reason is that with neutrality the very *concept of potentiality* is reframed. In positing consciousness, it is possible to observe a continuous movement from the attention of actual positings, or acts, into the inattention of potential acts constituting the halo of any explicit cogito. For example, looking at the table in front of me, I do not actually perceive the chair and the rest of the furniture behind my back, and yet the chair and the furniture are always ready to be perceived if I were to turn my regard towards them. They make up the background that I do not actually perceive, but that it is also given (or posited) with the perception of the table that I am looking at right now.

Neutralized consciousness, as we shall shortly see, is characterized by the fact that from the outset it does not posit anything in actuality, i.e., that it is completely indifferent towards the existence or non-existence of its object. Thus, in the mode of neutrality, there is in consciousness not a movement from effected and explicit acts to unaffected and potential ones, and vice versa, but rather a movement from *quasi-positing to quasi-positing*, that is, a movement from what is already a potentiality to another potentiality. In this respect, however, it is evident that the concept of potentiality (*Potentialität*) receives a new connotation. As a result, the task of clarifying the concept of neutrality modification will have to clarify the notion of potentiality essential to it.

The doctrine of neutrality modification finds its first formulation in the *Logical Investigations*.¹⁰ There Husserl describes a modification affecting the class of objectifying acts, like that of perception, and consisting in a transition from the positing act to its *mere* presentation (*Vorstellung*). This modification is called “qualitative modification” because it affects the quality of the act within the class to which the act belongs (e.g., a perceiving act into a *mere* presentation of the same act) and not the change from one class of acts into another (e.g., from a perceptual act to an act of sadness, which belongs to the class of *non-objectifying acts in the terminology of the Logical Investigations*).

If we turn to *Ideas I* and to the modification represented by the expression “neutralization,” then Husserl informs us that this modification is one

9. Cf. *Ideas I*, §§ 35, 37, 92.

10. Hua XIX/1, §§ 39ff. Cf. BERNET, KERN and MARBACH 1993: 146–147.

“related to the sphere of belief,” and that it had to come into view only with regard to the aspect of consciousness characterized as “doxic.”¹¹ On the other hand, however, the neutrality modification presents itself as a “*universal* modification of consciousness,” which does not belong to the series of modifications belonging to the sphere of belief.¹² In fact, Husserl defines this modification as “a modification which, in a certain way, completely annuls, completely renders powerless every doxic modality to which it is related.”¹³ Yet in *Ideas I* Husserl relates *all* possible acts, such as likings, feelings, willings, to doxic positionalities and ultimately to the primordial doxa. Since neutrality modification can affect any doxic modality whatsoever, then, at least in *Ideas I*, its scope becomes universal and extends to *all* conscious acts, even to the non-doxic acts (inclinations, appetites, affections, acts of willing, that is, those acts that in the *Logical Investigations* belonged to the class of *non-objectifying acts*).¹⁴ As a result, the doctrine of neutrality modification of *Ideas I* represents a radical universalization of the doctrine of “qualitative modification” of the *Logical Investigations*.

The “annulment” and “rendering powerless,” which is the effect of the neutrality modification, however, is not to be understood as a negation. According to Husserl, negation still falls under a doxic modality of consciousness, the modality that specifically posits something as non-being, which, however, “is itself again a being.”¹⁵ On the contrary, the characteristic of neutralization is that it “does not ‘effect’ anything: it is the conscious counterpart of all producing [*Leisten*].”¹⁶

The first peculiarity of the neutrality modification, therefore, over against the doxic modifications, is that the something of which the neutralized consciousness is aware (the object of which consciousness as such is consciousness *of*), is not a new object that consciousness takes up as being actual, or as being possible, or even as non-being. The modification effected by neutralization “puts out of action” any performance, any “belief” pertaining to living consciousness: from now on consciousness is deprived of all interested commitment to or engagement with its object, or, to put it in Husserl’s words, it loses all its “seriousness.”¹⁷ Neutralized consciousness engages only in mere (*bloß*) thinking, it has as its object only mere thoughts.¹⁸ In figurative language, one might say that neutralization freezes the life

11. Hua III/1, 222 (257).

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. Cf. *Ideas I*, § 117.

15. Hua III/1, 222 (258).

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

of consciousness, its belief and therefore also its doxic “as,” which posits the being–characteristic of its object. Neutralized consciousness merely thinks itself into living consciousness, it adverts to the “flesh and blood” consciousness and its objects, but without taking part to its life: “mere thinking–of ‘posits’ nothing, it is not a positing consciousness.”¹⁹

A second peculiarity of the neutrality modification that Husserl singles out, and that needs to be highlighted, is that neutralization is not necessarily bound to any “voluntary doing.” This remark will become more explicit when Husserl will establish the distinction between positionality and neutrality in terms of a universal distinction running throughout consciousness (Section 114), and especially when he will introduce the notion of “act–arousals” (Section 115).

The peculiarity, and strangeness, of the descriptions related to the neutrality modification are motivated, as Husserl himself also admits, by the fact that he is the first to attempt its thematization.²⁰ This explains also Husserl’s circumspection in the determination of the features of neutralization. For this reason, Husserl sets out to further characterize the latter “by a process of elimination.”²¹ This process consists in the successive exclusion of the possible equivocations affecting the expression merely thinking of (*sich-bloß-denken*), equivocations that could prevent a genuine understanding of this new and apparently so crucial moment of consciousness. The possible equivocations taken into account by Husserl are, in order, the *epoché* (§ 109), supposing/assuming and thinking (§ 110), and phantasy (§ 111). The equivocal aspect of these further modifications of belief consists in the fact that neutrality modification plays a role in each of them and yet it is presented at the same time as an “incomparable peculiarity of consciousness.”²²

2. Phantasy consciousness

In order more concretely to clarify the diverse implications of the neutrality modification for the method of phenomenology, with special emphasis on its contrastive analysis in connection to phantasy, let us first survey in broad outline the modification operated by phantasy, which, following Husserl, is *also* a neutrality modification.

Phantasy is counted by Husserl among those forms of intuitional consciousness that he designates with the term “presentiations” (*Vergegenwärti-*

19. Hua III/1, 223 (259).

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. Hua III/1, 223 (259).

gungen). As is well known, Husserl contrasts this class of intuitive acts with “presentations” (*Gegenwärtigungen*), such as perception. In a presentation, the object is present to consciousness “in person” (*leibhaft*), while in a presentation (a memory or a phantasy), the object is present to consciousness *as if* it were present itself. The peculiarity of all presentations is that they are reproductive, that is, they not only give an object *as if* it were there in person, but they also implicate (or are consciousness of) the corresponding impression and of the different kinds of intentionalities involved in the originary constitution of the object.²³ Phantasy, for instance, is the reproductive consciousness of memory which is the reproductive consciousness of perception. I can phantasy a world in which I fly because I can think myself into a memory in the first place through which alone I know anything like a perception of the earth upon which I walk, that I touch with my feet, of the sky, and of its flying creatures.

In Section III of *Ideas* I, Husserl defines more specifically phantasy as “the neutrality modification of ‘positing’ presentation, therefore of memory [*Erinnerung*] in the widest conceivable sense.”²⁴ The term “memory,” as Husserl himself remarks, is to be understood in the broadest sense of any positing presentation whatsoever, i.e., memories proper, expectations, co-presentations (apperception of the inner life of other subjects or the co-perception of the hidden sides of an object given in perception). The positing character of such presentations consists in the fact that they always relate somehow to an actual experience and are thereby lived in some modality of belief or another. Positing presentations create a continuity of original lived experience, in which even deception, doubts, uncertainties bear a connection to and are so motivated with respect to my actual present.²⁵ In contrast, phantasy, as it were, breaks this continuity by putting out of action all belief in the reality of what is experienced and instead lives through it in the mode of the “as if,” and, as a result, of that of unreality.²⁶ Unlike memory, phantasy has the feature of not positing its object (e.g., myself flying) as “actually” existing, nor as “probably” existing or “non-” existing. Phantasy, as the neutrality modification of memory, precisely “wrests” its object from the memorial context in which the latter is posited as existing in a way or another.²⁷

23. Cf. BERNET, KERN and MARBACH 1993: 145.

24. Hua III/I, 224 (260).

25. Cf. BERNET, KERN and MARBACH 1993, p. 148.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 147. Cf. Hua XXIII, 575 (693): “Mere or pure phantasy means that no actual positing or performing act is accomplished, phantasy is ‘pure presentation’ [*blosse Vorstellung*].” And further, “Phantasy is the realm of purposelessness, of play.” (Hua XXIII, 577 [695]) This aspect of playfulness pertaining to phantasy shows its commonality with the modification of neutrality and its character of non-seriousness. Cf. Hua III/I, 222 (258).

27. Cf. BRAINARD 2002: 296, fn. 102.

3. Picture-consciousness

That phantasy is a neutrality modification, and not *the* neutrality modification is shown by the fact that the experience peculiar to picture-consciousness exhibits a form of neutrality that is not reducible to phantasy consciousness. The experience of images and pictures as well as aesthetic experience in general are in fact no longer reproductive, but are rather founded on a direct perception of something.²⁸ In *Ideas I*, Husserl illustrates this case with reference to the contemplation of Dürer's etching, *Knight, Death, and the Devil*. In the analysis of this instance of aesthetic contemplation, Husserl distinguishes three relevant levels of experience. The first level consists in the normal perceiving of the physical object on which the etching is printed (the sheet or page). The second level of experience is that of the perception of the figures standing out in the etching (e.g., the outlined figure of the knight on his horse). Finally, the third level is that of the aesthetic regard of the depicted realities themselves (e.g., the knight "in flesh and blood"). In Husserl's account, the second level ("the consciousness of the 'picture'") is specifically an example of the neutrality modification of perception.²⁹ Picture-object consciousness does not perceive the figures as mere objects on a page, but as "knight," "death," and "devil." It bypasses perception towards the depicting picture-object, and thus it neutralizes perception. In this context, aesthetic consciousness proper is a founded modus of picture-object consciousness. Both the depicting picture-object (*abbildendes Bildobjekt*) and the depicted reality (*das Abgebildete*) are "present to us *neither as existing nor as not existing*, nor in any other *positional modality* [...] but as quasi-existing in the neutrality modification of being."³⁰

With respect to the relationship between the first and second level of experience of a picture, that between the physical thing (the etching) and the picture-object (the figure of the "knight"), however, there seems to arise a difficult problem that we shall briefly address.

In his lectures of 1904-'05 on *Phantasy and Picture-Consciousness*, Husserl introduced the concept of "overlapping" (*Verdeckung*). This concept expresses the fact that "in the stream of consciousness nothing is thinkable in

28. "'Image object,' which, appearing as present 'in person,' can nevertheless also be designated as 'fiction,' though one must no longer speak of re-presentation in this case. Indeed, it is presentation [*Präsentation*]. Here, too, the 'positing,' the believing in something, is 'missing.'" (Hua XXIII, 575 [693]).

29. For the sake of clarity, in the following I quote the relevant passage in its entirety: "The consciousness of the 'picture' (the small, grey figures in which, by virtue of founded noeses something else is 'depictively presented' by similarity) which mediates and makes possible the depicting, is now an example for the neutrality modification of perception." (Hua III/1, 226 [262])

30. *Ibid.*

isolation from the rest of the stream.”³¹ This is especially significant with respect to intuitions such as those provided by phantasy, in which a certain object is grasped in complete isolation from the continuity of positings in which consciousness lives. Yet, as it has been seen above, even if phantasy breaks the continuity of belief of consciousness, in it I do not actually lose consciousness of the perceptual world.³² Phantasy only interrupts the present intuition of perception, and thereby opens up a merely imagined perspective reproduced in the presentation, which, however, is only able to “cover up” (*verdecken, überdecken*) our actually present perspective on the world. The latter, as Husserl says, “does not vanish from my consciousness when I perform a presentation.”³³ To say that phantasy covers up the actuality of perception expresses Husserl’s insight according to which the actually perceptual present *and* the imagined present in phantasy (or, as Husserl also calls it, its “nonpresent” [*Nichtgegenwart*]) *cannot* be intuited *at the same time*.³⁴ Attention to the one excludes attention to the other. That is, in living intuition I am either actively involved with or affected by the objects of my experience *or* I am engaging in “playful” phantasies with them.

Let us turn back to the case of picture-consciousness. The sensuous contents of the physical thing, that Husserl in his lecture course of 1904–’05 calls *picture-thing* (*Bildding*), are here identical in both the picture-thing and the appearance of the picture-object.³⁵ Moreover, as Husserl writes in Section 83 of *Ideas I*, that “two essentially identical perceptions are also identical with respect to the determination of the surroundings, is of essential necessity impossible, for they would then be individually *one* perception.”³⁶ Yet, this is clearly the case of picture-consciousness. In the experience of a picture, we are given the same sensuous contents and have the exact same perception of an object with respect to its perceptually appearing surroundings, but *two* different apprehensions, namely, the apprehension of a picture-thing *and* the apprehension of an object in the picture. As in the case of phantasy, the actual perceptual world, in whose continuous nexus the physical picture-thing is given, does not disappear in the experience of the picture-object. However, it cannot be said that picture-consciousness covers up perceptual consciousness, since they constitute *one* single experience. The pictorial apprehension is rather in conflict with the perceptual apprehension, in the sense that picture-consciousness wrests from the sensuous

31. Cf. BERNET, KERN and MARBACH 1993: 148.

32. Cf. BERNET, KERN and MARBACH 1993: 149.

33. Cited in BERNET, KERN and MARBACH 1993: 149. Cf. also Hua XXIII, 580 (697).

34. Cf. BERNET, KERN and MARBACH 1993: 149.

35. Cf. BERNET, KERN and MARBACH 1993: 151.

36. Hua III/1, 167 (198).

contents of the picture–thing their character of reality, thereby allowing for the appearance of the picture–object, to which, therefore, there belongs the character of unreality.³⁷

As regards the relation between the second and third level involved in the apprehension of a picture, that between the picture–object (the figure of the “knight”) and the picture–subject (the knight “in flesh and blood”), the relationship is that of representation (*Darstellung*) or depiction (*Abbildung*). In the relationship between the representing picture and the represented or depicted subject the picture–object has the role of appearing foundation for the picture–subject, which, as such, does not appear, but is presentiated through a representation of similarity (*Ähnlichkeitsrepräsentation*).³⁸ The pictorial apprehension, as perceptually founded, finds on its part the apprehension of the picture–subject. The latter, as it were, is again wrested from the appearing picture–object.

4. Phantasy, picture–consciousness and the phenomenological method

As some of the most prominent Husserl scholars have already noted, Husserl’s interest in the analysis of the different forms of intuitional consciousness and their complicated intertwining had a fundamental role with respect to the work of clarification of the cognitive achievements of conceptual knowledge, thus of science, and ultimately of philosophy.³⁹ In the following, I will highlight in a concrete examination the contributions of Husserl’s analysis of phantasy and of picture–consciousness to the method of phenomenology. Since Husserl presents phenomenology as the eidetic science of pure experiences, i.e., as the science aiming at working out the laws of essence (*Wesensgesetze*) pertaining to the field of subjective experiencing, the following reflections will contribute to the clarification of the meaning of intuiting or seeing essences in phenomenology.

Husserl’s phenomenological project finds in the *Logical Investigations* (1900–’01) its groundbreaking beginning. As Husserl himself writes in his lecture course on *Phenomenological Psychology*, the *Logical Investigations* were the result of an attempt to clarify “the pure idea of logic by a return to the bestowing of sense or the performance of cognition which occurs in the nexus of lived experiences of logical thinking.”⁴⁰ In particular, Husserl continues, their task was to bring into one’s grip “the logical lived experi-

37. Cf. BERNET, KERN and MARBACH 1993: 151.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Cf. BERNET, KERN and MARBACH 1993: 142; Mohanty 2008: 306.

40. Hua IX, 20 (14).

ences which take place in us whenever we think but which we do not see just then, which we do not have in our noticing view whenever we carry out thought activity in a natural original manner.”⁴¹ Starting from the issue of the relationship between ideal objects (e.g., numbers and mathematical propositions) and the subjective experience in which they appear in their objective existence, the *Logical Investigations* begin to examine the “hidden” inner life of the subject in order to detect the fundamental structures in play in the experience of ideal objects.⁴² Husserl summarizes the question at stake in his *Logical Investigations* and eventually of his whole phenomenology as follows: “How do the hidden psychic lived experiences look, which are correlated to the respective idealities and which must occur as quite determinately appropriate producings, in order that the subject can have consciousness and evidently knowing consciousness of these idealities as objects? This designates the proper theme of the *Logical Investigations* and, in corresponding amplification, of all phenomenology.”⁴³

In experience ideal objects are given *as* not dependent on the psychological states or operations of the thinking subject, yet they can be made explicit and thought through psychological operations that unveil how it is that the psychological subject thinks them *as* such ideal objects. We take, as it were, a step back from simply being directed towards ideal objects and being concerned with them in order to open up the possibility of making that peculiar being-directed-towards and being-concerned-with itself a theme of research. In this reflection, the very experience of ideal objects becomes a “fact” from which we, as scientists, want to work out essential structures which regulate and make that “fact” possible in the first place.

Let us look at a concrete example. My working with the Pythagorean Theorem in order to solve a geometrical problem is certainly a new psychical fact each time I take up the theorem (right now, and again in ten minutes or tomorrow). Yet, the validity of the Pythagorean Theorem is identical at any given moment. The point for Husserl is to inquire into those subjective activities that are required in order that each time the Pythagorean Theorem is experienced in its universal validity. This inquiry led Husserl to the insight into a possible study of structures pertaining to subjective experiencing and bearing the character of unconditional necessity and uni-

41. *Ibid.*

42. This is a study of essential laws and structures that would account for our experience of ideal objects. This is not to say that ideal objects are the result of subjective structures of experience. The inquiry into fundamental structures of subjectivity aims at making intelligible the meaningful experience of objects, and not only of ideal objects, objects that are experienced by a subject in a determinate way that can be studied. This is an important distinction in order to avoid any unilateral critique of psychologism and/or idealism towards Husserl’s phenomenology.

43. Hua IX, 26 (18).

versality that would account for a realm of equally necessary and universal truths, that of pure logic and mathematics.⁴⁴ The study of ideal objectivities of logic and mathematics with respect to the subjective lived experiencing in which they appear as such objectivities represented the starting point for a more general and more radical study of those structure that are in play with respect to all possible objectivities as they are experienced by consciousness, thus also of real objects, e.g., the real objects of the physical world.⁴⁵ As a result, phenomenology emerges as an eidetic science of pure experiences.⁴⁶ Without taking up the difficult problems raised by the project of a foundation of such a science, problems that have to do with the ultimate issues of the meaning of science, reason, and truth, it is relevant for our purposes to address the question of the method of the eidetic science of phenomenology, since for its elaboration phantasy plays a crucial role.

5. Phantasy and ideation

Ideas I opens with a series of clarificatory reflections about the distinction between the concepts of “matter of fact” (*Tatsache*) and “essence” (*Wesen*). These reflections aim at laying down the first basis, as Husserl writes, “for our construction of the idea of a pure phenomenology as a science of essences.”⁴⁷ The exhibition of a field of study and of a possible science arising from it, however, depends first of all on the possibility to exhibit and delimit the object of such a science. This is why Husserl’s preliminary reflections in *Ideas I* deal with questions regarding the concept of “object” in general and the ways in which it becomes an object of experience and cognition.

Beginning with a general consideration about the kind of cognition pertaining to the “sciences of the world” as grounded in “natural experience,” Husserl identifies in perception the founding experience that pertains to such cognition. The specific character of perception lies in the fact that it presents its objects as really existing and thus as part of that real or actual world which is to be made into an object of scientific study. Perception is the *presentive* intuition (*gebende Anschauung*) of the “natural” sciences (this title to be understood in the broader sense of all the sciences of the world, thus not only of the physical, but also of the psychic and spiritual world).⁴⁸

44. Hua IX, 38 (27).

45. Cf. Hua IX, Section 3 (b).

46. Cf. MOHANTY 2008: 364.

47. Hua III/1, 33 (33).

48. Hua III/1, 7 (5).

Sciences of the world are thus experiential sciences (*Erfahrungswissenschaften*). Their experience, as Husserl remarks, does not only give something in its actual presence, but it presents something real “individually.” This is also why Husserl calls experiential sciences “sciences of ‘matters of fact.’”⁴⁹ The introduction of the concept of “matter of fact” serves Husserl as a springboard to the concept of “essence.” In fact, the description of what is experienced as a matter of fact, e.g., a certain spatiotemporal individual object (the red chair in the corner of the room), exhibits features that cannot be apprehended under the title “matter of fact,” but that take up the character of essential features. In Husserl words, “when we said that any matter of fact, ‘in respect of its own essence,’ could be otherwise, we are already saying that *it belongs to the sense of anything contingent to have an essence and therefore an Eidos which can be apprehended purely.*”⁵⁰

On the basis of this insight, Husserl begins to show the interweaving between knowledge of matters of fact and knowledge of essences. In this respect, the first thing to be noted, as it emerges from the passage just quoted, is that a transition from the *intuition of something individual* to *eidetic seeing* is *always possible*.⁵¹

Secondly, Husserl draws an analogy, or better establishes a radical community, between the two kinds of *seeing* and their respective objects. Seeing of essences, according to Husserl, *is* a form of intuition, to be sure of a *peculiar* and *novel* sort, but in all respects similar to the perceptual intuition of an object that I see in front of me; as regards the object of eidetic seeing, the essence, the latter *is* an object in all respects, even if *a new sort of object* if compared with the object given in perceptual intuition.⁵²

Finally, the interweaving between intuition of something individual, as in perception, and seeing of essences is shown by the fact that none of them is possible without the other. Seeing of essence is based on the appearance of something individual. On the other hand, according to Husserl, the intuition of something individual is not possible “without the free possibility of bringing about an ideation and, in it, directing one’s regard to the corresponding essence exemplified in what is individually sighted.”⁵³

The communality between the intuition of something individual and eidetic intuition, however, should not blur their essential differences. The first of these differences is that intuition of matters of fact is limited to what is given in factual experience and has to maintain itself within the

49. Hua III/1, 8 (7).

50. Hua III/1, 9 (7).

51. Hua III/1, 10 (8). Husserl readily remarks that this very possibility “is itself to be understood not as empirical, but as eidetic.”

52. Hua III/1, 10–11 (9).

53. Hua III/1, 12 (10).

boundaries of such experience, from which alone its statements receive their legitimacy. In contrast, intuition of essences is not limited to what is given in factual experience (in perception or memory), but it can also take as its point of departure what is not experienced at all (data of pure phantasy).⁵⁴ An essence can be grasped starting from an object given in perception (as in the case, dear to Husserl, of hearing a tone). Essences, however, can be also grasped starting directly from a phantasy (a tone that I have in mind by phantasy).

A second peculiarity of the intuition of essences, whether our point of departure is an actually experienced object or one merely phantasied, is that its statements do not imply any claim regarding matters of fact. The latter function only as examples: “*Pure eidetic truths contain not the slightest assertion about matters of fact.* And thus not even the most insignificant matter-of-fact truth can be deduced from pure eidetic truths *alone.*”⁵⁵ Husserl’s example for this case is the following statement: “The essence (the ‘genus’) color is other than the essence (the genus) sound.” Yet, as Husserl adds, seeing of essences, even though excluding every implication as regards factual existence, can articulate propositions that invest a totality of single particulars. In this case, the above eidetic statement is reformulated as follows: “Any color whatever is different from any sound whatever.”⁵⁶

Leaving aside the further complications of the theory of science and in particular of the doctrine of eidetic intuition that Husserl articulates in the chapter on “Matter of Fact and Essence,” this brief survey on the opening sections of *Ideas I* suffices in order to bring to light the crucial role of phantasy for Husserl’s phenomenological project. The characterization of the kind of intuition and of the object intuited in the case of seeing of essences highlights two main elements: (1) the possibility to be carried out in phantasy (2) without positing of factual existence.

In Section 70 of *Ideas I*, Husserl establishes the primacy of phantasy for the method of phenomenology. On the one hand, perception in general and external perception in particular has a primacy “as a foundation for phenomenological eidetic findings,” due to the clarity in which objects of perception obtain their originary givenness. On the other hand, however, the seeing of essences obtains its genuine dimension only in phantasy. The reason, according to Husserl, lies in the fact that what is immediately perceived in its present and is recalled to memory with regard to its past offers only a limited access to most general eidetic cognitions regarding perception, phantasy, memory, but also judging, feeling, or willing. To confine

54. Hua III/1, 12 (11).

55. Hua III/1, 13 (11).

56. Hua III/1, 14 (13).

oneself to these most general findings would be an arbitrary restriction. On the contrary, in phantasy, due to its unbounded character, it is possible to extend indefinitely the reproduction of examples from experience by projecting the indeterminate future in all possible directions predelineated by the universal style of the past.⁵⁷

In this way, as Husserl significantly remarks, the phenomenologist, whose object of study are the lived experiences and their correlates, proceeds like the geometer, who in phantasy feigns an indefinite number of figures and shapes, thereby working out the essential properties of any spatial shape whatever.⁵⁸ Therefore, “in phenomenology, as in all other eidetic sciences, presentations and, more precisely, *free phantasies* acquire a position of primacy over perceptions and do so even in the phenomenology of perception itself.”⁵⁹ Husserl concludes this Section by claiming that “‘feigning’ makes up the vital element of phenomenology as of every other eidetic science [...] feigning is the source from which the cognition of ‘eternal truths’ is fed.”⁶⁰

6. Picture-consciousness and ideation

In the last part of my essay, I will offer an interpretation of the methodological significance of the analysis of picture-consciousness for Husserl’s phenomenological project. Since in *Ideas I* Husserl discusses picture- and aesthetic consciousness in the context of his doctrine of neutrality modification, my analysis will at the same time clarify the import of the neutrality modification of consciousness for the method of phenomenology.

As it has been seen above, the experience of images or pictures and their aesthetic contemplation are introduced by Husserl in Section III of *Ideas I* as cases of the neutrality modification of perception. The analysis of picture- and aesthetic consciousness is therefore put forth in order to exhibit an instance of neutrality modification that is not that of phantasy, and thus to distinguish the concept of the *universal* neutrality modification from that operated by phantasy. Picture-consciousness (as well as the aesthetic consciousness founded on it) is directed towards its objects in the mode of unreality, that is, without any interest in the existence or non-existence of the picture-object.⁶¹ The picture-thing is certainly given to me in external perception, but in a pictorial apprehension I do not direct my regard to

57. Cf. Hua IX, 70 (52).

58. Hua III/I, 131 (159).

59. Hua III/I, 130–131 (158–159).

60. Hua III/I, 130–132 (158–160).

61. Hua XXIII, 385 (457).

the page or canvas. In my pictorial apprehension of the “knight” I *do not see* the page at all, but the “knight.” The main point, however, is that the “knight” itself is not apprehended as a real object, but precisely as a picture. No interest is there for the actual existence or non-existence of the “knight,” there is no “striving after certainty” (*Streben nach Gewissheit*).⁶² Picture-consciousness does not arise out of the perception of the page, but out of the “perception” of the figure, which differs from actual perception because it brackets or puts out of action the modality of belief essentially pertaining to perception. Thus, living in picture-consciousness I do not live in a consciousness that posits a reality, but what counts for me are rather the modes of appearance (*Erscheinungsweisen*) of the object (as “figure”), its “subjective” appearance, or the object-in-its-How (*Gegenstand-im-Wie*), with no consideration of its existence.⁶³

Husserl tries to express the complex state of affairs in which a presentation is mediated by a picture or an image with the expression “perceptive phantasy,” in order to distinguish the latter from the concept of ordinary phantasy or reproductive phantasy.⁶⁴ The meaning of this distinction can be illustrated with reference to the phenomenon of “double neutrality,” phenomenon that Husserl discusses in his lectures of 1904–’05. The examination of this phenomenon shall also help us in exhibiting the methodological import of the analysis of picture-consciousness.⁶⁵

Husserl introduced the notion of “double neutrality” in order to articulate more in detail the implications among different kinds of intuitional presentations. In the phenomenon of “double neutrality,” the first neutrality pertains to phantasy as neutrality modification, actively or passively performed, e.g., I presentiate a theory and play with its propositions, claims, etc., all of this performed under the sign of the “as-if” that belongs to phantasy. The second neutrality invests phantasy itself and its (*quasi-*) performances. This neutrality annuls the purely playful reproduction happening in phantasy in order to actually grasp what has been phantasied. The theory that I was playing with is now the object of my attention, to be sure not as this theory that I might or I might not believe in, but as “thought” of this theory. Not the theory, but the thought of it has actual existence for me now, it is a new *kind* of object (not a *new* object, we should carefully add) that, as Husserl writes, I can “pick out and describe in evident truth as the ‘content’ of my phantasy.”⁶⁶ The peculiarity of this second neutralization lies in the

62. Hua XXIII, 583 (701).

63. Hua XXIII, 388 (461), 584 (701–702). Regarding the “subjective” character, Cf. Husserl’s comment in Hua XXIII, 585, fn. 1 (702, fn. 16).

64. Hua XXIII, 585. Cf. also Hua III/1, 225 (261).

65. Hua XXIII, 573 (691).

66. Hua XXIII, 572 (690).

fact that it operates towards the neutralization of phantasy, not by modifying consciousness into an original positing consciousness, as when we “come back to reality” after having been lost in a phantasy for a moment. But rather by establishing a positional Ego *over* the neutral Ego of phantasy.⁶⁷ Drawing an analogy, Husserl compares phantasying with a state of dreaming and the objects phantasied with dreamt objects. Formulated in these terms, Husserl claims that with the second neutralization,

it is not a question of an abstention from actual positions with respect to the dreamt objects; they are by all means dreamt objects. At present I am precisely not supposed to be dreaming, lost to myself, not supposed to be *quasi*-performing such and such perceptions, judgments, and so on, making it seem to me as if these objects were there, as if they were changing in this way and that. On the contrary, as nonparticipating onlooker [*als unbeteiligter Zuschauer*] I am supposed to contemplate and fix what offers itself in this living-as-if just as it offers itself⁶⁸

Significantly, Husserl mentions the grasping of semblances (*Scheinen*) as objects — picture-objects and those semblances proper that are not seen as deceptions (Husserl’s examples are rainbows or the blue sky) — as cases in which a double neutrality modification is operating. In contemplating a picture, in fact, I also grasp the lines that make up the “knight,” but not as lines on the paper, but as features of the “knight.” These features are not grasped as existing or nonexistent, but they are certainly grasped, and posited, as the features of this object, the “knight,” that I can fix and describe in the way it gives itself to me. In pictorial apprehension, I posit the “knight” as what I actually see in my pictorial seeing, that is, I contemplate the “knight” as what actually appears there in person, but without appropriating it to myself as something I accept.⁶⁹ The pictorial and aesthetic interest is rather turned to the “object in the How of its presentedness,” (*Gegenstand im Wie der Dargestelltheit*) so that, Husserl concludes, “only what ‘appears as it appears,’ which comes to harmonious unity in this presentation, interests me.”⁷⁰

As a result, the characterization of the kind of intuition operating in picture-consciousness and of the object intuited in it singles out two moments that play a crucial role for the method of phenomenology: (1) The indifference to the existence or nonexistence of the object and (2) its reduction to modes of appearance.⁷¹

67. Hua XXIII, 573 (691).

68. *Ibid.*

69. Cf. Hua XXIII, 574 (692). Cf. Husserl’s comment in Hua XXIII, 586, fn. 1 (703, fn. 18): “To turn toward the image object and to contemplate it is to take it as if it existed. A ‘perception’ — just as in phantasying intuitively and inhibiting the thematizing (positional) *quasi*-performing of the phantasy acts, I find the ‘phantasy image’ and have it given itself as the phantasy of a perceptual image.”

70. Hua XXIII, 586f. (704f.).

71. Cf. in particular MOHANTY 2008: 313.

Final remarks

In the present context, the phenomenon of double neutrality is especially significant because it allows giving a unitary interpretation of the two forms of neutrality consciousness of phantasy and picture-consciousness in regards to their meaning for the method of phenomenology. The methodological significance of the phenomenon of double neutrality lies in the fact that phantasy alone is not enough in order to accomplish the descriptions that are essential to phenomenology. As a result, to change phantasy consciousness into a “positional” consciousness in the sense of the double neutrality modification is crucial in order to produce assertions and descriptions about the figments of phantasy.⁷² Thus, starting from the phenomenon of double neutrality, I suggest a possible definition of the phenomenological *seeing of essences* as a *thetic apprehension* (on the model of picture-consciousness) *of a neutralized object* (in phantasy). Such definition contributes to the clarification of the transition to the a priori peculiar to phenomenology. Phenomenology is the science that inquire into the hidden subjective lived experiences that must occur in order for the subject to actually have experience of various kinds of objects.⁷³ The transition from the single appearances of objects to the determination of necessary and universal laws and principles grounding (“constituting,” Husserl might say) their appearance to a consciousness, however, is nothing like a mystical process. This transition or ascension is describable and analyzable on the basis of the very operations of consciousness. These operations, such as phantasying and perceiving the object in a picture are the phenomenal attestations for the possibility of carrying out the activities of eidetic variation (*eidetische Variation*), its seeing of essence (*Wesensschau*) and their result consisting in the apprehension of the a priori (*Erfassung des Apriori*).⁷⁴ The characteristic mark of phantasy — and picture — consciousness is that they perform by their very nature a liberation from the fact.⁷⁵ The liberation from the fact is not a negation of the facts of experience nor of the factual world as a whole.⁷⁶ In phantasy, the facts of experience are no longer taken in their mere factual occurrence, but they receive instead the status of exemplary experiences whose specific style of development can become subject of a systematic study thanks to the arbitrariness and openness allowed by phantasy. By means of the endless variations on a single experience

72. Hua XXIII, 578 (696).

73. Hua IX, 26 (18). See also Hua IX, 42–43 (30–31).

74. See Hua IX, § 9.

75. See Hua IX 71 (52).

76. Hua IX, 71 (52).

allowed by phantasy, Husserl conceives the possibility to detect that which in the variation remains invariable. According to Husserl, this is the *eidōs* or essence. In this study, I claim that the phenomenon of double neutrality is especially fruitful in order to secure phenomenally the two moments that characterize the method of phenomenology: the variation in phantasy and the apprehension of the essence, the latter described on the model of picture-consciousness.

I would like to conclude this essay by pointing to an important implication that the present interpretation of the method of phenomenology has for the notion of essence as the object of phenomenological investigations. In fact, the conception that grounds the seeing of essences on the operation of phantasy reframes the very concept of essence. The *reality* of the essence which is apprehended is based on the aspect of *possibility* that constitutes all phantasing as such. Phantasy drops the actuality of the world of experience in order to determine the underlying structures that make the experience of the world and its objects possible. This identifies the transcendental character of phenomenology. But the structures or laws of essence (*Wesensgesetze*) that are singled out in the course of the analysis cannot be posited as categorical and a-temporal structures of experience. Rather the aspect of possibility attaches to them on the ground of the aspect of possibility that belongs to phantasied experience, which, ultimately, is grounded upon the unbounded character inherent in factual experience as such (*Crisis*, § 42).⁷⁷ That the essences of phenomenology define not what is factual, however, but rather what is possible in regards to the being of what is factual, also illustrates the sense of phenomenological philosophy understood, by Husserl, as an “infinite task,” thereby marking the historical divide between a dogmatic and a phenomenological transcendental philosophy.

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77. Describing the peculiar performance of the *epochē*, Husserl writes in Section 42 of the *Crisis*: “[But] the accomplishment of the total transformation of attitude must consist in the fact that the infinity of actual and possible world-experience transforms itself into the infinity of actual and possible ‘transcendental experience,’ in which, as a first step, the world and the natural experience of it are experiences as ‘phenomenon.’” (Hua VI, 156 [153])

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