Aisthesis

From *Abbild* to *Bild*? Depiction and Resemblance in Husserl's Phenomenology

Claudio Rozzoni

(New University of Lisbon)
claudio.rozzoni@gmail.com

Abstract. In a well-known course he gave in 1904-1905, Edmund Husserl developed a 'threefold' notion of image revolving around the notion of depiction [*Abbildung*]. More specifically, the phenomenological description allows a seeing-in to emerge as an essential characteristic of the image consciousness, in which an image object assumes the role of a representant [*Repräsentant*] in order to allow us to see the image subject in the image itself (thanks to "moments of resemblance" shared by image object and image subject). Nevertheless, our paper – focusing particularly on what might be called the depictive art *par excellence*, that is the portrait – aims to show that it would be erroneous to read the Husserlian notion of image exclusively on the basis of this earlier course: things seem to change significantly when Husserl develops a different notion of phantasy, and artistic images, in particular, are not to be thought of as resembling something else, but rather as expressive images producing their own model.

Key words. Image, Depiction, Expression, Portrait, Resemblance.

J'aime Michel. Mais j'aime encore mieux la vérité
D. Diderot

1. THE STRATIFIED STRUCTURE OF IMAGE CONSCIOUSNESS

In a well-known course he gave at Göttingen in the winter semester 1904-1905, entitled *Hauptstücke aus der Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, Edmund Husserl developed a 'threefold' notion of image. More specifically, the part of the course in which he deals with this specific issue is the third one (*Phantasy and Image Consciousness*). According to his approach, when phenomenologically examining "physical images" (distinct from "phantasy images", namely the 'visual immaterial images' one experiences in one's own imagination), we can distinguish three moments, "three distinct, yet inseparable inten-

tional objects" constituting them: the "image thing [*Bildding*]", namely the image considered as a thing hanging on the wall; the "image object [*Bildobjekt*]", that is the image we experience *seeing in* this thing on the wall and the "image subject [*Bildsujet*]", i.e. what is represented by the image object (see Husserl [1980]: 21). On the one hand, it is judicious to begin by recalling that this text is part of *Husserliana XXIII*, Husserl's collected manuscripts on *Phantasy, Image Consciousness and Memory*, which were never published within Husserl's lifetime. On the other hand, despite the often unsystematic character of these writings, it is possible to trace several significant lines of thought through them – viable potential avenues of research from which Husserl drew important conclusions actually appearing in his published works (*Ideas I* and *First Philosophy*, for example) and which still represent a treasure trove of ideas for new reflections on image to draw upon.

Concerning the tripartition we have just mentioned, the texts in this volume (which span nearly twenty years) show how, on several occasions, Husserl returned to re-examine this relationship among the three 'objects', which appears simple but is in truth highly complex. Thus, at minimum, we can say that such an account of physical images must not be seen as a fixed result of phenomenological investigations, but rather as a problematic nucleus that still stimulates important inquiries even today. In the last decade, significant works have been devoted to discussing this Husserlian account of image consciousness, more specifically with the goal of determining if and to what extent it can be beneficial for understanding twentieth-century and contemporary images. Here, we will have the opportunity to at least mention some of these contributions, and, more specifically, to try and gain some initial general insight on the role that *resemblance* plays in Husserl understanding of image, particularly in relation to the notion of *depiction* (*Abbildung*).

Thus, we can start by pointing out how, in the Göttingen analysis, the image object (the represent-ant [*Repräsentant*]) can represent the subject on the grounds of "moments of resemblance" (see Husserl [1980]: 33). The image object is representative of an image subject without merely being a sign of

it, precisely because an image is not something that points beyond itself – as, Husserl remarks, a sign does –, but is rather internally referential (see Husserl [1980]: 37). Images can function as, but are not, signs (see Husserl [1980]: 185; Marbach [2000]: 295). Husserl strongly insists upon this point: we see the image subject *in* the image object through "these moments of resemblance". What is implied in our experience of images is a "seeing-in" (see for example Husserl [1980]: 57)[1]. Now, at first glance, the threefold structure characterizing image consciousness can easily be identified and described when, for example, we refer to a 'normal' photograph of someone – let us consider a very well-known photograph of Husserl himself [Figure 1].

Viewing this photograph (and supposing it made of paper), we *can* decide to focus on: 1) the paper photograph as a "physical thing"; 2) the "miniature", the "grayish-violet" face, namely the "photographic image" – the "depictive" image, something "not taken by us for even a moment as something real"; and 3) "the image subject" that "is depicted", namely the father of phenomenology: Edmund Husserl (Husserl [1980]: 20-21).

Regarding the relation between image object and image subject, as we anticipated, Husserl writes that they share "moments of resemblance". And as regards resemblance, this 'depictive bind' seems, at this moment, to be constitutive of every image (including the ones we find in fine art). Accordingly, one might say that in a depiction, by using the sensible content of the image thing, the image object must *imitate* the *subject* in order to allow us to see it in the image. And yet, the Husserlian notion of *resemblance* implies a peculiar sense that cannot be reduced to one of *imitation*. Nicolas de Warren, for example, stated that even though "Husserl insists on resemblance as the irreducible core of visual representation […] resemblance is not taken to be a type of natural faithfulness, a causal

---

[1] As aptly recalled in Brough [2012]: 550:"the notion of 'seeing-in', understood as an essential moment of representation, has gained wide currency in Anglo-American aesthetics, particularly through Richard Wollheim's *Painting as an Art*". For a comparison between Husserl's and Wollheim's "seeing-in" see Brough [2012]: 550-553.
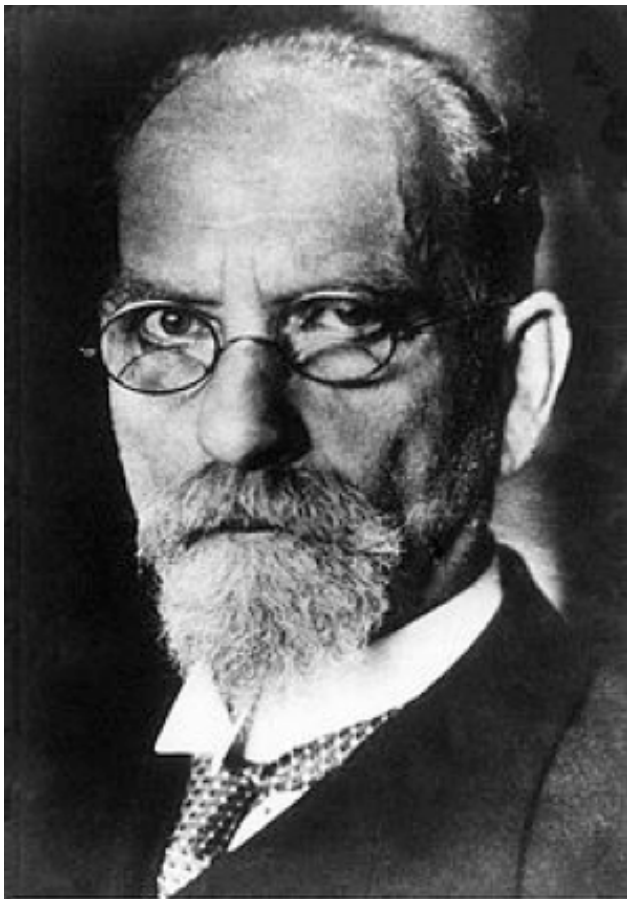
Figure 1

interaction between copy and original. […] Instead, Husserl examines image-consciousness as a *specific form of intentionality*; yet, this placement of image-consciousness in the framework of intentionality does not simply offer another name or novel guise for a traditional notion of resemblance as imitation (*mimesis*), as an appearance that imitates the look of another appearance" (de Warren [2010]: 306, my italics). This is tantamount to saying that the resemblance between an image and its subject is not, properly speaking, a resemblance between two things, namely an image and a person: "The original of which Husserl speaks does not enjoy a separate form of existence from its 'being-pictured' in an image" (de Warren [2010]: 316)[2].

It has been notoriously remarked that the notion of resemblance is a slippery one, and the debate about its function in depiction is well-known and plenty of facets (see for example Scholz [2004]: 17-81). Accordingly, we must proceed cautiously and try here to win some clarity as far as the Husserlian approach (that, by the way, anticipated that debate) is concerned. Let us consider the image representing Husserl a bit further. In this case, according to the Göttingen course, we have an image object that assumes the role of a representant [*Repräsentant*] for the image subject. The image object we see on the paper or the screen here is no higher than a span and of an unnatural color, one that we *know* could not be the color of Husserl's skin or that of anyone else. We *know* that, just as when we see old black-and-white photographs, we have no trouble understanding that the people and things depicted in them do not actually lack color. And yet, despite this difference (which indeed turns out to be a necessary moment of image consciousness (see Husserl [1980]: §19)) the phenomenological description allows a *seeing-in* to emerge as an essential characteristic of the image consciousness. Of course, the image can also function as a 'catalyst for imagination'. Starting from this photograph, we can imagine Husserl in flesh and blood, 'in full color', absorbed in one of his famous *philosophische Spaziergänge* with an assistant. But at that moment, we would have *left* the *image* in favor of engaging in a *phantasy*.

One can state that one sees Husserl (the image subject that is not present but presentified) *in* this image-object manifesting itself on the paper or on the screen. Nonetheless, even though seeing-in always occurs in images, we can start to suggest that this form of seeing-in can entail a very different experience for the spectator, depending on the *attitude* he or she assumes before images. In this par-

2 Also John Brough remarked (and this quotation clearly echoes de Warren's), that "the kind of resemblance at

work in image consciousness […] differs from resemblance as it is commonly understood, which involves an external relation. The resemblance in imaging is instead an internal matter bound to 'seeing-in'" (Brough [2012]: 555).

ticular case, for example, we might say that our experience of the image implies an attitude toward *reality*. Of course, this is not to suggest that we perceive something real: we do not *take* our experience of Husserl to be a *real* perception [*Wahr-nehmung*]. But we believe that this image *truly* represents the real Husserl who once was before the camera lens. We might add that, when we say that an image does not resemble the original, we already approach the image in a specific way, we are facing it in a specific attitude. Above, in a deliberately naïve way, we dubbed this attitude "normal". Now, we can certainly add that "normal" here does not mean 'impartial', 'unbiased'. As we will see, there is no such a thing as an 'innocent' – innocent in this very sense – image. We will come back to this. For now, what has been emphasized here is the fact that, in order for something to be an image of something else, the first need not be an imitation of the second. In this sense, images are not copies (see also Brough [2012]: 556). Nonetheless, that specified, we can still say that, at this stage of his reflections, Husserl describes the essence of image with a specific kind of relationship in mind between the image object and the subject we see in it. When seeing in a regime of image consciousness, he specifies, we do not intend, say, the little "grayish-violet" object we are effectively seeing, but rather "another object, for which the appearing object functions as a representant by means of its resemblance to it" (Husserl [1980]: 150). According to this 'model', as we have seen, the image object holds the function of "representant". It does not have *value* in itself, but acts as a deputy [*Stellvertreter*] for something else intended in it, "another object like it or resembling it" (Husserl [1980]: 22).

From here, then, it is no surprise that Husserl can easily make recourse to the case of portraiture – which, at this point of his analysis, we might suggest is not so much as an example for him as a paradigm of how images essentially function: "The *portrait* is taken by us to be an image; that is, we do not mean the image object appearing chiefly in shades of grey or even a painting's image object appearing in colors. We take the image object precisely as the image of such and such a person" (Husserl [1980]: 25).

2. THE 'INDEPENDENT LIFE' OF A PORTRAIT

We briefly defined the general traits that should help us outline the core of Husserl's understanding of image in 1904-1905. We must now point out the fact that – as we might have expected – this seemingly simple subdivision regarding image structure may require further investigation. Here, in particular, we would like to try and pose some questions about the nature of the *image subject*. In order to do that, it could be useful to begin by questioning a paradigmatic example.

As we have already noted, the Husserlian tri-partition we presented in reference to a 'common' photograph can be detected when referring to paintings. With respect to the famous portrait we now are going to discuss (see figure 2), we could, once again, distinguish the image thing (namely the "painted canvas" (see Husserl [1980]: 51)), the image object (that is, the "artificial presence" (see Wiesing [2005]) that, according to Husserl, appears to steal the sensory content from apprehension of the physical thing (see Husserl [1980]: 48-51) and the image subject (that is to say Denis Diderot, *le Philosophe*).

The case to which I would now like to refer is quite a renowned one. It concerns a passage of Diderot's famous *Salons*, the literary work composed by *comptes rendus* of the biannual Parisian exposition of the *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*, which the *philosophe* drew up for Melchior Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire* every two years from 1759 to 1781 (with the exceptions of 1773, 1777 and 1779). Here, suffice it to say that Diderot's task consisted of providing a literary description of the works shown in the *Salon Carré* at the Louvre, as Diderot's work for Grimm's Journal was basically meant to provide updates about the exhibit to a small number of royal houses outside France who were unable to see the masterpieces on display in Paris[3]. The specific passage I would like to examine is found in the *Salon* of 1767. Here, something very curious

[3] On the ekphrastic value of Diderot *comptes rendus*, see Mazzocut-Mis [2016].

Figure 2. Louis-Michel Van Loo, *Portrait de Denis Diderot* (1767)

occurs to Diderot the moment he finds himself before a portrait of himself by Louis-Michel Van Loo [Figure 2]. Despite the wealth of "moments of resemblance" marking this portrait as one of well-known *philosophe*, and despite the painting title (*M. Diderot*) unquestionably reflecting his own *identity*, the philosopher seems unable to *recognize* himself in this image. When describing Van Loo's portrait in his *compte rendu* for the *Correspondance littéraire*, he writes as follows:

Monsieur Diderot. Moi. J'aime Michel; mais j'aime encore mieux la vérité. Assez ressemblant. […] Très vivant. […] Mais trop jeune, tête trop petite. Joli comme une femme, lorgnant, souriant, mignard, faisant le petit bec, la bouche en cœur. […] Mais que diront mes petits-enfants, lorsqu'ils viendront à comparer mes tristes ouvrages avec ce riant, mignon, efféminé, vieux coquet-là? Mes enfants, je vous préviens que ce n'est pas moi. J'avais en une journée cent physionomies diverses, selon la chose dont j'étais affecté. J'étais serein, triste, rêveur, tendre, violent, passionné, enthousiaste. Mais je ne fus jamais tel que vous me voyez là (Diderot [1767]: 81-82, emphasis added).

Here, we clearly have a case of 'failed recognition'. It is not so much that the painter, Louis-Michel Van Loo, fails to *depict* Denis Diderot. We all *believe* that this is Diderot and, from a certain point of view, this man on the canvas does resemble him (that is, no one would say it has no resemblance to Diderot – let us ignore the fact that is only thanks to other images to Diderot that we are able to consider this image resemblant of him! –, or, for example, that this image could possibly function as a depiction of Nietzsche). Nevertheless, another possible sense of the term "depiction" is evidently emerging here. Hence, we can draw the attention to the fact that in the *Salons* (and not only there, as we will see) we can witness a spectator's experience (Diderot's, and through him, our own) in which what we see is an image *subject* expressed and *produced* by images differing from the *subject* they are supposed or claim to depict. We might suggest that such cases highlight a difference – not pertaining to the difference between image object and image subject so much as to the discrepancy between a *subject* declared, patent, and a *subject* produced, latent. It

seems that in these instances one might refer to a creative or expressive depiction, a veritable resemblance with no original. In this sense, keeping in mind our earlier remarks about image consciousness as seeing-in, we can say that the image object is always 'condemned' to *produce* a subject. From the moment where Husserl states that *seeing-in* pertains to the essence of image, he actually goes far beyond its own intentions.

As we have said, in the *Salon*, the subject we see in the image often (as in this case) eludes the painter's own explicit intention. This is not to say that depiction necessarily fails in such instances; indeed, the painter may even achieve a 'truthful' depiction unintentionally. In his *compte rendu*, after having described Van Loo's depiction of a 'stranger' claiming to be himself – a stranger full of moments of resemblance to him, yet so unfaithful to the original – Diderot gives us an example of a 'reliable' portrait of him. Now, the person who painted him in this appropriate way does not happen to be a great master; Diderot describes him as a "pauvre diable appelé Garant [*sic*][4], qui [l]'attrapa, comme il arrive à un sot qui dit un bon mot" (Diderot [1767]: 83). This more resemblant portrait, to refer to the 1904-1905 Husserlian account of physical images, seems to present far fewer moments of resemblance to the subject. Why? Diderot's own answer is simply: "Celui qui voit mon portrait par Garant, me voit. *Ecco il vero Polichinello*" (Diderot [1767]: 83) [Figure 3].

3. ART AND *PERZEPTIVE PHANTASIE*

Even though, as we have seen, the resemblance involved in the Husserlian account of image consciousness is a resemblance *sui generis* – an intentional resemblance in which we see the subject in the image – it must now be shown that the 'model' emerging from the Göttingen analysis is by no means definitive, a result to which we can reduce Husserl's entire understanding of image. It would thus be incorrect to consider Husserl's notion of image – and, for that matter, those of resemblance and depiction – on the sole basis of the 1904-1905 course, for, as we have said, Husserl's development of this analysis did not cease there[5]. A comprehensive account of his subsequent inquiries on the subject would obviously be outside the scope of this article, but it may be useful to attempt a general outline of certain developments that impacted his notion of image in later years. We mentioned earlier that no image is 'impartial', in the sense of there being no specific attitude presupposed towards it. We must now refer to the *aesthetic attitude* one can take when experiencing images, an attitude that, probably more than any other, can put the above-outlined essential structure of image consciousness to the test. It is important to preface this by remarking that distinguishing between one kind of attitude and another, as we are about to do, may appear too normative at times; indeed, different attitudes can often mingle. We will come back to this.

For now, we could start by saying that, for Husserl, when living in an aesthetic attitude, we are not interested in the existence of what we see before our eyes. Nor are we interested in the possible existence of a presentified subject we see in an image. Indeed, with the images of Husserl and Diderot discussed in the preceding sections, we may note similarities between them as regards the attitude we adopt towards them. On the one hand, we can affirm that we see, respectively, Edmund Husserl and Denis Diderot (with the paradigmatic case of Diderot's own denial) in the images. On the other hand, of course, "seeing" someone in an image is not the same as seeing someone "in per-

---

[4] Jean-Baptiste Garand portrayed Diderot in September 1760 at Mme d'Épinay's dwelling at La Chevrette. Note what Diderot writes to Sophie Volland relating to this portrait: "Je suis représenté […] comme quelqu'un qui médite. Je médite en effet sur cette toile. J'y vis, j'y respire, j'y suis animé; la pensée paroît à travers le front" (Diderot [1955-70]: III, 73).

[5] "In the years following these lectures, Husserl substantially refined the analysis of the various specific forms of acts of intuitively representifying something (*anschauliches Vergegenwärtigen*), acts of imagining, depicting, and remembering in particular" (Marbach [2013]: 433-434).

Figure 3. Pierre Chenu, engraving from Jean-Baptiste Garand, *Portrait de Diderot* (around 1760)

son", having them before us in "flesh and blood". Hence, these images do not constitute presentations (*Gegenwärtigungen*) of Edmund Husserl and Denis Diderot (they are not there, actually present), but merely presentifications (*Vergegenwärtigungen*) of them (they are presentified). And yet, we might affirm that, in both experiences (keeping in mind, of course, the many other differences between them) our attitude toward *reality* is that of *believing* in the real existence of the men the depictions purportedly represent. To borrow the famous expression of Roland Barthes (who instead, in this respect, would clearly keep separate the two kinds of image): we do believe that Edmund Husserl and Denis Diderot, respectively, "have been there". We certainly are in a regime of image consciousness and not of reality consciousness (we know very well that Husserl and Diderot in the image are not

really there on the paper or on the screen), yet our act of seeing-in into these images is, broadly speaking, intertwined with a "ray" of belief marking the subject we see in the image (we know that Husserl and Diderot are not here, but we *believe* they were there in "flesh and blood" when their portraits were created in either painted or photographic form). While viewing these kinds of photographs or paintings, our experience is stamped by a form of *belief* in the existence of what we see in the image – we have a specific attitude before it. In phenomenological terms, we could propose designating them as *positing images*, insofar as they posit something as existent (not the image object appearing on the canvas or paper, of course, but rather the image subject they claim to represent).

But what about images that do not involve any form of interest as regards what they repre-

sent? How do we approach the issue of subject depiction in those instances, and what role do resemblance and imitation play in such depictions? Indeed, this would appear also to involve what Husserl calls aesthetic consciousness, a separate type of image consciousness from that which characterizes 'common' physical images concerned with questions of 'existence'. Essential differences are to be found, for instance, between the consciousness involved in viewing in a simple photograph as denoting someone and the one involved in seeing the same image "aesthetically". In the latter, properly speaking, whether what I see *in* the image exists is not important: what truly matters is *how* what I see in it shows itself to me. In order to shed light on these delicate questions, it can be beneficial to refer, albeit in a very general way, to some noteworthy steps that, under specific aspects, represent a significant change in Husserl's consideration of image as compared to the 1904-1905 course we summarized above. First of all, let us recall the famous letter Husserl wrote to Hugo von Hofmannsthal in January 1907, in which Husserl points out several essential commonalities between the figure of the phenomenologist and that of the artist, thereby opening up possibilities for consideration of the role *epoché* might play in the aesthetic field. In particular, phenomenologists and artists share a peculiar "attitude towards all forms of objectivity" (Husserl [1907]: 2). Artists, Husserl says, suspend "all attitudes relating to emotions and the will which presuppose […] an existential attitude" (Husserl [1907]: 2) – a remark that, we might certainly add, applies to the audience as well. In order for us, as the audience, to contemplate a work of art in terms of a "purely aesthetic"(Husserl [1907]: 2) experience, no existence of the object observed is to be implied. Of course, this applies not only to 'the' image appearing exclusively, say, on a canvas – which is an image object, a "nothing" – but also to the subject we can see *in* the images on a canvas: the existence of what is seen *in* the image (for instance, in what we have called positing images, images with *belief*) is, from this perspective, out of *play*. This does not mean that art cannot involve

references to reality; indeed, many such references may be present on numerous levels. However, in order for us to judge from a purely aesthetic perspective, we should suspend all attitudes toward this reality. Philosopher (read: phenomenologist) and artist (and audience member) see what they see as a pure appearance (*Erscheinung*) (see Husserl [1907]: 2). They do not refute the existence of what they are seeing: that would be a *negation* of their existence implying a form of position taking (namely, against their existence). They do not even begin to take it as real. Although we cannot linger too long on this complicated question here, it must be noted that the reference to disinterestedness in existence as a defining characteristic of our aesthetic experience is clearly reminiscent of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* – a debt that, after all, Husserl himself explicitly acknowledges (see Husserl [1907]: 2).

Secondly, after having inaugurated his analysis on time precisely in the fourth part of the Göttingen course, by 1909 Husserl had considerably revised his "content-apprehension schema"[6] and abandoned his "theory of representation (*Theorie der Repräsentation*)"[7]. Though space constraints prevent us from providing a meticulous account of the complexities of this development here, let us remark that these changes represent significant steps that ultimately led him to reconsider his notion of phantasy-image and of phantasy *tout court*. Essentially, the problematic issue in 1904-1905 is that Husserl's initial inquiry into the essence of images relies upon representation [*Repräsentation*] as a model to explain both physical images (those manifesting themselves on a material support, such as photographs and paintings) and phantasy images (those generated purely through phantasy, which, as he says, merely "hover before us" (Husserl [1980]: 17)). Even when dealing with phantasy images, he attempts to characterize presentifications by calling into question

---

[6] See in particular "Text no. 8 (probably from Autumn 1909)" in Husserl [1980]: 323-327.
[7] See Husserl [1980]: 244, note 3: "The false theory of representation misled me".

the function of a representant that is designed to resemble (in the sense already outlined) a subject we are *supposed* to see in it. According to this initial approach, presentifications through physical and phantasy images can, in principle, be experienced by the same "I" that experiences perceptions under other circumstances – that is, the "I" who intuits a tree through perception, or who intuits a tree upon seeing it in a physical image (based on its resemblance to an actual tree) or phantasizing it in a phantasy image (again, based upon specific moments of resemblance), are one and the same.

Nevertheless, by the end of the third part of the course, Husserl is already growing hesitant to continue along this path, and soon he shifts the direction of his analysis (see Husserl [1980]: §38 ff.). Whereas before he had endeavored to find the common structure of physical and phantasy images based on the model of the depictive relationship recognized in physical images, he now begins to conceive of the essence of phantasy 'images' differently, and simultaneously to recognize that phantasy can assume a central role in image-consciousness[8]. What is important to stress here is that, thanks to developments in this direction furthered in later years – complementarily to Husserl's inquiries on time – the phenomenon of presentification reveals a peculiar structure that can be essentially differentiated from that of the image consciousness as it is still presented in the 1904-1905 analysis. Putting it in the simplest way: through his analysis, Husserl comes to the conclusion that, when we phantasy something, we do not merely have a phantasized image that purportedly functions as a representant of the thing phantasied (in the same way as an image object). Rather, we are involved in a veritable *reproduction*

of an experience in which we find not only 'what is phantasized', but also the implied reproduction of a phantasized "I" who phantasizes that content, *quasi*-living the judgments, the feelings, the desires brought about by this *quasi*-reality (see also Husserl [1980]: 713). A 'phantasy-I' must then be a transcendental correlate of a phantasized object that I – as a *Phantasie-Ich* – experience in the *as-if* mode without the mediation of an image. Phantasies are reproductions without being mere copies: they are reproductions involving a phantasized 'I' of experiences that never occurred[9]. We might well suggest that they are re-productions of *possible* experiences (see Franzini [2001]: 29). In a 1912 text, in keeping with the change of direction mentioned above, Husserl goes as far as to affirm that this very structure of phantasy also calls for a more developed conception of image consciousness: "*we must […] universalize*", he writes, "*the concept of phantasy* (let us say, *the concept of presentification*)" (Husserl [1980]: 565, transl. slightly modified), which then allows us to conceive of "*two fundamental forms of presentification*:

1) *reproductive presentification* [*we might also describe this as 'immaterial presentification'*]

2) *presentification complying with* perceptio [*perzeptive*][10], presentification in image" [Husserl [1980]: 565, transl. slightly modified].

According to this, both 'phantasy image' – that is, reproductive image – and 'image complying with *perceptio*' "*are cases of imagination* [*Imagination*]" (Husserl [1980]: 570). In this regard, Husserl goes as far as to state that "this must *never* be forgotten and is absolutely *certain*" (Husserl [1980]: 570). We can then notice the following: In 1904-1905, Husserl developed an ultimately unsuccessful parallel between image consciousness and phantasy consciousness on the basis of the notion of *imagination* [*Imagination*] understood as "conversion into image [*Verbildlichung*]"; here, he

---

[8] "Although one speaks in a respectable sense of imaging in phantasy, and although, on the other side, phantasy makes up the most essential moment even in common imaging, as we have just discovered, it nevertheless seems most appropriate to speak of 'imaging,' of 'image apprehension,' only in cases in which an image, which for its part first functions as a representing object for something depicted, actually appears" (Husserl [1980]: 87).

[9] On the creative character of the reproductive structure of phantasy, see for example Bernet [2004]: 94; 111-112.

[10] I discussed this terminological distinction between *perceptio* [*Perzeption*]/complying with *perceptio* [*perzeptiv*] and perception [*Wahrnehmung*] in Rozzoni [2016].

establishes that same parallel on the basis of imagination [*Imagination*], but this time understood as "*quasi*-actual experience [*quasi* Erfahrung]", namely "phantasy" (Husserl [1980]: 569). Image consciousness can then be conceived of as presentification complying with *perceptio* or, as Husserl also writes in a relevant manuscript we will now conclude with, *perzeptive Phantasie*.

4. FROM *ABBILD* TO *BILD*

In a manuscript that, according to Eduard Marbach, probably dates back to 1918, Husserl ultimately brings up this notion of *perzeptive Phantasie* directly in context of characterizing art as "the realm of phantasy that has been given form" (Husserl [1980]: 616). In this manuscript, Husserl strongly exemplifies the idea of a phantasy complying with a pure *positionless perceptio* through an inquiry concerning the 'perception' of the actor's body. Here, the notion of *perceptio* [*Perzeption*] and that of *phantasy* give rise to the crucial and complicated notion of *perzeptive Phantasie*, echoing the one of presentification complying with *perceptio* (and of imagination [*Imagination*] complying with *perceptio*, at least in the sense we have just specified). Although the 'experimental' nature of these manuscripts encourages us to exercise caution in evaluating the precise scope of their implications, this text[11], at the very least, can be described as offering relevant hints as to how Husserl's profound and ceaseless work on phantasy finally allows him (and us) to rethink the very notions of depiction and resemblance we discussed at the beginning of this article. Husserl declares that he previously erroneously "believed that […] belong[s] to the essence of fine art to present in an image" and "understood this presenting to be depicting" (Husserl [1980]: 616). The case of theater seems to be paradigmatic in this regard: "In the case of a theatrical performance", he affirms, "we live in a world of *perzeptive Phantasie*; we <have> 'images' (*Bilder*) within the cohesive unity of one

image, but we do not for that reason have depictions (*Abbilder*)" (Husserl [1980]: 616). Indeed, we experience such images in a consciousness of "neutrality"(Husserl [1980]: 617), better: In the consciousness of the "as-if"(Husserl [1980]: 617), in a phantasy that displays itself in accordance with *perceptio*. We can say that images are productive *ficta* permeated with the character of *unreality*. And yet, we are not dealing with an "illusion", at least "in the ordinary sense" (Husserl [1980]: 617) (unlike the well-known wax mannequin examples Husserl often drew upon[12]). Interestingly, Husserl specifies that "the actors produce an image, the image of a tragic event, each actor producing the image of a character in the play, and so on. But here 'image of' [*Bild von*] does not signify depiction of [*Abbild von*]" (Husserl [1980]: 617). And yet, even without aiming to circumscribe the exact range of this important statement here, we can at least suggest that this passage 'from *Abbild* to *Bild*' does not concern theater exclusively, but other arts as well; indeed, it may even concern what we might call the depictive art *par excellence*, namely the portrait. Note that Husserl is not suggesting that the depictive function *inevitably* disappears where the theater is concerned. As we already noted in the first two sections, it is important to clarify our attitude toward images, the type of consciousness they call for. Thus, when watching "Wallenstein or Richard III […] depictive presentations are surely involved, although the extent to which this depictiveness has an aesthetic function itself is a question we will have to consider" (Husserl [1980]: 616). "Certainly", Husserl writes, "depictiveness is not the *primary* concern; rather, it is a matter of imaging in the sense of phantasy

---

[11] I developed some of the many implications of this text in relation to filmic image in Rozzoni [2016].

[12] "We must note, however, the importance of the obvious distinction between: 1) The group of cases exemplified by the example of the mannequin/human being. Here we have unmodified apprehension tendencies, belief tendencies fighting with belief tendencies. 2) The image apprehensions, specifically the ordinary aesthetic image apprehensions (not the wax-figure apprehensions and similar 'disappointments')" (Husserl [1980]: 570). On the difference between the character of images and that of illusions, see also Desideri 2008: 161-164.

complying with *perceptio* understood as immediate imagination" (Husserl [1980]: 616, transl. slightly modified). The very same situation can arise with portraits. We can think of the model of the *Abbildung* as related to the attitude regarding the denotative depiction we outlined above. This is what Husserl means when he ascertains that "an actual depicting presents itself in the case of a portrait, which, moreover, can just as well be the portrait of an imaginary person as of an actual person" (Husserl [1980]: 617). And yet with portraits, too, "depictiveness […] may itself fall into the aesthetic consciousness as such" (Husserl [1980]: 617, transl. slighty modified) – more specifically, I would add, into an aesthetic consciousness complying with the regime of *perzeptive Phantasie*.

This seems to be exactly the case in the paradoxical instance of *failed recognition* experienced by Diderot: the image object appearing on the canvas enjoyed a form of "semblance" with itself, not relying on a denotative "depiction" (on this point see also Spinicci [2008]: 23-31). Rather, the *philosophe* experienced a form of presentification complying with *perceptio* of a stranger before him. Instead of confronting a depiction of a subject *preceding* the act of depiction, he encounters the subject produced – or we should say: expressed – in the phantasized experience given in accordance with *perceptio*. From this perspective, we can affirm that art – even the art of portraiture, as in this peculiar case – opens up to many *levels of recognition*, comprising a sort of creative recognition, and may present more or less of these levels in each case, intertwined in different ways.

Whereas the concept of "moments of resemblance" might strongly imply a denotative attitude under Husserl's 1904-1905 perspective, under the perspective of presentification complying with *perceptio*, such moments might now be understood as *expressive* as well (as, after all, a Husserl's manuscript from 1906 already suggests[13]). At the

very least, it might be suggested that Van Loo's portrait of Diderot expressed a subject that (if we take Diderot's word) never existed nor was imagined. More significantly, the last century compelled us to *recognize* new kinds of resemblances, in which "immanent subjects" emerge from the canvas rather than predating it in their existence. We can easily call to mind several examples of portraits in which the portrait artist's subject is unrecognizable on the canvas (even for the subject himself or herself). In such cases, despite the absence of a *denotative depiction*, we still can recognize a 'peculiar' subject (whose nature now warrants further investigation), and might then be able to recognize that subject in reality despite never having seen him or her before[14]. Even in cases where the portrait's title assures us that the face on the canvas is one belonging to a real person, this reference often becomes wholly unessential. What Proust wrote in the *Recherche* about the great painter Elstir (who, parenthetically, is in fact a product of Proust's imagination) is true of many other 20th-century painters as well: when viewing portraits they have produced, we struggle to recognize the subject they purportedly presentify. We sometimes even find it hard to phantasize them in a reproductive way. Nevertheless, in such instances in particular, we can experience a kind of recognition while *seeing-in* the image: indeed, "il y a là un être que nous sentons bien que nous avons déjà vu", a person who recall to us not this particular woman but other women, that is, in Elstir's case, "toutes celles qu'a peintes Elstir" (Proust [1919]: 425). Correspondingly, we can think along similar lines when considering recognition of a woman in, say, a Picasso, a Kirchner, an Otto Dix (and, again, different women emerg-

---

[13] "Instant photography: Among the innumerable particular positions that actually occur, which is the one 'noticed'? And among those that are noticed, which is the 'best'? Every nerve, every muscle, attuned to the action.

Nothing indifferent, nothing random. Etc. *As much expression as possible*" (Husserl [1980]: 169, my italics).

[14] "Des femmes passent dans la rue, différentes de celles d'autrefois, puisque ce sont des Renoir, ces Renoir où nous nous refusions jadis à voir des femmes. […] Tel est l'univers nouveau et périssable qui vient d'être créé. Il durera jusqu'à la prochaine catastrophe géologique que déchaîneront un nouveau peintre ou un nouvel écrivain originaux" (Proust [1920-21]: 317).

ing from the world – complying with *perceptio* – of each artist) [Figures 4, 5, 6].

One last suggestion we must mention, albeit briefly, before concluding regards the paradoxical fact that resemblance can often be obtained through this *perzeptive Phantasie* via *deformation*, especially in works created in the early part of the 20th century (see Costa [2010]: 135). Suffice it to note here that it could be profitable to trace this idea back – or at least connect it – to Husserl's famous statement in *Ideas I* about the importance of imagination as a means of discovering essence through variation, a concept elaborated significantly in Merleau-Ponty's work on the relation between painting and essence. To express it in a very general way, we could say that (for example in Merleau-Ponty) deformation of reality through painting becomes an essential means of enabling the expression and recognition of ideas. In Merleau-Ponty's words: "painting does not imitate the world but is a world of its own. This means that, in our encounter with a painting, at no stage are we sent back to the natural object; similarly, when we experience a portrait *aesthetically*, its 'resemblance' to the model is of no importance (those who commission portraits often want them to be good likenesses, but this is because their vanity is greater than their love of painting). […] Suffice it to say that even when painters are working with real objects, their aim is never to evoke the object itself, but to create on the canvas a spectacle which is sufficient unto itself" (Merleau-Ponty [1948]: 96).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brough, J., 2012: *Something that is Nothing but can be Anything: The Image and our Consciousness of it*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology*, ed. Dan Zahavi, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Figure 4. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Marzella* (1909-1910)

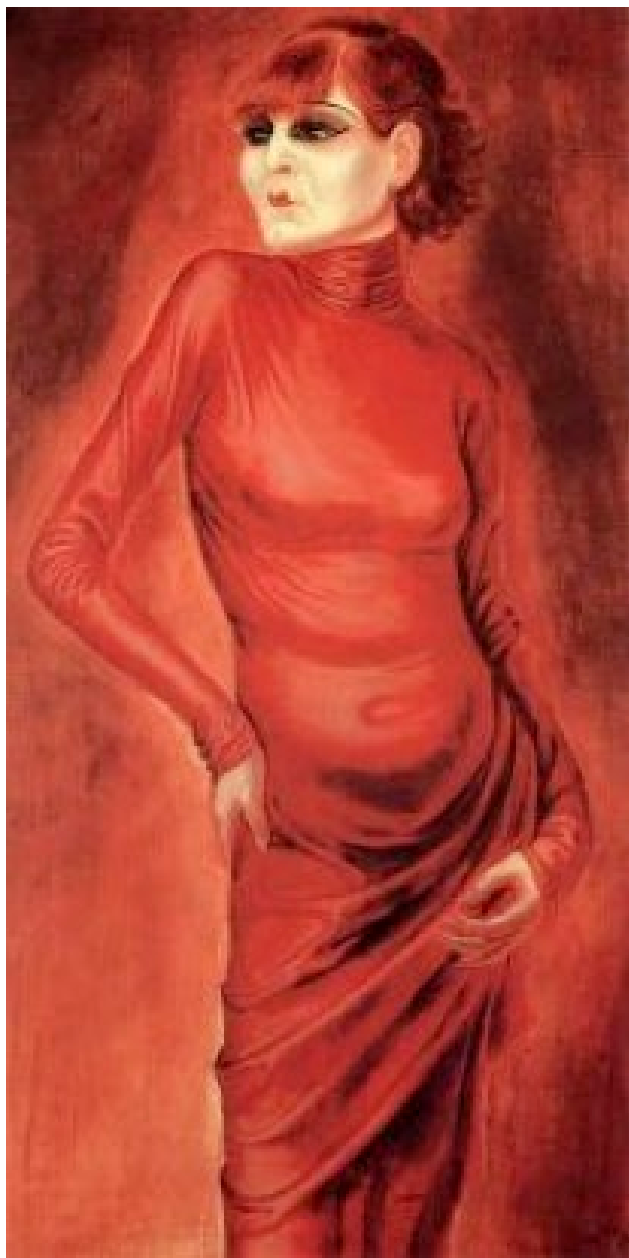**Figure 5.** Otto Dix, *Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia von Harden* (1926)

Figure 6. Otto Dix, *Portrait of the Dancer Anita Berber* (1925)

Costa, V., 2010: *Per una fenomenologia dell'immaginazione*, in *Memoria, immaginazione e tecnica*, ed. M. Feyles, NEU, Roma.

de Warren, N., 2010: *Tamino's Eyes, Pamina's Gaze: Husserl's Phenomenology of Image-Consciousness Refashioned*, in *Philosophy, Phenomenology, Sciences. Essays in Commemoration of Edmund Husserl*, eds. C. Ierna, H. Jacobs, F. Mattens, Springer, Dordrecht.

Desideri, F., 2008: *L'immagine che c'è*, "Aisthesis", vol. 1, n. 2, pp. 155-171.

Diderot, D., 1767: *Diderot, Salons III. Ruines et paysages. Salon 1767*, Hermann, Paris 1995.

Diderot, D., 1955-70: *Correspondance*, ed. G. Roth, J. Varloot, 16 Vols., Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris.

Franzini, E., 2001: *Fenomenologia dell'invisibile. Al di là dell'immagine*, Cortina, Milano.

Husserl, E., 1907: *Brief an Hugo von Hofmannsthal vom 12.01.1907, Husserliana Dokumente* III/7, *Briefwechsel -Wissenschaftlerkorrespondenz*, ed. K. Schuhmann, Dordrecht, Kluwer 1994, pp. 133-136, English translation (S.-O. Wallenstein), *Letter to Hofmannsthal (Göttingen, January 12th, 1907)*, "Site", 26-27, 2009, p. 2.

Husserl, E., 1980: *Phantasie, Bildbewusstsein, Erinnerung. Zur Phänomenologie der anschaulichen Vergegenwärtigungen. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1898–1925)*, ed. Eduard Marbach, Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag, English translation (J. Brough), *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898–1925)*, Springer, Dordrecht 2005.

Marbach, E., 2000: *On Depicting*, "Facta Philosophica", 2, pp. 291-308.

Marbach, E., 2013: *Towards a Phenomenological Analysis of Fictional Intentionality and Reference*, "International Journal of Philosophical Studies", 21/3, pp. 428-447.

Mazzocut-Mis, M., 2016: *Picture, Poetry and Theatricality. Writing the* Salons *is 'describing' the* Salons, "Lebenswelt", 8, pp. 68-80.

Merleau-Ponty, M., 1948: *Causeries 1948*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 2002, English translation (O. Davis), *The World of Perception*, Routledge, London/New York 2004.

Proust, M., 1919: *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, Gallimard "Folio", Paris 1988.

Proust, M., 1920-21: *Le Côté de Guermantes*, Gallimard "Folio", Paris 1988.

Rozzoni, C., 2016: *Cinema Consciousness. Elements of a Husserlian Approach to Film Image*, "Studia Phaenomenologica", Vol. 16, "Film and Phenomenology", eds. C. Ferencz-Flatz, J. Hanich, pp. 295-324.

Scholz, O. R., 2004: *Bild, Darstellung, Zeichen. Philosophische Theorien bildlicher Darstellung*, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main.

Spinicci, P., 2008: *Simile alle ombre e al sogno. La filosofia dell'immagine*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino.

Wiesing, L., 2005: *Artifizielle Präsenz. Studien zur Philosophie des Bildes*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main.