Pictorial Appearances

A Phenomenological Inquiry

Thèse de doctorat

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Abstract

This work thematizes the phenomenological thresholds that separate image and reality. The Husserlian theory of image consciousness is discussed, criticized in light of the contemporary debate on depiction, and then questioned against different types of pictorial spaces. It is argued that the major limitation of this theory is its focus on depictive images and the consequent flattening of the conditions that make possible the appearance of an image on the conditions of its having a meaning. To overcome this problem, a genetic phenomenological approach to the study of the image is proposed that takes into account the phenomenology of passive syntheses and the analyses of the constitution of space—three-dimensional first, and then pictorial. This work presents the idea that pictorial appearances unfold in a specific way that contrasts with phenomenal sequences of the ordinary objects that populate our environment. This contrast grounds the divide between image and reality.

Ce travail thématise les seuils phénoménologiques qui séparent l'image de la réalité. La théorie husserlienne de la conscience de l'image est discutée, critiquée à la lumière du débat contemporain sur la dépiction, puis remise en cause à l'aune de différents types d'espaces picturaux. Il est avancé que la principale limite de cette théorie est sa focalisation sur les images représentatives et par conséquent l'aplatissement des conditions qui rendent possible l'apparition d'une image sur les conditions de sa signification. Pour surmonter ce problème, une approche phénoménologique génétique de l'étude de l'image est proposée. Cette approche prend en compte la phénoménologie des synthèses passives et les analyses de la constitution de l'espace, d'abord tridimensionnel, puis pictural. Ce travail présente l'idée que les apparences picturales se déploient d'une manière spécifique qui contraste avec les séquences phénoménales des objets ordinaires qui peuplent notre environnement. Ce contraste fonde le clivage entre image et réalité.

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«Solo dopo aver conosciuto la superficie delle cose, – conclude, – ci si può spingere a cercare quel che c'è sotto. Ma la superficie delle cose è inesauribile».

["It is only after you have come to know the surface of things," he concludes, "that you can venture to seek what is underneath. But the surface of things is inexhaustible."]

Italo Calvino, *Palomar*

INTRODUCTION

§ 1. The cave problem, or: the genesis of the divide between image and reality

Let us go back to the first lines of the Book VII of *The Republic*, where Socrates and Glaucon engage in a singular thought experiment.

> '… Picture human beings living in some sort of underground cave dwelling, with an entrance which is long, as wide as the cave, and open to the light. Here they live, from the earliest childhood, with their legs and necks in chains, so that they have to stay where they are, looking only ahead of them, prevented by the chains from turning their heads. They have light from a distant fire, which is burning behind them and above them. Between the fire and the prisoners, at a higher level than them, is a path along which you must picture a low wall that has been built, like the screen which hides people when they are giving a puppet show, and above which they make the puppets appear.'
>
> 'Yes, I can picture all that,' he said.
>
> 'Picture also, along the length of the wall, people carrying all sorts of implements which project above it, and statues of people, and animals made of stone and wood and all kinds of materials. As you'd expect, some of the people carrying the objects are speaking, while others are silent.'
>
> 'A strange picture. And strange prisoners.'
>
> 'No more strange than us,' I said. 'Do you think, for a start, that prisoners of that sort have ever seen anything more of themselves and of one another than the shadows cast by the fire on the wall of the cave in front of them?'
>
> 'How could they, if they had been prevented from moving their heads all their lives?'
>
> 'What about the objects which are being carried? Wouldn't they see only shadows of these also?'
>
> 'Yes, of course.'
>
> (Plato, 2000: 220–221; 514a–515b)

Every philosophy student is aware of the tragic fate reserved for one of the prisoners, the gloomy implications that stem from it, and the diverse levels of reading underlying the

allegory of the cave – epistemological, ontological, pedagogical, and ethical, at least. However, this dissertation is primarily concerned with the phenomenological level of analysis and relates to a specific problem that hides in the passage quoted above: what do the prisoners see? Do they really see shadows, hence images, projected on a wall?

A hasty reading of the dialogue may indeed induce us to believe so. For after all, Socrates repeatedly states that the cave dwellers see nothing but passing shadows. Yet the very dialectic of the allegory runs against this idea. The fleeting forms that appear on the wall of the cave are all the prisoners are visually given. They are not aware of the fire that lights up the cave nor of the objects that project their shadows over the wall; the visual forms that appear in front of them make up their visual reality. So, when Socrates affirms that "what people in this situation would take for truth would be nothing more than the shadows of the manufactured objects" (Plato 2000: 221; 515c) he can only do so from his perspective, that is, from the perspective of someone who has not been living all his life in fetters, without the freedom to move and explore his space. Contrary to the reader, the prisoners do not and cannot know that they are in a cave and that all they see is but a sequence of pictorial appearances: they do not possess any notion of cave, nor do they have any clue about the distinction between image (shadow) and reality. Thus, they surely cannot see the shadows over the wall *qua* shadows – namely, visual appearances that are linked to the appearance of a physical object.

Nonetheless, Plato's allegory supports the idea that the prisoners can see the visual configurations on the wall, and not only that: they can recognize those shapes, recall which of them came earlier, or later, or simultaneously, and predict what would come next (516d). In other words, the prisoners are capable of various – perhaps all – kinds of mental acts with the shapes that show up in their experience. But is this general idea sound? To radicalize Plato's allegory, we can formulate the cave problem as follows: *what can a subject who has been living all her life without the possibility to move any part of the body and who has been visually exposed solely to sequences of images see?* Can we really take for granted the idea that someone who has never had access to three-dimensional objects and who has never had the freedom to explore the space around them can experience anything endowed with meaning simply by watching sequences of fleeting bidimensional shapes? Perhaps Plato's intuitions are a bit too optimistic on this count. I will rather defend the idea that the cave dwellers probably do not see much, and surely they do not see images.

From a phenomenological perspective, the cave problem is especially interesting for two reasons. The first concerns the conditions of visibility that the prisoners are subject to. They have been motionless since their birth: "they have to stay where they are, looking only ahead of them, prevented by the chains from turning their heads". Their visual world consists of a blank wall where bidimensional shapes appear and disappear. These conditions of visibility describe something as a pure gaze detached from the experiencing body – in phenomenological jargon, it amounts to the oculomotor field of view.

The second reason closely ties to the first. Subjects living in those conditions – Plato tells us – are captives of a fictive, unreal world. Yet the subsequent part of the allegory hypothesizes a change in their conditions: one of the cave dwellers is freed from the chains and starts a painful path out of the cave, towards the real world. The passage from the illusory reality of the cave to the outer world is meant to symbolize the capacity, intrinsic to each soul, of turning toward the truest region of the being. But leaving aside Plato's metaphysical aims and, running the risk of a hazardous interpretation, we can zoom in on one significant aspect of the allegory that is usually overlooked. This is the theory of constitution that hides in the allegory, and the essential role that the experiencing body plays in it. How does the constitution of an objective world come about? The initial conditions of visibility of the prisoners do not grant them access to the real world; as mentioned, these subjects cannot even see the shadows *qua* shadows. What is required to get out of this state is the freedom to move in space – what we may call *kinaesthetic freedom*. Once liberated from the fetters, the cave dweller stands up, turns the head around, and starts walking (515c). By performing those bodily movements, the horizon of the real eventually opens up, and with it, the line dividing image and reality is also drawn: the visual forms appearing on the cave wall are now apprehended as images, while the objects projecting their shadows are ascribed to the level of reality.

The present work digs into the genesis of the divide between image and reality, and examines the phenomenological conditions that make it possible to see an image. To a great extent, this will be a matter of developing the intuitions adumbrated in Plato's allegory.

§ 2. The field of inquiry

Drawing the line between image and reality is a difficult task. Even more so these days, when image technologies tend to hybridize elements of both realms and immerse the

viewer in image-environments. This work undertakes this task from as minimal a notion of image as possible. For after all, the immersive cogency of contemporary image technologies presupposes, and to some extent builds on, the phenomenological conditions that make 'traditional images' – those images that do not drive towards hybridization or immersivity – appear.

It is therefore useful to specify the primary field of inquiry. What kind of images will be taken into account? The first somewhat canonical distinction to trace concerns mental images and physical images, or pictures. This work focuses almost exclusively on the latter kind. This is not to say that the study of mental images could not benefit from the study of physical images or vice versa – as we will see, this is indeed the working hypothesis that guided Husserl's renowned reflections on intuitive representations. Yet the distinction between mental and physical images is grounded on a clear phenomenological datum: only the latter appear through a physical support, an object that is spatially located in our surroundings and whose persistence is independent of our acts of consciousness. The same is trivially false with regard to mental images. Perhaps this is already enough to justify a focused study on the experiential conditions that make the appearance of physical image possible.

Within the domain of physical images, further distinctions can be traced that better specify the field of inquiry. Plato's allegory of the cave comes in handy once more here. A dark region having, say, the outline shape of a horse, appears on a blank wall: shadows as well as outlines or silhouettes do constitute good examples of minimal forms of pictorial spaces. For our purposes, a rough outline of a horse, a realistic digital photograph of a horse, or a mosaic of the same subject equally count as pictures.[1] Despite the significant qualitative differences, their pictorial substratum is always a flat surface. This marks a difference from images that have a three-dimensional spatial form, such as the artifacts carried by the men passing behind the prisoners – "statues of people, and animals made of stone and wood and all kinds of materials". This work privileges the analysis of our experience of flat images.

Another distinction is worth mentioning. The shadows cast on the wall in front of the prisoners are in motion; not coincidentally, some see Plato's cave as the idea of the movie

[1] This is not to downplay their pictorial diversity and all the strata of meaning that relate to such diversity. My point is rather that the study of the latter presupposes the study of the conditions that make possible the appearance of an image in the first place. In addition, as we will see in due course, pictorial diversity can also be addressed phenomenologically.

theatre in embryo. In this work, I will focus on static images, but a good part of the analyses will still be relevant to moving images, such as films and video games.

To sum up, the primary object of inquiry is flat static pictures, regardless of their pictorial qualities. There is, however, a further distinction that is usually put forward by theorists of depiction. This concerns figurative and non-figurative images. The former includes, for instance, landscape paintings, portraits, and basically any picture that shows a recognizable subject, whereas non-figurative images are typically associated with, if not equated to, abstract configurations often composed of geometrical figures (squares, rectangles, circles, etc.) or even irregular shapes that can hardly be captured by our ordinary vocabulary. Although this distinction may be legitimate, it is often used to quickly dismiss the study of the latter kind of images. The problem with this move is twofold. First, figurative and abstract images relate to the same form of consciousness. When we look at a portrait and when we look at an abstract configuration of planar figures, we are conscious of being in front of a space that is phenomenologically different from the three-dimensional space that surrounds it. Any theory of pictorial experience should be able to account for both types of images. Second, and relatedly, if we skate over the study of abstract images, we may run into the risk of focusing too much on the representational level of images and prioritizing the explanation of how a certain surface variously marked can represent what it does. This is undeniably a crucial issue, one that any theory of pictorial *representation* needs to address. However, pictures need not necessarily represent – I will provide numerous instances of images that do not refer to something else and images that are so persuasive that they impose themselves as reality, thus losing, or at least hiding, their referential structure. If this is right, then the study of the *presentational* structure of images deserves at least equal attention. This study promises to deliver results towards the understanding of the divide between the pictorial and the real and the reasons that make the trespassing of threshold between the two realms possible.

Therefore, I propose to shift the focus from the question "How can a picture represent?" to a more fundamental problem: how can a pictorial space appear? This problem cuts across the distinction between figurative and non-figurative images and directly addresses the phenomenology of the pictorial. The aim of this thesis is to explicate the phenomenological conditions that qualify a certain portion of our visual space as pictorial.

§ 3. Method and plan

This inquiry develops along two main theoretical axes, which approximately inform the bipartite structure of the argument. The two axes correspond to the two phenomenological methods of analysis, namely the static and the genetic method.[2] What is the gain, within a study on physical imaging, of combining static and genetic analysis?

Static phenomenology is concerned with the analysis of already constituted objectivities – the ordinary objects that we encounter in our everyday life, for instance. It maps and describes their structures of sense and the intentional acts in which objects are given. An important task of static phenomenology is to elucidate the founding relations between the acts through which a certain object is intended. In consequence, a static analysis of our consciousness of physical images will start by describing the intentional acts that correlate to the experience of a physical image and will then lay out the founding relationships between these acts. This is precisely the project underlying the lecture course given by Husserl in Göttingen in the winter semester of 1904/05. These pages constitute a treasure trove of phenomenological descriptions whose importance has been rapidly growing over the last two decades – not only within the phenomenological debate (see Mion et al., forthcoming) – and whose potential is far from being exhausted, especially with regard to new media.

The static method employed in these lectures does what it promises: delineating the intentional layers of image consciousness and describing the relationships between them. And yet two crucial limitations can be identified. First, the analysis deals exclusively with depictive images, with the results that the conditions of the appearing of a pictorial space are flattened out on the conditions that make that pictorial space depictive. Second, the essence of physical images is equated to the complexity of its intentional structure, namely to the relationships of conflict involving its different intentional layers. The

[2] The clarification of the differences between static and genetic method, and especially the beginnings of the genetic method in Husserl's phenomenology, is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Here I would like to point out the fact that, although Husserl did not come to formulate the difference between static and genetic method until the early 1920s, the themes typically addressed through the genetic method can be found as early as the first phenomenological writings. Steinbock (2001: xxx, n. 14) points out that Husserl himself recognized this point when he wrote to Paul Natorp in 1918 that, for more than a decade, he had begun to consider the idea of a transcendental genesis as the main theme of phenomenology. It might be useful to relate this information to the analyses contained in *Ding und Raum*, which will be extensively employed in the second part of this work to inquire the genesis of the pictorial.

problem here is that the analysis of the intentional layers of the image and their conflictual relationships is based on an insufficiently investigated conceptual scheme and notion of sensation. Both this conceptual scheme and notion of sensation were later questioned by Husserl himself. The phenomenological theory of image consciousness is still waiting for revision in light of these theoretical developments.

Changing phenomenological approach, studying image consciousness from the perspective of genesis, promises to solve many of these problems and delve deeper into the constitution of the pictorial. To adopt the genetic method is to initiate a regressive analysis that moves from the constituted to the constituting, from the object as it is given to consciousness to the becoming of its layers of sense. What does this mean relative to the object of our inquiry? Pictures are first and foremost visual phenomena. Therefore, a genetic-phenomenological approach to the pictorial demands to go back to those pre-categorial, passive syntheses that autonomously organize the contents in our visual scene. The analysis of this level of constitution is key to understanding how a certain visual content – a 'figure' broadly understood – can acquire prominence, emerging as a sense-unit from a background. However, given that this condition is equally fundamental for perceiving an X and seeing the image of an X, this also implies that this level of constitution – the organization of the visual scene in terms of figure and ground – does not yet explain the distinction between image and perception. Put differently, limiting our analysis to the sphere of passive syntheses is not itself sufficient to account for the constitution of pictorial objects.

Plato's insights contained in the allegory of the cave may indicate the way forward. The level of visual content that is pre-delineated by passive syntheses needs to be associated with the embodied dimension of the experiencing subject – more precisely, the kinaesthetic systems. The constitution of the sensible things that we encounter in our ordinary experiences is grounded on the correlation between bodily movements and the visual sequences motivated by these movements. As Plato's allegory may be taken to suggest, a spatial, three-dimensional world can only appear to a bodily, mobile subject: as soon as the cave dweller stands up, turns the head around, and starts walking, a richer reality is disclosed, and the line dividing image and reality is also drawn. In order to understand the genesis of the pictorial, it will first be necessary to study the constitution of material objects, and this requires a focused analysis of those phenomenal relations that lead to the constitution of a closed body surface. Secondly, we shall have to embark on the description of how these phenomenal relations unfold when our visual field is

(partially) occupied by a pictorial space. This aspect of our experience has never been specifically addressed in the literature.

The real and the pictorial, it will be found, do not stand in a relation of conflict, as argued by the Husserlian theory. They stand in a relation of *contrast*: the phenomenological difference between the real and the pictorial is given as an irreducible contrast between two different styles of appearing. The partiality of the static method of investigation and the necessity to move on to a genetic analysis serves to expose a tacit assumption of most image theories, according to which the embodied and mobile dimension of the subject has no specific function in the constitution of the pictorial. This dissertation aims to show that, contrary to what is commonly believed, image consciousness too requires an embodied subject.

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Part I of this work critically engages with Husserl's static phenomenology of image consciousness and traces its limits. This part is divided into three chapters.

Chapter 1 provides a general overview of Husserl's theory of image consciousness and contrasts it with one of the most credited accounts of depiction – namely, Wollheim's account of seeing-in. This comparison serves to situate Husserl's theory within the contemporary debate and introduce some of the challenges that phenomenological (or experiential) theories of depiction face.

Chapter 2 ventures into the details of Husserl's theory by analyzing the three intentional layers ascribed to image consciousness and especially the relationships of conflict between them. It then evaluates how this theory fares against the challenges introduced in the previous chapter.

Chapter 3 puts forward a critique of Husserl's theory along the lines mentioned earlier in this paragraph. This will bring us to consider many instances of pictorial spaces that cannot be accommodated by Husserl's theory and then formulate a minimal requirement for having a pictorial space: a figure-ground organization.

Part II initiates a genetic inquiry on the notion of figure and examines the emergence of the divide between the pictorial and the real. This part is divided into two chapters.

Chapter 4 starts with Rubin's perceptual analysis of the figure-ground organization to outline its essential characteristics. Then, the gestalt principles of grouping complemented

with the phenomenology of passive syntheses are used to explain the emergence of sense-units, or figures, in our visual field. It is then argued that the notion of figure alone is too abstract, and thus insufficient, to account for the constitution of images. Calling on some results from the cognitive sciences, it is shown that the constitution of spatial entities, either real or pictorial, cannot be understood without considering the role of the viewer as an embodied, mobile subject.

Chapter 5 proposes a regressive analysis that focuses on the association between the visual field and the kinaesthetic functions of the experiencing subject. This chapter is subdivided into three sections. Section A studies the transcendental function of this association by individuating those fixed structures and regularities that make the constitution of an objective space possible. Section B analyzes the specific phenomena that ground the passage from the bidimensional visual field to the three-dimensional things that populate our environment: concealment, expansion, and rotation. Section C analyzes the visual sequences that correlate to concealment, expansion, and rotation when a portion of the visual field is occupied by a picture. Pictorial appearances, it is argued, unfold in a specific way that contrasts with phenomenal sequences of the ordinary objects that populate our environment. This contrast grounds the divide between image and reality.

PART I. THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF IMAGE CONSCIOUSNESS

1. HUSSERL'S THEORY OF IMAGE CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE ON DEPICTION

§ 4. Image consciousness and phantasy

Husserl discusses at length the notions of phantasy and image consciousness in a series of lectures given at the University of Göttingen in the winter semester of 1904/05. These lectures appear in Volume XXIII of Husserliana along with several other texts, written between 1898 and the middle of the twenties, where Husserl continuously goes back to these and related topics – in quoting these pages, I will refer to the English translation (PICM, henceforth).

At the very beginning of the 1904/05 lectures devoted to "Phantasy and image consciousness", Husserl forewarns that his "immediate aim is the phenomenology of *phantasy*" (PICM: 1). Within the overall phenomenological project, this is indeed a vital task that concerns the characterization and distinction of intuitive acts of consciousness – perceiving, remembering, fantasizing, and so on. The study of intuitive acts tallies with the very idea of a phenomenology and critique of reason: if we were unable to provide an account of the differences between intuitive acts (e.g., the person that I am now seeing and the person that I remember seeing yesterday), our natural belief in the consistency of the outer world could turn out to be unjustified. Skepticism would inevitably ensue.

So, how do we distinguish between the perception of an apple and the phantasy of an apple?

> Perceptual appearance and phantasy appearance are so closely related to one another, so similar, that they immediately suggest ideas about the relationship of original and image. In both cases we have objectivating apprehensions; and in both cases the same object can come to appearance, and even come to appearance with precisely the same determinations from the same side falling into the appearance.
>
> (PICM:10)

One may then be tempted to take a Humean stance and argue that, in fact, real apples and imaginary apples only differ in the vivacity of their appearance. However, grounding the

difference between perception and phantasy on the degree of vivacity, or other qualities of the corresponding experiences (*Erlebnisse*), makes this position vulnerable to a number of compelling, classical objections. Here I will only point out the different trajectory followed by Husserl: the difference between intuitive acts is to be found in their specific intentional structures.[3] The intentional structures of intuitive acts can be exhibited by describing how they refer to their objects and contrasting their similarities and differences (Bernet et al. 1993: 142). Such differences are then not presupposed but made explicit through description and comparison.[4]

The first, obvious term of comparison for the study of phantasy is perception. For perception is the primary form of intuitive consciousness: it presents its objects in original givenness, as being present here and now, in person (*Leibhaftig*). All the other intuitive acts are conceived by Husserl as modifications of perception that can only re-present, or presentify what is not present in actual givenness. As noted by Husserl, "to every possible perceptual presentation there belongs a possible phantasy presentation that refers to the same object and, in a certain sense, even refers to it in precisely the same way" (PICM: 17). However, perceptual consciousness is not the only touchstone – and arguably not the most important in the texts considered herein – for the description of the mode of givenness of phantasy objects. In order to determine the intentional structure of phantasy Husserl engages in a thorough phenomenological analysis of image consciousness. However, image consciousness is not only regarded as a term of comparison. The working hypothesis that informs these lectures is more radical: phantasy presentation can be understood in terms of image presentation.[5]

From this perspective, the sphere of image consciousness, or imagination, in the sense of "having an image of something", then groups phenomena as different as pure phantasy and the experience of seeing a picture, that is, a physical image. A mental image – a phantasy or a memory – would have the same intentional structure as a physical image.

[3] According to Piana (2020), the phenomenological approach to the analysis of experience aims indeed to "characterize acts of experience by outlining their differences in structure" (see also Piana 1967: 10).

[4] This approach is clearly stated in these lectures. Husserl writes: "Up to now, we have for the most part discussed what is *common* to imaginings based on perception and to imaginings belonging to phantasy. Now we want to study their *differences* and, in doing so, attempt at the same time to penetrate somewhat more deeply into their analytic essences" (PICM: 47).

[5] This interpretative model can already be found in Aristotle; for a comparison between Aristotle and Husserl on image consciousness, see de Warren (2010); see also Alloa (2021).

For instance, imagining a centaur would have the same structure as having consciousness of a physical depiction of a centaur. Husserl commits to studying the complex phenomenological structure of image consciousness starting from the experience of physical images. The latter is viewed as a primitive form of consciousness, "just as primitive and ultimate as the perceptual consciousness or consciousness of the present" (PICM: 18).

The idea that image consciousness and perceptual consciousness are equally primitive, however, needs clarifying; this will be done, leaving Husserl's static analyses in the background, in Part II of this work, when inquiring the genesis of the pictorial. For now, we can make a couple of general observations. First, stressing the analogies between perception and image consciousness is helpful – although insufficient – to challenge the idea that images work as symbols or signs do (Goodman 1968). The approach defended in this work goes against such an idea. Second, in attempting to account for phantasy presentation, Husserl seems to be looking for a middle ground, a form of consciousness that can help us understand how something absent can be brought to intuition (see Brough 2005: liii). Picture consciousness seems the best candidate here, for it always involves the perceptual consciousness of a depicting surface with its material properties, such as a canvas covered by colored pigments, and the consciousness of the represented scene. Image consciousness "has a foot in both the perceptual and imaginative worlds" (xliv). The absent subject we refer to when looking at a portrait appears thanks to something present, standing in front of the viewer.

As is well known, by the end of the lectures of 1904/05, Husserl abandons his initial working hypothesis and concludes that phantasy cannot be understood on the model of image consciousness.[6] Phantasy, like perception, but differently from image consciousness, directly refers to its object (PICM: 92). At any rate, the largest part of the phenomenological analyses contained in these lectures are devoted to the complex intentional structure of the consciousness of physical images. Moreover, importantly for our purposes, Husserl's conception of image consciousness remains sufficiently consistent throughout his writings (Brough 2005: xliv). Thus, I will only take into account the texts that present relevant integrations or changes to the discussion of image consciousness.

[6] For a discussion of the reasons that led Husserl to this conclusion, see Bernet et al. 1993: ch. 5; Marbach 2012; Brough 2013.

§ 5. A primitive form of consciousness

There is a sense in which images, similarly to ordinary things, did not have to wait for someone to create them. Imagine walking in the woods and letting your gaze run over the trunks of the trees nearby. It does sometimes happen that we catch sight of some familiar shape – a face, for instance. In such cases, we have consciousness of a surface in which something absent appears. This kind of experience, known as *visual pareidolia*, may be unexpected and bizarre, and yet it recurs in many circumstances. Leonardo da Vinci was well aware of this phenomenon, and in his writings on painting he advises to seek artistic inspiration by looking "into the stains on walls, or the ashes of a fire, or clouds, or mud, or like things" (da Vinci 1956: 51). These unprepared surfaces may present us with interesting visual scenes, exactly as a painting made by an artist normally does. True, a painting is an artifact expressly created to elicit a pictorial experience of a certain scene. A visual pareidolia is instead an "image made by chance" (Janson 1961) insofar as its figurative value is not the result of an intentional operation.

Thus, this visual phenomenon suggests that seeing something in a surface, or having image consciousness, is a natural perceptual capacity that precedes our ability to (intentionally) produce pictures. If this is so, we could further speculate that historically things went this way: first, our ancestors engaged in experiences of seeing-in elicited by pareidolic images, and only then, on the basis of such discovery, they started to decorate their caves (see Wollheim 1987: 47–48; de Warren 2010, 303–304).

The phenomenon of visual pareidolia brings us to another consideration. Pareidolic images come in different forms and typically are not really flat surfaces. A rock in the shape of an elephant is a three-dimensional object, and so is the appearance of what is recognized in the rock. Image consciousness seems then to capture instances of both flat pictures, such as paintings and photographs, and volumetric pictures, such as sculptures and low reliefs. This is precisely the extension of the concept of image consciousness that we find in Husserl: phenomena as different as painting, etching, and sculpture, but also moving image, mirror image, and theatre are all instances of image consciousness. There are of course significant phenomenal differences between plastic images, moving images, and traditional flat pictures. However, Husserl argues that they present the same intentional structure – I will come back later to this point.

§ 6. The threefold structure of image consciousness

Let us pretend that we are looking at a black and white photograph of a child, as Husserl invites us to do (PICM: 20). As noted above, any pictorial experience involves seeing a colored surface – in this case, photographic paper – and seeing what this surface depicts, namely a child. Already at this point, however, serious problems arise. While it is hard to deny that we perceive the depicting surface, it would be perplexing to say that we see a child. For there is actually no child to be seen in front of us. Moreover, the child we see in the picture does not appear as real children do. As things stand, a theory of depiction should therefore be able to account for (a) how a picture can represent an absent subject and (b) what distinguishes this experience from an ordinary perceptual experience.

Husserl's analysis of image consciousness addresses both problems. According to his account, image consciousness involves three distinct intentional objects – hence it is usually regarded as a threefold account of pictorial experience. On the first level, there is the physical image, or image-thing (*Bildding*). It is the material surface that we perceive, something that can be colored and marked in different ways; being a physical object, it can be moved, hung on a wall, and eventually spoiled by the passage of time. In the case of a photographic print, the physical image corresponds to the specific photographic paper used with black and white areas. On the second level, there is what Husserl calls the image-object (*Bildobject*), a purely phenomenal object only available to our sight – a small and greyish child, in this case. The image-object is also described as a semblance (*Schein*) that "is not taken by us for even a moment as something real" (PICM: 21). Finally, there is a third intentional layer. When we look at the photograph, we do not refer to an image-child, but to a real child: this is the image-subject (*Bildsujet*), what the photograph depicts.

The appearance of a real child is rather different from its depictions: children have colors, a three-dimensional extension, and so on. True, when we look at a photograph, we instantly refer to the child that was – or so we think – in front of the camera. This is how we normally interact with pictures. However, nothing keeps us from taking a step backwards and focusing on the image-object, the small colorless figure that clearly deviates from the depicted subject. In fact, the properties of the image-object need to diverge from the properties of the image-subject. If that was not the case, if the image-object and image-subject were indistinguishable, this would likely provoke an illusion. By contrast, as long as the viewer is aware of their difference, the subject is intended

through the image-object; more precisely, the appearance of the image-object presents some properties of the depicted subject. According to Husserl, the image-object has a depictive function, which is based on resemblance. To sum up, the image-object is an analogical representant with irreducible differences from the subject and, at the same time, a certain degree of resemblance. This is enough to justify the distinction between image-object and subject.

The other distinction implied by the triadic structure of image consciousness concerns instead the properties of the image-object and the properties of image-thing. This may seem a simple distinction to make but, in fact, it hides many theoretical subtleties. To start delving into this distinction, let us consider how the art historian Kenneth Clark refers his experience of a famous painting:

> One should be content to accept it without question, but one cannot look for long at *Las Meninas* without wanting to find out how it is done. I remember that when it hung in Geneva in 1939 I used to go very early in the morning, before the gallery was open, and try to stalk it, as if it really were alive. … I would start from as far away as I could, when the illusion was complete, and come gradually nearer, until suddenly what had been a hand, and a ribbon, and a piece of velvet, dissolved into a salad of beautiful brush strokes. I thought I might learn something if I could catch the moment at which this transformation took place, but it proved to be as elusive as the moment between waking and sleeping.
>
> (Clark 1960: 36)

This passage is suggestive because it gives us a general idea of what the experience of looking at the marked surface of a painting may consist in. Looking at the picture from a distance, Clark sees the majestic scene depicted by Velázquez, but coming close to the picture surface, he sees "a salad of beautiful brush strokes".[7] The same object, then, can be apprehended in two different ways. The properties of the depicting surface are not the same properties of what appears in the picture: these belong to different intentional levels. As Clark had to conclude, we are not able to find out "how it is done", that is, how brushstrokes and dabs of pigment, colors and lines are transformed into recognizable pictorial objects. (In fact, a painting like *Las Meninas* does not even require the viewer to come close to its surface to appreciate its material properties, since they are visible from a regular distance.) So, on the one hand, colors and lines are seen as the constitutive parts

[7] Here, of course, the distinction between image-object and subject is not taken into account.

of a flat surface, an ordinary object located among the other objects in the surrounding of the viewer; on the other hand, colors and lines constitute the visual properties of the image-object, which is not itself an ordinary thing, but something available only to the sight. The properties of the image-object refer to the subject and cannot be equated with the colors and shades of the surface. The color sensations correlated to the properties of the surface correspond to the part of the canvas covered with pigments that we perceive. And yet image consciousness does not present us with an ordinary perceptual object; we do not see only a colored canvas.

To clarify this point, Marbach (1993: 138) introduces a helpful distinction between perceptual properties and pictorial (or figurative) properties (see also Calì 2002: 31). While the former are attributed to the image-thing, and are indeed perceptual appearances, the latter are attributed to the image-object, and through their appearance an absent subject is intended. Consider, for instance, a patch of pink color on the canvas of *Las Meninas* that corresponds to the left hand of the Infanta. Insofar as the pink color is a perceptual property, such color property belongs to the physical image, to the very part of the canvas where it is perceived. We see the canvas as pink on that specific part. Conversely, when the pink color acts as a figurative property, that pink is not seen as a specific patch of color on the canvas, but as the pink of the left hand of the Infanta as it is presented by the image-object. The same duality is instantiated by the lines on the picture surface. A line or a pattern that we see in a painting can count as a physical mark on a surface or as a pictorial element with a figurative value. In the first case, the line is a perceptual property and entertains ordinary spatial relations with the elements in its surroundings (including the other lines and patterns on the picture surface), such as being at a certain measurable distance from the window at its left. But the same line that we see on the painting is also endowed with a figurative value: it does not appear as a simple mark but as the contour of some recognizable shape. When a line describes a contour, it acquires a certain meaning. Borrowing the language used by Husserl in the *Logical Investigations*, we can say that contours are non-independent elements: they are always contours *of*.

While this should suffice to justify the distinction of the three folds that Husserl ascribes to the structure of image consciousness, it does not suffice to account for how they can stay together. Indeed, Husserl understands image consciousness as a single experience, in which different apprehensions coexist (PICM: 30). In other words, the distinction between the three folds only makes sense as an analytical distinction: image-

thing, image-object, and image-subject do not unfold in chronological order, nor do they correlate to separate appearances.

A pressing issue emerges at this point. As we know, perception gives us things in person, in the here and now, whereas the characteristic of image consciousness is to re-present an absent subject. This movement towards the absent subject is mediated through the image-object, whose appearance, in turn, is made possible by the physical image, with its perceptual properties. Thus, the appearance of the image object, with its figurative properties, share the same material of sensation with the pictorial surface. The right hand that we see in *Las Meninas* shares the same spatial location occupied by a pink patch of color on the canvas. The question – that revamps Clark's problem – inevitably arises: how is this possible? How do these two layers interact? One thing is sure, image consciousness does not entail a doubling of our visual field, or some other puzzling experience of this kind. "Space is intuitable only once [at a given time]. (…) Intuition of space 'conceals' intuition of space" (PICM: 579).[8]

§ 7. The twofold structure of seeing-in: Wollheim's account

Before turning to the question raised at the end of the last paragraph, I will first delineate Wollheim's influential account of seeing-in – according to which pictorial experience has a twofold structure – and then compare it to the Husserlian notion of image consciousness (§8). While I do believe that the latter is theoretically better equipped to describe the structure of pictorial experience, much can be learned from the former and the heated debate around it.[9]

These two accounts, although coming from different philosophical traditions, present more than one point of convergence. According to Wollheim, to account for pictorial representation, one needs first to focus on what makes it specifically *pictorial*, thus distinguishing it from other, non-pictorial kinds of representation (1987: 59).[10] His idea

[8] This point is not hard to justify. Roughly put, we do not happen to experience different appearances localized in the same portion of our space. However, a full appreciation of it requires delving into Husserl's transcendental aesthetic (Husserl 1997; 2001).

[9] Here I will only consider Wollheim's latest view of pictorial representation (i.e., from 1980 onwards).

[10] Clearly enough, this is not a theoretically neutral move. Contemporary theories of pictorial representation polarize around two approaches, depending on what term – "pictorial" or "representation" – receives explanatory priority (see Abell 2009). The first approach emphasizes the study of depiction as *pictorial* representation and argues that whatever makes up pictoriality

is that pictorial representation is characterized by the *sui generis* visual experience elicited by pictures; in consequence, theoretical efforts should be placed on the study of its phenomenology. Capitalizing on an expression that we find in our everyday language, Wollheim calls this experience *seeing-in*: only those objects in which the viewer can see something else are pictorial representations.[11] The experience of seeing-in brings about a reorganization of a specific part of our visual field, precisely the part occupied by a picture. Recall Clark's description of his experience in front of the Velázquez: his perceptual scene changed from a conglomeration of graphical marks and colors to the experience of a rich depicted scene. Seeing-in experiences are able to reorganize the phenomenal configuration of a portion of our visual field, introducing a significant change to the appearance of the objects around us.

While this may convince us that the experience of seeing-in is indeed an experience with a specific phenomenology, more needs to be done to spell out what makes this experience *sui generis*. So far, seeing-in sounds indeed more like a metaphor – especially considering that we do not see something literally inside something else – than a detailed account. To move in this direction, Wollheim characterizes seeing-in as an act that

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sets depiction apart from all other forms of representation (such as linguistic representations). The second approach focuses instead on depiction as pictorial *representation* and tries to locate depiction within a general theory of representation. Goodman (1968) structural theory of depiction is arguably the most famous example of the latter. According to Goodman, pictorial representations and words are equally conventions. Pictures surely involve vision, but so do words: to understand a word, and to understand a picture, one needs to look at a marked surface. Rather, their difference is to be found in the formal set of features (syntactical and semantical) exploited for representing.

[11] Note that this is a necessary condition for depiction, but not a sufficient condition. In other words, the scope of seeing-in is larger than the scope of pictorial representation. Wollheim believes that a further condition is required for something to count as pictorial representation: that is, "that a standard of correctness applies to it and this standard derives from the intention of the maker of the representation" (Wollheim 1980: 137; see also Wollheim 1987: 47–52). Pictorial representations, then, are those objects that elicit an experience of seeing-in whose content can conform to the intention of the maker. It then follows that, based on these conditions, the whole category of 'images made by chance' mentioned above is cast out from the domain of depiction, since their figurative value is not the result of an intentional operation. But there are also cases of images that, following Wollheim's intentionality requirement, end up straddling the boundaries of representation. Some images, like those in the Rorschach test, are half-representations, so to say, since they were created with the purpose of eliciting seeing-in experiences, but not of a definite scene. However, it must be noted that the appeal to the intention of the maker of an artifact exposes this account to several objections. See Newall (2011: ch. 3) for a survey on the standard of correctness; Terrone (2021) for a recent defense.

"derives from a special perceptual capacity, which presupposes, but is something over and above, straightforward perception", that is, "the capacity that we humans and other animals have of perceiving things present to the senses" (1980: 145). This special perceptual capacity is what allows us to see things that are not actually present – either things that are absent or things that do not exist (see also Sartre 2005: 11–14). However, this perceptual capacity is yet too vague, and it cannot help to single out what is special about seeing-in. Indeed, a number of other forms of visual representation can put us in contact with things that are not actually present: phantasy, dreams, hallucinations, to name a few. What sets seeing-in aside from the latter is that seeing-in is ultimately a perceptual skill, and, more specifically, a subspecies of seeing in general. Therefore, it remains attached to the present: "visions of things not present now come about through looking at things present" (1980: 145). After all, Pictures are physical things that can easily be pointed at in our perceptual field.

At this point, Wollheim argues that the distinctive trait of seeing-in is *twofoldness* – this is arguably Wollheim's most significant contribution to the debate on pictorial representation. Pictorial experience presents an intrinsic duality of character, the same puzzling duality that we have encountered in Clark's account. Looking at pictures, one is visually aware of the picture surface – be it a marked canvas, a piece of paper with black and white areas, a colored screen, or any other pictorial surface *qua* physical thing – and of the depicted scene, that is, what is seen in the pictorial surface. These two folds that make up pictorial experiences are called, respectively, *configurational* and *recognitional* (Wollheim 1987: 73). Discussing how Titian masterfully exploits the dynamics of seeing-in, Wollheim says:

> Recognitionally we sense that the body that we see is about to move into action: configurationally we become aware of the coloured expanse in which we see the body as something spreading or pushing outwards. And – as is the case with twofoldness itself – we attend to these two effects not sequentially but simultaneously: they are twin aspects of a single, complex experience.
>
> (1987: 310)

The twofold character of seeing-in tells us that the spectator of a picture is simultaneously visually aware of two things, and painters like Titian are able to create rich interactions between them, so that the visual awareness of the spectator is equally directed at the

content of the configurational fold and the content of the recognitional fold.[12] However, the notion of twofoldness does not imply that such awareness must be equally distributed between the folds. In that respect, seeing-in allows for a certain degree of flexibility. Consider again the case of the images by chance. Catching sight of a meaningful pattern on the bark of a tree may be – and usually is – a fleeting experience. The knobby surface of the tree vaguely suggests the outline of a rabbit, and maybe just some part of the rabbit. We are struggling to see a rabbit, and this means that the configurational fold prevails: the wood covered in knobs is clearly distinguishable, while the head of the rabbit is a fleeting impression. So feeble that we may lose track of the rabbit. Twofoldness is gone, and so is seeing-in: now we merely perceive a knobby tree trunk. At the other end of the spectrum, the prevailing aspect of seeing-in can be the recognitional one. That is the case when the spectator's visual attention privileges the depicted subject. Perhaps they start to conjecture about the meaning of the scene and forget somehow the physical import of the surface in front of them. Now, the spectator is engaging in phantasies. Seeing-in is equally lost. Either way, seeing-in can transform into another experience: a full-blown perception of a material surface or mental imagery.[13]

§ 8. Twofoldness and threefoldness

There is more that Wollheim's theory of depiction can offer. But before going on with his account, let us recapitulate its main analogies with Husserl's. Both accounts share the general approach to understanding pictorial representation. Images are essentially visual representations, and their specific difference is to be found in the special visual experience they correlate to – or better, in their experiential structure. Within the contemporary debate on depiction, they fall in the category of experiential accounts (e.g., Kulvicky 2014: ch. 1; Hopkins 1998: 14–22). While "seeing-in" is a coinage usually attributed to Wollheim, it should be noted that Husserl, way before Wollheim, used similar

[12] Wollheim builds this idea into an argument that contends that twofoldness is how we ought to see representations. The complexity of seeing-in, captured by the notion of twofoldness, explains our aesthetic appreciation of great representational paintings. When we look at a Titian, we are led "to marvel endlessly at the way in which line or brushstroke or expanse of colour is exploited to render effects or establish analogies that can only be identified representationally" (1980: 145). How could this be possible if seeing-in was not a single experience composed of two intermingled aspects? This point, however, shows at best that twofoldness characterizes our experience of a certain category of pictures (Lopes 1996: 47).

[13] There is yet a third option – illusion – that I will mention shortly (§9).

terminology to describe our experience of pictures and argued that seeing-in (*Hineinschauen*) is precisely the element that demarcates pictorial representation from symbolic representation (PICM: 57). He writes: "The symbolizing function represents something externally; the imaging function exhibits its subject internally, seeing it in the image" (89).[14] The appeal to the phenomenon of seeing-in serves also to spell out the difference from ordinary perceptual presentation. If I look at my desk, I do not see anything else than my desk; nothing appears in it. Images are then the only objects that support the appearance of something else. Furthermore, both agree that seeing-in is a perceptual capacity that is independent of our ability to produce pictures – a point that is consistent with the rejection of the idea that pictures work as symbolic representations.[15]

The obvious difference between the two accounts concerns the internal structure of seeing-in. As already noted, Husserl conceives of the image-object as an intermediate element between the image-thing and the depicted subject. Now, it is not easy to say whether in Wollheim's account this intermediate element is absorbed by the configurational fold or the recognitional fold.[16] However, the difference at issue is better understood if we ask which fold does the representing. For Wollheim the marked surface is responsible for the representation: the properties of the surface are arranged so as to make something appear, that is the depicted subject. For Husserl, the marked surface (image-thing) bears only perceptual properties. The properties of the image-object, by contrast, are figurative properties; their appearance makes the reference to the image-subject possible. Accordingly, Husserl's threefold account of image consciousness can be understood as a double seeing-in – the depicted subject is seen in image-object, which, in turn, appears in the marked surface.[17]

Finally, there is a point on which both authors agree and insist, and which is particularly relevant for the discussion to follow. Pictorial experience is a single, complex experience involving different aspects, or moments (PICM: 28–29; Wollheim 1987: 46).

[14] It is worth stressing that Husserl extends the concept of seeing-in to sculpture and reliefs too (PICM: 30, 582, 645), whereas Wollheim is less prone to do so (1980: 151). Vance (1985) provides the basis for a Wollheimian account of sculpture.

[15] Wollheim (1987: 54) even goes so far as to say that seeing-in is an innate capacity. Even if this turned out to be true, it does not prevent us from investigating, from a genetic perspective, how the pictorial space is constituted.

[16] Brough (2012) argues that the recognitional fold in Wollheim's account of seeing-in conflates image-object and image-subject.

[17] Mion (2014; 2018) proposes a useful comparison between the two authors and tries to read Wollheim's account as a threefold account.

It does not consist of two (or three) separate experiences that would correlate to separate appearances. Husserl makes this clear: "If the depicted object were independently constituted by one act and the image by a second and separate act, then we would have neither an image nor something depicted. We would have one object presented here, another object presented there. … We do not have two separate presentations, and above all we do not have two separate appearances" (PICM: 28). Composite, separate sensory experiences are of course a genuine possibility – we can see a guitar and simultaneously listen to its sound. In fact, this is just how we normally experience the world across different sense modalities. Composite visual experiences are a possibility too according to some. Hopkins (1998: 16–17) considers the experience of looking at a castle while visualizing a horse. In this case, the seeing and the visualizing do not blend. Seeing the castle remain independent of imagining the horse, and vice versa. Indeed, if we cease to imagine the horse, the phenomenology of our perception of the castle remains unchanged. But when it comes to seeing-in, the opposite is true. If the awareness of the marked surface vanishes, we would be left with an experience that differs in phenomenology from the experience of seeing a depicted horse. And if the awareness of the depicted horse vanishes, we would be left with the mere perception of a surface in which nothing appears. The folds of seeing-in are inseparably interwoven.

§ 9. What are the conditions of the experience of seeing-in?

As mentioned, Wolheim's account has yet something to offer to a theory of pictorial experience. Seeing-in involves a dual visual awareness, true, but what is the content that the spectator is aware of? In other terms, what do the configurational and the recognitional fold represent, respectively? Wollheim argues that seeing-in is a kind of perception that "is triggered off by the presence within the field of vision of a differentiated surface" (1980: 46). When seeing-in occurs, "on the one hand, we are aware of the differentiation of the surface, and, on the other hand, we observe something in front of, or behind, something else" (1993: 188; see also Wollheim 1980: 46). A surface must be differentiated so as to support the experience a *figure-ground relationship*.

The locution "seeing-in" surely has metaphorical power but provides scarce theoretical guidance. However, it can be further specified in these terms: seeing-in expresses the idea that something is seen behind something else, and that this relationship takes place on a surface. Seeing-in involves, as Wollheim also writes, "awareness of depth" and "attention

to the marked surface" (1980: 62). These two elements represent the minimal conditions for the subsistence of twofoldness: the awareness of depth is related to recognitional fold, and the awareness of a differentiated surface is related to the configurational fold.[18]

To see this point, let us consider different kinds of pictorial scenes. The content of, say, a painting by Kazimir Malevich, in which nothing more than a black square against a white background appears, surely is quite different from that of a self-portrait by Frida Kahlo. And the difference may be even greater in the case of a painting by Joan Miró in which colored indefinable shapes populate the pictorial space. Yet there is a sense in which all these cases are equivalent. Their equivalence is granted by the form of experience to which they correlate, that is, seeing-in. More specifically, in all such cases the spectator is visually aware of a marked surface and of *something* in front of something else; indeed, "something in front of something else" is how we would probably describe what we see in Miró's compositions. Malevich's suprematist painting shows a black square against a white background, hence a figure-ground organization: in this case, the visual scene can be captured by a simple geometric concept. Finally, the self-portrait of Frida Kahlo is rich in detail and depicts the artist herself. The something here is surely more complex, and nonetheless this visual scene presupposes a figure-ground organization. Thus, it can be reduced to the same formula: we see Frida in front of a background of leaves and we see the pictorial surface. In all these cases, then, the conditions for twofoldness are respected and an experience of seeing-in occurs.

The only difference seems to pertain to the concepts that we apply to the different depicted scenes. Wollheim divides these concepts into abstract and figurative. While the former category contains concepts such as "square", "irregular shape", "space" or just "something", the latter includes concepts such as "man", "horse", and the like. However, this classification may turn out to be arbitrary, since it proves hard to draw the boundaries between figuration and non-figuration (or abstraction). For potentially every form the viewer is able to discern in a picture may be seen as the particular form of some (non-abstract) object: after all, a rectangular table seen from above, looks like a rectangle, and if we see it both as a rectangle and as a table seen from above, then, this picture would be figurative and non-figurative. At any rate, the relevant point here is that an experience of

[18] It is worth noting that that the term "recognitional" seems at variance with the idea that a picture may only show us something – even a mere spatial organization that we have never seen before – in front of something else. If that is the case, what specific role would recognition play?

seeing-in is no less such if we lack the words to describe what it represents, which is often the case with abstract compositions.[19]

There are, however, cases of pictures that straddle the boundaries of seeing-in. Wollheim (1980: 62–63) shows that these are borderline cases precisely because they do not respect the minimal conditions for twofoldness. If this is true, then twofoldness would turn out to be not only a sufficient condition but also a necessary condition for seeing-in.

It may be the case that when we look at a patterned surface that had been prepared with the intention of eliciting a seeing-in experience, no seeing-in experience takes place. Typically, a scribble on a sheet of paper looks like an intricate mixture of lines. Although a child might have accurately drawn this scribble with the intention of drawing a cat, we can only discern a set of physical marks, without seeing anything in them. And since an awareness of depth, however minimal, is required for twofoldness, seeing-in does not occur. But seeing-in can also fail when the content of the recognitional fold is so persuasive that it becomes deceptive. *Trompe-l'œil* paintings are devised so as to conceal the materiality of their surface, and thus to present the viewer with a real (non-pictorial) depth. If they succeed, the viewer does not have a seeing-in experience of, say, an apple, but an ordinary (although nonveridical) perception of an apple.

§ 10. Objections and challenges for experiential accounts of depiction

The general notion of seeing-in has been widely adopted to describe our experience of pictorial representations in the philosophy of depiction. Yet the thesis that seeing-in is a twofold act has been criticized on multiple fronts. It is worth considering the objections and requests for clarification that have been raised against Wollheim's theory because, as we will see, they are relevant for most experiential accounts of pictorial representation (Husserl's included).

[19] This is why I believe that a certain reading of Wollheim's account as a threefold account may be hard to maintain. According to Mion, "Wollheim's view implies two different kinds of experience: seeing non-figurative and figurative pictures, where the first can be explained as two-fold and the second as three-fold seeing-in. In the case of the non-figurative picture we experience the configuration of lines and strokes on the picture's surface and the representation. In the case of the figurative picture, we also see figuration" (2014: 23). Yet, as mentioned above, Wollheim's distinction between figurative and non-figurative seems problematic and probably is not adequate to support the addition of a further fold to seeing-in experience.

One source of criticism concerns the lack of clarity on the internal structure of the twofold experience (e.g., Lopes 1996: 44; Hopkins 1998: 19). For what is the nature of the experiences that correspond to the configurational and recognitional fold? All Wollheim says on this matter is that each aspect of the overall experience is describable as analogous to a separate experience (Wollheim 1980: 46). Thus, the configurational fold is analogous to seeing a surface without seeing anything in it, and the recognitional fold is analogous to seeing some real (three-dimensional) object. However, these are only analogies: "The particular complexity that one kind of experience has and the other lacks makes their phenomenology incommensurate" (47). This position, seems, however, quite elusive: why should the complexity of an experience prevent us from saying more about it? As things stand, Wollheim's account of seeing-in, as an experience with a distinctive phenomenology, is, at best, incomplete. All the more so, if we consider that Wollheim doubted "that anything significant can be said about exactly what a surface must be like for it to have this effect" (1980: 46).[20]

Another source of worry comes from the case of *trompe-l'œil* pictures. According to Lopes (1996: 49–50), the existence of this kind of pictures is incompatible with the idea that twofoldness is a necessary condition for seeing-in.[21] The reason is that *trompe-l'œil* belongs to a category of images "whose contents we experience even when their designed surfaces are not visible" (51). In other words, looking at a *trompe-l'œil*, the viewer is only aware of the depicted scene; the viewer actually sees that scene face-to-face. Therefore, Lopes concludes that, since there are pictorial experiences that do not include the configurational aspect, twofoldness cannot count as a necessary condition for depiction. This also undermines the idea that what is distinctive of pictorial representation has to do with some relevant feature of its phenomenology.

However, this argument does not seem to be conclusive. First, it seems to presuppose that a certain surface is a picture regardless of the experience of that surface. This ontological position is disputable, and it is not further specified by Lopes. True, a picture is a picture irrespective of any possible twofold experience as a theoretical construct. And yet if a *trompe-l'œil* always deceives the viewer, making her perceive a real space, how could we realize that, in fact, we are facing a pictorial space? *Trompe-l'œil* pictures are

[20] A challenge that is taken up, for instance, by the resemblance theories of depiction.

[21] However, he is willing to accept a weaker version of twofoldness. He recognizes that some 'painterly' pictures do, in effect, allow for a simultaneous visual awareness of the marked surface and the depicted scene.

such because at a certain point – and this is usually a matter of seconds – the illusion ceases, and a pictorial experience takes its place. After all, *trompe-l'œil* pictures are conceived to engage the viewer in a game that ends by reasserting its own nature of pictorial representation.[22] Second, if that is the case, Wollheim could simply reply that the transition from the (illusory) perception to a pictorial experience is motivated by the fact that the viewer becomes visually aware of the marked surface (however minimal this awareness might be). Therefore, twofoldness is (re-)established and a seeing-in experience occurs.

There are yet other – and deeper – sources of trouble for the defenders of twofoldness. As noted, seeing-in for Wollheim (and for Husserl) is a unitary experience. The two folds do not correspond to distinct simultaneous experiences, nor to distinct alternating experiences. However, such unity of integrated folds, whose phenomenology cannot be further specified (or so Wollheim believes), poses a serious problem. Supposedly, the picture surface and the depicted scene appear in the same spatial location. So, how can one be visually aware of the picture surface and the depicted scene at the same time? Does the depicted scene appear in a different space? Wollheim refuses to go into details about the nature of the experiential folds and how they relate to each other. We are left wondering what makes seeing-in a unitary experience in which two folds with different contents coexist.

Gombrich foresaw this problem. He famously asked: "But is it possible to 'see' both the plane surface and the battle horse at the same time? If we have been right so far, the demand is for the impossible. To understand the battle horse is for a moment to disregard the plane surface. We cannot have it both ways" (2000: 279). We cannot have visual awareness of the marked surface and of the depicted scene at once. Our visual awareness oscillates between the two: either "canvas or nature", in Gombrich's words. Here, pictorial experience is not understood as a unitary experience, but as compounded by two distinct experiences that follow one after the other without overlapping. In this perspective, then, the phenomenology of the components is not at all mysterious: at one time one *sees* a differentiated plane surface, at another a battle horse.[23] And considering

[22] For an insightful discussion on the nature of *trompe-l'œil*, and their place within the debate on depiction, see Spinicci (2008: 40–59).

[23] This is of course a sketchy summary of Gombrich's position that is instrumental in highlighting the shortcomings in Wollheim's account of twofoldness. For a detailed reading of Gombrich's theory of depiction, see Bantinaki (2007).

that the two component experiences do not occur at the same time, the problem of incompatibility outlined above seems less pressing; though it opens the question of why we switch from seeing one thing to seeing the other (Wollheim 1974: 280).

To explain, and somehow justify this position, Gombrich resorts to the ambiguous image of the duck-rabbit. Looking at ambiguous pictures, we oscillate between different, incompatible interpretations (depicted scenes): we can either see the rabbit or the duck, but we cannot see both at once (Gombrich 2000: 5). This is how the duality of pictorial representation is to be understood. In fact, Wollheim agrees that ambiguous pictures present us with incompatible seeing-in experiences. What he disagrees with is Gombrich's conviction that nature and canvas cannot appear together. This conviction follows from the assimilation of the canvas/nature couple to the duck/rabbit dichotomy. However, this move seems unjustified. For one thing, ambiguous pictures constitute a particular subclass of pictorial representations; taking them as the general model for analyzing the experiential structure of depiction is an odd place to start. For another, the assimilation proposed by Gombrich unduly collapses different phenomenological layers. True, we cannot see both animals at the same time, for seeing the rabbit and seeing the duck are indeed experiences of the same kind, they both correlate to the recognitional fold of a seeing-in experience. Thus, they turn out to be mutually exclusive. However, the same does not hold true for the canvas/nature couple. In this case, the phenomenology of the recognitional fold and the phenomenology of the configurational fold are heterogeneous; therefore, they are not incompatible (Wollheim 1980: 363 n. 6). Quite simply, the same surface supports two different alternating seeing-in experiences.[24]

With this reply, Wollhheim has perhaps shown that seeing a marked surface is not inconsistent with seeing what that surface represents, *according to the twofold structure of seeing-in*, and that ambiguous figures are not the interpretative model upon which one should rely to explain the duplicity intrinsic to pictorial representation. However, this does not amount to providing a positive explanation of how the viewer can be simultaneously aware of two things in the same portion of her visual field. The problem remains. The two experiential folds of seeing-in appear to have conflicting contents: visual awareness of a (planar) *surface*, on the one hand, and visual awareness of *depth*,

[24] Voltolini (2013) offers a detailed account of the Gombrich-Wollheim controversy. See also Voltolini (2012; 2015) for an attempt to reconcile Gombrich's and Wollheim's accounts of depiction.

on the other. How is that possible to be visually aware of something as uncanny as "a deep surface"?[25]

Wollheim refuses to give us more details about the nature of the folds, and he was also persuaded that nothing relevant could be said about how the configurational fold connects to the recognitional fold (Wollheim 1987: 46). Yet, if seeing-in is a distinctive experience that defines pictoriality (i.e., the feature that distinguishes pictorial representation from the other kinds of representation), and if seeing-in is to be conceived as a unitary experience, something more needs to be said. Absent a positive explanation of the question raised above, the idea that what characterizes pictorial representations is their distinctive phenomenology would turn out to be unsubstantiated and should leave room for other approaches.

At this point, a radical question needs to be addressed. What does it mean that, when we look at a picture, we (also) see its marked surface, or, in Husserl's terms, the image-thing? As already observed, when we approach a picture from a close distance, the depicted scene dissolves into what Clark described as "a salad of beautiful brush strokes". This is true, but it only describes the experience of looking at a surface where nothing other than physical marks appear; it does not help us to clarify the sense in which we see a marked surface while we are also aware of the represented scene.[26] Being the only element that is physically present in our space, and which must be present to support the

[25] Polanyi argues that it is precisely a contradictory quality like this that distinguishes pictorial representation. Polanyi calls it *depth-cum-flatness*: "This quality is perspectival, but its perspective is constrained by a suffusion of flatness" (1970: 230). Picture are therefore those objects that instantiate depth-cum-flatness. However, we are not told how this peculiar, oxymoronic property comes about; as such, it remains a metaphor in search of an explanation. Thus, no real advance over the issues raised above is made. The difference between Polanyi's and Wollheim's accounts is that the former attributes a distinctive quality to pictures, while the latter proposes that the distinctive factor is the *sui generis* experience seeing-in consists in.

[26] A possible aid to better understand the simultaneous visual awareness of the marked surface and the depicted scene may come from the concept of 'inflection'. There is more than one characterization of this concept, but I take Hopkin's definition to be the most accurate. He writes: "Sometimes, what is seen in a surface includes properties a full characterization of which needs to make reference to that surface's design (conceived as such)" (2010: 158). So, if we look at a pointillist painting we grasp the material properties of the picture – coloured dots – in their figurative function. The problem, however, is that there is no general agreement on the extension of inflection, nor on the exact nature of the phenomenon itself. For instance, Hopkins believes that a limited number of pictorial representations instantiate inflected properties (see also Nanay 2010). If this is the case, then we cannot use inflection to characterize the visual awareness of a pictorial surface in general (but see Voltolini 2015 for a different opinion).

depicted scene, it is often assumed that the viewer perceives it (or is visually aware of it). If the viewer did not see the marked surface of a picture, they would illusorily perceive the represented scene itself. In other words, the visual awareness of the surface has the functional role – at least according to the defenders of twofoldness – of explaining why pictures are not illusory (or even hallucinatory) representations, as the already mentioned case of *trompe-l'œil* pictures shows. However, it is far from being uncontroversial that one always sees the picture surface when one is having a pictorial experience. No doubt that in most cases we do see it – suffice it to think of paintings that have a painterly style, such as Van Gogh's. But not all pictures are made so as to flaunt the material properties of their surface. A t*rompe-l'œil* (recognized as such, that is, as pictorial representations), is made in such a way as to buffer our attention from the depicting surface. Lopes (1996: 49–50) argues that when we face a *trompe-l'œil* we do not see its surface. But there are also other pictures, which are not explicitly made to trick the eye, that equally conceal their materiality, thus creating a strong feeling of presence for the viewer. Newall, arguing against the twofold character of seeing-in, makes this point:

> Early Netherlandish painting provides instances of such pictures, van Eyck's The Arnolfini Portrait being one of the most famous and most effective in this respect. … Beside the general techniques of realistic painting, two qualities contribute to this effect. First, van Eyck avoids laying down any trace of brushwork that would be visible to the naked eye. Second, the details he depicts are so fine that they can be beyond the resolution of the naked eye, and well beyond the resolution of print reproduction, except when a substantially magnified view is presented. The modern viewer, trained to attend to technique as much as subject matter, looks into a painting such as this expecting to see some trace of the brush, some element of facture, but can only make out ever finer levels of detail of the objects depicted.
>
> (Newall 2010, 25–26)

He then concludes that there seems to be no non-stipulative reason to rule out this category of pictures from an account of pictorial experience.[27] But this also implies that the concept of twofoldness is inadequate to account for seeing-in. For, if the above considerations are right, pictorial experience "can involve the visual awareness of the subject matter, without an *awareness* of the picture surface" (Newall 2010: 26; my

[27] For a reply to this point within a Wollheimian framework see Voltolini (2015).

emphasis). I am not persuaded that Newall's example succeeds at showing that the viewer, in some cases, is not aware of the picture surface. However, it may succeed in showing that, in some cases, she is not *visually* aware. To bolster this point, consider the experiences we have in front of an image displayed by a contemporary ultra-high-definition screen, a clean mirror, a bidimensional hologram, and so on. At least some of the previous are normally considered as pictures, and this should be enough to take seriously the following questions: is the visual awareness of the picture surface a necessary condition for pictorial experience in general? If not, how are we to explain the peculiar phenomenology of pictorial experience (and the fact that we are not normally deceived by pictures)?

In the following section, I consider Husserl's account of image consciousness in light of the issue that emerged in the last pages. Indeed, the same problems that affect Wollheim's account of seeing-in, naturally transfer to threefold accounts: namely, (i) how the different folds, which have conflicting contents, can merge; (ii) in what sense we see the marked surface of a picture; (iii) what enables the representation of the image-subject? As we will see, the introduction of a third fold, or intentional layer, between the consciousness of the marked surface and the subject that the picture refers to, does not leave the situation unchanged, and allows to resolve some of the questions and challenges just mentioned.

2. BACK AGAIN TO THREEFOLDNESS

§ 11. The conflicting character of the image-object

Wollheim's central thesis – that pictorial representation is to be explained by focusing on the special visual experience it elicits – resonates with the Husserlian perspective, which engages in a phenomenological analysis of intentional acts of consciousness. However, Husserl's approach differs in a substantial respect. While it is true that image consciousness has a peculiar intentional structure, more complex than ordinary perception, there is no reason – if not for defeatism – to stop the analysis at this point. The very fact that image consciousness has different aspects to its structure does not make its phenomenology "incommensurate". Rather, the different intentional layers of image consciousness should be studied to explicate their relationships and establish the conditions that make the representation of something absent possible. Moreover, it can be argued that the very choice of the expression "image consciousness" introduces some elements of doubt about the special status of this act of consciousness: entertaining the consciousness of an image does not yet imply that such an act is of a special kind, a special kind of seeing, as Wollheim (and many other) would have it.[28]

The interposition of a further layer – the image-object – within the structure of pictorial experience has an immediate consequence. It is not the marked surface that, as it were, does the representing: paper and pencil lines are not the bearers of the figurative properties. It is rather the appearing image-object that is charged with the function of making the image-subject intuited. This intermediary layer, then, takes on the most critical role, and deserves a thorough analysis.

As we know, the structure of image consciousness correlates to three distinct objectivities. So, it may seem that in this perspective the problems weighing on

[28] It may well be that the act itself is an ordinary perceptual act, while its correlate, the object of this perceptual act, is of a distinctive kind – this is the position that I will defend. Husserl is not totally clear on this point. In more than one occasion he writes that image presentation is a separate genus of presentation (PICM: 19, 30), but other times it seems that the distinctiveness of image consciousness comes from the distinctive character of the image-object: "a figment, a perceptual object but also a semblance object" (PICM: 59).

Wollheim's theory are even aggravated: how can these three objectivities merge together? However, posing three intentional objects does not yet imply that one's visual awareness is directed to, or distributed between, multiple objectivities. Indeed, Husserl has an interesting take on this point.

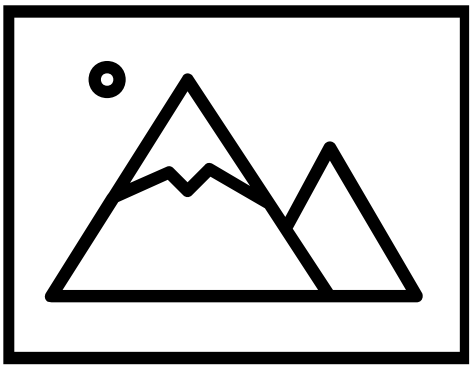

Figure 1. After Gombrich (2000: 7)

Let us consider a pencil drawing of a cat (Fig. 1) and focus on the relationship between the first and the second intentional layers of image consciousness. Typically, we can see, and direct our attention to, (i) the white paper and the grey lines the drawing consists of, and (ii) the cat appearing therein (which is different from the real, three-dimensional cat it depicts). Yet only the former is actually present in our surroundings. So, the same present object allows for two apprehensions (leaving aside for now the subject of the image), with a definite order of foundation.[29] The image-object requires the presence of the physical image to appear – Husserl sometimes refers to the latter as "the appropriate instigator of the appearance of a specific image" (PICM: 587). The sameness of the material thing that grounds the two perceptual apprehensions implies that the two apprehensions share the same sensuous contents: "The same visual sensations are interpreted as points and lines on paper *and* as appearing plastic form" (PICM: 48). The fact that the appearance of the image-object is supported by a physical thing is consistent with its perceptual character: "However much the person appearing in the photograph (not the depicted person) may be unlike the 'real' person being presented by it in size, coloring, and so on, in itself it appears in just the way

[29] It is worth reminding that, at this stage of the theoretical development of Husserlian phenomenology, the general structure of intuitive acts is analyzed according to the schema 'content of apprehension and apprehension'. Roughly, this schema assumes the presence of non-intentional sensory contents that are animated by intentional acts. Thus, the character of the act determines whether an object is perceived, remembered, seen in an image, and so on. An important, partial revision of this schema can already be found in the *Text No. 8* (of 1909) of *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898-1925)*. The consequences of this revision have a huge impact on the phenomenological understanding of sensation, on the sphere of passivity, and on phantasy itself. Their impact on a phenomenological theory of image consciousness (understood as pictorial representation) is yet to be flashed out (for research in this direction, see Rozzoni 2017; 2023).

in which a perceptual object does" (PICM: 145). This is especially true if we contrast its appearance with the appearance of a fantasized object: while the former displays "the full force and intensity of perception" (PICM: 62), the latter has instead a 'protean character'.[30]

Now, in order to show that the image-object apprehension has a perceptual character, Husserl invites us to consider a typical case of illusion caused by wax figures, but the same case can be made with panorama paintings or *trompe-l'œil* pictures. Such deceptive depictions can elicit an (illusory) perception of a human being or image consciousness; when they are particularly persuasive image consciousness comes and goes, leaving its place to a knowingly illusory perceptual experience. If this is the case, then the image-object appearance must in principle possess the character of a perceptual appearance, though with the substantial difference that the appearance of the image-object "is not, of course, a normal and full perception, inasmuch as what appears – for example, this image person in an oil painting – is not taken to be actually present. It appears as present, but it is not taken to be actual" (PICM: 43).

The fact that a common base of visual sensations supports two different perceptual interpretations poses a problem. On a phenomenological level, a pictorial experience does not amount to having two different, concurrent visual experiences – that of the canvas and that of nature, in Gombrich's terms. This would indeed violate a general principle that concerns the intuition of space. If two appearances are localized in the same portion of our visual field, this would generate a conflict – something like a doubling of a portion of our visual field. A system of localities is the foundation of the spatial order and, together with the dimension of time, is the condition of possibility of individualization. Two objects cannot occupy the same spatial location at the same moment, but they can occupy the same portion of space at different times. If that were not the case, the individuation of objects would become impossible, and our experience would lose its order. As Husserl writes around 1918, "what is distinctive about the individual differentia lies in this: that the genus 'time-point, time-duration,' in brief, the genera of the temporal

[30] "The phantasy objects appear as empty phantoms, transparently pale, with colors wholly unsaturated, with imperfect plastic form, often with only vague and unsteady contours filled out with *je ne sais quoi*" (PICM: 64). Now, this is not to say that the difference between phantasy and perception is just a matter of degree (as a Humean position would have it). If that were the case, a perceived pale red would risk being confused with a fantasized (red) color. However, this is not what normally happens.

as temporal (and then mediately the genera of the spatial as well), are capable of individual differentiation" (PICM: 600). As it is implied by this passage, spatial location functions as a principle of individualization for spatial entities. Pictures, having a substrate, are indeed spatial entities, and therefore they are identified both by temporal and spatial coordinates. This is why Husserl reminds us that "two intuitions cannot be brought simultaneously into the unity of one intuition in which the local values repeat themselves" (PICM: 83; the same idea is expressed on p. 579).

Although from very different backgrounds, Gombrich and Wollheim were dealing with this problem, to which they gave different solutions. On the one hand, Gombrich proposes that we cannot have nature and canvas at the same time; rather the viewer oscillates between these two ordinary visual experiences. On the other hand, Wollheim proposes that pictorial experience is not made up of two separate visual experiences and disagrees with the oscillation model: the visual awareness of the viewer is simultaneously distributed between nature and canvas. And yet he does not tell us how this fusion comes about. So, is it possible to retain the purity of Gombrich's claim – there is nothing special about the way in which the depicted scene appears – while avoiding the split of pictorial experience in two oscillating perceptions?[31]

Husserl has a brilliant solution to this problem. Looking at the drawing of the cat, we do not, in fact, apprehend the configuration, or design of the drawing, as a mere system of lines. We do see the paper at the margin of the drawing as white paper, but where the design of the image-object starts the paper becomes the body of the cat – a volume, however fictive. We see, for instance, that the white part enclosed by the first circle comes before the white part enclosed by the second, partially occluded circle. This situation is all the more explicit when we look at hyperrealistic pictorial representations. Where a figurative space emerges, the ordinary space recedes: "normal perceptual apprehension is absent as far as the design is concerned. At least, we cannot say here without further ado: We see paper. To the extent that the apprehension contents coincide, the image

[31] There is passage in which Husserl seems to argue for a position *à la* Gombrich. He writes: "And in spite of the identity of their sensory foundation, the two apprehensions certainly cannot exist at once: they cannot make two appearances stand out simultaneously. By turns, indeed, and therefore separately, but certainly not at once" (PICM: 48–49). However, the clarifications that follows immediately after shows a rather different view from that of Gombrich. Arguably, then, the passage at issue is only aimed at showing that the viewer does not entertain a visual experience as of physical marks on a surface and, at the same time, in the same spatial location but somehow separately, another visual experience (as of the depicted scene).

apprehension displaces the paper apprehension" (PICM: 49). Such displacement, however, does not amount to an erasure of our consciousness of the material support. The apprehension of the latter and the image apprehension are not to be understood on the model of the duck-rabbit figure, that is, as mutually exclusive experiences. Nor is their relationship to be understood on the model of a sensory illusion, as when we take a rope hanging from a tree for a snake, to recall Carneade's famous example. In this case, the perception of the rope erases the (mis)perception of the snake. By contrast, the apprehension of the depicting surface is not interrupted by the appearing of the image-object: it continues all along. However, it does not continue as a normal perception would, for the available apprehension contents, which are sensuous contents, are used up for the appearance of the image-object (49). The apprehension of the image-thing, of the pencil lines and paper "is also there in a certain way, connected with the continuously united *apprehension pertaining to our field of regard*", but while the latter properly appears, the picture *qua* image-thing does not, "since it has been deprived of apprehension contents" (49). Husserl holds that two perceptual apprehensions compete over the same available material of sensation: as soon as the viewer sees an image, such sensuous contents are apprehended as a cat, in our example. Although only the cat appears, the apprehension of the sheet of paper in which the cat is seen is still there, and its presence is felt by the viewer. "The image object *does triumph*, insofar as it comes to appearance", but the image-thing "preserves its normal, stable connection with the appearance of the surroundings" (50). *Conflict* is the peculiar dialectic between these intentional objectivities. This conflict takes place between the appearance of the image-cat and the physical image but also the surroundings, for while the latter two are perfectly connected and real, the cat seen in the image is not. A pictorial representation can appear only on the basis of a conflict, and this marks the image as a nothing *(ein Nichts*).

The nature of the constitutive conflict that marks image consciousness is easier to understand by focusing on non-conflicting apprehensions. As we are often reminded in the lectures on *Phantasy and image consciousness*, perception gives the characteristic of present reality, of what is 'in the now'. Our surroundings, the objects around us, bear this character; they belong in a continuum of objectivities that extend throughout our visual field. Each and every apprehension of the sensory contents in our visual field is brought to unity with other apprehensions and may result in a perceptual act directed to an object (or its parts) or to a multiplicity of objects in our surroundings. The value of reality that may be – and in principle is – attributed to an experienced objectivity depends on its

overall coherence with the other phenomenal appearances that show up in our experience. The coherence of the whole is established through a process, that unfolds in time, of continuous confirmation. While a definitive confirmation is never given, our experience has an overall concordant style, thanks to which a stable reality is given. All the appearances that show up in our experience and uniformly connect form a nexus of perceptions that bear the character of actuality, a coherent whole of objects. Such coherence is the condition of possibility of experience, but it is not given once and for all: the possibility of being deceived can never be ruled out.

Sensory deception is precisely an instance of conflict between opposing apprehensions, which eventually determines the insurgence of some inconsistency within the overall synthetic unity of our experiences. Husserl frequently narrates this episode: "I *remember* the scene at the waxworks in Berlin: How startled I was when the all-too-amiable 'lady' on the staircase beckoned to me. But how, after somewhat regaining my composure, I suddenly recognized that this was a mannequin calculated to deceive me" (PICM: 497). Similarly to the snake-rope misperception, here we have two conflicting visual interpretations of the same object. The lady is really perceived as such: that is, not only does the apprehension have a perceptual appearance, but it is also supplemented with *belief* – initially, at least. This (mis)perceptual outcome is brought about by the overall situation: the nearly perfect likeness of the lady-artifact, the presence, coherent with that the context, of a person, and so on. On this basis, the *fictum*, as long as the viewer is deceived, is directly perceived in its unity with the external reality. It is a perceptual appearance with a positional character. However, as soon as one "regains her composure", or simply approaches the lady, a new apprehension comes about: a wax figure appears, not a real person. The properties of the mannequin are in conflict with the properties of human beings – the mannequin is inanimate, it does not speak, it does not move, and so on. Thus, the human-apprehension does not cohere with the unfolding of the experience. It is discredited and eventually canceled. In the case of deceptions, the battle between the two perceptual apprehensions over the same sensory material does not end in a draw, and "the apprehension that determines what is actually present is the one that joins together with the unity of the total actual perception to form a comprehensive total perception" (PICM: 52). In fact, it is precisely in the moment that one of the two perceptual apprehensions prevails that the other is revealed as illusory. The conflict that characterizes sensory illusion is of a *destructive* kind (Brough 1992). The apprehension of the snake is

discontinued, replaced by the perception of the rope; if anything, the snake can be retrieved in memory.

By contrast, the conflicts that characterize image consciousness are of a *constructive* kind. These conflicts constitute image consciousness, and in case they cease – that is, if the conflict between the image-thing and the image-object, or between the image-object and the image-subject is resolved – the viewer no longer has a pictorial experience. Husserl compares the relationships that illusory objects and normal pictures entertain with the surrounding context:

> The following is the *difference between figment and image*: the genuine figment (the wax figure) directly appears in the unity of reality, while the image does not genuinely 'appear' in that unity but in its own space, which in itself has no direct relation to real space. … The illusory thing [*Scheinding*] stands before me in the nexus of these physical things belonging to my surroundings, in the same space, as a thing like them, and as real as they are.
>
> (PICM: 570)

This analysis shows that images do not have an illusory nature, for they are characterized by a *persisting conflict* with the surrounding reality. This point is worth stressing as it will also be at the core of the analyses in the following chapters: to understand how image consciousness works, one needs to factor in what lies outside the frame of the image, so to speak. Also what lies outside of the frame contributes to the emergence of image consciousness.[32]

Suppose seeing the picture of the cat in a real context: if we look at the edges of the picture, we can see the wooden surface of the table where the sketch is placed; then right beyond the table our gaze encounters the floor of the room, and a few meters away, the bookcase, placed against the walls of the living room. All that is located around the picture, and that occupies our visual field, belongs to the objective unity of perceptual apprehension (PICM: 49). Now, when we look at the cat, the perception of our surroundings does not disappear; although we do not heed the bookcase and the walls at its sides, they are still perceptually co-apprehended, present in our field of regard. But as

[32] In 1902, hence a couple of years before Husserl's lectures on *Phantasy and image consciousness*, Georg Simmel published a short essay (*Der Bilderrahmen. Ein ästhetischer Versuch*) in which he proposes that rather than directly looking 'inside' at a picture, we should focus instead on what we see at the edges of pictures. The function of the frame takes on a theoretical significance for the understanding of pictorial experience.

soon as our eyes meet the design of the drawing, and the cat is seen in the picture, the objective unity of our surroundings is interrupted. The image-cat introduces an element of discontinuity: now, a portion of our visual field changes its value and presents the viewer with an absence. However, Husserl characterizes such discontinuity in a peculiar way. All the apprehensions within the visual field, including the part occupied by the image, are of a perceptual kind:

> And so we have nothing but perceptual apprehensions, which, in conformity with our experience, enter into unity. Corresponding to the continuity of sense contents in the field of visual sensation, the whole appearing objectivity, the image objectivity and the objectivity of the surroundings of the image, takes its place *visually* in a single objective nexus. *One* objective nexus, which, however, *divides into two nexuses* according to the value of the reality involved.
>
> (PICM: 50)

Therefore, the discontinuity introduced by the image does not concern the act of consciousness itself, for also the image-object undergoes a perceptual apprehension, just as the surrounding objectivities. It is rather the value of reality that is modified, as the image-object – and the absent subject that it makes intuitive – is not posited as real: it is 'a nothing', it bears the character of unreality. Thus, the image object "appears in the manner of a perceptual object" but its appearance is not accompanied by a value of reality, as in the case of ordinary perception.

One may object that, construed in this way, image apprehension seems to imply some sort of hallucination: the perception of something – the cat represented by the image object – that is not actually there. But this is not the case, for the character of inactuality (*Uneigentlichkeit*) is mitigated by the actual presence of the image-thing, whose apprehension bears the character of reality since it legitimately enters into unity with the properly perceived surroundings. Indeed, Husserl specifies that the perceptual unity of the surroundings, which confers the character of actuality to its members, "continues on through the frame and then signifies 'printed paper' or 'painted canvas'" (PICM: 51). And yet the painted canvas is not perceived as such, since the sensory contents that should support its appearance are instead used to constitute the appearance of the image-object. The conflict over the sensory material modifies the quality of the apprehension of the

image-thing: “in a nongenuine way, in the mode of ‘nongenuine presentation,’ the paper perception is an appendix of the perception of the surroundings” (51).

On closer inspection, the relationship between image-thing and image-object is characterized by a twofold conflict. The first one concerns the battle over the available sensory data between two apprehensions. This conflict, then, takes place in a specific location in our visual field, since it extends as far as the design of the picture extends. The second one concerns the relationship between the picture and its surroundings, that is, the uniformly connected space that also includes the image *qua* image-thing. Thus, we may say that it is not precisely localized, since it runs beneath the appearance of the image-object and then, as it were, irradiates beyond. Typically, there is no battle over the sensory data in the remaining part of our visual field, which, in other words, is conflict-free; a normal perceptual object – a bookcase, say – does not present anything else. By contrast, the image-object is about something else, thus introducing a reference to an absent thing in the middle of our surroundings. The conflict between the picture and its surroundings influences the different positional character featured by the image apprehension.

The overall import of this twofold conflict can be summed up as follows. On the one hand, the image-thing is left bereft of ordinary perceptual appearance; it becomes a nongenuine presentation that nonetheless retains its character of actuality (the sheet of paper is really there). On the other, the image-object, drawing on the sensory material of the image-thing, gains proper perceptual appearance, but it receives a value of unreality due to the conflicts at its core.

Two conclusions can be drawn. The element of conflict accounts for the difference between image consciousness and ordinary perception, while the persistence of the conflict accounts for the difference from sensory illusion. The condition for the non-resolution of the conflict between the two adversary apprehensions at the core of image consciousness amounts to the modification of the positional act that presents the image-object, that is, the insertion of an appearance with the value of non-reality in the middle of the field of regard.

At this stage of the analysis, hence before having taken into account the image-subject intention, we can already outline some explanatory advantages of Husserl’s account of image consciousness. At the end of the last chapter, we were left with some questions that the theory put forward by Wollheim as well as other experiential accounts of depiction did not address. Here I consider the first two: (i) how the different folds, which have conflicting contents, can merge; (ii) in what sense do we see the marked surface of a

picture? The Husserlian account of image consciousness represents a step forward in dealing with the first, and partially with the second.

Conflict is assumed as the condition for the appearance of an image in our perceptual field. The image-object – hence the fold that is not distinguished from the image-subject in Wollheim's twofold account – is the only element that genuinely appears to the viewer. The marked surface, instead, does not genuinely appear (as such), but it is nonetheless apprehended, which is also why the conflict is preserved and the image apprehension does not turn into an illusion. So, the fact that there is only a proper appearance explains the compatibility between the two folds. In phenomenological terms, it explains why the two apprehensions do not contradict the principle according to which the same space cannot be brought to intuition twice for the same local values (PICM: 83). Again, only the intuition of the image-object does occupy such local values; thus, this description of image consciousness does not imply a doubling of appearances in the space where the image is located.

Moreover, there is progress with regard to the characterization of the acts involved in image consciousness. Wollheim, as we know, refused to tell us more about the *sui generis* nature of seeing-in, if not in terms of analogy. (The recognitional fold is said to be analogous to the visual perception of what the picture represents, and the configurational fold is analogous to the visual perception of the marked surface.) Husserl offers a more informative description. Both the depicting surface and the object that appears in it are perceptually apprehended, although in different ways. The former is perceived unauthentically: it is apprehended and has positional value but does not appear (as such). The latter appears perceptually – it properly appears – but lacks positional value. In addition, the fact that an image appears perceptually, thanks to the apprehension of the sensory contents available, is consistent with the phenomenological datum that that images have the same fullness or force of perception. To a certain extent, then, Husserl's analysis of image consciousness is able to retain the simplicity of Gombrich's account – according to which the appearance of the depicted scene does not call on a *sui generis* form of seeing (as Wollheim would have it) – and fill in the details about the complexity of pictorial experience.

Leaving the Husserlian argument in the background for a moment, there is an aspect that concerns the appearance of the image-thing that can be further developed. It relates to the following question: when an image appears in our perceptual field, what happens to the underlying perception of the picture surface? Can this element be brought (back) to intuition? This point can be better clarified looking at the well-known picture of the Dalmatian (Fig. 2). Typically, so-called "aspect dawning" pictures do not reveal their subject at first sight. One may perhaps sense to be in front of some kind of minimalistic and rather confused form of pictorial space. The configurations of splotches try to hide the represented subject. In the case of the picture of the Dalmatian, the speckled coat of the dog is mimicked, and thus dissembled, by the surrounding configuration of black splotches. Normally, however, with some effort, trying out different visual paths, the outline of the Dalmatian appears. When it does, the part of the configuration which presented us with black splotches changes its value, being replaced by the appearance of the image-object. Interestingly, this phenomenological change does not seem to be reversible. The scene that a moment ago could be described as "mere black splotches on white background" disappears as soon as the Dalmatian is seen. Even though the material substratum is exactly the same, the visual scene that confronted us before the Dalmatian appeared cannot be visually brought back.

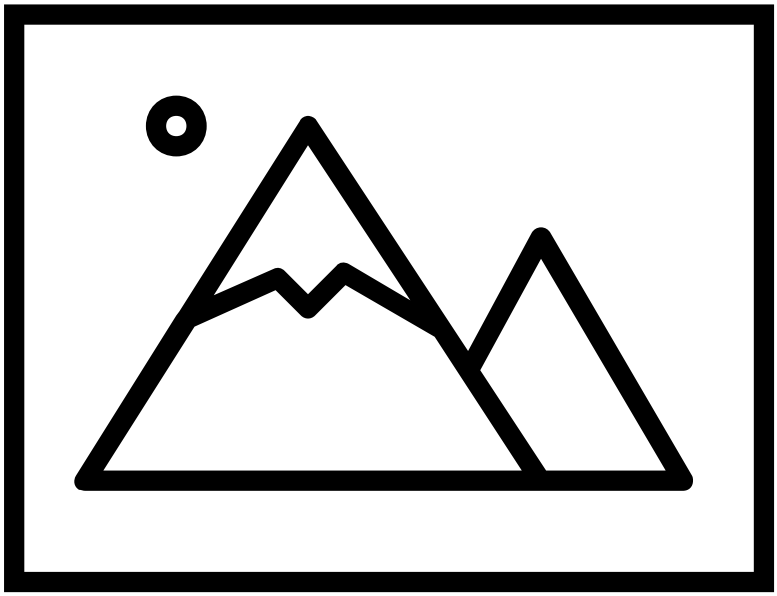

Figure 2. Dalmatian

This case of aspect dawning pictures is useful to make some observations. First, the vast majority of pictorial representations are not designed to play hide and seek with the viewer, as it were: the depicted scene appears without any effort, as ordinary perceptual objects do. In this regard, it would be mistaken to say that seeing the marked surface of a picture amounts to experiencing an assemblage of marks (plus seeing the depicted scene). Once an image of something appears, there is no such experience as of an assemblage of marks. And while in the case of the image of the Dalmatian, it is not possible to retrieve 'the before experience', in the case of ordinary (non-aspect dawning) pictures there is not even a 'before experience'. Husserl seems to imply something analogous when he writes that

> even if I wanted to, I could by no means just push aside the appearance belonging to the image object and then see *only* the lines and shadows on the card. At most I could do this with respect to particular spots that I pick out. It is otherwise, no doubt, when I contemplate a child's drawing. [But] this is hardly possible when I see a body drawn with good 'plastic' form: Only when I pick out a single detail – a single line, say – and abstract it from the rest, do I 'see' it on the paper.
>
> (PICM: 583)

So, it is quite clear that, *pace* Gombrich, when we look at a detailed photograph it is not really possible to disregard the depicted scene and only see the marked surface. In fact, I would also argue that, *pace* Husserl, the same is true for children's drawing or painterly pictorial representations, on condition that the former be not a mere scribble where nothing else appears and the second be not a mere mixture of pigments where nothing else appears (however artistically meaningful it may be). In other words, as long as the viewer is confronted with a minimal instance of pictorial space, it is not possible to displace its appearance in favor of the depicting surface, regardless of the material qualities of the picture at issue. In this respect, a simple pencil sketch or painterly impressionist painting and a lifelike photograph are on a par. Their difference is to be found elsewhere. Indeed, a painting like *L'allée de rosiers* (Fig. 3) certainly allows – and in a certain sense demands – its material properties to come to the fore. Even its photographic reproduction makes fully visible the material, tactile brushstrokes charged with colors. And yet the scene presented by this picture is organized in a very specific way, which is not reducible to the material presence of the marks on the surface

(differently from what one sees in Figure 4): the space is organized, however loosely, in a perspectival way, so that we see a certain part of the composition progressively receding in the distance, thus providing a sense of depth. No doubt that Monet's painting of the rose walk allows the viewer to pay attention to the brushstrokes, but this does not yet mean that, in so doing, one loses consciousness of their figurative value; rather, in this case, one is able to maintain visual awareness of both. And the same holds for a simple drawing of a cat, where the design lines are basically the only salient feature of the composition.

The only way to push aside the figurative value of a picture may be, as Husserl suggests, to pick out a single detail, thus, in a sense, abstracting from the whole by focusing on a rather limited part, such as a line, a group of brushstrokes, etc. But in fact, this abstractive procedure does not yield the desired outcome. For visually attending to a single detail does not imply losing awareness of what is around that detail, being somehow oblivious of the overall context in which such detail is located. It only implies making a certain part more prominent at the expense of the surrounding parts, which nevertheless maintain their (figurative) meaning. Thus, only in an abstract sense can we assert that we see a line in the drawing of the cat as a mere physical mark and nothing more.

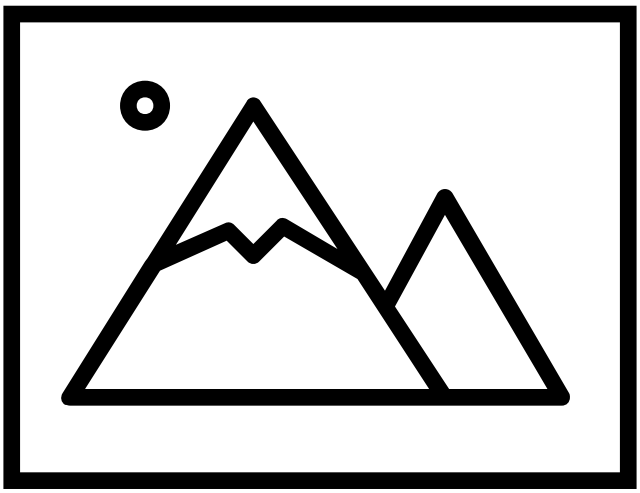

Figure 4. Detail

Figure 3. Claude Monet, *L'allée de rosiers, Giverny*

Arguably, a better strategy to visually abstract from the figurative value of a picture would be looking at it from a close range, in a way that recalls Clark's stalking of an illusion. However, as Figure 4 suggests, if we succeed in seeing the substratum as such by looking at some detail at a close range, this comes at the price of the pictorial experience itself. This means that, in fact, we never truly succeed in pushing aside the figurative value of the image: from a close distance, there seems to be no figurative value at all. After all, perception is no different in this respect: if I look closely at the surface of a wooden tabletop, I only perceive the wood and its pattern, but not the structure of the table. As with the picture of the Dalmatian, once a pictorial space appears, it is impossible to go back to the previous phenomenological configuration (in case a previous phenomenological configuration was there). The viewer does not have the capacity to switch from the new visual scene to the previous one.

We can, at this point, answer the question concerning the visibility of the image-thing in image consciousness by saying that one cannot direct her regard only to the image-thing and excise, as it were, the apprehension of the image-object from the experience. In Husserlian terms, this would violate the condition of conflict necessary for image consciousness.[33]

§ 12. Deeper into the reasons of conflict

Until now, we have considered the conflict between the image-thing and the image-object, thanks to which an image can appear in our visual field. However, images are typically referential structures, that is, they refer to something else, which is not present in the surroundings.[34] According to Husserl images are necessarily images *of*: when we look at a picture, we refer to its subject, not to the image-object. The latter is what properly

[33] Note that the last pages were meant to show that, insofar as the viewer has a pictorial experience, the appearance of the image-object cannot be set aside to let the image-thing appear as such. However, as I hope I have shown, there is no *phenomenological* reason to hold that the image-thing must be apprehended as such. This put some pressure on the necessity of the image-thing apprehension, understood in terms of visual awareness, as a condition for the appearance of an image. For the time being, only its *logical function*, which plays a key role in all experiential account of depiction (Husserl's included), may be retained: we know that we are facing a marked surface, even though a marked surface does not appear (as such). This latter function is usually utilized to explain why we are not deceived when looking at picture.

[34] An exception concerning the absence (relative to the viewer's peripersonal space) of what the image represents may be mirror images, and reflections, more in general.

appears, but the image-subject is what the viewer refers to. Monet's *L'allée de rosiers* depicts the path under the rose arches that leads to the painter's residence in Giverny – hence a particular place, which is the image-subject of that painting. There is a (visual) sense in which those who have visited the place immediately recognize the walk under the rose arches in Giverny, and yet this painting, in which the composition almost veers towards the abstraction, dramatically shows the irreducible differences between the image-object and what it depicts.

As Husserl writes, the "image object *must* be the bearer of conflict in a double sense" (PICM: 55; my emphasis). More precisely, the image-object can appear thanks to "two reasons: 1) the conflict that comes from being placed into the surroundings of 'reality': 2) *empirical conflict* (there are no human beings in photographic colors)" (175; see also Brough 1992). And if this is so, it follows that image consciousness necessarily entails reference to some subject: for Husserl, image consciousness is necessarily depictive. As soon as an image appears in our field of regard, reference to something absent is established: "The appearing object appears but is not taken independently. It holds good for something else and thus is taken to be an analogical representant, an image" (26). Not surprisingly, almost all the examples proposed by Husserl to analyze the structure of image consciousness belong to the genre of portraiture or have a particular referent.[35] These examples include the depiction of Emperor Maximilian, Bismarck, the Virgin Mary by Titian, the photograph of a child, and so forth.[36]

The conflict between the image-object the depicting surface and its surroundings may also be called "structural" (see Calì 2002), for it concerns the very structure of image consciousness as an intentional act – it involves the constitutive battle between two apprehensions over the same sensory base. The second kind of conflict concerns instead the relationship between the image-object and the subject in term of differences and analogies. This conflictual relationship is, as Husserl argues, based on *resemblance*. The

[35] Portraiture can indeed be considered the depictive art *par excellence*. There is a general agreement on the fact that portraits represent particular individuals (see Maes 2015 for discussion).

[36] In *Text no. 18*, Husserl explicitly acknowledges that his theory conceives of image consciousness essentially as a depictive act, and that this theory fits particularly well the case of portrait. And he also recognizes that image consciousness so understood is inadequate to account for the consciousness of play, which does not necessarily entail depiction, and consequently proposes a "[r]evision of the earlier theory of image consciousness as depiction" (2005: 616). It is not clear, however, if this revision should also apply (and, in case, how) to the consciousness of 'flat' pictures, so to say.

concept of resemblance itself implies a "consciousness of difference" between the two resembling terms, however minimal this may be (PICM: 22).

Let us first focus on the consciousness of difference, that is, the empirical conflict that takes place between the image-object and what is represented. This conflict is brought about by the gap between the properties of what appears in the image and the properties that the same subject enjoys in real life. As such, this conflict is grounded on the knowledge of the viewer: what the viewer knows about the real appearances of, say, men conflicts with the way in which men appear in pictorial representations. The fact, which is a fact based on our empirical experiences, that "there are no human beings in photographic colors" is at variance with how humans look in real life. The black and white shades of the appearing image-man by no means correspond to the color properties that belong to the appearance of normal humans, and this, for Husserl, is enough to bring about a consciousness of conflict. The same holds true for many other aspects that our knowledge prescribes to the actual appearance of human beings. Our knowledge demands that women have a certain size, brightness, and texture, that they are able to move, and so forth. But none of these determinations can adequately come to expression in a black and white photograph. Moreover, the conflict that concerns the determinations that the appearing image-object lacks is not the only kind of empirical conflict that can emerge in image consciousness:

> The object appears as A, but in appearing it shows properties that conflict with what we know and with our knowledge of what holds universally, with our empirical laws. Our knowledge defines expectations that are not fulfilled, demands properties that are not forthcoming. If the judgment is firm, then A cannot exist, or cannot exist in this way, and so on. Accordingly, *this is a logically (intellectually) mediated semblance*.
>
> (PICM: 172)

Here, Husserl is implying that conflict can also be mediated by our conceptual knowledge. In this case, the empirical conflict concerns the consistency between what appears in an image and its relationship with our conceptual knowledge of the world, which includes physical and logical impossibilities. For instance, in one of his sensational adventures, Baron Munchausen pulls himself and the horse he is sitting on out of a swamp by his own hair. This action blatantly conflicts with the law of gravity (without even considering that the Baron is holding on to the pigtail of his wig). The conceptually mediated kind of

conflict may come in handy to describe the viewer's first reaction toward certain deceptive images that are able to induce a strong impression of three-dimensionality. If a *trompe-l'œil* or a three-dimensional anamorphic image puts us in the presence of an object that seems suspended in the air, our judgment and conceptual resources will immediately inform us that something must be wrong – gravity does not allow physical bodies to hover in the air. The conflict thus emerged will then prompt the viewer to further explore such bizarre appearance to understand the (pictorial) nature of the object seen.

Typically, photographs can accurately render the plastic form of the depicted subject (and as I will point out later, for Husserl this is a key condition for depiction). In order for image consciousness to take place, the image must present at least some aspects that are in agreement with the image-subject. And it is precisely in virtue of these moments of agreement that the viewer can refer to the image-subject, that looking at a small greyish figure one intends a person of normal size, colors, and so forth. How should the apprehension of the depicted subject be understood? Husserl cautiously observes that the image-subject "is intended in a quite singular way. No appearance corresponds to it. It does not stand before me separately, in an intuition of its own; it does not appear as a second thing in addition to the image" (PICM: 29). This is due to the problem we already run into when dealing with the conflicting apprehensions of the appearing image-object and the non-genuinely appearing image-thing – space cannot be intuited twice for the same local values. Husserl proposes a similar, related solution to account for the apprehension of the image-subject. Such apprehension is *founded* on the apprehension of the image-object, and precisely for this reason the image-subject, that is, what the viewer refers to when looking at an image, cannot appear. As we know, the image-object genuinely appears by using up all the sensuous content available, and thus no other appearance can become constituted in that portion of our field of regard: the image-subject is apprehended but does not appear.

The apprehension of the image-subject, which consists in a referential activity (based on the appearance of the image-object), must be clearly distinguished from another form of representation which equally establish reference to an absent subject: symbolic consciousness. According to Husserl there is a clear difference between symbolic consciousness and image consciousness:

> The imaging apprehension also points to another object, but always to a similarly formed object, to an analogous object presenting itself in the image; and above all, it points to the

> object *through itself*. In symbolic presentation, the meaning regard is pointed away from the symbol; in pictorial presentation, it is pointed toward the image. In order to present the object, we are supposed to immerse ourselves *in* the image; we are supposed to find the object displayed in what carries the imaging function in the image.
>
> (PICM: 37)

Some examples may help to clarify this phenomenological distinction. The word "lips" refers to a specific part of the body, and the proper name "Mick Jagger" to a particular individual, but any other combination of letters, and in principle any other mark would equally work (assuming that it is supported by an intersubjective usage of that combination of letters or marks). The meaning of a linguistic representation is not in any significant way constrained by the material properties of its carrier – the phenomenal appearance of a sign (and often of symbols) is independent of the appearance of what is designated (or symbolized) by that sign. The same does not apply to pictorial representations: if one randomly changes the lines that make up the drawing of a mouth, then it is very likely that the drawing will no longer show a mouth (regardless of how we may use that drawing). In the case of pictures, then, not every configuration of marks on a surface can work just as well for depiction. Figure 1 clearly shows a cat, but if one were to rub the line that corresponds to the tail, another visual synthesis would come about: a purse, not a cat (as Gombrich himself demonstrates). Pictorial representations do not enjoy the same degree of freedom of linguistic representations: the intention directed at the image-subject is founded on the visual features of the image-object, and the visual features of the image-object are constrained by the material properties of the image-thing: a picture "points to the object *through itself*", as Husserl argues (PICM: 37). In other words, a picture has much to say – or better, show – about what it depicts. This makes sense of the common intuition and saying that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Yet this does not imply that pictures cannot be effectively used as symbolic representations. When pictures are employed in such a way, image consciousness does not change its threefold structure but is supplemented by a symbolic presentation. This

new kind of presentation points away from the picture and relates to something that is not present and that, differently from the image-object, is not made visible *in* the picture. Reference to the subject of symbolic consciousness may but need not be accompanied by more or less salient visual imagery (phantasy presentation).[37] Take, for instance, the famous tongue and lips logo that appears on the albums of The Rolling Stones (fig. 5). No doubt that looking at it one immediately sees a pair of full red lips and a tongue. Typically, however, one does also associate this image with The Rolling Stones. Thus, while this logo surely correlates to image consciousness, it can also function as a symbolic representation: when this happens, one's visual interest is diverted from the symbol-carrier and directed toward the rock band (see PICM: 56–57; Brough 1992).

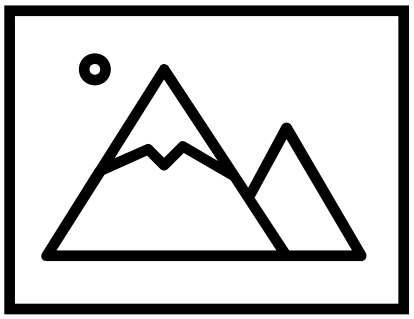

Figure 5. Tongue and lips logo

The phenomenological distinction between image consciousness and symbolic consciousness stresses the fact that the relationship between the image-object and subject is not one in which a further appearance comes about. There is a single appearance, that of the image-object, through which the depicted subject is intuited. Their relationship is not just characterized by conflict (due to the necessary consciousness of difference). It is also characterized by "permeation" (PICM: 31). The intention directed at the subject permeates the appearance of the image-object. For Husserl, then, the image-object and the image-subject are non-independent; they form a double objectivity.

§ 13. Depictive consciousness

How does the re-presentational consciousness of what does not appear in what does appear come about? In the last paragraph, I considered the condition that makes the

[37] This does not violate the principle that space cannot be brought to intuition twice for the same local values. An eventual phantasy presentation would not enter into conflict with the image-apprehension (that motivated it), but rather cover it. The fantasized objectivity appears in a space of its own, and the apprehension of the corresponding part of the real space becomes an empty presentation (see PICM: 579).

appearance of the double objectivity image-object/subject possible. Again, this condition amounts to the conflict between the two: the image-object must bear some difference from the depicted subject. However, image consciousness, which for Husserl is necessarily re-presentational (depictive), could not come about if a consciousness of difference were the only element at play. The relationship between image-object and subject must also be grounded on a coinciding in resemblance: «the image object makes intuitable what, indeed, is not identical to it but is more or less like it or *similar to it in content*" (PICM: 31; my emphasis). Thus, the resemblance between the two terms is objectively founded: some properties of the image-object must coincide with the properties of the image-subjects. And it is in virtue of such coinciding that an intention aimed at the subject – and thus image consciousness – can emerge.

The traits of the image-object that make the subject intuited are at the core of the above-mentioned phenomenon of permeation. Image consciousness is neither signitive nor symbolic, for the subject appears *in* the image, *through* the image-object, and precisely through those traits of the image-object that coincide with (or simply resemble to) the represented subject. Husserl takes seriously the (re-)presentative power that the sensory content of an image can exert on the viewer. Indeed, on this premises, Husserl comes to a somewhat emphatic and metaphorical conclusion: "The subject looks at us, as it were, through *these* traits" (PICM: 31–32). If that is the case, it is because the traits that make the subject intuited are potentially the same traits that the subject would present if we were to encounter it in real life.[38] There are no significant differences between perception and image consciousness in this regard. Both are objectifying acts of consciousness, whose intentional correlate transcends the very act that intends it. Yet image consciousness does not present us with something present, for the synthesis of coincidence, based on resemblance, can only attain a certain, and necessarily incomplete, fulfillment; the image-object presents some aspects that overtly diverge from how the subject would appear in real life.

[38] On this matter, Eldridge (2017) proposes an interesting development of Husserl's theory of image consciousness (although limited to the case of figurative images). In his proposal, the intention of the image-subject amounts to the consciousness of how something (i.e., the depicted subject) "ought" to appear, move, and so forth if it were seen in the flesh. But since it is intended through the appearance of the depicting (and necessarily different) image-object, such an "ought" is not fulfilled.

Importantly, however, not only does the image-object present resembling traits, but these traits also come to the fore of our experience. They are noticed and in their being noticed set apart from the traits of the image-object that do not resemble the depicted subject. The resembling traits and the non-resembling traits instantiated by the image-object accomplish different functions in image consciousness: only the former are responsible for the representation of the image-subject, and thus have a depictive function. The depicted subject is exhibited *in* these analogizing moments. More precisely, certain determinations of the image-subject are intuited in the resembling determinations of the image-object: this is how the conscious relation to the depicted subject can be established. However, as soon as an intention aimed at the image-subject arises, such intention collides with those moments of the image-object that do not possess a depictive function because their content deviates from – or is just indeterminate relative to – the corresponding determination of the subject: "consciousness of agreement and consciousness of conflict blend in the image" (PICM: 189).

Interestingly, however, Husserl seems to attribute a special status to the moments of the image-object that support a synthesis of coincidence with the subject, because it is in virtue of these moments that the intention of the subject can emerge and conflict (almost retrospectively) with the determinations of the image-object that diverge from the corresponding parts of the subject. Not having a depictive value, the non-analogizing moments are present in the image "but they are not operative"; they "have no relation to the [subject] at all", thus functioning as "stopgaps" (PICM: 54–55).

Take again Monet's *L'allée de rosiers*. According to Husserl's understanding of image consciousness, the intention aimed at the subject – a walk in Giverny – is brought about by the few analogizing moments of the painting: a certain spatial arrangement, colors that (more or less) resemble to the vegetation of the real walk, and to a certain extent the visual impression one may have walking down that path in a sunny spring day. All in all, the resembling traits in which the subject is exhibited are just a few and many are the non-analogizing moments that make apparent the difference from the subject, thus eliciting a consciousness of conflict: the entrance at the end of the walk is not visible, the rosebushes themselves are vaguely suggested, the shape of all elements of the composition is very imprecise, and so forth. A black and white photograph, by contrast, would render the shapes with great precision, but it would be silent, so to say, about colors.

In light of the distinction between analogizing and non-analogizing moments, it can be argued that the relationship between image-object and image-subject varies along a

scale at the ends of which we have a maximum convergence and maximum divergence. When the relationship between image-object and subject is excessively faint or excessively tight, image consciousness fades away being replaced by perception (veridical or illusory). In the latter case, for instance, the viewer is no longer aware of being in front of an image.

Husserl provides further elaboration on the factors that impact the variation along this scale. This is done in terms of *adequacy*, that is, how adequately an image can in principle represent its subject. Pictorial media presents different "extensity" (*Extensität*) and "intensity" (*Intensität*) characteristics (PICM: 61). In fact, this conceptual couple is just quickly sketched by Husserl. Yet with a bit more development, it can usefully be exploited to describe the pictorial diversity of depictive media e and styles.[39]

The characteristic of extensity amounts to the overall range of analogizing moments that a particular pictorial media allows. An oil painting and a high-definition screen can adequately render the color properties and the shapes of what they depict. Etchings, pastel drawings, and also medical ultrasounds have instead a comparatively reduced extensity, since they can exhibit their subject in a fewer number of depictive moments. By contrast, a marble sculpture can perfectly depict all aspects of the plastic shape of its subject, but it is inevitably far less rich as far as color properties are concerned; indeed, marble sculptures are usually silent about the color properties of their subjects. The spatiality of the medium plays a decisive role. Flat pictures present an imperfect spatiality (PICM: 581) that necessarily conflicts with the three-dimensionality implied by the actual appearance of their subject. The spatial structure of a relief allows to analogize the spatial appearance of its image-subject to a higher extent, depending on the depth of the relief. Accordingly, relief comes in variable depth-degrees, ranging from a minimum of analogization of depth, referred to as "low-relief", to a higher, although never full, representation of depth, called "high-relief". Coins and medals instantiate to a very minimal degree the spatial form of their subjects: "the appearance that I have is a coin on which a 'white head' appears. I have the head-appearance; and this has, as its spatiality,

[39] For Lopes, "pictorial diversity" is a key aspect of depiction. There are many ways to represent the world: "Egyptian tomb paintings, medieval miniatures, ukiyo-e prints, north-west coast First Nation totems, the cows and horses Lascaux, the collages of Picasso and Braque, all illustrate not only the diversity but also the cultural embeddedness and historical development of depiction" (1996: 8–9). He proposes that a theory of depiction should be able to account for such diversity, so as to avoid privileging a particular style of depiction (say, linear perspective). On pictorial diversity, see also Kulvicki (2010) and Inkpin (2016).

the spatiality of the relief belonging to the coin, and no other spatiality" (583). That is, not the spatiality that real heads have, but instead the (almost) flat spatiality of the coin. In this respect, the spatiality instantiated by the image-object on a coin does not present major phenomenological differences from the spatiality instantiated by painterly (flat) pictures. High reliefs and, of course, full reliefs are instead able to analogize the actual spatiality of their subject: the spatiality of the image-object coincides with the spatiality of the depicted subject.[40]

Thus, the concept of extensity permits to classify the depictive potential of the different pictorial media. The extension of the analogizing moments that a particular depictive media enjoys is grounded on the physical properties of the image-thing: flat vs. three-dimensional, analog vs. digital, monochrome vs. multicolored, painterly vs. naturalistic or illusionistic, moving vs. static, and so forth.

Clearly enough, a pictorial medium need not exploit all the analogizing moments that its extensity would allow. Being an oil painting, Monet's *L'allée de rosiers* allows for a detailed rendering of the represented subject in terms of shapes and colors. Yet the pictorial style that informs this pictorial representation does not aim at doing so – it does not seek adequacy (at least, in the sense normally attributed to this term). This situation is captured by the concept of *intensity*. According to Husserl, intensity amounts to the effective exploitation of the analogizing moments available in a particular pictorial media (that is, its specific extensity). It describes the degree of resemblance that a pictorial depiction is able to reach, in some respect. Thus, a drawing that only aims at depicting the outline shape of a cat can do so with perfect adequacy. As for this specific moment, a line drawing is no different from an oil painting, or a screen, or even a sculpture. The image-subject is perfectly intuited through this resembling moment, but of course it is not adequately exhibited through other moments of the drawing; line drawings have a limited extensity in color properties, if compared to photographs, for instance.

[40] Movement is yet another aspect that can be analogized to a lesser or a greater extent. In fact, Husserl himself cursorily mention moving pictures (PICM: 584 n. 3). For instance, the painting of a galloping horse does depict movement. Yet the image-object itself is not moving, and so movement is depicted only to a certain extent, for the movement of the galloping horse (the image-subject) is not seen as it would be seen in a real-life scenario. However, in the case of moving pictures, the image-object is not static. Therefore, it allows a richer analogization: movement is depicted by means of movement. On the relationship between depiction and movement is static images, see Marchetti (2022).

What about illusionistic images? The degree of intensity of the analogizing moments that *trompe-l'œil* paintings are able to instantiate is obviously very high. Being created with the aim of deceiving the viewer, these images deliberately exploit *all* the analogizing moments that their medium affords. As a result, *trompe-l'œils* are able to close the gap between the image-object and the subject: when this happen, if for a split second, the latter is directly presented to the viewer. However, time matters here, and *trompe-l'œils* are not able to pass its test: the extensity of this genre of images prevents them from exhibiting the depicted subject in all of its moments. The deceptive experiences that this kind of pictures is able to provoke can last for a limited time: a simple change in vantage point exposes the trick to the viewer. Indeed, the extensity of *trompe-l'œils* is not as wide as the extensity of sculptures. (This fact explains Husserl's interest in wax figures that re-present actual human beings.)

Duane Hanson's life-sized, hyper-realistic wax sculptures are practically indistinguishable from the people they represent. If one were to walk past one of his 'travelers' (Fig. 6) in the context of an airport or a train station, in all likelihood, they would not notice the trick. Besides size, color, and texture, wax figures can also analogize

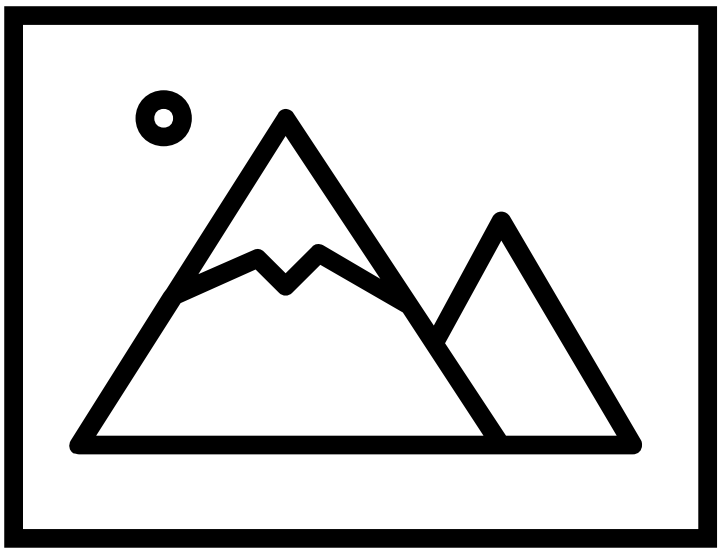

Figure 6. Duane Hansen, *Traveler*

to perfection the three-dimensional plastic shape of their subjects, so that it seems impossible to *notice* that they are in fact wax figures. In effect, illusory waxworks can render spatiality with perfect adequacy: "the genuine figment (the wax figure) directly appears in the unity of reality, while the image does not genuinely 'appear' in that unity but in its own space, which in itself has no direct relation to real space" (PICM: 570). Therefore, in order to realize the true nature of a wax figure *à la* Hansen other parameters need to be taken into account. Typically, movement is one of the factors that may reveal their fictive status. And yet the traveler in Figure 6 is particularly persuasive even in this respect: since the man seems to be sleeping, the dimension of movement is, as it were, neutralized, and thus, in a way, properly depicted. In addition, the illusionistic effect of the composition is enhanced by the presence of non-fictive, real props. The baggage of the traveler, his clothes, etc. are not made of wax, they are real things in all respects.

A similar case can be made for hyper-realistic cake sculptures. Nowadays we commonly find social media video reels in which cake sculpture artists cut ordinary object to reveal, to our bewilderment, that in fact such object are cakes. Figure 7 shows an onion-cake before and after the cutting. If compared to Hansen's traveler, the effect created by the cake-onion can be even more persuasive, for the element of movement, which may eventually unmask the fictitious status of the former, is naturally excluded from the latter – we do not expect onions to move. The conflict here can only arise when the cutting of the onion reveals that its inner parts are made up of layers of sponge cake, instead of the leaves that we would expect to see.

"If the image-object appearance were really to be completely like the subject, not only as momentary appearance but as *temporally continuous appearance*, we would have

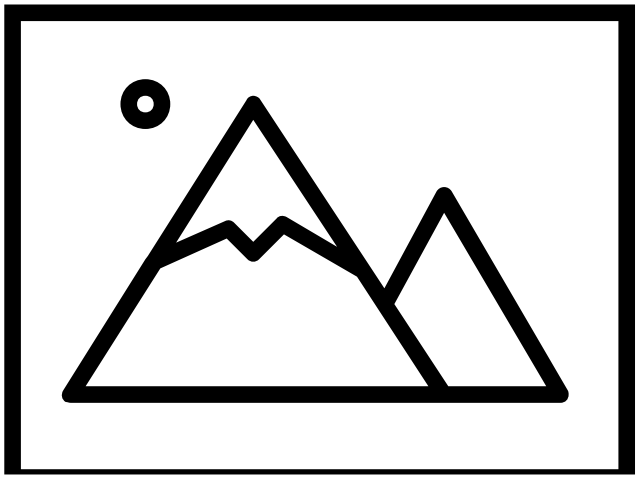

Figure 7. Natalie Sideserf, *Onion cake*

normal perception and no consciousness of conflict, no image-object appearance" (PICM: 155, my emphasis). If that were the case, we would be in a Pygmalion-like scenario, in which the sculpted person is brought to life, thus filling out all the aspect of a human being.[41] However, even Hansen's sculptures (and also hyper-realistic cake sculptures) are unable to pass the test of time, notwithstanding their illusory force. For at some point, one realizes that something must be wrong: "the man sleeping on the ground has not moved in hours; perhaps he is not real". There is a conflict, then, between the man represented by the mannequin and what is demanded empirically to human beings in general. The fact that this man does not possess a set of properties that are demanded to an entity to count as an actual man motivates a conflict, and on the basis of this conflict the viewer comes to realize that they are actually looking at a mannequin, that is, at an image-object. It is worth noting that in this case the conflict is grounded on our knowledge, and that the gap between image-object and image-subject is not seen as such, but only 'thought of'. The illusoriness of Hansen's artwork is so powerful that the presence of a real traveler tries to impose itself anew every time we look at it. The unmasking of the traveler cannot be definitive, for the primary phenomenological level does not support such 'conclusion': "We indeed 'know' that it is a semblance, but we cannot help ourselves – we see a human being. The accompanying conceptual judgment that what is at stake is a mere image becomes ineffective against the perceptual semblance" (PICM: 43).

For these reasons, image consciousness cannot properly arise here. True, the man is a mannequin, hence an image-object, and yet the traveler cannot be seen as an image-object. For the moments of difference from the image-subject are not visible, and thus a consciousness of difference – which is also a condition for image consciousness – does not arise on the visual level and is instead logically mediated.

Hopkins (1998: 30) argues that pictorial misrepresentation is *possible* but has its limits. Pictorially misrepresenting a certain subject amounts to depicting that subject with properties that it does not actually enjoy. In Husserlian terms, not only does image consciousness allow for misrepresentation, but it requires misrepresentation (to a certain extent). A full coinciding between the properties of the image-object and those of the depicted subject (as illusory waxworks make clear) is incompatible with image consciousness, as it undermines its condition of possibility, that is, conflict. But as

[41] According to the myth narrated by Ovid, however, the sculpture created by Pygmalion is made of ivory, and this would still entail an element of conflict within the appearance of the depicted person – hence image consciousness could arise.

Hopkins points out, misrepresentation cannot be unlimited either: a certain subject cannot be depicted as having only properties that it does not actually enjoy. It may be symbolized in that way, as green crosses symbolize pharmacies, but it does not depict it. For the image-object must at least instantiate some resembling traits through which the image-subject is intuited.

§ 14. Resemblance

Until now, we have considered the conditions that make the *appearance* of an image possible and found that they consist in the double conflict at the core of the image-object apprehension. However, image consciousness is necessarily depictive for Husserl since it always entails reference to some subject. And if this is so, then there must be other conditions that an image needs to satisfy, for conflict alone is not sufficient to explain how the reference to a certain subject is established. This is the third problem that affects Wollheim's theory of pictorial representation; that is, providing an explanation of what enables the passage from the configurational to the recognitional fold, in which a certain subject is recognized. Husserl was sensitive to this problem: "What does it mean to have the subject re-presented in the image? To live in the consciousness of resemblance and the blending of resembling moments with the nonanalogized but co-intended moments accompanying them contiguously" (PICM: 161).

Here I will only mention how Husserl handles this issue. Two reasons motivate this choice. First, Husserl himself did not provide a clear-cut account of the conditions (based on resemblance) that a picture should respect in order to depict a certain subject. It may also be worth noting that his general approach may not be suited for providing such conditions. The reason is that Husserl's theory of image consciousness ambitiously tries to cover every form of image (including, at least at the beginning, mental images), but it is questionable that pictorial media as different as flat pictures, moving pictures, and sculptures refer to their subject in the same way (under the same conditions). Second, the present work is mostly concerned with the phenomenological constitution of the pictorial, and – as I argue – the structuring of a certain portion of our visual field as pictorial is

independent of its having a certain referent. In this perspective, the issue of pictorial reference is subordinated to the emergence of something as pictorial.[42]

As we know, the image-object presents some analogizing traits in which the image-subject is exhibited. Such resembling traits support the emergence of the image-subject intention, which in turn enter into conflict with the non-analogizing moments of the image-object – those moments in which the image-subject is not exhibited. Now, the question is whether some resembling moments in particular are necessary for depicting a certain subject. The notion of resemblance can only make sense if one can specify the right respect in which two entities resemble each other (Goodman 1968), otherwise, the notion of resemblance would turn out to be uninformative.

According to Husserl, determinations like color, texture, and size may be perfectly represented by pictures but they are not necessary conditions for depiction. A black and white photograph of a man shows an image-man that lacks the colors of a real person, appears smaller in size than it should be, lacks depth (in the case of flat pictures), and has a different texture. Yet we refer to a man in three dimensions, with proper colors, size, and texture. Husserl seems to think that only one analogizing moment is necessary for depiction: "Under all circumstances, *plastic form*, though not qualitative determinations, must belong to the bearers of the pictorializing of a *physical thing*. In pure pictorializing consciousness, the *subject* is seen in the image with regard to this core, which bears the consciousness of pictorialization and is identified purely with it" (PICM: 90, my emphasis). And again: "the spatial aspect must be there" (163).

Now, the spatial aspect can be further differentiated on the basis of the material structure of the pictorial medium at issue. In the case of a sculpture or a relief, where the spatial structure of the image-subject can be adequately reproduced, the condition for depiction is the reproduction of the *plastic shape*. By contrast, in the case of flat pictures (paintings, photographs, screens, etc.), the medium does not allow for a proper analogization of three-dimensional objects, and the minimum requirement for depiction is the reproduction of the *outline shape* of the image-subject (see Brough 1992). All the aspects of the image-object (size, texture, depth, color) can diverge from the aspects of the depicted subject except one: "A rough *silhouette* can still be sensed as an image, and indeed quite purely if we concentrate our interest precisely on what comes to presentation

[42] Marbach (1993) and Calì (2002) offer insightful clarifications on, and developments of, the Husserlian theory of depiction with regard to the role of resemblance. See also de Warren (2010) and Eldridge (2017).

there" (PICM: 164, my emphasis). Even a rough silhouette seems enough to depict a certain subject. This is hard to deny: the drawing shown in Figure 1 is able to depict a cat seen from behind in virtue of a few lines. As a matter of fact, all pictorial media – from the most to the least adequate – can generally analogize the outline shape of the represented subject. With respect to this particular trait, a drawing and a high-definition digital image do not present any relevant difference – in Husserlian terms, they have the same intensity. In fact, the silhouette does not even need to be perfectly accurate. It can just loosely suggest the outline shape of the depicted subject, as child drawings typically do, on the condition that some subject be visible, and that the visual attention of the viewer remains anchored to the picture. If that was not the case, another form of consciousness would likely supplant image consciousness. A sketchy drawing of, say, a horse, as well as an incomplete drawing of a horse, may induce the intentional activity of the viewer to seek fulfillment through further apparitions (e.g., through a phantasy presentation). If so, the sketchy drawing would function as a symbol, whose referent is not intended through the appearance of the image-object, but beyond it.[43]

[43] It may be tempting to frame Husserl's remarks on the role of resemblance in depiction in terms of sufficient and necessary conditions. However, Husserl analysis does not proceed in this direction and does not take into account the array objections that resemblance theories of depiction are typically exposed to (how pictorial caricature can be accounted for within a theory of resemblance in outline shape, to name one). In the context of contemporary theories of depiction, Husserl's account would find its place between those theories that argue for an objective resemblance between the picture and its subject.

3. A CRITIQUE OF HUSSERL'S THEORY OF DEPICTION

§ 15. Image consciousness and knowledge

In Wollheim's theory of depiction, recall, the minimum requirement for the recognitional fold is a visual awareness of "something in front of, or behind, something else". This something needs not necessarily fall under a figurative concept, such as "tree", "face" or "unicorn"; an abstract concept, such as "square", or even a concept that only expresses a spatial relation, would do. In this regard, Wollheim's theory of seeing-in appears to be open to both figurative and non-figurative images (on the condition that the latter do present the viewer with a figure-ground relationship).

In Husserl's theory, by contrast, this something, which correspond to the image-object apprehension, is always spelled out more clearly. The content of image consciousness appears to be more determined. In effect, this is reflected by the limited range of examples made by Husserl throughout his analysis. Portraits and religious paintings, but also sculptures of the human figure, such as busts, may be said to be the most recurrent ones (Brough 2005). Portraiture, although very common, constitutes in fact a specific genre of pictures: the sense of a portrait depends on the representation of a sitter, someone who posed for an artist (Spinicci 2008; 2009; see also Maes 2015).[44] A portrait typically shows a particular individual that one may be able to recognize. Similarly, religious pictures narrate events and depict figures that are widely known and recognizable. In a sense, portrait and religious images truly are pictorial *representations*, for their meaning does depend on the intention directed at their subjects.[45] However, it is questionable that they can also be taken as the model for pictures in general.

[44] It is of course irrelevant that someone really posed in front of an artist, that the depicted individual be a real person, or that the picture really be made by an artist and not, say, taken with a smartphone.

[45] It may also be worth noting that the problematic issue here is not even the fact that portraits (as theoretical model) refer, as they typically do, to particular individuals. The situation would remain the same if one were to consider other kinds of pictorial representations that refer to some F – be it a particular F or some, but no particular, F of a certain type. Caricature corresponds to this category of pictorial representations, for caricature can either depict particular (and usually well recognizable) individuals, such as the current Italian Prime Minister or a Hollywood celebrity, but also types and social classes. Daumier's prolific work includes caricatures of different classes,

Granted, as noted at the end of the last chapter, Husserl believes that even the drawing of a rough silhouette can be enough for image consciousness to occur. And yet the concept of silhouette is not as loose, or neutral, as it might seem at first. A silhouette is not just 'something' visible in the pictorial space, for it implies reference to something else, something whose phenomenal appearance is independent from the image. After all, a silhouette only makes sense as a silhouette *of* something else (which is not a silhouette itself but a three-dimensional object). A silhouette is a property that can be extracted from the outward appearance of a certain subject and used for depicting that subject.[46] This makes evident how the second and the third fold in Husserl's account of image consciousness are non-independent. By looking at the sketch of a silhouette of a cat (the image-object), a cat is intuited: the silhouette is the one moment that brings about a synthesis of coinciding under that particular respect. But cats have yet further properties (spatial in the first place) which do not correspond to how the image-object presents them. What matters here is that according to Husserl these further properties are necessarily implied in image consciousness, even though they do not appear. Suppose one is looking at an ink drawing of a man:

> if I see in the physical thing before me an image head, then there belongs to the spatial figure a flesh color, and thus other determinations that … are in the relation of being otherwise. And these determinations are absolutely unperceived, are *emptily presented*, obscure (for I can only bring the flesh color to intuition by presenting the head to myself again, and then entirely in phantasy).
>
> (PICM: 582, my emphasis)

In synthesis, a drawn silhouette can be enough to bring about the consciousness of a certain subject, which bears further properties (many in the case of a rough silhouette) that are not instantiated by the depicting silhouette, and that in consequence are not seen in the image. Importantly, however, by looking at the silhouette, these further properties

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such as lawyers, petits bourgeois, teachers and students, and nowadays we commonly find caricatures of blue-collar workers on the front pages of newspapers.

[46] There are, of course, entities that do not have, for different reasons, outward appearances and that can nonetheless be depicted. Fictional entities like centaurs and nymphs do not (empirically) exist, but since there is a common agreement, typically based on myths, on their appearances (e.g., centaurs have such and such visual features), they can be depicted. For if one knows how centaurs should look like (e.g., upper body of a human, lower body of a horse), a silhouette can in principle be drawn.

are meant in empty presentations.[47] And, as we know from Husserl's discussion of the consciousness of illusions, such empty intention is necessary to determine the image-character of image consciousness, for they prevent a full synthesis of coincidence between depicting image and image-subject. If this is so, then, the consciousness of the appearing image-object is necessarily penetrated by the empty presentation of the image-subject. Husserl gives an example of the content of the intention directed to the image-subject: "Human beings can look very different from one another, but the idea 'human being' prescribes certain possibilities for perception: a human being is something that has a certain look in perception" (PICM: 585). By the same token, this idea prescribes that humans can only have certain colors and shapes. Thus, an image, such as a caricature, that modifies the perceptual look of humans will necessarily conflict with the possible range of appearances prescribed by the type "human".

In this framework, the idea implied by the image-subject intention appears to be constitutive of image consciousness. It bears two crucial functions: it prevents pictorial experience from eliciting an illusion (thanks to the consciousness of 'being otherwise'), and it tells us what the image is about. When it comes to images such as portraits, caricatures, and religious pictures, there is no doubt that our knowledge plays an important role in the overall structure of the experience of these pictorial representations. It can be argued that the viewer's understanding of a pictorial representation hinges on the epistemic resources mobilized in pictorial experience.[48] For I can see a picture as the caricature *of* the Italian Prime Minister only if I know how she looks like in the first place. Therefore, knowledge of the appearance of an F, be it a particular F or some, but no particular, F of a certain type, is required to understand a depiction of F. This condition is general enough to capture the situation in which the viewer is presented with a picture that refers to a particular individual whose appearance is unknown to the viewer. We can be sure that the president of the Italian Republic would recognize a caricature of the Italian Prime Minister. But we can equally be sure that it is unlikely that a five-year-old child who lives halfway around the world from Italy would recognize her. And yet this child

[47] For some developments on the relationship between empty presentation and image-subject intention, see Eldridge (2017).

[48] Schier (1986) is the main reference for theories of depiction built around the epistemic resources and competences involved in pictorial experience. According to Schier, knowledge of the appearance of a certain subject, plus general competence with depiction, that is, the ability to interpret pictorial representations in general, do constitute the conditions for depiction. See also Lopes (1996) for a similar account.

would have no trouble seeing a funny, distortive picture of a woman, being immediately aware that her lifelike appearance must be different. So, while in the first case, the viewer does recognize the particular individual depicted in the caricature, in the second case, the viewer does not (and cannot) recognize that particular individual, and yet that child still sees the general type "human face".[49] There are also pictures where nothing more than a general type is recognizable. A photograph of a blade of grass may be an example, for even though a photograph of an X is normally taken as a depiction of a particular individual (that in principle has spatiotemporal coordinates), that X may be phenomenally (almost) indistinguishable from other Xs, or used to refer to X in general, that is, to X as type. Similarly, schematic pictures are usually not about particular individuals. For instance, the black silhouette of a woman's body can be better suited to represent a type than a particular woman.

All this is consistent with Husserl's thesis that image consciousness (and surely image consciousness related to flat pictures) is necessarily depictive. Yet one may ask whether the phenomenon of seeing a silhouette is dependent on the occurrence of the phenomenon of seeing "something in front of, or behind, something else", and therefore whether image consciousness, as Husserl implies, necessarily needs to point beyond what is visible in the pictorial space. Likewise, one may ask whether ideas or concepts are necessarily included in a pictorial experience in general, that is, if they are required for the appearance of a pictorial space in our field of vision.

In the next sections, I will discuss the extent to which pictorial experience is tied to, and affected by, our knowledge. I propose some examples in which knowledge seems to make a difference in our experience of pictures, and others that illustrate that pictorial experience can be independent of our conceptual resources. In the end, I will argue that a pictorial space can appear in our field of regard without a synthesis of coincidence that establish a reference to an absent subject. In consequence, this inquiry undermines the necessity of a third fold to account for image consciousness in general. And since the sense of image-object itself is intrinsically interwoven with the image-subject (PICM: 28, 162), also the second fold of image consciousness will need to be revised.

[49] In the latter case, it must be noted, the fact that the viewer may not recognize a particular individual only depends on her background knowledge. For if the same viewer acquired the relevant knowledge (e.g., meeting the Italian Prime Minister), she would have no trouble recognising her in a pictorial representation.

§ 16. What do you see?

Suppose someone points at the configuration in Figure 8 and asks: "What is it?".[50] It is hard to say what this is, and most likely, one feels that the configuration shown by the figure is about nothing, since nothing (either specific or not) is recognized in the figure, at least at first sight. A possible description of this scene could be the following: there is a rectangle with the longer side as its base; the rectangle is crossed from side to side by a horizontal line that starts at the three-quarters of its shorter side; below this line, there are some irregular ovals, limited by two diverging lines that connect to the lower base of the rectangle.

Suppose now that a passer-by told us something like "There is a giraffe outside the window!". This utterance triggers a change in the sense of what we see. For, as it happens, what we see is reinterpreted in the light of something we are familiar with, that is, a giraffe. Accordingly, a new description captures the sense of the figure: a giraffe, and more precisely, a part of its long neck is outside a half-opened window. Thus, it can be said that a giraffe is what this picture is about, or that a giraffe is depicted. In this case, then, the concept "giraffe" has penetrated the visual scene and determined a depictive consciousness.

This episode can be interpreted in two ways. According to the first reading, which is consistent with Husserl's point of view, at time t_1 the viewer perceives a meaningless

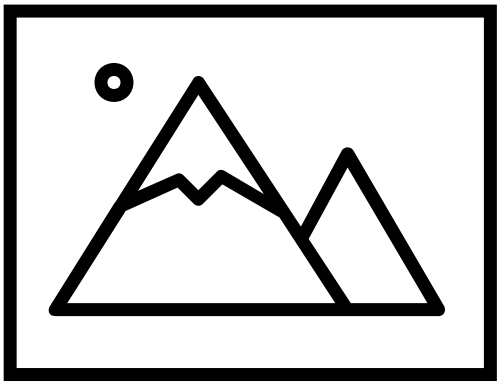


Figure 8. Example of a droodle (from Kaivola-Bregenhoj 2001: 62)

[50] In *Art and Visual Perception,* Arnheim uses a similar illustration to show the influence of past experience on perception (1974: 49). I preferred not to use Arnehim's figure since it seems to me (and those whom I presented the picture) that its interpretation is in fact quite immediate. See also Piana (1979: 65-66) for a discussion of Arnheim's example.

configuration, while at time t_2 the visual scene is reorganized and acquires a different meaning: the viewer is conscious of an image whose image-subject is a giraffe outside a window (Piana 1967: 65). Thus, there is both a change in the act of consciousness and a change in the content of that act: from the perception of a meaningless pattern (t_1) to the image consciousness of a giraffe outside a window (t_2).

Yet another reading is possible. While at t_2 the experience of the viewer can effectively be described as in the first reading, the description of the experience that the viewer undergoes at t_1 should be revised. For even though at t_1 nothing is recognized, this does not mean that the experience amounts to an ordinary perception (of a marked surface). The description of the experience at t_1 proposed by the first interpretation misses the fact that what appears is already a minimal instance of pictorial space: a flat space whose parts are organized according to a figure-ground relationship – hence not an ordinary space. Already at t_1 something is seen as being in front of, or behind, something else.

What matters here is that, in fact, this spatial organization is not objective, but pictorial. The figure-ground relationship at issue does not take place in our ordinary space: nothing is really behind or before the other elements of this type of space (and indeed there is more than one possible spatial organization of the pictorial elements). If perception is the act that gives us things 'in the flesh', in the here and now, and thus with determinate spatial relationships, the content of the visual scene one has at t_1 has a different phenomenology, for the viewer is presented with a spatial relationship that is only apparent (see Spinicci 2008). Although one sees that a certain pictorial object comes to the fore and that another part of the pictorial space recedes in the background, such spatial organization does not reflect a real, objective arrangement between the objects in one's field of regard. By contrast, if a glass stands in front of a bottle, then, a real distance separates the object that appears in the foreground, the glass, from the object in the background, the bottle.

If this is true, we should acknowledge that we were seeing a picture even before we recognized a giraffe. A *pictorial space*, in the basic form of a figure-ground organization, was already before us. The recognition of the giraffe does change the meaning of the configuration and can also affect the perceived spatial organization of some elements in the pictorial space – for instance, the oval spots are not holes that open on a deeper spatial level, but patches on a long neck. Yet the appearance of the giraffe hinges on the presence of these spatial, non-objective relationships, on the fact that there is a portion of our visual field that is so organized. And when the giraffe is seen (t_2), this does not change the

general structure of our experience of a pictorial space: something is still seen in front of something else, even though this time that something is recognized as the neck of the giraffe – it bears a depictive function. The visual interest of the viewer naturally goes to this meaningful visual solution, rather than to the underlying spatial organization between figure and ground.

I believe that the Husserlian theory of image consciousness poses too strong conditions over the notion of image, and is only partially able to capture what *pictoriality* consists in. By so doing, a whole series of pictorial phenomena such as the one just described are by fiat excluded from the domain of images. Thus, it is worthwhile to insist a bit more on our analysis of the experiential conditions for the emergence of a pictorial space to outline its founding function with respect to depictive consciousness.

§ 17. Pictorial riddles (aka Droodles)

Figures like that of the giraffe are, in fact, quite common, and they are quite interesting because they lie at the threshold of depiction, straddling the boundaries between figurativity and non-figurativity. These puzzling figures were popularized in the 1950s by the cartoonist Roger Price under the name of *droodles*, a blend of the words "doodle" and "riddle": "A Droodle is a borkley-looking sort of drawing that doesn't make any sense until you know the correct title" (Price 1992: 4). These simple and rather abstract drawings present a visual riddle which is usually introduced by asking questions like "What do you see?", or "What does this look like to you?". For example, one of the most famous droodles (Fig. 9) presents us with a composition of abstract elements: a horizontal line above which there is a triangle, on the right, and a trapezoidal figure on the left. The drawing is accompanied by the caption "A Ship Arriving Too Late to Save a Drowning Witch".

In fact, droodles have been around for centuries – at least from the Renaissance. Cesare Malvasia reports that the Bolognese painter Agostino Carracci created certain "divinarelli pittorici" (pictorial riddles) that with a few lines, and an appropriate explanation, were able to encode a distinct meaning (1678: 468). Figure 10 is surprising in this regard. The drawing is made up of a vertical line crossed by an oblique line and a semicircle. As such, no figurative meaning 'naturally' comes to intuition. Yet, this figure, according to the author's intentions, can be used to represent a blind beggar behind a corner (the vertical

line), of whom only the stick (the oblique line) and the alms pouch (the semicircle) are effectively visible (see Berra 1999).

It may be worth noting that droodles are not naïve drawings. Despite their visual simplicity, these pictorial configurations are conceived to encode a possible depictive effect (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 2001: 63). Such encoding often relies on the representation of the scene from an unusual angle, as in the case of the drawing of the blind beggar by Agostino Carracci. But it can also be constructed by offering a restricted view of the encoded scene, in which case the drawing zooms in on a restricted part of the visual scene. In so doing the droodle cuts out those details that would be relevant for a secure recognition of that scene – as in the case of the droodle of the giraffe and the drowning witch. Based on these encoding principles, droodles can in principle trigger the recognition (however undetermined) of the encoded scene.

Now, one may be tempted to object that droodles and like drawings do, in fact, function as signs, and thus they do not teach us anything relevant about pictures. For after all, they require a caption or a verbal clue in order to acquire their meaning. If this is true, then Droodles would function as traditional verbal riddles (whose component parts are words,

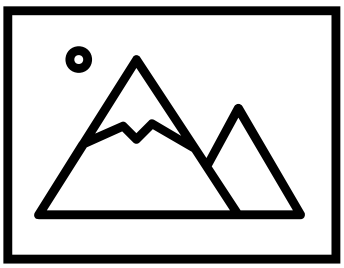


Figure 9. A ship arriving too late to save a drowning witch, from Price (1953)

Figure 10. A pictorial riddle by Agostino Carracci, from Malvasia (1678: 468)

and words do not show what they refer to, but rather signify it).[51] However, I do not believe that this is the case. For one thing, and *pace* Price's definition, the sense of droodles and like drawings is independent of the description that is usually provided for their solution. For another, their sense is purely visual, before and after their solution. Let us consider these two counter-objections in order.

While it is true that the captions associated with droodles is able to infuse a new sense on the configuration in a droodle, they are not necessary to obtain this effect. Several other conditions may equally trigger the hidden meaning of a droodle (see Arnheim 1974: 48-51). Past experience always plays a crucial role in our perceptual encounter with objects, and thus it can also influence our interpretation of droodles. So, for instance, if one has spent a good part of her afternoon watching a documentary on giraffes, and is then presented with Figure 8, it seems likely that a giraffe be recognized at first glance, without the need of a caption. But the same depictive effect – seeing an F in the pictorial space – can be obtained if the viewer is presented with the droodle and a bit more context is provided (e.g., other plates that show further portions of the encoded visual scene). Knowledge can be relevant as well: if the viewer knows that the riddler has a penchant for giraffes, this may prompt her to see a giraffe in the picture. Finally, personal motivations can also matter here: if someone's biggest desire is to encounter a giraffe, she may well be disposed to see giraffes everywhere, even though not many giraffe-clues are actually available. Arnheim writes: "A man waiting at a street corner for his girl friend will see her in almost every approaching woman, and this tyranny of the memory trace will get stronger as the minutes pass on the clock" (51).

All this suggests that the visual scene encoded by a droodle can be decoded – that is, seen in the droodle – independently of the verbal description usually attached to it. Thus, droodles do not necessarily require a caption to make sense. After all, even an ordinary object that is partially occluded by other things in our visual field may be hard to decode until we grasp a better view of it.

[51] There is yet another form of visual riddle that would be interesting to explore in this context: rebus. Here I can only suggest that, differently from droodles, rebuses present us with a sequence of pictorial objects that needs to be easily identifiable, and which are not accompanied by descriptions.

There are also obvious differences between traditional riddles and droodles which supports the second counter objection.[52] In the case of riddles, the description does constitute the riddle itself, and such description is specific to the language in which it is written, although it can surely be translated in whatever other language. In this respect, Kaivola-Bregenhøj notes that droodles are cross-cultural: "It seems odd that the Mexican, of all images, with its numerous variations should be by far the most common image and theme in the Finnish material", but he also adds that "droodles are nevertheless culture-oriented, since … understanding the picture calls for a culturally conventionalized system of rules, i.e. familiarity with the relevant code" (2001: 63). I do not believe that the figurative effect that a droodle may be able to produce calls for a conventionalized system of rules. Granted, a certain cultural background may facilitate the unfolding of certain perceptual synthesis, so that people familiar with Mexican headwear could possibly get faster to the solution of the droodle mentioned by Kaivola-Bregenhøj. Yet, this does not seem to be the case with the droodle of the giraffe: what conventionalized system of rules (supposedly unknowingly) should one apply to see the neck of the giraffe? When one solves the riddle, nothing changes in its visual appearance; the words that constitute the riddle appear as before.

By contrast, droodles are not specific to a particular language. They are accessible regardless of one's language: they only require (an appropriate) visual experience. Furthermore, the solution of a droodle brings about a phenomenological change, a reorganization of the visual scene. Those very lines that a moment ago appeared arranged in a certain way have now acquired a depictive value, and this entails a partial re-organization of the element of the configuration: the two converging lines in Figure 8 mark the shape of the neck of a giraffe; the oblique line in Figure 9 is the blind's man cane; the triangle on the right in Figure 10 is the hat of a drowning witch. Once the depictive value of the droodle is activated, one experiences the droodles as an image *of* a certain subject, however undetermined the appearance of this subject may be. Importantly, when a new phenomenological configuration comes about, it seems difficult

[52] An example of what I mean by "traditional riddle" may be the one famously posed by the Sphynx to Oedipus: What creature walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three in the evening? Once Oedipus arrives at the solution, the riddle does not undergo any reconfiguration. Rebuses are similar to traditional riddles in this respect. For the solution of a rebus does not bring about any phenomenological change – the appearance of the little figures that make up the rebus remains unchanged.

to regain the previous configuration and see the droodle as it appeared before (Kubovy 1986: 129); even though this may be possible if one forgets about the droodle and its solution for a long time.

There is yet another possible objection to the thesis that droodles are pictures and that their visual content plays a crucial role in their apprehension. Saying that droodles are able to produce a depictive effect and a related seeing-in experience may be too strong a claim, for someone might well not have a pictorial experience of a giraffe. And it seems to me very dubious that the droodle of the ship arriving too late to save the drowning witch can actually produce a pictorial experience in which one can truly grasp the scene suggested by the caption. Perhaps we can understand that the triangle on the right should stand for the hat of the submerged witch, the trapezoid on the left for the ship's bow, and so on, but this may not be sufficient for seeing the depiction of a hat, of a ship's bow, etc.

The question then arises: if droodles do not produce a depictive consciousness, are they to be ejected from the realm of pictures? The first thing to note is that at least a good number of droodles do support pictorial experiences in which one has a view of the scene encoded by the configuration: the head of the giraffe is not effectively seen in the picture (although somehow it feels present to the viewer), but its neck does effectively appear in the droodle, which means that a depictive consciousness comes about. But even those droodles that perhaps are not really able to produce a depictive effect can still be considered as pictures inasmuch as they present the viewer with a pictorial space.

Figure 10 may not let one see a hat and a ship's bow (let alone a ship arriving too late to save a drowning witch), and yet a pictorial space opens up in front of the viewer. For one does not simply entertain a perceptual consciousness of some black marks on a sheet of paper (or on a screen). Rather, the portion of space occupied by the droodle is articulated in a series of spatial relationships that unfold on a flat surface. Moreover, the content of this picture can adequately be captured by geometrical concepts: a square crossed by a horizontal line above which there stands a triangle, on the right, and a trapezoidal figure, on the left. Importantly, this description already implies a peculiar organization of the pictorial elements seen in the droodle: the triangle and the trapezoidal figure appear in front of a background, even though this spatial relation does not actually occur. This spatial relation is *pictorial*.

One may also organize the spatial relationship between the pictorial elements in the droodle in another way: the triangle and the trapezoidal, this time, are just portions of a background from which a thick, irregular arrow emerges. This alternative visual

organization does not change the nature of the apprehension of droodles, which is an image apprehension, but actually reasserts it. For again, also the alternative apprehension of the droodle equally consists in a figure ground organization that is only apparent, or better, *pictorial* – and this organization is not consistent with the spatial relationship that takes place in the objective space.

§ 18. From proctorial re-presentation to pictorial presentation

Drawings like droodles do count as pictures since they are able to disclose a space that is not an ordinary, perceptual space, but a space having a pictorial – hence not objective – depth. And if this is the case, then there is room for revising the Husserlian notion of image consciousness, and more specifically, uncoupling the dual objectivity image-object/image-subject. As we already know, for Husserl images are essentially depictive, for the image-object can be apprehended only insofar as it is co-apprehended with the image-subject. But this dual apprehension is only possible if there exists a consciousness of difference between image-object and subject, for if the image-object is brought to a full synthesis of coincidence with the image-subject, image consciousness vanishes and a consciousness of illusion comes about.

Droodles and like images do stand poles aside from illusionistic pictures. Their theoretical interest lies instead in the fact that the relationship to the image-subject, that is, their depictive link, is called into question. In many cases, such a link can be activated, and reference to the image-subject be established: the viewer sees a giraffe passing outside the window. Yet it may also happen that, even though the meaning of the droodle is known to the viewer, the image-subject is not apprehended. If this is the case, this means that a pictorial experience can occur even without an intention directed to an absent subject; pictorial reference does not obtain.

Thus, *pace* Husserl, the dual objectivity image-object/image-subject can be decoupled, making room for a revision of the very notion of image-object. The image-object, understood as a *pictorial space*, has a sense that is independent of any further depictive relationship. A pictorial space does not appear in our visual field thanks to the concurrent apprehension of an image-subject, but it actually grounds the apprehension of the image-subject: it is a condition of possibility for depiction. In other terms, *a depictive consciousness presupposes the emergence of a pictorial space*. The latter is the place where an absent object may (or may not) appear. Thus, the droodle proposed by Figure 8

is a pictorial space – hence an image – before any depictive apprehension comes about. In consequence, I propose that pictorial experiences in their simplest form, in which a pictorial space appears to the viewer without any reference to an image-subject, be called *pictorial presentation* – thus, losing the suffix "re". Pictorial presentation, then, is structurally prior to pictorial re-presentation.

This is an important point that highlights a shortcoming of the static analyses conducted by Husserl on image consciousness in his lectures of 1904/05 and which, at least concerning physical imaging, has not been reconsidered from a genetic perspective. Let me explain why.[53]

§ 19. The schema at work in image consciousness

A later development of Husserlian phenomenology concerns the problematic relationship between the contents of apprehension and the apprehending act. In *Logical Investigations*, the 'contents of apprehension' (or 'material of sensation') are conceived as *immanent sensory contents* (*Reell*) that undergo an act of apprehension, such as a perceptual apprehension, a phantasy apprehension, or an image apprehension, and so on. These immanent contents are, for Husserl, the sensory contents that continuously flow and change throughout the subject's acts of apprehension.

For instance, when I see a red apple, I am presented with a complex of sensory contents of shape and color that uniformly flow and change depending on many contingent conditions, including brightness, my distance from the object, and so on. Yet, the side of the apple that I am looking at does not change; it is always the same side that I am perceiving, and with it, the same shape and color are also given. If that was not the case, if the changing of the contents of apprehension corresponded to a modification of the object or properties of the object intended, then one could have the perception of a stable reality – external objects would coincide with their always changing manifestations.[54] However, intentional acts are not directed at immanent sensory contents; intentional acts

[53] For an in-depth analysis of the evolution of the Husserlian phenomenology, especially with regard to the passage from static phenomenology to genetic phenomenology, see Costa (1999); De Palma (2004).

[54] Ah Husserl shows, our belief in the consistency of the outer world can only arise if *esse* and *percipi* are note the same, that is, if the manifestation of that which appears does not coincide with the manifested (2001: § 4). In this perspective the *esse* is always partially exceeding the *percipi*, though it is given through the *percipi*.

are directed at the objects that are presented through such ever-changing contents of apprehension.

The problem implicit in the schema content of apprehension and apprehension is that the content of apprehension is conceived as bereft of intentionality; it is not itself consciousness (of something), and it only becomes an intentional element when it is apprehended by a perceptual act (or an imaginative act, and so on). Indeed, it is the apprehending act that bestows the apprehended content with meaning, thus animating it (Husserl 2012, § 85) – now we have a perceived apple, a desired apple, a depicted apple, and so on. The apprehending act, then, is charged with a significant responsibility. The apprehensions at the core of image consciousness do not, of course, escape this interpretive schema. As seen in the previous chapter, the analysis concerning image consciousness is indeed carried out by studying the conflicts that originate from the occurrence of different apprehending acts over the same sensory base (that which is made available by the image-thing).

However, following later developments in Husserl's phenomenology, the notion of sensation at the core of the schema undergoes a series of structural revisions – in this respect, Husserl's *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis* mark a point of arrival.[55] Put roughly, the materials of sensation that undergo an apprehension with a determinate sense (e.g., the cup of coffee on the table) are not to be conceived as a disorganized layer of sense-data that receive meaning and unification thanks to an apprehensional act, an "animating synthesis". Sensory contents are not raw materials awaiting to be enlivened by an apprehending act, for they are already organized in units of meaning before any interpretation comes about, that is, before any subjective operation thematizes them. The layer of sensory contents is already *passively* organized. It is already organized before an egologic activity turns towards it and apprehends it – such layer is independent of any egologic activity although it is constituted for an ego (De Palma 1994).

Already in text *No. 8*, written in 1909, Husserl proposes a revision of the schema content of apprehension and apprehension. Husserl writes that "we do not first of all have a color as content of apprehension and then the characteristic of apprehension that produces the appearance" (PICM: 323). This was indeed a presupposition linked to an

[55] See Brough (2005) for a review of the passages in which these revisions are carried out and applied to the sphere of intuitive re-presentation; namely, phantasy and remembrance.

insufficiently investigated notion of sensation. Nothing can be found in consciousness that corresponds to a pure, meaningless color (or shape) awaiting an apprehension that animates it, bestowing it with meaning: "*On the contrary: 'Consciousness' consists of consciousness through and through, and the sensation as well as the phantasm is already 'consciousness'*" (323). This means that if we analyze the content of a perceptual act of consciousness, we never find something as a shapeless, or meaningless, sensation. And this, of course, holds for phantasy acts too: "If I analyze phantasy consciousness (a phantasm), I do not find color or anything else of that kind; on the contrary, I again find phantasy consciousness" (326). The layer of sensation is already intentional; every sensation is already a form of consciousness, and consciousness is always consciousness *of*.

The external perception of, say, a lemon is a form of consciousness directed to a present object. I can surely further analyze the perception of this lemon and focus on its yellow. In so doing, the color yellow alone becomes the theme of my perceptual interest. However, this does not correspond to raw material of sensation that is animated by my turning towards it; this yellow is rather the object of my current act of perception, and it is given through adumbrations. What matters here is that whenever we analyze a perception, we do not find any raw, pure sensory content "*which contains in itself nothing intentional*" (Husserl 2012: 175). On the contrary, "I find perceptual consciousness over and over again when I analyze perceptual consciousness" (PICM: 326).[56] And what is found are synthetic units that are passively organized, that is, units that are constituted independently of any apprehension that intervenes on them. In fact, the direction of the apprehension is pre-delineated by this layer of passive synthesis (Husserl 2001).

Droodles, as well as other indeterminate types of pictorial spaces (more on this in § 20), do come in handy here, for they show that, although the same sensory base may support different apprehensions (e.g., the apprehension at t_1 and at t_2), such apprehensions are grounded on a pre-organized sensory layer, that is, on an intentional layer that exhibits

[56] "Accordingly, I abandon the identification of sensation and sensation content (which I made in the *Logical Investigations*), and I return to the view that sensation and perception stand fundamentally on one level, that every sensation is perception, only not full perception" (PICM: 324–325). As is well known, Merleau-Ponty, drawing on the works of Gestalt theorists, also insists on this point, arguing, against atomistic theories of perception, that in our experience nothing can be found that corresponds to "an undifferentiated, instantaneous, and punctual 'jolt'", for "the most simple factual perceptions that we know have to do with relationships and not with absolute terms" (2012: 3–4).

an internal structure. In other terms, the apprehension of the giraffe does not unify, or shape, the material of sensation, and it actually presupposes an organization that supports such apprehension.

The sense of an act of apprehension is constrained by what is already passively constituted and available (see Arnheim 1974: 49–50; Costa 1999: 150–152). The sense units that are pre-configured in Figure 8 are compatible from the beginning (at t1) with the apprehension of a giraffe passing outside a window, which is why this apprehension can be carried out (at t_2). However, there is no way in which the same apprehension can be carried out by looking at Figure 9, or 10 – a giraffe simply cannot be seen in those configurations. The sensory material available therein constrains the range of possible interpretations; it invites certain apprehensions and at the same time excludes others.[57] So, if someone pointed at Figure 9 and told us "There is a giraffe outside the window!", her words would have no effect: no apprehension of a giraffe would come about. This means that in order to visually recognize something, either in a picture or in a real-life scenario, there must be some grip on the side of the content that supports that act of apprehension.

Relatedly, this tells us that the intentions of the author are not sufficient to determine the direction of apprehension of the work. It is not sufficient that someone intends to draw a giraffe for having a picture of a giraffe, for she must also succeed in producing such a depiction. So, if a child shows us a confused tangle of lines that she has accurately traced on a sheet of paper and tells us that she has drawn a giraffe, we can try as hard as we might, but that tangle of lines will not turn into a picture of a giraffe. Such depictive failure, however, does not prevent one from using that tangle to refer to a giraffe. Symbols (and signs) only require a general agreement on their use, and this agreement, in turn, does not depend on the qualities of the symbol.

Now, as noted, the revision of the schema apprehension-content of apprehension is applied to phantasy consciousness, even though the contours of this revision are not

[57] The sense in which a visual configuration can be apprehended does not need to be ambiguous or open to multiple interpretations, of course. Typically, our perceptions of external objects are neither ambiguous – as the Necker cube, or the famous duck-rabbit picture – nor open to multiples interpretations – as many droodles are. But even the act of apprehension supported by a photograph of a landscape, or a common portrait tends to be univocal: looking at portrait, I cannot but see the person depicted therein.

always clear Brough (2005: lxiii).[58] By contrast, Husserl does not reconsider physical imaging in light of this revision. This is a complex interpretative issue and is not made easier by the experimental character of the texts on phantasy and image consciousness, where Husserl continuously reworks his arguments and introduces tentative distinctions and terminological modifications. Therefore, I will first need to detail more precisely how the schema is at work in his account of image consciousness, understood as physical imagining, of his lecture course of 1904/05, which is Husserl's more extensive text on the topic.

The apprehension-content of apprehension schema *de facto* consists in a

> form-content (hyle/morhpe) dualism whereby an interpretative intentional apprehending act is said to animate the intimately inherent (non-intentional) material sense-data (something that enabled Husserl to account for the fact that, e.g., the same empirical stuff 'over there' could be taken now as a bird, and now as fluttering leaves on a branch).
>
> (Steinbock 2001: lv-lvi)

In effect, Husserl relies on this interpretative model when he analyses the different apprehensions that occur in physical imaging. Suffice it to recall that there are two (at least) conflicting apprehensions that compete over the same sensory base, and that such competition can lead to different outcomes; namely, the appearance of the physical support of the picture, or the appearance of the image proper, or even the illusory appearance of the depicted subject, in some cases.

Indeed, the schema lies at the core of the structure of image consciousness. Now, in Husserl's account, the image-object is not regarded as an independent objectivity because it is always coupled with, and inseparable from, the intention of the image-subject; for this reason, some have legitimately referred to this couple as a double object or as the image-object/image-subject complex (Marbach 1993; Calì 2002). As already noted in the previous chapter, this dual objectivity is constitutive of image consciousness: "If the conscious relation to something depicted is not given with the image, then we certainly do not have an image" (PICM: 32). Husserl here is very clear: without the intentional relationship to an image-subject we do not have an image, and not simply we do not have

[58] Hui (2022) proposes a different reading on Husserl's later developments on phantasy consciousness; namely, that the schema content of apprehension-apprehension is still at works along with the notion of phantasm.

a depiction. The intention directed at the image-object/subject complex animates the sensory material made available by the image-thing, thus conferring an image-characteristic to the overall consciousness. As Husserl writes, the image-subject intention is not merely attached from the outside to the image-object presentation: "on the contrary, it coincides with it, *permeates* it, and in this permeation *gives it the characteristic of the image object*" (33; my emphasis). But if this is so, then, images appear in virtue of an interpretative intentional apprehending: the apprehension of an absent subject penetrates the sensory material and unifies it, according to a certain apprehensional sense. Put differently, an apprehensional sense, which belongs to the sphere of higher spiritual formations, so to say, constitutes image consciousness, and therefore an image can appear in the viewer's field of regard.

However, as we have seen, the sphere of sensory contents is not to be conceived as a sphere of shapeless and confused materials awaiting to be synthesized from above by an act of apprehension that assembles them. As Steinbock points out, the sphere of passivity "indicates a primordial regularity of sense-genesis in which the ego does not participate; it characterizes a pre-reflective dimension of experience of pregivenness of objectlike formations, a dimension that is founding for activity" (2001: xliii). This sphere already presents its own units whose sense is not dependent on any act of apprehension; this sphere, on the contrary, is foundational, for it pre-delineates the possible directions of apprehension.

Likewise, when it comes to pictures, it would be wrong to assume, as Husserl (see PICM: § 21) and other authors do, that the intention directed at the image-object/subject complex is able to animate, or give shape to, the pictorial space – as if prior to this subjective activity no pictorial space could emerge in our visual field. The apprehension of the depicted subject is not what makes a certain object a picture: in other words, it is not what constitutes pictoriality.

A pictorial space can appear in our field of regard with its peculiar visual sense independently of any further apprehension that may take place (or not) in that space. This is patently shown by droodles and similar drawings. If someone reveals to us that Figure 8 is intended to depict a giraffe passing outside the window, and if such suggestion prompts the recognition of that scene, this does not create the picture, for we were already seeing a picture before we recognized a giraffe. A pictorial space, in the basic form of a figure-ground organization, was already before us, and based on the configuration available therein, a further apprehension becomes possible. Pictorial presentation grounds

and motivates, pictorial *re*presentation, that is, the constitution of the dual objectivity image-object/subject.

It may be objected that not all pictures work like droodles and that, in fact, the vast majority does not. This is true. When we look at a photograph or film image there is no riddle or uncertainty about their content. We do not have a before experience followed by an after experience: from the very beginning the depicted subject is seen in the picture, and nothing like a pictorial space can be perceived without the occurrence of a depictive effect. The force that characterizes the appearance of photographs is comparable to the force of the perception that the same scene would have in a real-life scenario.[59]

But does this mean that pictorial representations – i.e., those pictures that clearly depict a certain subject – are different in kind from pictorial presentations, such as droodles? I believe that this is not the case. Pictorial representations and pictorial presentations share the same phenomenological structure: in both cases, a pictorial space opens up in front of the viewer. However, while in one case nothing more than a figure-ground organization becomes salient, in the other such phenomenological articulation is interwoven with the recognition of an F, and such an F appears as the subject of the picture; it is what the viewer refers to. The portrait of F has F as its subject, and arguably the background behind F's head (a white wall, say) is not even attended by the viewer. Yet the figure-ground relationship between the pictorial elements in this picture is still there and can be seen as such. The simplest form of pictorial space, such as an abstract image, and an illusionist form of depiction, such as a *trompe-l'œil*, have this one thing in common: "we observe something in front of, or behind, something else", to use Wollheim's words.[60] And the fact that most pictures immediately show us landscapes, faces, and so forth does not change the fact that the subject's appearance is given according to a figure-ground organization.

The following argument can support the last considerations. Let us suppose that there exists an alien population with perceptual and recognitional skills like ours and that we send them a photographical portrait of a terrestrial, T. Could the aliens see this object as

[59] This intuition is at the core of theories that conceive photography as a transparent medium (see Friday 1996 for a review of this topic).

[60] Spinicci (2008) proposes that the minimal condition for depiction is the perception of an apparent depth. Although I believe this is correct, one needs to say more about what makes this depth apparent (and not real). See also Spinicci (2012); Polanyi (1970); Michotte (1960); Rubin (1921); Kennedy (1974); Peterson and Salvagio (2010) for a review of the literature on figure-ground perception.

a picture *of* T? It seems likely that, since they do not know anything about human appearances, they could not see a depiction of T (not as an individual T, but neither as a type, i.e., as a terrestrial); likewise, they would not be able to interpret any other photograph as a depiction *of* some specific visual scene. Yet, it seems reasonable to imagine that these aliens would still be able to see a pictorial space, thus having a pictorial presentation instead of a mere perceptual presentation: that roundish shape at the center of the photograph will not appear to them as a head, that reddish fissure at the bottom of the photograph as a mouth, and so forth, and yet these elements would still be organized in figure ground-relationships within a space – the pictorial space – that is not the objective space, for it is only visual. If all this makes sense, such an alien population experiences these photographs in a similar manner to how one experiences the picture of the giraffe before seeing the giraffe. They have a pictorial presentation in that a pictorial space opens up before their eyes; in abstract terms, we could say that such an experience amounts to subtracting the depictive effect from the portion of the visual field in which the pictorial space appears. However, it also seems reasonable to assume that if they came to Earth and became acquainted with human appearances, they would be able to see the pictures we sent them in a richer way; the spatial articulation visible in the picture would become interwoven with the recognition of a certain subject. Now they can recognize what those pictures are about, and once this happens, they cannot regain their visual innocence.

This makes it clear that images do not function as signs and symbols. The conditions for the appearance of a sign, such as a word, are less demanding than the conditions for the appearance of a picture. The former does not need to interrupt the uniform connection of the objects that appear in our environment. Signs are sequences of physical marks on a sheet of paper, and as such they undergo an ordinary perceptual apprehension and do not correlate to a space with a specific phenomenal appearance. (Even though, again, this does not prevent one from using pictures as signs or symbols.)

§ 20. More on pictorial spaces: aesthetic autonomy

The last two paragraphs provided some arguments – grounded, on the one hand, on the phenomenology of pictorial space, and on the other hand, on a critique of the Husserlian static analysis of image consciousness – to differentiate the notion of pictorial representation (or depiction) from the notion of pictorial presentation. It is important to

emphasize that these two notions are not incompatible, for pictorial presentation, as I pointed out, is at the basis of pictorial re-presentation. The relationship between the former and the latter is to be understood – or so I believe – in the same way in which Husserl's later genetic analysis develops the relationship between passivity and activity. In this perspective, then, pictorial presentation already constitutes a sphere of pictorial sense-units that are foundational for any further apprehension which instead belongs to the sphere of "higher lying activities of cognitively fixing the common element as something concretely general or as a generic generality proper to a higher level" (Husserl 2001: 177).

The appearance of a pictorial space in a portion of our visual field does not necessarily require a reference to an image-subject. Put differently, the apprehension of an image-subject is not a necessary condition for an image to appear in our visual field. And indeed, many images can appear in our field of regard that do not seem to refer – at least, not necessarily – to a depicted subject. These images are better understood as pictorial spaces, noematically, and as pictorial presentations, noetically.

In the following part of this paragraph, I consider some instances of images of a specific kind: images that let appear some – often indeterminate or unresolved – visual meaning, rather than telling the viewer something meaningful. In so doing, they exhibit an aesthetic autonomy. These pictorial spaces are not constituted, or kept together, by higher intentional acts. Their visual sense is captured by the provocative statement of Frank Stella: "What you see is what you see"[61].

Picture tangrams (Fig. 11) have a similar structure to droodles in that they too are visual riddles, although not exactly of the same kind. Through a set of seven geometrical figures (one square, five triangles, and one parallelogram), one has to find "ways to depict, with maximum artistry or humor, or both, silhouettes of animals, human figures, and other recognizable objects" (Gardner 1974: 98; see also Dudeney 1917: 43–46). In fact, given the level of abstraction, these figures are not immediately recognizable to the viewer – and this makes them analogous to droodles. In addition, there are tangrams that are not conceived for depiction, and yet they can still be counted as minimal instances of pictorial spaces (rather than physical marks on a surface). These non-descript tangrams,

[61] Stella pronounced these words in 1964 during an interview with Bruce Glaser (Battcock 1968: 148).

which are in fact the majority, challenge the player to reproduce a given pattern by using all the seven pieces, or resolve geometrical problems (see Gardner 1988).

The abstraction presented by tangrams brings to mind – allowing us a small Pindaric flight – other forms of pictorial abstraction, which during the twentieth century has been sought in various ways by different artistic avant-gardes. There is a clear sense in which the artistic expressions of the twentieth century can be read as a successful attempt at liberating the aesthetic autonomy of the pictorial space, relieving it from the demands of mimesis, or – as we may also say at this point – from the reference to an absent image-subject, whose depiction would necessarily constraints the relationships between the materials within the pictorial space. Granted, this reading is instrumental to the account of pictorial experience that I am putting forward in this work, which is not as sensitive to the intimate reasons that animated artistic movements, in their historical perspective, as it is – or at least as it tries to be – with respect to the phenomenology of the pictorial. And yet it seems hard to deny that many works from pictorial styles and avant-gardes such as Suprematism, hard-edge painting, geometric abstraction, abstract expressionism, and color field painting, precisely aim at redeeming the shapes and colors that make up pictorial spaces from the rules to which they were subjected in most artistic traditions from the past, and, so to say, letting them speak for themselves. This tension is emphatically expressed by Malevich in his manifesto of Suprematism, where he invites the artist to break free from the slavery of (nature's) appearances and seek new forms: "An artist who creates rather than imitates expresses himself; his works are not reflections

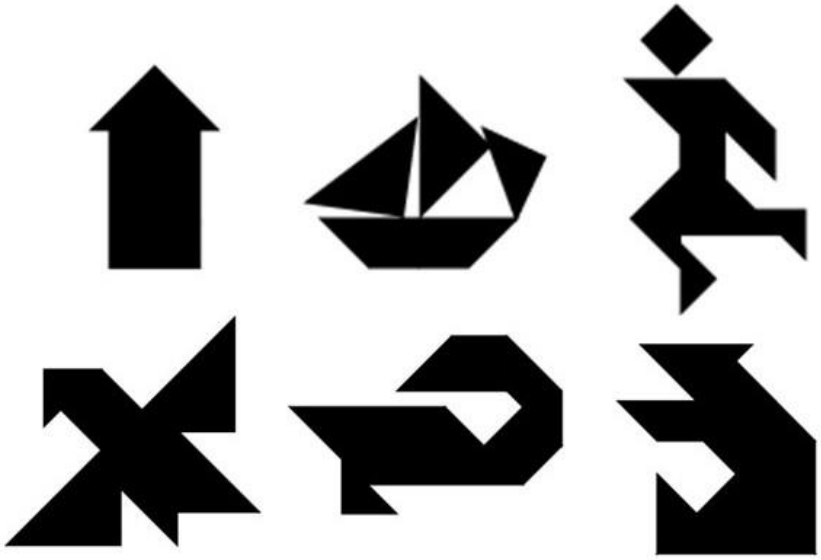


Figure 11. A sequence of picture tangrams

of nature but, instead, new realities, which are no less significant than the realities of nature itself" (1959: 30). And even more clearly:

> The public, to be sure, evaluates works of art (pictures) on the basis of external characteristics which are in accord with the 'familiar' – the approved – on the basis of subject matter, the fidelity to "nature" of the thing depicted, etc.
>
> If, then, a picture displays new additional elements so that it is no longer possible to fit it into the framework of the familiar norm, it is rejected by the public. … The public's lack of understanding, however, does not alter in the slightest the actual artistic value of a picture so that when, after a certain lapse of time, the people have accustomed themselves to the unfamiliar, the picture will inevitably come into its own.
>
> (38)

This is a relevant point, one that may teach us something about images in general. For we may indeed say that we have now – about a hundred years later – become visually accustomed to what was then unfamiliar, that is, to the pictorial configurations proposed by artistic avant-gardes. Indeed, suffice it to notice that the works of, say, Kandinsky have come out from galleries and museums and are now commonly found as printed reproductions in many public spaces (halls, hotel rooms, etc.) and shops (cafés, hair salons, etc.), as motifs on t-shirts, mugs, jigsaw puzzles, and other everyday objects. In other terms, they have been fully assimilated by mass culture. Yet our phenomenological understanding of such artworks is still lagging behind since they are often deliberately excluded from contemporary philosophical accounts of pictorial experience and depiction, including Lopes (1996), Kulvicky (2014), Voltolini (2015). In so doing, an important phenomenological threshold that concerns the conditions for having an image is overlooked: the value of an image appears to be entirely shifted on the side of the representation, on the intention directed to the depicted subject. In consequence, the spatial constitution of the image as a peculiar object of perception is not thematized. For analogous reasons, Husserlian theories of pictoriality do not seem fitted to account for nonfigurative images; for instance, Eldridge (2017) focuses exclusively on figurative pictures. Malevich's *Black Circle* (Fig. 12) constitute a good example of a minimal form of pictorial space since we see a simple black circle that floats against a white background. And this spatial organization tells us that an apparent space is located in a certain part of our visual field. By focusing only on pure geometrical abstractions disposed against a

white void ground, Malevich seeks to exhibit the experience of pure objectlessness (Barr 1936: 124), or the zero point of painting (Marcadé 2003: 40-41).

However, there is a sense in which the black circle is the absolute protagonist of the picture, and thus, against Malevich, and the argument I am pursuing here, one may object that, in fact, abstractions like this are not objectless, and that they do have a subject. Furthermore, to back up this objection, one may stress that the subject of Malevich's painting is immediately categorized under a common geometric concept, and that even considering more complex geometric compositions, such as Kandinsky's well-known *Yellow-Red-Blue*, the pictorial content can still be categorized under common geometric concepts – straight and curved lines, squares, rhombi, circles, and so on. If so, then the pictorial experience of geometrical abstractions *à la* Melevich would be appropriately captured by the notion of pictorial re-presentation (either in a threefold Husserlina version or in a twofold Wollheimian version).

However, even if we leave aside the cultural meaning of these paintings for a moment, whose complexity cannot be reduced to the visual scene they propose to the viewer, this move is at variance with a phenomenological analysis and also with the conceptual space of recognition. Let me start with the latter.

While we do see a black circle when looking at Figure 12, it would seem odd to say that we recognize a black circle. By contrast, when we look at a portrait of a dear friend, or even a caricature, we surely recognize the person depicted therein. In this respect, there seems to be a threshold that separates figurative images (and especially images of

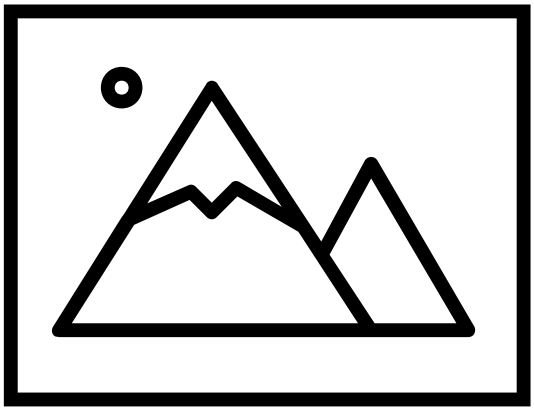


Figure 12. Kasimir Malevich, *Black Circle*

individuals) from abstract images. Although we are generally acquainted with planar abstract figures (typically from middle school), we do not say that we recognize such figures in pictures. A possible explanation for this is that geometric figures are not objects that can be found in our space, but rather elements that in a sense are necessarily pictorial. We do not happen to find planar geometric figures in our surroundings, for such figures live, as it were, in math textbooks and paintings: circles, rhombi, trapezoids, triangles, and so on do not have a phenomenal appearance prior to the pictorial spaces in which they are seen. However, we can always extract, or abstract, such figures from the objects in our surroundings, and draw them on paper. For instance, the book on my desk is an object that has a certain spatial structure and appearance that are certainly not precisely rectangular, and nonetheless, I can abstract the appearance of one of its sides – its front cover, say – and say that it is a rectangular shape; and if I fix this figure on paper, a minimal form of pictorial space is thus created.[62]

If we are to account for these images in terms of the Husserlian theory of image consciousness, then we should be able to point out the differences between image-object and image-subject. For, as we know, according to this theory the subject is intended through a set of analogizing moments (founded on a synthesis of coincidence) that are instantiated by the appearing image-object, which also displays a range of non-analogizing moments that are bereft of a representative function, for they do not resemble the subject. Yet it seems evident that when we look at geometrical abstractions and like compositions, we do not refer to an image-subject through the appearing image-object: there are neither analogizing nor non-analogizing moments in these pictures. But this is tantamount to saying that in these cases no consciousness of difference – which is a necessary condition for image consciousness within the Husserlian perspective – comes about. In other terms, the experience of a painting as *Yellow-Red-Blue* is not captured by the Husserlian account of image consciousness, even though there seems to be no reason to argue that such pictures do not correlate to an act of image consciousness.

In addition, this phenomenological point can be backed by some considerations about the cultural meaning of these pictures and the intentions of the author. Malevich geometric abstractions, such as *Black Circle* and *Black Square*, are meant to be new *icons*. They renew the sense of icon (and to a certain extent also the sense of image) by

[62] Resorting to the language of the *Logical Investigations*, we can say that a rectangle is a non-independent part of certain objects (which have rectangular sides). But when they are drawn figures on a surface, they are instead independent.

reminding the viewer that the meaning of an image is not exhausted by what is visible; it is to be researched in what does not appear, in what is super-sensible (Franzini 2008). By referring to the invisible, icons work as symbols. On this point, the Husserlian reflections on symbolic consciousness can be (partially) retained. The meaning of Malevich's icons points away from what appears in the pictorial space: a symbolic consciousness directed, for instance, to religious meanings, supplements the pictorial experience of the black circle. However, it is worth noting that the symbolic consciousness does not supplement the consciousness of an image-subject. For the artistic and theoretically oriented thrust proposed by Malevich was aimed precisely at de-objectifying what appears in the pictorial space; it was aimed at opening an imaginal space that could abstract from the repetition of the visible, thus inviting a pictorial experience oriented towards the invisible.[63]

The aesthetic autonomy of the pictorial space is even more evident when we consider images whose content cannot be easily subsumed under common abstract concepts. Since, as far as I know, we lack a general taxonomy of pictorial presentations, here I would like to mention and briefly describe, primarily from a phenomenological standpoint, some such cases.[64]

1. Artistic avant-gardes, again, offer uncountable examples of pictorial spaces in which no recognition takes place. Joan Mirò painted a large number of pictures whose content seems impossible to articulate in precise words: the pictorial spaces he created present the viewer with protean forms and cellular shapes that are often displayed against a uniform background. In cases like this, the viewer has a pictorial experience whose content is consistent with Wollheim's description of

[63] Contrary to what it may seem natural to assume, these images are also open to the narrative dimension, in a way that is not significantly different from traditional figurative images. There is experimental evidence that can be advocated on this point. The now classic experiment by Heider & Simmel (1944) shows that people tend to attribute a narrative meaning even to interactions between abstract geometric figures. In the domain of literary fiction, Edwin Abbott famously created a world – *Flatland* – in two dimensions, where the characters are more or less regular planar figures. Interestingly, this novel comes with a series of illustrations that substantially contribute to the understanding of the spatial structure of Flatland, and also to the narration (see Bossert 1985).

[64] Note that this is not intended as a rigorous classification. My intention is rather to provide a series of examples that illustrate the concept of pictorial space and its extension.

the recognitional fold of seeing-in: “I discern something standing out in front of, or (in certain cases) receding behind, something else”.

2. Images that do not (necessarily) refer to some subject are often utilized in psychology tests. Rorschach cards, as long as they are not merely seen as inkblots (that is, as physical marks) count as instances of indeterminate pictorial spaces. Typically, these figures have amorphous, indefinable appearances, but they do present one structural feature: bilateral symmetry. This is not irrelevant, for symmetry, as Gestalt psychology has shown, is a principle that invites certain kinds of grouping operations and figural formations: it motivates the segregation between figure and ground (see Peterson & Salvagio 2019; Dresp-Langley 2019), and thus the formation of a pictorial space. On the other hand, the amorphous appearances of Rorschach cards are open to a variety of interpretations (see Wollheim 1987: 50), as shown by the different responses pronounced by experimental subjects when, during the free association phase of the test, they are asked what they see in the cards. As already pointed out, in order to recognize something in a picture, there must be some visual grip on the side of the content that support that apprehension; the pictorial content constrains the range of possible apprehensions. But since the content of Rorschach cards is structurally under-determined, many possible apprehensions, however loose they might be, are available: these interpretations valorize the subjective moment of apprehension rather than the material configuration that supports that apprehension.

   From a psychological perspective, what a certain subject sees in the card can tell us something about her inner, and usually unconscious, life – or so the advocates of projective psychology techniques believe. From a phenomenological perspective, these ambiguous figures highlight the subjective moment of the intentional correlation. The subjectivity of this moment, however, does not imply a lack of structure in the experiential act, which is always grounded on the phenomenology pictorial presentation outlined so far. It rather highlights that a number of subjective factors can affect the apprehension of under-determined, ambiguous kinds of pictorial spaces. Most notably, past experience – which is in effect tied to the empirical subjectivity – is a factor that has a great bearing upon the synthesis carried out while looking at these pictures (Arnheim 1987: 48-51); this suggests an explanation for the variety of the interpretations.

3. Related to psychological projective tests, but actually prior to their invention, is *klecksography*: the art of making images from inkblots. Klecksography was (accidentally) pioneered by the German poet Justinus Kerner, who used symmetrical inkblots to illustrate his poems (Kerner 1890).[65] The technique does not require any artistic mastery and is able to generate infinite arbitrary results: it consists in dropping ink droplets on a sheet of paper, which is then folded in two halves so as to distribute the ink symmetrically on the two folds, thus forming some potentially recognizable shape. Interestingly, and relatedly to the tension towards the invisible that characterizes many artistic avant-gardes of the twentieth century, Kerner describes the images produced with this technique as "daguerreotypes of the invisible world" (quoted in Weltzien 2011: 274).

   Yet another mention of inkblot art is owed to the images that appear in the book *Gobolinks or Shadow-Pictures*: "Gobolink, as his name implies, is a veritable goblin of the ink-bottle, and the way he eludes the artist's design proves him a self-

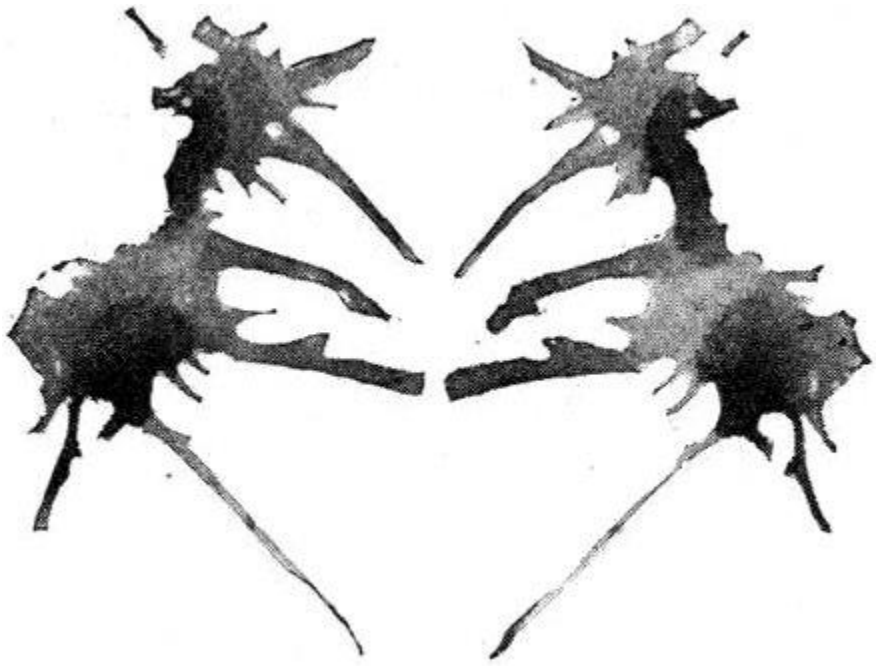


Figure 13. *The Unfriendly Chickens* (from Stuart and Paine 1896)

[65] Going back in history, one finds the germ of this idea already in Leonardo. In his *Treatise on Painting*, Leonardo instructs us about the relevance of inkblots (and other material formations) to artistic creation. More specifically, he advises the reader to accurately look into inkblots, stained walls, and like marked surfaces to discover that these apparently meaningless configurations may disclose wondrous visual scenes – and these are of the highest value for those who seek artistic inspiration.

made eccentric creature of a superior imagination" (Stuart & Paine 1896: ix). These ink creatures (Fig. 13) are produced with the same technique used by Kerner and are grounded on the same figural principle of bilateral symmetry. Each gobolink is accompanied by a short poem that has the function of indicating a possible interpretation of the inkblot picture. However, differently from the brief caption that appears under droodles, this text proposes a suggestion that is not meant to provide the viewer with a definite solution, for such creatures do not belong to our world: "Now, some one has said, in a moment of spleen, / We cannot make pictures of what we've not seen; / But such an assertion deserves only scorn, / For the shape of the Gobolink never was born / When one has been supping on salads and creams, / And curious changes of vision take place" (viii).[66]

[66] See Molaro (2022) for a historically informed reconstruction of the Rorschach projective test, both in the context of early twentieth-century psychiatry and the empirical and non-experimental approaches to inkblot pictures.

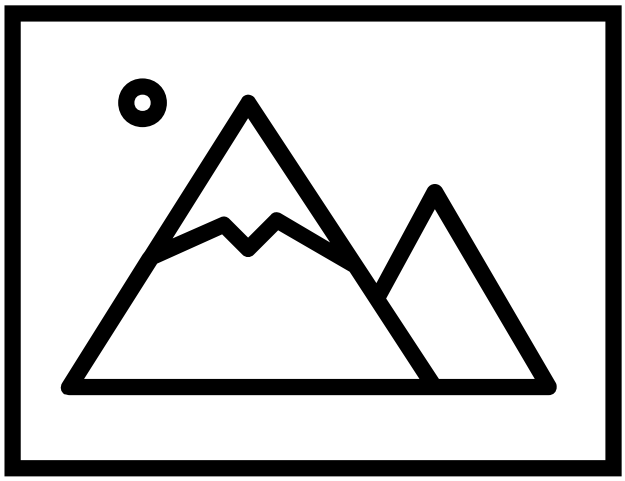
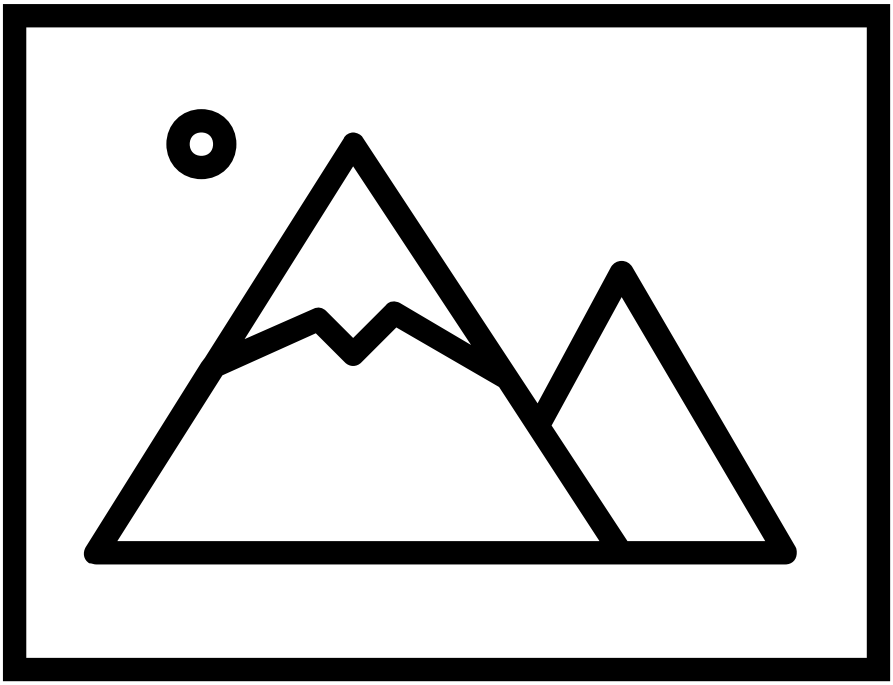


Figure 14 (above). Gaetano Kanizsa, *Bomboloide*

Figure 15 (under). Gaetano Kanizsa, *Corrugazione*



4. Halfway between psychological research (in the Gestalt tradition) and artistic exploration are the numerous black and white pictorial compositions created by Gaetano Kanizsa – partially collected in Kanizsa (2002). His works appear as a pictorial treatise on the notion of pure shape and figure – a research on the minimal conditions that constitute a pictorial presence, before that such presence can be said to refer to something else, that is, before the picture becomes a pictorial representation of an absent subject. Indeed, this is consistent with Kanizsa's panting technique (27). He proceeded by pressing the tip of the brush against the surface leaving a sequence of traces. Images were thus formed progressively by following the demands of an initial configuration of impressions. There was no overarching depicting intention in his gesture, but only the purpose of following the self-structuring of the material laid down on paper, thus, in a way, letting shapes and spaces express themselves in accordance with grouping and figural principles. The results can be seen as pictorial unities (that tend towards the biological form and an unknown animal kingdom) and spaces (bizarre landscapes and rippling surfaces) that do not lead to the recognition of something familiar (Fig. 14 and 15). Their allusive power invites the viewer to imaginatively complete the scene.
5. Kanizsa's textural compositions present similarities to Optical art pictures. Op artists seek to create surfaces that do not depict anything but instead open up deep spaces that are traversed by tensions. Such tensions are created by the contractions and de-contractions of certain areas of the pictorial space that appear to ripple, fluctuate, swell, and so on. In many cases, optical artworks are able to give the viewer the impression of movement or vibration, as *Current* by Bridget Riley does (Fig. 16). Op art images are arguably the most persuasive exhibition of the concept of pictorial spaces that are bereft of any tendency towards representation, or recognition. These images do not appear as enigmatic (if not for certain illusory effects), ambiguous, or open to a variety of interpretations. Here the pictorial space appears completely autonomous, structurally independent of any reference to something else. In Figure 16 there is nothing to see except a peculiar pictorial spatial organization: the upper portion of this space recedes creating a wide dip, and then it raises to form a narrow ridge that extends horizontally throughout this space, then again, a series of dips and ridges. This is Riley: "In my earlier paintings

I wanted the space between the picture plane and the spectator to be active. It was in that space, paradoxically, that the painting 'took place'" (2009: 144).

6. Some pictures are created with the purpose of frustrating visual recognition. Pepperell (2006; 2011) and Pepperell & Ishai (2015) investigate the phenomenon of visual indeterminacy from a theoretical point of view, but also in terms of artistic practice, and basically in two ways. First, thanks to graphic editor software, such as Photoshop, using preexisting images from the canon of art history and "suppress[ing] traces of recognizable objects while leaving the overall visual structure intact", or creating a collage of different image parts, again with the purpose of suppressing recognizable elements (2006: 399). Second, manually

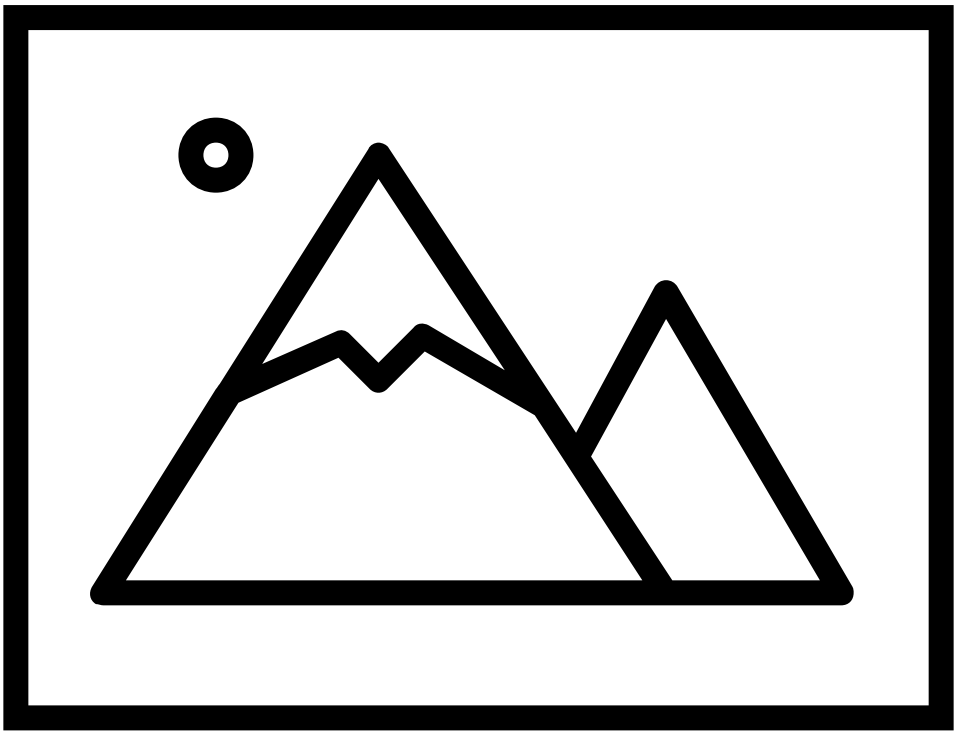


Figure 16. Bridget Riley, *Current*

drawing or painting indeterminate images, again with the purpose of denying precise identification (400).[67] What is striking about these pictures is that, differently from the other cases listed above, one has the impression of seeing many different objects in them, and sometimes object that have clear boundaries and shapes. And yet, even if you try as hard as you can, you will not be able to recognize anything in these pictorial spaces, for every time a shape appears that promises a line of apprehension, visual recognition is eventually frustrated. The composition of *Inflatable Still Life* (Fig. 17) shows an object with clear boundaries, edges, and colors, standing out from a uniform brown background. In a way, there is nothing equivocal about the shape of this object, and nonetheless, at the same time, its internal structure impedes a clear spatial organization, and its overall nature escapes our understanding. According to Pepperell, the experience of

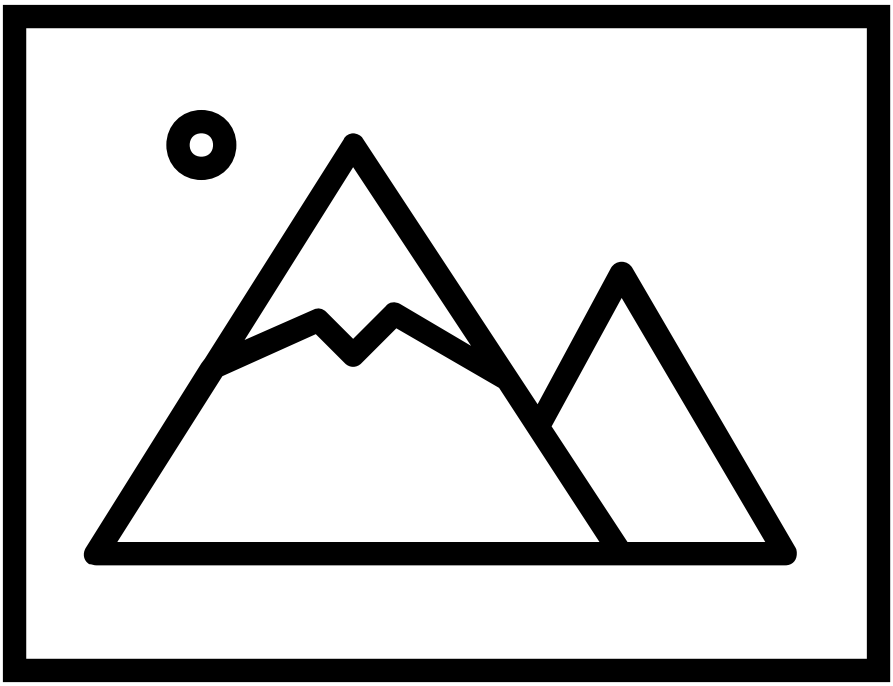


Figure 17. Robert Pepperell, *Inflatable Still Life*

[67] For an overview of indeterminacy in modern art, and the active process of giving meaning to indeterminate pictures, see Gamboni (2002); for an overview of visual indeterminacy in GAN (Generative Adversarial Networks) art, see Hertzmann (2020). For a take on the political implications of this phenomenon, see Zeilinger (2023).

indeterminate images correlates to a heightened state of awareness (indicated by an increased neural activity) that derives from the attempts of our visual system at domesticating the visual stimulus, that is, attributing some meaning to the visual pattern.

7. A final mention in this non-exhaustive classification goes to images of impossible objects. By "impossible object" I mean objects that are experienced as having some properties that they could not actually possess. Impossible objects instantiate paradoxical perceptual properties that for instance violate geometrical laws. Examples include Hogarth's *Satire on False Perspective*, which shows a pictorial scene that abounds in perspectival inconsistencies based on the technique of forced perspective, and Escher's impossible architectural structures – such as *Waterfall* – that creates an optical illusion grounded on conflicting figural laws. In fact, these pictures are not entirely like the cases considered so far, for the viewer is presented with scenes made up of recognizable elements: "Each individual part is acceptable as a representation of an object normally situated in three-dimensional space; and yet, owing to false connections of the parts, acceptance of the whole figure on this basis leads to the illusory effect of an impossible structure" (Penrose and Penrose 1958: 31). In this respect, impossible figures are different from visual riddles, indeterminate pictures, and so on. Looking at Hogarth's *Satire on False Perspective*, one can clearly distinguish the overall perspectival structure of the scene and the different subjects that appear in the picture: a gentleman with a fishing rod in the foreground, some barrels behind him, a bridge, a tree, a hill, a church very far away, and so on. Only, the different planes that dictate the distances within this picture contain several perspectival absurdities – e.g., the gentleman's fishing rod reaches a bit too far away relative to his foreground position. In principle, then, the phenomenology of this and similar impossible figures can be properly described with the threefold account of image consciousness, thus resorting to the couple image-object/image-subject. And yet there is something unsatisfactory with this resolution: the image-subject, that is, the subject that the viewer refers to when looking at a pictorial representation, should be an entity that possesses a phenomenal appearance that is independent of its pictorial exhibition. Yet, the visual impossibilities that appear in these pictures cannot, by definition, appear in reality, they cannot be actualized. In this sense, then, impossible figures powerfully show "how a three-dimensional object would look like that could never

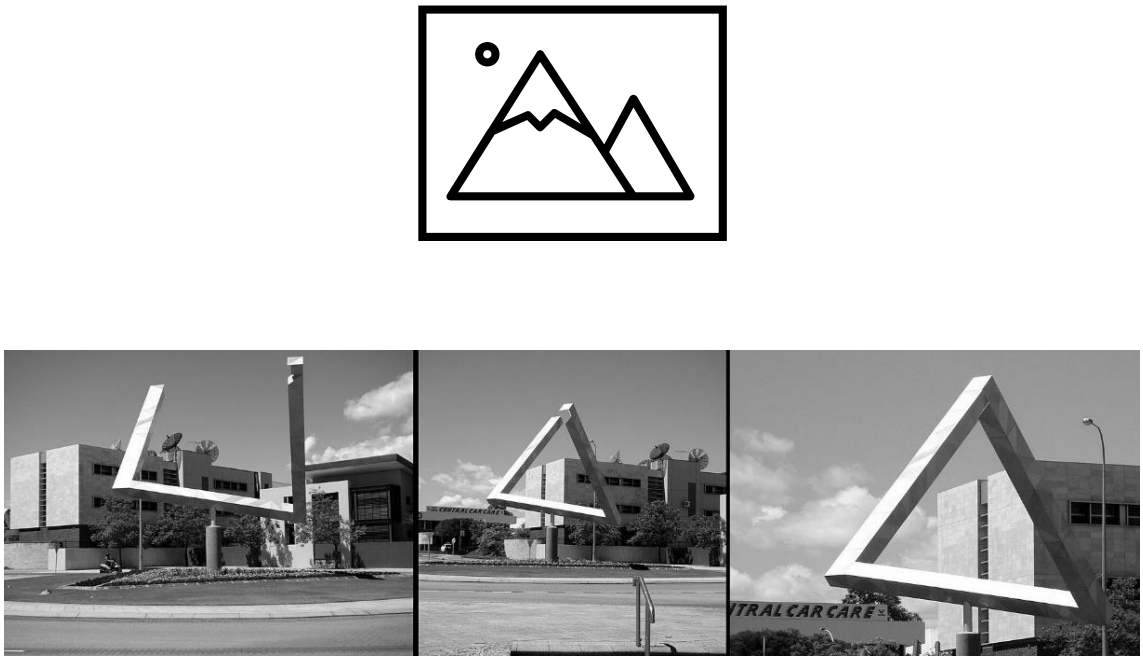


Figure 18. Above: A version of the Penrose triangle
Below: The Penrose triangle in 3D (Perth, Australia).
Bjørn Christian Tørrissen, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

exist in the first place, because its features are physically incompatible" (Alloa 2020: 190).

Concerning the last point, though, it may be objected that impossible objects can in fact appear in our world and be perceived as such. The famous Penrose triangle, for instance, has been reproduced three-dimensionally (Fig. 18). But if this is so, then impossible objects do have phenomenal appearances (in the three-dimensional space) independent of their pictorial exhibition. This objection, however, seems to miss the point of impossible figures. Granted, impossible figures can in principle be actualized and perceived outside pictorial spaces. But there is a sense in which their phenomenal character remains primarily pictorial: three-dimensional actualizations of impossible figures only make sense if the viewer assumes a *pictorial stance*. The impossible triangle in Figure 18 can only be seen as such – i.e., as an impossible object – when viewed from a particular and unique vantage point. As soon as the viewer moves around this installation, the illusoriness of the triangle is lost; the trick is revealed, and the object does not look like an impossible triangle anymore (in fact, it does not even look like a triangle). By contrast, the Penrose triangle maintains its character of impossibility

notwithstanding the vantage points that the viewer may assume. Therefore, the pictorial medium seems to provide a privileged space for the appearance of impossible entities. Indeed, it is not by accident that such entities typically originate in the pictorial realm. And although it is true that they can be *reproduced* in three dimensions, their phenomenology invites a reassessment of the widely accepted directionality of depiction: from the canvas to the visible, rather than from the visible to the canvas. In other terms, when it comes to impossible figures, art does not imitate nature, but it may be the other way around.

Before drawing some conclusions, we can perhaps express the general feeling of uneasiness that those pictures – and indeterminate, unresolved pictures in particular – are able to provoke in the viewer. For, in effect, pictures that do not represent anything, but merely assert their pictoriality by instantiating an apparent figure-ground organization, do overthrow our normal expectations towards pictures. In this light, indeterminate or meaningless pictorial spaces are *uncanny* in that they defamiliarize the normal function of images, which is being images *of*, referring to an absent subject.[68] This seems indeed consistent with the cases in which, at a certain point, meaning emerges, and in the same breath, the feeling of uncanny vanishes: now, the shape of a familiar subject appears in the picture.

In psychology, this sudden emergence of meaning – that of course is not specific to pictorial experiences – is called "aha effect" (or "eureka effect") and is indeed associated with pleasurable feelings: "Much excitement is generated as the 'aha' experience forms; everything suddenly seems to make sense in the moment of 'coming together'" (Mann 2010: 222). In other terms, when the content of the pictorial space is apprehended as something familiar, and the pictorial space re-gains its usual representational structure, the uncanny is replaced by its opposite (see Muth 2013; see Topolinski and Reber 2010 for an explanation of the feelings associated with the 'aha' effect).

[68] See Gineprini (2022) for an overview on the notion of uncanny; Trigg (2012; 2020) draws a parallel between the phenomenological method and the uncanny. My categorization of certain indeterminate pictorial spaces as uncanny partially resonates with the definition put forward by Windsor: "having uncertainty about what is real caused by an apparent impossibility" (2019). However, such definition needs to be adapted: having uncertainty about what is pictorial caused by an apparent impossibility. This impossibility would be the appearance of a deep space – where nothing particularly is recognized – on a surface.

§ 21. Pictorial presentation vs. the beholder's share

Many of the cases in the above taxonomy exhibit and valorize the subjective moment of the intentional correlation in pictorial experience. As I will point out in this paragraph, this may lead us to some substantial misunderstanding about the nature of pictorial experience and to an overinterpretation of certain artistic images (as well as to an overall skeptical conclusion).

When the content of a picture is structurally under-determined, ambiguous, or unfamiliar to the viewer, it can be apprehended in different ways which – to a certain extent – vary with the concrete individual that carries out the act of apprehension. Some authors (Gombrich 2000; Gamboni 2002; Pepperell 2006; 2011; Kandel 2013; 2016) take this point as evidence that image-apprehension is structurally dependent on the subjectivity (either as a particular individual or as a member of a certain cultural community) that undergoes a pictorial experience. This means emphasizing what Gombrich (2000) calls *the beholder's share*, namely, what the viewer actively brings to her encounter with an image and that is necessary to make sense of it.[69] In this regard, those pictorial spaces whose content cannot be brought to a synthesis of coincidence with an image-subject explicitly demand that the viewer actively interprets, or completes the pictorial content, infusing it with some meaning, thus shaping it. In this connection, Gombrich argues that

> the incomplete painting can arouse the beholder's *imagination* and project what is not there. … There are obviously two conditions that must be fulfilled if the mechanism of *projection* is to be set in motion. One is that the beholder must be left in no doubt about the way to close the gap; secondly, that he must be given a 'screen,' an empty or illdefined area onto which he can project the expected image.
>
> (Gombrich 2000: 208; my emphasis)

This idea has its roots in the theory of perception formulated by Helmholtz, according to whom visual perception – and therefore picture perception – consists in a system of (unconscious) hypotheses or inferences in search for confirmation. In Gombrich's *Art and*

[69] The general notion of "beholder's involvement" was introduced by the art historian Alois Riegl, who famously proposed that what the artist creates is only half of the artwork, for an artwork's meaning also requires the participation of the beholder – art would be incomplete without the emotional response of the viewer.

Illusion, we find the germ of this idea applied to visual arts: "it is the guess of the beholder that tests the medley of forms and colors for coherent meaning, crystallizing it into shape when a consistent interpretation has been found" (2000: 242). And not too far from this position, within the contemporary debate on pictorial representation, we find the make-believe theory of representation put forward by Walton (1990). He proposes that the act of seeing something in a picture necessarily implies visual imagination: when, for instance, one sees a giraffe in a picture, she imagines her visual perception of the pictorial surface – that is, her seeing a marked and colored sheet of paper – to be the perception of a giraffe. But this means that the first perception is imagined to be different from what it is, and that the imagining must penetrate – and thus modify – that perception (see Sedivy 2021 for a development of this position). Therefore, pictorial experience, as well as any other apprehension of a representative artifact, is an act founded on imagination – a game of make-believe (for some criticism of Walton's influential account, see, e.g., Wollheim 1991; Hopkins 1998).

In this perspective, indeterminate and ambiguous pictorial spaces enjoy a special position because they "make the beholder aware – either painfully or enjoyably – of the *active, subjective nature of seeing*" (Gamboni 2002: 18; my emphasis). Thus, according to this view, visual perception – whether directed to ordinary three-dimensional objects in our surrounding space or to pictures – would be fundamentally interpretative, hence dependent on the subjective moment of the intentional correlation.

The active involvement of the viewer in giving shape to pictures has also gained a renewed prominence in cognitive neuroscience, within the paradigm of predictive perception:

> Throughout the twentieth century, practices such as Cubism evolved into various forms of abstract art in which figurative or representational aspects were completely abandoned. In doing this, the artist further expands the scope of the beholder's share … going far beyond perceptual completion into a large territory of associations. In not depicting objects or scenes, the subjective power of abstract art rests even more strongly on the associations – perceptual, affective, and conceptual – evoked by the image. And … in relation to Expressionism and interoceptive inference, the novelty brought by a Helmholtzian perspective is that the multifarious associations elicited by an abstract canvas may not merely be subsequent to the visual perception. Instead, through the cascade of inside-out predictions, they may actually shape the visual experience itself.
>
> (Seth 2019: 397–398)

In this perspective, «our perceptual experience – whether of the world, of ourselves, or of an artwork – depends on the active 'top-down' interpretation of sensory input. Perception becomes a generative act» (2019: 378).[70]

Kendel (2016) subscribes to this idea: "By dismantling perspective, abstract art requires our brain to come up with a new logic of bottom-up processing. … But these bottom-up processes are likely to be modified or overridden altogether by extensive, creative top-down processing" (2016: 179-180). This is tantamount to saying that top-down processes, which are heavily called forth in abstract art, rewrite the phenomenal appearance of the visual/pictorial scene. Thus, the scene is shaped by the interpretative (semantic) activity of the viewer. Furthermore, abstract art is also classed as a fundamentally different visual phenomenon, thus creating a fracture with 'normal' figurative pictures but also with visual phenomena in general: "Abstract art dares our visual system to interpret an image that is fundamentally different from the kind of images our brain has evolved to reconstruct" (179).

As noted, the role of the beholder, which here is *a generative activity*, that is, an activity able to generate pictorial meaning, is especially emphasized and called forth by unresolved and abstract pictorial spaces but is nonetheless constitutive of pictorial experience in general – it is the underlying activity of image consciousness. The only difference is that such activity is tacit with (the apprehension of) realistic pictures: since these pictures appear immediately meaningful, they do not make us aware of the underlying interpretative activity of the beholder.

Following this train of thought and relying on the visual indeterminacy that some pictures are able to produce, Pepperell (2006) sets for two conclusions. First, by suppressing the semantic layer of visual perception, indeterminate pictures – and here Pepperell invokes some famous ideas previously expressed by Huxley and Ruskin – do

[70] Perception, in its generative, creative endeavor, is not self-sufficient and constantly needs the intervention of other mental functions that supplement the sensory information received by the viewer (Kendel 2013). But if we accept this view, then the line that separates reality from phantasy is canceled out: "Our perception of the world is a fantasy that coincides with reality" (Frith 2007: 111). However, this view is untenable, and it is at variance with a clear phenomenological datum that cannot be ignored: we always immediately know when we are perceiving an object and when we are imagining it. We do not happen to confuse these very different acts (save exceptional circumstances, such as pathological cases), and we do not resort to reflection to determine the nature of intentional acts. For a critical discussion of philosophical accounts that blur the line between perception and phantasy, see Sartre (2012).

bring the viewer back (at least to some extent) to the perceptual innocence of childhood, a moment of egoic life which was not yet tainted by conceptual knowledge. Such pictures, in other terms, let us experience again the world as a buzzing confusion, before the conceptual construction took over, making sense and setting things – or better, the material of sensation – in order. The second conclusion is related to the first and inevitably leads to a rather subjective position: "Even the properties that endow things with 'objecthood' – such as their perceptible boundaries or outlines – are given by us to the world rather than to us from the world" (398).

However, I believe that such a skeptical conclusion can be avoided. In fact, as I have already partially done, I would argue that the array of pictorial spaces previously analyzed point in the opposite direction and require a different interpretation.

§ 22. Towards the passive constitution of the pictorial

It is a thing to acknowledge – and arguably nobody would deny it – that the viewer does have a share in pictorial experience. As already noted, past experience does play a role in picture perception, and Gestalt psychologists of visual arts rightly insisted on this point (e.g., Arnheim 1974). However, it is another thing to say that image consciousness is only possible on the basis of an interpretative activity of the viewer, or – which is the same – that a pictorial space needs top-down processes to be constituted and appear in one's visual field.

The Husserlian theory of image consciousness does not explicitly claim that image consciousness requires an interpretative activity, nor does Husserl argue that visual perception is a generative activity, let alone that "the properties that endow things with 'objecthood' are given by us to the world rather than to us from the world" (quite the opposite!). And yet there is a sense in which Husserl's account of pictorial experience, at least as it is formulated in his 1904/05 lectures, in which the content of apprehension-apprehension schema is heavily employed, has something in common with the positions considered above: namely, the conceptual couple image-object/image-subject is thought to be constitutive for image consciousness. The *sujet* intention must penetrate the image-object, and when this happens an image appears in the viewer's field of regard. The appearing of an image depends on an active apprehension of the available material of sensation. Indeed, it may be worth recalling that Husserl conceives the constitutive relationship between image-object and image-subject as a conflictual relationship where

the former "appears as A, but in appearing it shows properties that conflict with what we know and with our knowledge of what holds universally, with our empirical laws", but this makes the image "*a logically (intellectually) mediated semblance*" (PICM: 172). At this level of phenomenological analysis, image consciousness seems to rely on active (categorial) synthesis. The active synthesis necessary for image consciousness in Husserl's account bears a double responsibility: i) it gives this act an image-character, differentiating it from a purely perceptual act;[71] ii) and gives it a referent, what the picture is about.

Yet, at this point, it is clear that this view is not able to account for physical imaging in general. For the array of images taken into account in the previous paragraph shows that there is a sense, a pictorial sense, which relates to a peculiar visual phenomenon, that is prior to, and required for, the viewer's interpretative activity. This distinction parallels the distinction that Husserl draws between categorial synthesis and aesthetic (or passive) synthesis, which serves to clarify the fact that there is a layer of passive sense that is independent of intellectual acts of higher order: "Something which is such-and-such, even if no concepts, no judgments in the predicative sense, are mediating" (1989: 22). The project of a transcendental phenomenological aesthetics coincides with the explication of the structures that are already available in experience before the subject actively turns towards them.

Pictorial experience also needs to be considered within this project. As already noted, Husserl's analysis of physical imaging is limited to a static level of analysis where the subjective moment of apprehension is emphasized. The genetic process of constitution of physical imaging is yet to be investigated. The first step was to analyse a number of cases where pictorial reference does not obtain: pictorial spaces can appear even though no recognition – which is a process that concerns the dynamics between image-object and image-subject – takes place. An image can present itself to the viewer even if no concept, no judgment in the predicative sense, is mediating, or to put it differently, even when the beholder does not (yet) have a share.

However, that an image can present itself to the viewer even if no concept, no judgment in the predicative sense, is mediating is but a partial conclusion that points to the necessity

[71] The other condition that is equally necessary is, of course, the conflict with the apprehension of the image-thing. This condition cannot be forgotten, because otherwise there would not be any significant distinction between physical imaging and phantasy consciousness (in Husserl's early theory).

of further (genetic) investigations. This bears the consequence that the importance of the apprehending act in shaping a certain object as pictorial can be deemphasized. In Wollheim's terms, this means that seeing-in may not be a *sui generis* kind of seeing, but rather ordinary seeing. Now, if it is not the nature of the apprehending act (or the *sui generis* kind of seeing) that marks the distinction between seeing a real space/object and seeing a pictorial space/object, then, the condition for pictoriality needs to be researched somewhere else.

My thesis is that pictures are peculiar objects of perception – they do not call for a different mode of consciousness. Put differently, I argue that image-consciousness is not a specific mode of consciousness (next to perception, phantasy, etc.). For pictures exhibit a specific way of appearing that marks their difference from the objects in their surroundings. This way of appearing is the mark of the pictorial and needs to be described through a phenomenological investigation that abstracts from – or puts into brackets – the cultural dimension in which images are considered as human (either artistic or not) artifacts.

Before moving in this direction, two possible objections must be dispelled. The first tries to reinstate image consciousness as a logically mediated semblance drawing on the case of aspect-dawning pictures. The second contends that that pictures are cultural formations and therefore their constitution must imply an active role on the part of the subject.

So-called aspect-dawning pictures, such as the picture of the Dalmatian dog (Fig. 2), only appear when their subject matter is seen in the picture. Thus, one may suggest that the apprehension of a certain subject constitutes image consciousness (at least in this case) because before seeing the dog, only a confused ensemble of marks on a surface occupied the corresponding portion of our visual field – this is indeed a common description of the experience of this particular kind of pictures (e.g., Lopes 1996; Voltolini 2015). However, it would be mistaken to think that it is the Dalmatian-apprehension that creates the pictorial space, or that the notion of pictorial space is unusable here. Granted, the description of the overall experience can be divided into a before-moment and an after-moment; only in the after moment the viewer is conscious of seeing an image. Yet once we see the picture, we see something (in this case a Dalmatian dog) standing out in front of something else. It is this apparent spatial organization that characterizes the structure of the pictorial space and not the fact that, in this case, a Dalmatian is seen in the picture. Although it is true that, once we see the Dalmatian, our attention goes to the more salient

element of her visual scene (the dog), and not to the general structure that underlies this apprehension.

The second objection is usually moved against the phenomenological approach in general and concerns the putative lack of attention toward cultural formations and the historical dimension. With regard to image consciousness, this objection has been expressed in this form:

> The main problem with Husserl's theory is, as I see it, the assumption that pictures are constituted primarily as a negation of purely perceptual consciousness and as a conflict … between perception and imagination. Against this ultimately mentalistic claim, I maintain the thesis that pictures are socially and materially constituted manifestations of plastic formations [*Bildungen*] and that Husserl fails to consider the fact that pictures are ultimately made by human beings, and that what we 'see' in pictures is ultimately our own shaping power [*Bildungskraft*].
>
> (Lotz 2007: 172)

In essence, the Husserlian theory of image consciousness, by paying a great deal of attention to the eidetic analysis of the structure of the intentional act, obliterates the fact that pictures are, first of all, cultural, social, historical formations: "Husserl fails to see that pictures are *from the bottom up* socio-cultural formations" (179).[72] However, this and other critiques put forward by Lotz are unfair, and miss the point of phenomenological analysis, in general, and phenomenology analysis of image consciousness, in particular.

In a phenomenological perspective, the eidetic analysis of the intentional structure of image consciousness has a precise function, which consists in the clarification of the conditions that makes the apprehension of an image possible. Now, one may well disagree on the specifics of the analysis carried out by Husserl, and indeed I devoted this chapter to show how pictorial experience is not grounded on the conflict between image-object

[72] In a similar vein, Bernard Stiegler argues that the knowledge of the spectator concerning the technologic conditions of production of images is constitutive of the way in which we see them: "the synthesis of the 'subject' stems from the knowledge he has of the technical conditions of the image-object's production, insofar as this object is also a trace, a souvenir-object overdetermining a relation to time (a way that the past has of giving itself to the present)" (2002: 159). The knowledge of the technical conditions co-determines the conditions of meaning of pictorial experience, so that "the evolution of the technical synthesis implies the evolution of the spectatorial synthesis. … That is to say, new image-objects are going to engender new mental images" (161-162).

and subject. But this critique does not undermine the phenomenological way of carrying our constitutive analysis, which explicitly acknowledges that such analysis consists in a methodological fiction where concrete phenomena, such as images, are considered in their eidetic structure, independently of, *but not incompatibly with*, further layers and formations of meaning. At no point does Husserl hold that pictures are not products of a material culture, and that this fact may become the theme of a further layer of analysis. It is important to emphasize that any further layer of meaning presupposes the analysis of the act of consciousness in which this meaning is constituted. Thus, the bracketing of the cultural aspect of pictures is only a cautionary procedure that is meant to give a foundation for the study of all further layer of meaning (cultural, historical, and so on). If one were to invert the order of analysis and argue that pictures are socio-cultural formations from the bottom-up, as Lotz rebukes, what could then be employed as the ground for any possible study of the products of a culture different from ours? Lotz does not provide a valid solution to these questions and limits himself to suggesting that "[b]oth picture and participant change through the picture experience, and dynamically constitute – by virtue of the activity of participating in the experience of pictures – the picture itself" (2007: 181).

In what follows, I pursue the opposite direction and describe the constitution of image consciousness from a genetic perspective in order to see at which point something as a pictorial space can emerge in the viewer's field of regard. In this perspective, the particular content of a picture – be it a perfectly recognizable subject or an abstract composition – does not play any relevant role. As noted above, this implies – as part of a methodological fiction – unclothing the concrete and undeniably cultural phenomenon of pictorial experience of its outmost layers to describe the genesis of the pictorial. The only relevant aspect is the particular visual phenomena corresponding to pictorial experience and whose structure can be exhibited and contrasted with the constitution of the adjacent ordinary spatial (three-dimensional) objectivities. This amounts to a regressive style of inquiry.

❋ ❋ ❋

Let me summarize the critical points that emerged so far and set out the plan for the next part of the inquiry into the phenomenology of the pictorial. Image consciousness does not

necessarily translate into depictive consciousness: images can appear independently of the apprehension of an absent subject (that which may be intended through the image-object/subject complex). Pictorial spaces exhibit their own autonomous structuring. The laws of organization of the pictorial belong to the pictorial contents themselves, which are not shaped by an active intervention of the subjectivity but is actually prior to it. This invites a reflection to be carried out on the grounds of passive syntheses, that is, those syntheses that take place before a subjectivity turns towards a certain object and without which such an object could not appear. As Piana observes, "the condition of possibility of phenomenological research thus amounts to this: experience possesses a structure in all its forms of manifestation, and phenomenological research must make this structure evident by clearly showing its knots and joints" (2020).

What are then the "knots and joints" of pictorial experience? The fundamental condition for having a pictorial space that emerged so far is the perception, in a certain portion of the subject's field of regard, of a figure-ground organization taking place on a flat surface. This condition already appears – although not further analyzed – in Wollheim's and Polanyi's accounts of pictorial experience. The former holds that "all that representation requires is that we see in the marked surface things three-dimensionally related" (Wollheim 1987: 21), while the latter argues that pictorial representations are characterized by a specific quality, "a fusion *of contradictory features*. The flatness of a canvas is combined with a perspectival depth, which is the very opposite of flatness" (Polanyi 1970: 230). However, none of the two accounts offer a sound explanation of how such contradiction may be justified; while Wollheim sets for a *sui generis* experience the nature of which remains unfathomable, Polanyi concludes that pictures instantiate sui generis, "transnatural" qualities.

Husserl, on his part, does not consider figure-ground organization as a requirement for image consciousness. His analysis focuses instead on the double conflict between the different apprehensions. Commenting on this position, Brough holds that Husserl's view turns out to be more inclusive than Wollheim's because even an abstract work in which no figure-ground organization becomes salient can still count as an image on the condition that such artwork do not appear merely as "an assemblage of pigmented canvas and wood and nails attached to a wall"; rather, "if one sees on the basis of such physical things an appearance different from them, then one would have an image in HusserI's sense, a *Schein* or 'show'" (1996: 50). It is unclear, however, how this is possible. For one thing, in order to have an appearance different from them, it would seem necessary that the

physical marks be somehow (re)organized, and when this happens it is hard to see how this new appearance be not perceived in terms of figure and ground, thus implying the perception a phenomenal depth. For another, if one follows Husserl to the letter, then another reason emerges that prevents one from considering an abstract artwork an image: namely, the image-object/image-subject complex implies the apprehension of something absent and whose appearance does not coincide with what is perceived as present (i.e., the image-thing). Yet this seems precisely what one perceives in front of many abstract works of art, whose meaning is certainly not reducible to the perceptual datum, but whose phenomenal appearance does coincide with an assemblage of physical marks. Take for instance Cy Twombly's *Scenes from an Ideal Marriage* (Fig. 19). On the one hand, it is plainly impossible to welcome the title of this artwork and see some scene from a marriage – not even in the faintest way. On the other, we do not perceive an apparent depth in the organization of the marks on the painting's surface, but a real depth. On a purely visual level, the viewer is indeed presented with an assemblage of physical marks, whose spatial relationships are objective and unfold in the real (non-figurative) space.

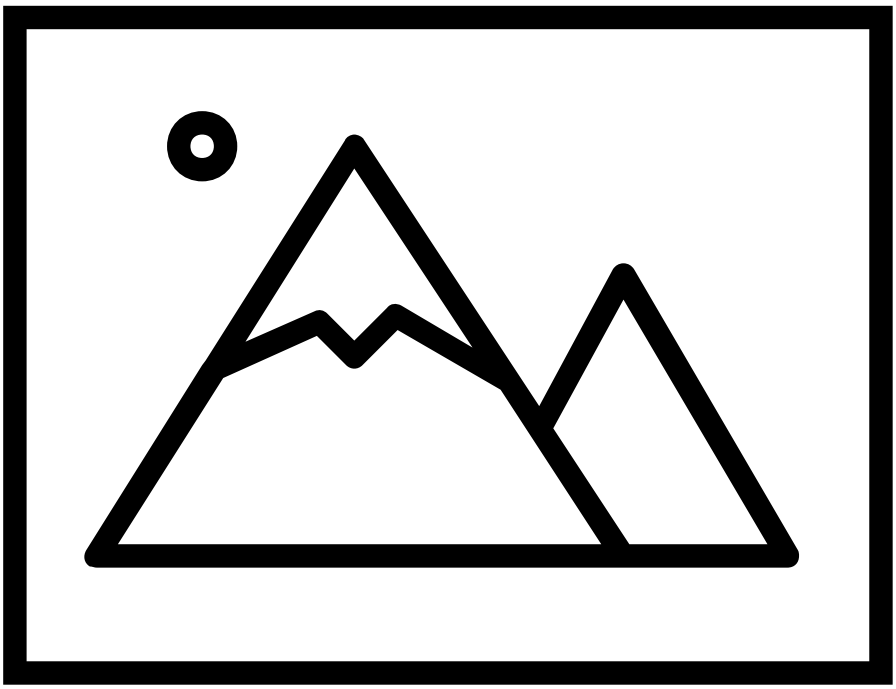


Figure 19. Cy Twombly, *Scenes from an Ideal Marriage*

One may think that denying that certain artworks (such as Twombly's) bring into being – or better, to phenomenality – a figurative space does amount to belittling their artistic value or diminishing their meaning. This is, for instance, what Brough seems to imply when he argues that Husserl's account is more inclusive (than Wollheim's) as regards abstract art: "If an image can be present in such cases, then meaning can be present as well, as it could not be if one had only a hodgepodge of physical things" (1996: 50). However, I believe that the opposite is true: denying that certain artworks bring into phenomenality a figurative space does not amount to diminishing their meaning. It only means (i) tracing a phenomenological distinction between pictorial space and real space, and then, based on this distinction, (ii) it means recognizing that their meaning is independent from the phenomenological conditions for having an image. If anything, this perspective liberates certain artworks from the conditions of pictoriality, and thus it permits to better assess their value and innovativeness.[73] Put otherwise, paintings need not stage a pictorial space in order to be artworks or have meaning.

Considering the above, the importance of the phenomenological condition of having a figure-ground organization should be easier to grasp. When a portion of our visual field is thus organized, the properties and the spatial relationships between the objects that appear therein display different phenomenological structures than those of the objects that appear, as it were, outside the frame. The viewer is visually presented with a space that is not the objective space, and where, for instance, the property "being to the right of X", or the property "being in front of Y" is only apparent and not objectively determinable; for, in fact, Y is not really behind what appears in the foreground, and the viewer is perfectly aware of this. (Twombly's painting, by contrast, let us see real spots of colour that are physically located on a white surface). In this perspective, pictoriality is grounded on a specific visual phenomenon rather than a specific mode of consciousness – a visual phenomenon that needs to be studied genetically.

[73] Allowing some room for speculation, one could argue that a painting like Barnett Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* is intentionally created with the purpose of straddling the boundaries between the pictorial and the real, and that by so doing it effectively manage to attain the sublime. There is a sense in which if a painting submits to the rules for pictoriality, then the presence of what it shows is constrained, and in a certain sense domesticated, by those rules, but when a painting calls into question the threshold that separates the imaginal space from the objective space, the presence of what is shown may be felt as real (or quasi-real) and reaching out to the viewer.

Indeed, a figure-ground organization is a visual phenomenon that takes place passively in one's field of regard; this spatial organization, *pace* Lotz, occurs independently from any intervention of the viewer and/or application of conceptual schemes. Images are so structured before an egoic activity enters the scene and apprehends that which is already passively constituted. Thus, the phenomenal emergence of a pictorial space needs first to be understood from a phenomenological and genetic perspective; the meaning of the pictorial in its cultural dimension and implications builds on the phenomenological constitution of the pictorial.[74] In this perspective, the cultural dimension and phenomenological dimension are not mutually exclusive, but fully compatible. Investigating the latter can only aid the understanding of the former.

The reasons provided in this section, together with the many instances of pictorial spaces discussed earlier, indicate why recognition-based accounts of pictorial experience, that argue that to see the picture of a certain subject one needs first to be familiar with its appearance (Schier 1986), ultimately fails in their intent. This position amounts indeed to arguing that recognition is the crucial factor that makes the viewer see a certain object as a picture rather than (only) a surface variously marked; thus, recognition itself would operate such 'pictorial synthesis', and this is done thanks to the epistemic resources employed in interpreting a certain configuration. However, in order to see a certain S in a picture we do not, in fact, need to have encountered that S before (or have acquired knowledge of S's appearance otherwise), for that S must first be pictorially constituted in order to be recognized as such – the relationship of foundation has a clear, univocal directionality in this case. What it true is that we need to know how S looks like in order to recognize *what we see* in the picture as an S and call it an "S" (see Spinicci 2008: 99).

On this point, Gestalt theory – which will be one of the protagonists of the next chapter – is enlightening.

> To be sure, the piece of paper, the pencil, and so forth, are well-known objects. I will also grant without hesitation that their uses and their names are known to me from numerous contacts in previous life. Much of the meaning which the objects now have unquestionably comes from this source. But from these facts there is a large step to the statement that

[74] In fact, one finds passages where Husserl hints at this level of analysis. We read, for instance: "As in the case of any art work, 'absorption' is needed in order to produce the interpretation adequate to it. What did the artist intend to present, and how did he intend to present it? What feelings did he want to excite, and so on? … Understanding the image yields this" (PICM: 190).

> papers, pencils, and so forth, would not be segregated units without that previously acquired knowledge. How is it proved that before I acquired this knowledge the visual field contained no such units? … Gestalt Psychology claims that it is precisely the original segregation of circumscribed wholes which makes it possible for the sensory world to appear so utterly imbued with meaning to the adult; for, in its gradual entrance into the sensory field, meaning follows the lines drawn by natural organization; it usually enters into segregated wholes.
>
> (Köhler 1947: 138–139)

These considerations are backed by common experiences:

> When I look into a dark corner, or when I walk through mist in the evening, I frequently find before me an unknown something which is detached from its environment as a particular object, while at the same time I am entirely unable to say what kind of thing it is. ... It follows that my knowledge about the practical significance of things cannot be responsible for their existence as detached visual units. … Whenever we say to ourselves or others: 'What may that something be, at the foot of that hill, just to the right of that tree, between those two houses, and so on?' we ask about the empirical meaning or use of a seen object and demonstrate by our very question that, as a matter of principle, segregation of visual things is independent of knowledge and meaning.
>
> (140)

PART II. THE GENESIS OF THE DIVIDE BETWEEN IMAGE AND REALITY

§ 23. Rubin on figure and ground

This and the following paragraph sketch a phenomenological psychology of the figure-ground organization. The first systematic study of figure-ground is owed to Edgar Rubin. From a historical point of view, it may not be worthless noting that Rubin was conducting experimental studies on the figure-ground organization between the years 1911 and 1914 at Göttingen (Katz 1951), where Husserl had been teaching since 1901, and that his dissertation (published in 1915 in Danish) appeared in German in 1921, around the same period in which Husserl delivered his lectures on passive synthesis (see Steinbock 2001: xlviii, n. 31).[75]

The notion of figure is intrinsically ambiguous. In the context of this work, three meanings of "figure" need to be disentangled and kept in mind. The first one refers to pictures in general, such as the drawing of a cat curled up on a pillow; yet it must be noted that with "figure" one typically refers to pictures that tend towards the essential, rather than hyper-realistic pictorial styles. Second, and relatedly, "figure" may refer to a specific partition of a pictorial space that coincides with the area that appears in the foreground, thus standing out against a background. For instance, in the case of the drawing of a cat curled up on a pillow, the former – i.e., the shape of the cat – constitutes the figure, while the pillow functions as the background. Third, the concept of figure can also be applied to the non-pictorial, that is, to the objects in our surroundings, which always appear against a background – as we when see a real cat curled up on a pillow. Now, as will

[75] In this connection, Katz writes that "like other experimental psychologists he was deeply impressed by the phenomenological point of view which at that time had pervaded the scientific atmosphere of Göttingen as a consequence of the spell cast by the ideas of Husserl. This outlook became apparent in his chief work, *Visuell wahrgenommene Figuren*" (1951: 387). To a certain extent, Rubin's style of investigation, although empirically informed, presents some similarity with the phenomenological method: "In psychology Rubin stood for the kind of inquiry which, so far as possible, is not encumbered with hypotheses, for the kind of investigation in which the facts are allowed to speak for themselves" (388). However, Rubin expressly refused to describe his methodology as phenomenological in order to avoid immediate references to Husserlian philosophy (Pind 2014: 202).

become clear later, the ambiguity of the notion of figure is a positive one (for this work at least), and thus I will not discriminate between these three meanings.

In his seminal study, Rubin points out a series of features that characterize the figure ground organization.[76] Although this study is carried out mostly with non-representational figures cut out from cardboard, the conclusions are considered to hold true in all circumstances, that is, both for pictorial spaces and for objective space – thus, all the three meanings mentioned above should be equally touched by Rubin's descriptions. The starting point is the observation that what appears as figure and what appears as ground have distinct phenomenological characteristics:

> To characterize the fundamental difference between figure and ground it is useful to consider the contour, which is defined as the common boundary of the two fields. One can then state as a fundamental principle: when two fields have a common border, and one is seen as figure and the other as ground, the immediate perceptual experience is characterized by a shaping effect which emerges from the common border of the fields and which operates only on one field, or operates more strongly on one than on the other.
>
> (Rubin 1958: 194–195)

The contour, then, describes the outer limits of the figure, while it does not positively characterize the ground. This is clear in Figure 20 (which recalls the non-sense figural stimuli used by Rubin): the white blob appears with a curvy, stain-like shape, while the black background does not appear as having a shape (at least in the proximity of the contour).[77]

However, this fundamental principle must be integrated with some complementary, critical remarks. On a phenomenological level, there is no shaping effect to which one can attend (as Rubin himself observes). In fact, talking of "effect" may be misleading, for the contour does not have any (causal) power over the surrounding areas of the field, nor

[76] Here I will only take into account and discuss those features that have relevant implications for the overall discussion on picture perception. For a recent discussion of Rubin's work on figure-ground, see Calì (2017).

[77] It should be noted that Rubin is not claiming that, given a common border between two adjoining areas, a figure-ground organization must occur in that portion of one's field of regard. Two puzzle pieces of the same color do share a common border, yet the viewer does not necessarily experience a figure-ground organization – both pieces are experienced as figures. Granted, other figure-ground organizations occur in the surrounding parts of the visual field (e.g., the two pieces constitute a figure that stands out against the table).

is it perceived as having one. Instead, a shaped surface (the figure) emerges in the visual field of the beholder which can then be further determined and become the theme of active inspection. Most importantly, the portion of the field that constitutes the ground is typically perceived as extending *behind* the figure. Thus, it is not solely a ground, a portion of the field that is adjacent to the figural formation: it is a *back*ground. Likewise, the figure is not merely something that is seen as having a (more or less) definite shape but also something that stands out at the front, thus occluding a portion of the ground; more precisely, the contour marks the part where the figure ends, and the occlusion of the ground begins. Rubin adds: "It must be noted that the impression that the ground extends behind the border, or that the figure ends at the border, is not a matter of an abstract knowing or an abstract assumption, but of an immediate impression which occurs *in spite of* knowledge" (1958: 196). Once again, figure-ground articulations are objectual syntheses that are passively constituted – they do not require any active intervention on the part of the experiencing subject.

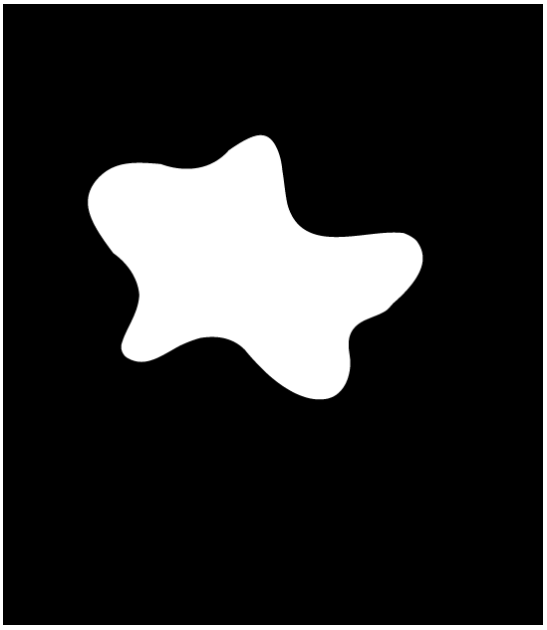


Figure 20.
Example of figure-ground organization

According to Rubin, another fundamental difference between figure and ground is that the former presents a thing-like character while the latter a more substance-like character (1958: 157). This difference seems a direct consequence of the first principle and the general observation that while ordinary things – such as chairs, mugs, etc. – typically appear with a definite shape, on the other hand, substances – such as sand, soil, etc. – typically do not appear as having a definite shape. Now, as we know, the common boundary that separates figure and ground only describes the shape of the figure, which thus take on a thing-like character; besides having a shape, the figure typically appears as a cohesive unity. By contrast, the ground, which is perceived as extending behind the figure, is not positively described by the contour, and its internal articulation is not

phenomenally salient – this makes it similar to substances.[78] In addition, the property of having a thing-like character does not imply having the character of something known, of a recognizable object. The white blob figure on a black background in Figure 18 has a thing-like character independently of any specific apprehensional sense and meaning one may attribute to it. In passing, it is worth noting that this point is coherent with the thesis defended in the previous sections: pictorial spaces have a visual sense that is prior to any recognition or bestowal of meaning.

A further fundamental difference between figure and ground, which is implied in the former observations, is worth mentioning: "This difference is based on the strong tendency to localize the area seen as figure closer than that seen as ground. … Often the difference is only that the figure lies on the ground, without any real difference in distance" (Rubin 1958: 199). However, Rubin also claims that in some circumstances the figure can appear behind the ground. With some effort, one can see the white blob of Figure 20 as an aperture (or a hole) on a space that is farther located than the surrounding black area; in this case, the region that corresponds to the white blob preserves its figural characteristics (such as having a shape defined by the contour) although it appears behind the black area. However, Rubin cautions that when the figure appears behind the ground, the latter does not appear as a fully-fledged ground but rather a "transitional formation".

It is particularly important to stress that the localization of the figure and the ground is relative, not absolute.[79] Something appears in the foreground and something else in the background only relative to an observer; more precisely, relative to the experiencing body – *Leib*, in Husserlian terms – of the observer, which occupies a unique perspective. (This link between the subject and the figure-ground organization will be investigated with a genetic approach later.)

Finally, the figure, as compared to the ground, tends to be more impressive and more dominant. This also entails that, in principle, one will better recall the characteristics of

[78] This principle, as Rubin also points out, cannot be indiscriminately applied to all figure ground articulations, for the ground can also have a thing-character. When we perceive a cat (figure) curled up on a pillow, the pillow does function as background but has nonetheless a thing-character. In general, however, it is true that the ground appears with fewer determinations, if only because it is partially occluded by the figure; in a way, the ground seems to merge with the surroundings.

[79] Although Rubin does not develop this point, it seems implicit in the title of the paragraph where localization is discussed: "Difference between Figure and Ground in Subjective Localization" (1958: 199; translation slightly modified).

the figure than the characteristics of the ground (Rubin 1958: 199). The relative localization of figure and ground – the former appearing, in principle, as spatially closer to the subject than the latter – do parallel their perceptual saliency.[80] To illustrate this point, Rubin proposes the following experience: "First look simply and naturally at a piece of rectangular white paper, and then quickly place a small black figure in its center. You can then observe, almost directly, how the white surface recedes from the center of consciousness, while the black figure takes over" (Rubin 1958: 199). Borrowing the language from the Husserlian analysis on passive syntheses, we could say that what, in the perceptual field, emerges as figure typically has an affective force that is likely to impose itself on consciousness and motivate the subject's thematic interest, typically at the expenses of the interest directed towards other regions (see Steinbock 2001: xlviii-xlix). This, of course, does not imply that one cannot actively direct her attention to the background, thus making it the theme of her interest; nor does it imply that the ground cannot – independently of one's thematical regard – conquer the center of consciousness.

The figure-ground organization is a fundamental structure, and a phenomenological rule, of visual perception: something can appear only against a background (Gurwitsch 2010: 109; see also Koffka 1922 for the extension of the figure-ground organization to other sensory fields). On this matter, Merleau-Ponty writes: "The perceptual 'something' is always in the middle of some other thing, it always belongs to a 'field.' A truly homogeneous area, offering *nothing to perceive*, cannot be given to *any perception*" (2012: 4).[81] As we have seen through Rubin's observations, figure and ground have significant phenomenal differences, and these differences become dramatically apparent when the figure is reversed into the background. But it is important to stress that their relationship is irreducible: figure and ground are non-independent terms.[82] If we try to

[80] Similarly, in his lectures on *Thing and Space*, Husserl observes: "What is perceived in the special sense is what we especially heed, what we attend to. The background things stand there, but we bestow on them no preferential attention" (1997: 67).

[81] In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Pointy takes the figure ground organization as the very principle at the core of conscious thinking: "to have a figure on a ground – one cannot go back any further" (1968: 191). And again, on another note from the same period: "The figure on a ground, the simplest 'Etwas' – the Gestalt contains the key to the problem of the mind" (1968: 192).

[82] This statement holds for the figure-ground relationship in general and does not have any implication on the particular (empiric) content of either the figure or the ground. Indeed, the shape of the figure shows a certain autonomy: it is preserved notwithstanding the backgrounds against which it may be placed. One may cut out the white blob of Figure 20 and place it on a field of grass or on a stretch of sand and nothing in the shape of the blob would change. On the other

imagine a figure that continuously expands and preserves its figural character, a ground is always present – it gives sense to the figure. A figure cannot coincide with the totality of our visual field. The reverse is also true: a background cannot be given without a figure. We may be able to imagine a completely empty space where no object appears. However, this would not be a background yet, but, at best, a space that could potentially become a background if some object appeared in it. Thus, there could not be a figure without a ground, and vice versa. This phenomenological structure is autonomous and belongs to the structuring of the contents themselves, to their mode of givenness and autonomous organization; it is not bestowed by the subject on the contents (see Husserl 2001b: 19). In other words, it is a synthesis that passively pre-disposes its possible apprehensions.

Now, Rubin did not content himself with the accurate description of the phenomenal differences of figures and grounds. He also posed the question regarding the predictability that a given region be seen as figure or background, thus initiating the research of the principles that, all things being equal, dictate the perceptual outcome (1958: 202–203). Briefly, to gain a general idea of the mechanisms that these principles are meant to capture, consider again Figure 20. The perceptual outcome of this configuration – a white blob against a black background – appears stable and clearly defined by virtue of the fact that three principles are operating without conflicts: the white blob is surrounded by the black area (*surroundedness*); it is smaller than the black region (*size*); its shape is more convex than the shape of the black region (*convexity*). These principles are known as "configural clues" since they can be used to predict the region that will appear with a figural character – these cues, needless to say, are commonly and purposefully employed in visual arts, promotional campaigns, and so on. However, similarly to Gestalt principles of perceptual grouping, configural cues are not infallible. They only indicate a probable perceptual outcome *all things being equal*, that is, in the absence of other clues that support an antagonist outcome (e.g., one region is smaller, but the other is convex). Indeed, if a certain configuration displays two regions that present conflicting configural cues, the outcome may be unpredictable, and as in the case of Gestalt principles, we do not have further principles for predicting with certainty which configural cue shall prevail. Ambiguous images, such as the famous Rubin's vase, are deliberately built so that

hand, the specific phenomenal qualities of the ground can affect the aesthetic properties of the ensemble (and viceversa): "put a heavy modern leather club-chair into a rococo salon and the effect will be hideous" (Koffka 1922: 567).

different configural cues conflict, thus supporting alternating figural outcomes – either a vase or two faces on opposite sides.[83]

§ 24. Fusion and contrast: the genesis of the figure

At this point, the question arises: how can a figure-ground organization emerge in one's visual field? How can something emerge from a background and appear as a cohesive sense-unit? The configural clues just mentioned do not help us here, for they only give us a probabilistic estimate of *which* region, in a given display, will appear as figure (and which as ground). But this does not tell us how something as a figure *can* emerge from a background in the first place. In other words, what are the conditions of possibility for the emergence of a figure from another area?

In the abstract, when we consider a certain visual area, there is a large number of partitions that can apply to such area – perhaps an infinity. For instance, I could *conceive* Figure 20 as partitioned in three 'horizontal' rectangles of different height, or of equal height, but I can also consider it as partitioned along one of its diagonals, or along its four axes of symmetry, and in an infinity of different ways; indeed, it is in virtue of such mental partitioning that one can concretely operate on, say, a sheet of paper and cut it along its diagonal, or in many other ways. However, of the countless partitions we may think of only one has natural phenomenal prominence. As it happens, we naturally see a white blob on black ground, and unnaturally, with some effort, we can see a black region against a white background. The figure-ground organization is pervasive and obvious. Its explanation is much less so.

One may be tempted to account for the appearing of a figure by calling on classic Gestalt laws of grouping, those laws – proximity, similarity, continuity, etc. – that are used to describe the formation of wholes in our perceptual field. This interpretation, however, must be set aside. Let me explain.

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[83] The classic configural clues introduced by Rubin and then elaborated by Gestalt psychologists have been generally confirmed by subsequent research, although some revision has been proposed (e.g., Kanizsa & Gerbino 1976). However, further configural principles haven been identified that add to the list of geometric configural clues, i.e., those configural clues that "that could be measured on the image" (Peterson & Selvagio 2010). And non-geometric principles have also been showed to affect figure ground organization: Peterson & Gibson (1993; 1994), for instance, have shown that past experience is able to affect figure assignment. For the importance of configural principles in an ecological perspective, see Palmer (1999: 283-284).

Principles of grouping were introduced by Gestalt psychologists in order to account for the regularities in the organization of our visual field, for the fact that we perceive some parts of our environment as going together, forming meaningful wholes (Wagemans et al. 2012). For instance, the law of proximity tells us that elements that are close to each other tend to be perceived as grouped together. This is indeed what happens with the configuration of dots in Figure 21. What one perceives in normal conditions are seven pairs of black dots with a precise arrangement – *a/b*, *c/d*, *e/f*, etc. Although other groupings are of course conceivable (for example, *b/c*, *d/e*, *f/h*, etc.), they do not spontaneously emerge on a phenomenal level, and, in most cases, even if one actively tries to perceive a different arrangement, her efforts are frustrated – the visual scene remains unchanged. Perceptual grouping by proximity can also occur with a configuration merely constituted by two dots close to each other – *a/b*, say. In this case, one tends to perceive a pair of dots rather than two unrelated elements, and this basic configuration presents specific phenomenal properties. The space between the two dots is, *de facto*, a blank space, and yet it does not appear as such, as, for instance, the blank regions immediately above or below *a/b*. On the contrary, it appears as a closed interval, encompassed, and contained, by the two dots (Gurwitsch 2010: 104).

However, as mentioned, principles of grouping, cannot account for the emergence of a figure, for, in fact, the emerging of a figure is presupposed by perceptual grouping. This can be shown from a logical point of view and from a phenomenological point of view.

From a logical point of view, elements that appear grouped together, as Gestalt factors predict, need first to be visible as individual elements (note that here "first" is not to be understood in chronological terms). But in order for something to appear as an individual formation, that something must be able to stand out, separating itself from a background. The pair *a/b* presupposes the figural formation of *a* and *b*, each of which counts as a minimal figural formation. If this is so, then perceptual grouping presupposes figure-ground relationships, and thus it cannot claim any explanatory priority. While proximity

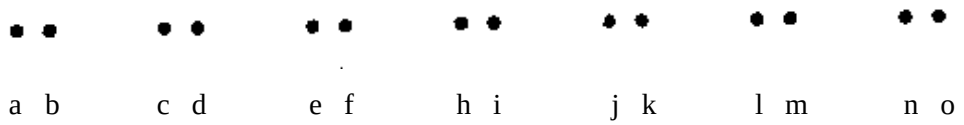

Figure 21. The factor of proximity (adapted from Wertheimer 1923)

– and gestalt principles in general – describes the phenomenal grouping of discrete elements, figure-ground organization describes the emergence of discrete elements. The elements on which grouping operates must be separated. They must allow some blank space, as it were, between them; in other words, they must allow for the phenomenal presence of ground.

Turning to the phenomenological perspective, let us consider again the pair *a/b*, as if it appeared alone. As noted, this basic configuration of dots already instantiates properties that exceed the properties of the single elements that make it up. The two dots appear as parts of a pair, and the spatial interval between them is, as it were, phenomenally charged. Indeed *a/b* is already a minimal Gestalt, on which the grouping by proximity operates. It must be noted that already this minimal configuration, a pair of dots, has the phenomenal structure of a figure – it stands out from a homogeneous background. Therefore, even the most basic kind of grouping appears as organized in terms of figure and ground. And we found such organization over and over, possibly at each step of growing perceptual complexity. Figure 21 can be seen as a line made up of pairs of dots, in which intervals of the same length link one pair to the next pair: this overall configuration can be seen as such only as an articulated figure against a background. This means that figure-ground is a perceptual structure that reiterates itself at all levels of complexity: from the most elementary to the more articulated ones, whose formation is described by the factors of grouping mentioned above.

These last considerations served to show why grouping factors cannot explain the emergence of sense-units, or figures. A more promising path – the one that I endorse here – would be to investigate the conditions of possibility for the formation of cohesive sense-units. These can be found in the phenomena of fusion and contrast that Husserl describes in his lectures on passive syntheses, within the framework of the phenomenological theory of association (Husserl 2001).[84]

Let us first introduce a phenomenon that, in a sense, is diametrically opposite to figure–ground organization, and that was first studied by Metzger (1929) in an experimental setting. This is the *Ganzfeld*, which roughly translates to "complete field". Experimental subjects are exposed to an unstructured, uniform visual field, filled up with homogeneous

[84] Further reflection on passive synthesis and the primordial phenomena at the basis of sensible experience can be found in *Experience and Judgement* (1973a). For a critical exposition of these themes in *Experience and Judgment*, see Spinicci (1985). For an introduction, accompanied by concrete examples, on passive synthesis in general, see Piana (2013).

brightness (either white or red, typically). This kind of uniform stimulus can be induced, to a certain extent, with immersion in an environment filled with fog. This visual condition amounts, in fact, to the deprivation of perception, for neither a structured formation nor a chaotic ensemble of colors is visible for the subject.[85] In other words, no figure-ground organization occurs. While this phenomenon has been described as an approximation to the experience of a "pure ground" by virtue of the lack of differentiation of the visual scene (Gurwitsch 2010: 110), it seems more appropriate to conceive of it as an experience closer to blindness (Zhok 2012: 44). Moreover, although this phenomenon is usually described as a case of sensory deprivation, this is not the best interpretation, for experiential subjects are indeed exposed to visual stimuli (a colored brightness) and their visual system is not impaired. Thus, a more plausible understanding of the Ganzfeld sees it as a lack of sensory differentiation, which is the most basic condition for perception (see Merleau-Ponty 2012: 4).

Phenomenal differentiation, and the appearance of perceptual phenomena in general, are rooted in two interdependent passive syntheses: *fusion* and *contrast*. These are considered by Husserl as primordial phenomena, for they are located at the deepest level of association together with – and actually grounded upon – the sense-form of time. However, differently from the internal nexuses of primary time consciousness, the former kind of associative syntheses stand on the side of contents; they concern their unity and differentiation.[86] Already in the *Logical Investigation* we find an outline of these concepts:

[85] Although, as reported in the original experiment by Metzeger, a prolonged exposition to the *Ganzfeld* tends to be followed by visual hallucination, ranging from a kaleidoscope of colours to quite detailed shapes and scenes. This sensory outcome was then exploited by parapsychologists to investigate altered states of consciousness that are supposed to engender paranormal phenomena, such as telepathy, psychometry, clairvoyance, and others (see Palmer 2003, for a review).

[86] Here I will not take into account Husserl's analysis of temporalization. This level of constitution is presupposed by any form of consciousness and bears the transcendental function of ordering contents in general. Yet "what gives unity to the particular object with respect to content, what makes up the differences between each of them with respect to content …, what makes division possible and the relation between parts in consciousness, and so forth–the analysis of time alone cannot tell us, for it abstracts precisely from content" (Husserl 2001: 174). In consequence, it does not help us to characterize those objects that are pictorial. Fink (1930/1966), Husserl's assistant at Freiburg, keeps a similar position towards physical image consciousness. However, he does not consider the level of constitution of passive synthesis, nor the role of kinaesthesis, which, by contrast, I deem crucial for the genesis of image consciousness and its differentiation from ordinary perception.

> The concrete thing of sensuous intuition therefore owes its isolation to the qualitative gap between neighbouring 'moments', but the relief achieved by the whole concretum has priority over the relief of the mutually separated moments of its content. This depends on the peculiarly intimate fusion of the different 'moments' of the concretum, their mutual 'penetration', which reveals itself in a mutual dependence as regard change and destruction. This fusion is not a fading into one another in the manner of the continuous, nor does it remove all separateness, but it is nonetheless a sort of peculiarly intimate mutual interconnection which must at a stroke set the whole complex of interpenetrating moments in relief, if only once a single discontinuous moment has provided the right conditions.
>
> (Husserl 2001b: 16)

Three ideas should be retained from this passage. First, wholes have phenomenological priority over parts, they constitute the original singularities that are given in intuitive acts; parts can also become intuitive, but their intuition is necessarily subsequent and unfolds as parsing of original singularities, or, as I propose, figural formations. Second, fusion is the synthesis that characterizes such original sense-units and their concrete moments. Third, and relatedly, fusion exhibits a relationship of co-dependence with discontinuity, or contrast: "inherent in every contrast that remains a phenomenon of homogeneity, there is something of fusion, there is something that unites the concrete data homogeneously and at the same time disturbs concretion by rupturing its continuity" (Husserl 2001: 185–186). Contrast is a synthesis that permits sense-units to appear as such, to acquire phenomenal relief as individual concretions, by setting them apart from what does not belong to that concretion.

In fact, Husserl distinguishes two forms of fusion: at-close-proximity (a_1), which runs between the moments of individual sense-units, and at-a-distance (a_2), which occurs between sense-units that have already acquired relief as such (see Costa 1999: 157; Bégout 2000: ch. 2; Biceaga 2010; Costa 2018: ch. 3). These two forms of fusion must

For analogous reasons, I will not take into account the notion of sense-fields in general, as a continuum of qualities of the same kind. It is, however, important to keep in mind the distinction between "1.) A sense-field (restricting ourselves to the primal fields, namely the field of the sense of sight and the field of touch) would be without qualitative differentiations; it would be a continuum of equal qualities, distinct only in their position within the order of the field" and "2.) In the sense-field, differentiations arise; a part of the extension of the whole field is delimited more or less 'sharply' as a differentiated content" (Husserl 1997: 278). Accordingly, in the following pages, I will consider the visual field as a system of different qualities.

then be considered in their temporal form, that is, as occurring synchronically (b_1), or diachronically (b_2). Thus, Husserl distinguishes four forms of fusion in total (Table 1). However, it is important to insist that fusion alone is not sufficient to qualify the emergence of sense-units within the perceptual field, for unity itself only gains intuitive relief through discontinuity, and discontinuity is indicated by contrast – "the relationship involving the unity of a prominent datum and that datum from which it is set in relief" (Husserl 2001: 185).

b. Time-form / a. Association (fusion)	b_1. Coexistence (synchronicity)	b_2. Succession (diachronicity)
a_1. At-close-proximity	Ex.: black dot against a white background	Ex.: dot moving from left to right
a_2. At-a-distance	Ex.: two black dots	Ex.: intermittent dot

Table 1. The four types of fusion described by Husserl (2001: Division 3). The examples proposed here refer to the visual domain, but fusion does occur in other sense modalities. In fact, Husserl's own examples of fusion at-close-proximity in succession and fusion at-a-distance in succession refer to the sense of hearing.

Given our previous remarks on the relationship between figure-ground organization and grouping, not all kinds of fusion reported in Table 1 are equally important in the present context. For those fusions that occur diachronically (i.e., a_1/b_2 and a_2/b_2) presuppose – considering that we are proceeding by abstraction – fusions that occur synchronically; moreover, as explained above, it is easy to see that a_2/b_2 presupposes a_1/b_1 since "[e]ach term of the multiplicity is a term for itself through contrast" (Husserl 2001: 185). Thus, fusion at-close-proximity turns out to be the simplest occurrence of sense-unit (see Costa 1999: 165; Gurwitsch 2010: 109): as simple as a black dot that emerges from a background.

Now, fusion at-close-proximity in coexistence (a_1/b_1) can be used to analyze the emergence of sense-units, hence the phenomenon of figure-ground organization. Going

back to Rubin's analysis, when a figure-ground organization occurs, the common border between figure and ground is attributed – and thus gives shape – to the former. This dynamic, on the one hand, presupposes fusion at-close-proximity as regards the figural synthesis, and, on the other, contrast as regards the insertion of a moment of discontinuity in the figural synthesis. Contrast takes place in the portion of one's field of regard that coincides with the border between the figure-area and the ground-area. The contour, then, is *the locus of a contrast*. It is a phenomenological threshold that both signals the end of a continuous, fused unit – whose internal phases can indeed be localized but which do not have phenomenal prominence for themselves (Husserl 2001: 166) – and gives phenomenal relief to the emerging figure. At this point, the sense-unit thus emerged can enter into other relations of fusion of different kinds with other constituted sense-units. For instance, our black speck can be associated at-a-distance with another speck (a_2/b_1), so that a pair of black specks becomes prominent. But it can also remain a singularity that moves along a certain trajectory (a_1/b_2), such as a spheroid lapillus ejected from a volcanic eruption.

§ 25. Before image, before reality: the insufficiency of the notion of figure and the way ahead

The analyses conducted so far have cast some light on the conditions for the constitution of sense-units, hence of something as a figural formation. However, the notion of figure thus delineated cannot account for the constitution of images, nor for the constitution of ordinary objects. Although, as seen, the layer of passivity is not "one great blooming, buzzing confusion" but presents instead its own regularities and laws of association, neither is this layer sufficient to account for the whole process that leads to the constitution of things that we ordinarily experience in our environment. Indeed, we have been dealing with object-like formations (and image-like formations, as we will see). But our world does not consist of dots against a background, or similar sense-units. The abstraction of these considerations needs to be reconciled with their transcendental function; namely, the (constituted) sensible objects that ordinarily appear in our experience – chairs, tables, trees, and also images. While these latter are the *telos* of the analysis of passive formations in general, pictorial objects and spaces are the *telos* of the present study.

As previously noted, the notion of figure, as it appears in Rubin's work, and in Gestalt psychology, is intrinsically ambiguous, for it can be said to accommodate both spatial objects and pictorial objects. Without further elaboration, it cannot be used to discriminate between the former and the latter. This ambiguity, however, does not compromise the preceding analyses, and it can actually be used to the benefit of what is to follow. Indeed, from a genetic perspective, I do not see any good reason to argue that a sense-unit, something that has emerged in our visual field and has acquired phenomenal prominence, is *originally* either a spatial object or a pictorial object, for space (and time) is also constituted – it has a genesis, and this genesis can be explicated with a regressive analysis. This is not to say that all perceptual objects are intrinsically ambiguous, being potentially pictorial objects;[87] and indeed, we do not happen to confuse one with the other, *save in exceptional circumstances*. Rather, I propose that the constitution of figure-ground relationships, understood as foreground and background, has a genesis that needs to be investigated. This investigation will serve to clarify the phenomenological conditions and processes that make a certain configuration pictorial instead of ordinarily spatial (i.e., three-dimensional). Image consciousness, understood as physical imaging, is yet to be explored from a genetic perspective.

The sphere of sense-units that emerge trough the phenomena of fusion and contrast is not (yet) a sphere of spatial objectivities, of objects that can be individuated in our surrounding space. Fusion and contrast do circumscribe certain conditions for the organization of figures and grounds, but they do not tell us how these regions of our visual field acquire an objective spatial organization in which one – typically the figure – occupies the foreground and the other the background, in the sense that one is objectively closer to the viewer than the other. As Rubin's work illustrates, one has "the strong tendency to localize the area seen as figure closer than that seen as ground". So, the question is: what is the process of constitution that enables one to see something as closer to herself, and likewise something behind something else? Of course, when it comes to pictorial spaces this visible relationship is only apparent, it is not objective since nothing is really in the background, behind the figure (although it appears that way). However, proclaiming that the pictorial space and its objects are apparent or irreal as is often done

[87] In fact, if we discuss about the pre-empiric visual field, it does not make any sense to say whether a sensible formation counts as a spatial objectivity or a pictorial entity, for the distinction between the two is not yet available in a pre-empiric field. Thus, a sense-unit, in this context, is neither real nor pictorial.

in the literature[88] is not really satisfactory, although it is not untrue. It is unsatisfactory because one should instead clarify the process of constitution and the relations of foundation that motivates the character of irreality which is normally attributed to images. Furthermore, the notion of irreality itself also applies to other objects; an imagined ice cream cone is also an irreal object, for example. Therefore, if on the one hand, it is true that an ice cream cone in a photograph and a fantasized ice cream cone are both irreal, on the other hand, they are not irreal in the same way. This is quite apparent if we consider that they can affect consciousness in quite different ways. For instance, the picture of a palatable dish may be more powerful than my imagining of it. And in both cases a physical reaction may be elicited: that vision made my mouth watering! Thus, the effect of the image is not at all irreal. This also implies that the character of irreality is not very useful in instructing us about what images can do and what they cannot do; it requires further internal differentiation to be properly employed in different cases.

In consequence, in order to see how a region of our visual field, the figure, can appear in the foreground, and another in the background extending behind the figure, theoretical efforts need to be addressed toward the phenomena at the roots of the constitution of space and ordinary spatial objects. My hypothesis is that in so doing we will be able to understand the conditions of possibility for something to be a pictorial space, hence a space that is different from what we ordinarily refer to as "real space". This approach implies a theoretical regress, a backward movement from what is already constituted to the phases of its constitution. Such theoretical regress brings the investigation on a ground of phenomena – sometimes Husserl (1997) calls this sphere "pre-empirical" or "pre-phenomenal" – where the distinction between the non-pictorial and the pictorial is not yet achieved, thus allowing a description of the reasons internal to the phenomena themselves that motivate such distinction.[89] By the same token, this analysis will be able to disclose

[88] Sticking to the phenomenological tradition, Fink (1966) and, even more, Sartre (2004) go in this direction.

[89] This theoretical point seems to have a hold on the terminology employed by Husserl himself in his lectures on *Thing and Space* (1907), where he introduces the notion of visual field and conceives of it as a diffusion or extension presupposed by the notion of objective, empirical extension and space. Here, Husserl refers to the visual field as a two-dimensional manifold (1997: §48, §49, §68, §69), which is not, however, to be understood as a surface in the objective space, and repeatedly makes use of the term *Bild* (frequently in quotation marks), as if – one may be tempted to speculate – this notion could still lay its claim to the appearance of the visual scene as it is conceived within the framework of the abstract fiction that characterizes the style of inquiry of these lectures.

the reasons behind our judging of pictorial objects as irreal. This judgment is grounded on an effective contrast with that which is constituted as primarily real. But even though images are judged as irreal, this does not mean that they do not have some degree of efficacy on us. If this is the case, as the example above indicates, then images must have some *pretension towards reality*.

This sphere of problems is already hinted at by one of the features of the figure-ground organization that we have already encountered while considering Rubin's study: the fact that the localization of the two regions – understood, respectively, as foreground and background – is relative, not absolute. It is relative because it necessarily implies the presence of an observer whose experiencing body occupies a certain perspective from which the visual scene can appear so organized, namely an area that stands in the foreground, closer to the observer, and another one that stands in the background.

Now, the problem is how one conceives of the observer, and what role is assigned to the observer as regards the process of constitution of spatial phenomena (i.e., pictorial or not). In the next paragraph, I consider and argue against the view according to which images are objects that can be studied *without* taking into account the role of the viewer *qua* embodied subject – if such a view were on point, the project of studying the sensorimotor constitution of the pictorial space would turn out to be meaningless.

§ 26. Against the snapshot conception of pictorial phenomena

The literature on image consciousness in the phenomenological tradition, and contemporary theories of depiction, but also in the cognitive sciences seems to agree on the issues raised above: pictures are visual objects that are simply grasped *at a glance*.[90] In consequence, there seems to be no need to give any specific role to the viewer and to investigate the constitution of the pictorial space: in this perspective, an image is an object

This suggestion, however, should be taken with a grain of salt, for nowhere in that text does Husserl focuses – and, plausibly, think – about pictures or image consciousness. In addition, it is worth remembering that by the time Husserl delivers his lectures on the constitution of space and material things, he has already rejected the so-called "image-theory" (2001: 125.; see also Husserl 1973: §14; but see De Palma 2001 for a critical assessment of the image-theory in the *Logical Investigations*).

[90] Ferretti (2023) is one, very recent exception to this widespread conception. His position, however, is different from mine both relative to the overall approach – his study heavily draws on neurosciences and builds on cognitive representationalist models – and for the specific thesis he puts forward.

that can equally appear to a disembodied gaze. It does not come as a surprise that all the theoretical interest for the pictorial concerns primarily depiction; that is, how a certain material configuration is able to refer to a certain subject and what differentiate pictorial reference from other forms of representation.

On the one hand, if we think about the differences in the approaches and theoretical positions of the authors that are interested in pictorial experience, which can diverge considerably, this general, and often implicit, agreement is somewhat surprising. On the other hand, however, not really so, for the general idea they subscribe to has a very intuitive appeal: pictures, especially static, flat pictures, do not require any particular action (save keeping the eyes open) to appear in the viewer's field of regard.

This position is very diffused – and arguably the dominant one in cognitive sciences – with regard to vision in general: the rich perceptual scene that we always enjoy is straightforwardly delivered to our eyes, captured by an inner screen (the retina), and then transmitted to the brain for subsequent elaboration. At this point, if one is eager to try and understand how the magic is worked out by the visual processes that occur on this sub-personal level, the study cannot be conducted on philosophical grounds and needs to turn to empirical methods.

There are some solid reasons that support the idea that images appear at a glance and that vision itself does capture our visual scene in the way described above, as a mechanic of passive registration.[91] In fact, these general ideas are strictly related, and the former can be seen as a consequence of the latter. They both deny any substantial role to the embodied dimension of the experiencing subject, thus overlooking the active kinaesthetic (in the Husserlian parlance) or sensorimotor (in the parlance of the contemporary enactive approach to perception) constitution of experience.[92] Let us see why in more detail.

Vision, as compared to other sense modalities, is indeed capable of offering its objects at one stroke and seemingly synchronously. As we open our eyes, we perceive a rich

[91] In this context, I will limit my considerations to the intuitions and the reasons that have at least some links with the phenomenological dimension. For a critical discussion of empirically informed arguments that deny a sensorimotor genesis of percepts, see for instance O'Regan & Nöe (2001), Noë (2004), Zhok (2012).

[92] Here, the term "active" does not imply any cognitive intervention on the part of the viewer; it rather highlights the difference from "static". Preferably, one should speak of spontaneity (in the Husserlian but also Sartrean sense) instead of activity; a reaction (either physical or emotional), for instance, may be spontaneous without involving any sort of egoic activity since it does not need any reflecting activity to occur.

visual scene, without any delay and without feeling that any particular activity on the part of the viewer is required. Here a comparison with the sense of touch is undoubtedly useful, for the sense of touch, like vision, correlates to spatial entities, but its phenomenology presents some structural differences from vision.

Haptic perception does not present its objects at a stroke, and instead it requires an active exploration that unfolds in time. This is immediately evident if we think about the experience of perceiving an object only relying on the sense of touch – hence keeping the eyes shut. The tactile perception of an object, in these conditions, proceeds gradually, phase after phase. I may start by moving my hand on a random part of an object that is located at around half my height. As I let my hand slide over what feels like a wide surface with a homogeneous texture, at a certain point, I sense a discontinuity, an empty space. The homogeneous surface that I was touching has an edge, a straight edge that ends with a sharp corner. Moving my hand forward, always at the same height, I encounter another straight edge that ends with another corner. This time, however, I decide to direct my hand downwards, until I reach the ground. Clearly enough the object that I was touching a moment ago is a familiar one: a table. The perceptual phases of my tactile exploration were progressively reunited into an articulated whole, whose spatial structure is that of a table.

In the case of haptic perception, the diachronic nature of the process is apparent: the spatial structure of the perceptual objects related to the sense of touch is not available all at once. It needs instead to be articulated in temporal phases. Relatedly, this articulation is grasped thanks to an active, kinaesthetic exploration. In most cases, a single touch of a certain object cannot disclose its structure and lead to recognition. The perceptual unity of the table is the final result, the synthesis of an active exploration that unfolds in time. When it comes to more articulated structures – e.g., a vase on a table – the diachronic aspect of haptic exploration becomes even more apparent as more temporal phases are needed to reach a satisfactory synthesis.

In addition, active exploration is also required to maintain the percept alive, as it were. What "maintaining the percept alive" means is easy to understand when we reflect on common experiences. For instance, when we sit down for hours, we tend to forget or leave in the background of our thematic consciousness the tactile feeling of the chair we are sitting on. The same is true with the pair of jeans we are wearing or the bar lines of the glasses that rest on our ears. In fact, we are particularly receptive to the texture of our clothes *as* we put them on, but we quickly become accustomed to their presence. The

perception of these objects is correlated to the dimension of kinaesthesis, and once this dimension becomes inoperative, the corresponding percept tends to fade away from consciousness.

By contrast, the phenomenology of visual perception does not straightforwardly exhibit the same characteristics. One may doubt that vision is a process that unfolds in time, diachronically, and that the kinaesthetic dimension is involved in the constitution of visual objects. Indeed, as mentioned, vision does present the subject with a rich visual scene synchronously: a multitude of objects simultaneously appear in spatial coexistence, and the level of spatial articulation of the objects in our visual field does not seem to have a direct relationship with the time required to perceive them (differently from the case of touch). Moreover, we typically do not feel an active involvement of our body when we look at the objects in our visual field.

On this basis, it seems natural to think that, if ordinary three-dimensional objects have these phenomenological features, pictures must *a fortiori* have these same features because pictures are static objects that typically appear in circumscribed portions of space and are given in sharp definition. As such, images constitute the paradigmatic case of visual objects that appear to a disembodied gaze all at once.[93] So paradigmatic that even Alva Noë, one of the main proponents of sensorimotor enactivism (according to which vision, and perception more in general, is an embodied, active process), shares this way of conceiving pictorial representation. This tension is palpable when he writes that

> the content of perception is not like the content of a picture. In particular, the detailed world is not given to consciousness all at once in the way detail is contained in a picture. In vision, as in touch, we gain perceptual content by active inquiry and exploration. When we see, for example, we are not aware of the whole scene in all its detail all at once.
>
> (Noë 2004: 33)

Here Noë is suggesting that pictures are not a good interpretative model to understand perception because "[t]he content of a perceptual experience is not given all at once the way the content of a picture is given in the picture all at once" (215). Therefore, Noë

[93] Our linguistic expressions seem to reflect this intuition. We say, for instance, "the big picture" to refer to a situation as a whole, that is, considered in all of its aspects.

seems to presuppose that pictorial content is not gained "by active inquiry and exploration".[94]

However, the fact that visual perception seems to present a multitude of objects synchronously, in sharp detail, and that we do not have a straightforward feeling of the kinaesthetic dimension of the processes involved in their constitution does not accurately describe its phenomenological structure. In fact, not all the details of the visual scene are truly sharp; the kinaesthetic dimension is indeed required for the constitution of visual objects; and, although we do not naturally sense visual kinaesthesis, as we readily do with haptic perception, visual kinaesthesis can be made salient (to a certain extent). Interestingly for our purposes, some of these points can be shown by resorting to pictures. If even the perception of pictures points toward a non-static, diachronic constitution, then, *a fortiori*, there is reason to doubt that vision in general is a static process.

Firstly, it would be mistaken to think that pictorial spaces necessarily present their content at all at once, in sharp detail. The only reason one may believe this is the case is that pictures typically occupy a circumscribed portion of our visual field, so we have the impression that pictorial content is given all at once, in sharp focus. Such an impression is surely a vivid one when we look at pictures on our smartphones, or on newspapers, for instance. However, pictorial spaces may as well occupy a vast area – and up to the entirety – of our visual field. This is the case with panorama paintings (Fig. 21), that is, those massive artworks, typically exhibited in rotundas, that became very popular during the 19th century (see, e.g., Oettermann 1997). Panoramas were able to create illusionistic effects by offering an all-encompassing representation of landscapes or other subjects that usually occupy the entirety of a visual scene – e.g., battlefields and cityscapes. There is no reason to believe that the content of such pictorial representations is given all at once, in sharp detail. Indeed, the spectator can only attend to certain parts of these artworks, precisely as one can only attend to certain parts of her perceptual scene. Granted, panorama pictures surely have an anomalous status *qua* pictorial representations, for they are built with the purpose of having an illusory power, but the same point can be made by taking into account many other kinds of pictorial representations, which do not have illusionistic effects. Consider for instance *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* by Pieter

[94] The title of this paragraph directly refers to what Noë (2004) calls "the snapshot conception" of vision: "You open your eyes and you are given experiences that represent the scene – picture-like – in sharp focus and uniform detail from the center out to the periphery" (35). The implicit problem here would be to think that picture perception does have this phenomenology.

Bruegel the Elder. Here, what catches the eye is the composition of the landscape – a marked contrast between the terrestrial foreground and a wide seascape that disperses in a light atmosphere. It is then not at all obvious (especially for those unaware of the title) to spot the dramatic episode that silently takes place in the lower right corner of the painting, completely unnoticed by the nearby workers who imperturbably go on with their activities. In addition, this is not the only element that can go unnoticed at first glance and that may be discovered by further exploring the composition of this painting. In dim light, among the shrubs on the left, the shape of an ashen face unexpectedly emerges, seemingly turned upwards – a corpse, perhaps (de Vries 2003; Baldwin 2008).

These examples indicate that the content of pictorial spaces, not differently from objective spaces, is not apprehended all at once. The same conclusion, however, is already implicit in some of the very arguments that Noë (2004) and O'Regan and Noë (2001) use to argue against the snapshot conception of perceptual phenomena. To make this point, they discuss the phenomena of *inattentional blindness* and *change blindness*. Let us have a quick look at the latter, which, in this context, is more relatable, for it deals with static pictures, and no particular cognitive task is demanded to experimental subjects. This is

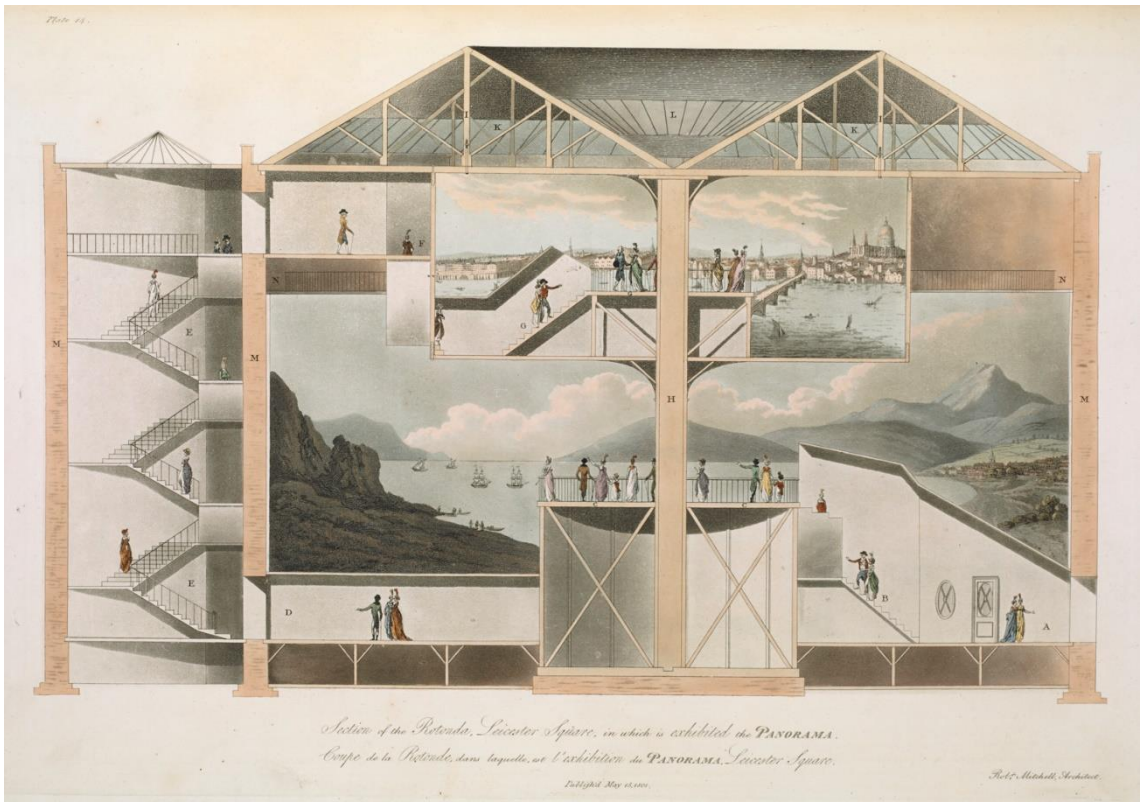

Figure 21. Cross-section of a Rotunda where a panorama is exhibited (from Mitchell 1801: plate 14)

Nöe on change blindness: “In one noteworthy recent demonstration …, you are shown a photograph of a Paris street scene. Over the seconds that you look at the picture, the colour of a car prominently displayed in the foreground changes from red to blue. Perceivers overwhelmingly fail to notice this change in colour, even though the change is dramatic and occurs over a short period of time” (2005: 51-52). When the color change is revealed, subjects’ reactions betray their surprise for not noticing the change that occurred right in front of their eyes.[95]

These experiments are advocated by enactivists to show that our perceptual experience is way less detailed, precise, and infallible than we might think: “We don’t have the detailed world in consciousness all at once. Our contact with that world is just that much more tenuous” (Noë 2004: 51). Such contact, then, is established over time, through an embodied exploration. However, the latter point, that an embodied, kinaesthetic exploration not only correlates to our contact with (visual) objects, but it is also a condition for their constitution, needs some arguing.

This problem can be addressed by asking this question: what would happen if we stopped moving our eyes? This question, however, is not so easy to address by resorting to ordinary experiences, for it is almost impossible to impede (involuntary) eye movements. It is, however, possible to limit eye movements to the central region of the oculomotor space, by fixating a visual target.[96] When we do so the objects that occupy the peripherals parts of one’s visual field start losing detail and color as if vision was progressively decaying outside the point of fixation (Roth 2012: 20). This is, in fact, a fundamental finding of the Swiss physician Ignaz Paul Vital Troxler, known as Troxler’s fading; Figure 22 offers an illustration of this phenomenon. Troxler’s fading is usually

[95] The fact that images, not differently from perceptual objects, are not given all at once runs against the idea that perception is a cognitive process that occurs within the brain and through which the perceptual system constructs an internal representation of outside objects. For even such representations would require a diachronic constitution in which further details could progressively emerge.

[96] This experience is usually easier with a single eye open.

Figure 22. Troxler fading: by fixating the black cross, the apple progressively tends to lose its spatial determinations, until it eventually fades away.

taken to show that vision stops working when there is no active exploration (movements) of the eyes (Yarbus 1967: 17). In other words, if one neutralizes or restricts the movements of their eyes, the objects located in certain peripheral parts of their visual field tend to progressively lose their salience and determinations and disappear (partially or completely). Yet, as soon as the viewer restarts moving their eyes, the disappeared shapes reappear.

More generally, Troxler fading is a phenomenon that characterizes the phenomenology of the margin of our visual field, which is typically less defined than the parts closer to the point of fixation, which is indeed the point of maximum resolution. The visual field always has a focal point, an area that appears with maximum acuity; at the periphery of this area, objects appear softer, so to speak, with less defined borders, colors, and so on. In consequence, the fading described by the Troxler effect naturally occurs in our visual experiences – even though we are not aware of it (see Zhok 2012: 46–47). This, however, does not prevent one from undertaking a phenomenological analysis of the appearance of objects at the periphery, thus making the periphery the theme of their attention (Diaz 2020).

The further point that needs to be addressed concerns the awareness of the kinaesthetic processes involved in spatial perception. As mentioned, while such awareness is immediate when it comes to haptic perception, the same does not hold for visual perception. This is, after all, just a phenomenological fact about vision: we are scarcely aware of the kinaesthetic dimension of vision, and we rarely need to visually explore what we are facing to figure it out. Yet, there are circumstances in which also the embodied dimension of vision becomes prominent.

When we look at ambiguous figures and impossible objects, such as the Penrose triangle (Fig. 17), we are caught in a visual conundrum. We cannot make sense of the paradoxical spatial structure of the triangle, for our visual expectations are constantly disattended: the spatial locations of the beams are inconsistent with one another. In consequence, our eyes relentlessly sweep the figure in search of a synthesis that is always

delayed and never obtained; an active exploration of the pictorial scene continuously flows. But there are other cases in which eye movements can become perceptually salient, making us aware of their activity. This happens, for instance, when the point of fixation is at a close distance from the observer, thus creating a perceivable muscular tension. This is easily observable with a simple test that everyone can try out. If I keep my arm extended and look at my thumb, the point of fixation is relatively distant, and I do not have any significant sensation about the movements of my eyes. But if I start to progressively bring my thumb closer to my nose while staring at it, at a certain moment the movement of my eyes becomes perceivable, and a disagreeable sensation typically occurs.

In synthesis, pictorial content, and visual content more in general, is not given to consciousness all at once. Even if pictorial spaces seem to appear at a glance, they have a diachronic constitution, as is shown by some specific kind of pictorial spaces considered above. Moreover, the constitution of visual objects is not independent of kinaesthetic processes. Husserl devoted illuminating analyses on the function of kinaesthesis within the process of constitution of spatial entities in his lecture on *Thing and Space*. The implications of these analyses are yet to be determined in relation to the genesis of the pictorial.

§ 27. Annotation. Sartre's phenomenological psychology of physical images

Within his phenomenological psychology of imaginative acts, Sartre proposes some interesting analyses of the relationship between physical images and the embodied dimension of the experiencing subject. Indeed, bodily movements play a fundamental role in the constitution of what Sartre calls "schematic drawings", that is, pictures poor in detail such as silhouettes and stick figures. Sartre claims that, in virtue of the material minimalism, or poverty, of these images, bodily movements are actively employed to constitute the image. But is that right? Can movements and kinaesthetic sensations have such power? In this annotation, I would like to consider Sartre's proposal in more detail. First, I consider Sartre's critique of Husserl. Then, I expose how Sartre deals with physical images, such as landscape paintings and photographic portraits. Lastly, I analyze, and then criticize, his account of schematic drawings and other intermediate types of images, that is, those images that rely on an active, kinaesthetic integration on the part of the beholder.

Throughout his phenomenological writings, Sartre is adamant in showing that imagination is a form of consciousness that cannot be reduced to perception.[97] The distinction comes from the character of intentional acts: imaginative consciousness gives to intuition an object as absent, whereas in perception the object is given in presence, in the 'here and now'. In this perspective, physical images and mental images can be studied together, for they accomplish the same function: they make intuitive something that is absent. Sartre admittedly takes these two ideas from Husserl. Yet he also believes that the phenomenological distinction between perceiving and imagining cannot amount only to the character of the intentional act. For, if the apprehensional contents are of the same kind, we would end up in a dilemma: (a) we could apprehend such contents both in an imaginative or in a perceptual way, or (b) imaginative objects and perceptual objects would not, in fact, be intrinsically distinguished. Both options are equally undesirable for Sartre. As for the first option, we can easily observe that the apprehensional contents, or as Sartre also says, the matter, of a mental image does not support different intentional apprehensions: "everyone can verify that it is impossible to animate its *hylē* so as to make of it the matter of a perception" (2012: 139). While I can imagine an ice cream at wish, I cannot turn the contents of apprehension of such imagining into the contents of a perceptual consciousness. The second option is incompatible with the "brute intuition … that there are images and perceptions, and we know very well how to recognize the ones and the others", for "we spontaneously make a radical distinction between those psychic states" (82). A theory incapable of accounting for this immediate distinction would be inadequate.

Therefore, since the intentional form is not sufficient to justify why something comes to be perceived rather than imagined, Sartre is led to hypothesize that "it must also be that

[97] Sartre's view on imagination appears in *L'imagination* (1936/2012) and in *L'imaginaire* (1940/2004), which were written together – and conceived as a single volume – after an intense research period focused on the study of Husserl's ideas. At the end of the first book, mostly devoted to a critical assessment of image theories from Descartes to twentieth-century experimental psychology, Sartre discusses the crucial phenomenological notions that he retains and employs in his original theory of imagination. His main reference is the first volume of *Ideen*, where he finds "a method" and "a set of fruitful suggestions" for "an entirely new theory of images" (2012: 129). It may be worth reminding that he did not have access to the wealth of phenomenological analyses that Husserl devoted to the intuitive representations in his lectures and manuscripts. Their theoretical value, as I hope the first part of this work has shown, extends far beyond a set of suggestions, and it can hardly be inferred from the paragraphs of *Ideen I*.

the matters are dissimilar" (2012: 141). This is, according to Sartre, the theoretical option that Husserl left open, and that a psychological phenomenology of the imagination ought to explore. Sartre carries out this project with regard to all forms of imaging consciousness. A portrait, a caricature, an impersonation, a stick figure, a face in the stains of a wall or in an arabesque, a hypnagogic image, and a fantasy – the differences of these phenomena come from their representational matters. Sartre provides a general definition: "the image is an act that aims in its corporeality at an absent or nonexistent object, through a physical or psychic content that is given not as itself but in the capacity of 'analogical *representative'* of the object aimed at" (2004: 20). In his perspective, an imaging intention apprehends physical and/or psychic contents to form the image, and the nature of such contents will, of course, condition how the imaged object is analogized.

In the following part of this annotation, I consider first Sartre's account of ordinary physical images, such as paintings and photographs. Then, I move to those images – schematic drawings and images by chance – whose physical support gets thinner, so to speak, and whose constitution consequently demands a more active contribution on the part of the viewer. Both ordinary physical images and intermediate types – as I refer to the second class of images – have an external character. Unlike mental images, they appear amidst the objects in our environment, and yet the externality of their appearance is gained in very different ways.

Ordinary physical images. A central thesis of Sartre's phenomenology of physical images is that an external object can function as an image only if a certain intention comes to interpret it as such. For Sartre, this appears from the different apprehensions that correlate to our consciousness of ordinary pictures. A photographic portrait can be perceived as a physical thing, namely a marked sheet of paper with a determined spatial and temporal location. But as soon as this object is apprehended as the photograph of a man, perception leaves its place to image consciousness; a different intentional form comes to interpret the same sensory contents. Portraits, as well as caricatures and other kinds of depiction, are typically made to refer to particular individuals, so that one sees P in the photo, not a man in general. Sartre says that in this experience we can distinguish "three successive stages of apprehension" whereby an external object is made into an

image of someone who is not there,[98] and this seems to imply some input from the viewer: "If I see Pierre in the photo, *it is because I put him there*" (2004: 19).

This claim seems disputable. If, on the one hand, one may agree that seeing a rabbit in the bark of a tree involves some mental effort, on the other, it does not seem that it is up to the viewer whether to see what a photograph depicts. In fact, Sartre (2004: 50) may agree on this point. What he seems instead to imply is that, in both cases, if one sees something absent in a picture, a certain form of knowledge needs to be mobilized, and thanks to the mobilization of this knowledge an image can appear. In the case of a photograph, one needs first to be familiar with Pierre's appearance to see him depicted; likewise, to see a rabbit in the bark of a tree, one needs to know what rabbits look like. The point, as we will see, is to understand *the role of knowledge* with respect to the different types of images.

Progress in this direction comes from the notion of *spontaneity*. For Sartre, a certain degree of spontaneity – which does not amount to will – characterizes all kinds of images. However, this notion is easier to understand by comparing perception and mental image. Sartre (2004: 12, 14) holds that consciousness, besides being consciousness of something else, always includes a nonthetic consciousness of itself (see also Husserl 1991; Zahavi 2005). Consciousness is always directed to some object and, at the same time, feels its own activities, without objectifying this implicit awareness. On these premises, Sartre can claim that, while perceptual consciousness appears to itself as *passive*, imaging consciousness appears to itself "as a spontaneity that produces and conserves the object as imaged" (2004: 14). In perceiving an apple, one is affected by an object whose permanence is not dependent on the act that intends it and whose qualities cannot be modulated at will. By contrast, the intuitive permanence of an imagined dinosaur is felt as dependent on the act that aims at the dinosaur. Ultimately, this is the reason that grounds our pre-reflexive grasp of the heterogeneity between perceptual and imaginative experiences, and which makes justice to the fact that we never confuse them (Sartre 2012: 5, 82).

[98] It would be tempting to read this claim in light of the threefold distinction made by Husserl. But in fact, this distinction does not play any explicative role in Sartre's analyses of physical images. Moreover, here Sartre seems only interested in distinguishing between seeing a picture of some, but no particular, P of a certain type and seeing a picture of a particular P; note, however, that this distinction does not correspond to Husserl's second and third fold.

Crucially, the feeling of spontaneity comes with different intensities, and the members of the image family are qualified by such intensities. Mental imagery qualifies as the spontaneous activity *par excellence* because the matter of the mental image is dependent on the subject's activity. By contrast, the consciousness of ordinary physical images is accompanied by a more tenuous feeling of spontaneity, for the matter of this act is borrowed, in a substantial way, from the world of things. The material substrate of a picture constrains what can be imaged. And yet, the very fact that consciousness relates to an absence implies that the contingency of perception (i.e., the perception of the pictorial surface) is surmounted by a spontaneous activity that transforms the matter of perception into representative matter – or so Sartre (2004: 21, 26) maintains. More precisely, in the case of ordinary physical images, the character of spontaneity refers to the mobilization of the intellectual knowledge used to form the image. To see P in a photograph, knowledge of P needs to be mobilized to form the intention aiming at P; the deployment of such knowledge is a subjective activity, an intellectual spontaneity. Consciousness is aware "of *animating* the photo, of lending life to it in order to make an image of it" (25).

Let us now focus on the relationship between the pictorial surface and the intention that aims at an absent entity. Sartre (2004) claims that, since imaging consciousness is radically heterogeneous from perception, this relationship is one of mutual exclusion: "when one aims at Pierre as imaged through a painting, one ceases by that very fact to perceive the painting" (2004: 120; see also PICM: 48–49). The perception of the pictorial surface is annihilated by the formation of the image. On this score, Wollheim (1980: 143–144) suggests that Sartre's position is at variance with the twofold thesis, according to which seeing a picture requires that one's visual attention be simultaneously distributed between the pictorial medium and the depicted object. Yet Sartre argues that image consciousness entails a constant interplay between the depicted subject and the pictorial surface. Observing the pictorial surface, the consciousness that aims at the depicted subject is continuously enriched (Sartre 2004: 23). Physical images have a remarkable phenomenological property: they are characterized by an "hyletic ambivalence" (Sartre, 2012: 139). Contrary to imaginings and perceptions, their "matter can be perceived for itself" – for example, as a colored piece of paper – but also "function as matter for an image" (Sartre 2004: 18). It is worth noting that Sartre's notion of matter here seems to conflate pictorial surface and sensory content; for Husserl sensory contents cannot be perceived for themselves.

The ambivalence of the matter of physical images has important implications. The matter of a portrait does not solely consist of a tangle of lines and colors: it rather gives itself as a quasi-person, with a quasi-face, a quasi-smile, and so forth (Sartre 2004: 22, 50). The visual syntheses that are supported by its matter are originally *neutral*: quasi-objects that "can enter into a synthesis of imagination or of perception" (22). For Sartre, the very fact that we can be deceived, if for a split second, by an artwork – as trompe a l'œil might do – indicates that, at its roots, the pictorial is undifferentiated from the real. In virtue of a relation of resemblance (which he does not specify further) between the matter of the image and the object depicted, the portrait solicits the viewer to see P in person (see also PICM: 43–44). However, the invitation to perceive (*sollicitation de percevoir*) P is eventually absorbed by an imaging consciousness, being used as its matter. Sartre specifies that it is this "invitation that functions as an analogon and it is through it that my intention is directed at Pierre" (2004: 22).

One may fear that this dynamic between perceptual and imaging syntheses could systematically, or at least frequently, produce illusory experiences. After all, Sartre (2004: 23) unapologetically states that the matter of the image acts as a *trompe-l'œil*. So, what, if anything, prevents image consciousness from being illusory? Sartre does not help us much here, but one may still find some clues for an answer – especially if his argument is read through a Husserlian lens. The matter of image consciousness functions as an analogical representative and is "never a perfect *analogue* of the object to be represented" (50). Now, the analogical nexus is based on resemblance, and resemblance always implies a consciousness of the difference between the resembling terms (PICM: 22, 162–163). The analogical representative necessarily lacks a certain number of determinations of the depicted subject. For instance, a monochrome photographic portrait lacks the relief, mobility, and colors of the depicted person (Sartre 2004: 24). A certain knowledge about the depicted subject must be presupposed by image consciousness and contribute to its formation. Its function is marking the differences between the depicting and the depicted. This knowledge penetrates the matter of the image and "fill in the gaps" (50). It is, therefore, by virtue of the missing determinations that the analogon cannot be brought to a synthesis of full coincidence with the represented subject. Clearly enough, many notions developed by Husserl (PICM) in his lectures and manuscripts could be used for discussing, and perhaps developing, this area of Sartre's theory of images; most notably, the distinction between analogizing and non-analogizing moments, and the empirical conflict(s) between the different apprehensions.

With ordinary physical images, as noted, the visual syntheses that are triggered on perceptual grounds eventually flow into image consciousness. The quasi-face and the quasi-smile are not attributed to the real object before me (i.e., the painted canvas) but to the depicted person. When such elements are apprehended by image consciousness, they lose their character of individuality: "In passing from perception to image, the matter acquires a certain generality" (Sartre 2004: 50). The pictorial smile of P is not a smile with spatial and temporal determinations, but a smile that stands for and synthetizes many smiles of P. The imaged P is "a prototype that acts as a thematic unity of all the individual appearances of Pierre". Sartre seems to conceive the physical image as a structure that represents its subject with a definite set of properties (P seen in profile, with a hat, and so on) but that can also function as an intuitive nucleus that condenses all that we know about the depicted subject, and from which such knowledge can irradiate. Images can make us think a lot. Perhaps, with some further development, this could amount to the symbolic dimension of ordinary physical images in a Sartrian sense – a dimension where our consciousness of artworks could find its place.

Stick figures, silhouettes, and faces seen in the fire or in the lines of an arabesque differ from ordinary physical images. Their representative matter is drawn both from the physical and the subjective world: it results from "syntheses of external elements and psychic elements" (Sartre 2004: 20). The matter of a realistic portrait invites the perception of P, and only in the abstract we can think of its pictorial surface as a tangle of lines and colors. Put differently, the representative matter of a portrait resists a mere perceptual apprehension (50; see also PICM: 583). By contrast, the material substrate of a stick figure does not offer the same resistance and is easily perceived for what it is – a configuration of black marks. This fact seems to suggest that the imaging synthesis is not so much solicited by the sensible qualities of the physical support as it is by the subject's own activities. In the case of intermediate types of images, there is indeed a certain disproportion between the role of the matter borrowed from the physical world and the subjective contribution. The point, for Sartre, is to understand how the knowledge required to form the image penetrates its matter. And his general thesis is that knowledge, drawing on the subject's kinaesthetic system, *enacts* this kind of images.

Schematic drawings. The sensible qualities of the material substrate of a schematic drawing are very few. If we consider – as Sartre proposes – a silhouette, or a stick figure, then we find that nothing more than a configuration of black lines is available to perception. Contrary to the case of realistic depictions, the matter of a schematic picture

does not itself invite the viewer to perceive a person. The resemblance between the schema and what the schema represents is almost negligible. Indeed, their matter only preserves some structural relations; typically, stick figures reproduce the spatial disposition of the limbs, the roundness of the head, and very few other properties. But the traits themselves that make up a stick figure are barely representative: the schema needs to be interpreted. Only through such interpreting can the perceptual apprehension (this pattern of lines) leave room for an image apprehension (that schematic man). It is important to stress that schematic images do not work like signs. For one thing, not every configuration of lines can schematize a man. For another, the man is still intuited in those lines and not simply meant. Schematic drawings provide consciousness with that minimum amount of representative material that serves to initiate the *interpretive activity* that will form the image. This interpretive activity transfers, as it were, our knowledge around the schematized on the spatial structure of the schema.

Sartre's main claim is that the interpreting is dependent on our *sensorimotor (or kinaesthetic) resources*. More precisely, eye movements, guided by one's knowledge, unravel the configuration of lines to constitute the image. Put differently, a certain knowledge is embodied in movement and enacted on the material substrate of the schema. To show the necessity of movement for the formation of the image, Sartre analyses a particular visual configuration (Fig. 23).

This configuration may appear as a mere pattern of segments on a blank space, in which case one's intentional activity is limited to the sphere of perception. However, another reading of the same configuration – surely not immediate, nor very salient – is

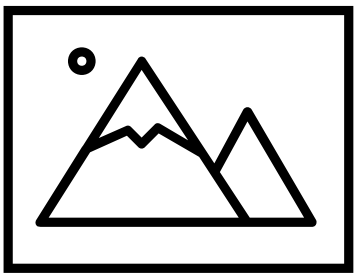

Figure 23. Line drawing (adapted from Sartre 1940)

available. Suppose that we are told that the figure represents a face in profile.[99] The scene should now undergo a radical change: the segment that rises obliquely is interpreted as the contour of the forehead, the small trait at its bottom is an eyebrow, the sloping segment is the ridge of the nose, and the curved line suggests the mouth and the chin. Crucially, Sartre argues that this phenomenological change depends on a bodily interpretation of the schema. The image can appear only if "my body adopts a certain attitude, plays a certain mime to animate this ensemble of lines" (2004: 31). Looking at a schematic drawing implies enacting its content, and this is done primarily through determined movements of the eyes. These are not mere or arbitrary movements, otherwise there would be no reason for a change in the phenomenology of the scene. The movements that interpret schematic images *carry and enact a specific meaning*. The beholder's knowledge of the represented object presides over the direction of the movement as it extends over the material pattern of the drawing. There is a sense in which we look at the schema of a profile just as we look at a face in profile.

This brings us to the constitution of the representative matter of intermediate images. As noted, the representative nexus that links the schema and the schematized is not grounded on resemblance. Nonetheless, there is a relationship of analogy between the two terms, and now we know that this analogy is based on the bodily movements performed while looking at the schema. A nose in profile, whether real or pictorial, cannot be looked at in *any* way: its spatial structure is only compatible with a certain range of eye movements (e.g., along an oblique line). Accordingly, the pattern of the schema must be such as to allow certain possibilities of visual exploration. In that case, knowledge can then stage itself in a "symbolic mime" (2004: 32). It takes the form of a *symbolic movement* that correlates to the pattern of the schema (34, 51). Sartre stresses that, although the pattern of segments functions as a track for the unfolding of such movement, it is primarily the latter that constitutes the representative matter for the imaging intention. Indeed, once the image appears, the black segments that make up the profile are no longer seen as such: eye movements are hypostatized, projected onto the material substrate of the drawing (32; see also Gombrich 2000: 242). Thus, the mere perception of the materiality of the black segments is eclipsed by this process – remember that, for Sartre, the appearance of an image accompanies the disappearance of a percept.

[99] That someone actually gives the viewer a clue is not relevant, since, for Sartre, our kinaesthetic spontaneity may at a certain point run into the appropriate reading of the figure (2004: 34).

In Sartre's argument, the schema of the profile illustrates the extent to which sensorimotor spontaneity can affect the phenomenology of the scene. Insofar as an imaging intention presides over eye movements, the black segments appear as the lineaments of the imaged face. At the same time, one's gaze embraces a certain amount of space to their right. This implies that such space has also acquired a figurative value: it is no longer perceived as a real piece of paper and appears instead as an element of the profile, thus inheriting a volume that sets it apart – if imprecisely – from the adjacent parts of the page. The visible lineaments mark a boundary for the eye movements that describe the profile. They form a contour that shapes the appearing figure but does not positively characterize the region immediately beyond, that functions instead as ground (see Rubin 1921). Moreover, symbolic movement fills the gap between the tip of the nose and the upper lip: as Sartre puts it, «we enact the absent line, we mimic it with our body" (2004: 31). Here sensorimotor spontaneity exhibits its creative character; not only does it interpret what is perceptually present, but it also analogizes an absent element giving it a quasi-visual character.

The representative matter of schematic drawing straddles the boundary between the physical and the psychological: it results from the coupling of a configuration of marks with the viewer's visual kinaesthesis. In perception and, to a lesser extent, in the case of realistic depictions, the matter apprehended by consciousness is given as already constituted, as pre-formed; its subsistence is independent of the act that apprehends it. When I look at a real person, the free spontaneity of my eye movements does not exhibit any relation to its appearing. By contrast, the representative matter of schematic drawings cannot do without the spontaneity of our visual kinaesthesis: the imaged face can only appear when the configuration is appropriately interpreted by the viewer's sensorimotor resources. Thus, the external character of a schematic drawing has a peculiar phenomenological status: it originates from the projection of an *intuitive but non-external* element (movement) onto an external object (a configuration of marks). Ultimately, this process grounds the difference between intermediate images and mental images, which do not enjoy an external character; but also between intermediate images and ordinary physical images, whose constitution does not rely on the sensorimotor resources of the viewer. As noted in the previous section, consciousness is always also non-thematically aware of itself and its activities. The consciousness of intermediate images appears to itself with an intense character of spontaneity since the representative matter is mostly supplied by a subjective activity. Not only does it involve an intellectual spontaneity (as

in the case of photographs and paintings), but also a sensorimotor spontaneity; namely, knowledge embodied in movement. Taking liberties with Kant, we can summarize Sartre's view on intermediate types as follows: movement without knowledge is blind, and knowledge without movement does not yield the intuition of an image.

Images by chance. Typically, when we look at a picture, we are implicitly aware that the material substrate on which the picture appears is an *artifact*, an object created by an artist (in the broadest sense of the term). This is not the case, however, when we catch sight of a familiar shape in the clouds, in the lines of an arabesque, or in any other physical object that does not seem to have been crafted for pictorial purposes. Such images appear instead as images made by chance. This phenomenon is also referred to as *visual pareidolia* and is described as the tendency to impose meaning on ambiguous stimuli.

Most of Sartre's observations on schematic drawings transfer to images by chance. However, there are some differences that are worth considering briefly. The intuitive base of a realistic portrait imposes itself as depictive, to the extent that, as noted, the representative matter resists a purely perceptual apprehension. The lines that constitute a schematic drawing are not equally persuasive, and yet they are felt as intrinsically representative – we sense that they are not so arranged by accident. But when we examine the material substrate of a chance image, nothing reveals a representational intent. This awareness affects our response to the image. Since the image does not appear as the product of the activity of an artist, we take on this role: in a sense, we feel responsible for its appearing.

We know from the previous section that this is done through the projection of symbolic movements onto the material substrate. The difference here is that the knowledge that is incorporated in movements to form the image appears as a "gratuitous hypothesis" and remains so throughout the imaging act (Sartre 2004: 36). Images by chance, like schematic drawings, have an external character by virtue of the projection of eye movement onto a physical object; however, unlike schematic drawings, *this projection is transient*. It persists only as long as we actively observe the image. The shape of the imaged object is not hypostasized on the material substrate. Typically, if we shift our gaze away from the surface and then look again at the same part of the wall, the image is no longer there. The imaging synthesis needs to be gained anew. This description manages to capture the phenomenology of the fleeting appearances sometimes hidden in rough surfaces, tapestries, scribbles, arabesques, and so on. Our visual hold on the imaged form is frail; the image necessitates continuous sensory input from eye movements and an

active interest on the part of the beholder. Since eye movements can easily be diverted, and our interest lost, these images typically take on a phantasmal presence.

To sum up, spontaneity is given a central role in Sartre's analysis of physical images. An intellectual spontaneity, consisting in the mobilization of conceptual resources, is required for the constitution of ordinary physical images. An intellectual and sensorimotor spontaneity – knowledge incorporated in movement – serves the constitution of intermediate types. In all these cases, the representative matter of image consciousness demands an active contribution on the part of the subject. The extent of such contribution grows as the material substrate of the image gets thinner, so to speak. For Sartre, "as knowledge takes on more importance, the intention gains in spontaneity" (2004: 51; translation modified).

This view, however, leaves us with many doubts. Why does symbolic movement have a constitutive role in some cases but not in others? After all, kinaesthetic sequences unfold both with intermediate images and ordinary physical images. Sartre may retort that only the matter of the former is thin enough to call for such subjective contribution. Yet the question remains as to where the boundary between a schematic drawing and other physical images might lie. There are indeed sketches that refer to complex architectural structures, and caricatures that depict individuals with just a few lines – these images cast doubts on Sartre's position. It may also be objected that, from a phenomenological point of view, the constitutive role Sartre accords to symbolic movement seems unwarranted.[100] Images as thin as pictograms (e.g., the figures representing the sports of the Olympic Games), silhouettes, or even emoticons, appear immediately, without requiring any visual search or mechanism of projection – just as realistic depictions do. Finally, the emphasis placed on intellectual and sensorimotor spontaneity risks making image consciousness a wholly subjective manifestation. For one may worry that any underdetermined visual pattern, interpreted by the subject's spontaneity, could yield image consciousness – but in fact, this is not the case.[101]

[100] The figure of the face in profile is instrumental to Sartre's purposes, for the appearance of the face does require a completion from the viewer; for instance, in terms of past experience (see Arnheim 1974). But does this completion have a visual character?

[101] It is important to stress that Sartre embarks on the project of analyzing the specific matters of our consciousness of images after borrowing the general notion of matter – although not leaving its meaning untouched – from *Ideen I*, where Husserl is still persuaded that sensory contents are non-intentional and function "as material for intentional informings or bestowals of meaning" (2012: 175). In this respect, Sartre's study of the matter of physical imaging aggravates Husserl's

Kinaesthesia is effectively involved in the apprehension of spatial phenomena. But their role may not be that of giving shape to that which is apprehended.

position. Looking at an image means "animating a certain matter to make a *representation* of an absent or nonexistent object" (Sartre 2004: 50). This process, as we know, takes on the contours of a subjective activity whereby the extent of the subject's contribution grows as the material substrate of the image gets thinner – up to the point where one's sensorimotor spontaneity supplements the representative matter of the image.

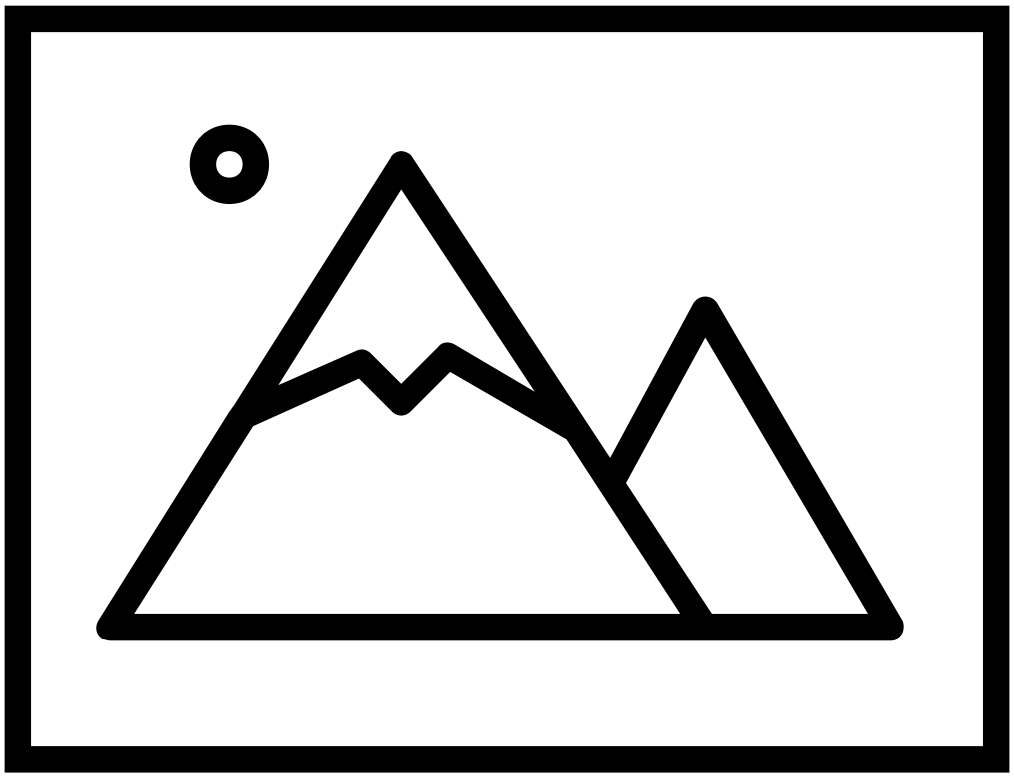

Figure 24. René Magritte, *Les promenades d'Euclide*

§ 28. The insular nature of the pictorial and its outer horizon

This chapter is devoted to analyzing the constitution of the pictorial space. However, a large part of the analysis here pursued will not be conducted on pictures, but on what lies immediately beyond the space they occupy, that is, the non-pictorial space, with the non-pictorial objects that appear therein. Thus, this latter dimension, which can be referred to as the *outer horizon* of the pictorial space, will be considered first. As a start, this may sound puzzling, but there are in fact good reasons to proceed in this way.

Pictures have an *insular nature*. They always appear in some place of our perceptual field. The appearance of a picture always includes the perception of what is immediately beyond the picture. Indeed, we can easily find a place where there are no pictures to be seen, but we are never in the condition of visualizing a pictorial space that encompasses the entirety of our visual field.[102] In other words, pictures have a circumscribed spatial structure; they do not extend indefinitely in space. Sometimes this insularity is marked, and even valorized, by a device – the frame – that encloses the figurative space and signals its boundaries. But even when pictures are devoid of an actual frame nothing changes: the end of the pictorial space is always marked by the phenomenological contrast with the adjacent, three-dimensional space as the result of different processes of constitution – this is one of the theses put forward in this chapter. Such contrast functions as the *implicit frame* of a picture and motivates both the separateness of the pictorial from the three-dimensional space, and it also explains the purpose of the frame as a device that highlights and embodies the boundary line between such spaces.

The phenomenological character of insularity is also signaled by our imaginative capacities. We are not able to visualize a picture that extends endlessly; at a certain point, the pictorial space halts and gives way to the real space, which, in turn, encompasses it and can proceed *ad infinitum*. Importantly, this imagining is always carried out from a certain perspective, that is, the vantage point from which the picture is seen. This implies

[102] Here I am referring to ordinary pictorial spaces. Another question is whether other pictorial technologies can encompass the entirety of the visual field and do so preserving their status of pictures (see Pinotti 2021: ch. iv).

that a certain distance from the pictorial medium is also presupposed in our consciousness of pictures. If this is right, then pictorial appearances essentially border with non-pictorial appearances and are included in the three-dimensional space, where the viewer is located. These considerations suggest that a phenomenological inquiry into the genesis of the pictorial should take into account the constitution of the ordinary three-dimensional space and the role played by the experiencing subject. Following the intentional strata of the constitution of spatial objects will clarify the emergence of something as pictorial. In this perspective, pictorial experience is distinguished from other sensible experiences for the peculiarity of its object and not for the peculiarity of the experience itself, which remains perceptual in nature. Generally speaking, to provide a comprehensive description of this perceptual state, it is crucial to elucidate its distinction from the state we experience when perceiving a real object (see Nanay 2011; Ferretti 2023). This difference, however, does not amount to the conflicts between apprehensions, as described in Husserl's theory of image consciousness in his static analyses; it does not correspond to the complete heterogeneity in intentional form and apprehensional matter posited by Sartre; nor to a *sui generis* form of seeing, as proposed by Wollheim. The thesis developed in this chapter is rather that the pictorial amounts to a specific way of appearing that can be described *iuxta propria principia*.

To explicate such phenomenological principia, I will follow the Husserlian analyses on the constitution of spatial objects; these analyses concern the correlation between the sensuous contents that form the visual field (understood as a bidimensional manifold) and the kinaesthetic level. A first form of deep space corresponds to the passage from a figure-ground relationship to a figure-*back*ground relationship – the latter organization implies an objective distance between what comes to the fore and what recedes in the background.[103] Husserl describes this passage through the analysis of the phenomenon of concealment. Then, I will account for the subsequent passages that progressively bring to the constitution of a complete object by considering the phenomena of perspectival expansion and contraction, rotation, and so on. In the last part, I will contrast these analyses with the specificity of the pictorial space.

Embracing this perspective means setting aside the common prejudice about picture perception encountered in the final part of the previous chapter (§ 26). This is the idea

[103] "Figure" here means primarily "object-like formation", and not picture. As long as we move in a field of forms that are not yet fully objective (spatialized), the distinction between the pictorial and the real is not yet constituted.

that pictures are static objects whose perception does not involve the embodied dimension of the experiencing subject. In contrast with this view, which is in part shared by the Husserlian analyses of image consciousness and the contemporary sensorimotor enactivism, *I argue that it is precisely this dimension that allows to distinguish the pictorial and the real*.[104]

Husserl devoted many pages to the problem of the representation of space. The most extensive treatment of this issue is found in a lecture course of 1907, entitled *Thing and Space* (TS henceforth). The general framework of these lectures is then synthetized, and slightly modified, in a text penned in 1916 and revised by Edith Stein in 1917.[105] The last passage of this text gives a track of the overall plan for a phenomenology of spatial entities and the phenomena that need to be taken into account for their constitution:

> All bodies have been, hitherto, 'surface beings,' at best 'spherical beings.' A homogeneous Riemannian space of two dimensions would be constituted here. These are constituted when groups of movements, i.e., groups of kinaesthetic data, are coordinated to new sorts of changes in images. The difficulty is to describe these changes. There come into consideration: phenomena of concealment, perspectival expansion and contraction, and, in general, all sorts of perspectival changes in size and form, in which approaching and receding, as well as rotation in various directions, are constituted.
>
> (Husserl 1997: 288)

In a similar fashion, the analyses conducted in the previous chapter on the terrain of passive synthesis were not concerned with constituted objects. Rather, we dealt with object-like formations located in our visual field; figures and grounds that result from different associative syntheses to constitute a layer of pre-given objectivities. These, as Husserl explains in the above passage, can be conceived as "surface beings". Here the air quotes are relevant. If we think about a surface, such as a tabletop, this is in fact an already constituted objectivity. It is the outer part of an object – a table – that is located in our surrounding space. What Husserl means by "surface being" is rather pre-given object

[104] This thesis will be pursued on phenomenological grounds, from a genetic perspective. The same thesis could also receive some support from empirical studies and, more precisely, by resorting to experiments in which the relevant kinaesthetic fields, that would underpin the differentiation between the real and the pictorial, are neutralized (Vishwanath & Hibbard: 2014).
[105] Both versions appear in TS. The quotes in this section refer to the text revised by Stein, except when explicitly pointed out.

formations that appear in our visual field. The visual field itself is not to be conceived as a surface in the objective space precisely for this reason. If the visual field was a surface, then it would be a part of an object. But the visual field, Husserl argues, is rather *the medium* through which spatial entities can appear. And the surfaces of spatial entities too are presented through the visual field. So, the direction of the analysis will proceed from surface beings to real surfaces and objects to explain the processes that motivates the constitution of the latter.

A. At the root of the objective space: visual field and kinaesthesis

§ 29. Visual contents and depth

The relationship between visual field and depth is of central importance for the study of the constitution of the objective space. On this matter, Husserl distances himself from Carl Stumpf. The reasons for his departure are worth considering briefly.

Both Stumpf and Husserl go against the Kantian approach to the problem of space. According to Kant,

> the pure form of sensible intuitions in general is to be encountered in the mind *a priori*, wherein all of the manifold of appearances is intuited in certain relations. This pure form of sensibility itself is also called pure intuition. So if I separate from the representation of a body that which the understanding thinks about it, such as substance, force, divisibility, etc., as well as that which belongs to sensation, such as impenetrability, hardness, color, etc., something from this empirical intuition is still left for me, namely extension and form. These belong to the pure intuition, which occurs *a priori*, even without an actual object of the senses or sensation, as a mere form of sensibility in the mind.
>
> (1998: 156)[106]

In his *Über den psychologischen Ursprung der Raumvorstellung* (1873), Stumpf critically discusses Kant's distinction between form and sensation (or matter) in the representation of space, and the general idea that sensations are raw contents that are organized by subjective pure forms of intuition (space and time). For Stumpf space is not a subjective form; space is not added to sensory contents, but it inherently belongs to visual contents. He famously argued that color and spatial extension are not independent of one another. We cannot represent, say, a red patch of color without representing this patch as spatially extended; likewise, we cannot represent something that enjoys a certain spatial extension without a color. On the same premises, Husserl argues that "[s]pace is a necessary form of things and is not a form of lived experience, specifically not of 'sensuous' lived experiences. 'Form of intuition' is a fundamentally false expression and implies, even in Kant, a fatally erroneous position" (TS: 37).

[106] See Franzini (2012) for a review on the theories of the representation of space in their connection with the artworld.

Extension, in Stump's perspective, is intrinsically contained in our visual (and tactile) sensations. But what is the phenomenological status of extension? As seen, a patch of color is constitutively non-independent of a certain extension, and vice versa. So, if we consider a patch of color red, this patch will extend along two directions: the above and below axis, and the left and right axis. These axes correspond to the geometry of the Cartesian plane. The Cartesian plane, however, is a geometrical idealization. The surfaces that we find in our surroundings are not ideal entities, and even planar surface – e.g., a tabletop or the floor of an apartment – present some minimal variations in height that goes beyond the above-below and left-right axes. Therefore, the surfaces that we find in our environment are, in fact, curved surfaces, and, in consequence, they extend along three dimensions. On this basis, one may argue that, if we perceive surfaces, and if surfaces extend in three dimensions, then we also perceive the dimension of depth. As Stumpf writes, "if a surface is given directly in the visual impression, so is the depth" (1873: 176, my translation).[107] In this perspective, any visual content would immediately involve the third dimension.

Stumpf's view clearly stands in contrast with the theory of vision proposed by Berkeley (1709). Although I will not discuss the arguments put forward by Berkeley in his essays, it may be useful to compare his general thesis with Stumpf's and Husserl's positions. According to Berkeley, distance is not immediately given to our visual sense – the visual field is bidimensional. The idea of distance is instead derived from the associations between different, heterogeneous ideas: kinaesthetic sensations (e.g., the convergence of the eyes at different distances from an object), visual sensations, and tactile sensations, which do unfold in three dimensions. Depth, in this perspective, is a product of past experience that rests on the association of visual and non-visual contents. Therefore, the experiencing subject does not have direct access to the dimension of depth.[108]

Interestingly, Husserl's position on this matter stands halfway between Stumpf's and Berkeley's. He argues that depth is not immediately perceived; it is not a sensible content. But neither is depth the product of a stable association between heterogeneous ideas, that

[107] "Wenn eine Fläche unmittelbar im Gesichtseindruck gegeben ist, so ist es auch die Tiefe".

[108] Berkeley also mentions other factors that stands for the dimension of depth; for instance, the fact that as we bring an object closer to our eyes, its image becomes more confused. Again, this visual confusion does not amount to a direct perception of the third dimension but rather suggests it.

is, visual non-three-dimensional contents and tactile contents that do relate to the third dimension. Indeed, the dimension of depth – and spatiality in general – is constituted within the visual domain. The problem, according to Husserl, comes from the ambiguity implicit in the notion of surface, and the confusion between the notion of visual field and surface.[109] The visual field can be conceived as a bidimensional manifold, but it is not a surface in the objective space (TS: 141). It is instead the condition of possibility for the constitution of surfaces and three-dimensional objects in general.[110] As Costa (1996: 184) points out, the visual field is not in space but is that in which spatial things are manifested, and in which the surfaces themselves appear.

The phenomenological analysis of spatial objects must follow a precise path: from the already constituted objectivities that appear in our everyday experiences to the intentional layers that make possible their constitution. This is precisely the regressive style of inquiry that informs the analyses that Husserl carries out in *Thing and Space*, and which characterize the project of a transcendental aesthetics. Within this project, the transcendent (spatial) object acts as the *fil rouge* for the phenomenological inquiry (see Costa 1998; 1999). Similarly, we can assume the pictorial object (and the pictorial space) as the *fil rouge* for the phenomenological inquiry pursued in this chapter.

Now, since visual contents are not immediately three-dimensional and the visual field does not correspond to the objective space, what makes possible the passage from the visual field to the three-dimensional objects and the objective space? And, relatedly, at what point of the constitution of the objective space can something emerge as pictorial? Since we already know that the appearance of a pictorial space always takes place against the background of the perception of the three-dimensional space, the analysis of the constitution of the latter must be prioritized.

§ 30. Visual field, kinaesthesis, movement

As we have already seen in Chapter 4, when considering Troxler fading, movement is a necessary condition for the subsistence of a percept. When bodily movements are neutralized, the percept tends to fade away. Moreover, visual contents alone are not

[109] Husserl's critical remarks on this position are contained in his copy of Stumpf's book (see Claesges 1997; Costa 1996).

[110] "It is only in space that we have planes, and where no space is constituted, there is no plane" (TS: 173).

sufficient to give us access to the objective (visual) space. Husserl maintains that kinaesthesia is necessary for its constitution: without the correlation between kinaesthetic systems and the visual sequences that unfold in our visual field, we would not have access to a three-dimensional spatial world. Its constitution, however, needs to be unpacked, for different kinaesthetic systems correlate to different phenomena that, only taken together, bring to the perception of spatial entities.

A three-dimensional object, such as an apple, is given to perception in a series of appearances in which its sides can be experienced. The notion of side is of particular interest, for it refers both to the experiencing subject and the experienced object. More precisely, "the side is something subjective, it is 'my perceptual appearance,' which belongs to me insofar as I occupy this or that position relative to the thing. And the side is also something Objective. It belongs to the thing, the thing appears in the side" (TS: 124). The manifestation of the sides of the object, and its overall spatial structure, can only be given through movement, "in the movement of the Object itself and in the movement of the 'Ego,' along with the change in orientation that is given thereby" (131). However, movement can be subjective or objective. If we consider only the visual contents that we experience, these do not tell us if the changing of the visual scene is due to self-movement (i.e., movement of the experiencing subject) or to the movement of that which appears in our visual scene (objective movement). The visual contents that present, say, a spheric object that progressively looks smaller are the same in two different situations: (i) when we move away from the spheric object and (ii) when the spheric object moves away from us. And this means that the visual contents themselves are not sufficient to discriminate the appearance of an object in rest and the appearance of the same object in motion (Fig. 25).

The phenomenological consideration of kinaesthetic sensation serves to discriminate between these two options, and therefore they have a constituting function for objective movement and rest: "the constitution of the Objective location and of Objective spatiality is essentially mediated by the movement of the Body or, in phenomenological terms, by the kinaesthetic sensations, whether these be constant or changing kinaesthetic sequences" (TS: 148). Kinaesthetic sensations have a peculiar phenomenological status in that they do not belong to any specific sense modality but relate instead to the experiencing body. This kind of sensations make the subject aware of the movement of her body because they always and solely refer to self-movement. However, these

sensations also bear the function of making us aware of the movements that do not pertain to our motility.

There are two basic scenarios to consider (TS: § 45). First scenario: all the range of movements of the body of the experiencing subject are inhibited (if fictionally). In other words, the subject does not walk, does not move the head, nor the eyes. If so, the subject receives no kinaesthetic sensations related to body movements. This first scenario is divided into two sub-scenarios. One may experience no movement at all: nothing changes in her visual field. "For the environing bodies, there exists (provided we still do not take into account the case of the *I am moved*) the basic condition of Objective rest, if, along with kinaesthetic standstill, no changes in orientation take place" (281). Or the visual contents may change, in which case movement can be experienced. This can happen in different ways: part of the contents of our visual field moves, while, at the same time, other presenting contents remain unchanged; but it can also be the case that all the contents appear in motion. If, for instance, my body is still, and I experience a change in

Figure 25. Did the observer approach the table or did the table come closer to the observer? The visual contents themselves remain neutral about these two options.

the presenting contents of the visual field, this change will be interpreted as objective movement.[111]

Second, we can suppose that the body is in motion, or as Husserl also writes, that there is kinaesthetic change.[112] In this case, different kinaesthetic systems can be activated: the oculomotor system, the cephalomotor system, and the system of the 'I walk'. Husserl prioritizes the analysis of the oculomotor field; eye movements are, in a sense, a good starting point, for they can occur when the other body parts are still (no movements of the head, the torso, and so on). In this sense, we can speak about an oculomotor field, that is, the total field that we obtain only considering eye movements. So, let us restrict our consideration to eye movements and suppose a situation in which we look at the scene before us and fixate, in turn, point A, at the center of our field of regard, and point B, on the left. As we move our eyes from point A to point B, the visual scene changes: the presentational contents in point A, now appear on the right part of our visual field, and those in point B, now occupy the center. In this situation, the changes in our visual field – the movement of the presentational contents from one position of our visual field to another – are attributed, thanks to the mediations of kinaesthetic sensations, to the movement of our eyes. However, this is not sufficient for the constitution of objective rest. It must also be the case that, if we decide to reverse the movement of our gaze, that is, if we move our eyes from point B back to point A, the visual scene we experience be the same visual scene that we experienced initially. Thus, objective rest can be

[111] Henri Poincaré, in an article titled *L'espace et la géométrie*, originally published 1894 in *Revue de Méthaphysique et de Morale*, starts from a very similar point: "Whether an object changes its state or only its position, this is always translated for us in the same manner, *by a modification in an aggregate of impression*. How then have we been enabled to distinguish them?". His conclusions are similar to Husserl's: "It follows that sight and touch could not have given us the idea of space without the help of the 'muscular sense.' Not only could this concept derive from a single sensation, or even from *a series of sensation*; but a *motionless* being could never acquire it, because, not being able to correct by his movements the effects of the change of position of external objects, he would have had no reason to distinguish them from changes of state" (1952: 58).

[112] Husserl uses the term "kinaesthesis" at least in three (related) ways. First, kinaesthesis amounts to the capacity of having sensations related to self-movement; for instance, the sensations related to the movements of my head, or the sensations related to the position of my eyes. The second meaning concerns instead self-movement itself, that is, the capacity to move and the sensations that are always correlated to this movement. As we will see, this second meaning concerns all the types of kinaesthetic systems, or possibilities of movement of the body. The third sense encompasses the first and the second: kinaesthesis as the relationship between subjective movements and the phenomenal sequences that one experiences along with their movements.

experienced "if, with a free traversal of all the kinaesthetic series, ever the same appurtenant changes in orientation occur in cyclical nexuses" (TS: 281).

It should be noted that this level of analysis is not concerned with the movement or rest of constituted objects. In a sense, we do not yet know what an object is and how its spatial form is constituted. We are instead concerned with the 'images',[113] or presenting contents, that appear in our visual field and that are associated to kinaesthetic systems. All the terms that, at this level of analysis, refers to objective properties, "such as line, point, location, shape, size, etc., are not to be understood in the spatial sense" (TS: 141). "The visual field, in virtue of its essential peculiarities, thus offers us, besides the pre-empirical matter, pre-empirical places, shapes, sizes, etc. Furthermore, their possible changes come into consideration as presentational means". That is, we consider them in their function of presenting, and not from the point of view of what is presented and apprehended. "Thus we can indeed speak, although, to be sure, only within a narrow sphere, of a mere movement of an 'image,' i.e., the movement of a visual concretum in the visual field. … But the moving image is not a moving empirical thing" (TS: 141). Even the relationship of identity that we find in the visual field is not the identity of the thing but only a pre-empirical identity. In other words, at this level of abstraction, we find the motivations between phenomena and intentional strata necessary for the constitution of empirical things. In order to avoid confusion between the ordinary notion of image as "picture" or "depiction" and the technical notion of image, extensively employed in these analyses, as "presenting content (immanent to the visual field)" or "pre-empirical visual objectivity", I will add an asterisk (*image**) to signal the latter meaning. These motivations are immanent to the field but serve for the constitution of transcendent things.

There are two observations to be made that concern the relationship between kinaesthesis and sensible contents. Kinaesthetic sensations are of a special kind and must be distinguished from presentational sensations. The latter serve to present the determinations and the properties of objects, whereas kinaesthetic sensations "make possible a presentation without being presentational themselves". A visual content such

[113] In his analysis on the constitution of space, Husserl uses the notion of image (*Bild*), usually in air quotes, to speak about pre-empirical – i.e., not already constituted – objectivities. It is interesting to observe that through the fundamental correlation (more on this in § 31) between such 'images' and the kinaesthetic systems that both ordinary three-dimensional objects and pictorial objects are constituted – or at least this is the view that I defend in this chapter (see n. 89 of this work).

as a sensation of red has the function of presenting a quality of the object we intend; on the other hand, the kinaesthetic sensations that we experience along with the movements of our body do not present anything objective.[114] Kinaesthesis "do not belong to the 'projection' of the thing. Nothing qualitative corresponds to them in the thing, nor do they adumbrate bodies or present them by way of projection. And yet without their cooperation there is no body there, no thing" (TS: 136).

Second, while color and extension, as we know, are non-independent moments, "[i]t is otherwise with regard to the kinaesthetic sensations. They lack an essential relation to the visual sensations; they are connected to them functionally but not essentially. The bond in the case of functional unity is a bond of what is separable; it is not the bond, or, rather, the intrinsic unity, of what is mutually founded" (TS: 143). This functional but non-essential connection is easy to observe. I am free to experience the same side of the mug before me from this or that perspective, from a greater or lesser distance, and through different kinaesthetic sequences (moving the eyes, turning the head, etc.). Visual contents are independent of the specific, empiric kinaesthetic sequences that correlate to them. The phenomenological link between kinaesthetic sequences and sensible contents is founded on a deeper level, namely temporality. Time is the formal synthesis that keeps together sensible contents and kinaesthesis.

§ 31. The lawful association between visual field and kinaesthetic systems

Three associative levels lead to the constitution of concrete objects.[115] Sensible materials are first of all kept together by the temporal form (on which I will enter into detail here). Sense-units acquire phenomenal relief through the passive syntheses previously described (fusions, contrasts, etc.). The emerged sense-units need then to be paired with kinaesthetic systems.

Let us focus on the last point – a point where the distance between Husserl and Kant becomes palpable. While in the Kantian perspective sensory contents are passively

[114] This is in fact an important distinction that would be worth relating to the current debate on sensorimotor enactivism. Indeed, sensorimotor enactivists are often criticized for giving too much power to sensorimotor contingencies, that is, giving them a presentational function (see, e.g., Block 2005; Prinz 2006; Aizawa 2007; 2010). The Husserlian perspective offers an option that recognizes a constitutive function to kinaesthesis but does not attribute them a presentational function.

[115] For an in-depth phenomenological analysis of these constitutive levels, see Summa (2014).

received and actively organized by the subject, Husserl shows that sensibility already has an intrinsic organization that is independent of any intellectual spontaneity, but also that there is a subjective spontaneity that is required for the constitution of spatiality. Only, this spontaneity that operates with the sensible contents is not of a categorial kind; it refers instead to the lived body of the subject and its possibilities of movement. So, if for Kant the layer of sensory contents owes its organization to a categorial spontaneity, for Husserl the sense-units are passively organized and then associated with the kinaesthetic spontaneity of the subject.

The body, then, plays a decisive role. It is the organon that organizes our perceptual activities. But how is kinaesthetic spontaneity to be understood? As noted, it is not an intellectual activity, yet it is not a pure passivity either. Kinaestheses are

> 'activities' in a certain sense, although not voluntary actions. In doing all this I do not (in general) carry out voluntary acts. I move my eyes, etc., involuntarily, without 'thinking about my eyes.' The kinaestheses involved have the character of an active, subjective process; hand in hand with them and motivated by them goes a sequence of visual or tactile changing 'images,' which 'belong' to them, while the object is still 'given' to me in an inactive duration or alteration. My relationship to the object is on the one hand receptive and on the other hand definitely productive.
>
> (Husserl 1973a: 84)

This ambiguity implicit in the phenomenological status of kinaesthesis is due to the fact that bodily movements are subjective and do constitute a form of activity, although such activity is not necessarily a voluntary activity (suffice to think about eye accommodation, which is out of voluntary control). It is rather a *corporeal spontaneity* that can be described phenomenologically.

As noted, kinaesthetic sensations do not have a presentational function; they are not related to transcendent objectivities. Kinaesthesis refers instead to our body and to our possibilities of movement. Now, while we do not have the power to modulate the visual contents that appear in our visual field (e.g., the colors and shapes that we experience), we do have the freedom to modulate kinaesthetic sequences, and thus to bring to manifestation certain aspects of the things in our environment. Moving our body – walking, turning the head, or simply moving the eyes – means activating certain kinaesthetic systems that correlate to certain phenomenal sequences. I can look at the tree

in front of me from the top down, but I can also look at it from left to right, or I can enact any other kinaesthetic sequence. The body is thus experienced as an *I can*, as a system of practical possibilities through which we can disclose the spatial structure of material things (Costa 1999: 246). Importantly, the correlation between spatial entities and the system of practical possibilities implies that presentational sensations that correlate to kinaesthetic sequences always accomplish their presentational function from a certain perspective, that correspond to the position occupied by the lived body.

As Husserl makes clear in the second volume of *Ideen*, aestheta (i.e., material things in their aesthetic structure) are necessarily paired with the aesthetic body, and this correlation is phenomenologically evident in our experiences. Moreover, the fundamental link between aestheta and aesthetic body is also exhibited by our representative capacities. Indeed, the spatiality that we can imaginatively bring to intuition is always organized from a point of orientation, and this point coincides with our body:

> each thing that appears has *eo ipso* an orienting relation to the Body, and this refers not only to what actually appears but to each thing that is supposed to be able to appear. If I am imagining a centaur I cannot help but imagine it as in a certain orientation and in a particular relation to my sense organs: it is "to the right" of me; it is "approaching" me or "moving away;" it is "revolving," turning toward or away from "me" – from me, i . e., from my Body, from my eye, which is directed at it.
>
> (Husserl 1989: 62)[116]

In other words, we are not able to imagine space if not from a certain orientation and as being given in correlation with certain kinaesthetic sequences. This means that the fact that spatiality is always organized from our lived body is not a contingent fact but an essential one.

It is worth insisting on this point: kinaesthetic systems do not have any causal power on what they bring to manifestation, nor are they able to generate presentational contents. The qualities of what we experience are independent of what we do; the free spontaneity of our kinaesthetic systems needs a field of independently organized content to operate.[117]

[116] The same order of considerations applies to haptic perception, which is the other sense modality that correlates to spatiality. Indeed, spatial entities are constituted through visual and haptic operations (Husserl 1989: 61–63).

[117] Within the Husserlian scholarship, Claesges seems to go in a different direction. He argues that kinaesthetic systems are the condition of possibility through which sensations are given to

Yet, at the same time, our experience of these qualities is only possible thanks to the nexus between kinaesthesis and presentational contents. Husserl captures this phenomenological situation by arguing that the flow of presenting contents "are accompanied by series of kinaesthetic sensations and are dependent on them *as motivated*" (1989: 61; my emphasis). This correlation eventually brings to a flow of appearances that present the object. Thus, the nexus between kinaesthesis and presenting contents is motivational, not causal. The flow of the visual contents that present the features of the thing is motivated by the free spontaneity of movement of the lived body. The motivational link between kinaesthetic series and phenomenal sequences presents an *if-then* structure: "*if* the eye turns in a certain way, *then* so does the 'image;' if it turns differently in some definite fashion, then so does the image alter differently, in correspondence. We constantly find here this two-fold articulation: kinesthetic sensations on the one side, the motivating; and the sensations of features on the other, the motivated" (63). When the subject produces a modification of the kinaesthetic situation, its perceptual field responds in a motivated way. Such response is independent as regards the sensible contents, but the way in which such sensible contents are given presents *regularities*, or as Husserl also puts it, "functional connections which relate the schematic modifications of the one aspect to those of the other aspects" (45). The constitution of a spatial entity arises out of the regulated cooperation of appearances and kinaesthetic sensations. The regularity at play will still need further elaboration, but one can already recognize that the very fact that we experience (and that we can describe phenomenologically) a regularity lays the foundations for the objectivity of our perceptions. If I move thus, certain phenomenal sequences will follow, and this experiential process is *repeatable*. Without this regulated cooperation our visual field would remain a bidimensional manifold, a world of images*.[118] But it is important to stress that these are not images in the sense of ordinary images such as paintings and photographs, but rather phenomenal sequences,

consciousness (1964: 74). And this seems to imply that something (if only sensations) could not appear without kinaesthesis. Yet, as we know from the previous chapter, there is a layer of passivity which is independent – and which can be studied independently – of kinaesthetic systems.

[118] It is worth reminding that talking of the visual field as a bidimensional manifold, or as a connection of 'images' only makes sense in the abstract (Welton 1982: 66). That is, only from the point of view of the methodological fiction in which we decompose the intentional layers that are necessary for the constitution of our object of study; in this case, spatialized entities (which also include pictures).

pre-empirical objectivities. Or – we may also speculate – the kind of visual entities experienced by the prisoners of Plato's cave (see § 1).

Let us consider more in detail the fundamental nexus between kinaesthesis (with particular attention to oculomotor changes) and the visual field, and let us assume that our body (including our eyes) is stationary and that which appears too.[119] In this situation, one experiences the same kinaesthetic sensation, K_0, and correlatively the same image*, i_0. As soon as we shift our gaze, say, to the left, a new situation arises. Now we experience K_1 and correlatively i_1. Every *i*-change is accompanied by a K-change, and vice versa. There is, as we know, a relationship of mutual dependence. However, the association between the Ks and the correlated images is not a fixed association. A determinate K is not necessarily accompanied by a determinate *i*, for, clearly enough, any K is in principle compatible with any *i*. Husserl argues that Ks and is are unified by association, and that this form of association is of an empirical – and therefore not essential – kind: "the more often an α and a β were given contemporaneously or successively in a consciousness, the stronger does the assumption that an a is given motivate the assumption that a β is given along with it" (TS: 150). Thus, this form of connection is aposteriori: the associative link between an α and a β is established through empirical occurrences. And it is also a weak form of connection. For, although this connection can effectively be established, and although within certain circumstances it can be experienced repeatedly (e.g., we keep moving our gaze from left to right experiencing over and over the same couple K-*i*), it is also bound to be "'destroyed' through the ever new connection of such a K with completely different images" (150). The visual field is filled in ever-changing ways.

However, Husserl invites us to observe that a necessary connection is still there. This connection holds between the system of locations of the visual field and the kinaesthetic sensations correlated to such locations. Let us see this point with an example. In Figure 26 we see in front of us, at the center of our visual field (here approximately represented as having an oval shape),[120] an apple and a pear separated by a short distance. Now, if we shift our gaze to the right, we will experience a corresponding change: the apple and the pear will now appear on the left margin of our visual field. This change of location,

[119] For simplicity, we can further suppose that the eyes occupy the zero-point. In the oculomotor system, the zero-point corresponds to the position of the eyes in which the under-above, right-left axes cross. To this special position corresponds, of course, a particular kinaesthetic sensation.

[120] Mach (1886) offers an illustration of the monocular (left) visual field (see also Noë 2004 for discussion).

however, is not arbitrary but necessary: independently of the specific images* that occupy our visual field, if we move our gaze to the right, the image* that was initially at the center, will then appear on the left part of the visual field. The same, of course, applies to other kinaesthetic sequences – e.g., if I move my eyes upwards, what is now located at the center of the field will move downwards. In other words, I know beforehand which eye movements are needed to re-orient the element in my field of regard.

Between the visual field, understood as the totality of locations, and the kinaesthetic systems in general, therefore, there is a necessary connection. As Husserl remarks, the totality of places is something absolutely invariable. It is always there notwithstanding the specific kinaesthetic circumstances: "To that extent, we have a fixed association, one that is never to be disturbed, yet it is not between one *K* and one place, but between the

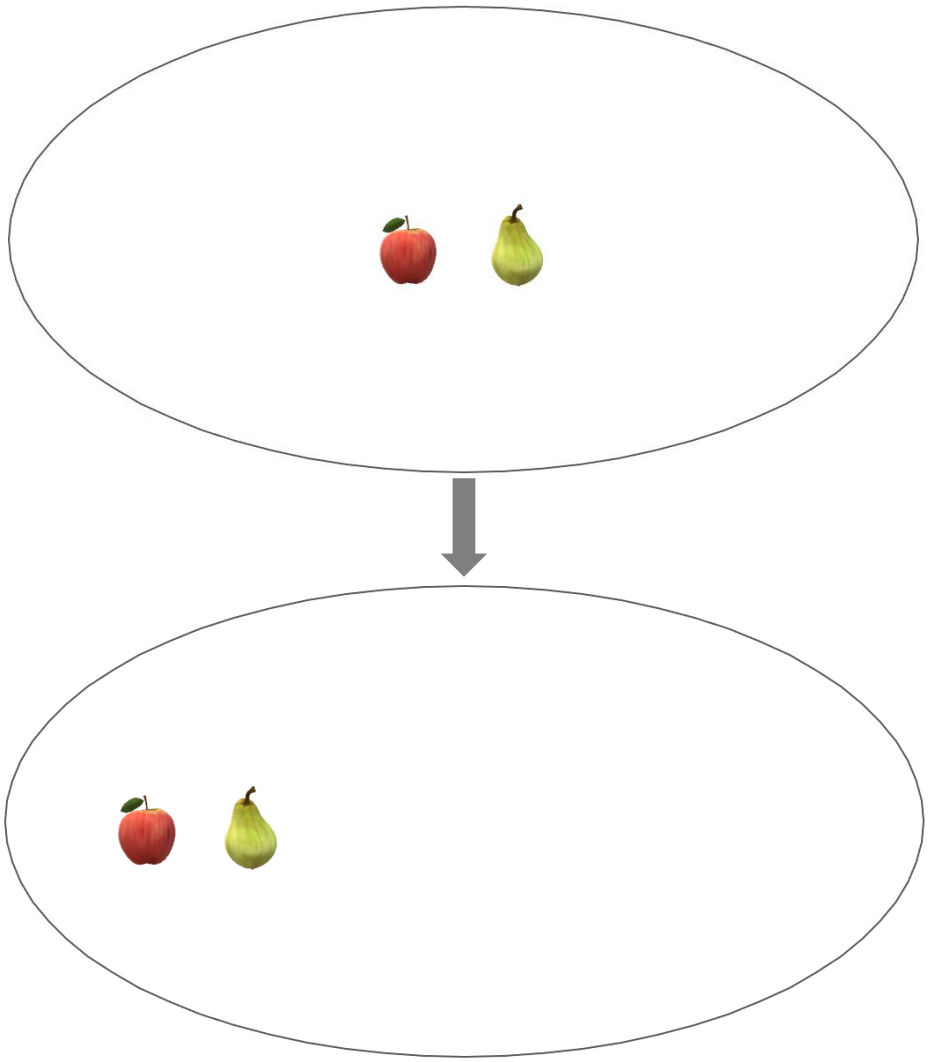

Figure 26. The partitioning of the images in the visual field correlated to two different kinaesthtic circumstances

entire extension of places and '*K* in general'" (TS: 151). In the abstract, then, the system of places of our visual field is independent of the specific images* that fill it, yet the different places can only emerge through the qualities of the images* that fill the extension of places.

Now, as noted above, the kinaesthetic systems do not have any generative power. The contents of our visual fields are not generated by kinaesthesis, nor shaped by them. They already have an autonomous organization that is passively gained and that does not pertain to the free spontaneity of the subject. One will not find any developed account of such autonomous organization in the Husserlian lectures on the constitution of space of 1907 – the analysis of this layer of passivity was yet to come to the fore of the Husserlian theory of constitution. Yet, as is often the case in the evolution of Husserl's phenomenological reflections, the lectures on the constitution of spatial entities and those on the analysis of passive synthesis are fully compatible, and complementary, on a theoretical level. Indeed, the analysis of the latter constitute the foundation for the analysis of the associative connections of the presentational contents of the visual field.[121] As we have seen in Chapter 4, these passive associations can be studied in terms of fusions (at close proximity or at a distance) and contrasts. What matters here is that the associations between visual contents present a different structure from the unification that takes place between kinaesthetic series. Kinaesthetic sensations do not refer to one another as the presentational contents do; we are free to enact any of the possible series of the manifold of eye movements, interrupt them, or reverse them. However, kinaesthetic sensations can be organized in series because the Ks are connected by the unidimensional formal unity of time. This is also the condition for their association with the phenomenal sequences of images* in our visual field. We have

> on the one hand the systems of images and on the other hand the kinaesthetic streams and systems of these streams. The temporal series on both sides are identical, and, in their filling, they correspond reciprocally and univocally. The associative connection joins together the corresponding phases through co-existence and joins the pairs, in their continuous sequence, through succession.

[121] In fact, this analysis is, in a sense, already invited by some descriptions that we find in *Thing and Space*. This seems particularly evident when Husserl analyzes the presenting contents of a square and observes that each of the visible points of its perimeter "'refers' to its continuous neighbors", so that "[w]e discover, founded in these moments, a thorough consciousness of unity" (TS: 152).

(TS: 154)

It is then clear that time, visual field, and kinaesthesis are strictly interwoven in the constitution of material things. The changes in our visual field are also experienced as temporal changes (Costa 1999: 248; 2018: 148). As is clear from Figure 26, concurrently with a change in the kinaesthetic situation, the two fruits pass from one place of the visual field to another, and if I reverse the K-change, the two fruits would consequently re-appear in the initial location. Without the fixed coordination between the kinaesthetic systems and the "total manifold of places which is merely fulfilled in a changing manner" (151), and therefore without the lawful coordination between kinaesthetic sensations and visual contents, we would remain confined, at best, to the experience of a sequence of (unrelated) images*. In other words, the relationship of identity between images* could not be constituted, nor, *a fortiori*, a transcendent three-dimensional object and space could emerge.

§ 32. The margins of the visual field and beyond

The illustration of the oculomotor field proposed in Figure 24 contains more than one simplification. The first is immediate to notice. As we move our gaze to the right, the images* that occupy the center of the visual field move in the opposite direction – now the two fruits are closer to the left margin of the field. However, the visual optimality of the field is not homogeneous across the different places; the illustration does not reflect this phenomenological fact, and indeed the fruits look exactly the same notwithstanding the change of place. The objects at the margins of the field appear way less defined. Those areas do not enjoy the visual optimality that characterizes the center of the field: "the image, in being moved out to the periphery of the field of places, becomes impoverished of inner distinctions or of inner possibilities of distinctions", so that "ever fewer separate parts can stand out prominently" (TS: 162; see Diaz 2021 for a phenomenological account of peripheral vision). The images at the margins appear as more indeterminate, but at the same time they are given with the character of a 'more precise determinability'. And it is important to note that such determinability hinges on the kinaesthetic system; our gaze can be directed towards those parts in order to make them more determined. Therefore,

the indeterminateness of certain parts of our visual field promises, in a sense, more than it explicitly presents.

The second simplification of the illustration is directly related to such a promise. The visual field is covered in all of its locations by diverse presenting contents – there is no blank space. A more appropriate illustration would then include images* spread all over the field. If we now consider a kinaesthetic series consisting of a movement of the eyes towards the right part of the field, we notice that the visual contents at the margins undergo significant changes. What was initially in the center of the field is now on the left (and therefore is still within the field), but what was originally in the left part of the field, close to the margin, has disappeared. Concurrently, the images* that were on the right margin of the field are now located approximately at the center, while the right margin is now occupied by new images*. Husserl names this phenomenon "amplification of the field of Objects" (TS: 177). It is clear, then, that kinaesthetic changes are not only correlated to single images, or to a 'single visual field', but to a broader field – in this case, the oculomotor field. In other words, every K-change "touches not merely an individual image of the visual field but the whole field" (180).[122]

It is also clear that there is then a dialectic between the appearance of new images and the disappearance of old images, and that these visual events do *unfold in a principled way*. For one thing, they only involve those elements that are located at the margins of the field. For another, they happen according to an ordered, cyclical sequence, which, as always, correlates to certain K-changes, and which preserves the relative distances between all the elements that show up in the field. As we will see, it is by virtue of these regularities that the objects located at, and beyond, the margins are not just experienced as appearing and disappearing, but are instead perceived all along: they are *there*, even though they are not explicitly perceived.

As Husserl proposes (TS: 177), we can pretend that our visual field presents us with a room full of people, or a forest with trees. The elements that make up the scene are not explicitly perceived all at once, within the same visual field, and nonetheless, they are

[122] The oculomotor field results from the continuous synthesis of the different visual fields (or, rather, of the different filling-ups) that relates (only) to oculomotor series. "While a perceptual phase continually passes over into another, we do not merely have various fields of Objects …. On the contrary, in the succession of perceptions one after the other, in their continuous transition, we have one field of Objects" (TS: 177). Therefore, what we experience at a given moment, related to a given K-circumstance, is not taken for itself but "counts as an extract from a broader environment of Objects".

perceptually available to the oculomotor field. How are we to describe the phenomenal sequences that occur in the oculomotor field? If we move, again, our gaze to the right, then, the images* – the different people, or the different trunks of the trees – that occupy different locations along the horizontal line of the field of objects will flow in this way:

$$O_0 (p, q, \underline{r}, s, t) \rightarrow O_{+1} (q, \underline{r}, s, t, u) \rightarrow O_{+2} (\underline{r}, s, t, u, v)$$

If we reverse the kinaesthetic series, moving the eyes from right to the center of the oculomotor field, the images will unfold in the opposite direction, until the initial configuration – O_0 (p, q, r, s, t) – is reached. And if we continue the movement to reach the left of the oculomotor field, we will experience this sequence:

$$O_0 (p, q, \underline{r}, s, t) \rightarrow O_{-1} (o, p, q, \underline{r}, s) \rightarrow O_{-2} (n, o, p, q, \underline{r})$$

As is clear from this schema, the images* in our visual field correlated to the specific visual kinaesthesis considered here flow in a precise direction. Husserl also speaks of the regularities of the flow of images* correlated to K-series in terms of "modes of oscillation" (1989: 45). Indeed, what we observe is that the images* enter in, and exit from, our visual field in an ordered manner. At the same time, the images* in the central part of our visual field never disappear completely: the image *r* travels through the oculomotor field and reaches, in turn, the left and right extremes, without ever disappearing completely. Moreover, "all the images together undergo a modification; they form a complex which undergoes a single modification" (TS: 180).

Husserl refers to this complex of objects as a spatial complex. This is because, already at this level of constitution, a first layer of spatiality can be described: "an Objective field transcendent to the visual field" (TS: 182). If we consider any two items of the scheme, say, *q* and *r*, we notice that they keep their relative distance no matter what kinaesthetic change takes place. Importantly, *all* the distances and relative positions (e.g., *r* is located between *q* and *s*, *s* between *r* and *t*, etc.) remain unchanged during the different kinaesthetic series that may be enacted. Therefore, "[n]ot only are the individual images connected, namely those that pass over into one another and are apprehended in the consciousness of unity as the same Object, but so are the successive fields of images» (185). The K-series that I can undertake motivate "a determinate and constant course of change in the fulfillment of the same identical field of locations through these or those

distributions of images" (185-186). In other words, going back to the original kinaesthetic situation, through opposite kinaesthetic series, I would get back to the same field saturated in the same way. It is to the extent that we are in command of our movements that we can spontaneously enact certain kinaesthetic series to motivate certain sequences of images*. This motivational link grounds the repeatability, and thus the predictability and stability of these experiences.

> In its motivated intertwining with the kinaesthetic circumstances, the total series of images points, no matter how these K's elapse, to determinately appurtenant changes which elapse as anticipated, and the series in general bears such a character that a manifold of other possibilities of change is implicated in the corresponding change of the kinaesthetic sequences.
>
> (186)

For Husserl, in virtue of this phenomenological association, the presenting contents of our visual field acquire an intentional character. This intention radiates from what appears in the field at a given time and kinaesthetic circumstances, so that, for instance, keeping our eyes stationary, and assuming that the objects in our visual field are also at rest, an anticipatory intention is directed towards a non-change of the presenting contents (and in case a single image* started to move, this phenomenal change would be interpreted as objective movement).

The intentionality of the contents in the visual field accounts for the fact that the images* beyond the margins, although not directly visible, do not disappear, and are instead co-perceived (their perception is mediated by what explicitly appears). In the passage from O_0 to O_{+1}, *p* exits the field, and yet is retained and co-posited through the now-appearing field. Its spatial location within the overall oculomotor field does not vary thanks to the motivational link between the kinaesthetic series and presenting images. We know how to bring again *p* to manifestation by enacting certain movements. The images* that transcend the visual field presently given maintain their spatial position within the oculomotor field; they constitute the external horizon of what is presently given. Husserl comes to this important conclusion: "The Being of the non-perceived parts of the Object refers to possible, and indeed motivated, ordered sequences of self-demonstrating perceptions (and thus of their presentations) which connect those non-perceived parts with the actually perceived ones" (TS: 188).

The phrasing of this passage is evocative. In particular, the word "Being" – which surely is not one of the most used by Husserl – and its relationships to "those non-perceived parts" immediately calls to mind Berkeley's controversial position on perception: to be is to be perceived. When something disappears from the field of regard, we can no longer testify its existence (although its existence can be grounded on the ubiquitous perception of God).[123] Now, the position outlined in the present chapter (together with the idea of a passive layer of experience) goes against such a view. Perceptual acts do constitute our access to the Being, and yet the Being always transcends our acts, in the sense that it cannot be reduced to them. The tree in the backyard that I see now does not cease to be after I turn my back, nor do I believe that it does – quite the contrary. This belief is motivated by the fact that all the images in our perceptual field are given with constant spatial relations notwithstanding our bodily movements, and also by the fact that it is precisely in virtue of the lawful correlation between kinaesthesis and visual field that we can bring back to manifestation what is not currently perceived.

These considerations point to the transcendental function of the lived body. The kinaesthetic systems (although we have limited our analysis to ocular kinaesthesis so far) have a transcendental function in that they are constitutive – in the sense of "having an essential function in the process of constitution" – of the sensible objectivities that transcend our perceptual acts. So far, these sensible objectivities amount to the presentational contents that appear in our visual field. I have referred to such presentational contents as images*. It is now time to see how the passage from these images* to the material thing is realized.

§ 33. Towards the constitution of depth

The constitution of the full spatial structure of a thing as simple as an apple is indeed a phenomenologically stratified process. The genesis of three-dimensionality requires going beyond the layer of constitution considered thus far, where the objects are still not things. As noted, the visual field, theoretically speaking, is a bidimensional manifold. And the extension that we obtain through eye movements – the oculomotor field – is yet

[123] In a popular limerick of Berkeleian taste, usually attributed to Ronald Knox, someone asks how can "the tree / continues to be when no one's about in the quad", and God readily replies: "Dear Sir, your astonishment's odd / I am always about in the quad. / And that's why the tree continues to be" (see Fleming 1985).

a bidimensional manifold. Importantly, this means that oculomotor kinaesthesis are not sufficient for the constitution of solid objects. However, the space we live in has also the dimension of depth. The question is then the following: how is the passage from the images* presented by a two-dimensional manifold to "a closed corporeality with a surface closed on all sides" (TS: 193) realized? In the previous paragraph, we have dealt with the passage from the visual field to the oculomotor field to understand how something that exceeds the margins of the visual field can nonetheless be presented by it. Now we have to deal with an "inner intensification" of that which is presented by the visual field. Although Husserl did not make use of this terminology in his lecture on *Thing and Space*, we can say that this project is concerned with the study of *the inner horizon of the visual field* and the images presented therein. More precisely, we will need to study how such images* (or bidimensional entities) are intentionally related to other appearances of identical intended objects.

To account for the perception of solid things, the analysis of the main kinaesthetic systems is necessary. In *Systematic Constitution of Space*, Husserl synthetizes them as follows: 1) the oculomotor system, which correlates to a delimited, planar space; 2) the system of head-movements around the basic axis, which correlates to a cylindrical field of vision; 3) the complete cephalomotor system, which correlates to the Riemannian space (i.e., the curved space). Other systems or possibilities of movements should also be added: the movements of the trunk and the system of the 'I walk' (which is crucial for the constitution of the illimited space). When we take into account these more complex kinaesthetic systems, new phenomena emerge: "concealment, perspectival expansion and contraction, and, in general, all sorts of perspectival changes in size and form, in which approaching and receding, as well as rotation in various directions, are constituted" (TS: 288).[124] As we will see, only through such new phenomena – concealment, expansion, rotation – three-dimensionality is constituted.

Before starting to analyze these phenomena, it is important to state where we stand with regard to the constitution of the pictorial space. The process of constitution of the spatial structure of a thing as simple as a picture of an apple is even more stratified than the constitution of an ordinary, three-dimensional apple. As we know, pictures have an

[124] Crucially, these phenomena exhibit an intrinsic necessity that does not depend on interpretation: "There are not, and cannot be, any other modifications, provided it is precisely a three-dimensional Objectivity that is to be constituted" (TS: 216). We can also say that – against a phenomenalism *à la* Berkeley – these phenomena are not signs of depth.

insular nature: they always appear in the context of three-dimensional things, and thus the constitution of spatial entities must (in part, at least) be presupposed. It is worthwhile to insist that the analyses conducted so far on the oculomotor field cannot account for the distinction between real and pictorial objects. The oculomotor field is a two-dimensional manifold, and in a two-dimensional manifold all that appears is located, as it were, at the same height: nothing is behind or before something else.[125] The only spatial relation available is the juxtaposition between qualities.

> In the constitution of the oculomotor image (or Object), what gives the image separate existence, what makes it stand out over and against other "Objects" in the field, is nothing else than qualitative discontinuity. The Object is the unity of the figure that is qualitatively distinguished in this or that way, and the figure is distinguished precisely by the fact that its coloration does not blend into that of the surroundings. … In the merely oculomotor field, insofar as it is a unitary and stationary field, we therefore possess no principle that could decisively anticipate the future constitution of the thing with regard to the nexus of images appertaining to one Object.
>
> (TS: 207)

If the only distinguishing factor of the presenting contents is a qualitative discontinuity, which consists in the distribution of colors, we immediately understand that, whether the part of the field we are looking at is filled up by a pictorial object or an ordinary object, this is clearly not enough to point to a phenomenological distinction. At this level of constitution, the pictorial and the real present the viewer with the same sort of qualitative discontinuities.

Later on, we will see that their difference is traced in terms of spatial discontinuity: the specificity of the correlation between K-series and phenomenal sequences marks the difference between the pictorial and the non-pictorial. The K-system, of course, is the same in both cases. The difference amounts instead to the different phenomenal responses occurring in picture perception. Allowing myself to anticipate some results, we can already point to the consequences of this thesis: the difference between seeing a picture of an apple and seeing an apple does not amount to a difference in the quality of the act. Recall that this is the very influential position defended, most famously, by Wollheim,

[125] Recall that this is one of the conditions for having a picture; more precisely, this condition concerns the content of the pictorial experience.

according to whom seeing-in is a *sui generis* kind of seeing, namely the kind of seeing that only pictures give rise to. By contrast, my claim is that the difference is to be found *a parte objecti*: pictures are special objects of perception. The pictorial is qualified by a specific style of appearing.

§ 34. The sensation of depth. The case of Stereo Sue

The specific question that needs to be addressed now is the following: how can the contents of a two-dimensional manifold – i.e., the visual field – gain a further spatial dimension? Under what conditions can something appear as standing in front of something else?

There is a first tempting answer that should be set aside. This is the idea that *binocular vision* alone could suffice to give us access to the dimension of depth.[126] It is worth spelling out that all the analyses of the present chapter did not take into consideration the phenomenological import of binocular vision. This theoretical limitation is harmless only to the extent that binocular vision does not itself allow, on a phenomenological level, for the constitution of objective depth. Let us see why.

Husserl's main idea on this matter is clear (his arguments a bit less so): binocular vision is not sufficient for the constitution of a three-dimensional, deep space. However, he also argues that binocular vision is responsible for the phenomenon of *relief*. When we fixate on an object in our visual field with both eyes open, this object is perceived as standing in relief with respect to other objects in its surroundings. In other words, there is a qualitative difference between monocular depth perception and binocular depth perception. This point can be illustrated by an interesting case of stereoblindness made famous by Oliver Sacks. This case is about the neuroscientist Susan Barry, who was dubbed "Stereo Sue" by Sacks in an article that appeared in *The New Yorker* in 2006. This article and, at greater length, a book by Barry (2009) focus on the experience of gaining binocular vision after a lifetime of monocular vision. Interestingly for our purposes, we can read Barry's personal descriptions and comparisons of both conditions.

As a child, Barry was stereoblind due to a condition of strabismus – esotropia – that made her eyes turn inward. When this occurs, the visual system suppresses part of the visual input coming from each eye to prevent the person from experiencing double vision.

[126] It is instead evident that binocular vision cannot be a necessary condition for the constitution of depth: the constitution of three-dimensionality is already available to monocular vision (TS: 309). However, binocular vision and monocular vision do not have the same phenomenal quality (see Sacks 2006; 2010; Barry 2009). In this paragraph, I sketch out some phenomenological differences between the two.

As a result, the person suffering from this condition tends to perceive the world with one eye at a time.[127] Under this condition, depth perception is achieved through monocular clues, and Barry was indeed able to lead a normal life. She was able to drive, play softball, and perform basically any action that people with stereoscopic vision can do. This is how Barry describes her 'monocular life':

> Stereoblind? Was I stereoblind? I looked around the class. The room didn't seem entirely flat to me. I knew that the student sitting in front of me was located between me and the blackboard because the student blocked my view of the blackboard. When I looked outside the classroom window, I knew which trees were located further away because they looked smaller than the closer ones. The footpath outside the window appeared to narrow as it extended out into the distance. Through cues like these, I could judge depth and distance. I knew the world was in 3D. Yet, my professor implied that there was another, different way to see space and depth. He called this way of seeing stereopsis. I couldn't imagine what he was talking about.
>
> (2009: 2)

In her account, Barry mentions the monocular depth clues that, in her non-naïve opinion, are responsible for her monocular perception of depth – occlusion, differences in size, and others that are not mentioned in this passage (see Palmers 1999 for a review on the psychology of depth). Following a visit to a developmental optometrist, who provided her with exercises to realign her eyes, Barry gradually gained stereo vision, and started to perceive depth with both eyes. This is how she describes one of her first experiences with stereo vision:

> I got into my car, sat down in the driver's seat, placed the key in the ignition, and glanced at the steering wheel. It was an ordinary steering wheel against an ordinary dashboard, but it took on a whole new dimension that day. The steering wheel was floating in its own space, with a palpable volume of empty space between the wheel and the dashboard. Curious and excited, I closed one eye and the position of the steering wheel looked "normal" again; that is, it lay flat just in front of the dashboard. I reopened the closed eye, and the steering wheel floated before me.
>
> (Barry 2009: 94)

[127] Husserl seems to describe a similar condition when he mentions the "phenomenon of competition" (TS: 145).

As the author says in her book, the passage from monocular vision to stereopsis did not occur overnight and required several sessions of training. Barry's novel stereoscopic vision was gained first with respect to objects in the proximities (as with the steering wheel), but eventually, she started to perceive depth at greater distances.

Barry's account dramatically illustrates the phenomenal richness that stereoscopic vision brings to the perception of depth. The passage from monocular vision to binocular vision implies the emergence of the phenomenon of relief. Every image* that results from the composition of double images* (of the two monocular, and slightly different, fields) bears "the quality of standing in relief of being differentiated in depth or of having depth-values" (TS: 145), or again, as having a "'remoteness'-determination" (194). These depth-values consist "of moments of sensation which, abstracting from the apprehension, are appended to the images and extend over the expanse of the image and thereby in a certain sense fill that expanse, concurrently and in parallel with the coloration" (145).[128] However, caution is needed here. It seems to be correct that the monocular field appears as flattened, and that its images* do not possesses relief. Nonetheless, even in binocular vision, we are still talking of images*, not of things. In other words, we are still considering a pre-empirical field.

Here a phenomenological distinction needs to be traced between the sensation of depth and the consciousness of depth. While in monocular vision we do have consciousness of depth, as the first quote from Barry's account perfectly illustrates, the sensation of depth is not attainable. Husserl understands the latter (without lingering too much on this point) as "the specifically presentational moment for properly seen depth" (TS: 146), which is correlated to "kinaesthetic depth: '*quasi*-disparity,' the relative elevation or deepening in the sensed relief, related in an indicational way to kinaesthetic depth and vice versa" (331). What matters here is that the sensation of depth does not amount to objective depth. We are still considering the visual field as a bidimensional, pre-empirical expanse, in which, to be sure, images* receive a first differentiation in terms of depth-values: "Here 'depth' can be meant only in the sense of the relief which, as it were, covers the appearing thing and shows 'by way of sensation' only *the appearing side* of the binocularly grasped thing" (146; my emphasis). Indeed, at this point, we do not have things but only single

[128] The depth-values available in the binocular field correlate, and are motivated by, oculomotor kinaesthesis. These concern the divergence and the convergence of the two eyes (see TS: Appendix iv).

sides which, although they are associated with sensations of relief, stand, as it were, juxtaposed on a planar space;[129] therefore, the front and back dimensions are yet to be gained. "A Euclidean space (although it can also be constituted monocularly without relief) arises only through new kinaesthetic systems, thus in addition to walking forward and back (and the like): through walking around the body, or through seeing it from all around by moving the head, or, correlatively, through a covering of the body" (313).

§ 35. The phenomenon of concealment, or how the visible refers to the invisible

The main objective of this paragraph is to address the following question: how can an image* in the visual field conceal another image*, thus introducing a front-and-back relationship?

The first form of objective depth is obtained through the phenomenon of concealment. As we will see, concealment has a fundamental importance in the phenomenological chain of the phenomena that lead to the constitution of closed material things; this is because every further phenomenon of this chain (i.e., expansion, rotation) entails to some degree relationships of concealment. This phenomenon cannot become prominent if our consideration is limited to oculomotor kinaesthesis in a stationary visual field. As seen, in these circumstances, eye movements correlate to an encompassing displacement (which takes place according to a fixed order) of all the presenting contents that fill up the field. Relationships of concealment can only present themselves in two circumstances. If we extend our consideration to the other kinaesthetic systems mentioned above, we notice that every movement of the head, the trunk, and, of course, the whole body correlates to some (if minimal) form of concealment. The game of hide-and-seek is an obvious example of a set of bodily actions that valorize relationships of concealment, and which involve multiple kinaesthetic systems. However, concealment is arguably easier to study if we presuppose another situation: that is, kinaesthetic stillness – except for eye movements – and objective movement of a single image* in the field. A solar eclipse is a natural phenomenon that describes this second type of situation. The sky corresponds to the visual field, the moon acts as the concealing image*, the sun as the concealed image*, and the point of view is the Earth.

[129] In fact, the same concept of side, of objective side belonging to a material thing, can only emerge through the phenomenon of turning (§ 38). Until then, the notion of side refers to a pre-empirical formation.

The displacement of a single image* in the visual field goes together with the modification of concealment: the image* that travels across the field, which continues to present the same object, necessarily covers, either partially or completely, another image*. Throughout the concealing movement of the former the latter does not vanish; although it is no longer directly visible, its presence is preserved, and felt, through the image that covers it. The relationship between the concealing image and the concealed image is such that we have "an Objectivation which holds fast to the image after it is no longer seen" (TS: 199). The very fact that there exists a phenomenological link between the visible and the invisible implies the spatial persistence of something that is not directly presented in our visual field. This is tantamount to saying that what does not appear can persist independently of its manifestativity.

To better understand the conditions of possibility of this objectivation, let us consider a simple example. We are sitting on a chair at the theatre looking at an actor that plays a monologue on the stage. The person sitting in the front row moves her head, say, from right to left, thus progressively covering our view, until the actor that we could see a moment ago is entirely eclipsed. What matters here is *how* the concealment takes place. The concealing image* (the head of the person in the front row) 'travels' across the visual field and reaches the left edge of the image* presenting the body of the actor; then, following the direction of this right-to-left movement, the head gradually starts to conceal the body of the actor, phase after phase. At each phase of this process, the non-covered portion of the body, it must be noted, continues to present the same entity (i.e., the actor). And even when the body is completely eclipsed, hence no longer visible, it is still present in the perceptual scene, *behind* what is directly seen: it is given as *potentially perceivable*. This possibility is based on two interrelated conditions. The first is the phenomenological *lawfulness* of the phenomenon. Each part of the occluded image, which occupies a specific place in the systems of locations of the oculomotor field, disappears in a precise order. In our example, the right edge of the body of the actor is the first part to disappear; then the part immediately on its left is concealed, and so forth, according to the same direction of occlusion. The second condition is the *reversibility* of the concealment. If the occluding movement of the head were reversed, the phases dictating the re-appearance of the actor would unfold in a pre-determined order. More precisely, the re-appearing parts of the body would elapse from left to right; the movement of the head of the person sitting in the front row to the right side of our oculomotor field would progressively bring back to manifestation – in reverse order – the body of the actor.

> When the movement is reversed, however, the Object is continuously built back up. This constant demolition and rebuilding due to such a concealing Object is a system of modifications which is strictly motivated by the kinaesthetic circumstances. A certain stage of this concealment pertains to every kinaesthetic situation, and a similar one pertains to a similar situation.
>
> (TS: 208).

Husserl carefully points out that there is a phenomenological discontinuity between the series of images that appertain to what is being concealed and the series of images of what conceals. The concealing image necessarily borders with the concealed image, but throughout the phases of this process we do not witness a fusion (at close distance) between the concealing image* and the bordering concealed image*. If that were the case, we could not speak of depth: the visual field would remain a bidimensional manifold, and the only possible spatial relationship would be that of coexistence in different places.

But this is not what happens. The two series of images do not enter into a synthesis of coincidence and continue instead to present two different objects: "The beam of rays of alert intentions which penetrates the concealing image and the beam which penetrates the concealed image are not identical; on the contrary, they are separate beams" (TS: 208). To start with, the rays of the former beam are, so to say, full intentions, that is, concretely presentational intentions. On the other hand, the intentions that radiates from the concealed image during the process of concealment undergo a transformation and become empty intentions – their proper presentational content is lost, being replaced by the presentational contents of the overcoming (concealing) image*. Importantly, their perceptual presence is alive within "the total motivational unity", for the kinaesthetic circumstances are such that, "by means of a reversal of the kinaesthetic sequences, the Object is constituted again in a complete presentation and is constantly built up visually" (209). The kinaesthetic component plays a fundamental role here because it grants perceptual access to what is not directly visible: throughout the process of concealment, the same kinaesthetic circumstance is associated with (i) the image* that appears in a location A of our visual field and (ii) to the image* that appeared just a moment ago in the same location and that is now given as perceivable, upon the enactment of an appropriate kinesthetic series (e.g., moving the head), in A. These two locations, A and A, would coincide in a bidimensional system of coordinates (the oculomotor field).

However, A and A are differentiated as soon as we take into account the other kinaesthetic systems. If we do so, then A becomes a location that lies beyond A. In our example A is occupied by a certain image* (the head), which conceals the image* in A (the actor). Thus, the concealed image* can preserve its identity notwithstanding the modification that occurs in location A. The *interplay between the visible and the invisible* is a constitutive element of the spatial structure of physical things. Such interplay is made possible by the activation of the appropriate motivational nexuses.

In the oculomotor field, which is a bidimensional manifold, two presenting contents can only be differentiated if they occupy different locations of the field. Therefore, in a sense, the dynamic relationship between the concealed image and the concealing image *breaks* the fixed, bidimensional form of the visual field by introducing the dimension of depth (see Giorello & Sinigaglia 2007): something, which is either partially visible or entirely invisible, is behind something else. The coexistence of two objects in the same space is no longer bound to a difference of places on the same bidimensional field and can also occur in a further dimension. If that is the case, then we have a fixed correspondence between the concealing image* and the concealed image*. Each point of the concealed object corresponds to a point of the concealing object: the same location of the field that presented the actor a moment ago now presents the head of the person in the front row (see TS: 209). It is important to highlight that we have two coexisting beams of intentions of which only one is fully presentational; the old image* retains its perceptual character but is given as 'behind' the new image*. Space, as Husserl argues, can be intuited only once. Only one object at a time can appear in the same spatial location.

Before we go any further, it is worth delimiting the import of the phenomenon of concealment. As we have already seen, the oculomotor field can be described as having a right-and-left and above-and-below axis.[130] Concealment adds to this structure the front-and-back axis, thus constituting a first objectivation of depth. However, this is not sufficient for the constitution of the three-dimensionality of material things. Not only do material things imply the relation of concealment, but they are also apprehended as having

[130] "Thus we can introduce coordinates, and indeed a system of coordinates is predelineated as an original one, namely the system which coincides, for the normal ways of holding the head, with the right-left and above-below orientations but which naturally is distinctive for every way of holding the head, precisely as pertaining to the visual or oculomotor field itself. We then speak of the orientation in breadth or in height. All the remaining lines of direction are, as it were, mixtures of these two (or indeed better: every positional value is a mixture of a right-left value and a height value)" (TS: 196).

a closed corporeal structure. As we will see later in this chapter (§ 41), the phenomenon of concealment, and its relationship to kinaesthesis, plays a crucial function in the constitution of the pictorial space. Yet pictures appear in the context of fully-fledged three-dimensional things, and this means that the analysis cannot be halted at this point.

§ 36. Expansions and contractions, approaching and receding

The phenomenon of expansion, and its contrary, contraction,[131] have a fundamental role as regards the constitution of space. However, Husserl's account of expansion (as well as the description of the phenomenon itself) tends to oscillate between his lectures. His first treatment (TS: § 64–§ 68) seems to overemphasize its constitutive importance.[132] In this and the following paragraph, I offer a considered view of this phenomenon, attempting to outline the new modifications that emerge through it.

It must first be noted that expansions can occur in different kinaesthetic circumstances. For instance, if we assume a situation of kinaesthetic stillness, where an image traverses our visual field from one side to the other, then expansion can be experienced. Our oculomotor field is filled with a road, horizontal with respect to the point of view. A bicycle enters the field from the left and moves along the road. As soon as the bike reaches the center of the field, its image* necessarily undergoes an expansion: it gets larger as it approaches the center field, and progressively smaller as the bike advances along the road. The image* of the bike does not keep its phenomenological dimension throughout its displacement in the visual field. (It should be stressed, once again, that the image becomes bigger, not the bicycle.)

The phenomenon of expansion can also be experienced – and with more interesting consequences – if we assume that the objects in our field are stationary. In this case,

[131] Husserl often uses the term "expansion" in a neutral way; namely, to mean both a positive expansion and a negative expansion (i.e., what is normally called "contraction").

[132] He writes: "With mere displacement and rotation (concealment is not, in principle, anything new), we would always have a mere oculomotor Objectivity, simply somewhat amplified, i.e., … this Object would still always be a kinaesthetic image and not yet a thing. It is only the multiform system of expansions that makes possible a new dimension which creates a thing out of the image and space out of the oculomotor field" (TS: 200). However, this seems disputable for two reasons. On the one hand, as we have seen, concealment does already make room for a distinction between presenting contents (or images*) and presented objects introducing a further dimension that is not confined to oculomotor images*. On the other hand, the modification of expansion alone is not sufficient to justify, phenomenologically, the constitution of closed three-dimensional things.

expansions are motivated by the activation of different kinaesthetic systems; these include the system of the I walk, the movements of the torso, and, more simply, the movements of the head (cephalomotor system). The relative kinaesthetic series, which imply approaching or receding from a field of objects, motivate *lawful modifications* of the images* flowing within the oculomotor field: "a certain modification of the contraction of the image elapses while the figure is preserved, if I, as it were, 'directly' recede from the Object" (TS: 194). More precisely, approaching a stationary field of objects goes hand in hand with their expansion, and receding goes hand in hand with their contraction (195). Importantly, while the kinaesthesis that relate to approaching and receding motivate a constant modification of the phenomenal dimensions of the image*, the shape is perceived as the same throughout these movements (even though, as we will see presently, this does not imply that also the image remains exactly the same).

Now, the fact that the shape of the object is perceived as the same independently from the viewer's movements yields two important consequences. First, the lawful modification of expansion (or contraction) of the image* does not concern the thing itself, it concerns instead the relationships between the thing and the 'Ego-center'. The way in which the image* appears in the visual field can vary without this entailing a modification of that which is presented by the image* (i.e., the intended object). Therefore, the phenomenon of expansion is about the appearance of the thing (and its relation to the ego-center), and not about the thing itself. Throughout all the modifications of expansion, the same side of the same object constantly appears (Costa 1999: 267).[133] The sameness of the object pertains to the phenomenological layer of passive synthesis previously analyzed; we see the same shape steadily undergoing modifications of expansions or contraction, and these modifications could be studied as fusions at-close-proximity in succession.

Second, the lawful correlation between the series of expansions and kinaesthetic circumstances introduces "a component essential to the constitution of the world, namely the integration of the Ego, through the Ego-point, into space and the relation of all spatial appearances to this Ego-point. Only when expansion is added do we have the full presentational material capable of presenting space" (TS: 201). The phenomenon of expansion provides a phenomenological measure of the distance between the viewer and

[133] "What is held fast not merely throughout all the oculomotor displacements, rotations, and concealments, but also throughout all the expansions, and which is, as it were, intuited in them, is the thing" (TS: 200).

the presenting images* in the visual field. This distance is phenomenologically different from the observable distances between the objects simultaneously presented in different locations of the visual field. This is due to the fact that the Ego-point does not itself fall in some location of the field, hence is not visually presented. However, approaching and receding do have a phenomenological prominence in that they are constantly associated with the expansions and contractions of the images* in the oculomotor field: "Every expansion has a relationship to the Ego-point; it presents a change in the remoteness from that Ego-point. The stronger is the positive or negative expansion, the greater is the approaching or the receding" (204; see also the remarks on p. 197). The Ego-point thus assumes a variable position that is motivated by the relationship between kinaesthetic series and expansions.

§ 37. Deeper into the phenomenology of expansion: non-uniformity, increments and decrements of visibility, occlusions

In the context of the present work, the phenomenon of expansion requires some further integrations and revisions (which one does not necessarily find in the Husserlian lectures). These clarifications concern especially the relationship between expansion and concealment and the specific constant modifications that the images* undergo during approaching or receding movements.

Let us start from *the non-uniformity of the phenomenon of expansion*. The first thing to note is that "expansion generally distributes itself in different ways to the different pieces of the field" (TS: 210). Indeed, not all the images* that appear in the field are bound to expand at the same time and velocity and exhibit the same type of expansion. It may be the case that, for instance, one image* (that presents an object coming closer to the viewer) undergoes an expansion, while the remaining images* in the field do not undergo any modification of this kind. Depending on the kinaesthetic circumstances, and on the absence or presence of objective movement, many forms of expansions may be experienced.

What if we restrict our consideration to singles images*? Do they undergo uniform expansions? At first, Husserl argues that "[t]he modification of mere receding is characterized by the preservation of the oculomotor figure as *completely the same* while its size is constantly altered. … This modification is such that along with the whole image every distinct piece of it undergoes the same modification" (TS: 195; my emphasis).

However, as he partially recognizes shortly after, this cannot be right, for the expansions that the images* undergo, as the viewer approaches or recedes, are not uniform. A uniform expansion can be described as a transformation that homogeneously expands (or contracts) *all the parts* of a figure – in mathematical terms, this corresponds to a homothety (Fig. 27). Now, the modification of the images in our visual field correlated to our approaching does not amount to a homothety, for they do not undergo a homogeneous expansion according to all their parts; put differently, when we approach a given object, its image does undergo an expansion, and yet not a homogeneous expansion. However, the fact that the expansion is nonhomogeneous is not particularly evident in every circumstance. For instance, when we look at a relatively small object, such as a mug, and consider smaller kinaesthetic sequences (e.g., those related to the cephalomotor system), the expansions of the image may be judged as homogeneous. To realize that, in fact, they are not, we need to consider more prominent modifications. A good example may be approaching, by walking, a column (especially a fluted column). In doing so, the image that presents the column undergoes interesting changes (that also involve the bordering images in the visual field) which can be phenomenologically described and that qualify as non-uniform expansions. Let us enucleate these modifications.[134]

As we approach a given object in a situation of objective stillness the images* at the margins of our visual field exit from the field in an ordered manner; and if we recede, new images* enter the field from the margins (§ 32). Therefore, the image-field surely

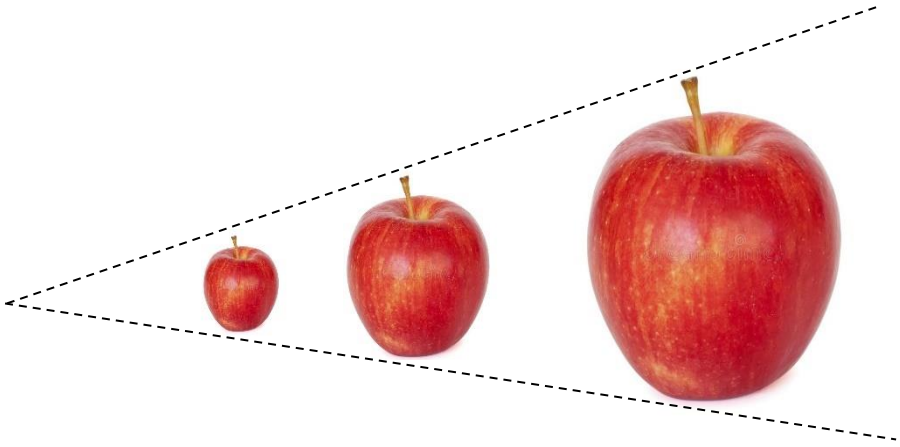

Figure 27. An example of homothety: expansion of all the parts of a given object

[134] As regards these phenomena, Gibson (1979: Part II, ch. 5) proposes interesting analyses that, although coming from a different theoretical perspective, could be beneficially integrated with Husserl's.

does not expand uniformly. On the other hand, the object towards which we move does undergo a constant expansion, but depending on its structure, the series of images that unfold do not necessarily present the same parts. In the case of a fluted column, we observe that, while the images that present the central part of its structure (namely, the part closer to the viewer) constantly expand, the same does not happen at its margins: the flutings closer to the borders slowly disappear. This is a kind of *self-occlusion*, whereby some parts of the objects occlude other parts; more specifically, this self-occlusion takes place in the outermost parts of the object.[135] As in the case of the phenomenon of concealment, this type of occlusion occurs according to a fixed order that is constantly motivated by kinaesthetic series; if the latter are reversed, the appurtenant parts of the object are brought back into view. But this is not the only relevant modification that may occur. Relatedly, precisely at the margins of the column, another kind of concealment takes place as we approach the object. Indeed, the expansion of the central part of the image* of the column implies a progressive (although not unlimited) concealment of the images at the borders of the column – this is a kind of *external occlusion* that occurs between bordering images. These examples show the constant interplay between expansions and occlusions.

> Thus of itself the necessity arises for the non-uniformity of the expansion to go hand in hand in certain cases with a concealment or with the removal of a concealment. If a piece of the field contracts in some way while its surroundings do not do so, or not as quickly, then something steps forth out of the background that was not visible; and, conversely, in the opposite case a piece of the field is concealed.
>
> (TS: 199).

There is a further case that is relevant for our purposes. This concerns the modification of the images* of undulated surfaces, such as a curtain, or a leaf; more generally, we can ascribe things whose spatial structures present noticeable concavities to this category. The

[135] It is important to note that, however, this description is specific of a certain kind of objects, which roughly corresponds to the kind of objects that have a convex spatial structure. If we were to describe, for instance, a box placed at such a height that only one of its faces is visible, we should then observe that, approaching this object perpendicularly, no self-occlusion occlusions occur, etc. Such a description would, in turn, account for the phenomenal sequences that relate to a cubic object (seen from a particular perspective). In consequence, it makes sense to speak about *typical forms of modifications* (cf. TS: 210), some of which are used as examples in this section.

phenomenological modifications of these objects, associated with our approaching movements, can surely present expansions and external occlusions (of the bordering objects). But what is specific to their phenomenology is that they also present *internal occlusions*, namely occlusions that concern internal regions or points of the same object. As Husserl writes, if we consider "a pair of points, of which one pertains to a crest of the wave and the other to a trough", we can observe that, as we approach this concave surface, "the two identical points, taken individually in virtue of the continuous transitions, and always preserving their identical distance, suddenly coincide. All at once we no longer have any distance in the image" (211).[136]

In view of the foregoing, it is evident that the phenomenal modifications associated with the kinaesthesis of approaching and receding usually include a whole spectrum of phenomena – the exiting or entering of images in the visual field, displacements, different forms of concealments, expansions, and contractions – even though under some circumstances, and especially when we consider minor kinaesthetic sequences, such modifications may be scarcely perceivable. Considering these different modifications by themselves is in fact a mere abstraction; one that is useful for analytical purposes, but that does not reflect the phenomenology of our everyday experiences, in which "the variations always elapse into one another with the most diverse relations" (TS: 199).

Before concluding this section and moving on to the consideration of the modifications motivated by turning, I would like to make two complementary remarks. First, the modifications discussed in this section and also in the previous one bring our attention to what happens at *the edges of the presenting images**. Both concealment and expansion entail modifications of what is visible, either in terms of loss (occluded image*) or in terms of increase (occluding image*) of the presentational contents. These relationships, as shown, are dynamic and motivated by the kinaesthetic systems at play. As I move towards an object, its image* expands, gaining a fuller extension in my visual field, and at the same time covering (if partially) the bordering images*.

Second, there is a sense in which the phenomenal sequences, associated with our approaching and receding, always present the same objects from the same side. When we consider the expansion of a given object, the sequence of images* that present this object can only undergo limited modifications. If, for instance, we are close to a given object

[136] Both internal occlusion and self-occlusion are distinguished from the (general) phenomenon of concealment. The former can never be integral: the image* that undergoes an internal or self-occlusion cannot integrally disappear from our visual field.

and we recede from this position, we may gain a more inclusive view on it. The full spatial structure of this object can indeed be sensed; related to our movement is the possibility of bringing further details of the same object into view. However, this increment always relates to *the same presenting side*, which, if we restrict our consideration to the kinaesthesis of approaching and receding, cannot be abandoned, as it were. Indeed, Husserl writes: "The appearing side is ever the same: it is always the 'front side.' That the Object has other sides is due to its co-constitution through the possible modifications of turning" (TS: 212). In a sense, then, already the phenomenon of expansion invites a further kinaesthetic exploration of the spatial structure of material things. This exploration is accomplished through the function of turning.

§ 38. The constitutive function of turning: achieving the closed corporeal surface

As mentioned, the modification of expansion is insufficient to reach the closedness of the spatial thing: "if the stationary manifold had at its disposal only this mode of expansional modification there could be presented in it nothing like a 'closedness' of the form of a thing in a continuum of sides or in any more sides above and beyond the given ones. The very concept of side would then completely collapse" (TS: 215). The closedness of the spatial structure of ordinary things is dependent on two conditions: (i) the object, through the appropriate motivational circumstances, must disclose further sides; (ii) these new sides that are brought into view through the appropriate kinaesthetic series must be joined to one another until a complete revolution around the object is carried out and the spatial form of the object is closed (which of course does not imply that we can keep under view different perspective at once).

Husserl further characterizes the novelty of the phenomenon of turning comparing it with the geometry of the phenomenal sequences related to approaching and receding. The general idea is that the latter constitute linear modifications. Approaching and receding unfold along the same direction line in one orientation or the other, namely forward (approaching) or backwards (receding).[137] Ideally, these kinaesthetic modifications can proceed *ad infinitum* in either of these two orientations. However, from a phenomenological point of view, receding has a null point: the image* contracts until it is no longer properly visible (it may be considered as a point). "As regards approaching,

[137] Husserl resorts to the mathematical definition of "direction", namely a straight line where an object (we can think of the lived body) can move in two different orientations or senses.

the image undergoes a positive expansion, ideally speaking, *ad infinitum.* Kinaesthetically, however, there corresponds to the image a finite limit" (TS: 216). By contrast, *the modification of turning is cyclical*: "the kinaesthetic circumstances vary cyclically, and in the system of pure modifications of turning they bring back the turning series of images" (212). There is no null point during the course of the manifestations: a full revolution brings the viewer back to the initial side of the object. Moreover, the rotation of the object can proceed in various ways, and potentially in any direction that is presented by the bidimensional manifold of the oculomotor field. That is, if we attend to a given point of an object, we can observe that such point can undergo a turning from left to right, from below to above, and in any other oblique direction available: "in order to acquire a closed corporeality in an adequate way – from all sides and in all appearances – each of these systems of turnings would therefore have to be traversed".

The cyclic nature of the phenomenon of turning is not due to the fact that if the order of the phenomenal sequences were reversed, we would go back to the initial image*.[138] Instead, the modification of turning is characterized by the fact that the continuous unfolding of the phenomenal sequences *in the same direction*, at a certain point, brings back to the initial configuration of the object. This outcome can be experienced (as usual) in at least two different circumstances: (i) the turning of the object around itself; (ii) the turning of the experiencing subject around the object (which Husserl defines as a "semblant turning").[139] The first is a situation of kinaesthetic stillness associated with objective movement. In this case, the object spins around itself. We can imagine, for instance, a dancer pirouetting around a vertical axis. In the second situation, we have kinaesthetic movement associated with objective stillness. In this case, the viewer activates complex kinaesthetic series that allows them to turn around the object. Clearly enough, in both circumstances, the visual field undergoes several other phenomenological modifications – potentially all the modifications considered so far. Therefore, it may be preferable, for simplicity, to keep in mind the first circumstance, namely the turning of the object around one of its axes.

[138] Even though this is also a genuine possibility: "every turning has its counter-turning, as is obvious, since the type of the stationary manifold requires that a counter-modification pertain to every modification, both kinaesthetically as well as with regard to the constant coordinated appearances" (TS: 212–213).

[139] "A body rotates: its images change cyclically in a two-dimensional cyclical modification, as it must if this modification is to be redressed by the two-dimensional, cyclical modification of my kinaesthetic movements of walking" (TS: 275).

Concealment and removal of concealment are crucial to the understanding of the modification of turning. As seen in the previous section, there are different types of concealment. Here, it is sufficient to keep in mind the distinction between the concealment that occurs when the image* of an object A conceals the image* of another object B, and the concealment that occurs when the image of A is occluded by another image*-part of A, namely when "what conceals [is] the same Object with respect to its own Objective points" (TS: 212). The latter case is necessarily implied by the modification of turning. The former case of concealment is usually included in the second, although this is not always the case: the turning of an object A does not necessarily affect the images* of the other bordering object (suffice it to think, for example, of a perfect sphere spinning around itself).

The phenomenological sequence of the images during a revolution of an object around itself unfolds in a precise order. Let us consider the rotation of a spheric object around its vertical axis in a clockwise direction. All the image*-points – that for simplicity we can suppose being aligned on a horizontal line – change their location in a fixed manner, that is, in line with the direction of the rotation. We can describe the phenomenological sequences of images that harmoniously unfold in a circumscribed part of our visual field (occupied by the spinning sphere) with the following scheme:

$$T_0\ (\underline{p},\ q,\ r,\ s) \rightarrow T_{+1}\ (q,\ r,\ s,\ n) \rightarrow T_{+2}\ (r,\ s,\ n,\ o)$$

This is precisely the same kind of scheme used (in § 32) to describe oculomotor kinaesthesis. However, there are two essential differences. In the present case, the distribution of the image*-points does not concern the entirety of the visual field, but only a circumscribed portion (namely, the portion occupied by the spinning sphere). Therefore, the exiting of old image*-points in the visual field as well as the entering of new ones – which does not occur from the margins of the field, as in the case of oculomotor kinaesthesis – necessarily imply a modification of concealment and one of removal of concealment, respectively.

The second essential difference concerns the fact that the modification at issue can continue in the same direction without limit. At any further moment, new presenting contents enter the scene, and others leave the scene. However, when the revolution of the sphere is complete, the image*-points that had disappeared from the left border of the spinning object, reappear from its right border:

T_{+3} (s, n, o, p) → T_{+4} (n, o, p, q) → T_{+5} (o, p, q, r)

The image-point *p*, which in T_0 was about to leave from the left, reappears in T_{+3} from the right; the image*-point immediately after, *q*, undergoes the same kind of modification, exiting from the left and re-entering from the right, and so do the other image*-points, following a fixed cyclical order of concealment and removal of concealment. As Husserl writes, "the new contents of the images perpetually emerge out of concealment by means of those image contents to which they continuously attach themselves. Conversely, the concealing image-contents are themselves constantly concealed by their neighbors in the image" (TS: 213). Each point of the appearing image* that travels from left to right corresponds to point of the concealed image* that travels from right to left (following the clockwise sense of the rotation) and that eventually re-emerges on the other part of the visual field. The same sequence of images*, unfolding in the cyclical order exemplified in the above scheme, would also be experienced if the observer turns around the (stationary) object.

The phenomenon of turning adds a fundamental layer to the constitution of the spatial thing. The concealing image* and the concealed image* intentionally refer to each other in that they belong to the same object (Sinigaglia & Giorello 2007: 119). This is a fundamental difference from the mere relationship of concealment analyzed earlier, in which an image* that moves across the oculomotor field covers another image*. In this latter case, the two images* do not entertain any essential relationship because potentially any image* can cover any another image*, when it comes to displacements. By contrast, the images* that harmoniously elapse during the rotation of the sphere entertain an essential relationship between them, and this implies that these images* constantly refer to one another, and together refer to the same object. In other words, they are the *sides* of the object being experienced. This brings Husserl to an important conclusion:

> Precisely this implies that to say 'the Object is turning' means the same as saying 'it constantly shows itself from new sides,' whereby gain matches loss, and thus for every new appearance something just seen disappears. Therefore the essential peculiarity of the visual Object consists phenomenologically in its being seen as 'having sides' and in always presenting itself incompletely in the 'sides,' in the characteristic system of rotational modifications.

(TS: 214)

Therefore, with the modification of turning the concept of side – that was still lacking from the analyses of the modifications of expansion and contraction – comes to light; we may also say that turning is the condition of possibility for the phenomenological constitution of sides. This is indeed an – if not the – essential characteristic of material things: they are given only by profiles. Each perspective that an observer may take is of necessity *partial*. Some aspects of the object are given to us fully and others are entirely or partially hidden, and the latter are co-intended through the former (in this regard, Husserl speaks of proper and improper givenness). And we know that the kinaesthetic system has precisely the function of motivating the empty intentions that are directed to the hidden parts of the object. The I can motivates the possibility of disclosing the further sides that are co-intended along with the properly appearing ones.[140]

But there is a precision to make. Although the notion of side has now emerged, we could not, in principle, speak of the closedness of the surface of the object. For a single complete revolution alone does not suffice to fully apprehend the physical object from all its sides. However, at this point, it is only a matter of multiplying the points of view on the same objectivity, enacting the different kinaesthetic systems. As Husserl observes with great emphasis,

> every single aspect of the object in itself points to a continuity, to multifarious continua of possible new perceptions, and precisely to those in which the same object would show itself

[140] This point is one of the central tenets of sensorimotor enactivism. Noë argues that the hidden sides of perceptual objects enjoy a specific kind of presence: "our sense of the perceptual presence of the cat as a whole now does not require us to be committed to the idea that we represent the whole cat in consciousness at once. What it requires, rather, is that we take ourselves to have access, now, to the whole cat. The cat, the tomato, the bottle, the detailed scene, all are present perceptually in the sense that they are perceptually accessible to us. They are present to perception as accessible. They are, in this sense, *virtually* present" (2004: 63). The accessibility of the hidden sides of perceptual objects is grounded on the sensorimotor skills of the experiencer. In Noë's theory, such skills have approximately the same function that kinaesthetic systems have in Husserl's: "My relation to the cat behind the fence is mediated by such facts as that, when I blink, I lose sight of it altogether, but when I move a few inches to the right, a part of its side that was previously hidden comes into view. My sense of the perceptual presence, now, of that which is now hidden behind a slat in the fence, consists in my expectation that by moving my body I can produce the right sort of 'new cat' stimulation". For a critical discussion of some of the convergences of these two perceptual paradigms, see Zhok 2014; see also Dell'Anna 2008; Summa 2014b.

> from ever new sides. In every moment of perceiving, the perceived is what it is in its mode of appearance [as] a system of referential implications with an appearance-core upon which appearances have their hold. And it calls out to us, as it were, in these referential implications: "There is still more to see here, turn me so you can see all my sides, let your gaze run through me, draw closer to me, open me up, divide me up; keep on looking me over again and again, turning me to see all sides. You will get to know me like this, all that I am, all my surface qualities, all my inner sensible qualities," etc.
>
> (2001: 41)

Ideally, and only ideally, an adequate givenness of the object is achieved when the spatial structure of the thing is explored from all its perspectives. In other words, in order to achieve closed corporeality, it would therefore be necessary that all systems of rotation were experienced.

§ 39. The transition from the near space to the remote space (and to the infinite space). Perceiving near things vs perceiving things from afar

As Husserl argues, it is through the combination of the modification of turning – two-dimensional, cyclical manifold – and the modifications of expansions and contractions – one-dimensional linear manifolds – that the passage from the bidimensional oculomotor field to the three-dimensional field of space is achieved. Therefore, the synthesis of different kinaesthetic systems grounds the constitution of the form of spatiality that characterizes material objects: "there are not, and cannot be, any other modifications, provided it is precisely a three-dimensional Objectivity that is to be constituted" (TS: 216).

It is important to highlight that this constitutive process brings to light the spatiality of the material object and that it does not yet account for the constitution of spatiality itself. However, since the latter is not of fundamental importance for the phenomenology of the pictorial, here I will only briefly mention this further layer of constitution.

The constitution of the space of the three-dimensional thing is, as seen, presupposed to the analysis of the concept of objective space in general. Husserl's draft on the *Systematic Constitution of Space* proposes a distinction between near space and remote

space.[141] The former is the space that we have considered so far, and "in which an actual three-dimensionality, an actual depth, is constituted" (TS: 272).[142] The latter, as we may also say, constitutes the outer horizon of the former. Objective space is indeed constituted in the transition from near space to remote space, and this transition is motivated by the system of the I walk (1973b: 546). The ambulatory system of movements transforms the near space into the objective, infinite space because the horizon of the near space is continuously displaced a little further along the direction of one's movement. In other terms, through the system of the I walk remoteness can be transformed into nearness. As soon as we start walking, the perception of depth acquires a relative meaning, and the visual space becomes the manifestation of the objective space (TS: 282). The 'here' occupied by the lived body, which was previously the absolute point from which all directions could irradiate, is now only a place among the other places in the objective space; we can walk to every other 'here' in our surroundings.

> I can walk toward every point of Riemannian sensible space and can walk back again: every point 'approaches' and, if it is not occupied by a body, becomes the null-point and 'disappears.' Ideally, each body can coincide with the null-body, and my Body can coincide with each body. Accordingly, there is constituted an Objective spatial point as well as a spatial region and an Objective corporeality.
>
> (273)

One last point. There is a significant phenomenological difference between the near space and the remote space. In the case of the former, any kinaesthetic change – even the smaller body movement – motivates perceivable modifications in our visual field. As we move our head just a little to the right, many modifications of concealment occur in our visual field. However, this does not necessarily hold in the case of the remote space. The movements of our head or torso, but even circumscribed kinaesthetic modifications made by walking (e.g., walking some steps), are not correlated to any perceivable change in the images* that present remote objects: "'my' approaching and receding by leaning back

[141] Note that the part of the text where this distinction appears is not included in Edith Stein's re-elaboration that I have been referring to so far. It only appears at the end of Husserl's original text of 1916 (TS: 271, n. 4).

[142] "If I have a closed visual field, and if I already have an identification of rotating and receding Objects merely through leaning my corporeal Body back and forth while its position remains fixed, then I have a delimited field of depth and a delimited sensible space" (TS: 272)

and forth, sidewards, etc., do not at all change the images, which are perhaps still understood as corporeal ones, although they are not demonstrable as such and do not exhibit depth and 'corporeality' in actual perception" (TS: 272). For instance, the movements of our heads do not disclose any new facets of objects seen in the distance, such as mountains, buildings, or the moon. In order to see more aspects of these objects, broader kinaesthetic changes are required.

The phenomenology of objects seen from afar shares some commonalities with the phenomenology of pictorial objects.[143] For both continue to present the same side of the appearing objects as we enact limited kinaesthetic series. For example, the photograph of a mountain and a real mountain seen from afar correlate to similar phenomenal sequences.

[143] Matthen (2005: 323) makes a similar observation. His theory of (picture) perception, however, goes in the opposite direction of the one proposed here, since he relies on a representationalist framework and argues for a separation between action and perception.

C. Pictorial appearances

§ 40. The challenge of the pictorial

The last two chapters followed the intentional layers that are implied in the constitution of spatial things.[144] Firstly, we have considered the essential nexus between the visual field and kinaesthetic systems. The former, as we know, does not correspond to the objective space; indeed, the dimension of depth is not included in the notion of visual space. What appears in the visual field are not things, yet the visual field is the medium through which spatial entities can appear, through which they are presented. And this presentation, as shown, is necessarily correlated to kinaesthetic systems. For, if the presentational contents were decoupled from kinaesthetic sensations, then the changes in our visual scene would be underdetermined – we could not say whether the modifications of a certain image* are objectively produced (i.e., the object is moving) or subjectively produced (i.e., the subject is moving). Kinesthetic sensations have therefore a constitutive function and this function is grounded upon the lawful association between kinaesthetic changes and phenomenal sequences. Without this essential connection, we would remain confined to the experience of a sequence of (unrelated) images*. Secondly, the passage from the visual field (which is a bidimensional manifold) to the three-dimensional space, and from the images* of the visual field to three-dimensional spatial things presented by these images* presupposes different phenomena which exhibit a progressive complexification: concealment, expansion, and rotation. As we have seen, concealment is implied by expansion and rotation, and expansion is implied by rotation. These three phenomena, whose complexity is condensed by the modification of rotation, contribute

[144] However, it should be noted that the constitutive layers analyzed therein only concern the visual thing, which of course is not the real thing. This abstraction excludes two fundamental layers of material entities. Spatial things have a cross-modal constitution that also involves the sense of touch, correlated to the tactile field (TS: § 22, 25). The second abstraction concerns "a new class of inner constitutive properties of the thing, the properties designated by the words 'ability,' 'power' (character of effecting and suffering), 'disposition.' These are the causal properties. Every thing possesses a complex of such properties and has a 'nature' (in the sense of natural science)" (299). Therefore, we may say that the analyses conducted so far bring to the visual "phantom" of the thing, or as Husserl also calls it, "the sensuous schema". The phantom of the spatial thing corresponds to the lowest layer of the appearance of the spatial thing.

to the achievement of the "complete and omni-sided closedness of the body, a closedness which is at the same time a separation from every other body" (TS: 220).

In synthesis, the fundamental association between kinaesthetic changes and images in the visual field, far from being arbitrary, exhibits a lawful structure, which can be described phenomenologically; the appearances occurring at a given point in time are always appearances under motivating circumstances. The phenomena that characterize the different strata of the constitution of material things have been analyzed by bringing to light the phenomenological regularities that make up the essential structures of our experience. Ultimately, the possibility of coming back to the same images*, by enacting the relevant kinaesthetic sequences, grounds the objectivity of these phenomena and motivates our consciousness of a stable, existing world. Indeed, the latter can only be formed – and, once formed, endure – based on a lawful connection between motivational nexuses and appearances, and a repeated fulfillment of this connection over time. "Identity means being able to go to the same place at will and experience completely the same thing through recognition", and so the notion of identity requires "the free possibility of access in repeatability" (Husserl 2001c: 62; my translation).[145] The kinaesthetic system underpins the repeatability of our experiences, while also serving as a condition for the formation of anticipations regarding the future course of experience. We anticipate that coming back to the same location we will encounter the same scenario. Without this predictability, there would not even be the possibility of grounding scientific knowledge about the world.[146]

> Every perceptual apprehension is motivated, and in this motivation it has its right to proclaim, as it were, Being. … Every perception, already while it endures, integrates its force, and in the perceptual nexus every perception is augmented by every other one, corresponding to all the series of fulfilments which interweave into a manifold braid, unitarily and harmoniously, the various sides and rays of the perceptions. The force that

[145] "Die Identität besagt, an dieselbe Stelle nach Belieben hingehen können und unter Wiedererkennen völlig Gleiches erfahren können. Überlegt man aber, was solche primitiven und in der Tat sehr zu verfeinernden Überlegungen voraussetzen, so ist es die freie Zugangs Möglichkeit in Wiederholbarkeit, darin der Begriff der Stelle, der Stelle aber <in> einem ganzen Stellensystem".

[146] Caution is needed here. The course of our experience is always open to the disappointment of anticipations. Our certainty about a given state of affairs is always presumptive; it is *motivated* by our experiences. In other words, the existence of a world is "not pregiven *a priori* but founded *a posteriori*" (TS: 251).

> grounds Being grows in the course of experience, with respect to its advancing rationalization, in the form of an experiential science which secures for every exception its reintegration under a rule and coordinates to every not-being a semblance that pertains to Being.
>
> (TS: 251)

One may wonder where pictorial experience fits (if it does) into this overarching scheme. If we were to follow Husserl on this point, it would seem that it does not. The analyses of the last two chapters make indeed a substantial use of the notion of image*. However, such notion is only valid pre-phenomenally, before the empirical object is constituted: more specifically, this notion serves to describe the passage from the bidimensional appearances of the visual field to the three-dimensional things that populate our surroundings.[147] The modifications of concealment, expansion, and rotation have been studied as the phenomenal layers that progressively bring to the omni-sided closedness of ordinary material things – mugs, cats, trees, houses, and so forth. One does not find in the Husserlian pages on the theory of constitution of material things any treatment of physical images.

The only reference to pictures that appear in these pages has a specific purpose: exemplifying the non-being. Pictorial fictions break the "harmonious, mutually fulfilling appearances which are subtended by a constant belief-consciousness or, if you prefer, by a consciousness that posits Being" (TS: 247). Pictorial appearances, as well as other forms of fiction and irreality (not-beings),

> do not fit within the lawfulness of … Being as posited in strict certainty. This amounts to saying that these appearances of themselves refer to a series of appearances and to nexuses of appearances which do not flow harmoniously into the actually elapsing series of appearances and into the actually comprehensive nexus of appearances. Nor do they collectively make possible a single harmonious unity of a nexus of things.
>
> (248)

Therefore, we have, on the one side, sequences of appearances "which in themselves are harmonious» and constitute reality, and on the other hand, in conflict with the former, we

[147] Pre-empirical images* are not the things themselves, nor are they representations (i.e., depictions) of the things themselves. Rather, pre-empirical images* directly manifest the things without coinciding with them.

have "*anomalous appearances*, which constitute fictions and which are possibly posited in belief but are not to be held fast in belief, insofar as the course of experience dashes belief in them to pieces and this belief must pass over into unbelief" (249; my emphasis).

In this perspective, pictorial appearances constitute a deviation from the regularity that characterizes ordinary objects of perception, and, for this reason, they are degraded to the not-beings, or fictional manifestations. However, contrary to this relatively quick dismissal of the pictorial, I would rather propose that pictorial phenomena too can be studied along the same lines as ordinary three-dimensional entities. Pictorial appearances cannot be simply labeled as "anomalous" insofar as they also show *lawful modifications* that can be phenomenologically described. If this is so, then it is precisely in virtue of these phenomenological regularities that certain appearances characterize a visual phenomenon as *pictorial*. In other terms, pictorial objects and spaces have a specific way of appearing that is different from the way of appearing of ordinary three-dimensional objects.[148] A depicted apple and a real apple are two distinct – equally perceptual – modes of appearing, and their difference lies in the way the relative images* in the visual field vary in relation to the same kinaesthetic sequences that the viewer may enact. Describing the lawful modifications that qualify picture perception is the challenge posed by the pictorial. Undertaking this phenomenological challenge is the primary aim of the following pages.

§ 41. Kinaesthetic series and pictorial modifications: concealment, expansion, and rotation

The main objective of this paragraph is to disclose and describe the phenomenal modifications that define the pictorial as a mode of appearing. The results of Section A, on the essential correlation between visual field and kinaesthetic systems, are presupposed by the present discussion – they underlie both the pictorial and the non-pictorial. The results of Section B are also presupposed in this section. Pictures, as mentioned have an insular nature: they always appear in the context of our ordinary three-dimensional space and are encompassed by non-pictorial appearances. When we look at

[148] This general thesis bears important consequences for a theory of depiction. It implies that what is special about pictorial experience is not the genre of the experience itself (e.g., imaginative, or illusory, rather than perceptual), but the object experienced. In other words, pictures are specific objects of perceptions.

a picture, we are already moving in a three-dimensional space, where things must disclose their appearances in a certain way. However, the phenomena underlying the constitution of closed material things will have to be re-examined: in the case of pictorial objects, the phenomenal sequences correlated to kinaesthetic circumstances unfold in a different way, according to specific phenomenological rules.

In the following analysis, we can suppose a situation of objective stillness – the objects presented by the visual field are not in motion – and subjective movement: the viewer can enact any kinaesthetic system (including walking, moving the torso, the head, and the eyes), so as to motivate the modifications that we have already encountered. The assumption of such kinaesthetic circumstances is only for 'convenience'. Typically, pictures do not change their location. However, the same analyses could also be carried out by considering different kinaesthetic circumstances.

So, let us consider in order how the modifications of concealment, expansion, and rotation unfold when our visual field presents us with pictorial objects.

Pictorial concealment. When the visual field contains a picture, the corresponding region presents a double 'phenomenological behaviour'. The phenomenology of the space enclosed by the perimeter (the 'frame') of the pictorial region – we can imagine this perimeter being rectangular, as many pictorial surfaces have indeed a rectangular shape – is different from the phenomenology of the perimetral region itself, namely the boundary where the pictorial space ends and the ordinary, three-dimensional space begins. We can therefore provisionally make a distinction between the internal part of the picture and the border part, adjacent to the ordinary space. Let us first consider the internal part.

The portion of our visual field where the picture is located does not exhibit any form of concealment.[149] The contours of the shapes within the perimeter of the picture remain 'fixed'. Regardless of the possible movements of the observer around the picture (or the possible displacements of the picture in the visual field), no concealment takes place. More precisely no self-occlusion, internal occlusion, and external occlusion occur (§ 37). Throughout a displacement, all parts of the picture – we may think of the different depicted objects within a given pictorial scene – move in unison. All the relative locations

[149] Here, of course, we are assuming that no other body is interposed between the point of view of the observer and the picture; if one or more objects were interposed between the viewer and the pictorial surface, we should then refer to the dynamics of concealment previously analyzed.

and distances remain unchanged, preventing any of them from occluding the others. As seen in Section B, this is not what normally happens with three-dimensional bodies. The images* that appear in a given region of the visual field undergo different kinds of concealment: these images* can move separately, hence not in unison, and cover each other.

The border part of the picture, adjacent to the ordinary space, exhibits a different phenomenology. Contrary to the internal part of the picture, the edges of the pictorial space do conceal what lies immediately after them. In this regard, the phenomenal modifications that occur along the perimeter of a picture are analogous to those described earlier as external occlusion (§ 35). Consider, for instance, a photograph hanging on a wall. If we decide to change its location, by moving it, say, to the left, the photograph will progressively conceal the corresponding part of the wall. The presenting contents of the wall disappear in a specific, fixed order, and if the direction of the displacement of the picture was reversed, they would be brought back into view in the reverse order. The same phenomenological laws on the modification of concealment that were described in the previous section apply to the pictorial surface (more precisely, to the relationship between the pictorial surface and the adjacent objects).

In consequence, the phenomenon of concealment only occurs at the edges of the pictorial space. The region in one's visual field that is occupied by a picture is characterized as a locus of image*-points that do not cover each other, regardless of the possible displacements of the picture in the visual field and the possible movements of the observer. This is an important point because, as we know from the preceding analyses, through the modification of concealment we obtain a first objectivation of depth. Recall: the phenomenal modifications that occur between the concealing image* and the concealed image* break the fixed, bidimensional form of the visual field by introducing a further dimension. Not only can two visual elements be arranged on a planar manifold. Something that is either partially visible or entirely invisible can also be located behind something else. Now, considering that within the pictorial space the contours of the depicted shapes remain fixed – that is, they do not disclose further presenting contents as one moves around – we have a first phenomenological reason why the dimension of depth cannot be constituted for the pictorial, and why in consequence *pictorial depth is only apparent*. No objective depth corresponds to the shapes of what appears in the pictorial space. However, we need to consider the other pictorial modifications – namely, pictorial expansion and pictorial rotation – to fully justify this point. But before doing that, it may

be helpful to introduce a distinction that synthesizes the difference between the ordinary modification of concealment and its pictorial counterpart.

While the former is always dynamic, pictorial concealment is *static*. Dynamic concealment characterizes the phenomenal modifications that occur at the edges of the three-dimensional objects in our visual environment, both in the case of movement of the observer and in the case of movement of the objects themselves. Edges are those parts of our visual field after which the adjoining presenting contents are subject to appearance or disappearance – or better, increments or decrements of visibility – depending on the direction of the displacement of the occluding edge, while the visibility of the occluding edge typically remains unchanged. By contrast, *pictorial edges* – namely, the edges within the pictorial space – are static: no increment or decrement of visibility of the adjoining presenting contents takes place in correlation with kinaesthetic changes. In other words, pictorial edges are such that nothing comes out of concealment or gets concealed. The relationship between an occluding pictorial edge and the occluded background can only be apparent. The fixity of pictorial edges also implies that the apparent occlusion is not reversible, regardless of all the kinaesthetic series that the viewer may enact.

Pictorial expansion. As regards this phenomenon, we can again assume a situation of objective stillness: what appears in the visual field is stationary. In this situation, as we already know from the previous analyses, the modification of expansion (or contraction) is motivated by the activation of different kinaesthetic systems. Approaching a stationary field of objects motivates a constant alteration of the phenomenal dimensions of their figure; more precisely, approaching goes hand in hand with their expansion, and receding goes hand in hand with their contraction. For our purposes, it is important to determine whether there are expansional modifications that are specific to the pictorial, and, if that is the case, to describe them.

As regards the expansional modifications that relate to ordinary spatial entities, we have seen that the expansions that the images* in our visual field undergo, as the viewer approaches or recedes, are not uniform: the figures in our visual field, motivated by kinaesthetic changes, do not undergo a homogeneous expansion according to all their parts, nor do the expansions necessarily unfold at the same time, and with the same velocity (§ 37). However, this seems precisely what occurs when a portion of our visual field is occupied with a pictorial surface. In general, the expansional modifications that

we experience while approaching (or receding) from a pictorial surface *tend to be uniform*. In mathematical terms, the expansional modification of pictorial objects can be described as a homothety. As the viewer approaches the material support of the picture, all the parts of the pictorial scene undergo a homogeneous expansion. The oculomotor figure remains unchanged while its phenomenal size progressively increases or decreases, depending on the approaching or receding movement of the viewer. Suppose that one's visual field, at time t_0, is filled with a pictorial apple having a phenomenal size s_0. Now, if the viewer moves some steps towards the pictorial apple, then, at time t_1, her visual field will present a pictorial apple of size s_1, with s_1 greater than s_0. The difference between the pictorial apple at t_0 and at t_1 is only a difference in phenomenal size (see Fig. 28). The figure of the pictorial apple remains utterly unchanged regardless of the approaching movement of the observer. This means that differently from the phenomenal sequences experienced when approaching a real apple, approaching or receding from an apple in a pictorial space does not entail any increment or decrement of presentational contents.

However, we do find the double phenomenological behaviour already encountered with pictorial concealment also in the case of pictorial expansion. Again, the distinction between the internal part of the picture and the border part, adjacent to the ordinary space, plays a crucial role. The tendency towards uniformity of the expansion that characterizes the pictorial is modified as soon as we take into account the border part of a pictorial space. While no increment or decrement of presentational contents occurs within the region of the visual field occupied by a picture, they do occur at its margins. Such increments and decrements of presentational contents occur – according to the modifications described earlier – in the whole portion of the visual field that surrounds the perimeter of the pictorial space. But they also occur right along the border between the pictorial space and the surrounding space – a place that, not coincidentally, is usually occupied by framing devices.[150] If we keep a photograph at hand, and we bring it closer to our eyes, then this double behavior becomes manifest: the margins of the pictorial space act as occluding edges for the space immediately after, which in this case undergoes a decrement in presentational contents (the margins of the photograph always occlude greater sections of the adjacent space), while at the same time, no increment or decrement

[150] From a phenomenological point of view, the frame serves to highlight that portion of the visual field that marks the divide between two different styles of appearing: the pictorial and the three-dimensional (i.e., the style of appearing of ordinary spatial entities).

of contents occurs within the pictorial space. With regard to the three forms of concealments that we have identified when studying the phenomenon of expansion (in the case of three-dimensional objects) and its correlation with approaching and receding, only external occlusion can be experienced with pictures – the physical support of an image objectively conceals the adjoining space. Both self-occlusion and internal occlusion do not take place when within the pictorial space. This is an essential difference concerning the association between pictorial modification and kinaesthetic series insofar as all such modifications do instead occur when we consider the objects in the three-dimensional space.

Recall: the phenomenon of expansion, when it comes to ordinary things, is essentially tied to the phenomenon of concealment, which in turn motivates a fundamental stratum for the constitution of depth. Now, the fact that the uniformity of pictorial expansion does not go hand in hand with concealment or removal concealment provides a further reason why the dimension of depth – more precisely, a figure-ground organization – that characterizes the pictorial takes on an apparent phenomenal quality.

There is another point that deserves some attention. The kinaesthetic series connected with the phenomenon of expansion – approaching and receding – are linear manifolds; simply put, such movements unfold along a straight line. As we know, the phenomenal sequences associated with approaching and receding present the same object from the same side. When we approach, say, a house, we keep on viewing the same façade of the building. Yet material things have multiplicity of sides to their spatial structure. The closedness of their corporeal form can only be reached through the constitutive function of turning. This is relevant for the pictorial too because pictorial objects do in fact show only one side. This is an essential aspect about their way of appearing, and a crucial difference from three-dimensional things. However, this difference in their spatial structure can only become phenomenologically appreciable when we consider the constitutive function of turning. As we know, if we restricted our considerations to the modification of expansion, the concept of side itself could not emerge in the first place.

Pictorial rotation (or turning). While the kinaesthetic modifications of approaching and receding always correlate to the same side of a given object, turning has the function of bringing further sides of an object into view. By turning around a stationary object, or when the object is rotating on itself and the subject is still, we are able to see ever new aspects of its spatial structure until the revolution is complete (and then its sides cyclically

repeat, provided that the direction of the revolution remains constant). This is what normally happens when dealing with ordinary things, such as apples, humans, and so on: the modification of turning discloses their closed corporeal surface. Three-dimensionality is constituted. However, this is precisely what does not occur when dealing with pictorial content.

When we look at pictures, the phenomenal sequences associated with turning do not disclose further aspects of the pictorial objects we see. Let us suppose that we are facing a painting that depicts a still nature and which is placed on an easel; we decide to approach one of its edges. At each step we make towards the painting, the pictorial scene remains exactly the same: the appearing sides of the fruits that stand on a wooden tabletop are ever the same notwithstanding the kinaesthetic changes enacted by the viewer.[151] We do not perceive any new facets of the objects depicted therein. Put differently, there is no increment of decrement of visibility above and beyond the sides that are initially given. We may call this phenomenological property of pictorial objects *one-sidedness*. Recall that the essential characteristic of three-dimensional entities is that they are gives by profiles (§ 38); they are multi-sided. Husserl described such characteristic by saying that every aspect of a thing points to a continuum of possible perceptions in which the same thing would show itself from new sides: "There is still more to see here, turn me so you can see all my sides, let your gaze run through me, draw closer to me, open me up, divide me up; keep on looking me over again and again, turning me to see all sides". The spatial syntheses of pictorial objects do not exert the same 'explorative call' on the experiencing subject.[152] Quite the opposite: the phenomenology of the appearances of the pictorial space do not invite any rotation or any turning around the image, for the pictorial scene does remain the same throughout all the possible kinaesthetic changes – it is not open to a perceptual exploration.

There is a sense in which pictorial objects constitutively do not keep their promise, as Figure 28 illustrates. As we know, image consciousness always implies a figure-ground organization. This is an essential – although insufficient – condition for the emergence of

[151] The same demonstration could be made by considering other kinaesthetic circumstances. For example, we can assume that the viewer holds a photograph in front of them with one hand and rotates it along its vertical axis.

[152] However, this does not imply that pictorial spaces cannot invite a view from a certain perspective (suffice it to think about Renaissance perspective). The relevant viewpoint can be achieved by enacting the appropriate kinaesthetic changes.

a pictorial space. However, the kinaesthetic modifications that have the function of disclosing the aspects of the object-like formations presented by the visual field yield different results when we look at ordinary things or at pictures. On the one hand, the edges of ordinary things coincide with the area where – in correlation with the appropriate motivational circumstances – relationships of concealment and removal of concealment occur; along such area, a dynamic interplay between the occluding edge of the figure and the occluded region beyond it is disclosed. On the other hand, pictorial edges are static: no movement made by the observer will bring other aspects of the figure or the ground into view. Therefore, the figure-ground organization does not correspond to a real depth, but to an apparent one. With the pictorial space, figure and ground lie indeed on the same surface plane.

In passing, it is worth noting that the double phenomenological behavior that, as we have seen, characterizes pictorial concealment and pictorial expansion does occur with pictorial turning too. This does not come unexpectedly, for, as we know, the kinaesthesis of turning always entails both the phenomenon of concealment (and its subvarieties) and the phenomenon of expansion; likewise, when it comes to the pictorial, the modification

Figure 28. The reverse side of an image

of turning does imply their pictorial siblings. So, once again, when turning around a pictorial space, its internal parts do not correlate to the ordinary form of concealment, and the expansions are of a uniform kind – hence pictorial. However, the border part of the picture does act according to the phenomenological rules previously described: depending on the kinaesthetic series enacted by the viewer, relationships of concealment and removal of concealment do occur along its outer edges; and the expansions and contractions that take place beyond the pictorial space are of a non-uniform kind (hence non-pictorial).

§ 42. The phenomenological lawfulness of pictorial appearances

The analysis of pictorial turning clearly shows that the content of a given pictorial scene is fixed once and for all, so to speak. Regardless of the kinaesthetic systems that the viewer may activate, the fruits that make up a still-life painting will continue to show the same side. In no way can the viewer determine whether the pictorial apple that appears to be intact is in fact bitten on its back side, for we have no perceptual access to the hidden sides of the objects appearing in a pictorial space. But is this all we can say about the phenomenological structure of the appearances of pictorial objects? Their one-sidedness should not discourage a more accurate description of the phenomenal sequences that unfold in our visual field as the experiencing subject moves around a pictorial space. As we will see in a moment, the phenomenal sequences correlated to these kinaesthetic changes elapse in a specific, lawful way.

Consider, for instance, a bowling ball depicted on a sketchbook. How are we to describe the phenomenal sequences that unfold in our visual filed when looking at a depicted bowling ball (or, for what matters, any other depicted spheric object)? A sketched bowling ball appears as a colored circle when viewed head-on.[153] By contrast, it will appear as elliptical when viewed edgeways. To put it differently, depending on the different vantage points, the depicted bowling ball will present the observer with a circular shape or with an elliptical shape that progressively flattens as the viewer move the head towards one of the sides of the pictorial surface (Fig. 29). Ideally, the limit point

[153] Note however that this does not mean that the content of our experience is a colored circle. We do see a depicted bowling ball. Nonetheless, we can analyze the phenomenal sequences that elapse during our pictorial perception of a bowling ball and isolate the circular profiles and elliptical profiles through which the depicted bowling ball appears.

of the shape-changes of the depicted bowling ball consists in a straight segment, in which case we would hardly speak about pictorial experience.[154] The latter is indeed a further phenomenological corollary which follows from the one-sidedness of pictorial objects. When we turn around a picture, the pictorial scene is bound to disappear at a certain point: our consciousness of the depicted bowling ball is replaced by the perception of a thin segment. When we turn around a real bowling ball nothing similar happens; we do not lose our visual consciousness of the object throughout the movement.

This example shows how the phenomenal sequences of a given pictorial object unfold in our visual field in correlation with the viewer's kinaesthetic series. More precisely, it shows that the phenomenal sequences unfold according to precise rules associated with the pictorial objects that show up in our (pictorial) experience. There is a sense in which a depicted bowling ball necessarily appears as circular when viewed edge-on and as elliptical when viewed sideways. If the phenomenal sequences were to vary in a different way, and, for instance, in the opposite way, we would not speak of a bowling ball. In all likelihood, we would be referring to something as a rugby ball, for the phenomenal sequences of rugby balls elapse approximately in the opposite order. What matters here

Figure 29. Approaching the right edge of a pictorial space. From a head-on position to a sideways position: circle – ellipses – quasi-segment

[154] The first section of Edwin A. Abbott's *Flatland* proposes similar considerations: "Place a penny on the middle of one of your tables in Space; and leaning over it, look down upon it. / It will appear a circle. But now, drawing back to the edge of the table, gradually lower your eye (thus bringing yourself more and more into the condition of the inhabitants of Flatland), and you will find the penny becoming more and more oval to your view; and at last when you have placed your eye exactly on the edge of the table (so that you are, as it were, actually a Flatlander) the penny will then have ceased to appear oval at all, and will have become, so far as you can see, a straight line" (1884: 4). Immediately after this passage, the phenomenal sequences related to the experience of a triangle are described.

is the lawfulness of the sequence of appearances of pictorial objects, and the fact that they can be described phenomenologically.

The lawfulness of pictorial appearances is also consistent with their *reversibility*. When we look at a given pictorial object and enact a certain kinaesthetic series, we expect that certain phenomenal sequences will elapse. But we also know that, by enacting the reverse kinaesthetic series (i.e., if we go back to our initial position), such phenomenal sequences will elapse in the reverse order. The same logic applies to pictorial objects in general: their appearances vary in a lawful way in correlation with the kinaesthetic changes enacted by the experiencing subject. So, if we moved from the right edge of the pictorial space shown by Figure 29 back to a head-on position, our visual field would present us with a quasi-segment, then a series of ellipses, and finally a circle.

Now, a crucial issue needs to be addressed. What does a real, three-dimensional bowling ball look like as we turn around it? Is there any significant difference between the phenomenal sequences that unfold in our visual field as we turn around real objects and pictorial objects? On closer inspection, this seems to be the case. If the viewer turns around a real bowling ball (or if the ball revolves around one of its axes), she will invariably see a sequence of circular profiles. This means that the observer will not experience any change in the phenomenal shape of the perceived spherical object: a real bowling ball presents circular profiles regardless of the vantage points taken by the viewer. This means that a three-dimensional ball and a ball depicted on a sketchbook do correlate to different visual sequences: in the first case, the phenomenal content of the scene consists of a sequence of circles, whereas, in the second case, it consists of a circle (when viewed head-on) and a series of ellipses that progressively flatten (when viewed sideways). The same kind of demonstration could be reiterated with other objects; for instance, a cubical box and its depicted equivalent.[155] Along this line, the phenomenological difference of the pictorial space comes to light: pictorial objects present specific phenomenal variations related to the subject's movements in the surrounding space. These variations are stable and predictable: they are part of the viewer's kinaesthetic awareness and enable a reliable distinction between pictorial and spatial objects. This distinction is already encoded in one of the lowest strata of our sensible experience and does not demand any help from higher cognitive functions (in

[155] Clearly enough, a precise vocabulary that describes the geometry of such shape-changes may not be immediate to find.

terms, for instance, of recognitional processes, or epistemic resources related to what a picture represents).

The geometry of pictorial appearances has been widely overlooked in the literature. Yet the specificity of pictorial appearances seems to provide solid experiential ground to distinguish between image and reality, between the perception of ordinary spatial objects and the perception of an image.

§ 43. Contrast vs. conflict: a revision of the Husserlian static analysis of image consciousness

The comparison between the appearances of depicted and real objects shows that the pictorial has a specific phenomenology, a specific style of appearing that differs from that of three-dimensional entities. When our visual field displays pictorial contents, the phenomenal sequences correlated to the subject's kinaesthetic series unfold according to specific rules. The study of such rules has shown the process of constitution that motivates why pictorial depth takes on an apparent phenomenal quality.

Now, since pictures have an insular nature, in that they always appear in the broader context of the surrounding three-dimensional space (and are encompassed by non-pictorial appearances), this means that the pictorial portion of our visual field will behave differently from the non-pictorial region that encompasses it. In other words, the phenomenal sequences correlated to our visual field and motivated by kinaesthetic changes present a double phenomenological behavior. The area encompassing the pictorial space follows the phenomenological lawfulness analyzed in Section B, while the pictorial region follows the phenomenological lawfulness analyzed in the last paragraph of this section. Importantly, the external margins of the pictorial space mark the boundary that divides these two different styles of appearing.

This brings to an important conclusion: image consciousness always implies an irreducible *contrast* between two different styles of appearing, and this contrast becomes especially salient around the line that divide pictorial space and ordinary space. A visual field that did not present such contrast could not support the emergence of something as pictorial.

It is important to highlight that the relationship between pictorial appearances and ordinary appearances is a relationship of contrast (*Kontrast*) – not of conflict (*Widerstreit*), contrary to what Husserl argues in his static analysis of image

consciousness. There is indeed no conflict between the phenomenal sequences correlated to the region of our visual field filled up by a picture and those correlated to the region that surrounds it. These two regions simply coexist, juxtaposed one to the other. Competition over the same visual region would arguably occur if pictorial experience was illusory in nature (hence trying to emerge as real) or imaginative (in which case an imagined object would be superimposed on a certain part, up to the whole, of the visual field); our analysis shows that pictorial objects and ordinary objects are equally given in acts of perception. Their difference – which motivates the phenomenological contrast – rather concerns the phenomenal sequences they are associated with. In other words, the phenomenology of pictorial experience is qualified by the specificity of its object, not by an intrinsic difference in the quality of the act or a complexification of its intentional structure.

This account has an explanatory advantage over the Husserlian static description of image consciousness, especially with regard to the analysis of the first and the second intentional layers that make up image consciousness. As we know, in those lectures, the perceptual consciousness of the image-thing and the consciousness of the image-object stand in a relationship of conflict, and Husserl explains this conflict by resorting to the apprehension-content of apprehension schema. The physical support of the image is perceptually apprehended but does not genuinely appear, for a second apprehension uses up all the material of sensation for the (genuine) appearance of the image-object. However, this view faces two major interrelated problems. First, the perceptual apprehension of something (the pictorial surface as such) that does not in fact appear in our experience seems more of a postulate than a descriptive element. Second, Husserl himself questioned the apprehension-content of apprehension schema (especially due to the problematic notion of sensation it is built upon), and this leaves the question about the constitution of image consciousness open. If a conflictual relationship between intentional layers does not ground the emergence of a visual phenomenon as pictorial, what does?

The solution here proposed accounts for the emergence of the divide between the pictorial and the real by leaving the static level of analysis in the background and delving deep into the constitution of spatial visual phenomena. Following this genetic level of constitution means going back to the fundamental correlation between the visual field – where the divide is not yet constituted – and the kinaesthetic sequences enacted by the experiencing subject. This correlation presents phenomenological regularities that bring

to the constitution of the ordinary three-dimensional objects that populate our surroundings, on the one hand, and to pictorial objects, on the other. Situating the analysis of image consciousness from a genetic perspective allows to dismiss the two problems raised above. There is indeed no need of postulating the apprehension of something as a pictorial surface (image-thing) that would stand in a relationship of conflict with another apprehension (image-object). As argued before, the visual field is a field of object-like formations – we do not have closed corporeal things yet, but images*. These object-like formations are neither pictorial nor real, and they take on these characters by virtue of their association with the kinaesthetic systems. Therefore, if we limit our consideration to the visual field, there is no such thing as an objective surface (either pictorial or real), for surfaces are already objects (or parts of objects) in the three-dimensional space. In this perspective, the pictorial does not receive its phenomenological character from a conflict between apprehensions that compete over the same sensory material. The pictorial emerges instead as a specific system of appearances that unfold in contrast with the appearances of ordinary spatial entities.

§ 44. The reality of the pictorial

What is the relationship between the pictorial and the real? Are pictorial objects on a par with ordinary three-dimensional objects from the point of view of the constitution? Are pictorial appearances independent of the appearances of ordinary objects?

They are independent in the sense that they unfold according to their own rules, as outlined in this chapter. However, they are non-independent of the level of ordinary spatial entities. We have already encountered an important asymmetry: on the one hand, pictorial spaces always appear in the broader context of the ordinary three-dimensional space; on the other, we can experience (and also imagine) an environment that is completely devoid of pictures. In this sense, the phenomenological constitution of closed spatial objects seems to have priority of over the constitution of pictorial objects. Simply put, the pictorial space is a derivative form of space.

At this point we have all the conceptual resources to give this thesis a proper phenomenological justification. The constitution of an objective figure-background organization – which involves a real distance between the figure and background – is not immediately available in the sensible configurations of the visual field. This perceptual organization requires the association with a system of practical possibilities, embodied

by the subject's kinaesthetic systems. Only by virtue of association between the contents presented by the visual field and kinaesthetic possibilities can the visible refer to the invisible: something can be seen (completely or partially) behind something else independently of its appearing. Now, the figure-ground organization does characterize the pictorial space, but this organization is given as apparent, not objective. This status is motivated by the specific phenomenal sequences associated with the appurtenant kinaesthetic series enacted by the viewer. The latter are not able to disclose further what appears to lie behind what appears in the foreground. The apparent depth that characterizes the pictorial presupposes the constitution of objective depth; in this sense, pictorial depth can be regarded as a modification of objective depth. From the genetic point of view, it is clear that we would not be able to live in a world of images: a whole stratum of spatial relationships needs to be constituted first. However, it is worth noting that such a conclusion only applies to the relationship between the forms of space that we are considering – the ordinary, three-dimensional space and the pictorial space. When it comes to the specific contents that fill up such spaces, the pictorial seems instead free to conjure up its own entities, whose identity may be independent of the things that we find in our ordinary space.[156]

The relationship of dependence between the constitution of the ordinary space and the pictorial space disclosed here brings to light the conceptual limitations of Plato's allegory of the cave. If the prisoners had spent all their lives in chains, with their legs and necks immobilized, only being able to look forward, they would not be able to experience the shadowy images of the objects projected onto the wall they are facing – contrary to what Plato's discourse seems to imply.[157]

This analysis clarifies the sense in which we commonly consider images as non-real entities. As long as we intend to express an opposition between the reality of closed corporeal things and the form of spatiality enjoyed by pictorial objects, the latter may indeed qualify as non-real entities. However, acknowledging the opposition between such terms will only lead us so far. A more constructive strategy consists in clarifying the level

[156] This conclusion is in line with the results obtained in Chapter 3 (on the aesthetic autonomy of pictorial objects).

[157] It is worth noting that Plato specifies that the prisoners do not see these visual phenomena as images, for such entities constitute instead their visual reality; they are all that the prisoners are visually given. Nevertheless, this allegory still implies that the prisoners are indeed able to see things on the wall of the cave. This is precisely the point that is disputable following the genetic analysis pursued here.

of reality that pertains to pictorial entities. Our genetic analysis shows that there is a constitutive layer in which the real and the pictorial are not yet differentiated, and that their differentiation proceeds from the association between the purely content-related level of the visual field and the system of practical possibilities of the lived body. The very fact that there is an undifferentiated constitutive level shows (i) that the pictorial can emerge as such only if we factor in the embodied dimension of the subject (hence not by virtue of a categorial operation), and (ii) that, if we limit ourselves – albeit within an abstract regressive analysis – to the contents offered by the visual field, pictorial contents can still advance a claim to reality, so to speak.

This point is consistent with the case of *trompe-l'œils* – a genre of images that poses a problem for many theories of picture perception. *Trompe-l'œils* pictures are created so as to make the claim of being real. Under appropriate conditions of visibility, *trompe-l'œils* can indeed succeed in deceiving the viewer – if for a few instants – inducing us to perceive what is instead merely depicted. From our point of view, what matters are precisely the conditions of visibility exploited by *trompe-l'œils* to deceive the viewer. Significantly, these conditions concern the spatial position (the viewpoint) and the (non)mobility of the viewer. Indeed, the deception is revealed as soon as these conditions are violated. When the viewer starts moving, thus changing the vantage point, the phenomenal sequences motivated by the appurtenant kinaesthetic changes unfold in a way that is not consistent with the spatial form of three-dimensional things. Thus, in line with the thesis defended herein, the presumption of reality – or at least the ambiguity – of the visual scene gives way to pictorial appearances when the viewer is in motion.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: FOR A PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPATIAL MEDIA

In what follows, I would like to recapitulate some of the main theoretical points and results of this inquiry, and then sketch a framework for conducting analogous phenomenological analysis of spatial media in general.[158]

In the first part of this work, after reconstructing Husserl's influential theory of image consciousness, I criticized one of its crucial aspects. Encoded in this theory is the idea that the appearing of an image requires a conflictual relationship between the image-object, which is what is visually salient, and the image-subject, which is what the image refers to: "If the conscious relation to something depicted is not given with the image, then we certainly do not have an image" (PICM: 32). If so, this theory turns out to be inadequate to account for any pictorial space whose content lacks a referent. A whole section of this work was devoted to the discussion and exemplification of many non-depictive pictorial spaces. These pictorial spaces are characterized by an aesthetic autonomy; their appearance is not dependent on any apprehension directed to an absent subject. As it stands, Husserl's theory seems to have a limited scope, not being able to account for a large portion of pictorial phenomena.

There is, however, a deeper problem that concerns the notions of sensation and apprehension at the basis of the theory. The conscious relation to what is depicted – established by the conflictual relationship between image-object and image-subject – is conceived as an apprehension that informs the available complex of sensation with the sense of an absent subject (PICM: 24). Indeed, at least until *Ideen I*, Husserl seems still persuaded that sensory contents are non-intentional and function "as material for intentional informings or bestowals of meaning" (2012: 175). This implies that the material of sensation is itself formless and awaits to receive its shape from an intentional act. When it comes to image consciousness this means that the formless contents of apprehension receive their form from the intention directed to the depicted subject. This latter gives shape to the image, thus constituting the pictorial shape.

[158] Here I will not enter into the details and reasons of what counts as a spatial media and what does not. However, the demonstrations in this work have described the form of spatiality that is specific to pictures. Other spatial media include moving pictures, bas-reliefs, statutes, videogames, VR/AR media, etc. By contrast, media that convey their meaning only through verbal descriptions would not count as spatial.

This general model, however, does not seem to be phenomenologically justified. In fact, already before *Ideen I*, Husserl rejects the assumption that sensory contents are 'blind', non-intentional materials: "*'Consciousness' consists of consciousness through and through, and the sensation as well as the phantasm is already 'consciousness'*" (PICM: 323). If we analyze our consciousness of a red apple, we will not find any complex of blind sensory contents awaiting to receive their meaning, or to be put into shape. We find instead "perceptual consciousness over and over" (326), and we also find that sensory contents already have autonomous forms of organization. These autonomous forms of organization, which amount to the passive layer of experience, are pre-categorial; they do not depend on the intellectual activities of the subject. Within the sphere of passive syntheses, we do not find any bestowal of meaning operated by an active 'ego' but an internal organization that unfolds according to its own phenomenological regularities.

These considerations equally apply to our consciousness of a real apple on a table and the consciousness of an apple painted on a canvas. The phenomenological theory of image consciousness, however, has not been rethought in light of this radically revised concept of sensibility. The positive part of my theoretical proposal had the objective of filling this gap. The preliminary step was decoupling the conditions for the appearing of an image in our visual field from the conditions that make a pictorial space have a certain meaning (and refer to an absent subject). The minimal condition that my account envisages for having a pictorial space – or, put differently, the minimal content of a pictorial space – is a figure-ground organization. This requirement is general enough to include all instances of pictorial spaces that were excluded by fiat from Husserl's account (and also by the majority of the contemporary theories of depiction) insofar as it abstracts from whatever specific subject may (or may not) be recognized in that space. However, the same generality of this requirement immediately poses a challenge. Since every visual scene (pictorial or not) is structured according to figure and ground relationships, the notion of figure turns out to not be itself sufficient to mark the difference between a pictorial space and our ordinary three-dimensional space. The further step was then to study the genesis of the divide between the pictorial and the real to understand how the former is based on an *apparent* figure and ground relationship while the latter on an *objective* figure and ground relationship.

This was done by adopting a different approach that frames the phenomenology of the pictorial in spatial terms, that is, following closely its spatial constitution. Since pictures always appears within our ordinary three-dimensional space, the constitution of the latter

needed to be studied first. To this purpose, Husserl's analyses contained in *Thing and Space* were employed to show that the material things, the ordinary objects that populate our environment, result from the lawful association between the visual field and the systems of sensed bodily movements (which includes stillness too) – namely, kinaesthetic systems. The associative nexuses between these two spheres lead to the constitution of closed corporeal surfaces of three-dimensional ordinary objects. The flow of appearances that unfold in our visual field is associated in a fixed way with the kinaesthetic systems: a plot of phenomenological regularities underlies the constitution of spatial entities. More specifically, the phenomena of concealment, expansion, and turning progressively realize the passage from the bidimensionality of the visual field to the constitution of three-dimensional material things. The constitutive function of the same phenomena was then studied when a certain portion of the visual field is occupied by pictorial content. When this is the case, the modifications of concealment, expansion, and turning present a different phenomenology. The visual sequences that we experience in that portion of our visual field unfold in a distinctive way; this led us to devote theoretical analysis to the phenomenology of *pictorial concealment*, *expansion*, and *turning*.

When a portion of the visual field is occupied by a pictorial space, the phenomenal sequences motivated by kinaesthetic changes present a double phenomenological behavior: the area that encompasses the pictorial space follows the phenomenological lawfulness that characterizes ordinary spatial entities analyzed in Section B of Chapter 5, while the pictorial region presents us with the modified sequences analyzed in Section C. Importantly, the external margins of the pictorial space mark the boundary that divides these two different styles of appearing. Image consciousness is characterized by a contrast between different styles of appearances. It is then a specific style of appearing that motivates the emergence of a visual phenomenon as pictorial rather than real.

* * *

In this work, I showed that contrary to our common intuitions, but also to what the vast majority of contemporary image theories propose, the phenomenology of the pictorial is defined by the spatial form that pictures embody and their relationship to the outer horizon – the three-dimensional space that encompasses the pictorial space. To reach this conclusion, I made use of both the static and the genetic method of phenomenological

inquiry: while static analyses are needed to map the intentional structure of image consciousness and identify the minimal conditions for having an image, they need to be implemented by a genetic, regressive inquiry that investigates its spatial constitution. This general framework can in principle be used to study the spatial structure of pictorial media and technologies, such as such as moving images, mirrors, shadows, low reliefs, statues, holograms, stereograms, virtual reality, and augmented reality. This approach promises to answer the question about the form of space that these media are able to embody and their relationships with the ordinary space we live in (Terrone forthcoming, goes in a similar direction).

With few exceptions, image theories have largely overlooked this problem. Being mostly concerned with the level of meaning, and trying to figure out what makes a picture a depiction of something else, the analysis of the spatial constitution of visual media has been left behind. Yet this task proves particularly urgent now: the latest pictorial technologies call into question our notion of spatial reality. They do so primarily by presenting the experiencing subject with spatialized entities and environments that enter into competition with our ordinary spaces and objects. The question to be answered in phenomenological terms is how these media can achieve such an effect, immersing the subject in their space. Focusing exclusively on the representational level risks losing the innovative scope of these pictorial technologies, whose drive seems to incline more towards the presentational rather than the re-presentational.

In practical terms, a phenomenology of spatial media will aim at two things. First, in a static perspective, enucleate the intentional structure(s) that make up our consciousness of the medium as an already constituted object (e.g., a statue, or a stereoscopic image encompassing our visual field). This first step has the objective of fixating the phenomenological thresholds that allows us to speak of a given medium and to identify the minimal conditions of its content. Second, analyze the genesis of the spatial form of the medium and its relationship to its outer horizon. Crucial to this step is the analysis of the phenomenal sequences that unfold in our visual field in association with the kinaesthetic changes enacted by the viewer. The phenomenal sequences correlated to the statute of a wax figure, for instance, may be the same visual sequences that would elapse when the viewer is presented with the real figure. If this is so, then the spatial form of a wax figure is the same of ordinary objects. Yet the wax figure of a cat does not move nor purr and this element conflicts with a set of expectations that the viewer has about cats; this makes room for image consciousness (on this point Husserl's analyses are very

accurate). Immersive pictorial technologies represent a more complex case. VR headsets are designed to take up the entirety of the experiencer's visual field and to immerse them in the environment it generates; in a sense, the image becomes the visual field. VR devices are able to achieve this effect by presenting the experiencer with visual sequences that unfold according to the same rules of the three-dimensional objects that we encounter in our ordinary space; these sequences are appropriately associated with the bodily movement enacted by the subject immersed in the virtual environment. But this is only part of the story. In fact, the kinaesthetic series enacted by the experiencing subject are constantly directed towards two experiential levels: (a) the VR-scene that has taken up the whole field of view of the user, and (b) the world that is now occluded by the VR-scene, and which is nonetheless always present. Its presence is vividly felt any time that the VR-scene contradicts our kinaesthetic expectations. Therefore, the same kinaesthetic systems of the immersed subject are in touch with a visual scene generated by the VR device and with an environment where our body is located but that is not visually available (being occluded by the images generated by the VR device). This is, I believe, the route to follow to understand our consciousness of VR environments and the form of spatiality enacted by VR technologies.

Between the case of simple flat still pictures that were studied at length in these pages and complex technologies that generate spatialized environments are many cases of pictorial media whose spatial form could be studied following the style of inquiry proposed in this work.

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