Husserl Studies
Phenomenology of Unclear Phantasy
--Manuscript Draft--

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To speak of unclear phantasy almost seems redundant. In the history of philosophy, the notion of phantasy has tended to be opaque from the very beginning. For example, one of the most obscure concepts of the whole Aristotelian *corpus* is the notion of φαντασία, elaborated in *De Anima* 3.3, as several commentators have emphasized (Caston 1996; Dow 2010; White 1985). The ambiguousness of phantasy is also due to its mediating function between different orders. Within different theoretical frameworks (from Aristotle to Avicenna, from Vico to Kant), phantasy is considered to play such a mediating role between perception and thought.

In my view, two disciplines have greatly contributed to a new understanding of phantasy and imagination in contemporary thought: phenomenology and psychoanalysis. These two different approaches developed almost simultaneously at the beginning of the twentieth century. As two distinct lines of research, they are, in my view, also the most promising for future investigation on this subject: the examination of *phantasy* benefits from a focus on the concrete form of the phantasm as a unique object formation, or better, as scene. The attention can also be directed to the style of imagining[1] as specific intentionality. Whereas the second line of research has been extensively studied in the context of phenomenological investigation, psychoanalytical inquiry has greatly contributed to the understanding of the phantasm as scene. In the present paper, I examine the notion of phantasy from a phenomenological perspective. More specifically, I intend to show the inner tensions between the concept of pure phantasy as intentional act, and the manner of appearance of unclear phantasy. However, I nonetheless find it appropriate to begin with some brief remarks on the psychoanalytical account in order to highlight the complexity of the phenomenon of

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[1] Husserl's notion of *Phantasie* is difficult to translate in English. I will use the terms *imagination* and *phantasy* interchangeably. Needless to say, the technical term 'phantasy' in Husserl's phenomenology is not identical with the use of 'fantasy' in (English) ordinary language (see Casey 2003). *Phantasieren* means the act of imagining. However, the term phantasy has also some advantages. Phantasy and *Phantasie* refer to the same Greek root. Furthermore, phantasy does not refer in any form to mental images, nor does it overemphasize the visual aspects, as the term imagination does. Accordingly, it is easier also to contrast phantasy with image-consciousness, by avoiding any possible misunderstanding.

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Phantasie.

1. Preliminary Distinctions

1.1 Psychoanalysis

In the context of psychoanalytical research, attention has been focused on phantasy-objects as embodiments of drives and of desires. The original repressed drives emerge in a deformed shape through phantasies. Phantasies fulfill an essential function in expressing desires while indirectly revealing them. Yet, it is not easy to determine the exact forms of phantasy from a topographical point of view. There are: 1) conscious, 2) preconscious, and 3) unconscious phantasy formations. In Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams,* phantasy is mainly understood in terms of preconscious day-dreaming. Still, this work also features passages in which phantasies are indirect expressions of unconscious drives (see Freud 1900, Ch. 8). The most relevant difficulty in determining phantasy from a topographical point of view lies in its shifting function between the different psychical systems: *Phantasie* tends to play a mediating role in a libidinal formation's transition between consciousness, the preconscious, and the unconscious.[2] The fluctuating nature of phantasy is particularly apparent in Freud's famous definition of *Phantasie* offered in *The Unconscious*:

> On the one hand, they [phantasies] are highly organized, free from self-contradiction, have made use of every acquisition of the system *Cs* [Consciousness] and would hardly be distinguished in our judgement from the formations of that system. On the other hand they are unconscious and are incapable of becoming conscious. Thus *qualitatively* they belong to the system *Pcs*. [Preconscious], but *factually* to the *Ucs* [Unconscious]. Their origin is what decides their fate (Freud 1995, p. 289).

The originally repressed wishes are deformed in phantasy. This deformation makes an objective concealment possible, while also ensuring an economically important expression of the repressed

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[2] For this reason, it is possible to find the simultaneous intervention of phantasy activities in different psychical systems. If we consider the dream work, we find an active role of phantasy at both poles of the process: "On the one hand, it is bound to the deepest unconscious wishes, […] while at the other extreme it has a part of play in the secondary revision. The two extremities of the dream process and the two corresponding modes of phantasy seem therefore to join up, or at least to be linked internally with each other–they appear, as it were, to symbolize each other" (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, p. 315).

desires. Through the phantasms, the repressed desires are transformed in such a way as to allow the ego to avoid direct confrontation with his/her drives. Accordingly, phantasies mediate all three psychical systems (the conscious, preconscious and unconscious).

With regard to this indirect self-manifestation of the subject, it is also appropriate to refer to the major contribution offered by Pontalis and Laplanche's theory of phantasm as scene. Laplanche and Pontalis show how the phantasy object cannot be interpreted as a mere hallucinatory substitute for the satisfaction of drives. The phantasized scene is not simply an object of desire. Rather, it is to be regarded as a kind of incarnation of the multi-layered life of the subject:

> In fantasy, the subject does not pursue the object of desire or its sign: he appears caught up himself in the sequences of the images. He forms no representation of the desired object, but is himself represented as participating in the scene although, in the earliest phantasy, he cannot be assigned any fixed place […]. As a result, the subject, although always present in the fantasy, may be so in a desubjectivised form - that is to say, in the very syntax of the sequence in question (Laplanche-Pontalis 1968, p. 335).

Accordingly, the relationship between phantasy and desire is very intricate. Still, we can discern three pivotal characteristics:

1. Phantasms are not simply imaginary objects understood as the target or aim of drives and desires. They are complex "scripts" of organized scenes; scenes that perform, express and manifest a dramatization of our affective life. These dramatizations mostly take a visual form (Laplanche-Pontalis 1973, p. 336).

2. The subject is always present in this sequence of scenes. The subject usually takes on different roles, appearances and functions in these scenes. He/she cannot be identified with a single 'character' appearing in it. As we have already seen, it is also not appropriate to focus exclusively on the different 'actors' or voices present in the phantasy scene. The subject also manifests itself in the syntax of the phantasmatic 'mise-en-scène' of desire.

3. If we assume that the desire is always woven into the phantasies, residing there, then

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phantasy formations become also a place of defense mechanisms (such as negation and

projection). Instances of the prohibition are always present in phantasies. The scenes are

therefore dramatization of desires and prohibitions.

Keeping these distinctions in mind, we will now see how a psychoanalytic approach can benefit

from the phenomenological method.

1.1. Phenomenology

Husserl has paved a new way for understanding phantasy through the elaboration of a sophisticated

architectonic of the various correlations between intentional acts and intended objects. He

emphasizes the difference between image consciousness (*Bildbewusstsein*) and phantasy

(*Phantasie*). The former is rooted in the perception of a present object, such as a painting, that

refers to another (absent) object (Hua XXIIII, p. 82). Contrarily, pure phantasy is not based on the

perception of a present object. If one wants to simplify Husserl's investigation of imagination, one

could summarize his complex path in the following terms: initially the relation between phantasy

and image-consciousness was at the center of his investigation. Once he recognized the radical

difference between image-consciousness (anchored on the perceptual field) and pure phantasy

(detached from the present horizon of the world), Husserl's research on phantasy subsequently

focused upon the comparison with another form of presentification: remembering

(*Wiedererinnerung*).

Husserl's mature position considers the act of imagining as analogue to the act of

remembering. Remembering is an intuitive consciousness of a past perception, while the act of

imagining is consciousness of a fictional perception.[3] The difference between phantasy and

remembering lies primarily in their differing doxic modalities. Acts, such as perception, memory or

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[3] "Husserl meint nun, dass ein (vergegenwärtigendes) Bewusstsein der anschaulichen Gegenwart eines Phantasiegegenstandes nur dadurch möglich ist, dass das Phantasieren die fiktive Wahrnehmung dieses Gegenstandes ‚intentional' impliziert – gerade so, wie auch die Erinnerung an einen vergangenen Gegenstand dessen frühere wirkliche Wahrnehmung intentional impliziert" (Bernet 2012, p. 5).

anticipation of a future object, entail a specific doxic positionality: the objects intended in those acts are experienced as real events occurring in different times during the life of consciousness. In remembering, we believe that a particular perception has actually taken place in the past: the intuitive situation is experienced as having been real. The object of an imagining act is not experienced as real. In phantasy, the positionality is neutralized: we relate to a perception that is fictional, one that does not belong to the common horizon of the world. In this regard, we are not surprised that Husserl treats the acts of phantasies as quasi-perception. The act of imagining is experienced by inner consciousness as "a simulation of a possible perception" (Jansen 2016, p. 70).[4]

The simulation of pure phantasy has an enigmatic character: on the one hand, it has the same internal structure as remembering, intentionally implying an unmodified perception. On the other hand, this perception is only a pure possibility rather than a past experience that occurred in the common world. We deal here with the paradoxical structure of an *unmodified* pure possibility.[5] The ambiguity of this notion can shed light on the productive character of phantasy. Put differently: it is possible to grasp the meaning of the unmodified pure possibility only under the condition of having clarified the intimate relationship between phantasy and freedom (Sartre 2004; Maldiney 1991).

Phantasie should be understood as quasi-perception. It should be characterized as a non-positing intuitive presentification. Presentification is a reproductive modification of a perceptual consciousness; a reproductive modification of a *possible* perception in the mode of *as-if*. Imagining is an act of consciousness that constitutes a distinctive awareness of objects without referring to the perceptual horizon: "In itself, however, the phantasy presentation (*Phantasievorstellung*) does not contain a manifold intention; *representation* (*Vergegenwärtigung*) [*of phantasy*] *is an ultimate*

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[4] Referring to an actual debate, Jansen highlights the sensory character of imagination, thus contrasting two widespread notions of imagination 1. as a basic faculty for synthesis or 2. a derivative product of perception (cf., Jansen 2016). One can ask if the term 'quasi-sensory' would be more appropriate here. This formulation would have not only the advantage of being loyal to Husserl's idea, but may also emphasize the intuitive character of phantasy. At the same time, it would stress the specific coherent deformation that takes place in the world of phantasy.

[5] Bernet underlines this aspect by recurring to the paradoxical expression of a perception that has never happened: "Die Quasi-Wahrnehmung eines fiktiven Objekts muss also als die Modifikation einer Wahrnehmung verstanden werden, die es unmodifiziert nie gegeben hat" (Bernet 2012, p. 5). I prefer to highlight the role of possibility than that of perception – therefore I use the expression 'an unmodified pure possibility' for defining the pure phantasy as quasi-perception.

mode of intuitive objectivation (*Vorstellung*), just like perceptual objectivation, just like presentation (*Gegenwärtigung*)" (Hua XXIII, p. 86/93). This sentence unambiguously shows the difficulties in translating Husserl's technical language into English. The same word "*Vorstellung*" is first translated with "presentation" and then with "objectivation." The situation is particularly intricate since the term "presentation" is also used for translating the word "*Gegenwärtigung*," which is opposed to "*Vergegenwärtigung*" (presentification). For this reason it is appropriate to quote the original text in German: "Aber an sich selbst enthält die Phantasievorstellung keine mehrfältige Intention, Vergegenwärtigung ist ein letzter Modus intuitiver Vorstellung, genauso wie Wahrnehmungsvorstellung, wie Gegenwärtigung" (Hua XXIII, p. 86).

The world of pure phantasy is another world, one that is radically separated from the world of the perceptual presence. In this respect it is particularly different from the image-consciousness: "the phantasy appearance does not appear within perception's field of regard and hence is not a perceptual figment" (Hua XXIII, p. 64/70). Husserl's investigations of phantasy also lead to further distinctions. Two differentiations are of great relevance: one is the distinction between pure phantasy and perceptual phantasy, while the other concerns the difference between clear and unclear phantasies. This latter distinction will be at the center of this paper.

Perceptive phantasy concerns the fictional experience anchored in the perceptual horizon, as it happens in the theatre: "in the case of a theatrical performance, we live in a world of perceptual phantasy" (Hua XXIII, p. 514 f./616). What we experience in the theater has an ambiguous and dynamic nature. We know that the fictional character incarnated by the actor is not real, yet we do not rule out the succession of appearances as nothingness. On the contrary – through them we live a different life. It has a 'transitional' character from actual perception to phantasy:

> But when a play is presented, no consciousness of depiction whatsoever needs to be excited, and what then appears is a pure perceptual figment. We live in neutrality; we do not carry out any actual positing at all with respect to what is intuited. Everything that occurs there, everything there in the way of things and persons, everything said and done there, and so on — all of this has the characteristic of the as-if (Hua XXIII, p. 515/617).

Once we have addressed this distinction between pure and perceptive phantasies, we can now move beyond these preliminary distinctions and address the core theme of this paper: the distinction between clear and unclear phantasy. We will see that the analysis of this distinction will question the legitimacy of considering the forms of unclear phantasy as intentional acts. If we want to anticipate, we can say that one important result of my investigation is that it is difficult to conceive unclear phantasy in terms of quasi-perception.

2. Clear and Unclear Phantasies

Husserl's research on clear and unclear phantasy is carried out in his study on pure phantasy. Pure phantasies do not imply any reference to the perceptual horizon. In clear phantasy, we have within the flow of intentional consciousness the constitution of a vivid phantasized *object*. In some (rare) cases, appearances of phantasy can reach an intuitive fulfillment so vivid as to approach that of perceptual appearances.[6] However, the situation is usually a very different one:

> There are often cases in which phantasy appearances present themselves as vigorous formations, cases in which they bring to intuition objects that are sharply drawn, plastic, and color saturates. However, in countless cases, - indeed, in most cases - the situation is otherwise. The phantasy object appears as empty phantom, transparently pale, with colors wholly unsaturated, with imperfect plastic form, often with only vague and steady contours filled out with *je ne sais quoi* or, properly speaking, with nothing, with nothing that one would assign as a defined surface, colored in such and such a way, to what appears (Hua XXIII, 59/63-64).

I would like to stress two aspects of this pivotal passage: first, according to Husserl most phantasies are not clear. It is essential to stress this point since the majority of the secondary research on Husserl's notion of pure phantasy primarily focuses on the clear form, giving too little attention to the form of unclear phantasy (Saraiva 1970; Volonté 1997; Bernet 2003, 2004a, 2012; Casey 2000,

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[6] "Occasionally — in the case of most people, only quite exceptionally—phantasy appearances present themselves in a manner that approximates that of perceptual appearance, indeed, that seems to approach phenomenological equality with it. Whether it actually is and can be its equal is difficult to decide. It is enough that one can be very uncertain about whether any difference at all exists for certain classes of persons and cases. In such limit cases, however, it is also uncertain whether hallucination or a physical image apprehension based on hallucination does not replace genuine phantasy apprehension" (Hua XXIII, p. 58/63).

2003; Jansen 2010, 2016; Lohmar 2008; Cobos 2012; Shum 2015). Nevertheless, unclear phantasy is more the rule than exception: "in countless cases, - indeed, in most cases" there is no formation of a clear phantasized object. Especially if one intends to contribute to the mutual enlightenment between phenomenology and psychoanalysis, it seems most appropriate to emphasize the relevance of unclear phantasy.

From this perspective, it is easy to understand the second moment stated in the previously quoted passage. The concrete boundaries of phantasy formations are extremely difficult to identify. These formations fundamentally differ from the continuous series of adumbrations at work in perception. Also, the fulfillment is totally indeterminate. Unclear phantasy has its own atmosphere in which everything tends to be vaguely grey. Husserl's phenomenological investigation continues by showing the protean feature of these appearances:

> The appearance changes in protean fashion; something flashes there as color and plastic form and is immediately gone again. And the color, even when it flashes, is peculiarly empty, unsaturated, without force; and similarly, the form is something so vague, so ghostly, that it could not occur to us to posit it in the sphere of actual perception and imaging. These are distinctions that we do indeed describe with expressions taken from the domain of perception and yet do not find in that domain; they are new distinctions (Hua XXIII, p. 59/64).

Husserl makes similar remarks about this difficulty of articulation in his investigation of time-consciousness in the famous text Nr. 54 of Hua X: we do not have the right notions and therefore must borrow concepts developed in other contexts if we are to describe these "new distinctions."[7] We encounter here a different and specific form of phenomenalisation: the unclear phantasies are characterized by a different form of passive synthesis and temporalization. His research on unclear phantasy reinforces Husserl's conviction in pure phantasy's independence from the field of perception. Unclear phantasy does not rely on an image-consciousness: "If obscure phantasies

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[7] "This flow is something we speak of *in conformity with what is constituted*, but it is not 'something in objective time'. It is *absolute subjectivity* and has the absolute properties of something to be designated *metaphorically* as 'flow'; the absolute properties of a point of actuality, of the primal source-point 'now', etc. In the actuality-experience we have the primal source-point and a continuity of moments of reverberation. For all of this, we have no names." (Hua X, p. 371/382)

become constituted on the basis of an imaging, then the primary image object is already a phantasy object" (Hua XXIII, p. 88/95). Unclear phantasies do not presuppose perception in any way.

It is noteworthy that we do not have any coherent intuition in unclear phantasy. We cannot say that we do not see anything in this form of imagining, but it is also not the case that we see something clearly. We experience something in between seeing and not-seeing, as if we can somehow glimpse the chaotic life of these overdetermined and fragile appearances. The form of intuition as such is modified:

> Rather, instead of intuition itself, we have a rudiment of intuition, a shadow of intuition. In the case of very obscure phantasies, the re-presentation is reduced to a wholly insufficient residue; and if this residue is suppressed entirely, as it is when the phantasms are interrupted, then the determinate but *empty* intention aimed at the object remains. With the sudden reappearance of the impoverished residues, the empty intention is confirmed and is filled with respect to these moments or those. However, it turns into actual intuition only when a sufficiently rich image is given. The gaps, the dissolving hues that disappear in the hollow light of phantasy's field of vision, and so on, are objectivated only when we choose to objectivate them, only when we choose to interpret them on the analogy of real objectivity. Otherwise they simply remain without objective interpretation […] (Hua XXIII, p. 88/95).[8]

The intention operating in unclear phantasies has the tendency to become empty and – we can add – disoriented. It is determinate to the extent that it has a direction: it aims at an object. Yet, the appearances change so rapidly and abruptly that they surprise any anticipation. This passage concretely shows the profound indeterminacy of this inchoate dimension where nothing is stable. Phantasy's field of vision has a unique character incomparable to the perceptual field. The world of phantasy is another world where everything is volatile. It is hence not appropriate to speak of objects in the dimension of unclear phantasies. Therefore, I systematically use the term 'appearances.' The validity of this use finds a confirmation in Husserl's text that I have just quoted. We can objectify the appearances of unclear *Phantasien*, yet we cannot grasp them through this act

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[8] "Bei sehr dunklen Phantasien reduziert sich die Vergegenwärtigung auf einen ganz dürftigen Rest, und fällt dieser ganz weg, wie beim Intermittieren der Phantasmen, so bleibt die bestimmte, aber leere Intention auf den Gegenstand übrig. Mit den dürftigen, wieder auftauchenden Resten bekräftigt sie sich und füllt sie sich nach den oder jenen Momenten. Aber zur wirklichen Anschauung wird sie erst, wenn ein reichhaltiges Bild gegeben ist. Die Lücken, die zerfließenden Färbungen, die untertauchen in den Lichtstaub des Phantasiegesichtsfeldes usw., dergleichen wird erst objektiviert, wenn wir wollen, wenn wir dies nach Analogie wirklicher Gegenständlichkeit interpretieren wollen. Sonst

of objectification. Such a supposed grasping would reduce them to an intentional paradigm that is incompatible with their ways of appearing (and disappearing).

Now, I intend to further deepen the understanding of this inchoate realm by analyzing the notion of inner (time) consciousness: Which impact does the formation of these incoherent appearances have on the notion of inner consciousness? Does the temporalization of unclear phantasies lead (and perhaps even force) us to rethink Husserl's concept of inner time consciousness? I intend to investigate these questions by considering two different moments of inner consciousness that are strictly intertwined: a. inner consciousness as impressional consciousness and b. the articulation of inner time consciousness in the three ecstatic moments: primary impression, retention and protention.

2.1. Inner Consciousness as Impressional Consciousness

Each intentional act is not only directed to something else, but is also characterized by an internal consciousness due to its coinciding directedness to the subject. Zahavi rightly emphasizes that Husserl often uses three different terms for referring to the same phenomenon: 'internal consciousness,' 'primary consciousness' (*Urbewußtsein)* and 'impressional consciousness' (Zahavi 2003, p. 90). Inner consciousness can be conceived as impressional prereflective awareness of our intentional life:

> Through inner time-consciousness one is aware not only of the stream of consciousness (prereflective self-awareness), but also of the acts as demarcated temporal objects in subjective time (reflective self-awareness) and of the transcendent objects in objective time (intentional consciousness). Inner time-consciousness is simply another name for the prereflective self-awareness of our experiences, a streaming self-awareness that is not itself an intentional act, a temporal unit, or an immanent object (Hua X, p. 127), but an intrinsic and irrelational feature of our consciousness (Zahavi, 2003, p. 91).

In the famous Appendix XII of his 1905 Lectures, Husserl writes:

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bleibt es einfach ohne gegenständliche Interpretation (...)" (Hua XXIII, p. 88).

Every act is consciousness of something, but there is also consciousness of every act. Every experience is 'sensed', is immanently 'perceived' (internal consciousness), although naturally not posited, meant (to perceive here does not mean to grasp something and to be turned towards it in an act of meaning) (Hua X, 126/130).[9]

Bernet emphasizes the essential role that inner consciousness has in the subject's need to orient itself in the intricate web of the different temporalities of intentional acts.[10] The precise description of the inner consciousness of the act of phantasy is one of the most difficult challenges for phenomenological research. Already in clear phantasy we deal with a very complex phenomenon. When we imagine, we are aware of the intentional object in terms of an 'as if'-consciousness. The object is experienced as fictional. In contrast to it, we are impressionally aware of performing the act of imagining. In other words, the act of imagining is surely not experienced as being imaginary itself. Like the rest of our acts, it belongs to the history of our personal life, in the horizon of the common world. In several texts, Husserl's subtle phenomenological analysis attempts to grasp the complex relation between the fictional object of phantasy, the living performing act of imagining, and the inner consciousness of both the real act and the fictional object.

The situation is even more intricate regarding unclear phantasy: what kind of inner consciousness is at work when we experience the vanishing appearances of unclear phantasy? How can we be aware of them? We are touched by these appearances without the possibility of identifying them with certainty, even in their doxic modality. Therefore, to fully understand the reason for this confusion and lack of orientation, we must consider a second aspect of inner consciousness.

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[9] "Jeder Akt ist Bewusstsein von etwas, aber jeder Akt ist auch bewusst. Jedes Erlebnis ist 'empfunden', ist immanent ‚wahrgenommen' (inneres Bewusstsein), wenn auch natürlich nicht gesetzt, gemeint (wahrnehmen heißt hier nicht meinend zugewendet sein und erfassen)." (Hua X, p. 126) Another interesting passage is the following one: "Or every experience is 'consciousness,' and consciousness is consciousness *of. ......* But every experience is *itself experienced* [*erlebt*], and *to that extent* also conscious [*bewußt*]" (Hua X, p. 291/301 [transl. modified]).

[10] "Darüber hinaus besteht die Funktion dieses inneren (mir vor-reflektiven) Bewußtseins darin, den gegenwärtigen Akt in das Gewebe all meiner anderen intentionalen Akte einzugliedern, die entweder bereits vollzogen wurden oder noch vollzogen werden müssen." (Bernet 2004b, p. 54)

2.2. Inner Time-Consciousness in the light of the Relations between Primary Impression, Protention and Retention

The notion of inner time consciousness refers to the intertwining between protention, primary impression and retention. It is well-known that Husserl explores different possibilities for defining the relation between these constitutive moments of time-consciousness. He tends to conceive primary impression as the source of the temporal process in the 1905 Lectures. Nevertheless, he offers a different interpretation in the first and second texts of *Bernau Manuscripts*: primary impression is considered as a result of the intertwining between the rententional continuum (with its double intentionality) and the protentional continuum (with its double intentionality) (Hua XXXIII, p. 38). Although different interpretations are explored for defining the relation between primary impression, retention and protention, Husserl always maintains the assumption that there is one invariant and unique form of time consciousness (Hua X, p. 373).

Previous research has insisted on the potentially revolutionary implications of Husserl's analysis of the temporalization of unclear phantasy, particularly for rethinking the notion of inner time consciousness as such. This is especially true concerning the relation between primary impression, retention and protention (cf., Richir 2000, 2003; Micali 2010). Do we have to assume an invariable structure of time consciousness common to all experiences? Or is it possible that the relation between primary impression, retention and protention modifies itself in different forms of experience (cf., Micali 2008, pp. 218-234)?

Husserl highlights three essential characteristics of the temporalization of appearances in unclear phantasy: *1. their protean character; 2. their abrupt appearing and disappearing; 3. the intermittence.*

1. The appearances of unclear *phantasy* have a protean character: they incessantly change without constituting a coherent unity: "An object has just now come to appearance that may have developed out of the previous object but is no longer precisely the same object;

on the contrary, it is a different object, with representational moments that are less rich" (Hua XXIII, pp. 61-62/66). Different appearances belonging to different objects succeed without any consistency: "Thus, for example, I present Bismarck to myself; specifically, through one of the famous images depicting him in a cuirassier's uniform. Then suddenly another image of him, in civilian clothes, emerges, and so on" (Hua XXIII, p. 62/66). Husserl speaks here of "object". He emphasized the indeterminacy of its way of appearing in unclear phantasy: "the appearing object fluctuates in protean fashion" (Hua XIII, p. 63/67). As already said, one would be wise to substitute the word "object" here with "appearance". Specific appearances suddenly emerge. These fluctuating and overdetermined appearances can be confusedly referred to different objects. Sometimes the appearances are changing and fluctuating to such an extent that they can be referred to any object. The presenting content undergoes a continuous change: "On the side of phantasy, the absence of stability, the fleetingness and constant variation of the presenting contents, not only with respect to their fullness, but also with respect to their quality, their specific character as a whole" (Hua XXIII, p. 64/70).

2. The genesis of the appearances of unclear phantasy is always sudden, abrupt and unexpected: "Along with this protean mutability of the presenting contents, the objective appearances change *eo ipso* and in parallel. And as a rule they are not only mutable but also change *abruptly*" (Hua XXIII, 64/70). The experience of an object in the perceptual field is characterized by a stable and consistent order: a synthesis of adumbrations takes place in a highly coherent way. It is not possible to retrace the same order in the unclear phantasy:

> Ordinarily, however, the appearances in phantasy do not succeed one another in this order. The object presents itself at one moment from the front, then suddenly from the rear; on one occasion it presents itself as it appeared at some definite time and then as it appeared at an entirely different time, in which case the two times are widely separated (Hua XIII, p. 65/71).

The emergence of the different appearances is not subjected to any stable order; it always

surprises the subject. Richir compares them with the *Einfall* – we are not capable of

anticipating them (Richir, 2000, p. 74). Because of the abrupt, radical transformation of

these appearances, the retentional continuum is not able to set in and develop itself. The

absence of a stable order creates great difficulties in assessing the temporal relationship

between the appearances. Any effort to evaluate the interval between the two times (with

regard to the emergence of two appearances) becomes highly problematic.

3. The third essential character of the unclear phantasy lies in the intermittence of the

appearances. Usually the appearances of unclear phantasy do not emerge in a kaleidoscopic

fashion and then simply disappear into nothingness. These appearances tend to return.

Richir rightly emphasized that Husserl's analysis of unclear phantasy does not leave room

for any doubt: the 'appearances' of unclear phantasy escape the dimension of the present, even in its

most primitive form as living present (*lebendige Gegenwart*). Neither retentions nor protentions are

able to attach themselves to the 'primal impression' that appears by surprise and immediately

disappears. Here the quotation marks on "primary impression" are mandatory. It is difficult to think

a primary impression detached from the retentional continuum and from the series of protentions

within the usual framework that we find in Husserl's research on time-consciousness. Now that we

have pointed out the modification of time-consciousness that is proper to unclear phantasy, we can

return to our initial question: what is keeping us from identifying with certainty the quality of the

appearances of unclear phantasy?

The main problem here is that we cannot treat these appearances in terms of intentional acts.

If a coherent object shows itself, we can quite easily identify the quality of our intentional

acts: i) we can determine the manner of givenness, in which a determinate object is intended in

terms of perception, memory or phantasy; ii) we can also be pre-reflexively aware of the specific

doxic positionality of the specific act – the intentional object is intended as being real or as being

doubtful and so on. The evanescence of these appearances has an impact how inner-time

consciousness operates in them. The surprising emergence of appearances of unclear phantasy is so evanescent that inner-consciousness is incapable of determining their doxic positionality. Is this fugitive appearance an expression of a real desire? Or is this flash, that suddenly affected me, just *mere* phantasy and nothing else? Is it a dream? Is it real? Or does it want to say something to me?

2.3. Unclear Phantasy and Affective Life

I would like to conclude by outlining the possibility of a different approach to unclear phantasy. I am convinced that Husserl's meticulous analysis of unclear phantasy can be most productive if we abandon two major premises of his line of research:

1. Firstly, Husserl's investigation on phantasy focuses exclusively upon the question of *Vorstellung* by highlighting the specific features of this intentional act of presentification, as if the relevance of phantasy to subjective life was reducible to re*presenting* something absent in the form of the as-if.

2. Secondly, Husserl has a clear tendency to consider phantasy submitted to our will. He primarily treats the appearances of phantasy as if they would be under our control. We can reproduce them. We can imagine whatever we want. Phantasy is an infinite resource of possibilities and our will has an infinite power to manipulate them. Needless to say, there is a tension between the protean character of unclear phantasy and this voluntaristic approach to phantasy. Yet, it is not impossible to relieve this tension. One could overcome these difficulties by considering the appearances of unclear phantasy as marginal remains of meaningful phenomena: they are only irrelevant sketches preparing the ground for the manifestation of the object of clear phantasy. If one holds to the voluntaristic approach, the protean character of these appearances just shows the limits of evidence.

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I would like to choose a different path. In my view, Husserl's investigation on unclear phantasy can substantially contribute to understanding how we experience the intimate dimension of our affective life. In other words: the temporalization of unclear phantasy concerns us not only with regard to our limited capability of representing the idle actions of possible centaurs. Rather, the appearances of unclear phantasy are the dimensions where our desires, anxieties, and fears form themselves. The fears that visit children before falling asleep show themselves in the form of unclear phantasies. The appearances of unclear phantasies play a major role in the remorse of a guilty person who has committed something unforgivable. They are also involved in the self-punishment of a person suffering from obsessive-compulsive disturbances. In all these cases, it becomes clear how the appearances of phantasy are not submitted to our will. We see therefore that the heteronomy of the appearances of phantasy calls for greater emphasis. The appearances of phantasy incarnate our most intimate dimension, one that escapes both our grasp, as well as our control. In phantasy something deeper appears and at the same time vanishes; something essential to our identity, something that we are, but which we cannot grasp.

Let us here briefly consider the special case of obsessions with intrusive thoughts (Rachman, 2007) that are strictly connected to the sphere of unclear phantasies. In these cases, there is the deep anxiety of thinking of something unsayable. These lightning appearances are taken as an expression of what is *immonde* ("un-world") in Nancy's sense: what does not belong to the world (cf., Nancy 2007), what should not see the light of day. The mere confused appearance of such possibilities is an accusation. In order to assess the consistency of this charge, one is forced to retrace the terms of the charges in such a way that one ultimately creates and thus encounters those same ghosts that one wanted to elude. By exploring the accusation, one becomes guilty. In the repetition of these explorations, the concretization and condensation of an initially indeterminately negative feeling takes place. The repetition compulsion sets in. The appearances of unclear phantasy are thus not only unstable and volatile, but also malleable. This also means that they could be fully manipulated. Eventually, they could refer to any object, to any subject, to anything. This is

the reason why in obsessive disorders one can constantly fabricate evidence against oneself, since there is no clear constitution of any intentional object in the tumultuous life of unclear phantasy.

To summarize my position, if we recall the essential traits of the appearances of unclear phantasies (protean form, abruptness, and intermittence), the unclear phantasies cannot be considered as *quasi-perceptions* of a fictional object, since no *intentional object* constitutes itself in this confused dimension. They do not reproduce the modification of any intentional act, or of any possible perception in the as-if mode. Husserl's analysis of unclear phantasy could give a major contribution to the understanding of subjectivity in a very different framework: when we consider the unclear phantasies as inchoate expressions of our challenging affective life.

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