

AFFECTIVE IMAGINATION: THE SHARED AWARENESS OF OUR DREAMS

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Abstract

What is the relationship between imagination and affectivity? The hypothesis discussed in this paper is that, far from being a constant basis for our acts of imagination, affectivity rather interrupts and re-orientates them toward new directions that cannot be consciously anticipated. Instead of understanding the affectivity of imagination as rooted in direct impression, I propose to understand it in terms of sudden infraction and contingent exposure to something that does not belong to the sphere of our conscious acts. While imagination and affectivity operate at two different levels of our subjective life, my aim is to show that their interference opens new world-perspectives and connects us to a larger human community. By cultivating contradiction in the life of our sensibility, imagination intensifies emotions that reveal the social and the cosmological dimension of our affectivity.

Keywords: Husserl; imagination; affectivity; temporality; world

“J’explorerais la nuit ! Mais non, c’est la nuit qui m’explore...”¹

The relationship between imagination² and affectivity is different from the classic relationship between imagination and perception, inasmuch as the former brings

¹ Bataille, Georges, *L’expérience intérieure*, Gallimard, Paris 1954, p. 130.

² For methodological purposes, the distinction between imagination understood as consciousness of image (*Bildbewusstsein*) and fantasy (*Phantasia* or *Phantasie*) will not be sharply maintained throughout this paper. The reason of this choice is that I am focusing here on modes of image-consciousness that involve fantasy, as well as forms of perceptive fantasy (*Perzeptive Phantasie*). See for example Husserl, Edmund: *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898–1925)*, Tr. John

to the fore the problem of the specific materiality of imagination.³ Following Husserl, sensation is the material of perception, while imagination works with phantasms that reproduce sensations and displace their presentation in a re-presentation.⁴ However, the status of phantasms themselves is far from being clear. While they are presented as a second degree material of the life of consciousness, their surrogate role is complex, contributing to the constitution of the sense of our world and at the same time offering an alternative to it. Moreover, the affectivity of phantasms – the specific intensity and the atmosphere cultivated through them – is difficult to compare to the affectivity of our perceptive life⁵, as if they followed a different code or were expressed in a different language. Imaginative affectivity presents itself as a mere duplicate of perceptive affectivity, nevertheless introducing new modes of resonance and reflexivity our perception ignores. From sensation to phantasm – if we maintain Husserl’s hyletic terms – there seems to be a gap whose elucidation requires an in-depth exploration of the temporality of our imagination.⁶

The hypothesis I sketch in this paper is that the affectivity of our imagination is made of interruptions and re-orientations toward new directions that cannot be consciously anticipated. Instead of understanding the affectivity of imagination as rooted in direct impression, I propose to understand it in terms of sudden infraction and contingent exposure to something that does not belong to the economy of our conscious acts, but to a larger social economy of our emotions. This special relationship to affectivity is what differentiates imagination from the other forms of presentification (*Vergegenwärtigungen*) – memory and waiting – whose affectivity embraces modalities of continuity and patience. Conversely, by cultivating

B. Brough. Springer, NYC, 2005 (Hua XXIII), N°20. See also Appendix XI to § 45, XLIII to No.15g, LXIV to No.15g.

³ See our “La matérialité de l’imagination”, in *Bulletin d’Analyse Phénoménologique*, V, 9, 2009, pp. 1–18 (<https://popups.uliege.be/1782-2041/index.php?id=346&file=1&pid=344>) and “La relation entre imagination et perception : différence ou répétition ?” in *Bulletin d’Analyse Phénoménologique*, Vol. 13, Numéro 2: L’acte d’imagination: Approches phénoménologiques (Actes n°10), 2017, pp. 18–33 (<http://popups.ulg.ac.be/1782-2041/index.php?id=977&file=1&pid=926>).

⁴ Husserl, Edmund, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)*, Tr. John Barnett, Kluwer Academic, Dordrecht/Boston/London 1991 (Hua X), Supplement II, pp. 156–158.

⁵ I am accentuating the difference between imagination and perception in order to focus on the specific affectivity of imagination. In our everyday life, there is no straight distinction between imagination and perception. Rather, our perceptive life is always infused with imaginations. See Dufourcq, Annabelle, *La dimension imaginaire du réel dans la philosophie de Husserl*, Springer, Phaenomenologica, Dordrecht 2011.

⁶ See our “La temporalité de l’imagination : le projeté et l’imprévisible” in Dufourcq, *Est-ce réel ? Phénoménologies de l’imaginaire*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2016, pp. 42–56.

contradiction in the life of our sensibility, imagination amplifies emotions that reveal matters related to the social and the cosmological dimension of our affectivity. Namely, imagination is a laboratory for the experience of a mutual affection that offers us the possibility to experience the world as *common*. While imagination and affectivity can be considered as operating at two different levels of our subjective life, my aim is to show that they interfere in a way that enhances our social creativity, connecting us to a larger human community.

1. Imagining at a Distance

How does the *imminence* of phantasms play within the *actuality* of our perceptions? To whom do these phantasms belong? How are they produced and how can we grasp their finality? When Husserl describes imagination as a consciousness that is modified and reproductive⁷, he has in view a detachment from the immediate impression that allows us to immerse ourselves in the stable images of art or in the streaming images of nightly dreaming and daydreaming. The absence out of which this distance is made belongs to what we imaginatively grasp, that cannot be immediately reached as such, but also to our own absence to ourselves – a sort of self-distancing or self-oblivion – as perceiving subjects. When we imagine, we experience an absence that is twofold: in the objects we imagine on the one hand and on the other hand in the subject we “are”, who is at the same time perceiving and “phantasizing”. How is this absence of the imagined objects and of ourselves compatible with vivid affections such as enchantment and fright? How can we explain the affections driving our imagination from the standpoint of this absence or of this distance to oneself and to the objects we imagine? Asking these questions forces us to quit the realm of a merely reflexive imagination or of an imagination necessarily connected to the exercise of our reflexivity – eidetic imagination –, in order to investigate an imagination that is first and foremost affective, working with immediate impressions and contingent reactions, with sudden changes and newly born emotions, and producing long-lasting feelings that can be revisited and reflexively explored.

From the standpoint of such an imagination, a contradiction becomes obvious between affection and distanciation, expressing the contrast between the imaginative subject’s immersion in presence and its absence to itself and to what it imagines. How is it possible for us to be affectively impressed while experiencing things

⁷ Hua X, § 16.

at a distance and *from a distance*? Distance, understood spatially, is precisely what makes any kind of direct impression impossible, weakening our sense of contact and our immediate sensitivity. “Putting some distance” between us and a given reality is withdrawing ourselves from a position in which we can be impressed or, strictly speaking, affected. In order to clarify this problem, we can refer to John Sallis’ work on imagination, which is described as a power of “hovering” and “conjoining” that is necessarily consorting with contradiction:

Imagination hovers between different, distinct, often even opposed, moments. In and through this hovering between moments, imagination holds them together. This conjoining does not reduce the difference between the moments. It does not blend the moments, does not eliminate their distinctness; it does not, in the case of opposites, cancel their opposition. It does not issue in what might be called a synthesis. On the contrary, in holding the moments together, imagination also sustains their difference; in drawing opposites together, it maintains them in their opposition. (...) Thus, in the act of imagining, imagination comes to hold together the moments of intuition and production; it draws them together in their difference, in their opposed directionalities.⁸

The inherent contradiction of imaginative hovering and conjoining is the source of a distortion of our perceptive field, producing an “infracture of the law”⁹ organizing it. Far from being an accident, this infracture of the law of perception happens because imagination works as a “power of intuiting an object that is not itself present”.¹⁰ The power of making images (*Verbildlichung*) “hovers around this virtual contradiction, that of something being – and yet not being – present”¹¹, something kept distant and at the same time brought close, something unreachable that affects us, though, in a very intimate manner. Imagination is thus “unruly”, “not only as the symmetrical opposite of rule, order, form, but also as what underlies all that displays the rule of order and form”.¹²

One of the first things to consider in the description of the interplay between presence and absence that images disclose is the kind of *affection* made possible through them. When we look at an image that captures our attention or when we are caught in daydreaming, we are always affected *at a distance* in which the image

⁸ Sallis, John, *Logic of Imagination*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2012, pp. 160–161.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 216.

is the *mediator* for something that is absent.¹³ Even if we are vividly attracted by the image we see or fully absorbed in a daydream, their meaning resonates from a realm where our full presence cannot be displayed. How can something absent affect us through fantasies and images? What is the modality of this affection? I would like to suggest that what looking at an image teaches us is that we can be *affected* without being properly speaking *impressed*. Indeed, there seems to be at least one dimension of our affectivity that cannot be reduced to mere impression, be it internal or external.

In Michel Henry's theory of affectivity, affectivity cannot be considered a mere component of our external perception, but stems instead from the inner struggle of being alive.¹⁴ Yet, while stressing the importance of a life that is affected by itself before being affected by worldly presences, Henry somehow loses track of the connection between affectivity and the worldly orientation of our subjective life – as if we had two lives, one intensely struggling with itself for the sake of maintaining a true essence of appearing and another scattered in a world made of traps and delusions.¹⁵ Henry's account of imagination in *L'essence de la manifestation* and *Voir l'invisible*¹⁶ appears to be strangely distorted and repressive because he does not really consider our subjective affectivity as belonging to the world, but rather as constantly inclined to disconnect itself from it when it comes to reveal its inner movement. Could we think about an affectivity that is social and cosmological before being experienced as individual and subjective? Could imagination seek to affirm this cosmological dimension of affectivity instead of narrowing it down to the psychological sphere of our private impressions?

From the perspective I would like to follow, imagination is to be considered as the source of a deep connection with the world we live in, in its actuality and its potentiality. The experience of being absorbed in imagination¹⁷ is about letting ourselves be absorbed by the world – called by it, attracted, captured –, *beyond* – or rather despite – any inner movement of dissociation that would seek to disconnect

¹³ See Bernet, Rudolf, *Conscience et existence. Perspectives phénoménologiques*, PUF, Paris 2004, pp. 119–142.

¹⁴ See Henry, Michel, *L'essence de la manifestation*, PUF, Paris 1963.

¹⁵ See our "L'imagination chez Michel Henry: entre matérialité et abstraction" in Jdey, Adnen et Kühn, Rolf (éd.), *Michel Henry et l'affect de l'art. Recherches sur l'esthétique de la phénoménologie matérielle*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2012, pp. 159–174.

¹⁶ Henry, *Voir l'invisible. Sur Kandinsky*, éd. François Bourin, Paris 1988.

¹⁷ See Fink, Eugen, *Representation and Image [Vergegenwärtigung und Bild. Beiträge zur Phänomenologie der Unwirklichkeit. (1930)]* in Fink, Eugen, *Studien zur Phaenomenologie 1930–1939*, Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag 1966, § 26.

us from it.¹⁸ This is one of the reasons why the affectivity displayed in our imagination cannot be an unworldly one and why its social dimension requires further investigation. In the anti-Sartrean view I adopt here¹⁹, there is an affectivity at work in the life of our imagination that maintains us *within the real world*, despite other tendencies that seek to disconnect us from it.²⁰ I would like to take one step further in this direction, stating that imagination opens us to an affectivity that is worldly (and openly social) before being, strictly speaking, subjective (and particular) – especially if we understand by “subjectivity” the core of the self-presence that Husserl has put at the center of his phenomenological descriptions.

2. Temporality

In order to understand the idea of an affectivity that cannot be reduced to impression without losing sight of the worldly attachment of imagination, we need to further investigate the temporality of imagination. As we mentioned already, for Husserl imagination is a reproductive consciousness that modifies our perceptive attachments into a detachment from immediate impression. Along these lines, Nicolas de Warren has argued that the distance at work in imagination is the expression of a temporality which is not directly tied to the wellspring of an original impression.²¹ This perspective acknowledges imagination’s exceptional situation, given the fact that original impression is for Husserl the temporal core of any lived experience. Indeed, in Husserl’s theory of time, one can find three levels of temporality: the objective moments of time measured by clocks, the stream of intentional acts constituting their meaning, and finally the original impression that makes each moment of time arise anew.²² This third layer of temporality be-

¹⁸ Following this direction, Paul Ricoeur understands task of imagination as a re-description of reality that provides motivations for our actions at an intersubjective and historic level. See Ricoeur, Paul, *Du texte à l’action*, Seuil, Paris 1986, pp. 245–253.

¹⁹ See Sartre, Jean-Paul, *The Imaginary. A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, Tr. J. Weber, Routledge, London and New York 2004.

²⁰ At a narrow (subjective) scale, the transcendental consciousness as Sartre understands it is an example of such a movement of withdrawal from the world. At the larger (objective) scale, capitalism, understood as an economical system of living and thought, embodies a structurally similar movement of separation. See Sartre, *La Transcendance de l’ego. Esquisse d’une description phénoménologique*, Vrin, Paris 1936 and Debord, Guy, *La société du spectacle*, Buchet/Chastel, Paris 1967.

²¹ De Warren, Nicolas, *Husserl and the Promise of Time: Subjectivity in Transcendental Phenomenology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009.

²² Hua X, § 39.

came increasingly important for Husserl as he progressed in his phenomenological analysis. One could argue in favor of a decay of interest in the intentional account of temporality Husserl was so attached to in his 1904 lectures, that is proportional to a growth of interest in the affective spring of temporality, leading him to stress the importance of the living present (*lebendige Gegegenwart*)²³ for the constituted meaning of any given experience. This movement from intentionality to impression goes together with Husserl's increasing doubt concerning the efficiency of the *Auffassung-Inhalt* intentional model for the description of the living stream of temporality in general and of the specific dynamism of imagination in particular.²⁴

Nicolas de Warren's thesis is that imagination appears as a fluctuating and unstable form of intuitive givenness – particularly in dreams – because its temporalization is “headless, bereft of an ever-renewing stabilizing axis of temporalization”.²⁵ As a consequence, when Husserl describes imaginative acts as modified at their very basis, belonging to the same reproductive consciousness as memory, this does not mean that we need an original impression first and then its modification as second in order for an imagination to be produced. Rather, imagination evolves in a kind of an alternative temporal stream that is detached from any original impression, floating parallel to the stream of temporality rooted in impression. The headless temporal character of the life of our imagination is responsible for the lack of unity and cohesion of our imaginative life compared to the unity and the cohesion of our perceptive life.²⁶ This distinction between the temporality of imagination and the temporality of perception becomes a crucial one for the classic Cartesian question about the certainty of the distinction between being awake or dreaming.²⁷

In the purpose of highlighting the difference between the hectic temporality of imagination and the cohesive temporality of perception, it is important to

²³ See Benoist, Jocelyn, *Autour de Husserl. L'ego et la raison*, Vrin, Paris 1994, Chapitre IV.

²⁴ See Rudolf Bernet, Iso Kern, Ernst Marbach, *Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1993, p. 145 sq.

²⁵ De Warren, “The Third Life of Subjectivity” in Breeur, Roland and Melle, Ulrich (ed.), *Life, Subjectivity and Art. Essays in Honor of Rudolf Bernet*, Springer, Dordrecht 2012, p. 467.

²⁶ This is the main argument used in favor of a sharp separation between imagination and perception. See Husserl, *Experience and Judgement. Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, Revised and Edited by Ludwig Landgrebe, Tr. J. S. Churchill and K. Ameriks, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1973, § 39–40. The powerful effect of psychotic hallucinations or other forms of long-lasting illusions is due to the fact that they tend to replace and enhance trivial perception. When we experience them, we are probably under the spell of an imaginary that is entirely perceived (not imagined), analogous to the imaginary of dreams but much more robust and consistent.

²⁷ See Descartes, René, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Tr. D. A. Cress, in Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis and Cambridge 1998, I and VI, pp. 62 and 103.

understand that while the general unity of the temporal stream relies on an ever-renewing original impression, the specific temporality of imagination is dis-united, redundant and chaotic because it is deprived of this original impression. Nonetheless, imaginations long-lastingly attract us, excite and sadden us, modifying our states of mind and our life-perspectives. Our analysis of temporality encourages us to reconsider the affectivity of imagination as being of a different kind than impression. It is not because, as a consciousness, I am passively the “receiver” of an original impression constantly renewing the temporal stream that I am able to be affected in imagination. Rather, when I imagine, I am affected by something else, something kept at a distance because its origin is not to be found in the inner core of my consciousness, because it comes from elsewhere, from afar. To the inner sense of temporality explored by Husserl, we need to add the external sense of our affective life expressed in imagination. This external sense provided by the affectivity of our imagination is the source of a specific continuity and historicity, which is different from the historicity of our conscious perception.

As a consequence, I would like to suggest that the worldly dimension of imagination should be understood as a direct consequence of this disconnection from original impression. We experience things at a distance in imagination because we are unable to benefit from the ever-refreshing source of an original impression that would passively impress us. Moreover, our imagination detaches us from time understood as an absolute inner sense, creating room for unpredictable interactions and surprising encounters with something else and someone else than ourselves. In this sense, affective imagination provides the temporal root of social relationality and historicity understood both in terms of a culture of mutual affection and of a getaway from epistemological solipsism and psychological narcissism.

When we imagine, something is from the very beginning disconnected, aerial, floating in a dimension that has no apparent need to be moored in us because it is probably moored elsewhere. Another way to express this idea is to say that since imagination is never freshly new, imaginative experience is always somehow “old”, already worn and used – the question being to understand where its affective intensity and attraction comes from. By what exactly are we affected when we imagine, if not by the original impression that carries our temporal stream? My provisional thesis is that when we imagine, we are affected by the imaginative experience of others. We receive affects from afar in our imaginary because we mutually affect each other, at an unconscious level of experience that is not directly accessible to perception.

The temporality of imagination is distorted because it has never been straight (in the sense of the straight echoing of moments of time we perceive), it is detached

because it has never been attached (as perceived moments are attached to the impression of “what happens now”). Rather, we might be in need to *learn* to attach ourselves to primary impressions starting from this imaginative state of detachment, if we were to accept with Marc Richir that our imaginary understood as life of *Phantasia* is an archaic passive layer of experience on which intentional perception is grounded.²⁸ However, I would like to modify the sense Richir gives to “archaic” and understand it as “old”, in order to relate it directly to the passivity of human mutual affection, contamination and transmission. Imaginative experience is old because it has already been used by someone else, worn elsewhere, experienced by another person. Yet, it is not obsolete, as it affects us vividly and establishes new experiences of contemporaneity. Imaginative experience is archaic, passively exposing us to unknown others. Yet, it is not anachronic, since it interrupts and reorients the sense we give to our present. In order to clarify the meaning of this reorientation, I will now examine another aspect of the reproductive modification of imagination: its “spacing” feature.

3. Spacing Imagination

I started this paper by noticing that the difference between the relationship between imagination and affectivity and the classic relationship between imagination and perception comes from the fact that the former carries the problem of the materiality of imagination. After having examined the temporality of this materiality, we need to return now to Husserl’s intentional analysis. If we go back to the contradiction between presence and absence that seems to define, to a greater or a lesser extent, any kind of imagination, we notice that feelings, emotions and sentiments occur against the background of a twofold absence which is, I would like to argue, both the absence of “objects” we lost or remain inaccessible, and that of a subjectivation²⁹ that is not yet operative. Between what we lost and what we are about to become – but we are not yet – imagination displays its affectivity, reuniting elements of our experience for which there is no direct encounter possible and keeping them connected through attractions, calls and captures that reorient our situation in the world. Imagination’s affective efficiency projects us somewhere in the gap between two forms of temporal becoming – our own, as subjects of our

²⁸ See Richir, Marc, *Phénoménologie en esquisses. Nouvelles fondations*, Millon, Grenoble 2000.

²⁹ I understand subjectivation as the process of becoming a subject of an experience. See Rancière, Jacques, *On the Shores of Politics*, Tr. L. Heron, Verso, London 2007.

future experience, and the remote becoming of what we lost or cannot reach, that we retrieve in a sort of eternity.³⁰

For John Sallis, the work of imagination makes possible a *spacing* within our subjectivity that creates a scene in which our feelings are engaged in a specific manner. Something is shown to us, drawing out attention and our interest, something appears in such a way that we cannot remain indifferent, as we most often chose to do when caught in a sequence of mere perceptions. Imagined persons, acts and landscapes affect us more intensely than the persons, the acts and the landscapes we perceive in the actuality of what is immediately present. While “seeing” persons and things at a distance and from a distance in our imagination, we endure their increased affective presence, whose projection incites an awareness that goes beyond wakefulness. Atmospheric effects of resonance and reverberation partially explain this affective efficiency of imagination. But in order to understand it truly, we have to consider imagination as an act through which the reality of our perception is multiplied, enriched and transformed.

When he explains the making of an image, Husserl refers to two noetic apprehensions (*Auffassungen*) that meet in the same intentional act: one aiming at the image itself as an object (*Bildobjekt*) and the other aiming to its absent subject (*Bildsujet*).³¹ However, the image is the wavering result of these two different intentions when they are tightly intertwined. This noetic account of imagination is interesting for several reasons. First, it shows that imagination has a perceptive dimension that one should not underestimate. Perception is not only heavily present in our relationship to images such as pictures, movies or paintings. It is also involved in daydreaming and dreaming, in such a way that Husserl defines imagination as a quasi-perception or as a modified perception or, in my terms, a purposely distorted perception.³² Expressing progressive doubts about the importance of noetic intentionality in his various manuscripts on imagination³³, Husserl stresses the importance of the “hyletic” contents, stating that the difference between

³⁰ For this temporal aspect, see our “La relation entre imagination et perception : différence ou répétition ?”, *art. cit.*

³¹ In Husserl’s terms, these two acts entail two different forms of intuition: a presenting one and a presentifying one. Among the two, only the latter is properly speaking an imaginative act, the aiming at an image as an object being a perceptive act. Moreover, phenomenologically explained, the image-making (*Verbildlichung*) appears to be grounded (*fundiert*) in the intentional act directed on the image as an object. See Hua XXIII, n°1, § 19, p. 39.

³² In the context of this problem, the nature of perception in which Husserl grounds his phenomenology needs further elucidation. Marc Richir makes an important contribution to this elucidation. See Richir, *Phénoménologie en esquisses*, p. 185–203. See also Schnell, Alexander, *Le Sens se faisant. Marc Richir et la refondation de la phénoménologie transcendentale*, Ousia, Bruxelles 2011, pp. 70–75.

³³ See Hua XXIII, Appendix XII and XIII.

sensations and phantasms – basic material of our affective experience – also decides if an intentional act is perceptive or imaginative. It is not (only) the modality of consciousness through which one grasps an image that makes it appear as an image, as Husserl himself affirmed in the famous Appendix to paragraphs 11 and 20 of the fifth *Logical Investigation*. The very nature of the hyletic material involved in it – supporting it – leads us to image-making (*Verbildlichung*), when it affects us without being present “in person” (*leibhaftig*). In other words, before being intentionally determined, the distinction between imagination and perception might stem from the hyletic differentiation of sensations and phantasms.

This hyletic “solution” brings us back to the question of the temporality of phantasms, and further on to the problem of their specific affectivity. In this regard, the relationship between the image-object and the image-subject seems to depend on a relationship of *likeness*. Quasi-perceiving something in an imaginary mode means providing a semblance of its perception which cannot be achieved in a total identification. Here too, there seems to be a distance that persists between what can be perceived and what is imagined, but this distance is seized as likeness, because the imagined *looks like* the perceived, imitates it, and reproduces it in (sometimes) a very convincing manner. However imagination offers more than a failed identification, that is, the possibility of a sudden exposure to the life of others and their imaginations.

What do we mean when we say that something we imagine looks like something we perceived or could perceive? When he examines the motivation driving the association created between the image-subject and the image-object, Husserl goes back to noetic intentionality, bringing forth “the power of an ego”³⁴ that transforms a thing into an image as responsible for the *inner character* of the imaginative act. Husserl’s point is that hyletic likeness as such is never enough in order to make one thing the image of the other. However convincing, this argument ultimately suggests that the specificity of imagination depends on an arbitrary decision of our consciousness understood as the power of an ego that secretly operates the segregation between what is perceived and what is imagined. Yet when we focus on the hyletic dimension of imagination, the likeness at stake here appears to operate as a combustive contamination, increasing the intensity of our ordinary affects and providing them with new horizons. If likeness is affectively charged, the motivation of entering the imaginary mode of consciousness might not come

³⁴ Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Tr. J. N. Findlay, Prometheus Books, New York City 2000, II, V, Appendix to 11 and 20, p. 594.

from consciousness itself, but from the affectivity involved when we look at a thing and see something else that is very much alike and at the same time sufficiently different.

If we take into consideration the absence of the image-subject in imagination *and* the absence of the subject who imagines itself – if we see our imaginative experiences as involving a failure of the subject we are when we perceive – it appears that seeing another thing *through* a perceived one in an imaginative mode has little to do with “acting as if” this thing was another or with a real modification of the subjective belief invested in it. A likeness that is not an “acting as if” nor a modification of belief is a likeness that is at play at a level of our experience which is not guided or determined by intentional acts or subjective beliefs. Rather, there seems to be something passive in the economy of our affects that invests the imaginative likeness in such a way that I am imagining one thing *through* another, bringing it to presence without making it totally present. Images are translucent in the sense that they offer a view towards something that cannot be touched and yet touches us, reorienting our affective experience.

This hypothesis resonates with an argument brought forth by Sara Ahmed in her article “Affective Economies”, following which “emotionality involves movements or associations whereby feelings take us across different levels of signification, not all of which can be admitted in the present”.³⁵ As a consequence, certain economies of our emotions and feelings are not organized by conscious subjective acts, leaning heavily on effects of likeness that derive from larger normative movements of alignment, appropriation and identification that orient our social experience.³⁶ Before being claimed by subjective consciousness, these areas of our affective life are shaped by the social normative order in which subjectivity is immersed.³⁷ Rooted in a psychoanalytical view on the melancholy of loss, this theory of emotions sheds light on Husserl’s idea of “reproductive modification” in imaginative experiences and on our hypothesis of an archaic imagination that recycles, as it were, affective experiences that intervene in our life by infraction. Far from being a constant basis for our acts of imagination, affectivity interrupts

³⁵ Ahmed, Sara, “Affective Economies” in *Social Text*, 79, Volume 22, Number 2, Summer 2004, Duke University Press, p. 120.

³⁶ See Ahmed, Sara, *Queer Phenomenology*, Duke University Press, Durham 2006.

³⁷ One step further, Ahmed poses that the institution of the subject itself is made possible by *imitating* a lost “object” of love – an object to which we have been affectively attached and from which we have been abruptly detached –, moved by a principle of resemblance that pushes it to “become alike” in order to become itself. See also our “Subjects of Desire. Time, Mourning and Melancholia” in C. Bodea and D. Popa (ed.), *Describing the Unconscious. Phenomenological Perspectives on the Subject of Psychoanalysis*, Zeta Books, Bucharest 2018, pp. 117–138.

and re-orient them toward new directions that cannot be consciously anticipated, initiating us to the common sphere of a mutually unconscious exposure. By cultivating contradiction in the life of our sensibility, imagination intensifies emotions that not only reveal other possible perspectives, but also articulate the social dimension of our affectivity. As a consequence, far from merely escaping the constraints of reality, imagination is a laboratory for an affective experience that is the vivid source of a common world, a world that is ours in affectivity before being intentionally mine or yours. This social aspect of the life of our imagination is supported by an affective intersubjectivity whose passive dimension needs to be further explored.

4. Subjective and Intersubjective Imagination

Husserl and his commentators often noticed that imagination entails a form of double-consciousness.³⁸ When I imagine, I leave aside my perceptive consciousness and become simultaneously an imaginative ego. Husserl has a number of ambiguous ways to express this doubling of the ego, as for example when he writes that the imaginative ego forgets itself in its imaginations:

In a self-oblivion, in which not even my lived-body and my closest perceptual environment receive the grace of being regarded, thus an actively grasping and reality-positing experience, I live entirely in the world of the “as if,” and all my perceiving, representing, thinking, feeling, acting is itself an activity in the “as if”: as is the case, for instance, when I live, lost in dreams, in my forest adventures, in all the amazing things that I see and hear, what I encounter in fright.³⁹

Yet, this imaginative self-oblivion does not suspend all forms of subjectivity: someone is really imagining, someone is numbed and transformed, one evidence of this being that we are often deeply *affected* by our imaginative experiences. As Maria Zambrano would put it, we are enduring our imaginative life, whose un-

³⁸ See Xua XXIII, Appendix XXIII; Schnell, *Husserl et les fondements de la phénoménologie constructive*, Millon, Grenoble 2007, p. 150 sq. ; Bernet, Rudolf, *Conscience et existence. Perspectives phénoménologiques*, III ; Depraz, Natalie, *Transcendance et Incarnation. Le statut de l'intersubjectivité comme alterité à soi chez Husserl*, Vrin, Paris 1995.

³⁹ Husserl, *First Philosophy. Lectures 1923–1925 and Related Texts from the Manuscripts*, Springer, Dordrecht 2019 (Hua VIII), II, Lecture 44 “Positional and Quasi-Positional Acts and Their Reduction; *Epoché* and Quasi-*Epoché*”, p. 317.

bearable passive weight is enclosing us in a circle.⁴⁰ If imagination is classically presented as an escape from the narrowness of perceptive life, there is also a necessary escape from the enclosing force of our imaginary, which is best attested in the urge to wake up from our dreams and to interrupt prolonged sequences of daydreaming. There is a dream hidden in our dreams, which is about reaching and maintaining lucidity and mutual co-presence with others. The presupposed ideal purity of imaginative life has its own specific weight that nourishes resistance and reluctance to it and motivates our attachment to wakeful attention.

The imaginative doubling of the self can be understood in terms of *semblance*, as our imaginative “consciousness induces within itself a semblance of its own perceptual activity”.⁴¹ At first sight, the split of the self in imagination is operated on the basis of the likeness that imagination creates in regard to the world of our perception. Yet, it is important to notice that this likeness is never perfectly adjusted to its model. Rather, it seeks to constantly diverge from it and to contrast with it. Imaginative experience is thus never identical to perceptive experience – neither is the imaginative ego to the perceptive one. The alignment of imagination and perception is deficient – which could also mean that imitating the perceptive style is maybe not at all imagination’s true goal. As we saw, the imaginative ego is also a distorted version of the perceptive ego because it leaves aside the rules guiding its experience in order to reveal different modalities and possibilities. As a consequence, the imaginative ego is not an organizing principle of experience in the same way in which the perceptive ego is. Its transcendental function is different: rather than being in charge of unifying the field of an experience, the imaginative ego passively receives something in it, attesting for an alterity that guides the life of any subjectivity. Rather than the agent, it is the recipient, the addressee of an experience that has its source elsewhere, touching it because it has already touched others, or because it is currently touching others.

This specific subjective position of “being touched by what touches the others” goes together with a special kind of awareness one can observe especially in dreams, where we develop an awareness we could never adopt while we are awake, which has its condition of possibility in sleeping. Dreaming thus raises the paradox of a situation in which the dreamt ego is awake while the dreaming ego sleeps. In other words, “dreaming occurs on the condition that the dreaming

⁴⁰ See Zambrano, Maria, *El Sueño creador*, Turner, Madrid 1986. See our “L’imaginaire du rêve: entre surprise et répétition” in *Ostium*, 12, 2016, pp. 1–13 (<http://www.ostium.sk/sk/limaginaire-du-reve-entre-surprise-et-repetition/>).

⁴¹ De Warren, “The Third Life of Subjectivity”, *art. cit.*, p. 463.

consciousness does not, and cannot, appear as itself dreaming”.⁴² Hence, the awareness of our dreams is pre-reflective, exposing us to a set of experiences through which the sense of my “being me” is transformed in an archaic mode: that is a mode through which we are engaged without being asked, a mode of “being affected by surprise” or by infraction, which I would like to understand as an original mode of imaginative affection. In this context, impression and infraction could be seen as two different sources of human affectivity, one leading to everyday normalized perception and the other launching the normative creativity of imagination.

Interestingly, Nicolas de Warren describes the awareness of our dreams as inaccessible both to wakeful perception *and* to wakeful imagination. As a consequence, in the life of our imagination a thin line separates dreams on the one hand and image-making, image-seeing and even daydreaming on the other hand – transforming dreams into a special case where a different awareness of who we are and of the world becomes possible. In both cases, there is a split between the ego who is imagining and the imagined ego, as “the consciousness that I am imagining is not an imagined consciousness”.⁴³ But in wakeful imaginations, this split of subjectivity is lived as an incompatibility in simultaneity, as if subjectivity was double-sided, whereas in the case of dreaming, the incompatibility diminishes and evaporates. While in wakeful imagination there is an implicit awareness, at a distance, that I am imagining, in dreams a pre-reflective awareness of the dreamt ego guides the dreaming ego who remains asleep.⁴⁴

Hence “to dream is not to experience oneself at a distance; it is, instead, to experience oneself entirely flattened and beholden to the imaginary, and to be adrift within the absence of one’s own consciousness, unhinged and unmoored from oneself”.⁴⁵ The relationship between the imagining ego and the imagined ego is here inverted, because the imagined ego is leading (or rather enduring) the experience of imagining while the imagining ego is neutralized by being asleep; whereas in wakeful imagination, the imagining ego stays in control of its imaginations, being never totally submerged in the imagined ego. Therefore the awareness that we discover in dreams seems to absorb the distance present in wakeful imagination. Not only is this state of absorption about being immersed into the imaginary itself

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 478. See also De Warren, “The Inner Night: Toward a Phenomenology of (Dreamless) Sleep” in D. Lohmar and I. Yamaguchi, *On Time: New Contributions to Husserlian Phenomenology of Time*, Springer, Dordrecht 2010, pp. 273–294.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 478.

understood as a parallel world⁴⁶ – in dreams we are absorbed “into horizons that are wider than those of wakeful life”.⁴⁷ While our wakeful life is restrained to the interests of individual egos, in dreams we experience what it means to be a subject from several points of view, from different perspectives, as if we were allowed to embrace a social setting to which we never have access in our wakeful imagination or perception. The phenomenological sense of this multiplicity exceeds a mere exercise of variation of the experience that is directly given to me or of a simple intellectual curiosity. Heavily captured in our imaginary when we dream, we fully experience its worldly dimension, its bodily texture and social rooting in order to open access to a common sphere of mutual exposure and affection.

If the “I” is a necessary condition to any act of fantasizing⁴⁸, its function is not the same in wakeful imagination and in dreaming imagination. Following Nicolas de Warren’s descriptions, in dreams “we have a self-transcendence that is no longer solidly anchored in immanence”⁴⁹, which corresponds to a floating and unmoored subjectivity. “I become other than myself in a more radical manner”, writes de Warren, “and this might explain why it is easy to think that dreams are visitations by the gods, or that in dreaming we are receiving something that we do not give to ourselves”.⁵⁰ If in our dreams we discover something we are not able to give to ourselves, what is the provenance of this discovery? As in Freud⁵¹, the hypothesis of a divine intervention in human dreams can be developed toward the more ambiguous thesis of a human connection whose multiple meanings remain to be deciphered – which means that before being visited by gods in our dreams, we are probably visited by other dreamers, imaginative subjects like us, whose imaginative experience affects ours like a magnet or a second source.

As a consequence, there is an affective dimension of our imaginary we share in our dreams, as idiomatic and obscure as they might be. Something taken from their “atmosphere” – a scene, a motif, a perceptive detail, a tonality, a fright, a state of attention – is shared before being experienced first-hand. The first person singular of our perceptive life dissolves into a first person plural in our dreams, or rather regresses towards the common sphere of a mutual affectivity discovered in

⁴⁶ J.-P. Sartre points out the problematic character of such a second world. See Sartre, *The Imaginary*, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁴⁷ de Warren, “The Third Life of Subjectivity”, *art. cit.*, p. 479.

⁴⁸ See Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Tr. F. Kersten, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague / Boston / Lancaster 1983 (Hua III), § 46, p. 101.

⁴⁹ de Warren, “The Third Life of Subjectivity”, *art. cit.*, p. 477.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ See Freud, Sigmund, *On Dreams in Sigmund Freud. The Standard Edition*, Vol. V (1900–1901), The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London 1967, p. 633.

the immemorial passivity of being affected by others before being affected by ourselves. This awareness with which we associate others, because we continue to be affected by them, is the core of an imaginative intersubjectivity whose conditions of possibility require further clarification.

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