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Cinema Consciousness
Elements of a Husserlian Approach to Film Image¹

Abstract:

Dialoguing with Husserl's manuscripts on *Phantasy, Image Consciousness and Memory*, this paper aims to shed light on some of the primary concepts defining his notion of image – such as “belief,” “presentification” (*Vergegenwärtigung*) and *perzeptive Phantasie* – and endeavors to show how such concepts could be profitably developed for the sake of a phenomenological description of film image. More in particular, these analyses aim to give a phenomenological account of the distinction between positing film images, presupposing a claim to reality – for example the ones we experience in a documentary attitude – and *quasi*-positing film images involved in artistic creation. The latter, despite their photographic relation to reality, are capable of giving rise to filmic “image-worlds” having intersubjective existence.

Keywords: *Image, Phantasy, Belief, Reality, Perceptio*

1. *Husserlian Windowness: a Premise*

Vivian Sobchack states that “three metaphors have dominated film theory: the *picture frame*, the *window*, and the *mirror*.”² Indeed, using any of these metaphors to describe the cinematographic screen inevitably influences one's approach from the beginning to questions regarding the essence of film image. We might begin our inquiry by drawing upon this taxonomy and asking which screen metaphor the Husserlian “phenomenology of image” allows us to discover. At first glance, the answer might seem almost too simple: the window metaphor. And in fact, this perspective towards Husserl's position has even at times led others to deem it outdated.³

It is a well-known fact that Husserl makes reference to the windowness of image in his own writings,⁴ so it is certainly no mistake to point out that the father of phenomenology drew upon this paradigm as an illustrative example when articulating his intricate inquiry regarding the essence of images. Nevertheless, categorically reducing Husserl's position to a single, determinate interpretation of this window paradigm would be perilously hasty—not least because, as will become clear, it is quite possible to describe the Husserlian notion of image even without relying upon this metaphor in the first place. Let us address this question briefly, merely to avoid potential misunderstandings. Besides the fact that the “window” is not the primary point of reference in Husserl's description of image, it also seems all the more misleading to read Husserl's recourse to the paradigm as having been derived from an allegedly outdated concept of vision—one in the tradition of Leon Battista Alberti, that is⁵—or to apply meanings borrowed from this tradition to

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² Recalling a “formulation [...] first emphasized” by “Charles F. Altman” (Sobchak 1992:14).

³ See for example Boehm 1994: 19.

⁴ See for example Hua XXIII: 50; 133–134; 612. As far as Hua XXIII is concerned, here and henceforth page numbers refer to the English edition.

⁵ On the Albertian heritage that would still affect a certain way of understanding the essence of images, see Carbone 2014: 21–34. On the Husserlian use of the window example it is useful to recall what Lambert Wiesing specifies in his *Artificial Presence*: “We look out of the window into an existing world; yet this is in no way the case for looking at an image. Husserl describes this difference in a particularly precise way by the concept of a conflict, and he is thus able to

terms used by Husserl, as though he had merely inherited this concept unquestioningly. Of course, it would likewise be improper to ignore the possibility of these meanings being present in, or having influenced, Husserlian ideas, but it is crucial to remember that, for Husserl, phenomenological analysis is what defines the actual boundaries of the notion of image—and, even more importantly, these boundaries can vary accordingly, over the course of research that may extend over many years. When this analysis yields differing perspectives, as Husserl himself notes, new results can shed new light on results that were previously considered established: “Indeed, this is universally the peculiarity of phenomenological analysis. Every step forward yields new points of view from which what we have already discovered appears in a new light, so that often enough what we were originally able to take as simple and undivided presents itself as complex and full of distinctions.”⁶

This notion is particularly prevalent within Husserl’s manuscripts on image, from which this last quote stems. Yet these same texts also provide insights into the fundamental ideas Husserl incorporated into his own notion of image; in fact, despite all their complexity and intricacy, the in-depth analyses contained within them still open up new paths for fruitful discovery even today. At the very least, these paths clearly do not lead backward, toward a conventional Albertian concept of windowness. On the contrary, it is useful to explore the wealth of possibilities they contain, in order to develop both their explicit and implicit potentialities. Thus it is no coincidence that several significant recent contributions, though offering differing interpretations of some key Husserlian concepts, are united in their efforts to point out the true originality of Husserl’s approach and the necessity of giving it its rightful place within the most recent debate on image.⁷ With regard to our current topic specifically, several significant Husserlian notions reveal themselves to be powerful tools when reflecting upon the essence of film image.

It may be useful to begin with a few words on the approach taken here. This paper primarily discusses Husserl’s phenomenology of images, which indeed included few references to cinematic images. As such, any study on cinema based solely upon Husserl’s arguments would run the risk of overlooking numerous specifically cinematographic considerations like sound, montage and off-screen space—aspects that differentiate film imagery from the types of images Husserl addressed more expressly. Even so, exploring Husserlian inquiry into the *essence* of the image need not circumscribe the research to only those aspects Husserl explicitly thematized; rather, it implies an effort to rethink the Husserlian path and develop it beyond the issues and goals set by Husserl himself in order to explore the potentialities of his method. This is all the more true of the specific texts our analysis will consider—manuscripts not published within Husserl’s lifetime, often containing experimental ideas or sometimes even “aporetical” results. This need not represent a threat to the contemporary recovery of his research, but rather an opportunity to develop a new field of investigation allowing new modes of description for new objects. The defined scope of the present study is not intended as exhaustive, but as a starting point for additional research; specifically, we consider it a necessary first step into phenomenological explorations of the emotional and axiological dimensions of film images (including the role music and off-screen space play in the cinematic experience).

determine the limits of Alberti’s metaphor of the open window. The comparison to the window does not do justice to the conflictual mode of givenness of an image object. A thing depicted in an image ‘appears’, Husserl writes, ‘in the way in which an actual physical thing appears, but in conflict with the actual presence (*Gegenwart*) that conflict-free perception brings about’. This means that looking at the image does not lead us to feel ‘as if the person were there himself’ at all. [...] The appearance of a thing in the image does not possess the unbroken character of the immediate presence of that thing, which presence is characteristic of the view through a window” (Wiesing 2010: 81). In this regard, see also Ferencz-Flatz 2009: 239: “Der Raum, den ich durch ein Fenster hindurch sehe, setzt eine zusätzliche Sichtbarkeit voraus, z.B. nach links und rechts, die ich dadurch aktualisieren kann, dass ich mich dem Fenster nähere. Dagegen führt jeder Versuch, ähnliche Umgebungszustände des Bildes zu aktualisieren, zur Enttäuschung und somit zum Widerstreit. Jenseits eines bestimmten Spielfeldes ‘münden’ die Umgebungszustände des Bildes in den Bereich der ‘normalen Wahrnehmungsgegenwart’, um dort Widerstreit zu erfahren. Mit anderen Worten: Das Bild setzt sich selbst nicht widerspruchlos in seiner Wahrnehmungsumgebung fort”.

⁶ Hua XXIII: 19.

⁷ See for example de Warren 2010: 305-306.

2. Husserlian Tripartition in Image Consciousness

In order to do this, it is useful to start by examining what the underlying driving force behind Husserlian analysis is, paying particular attention to those aspects that are directly relevant to the question at hand. The core issue is that of *difference*, specifically, the differences distinguishing specific modalities of consciousness that can be discovered and described through a phenomenological eye. In this regard, it is useful to recall what is perhaps the best-known of the texts found in *Husserliana XXIII*, edited by Eduard Marbach, which collects most of Husserl's unpublished work on *Phantasy, Image Consciousness and Memory*. I refer to the first text contained therein, which is the third part (*Phantasy and Image Consciousness*) of the *Hauptstücke aus der Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, a lecture course Husserl gave at Göttingen in the winter semester of 1904-1905.

The question of the differences among perception, physical images and phantasy images plays a prominent role in this text. Husserl had focused on the perceptual dimension during the first two parts of the course, and was now seeking to pinpoint the eidetic differences distinguishing image consciousness and phantasy consciousness from perceptual consciousness—differences without which it was impossible to describe the latter “fully adequate[ly]” from a phenomenological perspective.⁸ The cinematic experience clearly involves all three of these types of consciousness. More precisely, as we will soon see, the interplay among these three dimensions becomes central to what, along with Husserl, we could call aesthetic consciousness. The precise nature of this interplay occupied Husserl throughout the course of his reflections on the essence of images.⁹ Of course, it could either be described in terms of *opacity* or *transparency*, depending which facet of this interaction one wished to emphasize. When considering the cinematic screen, however, what is important is not establishing whether the screen ought to be defined as transparent (due to its alleged windowness) or opaque (as its etymological meaning seems to suggest¹⁰), but rather to bring to light the manifold senses in which one *is allowed to* refer to film image in terms of the opacity and/or transparency.

According to these premises, when seeking to characterize film images in Husserlian terms, one might start by examining the kinds of images Husserl identified in his 1904-1905 lectures, and then determine which ones the images we see on the screen would fall under. At the very beginning of his analyses on *Phantasy and Image Consciousness*, Husserl distinguishes between “physical images” and “phantasy images”¹¹—that is, between those images appearing on a material support and mental images, as it might often be described (or, as Husserl also puts it in his phenomenological terms, images which “hover before us”¹²). In describing the former, Husserl primarily refers to paintings and photography. Although it would be an oversimplification to say that the material conditions characterizing paintings and photographic images are immediately applicable to film images, we could still consider film images physical ones at this level of the analysis, also in light of Husserl's own references to cinematic images.¹³ They are not images a

⁸ “We have been occupying ourselves up to this point with the phenomenology of perception. We cannot attempt to carry out a phenomenology of perception in a fully adequate way and complete it on its own account without taking into consideration the phenomena closely related to perception” (Hua XXIII: 1).

⁹ For a rich account of such a development in Husserl thought, see Marbach 1980: XXV–LXXXII.

¹⁰ On this point, see Carbone 2014: 29.

¹¹ See Hua XXIII: 19–20.

¹² Hua XXIII: 20. Yet, it has to be stressed that in the course of his investigation, Husserl will come to the conclusion that in phantasy we do not have, properly speaking, *images* (see for example Hua XXIII: 92–94).

¹³ See Hua XXIII: 66; 146; 584, note 3; 645–646. On this point see also Ferencz-Flatz 2008-2009: 95: “Im Band XXIII der *Husserliana* sind nun, in diesem Horizont, *fünf* kurze Bemerkungen zum Thema Film aufgezeichnet, die aus der Periode 1904-1921 stammen und den Film ausdrücklich als eine Bildart, neben Holzschnitt, Gemälde, Photographie usw. besprechen”. In a certain way, it could be suggested that the moving image finds its place in Husserl's reflection between stable “physical images” and the phantasy images he tries to describe in his 1904-1905 course, the first being stable but lacking movement, the second moving but lacking stability. That is why it is profitable to put the issue about

spectator can merely imagine—showing them to the audience requires a physical dimension. Physical images are not supposed to show perceptual objects themselves: what we see on the screen are images, not the things “in themselves,” their “flesh and blood” presence, which is what we normally experience perceptively.

The phenomenological description of physical images Husserl offers in his 1904-1905 lectures famously identifies three different constitutive moments:¹⁴ he distinguishes among “1) the physical image, the physical thing made from canvas, marble, and so on; 2) the representing or depicting object; and 3) the represented or depicted object.”¹⁵ As he also puts it, “for the latter, we prefer to say simply ‘*image subject*’ (*Bildsujet*); for the first object, we prefer ‘physical image’ (*das physische Bild*)” – or, as he also calls it: “image-thing (*Bildding*)” –; for the second, ‘representing image’ or ‘image object’ (*Bildobjekt*).”¹⁶ As far as the image object is concerned, Lambert Wiesing interestingly characterizes it as an “artificial presence,”¹⁷ “an immaterial, which means exclusively visible, object [...] brought into appearance (*Erscheinung*) by means of a material image carrier.”¹⁸ To put it another way, image objects are “exclusively visible” and “not subject to the laws of physics.”¹⁹ Based on this point of view, one could decide to rip up a photograph (for whatever reason), but in doing so, one would not, properly speaking, affect the image object manifested upon the surface of the image. The image object would disappear, of course, but only because its material conditions (*de facto* conditions) were no longer in place. In other words, we could say that, when we see images, we do not see the “image-things,” but rather what manifests itself at their impalpable surface. And yet this description does not suffice.

Interestingly, Deleuze’s late reflections on images make a similar point, which it may be useful to recall here briefly. In reference to images on canvas, on films and even in novels, the French philosopher remarks: “The young man will smile on the canvas for as long as the canvas lasts. Blood throbs under the skin of this woman’s face, the wind shakes a branch, a group of men prepare to leave. In a novel or *a film*, the young man will stop smiling, but he will start to smile again when we turn to this page or that moment.”²⁰ Note that, here, Deleuze is indeed talking about artistic images, and—significantly for us in this context—also makes reference to the cinematic experience. Not all images are such images, and as we will soon see, this distinction is entirely relevant in the Husserlian context as well. Clearly, an additional issue should be addressed here, namely the one concerning the role of the material in aesthetic consciousness—considering that, in physical images, material dimension is only a *factual* condition necessary for something to be manifested. For example, despite their artistic *transient* physical status, Deleuze argues that images—including those in film—allow us to experience something eternal, “although actually” such an eternity “lasts no longer than its support and materials – stone, canvas, chemical color, and so on (*quid facti?*).”²¹

Husserl’s explicit interest in film image as follows: “Wie kann eine sich wandelnde Bildfigur in stabiler Weise ein Bildsujet darstellen? Die Antwort liegt für Husserl in der Tatsache, dass die filmische Bilderfolge nicht einfach von einem Gegenstand zum anderen un stetig überspringt, sondern einen einheitlichen Bildzusammenhang ins Spiel bringt” (Ferencz-Flatz 2008-2009: 95).

¹⁴ “Three distinct, yet inseparable intentional objects, along with three layered noetic acts of apprehension” (De Warren 2010: 315).

¹⁵ Hua XXIII: 21.

¹⁶ Hua XXIII: 21. Accounting for this distinction can also benefit us when referring to the different possible meanings one might intend when using the word “image”. On this point see Wiesing 2010: 30–33. As regards different ways of considering images, let us recall, as one token example, the words of photographer Stephen Shore: “As an object, a photograph has its own life in the world. It can be saved in a shoebox or in an album or in a museum. It can be reproduced as information or as an advertisement. It can be bought and sold. It may be regarded as a utilitarian object or as a work of art. The context in which a photograph is seen affects the meanings a viewer draws from it” (Shore 2002).

¹⁷ Wiesing 2010: 19.

¹⁸ Wiesing 2010: 35.

¹⁹ Wiesing 2010: 35.

²⁰ Deleuze, Guattari 1994: 163, my italics.

²¹ Deleuze, Guattari 1994: 163.

We could say that, in experiencing images, we do not actually see images as things. In a certain way, the latter become, as it were, transparent, in the sense that the material substance as a “thing” seems to disappear: it is only the factual condition that allows a work of art to appear. Nevertheless – *nota bene* – this does not imply that one no longer sees that which is manifested, or that this materiality is unimportant in the Husserlian (or the Deleuzian) context.²² However, we cannot yet linger on this issue at this point of the analysis: it is first necessary to turn our attention to other key Husserlian notions in order to make further distinctions within the field of what we have called “physical images.”

3. From Photograph to Film: Presentification and Belief

The Husserlian tripartition outlined in the previous section does not seem to apply to every physical image the same way. Let us begin by considering a simple example: a common photograph of a friend. When looking at it, we can easily repeat the experience Husserl describes in his 1904-1905 lectures, referring to a photograph of a child:

For example, there lies before us a photograph representing a child. How does it do this? Well, primarily by sketching an image that on the whole does indeed resemble the child but deviates from it markedly in appearing size, coloring, and so on. Of course, this miniature child appearing here in disagreeably grayish-violet coloring is not the child that is meant, not the represented child. It is not the child itself but its photographic *image*. If we speak of the image in this way, and if we say in criticism that the image fails, that it resembles the original only in this or that respect, or if we say that it resembles it perfectly, then naturally we do not mean the physical image, the thing that lies there on the table or hangs on the wall. The photograph as physical thing is a real object and is taken as such in perception.²³

In our example, the photograph of our friend, we *can* recognize: 1) the photograph as a “physical thing”; 2) the “miniature [friend],” the “photographic image,” the “depictive” image, something that actually “has never existed and never will exist and, of course, is not taken by us for even a moment as something real”; and 3) “the image subject” which “is depicted,”²⁴ namely our friend. Yet—I ask, and the answer will require a very cautious approach—to what extent can these same distinctions be made in reference to film images? Can the experience of looking at the cinematic screen be described using the same tripartite framework? To answer this both simple and complex question, we must linger further on the characterization of what we referred to as a “common photograph” and then proceed to try and draw a parallel with the corresponding kind of film image. In order to do that, it is useful to focus on some of the elements that define the former, in our case a simple image of our friend. On the one hand, we can affirm that we see our friend (image subject) *in* the photograph (as it were, through the image-object). On the other hand, as we have stated, this seeing is not the same seeing we experience in perception, when our friend is there in front of us, “in the flesh.” Yet even so, even though such an image does not constitute a presentation (*Gegenwärtigung*) of our friend, but merely a presentification (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of him or her—that is, he or she is not actually *present* in the room but merely *presentified*—we could ask what our attitude toward *reality* is in such an experience. In other words: do we *believe* in the real existence of what we are seeing?

As has been aptly explained,²⁵ this question also recalls some of the key issues explored by

²² As is suggested in Lotz 2010: 164: “we should come to the conclusion that from a ‘pure’ Husserlian standpoint, a satisfactory investigation of photography is impossible, since this point of view is unable to take into account satisfactorily the specificity and materiality of photography (and other arts).” Husserl, for example, mentions the aesthetic function of “the means and materials of reproduction, for example, the bold brushwork of many masters, the aesthetic effect of marble, and so on” (Hua XXIII: 55; see also Hua XXIII: 41, note 5). Deleuze refers to a “becom[ing] expressive” of “all the material” in artistic images (Deleuze, Guattari 1994: 167).

²³ Hua XXIII: 20–21.

²⁴ Hua XXIII: 21.

²⁵ See Lotz 2010.

Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, his famous 1980 essay (which is, incidentally, the same year the Husserlian manuscripts on image were published in *Hua XXIII*). “Show your photographs to someone,” Barthes writes, “he will immediately show you his: ‘Look, this is my brother; this is me as a child’, etc., the Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of ‘look,’ ‘see,’ ‘Here it is’; it points a finger at certain *vis-à-vis*.” And again, in Barthes’ essay we read that a “photograph always carries its referent with itself.”²⁶ As far as the “look” is concerned, Husserl describes viewing photographs in terms of “looking in.” And still with him we can say that we see the “referent” (in Husserlian words the depicted image subject) *in* the photograph. It must be stressed that, for Husserl, the image subject is not located outside the photograph, but rather we see it *in* the photograph itself.²⁷ Indeed, he makes an essential distinction between *internal (immanent) and external symbolic (transeunt) imaging*: “in a certain sense, *both*” images and symbols “point beyond themselves. But the symbolic apprehension and, in addition, the signitive apprehension point beyond to an object foreign to what appears internally.”²⁸ Only the first kind of imaging gives rise, properly speaking, to a “genuine[e] imaging”²⁹ which would refer to something in itself: “we see the subject *in* the image itself; we see the former *in* the latter.”³⁰ Once this point has been clarified, “in the second place” we can “distinguish this internal imaging from an external, transeunt imaging, a different mode of representation by means of resemblance, which belongs in a series with representation by means of signs, or at least mediates imaginative consciousness with signitive consciousness.”³¹ In this second case, images “divert interest from themselves and seek to turn it away, as it were.”³² It is based on this that we can state that an image *can*—but not essentially *must*—function as a sign.³³ Hence, not only do we *not* see the image as a mere thing (though it is also possible to take that attitude, for example when we say that it is hanging on the wall), we must also specify that we see the image subject *in* the image object appearing at the photograph’s surface.

We might now reformulate the issue of our *belief* in what we see in the photograph as follows: we know that the image is not reality (reality being the domain of perception), that what

²⁶ Barthes 1982: 5.

²⁷ Properly speaking the image subject is not, for example, “the real friend in the real world”. Although “Husserl insists on resemblance as the irreducible core of visual representation [...] resemblance is not taken to be a type of natural faithfulness, a causal interaction between copy and original. [...] Instead, Husserl examines image-consciousness as a *specific form of intentionality*; yet, this placement of image-consciousness in the framework of intentionality does not simply offer another name or novel guise for a traditional notion of resemblance as imitation (mimesis), as an appearance that imitates the look of another appearance. Though Husserl retains the idea of resemblance as central to depiction, image-consciousness is not construed narrowly as the consciousness of imitation—as a relation between two separate appearances, a copy and its original” (de Warren 2010: 306), that is, the image object of my friend appearing on the surface of the photograph and the real friend in the real world. Eduard Marbach already touched upon this idea: “I think that it was Husserl’s view, which I endorse, that the pictorial relation must not be established between the physically present picture as a thing and its depictum; however, the pictorial relation must be anchored in or based on the physically present picture” (Marbach 2000: 303-304).

²⁸ *Hua XXIII*: 37.

²⁹ *Hua XXIII*: 56.

³⁰ *Hua XXIII*: 54, my italics.

³¹ *Hua XXIII*: 59.

³² *Hua XXIII*: 56. In this regard, see in particular Eduard Marbach’s *On depicting*, where the editor of *Hua XXIII* also “stress[es]” that “inner iconicity is by no means restricted, as one might perhaps think at first, to so-called realistic or naturalistic pictorial representation. Instead [...] inner iconicity is a matter of attitudinal stance, set, or turn of mind, which can be alive in the presence of representations that are even relatively ‘impoverished’ as regards their iconifying moments. [...] Outer iconicity, too, is a matter of attitudinal stance, set, or turn of mind. The outward-turn may be triggered more readily by certain types of pictures, but according to Husserl it is in principle always possible to adopt this stance on the presence of pictorial representation” (Marbach 2000: 294-295).

³³ As shown by Husserl’s example pointed out by Marbach (see Marbach 2000: 295): “I look at this small advertising reproduction of the *Pietà* of Fra Bartolomeo. I grasp the image at one glance. The consciousness of agreement does not fill me. I do not live in the image; on the contrary, I feel pulled outward. I experience the image as a sign for the original, which I have seen at an earlier time. The meaning is not inherent in the image; rather, it is inherent in a second meaning-consciousness grounded on the image consciousness and connected with the image consciousness in the way in which a symbol and an intention that points beyond it are connected” (*Hua XXIII*: 185). On this point see also Wiesing 2010: 24–26.

we see in the image is not something present but rather presentified. Yet even though the image is not reality, when looking at a photograph of our friend, we *believe* in the existence of what we see in the image, that is to say in his or her existence. On the one hand, we are operating within a regime of image consciousness, not of reality consciousness (i.e., we know that the friend in the image is not here with us), but, on the other hand, there is a form of belief that affects what we see in the image (we know our friend is not here, but we believe he or she was there “in the flesh” when someone took a picture of him or her). Again, in Barthes’ terms, we could say that we usually look at a photograph with a certainty, namely that the person or thing shown therein is something or someone that “has been there”³⁴ (even if we might not be able to find it again in reality). Therefore, by stating that, in a physical image, the image subject that is the presentified can be either real or fictive,³⁵ Husserl himself, as we will see, seems to allow us to draw a distinction between images *characterized by belief* and images *free of belief*. Photographs in Barthesian sense seem to be of the first kind, always accompanied by a certainty: *it*, what I am seeing in the image, *has been there*.

In accordance to what we have anticipated, the question now is whether we have an analogous relationship with reality as regards film images. Let us begin by examining whether Husserl’s tripartition suitably applies. We have already classified film images as physical images;³⁶ Husserl himself seems to clear up any doubts on this in a *Hua XXIII* text probably dating back to 1917: “It pertains to an image that the depictive image, understood as image object, has a ‘being’ that persists and abides. This persisting, this remaining unchanged, does not mean that the image object is unchanging; indeed, it can be a cinematographic depictive image.”³⁷ Accordingly, it can legitimately be stated that “the changing image-object is synthetically identified and intended as ‘the same’ throughout all of its changes, and thus allows an identical pictorialization [*Verbildlichung*] of the same image-subject.”³⁸ Put another way: if I see my friend in some film footage, what I see is him or her (the image subject) in his or her image object moving on the surface the film is projected on. The Lumière Brothers’ first films, to choose a famous example, provide another case of moving images in which what we see are “real person[s].”³⁹

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes writes in reference to “Ernest, Paris 1931,” a photograph by Kertész: “It is *possible* that Ernest [...] is still alive today (but where? how? What a novel!).”⁴⁰ Now, we might experience the very same astonishment and the very same questions little Ernest’s image arouses in Roland Barthes when seeing a person appearing in a sufficiently dated movie—provided that we *believe* in the existence of the image subject appearing on the screen. We will come back to

³⁴ Barthes 1982: 76. For a discussion of the phenomenological approach of Barthes’ text see Lotz 2010.

³⁵ See for example *Hua XXIII*: 616, 620.

³⁶ Defining the “image-thing” can become more complicated with cinematic projection than it is with paintings or photographs, and in doing so we are pushed to tread on slippery ground. For instance, does the division between film strip/projector and screen/projection complicate the idea of the “image thing”? On the one hand, one could say that the latter does not exist without the former, but at the same time, we do not see the film strip and the projector as physical parts of the image. In John Brough’s interesting article *Showing and Seeing. Film as Phenomenology*, we read for example that “Husserl finds three moments in image-consciousness: the image itself, the characters I see on the screen, for example; the image’s physical support, such as the projector and film stock; and the subject of the image, what it is about. Image-consciousness is unique in that it has a foot in both the perceptual and imaginative worlds” (Brough 2011: 198). But are we sure we can truly say that “projector and film stock” are part of the image-thing from a phenomenological point of view? Although I do think this question requires further, specifically phenomenological, development (especially as regards the new kinds of cinematic experiences made possible by new media), I would be inclined to say that the projector and film would not be considered part of the image-thing in Husserlian terms, simply because they are not part of our movie theater experience, nor are they intended to be. For the moment, I would restrict my definition of the “image thing” to the illuminated screen itself. (Of course, the projectionist might look at a photogram on the film strip and discern the threefold structure of image we have been discussing, but this is another experience, not the one the director intended for me as a viewer).

³⁷ *Hua XXIII*: 645.

³⁸ Ferencz-Flatz 2008-2009: 95–96. My translation.

³⁹ Even though the people filmed had been “prepared” to be filmed, the image objects moving on the screen are supposed to show “real people.”

⁴⁰ Barthes 1982: 84.

this. For now, we can say that, at least at this level of analysis, when viewing film footage or looking at a photograph, our experiences are marked by a *belief* in the existence of what we see in the image. Even if, in such cases, we are not operating in a consciousness of reality, but rather operating within image consciousness, we nonetheless believe in the real existence of what is presentified. It is interesting to note that *presentification* and *belief* are two elements that this kind of consciousness shares with memory-consciousness: if we remember our friend having bought us coffee the previous afternoon, we are experiencing *presentification* as well as *belief* about what we are presentifying (we believe that he or she did, indeed, buy us coffee the day before).

From this point, it is a short step (though potentially a complicated one) to so-called *cinéma vérité*,⁴¹ as well as direct cinema or documentary films. Let us confront this group of images now; we will be dealing with fiction films later. Although these types of cinema are profoundly different from one another in certain respects, the least we can say for the sake of our argument is that they are similar in that they are all *presentifications* of an alleged reality. The audience's belief in what they see *in* these images is also a major component of these forms of cinema; to the directors of such films, giving audiences a "faithful" image of *reality* is – at least in principle – a major consideration. In turn, as spectators, we have a specific *attitude* towards these works: we are supposed to believe what we are being shown, we are supposed to see reality through images. In a certain sense we are pushed to say, along with Barthes: "given that I am seeing it now in the image, it *must have happened*."⁴²

This notion of *belief* also characterizes the experience of another very common kind of screen: the TV screen. We cannot linger too long on this question neither; suffice it to say that, in the case of live transmissions, for instance, we can have the very same pair, *presentification* and *belief*, operating in the present tense (note that among the forms of presentification, Husserl also includes that of the "memory of the present [*Gegenwartserinnerung*]," a presentification in which I posit the *current* existence of something I am not currently perceiving, for example the movie

⁴¹ For some decisive points concerning the relationship between camera and reality in *cinéma vérité*, see Mamber 1973: 4–5: "Cinema verite is a practical working method based upon a faith in unmanipulated reality, a refusal to temper with life as it presents itself. [...] Still, cinema verite is more than a mutant offspring of documentary techniques. It deserves a place of its own as an alternative kind of cinema – neither documentary (as usually practiced) nor fiction (though often telling a story)"

⁴² Thus, in this regard we cannot embrace the way in which Metz presents the issue of *belief* in films in his *On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema*, in which he counterposes cinema with photography on this very point. It seems that Metz's argument confuses two different levels. He writes: "There is thus a great difference between photography and the cinema, which is an art of fiction and narration and has considerable projective power. The movie spectator is absorbed, not by a 'has been there,' but by a sense of 'There it is.'" (Metz 1974: 6). Yet on closer inspection the parallel he has drawn is less between "has been there" and "there it is" than between "has been there" and "as if there it were." The Barthesian "has been there," to which Metz explicitly refers as well, concerns a genuine *belief* in reality. In Husserlian terms: this *belief* concerns a relationship with a form of *reality* in some way. If one draws a parallel between this kind of *belief* and the "impression of belief" of the filmic modality as Metz does, one must be very careful to define what kind of *belief* is implied in the latter—as we will see, the cinematic experience associated with moving images can assume different forms. For example, this "impression of reality" may take on different connotations depending on whether one is watching a fictional movie, a documentary, or old footage of a person who, say, has since died. Indeed, one may certainly acquire an "impression of reality" while watching a fictional movie, despite not believing that the events on the screen are *actually* happening, have ever happened, or will ever happen. Denis Diderot left us great contributions regarding the "effet de réel" produced by unreal images. This kind of *belief*, however, should not be equated to the level of *belief* in something as existent one has in viewing a documentary, a film claiming to present something that actually happened. It is no coincidence that, at a certain point in his article, Metz is forced to distinguish between a "'real' reality" and "reality of the fiction" (Metz 1974: 11). Besides, when Barthes affirms at the end of his essay that "cinema participates in [the] domestication of Photograph," he is explicitly referring to "fictional cinema, precisely the one said to be the seventh art," and only in this sense he can denote it as "illusion" (Barthes 1982: 117; more precisely, we might refer to this particular case as "artistic illusion" in Husserlian terms, see Hua XXIII: 617). Indeed, this kind of "domestication of Photograph" Barthes focuses on can affect photography as well (consider Gregory Crewdson's work, for example): "do you suppose that looking at Commander Puyo's strollers I am disturbed and exclaim 'That-has-been!'" (Barthes 1984: 117).

theater three blocks away).⁴³ When before them, we posit that something exists *now*, in the present, although we are not properly perceiving it. For example, an event one can only see on tele-vision (*Fern-sehen*),⁴⁴ essentially seeing it at a distance (*tele/fern*). The viewer can see something presentified on the screen while believing that it is happening in the present. (In the case of our friend, a similar type of consciousness is at work during a Skype video chat: I see him or her in the image object appearing on the screen. He or she talks to me and I do believe in his or her existence). According to Lambert Wiesing, this is the defining characteristic of television. Of course, “it is possible to watch movies on TV, but that is not a specific capacity of the TV; we can do that in the movie theater as well. When we watch a movie on TV, we use the TV not as television but as home cinema, as a movie theater substitute. Only when we watch live transmissions do we use the TV as television”⁴⁵ and “in that case we let ourselves be shown something that only television can show, something that is not a film but a broadcast.”⁴⁶ In this particular instance, Wiesing chooses to characterize the screen in terms of window: “The invention of the TV is the actualization of windows that are even better than those we are familiar with from normal houses.”⁴⁷ So it seems that the window paradigm is allowed in this context: one might, at least at first glance, describe these experiences (of watching *cinéma vérité*, television broadcasts, etc.) as looking through a window opened out onto *reality* (whether past or contemporary reality). When the entire world stopped to watch the television coverage of the events of 9/11, everyone was forced to believe that what was happening before their eyes was real. Of course, there is room to discuss the unprecedented manner in which the Gulf War was presented to us⁴⁸ – and, in a certain sense, even constructed for us – by television. Yet, a prerequisite of such images is that we are called to believe that what we saw *was happening at the time*. Likewise, we could discuss the way television images can “narcotize” our experience of reality or our “perception” of real violence⁴⁹—to the point where, as Baudrillard suggests, a proliferation of images leads to *iconoclastic* results. However, that does not change the fact that in such cases the viewer believes what he or she is seeing (though, again, there is potential room for discussion and analysis of such belief in its many possible “deviations,” or even to question whether it is well-founded).

4. *Phantasy Complying with Perceptio: Seeing the Character*

So far, we have outlined possibilities for Husserlian description of images we believe represent something real. In phenomenological terms, we can also say *positing images*, namely images that, even if not real in themselves, nonetheless posit the existence of something or someone. But what about when we are dealing with images that – despite their photographic nature – were never intended to represent something as existent? In other words, what about “object images” that are not held to be concerned with whether the “image subjects” they presentify actually exist? According to Husserl, such images presuppose a different kind of consciousness from the image consciousness involved with physical images characterized by a “position taking.”⁵⁰ When describing film images, then, how do we need to change our approach when discussing a fiction film, rather than film footage of our friend’s birthday party? What essentially changes if the people we see *in* the images are not “real people” but characters? In short, how do we characterize images when referring to fiction films? At this juncture, it may be helpful to recall that this analysis deliberately excludes

⁴³ See Hua X: 60-61.

⁴⁴ “The name *television* suggests that the apparatus of this name possesses the capacity to afford a view into the distance” (Wiesing 2010: 82).

⁴⁵ Wiesing 2010: 83. Still, and even though this issue does not concern directly the point Wiesing is making here, the peculiar essence of shows specifically conceived for a TV set, such as a TV series, should be questioned.

⁴⁶ Wiesing 2010: 83.

⁴⁷ Wiesing 2010: 82.

⁴⁸ See Baudrillard 1995.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Haneke 2010: 576; 578.

⁵⁰ See Hua 23: 456–458.

animated images, which would seem to imply a different kind of filmic image. This restriction of our inquiry to “conventional” photographic movies is not an effort to avoid this issue, however; rather, it is made with the awareness that our analysis represents a first step, one that can provide important phenomenological tools for use in further inquiries into animation, or into films made using more recently developed imaging technologies (performance capture, for example).⁵¹

The triadic relationship described in Husserl’s discussion of image consciousness becomes more complex when used in reference to fictional film images; the stratified structure of phenomenological description reveals new levels of analysis. Let us begin by defining some essential points to consider in approaching this complicated issue. First of all, we must, at least briefly, consider the letter Husserl famously wrote to Hugo von Hofmannsthal in January of 1907, wherein Husserl highlights several essential commonalities between phenomenologists and artists. In particular, he notes that they share a peculiar “attitude towards all forms of objectivity.”⁵² Artists, he says, suspend “all attitudes relating to emotions and the will which presuppose such an existential attitude;”⁵³ it is worth mentioning that this is true not only of the creator of the work of art, but also for its intended recipient, the audience. When they contemplate art in terms of a “purely aesthetic”⁵⁴ experience, he notes, the existence of the object under contemplation is not implied. The Kantian slant to Husserl’s approach is clear in this instance. The parallel he sees between philosophers (i.e., the phenomenologist) and artists (and, we might add, audience) primarily concerns the fact that both suspend all judgment regarding the existence of the objects of their respective experiences. They see what they see as pure appearance (*Erscheinung*).⁵⁵ Nevertheless, *nota bene*: they do not deny the existence of what they are seeing; that would be a negation of their existence, that is to say position-taking (against their existence). Rather, according to Husserl, one should say that they are *neutralized*.

In this regard, it can be particularly illuminating to refer to another of the texts collected in *Hua XXIII*—a manuscript from 1912, i.e. about seven years after the 1904/1905 lecture course. Husserl’s notion of image had changed in the period following that course; as Eduard Marbach’s analysis has shown very clearly, it would be dangerous to limit consideration of Husserl’s notion of image exclusively to the manuscripts from that Göttingen course. An in-depth exploration of this vast subject would obviously be outside the scope of this paper, but it is sufficient to recall that, by 1912, Husserl had abandoned his content-form schema and his “theory of representation (*Repräsentationstheorie*),”⁵⁶ a change that led him to reconsider his notion of “phantasy-image” and, we could add, of *phantasy* in general.⁵⁷ Now, in 1912, thanks to the new role he assigns to phantasy in aesthetic experience, he can develop a new characterization of the status of the works of art. Husserl’s discussion of theater are particularly relevant to our efforts to describe fictional cinematic images. Obviously, this is not to claim that theatrical and cinematic experiences are identical, but Husserl’s account of our experience in the theater can serve as a valuable starting point for a

⁵¹ See for example Manovich 2001: 293: “Computer media redefine the very identity of cinema.”

⁵² Husserl 2009: 2.

⁵³ Husserl 2009: 2.

⁵⁴ Husserl 2009: 2.

⁵⁵ See Husserl 2009: 2.

⁵⁶ See especially text no. 8, probably from 1909, in *Hua XXIII*, entitled “Phantasy as ‘Modification through and through’. On the Revision of the Content-Apprehension schema.” On this issue see also Brough 1980: LVII–LXI.

⁵⁷ “As a historical note, recall that in his early writings before and at the time of the *Logical Investigations* Husserl tended to describe acts of imagining or phantasy as a form of image consciousness (*Bildbewusstsein*). Only in the course of his 1904/05 lectures on ‘Phantasy and image consciousness’ did he revise his account and sharply distinguish between imagination (*Imagination*) in the proper sense of making use of an image (*perceptive Imagination; Bildbewusstsein*) and imagination as (simple) phantasy, the former involving a double-object, namely an image object (*Bildobjekt*) and a subject (*Bildsujet*), the image object being the way in which the (real or fictive) subject as it were appears in the physical picture (*Bildding*). In the years following these lectures, Husserl substantially refined the analysis of the various specific forms of acts of intuitively representifying something (*anschauliches Vergegenwärtigen*), acts of imagining, depicting, and remembering in particular” (Marbach 2013: 433–434).

phenomenological description of the images we experience at the movie theater. For instance, both types of works involve playing of characters by *real* people, by actors.⁵⁸

In his 1912 text, Husserl asserts that, when we sit in a theater, we have a particular attitude toward the action on stage: when watching “performances in a stage play,” we are not perceiving “bodies” in the proper sense, but rather “*fict[a]* complying with *perceptio* (*perzeptiv[e]* *Fikt[a]*).”⁵⁹ From the outset, we live in a type of consciousness that does not imply either the existence or the non-existence of what we are looking at—as Husserl puts it, we are “living in the iconic consciousness.”⁶⁰ Here, Husserl refers to cases of “imagery complying with *perceptio*, specifically, *iconic* imagery,” “the performances in a stage play” or the “contemplat[ion]” of “a painting.”⁶¹ As he puts it, experiences in which “something not present (something that in other circumstances would be intuitive and even be presented in a reproduction or in another *perceptio*) are pictorialized and made for me sensible according to *perceptio* in the figment complying with *perception*.”⁶² Husserl is referring to *Perzeption* rather than to *Wahrnehmung* in an effort to describe this peculiar consciousness, which entails a form of perception that does not involve, as it were, the mark of *belief* regarding what appears—in other words, he is trying to describe the peculiar *attitude* in which we perceive without even raising the question of whether what we are perceiving actually exists. By distinguishing between *perzipieren* und *wahrnehmen*, Husserl differentiates between *perzipieren* as a pure *percipere*, with no presuppositions regarding the existence of the merely perceived object, and perceiving as *wahrnehmen*, a *percipere* that implies that object’s existence. Perception as *Wahrnehmung* implies a position taking—*wahr-nehmen* as “holding as true”—as Husserl suggested in his 1907 *Dingvorlesung*.⁶³ In this sense, *cinéma vérité* is a cinema which aims to *presentify* an object that has undergone this kind of perception, that is to say images marked with the sign of *belief*. To be sure, *cinéma vérité* is still image consciousness and as such is not *Wahrnehmung*: its own belief is not direct perceptive belief.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, “we must note that

⁵⁸ Both theater and cinema also involve sound, another example of a characteristic distinguishing them from painting and photography. Although we must reserve specific analysis of this point for another work, it deserves particular attention, especially in relation to the emotional and axiological dimensions of images. Here, too, some of the analyses to be found in *Hua XXIII* can pave the way to fruitful future phenomenological developments.

⁵⁹ *Hua XXIII*: 456, transl. slightly modified. I prefer to translate the word “*Perzeption*” using the Latin word “*perceptio*”—and the corresponding adjective, “perceptive” as “complying with *perceptio*”—in order to keep it separate from the term “perception”, the usual translation for the German word *Wahrnehmung*. Even though Husserl sometimes uses these terms interchangeably, in *Hua XXIII* we can find more than one reason to try and maintain the distinction Husserl actually made between *Wahrnehmung* and *Perzeption* in the English translation. *Perzeption* is *Wahrnehmung* without belief, and, as Husserl says, any *Wahrnehmung* that does not take [*nimmt*] something as true [*wahr*] is no longer *Wahrnehmung* in the proper sense of the word. It can legitimately be affirmed that an object given perceptually [*wahrnehmungsmäßig*] is also given when complying with *perceptio* [*perzeptiv*], but conversely we cannot state that what is given when complying with *perceptio* [*perzeptiv*] is automatically given perceptually [*wahrnehmungsmäßig*]. The fact that there are cases in which the terms practically coincide does not change the fact that a distinction in an English translation can be rightfully—and not pleonastically—introduced, allowing the reader to feel the *difference* between *Wahrnehmung* and *Perzeption*, a difference that plays a very important role in these analyses. This is why the famous cases in which Husserl refers to illusion claiming the status of reality are not, in principle, cases of phantasy complying with perception [*perzeptiv*] but of perceptual [*wahrnehmungsmäßig*] illusions that, once discovered, become canceled perceptions [*Wahrnehmungen*], canceled realities (and only *après coup* could they be apprehended as *perceptive Phantasien*). According to this, and based on what Husserl himself says, we can also think of *perceptio* as a general term: we then have a *positional perceptio*, or *Wahrnehmung*, and a positionless *perceptio*, or *perceptio* in the strict sense. Thus, it is not by chance that Husserl here does not speak about a “*wahrnehmungsmäßige Phantasie*” but a “*perceptive Phantasie*.” Here *Phantasie* plays a role *before* we take anything to be true, to be real.

⁶⁰ *Hua XXIII*: 457.

⁶¹ *Hua XXIII*: 456, transl. slightly modified.

⁶² *Hua XXIII*: 456, transl. slightly modified.

⁶³ See *Hua XVI*: 16. See also *Hua XVI*: 48-49: “Wir nennen Perzeption ihrem gewöhnlichen Wortsinn nach einfach Wahrnehmung, nur daß wir die Stellungnahme nicht mit hinzunehmen.”

⁶⁴ In any case, it must be noted that, as Vincenzo Costa highlighted very clearly, “the character of being present in original, the *Leibhaftigkeit* that characterizes perception must not to be confused with character of reality [*Wirklichkeitscharakter*], that pertains to a perception whose object is considered as existent,” that is *Wahrnehmung*. (Costa 1999: 60).

image consciousness can be either positing or nonpositing,” and in case of *positing images* “the subject [...] posited [...] is given as existing.”⁶⁵ The *perceptio* (*Perzeption*), by contrast, is “pure positionless.”⁶⁶ This relevant distinction is discussed extensively about six years later in another text from Hua XXIII, in which Husserl once again focuses on the theater, in which the experience of the character’s body strongly exemplifies the experience of a pure positionless *perception* – counterposed to positional *perceptio*, that is, *Wahrnehmung*.

More particularly, in this 1918 text, the notion of *perception* and that of *iconic phantasy* gives rise to the complex and important notion of *perceptive Phantasie*, of “phantasy complying with *perception*.” It is important to recall that Husserl himself admits having changed his views significantly in this regard. Just after stating that “art is the realm of phantasy that has been given form,” he writes: “Earlier I believed that it belonged to the essence of fine art to present in an image, and I understood this presenting to be depicting. Looked at more closely, however, this is not correct.”⁶⁷ Exploring this delicate issue can also shed new light on the questions we raised in the first part of the paper regarding photographic and film images. Here, reflecting on theatrical image gives Husserl the opportunity to develop this notion, which, at least initially, might sound like a veritable oxymoron. “In the case of a theatrical performance,” he says, “we live in a world of phantasy complying with *perceptio* (*perceptive Phantasie*); we <have> ‘images’ (*Bilder*) within the cohesive unity of one image, but we do not for that reason have depictions (*Abbilder*).”⁶⁸ Let us consider this first point more closely. Here Husserl is not saying that when sitting in the audience watching a play, we cannot consider the “body images” moving throughout the scene as having a depictive (*abbildende*) function. Rather, the relevant point here concerns the role this depiction plays in the aesthetic experience: “if Wallenstein or Richard III is presented on stage, depictive presentations are surely involved, although the extent to which this depictiveness has an aesthetic function itself is a question we will have to consider.”⁶⁹ That being true, Husserl then seems to be suggesting that, even though a “depictiveness” can be present in art, it is “certainly [...] not the *primary* concern.”⁷⁰ What truly counts is “rather” the “character of image (*Bildlichkeit*) in the sense of phantasy complying with *perception*,” “understood as immediate imagination (*Imagination*).”⁷¹ Moreover, this holds true not only “in the case of a domestic comedy or drama,” where “depiction is obviously omitted,” but also in the case of “*stories*,” “even though they begin with ‘once upon a time,’ as fairy tales commonly do. They are intuitive or partially intuitive reproductions of what is past that are offered to us specifically in the mode of the phantasy of the past and, on occasion, in the mode of completely pure phantasy, as in the fairy tales of Hoffmannsthal.”⁷²

Husserl takes a decisive step here. He points out the productive power of the art of stage, the power of creation of the performance: “The actors produce an image, the image of a tragic event, each actor producing the image of a character in the play, and so on. But here ‘image of’ (*Bild von*) does not signify depiction of (*Abbild von*).”⁷³ The essential moment of such an experience is not the relationship between an image subject and an image object supposed to depict (*abbilden*) it.

⁶⁵ Hua XXIII: 564. And again, “this points to the fact that the possibility of a shift into presentive intuition essentially belongs to every exhibiting. We will probably have to say that intentions aimed in that direction are involved in the exhibiting, just as possible shifts in perceptual connections [*wahrnehmungszusammenhänge*] are involved in every perception [*Wahrnehmung*], and we have to take corresponding ‘intentions’ aimed at possible fulfillment to be an intrinsic part of the perception. Hence the question — What is essentially involved in image consciousness as ‘intention’ in relation to possible fulfillment? — is a cardinal point” (Hua XXIII: 564).

⁶⁶ Hua XXIII: 556.

⁶⁷ Hua XXIII: 516. On the general range of this change, see Ferencz-Flatz 2009: 249, note 41 (where it is exclusively referred to the Husserlian reflection on theater); Haardt 1995: 112 and Brough 2005: L (where, instead, in wider terms, it is considered to affect the Husserl’s consideration of aesthetic image consciousness at its very basis).

⁶⁸ Hua XXIII: 516, transl. slightly modified.

⁶⁹ Hua XXIII: 516.

⁷⁰ Hua XXIII: 516.

⁷¹ Hua XXIII: 516, transl. slightly modified.

⁷² Hua XXIII: 516, transl. slightly modified.

⁷³ Hua XXIII: 516.

In theater, the body in the scene becomes a “pure *fictum*” which nonetheless manifests itself within the regime of *perceptio*. As we suggested earlier, we experience it in a consciousness of “neutrality.” Yet speaking only of neutrality does not suffice here; we must also specify that we are in regime of the consciousness of the “as-if,” in a phantasy that displays itself according to *perception* generating an “artistic illusion,”⁷⁴ which generates a “*quasi*-position.” “*Quasi*” in the sense implied in the Latin roots of the term: “*quam si*”, namely “as-if.”

Of course, even though this *fictum* is imbued with the character of unreality, we are not dealing with an “illusion in the ordinary sense.”⁷⁵ Consequently, this issue concerning the aesthetic experience must not be confused with those regarding the famous wax mannequin examples Husserl often drew upon, in which we first take something to be a real perception [*Wahrnehmung*], then recognize our mistake and deem our previous perception an *illusion*.⁷⁶ Here we are dealing with another kind of consciousness. The image does not claim any form of real positing pretense, even if it manifests itself according to *perceptio* (and yet these *ficta* entail a creation, a production). We know from the beginning that “the sitting is not actual sitting but phantasy sitting, although the actor does also actually sit,” that the gun in the scene does not kill anyone. Actors do not actually hurt themselves; characters do.⁷⁷

5. Play’s Productive Power

Finally, let us turn our attention to fictional cinema. Even while entering the movie theater, we are preparing to be attuned to this peculiar attitude of phantasy neutrality. From the very beginning of our aesthetic experience, we live in the “iconic consciousness” without position-taking. We do not take a position regarding the actual existence of what appears on the screen (I am referring here to image subjects, not to the artificial presences image objects are; image objects are never posited, properly speaking, they are a nothing). We are in the *as-if* attitude, in the attitude of the *play* [*Spiel*], of *quasi*-positionality: “we are, of course, actually experiencing, but we are not in the attitude of actual experience; we do not actually join in the experiential positing. The reality changes into reality-as-if for us, changes into ‘play’.”⁷⁸

As mentioned earlier, when viewing a picture of our friend or some film footage of his or her birthday party, we believe in the past existence of what we are seeing. The same attitude, we said, shapes our experience when we watch *cinéma vérité* or, more generally, documentary films, and also when we view television images that purportedly allow us to view something happening “from a distance”, or when we video chat to our friend on Skype (in this case, as we said, we believe that what we are seeing is really happening in the present tense).

On the contrary, when we watch fiction movies, we do not take any actual position regarding the existence of what we see on the screen. Earlier, we described photographic depiction in terms of presentification (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of something that is – or has been – real even though we do not perceive it (*wahrnehmen*) in the image. Now, we can certainly focus on this kind of relationship when considering the images appearing on the screen in the cinematic experience. To return to our earlier discussion of Barthes’ remarks in *Camera Lucida*, while watching a movie, we can experience analogous astonishment to what Barthes feels when viewing the photo of little Ernest. As Barthes himself seems to suggest,⁷⁹ we might wonder about Buddy Swan, the child who played

⁷⁴ Hua XIII: 617.

⁷⁵ Hua XXIII: 617.

⁷⁶ See for example Hua XXIII: 48–49. On this point see also Marbach 1980: LXIX–LXX. This confusion can be accentuated if one does not recognize that “Der Ausdruck ‘Fikta’ wird von Husserl abwechselnd bald für Illusionen und bald für Bilder benutzt. Hier [as in the passages we are dealing with] bezieht er sich offenbar auf letztere” (Ferencz-Flatz 2009: 242, note 24).

⁷⁷ Parenthetically, it is because we do acknowledge this that cinema could imagine to play with this awareness (we need only to think of Iñárritu’s *Birdman* as one of the most recent cases).

⁷⁸ Hua XXIII: 615.

⁷⁹ “The (fictional) cinema combines two poses: the actor’s ‘this-has-been’ and the role’s, so that (something I would not experience before a painting) I can never see or see again in a film certain actors whom I know to be dead without a

the eight-year-old Charles Foster Kane, in the same way that Barthes wonders about Ernest: “It is possible that Buddy is still alive today: but where? how? What a novel!” Nowadays, of course, we can quickly discover the “plot” of this “novel” as well by simply Googling Buddy Swan and discovering his Wikipedia page, which tells us that “Paul Benjamin ‘Buddy’ Swann (October 24, 1929 – March 21, 1993) (also credited as Buddy Swann [Buddy Swan]) was an American child actor, best known for playing the title character of the 1941 film *Citizen Kane* as an eight-year-old boy” and that he died “March 21, 1993 (aged 63) in Colorado Springs, Colorado, U.S.” Perhaps we might then become interested in Buddy’s own story and, for example, shoot a documentary about the man who was (and will always be) the young Kane in the world of cinematographic art.⁸⁰ We have already recalled Deleuze’s statement about the capacity of art to preserve: “Art preserves, and it is the only thing in the world that is preserved. It preserves and is preserved in itself (*quid juris?*). [...] The young girl [as the young Kane] maintains the pose that she [he] has had for five thousand years [every time *Citizen Kane* is screened],” but this is “a gesture that no longer depends on whoever made it.”⁸¹

Also in light of Husserl’s remarks on the theater, then, we might suggest that a gesture we view on the screen “no longer depends on whoever made it,” either. On the one hand, we can bring about the depictive relationship according to which we see Buddy Swan as image subject *in* his giant image object appearing on the screen. But when attending a screening of *Citizen Kane* in a movie theater we are not supposed to pay attention to the photographic relationship between image subject and image object in which the latter has to depict a person who “has been there” in front of the lens;⁸² our attitude is set on the character, in this case the eight-year-old C. F. Kane. In Image 1

kind of melancholy: the melancholy of Photography itself” (Barthes 1982: 79).

⁸⁰ It must be mentioned that our approach shares some important facets with the discourse on “documentary consciousness” Vivian Sobchack develops in “Toward a Phenomenology of Nonfictional Film Experience.” Significantly, this text dialogues explicitly with the phenomenological (Merleau-Pontyan) approach to film image proposed in Meunier’s *Les structures de l’expérience filmique: l’identification filmique*, an “undeservedly neglected [...] volume,” as Sobchack writes, that “offers the premises and potential for an enriched understanding of how dynamic and fluid our engagement with the cinema really is” (Sobchack 1999: 242). Although we cannot undertake a strict comparison between our position and Sobchack’s and Meunier’s here, what is particularly interesting in relation to our inquiry is Sobchack’s emphasis on the role of spectator *attitude* in the distinction between documentary and fiction (“documentary is less a *thing* than an *experience*”), and that, accordingly, she speaks of a “documentary consciousness” (Sobchack 1999: 241), a consciousness that is “charge[d] with real” (Sobchack 1999: 242). Sobchack takes a crystal-clear stance on the subject we have addressed here regarding the shift of attention between Buddy Swan and Charles Foster Kane. In effect, she says, “in some cases” it happens that the “existential echo can be raised to a shout and fictional consciousness ruptured” (Sobchack 1999: 246). For example, in Renoir’s *Rules of the Game*, “the rabbit’s death leap as it is shot, the viewer’s extratextual knowledge suddenly *positing* the rabbit’s existence beyond the frame of the fiction into the documentary space of ‘elsewhere’ where it lived its rabbit life” (Sobchack 1999: 246). Or, again, “our cultural knowledge of the Burton/Taylor off-screen romance puts us in a different and less focused relation to the specific images on the screen” and “watching a fiction film such as *Cleopatra*, we cease to bracket the existence of the performers and suddenly find ourselves watching not Cleopatra but Elizabeth Taylor kiss not Antony but Richard Burton” (Sobchack 1999: 252). That is not to say that the spectator is completely free, but merely that, even though *documentary consciousness* can be “solicited,” it “is never determined a priori” (Sobchack 1999: 252–253). About this question, see also the remarks on a photograph of Woody Allen made in Wiesing 2010: 47: “As soon as the title *Zelig* is placed underneath a photograph of Woody Allen, we will use the visible image object (which could still well be used as a pictorial sign for Woody Allen) as a sign for a different, in this case fictional, person. [...] In a biography of Woody Allen we could once more refer the image already mentioned, which was previously used as a sign for Zelig, to Woody Allen; then, perhaps, the caption would read *Woody Allen in Zelig, 1983.*”

⁸¹ Deleuze, Guattari 1994:163.

⁸² And yet, once again, this is merely an initial stepping stone on the way to further description, and is certainly too normative when considered on its own. Besides the Sobchack examples just mentioned, further inquiry is warranted into the subject we will soon touch upon here in reference to Proust’s writings—that is, into the many ways actors can *produce* their characters, and the role the actor’s own *style* plays in this production. Another related consideration worth mentioning is the concept of celebrity in both theater and film, and the way it has accustomed us to a form of enjoinder wherein the actor’s “real” identity and the characters he or she plays are no longer entirely independent. The director may embrace this aspect of the cinematic experience in some cases; in others, he may attempt to reject it by employing unknown actors in order to avoid star-character confusion; or in still other cases, he may play around with it

below—or, more properly, in the part of the film from which this image-object was taken—what we are “supposed” to see is the eternal (in the Deleuzian sense) young Kane, not Buddy Swan.



Image 1: *Citizen Kane*, Buddy Swan/Charles Foster Kane

In fact, if we adopt the Husserlian position referenced above, we cannot even read this image as *merely* depicting an imaginary person, insofar as in the aesthetic attitude “depictiveness is not the *primary* concern.”⁸³ Of course, by stating this, we are not saying that images on the screen are of exactly the same type as those on the stage. The most immediately obvious difference is that a stage

(for example, as Michael Haneke did when remaking his 1997 *Funny Games* for an American audience ten years later, casting Naomi Watts and Tim Roth in the leading roles).

⁸³ Hua XXIII: 616. The question is not what this images are actually depicting, but what this depiction is producing. I do not think, then, that we should concentrate solely on the fact that the theater involves flesh-and-blood bodies, whereas the cinema offers only indirect access to them. The essential question for Husserl here is the role of phantasy and of play in our artistic experience. What would happen if, say, a theater director decided to raise a huge “digital fourth wall” up in front of the audience that covered the stage, so that the audience could only view the play on that screen? Although this would clearly involve a depiction, does this mean that Husserl’s discourse about the covered identity of the actor would essentially change? Could we no longer speak about *perzeptive Phantasie*? Moreover, what happens when I enjoy theater and opera on DVD, even though they were not originally conceived as spectacles to be enjoyed on screen? Would I no longer enjoy the images [*Bilder*] created by actors? Would the singing then be a mere depiction of “flesh and blood” singing? And besides, it can be useful to notice that, when Husserl talks about theatrical consciousness, he does not exclusively refer his discourse to things and persons that are on the stage “in flesh and blood,” but also to the painted coulisse, which clearly involves depiction. Along these lines, the proper question here is: what kind of experience does the cinematic *play* give us? What happens to the filmic material we see on screen in this artistic play?

actor's can be apprehended as a body "in the flesh," whereas in cinema, even if we choose to refer to the actor rather than the character he or she is playing, we still have a presentification. This presentification may be one of a real person and a real thing (Buddy Swan and a wooden prop sled, in the example we have mentioned). Yet we do not let this type of seeing come about (though it can happen, or we may choose to direct our attention in this manner), just as we do not let belief in real things and bodies to emerge in the theater; from the very beginning, the images we see on the screen are as-if images, producing—*quasi*-positing—a world, an "image-world" which "has intersubjective 'existence'": our "judgments about the characters [...] have a *kind of objective truth, even though they refer to fictions.*"⁸⁴

Aesthetically speaking, an image object "does not have to depict or refer beyond itself to any particular subject."⁸⁵ Rather than *merely* representing its own image-subject, the image-object actually *produces* it. To make a very broad generalization (through which we can only anticipate further levels of analysis to follow this one), we can say that works of art *express* their own subject instead of depict them. Thus, it is in this sense that movies—as much as theatrical works—have the power to "produce" characters. What we see *in* the movie image is young Kane and his eternal *expression*—regardless of how long its material conditions last.⁸⁶ Despite all their *nothingness*,⁸⁷ their "artificial presence," image objects⁸⁸ are there on the movie screen to *produce* eternal characters. Watching the movie, we *can* change attitude and bring about the image object's subject "Buddy Swan", but in principle this is not the essential element of the artistic experience. The same character can even, as it were, go through different depictions: we know that little Kane is played by Buddy Swan and adult Kane by Orson Welles, but that does not prevent us from seeing the same character in the two image objects of the two actors. *Through* the play of image objects I can see the *same* character produced in the *as if* world. Or we can have the same actor giving life to two different characters conversing with one another (consider Woody Allen's 1985 film *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, in which Jeff Daniels plays both Tom Baxter and Gil Shepherd).⁸⁹ And that is because art is not *merely* to depict, but more essentially *to produce*. When dealing with fictional film images, we suspend *belief* in the reality of what we are seeing, but, more essentially, we begin to *quasi*-believe, in the *phantasy* attitude,⁹⁰ in the realm of play.

Besides, as Husserl famously pointed out—and as his pupil Eugen Fink later makes very clear in his reflections on the notion of play [*Spiel*]⁹¹—phantasy modification, unlike neutrality modification *stricto sensu*, can be reiterated at many levels. For instance, the *quasi*-reality of the image-world we experience in fiction movies can allow us to be spectators to many kind of *quasi*-

⁸⁴ Hua XXIII: 621. For a characterization of cinematic experience in terms of "collective spectatorship" see Hanich 2014.

⁸⁵ Brough 2005: L.

⁸⁶ "What is preserved by right is not the material, which constitutes only the de facto condition, but, insofar as this condition is satisfied (that is, that canvas, color, or stone [or film, for example] does not crumble into dust), it is the percept or affect that is preserved in itself. Even if the material lasts for only a few seconds it will give sensation the power to exist and be preserved in itself *in the eternity that coexists with this short duration*" (Deleuze, Guattari 1994: 166).

⁸⁷ "I am conscious of the 'image' itself – the image object in which what is not present is presentified – as null. This consciousness of nullity comes about when I turn toward the image object" (Hua XXIII: 457, transl. slightly modified).

⁸⁸ Let us also consider the fact that image objects are huge figures on a movie theater screen or tiny ones if we are watching a film on a TV screen or on any mobile device. Thus, we can have different-sized image objects of the same image subject.

⁸⁹ For an interesting phenomenological account of Allen's *The Purple Rose* see Brough 2011: 198–205.

⁹⁰ See Hua XXIII: 614–625.

⁹¹ The example Fink often makes recourse to is the famous case of a "play in the play" in *Hamlet*. See Fink 2010: 77: "Nun läßt aber der Dänenprinz auf der offenen Szenerie den Vorgang des Königsmordes darstellen, um den Schuldigen zu verstehen zu geben, daß er ihre Schuld kennt. Es wird also im Theater noch einmal Theater gespielt, und eine doppelte 'Unwirklichkeit' stellt sich ein. Was ist das für ein merkwürdiger und seltsamer 'Schein', der zum Darstellungsspiel, ja in gewisser Weise zum Spiel überhaupt gehört, der zwar wirklich ist, aber nichts Wirkliches zeigt? Kann die 'Unwirklichkeit' solcher Scheinwelten sich beliebig wiederholen? Wie kann überhaupt eine Unwirklichkeit wirklich sein?"

images within it. Still considering *Citizen Kane*, Welles introduces an “as-if newsreel” (*News on the March*) in his masterpiece, which in the film supposedly reports an alleged “reality” to the “audience.” In movies, just as in theater, *belief* in a character can literally be *played*, and the director can play with elements complying with *perceptio* on many levels. Let us consider the very recent example of Polanski’s *Venus in Fur* (2013),⁹² which is basically a movie about rehearsals of a *pièce*. Here, too, we can choose to see the actors, whose real names are Mathieu Amalric and Emmanuelle Seigner, in the image objects we see on the screen. In the words of Barthes: we believe in both actors having been there in front of the camera. But, as Husserl would add, this depictiveness of the presentification is not in itself aesthetically essential to the purpose of this kind of cinematic experience, and our belief in the two actors having been there is obstructed in favor of the creation of the characters: Thomas, director and writer of the piece rehearsed in the movie, and Vanda, the actress auditioning for the role of Vanda von Dunayev in this same piece. In the “as-if world” created by the movie, these characters are in turn characters having the value of real people—they would be perceived in flesh and blood by other characters, by a hypothetical *quasi*-real audience. Thus, when they start rehearsing on the stage, their *quasi*-existence, their status of *quasi*-posited persons is in turn *quasi*-obstructed, and the hypothetical *quasi*-real spectators of the piece would no longer have a *quasi*-perception (*quasi-Wahrnehmung*) of their bodies, but would instead experience a *quasi*-perceptive *Phantasie* (in contrast with their *quasi*-perceptive surroundings), allowing them to see Severin von Kushemski and Vanda von Dunayev (image 2), the characters in the play that the director wrote based (yet another level!) on Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs*. And this work is particularly interesting in this regard because the rehearsal situation, in turn, permits us to be spectators of a very fast and incessant switching of characters between their “as-if real” condition and their “as-if in the as-if” (*mise en abyme*) status.



Image 2: *Venus in Fur*, Emmanuelle Seigner/Vanda/Vanda von Dunayev and Mathieu Amalric/Thomas/Severin von Kushemski

Similarly, at the end of Truffaut’s *The Last Metro* (1980), we see Marion Steiner (Catherine Deneuve) and Bernard Granger (Gerard Depardieu) in what we believe to be a *quasi*-real hospital room in the “film-world” (note that Truffaut allows us to see through the window behind them and into two windows of another building, where two *quasi*-real persons are conversing—almost to

⁹² This movie is in turn based on David Ives’ *Venus in Fur*, a two-person *pièce* in which a theatrical *mise en abyme* is already at work. In this *pièce*, as in Polanski’s film, Thomas Novachek is the writer and director of a new play based on Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs*, and he is casting for the role of Vanda von Dunayev (unlike in Polanski’s film, which is set in a theater, Ives’ *pièce* takes place in an audition room).

reinforce our impression of *quasi*-reality in this scene, see image 3). Then the camera zooms out, and a “curtain” falls over the scene, opening out again onto a frontal shot of the audience we now discover was watching this staged *pièce* starring Bernard and Marion—as it turns out, this “hospital room” is part of a *quasi*-theatrical reality within the *quasi*-filmic reality (clearly reminiscent of the final scene of Hitchcock’s *Murder!* [1930]), and the two *quasi*-real persons visible through the background windows are now figures painted onto on the set backdrop (see image 4).



Image 3: Bertrand and Marion



Image 4: The two characters played by Bertrand and Marion

In conclusion, while watching a fiction film we do not deal, as it were, with a *positing presentification* of a real image-subject (the real existence of who was in front of the camera is not relevant), which would presuppose a claim to reality. We suspend belief in the real existence of what we see *in* the image. We have what we might call *quasi-positing images*; we “passively cancel”⁹³ this very *belief* that, as we have seen, is the premise upon which the forms of film claiming their right to *depict* reality rely. Here, this relation is out of play from the beginning, thereby preventing the presentification of a past reality from coming into play and allowing us to enjoy art—that is, as Husserl aptly puts it, phantasy complying with *perceptio* that “has been given form.” With this in mind, we might now return to the reference we began with (the “window” metaphor) and suggest that in this case the screen is a window allowing us to see not reality but a *quasi*-world. Buddy Swan and Orson Welles are covered—hidden (*verdeckt*), as Husserl would say⁹⁴—by the character of Charles Foster Kane. As in theater, in film images the body of the actor can be covered by the production of the character. The screen becomes a place of productivity, giving rise to characters.

In this sense, as Marcel Proust pointed out in the *Recherche* when referring to the great artist Berma’s acting while interpreting *Phaedra*, the *real body* of the actor has to become the *character’s body*. Here the ordinary body becomes *transparent* and spectators *no longer see* the performer himself: “he/she is simply a *window* opening upon a great work of art.”⁹⁵ Nonetheless, that said, it still remains to specify that this very transparency is *sui generis*. Indeed, there are several ways in which an actor can “rule out” his/her mundane gestures and *produce* his/her character: his/her own *style* plays a crucial role in this production. In the same description of Berma’s acting, Proust brought this question to the fore in a clear way: if, on the one hand, the “ordinary Berma,” the everyday attitude of the actress must disappear on stage in order to let the spectator see *Phaedra* (bad actors, Proust says, are incapable of controlling their bad habits, of governing their bodies), on

⁹³ See Hua XXIII: 612.

⁹⁴ See Hua XXIII: 456.

⁹⁵ Proust 1983a: 44.

the other hand, the character *Phaedra* is created by the actress Berma, and *Recherche*'s narrator can recognize her stylistic *accent* within it. Accordingly, the character becomes “the masterpiece” of the actor: “Thus into the prose sentences of the modern playwright as into the verse of Racine Berma contrived to introduce those vast images of grief, nobility, passion, which were the masterpieces of her own personal art, and in which she could be recognised as, in the portraits which he has made of different sitters, we recognise a painter”⁹⁶. Quite analogously, in her phenomenological account of the actor’s “four bodies,” Vivian Sobchack talks about the possibility of recognizing “Dustin Hoffman for his ‘Hoffman-ness’” and “Meryl Streep for her ‘Streep-ness’.”⁹⁷ Besides, it is worth recalling that Sobchack also makes very clear how the “fleshy *habitus*”⁹⁸ that menace acting in the sense we just underlined with Proust, that is what she named the “prepersonal body,” “preconscious and culturally habituated,”⁹⁹ can also become – when we want it to be part of the film-world – a significant resource for the constitution of a character. Hence, in this last case, the window is not to be thought of as an image opening upon a presentificated reality (be it a present or past reality), but rather upon “a work of art” produced by images themselves, by the productive power of the play, of the *Spiel*. In an interview, Jacques Rivette seems to suggest that, in movies, new worlds can be “create[d]” by “the movement of the film.”¹⁰⁰ However, this does not turn a director into a “liar” but rather, as he specifies, “a creator of artifice (and not [...] of lies).”¹⁰¹ While sitting in the movie theater we know that what we are looking at is not *really* existing. Nevertheless, these “unreal” images and “reality” share some essential structures of our “real” experience, that is to say the “precategorical” dimension that pertains “both to real and possible representations”¹⁰²—in other words, the eidetic field of ideas, which, as Proust says about *time*,¹⁰³ is ordinarily invisible in our everyday lives. In this sense, as Deleuze seems to suggest, we may need cinema and its characters to “believe” in this world, to create new “link[s] between man and the world.”¹⁰⁴ But this is already another question that deserves further and specific discussion.

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⁹⁶ Proust 1983b: 48.

⁹⁷ Sobchack 2012: 437.

⁹⁸ Sobchack 2012: 432.

⁹⁹ Sobchack 2012: 431.

¹⁰⁰ Rivette 1977: 30.

¹⁰¹ Rivette 1977: 43.

¹⁰² Franzini 2001: 160.

¹⁰³ Proust 1983b: 1103.

¹⁰⁴ Deleuze 1989: 171–172.

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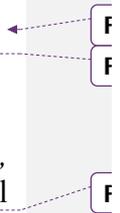
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