

Neutral phantasies and possible emotions

A phenomenological perspective on aesthetic education

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Abstract: In this paper I draw from Husserl's lectures on ethics and manuscripts on phantasy to clarify the role and the structure of aesthetic education within a phenomenological theory of experience. First, I show that Husserl's take on emotions as material contents of value experiences involves the problem of justifying the validity of the relation between factual emotions and ideal values. I then suggest, on the basis of some of Husserl's phenomenological claims on phantasy, that this discrepancy can be bridged through the enjoyment of art: that is, through a process of aesthetic education. I will focus, as Husserl does, on theatre as a case study. His approach to the experience of theatre provides the possibility of an education of emotions by helping the spectator to explore the eidetic structure of emotional states in their individuality, but regardless of their isolated *here and now* (that is, of their facticity). After a presentation of the elements that play into the phenomenological perspective, the first part of the argument refers to the last chapters of Husserl's *Einleitung in die Ethik* (1920/1924). The second part focuses on a 1918 manuscript. I conclude by hinting at the possibility of widening Husserl's account of aesthetic education beyond the experience of theatre.

Keywords: Edmund Husserl; phenomenology; phantasy; emotion; aesthetic education

1. Introduction

How does beauty relate to truth? This widely discussed issue recently came back into the spotlight thanks to some studies in cognitive psychology (see, e.g., Schwarz 2018, 25; Reber 2018) that showed how judgments about truth and judgments about beauty share some relevant dynamics concerning their treatment of cognitive information. This topic becomes even more complex when we shift towards the analogous relation between knowledge and art. Since both imply an effort towards a value, philosophers have been discussing their relation from an axiological point of view (see, e. g., Goldie 2008, Sherman and Morrissey 2017). They posed questions such as: could art be useful to knowledge? Can either of them provide some help in the endeavour towards other values?

Another complication arises when we focus, in a Platonic fashion, on good as the ultimate aim of beauty and truth – that is, on ethical values. The beauty of art often refers to fictional objects. How can art, often directed towards the production of fictionalities, benefit our attempts at being good people? And also: should it aim to benefit these attempts? This is another often debated topic, nowadays (see, e. g., Carroll 2000, Bermúdez, Gardner 2003).

Some authors (Jenkins 1968, and more recently Spivak 2012: 275-300) claimed that these two clusters of problems (respectively, the relation between art and knowledge and the influence of fiction-based art on ethical endeavours) are in fact connected. They argued that it is only through its fiction-related properties that art can grant some help in the acquisition of a knowledge that, in its turn, helps us to be ethically virtuous. This would be a process of *aesthetic education*.

My aim here is to draw some elements from Husserl's writings in order to sketch the possible articulation of this process from a phenomenological point of view. This would provide a phenomenological framework to experimental studies such as Shoemaker, Costabile & Arkin 2014, which show how our acquaintance with fictional objects or characters does indeed help us better understand and articulate our emotions in view of ethical values. It is worth noting that the phenomenological approach is strikingly absent from the recent reconstruction of the debate about fictional objects in art: for instance, Livingston-Sauchelli (2011) and Brock-Everett (2015) never mention Husserl or other phenomenologists.

Husserl believes that the education we experience through the enjoyment of art is an actual education of real emotions, even if these emotions refer to fictional objects. In the current debate, many would agree with this claim (see, e. g., Gaut 2007: 203-226). A phenomenological perspective, however, offers the specific advantage of allowing a realist approach towards the education of fiction-directed emotions without restricting it to the education of the *behavioural response* to fictional or real objects (as do De Sousa 1990 and Arslan 2014). The phenomenological picture of aesthetic education is neither behaviouristic nor simply reactive. Rather, it has to do both with an active exercise of *phantasy* and with the preparation for *possible* future emotional evaluations and ethical dilemmas.

I will discuss theatre as a case study, since this is Husserl's favourite example. The experience of enjoying a theatre play educates us, the spectators, by supplying us with knowledge about how possible scenarios involving emotions, values and actions could play out. Before discussing this phenomenological perspective, we need to become acquainted with its main ingredients: phantasy as a type of cognitive experience, fiction-directed emotions with their

inherent material logic and art as a privileged field of expression for a specific declination of phantasy.

2. *Phantasy, emotions, aesthetic education*

In a 1918 manuscript,¹ Husserl depicts certain phantasies as *quasi-experiences* (*quasi-Erfahrungen*). What does this mean? Perhaps phantasy is no experience? And, if so, how can it provide any cognitive content whatsoever? Actually, in Husserl's perspective, the *quasi* marks phantasy as a peculiar type of experience, at least from 1918 onwards. And the peculiarity of this experience is the glue that holds the phenomenological picture of aesthetic education together.

In the manuscript, Husserl is mainly concerned with the question of how individuals can appear to an intentional consciousness. First of all, obviously, through perception. Perception shows individuals than are actually there. It shows facts, present here and now. It is our primary access to facticity. However, we can also presentify: through memory, through expectation and through imaginative constructions we can produce or reproduce individual contents for our consciousness. This productive or reproductive domain is the general sphere of phantasy (Husserl 1980: 504-508).

Given this dichotomy between presence and presentification, the manuscript attempts at highlighting the specific primacy of perception among experiences by defining it the only experience that relates to reality (*Wirklichkeit*). It is the only experience that shows a certain *here and now*, a certain facticity (Husserl 1980, 504); thus, it is different from any other kind of experience. However, there are some relevant and widespread experiences that defy this dichotomy, such as primary, immediate retention.² The apple we perceived just before the present moment is not, in fact, present here and now. We do not actually perceive it, in a sense, because we can only perceive the apple that is right

¹ The manuscript is presented under the title *Zur Lehre von den Anschauungen und Ihren Modis* (*On the Theory of Intuition and its Modes*) in Husserl 1980: 498-545. It seems that, before 1918, this expression appears only once in Husserl's *corpus*. *Quasi-Erfahrung* cursorily appears in a 1912 manuscript (Husserl 1980: 479) with reference to imagination (*Imagination*, archaic synonym of *Einbildungskraft*, perhaps more focused on *having* the presentified images rather than *producing* them). After 1918, the expression reappears quite often. Husserl focuses again on *quasi-Erfahrungen* in a 1922/23 manuscript, *Reine Möglichkeit und Phantasie* (*Pure Possibility and Phantasy*) in Husserl 1980: 546-570, again with reference to phantasy. *Quasi-Erfahrung* even appears in Husserl 1954: 462, with reference to memory. Thus, it is safe to assume that this concept belongs with a certain consistency at least to the later phases of Husserl's phenomenological project.

² A comprehensive picture of the relation between primary retention and perception can be found in Hoerl 2013.

here and now. At the same time, it cannot be completely *unwirklich*, unreal, since otherwise no perception of the apple as something that is self-identical through time could be possible. Thus, it has to present itself in some other way. Husserl calls these specific kinds of presentification *perceptual phantasies*, i. e. phantasies that conform to perception, that try to do so, or that pretend to do so. The past aspect of the apple presents itself, Husserl says, as some sort of «suppressed reality» (*aufgehobene Wirklichkeit*: Husserl 1980: 502). It aches to be real, so to speak. This is the meaning of the *quasi*: *quasi*-experience means the *actual* experience of *quasi*-perception, of *as-if* perception (see Bernet 2017). This experience is neutral with respect to facticity (i. e., the positing of real existence) and yet it entertains a certain a priori relation with facts: a relation of conformity. This conformity is simply a consequence of the identity between the perceived individual and the quasi-perceived individual. The apple I just saw and the apple I am seeing now present themselves as the *same* apple.

Let us move on to emotions. In Husserl's late work on ethics, emotions play the role of contents of the will (see Zhang 2009). These contents are, in a few words, everything that has to do with values without being included in a formal axiology. Every will or desire is involved with emotions. According to Husserl, emotions – as opposed to passive feelings (*passive Gefühle*) – are always *emotion-acts* (*Gemütsakte*), active acts of evaluation (Husserl 2004: 3-153). Thanks to these judgment acts, we gain access to the relation between certain values³ and certain factual situations that are imbued with feelings. Once a value has been found to be possibly related to the situation we are in, we act consequently and in view of this emotionally marked object. These acts are acts of will, since we want to realize the corresponding value. The domain of the acts of will is none other than the domain of ethics (Husserl 2004: 8). Hence, the general form of these acts is a matter of formal axiology. Ethics is, vice versa, a concrete axiology.⁴ Emotions are material determinations of the acts of will: they direct them towards a specific value. At the same time, they are factual, contingent moments of these acts. So, the ques-

³ Concerning the contemplative, autonomous experience of values – such as the grasping of the beauty of something – Husserl seems to hold a realist, perceptualist account. This will not be discussed here, since the main focus is about the value-oriented use of emotions in a practical context, and thus, e. g., the relation between a factual situation and its possible beauty, that has yet to be realized as a new, possible situation. On this issue, see Mulligan 2004.

⁴ The critical reception of Husserl's rationalism in ethics presented some good arguments concerning the role of formality and evidence within ethics. The early instances of these objections (presented by Geiger, for instance) directly influenced Husserl's work – prompting him to focus on the role of emotions and feelings of love in the ethical context. Later, the French reception of Husserl (and especially Ricoeur and Levinas) kept on delving into these same issues in an original and radical way. A recapitulation of these objection can be found in Ferrarello 2015: 81-88 and 180.

tion becomes: how can these factual emotional states work as the content a rational law of the will?

Finally, let us consider aesthetic education. The aesthetic sphere could be traditionally described as the sphere of the enjoyment of the work of art. The phenomenological account is characterized by a shift from this classical description to a more dynamic and comprehensive one. The reflection on a work of art is, in Husserl's perspective, a process that trains us to recognize (i. e., to see, to contemplate) possible ethical relations (i. e., practical relations, concerning what we ought to do) through an aesthetic experience (i. e., through an emotional experience under the light of a specific type of phantasy). This process consists of a progressive integration between aesthetics and ethics – that is, of a practical use of disinterested aesthetic contemplation. The possibility of this integration stems from the consideration that our praxis can profitably and repeatedly incorporate an aesthetic moment. In the possibility of this unending refinement lies the opportunity for an exploration of the logic of emotions as structured material contents and material determinations of the will.

The claim that I want to draw from these ingredients is the following: when experienced through art and by virtue of the specific phantastical experience that artistic enjoyment requires, fiction-directed emotions can effectively deepen and articulate our experience of actual emotions. This phantasy is marked by a crucial reference to the reality of our shared world: that is, to the facticity in which our concrete praxis does actually take place. But how would this process articulate itself? To answer this question, we first need a better grasp of the problem of emotions in Husserl's perspective.

3. *The active ethical role of emotions*

Husserl's efforts in defining a phenomenology of practical reason are constantly renewed throughout the course of his philosophical path. Some interpreters (e. g., Ferrarello 2015) argued that ethics are key in understanding Husserl's phenomenological project as a coherent whole. An ethical commitment defines the very character of phenomenology as a theory and as a living praxis.⁵ This praxis attempts at extricating a logic of sensibility from experience.⁶ Phenom-

⁵ The concept of correlation is here intended to embrace also that of coimplication: from an ontological point of view, theory implies (or is encompassed by) praxis, since it *is* a praxis; from an epistemological point of view, instead, praxis implies (or is encompassed by) theory, as long as it is an object of knowledge. About this, see Larrabee 1990.

⁶ The Italian reception of Husserl's work put some emphasis on the relation between the phenomenological method and these issues derived from the platonic problem of *methexis* and the Kantian problem of *schematism*. See Paci 1957 and Melandri 1960.

enological ethics could then be designated, within this general framework, as an attempt at describing the correlative logic that embraces both the facticity of emotions and the ideality of values. This correlative and dynamic conception soon ends up being at odds with the notion that the materiality of emotions implies, in a Kantian fashion, their passivity.

At first glance, the juxtaposition of materiality, emotionality and sensibility seems to mark the entirety of Husserl's work. The first instance of a "form-matter approach" about emotions and values dates back to the 1914 lectures about ethics and value-theory (Husserl 1988: 3-153). At least in an initial phase, the idea of an analogy between the value-emotion relation and the form-matter relation grounds Husserl's idea of ethics as a theory of practical reason. The 1920-1924 lectures (Husserl 2004: 3-255), however, put a special emphasis on the material dynamical logic that pertains to emotional states as such.

Husserl recognizes that there is a passive, factual aspect in play within the frame of ethics: it is the aspect of affectivity, i. e. the space of feelings (Husserl 2004: 8). Feelings and affections belong to ethics thanks to their bond with emotions. This bond has an essentially motivational character (see Rump 2017): it is only when we feel something that we are motivated to emotionally evaluate the source of this affection. Hence, emotional acts are both passive (insofar as they are prompted by an affection) and active (insofar as the emotional evaluation involves willing and a degree of self-awareness).

This ambiguous terrain is the field of phenomenological ethics. The form-matter distinction is functional to its clarification. We evaluate if something is to be willed or to be refused by means of the emotional tone of the corresponding experience. This evaluation actively grasps values in their relation with the factual situation we find ourselves in. If we want to consider how these values appear in themselves, we first have to look at what makes each value *a value as such* – that is, we need to find the formal laws of the sphere of value (Husserl 1988: 80-101). This formal axiology cannot, however, exhaust ethics. Husserl knows that any ethical theory needs a concrete indication about what we ought to do. Our need to learn what is the right value to prefer in any given emotional situation implies the need to define the proper emotion to cultivate in specific situations. Husserl recognizes this want of a material content for ethical laws even in his 1914 lectures (Husserl 1988: 126-153).

The problem is that we do not just *receive* emotions. They are in fact embedded in a concrete, factual situation. They are interwoven with facticity. In the emotion act we actively extrapolate what relates to a certain value from the variety of what we factually feel. This is the ethical endeavour in its more general form (Husserl 2004, 332). But how is it possible? According to Husserl, the incorporation of feelings within emotions gives a peculiar mo-

tivational, practical and project-oriented light to emotions: which motivate our actions (Husserl 2004: 232-237). This is another way of describing their duplicity: they present themselves within a formal legality, yet they carry on the motivational force received from the feeling embedded in a contingent factual context.

Thus, emotions can work as contents of acts of will (i. e., as material moments of the ethical sphere) only insofar as they are, at the same time, actively motivating an action in view of a value. This evidently clashes with the form-matter framework: not only emotions have their own motivational, material lawfulness (see again Rump 2017), but this lawfulness actually contributes in shaping values by granting a new theoretical and especially *practical* perspective over their relations with different factual situations.

The fact that the emotional access to values is always in view of a possible future action implies that a value has to relate to the unpredictability and contingency of facticity. Thus, our praxis-oriented understanding of values is intimately connected with a perpetual re-establishment of the complex of factual situations the value relates to (See Welton 2000: 309). If we accept a corresponding motivation-oriented conception of emotions, we could say that emotions contribute to our grasping of values to the extent that they help establish the connection between each of these values and a corresponding variety of facts. For all intents, then, the education of emotions is indeed an ethical education.

Once the ethical field has been outlined, the aim of this education becomes to learn how the infinite and nuanced variety of our factual emotional experiences can motivate us towards specific actions and specific values, defined by their position within an eidetic framework. This is difficult, because it deals with the conjunction of two modally heterogeneous extremes: the emotion that is *here* and *now*, radically individual and contingent, and the *ideal* architecture of values. Let us then return to the phenomenological device that makes such an education possible: perceptual phantasy.

4. *Neutrality and phantasy*

Husserl starts his 1904/1905 lectures on *Phantasie und Bildbewusstsein* (*Phantasy and Image-Consciousness*, Husserl 1980: 1-108) by claiming that phantasy is, first of all, a mode of seeing. As said above, phantasy is an actual experience that presents something: only under this light it is possible to describe it phenomenologically (Husserl 1980: 6). Can phantasy present emotions, then? Or, better yet: can it present *examples* of emotions?

The role of the example in phenomenology is well-known.⁷ In the first book of *Ideen*, each eidetic intuition is bound to an example, i. e. to an individual whose concrete essence is originally intuitable as an eidetic field of possibilities (Husserl 1976: 14-16). This bond between individual example and eidetic intuition provides a way to think about individuals in an eidetic sense. Each individual implies an individual essence, and this essence is defined by a field of structural relations. An exemplary emotion would then be an individual emotion presented under the light of the material eidetic lawfulness that frames it. This individual exemplary emotion would be somewhat detached from the factual occasion from which it arose, and still be a concrete individual, a motivational force *intuited* as a unity. This is the only way it can remain an emotion (since emotions are innervated by a motivational force, as we have seen) while being at the same time part of a wider eidetic framework as an act of evaluation.

The unity of this exemplary emotion needs a corresponding intuition. Can phantasy provide it? Let us first observe that, if we can produce an image of an object, then this object is at least epistemically possible. As Jansen 2013 claims, images present a certain *situatedness* as long as they involve a spatial and temporal character. Thus, the object of which we produce an image is at least placeable within a possible spatiotemporal frame – that is, within a possible reality. This object is at least a *spatiotemporal* unity. Its actual position is not self-contradictory, even if the object is not part of our shared natural world. A unicorn, for instance, is not impossible, at least from an epistemical point of view. It just did not happen to be any unicorn in the world that we know of.⁸

Now, phantasy can actually provide this kind of spatiotemporal unities without committing to a specific here and now. The key to this resides in its specific *neutrality*. Neutrality is, in a word, the non-positional attitude towards an object, i. e. an assumption of neutrality with respect to the being and non-being of an object. It is a non-positional modification applicable, in principle, to every presentation. Husserl (1976: 250-252) observes that neutrality is not exclusive to phantasy. However, since phantasy is in fact a neutralizing act and

⁷ Derrida 1962: 32-37 and 46-47 highlights the relevance of the example as a structural moment of phenomenology as an articulated theory and descriptive method through some notable observations in his *Introduction* to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*.

⁸ Kripke 1980: 156-158 famously argued against the possibility of unicorns. However, while fictional unicorns and artistic images of unicorns do not seem to involve any consideration regarding their biology or zoology, it seems to me that an actual unicorn would be clearly recognizable through some salient traits. Would a horned horse (with only one horn) suddenly appear within the context of nature, it would be called unicorn. This would perhaps not grant the property of being real to unicorns *according to the classifications of biology and zoology*. However, if this was the case, it seems to me that this should be credited to an insufficiency of these sciences in describing factual reality, rather than to the unreality of the horned horse/unicorn.

is in principle applicable to every presentation in its own right, the two often end up mixed together.⁹ An object of neutral cognition is given *as if* it was present in this or that way, while any belief about its real existence, about its facticity, is suspended. Neutral acts are then a species of presentification acts; however, while memory presentifies something that was present then and now is present no more, neutral acts presentify something that was never there in the first place.

Neutral acts entertain a peculiar relation with the facticity we encounter in perceptual experience. They seem to be detached from actual experience and yet related to it. In a neutral cognition we see something that never pertained to factual reality, and yet this cognition provides us with some content about reality. It gives us some information about the eidetic structure of a certain effective material determination considered in its possible variations. It is a modification of reality that also makes us learn something about reality. This double bond of neutral cognition makes it a pivotal resource of phenomenological investigation. However, simply neutralizing an emotional act is not enough: the mere removal of the ontological position can be helpful in a theoretical description of the phenomenological essential texture of a specific emotional state; but it is of no help in exploring the motivational, practical legality of this emotion, since it does not connect it to any possible action nor to any possible factual context.

Phantasy acts are a species of neutral acts. Husserl devotes particular attention to the specificity of phantasy, among other neutral acts, in a manuscript (*Phantasie – Neutralität, Phantasy – Neutrality*) wrote between 1921 and 1924 (Husserl 2004: 571-593). Phantasy, he observes, is specifically a disinterested spiritual praxis (Husserl 2004: 577). It does not refer to any present or past stance we could have assumed towards facticity. It is a moment of *Zwecklosigkeit*, of relatively¹⁰ free play, where the *as if* of general neutrality is extended to the operations of the ego itself (Husserl 2004: 572-573). It is a sort of dream-

⁹ The idea of neutrality makes its first non-cursory apparition, within the context of Husserl's writings, in a 1912 manuscript (Husserl 1980: 352-364), right before *Ideen*. There, we can find in a footnote (356) the simple equivalence «neutral = nichtsetzend» («neutral = non-positive»). But phantasy is not the only non-positioning act. Neutral objects do not need to be necessarily produced or reproduced: we can also neutralise perceived objects. This is the case of the phenomenological *epoché*.

¹⁰ Husserl speaks about a *bound* (*verbunden* or *gebunden*) exercise of phantastical variation. In a formal sense, its bounds are its defining conditions. In a more concrete sense, however, they could perhaps be defined as the ties that keep phantasy within the unity of possible experience, thus giving to phantasy the possibility to present some truth about possible experience as a coherent whole. We could perhaps say that this attention for the dynamic and logically articulated unity of experience is key in characterizing the phenomenological attunement through which we are trying to reconsider the idea of aesthetic education. On the bounds of phantasy, see Williamson 2016, Summa 2017.

ego,¹¹ a possible ego as opposed to the actual one, that phantastically delves into an as-if world, into a possible world.

Even as we phantasize, however, we remain the same actual ego. This is the first bond between phantasy and perception. The mark of the as-if does not create a phantastical world, detached from the world of proper (i. e., perceptual) experience. It looks at this same world under a different light. This is why phantasy is an experience from which and to which we can return at will (Husserl 2004: 577). We can bring back some information about our shared reality from this experience, because the neutrality-modification does not necessarily damage the material-eidetic texture of the neutralised object: its sense-contents remain the same, only without facticity.

Moreover, specifically perceptual phantasy can also preserve the spatiotemporal unity of the perceived object. This makes it the much-needed surgical instrument that can remove the specific *hic et nunc* correlated with the facticity of an actual emotion while preserving its *hic et nunc-ability* – i. e. the spatiotemporal coherency that allows us to imagine that same emotion we are living within other factual contexts. An emotion presents itself and it is actual, here and now. It is caused by this or that. It is a fact. However, if we phantasize about it in a way that conforms to perception, it also becomes *factu-able*, so to say: not only a fact, that maybe now has expired along with its contingent conditions, but *something that could be a fact*, something that could actualize itself in many other possible factual contexts.

As Husserl says in a 1922 manuscript, «the experience in phantasy is possible experience in itself» (Husserl 1980: 548), that goes even beyond the image-consciousness and the imaginary position of *ficta* within the real world. The structure of possible experience, then, is what actual experience and phantasy experience *do* have in common in the most radical sense. Phantasy provides us with modal information about reality: it tells us what is possible and what is not. And it does so a priori, inasmuch as it is not bound by the conditions of a specific *hic et nunc* experience. *Perceptual* phantasy, however, seems to be bound to image-consciousness (Husserl 2004: 504). The question then becomes: does the need to conform to perception necessarily restricts the object of perceptual phantasy to image-objects? And, vice versa: what is the relation between artistic experience and image-objects? Instead of dealing systematically with these issues, Husserl discusses a telling example: that of theatre.

¹¹ This comparison implies perhaps some problems, given that the very phenomenology of dream experiences is one of the most complex parts of the phenomenological theory of experience. It is, however, a comparison directly suggested by Husserl 1980, 548. For a concise outline of the phenomenology of dreams, see e. g. Zippel 2016.

5. *Perceptual phantasy and aesthetic education: the case of theatre*

Husserl's account of the experience of enjoying a theatre play provides, somewhat between the lines, a way in which emotions can be educated through perceptual phantasy. It is worth noting that, according to Husserl, art is a privileged field for the expression of a specific type of phantasy. It is «the kingdom of phantasy that took form, of perceptual or reproductive phantasy, of phantasy that is intuitive – but also partly not intuitive» (Husserl 1980: 514). This passage of the 1918 manuscript is quite ambiguous. Art is the kingdom of perceptual phantasy or of reproductive phantasy? Or are they the same? Can the conformity to perception only be thought in terms of image reproduction? And what does it mean that a phantasy is intuitive or non-intuitive?

The idea of an affinity between art and neutral cognition is already present in a letter from Husserl to Hugo von Hofmannsthal, dated 1907 (Husserl 1994: 133-136). Even there, theatre is Husserl's preferred example. In the letter, the experience of enjoying a theatre performance is actually compared to the phenomenological *epoché*. The artistic object correlates to a neutralizing act in the 1918 manuscript too. This manuscript also specifies that the general neutrality that the artistic object shares with the pure phenomenon is the neutrality of the objects of intuitive or perceptual phantasy.

This fits particularly well with the features of theatre, even if theatre does not resemble, perhaps, our common figuration of a free play of phantasy. Husserl's focus on this specific form of art mirrors Hume's preference for theatre in his endeavours at describing the relations among passions, values and aesthetic experience – endeavours that provide an account of these relations that is quite similar to the one Husserl presents against Kant (see Hume 1998; Husserl 2004: 200-243).

What is intuitive phantasy, and to what extent does it coincide with perceptual phantasy? We have seen that perceptual phantasy is only partially detached from our actual perceptual world. Since Husserl speaks of the objects of theatre as both object of perceptual and intuitive phantasy, we can refer to them to better understand what Husserl means by the concept of intuitivity. Now, theatre does not necessarily present images that resemble or imitate perceptual reality. However, it does present *ficta*, possibilities that yet are in some way and to some extent informative about our shared actual reality. These *ficta* conform to the general structure of perception (or to *Perzeption* as opposed to *Wahrnehmung*).¹² The events depicted on stage are indeed fictional: they do not

¹² This distinction is clearly defined in Husserl's MS C16 VI (May 1932). It is however already present in our 1918 manuscript, albeit only in an adjectival form. For simplicity's sake, *Perzeption* is to be understood here as a *Wahrnehmung* without the factual position of its object. It is what makes a

actually happen. What does actually happen is the *acting* of the actors, that we interpret, with the help of perceptual phantasy, as signifying a fictional event. These *ficta do* happen in the as-if world of phantasy (that is: in our shared world posed under the light of the as-if). They are not posed by an ordinary operation of the imagination. As long as we are caught in the suspension of disbelief, with the help of good acting, we react to them as if they were actually happening (Husserl 1980: 514-516). We react through actual feelings and we evaluate the action through actual emotions. The emotions we feel while enjoying a theatre play are facts. But what about the *ficta* to which we relate these emotions? What are they, beyond their fictional character? Are they images?

They are *intuitive unities*. Theatre, as an exercise in collective phantasy, shows us the primary difference between facticity and intuitivity. The phenomenological possibility of a *Perzeption*, of experiencing something *as if* it were perceived, without it actually happening here and now, depends on the possibility of defining an intuitable object without facticity. According to Husserl, this is indeed possible, being that intuitivity (that is, being a possible spatiotemporal individual in *any* perceptual time and space) is not the same as facticity (that is, factually being here and now, in *this* place and time). We can ascribe a specific property – intuitivity – to the phantasy that presents such unities. And intuitivity is essentially what defines perceptual phantasy as such; it is, in fact, the key to its use within aesthetic education.

The enjoyment of a theatre play involving a unicorn requires something more than the simple claim that “here is a unicorn”, along with the corresponding phantasy act, does. The unicorn that appears in an artistic experience is indeed a fictional object. It could perhaps be reduced, to some extent, to an image or to a combination of images. But its key peculiarity is that it appears, as a fictional object, neither here nor there, but *in a new possible world* or rather in our shared world under the light of what it could possibly become – a world we enter when we choose to suspend our disbelief and to dissolve the connection of a certain internally coherent experience (a story, an image, and so on) with ordinary practical matters in order to enjoy it aesthetically. This operation of suspension always concerns the whole world, and never a single image; it is a defining moment in the experience of taking part in a theatre play as a spectator (Husserl 1980: 515-517).

The world we take a glance at through a theatre play is indeed a different world, even when overlapped with our shared real world (and practical con-

ceptual phantasy a quasi-perception. The phenomenological possibility of defining the framework of *Perzeption* depends on the possibility of defining a perceptual object with a character other than facticity. According to Husserl, this is indeed possible, being that intuitivity (that is, being a spatiotemporal individual) is not the same as facticity (that is, factually being here and now).

text). We generally do not believe that the Venice of Shakespeare's *Othello* is the same as the real one, or that the killing of Desdemona happened there and then in this exact way, or even that it is happening right at this moment on the stage. But it is indeed a possible world, that remains connected to our actual world through the same relation that ties together facts and possibilities. The possible actions that constitute the narration are not isolated images in search of a spatiotemporal collocation: rather, they already are defined individual (possible) facts within a possible world, with their own spatiotemporal position. This is why theatrical *ficta* cannot be images in the sense in which an image is a refiguration-of (*Abbild von*). How can there be a refiguration of a world, since we can never figure a world as a whole in the first place? The actors on stage do not portray an imitation of reality: they transport us in an artistic illusion (*künstlerische Illusion*) that they prompt our perceptual phantasy to produce (Husserl 1980: 515-516).

How does this happen? We, not being able to reproduce a full image of a world, simply borrow the structure of a world from perceptual reality. Each fictional event takes place in the spatiotemporal frame that is the world of perception, unless stated otherwise within the play. And, even then, the framework to which we apply any suggested spatiotemporal modification is the one that we borrow from perception. Dramatic action takes place within the space of this possible world, thus requiring that this world be defined by certain conditions that this fictional world shares with the real and ordinary context of our actions. This framework provides some unity conditions for the events taking place in it: this happens here, then that happens there, and so on.

One of phenomenology's revolutionary concepts is indeed that of intuition, or of direct grasping of non-perceptual unities (Hintikka 2003). Thus, *this* and *that* are indeed objects of an intuitive phantasy, since they are non-perceptual spatiotemporal unities. By claiming that the non-intuitive aspect of artistic phantasy is the pivotal ingredient of this experience, since the time and the space of the *ficta* are not completely adherent to the time and space of perception, Carreño 2016 neglects this basic form of spatiotemporal unity: space and time can indeed vary their structure within fiction; but they can do so only insofar this basic form of *intuitive* individuation first allows this fiction to be distinguished from complete chaos.

Perceptual phantasy is indeed still phantasy, inasmuch as it represents a (relatively) free play of as-if possibilities within certain defining conditions, and does so a priori, independent of the specific occasionality of each actual experience. But it also the pivotal type of intuitive phantasy. This allows for a structural convertibility of phantasy individual with real ones. And this is the key of perceptual phantasy's possible use within ethics.

Let us take a closer look at this conversion between fictional facts and *hic et nunc* facts. The 1918 manuscript starts with some considerations about the occasionality of perceptual content. The perceptual object is given in such a way that its presentation is bound to an irreducible, non-repeatable and non-describable spatiotemporal contingency (Husserl 1980: 499). This contingency belongs to its concrete individual essence: it cannot be completely described, but it can be originally given in a perception. A perceptual phantasy seems a *contradictio in adjecto* only if we assume that this original givenness, this intuitivity, is one and the same with the positionality we attribute to every natural perception – the same positionality every neutral act renounced to. If intuitivity is *not* positionality, then individuality and occasionality are not the same, and it is possible to distinguish a general perceptual mark from each concrete *Wahrnehmung*. This mark (the mark of intuitivity and spatiotemporal individuality) is the abstract structure that Husserl designates as *Perzeption*. How can artistic phantasy conform to *Perzeption* while meeting the criteria that define it as a phantasy? It has to remain intuitive, i. e. referred to individuals.

We could say that perceptual phantasy is an intuitive phantasy as long as its objects are marked by a character of spatiotemporal individuation. They do not necessarily need to be reproductive figurations of reality. Theatre performances often present objects that are most evidently convertible in real, possible situations, since we are used to unify the individuality of real objects with other characteristics such as causal interactivity, time linearity and space continuity. However, individuality – the objective correlate of intuitivity – does not necessarily need to be *factual* individuality.

Intuitivity, as Husserl puts it, means the structurally correlative identity between a possible object of phantasy and a possible object of perception. Perceptual phantasy does, in fact, grasp individuals: it grasps free possibilities that are nevertheless marked, in some way, by a character of spatiotemporal individuation. This is proven by the fact that the phantastical object *A* (the individual-character) and the actual object *B* (the individual-actor) phenomenologically converge – as Husserl writes (Husserl 1980: 508) – in their individual essences, and yet they are different in that the phantastical singularity is modified by the mark of phantasy. They are suspended in a possible, but not yet accomplished, identity. The phenomenology of perceptual phantasy in an artistic experience is the phenomenology of this suspended contrast, or suspended convergence. The possibility of this identification suffices in defining the phantastical object as an individual, since 1) *A* has to be susceptible of being identified with *B*; 2) *B* is determined as an individual; 3) the only difference between *A* and *B* follows from a neutrality modification that, as we have seen, has to do only with the position of the object and not with its determination-content (or sense-

content).¹³ Thus, A – the fictional object of artistic and perceptual phantasy – is also an individual in itself, and perceptual phantasy is inherently intuitive while remaining neutral, i. e. not positional.

This convertibility between individuals is what allows us to be emotionally and rationally involved in a play, repeating, evaluating and enriching the choices prescribed by the author (Husserl 1980: 519). In doing so, we explore how different emotions can act as different motivations, and how different motivations could prompt different and unexpected consequences. As Husserl claims, our evaluations concerning the action happening in the as-if world «possess a sort of objective truth, even if they are about ficta [...]. Indeed we, as actual men, judge, and not the poet in a predetermined way» (Husserl 1980: 520). This openness of the work of art, this request to judge that the work of art poses to us, is the essential prompt of aesthetic education.

Elicited by this request, we explore through fiction-directed emotions the logical articulation of possible emotional states. Eventually, we can draw an eidetic cartography of the ethical sphere, encompassing possible emotions, possible desires and their internal value-structure. We can understand, for instance, that an excess of pleasure structurally converts into a certain type of pain, and from this eidetic structure we could extract the rational norm that commands moderation in the experience of pleasure, given that we partake to the rational pursuit of happiness. Classic examples of this exercise are offered by Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (through which we investigate personal pride as a motivation for political ambition) and Sophocles' Theban plays (through which we delve into the reciprocal implications of rage, sorrow and revenge).

6. *Beyond theatre?*

Each one of the possibilities grasped by perceptual phantasy is an individual: a *this*, an *individuum*. And yet, it is a *possible* individuum, in relation to other eidetic material possibilities (or impossibilities). We have seen that this intuitive unity is not an image. The last question I will consider here is if this means that even less perception-bound forms of art can present this kind of exemplary individuals.

The idea of a free-playing phantasy would seem to concern an abstract painting more than theatre.¹⁴ Literature and music also help us phantastically

¹³ The identification of the determination content of an object with its (noematic) sense remains an open and problematic possibility. Here, I refer especially to Husserl 1976: 297-299.

¹⁴ Abstract paintings represent an interesting borderline case for the "narrative" conception of art that Husserl emphasizes here. It could be argued that even abstract paintings tell us about possible courses of action, at least in a wide and perhaps metaphorical sense. Abstract paintings do in fact

exploring and articulating our emotions. If we think about works such as Melville's *Moby Dick* and Mozart's *Requiems* we can perhaps figure out how these forms of expression can help us better understand pride, rage and sorrow. But is the phantasy involved in music and literature intuitive, at least to a certain extent?

We have seen that it is not contradictory to attribute a non-figurative intuitivity to music, literature or even to abstract visual art, since intuitivity and figurative character are different properties. The problem is to find these intuitive unities in other artistic experiences. In some arts, they are somewhat circumscribable: *this* is what the painting represents, *this* is the event the actors are acting. Now, the intuitive character of these unities does not reside in these visual or verbal explanations. It is in the "this", since intuitive unity is exactly what allows to speak of *this* and *that* fictum in the first place. And it is easy to recognize that even an abstract painting can express a "this", because otherwise we could never be able answer to questions such as "what does it talk about?" or "what does it express?". This impossibility would be structural. Instead, it seems that our possible inability to answers depends on the fact that we have not reflected enough on the artwork, while the artwork in itself does indeed express *something*.

Here I want to just cursively note that a phenomenological theory of fictional deixis does exist. A successful integration of a phenomenological theory of fictional deixis (see the concept of deixis *am Phantasma* in Bühler 1934: 124) within Husserl's framework would allow to complete our picture of a phenomenological aesthetic education. This integration would perhaps allow to speak of the contents of art in general as intuitive individual essences of "spiritual", intersubjective, non-sensible relations. They would be intentional objects connotated with certain emotions and referring to certain values. Picasso's *Guernica* would connote the "values" of violence and war with the emotions of pain and sorrow. Malevich's *White on white* would connect a feeling of mystic abandonment with the values of simplicity and absoluteness. In any case, these relations can be simply considered the (metaphorical) meaning of the abstract artistic product, which works as a sort of signifier or as a form of expression.¹⁵ All these instances do in fact provide some sort of objective information about our shared

consists of perceptual elements installed in certain interrelations. If we could present this interaction of perceptual elements as the exploration of possible interactions between emotions (and thus values), then the account of artistic experience that we are exploring could also encompass abstract art. For a phenomenological introduction to the issue, see Crowther 2009: 99-119. The same problem arises when dealing with non-tonal music and, in general, with all art forms that seem to refuse any conformity to perception.

¹⁵ On the problem of defining the object of abstract artistic expression, see Poggi 2004.

factual reality, as long as these fictional emotions are facts on their own and can be converted into possible non-fictional emotions (Husserl 1980: 520).

In short, perceptual, intuitive phantasy entertains a peculiar relation with truth, since it can show possible relations between certain values and certain factual situations. Its neutrality dissolves the occasional constraints of actual perception. Its phantastical character allows for a relatively free exploration of eidetic possibilities. Its intuitivity allows this eidetic exploration to refer to individual actions and desires. We, as spectators, reflect on the individual fiction-directed emotions we feel during the fruition of art – on the emotional acts through which we connected certain situations, certain factual feelings, with certain values. As we partake in this phantastical simulation, we evaluate and phantasize about other possible emotional evaluations and about other possible actions. We continue the phantasy that constitutes the artistic object. We explore it, we articulate it, and we detach from the object and return to it. And, insofar as this eidetic exploration also concerns examples of emotions, we gain a better understanding of our own emotionality, and thus of our own ethical disposition.

This is indeed a form of aesthetic education, albeit a peculiar one. It searches no more, within the horizon of beauty, an ideal medium between Kantian opposites. It ends up putting into question the very distinction between form and matter. The highlight that a phenomenological approach puts on the importance of a possible practical use of phantasy experiences shows that there is just as much ideality and formal lawfulness within the factual space of emotions, as there is facticity and material specificity within the ideal space of values. A logic that is both relatively material and relatively formal already can embrace the entirety of experience, i. e. both fictional and non-fictional objects.

7. *Conclusion*

Kind (2016) treats imagination, when engaged with art, as unconstrained. This paper showed that even when we zoom out from imagination to non-imaginative phantasy some constraints remain for the phantastical involvement in an artistic experience. It did so by sketching the structure of a logico-phenomenological foundation of the idea of aesthetic education. It also clarified Husserl's idea of a connection between aesthetics and ethics by explicating and presenting what was already implicit in his phenomenological work.

It argued that we can train ourselves to progressively understand our actual emotions, however occasional, as motivations towards a certain value and towards a certain action by repeatedly and freely comparing them to exemplary fiction-directed emotions. The individuality of these exemplary emotions

does not prevent their understanding as material (and eidetically structured) contents of a rational law of the will. Hence there is no real contrast, in Husserl's lifelong work, between a Kantian (Crespo 2015) and an anti-Kantian or Aristotelic (Drummond 2014) perspective on ethics. Even the juxtaposition of the two different perspectives along two different phases of Husserl's work on ethics (Smith 2007) does not make proper justice to the profound unity of Husserl's phenomenological take on ethics.

The phenomenological idea of aesthetic education presented here could contribute to the effort in highlighting the intrinsic ideal relational logic of our living experience against unilaterally "naturalizing" approaches. It could also provide an argument for the ethical value of art that does not commit to any behaviouristic verification and presents itself with clear evidence within self-reflection and dialogical confrontation. A more complete picture of the promising phenomenological possibilities in the field of aesthetic education requires, however, further investigations on the relations between non-figurative art and intuitive phantasy.

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