

Martin Nitsche and Olga Louchakova-Schwartz (eds.)  
Image and Imagination

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# Image and Imagination in Phenomenology of Religious Experience

Edited by

Martin Nitsche

Olga Louchakova-Schwartz

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# Foreword: Phenomenology, Givenness, Religion

Joseph Rivera

Dublin City University

Theological and religious themes have been commented extensively upon by philosophers working in the phenomenological tradition at least since Heidegger (if not since Husserl). Such commentary, as is widely acknowledged, reached a high point with the advent of Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*. Explicit recourse to theological vocabularies reached ever more heights with the French tradition after the Levinasian "theological swerve." It includes figures spanning several decades, from Derrida, Henry, and Ricoeur to the more recent writings of Marion, Lacoste, and Falque. The present volume adds to this dynamic trajectory with a renewed emphasis on imagination, icons, iconography, and iconoclasm.

While Dominique Janicaud in the 1990s infamously denounced the theological turn as a violation of phenomenology's economy of scientific rigor, the fact remains that no design, concept, or anthropology can curtail or delimit phenomenology as an intellectual movement. Quite the contrary. Its economy, in principle, can neither be fully defined nor fully closed. And theology in particular has only served to incentivize further investigations into phenomenology. Why is this so? The answer lies within the commitment to a universal principle: that of givenness. Phenomenology explicates the aboriginal precomprehension of the implicit relation we enjoy to whatever may give itself.

What gives itself? The key: whatever is given. The constitution of the given can be as concrete as a chair or cube or as spiritually intricate as an icon, a ritual, or a theological image. This surely leads to a maximalist phenomenology. Such a statement that qualifies phenomenological analysis as "maximalist" or "open" must be made if only because Janicaud suggests a more narrow version of post-Husserlian investigation, in which the given remains tied to empiricism and scientific rigor, what he names a "minimalist" phenomenology.

But can givenness be restricted in this manner (or any other manner)? Givenness occupies a central linguistic and ontological role in the post-Husserlian tradition. Certainly imagination lends itself to a maximalist style of phenomenological investigation. Husserl himself notes in the *Crisis* that imagination consists of a free variation of the world, its shape, its future, its potentialities as such. We can imagine in this or that way. Perhaps we see the world gives itself in the form of “an empirical overall-all style.” But in imagination the world assumes a set of possibilities, “as it might be,” and yet, the world never takes leave of that empirical whole we know as its empirical apriori.<sup>1</sup>

More complicated still is Husserl’s investigation of imagination and phantasy, of “imaginings” [*Phantasien*] as they emerge in fellowship with time and “quasi-time” in *Experience and Judgment*. The observation that imagination produces lived experiences disconnected from a linear flow of temporal streaming evokes the question of temporal play that imagination makes possible; hence “objectivities of imagination lack absolute temporal position, and so they also cannot have a temporal unity among themselves, a unique temporal order like the objects of perception.”<sup>2</sup> At once posing a fertile source of reflection and a philosophical challenge to meet by theologians and philosophers of religion, the faculty of imagination in Husserl opens up novel strategies for the analysis of liturgical time or contemplative and meditative time. What might a theologian, on a related note, make of the following: “Every act of imagination, being divorced from all temporal connection, has its own *imagination-time*, and there are as many such, incomparable with another, as there are or can be such imaginings, thus, infinitely many.”<sup>3</sup> From the point of view of world religions and interfaith dialogue, the exploration of overlapping temporal dynamics opens out onto many of the questions addressed in this volume—this I pause to note is on display lucidly in Olga Louchakova-Schwartz’s essay on Husserl and the Muslim medieval philosopher Suhrawardi. Here the very conception of illumination in mystical theology invokes finely-grained phenomenological analyses of phantasy in Husserl. The repartee here between Suhrawardi and Husserl is representative of the volume’s attempt to exploit the category of

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- 1 Edmund Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 31. For a focused and sustained interrogation of imagination and phantasy, see Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898–1925)* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005).
  - 2 Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgment* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1973), 170.
  - 3 Ibid.

imagination in service of religious and theological analysis with inventive proficiency. What does it imagination give in the performance of imagining? What kind of original self-giving arises in the medium of imagination, phantasy, and image consciousness?

Many of the essays reinforce the point that the more a phenomenon can give itself, the more it can be experienced, especially as it is harnessed in the faculty of imagination and its aptitude for free variation. And the more one is open to experience, the more a phenomenon can be given just as it gives itself. Phenomenology's intention, therefore, to which the volume attests, is not to submit human experience to a taxonomy of categories in advance or to a rigid assumption taken up prior to the event being given—for that would fall prey to the unnecessary restrictive attitude of the minimalist point of view.

It should be clear by now that phenomenology labours to avoid principles or guiding methods, except for one: the “pure letting appear” of that which is given, so that “Being arises and reveals itself in itself, integrates itself with self and experiences itself,”<sup>4</sup> in the absolute priority granted to the phenomenon's power to self-disclose. Quite literally, phenomenologists like Henry and Marion shall strongly indicate that the object or the “phenomenon” enjoys a level of agency (of selfhood), wielding a living power to give itself. We can thus read in *Étant Donnée* Marion's bold statement in this spirit: “The *self* of the phenomenon is marked in its determination as event. It comes, does *its* thing, and leaves on its own. Showing *itself*, it also shows the *self* that takes the initiative of giving *itself* [Le *soi* du phénomène se marque dans sa détermination d'événement: il vient, survient et part de lui-même et, se montrant, il montre aussi le soi qui prend (ou retire) l'initiative de se donner].”<sup>5</sup> Such a programmatic statement does not necessarily conflict with the faculty of imagination but grants to it the power of receptivity, that it enables us to receive the many shades of self-giving that arises from the side of the phenomenon.

Phenomenology concerns all possible forms of experience, including religious or mystical types of experiential excess and mystery. Phenomenology's function, strictly said as a discipline rooted in the givenness initiated from the side of the thing given, is to permit us to explore the “how” of whatever is given. The “principle of principles” discussed in §24 of *Ideas I* has often been considered the chief point of departure in this regard. For Husserl, as

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4 Michel Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 684.

5 Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 159. For the French rendition, see Marion, *Étant donné* (Paris: PUF, 2013), 226.

for much of the tradition that follows in his wake, it can be argued that philosophers should “exclude these obstacles in the form of the natural ‘dogmatic’ sciences by making clear to ourselves and vividly keeping in mind only the most universal principle of all methods, the principle of the original right of all data.”<sup>6</sup> What kind of data? Ritual? Byzantine art? Icons? The answer must be finally: all data. Is this maximalist? Or is it, to be more clear, faithfulness to this universal principle?

Theology and spirituality, among any other domain of lived experience, then, in principle, is by right a legitimate source of givenness. Why must this relaxed or maximalist framework (i.e. the original right of all data) be condemned as fundamentally inadequate or impoverished by Janicaud when it is Husserl himself who insists on this universal principle of all methods? Janicaud, we recall, accuses those involved in the theological turn of having injured or broken phenomenology. It now has no boundaries and is thus “wide open” (*La phenomenology élatée*). Is phenomenology’s commitment to the universal principle of givenness make it boundary-less? I would suggest it makes phenomenology a flexible method that can explore any data-set, be it light, an icon, prayer, or liturgical time, with fresh eyes.

The present volume addresses Janicaud’s concerns by assuming the following rhetorical devices indirectly: Why should a phenomenological theology or a “phenomenology of religious life” be repudiated as disingenuous or fraudulent? Or (and this is my perspective) is the rejection of theology as a legitimate discourse due only to Janicaud’s personal distaste of theological themes? What is the alternative? Should phenomenology surrender itself to a specific metaphysics, say to science or materialism or secularism? Should it, then, close in on itself according to the canon of a certain kind of late modern materialist rationalism? Should it restrict itself only to objects already enclosed by a principle, framework, ideology, or functional discourse? This would truly be a minimal outlook that betrays Husserl’s universal principle.

In the face of these petitions, we can claim that, phenomenology, in any case, is not so much invested in objects as in the human experience of objects. Because each of the essays frames experience in this way, the volume escapes scientific reductionism. Each essay, moreover, illustrates the unique anthropology on which phenomenology rests. We are not in the world in the manner of an object or entity. We are instead open to the world, embedded in its flow and experiencing thereby all that may arise within the dynamics of that flow.

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6 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Second Book, Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1989), 61.

What is specific to humans, what formulates our *humanitas*, is precisely the truth that we undergo and suffer the flow of objects; often specific experiences constitute the object at play, such as feeling or imagining the object, fearing or loving the object, and so forth.

Phenomenology is wielded in just this positive and constructive way in the present volume. The essays consist of a wide array of topics that should evoke in readers a creative tension between phenomenology and different theological traditions. The range of phenomenological voices highlighted here is impressive: Schutz, Merleau-Ponty, Marcel Mauss (enlisted as a phenomenological source for the first time!), Marion, Husserl, Heidegger, Dooyeweerd, and Stein. Much profit can be had in a careful reading of the textured readings of these thinkers and others in the following pages. I congratulate the editors and contributors on a truly imaginative and generative collection of essays.

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# Introduction: Phenomenology of Religious Experience, Image Consciousness and Imagination

Martin Nitsche<sup>1</sup>

Purkyne University, Usti nad Labem

For the phenomenological school, the notion of “religious experience” has two interrelated meanings. In one sense it captures human experience in the framework of a *religious world* and in another it denotes individual *religious experiencing*. Both meanings are not distinct, but complement each other in building a complex phenomenological notion of religious experience. What I understand here as a religious world encompasses all objects, institutions, habits, and rituals as they are related to religious practice; these can be official or unofficial, public or private, defined or random. Religious world can also be understood as a subset of what is in phenomenology generally called the *life-world (Lebenswelt)*; the life-world consists not only of objects (and other entities) around us, but of them as they are experienced or lived.<sup>2</sup> Religious experiencing, on the other hand, stands for the subjective course of religious life such as, for example, thinking, contemplating, praying, feeling, and hoping. Again, these subjective occurrences can be informed by religious teaching (by an ideology) or not. Both, religious world and experiencing, co-establish religious consciousness – and what is important for this volume – both are closely related with human faculty of imagination as well as with our ability to be conscious not only of objects but also of their images. The main goal of this

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- 1 Martin Nitsche’s work on this introduction was supported by the project with No.: UJEP-IGA-JR-2021-46-010-2 by the Internal Grant Agency UJEP.
  - 2 Therefore, the emphasis on religious *practice* in my explanation of religious world does not differentiate practice from a religious theory (since the theory/practice distinction is complicated in contexts of religious experience), but highlights the experiential basis of phenomenology.

volume is to explore the role which imagination and image consciousness play in the constitution of religious world and the course of religious experiencing.<sup>3</sup>

One of the main group of problems within the context of religious experience that can be addressed by the phenomenological conception of imagination are questions regarding the reality of images. On the one hand, many religious images simply cannot be real since they are supranatural, on the other hand, though, the very same images have a power to create a religious world. Once a supranatural deity, to make a very simple example, is depicted, it reaches a reality of a thing (a sculpture or a painting) and thus becomes a part of a *real* world – yet not as such, but only as a physical image. The phenomenological conception of imagination, as we aim to show in this volume, explains transitions between real and imagined along with consequently elucidating the medial nature of a religious world as imagined-and-real.

Whereas most of the chapters in this volume focus on contemporary phenomenological approaches to imagination along with their applications to problems of religious experience, this introduction presents the roots of phenomenological theory of imagination in the works of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. Initially it emphasizes the essential role of imagination in building the phenomenological consciousness, consequently it explicates the interplay of imagination and image-consciousness, and finally it introduces the lived world as an imagined-and-real sphere.

## 1. Phenomenology of imaginative consciousness

Departure point for this introductory chapter is given by Husserl's investigations of imagination, which are collected in the volume XXIII of *Husserliana*, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory*.<sup>4</sup> Here, in the text number 1 entitled "Phantasy and Image Consciousness", Husserl not only distinguishes between imagination and image-consciousness (while defining both), but also

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3 Olga Louchakova-Schwartz Ed., *The Problem of Religious Experience. Case Studies in Phenomenology, with Reflections and Commentaries*, (Cham: Springer, 2019. Martin Nitsche (ed.). *Image in Space. Contributions to a Topology of Images*, (Nordhausen: Bautz Verlag, 2015).

4 Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898–1925)*, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005). Edmund Husserl, *Phantasie, Bildbewusstsein, Erinnerung. Zur Phänomenologie der anschaulichen Vergegenwärtigungen*. *Husserliana* XXIII, (the Hague: Nijhoff, 1980).

presents imagination as one of the core functions of the phenomenological consciousness.

### 1.1. Phenomenological conception of consciousness

Husserl always saw phenomenology as a fundamentally new position in the tradition of philosophy. Taking such position often means – and it is crucial for new beginnings – to abandon or overcome dichotomies postulated within older perspectives of thinking. Within the first published methodological reflections of phenomenology, in *Logical Investigations*, Husserl addresses critically three interrelated distinctions made by the Brentano School (following the tradition of British empiricism), namely the distinctions between inner – outer, psychical – physical, and evident – non-evident.<sup>5</sup> He declines the view that inner perception coincides only with psychical phenomena, and that evidence must be routinely connected with inner or psychical experience. In this polemic with Brentano, he concludes that these interconnected distinctions cannot serve as foundational principles of phenomenology and must be neglected. Phenomenological conception of consciousness crosses the borders between inner and outer experience; this move gives the phenomenological consciousness a methodological primacy above interiority and exteriority. Consequently, the facticity of our life-world can be described by monitoring directly the *stream of consciousness*, which *eo ipso* interlinks inner and outer “realities”. In the same time, ontologically speaking, with the methodological primacy consciousness (i.e., the stream of consciousness as Husserl puts more precisely) gains a medial and transitive nature. The ontological moment here means that facing a polemic reference to the natural distinction between physical and psychical experience (and how substantial it is), phenomenology can respond by drawing attention to consciousness as actually existing and by description clearly determinable sphere of consciousness that intersects this distinction.

Within the context of his investigations related to imagination, Husserl nicely expounds the primacy of consciousness for phenomenology using

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5 The criticism of these distinctions can be found in the short text entitled “External and internal perception: physical and psychical phenomena”; it was published as an appendix to the second volume of *Logical Investigations*. Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. 2, (London – New York: Routledge, 2001), 335–348. Closer interpretation in Martin Nitsche, *Methodical Precedence of Intertwining. An Introduction to a Transitive-Topological Phenomenology*, (Würzburg: Königshausen u. Neumann, 2018), 19–23.

these words: “‘Consciousness’ consists of consciousness through and through, and the sensation as well as the phantasm is already ‘consciousness’.”<sup>6</sup> This note, presumably from 1909 (from the text Nr. 8 published in *Husserliana XXIII Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory*), follows an authentic author’s lament: “What is the source of the attempt—repeated again and again and failing again and again—to clarify the relationship between *perception and phantasy*? Or rather, what is the source of the *failure* of this attempt?”<sup>7</sup> The quoted note coronates a longer response that identifies the scheme “content of apprehension and apprehension” as the source of the failure. Consistently dividing a content of consciousness from functions of consciousness (this is an approach deeply rooted in the philosophical tradition, which goes back if not to Aristotle than at least to Descartes) leads to a split between perceived and imagined qualities.<sup>8</sup> This split has two serious consequences; first, it declares the perceived to be real and the imagined “mere” imagination, and second, it articulates the relation between them as representation. Husserl remarks that, for example, a phantasm-color is in this scheme forced to a representative relation to a sensed color since it in a difference to phantasm relates to a real object. So, the status of image-consciousness becomes in this scheme derivative: images as contents of consciousness are degraded to representations of reality and the imagination is not taken as an original productive function of consciousness.

Husserl’s remark “‘consciousness’ consists of consciousness through and through” declares the phenomenological attempt to overcome both the strict distinctions between contents and acts of consciousness and the degrading of images to mere representations. The ground-breaking method Husserl proposes to proceed in fulfilling these aims starts with accentuating the temporal dimension of acts of consciousness and culminates with shifting the essence of consciousness from intentionality to temporality. The initial step can be illustrated by this Husserl’s observation from the text Nr. 8 (*Husserliana XXIII*): “I have not seen (and generally it has not been seen) that in the phantasy of a color, for example, it is not the case that something present is given, that color

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6 Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory*, 323. “‘Bewusstsein’ besteht durch und durch aus Bewusstsein, und schon Empfindung so wie Phantasma ist ‘Bewusstsein’.” (Husserl, *Phantasie, Bildbewusstsein, Erinnerung*, 265).

7 Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory*, 323.

8 Initially, in *Logical Investigations*, Husserl himself also advocates the schema of consciousness, which is based on conceptualizing contents of consciousness as its essential moment; for example, here: “Each concretely complete objectifying act has three components: its quality, its matter and its representative content.” Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. 2, 242.

as a really immanent occurrence is given, which then serves as the representant for the actual color.”<sup>9</sup> This finding helps Husserl to untie bonds of phantasy to presence, i.e., to experience of something present. And consequently, it enables to understand phantasy not as a weaker representation of reality, but as the imagination, an original productive function of consciousness. In this way, the phenomenological focus on consciousness as the united physical-and-psychical sphere of experience (and not just a mind) coincides with uncovering of its the temporality.

## 1.2. Reality and temporality: imagination as presentification

In the texts collected in Husserliana XXIII, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory*, Husserl revokes the way he distinguished phantasy from perception based on the content/act relation and develops a temporal version of this distinction. While the scheme “content of apprehension and apprehension” still invokes the dynamics of modern metaphysics (the object *in front of* the perceiving subject), the temporal model distinguishes between original impression or “presentation” (*Gegenwärtigung*) on the one hand and reproduction or “presentification” (*Vergegenwärtigung*) on the other.<sup>10</sup> Perception consists in the original impression of the appearance, but this cannot be understood as the initial acceptance of sensory data (as, e.g., the Kantian affection of things themselves) and the fulfillment of consciousness with contents, but fundamentally as a temporal function within the unified sphere of consciousness. Similarly, reproduction is not a re-presentation of the acquired content of consciousness,

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9 Husserl, E., *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory*, 323.

10 John B. Brough translates *Gegenwärtigung* by “presentation” and *Vergegenwärtigung* “representation”; see his explanation in Husserl, E., *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory*, 1. In my opinion, the latter translation is not entirely appropriate – for two reasons. Firstly, Husserl repeatedly emphasizes that temporal conception of consciousness wants to avoid to understand contents of consciousness as representations of objects (and Brough is fully aware of this fact, see his introduction to the volume, *ibid.*, LIV). Secondly, the prefix “re-” – in an essential difference to German “ver-” – indicates a repetition; “ver-” expresses becoming something or changing to something. I understand that “representation” refers to connections between *Vergegenwärtigung* and reproduction, yet this does not justify, in my opinion, to use it in Husserl’s work. Therefore, I utilize in following the solution offered by Rojczewicz, who translates *Vergegenwärtigung* as “presentification” in, e.g., his translation of Husserl, *Thing and Space*.

but again a temporal function or a form of consciousness; where consciousness is essentially the unity of appearance and perception.

Presentation and presentification are temporal forms of consciousness; and thus, they have a different functional relationship to reality, where reality does not mean the so-called ‘external’ reality, which stands ‘in front of’ consciousness and relates ‘to’ it. Methodically restricting the distinction between inner and outer experience, Husserl connects the reality of presentation temporally to the actual presence of the perception in the current now; whereas the presentification (e.g., phantasy or memory) does not contain this feature of being present “as there in the flesh” in the current now.<sup>11</sup> The presence of what is perceived “in the flesh” (leibhaft) is constituted by perceiving itself as a phenomenal self-givenness: “the essence of perception itself involves the presentation of an object in the flesh, an object which is presented as qualified in this or that way.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, for Husserl, the presence in the flesh is not descriptively referenced to some ‘hard’ external reality, but is derived directly from the fact of perceiving.

The non-phenomenological distinction between external reality of objects and internal consciousness of mental representations is by Husserl replaced with temporal differentiation between presence of a perceived object in the flesh, i.e., in the current now and the presentification of an object that is also “in front of our eyes” but “not as something currently given now”: it “does not give itself’ as itself, actual and now”.<sup>13</sup> Based on this temporal differentiation, perceptions and phantasies are both real – both contributing to the reality of our experience. The difference consists in the degree of self-givenness accord-

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11 In the following I quote from Husserl’s lectures *Thing and Space* (1907), where Husserl, before starting the analyses of spatial consciousness, summarizes the position he reached methodically in the period 1904–05, i.e., including his explanations of image consciousness. “Thus there stands out in the initial consideration a peculiar character of perception which we can express in an intelligible way as follows: the object stands in perception as there in the flesh, it stands, to speak still more precisely, as actually present, as self-given there in the current now. In phantasy, the object does not stand there as in the flesh, actual, currently present.” Edmund Husserl, *Thing and Space. Lectures of 1907*, (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997), 12.

12 Ibid., 15. “[Z]um Wesen der Wahrnehmung selbst gehört es, einen Gegenstand leibhaft darzustellen, der also so und so beschaffener dargestellt ist.” Edmund Husserl, *Ding und Raum Vorlesungen 1907*. Husserliana XVI, (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1973), 18.

13 Husserl, *Thing and Space*, 12.