

Image and Imagination in Phenomenology of Religious Experience

Edited by
Martin Nitsche and
Olga Louchakova-Schwartz

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Image and Imagination

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Foreword: Phenomenology, Givenness, Religion

Joseph Rivera

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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.¹

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.”² 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.”³ 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,”⁴ 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 *Etant Donn  * 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 ph  nom  ne se marque dans sa d  termination d'  v  nement: il vient, survient et part de lui-m  me et, *se montrant*, il montre aussi le *soi* qui prend (ou retire) l'initiative de se donner].”⁵ 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

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, *  tant donn  * (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.”⁶ 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 élargie*). 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.

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

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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.² 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.³

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*.⁴ 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

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.⁵ 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

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’.”⁶ 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?”⁷ 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.⁸ 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

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.”⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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,

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.¹¹ 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.”¹² 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”.¹³ 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-

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.

ing to which perceptions are there in front of us “in the flesh” whereas the phantasies only “as if” in the flesh. In this way, perceptions and phantasies are two modes of evidence; they do not differ as objectively real and imaginatively unreal. In other words, the “as if” of phantasy does not mean “unreal”. In parallel with transforming the difference of real and unreal to temporal degrees of self-givenness the same methodical step of Husserl’s phenomenology also reveals connections of both, perceptions and phantasies, to imagination. Not only phantasy, but also “real” perception utilizes the ability of consciousness to conceive of images. For with respect to creating the world of our experience there is not a strict dividing line between perceiving of an object and being conscious of an image; both contribute as creative forces to appearing objectivity of our world.

1.3. Imagination and image consciousness. Imagined-and-Real.

Text number one from Husserliana XXIII, “Phantasy and Image Consciousness” (1904/05), both distinguishes phantasy from image consciousness and explains their relationship that is carried out by imagination. Essentially, imagination is a form of presentification (*Vergegenwärtigung*) which is specified as “pictorialization” (*Verbildlichung*).¹⁴ Husserl speaks about two types of imagination; the first is connected to phantasy, and the second to image consciousness. The first one has a primordial, simpler structure of image-presentification (i.e., pictorialization) as the productive, creative ability of consciousness as was described above in our introduction. In this sense, the imagination ranks among other forms of temporal reproductions including particularly memory (*Erinnerung*) and expectation (*Erwartung*). In case of image consciousness, pictorialization is mediated by a presence of a physical image such as, for example, a painting, a photograph, a film, a sculpture, or an architectural structure. Image consciousness, in other words, stands for the ability of consciousness to experience works of art, that is, physical objects which besides being such objects are also images.

The structure of imagination in the second meaning is more complicated (since it is mediated); for Husserl three moments play a role: “We have three objects: 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. For the latter, we prefer to say simply ‘image subject’; for the first object, we prefer ‘physical image’; for the second, ‘representing image’ or

14 See, e.g., Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory*, 18.

'image object'.¹⁵ Most interesting from these three, in terms of phenomenological analysis, is the second one – the “image object” (Bildobjekt). Whereas the other two make sense also for a naive understanding – the “physical image” (das physische Bild) as the thing we perceive on wall in a gallery, for example, and the depicted “image subject” (Bildsujet)¹⁶ as a more or less obvious meaning of respective work of art – the “image object” stand for the mysterious image in the proper sense. Merleau-Ponty in *Eye and Mind* describes this mysterious nature of images with these famous lines: “The animals painted on the walls of Lascaux are not there in the same way as the fissures and limestone formations. But they are not *elsewhere*. Pushed forward here, held back there, held up by the wall’s mass they use so adroitly, they spread around the wall without ever breaking from their elusive moorings in it. I would be at great pains to say *where* is the painting I am looking at. For I do not look at it as I do at a thing; I do not fix it in its place. My gaze wanders in it as in the halos of Being. It is more accurate to say that I see according to it, or with it, than that I *see it*.”¹⁷

Even though Merleau-Ponty does not follow Husserl’s conception of image consciousness explicitly, it is obvious that it reflects the same phenomenological task to explain the relations among three moments: the physical carrier of an image, the image itself, and our looking at it. In a difference to Husserl, Merleau-Ponty understands this task in topological terms as a question wondering where is the image (i.e., image object in Husserl terminology). Husserl himself characterizes the image object also as “the precise analogue of the phantasy image,”¹⁸ which points at the key connection between image consciousness and imagination. The imagination, which is primarily the creative ability of image-presentification and pictorialization, helps the consciousness to be aware of the mysterious character of image object that presents the image subject. Whereas the image subject counts as “depicted”, the image object is –

15 Ibid., 21.

16 “Image subject”: in the original, Husserl does not use the expression “Bildsubjekt”, but speaks about “Bildsujet” utilizing the French “sujet” which was (and still is) a common notion for a “theme” in art theory.

17 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind”. In *The Primacy of Perception. And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 159 – 190, 164.

18 “By the image object we do not mean the depicted object, the image subject, but the precise analogue of the phantasy image; namely, the appearing object that is the representant for the image subject.” Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory*, 20.

thanks to the power of imagination – the “depicting” object.¹⁹ What depicts is the consciousness itself, not the physical image, which serves only as a physical carrier, i.e., the *place where imagination creates the image object*.

Merleau-Ponty, in accord with Husserl, underlines the topological importance of imagination dynamics by describing how the vision *inscribes* into the structure of visible.²⁰ He widely develops analogies between sight and touch explaining that looking at the visible corresponds to palpation; in this way, visions are inscribed “in the midst of the visible”.²¹ The process of imagination as inscription constitutes here, in the midst of the visible, a specific layer of reality, which is called by Merleau-Ponty the imaginary. At this layer, images in the sense of Husserl’s image objects are localized. Here, is the real (the physical image) intertwined with vision (that accompanies both perception and phantasy). We can therefore call this layer together with Annabelle Dufourcq “imaginareal”²² or with Edward Soja “real-and-imagined place”²³.

These notions of “imaginareal” underline the fact that imaginary is actually our natural environment – which is never composed only from real objects, but

19 See quoted above. In German, Husserl confronts “abgebildete” (depicted) with “abbildende” (depicting); Husserl, *Phantasie, Bildbewusstsein, Erinnerung*, 19.

20 In a closer look, Merleau-Ponty claims that the process of inscribing involves a doubling of a vision; this claim resembles Husserl’s distinction of image object and subject. Further, the idea of sensations’ doubling also further unfolds Husserlian restriction of inner/outer distinction. See, e.g., “The things touch me as I touch them and touch myself: flesh of the world— distinct from my flesh: the double inscription outside and inside. The inside receives without flesh: not a “psychic state,” but intra-corporeal, reverse of the outside that my body shows to the things.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 261.

21 “Hence, without even entering into the implications proper to the seer and the visible, we know that, since vision is a palpation with the look, it must also be inscribed in the order of being that it discloses to us; he who looks must not himself be foreign to the world that he looks at. As soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision (as is so well indicated by the double meaning of the word) be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision; myself seen from without, such as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible, occupied in considering it from a certain spot.” Ibid., 134.

22 Annabelle Dufourcq, “The Fundamental Imaginary Dimension of the Real in Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy,” *Research in Phenomenology* 45 (2015) 33–52, 47.

23 Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996).

always already affected with images by the force of imagination. The inscription of images on the physical canvas of the real objects cannot be understood as a mental projection, nor as an externalization of internal contents (see above). According to the phenomenological conception of embodied consciousness, the imaginative inscription always already participates in the constitution of our life-world. In other words, what we commonly call “reality” has in fact the imaginareal nature.

1.4. Imagination and Image Consciousness in Religious experience

Phenomenology of religious experience aims, among other, to explore the constitution of religious world within the course of religious experiencing. In this volume, we investigate the role which imagination and image consciousness play in this constitution. Husserl’s descriptions of image consciousness, the temporal understanding of imagination as a creative ability of consciousness which restricts an oversimplified distinction of inner/outer experience, and Merleau-Ponty’s subsequent conception of the imaginary help to answer questions regarding the validity of religious images. The phenomenological conception of imagination explains transitions between real and imagined along with consequently elucidating the medial nature of a religious world as imagined-and-real.

2. The present volume²⁴

After introducing the main topics, we can begin considering the present volume as the collection of particular essays. The chapters are organized in three parts: Part 1, *Imagination*; Part 2, *Images in Religious Experience*; and Part 3, *The Performative Function of Images*. Part 1 includes papers by Sepp, Costello, Sitsch, Louchakova-Schwartz, and Lumma and Sparby. The authors of Part 1 attempt to clarify position of religious imagination in several domains of significance: in relationship to the self, to others, to the world, and to the ultimate transcendent. Sepp, in his “Religious Experience: The Beginnings and Ends of Imagination,”

24 I would like to thank Olga Louchakova-Schwartz for the friendly and inspiring co-operation on this volume, as well as for her help with this part of my introduction. We both want to thank Hans Rainer Sepp for accepting this volume to Libri Nigri series.

places the religious at the crossing point between imagination and the world. He argues such placement is a necessity in the overall scheme of things. Thus, the limit of the living body—which religious imagination is—moves us between the two polarities: the factual dependency on one’s egocentricity and the reality that absolutely transcends this factual dependence. One has a choice between keeping the habitual ego and letting the doors of perception open.

Costello, in “The Imago Dei and Image-consciousness: The Phenomenological Conjunction of Meaning and Community,” picks up the theme initiated by Sepp and reads the book of Genesis together with Husserl’s *Phantasy, Image-consciousness and Memory*. Genesis suggests that we are created in the image and likeness of God, we can create images but not His image. God turns us, ethically, toward one another. In every act of consciousness, the image and the imagined merge in order to further draw out the meaning of community—just as in Husserlian “pairing” in *Cartesian Meditations*. Transcendence is thus a kind of birthright because our own being is a fundamental image of transcendence.

Sitsch, in his “Parallels Between the Epoché and Religious Experiences,” also engages the theme of alterity. Coming as the other, religious image interrupts the constitution of the everyday, yet does not cause a full rupture.

Lumma and Sparby in the “First-person Phenomenological Assessment of Meditative Landmarks” say that the religious imagination contributes to lived-through structures of consciousness in the contemplative experience. The meditative practice of religious imagination also predictably invokes these structures. This position would be shared by Suhrawardi, who was a practicing Sufi well familiar with both states and stations in spiritual contemplation.

In “Apodicticity of Mental Imagery in Suhrawardi versus Husserl’s Notion of Original Self-Giving,” Olga Louchakova-Schwartz examines conditions of possibility for truth in Husserl and Suhrawardi. According to Suhrawardi, truth in religious imagination is grounded in two *a priori* moments, light and mirror-image. Light is self-evidential self-giving, similar to Husserl’s notion of truth in originary self-giving. But in contrast to Husserl, who takes apodicticity as something constituted, Suhrawardi seeks an absolute *a priori* of self-evidence. Obviously, this *a priori* in itself has to be not an object, but a condition of possibility for the appearance of objects. Since, in the real world, light is not an object in itself, but makes objects visible. Suhrawardi predicates his ideal principle of apodictic self-evidence on the relationships between visual light and objects; then he finds a condition of possibility for mental imagery in the form. The form, which is an abstraction from real objects, relates to them in the same manner that a reflection in the mirror relates to the thing reflected. The truth in mental images obtains in the unities of self-evident lights (i.e.,

existentially modalized ontological intuitions) and their visual expressions by means of forms. In the ontological hierarchy of such apodictic intuitions, the highest position belongs to the images with religious contents.

Part 2, *Images in Religious Experience*, includes chapters by DeRoo, Rumpza, Oberg and Niemann. One of the difficulties in applying phenomenology for the clarifications of religious imagination consists in reconciling the idea of absolute transcendence implicit in religious image with an idea of the possibility of an experience of mental or external religious imagery that is explicitly constituted, and out of the shards of manifested forms. DeRoo, in “A Phenomenology of Image-Bearing: Spirituality, Humanity, and the ‘Supra-Relation,’” builds on the work of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and the Dutch phenomenologist Herman Dooyeweerd in suggesting that the structure of being “in the image of X” presupposes a constitutive participation of X in the image. His position runs counter to the prevalent notions in Anglo-American philosophy of religion that construe our imaging God as entailing our bearing a similar property (e.g., free will; rationality; etc.) in an analogously similar way that God bears that property. DeRoo’s notion of “heart-ed” beings (the Judeo-Christian scriptural conception of ‘the heart.’) is thus construed both theologically (“all of life is religious”) and phenomenologically (in relation to our understanding of “the transcendental”).

Rumpza’s “On Spiritual vs. Carnal Visibility: Phenomenologically Dismantling an Orthodox Iconoclasm” discusses the tradition of worship which relies heavily on the aesthetics of the image adapted for the spiritual task. Showing the limitations of purely theological discursive approach to this issue, Rumpza argues that this problem is not a matter of *theology* but of *phenomenology*, specifically, of the phenomenology of visibility. Oberg, in “Bloodying God: Crucifixion and the Image,” argues that the aesthetics of image, even as violent as the image of crucifixion, directs emotion to signify the transcendence. Niemann, in “Pain and Religion,” argues along the same lines by showing that the depiction of pain invokes a sense of the boundary of the body, and therefore, mediates the transcendental function of the image.

In Part 3, *The Performative Function of Images*, Barber, Krebs, Žukauskienė, Schenk, and Lee focus on the performative-psychological function of the religious image. In “Typifications, Play, and Ritual,” Barber shows that the ritual integrates emancipatory religious relevances (in the image) with existing pragmatic relevances, as well as the new imposed relevances (e.g., the arrival of the new year, war, tragedy, etc.). The ritual relies on general structures of Schutzian social typification. When these categorical patterns become interrelated, one comes to develop new typifications and new behaviors. The imaginative

capacity of human beings and animals serves to grasp creative connections and break free from the weight of cosmic interruptions of life or preoccupying pragmatic imperatives.

In “Above which more consoling cannot be ‘given’ – The role of images in the Phenomenology of Consolation,” Krebs continues investigating the role of religious images in therapeutic dialogue as a decisive force of consolation. Boethius’ *Consolatio Philosophiae* contains hints of this function of imagination, but Stein’s *Kreuzeswissenschaft* suggests that what at the first glance seemed comforting can paradoxically prove unhelpful at a later time. According to Žukauskienė’s “The Role of Movement in Religious Experience,” movement not only influences but constructs religious experience and its imagery, supporting the point made by Barber regarding the hermeneutics of image in the ritual. Schenk, in “Revelation as an Erotic Phenomenon – the Interplay of Revelation, Love and Reduction in Jean-Luc Marion’s Phenomenology of Givenness,” reiterates Marion’s views on phenomenality as a visible into non-visible is folded. The access to this intertwining happens in religious experience, via “erotic reduction” which reveals the ego pole in a reciprocal intertwining with the beloved. As one can see, this perspective can be contrasted with Schutzian-Husserlian approach in Barber’s paper concerning the integrated relevances of the ritual.

The Schutzian hermeneutics of the pragmatic and emancipatory religious relevances in ritual is once again highlighted by Lee’s anthropo-psychological exploration in “Spirit Possession in *Dang-ki* Healing: An Embodied, Intercorporeal and Intersubjective Phenomenon”. Lee examines *dang-ki* healing, a form of Chinese spirit mediumship practiced in Singapore and Southeast Asia. This practice is based on the belief that a deity can possess a human (called *dang-ki*) to offer help to supplicants. In the practice, *dang-ki* participants undergo the reconstitution of their embodied selves through two interrelated pathways: First, the changes in identity and social role in becoming a *dang-ki*. Second, during the possession rituals, changes of awareness, of the locus of control, and overall character of embodiment. In agreement with Costello, DeRoo and others in the volume, we can conclude that religious image indeed serves as a vehicle of transcendence, mediating, as in the case reported by Lee, a gateway from sickness to psychological and even physical health.

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The Second Editor's Introduction: Religious Imagination Empirically, With Just a Slight Taste of Phenomenology

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The purpose of my introduction is to give a brief overview of the empirical side of religious imagination. Only after this initial clarification can we face the emerging tasks of the phenomenology of religious imagination. Imagination, and in particular, visual imagery, is the most frequent medium of religious experience. A reliance on visuality in religious imagination is not surprising because the real world is mostly visual, and religious imagination tries to construct its worlds by analogy with their real counterpart. However, there may be also other kinds of mental imagery involved. For example, Radha Soami Satsang, an Indian religious group, employs mental sound imagery;¹ the same takes place in the practice of the so called *bija*-mantras, or in the imagery of cosmic river *Pranava*.² Also, it is a common feature of all instances of religious imagination, and thereby, worth noting right away that embodied imagination can work either actively from the ego, or in the mode of passive receiving of spontaneously emerging images—in an “ascending” or “descending” manner.³ The mental sound or visual image can be kept static, for the purpose of training internal concentration, or these images can become transformed, often on their own accord; and they can be also synesthetic. The sense of touch rarely figures in religious imagery by itself, but often in connection with other senses,

1 Puri, *Radha Soami Teachings*.

2 These meditations are a staple of New Age yoga communities, and references to such practices are easily available and abundant on the internet via search engines.

3 Sviri, *The Taste*.

just as haptic perception functions in a daily life. The sense of touch mediates perception of what mystics call “subtle energy”: various gradients of intensity in hyletics, at times associated with movement.⁴ Deeply absorptive practices of contemplation, e.g., in Kashmir Shaivism or Tantric Buddhism,⁵ can engage all the senses, with imagery of different modalities; the same in Buddhist Tantra; and the images can be of varying degrees of complexity in terms of both form and meaningful context, can be geometrically abstract or very concrete etc. However, a commonly shared feature is that the practices of embodied creative imagination and internal speech practices, such as, e.g., the Christian *Lectio Divina*, the Buddhist internalization of *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, or the Indian mantra-*japa*, entail a different internal mode of doing, and so different schools of thought prefer one way of practicing over the other.⁶ There may be some correlation between the preferred ways of practice and the art admitted in the tradition, but the analysis of relationships between iconography, lexicography, and internal practices exceed the scope of present volume.

Religious traditions formed very different ideas regarding the role of visual imagery in their soteriological practices. Taking a sweeping Eliade-Huston Smith style of comparison: in *Mahāmudrā*, imagination is first cultivated but then has to be completely overcome in order to realize a formless reality.⁷ In Christian Hesychasm, the practices of imagination are admitted but believed to be inferior in their value to the practices which are verbal, such as, e.g., the Prayer of the Heart. The reason for such judgement of imagination is that in the verbal practices, the word-form is transcended into pure meaning (in the *Lectio Divina*),⁸ or stillness (in the Prayer of the Heart, Sufi *Dhikr*, or mantra-*japa* in the Spiritual Heart according to Indian *Vedānta*) and other forms of

4 For an example of hyletic gradient in the practice of the Prayer of the Heart, see Louchakova-Schwartz, “Theophanis”.

5 For absorptive concentration practices that involve mental image, in Kashmir Shaivism, see Singh, *Vijñānabhairava*; for Buddhism, see Bronkhorst, *Absorption*.

6 For the analysis of practice in *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, see Myall, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā. Lectio Divina* or mantra-*japa* do not require referencing as these practices are commonly well known and instructions are abundant on the internet.

7 For Zen Buddhism, see a description of kensho by Jiyu-Kennett, *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*. For related examples of progression from mental imagery to formless practices, in *Dzogchen*, see Guenther, *Meditation*; in Bon, see Wangyal, *The Wonders*.

8 Relevant to understanding how such practices work is Husserl’s ontology of expression and meaning in the First Investigation of *Logical Investigations*.

experience in which the transcendent is claimed to be intuited directly.⁹ By contrast, imagination may give us, at best, an intimation of transcendence, which is an indirect and thereby less perfect form of communion with the Deity.¹⁰ But such judgement is not always the case as the attitude to and the forms of imagination differ in different stages of one's internal practice. In Sufism, one finds both a cultivation of imagination as a self-revealing knowledge of God, and on the opposite side, a requirement to differentiate oneself from one's own imagination in order to attain the unity with the Beloved.¹¹ In fact, Tibetan dark retreats (when one seats in complete darkness until imagination exhausts itself) serve a similar purpose. On the other hand, internal visual images, which get transformed into pure impressions of internal light and further, serve as gateways into a state of non-conceptual formless presence.¹² External images can be used as support for the mind in its attempt to attain vision of God—in, e.g., Orthodox Christian praying with icons (for more, see Rumpza, in this volume).¹³ In shamanism, one dwells in visual imagery but this is not creative imagination as we know it; rather, it is an alternative pre-given world or worlds to inhabit, etc.

Psychologically, religious imagery can play different roles as well. Using image, whether mental or extra-mental, as an object of attentional focusing trains the capacity of concentration which later becomes essential for the absorptive practices of unity. Such concentration of attention can be practiced egologically, i.e., with one's self-identification with the image. One becomes what one imagines oneself to be: the egological imagination can lead to the changes in personality, cultivation of qualities one wants to attain, and a dissociation from the unwanted qualities. Or, religious mental imagery can be practiced non-egologically, with an image as something one looks at, observes, maintains as an environment, etc. The image can be placed into the body; the focus can be within the image or on the image, dependent on the practice. One's body

9 For more on resolving of verbal practices, see Laude, "the Silence"; Louchakova (a.k.a. Louchakova-Schwartz), "Ontopoiesis".

10 For the superiority of the practice of the Prayer of the Heart over the practice of imagery, see St. Simeon the New Theologian, "Three Methods".

11 For imagination in Sufism, see Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination* (for Ibn-Arabī); Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy*; Sviri, *The Taste* (for Tirmidhī).

12 For descriptions of such transformations, see, e.g., Goleman, *The Meditative Mind*; Louchakova-Schwartz, "Cognitive Phenomenology".

13 For the vision and image of God in the Orthodox piety, see Lossky, *The Vision*. For the method of prayer with icons, see Forest, *Praying with Icons*.

schema may or may not be involved in the generation of imagery; and of course, images can be pleasant or unpleasant, wholesome or unwholesome, associated with “the shadow” (to use Jungian terms), archetypal, etc. in their contents.

Neither clinical nor scientific psychologies take into account the ethics of imagination: for psychology, images are just an activity of the mind. Imagination is treated either as the symbolic means of the mind accessing its own deeper contents (in clinical psychology), or the means of information processing for the brain (in cognitive psychology). But within religious psychologies or a psychology of spirituality, it is acknowledged that religious image has a transformative and emancipatory value, along with the cognitive value in terms of the metaphysics of reality potentially linked to the religious imagination. Its value can even be eschatological, as a promise of the world to come: “things to be seen with/in bliss amidst the lights”.¹⁴ To meet these objectives, the quality and the contents of image can be a subject of regulatory normativity. For example, in Christianity, emotionally dark imagery can be considered as proceeding from Satan, excessive dwelling in imagination can be regarded as *prelest* ‘an evil temptation.’¹⁵ Or, on the contrary, visions can carry the connotations of goodness and thereby, an authenticity of divine revelation.¹⁶ In Buddhism, one discriminates between wholesome and unwholesome mental states, including in relation to imagery. But perhaps, the most interesting is the treatment of imagination as cognition, and treatment of image as knowledge-giving intuition. Some proponents of this position, such as Swedenborg, Ibn-Arabī, and especially Suhrawardī, even put forth the idea that the worlds of image have their own internal structure.¹⁷ Having access to these worlds is essential to human perfection.¹⁸ Speaking phenomenologically, such approach places structures of religious imagination within the lifeworld, thus opening a greater-than-theological possibility of inquiring into the nature of transcendence signified by religious images.

Even a most casual and quick gleaning from empirical aspects of religious image brings up puzzles in need of phenomenologically-minded thematizing.

14 For the attestation of the earliest in history visuality of paradise, in Zoroaster’s poetry, see Schwartz, “Revelation,” 1.

15 For examples of *prelest*, see Rose, *God’s Revelation*.

16 For an example of St. Seraphim of Sarov’s instructions how to distinguish “good” from “bad” imagination, see Dobbie-Bateman, *The Spiritual Instructions*.

17 For imagination in Swedenborg and Ibn-Arabi, see Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*; for Suhrawardī, see van Lit, *The World*.

18 Ziai, “Source”.

Consider, for example, internal visuality of the Indian chakra system.¹⁹ In the tradition of Tantric yoga, e.g., Kundalini yoga, each chakra is associated with the segment of the lived body. The chakra imagery of Kundalini Tantra flows not just from diachronic transformations of symbols or texts, but from a scope of internal impressions in which visuality is intertwined with the haptic perception (or, phenomenologically, hyletics) and the perception of the body (movement, body-schema, etc.). Not only is this complex of percepts synesthetic and intertwined with religious imagery, but its temporally extended structures are seeded with meanings and mental states in strictly predictable, reproducible fashion (cf. Lumma and Sparby, in this volume).²⁰ These peculiar empirical unities can include sound, degrees of inner luminosity, colors—hence comes the mystique of sound and light so liked by New Age culture. Is this array of chakra visuals indeed is a body of imagination, a subtle body somehow linked to yet undescribed constitutive aspects of embodiment? Cosmological religiosities equate microcosm with macrocosm; alchemical religiosities announce “as above, so below”... and the students of spirituality come up with statements like: “wow, inside I am much larger than on the outside!” or “I did not know I am so beautiful inside” [in the present author’s personal encounters]. One of the legends of the Bhagavad Gita describes the mother of the God Krishna looking into his mouth and seeing the whole universe. As a researcher, how seriously should one take such accounts?

This is not a theoretical question. Phenomenology is the first-person endeavor. Before one attempts to do heterophenomenology of religious experience—which textual analysis *de facto* is—one must empirically live through religious perception. Not having such perception is not an excuse, for the simple reason that this is a common human problem that was addressed and already solved. It was addressed and solved by all religious traditions which offer introspective, transformative, meditative and contemplative practices of different kinds in order specifically to remedy a lacking of religious perception. Having such perception takes “inner doing”: it takes time and dedication, and it is work. A systematic, devotional, contemplative prayer, i.e., a *practice* of prayer, helps as well. Religious experience is a result of reduction/interruption of the ordinary, mundane, everyday, pragmatic, ordinary language conscious-

19 For visuality of chakra system, see Antonov and Vaver *Complexnaya Sistema*; Goswami, *Laya Yoga*; Woodroffe, *The Serpent Power*.

20 See manuals for guided meditation, e.g., Antonov and Vaver, *Complexnaya Sistema*; Radha, *Kundalini Yoga*.

ness.²¹ A reduction/interruption is not followed by religious experience each time a reduction takes place. However, if a religious experience did happen, a reduction was a necessary part of it. Interruption creates predisposition to religious perception, and this predisposition, in particular, is what is trainable. The point is that the practice, i.e. systematic “inner doing,” brings up first-person experience of religious imagination, and having such an experience allows one to recognize her way through the forest of religious imagination as a phenomenologist.

Empirically, a practitioner can easily distinguish imaginal religious experience from phantasy and other mental activities. The difference appears to be in the originary giving intuition. A spin of fantasy is empty of fulfillment, and Husserl’s ideas regarding phantasy are capturing phantasy with religious connotations just as well as ordinary phantasy. The imagery in phantasy is unfulfilling and exhausting to the power of the mind. In the practice of meditation, one observes that the mind which is capable of concentration and bringing up a religious image is the mind that doesn’t run random chatter: a strong mind is the silent mind. Empty phantasy drains the strength of the mind, thereby it becomes unable to bring up an internal image that carries an authentic religious sense. Consequently, to produce an image which points to a potential or actual presence of an intentionally fulfilling object, a practitioner normally would try to prevent the mind from daydreaming or running random thoughts. Likewise, true religious imagination is not a matter of reasoning or faith. Ideas regarding God, whether logical or not, are not where experience of religious imagination is grounded. As Sepp rightly suggests in this volume, religious image is implicitly connected with embodiment. When a practicing mystic feels she is “larger inside than on the outside,” this points to the inner space of the body, i.e., the field of experience which opens up when attention turns inward and when this turning inward is directed not into the sphere of one’s ideas but into the actuality of the embodied self.²² Seeing imagery inwardly takes place gradually (see the description of Theophanis’ Ladder in the Christian practice of the Prayer of the Heart),²³ with a predictable progression. At work here is the auto-erotic reduction of the body (cf. Schenk on Marion, in this volume) which takes one into a devotional or absorption in the phenomenological materiality of the inner space and away from the usual pragmatic intentionalities

21 For more on reduction in religious experience, see Louchakova-Schwartz, “Introduction”.

22 For an example of “material” inwardness, see Louchakova-Schwartz, “Qualia”.

23 Louchakova, “Ontopoiesis”.

and correlated with them and immersed in the real world bodily sense. In this phenomenal internal space of the body, the acts of consciousness posit mental images which are informed by the sensory data – cf., e.g., the description of the five circles of senses in the heart.²⁴

There is a multidimensionality to the internal world of imagination. Besides the usual three-dimensional spatiality, there is a dimension of depth. In addition to depth, imaginal worlds have yet another dimension, which can be described as density or, perhaps, tactile intensity.²⁵ On top of that, there are en-fleshed topographical figures of meaning intertwined with the latter dimension,²⁶ as in the sense: “I am He” emerging when consciousness takes its internal absorptive focus in the center of one’s chest.²⁷ Within these dimensions (already five of them), there are certain locales that produce specific internal impressions, all of which, in this or that manner, can be qualified as religious.²⁸ This multiverse of dimensions has emotions associated with it. Indeed, “in my Father’s house there are many mansions” (John 14:2). Navigating these “mansions” will lead a practitioner to change her assumptions regarding the nature of reality and the structure of the world she lives in.

Of course, phenomenology has an advantage in understanding such accounts: it has the means to clarify the enigmatic forms of experience. Religious imagination is especially adept in producing Enigma: whether passive or active, experiences of creative imagination are not commonly co-lived, and their verbal expression is problematic. And even if we clarify their descriptions and essences, they remain enigmatic in terms of their constitution because of the difficulties with the ontology involved: what components of their constitution exist, in what manner, how the visible and invisible interact in this unity, what is the “ontological cement” (using Kevin Mulligan’s expression) that keeps them together, etc. For example, is religious imagery appresentational or presentational? Does it have its own direct intuitional component or is it working off the reconstitution of episodic memory, i.e., by presentification? What is the subject of religious image, and what are the relationships between the two? What metaphysics of subjectivity the fact of religious imagination implies? One

24 Singh *Vijñānabhairava*, 29, verse 32.

25 For the descriptions of degrees of internal density in the inner space of the body, see, e.g., Louchakova-Schwartz, “Theophanis”.

26 Cf. Rosen, *Topologies*.

27 Louchakova, “Ontopoiesis”; and *eadem*, “Theophanis”.

28 For an example, see descriptions of Sufi system of *lāṭa’if*, subtle centers of consciousness, in Dahnhardt, *Change*.

of the advantages in writing an introduction to an edited volume is that one can ask questions without being responsible for the answer. If the consciousness of religious image is appresentational, it would mean that a mental image one encounters in religious experience is constituted through association of bits and pieces of prior intuitions which one's memory eagerly serves and which imagination puts together in a picture resembling of some prior reality. If we use the findings of one of the authors of this volume, Michael Barber, for religious experience, appresentation is not an isolated instance, but the whole of the mind in religious province of meaning enters the appresentative mindset.²⁹

But an earlier author, the 12th Century Shahab al-Din Yahya ibn Habash Suhrawardī, who enters our dialogue via the vehicle of paper by Louchakova-Schwartz (in this volume), would vigorously object to such an idea. According to Suhrawardī, who counts as a phenomenologist in his own right, religious imagination delivers new knowledge. Thus, a religious image may, perhaps, use the scraps and pieces of what was previously seen to reflect the unseen, but this reflection is a true intuition of this invisible reality nevertheless. It has a subject whom it objectifies, one aspect at a time, as this is the way human knowledge proceeds. Moreover, being certainly alive and more alive than its reflection, the divine subject of the image commands imagination and chooses to appear and disappear in its mirror. God reveals or conceals Himself by the mirror of imagination, which in this case becomes a cognitive organ by which the mosaic of memory puts together the signifier-image for what is absolutely transcendent beyond any form. The way of Husserl—if we work off his concept of *Evidenz*—would be the foremost means to understand religious imagination. The structure of experience itself, and nothing other than that, should tell us what it is and from where such experience flows.

29 Barber "Religion".

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