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# Phenomenology of Phantasy and Emotion

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Schriften zur  
Phänomenologie  
und Anthropologie

1

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# Am I Truly Feeling This? Quasi-Emotions and Quasi-Values in Cinematic Experience<sup>1</sup>

CLAUDIO ROZZONI

**Abstract:** This article aims to show how Husserl's work on *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory* can offer insights towards (i) a philosophical account of the relation between images and reality; (ii) a phenomenological clarification of concepts such as 'quasi-emotions.' I will primarily be discussing this issue with reference to cinematic images. In the first section, I endeavour to give a phenomenological account of how belief can intervene in our experience of images. In the second section, also taking into account the well-known 'Paradox of Fiction,' I will address the issue concerning the relationship between emotions aroused by images we believe to be presenting real subjects and those elicited by fictional images. In the third and last section, I will attempt to take the analysis one step further by calling attention to the relationship between fictional emotions and values, bringing out the issue concerning the legitimacy of distinguishing between 'genuine values' experienced in reality and 'quasi-values' experienced through fiction.

**Keywords:** Image, Phantasy, Quasi-Emotions, Quasi-Values, Narrative

The volume collecting Husserl's unpublished work on *Phantasy, Image Consciousness and Memory* (Hua 23; Husserl 2005) can offer insights with regard to two lines of research decisive for the contemporary debates concerning our relationship with images: for one, towards a philosophical account of the relation between images

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and reality; for another, towards a phenomenological clarification of concepts such as ‘quasi-emotions’ and, as I will propose, the possibility of analogously discussing ‘quasi-values.’ In this paper, I will primarily be discussing aspects of these two lines of inquiry with reference to cinematic images.

Among filmic images, the classical distinction between documentary and fiction<sup>2</sup> might prompt one to distinguish between corresponding emotional reactions, i.e., thereby creating a divide between emotions aroused by real and fictive occurrences. Such a demarcation between emotions has become a major focus in multiple fields, particularly in analytic philosophy, over the past forty years (Currie 1990; Gendler & Kovakovich 2005; Walton 1978; 1990). In this context, several influential authors came to distinguish between ‘genuine emotions,’ elicited by real situations, and ‘quasi-emotions,’ elicited by fictional contexts (Konrad et al. 2018). However, it is beneficial to stress that, as we shall see, Husserl already used ‘quasi-emotions’ as a term for emotions elicited through phantasy, thereby distinguishing them from those we experience in real contexts.<sup>3</sup>

Here, I shall particularly focus on such an Husserlian side, attempting to show how the current debate on quasi-emotions could find, in its unnoticed phenomenological precursor, a philosophical account that can help disentangle some of the most challenging puzzles raised within it. Specifically, as far as cinema is concerned, I will shed light on several phenomenological points that may prove highly beneficial when questioning the nature of the relationship between filmic images and reality, and I will consider whether and how the emotions experienced in fictional

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<sup>2</sup> Although such a distinction can certainly be put into question, it is fully justified both from a methodological and historical point of view. Indeed, it is undeniable that in the last century the distinction between documentary and fiction was largely acknowledged and discussed by various influential scholars (Barthes, Metz, Sobchack, to name only a few). Also, such a distinction is defined as ‘classical’ by many important contemporary artists (such as photographer Jeff Wall, who expressly questions the boundaries of such distinctions). *Nota bene*: this is not to state that such a distinction has always been discussed uniquely, nor that, as I mentioned, its being “classical” implies that the boundaries defining it were always fixed and unquestioned.

<sup>3</sup> It is also appropriate to recall that the notion of ‘quasi-emotions’ was also studied thoroughly and developed by other Brentano students, such as Meinong and his student Witasek. Vendrell Ferran (2010) offers a detailed account of the debate on fictional emotions developed in the Graz School, and also proposes insights for a dialogue between such a debate and the one emerging in the analytic field.

films are qualitatively different from those we experience in documentary film, and, ultimately, in reality.

This paper is divided into three sections. In the first section, I endeavour to give a phenomenological account of the ways in which belief can intervene in our experience of images. This issue proves particularly relevant with regard to the questions of whether and what differences are evident between the emotions aroused by images we believe to be presenting real subjects and those elicited by fictional images; I address this question in the second section, taking the well-known ‘Paradox of Fiction’ into account and underlining the role played by narrative involvement in our emotional processes. Finally, in the third section, I attempt to take this analysis one step further by calling attention to the relationship between fictional emotions and values, thereby touching upon the issue concerning the legitimacy of distinguishing between ‘genuine values’ experienced in reality and ‘quasi-values’ experienced through fiction, analogously to what has been discussed with regard to emotions.

## 1 Images and Belief

According to Husserl (1997, § 5), the notion of belief plays a primary role in the constitution of perception in “flesh and blood,” where the concrete object is perceived in the sense that it is “*wahr-genommen*,” that is, “taken-as-true, as real.” Conversely, as we shall see, an image is never “perceived” (*wahr-genommen*) in itself, properly speaking: it is merely a “*figment, an illusory object*” (Husserl 2005, 52). Notwithstanding this point, I aim to shed light on the pivotal role belief assumes in the experience of *filmic images* claiming to represent reality.

In the third part of the 1904/05 Göttingen course on “Principal Parts of the Phenomenology and Theory of Knowledge” (ibid., 1–108), Husserl introduces his famous tripartition concerning the structure of image consciousness, which distinguishes between: (1) the “image-thing” (*Bildding*), that is, “the physical image, the physical thing made from canvas, marble, and so on”; (2) “the ‘representing image’ or ‘image object’” (*Bildobjekt*), that is, “the representing or depicting object”; and (3) the “*image subject*” (*Bildsujet*), that is, “the represented or depicted object” (ibid., 21).

According to such an analysis, the question of the ontological status of images seems to concern the *image object* in particular. In fact, the ‘image thing’ made of

paper, of canvas, is a ‘physical thing’ that can be perceived and said to exist – an object that is part of the perceptual flux we continually recognize as our real environment,<sup>4</sup> with its own ‘normativity.’<sup>5</sup> The *image subject* (the object that is “depicted”), for its part, *can* be said to exist, or to exist in some cases and not in others (either way, however, it cannot be said to be present) (Marbach 2000, 300). The *image object*, instead, is something that Husserl says “has never existed and never will exist and, of course, is not taken by us for even a moment as something real” (Husserl 2005, 21).

From this point of view, one might say that the depictive image puts the subject at a certain ontological *distance* (even in the case of close-up images), in the specific sense that it is never *there* where it appears: it manifests itself *in absentia*. From this perspective, filmic images, like other physical images, do not show perceptual objects: what appears on the screen are in themselves images and not things ‘in the flesh,’ ‘in person.’ Properly speaking, we could not touch the objects on the screen even if we wanted to – they are intangible objects, exclusively visual in nature. They are not inserted into the material flux of the actuality surrounding us (images as things exist, not the image objects manifesting themselves on their surface). There is a conflict (*Widerstreit*) between the iconic objects emerging in the peculiar space manifesting itself on a screen and the actual objects surrounding the screen (including the screen itself as a ‘thing’).<sup>6</sup> In other words, if someone on screen spills milk, no one worries about stains on the movie theatre floor. We cannot grasp the objects we see on screen and share them with the people around us, because image objects within the screen space do not pertain to the domain of perception.

This, of course, bears upon the nature of the act of viewing. When viewing these images, what type of experience are we living? We know that an image of a knife on a screen cannot physically hurt us; it is merely an image object showing a knife.

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<sup>4</sup> “The consciousness that ‘it agrees,’ the consciousness of reality, is living and is genuinely explicated in the harmonious transition of concordant perceptions and not in the latent background of conflicting perceptions” (Husserl 2005, 439f.).

<sup>5</sup> On the Husserlian account of the “kind of normativity [...] inform[ing] perceptual intentionality,” Crowell (2013, 124–146).

<sup>6</sup> “The image object as image object must be the bearer of conflict in a double sense. In one sense (a), it is in conflict with the actual perceptual present. This is the conflict between the image as image object appearance and the image as physical image thing; (b) in the other sense, there is the conflict between the image-object appearance and the presentation of the subject entwined with it or, rather, partially coinciding with it” (Husserl 2005, 55).

On the one hand, we can affirm that we see a knife (image subject) *in* the ‘cinematographic depictive image.’<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, this seeing is not the same seeing I experience when perceiving a knife in ‘the flesh.’<sup>8</sup> Looking at the screen, we do not experience a presentation (*Gegenwärtigung*) of a knife, but a *presentification* (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of it – that is, the knife is *presentified* on screen, not actually *present* in the movie theatre with us. Still, even though the question of existence appears to be neutralized at the image-object level – the image object being a “*nothing*” (ibid., 50), a “*nullity*” (ibid., 51), neither existent nor nonexistent –, it must be asked what our attitude toward the image subject is in such experiences, because, as we noted earlier, image consciousness does not *eo ipso* imply a consciousness of unreality as regards the image subject, which, in fact, can be intentioned as existent or nonexistent.

Let us consider the case in which we know that what we are about to see is a documentary film, e.g., one in which the photographic nature of the image might work as a testimony of the fact that – as Roland Barthes (1981, 76) says – the person or thing manifesting on the iconic surface “*has been there.*” In this type of context, even though what we effectively see are only images and not things “in person,” we believe in the existence of what we see *in* them. Interestingly, in a manuscript published as Appendix XLII (probably around 1911/12) to *Husserliana* 23, also referencing photographs, Husserl offers an insight into the possibility of experiencing an image with a “positional”<sup>9</sup> connotation – not a positional stance towards the image object, which is a “*figment*” that “is a nullity of a unique type” (Husserl 2005, 586), but rather towards the subject presentified in the image:

Let us consider judgments that are made on the basis of impressional images [*impressionalen Bildern*]. I contemplate the photograph of a zeppelin and confirm on its basis certain of the zeppelin’s striking features. Here we again

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<sup>7</sup> “It pertains to an image that the depictive image, understood as image object, has a ‘being’ that persists and abides. This persisting, this remaining unchanged, does not mean that the image object is unchanging; indeed, it can be a cinematographic depictive image” (Husserl 2005, 645).

<sup>8</sup> Husserl (2005, 57) characterizes it as “seeing-in.” On Husserl’s image consciousness as “seeing-in,” Brough (2012, 550–553) and de Warren (2009, 146–149).

<sup>9</sup> “Positional experiences are experiences of consciousness in which the Ego accepts something, in which a belief is involved” (Husserl 2005, 696).

have pictorial exhibiting and, indeed, *positing*. My description moves in the image space, in this image world. It possesses the character of judgment with respect to the depicted *subject*. But it expresses above all the image subject (only with respect to the exhibiting moments, of course; the color is not included, and so on) (*ibid.*, 533, my italics).

In other words, there can be an interaction between *iconic presentification* and *belief*,<sup>10</sup> as is the case with the images Husserl calls ‘impressional.’ Such an interaction can imply a belief with regard not only to past occurrences, but also to present ones. In the case of live broadcasts, we believe that the action we are seeing on the screen (which is definitely not literally happening *on* the screen) is genuinely taking place in front of one or more cameras.

Nevertheless, it must be stressed that nothing in the image itself seems able to ground our belief on its own. ‘Impressional images’ are not *eo ipso* trustworthy. Recognition of the image always seems to presuppose a certain knowledge about it. We know that an image can be manipulated or doctored, thereby eliciting our position of reality through deception. Photographs, even those that manifest themselves in all their documentary power, always acquire this ‘authority’ within a specific context, a horizon of meaning which, alone, can support our attitude towards them and make them function in a certain way.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the power to ‘ratify,’ which Barthes attributes to photography itself, is not something that can be traced back entirely to the image itself; rather, he resorts to a knowledge underpinning it, that is, a knowledge about the process through which the ‘trace’ has been generated – a chemical process.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “There are, however, mixed experiences, and they are very common. Such mixed experiences can be positional, and, particularly as acts, actually bring about a position, and yet include phantasies in themselves. And they can be phantasies and yet include positions in themselves” (Husserl 2005, 696).

<sup>11</sup> In the words of photographer Jeff Wall (2015): “People tend to relate to photographs by looking at what’s in them and saying what’s going on and they might get frustrated if they immediately can’t recognize what’s going on like they can recognize what’s going on in the news. [...] [A] picture [...] has [...] this character that it seems to disclose an actuality very simply but it is not that simple. Most people think that photographs are simple because they are accompanied by a lot of description, verbal: take away the verbal description, you get into the pure picture, then you have to relate to it as a poem.”

<sup>12</sup> “It is often said that it was the painters who invented Photography (by bequeathing it their framing, the Albertian perspective, and the optic of the *camera obscura*). I say: no,

However, it is important to recall how such a consideration, in principle, also holds true with regard to perceptual reality. Many of the perceptual experiences that our eyes ‘baptize’ as real may have been surreptitiously adjusted to appear as such. “*Perceptio*” (*Perzeption*) in itself – read: perception without the “character of belief”<sup>13</sup> – is not yet a guarantee of reality: “*perceptio* as such determines nothing” (ibid., 625, translation slightly modified). Our perception (*Wahrnehmung*) can only arise in a horizon of sense, in a mutual cross-reference of meanings that essentially hold an emotional connotation.

One such example would be practical jokes – planned simulations carried out in an everyday perceptual context, leading the unfortunate victim to ‘take’ the situation ‘as true’ (*Wahrnehmen* as ‘*Für-wahr-Nehmen*’). We always perceive contextually, and a switch of sense can modify the reality of what we had previously perceived, only then allowing us to recognize it as an illusion. Consider this dynamic of belief in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958), in which John ‘Scottie’ Ferguson, a retired detective, is lured by a former college friend, Gavin Elster, into *believing* that his wife Madeleine suffers from a serious condition, and thus into accepting the task of following her around to make sure nothing bad happens to her. However, the reality Scottie takes to be true – and to be fitting into the perceptual flux of his everyday life – is “only” performed by Elster’s mistress, Judy Barton, who impersonates Madeleine as part of a *plot* she and Elster have devised in order to murder Elster’s wife.

The point I am trying to make is that a distinction between *perceptio* (*Perzeption*) and image consciousness does not *ipso facto* correspond to the distinction between reality and unreality. Again: I can “see” in a *perceptio* the body of Othello as something *unreal* on the stage and also “take as true, as *real*” some facial features of a man when viewing his photograph (Husserl 2005, 616–620). In fact, our shared objective

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it was the chemists. For the *noeme* ‘That-has-been’ was possible only on the day when a scientific circumstance (the discovery that silver halogens were sensitive to light) made it possible to recover and print directly the luminous rays emitted by a variously lighted object. The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent” (Barthes 1981, 80).

<sup>13</sup> Husserl (1997) points out the distinction between presence in the flesh and belief. In this regard, he remarks that “the concept of perception [*Wahrnehmung*]” can be “so restricted that it excludes the taking-for-true [*Für-wahr-Nehmen*] properly so-called (and *a fortiori* actual truth-taking [*Wahr-Nehmen*]); that is to say, it excludes the character of belief, the character of belief in what stands there.” To mark this difference, he continues, “a name that holds the matter fast is needed for the concept that is more restricted in content. We will say *perceptio* [*Perzeption*]” (ibid., 13, translation slightly modified).

present (and past) is – seemingly increasingly – constituted by images that we believe to be presenting a reality that is actually happening (or has actually happened) and consequently find a place in our shared world and its history, as in the infamous cases of live coverage of 9/11 (fig. 1) or Abraham Zapruder’s film of John F. Kennedy’s assassination (fig. 2). The same holds true for our personal lives and our personal and shared narratives, which are increasingly based on the presentification of real occurrences through either streamed or recorded images.



*Fig. 1: Still from CNN's coverage of the 9/11 attacks*

From this standpoint, images experienced through a documentary consciousness differ from those lacking the mark of belief, which do not find a place in our shared 'objective' world – nor do they aspire to. In fact, as we all know, there are also images that, in a manner of speaking, do not lay claim to existence, or to any positional stance as regards the actions they presentify to us (fig. 3). Thus, in keeping with what I proposed earlier, we can distinguish in phenomenological terms between *positing images*, which involve a *claim* to reality (the ones we experience in a documentary attitude, for example) and quasi-positing images experienced in a fictional context as presentifications of fictional subjects.



*Fig. 2: Still from Abraham Zapruder's film of John F. Kennedy's assassination*



*Fig. 3: Still from Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) – James Stewart as Scottie*



Rightly, Husserl implies that judgments ‘made on the basis of impressional images’ – i.e., a ‘positing [...] pictorial exhibiting’ – are not the same as those made when confronting a ‘pictorial exhibiting’ pertaining to a fictional subject. This might well hold true for our emotional reactions to such images as well. We may feel threatened by positing images that – despite their presentifying nature – we find frightening or upsetting in a very different way than if we were told that everything presentified in them was merely fiction. In order to give these issues the necessary consideration, we begin with a philosophical inquiry into whether and how the emotions we experience in connection with fictional images are different from those intertwined with a consciousness of reality.

## 2 Paradoxical Emotions?

While watching a documentary film, if we see one person showing compassion towards another, we might feel admiration for that gesture or upon seeing someone harassing someone else, we might respond with indignation. Using Husserl’s view as our starting point, and keeping in mind our previous remarks on the possibility of experiencing images positionally, we might say that the emotions we feel in these instances are “actual,” (ibid., 554) unmodified emotions, since they are founded upon a form of existential position-taking: presentification and belief.<sup>14</sup> To put it in somewhat rougher, more general terms, we generally do not question the reality of those emotions, taking them for real emotional responses to real (or, at least, believed-to-be-real) facts.

But what about emotions grounded in *presentifications* of fictional subjects? How are they to be understood? To return to our previous example, we might ask how our responses of admiration and indignation might change upon learning that the film we were watching in a ‘documentary mode’ was, in fact, a work of fiction. Do emotions change in nature depending on whether or not they are grounded in

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<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that our emotional encounters with a subject in an image and the same subject in the flesh are the same. In this regard, it should be valuable to inquire into the difference between what Fuchs (2014, 156) calls “*primary*, intercorporeal empathy” and an empathy grounded on “positional images.”

presentifications involving belief in the existence of the subject/situation? If so, then what kind of emotions are elicited by fictional films?<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, if I get scared or if I feel joy in phantasy, my “emotions” (*Gefühle*), Husserl says, are “modified” in the sense of “not relating to reality but to a phantasied world” (ibid., 448, translation slightly modified).<sup>16</sup> Let us assume (via Husserl)<sup>17</sup> that I am sitting in a movie theatre watching a fictional film,

[...] and in it a jungle appears to me. A man sits on the ground and searches for bugs. And then suddenly a huge lion emerges, and the man laughs cheerfully. While [...] this series of [iconic] phantasies runs its course, I feel astonishment, perhaps even fear. This is not fear or astonishment in the ordinary sense. They are certainly not reproductive acts (phantasy acts), but actual acts [*wirkliche Akte*], grounded in the actually executed phantasy. On the other hand, I do not have “actual astonishment” [*wirkliches Erstaunen*], “actual fear” [*wirkliche Angst*], but modified acts [*modifizierte Akte*]” (ibid., 447f., translation slightly modified).

However, I would like to stress that the adjective ‘modified’ here is not to refer to the emotion in itself, as if – say – tears shed for a phantasized character were inherently different from those shed for a ‘real person.’ In a patently fictional situation, I *know* that my tears fit the phantasy actions I am experiencing (or we, the audience, are

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<sup>15</sup> Following up on what has been said in note 1, for the sake of argument, I am referring to fictional movies in the very general sense of fictional works developing a fictional narrative that is not accountable for any *individual* occurrence in reality. Clearly, the line between ‘documentary’ and ‘fiction’ is often blurred, and several hybrid forms fall somewhere on the spectrum between these two genres. While exploring these hybrid forms would be outside the scope of this work, I would argue that the issue at stake here can contribute to a more complete understanding of them.

<sup>16</sup> At this level of my analysis, I am not addressing the complex matter of the distinction between emotions and feelings, but more generally questioning the alleged change of status that can influence our affective “reactions” (Husserl 2005, 461) when shifting from a documentary to a fictional attitude and vice versa. This clearly does leave open the possibility of exploring, on another level, whether any change of status might occur for certain kinds of feelings/emotions and not for others.

<sup>17</sup> I am slightly modifying his example concerning reproductive phantasy by referring to “iconic phantasy” (Husserl 2005, 456ff.), that is, the kind of phantasy involved in the experience of fictional movies.

experiencing), and I am aware that such actions are not presenting real occurrences that are happening, or have happened, elsewhere. In other words, my tears are not *motivated* by a consciousness of reality as regards the individual existence of characters: their actions affect only the specific quasi-world unfolding in our iconically phantasized experience.<sup>18</sup>

Analogously, this also holds for desires elicited by iconic phantasies: if we see “a beautiful woman” on screen “and desire her love [...] [we] actually feel this ‘desire,’” and yet we “certainly cannot ‘actually’ desire that *this* woman, who does not even exist, love [us]” (ibid., 448, my italics). Following Husserl’s example, when watching *Vertigo*, one might fall under Madeleine’s (or Judy’s, for that matter) spell and desire her, just as Scottie does. That act would not be irrational. What would be irrational, in this case, would be to desire *that* person – specifically, that Madeleine (or Judy) who does not (and did not, for that matter) actually live in San Francisco or elsewhere.

Nevertheless, when viewing this issue through the lens of the well-known Paradox of Fiction mentioned in the introductory section, one might well conclude that emotions aroused by documentary images (grounded in a *belief* in the real existence of the image subjects presentified) are fully justifiable and ‘genuine,’ whereas emotions aroused by phantasy characters (whom we do not actually believe to exist) cannot be justified. In fact, one of the three premises underlying the paradox is that (a) in order for us to have an emotion we *must* believe that the object of our emotion exists.

The Paradox of Fiction comprises three premises, each considered plausible in themselves but contradicting one another when considered as a group – each individual statement is allegedly true, yet they cannot all be true at the same time. The other two premises (the a, b, and c labels are taken to be arbitrary here, insofar as the three premises are of equal importance; what matters is their mutual irreconcilability) are as follows: (b) we do not believe in the existence of fictional characters; (c) we have emotional reactions towards objects we know to be fictional.

In view of this paradox, then, problems concerning the nature of our emotions seem to arise when considering fictional presentifications. In fact, in his famous

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<sup>18</sup> Of course, tears might also be caused by a recollection prompted by fictional images. In this case, as Husserl (2005, 53) puts it, images work as “engines of memory.” However, this is not the case under scrutiny here.

1975 essay that gave rise to the debate on the Paradox of Fiction, Colin Radford (1975, 69, *my italics*) claimed that

[...] there is no problem about being moved by historical novels or plays, *documentary films, etc.* For these works depict and forcibly remind us of the real plight and of the real suffering of real people, and it is for these persons that we feel. What seems unintelligible is how we could have a similar reaction to the fate of Anna Karenina, the plight of Madame Bovary or the death of Mercutio. Yet we do.

According to Radford, this *kind* of reaction “involves us in inconsistency and so incoherence” (ibid., 78). To go back to *Vertigo*, the idea of reacting emotionally to Scottie’s or Judy’s fate, viewed from this perspective, should seem unintelligible to us, as they have never existed.

However, I believe that a phenomenological account as outlined above can put this very inconsistency into question. On the one hand, we might say that the assertions in premises (b) and (c) can be supported by the phenomenological analysis we have delineated. They present results that can be exhibited by “phenomenological data” (Husserl 2005, 3). Premise (b) states that one can tell the difference between believing in the actual existence of a person and phantasizing about the existence of a made-up character; as for (c), it is merely a statement of fact – the fact that our awareness that characters and stories are fictional does not prevent us from having reactions fitting these quasi-people and their quasi-actions that are not found as concrete individuals in our world.

Premise (a), on the other hand, is an *explanatory* proposition, which alludes to a ‘theory of emotion’ postulating a cognitive basis: namely, that belief in the existence of the object of an emotion is a prerequisite condition for that emotion.<sup>19</sup> From a phenomenological point of view, this appears to be an unjustified assumption: the phenomenological description brings to light that our experiences, whether positional or fictional, *always* manifest themselves through emotional connotations. It

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<sup>19</sup> Stecker (2011, 295) conveniently points out that “the paradox was formulated during the heyday of the cognitive theory of emotions,” and that “now virtually no one accepts” that “to pity someone, one must believe that they exist and are suffering.” See Vendrell Ferran (2018, 206) on the possibility of discussing the “paradox” as a profitable “heuristic tool to shed light on problems regarding our involvement with fiction.”

is not by chance that, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger maintains that *Befindlichkeit*, our ‘affective state,’ is an essential feature of our ‘being-in-the-world.’<sup>20</sup> Emotions do not presuppose beliefs, but rather an original relationship of ‘involvement,’<sup>21</sup> and this holds also for our worldly “involvement” in phantasy, for our phantasy states.

The latter sheds light on a key aspect of the structure of phantasy experience. Husserl’s phenomenological description indicates that phantasy acts do not consist solely of the intuitive presentification of the phantasized object, but rather essentially implies the reproduction of a subjective act that quasi-perceives that object, thereby generating a splitting of consciousness between a real ego and a phantasy ego. In *First Philosophy*, Husserl (2019, 320) writes that “the actus ‘I phantasize a scene of centaurs’ is only possible in the form that I enact, in the mode of the ‘as if;’ the actus ‘I perceive the scene of centaurs.’”

Even though we cannot linger on this specific question here,<sup>22</sup> it is beneficial to underscore two aspects relevant to the matter at hand: for one, the ego-splitting pertaining to phantasy experience is not to be construed as a sort of schizophrenic process involving a real ego and a phantasy ego unable to communicate.<sup>23</sup> For another, it is exactly this awareness of such an egological *difference* accompanying our phantasy (however minimal, for example, when absorbed in a vivid daydream)<sup>24</sup> that prevents us from slipping into hallucination, which we might call the absolute state of immersion.

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<sup>20</sup> “Mood assails. It comes neither from ‘without’ nor from ‘within,’ but rises from being-in-the-world as a mode of that being” (Heidegger 1996, 129).

<sup>21</sup> “Prior to believing that a certain state of affairs exists, and prior to being able to doubt that there are sufficient reasons to assert it, we are already engaged by certainties that have to do with our being in a given situation. Now, emotions are forms in which our rooting in the *situation* is made manifest: they do not call for beliefs, but only for the original relationship of *involvement*” (Spinicci 2014, 86).

<sup>22</sup> On such a “doubling of consciousness” in Husserl, for example, de Warren (2009, 156f.) and Bernet (2004, 93–117). See also Cavallaro (2019) for a recent phenomenological analysis specifically relating ego-splitting and fictional emotions.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of the “discontinuity and permeability” between real and phantasy ego, Summa (2017).

<sup>24</sup> “The more frequent case, however, is probably that in which the real world before our eyes is *almost* swallowed up while we pursue the phantasies, although that world makes us aware, in however minimal a way, of its factual existence, so that a faint consciousness that they are semblances constantly colors our phantasy formations” (Husserl 2005, 45).

The latter (ii), in particular, also counts as one significant reason why a naïve *theory of illusion* – which might be summoned to justify emotions in a fictional regime in compliance with the paradox premise (a) – is insufficient. If spectators were *completely* unaware of the fictional nature of the action unfolding on screen, they would react differently from how they usually do and not in the ‘modified’ manner described above. (In Pasolini’s *Che cosa sono le nuvole?* (1968), the audience, who cannot tell reality from imagination, intervenes to try to save Desdemona from her fate – or, to refer to a famous literary example, consider Don Quixote’s attack on Maese Pedro’s Puppet Show.)

Besides, in keeping with the former point, it must be stressed that the emergence of an ego-splitting as a condition of possibility of a ‘phantasy life’ does not automatically entail two separate and wholly impermeable sides of emotions (reality/phantasy, that is), as though when acting as a phantasy ego I lost *all* awareness of my real ego’s emotional life and vice versa. Undoubtedly, there are several cases in which emotional responses of the real ego and of the phantasy ego are in sharp contrast, as though the real and the phantasy egos were, so to speak, two strangers. For example, we might be puzzled by the fact that fictional movies allow us to quasi-participate in phantasy actions that we would never carry out in real life, for a variety of reasons – we might be alarmed to find ourselves enjoying a fictional situation that, at least *prima facie*, we would likely condemn in reality. Nevertheless, this is not necessarily a symptom of egological incompatibility. For one, although we refer to the ‘same’ action being experienced in reality and in phantasy, the real ego and the phantasy ego are not, strictly speaking, in the ‘same’ situation. Our phantasy ego knows it is not *actually* carrying out an action, and thus we need not concern ourselves with a long list of real material consequences that such an action might have for us if it were actually accomplished. Accordingly, our emotional responses in phantasy situations might *fit* this kind of awareness.

Moreover, the very possibility of puzzlement in this regard is grounded in the fact that the real ego can touch upon these phantasy experiences, and that, despite the split, it appears to remain the only one responsible for them. Let us notice that this view can also offer some relevant insights with regard to the phenomenon of “imaginative resistance” (Moran 2017, 18–25; Michela Summa’s chapter in this volume), in which the phantasy ego, despite its almost inexhaustible ability to generate phantasy experiences, is incapable of even imagining some specific situations, of even quasi-carrying out certain specific quasi-acts of phantasy. This suggests once more

that phantasy egos are not *tabulae rasae*, abstract subjects *fully* alien to the real one, starting from scratch every time we begin phantasizing. We might go as far as to say that a phantasy ego is always possible as a variation of the real ego, an imaginative variation that can in turn affect and shape what we call the real one.

### 3 Experiencing Values

To clarify and possibly expand upon these questions, I would like to draw attention to a passage from Marcel Proust's masterpiece *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*), in which one can quite rightly say that the narrator raises the issue concerning emotions elicited by fiction. On the one hand, *Recherche's* narrator has no problem admitting that "it is true that the people concerned in" fiction are "not what Françoise would have called 'real people'" (Proust 1992, 116). We might suggest that, in *Recherche*, the maid Françoise represents the uncontested and unproblematized natural attitude. Clichés and popular wisdom are sculpted in her with the force of sedimentation over time, repeatedly fortified by the silent perseverance of "habit" (Beckett 1931, 9).<sup>25</sup>

It is not by chance that, in this context ruled by the natural attitude, the young narrator is granted the 'pleasures of reading' only on Sundays, days of rest on which labour is banned – in other words, days where any activity is permitted, as long as it is nothing 'serious,' nothing 'concrete': no work, only pastimes. According to this sedimented view, then, no serious activity or emotion can be elicited in fiction (the same goes for watching fictional movies, a perfect Sunday activity from this perspective):

I was reading in the garden [the narrator writes], a thing my great-aunt [another voice of the uncontested natural attitude] would never have understood my doing save on a Sunday, that being the day on which it is

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<sup>25</sup> "Habit is like Françoise, the immortal cook of the Proust household, who knows what has to be done, and will slave all day and all night rather than tolerate any redundant activity in the kitchen" (Beckett 1931, 9). In the same vein, Robert Pippin (2005, 320) depicts her as "the rock of ages in the book, outside modern, historical time, supremely self-confident, unchanging, full of the opinions and the superstitions her ancestors would have expressed."

unlawful to indulge in any serious occupation, and on which she herself would lay aside her sewing (on a week-day she would have said, “What! Still amusing yourself with a book? It isn’t Sunday, you know!” – putting into the word “amusing” an implication of childishness and waste of time) (Proust 1992, 139).

However, as we shall soon see, Proust’s response to these clichés points in the direction we stressed above, proposing that, in the emotional process, involvement in a world (be it ‘fictional’ or ‘real’) takes precedence over the moment of belief in existence. In this regard, before delving expressly into Proust’s suggestion, it is useful to return our attention to, and expand upon, several Husserlian perspectives that can add to the phenomenological account of emotion we developed earlier, and may offer insights that will aid us in relating the Proustian issue in question to the iconic dimension implied in movies.

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Rozzoni 2017), in a passage from *Husserliana* 23, dating back to 1918, Husserl finally seems to recognize the productive power images can acquire when dramatized (as is also the case in fictional movies) – that is, elaborating on Husserl’s manuscript, when the generative power of the *narrative* allows meanings and values to originate through images, irrespective of whether these images depict our ‘objective’ reality or not.<sup>26</sup>

A fictional film can lead us, as phantasy egos, to experience new perspectives – new variations of what we call a real ego, as pointed out in the previous section – whence we are able to experience values, which can either corroborate or conflict with the values participating in the constitution of our ‘real life’ and motivating our actions on a daily basis.<sup>27</sup> Cinema can make me feel values that run contrary to my own, show me standpoints and narratives that help me understand and feel

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<sup>26</sup> “The actors produce an image, the image of a tragic event, each actor producing the image of a character in the play, and so on. But here ‘image of’ [*Bild von*] does not signify depiction of [*Abbild von*]” (Husserl 2005, 616).

<sup>27</sup> For obvious reasons, I cannot linger here on the question concerning the different values – artistic, aesthetic, ethical – that might be brought into such a discussion. However, it is at least useful to remark that the point I am making here need not be confined to artistic cinema or literature but can certainly also concern literary and cinematic entertainment products – to which, then, different kinds of spectators would react in different ways with different assessments.



differently about things. And even though a film is presenting ‘facts’ that have never existed empirically and that I believe will never exist as such, a counter-value I feel while quasi-living a cinematic dramatization can prompt me to draw ‘my own’ values, i.e., the values I feel personally attached to, into question – not by making a logical point, but by triggering a process of emotional evaluations holding a cognitive value, even though it may not be fully articulable in a predicative thought or reducible to propositional knowledge: an “aesthetic mode of understanding” (Pippin 2020, 11).

In other words, although I, as a phantasy subject, can be said to act in a neutral and ‘protected’ situation (*qua* being unaffected by the question of whether a character in a story really exists or not), I cannot be considered unaffected by counter-values and alternative perspectives expressed in that story. And these axiological effects, as we suggested earlier, cannot be simply confined to the phantasy boundaries of my egological dimension – they also can concern me as a real ego.

The key point is that, in such cases, despite not believing in the existence of what we see in the image, we are still *involved* and caught up in another *interest* – namely, what Husserl (2019, 307) in *First Philosophy* calls an “*interest of the heart* [Gemütsinteresse], a valuing interest [wertendes Interesse] in the broadest sense of the term.” This kind of interest is not preconditioned by a belief in existence: *Wertnehmung* as “value-taking” is not founded upon *Wahrnehmung* as taking something as existent – both are originary modes of givenness.<sup>28</sup> In fact, there is an *essential* relationship between the perception of values [Wert-nehmung] and the emotional dimension: a value is something that can *originally* appear to us only as *felt*, and an object of evaluation cannot be *reduced* to a merely propositional/logical significance.

Accordingly, from a phenomenological point of view, we – as quasi-audience – are not axiologically separated from what is quasi-happening on the screen. Within a fictional context, we can also be said to be emotionally ‘interested,’ despite our disbelief in the actual existence of what we are experiencing. A fictional movie can express a world in a way that invites our phantasy ego to participate in a *horizon* of perspectives opening different values, which can expand, confirm, restrict, or call into question our axiological scope.

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<sup>28</sup> “The value itself in its value-truth [Wertwahrheit] is not perceived [wahrgenommen], but as it were taken as value; and what *perception* [Wahrnehmung] achieves for the mere object, is achieved for the value by *value-taking* [Wertnehmung]” (Husserl 2019, 307).

It should be emphasized, however, that this is not merely tantamount to simply handing predetermined senses and values to the audience in a fictional context, as if the film were simply a means to ‘translate’ them in a cinematic language (at least: this rarely makes for a good film). Rather, in the vein of Pippin’s account of cinematic thought (Pippin 2020), we can say that such cases involve cinematic thinking in a non-propositional way: an “a-conceptual”<sup>29</sup> thought is developed through a word/image narrative implying an axiological-emotional dimension.

These final considerations, of course, open up a whole field of research that surely warrants further study and invites further phenomenological distinctions. Though this would go beyond the scope of the present study, I would like to stress that, in keeping with what I have said above, a *quasi-value* expressed through a fictional situation is not to be considered a quasi-value in the sense of being non-genuine, a ‘make-believe’ value, or a copy of a value – for, as we have seen, a value is something attracting the subject before the issue of something’s factual existence.

All this, as I indicated earlier, might also serve to help us better interpret Proust’s responses to Françoise-like stubborn complete mistrust in fictional people. Indeed, the *Recherche*’s narrator seems to prompt his reader to make one step further, shifting the emphasis to the *imaginative side of emotion*. He makes a key remark on the nature of our emotions when he points out how “none of the feelings [*sentiments*] which the joys or misfortunes of a real person [*personnage réel*] [...] arouse in us can be awakened except through an image [*image*] of those joys or misfortunes” (Proust 1992, 116, translation modified).

Of course, ‘image’ in this sense does not specifically refer to an iconic manifestation, but to the narrative construction of fragments that we are called to piece together every day in order to get to know others – and that alone, according to Proust, can prompt us to care for or despise them,<sup>30</sup> thereby suggesting the precedence of the sense of our narratives over the real existence of our ‘objective’ bodies.<sup>31</sup> It is on this basis that the narrator can affirm that

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<sup>29</sup> ‘A-conceptual’ in the sense that no *determinate concept* can exhaust its sense, as is the case with Kant’s aesthetic ideas.

<sup>30</sup> This clearly calls for further phenomenological inquiry into the role “narrative perspective taking” can play in the empathic process, a topic explored by Breyer (2019).

<sup>31</sup> “A real person, profoundly as we may sympathise with him, is in a great measure perceptible *only through our senses*, that is to say, remains *opaque*, presents a *dead weight* which our sensibilities have not the strength to lift. [...] The novelist’s happy discovery was to

[...] the ingenuity of the first novelist lay in his understanding that, *as the image was the one essential element in the complicated structure of our emotions* [émotions], so that simplification of it which consisted in the suppression, pure and simple, of real people [*personnages réels*] would be a decided improvement (ibid., 116, my italics).

Let us remark, in conclusion, that this same mechanism is very much at work in the other art piece I referenced here, i.e. Hitchcock's *Vertigo*,<sup>32</sup> in which Madeleine and Judy, despite sharing one body, are in fact two different persons, two different 'characters' (figs. 4 and 5).



Fig. 4: Still from *Vertigo* (1958) – Madeleine (Kim Novak)

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think of substituting for those *opaque* sections, impenetrable to the human soul, their equivalent in *immaterial* sections, things, that is, which one's soul can assimilate" (Proust 1992, 116f., my italics).

<sup>32</sup> For a rich analysis of the relationship between Proust's *Recherche* and Hitchcock's *Vertigo* see Goodkin (1987).



*Fig. 5: Still from Vertigo (1958) – Judy (Kim Novak)*

When the desperate Scottie, still pining for Madeleine (whom he believes dead), meets a girl who looks exactly like her – the very same Judy Barton who impersonated Madeleine, the ‘fake wife’ (as the audience is going to discover at that point) – he actually re-encounters Madeleine’s physical body, but this is clearly not sufficient for him to find Madeleine again. Obsessed with Judy’s resemblance to Madeleine, he pleads with her to dress as Madeleine, to mimic Madeleine’s physical mannerisms, in a frantic effort to recreate a narrative that will allow him to see Madeleine again. In Proust’s terms, he tries to reconstruct her ‘image.’



*Fig. 6: Still from Vertigo – Judy (Kim Novak) dressed as Madeleine.*

At the end of *Vertigo*, upon Scottie's final discovery that Madeleine was, in reality, Judy Barton, he still addresses the latter by saying, "I loved you so, Madeleine" – thereby

indicating that “the grip of a fantasy, a projected image, a theatrical persona, can survive with a life-altering intensity, even after the ‘truth’ is known” (Pippin 2015, 120). Though Madeleine never truly existed except as a character performed by Judy, the corporeal Judy is certainly not enough for Scottie, despite the fact that her physical body and Madeleine’s are one and the same. Madeleine, a simulacrum (fig. 6), has become more real than Judy, the alleged original.

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