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IMAGINATION AND PHANTASY

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Not all philosophical handbooks require an entry on imagination. The handbook of phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy, however, does. Husserl considered imagining one of the key elements of his phenomenological method. His meticulous analyses of what exactly it is we do when we imagine, and of the nature of imagined objects, led him to important ontological discoveries and to valuable insights into the complexity of intentional consciousness. Some of the most prominent philosophers of the 20th century who drew from Husserl’s phenomenology as at least one of their sources, even when they largely parted ways with him, still retained some of the key philosophical lessons to be drawn from his scrupulous analyses of imagination: for example, that imagining need not involve the manipulation of mental images and thus challenges a representationalist account of the mind. That imagining enables us, first of all, to distinguish between the real and the unreal and thus is constitutive both of a sense of reality and of a sense that we can reach beyond it, to consider alternative realities and pure possibilities, that is, of a sense of freedom. And, not least, that philosophical thinking cannot rely on empirical observations, concepts, and inferences alone, but equally requires the philosopher to be imaginative and creative.

In what follows, I attempt to give an overview of some of the most important themes that have emerged and have been explored by phenomenological research into the imagination. This is, of course, a selection. Given the significance of the imagination for phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy as a whole, it is not surprising that there is a wealth of sources in the tradition as well as in contemporary thought – especially if one looks for relevant ideas beyond the name “imagination” to include relevant analyses of images and of creative thought. There is no way to do justice to this wealth within the constraints of this article. I have thus chosen to highlight certain coordinates or ‘nodes’ that I hope will also illuminate, by way of influence, connection, or opposition, some of the positions that I cannot mention explicitly here.

19.1. Imagination, image consciousness, and representation

Husserl begins his efforts to re-examine imagination in his 1904/05 lectures on “Phantasy and Image Consciousness (Phantasie und Bildbewusstsein)” (Husserl 1983, 2005, Text 1). From the start, he leaves aside the classical Aristotelian model that places the imagination (phantasia) between perception and thought, as well as the Kantian notion of a transcendental imagination.
Einbildungskraft) as a faculty that is geared towards judgment and, in its name, carries an unquestioned link to images (Bilder). Instead, Husserl, in an attempt to avoid traditional preconceptions, begins afresh with his analysis of “phantasy (Phantasie),” a term that is also common in everyday German language use. For ease of expression and to highlight the connections between the different positions outlined in this article, I will drop ‘phantasy’ in what follows and instead use the verb ‘imagining’ to express that Husserl is investigating an act of consciousness, not a faculty or mental state.1

Genuine cases of imagining (as opposed to, for example, cases of ‘mere supposing,’ or of ‘imagining that’) are, for Husserl, cases of sensory imagination. Imagining is, in the language of German philosophy, “intuitive (anschaulich).” Given the correlative nature of intentionality, according to Husserl, we do not simply imagine something, we imagine seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and/or touching something. An imagined object or scene is imagined as being seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and/or touched. An object that (de iure, not de facto) cannot be experienced in at least one of these modes is ‘un-imaginable’ in the relevant sense. Hence, the distinction between imagining and perceiving does not depend on the absence or presence of such sensory contents, nor, as Hume would have it, does it depend on their comparative vivacity. Instead, it depends on the distinct mode in which they are experienced: namely, in the mode of “non-actuality” or “irreality.”

To say that an imagined object is experienced as ‘non-actual’ or ‘irreal,’ rather than as ‘unreal,’ is meant to avoid the impression that only a particular set of objects are imaginable, namely those that are unreal, or non-existent. We may, but need not, imagine unreal, non-existent objects, such as unicorns and golden mountains. We may just as well imagine objects that in fact exist, such as an idyllic beach, or a cold beer; or we may imagine the possibility of being at that beach, or having that cold beer. Imagining, for Husserl, does not involve a relation to objects of a special ontological category, e.g., non-existent or fictional objects, but rather involves a particular mode of relating to objects. Referring to imagined objects as ‘non-actual’ suggests that they are experienced as objects that could be actual (because they are, to speak with Kant, ‘possible objects of experience’); they are, or at least not in the present environment of the person imagining. Referring to imagined objects as ‘irreal’ suggests that the person imagining is indifferent towards their ontological status, real or not; the usual positionality, which, according to Husserl, accompanies other acts (in perception, objects are posited as actual; in memory, objects are posited as having been actual, etc.), is neutralized. The senses of both ‘non-actual,’ which points towards imagining as awareness of possibilities, and ‘irreal,’ which points towards its ontological neutrality, are combined in the sense of the German unwirklich. In Husserl’s terminology, imagining is “quasi-perceptual”; a “phantasy” is a “quasi-perception (Quasi-Wahrnehmung).” Whereas in perception “the object appears to us, so to speak, ‘in person,’ as itself present”; the imagined object appears as merely represented or as only possible (but not actual): “it is as though it were there, but only as though” (Husserl 2005, 18).

However, Husserl does not merely gather his findings. His analyses also contribute to a change in his approach. Continuing to come back to the issue of imagining, he also draws from it in his turn towards transcendental phenomenology. With respect to imagining specifically, this involves an increasing skepticism towards a model of consciousness as a mind, i.e., an entity that in some sense ‘contains’ representations that can stand-in for external objects. This positions Husserl against philosophers who insist on the need for such representations in the case of imagining, even if they may have non-representationalist convictions concerning other modes of cognition. Historical examples may come to mind here. Think of Locke and Hume, or remember, for example, Kant’s definition of imagination as “the power of presenting an object even without the object’s being present” (Kant 1996, B 151), which prima facie seems to require that the object’s presence be replaced by the presence of a mental image. You can also find many advocates of
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such views in contemporary discussions in philosophy of mind and cognition science. For example, even in circles that otherwise advance alternatives to representationalist models (such as extended or enactive approaches), imagining has been described as “representation-hungry” (Clark and Torribio 1995). Husserl effectively rejects all such views in an anti-representationalist move that seeks to overcome what he calls the “image theory” of consciousness.

Instrumental in his move is Husserl’s analysis of what he calls “image consciousness (Bildbewusstsein).” Image consciousness involves an awareness of a perceptual object (for example a photograph, canvas, or computer screen), which lets us ‘see’ the object that it depicts. According to Husserl, this may involve three distinct moments: (1) the physical image, such as the black-and-white patches on an old photograph, the paint distributed on the canvas, or the pixels on the screen; (2) the image object, i.e., the figure, which is configured by a certain distribution of colors and shapes; and (3) the image subject, the object, person, or scene depicted or represented by the picture (Husserl 2005, 20f.). The physical image is indispensable for image consciousness. Therewith, according to Husserl, image consciousness is ‘essentially’ different from imagining, which requires no such image (physical or mental), but instead aims directly at its imaginary object. Only image consciousness involves this peculiar tripartite structure.

Consequently, Husserl vehemently rejects the “erroneous image-theory” which assumes “that: ‘Outside the thing itself is there (or is at times there); in consciousness there is an image which does duty for it’” (Husserl 2001a, 125; 5th Log. Inv., Appx. to §11 and §20). It is not an act of viewing of mental images that characterizes imagining, but an act of simulating possible experiences, including experiences of image consciousness (I may, of course, imagine [seeing] an image). Imagining makes us thus, implicitly or explicitly, aware of perceptual possibilities, regardless of whether they were or ever will be actualized. This modal capacity of imagining depends on and makes evident a ‘parallelism’ between perception and phantasy, which remains a leading systematic idea throughout Husserl’s work (cf. Husserl 2001a, 285 f., 6th Log. Inv. §47; Husserl 1969, 183; Husserl 1973, 28 §6) and bears great methodological significance.

This culminates in Husserl’s renewed efforts to approach the phenomenon of imagining in the context of his later genetic analyses, which are meant to uncover the ‘history’ of those relations and the complex interconnections in which they are generated (Husserl 2001b). This illuminates the depths of imagining much further, including its original temporality and its modal functions. In this context, Husserl is increasingly interested in the capacity of imagining to generate consciousness of possibilities. Such consciousness relies on the possibility of switching between the position of the imagining ‘I’ and the ‘I’ of the imaginatively simulated experience. In other words, when I immerse myself in my imaginings, I live in the ‘as if.’ When I instead consciously hold the position of the one who is imagining herself experiencing something in such imaginings, they manifest possibilities to me, namely, possible ways of experiencing something, and, correlative, possible objects to experience (see Husserl 2005, Text 19). Of critical importance for Husserl, also methodologically, is the distinction between “real possibilities,” which are motivated by actual experience and, more generally, by the ‘real’ world of the individual who is imagining. By contrast, a “pure possibility”

would be a possibility in which no individual reality is co-posted as actual; a pure possibility is therefore anything objective that becomes constituted exclusively by imaginative quasi-experience.

(Husserl 2005, 661; trans. slightly modified)
of possibilities, and is thus, to use the language of Ideas I, a “legitimizing source of cognition” (Husserl 1983, 44). Of course, the evidence imagining provides may only be accepted “within the limits” (ibid.) appropriate to it. Insofar as it is an intuitive act, imagining yields evidence, even though as a presentifying (vergegenwärtigender) and not directly presenting (gegenwärtigender) act, the evidence it can give us is limited. Obviously, we cannot, without further ado, believe in the existence of whatever we imagine (think of hallucinations, for example), nor in the very ways something presents itself in our imagination (think of illusions, for example). However, as long as we keep in mind that we are imagining something, and not perceptually observing or logically deducing something, it is, according to Husserl, appropriate to say that we learn something from imagining. We even learn from it something that we cannot learn by other means, we learn about possibilities that are not already implicit in the ‘status quo.’

Not everyone agreed with Husserl on this pronounced opinion on the evidential force of imagining, nor on the possibility of (becoming aware of) pure possibilities. Here it is not irrelevant that by the time Sartre, for example, famously maintained that “one can never learn from an image what one does not know already” (Sartre 2004, 10), the life-world of most phenomenological philosophers had radically changed. In a world that is oversaturated by images of all kinds, their seductive distracting and distorting nature is often foregrounded, even though our (e.g., neuro- and medical) sciences rely on “imaging” more than ever. That said, even though Sartre was skeptical of the epistemic, i.e., evidential, powers of imagining, he also saw in it the locus of possibility, as well as of negativity and lack. In his existentialist phenomenology, imagining explicitly becomes an expression of human freedom.

19.2. Imagination, being, and freedom

For Sartre, then, the imagination shows the way towards what we might call the ‘existentialist stance,’ from which consciousness comes to be seen not any longer as a certain kind of being, but as the opposite of being, that is, the ‘nothingness’ that flings itself out towards any being. From this perspective, “transcendental philosophy” appears like the idealist reminder of a ‘digestive’ consciousness philosophy that needs to be overcome so badly. For Husserl, on the contrary, a proper account of imagining inevitably challenges ‘natural’ assumptions about consciousness and thus contributes in a significant way towards his ‘transcendental turn’ (Jansen 2005). It should be noted, however, that Sartre’s existentialist and Husserl’s transcendental stance converge, despite fundamental oppositions, on the following point: consistently remaining true to the intentional nature of consciousness requires giving up, once and for all, the idea that consciousness can somehow be thought as a mind whose inner inventory (e.g., mental states and representations) and whose inner workings can be reduced to causal relations (e.g., psychological or neurological ones). In that sense, the phenomenological analysis of imagining leads to a liberation of phenomenological philosophy for a ‘de-naturalized’ (Jansen 2018) approach.

While much of what is truly original and most philosophically valuable of Husserl’s work on imagining can be found only in his later research manuscripts, it is also true that even there Husserl holds on to some of his earliest convictions. One of the most important of these is Husserl’s commitment to ‘eidetic’ inquiry, or to inquiry into what is essential about something. This involves Husserl’s general ontological thesis that reality, in the all-encompassing sense of ‘everything there is,’ is irreducible to ‘real’ objects stricte sensu, namely to objects in space and time. As Husserl already lays out in the Logical Investigations, there are also ideal objects, which are irreducible to real ones, such as psychological events or nominalist constructions. Ideal objects, for Husserl, are objects at which consciousness can be intentionally directed and which
have their own ontological nature, such as, for example, meanings, which remain irreducible to their real linguistic expressions, or species (like the color ‘red’), which remain irreducible to their real exemplifications (like any red object, which is necessarily of a particular shade of red). By the time of the publication of his Ideas I in 1913 as well as in the second edition of the Logical Investigations (published around the same time), Husserl develops this thought into his doctrine of eide, or essences. Since an essence (the essential ‘what’ or something as opposed to its contingent particularities) is irreducible to a mere concept, it can, according to Husserl, not just be thought, but intuited. Since an essence is irreducible to any real object or event (e.g., a psychological one), it is intuited not by empirical, but by eidetic intuition. Eidetic intuition has been very controversially discussed, with many doubting that there even is such a thing. For Husserl, it is the intuitive fulfillment of a thought that is directed at something general or abstract. It is that, in other words, which gives us the experience of not only thinking it, but seeing that it holds and what it means. For him, the question is not whether there is such an experience (one mode of which would be a certain ‘aha’ experience), but rather how it can be kept from missing its mark because the researcher is, for example, merely projecting, or illegitimately, as we would put it today, ‘essentializing.’ Given that the whole purpose of Husserlian phenomenology is to figure out the essential features of consciousness in its different modes and with its different objects, this remains a methodological issue for the rest of his life.

Husserl sets the bar increasingly high. While initially he does not seem to think much of it when he maintains that we ‘see’ the species ‘in’ its particular real instance (e.g., the species ‘red’ in any red thing), he soon realizes that a more rigorously methodic form of ideation is required in order to avoid, as much as possible, the pitfalls of empirical induction or generalization for the sake of gaining ‘essential,’ i.e., necessary, insights. It is here that imagining acquires a privileged position. Imagining, methodically trained, helps circumvent contingency by enabling the “arbitrary variation” of an arbitrarily chosen sample of whatever essence we are trying to clarify (Husserl 1973 §87). By thus releasing the researcher (at least to a certain extent) from habitual preconceptions concerning that essence, imagining does not yet itself yield eidetic insights, but it does provide as rich a tapestry of samples as possible, which, insofar as it is produced by acts of imagining, has only slackened ties to the reality a researcher is habitually familiar with. On the basis of this, and not on the basis of contingently chosen examples, can researchers methodically and rigorously reach insights into the overlaps and boundaries of that tapestry of variations: they can grasp what is essential to it, and, importantly, what falls outside it, thus what is inessential to it.

With this, the imagination moves center stage in phenomenological ontology. Other philosophers within the phenomenological tradition, even those who, like Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, oppose Husserl’s prioritizing of eidetic analyses in favor of existential ones (after all, “existence precedes essence!” and not the other way around), retain the outstanding position Husserl ascribes to it. Not having access to Husserl’s later research manuscripts, they take their clues from what they knew. Sartre picks up on the issue of imagination already in response to Ideas I and to the Lectures on a Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness (which he read during his research stay in Berlin in 1933/34). Merleau-Ponty takes inspiration from additional, at the time unpublished, sources, such as the material that was later edited under the title Ideas II (which he read during his visit to the newly founded Husserl Archives in Leuven in 1939). Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, far from being followers, rethought those Husserlian ideas concerning the imagination in their own ways, which of course also reflected other philosophical influences, such as, for example, the Bergsonian notion of “image” (Bergson 2005) and the French idealism represented by Brunschvicg, which was dominant when they were students. Their ‘rethinking,’ in different ways, also betrays their shared suspicions towards an old-fashioned ‘subject-philosophy.’
For Sartre, the “imaginary,” not the ‘imagination,’ becomes central to an ontology of human existence and central to his existentialist account of freedom in particular. Sartre picks up on Husserl’s point that both imagining and image consciousness share a “non-positing” character. He is as convinced as Husserl was that ‘images’ cannot be found ‘in’ consciousness. However, while Husserl asserts an essential difference between image consciousness and imagining as two fundamentally different modes of consciousness, Sartre investigates “the image family” (Sartre 2004, 17), or the field of “the imaginary.” This ranges from concrete pictures (a photograph of Pierre), to more abstract ones (portraits, caricatures, impersonations, drawings, hypnagogic images, even things seen in coffee grounds and crystal balls), and mental images. In all these cases the respective image is ‘no thing’, but “nothing other than a relation,” namely “the relation of consciousness to the object,” or an “act” (Sartre 2004, 7, 9). In fact, the misappropriation of an image as a thing, as something objective and static, is one common source of human self-subjugation. The self-identification with a certain image of oneself (as, to use Sartre’s famous example, a waiter) denies one’s own transcendence of any being ‘in itself’ and displays that existential attitude which in Being and Nothingness Sartre calls “bad faith” (mauvaise foi) (Sartre 1978, 47–70). As he astutely observes, we are not only creators of images, we are also held captive by them.

However, understood as a creative act of the ‘for itself,’ imagining is more than just one way of asserting one’s freedom among others. The ability to imagine is the ability to negate par excellence. To imagine, Sartre explains, one

must be able to deny the reality of the picture, and … deny this reality … by standing back from reality grasped in its totality. To posit an image is to constitute an object in the margin of the totality of the real, it is therefore to hold the real at a distance, to be freed from it, in a word, to deny it.

(Sartre 2004, 183)

It is only by being able to (imaginatively) negate and hold at bay what actually impinges on us that we become able to step back and grasp our surroundings, i.e., our world, as a whole. And only then do we gain an awareness of "the world," set before us as a particular situation to which we can respond and which we can change. Given the fundamental importance of these considerations, Sartre might very well be called “a philosopher of the imaginary,” for whom the imagination, properly understood, reveals itself both as constant threat of self-objectiviation and as the “the locus of possibility, negativity and lack, articulated in creative freedom” (Flynn 2014, 76).

For Merleau-Ponty, especially in his late working notes on The Visible and the Invisible, the imagination is rethought in terms of an ontology of the rich lived fabric of reciprocal intertwinnings of lived body and world that he will eventually call “the flesh” (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1968). Thus, on the one hand, Merleau-Ponty is keen to dispel the impression that his phenomenology of perception confines consciousness to the real.

On the basis of what I have said, one might think that I hold that man lives only in the realm of the real. But we also live in the imaginary, also in the world of ideality. Thus it is necessary to develop a theory of imaginary existence.

(Merleau-Ponty 1964a, 40)

On the other hand, he also wants to challenge too simple a conception of what ‘the real’ amounts to: “The same creative capacity that is at work in imagination and in ideation is present, in germ, in the first human perception” (Ibid.). Thus Merleau-Ponty denies the common
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dichotomy between the real and the imaginary. What we call ‘the real’ is much more instable than we tend to believe. Rather than being made of a totality of objects that knows no gaps or jumps and that is exhausted by what is causally explicable, the real is dynamic and open. It has imaginary dimensions and oneiric qualities. The imaginary, then, is not the ‘other’ of reality. It is the stuff of reveries and nightmares, of poetic and artistic creations, of feverish fantasies and pathological aberrations, of childhood plays and dreams. In a certain sense, Merleau-Ponty here blends the Husserlian insight that reality cannot be reduced to the real narrowly conceived with the Kantian claim that imagination is “a necessary ingredient of perception itself” (Kant 1995, A 120 n.) with his own ontology of the flesh. The real of this ontology is shot through with the imaginary and also demands ontological inquiry that attempts to make out the ‘essential’ linings of reality imaginatively, in an “exploration of an invisible and the disclosure of a universe of ideas” (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 130). Such an inquiry learns from current science as much as from Cézanne, Klee, and Proust. It also requires and generates the awareness that these explorations and interrogations are reciprocated by being, and that the philosopher is summoned and interrogated just as much.

Thus imagining is not anymore to be thought necessarily as the activity of an individual ‘consciousness’ (of an imagining philosopher even); and the ‘imaginary’ is not “a mere figment of my imagination, a mental entity that I could still possess in the very absence of its object” (Dufourcq 2015, 33). It becomes a “fundamental dimension of the real” (Dufourcq 2012, 187–189, 342–398), which is part and parcel of the intricate “intertwining (entrelacs)” of things and ideas that “institutes” being (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 262). Like “flesh,” it thus is, for Merleau-Ponty, “a ‘general thing’ between the individual and the idea that does not correspond to any traditional philosophical concept, but is closest to the notion of an ‘element’ in the classical sense” (Toadvine 2016; Merleau-Ponty 1968, 139; Jansen 2018).

It was, of course, Heidegger who had strongly influenced French existentialist in their disavowal of idealist ‘subject-philosophy.’ However, curiously, his stance towards imagination significantly differs from theirs. Although, even after his ‘turn’, Heidegger remains indebted to a language of essence (Wesen), he, unlike his estranged philosophical ‘father’ Husserl, never considers the imagination central to letting essences come to the fore. On the contrary, any preoccupation with the imagination appears, from his perspective, symptomatic of those idealist philosophies he calls on us to overcome. He does, however, already early on, acknowledge the significance of the imagination for precisely such philosophies. His chosen example in this respect is the philosophy of Kant, who, according to Heidegger’s controversial reading in his so-called Kant-Buch of 1929, “shrinks back” from the final consequences of his notion of the ‘transcendental imagination’ and thus fails to recognize that he is really grappling with the “common root” of the faculties, thereby anticipating but falling short of Heidegger’s account of temporality (Heidegger 1997).

Heidegger never makes reference to Husserl’s extensive research on the imagination, even though we have to assume that he was well aware of it. This overt eclipse of the imagination notwithstanding, one may consider Heidegger’s post-turn reflections on art and, in particular, on poetry as his post-subjective rethinking of imagination: Art “works” to “gather” being (Heidegger 1971); poetry articulates language as the “house of being” beyond conventions; man is free to “let things be” without having to reify or dominate them, and thus to “dwell” in an otherwise alienated world (Heidegger 1993, 393–426). The freedom we find here is the freedom from the technocratic “framing (Gestell)” and the utilitarian “machinations (Machenschaften),” or the freedom from the forgetting of being (Heidegger 1993, 307–342).
This line of thinking is, in different ways, taken up in the distinct original philosophical reflections of, for example, Eugen Fink, one of Husserl’s closest assistants who, however, is at least as much indebted philosophically to Heidegger. Fink develops a phenomenological metaphysics, which expands the idea of simulation into the idea of ‘worlds’ of phantasy and which remains relevant in contemporary discussion (Fink 1930). At the beginning of the 21st century, Marc Richir explicitly returned to a phenomenology of phantasy, as part of a new transcendental philosophy, in order, on the one hand, to radicalize the constitutive role of imagining for reality, and, on the other hand, to tie it back to its “image producing” function (Richir 2004). In a way that is much more directly inspired by Heidegger’s ‘poetics,’ John Sallis (2012) continues to expand the horizons of the imagination, in two directions, towards the elements and towards the cosmos.

Within the more recent rediscovery of a phenomenological metaphysics, phenomenological challenges meet ‘new realist’ (post-)phenomenological approaches in the attempt to do justice to the ‘surplus’ of being that allegedly transcends any intentional correlation. In the work of Alexander Schnell, for example, imagining acquires renewed significance within a new ‘constructive’ phenomenology that helps connect the two sides of reality that cannot simply be presupposed: on the one hand, the concretely real, which is always moving in a process of phenomenalization, and, on the other hand, the ‘material a priori,’ which always requires schematic appropriation (see Schnell 2015, 20f.). This leads him also to anthropological conclusions. The human is here seen as ‘homo imaginans’ with three “forming” or “imaging” (bildende) functions: representation, reflexion, and phantasy.

**Conclusion: imagination, phenomenology, and phenomenological philosophy**

Looking back, much begins with Husserl’s insistence on the freedom of imagining. He did not think of this as a (surely naïve) assumption concerning the factual freedom of anyone’s capacity to imagine. Rather, he thought of the ideal freedom of the imagination as a philosophical and existential imperative – namely, the imperative perpetually to work towards liberating oneself from traditional, disciplinary, and other preconceptions and habits. Tracing this imperative from Husserl through the later phenomenological philosophers towards the discussions of today, on the one hand highlights the existential dimensions of phenomenological philosophy already present, but not yet released, in Husserl.

On the other hand, it helps, in my view, to dispel a common reductive understanding of phenomenology (promoted also by some phenomenologists) as nothing more than a matter of methodic description of the many aspects of consciousness, or of lived experience, from a first-person perspective. The significance of the imagination for phenomenological philosophy also brings out the attempt to find new creative modes of engagement with whatever being it investigates and is challenged by, new creative modes of being, new creative interventions in the real.

Following the line of thought traced in this chapter, it would appear that the worst kind of philosopher is the non-imaginative one. This is not only because there is simply a need, let’s say, to ‘imaginatively’ explore Being as it is and to be ‘creative’ about it. It is also because, as Nietzsche (1968), and, more recently, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) have reminded us, genuine philosophical thinking is productive. Far from merely describing the given or merely reflecting (on) it, it interferes with, crosses out, and adds to the possibilities of being by means of the concepts it produces and the evidences it seeks; it generates realities as much as it encounters them. Taking imagining as a leading clue in one’s tracing of trajectories through phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy begins to bring this into focus.
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Notes
1 The next two paragraphs are taken from Jansen 2016.
2 For a critical discussion of these views from a Husserlian perspective see Jansen 2014.
3 An image subject, in contrast, is not required for image consciousness, as is evident in images that do not depict anything. Think of highly abstract paintings. Even objets trouvés, or ready-mades, are images and correlate with image consciousness, according to Husserl's model. They become, by virtue of being placed in a gallery, irreducibly distinct from the physical objects that they also are (thus opening the gap between physical object and image object), but openly resist the idea of depiction.
4 Husserl is well aware that there is a difference between the freedom of ideal phantasy, to which researchers can only aspire, and the real constraints of the empirical capacities of real researchers. For Husserl, this does not disqualify phantasy in the slightest; it only makes the efforts required to approximate that freedom an infinite task. See his Revisions to the 6th Logical Investigation.
5 Here it is interesting that 'imaging' in contemporary sciences most of the time does not involve 'images' in the sense in which many people understand images, namely visual representations.
6 Note here the transition in title from his 1936 book L'imagination to his 1940 study L'imaginaire.
7 See, for example, Heidegger's inquiries into "the essence of truth," or into "the essence of technology" (Heidegger 1993), etc.

References