Part I

The Certain
THE INTENTIONAL STRUCTURE
OF THE IMAGE

This work aims to describe the great ‘irrealizing’ function of consciousness, or ‘imagination’, and its noematic correlate, the imaginary.

I have permitted myself to use the word ‘consciousness’ in a sense a little different from that which it usually receives. The expression ‘state of consciousness’ implies, for psychic structures, a kind of inertia or passivity that seems to me incompatible with the data of reflection. I use the term ‘consciousness’ not to designate the monad and the set of its psychic structures, but to name each of these structures in its concrete particularity. I will therefore speak of the image consciousness, the perceptual consciousness, etc., inspired by one of the senses of the German word Bewusstsein.
I. THE METHOD

Despite some prejudices, to which we will return, it is certain that when I produce in myself the image of Pierre, it is Pierre who is the object of my current consciousness. So long as that consciousness remains unaltered, I can give a description of the object as it appears to me as imaged, but not of the image as such. To determine the characteristics of the image as image, it is necessary to turn to a new act of consciousness: it is necessary to reflect. So the image as image is describable only by a second-order act in which the look is turned away from the object and directed at the way in which the object is given. It is this reflective act that permits the judgement 'I have an image'.

It is necessary to repeat here what has been known since Descartes: a reflective consciousness delivers us absolutely certain data; someone who, in an act of reflection, becomes conscious of 'having an image' cannot be mistaken. Undoubtedly there have been psychologists who affirm that we cannot, in the limiting case, distinguish an intense image from a weak perception. Titchener even appeals to certain experiments in support of this thesis. But we will see later on that these affirmations depend on an error. In fact, confusion is impossible: what is conventionally called an ‘image’ gives itself immediately as such to reflection. But this is not a matter of a metaphysical and ineffable revelation. If these consciousnesses are immediately distinguishable from all others, it is because they present themselves to reflection with certain marks, certain characteristics that immediately determine the judgement 'I have an image'. The act of reflection therefore has an immediately certain content that I will call the essence of the image. This essence is the same for everyone; the first task of psychology is to make it explicit, describe it, fix it.
Why then, one might ask, is there an extreme diversity of doctrines? The psychologists should all agree, if they refer to this immediate knowledge. My answer is that the majority of psychologists do not refer to it. They leave it in an implicit state and prefer to build explanatory hypotheses about the nature of the image. These, like all scientific hypotheses, never have more than a certain probability: the data of reflection are certain.

All new studies of the image must therefore begin with a radical distinction: a description of the image is one thing, inductive claims about its nature another. Passing from one to the other is passing from the certain to the probable. The first duty of the psychologist is evidently to fix in concepts the immediate and certain knowledge.

We will leave the theories on one side. We want to know nothing of the image but what reflection can teach us. Later on, I will try, as do other psychologists, to classify the image consciousness among the other consciousnesses, to find it a ‘family’, and to form hypotheses about its inner nature. For now I want only to attempt a ‘phenomenology’ of the image. The method is simple: produce images in ourselves, reflect on these images, describe them, which is to say, try to determine and classify their distinctive characteristics.

II. FIRST CHARACTERISTIC: THE IMAGE IS A CONSCIOUSNESS

At the first reflective glance, we see that we have so far committed a double error. We thought, without justifying it to ourselves, that the image was in consciousness and that the object of the image was in the image. We depicted consciousness as a place peopled with small imitations and these imitations were the images. Without any doubt, the origin of this illusion must be sought in our habit of thinking in space and in terms of space. I will call it: the illusion of immanence. It finds its clearest expression in Hume, who distinguishes ideas and impressions:

The perceptions, which enter with the most force and violence, we may name impressions . . . By ideas I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning . . .

These ideas are none other than what we call images. Then he adds, a few pages further on:

But to form the idea of an object, and to form an idea simply is the same thing; the reference of the idea to an object being an extraneous denomination, of which in itself it bears no mark or character. Now as ‘tis impossible to form an idea of an object, that is possesst of quantity and quality, and yet is
possess of no precise degree of either; it follows that there is an equal impossibility of forming an idea, that is not limited and confin’d in both these particulars.\textsuperscript{3}

So my current idea of chair refers only externally to an existing chair. It is not the chair in the external world, the chair that I perceived earlier; it is not that chair of straw and wood that allows me to distinguish my idea from ideas of table or of inkwell. Nevertheless my current idea really is an idea of chair. What does this mean, if not that, for Hume, the idea of chair and the chair as idea are one and the same thing? To have an idea of chair is to have a chair in consciousness. Good proof of this is that what applies to the object applies to the idea. If the object must have a determinate quantity and quality, the idea must also possess these determinations.

Psychologists and philosophers have mainly adopted this point of view. It is also that of common sense. When I say that ’I have an image’ of Pierre, it is thought that I presently have a certain portrait of Pierre in consciousness. The object of my current consciousness is precisely this portrait, and Pierre, the man of flesh and blood, is reached only very indirectly, in an ’extrinsic’ manner, only by the fact that he is what the portrait represents. Likewise, in an exhibition, I can contemplate a portrait for itself at length, without seeing written at the bottom of the picture ’Portrait of Pierre Z . . .’. In other words, an image is implicitly assimilated to the material object that it represents.

What can be surprising is that the radical heterogeneity of consciousness and the image thus conceived was never felt. Without doubt, the illusion of immanence was always left implicit. Otherwise it would have been understood that it was impossible to slip these material portraits into a conscious synthetic structure without destroying the structure, cutting the contacts, stopping the current, breaking the continuity. Consciousness would cease to be transparent to itself; everywhere its unity would be broken by the inassimilable, opaque screens. In vain did works like those of Spaier, Bühler, Flach soften this same notion of image, showing it full of life, penetrated with feeling and knowledge; the image, raised to the status of an organism, remains nonetheless an inassimilable product for consciousness. It is for this reason that certain logical minds, like F. Moutier, believed that we must deny the existence of mental images to save the integrity of the psychic synthesis.\textsuperscript{4} This radical solution is contradicted by the data of introspection. I can, at will, imagine a horse, a tree, a house. And yet if we accept the illusion of immanence, we are necessarily led to constitute the world of the mind from objects very similar to those of the external world and which, simply, obey different laws. Let us leave these theories aside and, to deliver us from the illusion of immanence, let us see what reflection teaches us.

When I perceive a chair, it would be absurd to say that the chair is in my
perception. My perception is, in accordance with the terminology that we have adopted, a certain consciousness and the chair is the object of that consciousness. Now I close my eyes and I produce the image of the chair that I have just perceived. The chair, now being given as imaged, can no more enter into consciousness than previously. An image of a chair is not and cannot be a chair. Actually, whether I perceive or imagine this straw-bottomed chair on which I sit, it always remains outside of consciousness. In both cases it is there, in space, in that room, in front of the desk. Now – this is, above all, what reflection teaches us – whether I perceive or imagine that chair, the object of my perception and that of my image are identical: it is that straw-bottomed chair on which I sit. It is simply that consciousness is related to this same chair in two different ways. In both cases, it aims at the chair in its concrete individuality, in its corporeality. Only, in one of the cases, the chair is ‘encountered’ by consciousness; in the other, it is not. But the chair is not in consciousness. Not even as an image. It is not a matter of an imitation chair that suddenly entered into consciousness and has only an ‘extrinsic’ relation to the existing chair; it is a matter of a certain type of consciousness, which is to say of a synthetic organization, relating directly to the existing chair and whose inner essence is precisely to relate in such-and-such a manner to the existing chair.

And what exactly is the image? It is evidently not the chair: in general, the object of the image is not itself an image. Will we say that the image is the total synthetic organization, the consciousness? But this consciousness is a current and concrete nature, which exists in itself and for itself, and can always give itself to reflection without intermediary. The word ‘image’ could only indicate therefore the relation of consciousness to the object; in other words, it is a certain way in which the object appears to consciousness, or, if one prefers, a certain way in which consciousness presents to itself an object. To tell the truth, the expression ‘mental image’ gives rise to confusion. It would be better to say ‘consciousness of Pierre-as-imaged’ or ‘imaging consciousness of Pierre’. As the word ‘image’ is long-standing, we cannot reject it completely. But, to avoid all ambiguity, I repeat here that an image is nothing other than a relation. The imaging consciousness that I have of Pierre is not a consciousness of an image of Pierre: Pierre is directly reached, my attention is not directed at an image, but at an object.5

So, in the weave of the synthetic acts of consciousness there appear at times certain structures that we call imaging consciousnesses. They are born, develop, and disappear according to laws specific to them and that we will try to determine. And it would be a grave error to confuse this life of the imaging consciousness, which endures, becomes organized, and disintegrates, with the object of this consciousness, which, meanwhile, may well remain immutable.
III. SECOND CHARACTERISTIC: THE PHENOMENON OF QUASI-OBSERVATION

When we began this study we thought that we would be dealing with images, which is to say with elements of consciousness. We now see that we are dealing with complete consciousnesses, which is to say with complex structures that ‘intend’ certain objects. Let us see whether reflection cannot teach us more about these consciousnesses. It will be simplest to consider the image in relation to the concept and to perception. To perceive, to conceive, to imagine: such are indeed the three types of consciousness by which the same object can be given to us.

In perception I observe objects. It should be understood by this that the object, though it enters whole into my perception, is never given to me but one side at a time. Consider the example of a cube: I do not know it is a cube unless I have seen its six faces; I can possibly see three together, but never more. It is necessary therefore that I apprehend them successively. And when I pass, for example, from the apprehension of faces ABC to faces BCD, it always remains possible that face A disappeared during my change of position. The existence of the cube will therefore remain doubtful. At the same time, we must notice that when I see three faces of the cube together, these three faces are never presented to me like squares: their lines are flattened, their angles become obtuse, and I must reconstitute their nature as squares starting from the appearances in my perception. All this has been said a hundred times: it is characteristic of perception that the object never appears except in a series of profiles, of projections. The cube is indeed present to me, I can touch it, see it; but I can never see it except in a certain way, which calls for and excludes at the same time an infinity of other points of view. One must learn objects, which is to say, multiply the possible points of view on them. The object itself is the synthesis of all these appearances. The perception of an object is therefore a phenomenon of an infinity of aspects. What does this signify for us? The necessity of making a tour of objects, of waiting, as Bergson said, until the ‘sugar dissolves’.

When, on the other hand, I think of a cube by a concrete concept, I think of its six sides and its eight angles at the same time; I think that its angles are right angles, its sides squares. I am at the centre of my idea, I apprehend its entirety in one glance. Naturally, this is not to say that my idea does not need to be completed by an infinite progression. But I can think the concrete essences in a single act of consciousness; I do not need to recover images, I have no apprenticeship to serve. Such is without doubt the clearest difference between thought and perception. That is why we can never perceive a thought nor think a perception. They are radically distinct phenomena: one is knowledge conscious of itself, which places itself at once in the centre of the
object; the other is a synthetic unity of a multiplicity of appearances, which slowly serves its apprenticeship.

What will we say of the image? Is it apprenticeship or knowledge? Let us note initially that it seems ‘on the side of’ perception. In the one as in the other the object gives itself by profiles, by projections, by what the Germans designate by the apt term ‘Abschattungen’. Only, we no longer need to make the tour of it: the imaged cube is given immediately for what it is. When I say ’the object I perceive is a cube’, I make a hypothesis that the later course of my perceptions may oblige me to abandon. When I say ‘the object of which I have an image at this moment is a cube’, I make here a judgement of obviousness: it is absolutely certain that the object of my image is a cube. What does this say? In perception, knowledge is formed slowly; in the image, knowledge is immediate. We see now that the image is a synthetic act that links a concrete, not imaged, knowledge to elements more properly representative. An image is not learned: it is organized exactly as the objects that are learned, but, in fact, it is given whole, for what it is, in its appearance. If you turn a cube-image in thought to amuse yourself, if you pretend that it presents its various faces to you, then you will not be more advanced at the end of the operation: you will not have learned anything.

This is not all. Let us consider this sheet of paper on the table. The more we look at it, the more it reveals to us of its characteristics.

Each new orientation of my attention, of my analysis, reveals to me a new detail: the upper edge of the sheet is slightly warped, the end of the third line is dotted, etc. But I can keep an image in view as long as I want: I will never find anything there but what I put there. This remark is of the utmost importance in distinguishing the image from perception. In the world of perception, no ‘thing’ can appear without maintaining an infinity of relations to other things. Better, it is this infinity of relations – as well as the infinity of the relations that its elements support between them – it is this infinity of relations that constitutes the very essence of a thing. Hence a kind of overflowing in the world of ‘things’: there is, at every moment, always infinitely more than we can see; to exhaust the richness of my current perception would take an infinite time. Let us not be mistaken here: this kind of ‘overflowing’ is constitutive of the very nature of objects. When it is said that an object cannot exist without a definite individuality, it is necessary to understand by this ‘without maintaining an infinity of determinate relations with the infinity of other objects’.

But in the image, on the other hand, there is a kind of essential poverty. The different elements of an image maintain no relations with the rest of the world and maintain only two or three relations between themselves: those, for example, that I could note, or those that it is presently important to retain.
It should not be said that the other relations exist in secret, that they wait until a beam of light moves on them. No: they do not exist at all. Two colours, for example, which maintain a certain discordant relation in reality can coexist in imagery without having any kind of relation between them. The objects exist only in so far as they are thought. This is what is incomprehensible for all those who consider the image a reborn perception. Indeed, it is not at all a question of a difference in intensity, but rather the objects of the world of images could in no way exist in the world of perception; they do not meet the necessary conditions.

In a word, the object of perception constantly overflows consciousness; the object of an image is never anything more than the consciousness one has of it; it is defined by that consciousness: one can never learn from an image what one does not know already. Admittedly, it can happen that a memory image – the face of somebody, or a certain place – springs up unexpectedly. But, even in such a case, it is given to intuition in one piece, it delivers in one glance what it is. If I perceived this patch of grass, I should study it for some time to know where it comes from. In the case of the image, I know it immediately: it is the grass of such-and-such a meadow, at such-and-such a place. And this origin cannot be deciphered from the image: in the very act that gives me the object as imaged is included the knowledge (connaissance) of what it is. One will object, admittedly, that there are rather rare cases where a memory image retains anonymity: all of a sudden, I see again a dreary garden under a grey sky and it is impossible for me to know where and when I saw this garden. But this is quite simply a determination that the image lacks, and no observation, however prolonged, could give me the knowledge (connaissance) that I lack. If I discover, a little later, the name of the garden, it is by means of processes that have nothing to do with pure and simple observation: the image gave at once all that it possessed.

Thus the object, in the image, is presented as having to be apprehended in a multiplicity of synthetic acts. Because of this fact, because its contents retain, like a phantom, a sensible opacity, because it involves neither essences nor generating laws but only an irrational quality, it seems to be the object of observation: from this point of view the image would be closer to perception than to the concept. But, in addition, the image does not teach anything, never gives the impression of novelty, never reveals an aspect of the object. It delivers it as a whole. No risk, no waiting: a certainty. My perception can mislead me, but not my image. Our attitude in relation to the object of the image could be called ‘quasi-observation’. We are, indeed, placed in the attitude of observation, but it is an observation that does not teach anything. If I give myself in image the page of a book, I am in the attitude of the reader, I look at the printed lines. But I do not read. And, at bottom, I am not even looking, because I already know what is written.
Without abandoning the domain of pure description, one can try to explain this characteristic property of the image. In the image, indeed, a certain consciousness gives itself a certain object. The object is therefore correlative with a certain synthetic act, which includes among its structures a certain knowledge and a certain ‘intention’. The intention is at the centre of consciousness: it is the intention that aims at the object, which is to say, that constitutes it for what it is. The knowledge, which is indissolubly linked to the intention, specifies that the object is such or such, adds determinations synthetically. To constitute as an image in oneself a certain consciousness of the table is at the same time to constitute the table as an object of imaging consciousness. The object as imaged is therefore contemporary with the consciousness that I have of it and it is exactly determined by that consciousness: it includes in itself nothing but what I am conscious of; but, inversely, everything that constitutes my consciousness finds its correlate in the object. My knowledge is nothing other than knowledge of the object, knowledge concerning the object. In the act of consciousness, the representative element and the knowledge element are linked in a synthetic act. The correlative object of this act is therefore constituted as a concrete, sensible object and at the same time as an object of knowledge. This results in the paradoxical consequence that the object is present for us externally and internally at the same time. Externally, because we observe it; internally, because it is in it that we observe what it is. This is why extremely poor and truncated images, reduced to a few spatial determinations, can have a rich and profound sense for me. And this sense is there, immediate, in these lines, it is given without a need to decipher it. This is also why the world of images is a world where nothing happens. I can easily, at my liking, move such-and-such an object as imaged, turn a cube, make a plant grow, make a horse run, there will be never the smallest time-lag between the object and the consciousness. Not a second of surprise: the object that is moving is not alive, it never precedes the intention. But neither is it inert, passive, ‘worked’ from the outside, like a marionette: the consciousness never precedes the object, the intention reveals itself at the same time as it realizes itself, in and by its realization.

IV. THIRD CHARACTERISTIC: THE IMAGING CONSCIOUSNESS POSITS ITS OBJECT AS A NOTHINGNESS

All consciousness is consciousness of something. Unreflective consciousness aims at objects different in kind from consciousness: for example, the imaging consciousness of a tree aims at a tree, which is to say a body that is by nature external to consciousness; consciousness goes out of itself, transcends itself.

If we want to describe this consciousness, it is necessary, we have seen, that
we produce a new consciousness called ‘reflective’. For the first is entirely consciousness of the tree. However, care should be taken: all consciousness is consciousness through and through. If the imaging consciousness of a tree, for example, were conscious only as an object of reflection, then it would be, in the unreflected state, unconscious of itself, which is a contradiction. It must, therefore, since it has no other object than the tree as imaged and is itself an object only for reflection, contain within it a certain consciousness of itself. Let us say that it possesses an immanent and nonthetic consciousness of itself. It is not our business to describe this nonthetic consciousness. But it is evident that our description of the imaging consciousness would be very incomplete if we do not seek to know:

1. How the unreflective consciousness posits its object.
2. How this consciousness appears to itself in the nonthetic consciousness that accompanies the positing of the object.

The transcendent consciousness of a tree as imaged posits the tree. But it posits it as imaged, which is to say in a certain manner, which is not that of perceptual consciousness.

People have often proceeded as if the image were initially constructed on the model of perception and then something (reducer, knowledge, etc.) intervened to put it in its proper place as an image. The object as imaged would therefore be constituted first in the world of things, in order to be, afterwards, driven from this world. But this thesis does not correspond to the data of phenomenological description; moreover, we have seen in another work that, if perception and image are not by nature distinct, if their objects are not given to consciousness as sui generis, there will not remain any means for us to distinguish these two ways in which objects are given; in a word, we have observed the insufficiency of external criteria of the image. It is therefore necessary – since we want to talk of images, since this term has a sense for us – that the image, taken in itself, contains in its inner nature an element of radical distinction. A reflective investigation will make us find this element in the positional act of the imaging consciousness.

Every consciousness posits its object, but each in its own way. Perception, for example, posits its object as existing. The image also includes an act of belief or a positional act. The act can take four and only four forms: it can posit the object as nonexistent, or as absent, or as existing elsewhere; it can also ‘neutralize’ itself, which is to say not posit its object as existent.10 Two of these acts are negations; the fourth corresponds to a suspension or neutralization of the thesis. The third, which is positive, assumes an implicit negation of the natural and present existence of the object. These positional acts – this remark is crucial – are not superimposed on the image after it is constituted:
the positional act is constitutive of the image consciousness. Any other theory, indeed, not only would be contrary to the data of reflection, but also would lead us into the illusion of immanence.

This positing of absence or of nonexistence can occur only where quasi-observation is concerned. On the one hand, indeed, perception posits the existence of its object; on the other hand, concepts and knowledge posit the existence of natures (universal essences) constituted by relations and are indifferent to the ‘flesh and blood’ existence of objects. To think the concept ‘man’, for example, is to posit nothing but an essence, since, as Spinoza said:

> the true definition of each thing neither involves nor expresses anything apart from the nature of the defined thing. From this it follows that no definition either involves or expresses a certain number of individuals.11

To think of Pierre by a concrete concept is only to think of a collection of relations. Among these relations can be found determinations of place (Pierre is on a trip to Berlin, he is a lawyer in Rabat, etc.). But these determinations add a positive element to the concrete nature ‘Pierre’; they never have that privative, negative character of the positional acts of the image. It is only on the ground of sensory intuition that the words ‘absent’, ‘far from me’ can have a sense, on the ground of a sensory intuition that gives itself as not being able to take place. For example, if the image of a dead loved one appears to me abruptly, there is no need for a ‘reduction’ to feel the ache in my heart: it is part of the image, it is the direct consequence of the fact that the image gives its object as a nothingness of being.

There undoubtedly exist judgements of perception that involve a neutralized positional act. This is what happens when I see a man coming towards me and I say ‘It is possible that this man is Pierre’. But, precisely, this suspension of belief, this abstention, concerns the man approaching. Of this man, I doubt that he is Pierre; I do not thereby doubt that he is a man. In a word, my doubt necessarily implies a positing of existence of the type: a man coming towards me. On the contrary, to say ‘I have an image of Pierre’ is equivalent to saying not only ‘I do not see Pierre’, but also ‘I do not see anything at all’. The characteristic of the intentional object of the imaging consciousness is that the object is not there and is posited as such, or that it does not exist and is posited as nonexistent, or that it is not posited at all.

To produce in me the image consciousness of Pierre is to make an intentional synthesis that gathers in itself a host of past moments, which assert the identity of Pierre across these diverse appearances and which give this same object under a certain aspect (in profile, in three-quarters, full size, head and shoulders, etc.). This aspect is necessarily an intuitive aspect: what my present intention aims at is Pierre in his corporeality, the Pierre that I can see, touch,
hear, were I to see him, touch him, hear him. It is a body that is necessarily at a certain distance from mine, necessarily in a certain position in relation to me. Only, the Pierre that I could touch I posit at present as not being touched by me. My image of him is a certain manner of not touching him, not seeing him, a way he has of not being at such a distance, in such a position. The belief, in the image, posits the intuition, but does not posit Pierre. The characteristic of Pierre is not to be non-intuitive, as one might be tempted to believe, but to be ‘intuitive-absent’, given as absent to intuition. In this sense, one can say that the image has wrapped within it a certain nothingness. Its object is not a simple portrait, it asserts itself: but in asserting itself it destroys itself. However lively, appealing, strong the image, it gives its object as not being. This does not preclude our then reacting to this image as if its object were present, before us: we will see that it can happen that we try, with all our being, to react to an image as if it were a perception. But the ambiguous and false state at which we thus arrive only throws into relief what has just been said: in vain we seek by our conduct towards the object to give rise to the belief that it really exists; we can ignore for a second, but cannot destroy the immediate consciousness of its nothingness.

V. FOURTH CHARACTERISTIC: SPONTANEITY

The imaging consciousness of the object includes, as we noted above, a nonthetic consciousness of itself. This consciousness, which one could call transversal, has no object. It posits nothing, refers to nothing, is not knowledge (connaissance): it is a diffuse light that consciousness emits for itself, or – to abandon comparisons – it is an indefinable quality that attaches itself to every consciousness. A perceptual consciousness appears to itself as passive. On the other hand, an imaging consciousness gives itself to itself as an imaging consciousness, which is to say as a spontaneity that produces and conserves the object as imaged. It is a kind of indefinable counterpart to the fact that the object gives itself as a nothingness. The consciousness appears to itself as creative, but without positing as object this creative character. It is thanks to this vague and fugitive quality that the image consciousness is not given as a piece of wood that floats on the sea, but as a wave among the waves. It feels itself to be consciousness through and through and homogeneous with the other consciousnesses that have preceded it and with which it is synthetically united.

VI. CONCLUSION

There remains much more that we can know with certainty concerning images. But it will be necessary, for that, to place the mental image in the
midst of phenomena having a similar structure and to attempt a comparative description. Simple reflection, it seems to us, has delivered all that it can. It informed us about what one could call the statics of the image, about the image considered as an isolated phenomenon.

We cannot ignore the importance of this information. If we try to group it and order it, it appears to us initially that the image is not a state, a solid and opaque residue, but a consciousness. The majority of psychologists think that they find the image in taking a cross-section through the current of consciousness. For them, the image is an element in an instantaneous synthesis, and each consciousness includes or can include one or more images; to study the role of the image in thought is to seek the place of the image among the collection of objects that constitute the present consciousness; it is in this sense that they can speak of a thought that is supported by images. We now know that we must renounce these spatial metaphors. The image is a sui generis consciousness that cannot in any way form part of a larger consciousness. There is no image in a consciousness that would contain it, in addition to the thought, signs, feelings, sensations. Rather, the image consciousness is a synthetic form that appears as a certain moment of a temporal synthesis and organizes itself with the other forms of consciousness, which precede and follow it to form a melodic unity. To say that an object is given as imaged and as conceived at the same time is as absurd as to speak of a body that would be solid and gas at the same time.

This imaging consciousness may be called representative in the sense that it will seek its object on the ground of perception and aims at the sensitive elements that constitute that object. At the same time, the imaging consciousness orients itself in relation to its object as the perceptual consciousness in relation to the perceived object. In addition, it is spontaneous and creative; it supports, maintains by continuous creation, the sensible qualities of its object. In perception, the actual representative element corresponds to a passivity of consciousness. In the image, that element, in so far as it is primary and incommunicable, is the product of a conscious activity, is shot through with a flow of creative will. It follows necessarily that the object as imaged is never anything more than the consciousness one has of it. That is what I have called the phenomenon of quasi-observation. To have vague consciousness of an image is to have consciousness of a vague image. We are here a long way from Berkeley and Hume, who declared general images, indeterminate images, impossible. But we agree fully with the subjects of Watt and Messer.

‘I saw’, said subject I, ‘something that looked like a wing’. Subject II saw a face without knowing whether it was that of a man or a woman. Subject I had ‘an approximate image of a human face; a typical, not individual, image’.12
Berkeley’s error was to prescribe for the image conditions that apply only to perception. A hare vaguely perceived is in itself a determinate hare. But a hare that is the object of a vague image is an indeterminate hare.

The final consequence of the preceding is that the flesh of the object is not the same in the image as in perception. By ‘flesh’ I understand the intimate texture. The classical authors gave us the image as a less vivid perception, less clear but in all other respects like it in the flesh. We now know that this is a mistake. The object of perception is constituted by an infinite multiplicity of determinations and possible relations. On the other hand, the most determinate image possesses in itself only a finite number of determinations, precisely those of which we are conscious. These determinations can remain unrelated to one another if we are not conscious that they support relations between them. Hence the discontinuity at the very heart of the object of the image, something halting, qualities that spring towards existence and stop halfway, an essential poverty.

We still have much to learn. The relation between the image and its object, for example, remains very obscure. We have said that the image is consciousness of an object. The object of the image of Pierre, we have said, is the Pierre of flesh and blood, who is currently in Berlin. But, on the other hand, the image that I presently have of Pierre shows him at home, in his room in Paris, seated on a chair that I know well. Then, one could ask, is the object of the image the Pierre who currently lives in Berlin, or the Pierre who lived last year in Paris? And if we persist in affirming that it is the Pierre who lives in Berlin, we must explain the paradox: why and how does the imaged consciousness aim at the Pierre of Berlin through the Pierre who lived last year in Paris?

But we know so far only the statics of the image; we cannot at once form a theory of the relation of the image to its object: it is necessary first to describe the image as a functional attitude.
Conclusion
I. CONSCIOUSNESS AND IMAGINATION

We can now pose the metaphysical question that has been gradually disclosed by these studies of phenomenological psychology. It can be formulated thus: what are the characteristics that can be attributed to consciousness on the basis of the fact that it is consciousness capable of imagining? This question can be taken in the sense of a critical analysis in the form: what must consciousness in general be if it is true that the constitution of an image is always possible? And, without doubt, it is in this form that our minds, accustomed to posing philosophical questions in the Kantian perspective, will best understand it. But, to tell the truth, the deepest sense of the problem can be grasped only from a phenomenological point of view.

After the phenomenological reduction, we find ourselves in the presence of the transcendental consciousness that is disclosed to our reflective descriptions. We can thus fix by concepts the result of our eidetic intuition of the essence ‘consciousness’. Now, phenomenological descriptions can discover, for example, that the very structure of transcendental consciousness implies that this consciousness is constitutive of a world. But it is evident that they will not teach us that it must be constitutive of one such world, which is to say precisely the one where we are, with its earth, its animals, its people, and the history of its people. We are here in the presence of a primary and irreducible fact that is given as a contingent and irrational specification of the noematic essence of world. And many phenomenologists will call ‘metaphysics’ the research that aims at disclosing this contingent existent in its entirety. This is not exactly what I would call metaphysics, but this is of little importance here. What will concern us is this: is the function of imagining a contingent and metaphysical specification of the essence ‘consciousness’ or should it rather be described as a constitutive structure of this essence? in other words: can we conceive of a consciousness that would never imagine and that would be entirely absorbed in its intuitions of the real – in which case, the possibility of imagining, which appears as one quality among others of our consciousnesses, would be a contingent enrichment – or rather, as soon as we posit a consciousness, must it be posited as always able to imagine? We should be able to settle this question by the simple reflective inspection of the essence ‘consciousness’ and it is thus that I would try to settle it, were I not addressing a public still little accustomed to phenomenological methods. But as the idea of an eidetic intuition is still repugnant to many French readers I will use an oblique method, which is to say a somewhat more complex method. We will start from the question: what must consciousness be in order that it can imagine? We will try to develop this by means of the ordinary procedures of critical analysis, which is to say by a regressive method. Next we will compare the results obtained from this with those
that are given to us by the Cartesian intuition of consciousness realized by
the cogito, and we will see whether the necessary conditions for realizing
an imagining consciousness are the same as or different from the conditions of
possibility of a consciousness in general.

To tell the truth, the problem thus posed can appear entirely new and even
irrelevant to French psychologists. And, in fact, as long as we are the victims
of the illusion of immanence, there is no general problem of imagination.
Images are in fact provided, in these theories, with a type of existence rigor-
ously identical to that of things. They are reborn sensations that can differ in
degree, in cohesion, in signification from primitive sensation, but which
belong like them to intra-worldly existence. The image is as real as any other
existent. The only problem that is posed for its subject is the problem of its
relation to other existents, but whatever this relation may be it leaves the very
existence of the image intact. Similarly, whether the portrait of King Charles
VI is or is not a good likeness, whether the king is dead or alive or even if he
never existed, the portrait remains an existent thing in the world. There is
therefore no existential problem of the image.

But if, on the contrary, we envisage the image as we have tried to in this
work, the existential problem of the image can no longer be pushed aside. In
fact, to the existence of an object for consciousness there corresponds noeti-
cally a thesis or positing of existence. Now, the thesis of the imaging con-
sciousness is radically different from the thesis of a realizing consciousness.
This means that the type of existence of the imaged object in so far as it is imaged
differs in nature from the type of existence of the object grasped as real. And,
certainly, if I now form the image of Pierre, my imaging consciousness
encloses a certain positing of Pierre’s existence, such as that he is, at this very
moment, in Berlin or in London. But in so far as he appears to me as imaged, this
Pierre who is present in London, appears to me as absent. This fundamental
absence, this essential nothingness of the imaged object, suffices to differenti-
ate it from the objects of perception. What therefore must a consciousness be
in order that it can successively posit real objects and imaged objects?

We must at once make an essential observation, that readers may have
already made if they have studied with me the problem of the relation of
perception to the image (see Part II, § V). For an object or any element of an
object there is a great difference between being aimed at emptily and being given-
as-absent. In any perception, many empty intentions are directed, starting from
the elements of the object presently given, towards the other sides and other
elements of the object that are not yet or no longer revealed to our intuition.
For example, the arabesques of a tapestry that I am gazing at are only partly
given to my intuition. The legs of the armchair in front of the window hide
certain curves, certain designs. I nevertheless grasp these hidden arabesques
as presently existing, as veiled and not at all as absent. And I grasp them not for
themselves in trying to presentify them by means of an analogon but in the
very manner in which I grasp what has been given to me as their contin-
uation. I perceive their hidden beginnings and endings (which appear to me
before and behind the legs of the armchair), as being continued behind the legs
of the armchair. It is therefore in the manner in which I grasp what is given that I posit
as real what is not given. Real in the same sense as that which is given, as that
which confers on it its signification and its very nature. Similarly, the succes-
sive notes of a melody are grasped by appropriate retentions as that which
make the note presently heard precisely what it is. In this sense, to perceive
this or that real datum is to perceive it on the ground of reality as a whole. This
reality is not the object of any special act of my attention but it is co-present
as the essential condition of the existence of the reality currently perceived.

We can see that the imaging act is the inverse of the realizing act. If I want to
imagine the hidden arabesques, I direct my attention towards them and I
isolate them, just as I isolate on the ground of an undifferentiated universe
the thing that I presently perceive. I cease to grasp them emptily as constitut-
ing the sense of the perceived reality, I give myself them in themselves. But
precisely as I cease to aim at them starting from what is present to grasp them
in themselves, I grasp them as absent, they appear to me as given emptily.
Certainly they really exist over there under the armchair and it is over there
that I aim at them but as I aim at them there where they are not given to me, I
grasp them as a nothingness for me. Thus the imaginative act is at once
constituting, isolating, and annihilating.

This is what makes the problem of memory and the problem of anticipa-
tion two problems radically different from the problem of imagination.
Certainly, the memory, from many points of view, seems very close to the
image, and I was sometimes able to draw my examples from memory to
better understand the nature of the image. There is nevertheless an essential
difference between the thesis of the memory and that of the image. If I recall
an event of my past life, I do not imagine it, I remember it. That is to say, I do not
posit it as given-absent, but as given-now as passed. Pierre’s handshake when leaving
me yesterday evening did not undergo a modification of irreality while flow-
ing into the past: it simply went into retirement; it is always real but past. It exists
past, which is one mode of real existence among others. And when I want to
apprehend it anew, I aim at it where it is, I direct my consciousness towards this
past object that is yesterday and, at the heart of that object, I regain the event
that I am seeking, Pierre’s handshake. In a word, just as when I want to really
see the arabesques hidden beneath the armchair, I must look for them where
they are, which is to say move the armchair, so when I recall this or that
memory, I do not evoke it but I take myself to where it is, I direct my con-
sciousness towards the past where it awaits me as a real event in retirement.
On the other hand if I represent Pierre as he might be at this moment in
Berlin – or simply Pierre as he exists at this moment (and not as he was yesterday on leaving me), I grasp an object that is not given to me at all or that is precisely given to me as being out of reach. There I grasp nothing, which is to say I posit nothing. In this sense, the imaging consciousness of Pierre in Berlin (what is he doing at the moment? I imagine that he is walking on the Kurfürstendamm etc.) is much closer to that of the centaur (whose complete nonexistence I affirm) than to the memory of Pierre as he was the day he left. What is common between Pierre as imaged and the centaur as imaged is that they are two aspects of Nothingness. And it is also this that distinguishes the lived future from the imagined future. There are in fact two sorts of futures: one is but the temporal ground on which my present perception develops, the other is posited for itself but as that which is not yet. When I play tennis I see my opponent hit the ball with the racket and I leap to the net. There is therefore anticipation here, since I foresee the trajectory of the ball. But this anticipation does not posit for itself the passage of the ball to this or that point. Actually, the future is here only the real development of a form begun by my opponent’s movement and this opponent’s real movement communicates its reality to the whole form. If one prefers, the real form with its zones of real-past and real-future is entirely realized through my opponent’s movement. As for my foresight, it is also reality, I continue to realize the form in foreseeing it, since my foresight is a real movement internal to the form. Thus, step by step, there is always a real future that occurs simply, like the real past, as the sense of a current form in development or, if one prefers, as the signification of the universe. And, in this sense, it makes no difference whether we present the real unperceived aspects of objects as a present reality and aimed at emptily, or as a real future. The arabesques hidden by the armchair are the real complement of my bodily movement by which I move the armchair, as well as the present and latent existence concealed by the armchair. All real existence is given with present, past and future structures, therefore the past and the future as essential structures of the real are equally real, which is to say correlates of a realizing thesis. But if, on the other hand, lying on my bed, I foresee what could happen when my friend Pierre returns from Berlin, I detach the future from the present that constitutes its sense. I posit it for itself and I give it to myself. But, precisely, I give it to myself as not yet, which is to say as absent or if one prefers as a nothingness. Thus, I can live a future in reality as grounded in the present (when for example I go to look for Pierre at the station and all my acts presuppose as their real sense the arrival of Pierre at 7.35 p.m.), or on the other hand I can isolate this same future and posit it for itself but by cutting it off from all reality and annihilating it, by presentifying it as nothingness.

We can now grasp the essential condition for a consciousness to be able to image: it must have the possibility of positing a thesis of irreality. But we must
make this condition more precise. It is not a question of consciousness ceasing to be consciousness of something. It is in the very nature of consciousness to be intentional and a consciousness that ceased to be consciousness of something would thereby cease to exist. But consciousness must be able to form and posit objects affected by a certain character of nothingness in relation to the totality of reality. One can recall, in fact, that the imaginary object can be posited as nonexistent or as absent or as existing elsewhere or not be posited as existent. We notice that the common characteristic of these four theses is that they include the entire category of negation, though in different degrees. Thus the negative act is constitutive of the image. We have already noted in fact that the thesis is not added to the image, but that it is its most inner structure. But in relation to what is the negation effected? To answer this, it is enough to consider for a moment what is produced when we consider the portrait of Charles VIII as an image of Charles VIII. I at once cease to consider the picture as making up part of the real world. It can no longer be that the object perceived in the picture is susceptible to being altered by changes in its surrounding environment. The picture itself, as a real thing, can be more or less illuminated, its colours can flake off, it can burn. This is because it possesses – for want of the ‘being-in-the-world’ that is reserved for consciousness – a ‘being-in-the-midst-of-the-world’. Its objective nature depends on reality grasped as a spatio-temporal whole. But if, on the other hand, I grasp Charles VIII as imaged in the picture, the object apprehended can no longer be subjected, for example, to modifications of lighting. It is not true, for example, that I can light the cheek of Charles VIII more or less.

The illumination of that cheek, in fact, has been ruled in the irreal once and for all by the painter. It is the irreal sun – or the irreal candle that is positioned by the painter at this or that distance from the face being painted – that determines the degree of illumination of the cheek. All that a real projector can do is to light the part of the real picture that corresponds to the cheek of Charles VIII. Similarly, if the picture burns, it is not Charles VIII as imaged that burns but simply the material object that serves as an analogon for the manifestation of the imaged object. Thus the irreal object appears at once as out of reach in relation to reality. We therefore see that in order to produce the object ‘Charles VIII’ as imaged, consciousness must be able to deny the reality of the picture, and that it could deny this reality only 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. Or, if one prefers, to deny that an object belongs to the real is to deny the real in positing the object; the two negations are complementary and the latter is the condition of the former. We know, besides, that the totality of the real, in
so far as it is grasped by consciousness as a synthetic situation for that consciousness, is the world. There is therefore a double condition for consciousness to be able to imagine: it must be able to posit the world in its synthetic totality and, at the same time, it must be able to posit the imagined object as out of reach in relation to that synthetic whole, which is to say posit the world as a nothingness in relation to the image. It clearly follows from this that all creation of the imaginary would be totally impossible to a consciousness whose nature was precisely to be ‘in-the-midst-of-the-world’. If we assume a consciousness placed at the heart of the world as an existent among others, we must conceive it, by hypothesis, as subjected to the action of diverse realities without recourse – without its being able to surpass the detail of these realities by an intuition that embraces their totality. This consciousness could therefore contain only real modifications provoked by real actions and all imagination would be prohibited to it, precisely to the extent to which it was bogged down in the real. This conception of a consciousness stuck in the world is not unknown (inconnue) to us since it is precisely that of psychological determinism. We can affirm without fear that, if consciousness is a succession of determined psychical facts, it is totally impossible for it ever to produce anything other than the real. For consciousness to be able to imagine, it must be able to escape from the world by its very nature, it must be able to stand back from the world by its own efforts. In a word, it must be free. Thus the thesis of irreality has delivered us the possibility of negation as its condition. Now, the latter is possible only by the ‘nihilation’ of the world as totality and this nihilation is revealed to us as being the inverse of the very freedom of consciousness. But here several remarks are called for: first of all we must bear in mind that the act of positing the world as a synthetic totality and the act of ‘standing back’ from the world are one and the same act. If we can use a comparison, it is precisely in putting themselves at a convenient distance from their paintings that impressionist painters bring out the whole ‘forest’ or ‘white water lilies’ from the multitude of little strokes they have placed on the canvas. But, reciprocally, the possibility of constituting a whole is given as the primary structure of the act of standing back. So to posit reality as a synthetic whole is enough to posit oneself as free from it and this surpassing is freedom itself since it could not be effected were consciousness not free. So to posit the world as world and to ‘nihilate’ it are one and the same thing. In this sense Heidegger can say that nothingness is the constitutive structure of the existent. In order to be able to imagine, it is enough that consciousness can surpass the real and constitute it as a world, since the nihilation of the real is always implied by its constitution as a world. But this surpassing cannot be effected in just any way and the freedom of consciousness should not be confused with arbitrariness. For an image is not purely and simply the world denied, but is always the world denied from a certain point of
view, precisely that which allows the positing of the absence or the nonexistence of the object presented ‘as imaged’. The arbitrary positing of the real as a world will not of itself make the centaur appear as an irreal object. For the centaur to arise as irreal, the world must be grasped precisely as world-where-the-centaur-is-not, and this can be produced only if different motivations lead consciousness to grasp the world as being exactly such that the centaur has no place in it. Likewise, for my friend Pierre to be given to me as absent, I must have been led to grasp the world as a whole such that Pierre cannot currently be present in it for me. (He could be currently present for others – in Berlin, for example.) What motivates the appearance of the irreal is not necessarily, nor even most often, the representative intuition of the world from this or that point of view. There are in fact, for consciousness, many other ways to surpass the real in order to make a world of it: the surpassing can and should be made at first by affectivity or by action. For example, the appearance of a dead friend as irreal occurs on the ground of affective apprehension of the real as an empty world from this point of view.

I will call the different immediate modes of apprehension of the real as a world ‘situations’. We can then say that the essential condition for a consciousness to imagine is that it be ‘situated in the world’ or more briefly that it ‘be-in-the-world’. It is the situation-in-the-world, grasped as a concrete and individual reality of consciousness, that is the motivation for the constitution of any irreal object whatever and the nature of that irreal object is circumscribed by this motivation. Thus the situation of consciousness must appear not as a pure and abstract condition of possibility for all of the imaginary, but as the concrete and precise motivation for the appearance of a certain particular imaginary.

From this point of view, we can finally grasp the connection of the irreal to the real. First of all, even if no image is produced at the moment, every apprehension of the real as a world tends of its own accord to end up with the production of irreal objects since it is always, in a sense, free nihilation of the world and this always from a particular point of view. So, if consciousness is free, the noematic correlate of its freedom should be the world that carries in itself its possibility of negation, at each moment and from each point of view, by means of an image, even while the image must as yet be constituted by a particular intention of consciousness. But, reciprocally, an image, being a negation of the world from a particular point of view, can appear only on the ground of the world and in connection with that ground. Of course, the appearance of the image requires that the particular perceptions be diluted in the syncretic wholeness world and that this whole withdraws. But it is precisely the withdrawal of the whole that constitutes it as ground, that ground on which the irreal form must stand out. So although, by means of the production of the irreal, consciousness can momentarily appear delivered from
its ‘being-in-the-world’, on the contrary this ‘being-in-the-world’ is the necessary condition of imagination.

Thus the critical analysis of the conditions of possibility for all imagination has led us to the following discoveries: in order to imagine, consciousness must be free from all particular reality and this freedom must be able to be defined by a ‘being-in-the-world’ that is at once constitution and nihilation of the world; the concrete situation of consciousness in the world must at each moment serve as the singular motivation for the constitution of the irreal. Thus the irreal – which is always double nothingness: nothingness of itself in relation to the world, nothingness of the world in relation to it – must always be constituted on the ground of the world that it denies, it being well understood, moreover, that the world is not delivered only to a representative intuition and that this synthetic ground simply demands to be lived as situation. If these are the conditions for imagination to be possible, do they correspond to a specification, a contingent enrichment of the essence ‘consciousness’ or are they nothing other than the very essence of this consciousness considered from a particular point of view? It seems that the answer is in the question. What is the free consciousness, in fact, whose nature is to be consciousness of something, but which, for this very reason, constitutes itself in the face of the real and surpasses it at each moment because it cannot be other than ‘being-in-the-world’, which is to say by living its relation with the real as situation, what is it, in fact, if not simply consciousness as it is revealed to itself in the cogito?

Is not the very first condition of the cogito doubt, which is to say the constitution of the real as a world at the same time as its nihilation from this same point of view, and does not the reflective grasp of doubt as doubt coincide with the apodictic intuition of freedom?

We may therefore conclude that imagination is not an empirical power added to consciousness, but is the whole of consciousness as it realizes its freedom; every concrete and real situation of consciousness in the world is pregnant with the imaginary in so far as it is always presented as a surpassing of the real. It does not follow that all perception of the real must be reversed in imagination, but as consciousness is always ‘in situation’ because it is always free, there is always and at every moment the concrete possibility for it to produce the irreal. There are various motivations that decide at each instant if consciousness will be only realizing or if it will imagine. The irreal is produced outside the world by a consciousness that remains in the world and it is because we are transcendentally free that we can imagine.

But, in its turn, the imagination that has become a psychological and empirical function is the necessary condition of the freedom of empirical humans in the midst of the world. For, if the nihilating function belonging to
consciousness – which Heidegger calls surpassing – is that which renders the act of imagination possible, it must be added that, reciprocally, this function can be manifested only in an imaging act. There cannot be an intuition of nothingness, precisely because nothingness is nothing and because all consciousness – intuitive or not – is consciousness of something. Nothingness can be given only as an infrastructure of something. The experience of nothingness is not, strictly speaking, an indirect experience, but is an experience that is, on principle, given ‘with’ and ‘in’. Bergson’s analyses remain valid here: an attempt to conceive death or the nothingness of existence directly is by nature doomed to fail.

The sliding of the world into the heart of nothingness and the emergence of the human-reality in this very nothingness can occur only through the positing of something that is nothingness in relation to the world and in relation to which the world is nothingness. This is to define, evidently, the constitution of the imaginary. It is the appearance of the imaginary before consciousness that allows us to grasp that the nihilation of the world is its essential condition and its primary structure. If it were possible to conceive for a moment a consciousness that does not imagine, it would be necessary to conceive it as totally bogged down in the existent and without the possibility of grasping anything other than the existent. But it is precisely this that is not and never could be: every existent, as soon as it is posited, is consequently surpassed. But still it must be surpassed towards something. The imaginary is in every case the concrete ‘something’ towards which the existent is surpassed. When the imaginary is not posited as a fact, the surpassing and the nihilation of the existent are stuck in the existent, the surpassing and the freedom are there but they are not revealed; the person is squashed in the world, transfixed by the real, and is closest to the thing. However, as soon as this person apprehends in one way or another (most of the time without representation) the whole as a situation, that person surpasses it towards that in relation to which the person is a lack, an emptiness, etc. In a word, the concrete motivation of the imaging consciousness itself presupposes the imaging structure of consciousness; the realizing consciousness always includes a surpassing towards a particular imaging consciousness that is like the inverse of the situation and in relation to which the situation is defined. For example, if I desire to see my friend Pierre, who is not here at present, the situation is defined as a ‘being-in-the-world’ such that Pierre is not at present given and Pierre is that in relation to which the totality of the real is surpassed in order to make a world. But this is not at all the real Pierre who, on the contrary, if he were given as present or as aimed at starting from the real by empty but presentifying intentions (for example, if I heard his steps outside the door), would be a part of the situation: this Pierre in relation to whom the situation is defined is precisely Pierre absent.
Thus the imaginary represents at each moment the implicit sense of the real. The imaging act properly so called consists in positing the imaginary for itself, which is to say in making that sense explicit — as when Pierre as imaged abruptly arises before me — but this specific positing of the imaginary is accompanied by a collapse of the world which is then no more than the nihilated ground of the irreal. And if negation is the unconditioned principle of all imagination, reciprocally it can only ever be realized in and by an act of imagination. One must imagine what one denies. In fact, the object of a negation cannot be a reality since this would then affirm what is being denied — but neither can it be a total nothing since, precisely, one denies something. Thus the object of a negation must be posited as imaginary. And this is true for the logical forms of negation (doubt, restriction, etc.), as for its affective and active forms (prohibition, consciousness of impotence, lack, etc.).

We are now at the point of understanding the sense and the value of the imaginary. The imaginary appears ‘on the ground of the world’, but reciprocally all apprehension of the real as world implies a hidden surpassing towards the imaginary. All imaging consciousness maintains the world as the nihilated ground of the imaginary and reciprocally all consciousness of the world calls and motivates an imaging consciousness as grasping the particular sense of the situation. The apprehension of nothingness cannot occur by an immediate disclosure, it is realized in and by the free succession of consciousnesses, the nothingness is the matter of surpassing the world towards the imaginary. It is as such that it is lived, without ever being posited for itself. There could be no realizing consciousness without imaging consciousness, and vice versa. Thus imagination, far from appearing as an accidental characteristic of consciousness, is disclosed as an essential and transcendental condition of consciousness. It is as absurd to conceive of a consciousness that does not imagine as it is to conceive of a consciousness that cannot effect the cogito.

II. THE WORK OF ART

I do not want to tackle here the problem of the work of art as a whole. Although it is strictly dependent on the question of the Imaginary, its treatment would require a work specifically on it. But it seems that it is time to draw some conclusions from the long studies where we took for our example a statue, a portrait of Charles VIII or a novel. The following remarks essentially concern the existential type of the work of art. And we can at once formulate the principle: the work of art is an irreality.
understood aright, the same object as the painting, the canvas, the real layers of paint. So long as we consider the canvas and the frame for themselves, the aesthetic object ‘Charles VIII’ does not appear. It is not that it is hidden by the painting, but that it cannot be given to a realizing consciousness. It appears the moment that consciousness, effecting a radical conversion that requires the nihilation of the world, constitutes itself as imaging. This is like the situation with those cubes that can be seen as five or six in number. It would not be appropriate to say that when one sees five, one conceals the aspect of the drawing in which six appear. But, rather, one cannot see five and six at the same time. The intentional act that apprehends them as being five is sufficient in itself, it is complete and exclusive of the act that grasps them as six. So it is with the apprehension of Charles VIII as imaged that is depicted by the painting. This depicted Charles VIII is necessarily the correlate of the intentional act of an imaging consciousness. And as this Charles VIII, who is an irreality in so far as he is grasped on the canvas, is precisely the object of our aesthetic appreciations (it is he that we say ‘moves us’, ‘is painted with intelligence, with power, with grace’, etc.), we are led to recognize that in a picture the aesthetic object is an irreality. This is of considerable importance if we bear in mind the confusion ordinarily made between the real and the imaginary in the work of art. It is often heard said, in fact, that an artist first has an idea as imaged and then realizes it on the canvas. The error made here is the idea that the artist can, in fact, start from a mental image that is, as such, incommunicable and at the end of the work deliver to the public an object that anyone can contemplate. It is then thought that there was a passage from the imaginary to the real. But this is in no way true. What is real, we must not tire of affirming, are the results of the brush strokes, the impasting of the canvas, its grain, the varnish spread over the colours. But, precisely, all this is not the object of aesthetic appreciation. What is ‘beautiful’, on the contrary, is a being that cannot be given to perception and that, in its very nature, is isolated from the universe. We have just shown that it cannot be illuminated, by projecting a light beam on the canvas for example: it is the canvas that is illuminated and not the object of aesthetic appreciation. In fact the painter did not realize a mental image at all, but simply constituted a material analogon such that anyone can grasp that image if only they gaze at the analogon. But the image thus provided with an external analogon remains an image. There is no realization of the imaginary, nor should one talk of its objectification. Each stroke of the brush was given not for itself nor even in terms of the construction of a coherent real whole (in the sense that one can say that a certain lever in a machine was conceived in terms of the whole and not in terms of itself). It was given in connection with an irreal synthetic whole and the aim of the artist was to construct a whole of real tones that would enable this irreality to be manifested. So the painting should be conceived as a material thing visited
from time to time (every time that the spectator takes the imaging attitude) by an irreality that is precisely the painted object. What deceives us here is the real and sensual pleasure given by certain real colours on the canvas. Certain of Matisse’s reds, for example, provoke a sensual enjoyment in those that see them. But we must understand that this sensual enjoyment, if considered in isolation – for example, if it is provoked by a red actually given in nature – has nothing of the aesthetic. It is purely and simply a pleasure of the senses. But when, on the other hand, one grasps the red on the painting, one grasps it, despite everything, as making up part of an irreal whole, and it is in this whole that it is beautiful. For example, it is the red of a rug near a table. Besides, there is never pure colour. Even if the artist is concerned solely with the sensible relations between forms and colours, that artist will choose a rug precisely in order to increase the sensory value of the red: tactile elements, for example, must be intended through that red, it is a woollen red, because the rug is of woollen material. Without this ‘woollen’ characteristic of the colour, something would be lost. And certainly the rug is painted for the red that it justifies, and not the red for the rug. But if Matisse had chosen a rug rather than a dry and glossy sheet of paper, this is because of the voluptuous mixture that is constituted by the colour, the density, and the tactile qualities of the wool. Consequently, one can genuinely enjoy the red only in grasping it as red of the rug, and therefore as irreal. And what is strongest in the contrast with the green of the wall would be lost if that green were not precisely so stiff and shiny because it is the green of a wall covering. It is therefore in the irreal that the relations of colours and forms take on their true sense. And even when the objects depicted have their usual sense reduced to a minimum, as in cubist paintings, at least the painting is not flat. The forms that we grasp are certainly not the forms of a rug, a table or anything else that we ordinarily grasp in the world. Nevertheless, they have a density, a matter, a depth, they bear relations of perspective to one another. They are things. And precisely to the extent that they are things, they are irreals. One is accustomed, since cubism, to claiming that the painting need not represent or imitate the real, but should constitute an object in itself. This doctrine, as an aesthetic programme, is perfectly defensible and we owe a number of masterpieces to it. Still, it needs to be understood. If it means that the painting, although altogether devoid of signification, is nevertheless a real object, it commits a grave error. Certainly, it no longer represents nature. The real object no longer functions as an analogon for a bouquet of flowers or a clearing. But when I ‘contemplate’ it, I am not, for all that, in the realizing attitude. The painting still functions as an analogon. It is simply that what is manifested through it is an irreal ensemble of new things, of objects that I have never seen nor will ever see but that are nonetheless irreal objects, objects that do not exist in the painting, nor anywhere in the world, but that are manifested
through the canvas and that have seized it by a kind of possession. And it is
the ensemble of these irreal objects that I describe as beautiful. As for the
aesthetic enjoyment, it is real but is not grasped for itself, as produced by a
real colour: it is nothing but a manner of apprehending the irreal object and,
far from being directed on the real painting, it serves to constitute the
imaginary object through the real canvas. This is the source of the famous
disinterestedness of aesthetic vision. This is why Kant could say that it does
not matter whether or not the beautiful object, grasped as beautiful, is pro-
vided with existence; this is why Schopenhauer could speak of a kind of
suspension of the Will to Power. This does not come from some mysterious
way, that we are sometimes able to use, of apprehending the real. It is
simply that the aesthetic object is constituted and apprehended by an imaging
consciousness that posits it as irreal.

What we have just shown regarding painting can also be easily shown with
regard to the arts of fiction, poetry and drama. It goes without saying that the
novelist, the poet, the dramatist constitute irreal objects through verbal anal-
ogons; it also goes without saying that the actor who plays Hamlet makes
himself, his whole body, serve as an analogon for that imaginary person. This
even settles the famous discussion of the paradox of the actor. We know, in
fact, that certain authors insist that actors do not believe in their characters.
Others, on the contrary, emphasizing numerous testimonies, show us actors
taken with the play, victims in some way of the heroes they represent. It
appears to me that these two theses are not mutually exclusive: if one under-
stands by 'belief' the realizing thesis, it is evident that the actor does not posit
that he is Hamlet. But this does not signify that he is not entirely 'mobilized'
to produce Hamlet. He uses all his feelings, all his strength, all his gestures as
analogons of the feelings and conduct of Hamlet. But by this very fact he
irrealizes them. He lives entirely in an irreal world. And it matters little that he
really cries in playing the role. These tears, whose origin I have explained above
(see Part 4, § II), he grasps them himself – and the public with him – as the
tears of Hamlet, which is to say as an analogons of irreal tears. The transform-
ation that is made here is similar to that which I have discussed in the dream:
the actor is entirely gripped, inspired by the irreal. It is not that the character
is realized in the actor, but that the actor is irrealized in the character.¹

But are there not arts whose objects seem to escape irreality by their very
nature? A melody, for example, refers to nothing but itself. Is a cathedral not
simply that real mass of stone that dominates the surrounding rooftops? But
let us look more closely. I listen, for example, to a symphonic orchestra
interpreting Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony. Let us leave aside deviant cases,
which are anyway on the margins of aesthetic contemplation, as when I go
‘to hear Toscanini’ interpret Beethoven in his own way. As a general rule
what draws me to the concert is the desire ‘to hear the Seventh Symphony’.
Of course I may have some objection to hearing an amateur orchestra, I may have preferences for some conductor or other. But this is due to my naive desire to hear the Seventh Symphony ‘performed perfectly’, because the symphony will then be perfectly itself. The errors of a poor orchestra that play ‘too fast’, ‘too slow’, ‘in the wrong tempo’, etc., appear to me to conceal, to ‘betray’ the work they are interpreting. At best, the orchestra lets itself be eclipsed by the work it interprets and, if I have reason to be confident in the performers and their conductor, I will grasp myself as confronted by the Seventh Symphony itself, in person. Everyone will agree with me on that. But, now, what is the Seventh Symphony ‘in person’? It is evidently a thing, which is to say something that is before me, that resists, that endures. Of course, there is no further need to prove that this thing is a synthetic whole, that does not exist note by note but through large thematic ensembles. But is this ‘thing’ real or irreal? Let us first consider that I am listening to the Seventh Symphony. For me, this ‘Seventh Symphony’ does not exist in time, I do not grasp it as a dated event, as an artistic manifestation that unfurls in the Châtelet auditorium on 17 November 1938. If tomorrow or a week later I hear Furtwängler conduct another orchestra interpreting this symphony, I am once more in the presence of the same symphony. It is simply being played better or worse. Let us now examine how I listen to this symphony: some people shut their eyes. In that case they ignore the visual and dated event that is this interpretation; they abandon themselves only to pure sounds. Others stare at the orchestra or at the conductor’s back. But they do not see what they are looking at. This is what Revault d’Allonnes calls reflection with auxiliary fascination. In fact the auditorium, the conductor, and even the orchestra have all vanished. I am therefore confronted by the Seventh Symphony but on the express condition that I hear it nowhere, that I cease to think of the event as current and dated, and on the condition that I interpret the succession of themes as an absolute succession and not as a real succession that is unfurling while Pierre is, simultaneously, visiting one of his friends. To the extent that I grasp it, the symphony is not there, between those walls, at the tip of the violin bows. Nor is it ‘past’ as if I thought: this is the work that took shape on such a date in the mind of Beethoven. It is entirely outside the real. It has its own time, which is to say it possesses an internal time, which flows from the first note of the allegro to the last note of the finale, but this time does not follow another time that it continues and that happened ‘before’ the beginning of the allegro, nor is it followed by a time that would come ‘after’ the finale. The Seventh Symphony is in no way in time. It therefore entirely escapes the real. It is given in person, but as absent, as being out of reach. It would be impossible for me to act on it, to change a single note of it, or to slow its movement. Yet it depends, in its appearance, on the real: that the conductor does not faint, that a fire breaking out in the hall does not put a sudden stop to the
performance. Nor can we conclude that we would, in such a case, grasp the Seventh Symphony as interrupted. No, we would only think that the performance of the symphony stopped. Does one not clearly see that the performance of the Seventh Symphony is its analogon? It can be manifested only through analogons that are dated and that unfurl in our time. But in order to grasp it on these analogons, it is necessary to operate the imaging reduction, which is to say, apprehend precisely the real sounds as analogons. It is therefore given as a perpetual elsewhere, a perpetual absence. We must not picture it (as does Spandrell in Huxley’s Point Counter Point – as do so many Platonists) such that it exists in another world, in an intelligible heaven. It is not simply outside time and space – as are essences, for example: it is outside the real, outside existence. I do not really hear it, I listen to it in the imaginary. This is what explains the considerable difficulty that we always experience in passing from the ‘world’ of the theatre or of music to that of our everyday concerns. To tell the truth, there is no passage from one world to the other, there is a passage from the imaging attitude to the realizing attitude. Aesthetic contemplation is an induced dream and the passage to the real is an authentic awakening. We often speak of the ‘disappointment’ that accompanies the return to reality. But this does not explain why this discomfort exists, for example, after witnessing a realistic and cruel play; in that case, in fact, reality should be grasped as reassuring. In fact the discomfort is simply that of the sleeper on awakening: a fascinated consciousness, stuck in the imaginary is suddenly freed by the abrupt ending of the play, of the symphony, and suddenly regains contact with existence. Nothing more is needed to provoke the nauseous disgust that characterizes the realizing consciousness.

From these few remarks, one can already conclude that the real is never beautiful. Beauty is a value that can only ever be applied to the imaginary and that carries the nihilation of the world in its essential structure. This is why it is stupid to confuse the moral and the aesthetic. The values of the Good presume being-in-the-world, they aim at conduct in the real and are subject from the outset to the essential absurdity of existence. To say that one ‘takes’ an aesthetic attitude to life is to confuse the real and the imaginary. It happens, however, that we can take the attitude of aesthetic contemplation in the face of real objects or events. In that case, everyone can observe in themselves a kind of standing back from the object contemplated, which itself slides into nothingness. Starting from this moment, the object is no longer perceived; it functions as an analogon of itself, which is to say that an irreal image of what it is becomes manifested for us through its current presence. This image could be purely and simply the object ‘itself’ neutralized, nihilated, as when I contemplate a beautiful woman or the death at a bullfight; it could also be the imperfect and muddled appearance of what it could be through what it is, as when the painter grasps the harmony of two more intense, more
lively colours through the real spots encountered on a wall. In the same way, the object, given as behind itself, becomes untouchable, it is beyond our reach, and hence there arises a kind of painful disinterest in relation to it. It is in this sense that one can say: the extreme beauty of a woman kills the desire for her. In fact we cannot simultaneously place ourselves on the aesthetic plane with this irreal ‘herself’ that we admire and on the realizing plane of physical possession. In order to desire her it is necessary to forget that she is beautiful, since desire is a plunge into the heart of existence, into what is most contingent and most absurd. Aesthetic contemplation of real objects has the same structure as paramnesia, in which the real object functions as an analogon for itself in the past. But in one case there is nihilation and in the other there is pastification (passéification). Paramnesia differs from the aesthetic attitude as memory differs from imagination.