Engaging Husserl's Theory of Meaning for the Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures

SHAWN LOHT

Introduction

This article aims to engage Edmund Husserl's theory of meaning in *Logical Investigations*[1] in order to highlight some phenomenological dimensions of the question of meaning in the images of film and motion pictures. A related aim is to engage Husserl's theory of meaning for the purpose of illuminating the particular kind of intentionality involved in viewing film and motion pictures. In what follows, I want to suggest that Husserl's account of meaning has bearing both for meaning considered as an immanent feature of cinematic images or shots as such, and for the cumulative meaning that is generated by the editing of cinematic images into a work as a whole. In adopting a phenomenological approach, by discussing meaning and intentionality, I want to open up space to recast some of the classical thought in this debate into terms that describe film viewing explicitly from first-person experience. I want to highlight the occurrence of meaning in film images insofar as this is a subjectively experienced, cognitive, epistemic phenomenon. To clarify some of the terms I will be employing, by "film and motion pictures" and "cinema" and the "cinematic," I refer broadly to these following Carroll's taxonomy of "motion pictures."[2] However, I will be considering film and motion pictures with special emphasis on their constitution in shots and in works whose makeup consists in the editing together of shots. By the notion of "meaning," I follow Husserl in describing this concept according to the highest degree of generality. From a phenomenological standpoint, this entails describing meaning insofar as it comprises a feature of intentional consciousness, through which objects and states of affairs are intelligibly present. Therefore, in terms of discussing meaning in the images of film and motion pictures, my interest is not to take up particular kinds of meaning we often find in these media (e.g. constructed, referential, symbolic, cultural, etc.), but instead to engage Husserl's phenomenology of meaning as it comprises a foundation for notions of meaning in film and motion pictures as such. While a small body of scholarship has explored the relevance of Husserl's philosophy for the philosophy of film – most notably, the work of Allan Casebier[3] – the present work will add to this scholarship by concentrating on themes in Husserl's early work, predating his turn with *Ideas* toward idealism and transcendental phenomenology. The present work will also contribute to scholarship on Husserl's thought regarding "image consciousness" and "phantasy" by virtue of connecting this material to his earlier work in the *Investigations*.

What does Husserl Mean by "Meaning"?

The first of Husserl's six Logical Investigations illustrates the concept of meaning by examining its role in expression. On one hand, expressions have their seat in the words that carry them. A word can be merely "a verbal sound infused with sense," as Husserl puts it (*LI*, 281). This feature is exemplified with any word I can say aloud, such as "fire." "Fire" can just be a word I say without further implication. On the other hand, the mere words in an expression typically possess a phenomenological unity with the intuitive referent, or objective correlate, to which the expression corresponds. This is to say, the words are bound up with *what* they have to

communicate, where that *what* is usually something in the world that we can intuitively behold, or else something we can envision through imagination. "Meaning" here describes the mental act in which the word "fire" is linked to its intuitive referent, such as when a cook in a restaurant kitchen yells "Fire! Fire!" to alert the fellow staff that a fire is burning. As Husserl describes this phenomenon, "the expression is more than a merely sounded word. It *means* something, and insofar as it means something, it relates to what is objective" (*LI*, 280). Accordingly, Husserl describes the phenomenon of meaning in a twofold guise. "Meaning-intention" refers to an expression one makes with *mere* meaning, when the object is not before one, when it can only be understood schematically, as it were.[4] Whereas "meaning-fulfillment" names the act in which the object of the original expression is confirmed or illustrated (*LI*, 281). Overall, the crux of this distinction is that meaning is not a totally mental phenomenon. It does not simply live at the level of thought or expressed words; in its fullest form, meaning resides in the experience by which the meaning initially conferred in the expression is fulfilled, by the presence of the intended object or state of affairs. Nor is meaning simply read off of objects; rather, meaning is the "act" whereby the object of our meaning-intention becomes present to us as what it is (*LI*, 283). Thus, in the example from a restaurant kitchen, the kitchen staff experience the meaning conveyed by the shouts of "Fire!" by stopping what they are doing and looking up to see flames shooting from a frying vat, cognizing that there is indeed a fire.

Although Husserl's entry point into describing meaning focuses on meaning in expressions, in Investigation Six he observes the broader scope in which meaning can refer to any experience of intentionality mediating presence and absence. For intentionality can be imaginative, such that intentional states are often minded toward what is not present but still thought. The role of imagination was implicit in the discussion above, as one can have an intention that seeks fulfillment based on the immanent meaning of an expression, as in our example of someone nearby yelling "fire!" I may imaginatively envision a fire even though I have not discerned where it is. Alternately, my intentional state may be such that I imagine an absent object or state of affairs based simply on what is present to me. For example, if I am hiking through deep woods and low on water, the sound of a stream will likely cause me to imagine water nearby. In cases such as these, my meaning-intention is imaginative rather than "signitive" (*LI*, 669). Indeed, there need not be any signitive or verbal expression embedded in my meaning-intention. My meaning-intention that is imaginatively minded toward water can be correspondingly fulfilled if I do discover a running stream. Should I indeed discover the stream, an act of recognition occurs by which my imaginative picturing of water becomes united with the actual presence of water (*LI*, 689). My meaning-intention is intuitively fulfilled; I have before me what I was intentionally minding in its absence (*LI*, 694). On this phenomenon of my imaginative intention receiving fulfillment through the presence of my sought object, Husserl remarks "Talk about recognizing objects, and talk about fulfilling a meaning-intention, therefore express the same fact" (*LI*, 695). Or, as J.N. Mohanty observes, of particular note here is meaning-fulfillment seen as the foundation for knowledge. For knowledge originates not just in outward-directed thinking about something, but in apprehension of the object in its presence, in Husserl's locution, "meaning-fulfillment."[5]

The phenomenon I wish to highlight at this juncture lay in Husserl's observation that intentions, broadly construed, "provide the basis for relations of fulfillment" (*LI*, 699). In other words, it is inherent to intentional states to lay out their own conditions of fulfillment.[6] For instance, when I hear someone shout "fire!" the meaning-intention I experience through the exclamation seeks the conditions that will fulfill it. In such a case the fulfillment will be seeing flames burning as I am accustomed to see when a fire is present. As Rudolf Bernet observes on this score, a meaning-intention's relation to its fulfillment has a character of desire, not in the sense of wanting to possess the object, but to know it, by virtue of having it before one. Moreover, given that "complete" intuitive presence of an object is never possible, such having of an object is necessarily

an ideal.[7] On this note, Husserl observes that intentions that seek fulfillment can do so in an indefinite way, such that the potential fulfillment can be satisfied by a range of intuitive contents, so long as these enable a recognition of what one's intention sought (*LI*, 700). There are many instantiations of fire that can intuitively fulfill my meaning-intention of a fire occurring, as there are multiple ways my imaginative intention of a stream during hiking can be fulfilled. Nonetheless, it still remains the case that intentions predetermine their conditions of fulfillment.[8]

Husserl's account of the relationship between meaning and intentionality comes to a climax with the observation that this framework by and large characterizes perceptual, intentional experience as such.[9] He writes: "All perceiving and imagining is, on our view, a web of partial intentions" through which a unity of total intention is fused together, where "[t]he correlate of this last intention is the thing, while the correlate of its partial intentions are *the thing's parts and aspects*" (*LI*, 701). Perception and imagination have the character of being incomplete. They typically comprise intentions that are partially filled, and which anticipate yet other partial intentions that may furnish some fulfillment in turn.[10] A classical way of describing this phenomenon is the observation that we can never see the "back" of an object, like a building, when facing it from the front.[11] Rather, to see the back of a building, we must walk behind it, at which point we can no longer see the front. Furthermore, while perception and imagination are inherently acts that reach beyond themselves, toward both what is intuitively present and what is not, respectively, they are also additive and serial, often comprising in piecemeal fashion an intentional comprehension of a larger thing or a state of affairs. If I walk around the perimeter of a building I am seeing for the first time, my intentional comprehension of it in total will be additive and piecemeal in this way. And as I proceed, much of my vision of the building may still remain imaginative. For instance, if I try to imagine what it looks like inside (suppose it is an historic mansion), I may be able to formulate a mental picture of the interior layout from the constraints of the exterior design, or by looking through windows, but other aspects will remain unknown to me. In sum, my total intention is aimed toward the building itself, but this total intention is a product of multiple, partial intentions of the various components that comprise the building. To be sure, not all perceptual and imaginative states are this robust, as intentional states can often be static and lifeless, such as when I am falling asleep and blankly staring at the ceiling. In contrast, Husserl remarks, the more robust phenomenon of multiple partial intentions geared toward an overall object is typically occasioned when perception is "in flux, when it is spread out into a continuous series of percepts" (*LI*, 701).

Returning to Husserl's thesis on meaning as it pertains to these phenomena, the takeaway is that meaning is embodied in the beyond-reaching aspect of intentional consciousness by which one is minded toward things with an expectancy or anticipation of fulfillment. Meaning does not consist in the bare state of perception ("[p]erception is an act which determines but does not embody meaning" (*LI*, 684)), or merely in thought, but rather in the connection between meaning-intention and meaning-fulfillment, where one is able to make present what was intentionally absent. As Husserl crucially summarizes, the claim that all perceiving and imagining consist of a web of partial intentions illustrates how consciousness can "mean beyond itself" and have its meaning be fulfilled (*LI*, 701). Meaning lay in the interplay of the fulfilment-seeking and fulfillment- finding character of intentional consciousness as such.

In what follows, my overall goal is to highlight the way Husserl's account of meaning as centered in intentional consciousness underpins the experience of meaning in the viewing of film and motion pictures. Before getting to this topic, I wish to highlight some elements of what Husserl terms "image consciousness" in order to clarify how he envisions the peculiar sort of intentionality that characterizes the perception of pictures, photographs, and cinematic images. This side analysis will enable us to comprehend in more detail, in the framework sketched by the *Investigations*, the experience of meaning that is occasioned in the viewing of film and motion pictures.

Husserl on Image Consciousness

Husserl's various writings on image consciousness are collected in Volume XXIII of the collected works (*Husserliana*), published in English translation under the title *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory*.[12] Composed sporadically throughout Husserl's career, and consisting of lecture notes and unpublished studies, these texts do not comprise a unified view by any means; rather, they are perhaps best understood as different, complementary investigations of the phenomenology involved with the perception of images and pictures, and more broadly, the phenomenology of imagination. And although these writings span multiple decades, from both prior to the *Logical Investigations* and well after, I believe the main contours of Husserl's work on image consciousness are compatible with the positions laid out in the *Investigations* pertaining to the interplay of intentionality, intuition, imagination, and meaning. Where the *Investigations* describe basic features of intentional consciousness in very high degrees of generality, the writings on image consciousness simply explore a particular kind of intentionality. This last point echoes a view Husserl voices throughout his career, namely, that for every region and type of experience, there is a unique structure of intentional consciousness.[13]

By the term "image consciousness," Husserl simply means the capacity for seeing images. He understands it similarly to the concept of *phantasia* (commonly called "imagination") in Aristotle, where this faculty enables one to represent absent objects via images. Image consciousness for Husserl can take place through either physically present images, for which Husserl reserves the term "image consciousness" proper, or through "phantasy," the capacity for seeing images conjured through one's own imagination. Memory is a related phenomenon, as memory comprises the reproduction of previously experienced events in the form of images.

Decisive in Husserl's early writings on image consciousness, circa 1904-05, is the topic of the *constitution* of images, that is, the multi-leveled cognitive structure underlying the perception of images (*PICM*, 19-20 [18]). In this account, the constitution of images consists of three perceptual moments: the physical image, the image object, and the image subject (*PICM*, 21 [19]). The *physical image* is the material foundation, the physical thing in which the image occurs. In a painting, the physical image would be the canvas, pigment, and other physical media comprising the piece. The *image object* lay in the shapes, lines, or other visual cues that bear resemblance to a subject the viewer can recognize. A painted portrait will for instance contain outlines, contrasts of light and dark, and so forth, arranged in a way that conveys to the viewer similarity to a person's visage. Finally, the *image subject* is the matter of depiction, whatever is meant in the presentation (*PICM*, 19 [18]). Husserl specifies that one sees the image subject *in* the image object, where the image object allows one to behold the image subject intentionally (*PICM* 20, [18]). Accordingly, if I view a portrait of ex. Marcel Proust, while the visual features of the portrait, as image object, present to me a resemblance of Proust, it is as the image subject that I actually intend Proust the man.

A crucial feature of image consciousness for Husserl is the conflictual mediation occasioned in the tripartite structure of image constitution. The portrait I view in the museum is not merely a physical thing, but also contains an image object, in a fashion that these two dimensions are in tension without negating each other. I constitute the image object intentionally; it is an ideal object, different from the physical thing in which it occurs.[14] There are thus two different perceptual apprehensions, the first of something physically present, and the second a perception of an image object I know not to be present.[15] A second conflict lay in the fact that, as Husserl maintains, image objects do not *exist*; they are constituted with "the characteristic of unreality" (*PICM*, 51 [47]). Image objects are actually nothing more than the material in which they occur. Husserl describes that whereas image objects certainly appear, grounding the image subject's appearance *in* the image, image objects are an appearance of "a not now *in the now*" (*Ibid.*). As a result, image objects are not part of the real but instead are meant intentionally.[16] A third conflict distinguishes

the image object and the image subject. While the image object yields only one appearance, the viewing thereof involves two distinct apprehensions: an apprehension of a likeness, and one of the actual subject depicted (*PICM*, 29 [30-31]). Husserl observes the qualification that these two dimensions are inherent to image consciousness; we do not have an image if it does not both occasion the apprehension of resemblance *and* the apprehension of a subject.

Another theme Husserl treats in these writings that is of interest for our purpose is the character of *presence* or *reality* the subjects of images bear, where the subject seems to be directly before one. For example, if I were acquainted with Marcel Proust in real life, I might say that this portrait really captures his essence, or that it is *him*. A crucial qualifier of Husserl's later accounts of image consciousness, circa 1912 and onward, is the *attitude* in which the viewer regards the image subject's existence. In this account, image subjects can be viewed "positionally" or "nonpositionally." Husserl observes that every intentional state is positional or nonpositional in its comportment toward its object (*PICM,* 430-31 [358-59]). One either apprehends the subject while also positing its existence, or else one views the subject in a "neutralized," non-judging stance toward its existence. For instance, when I look at a photograph of my son and notice his freckles or the crack in his smile, my intentional consciousness of him and of these features is positional. I am comported toward him insofar as he exists. Whereas my viewing the picture of a fictionalized Prince Hamlet on the cover of my Arden Shakespeare copy of *Hamlet* includes a nonpositional intention of the image subject Hamlet. I am minded toward Hamlet while abstaining from a judgment on whether he exists. Nonetheless, regarding image subjects perceived in the nonpositional attitude, Husserl observes that one's judgments about these image subjects also still hold good when they remain under the governance of this original attitude. One can still comport oneself toward fictional and thus nonposited image subjects and states of affairs as if they are actual within the intentional nexus in which they appear (*PICM*, 486 [413], 537 [452]). One can make sense of the contents of images just as one does with those in real life (*PICM*, 554 [465-66]). For instance, if I view the painting "Nighthawks" by Edward Hopper – a painting that depicts individuals sitting around a late-night bar in an urban streetscape – I can make defensible judgments about who these people are, their backgrounds, what they are eating and drinking, and what they are talking or thinking about, just as I would in a real-life instance of watching such a scene. The difference in my intentionality toward the scene in the painting versus a real scene is that my overall attitude in viewing the painting's subject is nonpositional.

Perhaps the most robust formulation of Husserl's that speaks to our present interest occurs in Husserl's writings on image consciousness circa 1917-18. In this later work, Husserl eschews image consciousness in terms of representation*,* focusing instead on the occurrences in which image consciousness can take the form of "perceptual phantasy" or "immediate imagination." Yet, the paradoxical nature of this locution reflects the cognitive tension with which Husserl still understands image consciousness in this mature view.[17] In perceptual phantasy, one directly perceives entities in a fashion such that their outward, phantastical look is *self-constituted*. Perceptual phantasy is thus a mode where the image subject readily presents itself in a phantastic guise, without additional contribution on the viewer's part. Imagination is thus "immediate."[18] An exemplar instance for Husserl is theatrical performance. The viewer of a stage play does not view it through representative image consciousness, as if the actual characters and events were happening somewhere else, with the stage players, set, and props merely representing the actual ones. Perceptual phantasy is an intentional mode in which one perceives the image subjects, for instance Prince Hamlet and his mother Gertrude, in an "as if" attitude. Or as Husserl puts it in these later texts, I "quasi-perceive" them; I do not look at the actor and hold that he "represents" or "depicts" the true Hamlet. Husserl comments that in the case of theatrical performance, we enter a *world* of perceptual phantasy (*PICM,* 616 [514-15]). The presentative, illusory aspect of the play is temporarily concealed, while a self-constituting productivity emerges. This state of perceptual

phantasy is possible precisely because we can take the entire image world as "null," as annulled with respect to reality (*PICM,* 618 [516]). An upshot of this later account regarding perceptual phantasy in distinction to the earlier account of the positionality or nonpositionality of the viewer's attitude is that the former emphasizes the immersive, world-fostering character of certain instantiations of image consciousness. It illuminates the aspect of some encounters with art that enact self-creating worlds, where the actual world disappears for a time and the immediately imagined world becomes seemingly real unto itself. Similarly, the account of perceptual phantasy also speaks to the relative disappearance of the *medium* in which images appear, where the image subject and its world appear as if they are directly before us. Regarded as "immediate imagination," the phenomenon of perceptual phantasy occurs without explicit mediation between the vehicle housing the image subject, and the image subject itself.

In the next section, I return to discussing Husserl's account of meaning and intentionality, particularly as these pertain to the meaning bound up with the images of film and motion pictures. Before transitioning to that discussion, I want to highlight some key points of relevance for the philosophy of film and motion pictures that are borne out of Husserl's various accounts of image consciousness. Looking at his earliest material on this subject, it is persuasive that the tripartite model of physical image–image object–image subject comfortably applies to the images afforded by film and motion pictures. For these media consist of a physical image, in the materiality of the screen or surface upon which cinematic images appear. The "image objects" of film and motion pictures, namely, the arrangements of light and color appearing on a two-dimensional surface situated in my spatiotemporal proximity, clearly occasion resemblance to things known in real life. And perhaps most crucially, the "image subjects" of film and motion pictures (such as people and places) clearly rely on the viewer's seeing them "in" the image objects. Thus, I become intentionally comported toward New York's Empire State Building, qua image subject, when I see it "in" the image object fostered by the familiar outline of the building in Andy Warhol's *Empire*. In general, the takeaway point is that I can intentionally behold the image subject in a film as this or that object, person, etc., by virtue of this phenomenological dimension of intentional experience. Just as it is a phenomenological feature of image consciousness for one to be able to see an image subject through the vehicle of a resembling, guiding image object, it is likewise salient to hold that the intentional consciousness afforded by films and motion pictures grants seeing one thing through another.[19] One might contrast this to theses of photographic "transparency" or "realism" according to which viewing the image subject of a film equates to seeing the actual thing. In the light I have discussed here, rather, at issue is a type of intentionality directed toward the object in its absence[20] – a species of meaning-intention in the vocabulary of the *Logical Investigations* – making it present to thought amidst the awareness that it is not present.

Husserl's later accounts of image consciousness in terms of positionality and nonpositionality, and "perceptual phantasy" or "immediate imagination," in contrast, are important for my present purpose in a different way. Foremost of interest in this material for the philosophy of film and motion pictures is the dimension in which these media exemplify the human ability to engage in perception that takes the perceived subjects as real, or which otherwise regards these as real in the imaginative world where they exist. Fictional film and television media particularly benefit from this aspect of Husserlian image consciousness by virtue of their ability to convey immersive worlds that unfold in a self-generating guise, in which the people and places depicted appear to be real and hermeneutically consistent with the actual world. And when cinematic media present entities, ideas, and the like that are patently unreal or nonexistent (as in e.g. fantasy series such as *Game of Thrones* (various directors, 2011–2019)), we are able to continue meaningful viewing with the questionable or doubted existences as annulled with respect to reality. Especially in viewing fictional cinema, we often do not stop to make an explicit judgment on whether the matter of depiction exist; we simply perceive what is in front of us automatically, bracketing

questions about the reality of what we are seeing. Our imagination works immediately. Likewise, the experience of viewing film and motion pictures is such that *we do not typically stop to behold* the conflictual, tripartite dimension of our image consciousness Husserl describes in his earlier work, though such consciousness is inevitably at work from a cognitive standpoint.

With all of these parallels in mind, one still might ask about the particular kind of intentionality that underlies viewing film and motion pictures. What specifically differentiates the images of film and motion pictures from the general types of images Husserl groups under image consciousness? While Husserl gives little for us to go on in terms of comprehending how he might describe the image consciousness involved specifically with film and motion pictures, there are some items we can look to for clues. Following John Brough, it seems safe to assume that Husserl envisions the images of film to be largely coextensive with everyday audiovisual perception, but with the qualification that film images are specifically regarded in an as–if, phantastical attitude.[21] In this guise, to behold something in a film is in large part to behold it perceptually, as if it were really in front of one, within the audiovisual confines a film allows, albeit with the equal qualification that one knows one is viewing a film image.[22] Thus, the intentionality of film viewing involves perception, but is not simply perception.[23] Yet the sensory content of cinematic images is similar to and derivative from the sensory content of ordinary perception.[24] One's perception of the content of cinematic images still involves the consitutions of objects in analogous fashion to audiovisual object constitution in real life.[25] Similarly, in the passages where Husserl himself speaks most explicitly regarding the makeup of film or motion pictures, the overall thrust for our purposes is that he understands the medium to allow for perceptual experiences to be replayed by virtue of the medium's capacity for preservation and repeatability. In one passage, Husserl makes a comparison to hearing music, where repeated performances allow one to discern the same melody. More crucially, he suggests that one's intentional state can be such that the events depicted in cinematic images appear as if they were really happening.[26] In sum, he seems to understand the perception involved with film and motion pictures as mimicking or copying ordinary audiovisual perception. On this note, although there are important differences, Husserl's position is related to Vivian Sobchack's phenomenological account of the analogy between film images and the state of audiovisual perception. In Sobchack's thesis, film images comprise a "viewed view" whereby the viewer views the contents of the filmmaker's embodied state of vision.[27] In sum, then, I suggest we regard the intentionality of film and motion pictures in a similar mould, where the perception of images of this medium comprises experiencing a copy or imitation of everyday audiovisual consciousness.[28]

Finally, the strongest claim I want to leverage from the material discussed so far concerns how the concept of meaning from the *Logical Investigations* might square with the explorations on image consciousness and perceptual phantasy in film and motion pictures. Looking back at the *Investigations*, I suggest that the immediate, reality-directed character of film viewing qua the perceptual phantasy-variety of image consciousness can be read in conjunction with Husserl's theory of meaning. In other words, insofar as perceptual phantasy in Husserl's account involves perceiving, intending, or meaning an imaginary subject as if it were real, I suggest that there is a natural continuity here with the basic features of meaning and intentionality discussed above, given that these are also grounded in the world of real, first-person experience.

Film Viewing in the Context of Husserl's Theory of Meaning

My interest in what follows is to highlight the relevance of Husserl's account of meaning and intentionality in the way that these lend phenomenological clarity to issues of meaning and cognition in the *images*, or shots, of film and motion pictures. First, the intentionality involved with the viewing of film and motion pictures at the most basic level begins with one's meaning-intention upon viewing the shot. When I view a film shot, I perceive the subject(s) positioned in

the shot. I also typically perceive a surrounding context, such as a foreground or background, and perhaps the *mise en scene*. I may become intentionally minded toward who or what the subjects are, or what they are doing, or how they relate to their surroundings. And so forth. The point to emphasize in Husserlian terms is the partial, complementary nature of the various intentions at play as I perceive the shot. These partial intentions assemble themselves into a total, though not necessarily complete intentional state. For instance, in viewing Andy Warhol's single-shot film *Empire*, I might become intentionally minded toward not just the visage of the Empire State Building, but also the New York skyline, the weather, and the state of daylight. As I continue my engagement with the shot, I may become more or less intentionally aware of other things present or implicit in the shot, adding to the aggregate of partial intentions I am assembling in service of a total intentional picture. However, as we know, *Empire* is a film consisting of a single shot taken from a stationary camera. As such, it is bound to leave the viewer with primarily static meaning-intention, given that the viewing material afforded by the single continuous shot does not lead to subsequent fulfillment on its own. For me to achieve subsequent fulfillment, I might need to visit the building, or read a book about it.[29] *Empire* does not provide other shots that can complete or add to one's intentional comprehension. Thus, one is never able to see behind the building, or around it, or what is contained inside. In this regard, the "meaning," in Husserl's sense, that one can derive from viewing the film's continuous shot is going to be identical with the static meaning- intention occasioned by this viewing.

But we know that film and motion pictures also by and large consist of shots assembled together through editing, with one shot following another shot, often with some thematic, narrative, or hermeneutic connection linking them. And this occurrence typically plays out in a fashion where the sum of all of the work's shots supports comprehension of it as a cohesive whole. A question in classical film theory as well as in the philosophy of film and motion pictures regards the mechanism or causality with which the film viewer makes the cognitive transition from shot-to-shot. This question concerns what enables the viewer cognitively to connect one shot to the next, such that there is a discernable and justifiable logic of meaning. As Carroll has observed, because this occurrence has a communicative element, with the shot chains of films typically "communicating" a narrative, theme, or message, film theorists have sought ways to account for film editing as a kind of "language."[30] Apposite about Husserl's account of meaning and intentionality *vis-a-vis* the composition of films in edited shot chains is the repeated play of meaning- intention and meaning-fulfillment that the shot-to-shot transition occasions. For while an isolated shot, as we have observed, itself principally contains meaning for the viewer at the level of static, unfulfilled meaning-intention, subsequent shots offer opportunity for fulfillment. In other words, the transition from one shot's initial meaning-intention affords the possibility for meaning-fulfillment (even if only partially) in the next shot or shots to come later. And as a film proceeds, each transition to a new shot or shot chain likewise contributes further fulfillment to the series of meaning-intentions that precede them. The beginning sequences of narrative films furnish helpful illustration here, given that an opening sequence will typically occur without prior context. For a simple illustration, one might consider the opening shots of *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), which begins with an establishing shot of a cityscape, followed by progressively more focused shots within the cityscape, eventually focusing on a single building, and ending with a scene-establishing shot of a hotel room inside this building, where two people are present. The hotel room scene provides meaning-fulfillment to the meaning-intentions afforded in the previous shots. The fulfillment furnished by the shot inside the hotel room fulfills one's initial meaning-intentions, regarding what is happening in this cityscape and in these buildings and in this particular building. Similarly, the shots leading up to the shot of the hotel room progressively lend fulfillment to the ones previous, by virtue of the progressive focus of each successive shot of the cityscape. For a more complex example, consider the opening scene of *Once Upon a Time in the West*

(Sergio Leone, 1968). This shot chain, which plays amidst the rolling of this film's opening titles, contains several shots occurring without dialogue and depicting unnamed men hanging around different parts of what appears to be a railroad depot in a remote outpost of the American frontier. The edits transition between shots of these men and various elements of the setting, including a water wheel, a telegraph machine, a pesky fly, and a leaky roof. We are able to gain a sense of what each man is up to, as the shots transition between initially establishing the character, shots contextualizing each man's scene placement, and eventually shots returning to each man, fulfilling that initial glimpse of meaning. Various auditory sounds also connect shots during these transitions, including the sound of the creaky water wheel that is heard alternately from close up and far away, and the buzzing of a fly, heard across multiple shots, that lands on one of these men as he waits in ambush position. These auditory connections linking the shots can be said to have a character of meaning-intention and subsequent fulfillment just as the visual image content. Eventually, it becomes evident that the men are waiting for something or someone; among other things, we see that they were prepared for a firefight when one breaks out. Again, the point to observe in Husserlian terms is that each shot, building from the first, offers at once some fulfillment of the meaning-intentions of the previous, while adding to a cumulative intentional sum of partial fulfillments. With the example at hand, the meaning- intentions afforded by the shots comprising this opening sequence of *Once Upon a Time in the West* add up to provide a total intention of a scene. And to be sure, this cumulative, aggregating structure may build, climax, and restart, as we see in the conclusion of *Once Upon a Time in the West*'s opening scene, which ends with a train arrival, a firefight, and the introduction of the "Harmonica" character, played by Charles Bronson. Finally, similar structures are easily observable in films as wholes, for instance with the famous last word of Kane in *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), "Rosebud," which is spoken at the film's start. It takes the entire duration of the film for the viewer to find fulfillment of this initial, mysterious word, yet this fulfillment ostensibly occurs. The meaning of "Rosebud" is fulfilled during the film's final sequence when a shot depicts a child's snow sled thrown into a fire as Kane's possessions are burned. The name "Rosebud" is etched on the sled. This example shows not only a case of an initially "signitive" or verbal meaning-intention receiving fulfilment with an image at the film's end. The example of "Rosebud" also illustrates how the viewer's meaning-intentional state can hold itself over indefinitely, as it were, awaiting prospective fulfilment as the entire film plays. And certainly there are films (such as e.g. *Rashomon* (Akira Kurosawa, 1950)) where such a final fulfillment never comes, leaving the film's narrative an open-ended series of meaning-intentions and partial fulfillments.

To be sure, film and motion picture media will exhibit countlessly varying degrees of the intention-fulfillment structures I have briefly described in the preceding examples. However, in summary, I suggest that the features of film and motion pictures I have analyzed here are *descriptive* traits of the film-viewing experience, predicated on the forward-, outward-looking character of perceptual, intentional consciousness. As Husserl observes, all perception consists of empty, fulfillment-seeking states of meaning, and alternately, it consists of states of meaning in which the former are fulfilled. To reiterate a quotation from Husserl cited in the first section above: all perception and imagination are a web of partially filled intentions. And these partial intentions often add together to build a total state of meaning. Thus, in the Husserlian framework, the construction of meaning on part of the film viewer is derivative from the nature of intentional consciousness, particularly its propensity to seek fulfillment for its states of meaning- intention. So by engaging Husserl's theory of meaning and the intentional structures it involves, we have effectively highlighted a phenomenological underpinning to the experience of meaning-building in the viewing of a film.

As a coda, I wish to highlight some of the ways that the Husserlian themes I have discussed have bearing for broader issues of meaning and interpretation in the philosophy of film and

motion pictures. Given the limitations of space, my summary will simply provide an outline of avenues for exploration. We have observed that meaning for Husserl consists of the dimensions of meaning-intention and meaning-fulfillment. Meaning is an act whereby one is either minded toward or else present with an object or state of affairs. Meaning as experienced in the images of film and motion pictures is thus predicated on one's being intentionally minded toward the objects or states of affairs made present in these, and where these objects and states of affairs presence themselves in an "as-if" guise of perceptual phantasy or immediate imagination. From this standpoint, meaning is not a quality of the cinematic image, but instead, realized intentionally with and through the cinematic image. Meaning in the viewing of film and motion pictures is therefore a phenomenon that occurs in first-person subjectivity.

In order to appreciate the thrust of this observation, consider the classical position of Roger Scruton regarding the lack of representative meaning in photographic pictures. Scruton holds that photographic images do not have representative meaning in their own right, or putting it simply, they do not "represent." Rather, Scruton holds, while the *subjects* of a film-photographic image may provoke aesthetic interest or suggest a meaning, there is nothing inherent to photographic images as such from which meaning can be derived.[31] This position suggests for the philosophy of film and motion pictures a parallel indication that images in these media cannot represent or convey meaning in their own right; meaning will at most consist in things like set design, lighting, acting, and other items depicted by the image. Noteworthy about Scruton's position *vis-à-vis* what I have discussed to this point is that Scruton treats meaning as if it were a property that could belong to the object on its own. Whereas in the Husserlian model I have sketched, meaning does not inhere in the object beheld, but instead, in the intentional consciousness of the viewer. In this guise, intentional consciousness is the conditioning locus for any meaning to be realized through a photograph, or through anything else. Moreover, in the view I have defended, meaning in film and motion picture images is also mediated through the alternating intentional steps of intention and fulfillment. The model I have described supposes a context of intentional consciousness in which intentions are fulfillment- seeking. Thus, the meaning afforded through the images of film-viewing occurs through this structure. From this perspective, meaning is not a feature of lone cinematic images, but rather, a dynamic act realized through the flow of images and shot chains. Moreover, my position has bearing not only for an argument such as Scruton's, which seeks to deny meaning to images of photography and its cousins, but also for philosophical views that ascribe an exaggerated sense of meaning to cinematic images. On this last, I am thinking of the Cavellian-Bazinian school, in which the film camera's subject is sometimes said to be "transfigured," achieving a special status of meaning, by virtue of appearing in a cinematic image. As with my rejoinder to Scruton, I would suggest that the phenomenological underpinning of meaning's intentional structure has application here.

Finally, I would emphasize that the position I have defended, while focusing principally on cognitive, epistemic dimensions of meaning in film viewership, should complement questions about the *kinds* of meaning that are possible in film and motion pictures. By this latter notion, I mean the different *types* of meaning (ex. referential, narrative, symbolic, cultural) film critics often observe in these works. While the specific types of meaning afforded by film and motion pictures ostensibly transcend the framework I have sketched here, I would suggest that the phenomenological account of meaning I have adapted from Husserl is a crucial component of the first-person, subjective underpinning of the various types of meaning that can occur cinematically. I would make the same case about broader questions regarding how film meaning occurs, for instance, whether it is viewer-"constructed," and how to account for filmmaker intention.[32]

Baton Rouge Community College, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

Notes

[1] Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Books, 2000). Cited hereafter in paranthetical references as *LI*.

[2] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (Malden: Wiley–Blackwell, 2008), Chapter 3. According to Carroll, who prefers the term "motion pictures," the ontology of motion pictures is defined by the joint conditions of a two-dimensional array; whose matter of depiction is both spatiotemporally distinct from me, and capable of showing motion; whose token instances are identical with their type; and whose performances are identical with their type.

[3] Allan Casebier, *Film and Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Aside from focusing on Husserl's work circa *Ideas I*, Casebier's text predates publication of Husserl's writings on phantasy, image consciousness, and memory, missing out on crucial texts that would have altered the theorical landscape significantly. For more recent scholarship, see the special issue of *Studia Phaenomenologica*, XVI (2016), which treats the subject of Film and Phenomenology.

[4] Peter Simons, "Meaning and Language," in *The Cambridge Companion Husserl*, ed. Barry Smith and David Woodruff Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 110.

[5] J.N. Mohanty, *Husserl's Theory of Meaning*, Second Edition (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969), 37–38.

[6] *Ibid.*, 69.

[7] Rudolf Bernet, "Desiring to Know Through Intuition," *Husserl Studies* 19 (2003): 156-57.

[8] Mohanty, *Husserl's Theory of Meaning*, 47.

[9] *Ibid.*, 41.

[10] *Ibid.*, 46.

[11] Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17-18.

[12] Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898-1925)*, trans. John B. Brough (Dordrect: Springer, 2005). Hereafter cited in paranthetical references as *PICM*.

[13] Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 16.

[14] Peter Shum, "The Evolution and Implications of Husserl's Account of the Imagination," *Husserl Studies* 31 (2015): 217.

[15] Regina–Nino Mion, "Husserl and Cinematographic Depictive Images," *Studia Phaenomeologica* XVI (2016): 272.

[16] Shum, "The Evolution and Implications of Husserl's Account of the Imagination," 217.

[17] *Ibid.*, 218.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] Robert Sokolowski, *Husserlian Meditations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 23, 25.

[20] *Ibid.*, 24.

[21] John B. Brough, Translator's Introduction to Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory*, XXXVIII. Also see John B. Brough, "Seeing and Showing: Film as Phenomenology," in *Art and Phenomenology*, ed. Joseph B. Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 192-93.

[22] Sokolowski, *Husserlian Meditations*, 24.

[23] Shum, "The Evolution and Implications of Husserl's Account of the Imagination," 218.

[24] Sokolowksi, *Husserlian Meditations*, 23, 25; Shum, "The Evolution and Implications of Husserl's Account of the Imagination," 218.

[25] Sokolowksi, *Husserlian Meditations*, 25.

[26] "It pertains to an image object that the depictive image, understood as image object, has a 'being' that persists and abides. This persisting, this remaining unchanged, does not mean that the image object is unchanging; indeed, it can be a depictive cinematograhic image…. If I let a cinematographic presentation run off repeatedly, then (in relation to the subject) the image object in the How of its modes of appearance itself is given as identically the same image object or as identically the same mode of appearance. This is also true, of course, when I make a piano piece play for me several times on a mechanical apparatus" (*PICM*, 645-46 [546]). "A stereoscopic, cinematographic semblance stands before me. 1) At first I lose myself in as-if contemplation; I contemplate the events as if they were actually happening. This is neutrality consciousness (phantasying). 2) Taking a position, I posit the semblance image as reality, as 'what is seen' in this quasi-seeing" (*PICM* 692 [574]). For additional commentary, see Claudio Rozzoni, "Cinema Consciousness: Elements of a Husserlian Approach to Film Image," *Studia Phaenomenologica* XVI (2016): 301ff.

[27] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3-14, 23-24, 56-57; more recently, see Vivian Sobchack, "The Active Eye (Revisited)," *Studia Phaenomenologica* XVI (2016): 63-90.

[28] One may also consider for further insight the web of relationships Husserl describes within which image consciousness operates in the principal subjects of the writings on phantasy, image consciousness, and memory. Given that memory and phantasy are both derivative from everyday intentional consciousness, and given the propensity of cinematic media to play and replay experiences similarly to memory and phantasy, it is fitting to hold that film viewing comprises a brand of intentionality somewhere between memory and phantasy, and which involves a degree of recording and communication of everyday audiovisual perception.

[29] Shum, "The Evolution and Implications of Husserl's Account of the Imagination," 216.

[30] For a survey of views, see Noël Carroll, "Toward a Theory of Film Editing," in *Theorizing the Moving Image*, ed. Noël Carroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 403-420.

[31] Roger Scruton, "Photography and Representation," *Critical Inquiry* 7(3) (1981): 577-603.

[32] For surveys on types and mechanisms of meaning in film and motion pictures, see Berys Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Chapter 4; George Wilson, "Interpretation," in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, ed. Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (London: Routledge, 2009), 162-72.

Works Cited

Bernet, Rudolf. "Desiring to Know Through Intuition." *Husserl Studies* 19 (2003). 153-66. Brough, John B. "Seeing and Showing: Film as Phenomenology." In Joseph B. Parry, ed. *Art and Phenomenology*. 192-214. Abingdon: Routledge, 2010.

Carroll, Noël. *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.

_____."Toward a Theory of Film Editing." In Noël Carroll, ed., *Theorizing the Moving Image*. 403-20. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Casebier, Allan. *Film and Phenomenology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Gaut, Berys. *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Husserl, Edmund. *Logical Investigations*. Translated by J.N. Findlay. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Books, 2000.

_____. *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory, 1898-1925*. Translated by John B. Brough. Dordrecht: Springer, 2005.

Mion, Regina-Nino. "Husserl and Cinematographic Depictive Images." *Studia Phaenomeologica* XVI (2016). 269-94.

Mohanty, J.N. *Husserl's Theory of Meaning*. Second Edition. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969.

Rozzoni, Claudio. "Cinema Consciousness: Elements of a Husserlian Approach to Film Image." *Studia Phaenomenologica* XVI (2016). 295-324.

Scruton, Roger. "Photography and Representation." *Critical Inquiry* 7(3) (1981). 577-603.

Shum, Peter. "The Evolution and Implications of Husserl's Concept of the Imagination." *Husserl Studies* 31 (2015). 213-36.

Simons, Peter. "Meaning and Language." In Barry Smith and David Woodruff Smith, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*. 106-37. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Sobchack, Vivian. *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

_____. "The Active Eye (Revisited)," *Studia Phaenomenologica* XVI (2016): 63-90. Sokolowski, Robert. *Husserlian Meditiations*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974.

_____. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Wilson, George. "Interpretation." In Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*. 162-72. London: Routledge, 2009.

Zahavi, Dan. *Husserl's Phenomenology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.