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The Realms of Fantasy: Aristotle on the Phenomenality of Mental Imagery

Pia Campeggiani

Abstract

This chapter explores the sensorimotor dimension and experiential character of the cognitive power of *phantasia* in Aristotle's psychology. The author puts forward two main claims. The first is that *phantasia* may be understood as a capacity for experiential (re)-enactment and *phantasmata*, *qua* instances of actualization of the power of *phantasia*, as (phenomenally) *off-line sensory experiences* that (physically) consist in *patterns of bodily activation*. More specifically, the author argues that, insofar as they are bodily changes, *phantasmata* are *sensorimotor instructions* for re-enacting past experiences (e.g. when we remember) or enacting possible, fictitious, or oneiric ones (e.g. in anticipation, imagination, and dreams). Experiencing a *phantasma* can, therefore, be described as enacting given patterns of motor behaviour and receiving the corresponding sensory feedback. The second claim is that, when interpreting Aristotle's *phantasmata*, any distinction between format and content falls victim to the problem of naturalizing content. One way to get around the obstacle, the author suggests, is to give up the idea of *phantasmata* as content-bearing structures and understand them as dispositional embodied procedures that, when actualized, are tinged with phenomenality.

This volume explores processes of the imagination in Classical Athens, conceived as a wide set of relations between the mind, the body, and the world; these relations, and reflections upon them, are mediated by texts and images before the emergence of a scientific vocabulary. My own chapter takes a different, but complementary, approach, examining the sensorimotor dimension and experiential character of the cognitive power of *phantasia* in Aristotle's psychology. My

analysis resonates with the more cultural concerns of other chapters,¹ and it suggests connections between the embodied psychology of Classical Athens and contemporary cognitive science.

In the first section (Psychophysiology), I offer an analysis of *phantasia* in embodied and phenomenal terms. The main claim I put forward is that *phantasia* may profitably be understood as a capacity for experiential (re)-enactment and *phantasmata*, *qua* instances of actualization of the power of *phantasia*, as (phenomenally) *off-line sensory experiences* that (physically) consist in *patterns of bodily activation*. More specifically, I argue that insofar as they are bodily changes, *phantasmata* are *sensorimotor instructions* for re-enacting past experiences (e.g. when we remember) or enacting possible, fictitious, or oneiric ones (e.g. in anticipation, imagination, and dreams). Experiencing a *phantasma* can, therefore, be described as enacting given patterns of motor behaviour and receiving the corresponding sensory feedback. Depending on the cognitive activity one is engaged in (whether one is remembering, dreaming, imagining, and so on) and even though sensory character is what all instances of *phantasia* have in common, there are major phenomenal differences in attention, volition, and action potential that distinguish each of the experiences by which *phantasia* is involved. In the second section (Content), I take issue with the representationalist interpretation of the relation between the physical and the phenomenal dimension of *phantasmata*. My main claim here is that, in interpreting Aristotle's *phantasmata*, any distinction between format and content falls victim to the problem of naturalizing content. One way to get round the obstacle, the one I suggest, is to give up the idea of *phantasmata* as content-bearing structures and understand them as dispositional embodied procedures that, when actualized, are tinged with phenomenality.

I. Introduction

‘Imagination’ as speakers of English typically understand it, that is, as the creative capacity to invent images, similitudes, analogies, and so on,² is only one of the many functions of the cognitive power that Aristotle calls *phantasia*.³ Aristotle has creative imagination in mind when, at *De anima* 427b17–24, he distinguishes *phantasia* from belief (*doxa*) on the basis that the former is ‘up to us, whenever we wish’ (ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἐστίν, ὅταν βουλώμεθα). Belief is subject to truth constraints (that is, it is either true or false) and, as a consequence of this, one cannot believe what one believes to be false, just as one cannot disbelieve what one believes to be true. On the other hand, when one voluntarily engages in an act of imagination, truth constraints do not apply. They do not apply objectively, because there is no requirement for imagined content to correctly correspond to any state of affairs; and they do not apply subjectively, because imagination does not require the subject to be convinced that the imagined content is true. Aristotle explicitly refers to this subjective aspect later in the text, where he claims that belief involves *pistis* while *phantasia* does not (*De an.* 428a18–23). In this context, he is thinking of *phantasia* in its broad sense, as the ability to conceive entities, situations, and narratives that are not physically present or even real, as proved by his reference to nonhuman animals (who are capable of *phantasia* even if incapable of *logos* and *pistis*).⁴ As for creative imagination, however, he indirectly makes the same point by means of the observation that one’s emotional reactions to what one believes differ from those that one has to what one imagines: in the first case, one reacts immediately; in the second case, one reacts in the same way as when one looks at something in a picture (thus, presumably, less intensely).⁵ Such difference seems to depend on one’s serious commitment to one’s beliefs (‘believing *x*’ entails ‘believing that *x* is true’) as opposed to a non-committal attitude in the activity of imagination.

In what follows, however, I shall not focus on the power of creative imagination, but rather on the multiple ways *phantasia* is discharged in dreams, memories, anticipations, and so on.

Aristotle is relatively clear as regards what *phantasia* is for: it is required by or involved in cognitive activities as numerous and as diverse as experiencing emotional reactions,⁶ having desires,⁷ moving through space and performing actions,⁸ having memories,⁹ forming expectations,¹⁰ thinking abstractly,¹¹ imagining,¹² dreaming,¹³ having a perceptual impression that is reasonably trustworthy, but which one has not thought through,¹⁴ supposing what an imprecisely perceived object might be,¹⁵ and forming or being under perceptual impressions that contradict true beliefs.¹⁶

But what exactly is *phantasia*? And what are its products, the experiential instances of its exercise and actualization that Aristotle calls *phantasmata*?¹⁷ Aristotle's comments on this are scattered throughout the corpus. The only explicit treatment he offers is to be found, as one would expect, in the *De anima*, but here, as opposed to what he does for the other activities of the soul, he defines *phantasia* mainly *ex negativo*, by emphasizing what it is not and how it differs from *aisthēsis*, *hypolēpsis*, and other cognitive processes. The ongoing debate shows that it has not been possible to reach a consensus on a number of crucial issues regarding the power of *phantasia* and how it is actualized. Even the few points on which scholars agree are interpreted in different and often incompatible ways. For example, everybody agrees that *phantasia* is very closely connected with *aisthēsis*, but its role in perceptual activity has been widely debated, leading to diverse interpretations ranging from the equation of *phantasia* with perceptual awareness¹⁸ to its illustration as only concerned with non-paradigmatic sensory experiences.¹⁹ Scholars also generally agree that *phantasia* is best understood in representationalist terms.²⁰ However, while some interpreters explain the format of fantastic

representations in terms of images,²¹ others acknowledge that Aristotle's understanding of *phantasmata* is not limited to visual imagery but encompasses all sense modalities.²² Various non-imagistic interpretations have also been developed, ranging from positions more similar to contemporary propositionalism to views that echo analogue theory and isomorphism.²³

A full reconstruction of Aristotle's theory of *phantasia* cannot be attempted here, nor is it possible to provide readers with a complete account of the current scholarly debate on the subject.²⁴ Instead, some specific questions about *phantasia* and *phantasmata* will lead us through the exploration of one aspect in particular, that is, their sensorimotor dimension and experiential character. These questions can be grouped under two main headings:

- PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGY: What are *phantasmata* in embodied terms? And how do they feature in our subjective experience? To answer this question, we shall read closely Aristotle's discussion of the relation between *phantasia* and *aisthēsis* in *De an.* 3.3 and unpack his definitions of *phantasmata* by means of reference to *aisthēmata* (e.g. *De an.* 431a15, 432a9; *Somn.* 456a26; *Insomn.* 461a19, 30).
- CONTENT: What is the relation between the physical and the phenomenal dimension of *phantasmata*? Is a representationalist reading of the relation between fantastic format and fantastic content the only game in town?

In an attempt to answer these questions, I shall briefly illustrate Aristotle's arguments as they appear in some of the crucial passages dedicated to *phantasia* or to the activities that involve it, and I shall discuss the most relevant representationalist readings that have been offered so far. I shall conclude with the suggestion that *phantasia* may profitably be understood as a capacity for experiential (re)-enactment and *phantasmata*, *qua* instances of actualization of the power of *phantasia*, as (phenomenally) *off-line sensory experiences* that (physically) consist in *patterns of*

bodily activation. More specifically, I shall argue that insofar as they are bodily changes, *phantasmata* are *sensorimotor instructions* for re-enacting past experiences (e.g. when we remember) or enacting possible, fictitious, or oneiric ones (e.g. in anticipation, imagination, and dreams).

II. Psychophysiology

From a physical viewpoint, *phantasia* is a kind of motion (κίνησις τις; *De an.* 428b11; *Ph.* 254a29). More specifically, it is a motion effected by actual *aisthēsis* (κίνησις ὑπὸ τῆς αἰσθήσεως τῆς κατ' ἐνέργειαν γιγνομένη; *De an.* 429a1–2; ἔστι δὲ φαντασία ἡ ὑπὸ τῆς κατ' ἐνέργειαν αἰσθήσεως γινομένη κίνησις; *Insomn.* 459a17–18) and its products or instantiations – *phantasmata* – are residuary movements based on *aisthēmata* (ὑπόλοιποι κινήσεις ... συμβαίνουσαι ἀπὸ τῶν αἰσθημάτων; *Insomn.* 461a17–18) and situated in the sensory organs (κινήσεις φανταστικαὶ ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητηρίοις; *Insomn.* 462a8–9). The embodied nature of *phantasia* is explicitly indicated at *De an.* 403a5–10: here, when discussing affections of the soul as not ‘without the body’ (ἄνευ τοῦ σώματος), Aristotle wonders whether reasoning (τὸ νοεῖν) is also embodied and tells us that if it is a sort of *phantasia*, or not without *phantasia* (φαντασία τις ἢ μὴ ἄνευ φαντασίας; *De an.* 403a9), then it must be. Aristotle’s references to the experiential character of *phantasia* (that is, the fact that it goes with feelings) also provide an illustration of its corporeal nature. At *Rh.* 1370a27–32, for example, he defines pleasure as the feeling of a certain affection and describes *phantasia* as a weakened form of *aisthēsis*. He goes on to say that since memory and expectation require *phantasia*, they are also accompanied by *aisthēsis* and, therefore, possibly, by the feeling of pleasure:

ἐπεὶ δ' ἐστὶν τὸ ἡδεσθαι ἐν τῷ αἰσθάνεσθαι τινος πάθους, ἡ δὲ φαντασία ἐστὶν αἰσθησίς τις ἀσθενής, αἰεὶ ἐν τῷ μεμνημένῳ καὶ τῷ ἐλπίζοντι ἀκολουθοῖ ἂν φαντασία τις οὗ μέμνηται ἢ ἐλπίζει· εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, δῆλον ὅτι καὶ ἡδοναὶ ἅμα μεμνημένοις καὶ ἐλπίζουσιν, ἐπεὶ καὶ αἰσθησίς.

Since pleasure is the sensation of a certain *pathos* and *phantasia* is a weakened kind of *aisthēsis*, one who remembers and expects will always be attended by the *phantasia* of what one remembers and expects: if this is so, it is clear that because *aisthēsis* belongs to those who remember and expect, these may feel pleasure at the same time.

Accordingly, the *phantasia* of superiority that one enjoys in victory is pleasant (*Rh.* 1370b32–4) and the same is true of the *phantasia* of being excellent that is produced in one when one is honoured (*Rh.* 1371a8–10), the *phantasia* that one possesses goodness when one is loved (*Rh.* 1371a17–21) and that of revenge in anger (*Rh.* 1378b7–10). On the other hand, the *phantasia* of impending evil that is entailed by fear is painful (*Rh.* 1382a20–2). Similarly, in the *De motu animalium*, Aristotle illustrates the corporeal alterations that come with *phantasia* in terms of pleasant or fearful bodily feelings and acknowledges the important role they play in motivating animals to act by producing appetites, repulsions, and desires (e.g. *De motu an.* 701b17–21, 701b33–702a10).

The embodiment and phenomenal qualities of *phantasia* depend on its close connection with *aisthēsis* – a topic that Aristotle discusses at length in *De an.* 3.3, and to which we shall now turn.

a. *De an.* 3.3

Not everybody agrees on taking *De an.* 3.3 (427a17–429a9) as the starting point for an enquiry into Aristotle's notion of *phantasia*. Nussbaum, for example, prefers to approach the problem of *phantasia* through the account of the cognitive activities that involve it (especially action and movement as they are discussed later in *De anima* and in *De motu animalium*).²⁵ Be that as it may, it is true that *De an.* 3.3 is 'Aristotle's one concentrated, extended theoretical discussion of *phantasia*'²⁶ and quite a lot of information can be gathered by closely reading this text.

Here, Aristotle sets off by establishing distinctions and relations of dependency between a number of cognitive activities: *phantasia* is different from *aisthēsis*, from *dianoia*, and from *hypolēpsis*; it depends on *aisthēsis* and, in turn, *hypolēpsis* depends on *phantasia* (*De an.* 427b14–16). As specified later in the text, *epistēmē*, *doxa*, *phronēsis*, and their opposites all count as varieties of *hypolēpsis* (*De an.* 427b24–6): this means they all entail *phantasia*.

Aristotle's worries about distinguishing *phantasia* from other cognitive processes stem from his consideration, at *De an.* 427b27–428a5, that since *phantasia* is that in virtue of which we say that a *phantasma* comes to us, if we do not speak of it metaphorically,²⁷ it is to be defined as a capacity (*dynamis*) or a state (*hexis*) in virtue of which we discriminate (*krinomen*) and issue truths or falsehoods.²⁸ But *aisthēsis*, *doxa*, *epistēmē*, and *nous* are also critical capacities in virtue of which we issue truths or falsehoods. Will *phantasia* be one of these? Hence the importance of investigating their similarities and differences.

While an identity between *phantasia* and *epistēmē*, on one hand, and *phantasia* and *nous*, on the other, is easily ruled out, since *epistēmē* and *nous* are always true, whereas *phantasia* may also be false (*De an.* 428a17–18), the analysis of the relation between *phantasia* and *aisthēsis* is definitely more challenging. In the *De insomniis*, making reference to his own treatment of the

subject in the *De anima*, Aristotle claims that the faculty of *phantasia* is the same as the faculty of *aisthēsis*, but that they differ in essence (ἔστι μὲν τὸ αὐτὸ τῷ αἰσθητικῷ τὸ φανταστικόν, τὸ δ' εἶναι φανταστικῷ καὶ αἰσθητικῷ ἕτερον, *Insomn.* 459a15–16). This claim appears as the first premise of an argument about the nature of dreaming: since the *phantastikon* is the same as the *aisthētikon*, *phantasia* is a movement effected by actual *aisthēsis*, and a dream is a *phantasma*, it follows that dreaming belongs to the *aisthētikon qua phantastikon* (*Insomn.* 459a17–21). As Nussbaum remarks, the link between the *aisthētikon* and the *phantastikon* that is established here can be interpreted more or less tightly.²⁹ On a weaker interpretation, Aristotle might mean that there is a general cognitive power that carries out two different activities – some perceptual and some fantastic. On a stronger interpretation, Aristotle's suggestion that the *aisthētikon* is the same as the *phantastikon* would entail that the difference between perceptual and fantastic activities ultimately depends on how one looks at them – much in the same way as one and the same road can be either a road up or a road down depending on one's viewpoint (*Metaph.* 1066a33). This is the reading that Nussbaum favours, based on her understanding of *phantasia* as the interpretative aspect of *aisthēsis* (that is, as what makes *aisthēsis* a process of active perception rather than of passive reception).³⁰

Assuredly, Aristotle thinks *phantasia* depends on *aisthēsis* in a very strong sense: as clearly stated on various occasions in the *De anima*, *phantasia* cannot occur without *aisthēsis* (e.g. *De an.* 427b14–16, 428b10, 428b15). On the other hand, he remains cautious regarding whether all living beings that are capable of *aisthēsis* are also capable of *phantasia*: even if at *De an.* 413b16–24 he seems to be thinking of *aisthēsis* and *phantasia* as co-extensive (εἰ δ' αἰσθησιν, καὶ φαντασίαν), he is in doubt and allows for exceptions elsewhere.³¹ That the activity of *phantasia* and that of *aisthēsis* are not identical is illustrated at *De an.* 428a5–16, where Aristotle

provides us with four reasons why the equation of the two should be rejected:³² first, there are occasions when *phantasia* is active and *aisthēsis* is not (e.g. when we are sleeping); second, *aisthēsis* belongs to all animals, but *phantasia* does not;³³ third, *aisthēseis* are always true, whereas *phantasiai* are for the most part false;³⁴ and fourth, language of ‘appearances’³⁵ is not appropriate to cases of accurate *aisthēsis*: when one is certain that one is seeing a man, one does not say that this appears (φαίνεται) to be a man. However, there is an important connection between the two: *phantasia* cannot occur without *aisthēsis* because it is ‘of those things of which *aisthēsis* is’ (ἡ δὲ φαντασία ... ὧν αἰσθησις ἔστιν, *De an.* 428b11). This means that they are both directed towards the same objects: *aisthēsis* provides *phantasia* with ‘content’, so to speak. This explains both why *phantasia* may be true or false,³⁶ and why its *kinēsis* is so similar to sense perception (*De an.* 428b14–17).

b. Similar Movements

In order to discover more about the embodied nature and the phenomenal qualities of *phantasia*, we must further inquire into the similarity between instances of *phantasia* and *aisthēsis*. In the *De anima*, Aristotle illustrates it in motivational terms: it is by virtue of this similarity that living beings often act and behave according to *phantasia* (*De an.* 428b16–17, 429a4–8).³⁷ It is in the context of Aristotle’s account of action in the *De motu animalium*, though, that the corporeal and the phenomenal similarity between fantastic and perceptual processes is especially emphasized. Here, the main feature of animal movement emerges from a comparison with the way puppets move. While the movement of puppets does not entail any change in their parts, since they are made of cables, strings, wheels, and other such components, when animals move something special goes on. Animals undergo physiological alterations: their parts become larger or smaller,

change shape, expand, or contract. It is because of these ἀλλοιώσεις that animal movement occurs. But how do these alterations come about?

ἀλλοιοῦσι δ' αἱ φαντασίαι καὶ αἱ αἰσθήσεις καὶ αἱ ἔννοιαι. αἱ μὲν γὰρ αἰσθήσεις εὐθὺς ὑπάρχουσιν ἀλλοιώσεις τινὲς οὔσαι, ἡ δὲ φαντασία καὶ ἡ νόησις τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων ἔχουσι δύναμιν· τρόπον γάρ τινα τὸ εἶδος τὸ νοούμενον τὸ τοῦ θερμοῦ ἢ ψυχροῦ ἢ ἡδέος ἢ φοβεροῦ τοιοῦτον τυγχάνει ὃν οἷόν περ καὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ἕκαστον, διὸ καὶ φρίττουσι καὶ φοβοῦνται νοήσαντες μόνον. ταῦτα δὲ πάντα πάθη καὶ ἀλλοιώσεις εἰσίν. ἀλλοιουμένων δ' ἐν τῷ σώματι τὰ μὲν μείζω τὰ δ' ἐλάττω γίνεται.

(*De motu an.* 701b16–24)

Phantasiai, *aisthēseis*, and ideas produce alterations. *Aisthēseis* are at once alterations of a sort and *phantasia* and thinking have the power of the actual things. In a certain way the form conceived of the warm and the cold or the pleasant or the fearful is like the actual thing itself. For this reason, people shudder and are frightened just thinking of something. All these are *pathē* and alterations. And of the bodily parts that undergo alteration some become larger and some smaller.

The alterations causing movement are not presented as results or consequences of perceptual, fantastic, or thinking processes; rather, these *pathē* are described as physiological alterations themselves. In fact, the relation between *pathē* and physiological alterations is one of *necessity* (*De motu an.* 701b33–702a1) and *simultaneity* (*De motu an.* 702a15–16; 702a20–21). This is consistent with Aristotle's teleological explanation of the structure of the living body: inner regions are fashioned as they are for the sake of changing from soft to hard, solid to liquid, and so on. The reason why, on the physical level, *pathē* consist in physiological alterations (and therefore, on the phenomenal level, usually *feel* in a certain way) is, therefore, explained by

reference to their biological function of preparing the organic parts for movement. What Aristotle is telling us here is that both *aisthēmata* and *phantasmata* enable animals to act. Both consist in physiological alterations, and those of *phantasmata* are sufficiently similar to those of *aisthēmata* as to make it possible for *phantasmata* to exert ‘the power of the actual things’ (τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων δύναμιν). Therefore, fantastic processes consist in bodily changes as much as perceptual processes do. These patterns of bodily activation are alike because *phantasia* depends on *aisthēsis* and its *kinēseis* on the ‘material’ that is provided by *aisthēsis*.³⁸ Phenomenally, they are also alike: they go with sensations that are similar enough to motivate the animal towards the same goals and behaviour.³⁹

c. The Power of the Actual Things

At *De an.* 432a9–10, Aristotle defines *phantasmata* as being just like *aisthēmata* but without the matter (τὰ γὰρ φαντάσματα ὥσπερ αἰσθήματά ἐστι, πλὴν ἄνευ ὕλης). *Aisthēmata* are the bodily changes and corresponding sensations arising from the organism’s perceptual encounters with the external environment. They emerge in the presence of external stimuli; on occasion, they might persist for a while after the external stimulus has ceased to exist, as argued in *Insomn.* 2 (459a23–460b27), by means of the analogy of projectiles and the discussion of the phenomenon of after-images. As projectiles continue to move even when the moving agent is no longer in contact with them, because each portion of air imparts movement to the proximate one, so it happens that *aisthēmata* continue to be felt and experienced even after the external stimulus has departed (καὶ ἀπελθόντος τοῦ θύραθεν αἰσθητοῦ ἐμμένει τὰ αἰσθήματα αἰσθητὰ ὄντα, *Insomn.* 460b2–3). This is the case, for example, when we remain temporarily blind after looking at an intense source of light; when we keep our gaze fixed on a colour and continue to see it even

when we look away; or when we hear a very loud sound and we cannot hear anything else for a while afterwards. That it is possible for perceptual sensations to persist even after their originating stimulus has disappeared is part of Aristotle's explanation of what happens when we dream and, more specifically, of the similarity between real-life perceptual sensations (*aisthēmata*) and those we experience in oneiric episodes during sleep, when we are not actively perceiving anything (*phantasmata*). In fact, *phantasia* and *phantasmata* constitute our way of interacting with the environment when we cannot perceive it. Therefore, since we can only perceive what is here and now, *phantasia* and *phantasmata* are what makes it possible for us to relate to the past and to the future by forming memories and anticipations. Since our faculty of sense perception is temporarily inactive when we are asleep, it is thanks to *phantasia* and *phantasmata* that we have dreams. Besides, since the objects of reason also take perceptible forms (ἐν τοῖς εἶδεσι τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς τὰ νοητά ἐστι, *De an.* 432a4–5; cf. *Mem.* 449b30–450a14), we could not even think without a *phantasma* (οὐδέποτε νοεῖ ἄνευ φαντάσματος ἡ ψυχή, *De an.* 431a17).

Aristotle extensively illustrates the physiology of *phantasmata* and their relation with *aisthēmata* in the *Parva Naturalia*. In the *De Memoria*, for example, he invites us to think of the *phantasma* whose *hexis* is memory as if it were a sort of impression (*typos*) of the *aisthēma* – an impression stamped in by the movement of sense perception in the same way as one would make an impression with a seal. By virtue of this analogy, he continues, it is easy to explain the importance of one's bodily constitution, metabolism (bodily flux: ῥέος),⁴⁰ and corporeal states in the formation and in the retention of *phantasmata*: for a *phantasma* to take hold in one's memory, one must be sufficiently calm, otherwise it will leave no trace, just as a seal forms no impression on running water; similarly, the excessive moisture of quick people hinders their

capacity to retain the *phantasma*, while the excessive hardness of slow people makes it difficult for it to be imprinted in the first place (*Mem.* 450a25–b10). The same is true of *phantasmata* in one's dreaming experiences: by means of yet another analogy, that of reflections that either do not appear or look deformed if the water surface is turbulent, Aristotle insists that the residual movements derived from *aisthēmata* remain unattended to or turn into something disfigured and grotesque if the sleeper's body is disturbed (e.g. if one has eaten too much and is, therefore, agitated by the heat coming up from the food, or if one suffers from melancholia or other conditions that cause pneumatic agitation: *Insomn.* 461a12–26).

Phantasmata (αἱ κινήσεις αἱ ἀπὸ τῶν αἰσθημάτων γινόμεναι, *Insomn.* 460b29–30) occur both when we are awake and when we are asleep. Aristotle believes that we experience *phantasmata* only when they reach the starting point of *aisthēsis* (which he thinks is the heart) and that they do so by moving through the blood. However, in the waking state not all perceptual *kinēseis* make it to the heart: some remain unattended to because more relevant stimuli call for attention, forcing the less significant ones into the background. But during sleep, when *aisthēsis* is dormant and the heat reverses its flow towards the inside of the body, these *phantasmata* also reach the heart and become manifest. In animals that have blood, once the blood has become quiet, the persisting movement arising from the *aisthēmata* derived from each sensory organ (σωζομένη τῶν αἰσθημάτων ἢ κίνησις ἀφ' ἑκάστου τῶν αἰσθητηρίων) is what causes the dream and what makes the dreamer think that he is having a real-life experience (*Insomn.* 461a25–30). During sleep the judging faculty (τὸ ἐπικρῖνον) is either restrained or not properly exercised (*Insomn.* 461b6): just as people affected by different *pathē*, such as strong emotions or fever, can be perceptually deceived, so the *pathos* of sleep can also deceive and make things look real and dreaming experiences phenomenally indistinguishable from those occurring in waking life (ὥσπερ δ'

εἵπομεν ὅτι ἄλλοι δι' ἄλλο πάθος εὐαπάτητοι, οὕτως ὁ καθεύδων διὰ τὸν ὕπνον καὶ τὸ κινεῖσθαι τὰ αἰσθητήρια καὶ τᾶλλα τὰ συμβαίνοντα περὶ τὴν αἴσθησιν, ὥστε τὸ μικρὰν ἔχον ὁμοιότητα φαίνεται ἐκεῖνο, *Insomn.* 461b8–11; cf. *Insomn.* 461b29–462a8).

Since *phantasmata* are *aisthēmata* in the absence of external stimuli, they still consist in bodily changes and corresponding sensations: they are physical states but also phenomenal states. For us to become phenomenally aware of *phantasmata*, they need to be actualized (*Insomn.* 461b15–20): at the physical level, this means that they can freely move, via the blood which remains in the sensory organs, towards the heart; at the level of subjective experience, it means that we live through the *phantasma*, that is, we perceive and feel something that is qualitatively similar to what we would feel and perceive if we were awake (or to what we have felt and perceived in the past, in the case of memory; what it would be possible for us to feel and perceive, in the case of imagination, etc.). Once again, *phantasmata* have ‘the power of the actual things’: they affect us in a similar way as *aisthēmata*, both on the physical level of the bodily patterns of activation they consist in and, when they reach the heart, on the phenomenal level of the sensations that we experience.

III Content

Talk of *phantasmata* as ‘reaching the heart’ and ‘becoming manifest’ or, in Aristotle’s parlance, as something we contemplate (e.g. *De an.* 432a: φάντασμά τι θεωρεῖν) as if we were looking at them (e.g. *De an.* 431b7: ὥσπερ ὁρῶν), something that our soul perceives (e.g. *Mem.* 450b28: αἰσθάνηται ἡ ψυχὴ) and that is ‘in us’ (e.g. *Insomn.* 450b24: ἐν ἡμῖν), might suggest that they are inner objects that we feel and perceive (mainly, visually). Undoubtedly, Aristotle’s lexical choices and analogies often rely on the ontological metaphor *PHANTASMATA ARE PICTURES* – a

metaphor that allows him to talk about *phantasmata* as entities or substances.⁴¹ The imprint analogy and the parallel between *phantasmata* and reflections on the water surface have already been mentioned above. To take another famous example, consider Aristotle's definition of memory (*Mem.* 451a15–17) and his inquiry into how it is possible to remember something that is not present (*Mem.* 450b11–451a2). *Mnēmē* is the *hexis* of having a *phantasma* taken as an *eikōn* of that of which it is a *phantasma* (ὡς εἰκόνοσ οὔ φάντασμα). The *phantasma* is somehow similar to an impression or a painting inside us (τύπος ἢ γραφή ἐν ἡμῖν) that we perceive when we remember. Aristotle further develops this analogy in order to explain the problem of presence in absence: if, when one remembers, it is the affection produced by the object (the *phantasma*) that one perceives (since it is impossible to perceive something that is not present, as Aristotle has established elsewhere), is there any way that the perception of the *phantasma* can be perception of something else, viz., the thing, now absent, which one has perceived in the past? What follows is an elaborate development of the representationalist implications of the metaphor *PHANTASMATA ARE PICTURES*: a painting is at the same time just a painting and an *eikōn*. Similarly, a *phantasma* is both something in itself (καθ' αὐτό) and of something else (ἄλλου). *Qua* καθ' αὐτό, it is something we think of (*theōrēma*) or a *phantasma*; *qua* ἄλλου, it is like an *eikōn* and something remembered (*mnēmoneuma*). When the movement is actualized, if the soul perceives it καθ' αὐτό, then it seems to occur as a *noēma* or a *phantasma*; but if the soul perceives it ἄλλου and in the way one looks at a picture *qua eikōn* (ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ γραφῇ ὡς εἰκόνα θεωρεῖ), like an *eikōn* of Coriscus without having Coriscus in sight, then the *pathos* of this way of looking at it (τὸ πάθος τῆς θεωρίας ταύτης) is different from the *pathos* of when you look at it as a picture: in the soul, one arises simply as a *noēma*, whereas the other, because it is an *eikōn*, arises as something that is remembered (μνημόνευμα). In a similar way, in the *De insomniis*, Aristotle talks of

phantasmata as *eidōla* appearing during sleep (*Insomn.* 462a11) and compares them to the clouds, whose changing shape may be taken to represent different figures (*Insomn.* 461b19–20). In a paper tellingly titled ‘Aristotle and the Cartesian theater’, Victor Caston claims that many interpreters, by translating *phantasmata* as ‘mental images’, implicitly take them to be internal objects of awareness, something we look at with our mind’s eye.⁴² This is wrong, he argues. And it is wrong for the same reasons that Stephen Kosslyn’s theory of mental imagery, to which Daniel Dennett has provocatively referred as the ‘Cartesian theater’ view of the mind,⁴³ is wrong: the inner-picture theory of imagery is victim to the homunculus fallacy.⁴⁴ Caston argues that *phantasmata* are rather that *by means of which* we feel and perceive: ‘when Aristotle speaks of “placing things before the eyes” in connection with *phantasia* and *phantasmata*, he needn’t think that the resulting visualization consists in our viewing *them*. Visualization may simply be an effect they produce’.⁴⁵ ‘They [*phantasmata*] are states of our body, bearing representational content’.⁴⁶ But ‘content’ is of course another metaphor: while it is natural and to some extent inevitable to resort to conceptual metaphor in order to talk about abstract phenomena, we need to recognize metaphor for what it is.⁴⁷ If we describe *phantasmata* as ‘bodily states bearing content’, for example, we need not commit ourselves to the implications of the container metaphor, viz. to the assumption that the container (or the format: here, the bodily states) and the content (here, the subjective experience) are two different things. Still, Caston affirms that ‘the change (κίνησις) that constitutes *phantasia* is distinct from both the experience of visualization and the objects that seem to appear in such experiences’ and that ‘they [*phantasmata*] can produce such experiences and account for their content. But they are not *themselves* images’.⁴⁸ It is of course true that *phantasmata* are not images we look at (both because they encompass all sensory modalities and because they are not inner objects); however, on the assumption that

phantasmata bear content, how they give rise to the subjective experience of that content (when they do, that is, when they reach the heart) remains somewhat mysterious. In fact, when discussing the intentionality of *phantasmata* and the way *phantasia* allows for error, Caston also offers a solution to the problem of the experience of content. This solution is based on the fact that *phantasmata* and *aisthēmata* have the same causal powers: ‘the phantasma is produced in a way that ensures it will be a similar [to the *aisthēma*] sort of change and so, importantly, *can have similar sorts of effects*: in particular, it can travel to the central organ and affect it in similar ways. A phantasma will thus have similar *causal powers* to the stimulation from which it derives, including the ability to produce an experience *phenomenally like* a sensation’.⁴⁹ Note that this explanation still assumes a distinction between format and content. One of the reasons why Caston settles on the distinction is that it allows him to account for the fact that we do not always consciously experience our *phantasmata*.⁵⁰ But an objectified account of content as a commodity we can access and that is carried by the physical vehicle of our bodily states is not our only option. In fact, a dispositional reading of *phantasmata* as sensory-motor patterns that, when recalled or otherwise re-activated, allow us experientially to (re)-enact possible, fictitious, oneiric, or past experiences may prove to be a good alternative. On this reading, experiencing a *phantasma* does not mean accessing some piece of content that has been stored on the occasion of previous on-line interactions and that is transported above our threshold of awareness by means of *kinēseis* travelling through the blood. Neither Aristotle nor we have a naturalistic, explanatory account of what such content would be, of how it would be stored and eventually retrieved. Instead, experiencing a *phantasma* can be described as enacting given patterns of motor behaviour and receiving the corresponding sensory feedback (that sometimes is weaker than in active perception, as Aristotle knows).⁵¹ Depending on the cognitive activity one is

engaged in (whether one is remembering, dreaming, imagining, and so on) and even though sensory character is what all instances of *phantasia* have in common, the phenomenal quality of the *phantasmata* involved differs. For example, one lives through one's memory-*phantasmata* by re-enacting them *as past*. Recall Aristotle's claim that a *phantasma* is both something in itself (καθ' αὐτό) and of something else (ἄλλου): only when a *phantasma* is experienced *as having occurred* does it count as something remembered.⁵² Similarly, imagination-*phantasmata* are enacted *as unreal*, expectation-*phantasmata* *as possible*, and so on. There are major phenomenal differences in attention, volition, and action potential that distinguish each of these experiences. Of course, there might be times when one is not aware of these phenomenal differences, as for example, in dreams, hallucinations, or when we cannot say for sure whether something we are experiencing as a memory has really ever occurred. But otherwise, Aristotle thinks, subjective experience is all that one needs, and one should not even worry about how to tell experiences apart, because one just does (*Metaph.* 1010b3–4, b8–11):

εἴτ' ἄξιον θαυμάσαι εἰ τοῦτ' ἀποροῦσι ... καὶ ἀληθῆ πότερον ἂ τοῖς καθεύδουσιν ἢ ἂ τοῖς ἐγρηγορόσιν. ὅτι μὲν γὰρ οὐκ οἴονται γε, φανερόν· οὐθεὶς γοῦν, ἐὰν ὑπολάβῃ νύκτωρ Ἀθήνησιν εἶναι ὃν ἐν Λιβύῃ, πορεύεται εἰς τὸ ᾠδεῖον.

It is surprising that they are uncertain about this ...: whether what appears to sleepers is truer than what appears to those who are awake. It is clear that not even they think so. Nobody who, being in Libya, during the night took himself to be in Athens, would walk to the Odeon.

In conclusion, on-line perceiving (*aisthēmata*) and off-line experiences (*phantasmata*) have a similar phenomenality because they share the same causal powers. All kinds of *phantasmata* have a common sensory character, but they also display phenomenal features that are characteristic of the different cognitive activity they are involved in. When interpreting

Aristotle's *phantasmata*, any distinction between format and content falls victim to the problem of naturalizing content – a problem that Aristotle does not even raise, precisely because he never draws a sharp line between the two. One way to get round the obstacle, the one I have suggested here, is to give up the idea of *phantasmata* as content-bearing structures and understand them as dispositional embodied procedures that, when actualized, are tinged with phenomenality.⁵³

Abbreviations

Abbreviations of ancient authors and texts, as well as scholarly reference works, generally follow those of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, fourth edition; abbreviations of journal titles follow those of the *L'Année Philologique*. Exceptions are listed below.

Arist. *Insomn.* = Aristotle, *De insomniis*. This is 453b–458a of the *Parva naturalia* (OCD: *Parv. nat.*).

Arist. *Somn.* = Aristotle, *De somno*. This is 458a–462b of the *Parva naturalia* (OCD: *Parv. nat.*).

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¹ See especially the previous chapter, in which Luuk Huitink investigates Collingwood's 'historical imagination' and 're-enactment' in the light of contemporary cognitive science; his comparison of battle reports explores the way some writers depart from conventional 'distanced' representation, to be viewed impassively from a distance, and instead actively engage the body and subjectivity of the reader. Such *enargeia* relies on the kind of sensorimotor *phantasia* that I discuss below. Xavier Buxton, in his chapter on deliberation in Aeschylus, calls upon Aristotle's *phantasia bouleutikē* and a similarly embodied enactment of possible experience.

² Cf. *OED* s.v. 5: 'The mind's creativity and resourcefulness in using and inventing images, analogies, etc.; poetic or artistic genius or talent. Also: an individual's poetic or artistic genius or talent'.

³ By 'cognitive power' I refer to cognition broadly construed, including perceptual and affective processes as well as intellectual and theoretical ones. In Aristotle's philosophy, mind and life are continuous: where there is biological life (at least, sentience), there is cognition too. One of the main implications of the principle of continuity is that cognition is bodily through and through. It is within this framework that *phantasia* must be investigated.

⁴ The link that Aristotle emphasizes here between *pistis*, *peithō*, and *logos*, together with the crucial role he elsewhere attributes to *phantasia* as a source of agency (esp. in *De motu animalium*), suggests that the *pistis* that he denies is required by *phantasia* broadly construed must consist in a reflexive act of commitment; since humans and nonhuman animals often act on *phantasia*, they must be – pragmatically – committed to it.

⁵ *De an.* 427b21–23: ἔτι δὲ ὅταν μὲν δοξάζωμεν δεινόν τι ἢ φοβερὸν, εὐθὺς συμπάσχομεν, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ θαρραλέον· κατὰ δὲ τὴν φαντασίαν ὡσαύτως ἔχομεν ὥσπερ ἂν εἰ θεώμενοι ἐν γραφῇ τὰ δεινὰ ἢ θαρραλέα.

⁶ E.g. *Rh.* 1382a20–2, 1383a16–19, 1384a22.

⁷ E.g. *De an.* 433a9–30, 433b11–12, 433b27–30; *De motu an.* 702a17–21.

⁸ E.g. *De an.* 429a4–8, 431b4–5, 432b13–17, 433a9–30, 433b27–30; *De motu an.* 700b17–23; 701a2–6, 34–6.

⁹ E.g. *Mem.* 450a10–13, 23–5, 451a14–17; *Rh.* 1370a27–35.

¹⁰ E.g. *Rh.* 1370a27–35.

¹¹ *Hypolēpsis*: *De an.* 427b15–16; *noein*, including planning: 431a14–20, b2–10, *Mem.* 449b30; *theōrein*: 432a7–14; calculating and choosing: 434a6–11.

¹² In the sense of visualizing: εἰδωλοποιῶν, *De an.* 427b19–21.

¹³ E.g. *Insomn.* 459a14–21, 462a15–31.

¹⁴ E.g. *Ph.* 211b29–212a2; *De an.* 402b23–5.

¹⁵ E.g. *De an.* 428a12–15.

¹⁶ E.g. *De an.* 428b2–10; *Insomn.* 460b16–27.

¹⁷ Sometimes Aristotle calls them *phantasiai*: e.g. *De an.* 425b25, 428a12, 433a11, 27.

¹⁸ E.g. Nussbaum (1978).

¹⁹ E.g. Schofield (1995 – first published in 1978). By ‘non-paradigmatic sensory experiences’ Schofield means ‘experiences so diverse as dreams and the interpreting of indistinct or puzzling sense-data, which may be held to resemble the paradigm of successful sense-perception in one way or another, yet patently lack one or more of its central features, and so give rise to the sceptical, cautious, or non-committal *phainetai*’: Schofield (1995: 253).

²⁰ For extensive discussion, cf. Wedin (1988); Caston (1998; 2006; 2021); King (2009).

²¹ E.g. Bloch (2007: 64–70, esp. 67).

²² E.g. *Insomn.* 458b31: ὁρᾶν καὶ αἰσθάνεσθαι τι, 459a1: ὁρᾶν...ἀκούειν...ὅλως αἰσθάνεσθαι, 459a3: ὅψιν...καὶ τὰς ἄλλας αἰσθήσεις, 461a29–30: διὰ μὲν τὰ ἀπὸ τῆς ὄψεως καταφερόμενα ὁρᾶν, διὰ δὲ τὰ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀκοῆς ἀκούειν). Cf., among others, Nussbaum (1978); Caston (1998; 2021); Labarrière (2002); Osborne (2007); King (2009); Schofield (2011).

²³ Respectively, King (2009) and Caston (2021). King does not classify his own view as propositionalist; Caston more explicitly engages with the debate on mental imagery, but he also refrains from adhering to any specific contemporary position. As for propositionalism (its contemporary formulations within the analogue-propositional debate and the view I attribute to King), the label can be misleading: imagery (*phantasmata*) is structured in descriptive sentences, even if the language of these sentences is not natural language. So, e.g., King (2009: 56): ‘the representation ... has certain structural similarities with saying that such and such is the case, while of course not involving an assertion’. On the other hand, Caston’s explanation of how *phantasmata* come to have their content and his comments on *Mem.* 452b9–16 somehow echo Kosslyn’s views on the resemblance between representations and their objects (e.g. Kosslyn (1994: 5): ‘each part of an object is represented by a pattern of points, and the spatial relation among these patterns in the functional space correspond to the spatial relations among the parts themselves’): ‘the subject thinks of objects *by undergoing the change* that exhibits this proportional relation structure (τῇ ἀνάλογον κινήσει, b11–12). Such a model is no doubt a *phantasma*. But it has the content it does merely in virtue of possessing these features and embodying this relation structure, which in turn enables it to underwrite the content of thoughts based on it’ (Caston [2021: 189]).

²⁴ Nussbaum (1978); Modrak (1986); Watson (1988); Wedin (1988); Frede (1995 – first published in 1992); Schofield (1995; 2011); Caston (1996; 2009; 2021); Labarrière (1997; 2002); Rapp (2001); Osborne (2007: esp. 79–97); King (2009: esp. 40–62; 2018) are some of the most influential accounts.

²⁵ Nussbaum (1978).

²⁶ Schofield (1995: 255).

²⁷ The meaning of Aristotle’s reference to the transferred sense of *phantasia* is an object of debate. Schofield thinks that ‘Aristotle is concerned with the employment of “appears” peculiarly appropriate to imagination or non-paradigmatic sensory experience, and treats its applications in ordinary perceptual reports or in statements of belief (“that seems to me a

dangerous course of action”) as extensions of that usage’: Schofield (1995: 266 n. 41).

Nussbaum (1978: 254) follows Freudenthal (1863) in taking ‘(mere) show, pomp, ostentatiousness’ as the metaphorical use.

²⁸ Ross’s emendation at 428a3 turns the statement that *phantasia* is a critical faculty into a question, but this creates unnecessary interpretative problems. *Phantasia* is described as a critical capacity also at *De motu an.* 700b20.

²⁹ Nussbaum (1978: 235).

³⁰ Nussbaum believes that *aisthēsis* by itself is the passive reception of external stimuli; *phantasia* is the process of becoming aware of these stimuli by perceiving them *as* something – i.e., of experiencing perceptions (Nussbaum [1978]). *Contra* Schofield (1995).

³¹ E.g. *De an.* 414b14–16, 415a8–12 and 428a8–11; at *De an.* 433b31–434a11, where he contemplates the possibility that in imperfectly developed animals whose *aisthēsis* is limited to touch *phantasia* might be present only in an indeterminate way; also cf. *De an.* 433b27–30.

Reasons to believe that Aristotle is in fact committed to strict coextension are provided by Caston (1996: 23 n. 9).

³² I believe the differences between *phantasia* and *aisthēsis* listed in this passage are four because I take the claim that visions (*oramata*) appear to us also when our eyes are closed (*De an.* 428a16) as a qualification of the statement that there are occasions when *phantasia* is active and *aisthēsis* is dormant.

³³ Here *aei* means ‘always’ in a non-temporal sense, that is, with no exception (*contra* Nussbaum [1978: 256]). In this passage, Aristotle claims that *phantasia* belongs to the ant and to the bee, but not to the grub (*skōlēx*). Aristotle’s denial of *phantasia* to some animals is controversial: see above, n. 31.

³⁴ This statement needs to be qualified, because only *aisthēsis* of special objects (e.g. colour for sight, sound for hearing, flavour for taste, etc.) is always true. As for *phantasiai* being false for the most part, Schofield suggests that Aristotle might be thinking of some of the main sorts of *phantasiai*, such as fantasies, dreams, and after-images (Schofield [1995: 262]).

³⁵ *Phantasia* is connected with appearances because of its etymological connection with the verb *phainesthai*; cf. Aristotle’s invented etymology at *De an.* 429a2–4.

³⁶ The truth criterion for instances of *phantasia* is related to the kind of perceptual processes they result from: when the fantastic *kinēsis* is simultaneous with *aisthēsis* of special objects it is

always true, whereas when it derives from the *aisthēseis* of incidentals or of common objects it can also be false, independently of whether it occurs simultaneously with *aisthēsis* or not, and most often when the object of perception is far away (*De an.* 428b18–30).

³⁷ For the role of *phantasia* in Aristotle's account of action cf. *De an.* 3.9–11 (432a15–434a21) and *De motu an.* 6–11 (700b4–704b3).

³⁸ For a historical illustration of such a theory in practice, see Sekita (this volume).

³⁹ For a discussion of the likeness between *phantasmata* and *aisthēmata* in terms of the similarity of their causal powers cf. Caston (1996: 48–51; 1998: 272–81).

⁴⁰ Cf. King (2009: 73–4).

⁴¹ Cf. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) on conceptual metaphor theory, also discussed by Buxton (this volume, p. XXX).

⁴² Caston (2021). Cf. also Caston (1998: 279–81).

⁴³ Dennett (1991).

⁴⁴ That is, it relies on the assumption that there is a little man inside who looks at the images.

⁴⁵ Caston (2021: 174–5).

⁴⁶ Caston (2021: 170).

⁴⁷ Caston also makes use of the classical computer metaphor (with a vintage twist when it comes to vinyl records): 'The image files on your computer can, in conjunction with the right software, produce visible representations of objects on a monitor screen. But you would look in vain to find anything inside the computer, in the circuits and storage devices where the files reside, that *looked like* those objects. These image files, moreover, consist of information that can be accessed and further manipulated, even when nothing is projected on the monitor screen. The image files thus possess representational content without themselves looking like external objects or needing to be viewed at all; and their ability to produce images on the screen is to be explained in terms of this content. The underlying idea here does not depend on the fact that computer data is digital and symbolic either. Consider a slightly older example, which is analog. Vinyl records encode information in their grooves that, when a phonograph needle runs through them and sends them through an amplifier system, can produce sounds through speakers. The physical features of the grooves don't sound like music, of course, because they don't emit sound themselves. We don't hear them or direct any other intentional attitude towards them. When we

listen to the music they contain, it is the sounds they produce from the speakers. *Phantasmata*, I would argue, are like this' (Caston [2021: 175]).

⁴⁸ Caston (2021: 175–6).

⁴⁹ Caston (1998: 274).

⁵⁰ In the *De insomniis*, Aristotle illustrates the way *phantasmata* become active during sleep. *Phantasmata* actualize themselves under specific bodily conditions; until these obtain, *phantasmata* are only potential (αἱ δυνάμει, *Insomn.* 461b12–13) or present potentially (ἔνεσσι δυνάμει, *Insomn.* 461b17).

⁵¹ At *Rh.* 1370a 27–32. See above (p. XXX).

⁵² Thus, as opposed to what Aristotle's picture metaphor might suggest if taken *au pied de la lettre*, when remembering we do not take ourselves to be looking at, imagining, or otherwise experiencing something that looks like what has occurred; rather, we experience it *as it occurred*.

⁵³ I am grateful to Douglas Cairns for inspiring comments on this paper.