

# DID I JUST SEE ROMEO COMMIT SUICIDE?

## MEINONG AND BLAUSTEIN ON THEATER

Hicham JAKHA

Institute of Philosophy, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Al.  
Raclawickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Poland

*hichamjakha97@gmail.com*

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### *Abstract*

I analyze the aesthetic experience of theatergoers in light of Meinong's "assumptions" and Blaustein's "imaginative presentations," taking Brentano's "universality thesis" as the background of my analyses. I argue that "presentations" and "judgments" go hand in hand, as far as theater experience is concerned. To put forth my main argument, I follow a two-fold line of reasoning: *phenomenological* and *ontological*. On the phenomenological level, Blaustein's imaginative presentations, I argue, are

self-sufficient. Nonetheless, on the ontological level, the theater's represented objects emerge as having a two-sided structure that undermines the phenomenological simplicity of presentations. By characterizing represented objects' ontology in this manner, I admit Meinong's assumptions as a fourth class of mental phenomena, and, beyond the frameworks of both Meinong and Blaustein, incorporate judgments into the aesthetic experience of theater.

*Keywords:* Alexius Meinong, Leopold Blaustein, theater, phenomenology, ontology.

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### **Ali sem ravnokar videl Romea storiti samomor? Meinong in Blaustein o gledališču**

#### *Povzetek*

138 V članku estetsko izkustvo obiskovalcev gledališča analiziram v luči Meinongovih »domnev« in Blausteinovih »domišljijjskih predstav«, pri čemer si za ozadje razpravljanja jemljem Brentanovo »tezo o univerzalnosti«. Zagovarjam mnenje, da se »predstave« in »sodbe« skladajo, ko gre za gledališko izkušnjo. Z namenom podkrepitve argumentacije sledim dvojni smeri razgrnitve: *fenomenološki* in *ontološki*. Na fenomenološki ravni so po mojem mnenju Blausteinove domišljijjske predstave samozadostne. Vendar se za predstavljene objekte gledališča na ontološki ravni izkaže, da imajo dvostransko strukturo, ki spodjeda fenomenološko enostavnost predstav. S tem ko na takšen način opredelim ontologijo predstavljenih objektov, priznam Meinongove domneve kot četrti razred mentalnih fenomenov in sodbe, onkraj tako Meinongovega kot Blausteinovega miselnega okvira, vključim v estetsko izkustvo gledališča.

*Ključne besede:* Alexius Meinong, Leopold Blaustein, gledališče, fenomenologija, ontologija.

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## Introduction

The present article tackles the conceptions of “assumptions” and “imaginative presentations” and their applicability to “theater,” drawing from the philosophies of Alexius Meinong and Leopold Blaustein,<sup>1</sup> treating presentations and assumptions as two distinct kinds of mental phenomena delineating one’s aesthetic experience of theater plays. At the heart of my analyses is Franz Brentano’s “universality thesis,” according to which his three classes of mental phenomena (presentations, judgments, and emotions) always go hand in hand.<sup>2</sup> To be more explicit, I attempt to uphold Brentano’s universality thesis, without rejecting outright Meinong’s *Annahmen* (assumptions) as a fourth class of mental phenomena. In so doing, I argue against Blaustein’s rejection of judgments and their role in constituting imaginative presentations, while incorporating Meinong’s assumptions as “pretended judgments,” necessary for the “internal” constitution of represented objects. A key reference here is Irena Filozofówna’s criticism of Blaustein’s imaginative presentations,<sup>3</sup> which will be the point of departure for my systematic analysis of theater experience/objects in Blaustein and Meinong.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, beyond

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1 Blaustein studied under such influential figures as Kazimierz Twardowski and Edmund Husserl, which incidentally made the task of classifying his philosophical corpus difficult (see: Woleński 1989; Pokropski 2015; Miskiewicz 2009; Płotka 2021a; 2023, etc.). His main area of research was aesthetics, with his “imaginative presentations” theory being one of his notable contributions to the field. Blaustein’s connection to Meinong is a mediated one. Both can be classified as Brentanian scholars, and both personally knew and worked with Twardowski’s ideas (for more on Meinong’s place within Polish philosophy, see Jadacki 2017).

2 Although the universality thesis concerns all three mental phenomena, I focus chiefly on the universality of presentations and judgments.

3 For more on the Filozofówna–Blaustein debate, see Płotka 2021b.

4 A point of clarification is in order. I will not delve deeper into Meinong’s understanding of imaginative presentations. Rather, I will concentrate my analysis on Filozofówna’s

Meinong's framework, I argue the case that genuine judgments are a necessary supplement to imaginative presentations, further supporting the Brentanian universality thesis. In order to put forth my thesis, I follow a two-fold line of reasoning: *phenomenological* and *ontological*.<sup>5</sup> On the phenomenological level, presentations, in the way they are manifested in experience, are self-sufficient. However, as we depart from the basic presentive level of imaginative perception, the objects of said perception—i.e., represented objects—emerge as having a distinctive ontological structure, namely “two-sidedness,” that undermines the phenomenological self-sufficiency of presentations.

Let us suppose you are in the theater to see *Romeo and Juliet*. You “see” Romeo and Juliet conversing on the theater stage. You “see” a world that is, for all intents and purposes, *real*. But what is it that theater spectators “see”? Do they see Romeo, Juliet, and their world? Or do they rather see actors acting out the play's scenes? It is natural to treat spectators' experiences of theater to revolve around the latter. That is to say, in its most basic form, theater experience involves basic “perception.”<sup>6</sup> The spectator attends to the theater's “gestures,” “sound-effects,” etc. Naturally, they attend to these features in relation to the actors/objects presented on stage (cf. Melinger and Levelt 2004; Novack and Goldin-Meadow 2017). The ways, in which spectators perceive the theater, are explained by empirical psychology (cf. Rutherford and Kuhlmeier 2013). However, what do spectators do with the “content” of their perceptions? Various accounts have been developed trying to answer this

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criticism of Blaustein, using elements from Meinong's philosophy (primarily from his *Annahmen*). It is important to note that Meinong does not explicitly reject Brentano's universality thesis, but he, too, primarily refers only to assumptions.

5 By “phenomenology,” I understand what Brentano, Blaustein, and the Husserl of *Logical Investigations* would call “descriptive psychology.” This is to be distinguished from Husserl's phenomenology as presented in his *Ideas I*. In distinguishing ontology and phenomenology, I intend to draw a distinction between two levels of inquiry: phenomenology *qua* descriptive psychology places an emphasis on first-person experience, and ontology focuses on the “objects” experienced, attempting to determine their ontic status, formal structure, etc.

6 “Perception” shall be understood as being “cross-modal,” i.e., as involving not only seeing, but also hearing (and possibly touching and smelling). For a view of cross-modal perception, see Driver and Spence 2004.

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question,<sup>7</sup> but not much has been said specific to theater (Hamilton 2019). The formulation of theater perception in terms of natural perception implies that the latter's passivity extends to the former. In that case, Blaustein and Meinong are right in conceiving of theater experience as being based on imagination. Adhering to its phenomenological simplicity, imaginative presentation is a mental phenomenon, in which the spectator *simply* perceives the theater's world, somehow *involuntarily*. The presentation is imaginative, for it is to be distinguished from perceptual presentation, where the perceived objects are mind-independent. Nonetheless, the question raised earlier also affects Blaustein's and Meinong's accounts of imaginative presentations. It is safe to say that theater spectators do not merely perceive naturally; there is also the "imaginative" component. How should we, then, account for the "imaginative" in imaginative presentations? To put it in Hamilton's terms, what do spectators do with the content of their imaginative presentations? In my view, in order to provide an adequate answer to these questions, we need to look beyond phenomenology. To clearly see the distinctiveness of imaginative objects, we need to engage their ontology.<sup>8</sup>

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With this goal in mind, my article is structured as follows. First, I will start with an exposition of presentations in Blaustein (I) and Meinong (II). In III, I will systemically compare the conceptions of Blaustein and Meinong, devising Filozofówna's criticism of Blaustein. In a nutshell, I will argue that, phenomenologically (i), Blaustein's imaginative presentations are tenable. That said, I will argue, the ontology (ii) of the theater's represented objects raises a challenge to Blaustein's and Meinong's view of imaginative presentations' self-sufficiency. In so doing, I will uphold Brentano's universality thesis, while—*contra* Brentano—defending Meinong's *Annahmen* as a fourth class of mental phenomena.

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7 Cf. Levinson's (1997) "concatenationist" theory of musical works and Carroll's (2008) conception of movies.

8 Imaginative objects and fictional objects differ in the mode, in which they are accessed. Whereas imaginative objects are conditioned *subjectively* (placing an emphasis on the first-person point of view), fictional objects are conditioned objectively, i.e., with regard to the *objective* side of experience.

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## I. Blaustein on presentations

Since both Meinong and Blaustein refer to Brentano's "presentations" (*Vorstellungen*), we can begin our deliberations with him. According to Brentano (1995), when we speak of a presentation, we do not mean what is presented, but rather the "act" of presenting. "Thus, hearing a sound, seeing a colored object, feeling warmth or cold, as well as similar states of imagination are examples of what I mean by this term." (60.) Brentano conceives of presentations as being different from other "psychic phenomena," such as "judgments" and "emotions." Presentations are the most basic of the three. All that it takes for a presentation to take place is for an individual's intentional act to be directed toward a certain object. Which kind of presentation is at stake, does not really matter. For instance, we could be imagining, perceiving, or remembering the object of presentation. Judgments and emotions are based on presentations. The former allow us to concede or deny the existence of the object of presentation, whereas the latter consolidate our feelings toward it. Therefore, both judgments and emotions are closely tied to presentations (cf. Huemer 2019).<sup>9</sup>

Blaustein shared many of Brentano's ideas. For instance, he shared Brentano's posit that presentations are "[...] special, simple, intentional mental act[s]" (Blaustein 2011a, 210).<sup>10</sup> Blaustein also shared Brentano's posit that presentations are "non-extended" (cf. Blaustein 1928, 69–70). Nevertheless, it would not be appropriate to characterize Blaustein as a strictly Brentanian follower. Blaustein rejected Brentano's in-existence thesis, according to which intentionality is to be reduced to the "mental in-existence of the object."<sup>11</sup> Blaustein's motivation behind rejecting the aforementioned Brentanian thesis is Twardowskian. To be more explicit, Blaustein relies on Twardowski's

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<sup>9</sup> See also Kriegel 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Bokinec uses in her translation of Blaustein's *Przedstawienia imaginatywne* the term "representation," not "presentation." Presentation is a more natural translation of Brentano's "*Vorstellung*" and Blaustein's "*przedstawienie*." I adhere to this terminology throughout my article.

<sup>11</sup> Whether Brentano indeed subscribes to immanentism is irrelevant to the problematics of my current article. See Kriegel (2018) for a comprehensive study of Brentano's philosophy.

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threefold distinction amongst act, content, and object of presentation, in order to defend his critical position. Basically, Blaustein was opposed to Brentano's immanentism thesis due to its conflation of the object of the presentation act with its content (cf. Blaustein 1928, 5–6). In his reformulation of Brentano's ideas, Blaustein held a view of presentations as being based on "sensations." Accordingly, "[...] every presentation is a sensation (the act of sensation) or is based upon a sensation or sensations" (Blaustein 1926/27, 193b). Along with Brentano, Blaustein maintained that presentations do indeed present objects, but since presentations are based on sensations, sensations are non-intentional (Plotka 2024, 43).

Moreover, Brentano was insistent upon the intertwining of his three classes of mental phenomena. He argued that "[...] the three classes are of the utmost universality; there is no mental act in which all three are not present. There is a certain ubiquity pertaining to each class in all of our conscious life." (Brentano 1995, 206.) Blaustein did not accept Brentano's universality thesis. He gives "schematic" and "symbolic" presentations as concrete examples of mental acts that do not involve judgments. When experiencing a schema or a symbol, we do not reject/accept the existence of these objects, hence Blaustein's rejection of Brentano's thesis (cf. Blaustein 1931a, 2). In defense of his position, Blaustein refers to Meinong's "*Annahmen*" (assumptions) and their role in various aesthetic experiences. In his *Przedstawienia imaginatywne*, Blaustein explores the possibility of reducing the experience of watching a theater play to "illusion" (cf. Blaustein 2011a, 231–233). Were this possibility to obtain, it would indeed warrant that we admit the presence of both presentations and judgments. Nevertheless, we do not regard theater plays as making true/false assertions. Such phenomena, Blaustein argues, are best characterized by Meinong's assumptions, treating them as "phantasy experiences" situated between presentations and judgments (cf. Meinong 1910, 3; 1983, 12). Running along Meinongian lines, Blaustein argues that judgments are "object-directed" and are marked by the presence of "convictions," whereas assumptions lack convictions. Accordingly, a theater spectator does not judge whether the world depicted on-stage is true/false; rather, they *assume* the world depicted therein is merely fictional. Adopting such an approach, the spectator's emotions toward represented worlds/objects become neutralized (cf. Blaustein 2011a, 232). The

experience of the theater spectator, Blaustein maintains, negates Brentano's assertion that presentations and judgments are present in every mental act (Plotka 2024, 45–46).

All in all, while Blaustein's take on presentations follows Brentano in many respects, it departs from him in other important respects. The main thing that characterizes Blaustein's theory of mental phenomena is his rejection of Brentano's universality thesis. In this regard, Blaustein follows Meinong, and maintains that imaginative presentations involve assumptions, not judgments. In the following, I will analyze in more detail Meinong's take on presentations. Afterward, I will systematically compare Blaustein's and Meinong's approaches to imaginative presentations/assumptions in light of theater experience.

## II. Meinong on presentations

144 Like Blaustein, Meinong is also connected to Brentano. Meinong's connection to Brentano is manifested in the former's adoption of the latter's descriptive psychology, in order to put forth his (Meinong's) novel theory of the object (Schubert Kalsi 1987, 4). Meinong, too, cannot be depicted as a faithful follower of Brentano's. In clear opposition to Brentano's classification of experiences, Meinong advocates for two classes of experience: "intellectual" and "emotional" (see Dewalque 2018). With respect to Brentano's theory of intentionality and its (alleged) immanentism, Meinong approaches the problem of immanent objects with the help of Twardowski's distinction between object and content (Jacquette 2015, 11). According to Meinong, presentations are part of lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*); thus, they are to be classed under intellectual experiences. Following Brentano, Meinong posits that presentations are given immanently. Moreover, presentations are understood by Meinong to be the basis of all lived experiences. Unlike Brentano, however, Meinong does not conceive of object-directedness as being a constitutive element of intentionality, as far as experiences are concerned. Be that as it may, Meinong argues that experiences *usually* involve reference to an object (cf. Marek 2024). With regard to presentations, Meinong holds that they always function in conjunction with other experiences (emotions, judgments, assumptions, etc.), taking these experiences to be more complex

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than basic presentations. Nonetheless, presentations “directly” refer to their objects (Raspa 2005, 96). Therefore, in Meinong’s formulation, presentations are “immediate” and “passive” (cf. Meinong 1910, 233–246, §38; 1983, 170–178, §38).<sup>12</sup>

In order to better illustrate the Brentanian background of Meinong’s philosophy, it will be helpful to trace two phases in his thought. In the early Meinong, we can find a strong adherence to Brentano. In his early studies on David Hume, Meinong did not abide by the object–content distinction and treated the object of presentation (*Vorstellungsobjekt*) and the immanent object (*immanentes Objekt*) alike as being subsumed under the umbrella term “object” (*Objekt*) (cf. Meinong 1878, 234). In *Logik*, written in collaboration with Höfler, Meinong sees the necessity of the object’s transcendence to account for intentionality. Thus, Meinong breaks with Brentano’s mental in-existence in favor of Twardowski’s content–object distinction, restricting immanence to the content (*Inhalt*) and transcendence to the object (cf. Höfler 1890, 6–7).<sup>13</sup> Congruently, in his subsequent texts, Meinong clearly puts forth his formulations on presentations in the context of the content–object distinction (Płotka 2024, 84–86).<sup>14</sup>

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If we move on to a more concentrated analysis of Meinong’s presentations, he distinguishes between two pairs of definitions, one adhering to the presentation’s “category” (“concrete”/“abstract”) and the second specifying its “division” (“particular”/“general”). A presentation can be categorized as *concrete*, if it presents all the properties of its object; a presentation that fails to do so is *abstract*. A presentation’s *particularity* is determined by whether it refers to an “individual” object; a presentation that does not is *general*. Accordingly, Meinong treats presentations pertaining to “outer perception” as being both concrete and particular (he also adds the term “intuitive” [*anschaulich*] to their determination) (cf. Meinong 1889, 213–214; 1910, 247–251). Amongst abstract presentations Meinong lists “concepts.” Surprisingly, he does not treat

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12 See also Findlay 1963, 5–6.

13 It is worth noting that a distinction between content and object can also be found in the earlier Meinong, but it can be safely asserted that he later admits Twardowski’s distinction as being more elaborate than his own (Jacquette 2015, 11).

14 See, e.g., Meinong 1978a, 141–143; 1910, 233–246.

all abstract presentations to be “non-intuitive” (*unanschaulich*), positing that we can talk of “abstract intuitions” and “intuitive concepts.” The intuitiveness of concepts is brought forth by their being comprised of “partial presentations” and their place within a “unified complex” (*Komplexion*). In his “Hume-Studien II,” Meinong argues that the “essence” of concepts can be found in their content (*Inhalt*). In other words, presentations are “built” through partial presentations, which highlight different properties within their content (Meinong 1882, 660). The abstractness of partial presentations, in turn, is down to “abstraction,” the method, according to which some properties of the object are spotlighted at the expense of other blurred properties.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, a concept is a “complex” presentation that synthesizes different, simpler presentations within one “mental unity.” Being produced thusly, concepts can be said to share the structure of phantasy presentations (Meinong 1889, 165–166). In the event that the synthesis of partial presentations into a unified mental unity fails, the resultant complex is “non-intuitive” (*unanschaulich*) (ibid., 210–211).<sup>16</sup> It is noteworthy that Meinong holds presentations’ “manifestness” highly. In  
146 his account, in the presence of parts’ incompatibility (*Unverträglichkeit*) (e.g., when an object is depicted as having contradictory properties), presentations lose their sense of manifestness (ibid., 210). Similarly, Twardowski approaches concepts as presentations whose images cannot be synthesized into a single whole. However, this does not force Twardowski to do away with presentations of incompatible properties. For example, if one fails to imagine a round square, one can still refer to the object with the use of a concept. In Twardowski’s view, the image of a round square is a synthesis of a basic presentation that, together with a presenting judgment, gives rise to a unified whole, i.e., a concept (Płotka 2024, 86–89).<sup>17</sup>

By and large, Meinong’s approach to presentations is shaped by his relationship to, primarily, Brentano. These considerations have shown that Meinong, like Blaustein, engaged with the Brentanian/Twardowskian

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15 See Chrudzimski (2007, 55–64) for a critical evaluation of Meinong’s theory of abstraction.

16 Twardowski would later adopt this theory.

17 Cf. van der Schaar 2015, 81–83. For more on Twardowski’s position, especially as it relates to Meinong’s presentations, see 1995. See also Raspa 2023.

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arguments, in order to mold his own approach to lived experiences. In the following section, I will shift my attention to imaginative presentations, assumptions, and judgments in Meinong and Blaustein in the context of theater experience. In particular, I will attempt to answer the following: are imaginative presentations possible without judgments?

### III. Assumptions, judgments, and imaginative presentations

Blaustein was familiar with Meinong's writings, from which he adopted various elements. Apart from his incorporation of Meinong's assumptions into his own aesthetic deliberations, it can be argued that Blaustein also adopted Meinong's "*Phantasievorstellungen*," on the basis of which Blaustein established his "*przedstawienia imaginatywne*."<sup>18</sup> Blaustein, in reference to Filozofówna's criticism (see, e.g., 1931a; 1931b), appeals to Meinong's assumptions, in order to argue against Brentano's universality thesis.<sup>19</sup> According to Blaustein, Brentano is wrong in positing that his three classes of mental phenomena always go hand in hand. Blaustein's criticism is specifically directed toward the phenomenological inseparability of presentations and judgments. In order to back his position, he devises the aesthetic experience of theater spectators and its peculiarity. While watching a play, one experiences imaginative presentations that can evoke aesthetic experiences. Roughly put, Blaustein's point is that theater spectators do not make true/false judgments about the objects constituting the imaginative world on stage. This leaves us only with presentations. In any case, Blaustein concludes that the example of the theater spectator compellingly makes the case for an experience that does not conjoin presentations and judgments. If the theater spectator does not judge the imaginative objects/world on stage, what is it they are doing? It is certainly not the case that they are doing nothing, in the sense that they would be passive recipients of contentless presentations. Invoking Meinong's concept, Blaustein argues that what the theater spectator does is not judging, but assuming that the imaginative objects on stage and their world are

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18 To be clear, there is no textual evidence to back this claim. Nevertheless, Blaustein's familiarity with Meinong, especially with his theory of assumptions, suggests that the motivation behind Blaustein's concept might have been Meinongian.

19 For details of Blaustein's response, see 1931b.

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merely fictional (Blaustein 2011a, 232).<sup>20</sup> Meinong's assumptions, therefore, are conceived of as a distinct kind of mental phenomena placed somehow neatly between presentations and judgments (cf. Meinong 1910, 3), which can account for phenomenological interaction with imaginative presentations in a way that preserves the fiction–reality dichotomy.

Blaustein's reliance on assumptions, in order to rule out judgments from the domain of aesthetic experiences, can be approached from two perspectives: (i) *phenomenological* and (ii) *ontological*. On the phenomenological level, I argue, Blaustein's imaginative presentations do not need judgments to function properly. That said, on the ontological level, Blaustein's imaginative presentations raise a number of issues. Nevertheless, I do not think an outright rejection of imaginative presentations follows from their ontological shortcomings. *Contra* Filozofówna (see 1931b), it is phenomenologically cogent to admit imaginative presentations as a *sui generis* class of mental phenomena, in order to explain the (phenomenological) distinctness of these presentations from, say, perceptual presentations (i.e., perceiving real objects). Indeed, this is the motivation behind Blaustein's descriptive account of presentations.

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### (i) *Phenomenology*

Blaustein's phenomenology of "perception" takes into consideration the nature of the objects perceived and their intentionality. Accordingly, two kinds of perception are emphasized: "observative" and "imaginative." Observative perception is linked to "everyday phenomena"; basically, real, mind-independent objects are *observatively* perceived. Imaginative perception is peculiar, for it involves both strictly and imaginatively perceived objects. The strictly perceived object is the "presenting object," and the imaginatively perceived object assumes the role of the "represented" object within a certain fiction. For instance, while watching *Romeo and Juliet*, our perception—strictly speaking—is directed toward the presenting objects on stage, i.e., the actors *qua* natural persons, props, etc., utilized to depict the play's scenes. Our interaction with Shakespeare's fictional objects can be explained by virtue of

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20 For Blaustein, presented judgments are a form of presentations; in this case, one does not require a judgment, but only that one presents it to oneself.

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our imaginative perception of said objects, treating them as represented objects within the work-world. We do not imaginatively perceive the natural persons acting out the play's scenes; rather, we imaginatively perceive Romeo, Juliet, and their world being represented on stage (cf. Blaustein 2011b, 237).

Blaustein's phenomenological insights can also provide us with a solid framework for the "presentationality" of *Romeo and Juliet* and its relation to the perceiving subject. A spectator perceiving the imaginative objects within the play, i.e., Romeo, Juliet, etc., is "situated" within the work-world. They see the actors fully in character, reciting the script of Shakespeare's play. In line with the two kinds of perception outlined above, the spectator's perception presents both the intentional object of the play as well as their "relation" to the represented objects *within*. The spectator can be so immersed in the play that they start to notice certain relations that connect them with the objects represented on stage. For instance, as soon as Romeo walks to the front of the stage, the spectator might *imaginatively* characterize this move as denoting a spatial relation between them and Romeo; "Romeo is getting closer to me," the spectator might notice. The imaginary wall that separates the spectator from Romeo's world appears to be lifted. In which case, the wall seems to go only one-way, restricting Romeo's interaction with the audience and allowing spectators—at least imaginatively—to establish spatial relations with the play's characters. The spectator's spatial relations to the play's world are peculiar. On the one hand, the spectator's body is genuinely related to the natural persons/props on stage. But, when an actor edges closer to them, they do not go: "Oh look! Actor x (using their real name) is getting closer to me." Rather, the spectator perceives the actor's movements as being those of, say, Romeo. Accordingly, it is *as if* spatial relations obtain between Romeo and the spectator. "As if" is the key in describing the kind of relation that obtains between real and fictional objects. While the relation that obtains between the spectator and the actors *qua* natural persons is phenomenologically real, the one obtaining between the spectator and the actors *qua* ficta is merely "quasi-real" (cf. Blaustein 2011a, 215–221).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The same parameters that govern spatial relations also govern the spectator's

To further cement the phenomenological distinctiveness of theater and its experience, we can devise Blaustein's "attitudes." These attitudes complement the two kinds of perception explored earlier. Explicitly, Blaustein analyzes three attitudes that play a major role in determining imaginative presentations; these attitudes are: "natural," "imaginative," and "signitive" (Blaustein 2011a, 216). The spectator's attitudes may change as they adjust their perception. For example, while attending to the play's presenting content, the spectator's attitude is natural. The attitude that immerses the spectator in the aesthetic experience of watching a theater play is the imaginative one. While in this attitude, the spectator is fully immersed in the work-world, suspending temporarily existential judgments. As far as spectators are concerned, the imaginative presentationality of the play is phenomenologically real. It is within this attitude that assumptions function properly. Adopting the imaginative attitude, the spectator *assumes* the play's world is real, that the two protagonists are really Romeo and Juliet, that the props on stage are real objects that can be found in the real world, etc. In a nutshell, the spectator's imaginative attitude facilitates their assumptions. The spectator's aesthetic experience is closely connected with their attitudes. The spectator's imaginative attitude might be interrupted by a fellow spectator opening a bag of chips, in which case a shift to the natural attitude takes place, as aesthetic attention is no longer on the work-world. The shift in attitude is accompanied by a shift in perception, from the imaginative to the observative.

All things considered, Blaustein's descriptive analyses serve to illustrate the phenomenological distinctiveness of imaginative presentations. The spectator's aesthetic experience of the play can be adequately explained in terms of Blaustein's phenomenology. As a result, his imaginative presentations are equipped with a solid phenomenological foundation. Nonetheless, Blaustein's imaginative presentations may warrant ontological treatment, especially as we tend to the play's represented objects. Once we delve into the domain of fictional objects, we notice that these entities are not as simple and basic as

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"temporal" relations to the work-world. Blaustein distinguishes, within temporal relations, between "static" and "dynamic" appearances. The relations obtaining between the theater spectator and the work-world are dynamic (cf. 2011a, 219–220).

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Blaustein's theory of imaginative presentations suggests. In the following, I will attempt to show that imaginative presentations must appeal to something over and beyond basic presentations, in order to account for the ontological complexity of fictional objects.

(ii) *From phenomenology to ontology*

In summary, Blaustein relies on Meinong's assumptions, in order to argue against Brentano's universality thesis. I take issue with both Blaustein's rejection of Brentano's thesis and his appropriation of Meinong's *Annahmen*.<sup>22</sup>

In her early works, Filozofówna devises Meinong's *Annahmen* in the way that, I think, Meinong himself intended them to be understood.<sup>23</sup> Instead of categorically contrasting assumptions and judgments in a way that completely cuts off *any* links between the two (as Blaustein understands *Annahmen*), Filozofówna treats these two as being connected components within the wider aesthetic experience of theater.<sup>24</sup> According to her, an assumption is basically a "pretended judgment" (*sąd na niby*) (Filozofówna 1935, 180, fn. 15).<sup>25</sup> Pretended judgments parallel genuine judgments, for they (pretended judgments) can be either "affirmative" or "negative" (Płotka 2024, 250). Therefore, judgments—be they pretended or genuine—are cardinal for the functioning of presentations. Filozofówna criticizes Blaustein's conflation of presentations and judgments. In his view of imaginative presentations, Blaustein delineates the objects of presentation as being such-and-such and hence being determined in a certain

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22 Please note that *Über Annahmen* is not a study in ontology. It is rather a study in descriptive psychology (philosophy of mind, in today's terminology). Later on, I will attempt to read Meinong's *Annahmen* along ontological lines, making references to his theory of objects, which is considered to be his prized contribution to ontology.

23 It is worth noting that Filozofówna was first interested in assumptions from the standpoint of actors. Later, she turned her attention to assumptions from the perspective of spectators. In his *Über Annahmen*, Meinong appears to refer to both perspectives, i.e., to what actors assume (cf. 1983, 85; 86; 295) and to what spectators assume (cf. *ibid.*, 96; 224).

24 Filozofówna wrote her doctoral dissertation on actors' actions in theater, devising Meinong's *Annahmen* (see 1935).

25 Here, Filozofówna follows Witwicki's terminology as used in his *Psychologia* (cf. 1925, 332).

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way. This is a categorical mistake, for it is judgments that allow us to ascribe properties to objects, not presentations. The latter are passive, in the sense that their mere function is to present something, suspending any judgments regarding its qualitative endowments, which would otherwise render it more complex than a mere presentation. Furthermore, *contra* Blaustein, Filozofówna (1931b, 64) argues that what facilitates the function of “intending” an object of presentation to be such-and-such are judgments, not the “matter” of the presentation act. In defense of her critical stance, she provides an example of a person who mistakes a passer-by for their friend. It is only after the passer-by gets closer and is visibly *not* their friend does the perceiver realize the inaccuracy of their perceptual presentation. But the perceptual presentation as well as the presenting content remain the same prior to and after the perceiver realizes that the passer-by is not their friend. What changes after the perceiver becomes aware of their misidentifying presentation is that the presenting content is *apprehended* differently. To put it in Filozofówna’s terms, prior to their realization of the occurrence of a misidentification, the perceiver makes an

152 “affirmative judgment,” namely that *they see their friend approaching*; following their realization of said misidentification, the perceiver adjusts their initial judgment and makes a “negative judgment,” namely *they do not see their friend approaching* (Filozofówna 1931b, 64–65). Therefore, in Filozofówna’s view, presentations are concerned with “objects,” i.e., the objects *about* which they are, whereas judgments *apprehend* these objects as being such-and-such, and in so doing a positive or negative value is ascribed to them (Filozofówna 1931a, 188). In light of these considerations, Filozofówna concludes, it is not right to conceive of imaginative presentations as a *sui generis* class of presentations, for they are after all grounded on basic presentations and judgments, just like Brentano and Twardowski upheld (Płotka 2024, 251).<sup>26</sup>

Meinong, I argue, understood *Annahmen* in a similar fashion. At the risk of sounding repetitive, Meinong considers assumptions to constitute a *sui generis* class of (intellectual) mental phenomena situated *purposefully* between presentations and judgments. The purpose of situating assumptions between presentations and judgments lies in his treatment of assumptions as being more

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26 See also Płotka 2021b.

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complex than presentations and less committal than judgments (cf. Meinong 1983, 12). While Blaustein explicitly subscribes to assumptions as being less committal than judgments, it is not clear whether he accepts assumptions as being more complex than presentations. Blaustein treats presentations as being simple, intentional acts. Adhering to the simplicity of presentations and Meinong's characterization of assumptions, Blaustein's imaginative presentations in fact infringe his overarching view of presentations as being both simple acts and independent of judgments. To wit, it appears that Blaustein did not give his incorporation of Meinong's assumptions sufficient thought. In other words, by incorporating Meinong's assumptions, Blaustein can no longer say that imaginative presentations are independent, simple intentional acts, for assumptions are more complex than mere presentations, albeit being less committal than judgments. Thus, Blaustein's adoption of assumptions, in order to account for imaginative presentations, draws him closer to judgments and pushes him farther from presentations; the exact same effect that, I presume, he sought to avert through assumptions. This, I maintain, further demonstrates that imaginative presentations refer to basic intentional presentations and judgments, or at least something weaker than judgments, yet more complex than presentations, as Meinong would say.

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Moreover, one could find in Meinong's *Über Annahmen* supporting arguments in favor of reading assumptions as forming some sort of bridge that connects presentations and genuine judgments; and, by implication, arguments against Blaustein's denial of said bridge. *Annahme* is not a passive intentional operation like a presentation. Rather, it is an active intentional operation, on the basis of which one could arrive at genuine judgments. Therefore, assumptions can be devised as practical, methodological tools that one can use to process theories and refine human cognition.

Assumption can be thought of phenomenologically as a preparation for certain kinds of judgments [...]. An assumption is something we make in order to be able to reach a judgment, in a process of thought that phenomenologically is not yet but may in some instances be on its way to becoming a judgment. (Jacquette 2015, 50.)

As indicated by Jacqueline, Meinong's assumptions are an important phenomenological tool, through which mere hypotheses are transformed into knowledge. To assume is to entertain a possibility that may be actualized. To assume is to have a judgment in mind; a judgment that may or may not materialize. Even if the judgment does not materialize, the epistemic role assumptions play is praiseworthy. The denial of a judgment is as important for epistemology as is its positive affirmation. In Filozofówna's conception of assumptions and judgments, "belief" or "conviction" is emphasized (cf. 1931a, 190–191). This, of course, follows Meinong's original characterization of assumption as being "a judgment without belief" or that "a judgment is an assumption with the addition of belief" (Meinong 1983, 242). Thus, what separates assumptions and judgments is the presence/lack of "belief."

154 Returning to the matter at hand, I take issue with Blaustein's assertion that a theater spectator does not judge the fictional world depicted on stage, but, rather, assumes it is fictional (cf. Blaustein 2011a, 232). In this respect, I would like to draw an ontological distinction between two "aspects" relevant to worlds of fiction: (a) "inside" and (b) "outside." A play, or any work of fiction for that matter, is endowed with the inside and outside aspects. The inside aspect includes *all and only* the objectivities *ascribed* to the fictional world by its author/creator. For example, in the inside aspect of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo dies after drinking the poison. This state of affairs takes place inside the world created by Shakespeare. Meinong's characterization of assumptions in terms of the "antithesis of yes and no"<sup>27</sup> is preserved, for the play's inside aspect can be evaluated with respect to the determinations explicitly or implicitly specified of the play's characters.<sup>28</sup> For instance, it

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<sup>27</sup> See Meinong 1983, 98.

<sup>28</sup> The inside aspect of the play can be characterized, *à la* Meinong, as the object of assumptions, namely "objectives" or "propositions," to use Russell's term. Like judgments, assumptions are positive or negative by virtue of the positivity/negativity of their objectives (cf. Meinong 1983, 98). Please note that objects of judgment, according to Meinong, are also objectives. But it is important to draw an ontological distinction between these two. As I argue in the text, the outside aspect of the play involves judgments, hence their objectives are ontologically distinct from their inside counterparts; the latter's truth value is contingent upon a representational work, whereas the former's is ontologically independent.

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is either true or false that Romeo outlived Juliet.<sup>29</sup> *Romeo and Juliet* is also endowed with an outside aspect. We can speak of numerous “facts” that obtain outside of the work-world. For instance, it is literally (and not merely internally) true that *Romeo and Juliet was created by Shakespeare*, and it is literally true that *Romeo and Juliet are fictional objects*. A similar distinction between ficta’s “constitutive” and “extraconstitutive” properties can be found in Meinong (cf. Meinong 1972, 176). Accordingly, what I termed “inside” objectivities are equivalent to Meinong’s constitutive properties, e.g., *Romeo is a pure lover*; this is a major property that *constitutes* Romeo. Apart from constitutive properties, Romeo can also be said to possess extraconstitutive (outside) properties that define his external qualitative character as a fictum, e.g., *Romeo is a character created by Shakespeare*.

Following Blaustein, a spectator is expected to *assume* the fictionality of Shakespeare’s play. I beg to differ. The spectator does not *assume* the fictionality of Shakespeare’s world; they rather *judge* it as being so. The fictionality of *Romeo and Juliet* is not assumed within the work-world. Put differently, the fact that the play is fictional is not contained within Shakespeare’s work. Thus, it is not an inside (constitutive) fact that obtains within the work-world and fails to obtain outside it. *Au contraire*, the fictionality of *Romeo and Juliet* is a fact that obtains outside Shakespeare’s work-world and fails to obtain inside it. As has been stated previously, outside propositions that involve ficta and their world are literally true. Therefore, adhering to Meinong’s reasoning, the play spectator genuinely judges the fictionality of the work-world, for it is literally true that *Romeo and Juliet* is fictional. In terms of *Annahmen*’s epistemological utility, we gain genuine knowledge by judging Shakespeare’s play as fiction and not, say, non-fiction.

In my view, the spectator’s assumptions should be restricted to the inside aspect of the fiction. What, in fact, the spectator assumes inside the work-world is the reality, not fictionality, of *Romeo and Juliet*. Inside the work-world, Romeo and Juliet are described according to the norms and principles of reality.

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29 That said, the (in)famous problem of indeterminacy also affects the inside aspect of theater plays. We can talk of numerous properties that Romeo neither possesses nor fails to possess.

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The fictional world Shakespeare created is *internally* as real as our world is *externally*. Therefore, the spectator assumes, for the sake of aesthetic vividness, that the world, in which Romeo blindly falls in love with Juliet and tragically puts an end to his life in pursuit of her love, is real. They assume that Romeo is an ordinary man, and Juliet is an ordinary woman. They assume the meaning of the concepts included in the fiction has the same meaning they do in our world; that “love” is the same love we ordinarily talk about, that “tragedy” is the same tragedy we are familiar with in real life, etc. It is by virtue of assuming that the world of *Romeo and Juliet* is as real as ours that spectators are able to develop emotional connections to entities that are otherwise remote. In short, it is the “assumption of reality” that makes *Romeo and Juliet* relatable, and the tragedy depicted therein all the more touching. It is these (inside) assumptions that define the represented content of imaginative presentations. Blaustein in particular falls prey to a category mistake by equating the fictional and the assumptive. As I have argued above, the external fictionality of imaginative presentations is a matter of genuine judgment, not assumption, and fictional worlds in general can include both judgments (relative to their outside aspect) and assumptions (relative to their inside aspect).

## Conclusion

In the article, I have tackled Meinong’s assumptions and Blaustein’s imaginative presentations, taking “theater” as a study case. I devised Filozofówna’s Meinongian criticism of Blaustein, in order to put forth my thesis. I have systematically analyzed Meinong’s and Blaustein’s ideas on two levels, the *phenomenological* and the *ontological* one. On the phenomenological level, I have demonstrated that Blaustein’s descriptive analyses of presentation, perception, and attitudes have the potential to adequately account for the experience of theater spectators. However, Blaustein’s phenomenology is limited in the way it approaches the *objects* of imaginative presentations. I have proposed supplementing Blaustein’s phenomenology with ontological considerations that delimit the constitution of imaginative objects.

Analyzing his rejection of judgments in favor of Meinong’s assumptions, I have argued that Blaustein did not follow *Annahmen* in the way Meinong

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intended, for the latter established assumptions as a mediary class between presentations and judgments. To that end, Meinong advocated for assumptions as potential pre-judgments. Therefore, it is clear that Meinong did not rule out the instantaneous presence of presentations and judgments in favor of assumptions. I have posited that Filozofówna's understanding of *Annahmen* as "pretended judgments" is more in line with Meinong's, for she, too, bridges presentations and judgments. Further, I have attempted to both defend Brentano's universality thesis and incorporate Meinong's *Annahmen* into imaginative presentations (while keeping the two separate, of course). I have shown that Blaustein's explanation of the spectator's aesthetic experience of theater along the lines of assumptions is misleading. To make my case, I have appealed to an ontological distinction between the "inside" and "outside" aspects of imaginative presentations. Inside a play, the spectator imports what I called "principles of reality" into the fictional world of their experience. Everything that is imported from reality into fiction is a matter of assumption. Since fictional objects are constituted internally (inside the fiction), Filozofówna's description of *Annahmen* as "pretended judgments" is *à propos*.

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Indeed, the constitution of ficta can be described in terms of intentional ascriptions; hence, the ascribed properties are only pretended of ficta.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, acts of ascription are not basic, presentive acts, for well-individuated objects are determined via these acts. Rather, they are complex, yet not as complex as genuine judgments, for they do not bring into our ontology independent objects. It is, therefore, more appropriate to link assumptions to judgments than to presentations, as Blaustein does. A further argument in favor of the latter was raised with regard to ficta's "outside" aspect. Beyond Meinong's framework, I have argued that imaginative presentations' outside objectivities are a matter of genuine judgment. It is, for example, genuinely true that *Romeo*

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30 It is worth noting that Meinong's theory of objects does not treat *außerseiende* entities' *Sosein* as being dependent on intentional acts. Thought can only be said to "grasp" independently constituted entities (cf. Meinong 1978b, 153–154). However, a different version of Meinongianism can be discerned from his *Über Annahmen*, where *außerseiende* entities like ficta possess the properties they are assumed, hence pretended intentionally or linguistically, to have (cf. Kroon 1992). The intentional constitution of ficta's inside aspect is compatible with the latter Meinong, but not the former.

and *Juliet was created by Shakespeare*. This is not a mere assumption that is *relatively* true; it is *absolutely* true, and for that it is a genuine judgment. I have maintained that Blaustein infringes my proposed distinction, as he takes the theater spectator to assume the fictionality of the work-world. Blaustein's move constitutes a category mistake, for we genuinely judge the (outside) fictionality of the work-world, and we pretendedly assume its (inside) reality.

To answer my article's problematic, imaginative presentations require both assumptions and judgments. This does not entail that assumptions/judgments are "parts" of imaginative presentations. Rather, along with Blaustein and Meinong, imaginative presentations are basic, and assumptions/judgments are essentially separate. The problem with imaginative presentations, in my view, is that they are ontologically *non-selfsufficient*, for they require assumptions and judgments to be fully comprehensible.

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*Phainomena 34 | 132-133 | June 2025*

## **Transitions | Prehajanja**

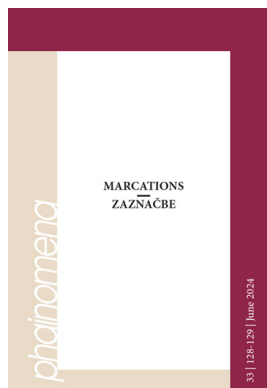
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*Phainomena 33 | 130-131 | November 2024*

## **Human Existence and Coexistence in the Epoch of Nihilism**

Damir Barbarić | Jon Stewart | Cathrin Nielsen | Ilia Inishev | Petar Bojanić | Holger Zaborowski | Dragan D. Prole | Susanna Lindberg | Jeff Malpas | Azelarabe Lahkim Bennani | Josef Estermann | Chung-Chi Yu | Alfredo Rocha de la Torre | Jesús Adrián Escudero | Veronica Neri | Žarko Paić | Werner Stegmaier | Adriano Fabris | Dean Komel



*Phainomena 33 | 128-129 | June 2024*

## **Marcations | Zaznačbe**

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