

(2016). Christopher J. McCarroll and John Sutton. Multiperspectival imagery: Sartre and cognitive theory on point of view in remembering and imagining. In Jack Reynolds & Richard Sebold (Eds.), *Phenomenology and Science: confrontations and convergences* (pp. 181-204). London: Palgrave.

*NB This is a final draft version only, and is not identical to the published version. Please cite and quote from the published version, as above.*

## Multiperspectival imagery: Sartre and cognitive theory on point of view in remembering and imagining

Christopher Jude McCarroll and John Sutton<sup>1</sup>

A familiar but remarkable fact about the psychology of memory is that the visual phenomenology of a memory of performing an activity like swimming across a lake will often be presented from a point of view above or behind the figure doing the swimming (that is *oneself*).

—Richard Moran (1994, 91)

### 1. Introduction

When remembering events from one's life one often visualises the remembered scene as one originally experienced it: from an 'internal', 'own-eyes', 'first-person', or 'field' perspective. Sometimes, however, one sees oneself in the remembered scene: from an 'external', 'third-person', or 'observer' perspective (Nigro & Neisser 1983).

Study of this phenomenon has a long past but a (relatively) short history in psychology (Eich et al. 2011). Observer perspectives in autobiographical memory were noted by Freud, for example, in his essay *Screen Memories* (1899/2001), and were thought to be the product of psychodynamic reconstruction. Yet it was not until Nigro and Neisser's (1983) pivotal paper on the distinction that psychological interest in point of view in memory ignited.

Since then empirical research has produced a number of consistent findings related to the differing points of view: the field perspective is more common, although there are important

individual and cultural differences; observer perspectives, however, are more common when remembering more temporally remote events, such as memories of childhood; field perspectives are more likely to include information on emotion and feelings, while observer perspectives tend to have less affective detail but contain more objective information; observer perspectives are also more common when there is a high degree of emotional self-awareness either at the time of the past event or at the time it is recalled (Nigro & Neisser 1983; Robinson & Swanson 1993; McIsaac & Eich, 2002; Eich et al. 2011).

One particularly puzzling piece of evidence is that the perspective within a single retrieval of memory can shift from one point of view to the other: for example, ‘when remembering a childhood beach vacation, a third-person perspective image may initially come to mind followed by a first-person perspective’ (Rice & Rubin 2009, 878). This ability to switch between perspectives affords the possibility that a single memory need not involve *either* one perspective *or* the other, but may in fact involve *both* field and observer perspectives. How would one make sense of this multiperspectival imagery? Phenomenology can help elucidate this puzzling plurality of perspective.

In this chapter we apply the insights of phenomenological analysis of mental imagery to the puzzles of point of view in personal memory. Indeed, it seems hard to see how one would make sense of multiperspectival memory imagery without using a phenomenological approach. Thinking about perspectives in imagery is complicated by the difficulty of accessing these aspects of one’s psychology, and for this reason phenomenology is a particularly insightful way of tapping into such nebulous phenomena.

We draw upon two key features of Sartre’s remarks on imagery as a way of making sense of some of the empirical evidence on visual perspective in memory.<sup>2</sup> Sartre applies the phenomenological method to imagery and argues that, firstly, the mental image is not an *object in* consciousness but is rather an *act* of consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, the image only admits of

*quasi-observation*. In other words, there is an *essential poverty* to the image: the image teaches us nothing, but, rather, it presents in such a way that ‘it is complete at the very moment of its appearance’ (Sartre 1940/1972, 7).<sup>4</sup>

These insights offer a way of understanding a specific live topic in contemporary cognitive science: the multiperspectival nature of memory imagery.<sup>5</sup> The key phenomenological idea that the image is an act of consciousness, or a way of thinking about an object or event, provides a way of elucidating some of the empirical findings on point of view in personal memory, and can help account for what we will describe as the self-presence of observer perspectives in personal memory.

## **2. The image as an act of consciousness**

Consider the following example of an observer perspective memory; an image of a remembered scene from one of the present authors’ own childhoods:

I am seated on a rope swing, dangling from the branches of a large but anonymous tree. My father is pushing me from behind, and I see myself swinging back and forth. Suddenly I lose my grip just as the swing reaches its forward apex. I fall off, landing on my back. I feel that horrible sensation of being winded, the tightening of the chest, the anxiety of being unable to breathe. I see myself, as if from behind, run down the hill in panic.

Such a description naturally invites the thought that one is inspecting the memory image before the mind’s eye: the image is somehow *in* consciousness, inspected *by* consciousness. This way of thinking is so natural that Sartre tells us that ‘Psychologists and philosophers have in the main adopted this point of view. It is also the point of view of common sense’ (1940/1972, 3).<sup>6</sup> For Sartre, this view reflects a ‘naïve ontology’ (1936/1962) of the image: it is to move the

image too close to perception. That is, it is to think of the image as a ‘reborn perception’ (Sartre 1940/2004, 10)—a weak and degraded copy of a previously vivid percept. For Sartre, phenomenological reflection shows this view to be misguided:

At the first reflective glance, we see that we have so far committed a double error. We thought, without justifying it to ourselves, that the image was *in* consciousness and that the object of the image was *in* the image. We depicted consciousness as a place peopled with small imitations and these imitations were the images. (Sartre 1940/2004, 5 emphasis original)

To hold this mistaken view—that is to think of the image as a type of picture or thing in consciousness, to believe ‘that images possess the same basic properties as externally perceived objects’ (Casey 1981, 143)—is to succumb to what Sartre calls the *illusion of immanence* (1940/1972, 2).<sup>7</sup> Although Sartre himself does not provide many arguments to dispel the illusion of immanence, being ‘more concerned to grasp the source of its attraction than to argue against it’ (Hopkins 1998, 161), there are a number of problems with such a simple picture theory.

One problem relates to the notion of optimal viewing conditions. When one perceives a picture or photograph, a range of viewing conditions affect how one actually sees the images: lighting; distance; other objects in one’s field of view, etc. One’s view of the picture will be more or less optimal. In the case of mental imagery, however, there are no such optimal viewing conditions:<sup>8</sup> ‘there is no mental analogue of turning up the light on a dimly lit inner picture’ (McGinn 2004, 64).<sup>9</sup>

A related problem concerns the medium of the image. Pictures are made from certain materials. If the image is an object in consciousness, a type of picture say, then it will be constructed of certain (physical) materials. Just as photographic paper is the medium of the

photographic image, then if the image is an object in consciousness it too will be constructed out of certain materials which act as a medium. Furthermore, these materials provide a picture with ‘certain intrinsic non-intentional properties’ (McGinn 2004, 63); properties which can themselves become the object of one’s attention. In the case of the image, however, one cannot turn one’s attention to the medium of the image, to ‘the materials of the image independently of what it is an image of’ (McGinn 2004, 63).<sup>10</sup> This leads to the conclusion that ‘if there are no such intrinsic properties, then I cannot be said to see a picture in my mind’s eye, since it is constitutive of being a picture that there be this partition into intentional and non-intentional properties’ (McGinn 2004, 63).

By taking the image as an act of consciousness that only admits of quasi-observation, Sartre distances imagery from perception.<sup>11</sup> Theories of imagery which fall prey to the illusion of immanence view the image as a reified copy of an original percept, such that ‘images exist strictly atomistically and thus as incapable of becoming parts of genuine synthetic wholes’ (Casey 1981, 142). Yet for Sartre consciousness is synthetic or holistic through and through: so ‘the atomistic view of images, by regarding them as isolated units, disrupts the continuity of consciousness and spoils its spontaneity’ (Casey 1981, 142).

Sartre tells us that it would be:

impossible to slip these material portraits into a conscious synthetic structure without destroying the structure, cutting the contacts, stopping the current, breaking the continuity. Consciousness would cease to be transparent to itself; everywhere its unity would be broken by the inassimilable, opaque screens. (1940/2004, 6)<sup>12</sup>

We want to invoke the important phenomenological insight that the image ‘is not a content in consciousness; rather it is a dynamic and relational act of consciousness (Thompson 2007, 301). In Sartre’s words:

The word 'image' could only indicate therefore the relation of consciousness to the object; in other words, it is a certain way in which the object appears to consciousness, or, if one prefers, a certain way in which consciousness presents to itself an object...to avoid all ambiguity, I repeat here that an image is nothing other than a relation. The imaging consciousness that I have of Pierre is not a consciousness of an image of Pierre: Pierre is directly reached, my attention is not directed at an image, but at an object. (Sartre 1940/2004, 7)

There are not, and never could be, images *in* consciousness. Rather, an image is *a certain type of consciousness*. An image is an act, not some thing. An image is a consciousness of some thing. (1936/1962, 146 emphasis original)

We think that understanding the image as an act of consciousness, as a mode of presentation, has explanatory value in relation to the problems of memory imagery. In the next section we invoke another of Sartre's key characteristics of mental imagery, one which is related to the idea of the image as an act of consciousness: the notion of *quasi-observation*. And then we can apply these phenomenological insights to the puzzles of point of view in personal memory.

### **3. The image and quasi-observation**

To explain the notion of quasi-observation, Sartre examines the relation between the mental image, the percept, and the concept. According to Sartre, in perception one observes objects. Perception is perspectival, and objects are presented from a particular point of view. In perception, in order to fully know an object one must *make a tour* of it and synthesise the

various aspects of the perceptual object (Sartre 1940/2004, 8). In other words, the objects of perception are presented:

only in a series of profiles, of projections. The cube is indeed present to me, I can touch it, see it; but I can never see it except in a certain way, which calls for and excludes at the same time an infinity of other points of view. One must *learn* objects, which is to say, multiply the possible points of view on them. (Sartre 1940/2004, 8 emphasis original)

In contrast, when one thinks of a cube by means of the concrete concept, one conceives of it (six sides and eight angles) all at once: one can think of ‘the concrete essences in a single act of consciousness’ (Sartre 1940/1972, 6). Sartre tells us that when I am thinking conceptually ‘I am at the centre of my idea, I seize it in its entirety at one glance’ (Sartre 1940/1972, 6).

How then are we to understand the image? Sartre, initially at least, places the image as somewhat intermediate between the percept and the concept. For Sartre, ‘mental imagery, unlike conceptual thought, makes its object seem in some way *present*, not merely indicated’ (Webber 2004, xxii emphasis original). The imagined object is, just like the perceived object, ‘presented in profiles, in projections’ (Sartre 1940/1972, 7), although this is a claim we return to in the next section. Unlike the perceived object, however, one cannot discover anything new about the object as imaged. According to Sartre, ‘No matter how long I may look at an image, I shall never find anything but what I put there. It is in this fact that we find the distinction between an image and a perception’ (1940/1972, 7). This is why he describes the image as suffering from an *essential poverty*: ‘nothing can be learned from an image that is not already known’ (Sartre 1940/1972, 8). Sartre’s position on impoverished imagery may be summarised as follows:

There is always more to the perceived object than we can see, but imagination shares with conceptual thought the trait of its object having all and only the properties that it is presented as having. In perception, knowledge of the object is consequent upon the experience of it, whereas in imagination knowledge is prior to experience. (Webber 2004, xxi)

It may be that Sartre overstates the point about the essential poverty of the image. He recognises that ‘it can...happen that a memory image presents itself suddenly and presents some new aspects’ (1940/1972, 8). But Sartre responds that even in such cases the image ‘presents itself in one piece to intuition, it reveals immediately what it is’ (1940/1972, 8). Even in instances in which a memory image of a place, a dreary garden say, remains unidentified, Sartre tells us that no amount of observation will yield the name of the place: ‘If I later discover the name of the garden it is by means of processes which have nothing to do with pure and simple observation: the image gave everything it possessed all at once’ (Sartre 1940/1972, 9).

In what can be construed as a further challenge to Sartre’s thesis of quasi-observation of the image, Stephen Kosslyn and his colleagues show that mental imagery can be informative and provide answers to such questions as ‘do frogs have stubby green tails?’. In answering such queries subjects often report that they form an image and inspect it (Kosslyn 1980, 1). McGinn argues that this challenge can be met. He suggests that the Sartrean point of quasi-observation relates to ‘the *flow* of information from the object to the belief system and the associated attitude of observation—and this contrast still holds once we concede the way that images *can* inform us’ (McGinn 2004, 20 emphasis original). In cases in which the image is informative the stored information is transformed from an implicit to an explicit form. For McGinn, Sartre’s thesis is untouched: the conversion of information from memory images to explicit knowledge does not involve a flow of information from the object and observation of that object (McGinn 2004, 20).

We use Sartre's thesis that the mental image is infused with and constituted by knowledge to help make sense of plural perspectives in personal memory.

#### **4. Multiperspectival imagery: cognitive science and phenomenology**

The relation between visual perspective and memory is complex. As we saw earlier, the visual perspective involved in a single episode of memory retrieval need not be fixed. One's perspective on the past may flit or flutter between internal and external (visual) points of view. Or, it may be the case that one's perspective on the past may be blended and embrace both field and observer perspectives. Perspectives in memory may be protean.

We see a nice example of this switching (from observer to field), in an excerpt from a diary study by Dorte Berntsen and David Rubin:

I see myself dancing at a party at the university. I remember my clothes and my legs (the way they moved). Suddenly, I am 'inside my own body' looking out. A guy I know a little walks by me and says as he passes: 'You look good today'.<sup>13</sup>

This ability to switch between perspectives opens the possibility that a single memory need not involve *either* one perspective *or* the other, but may in fact involve *both* field and observer perspectives.

Examining the variability of visual point of view in remembering, Heather Rice and David Rubin suggest that there are a number of possible ways in which visual perspective may manifest within a particular mnemonic episode:

First, memories can be either first-person or third-person, but not both; only one perspective can be experienced during a particular retrieval attempt. This will be referred to as the "mutually exclusive framework." Second, the two perspectives are two ends of a continuum and are complementary. An individual may be able to experience both

perspectives during a single retrieval episode, but the experience of more of one necessitates the experience of less of the other. This will be referred to as the “complementary framework.” Third, individuals can experience both a first- and third-person perspective during recall and they are not dependent on one another; individuals can experience a strong first-person perspective and strong third-person perspective during the same retrieval attempt. This will be referred to as the “independent framework”. (2009, 879)

Rice and Rubin conducted a number of studies to test the three frameworks, concluding that ‘the preponderance of evidence supported the independent framework over the complementary and mutually exclusive frameworks’ (2009, 887). The visual perspective experienced during a single memory retrieval need not be *either* field perspective *or* observer perspective, it can be *both*.<sup>14</sup> This raises the question: how do individuals experience multiple perspectives? Rice and Rubin tell us that ‘One possibility is that individuals switch from one distinct perspective to another distinct perspective. However, it may be that they experience multiple perspectives simultaneously’ (Rice & Rubin 2009, 887). Rice and Rubin, following informal conversations with their participants, cautiously adopt the former hypothesis, but they do not rule out the possibility of simultaneous perspectives and advocate that future investigations should examine both alternatives. We argue that it is easier to make sense of both alternatives—switching and blending of perspectives—by considering the image as a mode of presentation of a particular past event.

If mental imagery, and particularly memory imagery, is thought of as a reborn percept, then it becomes hard to make sense of the notion that one can switch between field and observer perspectives in a single episode of remembering.<sup>15</sup> On such a view there should be a single atomistic copy of the past event, perpetually preserved in memory and pictured before the

mind's eye. In essence the possibility of switching never arises because there is a unique unitary object that is visualised.

Further, according to the copy theories that Sartre challenges, mnemonic observer perspectives would not be genuine instances of episodic memory. According to such theories, mental imagery, especially memory imagery, involves reproductions of previous perceptions. Given that one did not see oneself from-the-outside at the time of the original experience, one cannot have a memory in which one sees oneself from-the-outside: one cannot recall from an observer perspective.<sup>16</sup>

Yet there is now a wealth of evidence to suggest that personal or episodic memory is *essentially* reconstructive rather than reproductive (Schacter & Addis 2007). This means that *both* field and observer perspectives are (re)constructed rather than reproduced. Further, reconstruction in memory does not entail distortion or error: genuine or veridical memories are reconstructed too (Barnier et al. 2008; Campbell 2014). This is a point John Campbell insists on:

memory images are not simple copies of past perceptions; they are reconstructed from compilations of past perceptions. This is immediately apparent when you reflect even on the contrast between the course of your perceptions as you enter a room—jerky, rapidly switching from shot to shot, disorganized—and your imagistic memory a few moments later of your entry to the room, which is a smooth, carefully edited, coherent sequence. The constructed character of memory imagery—the fact that we cannot view the memory image as a simple copy of an earlier perception—also shows up in the fact that many people, reporting the contents of their memories of scenes in which they played a part, report that they have a third-person image of themselves as one among the people in the scene, rather than remembering the scene from their own past point of view. (2001: 182)

In fact Nigro and Neisser posit the possibility of genuine observer perspective *experiences*.<sup>17</sup> Although they do not clarify how these observer perspective experiences arise, Nigro and Neisser propose two possible interpretations of these detached, from-the-outside, experiences: firstly, that they are nonegocentric forms of direct perception; alternatively, they may be products of instantaneous reconstruction (1983, 467-468).

Rather than thinking of observer perspective experiences as involving a visual perception of oneself from-the-outside, we argue that even at the time of the experience, at the time of memory encoding, one may adopt an external perspective on oneself. This external perspective need not be, and perhaps cannot be, genuinely perceptual. But, nonetheless, the context of encoding may encourage the selection of information based on an external perspective.<sup>18</sup>

Both the contexts of encoding and retrieval have an effect on the content of memory (Schacter 1996). Recall that memories in which one adopts an observer perspective are more common when there is a high degree of emotional self-awareness either at the time of the original experience or at the time of recall. If the memory image is thought of as a picture-like copy of an original perceptual experience, it becomes difficult to explain the possibility of genuine memories recalled from an observer perspective.

Sartre's notion of the image as a way of thinking about an event, a mode of presentation of that past event, helps make sense of, firstly, the notion of observer perspective experiences giving rise to observer perspective memories. Secondly, it elucidates the idea that the visual perspective of memory is not fixed, that there may be switching between field and observer perspectives. During encoding the information available to memory may be richer than mere perceptual input: one may adopt an external perspective on oneself, thinking of how one looks to the audience as one is engaged in public speaking, or perhaps being more attentive to the objective features of the situation.

Using Sartre's framework to think about memory imagery, we can say that field and observer perspectives are simply different modes of presentation of the same past event. Observer perspective experiences involve the encoding of information in which one adopts an external perspective on oneself, and memories in which one adopts an observer perspective may involve thinking about those aspects of the past event. Switching between perspectives then is a matter of thinking about the same past event in different ways or thinking about different aspects of the same past event. As we shall see in the last section, this Sartrean understanding of the imagery of memory also coheres with an influential cognitive theory of visual perspective in imagery.

What of the possibility of blended imagery? How would one make sense of the claim that a memory may be recalled from *both* a field perspective and an observer perspective simultaneously? We suggest that invoking Sartre's conception of mental imagery can help elucidate this intriguing possibility.

For Sartre, the mental image is not an object *in* consciousness, but rather an *act* of consciousness. On Sartre's view the objects of perception are observable: one can discover new things about the object by moving position, say, and gaining knowledge of the object. However, unlike perception, the objects presented by mental imagery involve quasi-observation. The objects of imagery may present from a particular perspective, but one's knowledge of the object is complete: unlike perception, in imaging the object 'we no longer need to make a tour of it' (Sartre 1940/2004, 9).

Indeed, for Sartre, because the image is intermediate between the concept and the perception: 'the object of the image appears in a form which it could not possibly have in perception' (Sartre 1940/1972, 105). The image, like the concept, may present multiple aspects of the object:

The image is directed to the object most of the time in its entirety, all at once. What we try to recover in the image is not this or that aspect of a person but the person himself, as a synthesis of all his aspects. (Sartre 1940/1972, 105-106)

Expanding upon the idea that the objects of imagination are already fully known, Sartre presents us with a picture of the multiperspectival nature of mental imagery. Sartre tells us that imagery need not present an object from a particular point of view, but like Cubist art may show an object from multiple points of view simultaneously: ‘these objects do not appear, as they do in perception, from a particular angle; they do not occur *from a point of view*; I attempt to bring them to birth as they are in themselves’ (1940/1972, 141 emphasis original).

Recall that for Sartre the image is a form of consciousness, a way of thinking (imagistically) about an object or event: ‘The fact is that there is no opposition between image and thought but only the relation of a species to a genus which subsumes it’ (Sartre 1940/1972, 140). The image is not something from which one can learn, one’s knowledge precedes the image, and the image reflects one’s knowledge (implicit and explicit). This means that unlike percepts, which are experienced from a particular point of view, imaged objects may be visualised as if from multiple points of view simultaneously. Sartre informs us that:

imagined objects are seen from several sides at the same time: or better – for this multiplication of points of view, of sides, does not give an exact account of the imaginative intention – they are ‘presentable’ under an all-inclusive aspect. It is something like a rough draft of a point of view on them which vanishes, becomes diluted. (1940/1972, 141)

It may be that one switches rapidly between field and observer perspectives in personal memory, but adopting a version of Sartre’s framework for thinking about mental imagery can at least start to make sense of the notion of blended perspectives.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, without this theory

of the image, the possibility of blending does not make any sense: appealing to a simple picture theory of imagery cannot account for the synthetic multiperspectival nature of memory imagery.

This blending of perspectives is not exclusively tied to the domain of memory and imagination. The notion of multiple and blended spatial perspectives comes to the fore when we consider how spatial information is communicated. Barbara Tversky first alludes to the distinction between egocentric (embedded or ‘route’) points of view and allocentric (extrinsic or ‘survey’) perspectives before stating:

just as spontaneous descriptions of space mix perspectives, using route and survey expressions in the same clause...maps (as well as pictorial and other external representations) often show mixed perspectives; for example, many ancient and modern maps of towns and cities show the network of roads from an overhead view and key buildings from a frontal view...Like Cubist and post-Cubist art, maps can show different views simultaneously in ways that violate the rules of perspective, but that *may promote understanding of what is portrayed*. (2011, 507 emphasis added)<sup>20</sup>

This way of thinking of blurred perspectives echoes Sartre’s claim above, and the analogy with Cubist art is mirrored in this further claim from Sartre: ‘the objects of our imaginative consciousness are like the silhouettes drawn by children; the face is seen in profile, but both eyes are nevertheless drawn in’ (1940/1972, 141). For such an image just think of Picasso’s Cubist homage to the atrocity at Guernica, ‘Weeping Woman’, 1937. And the reciprocity of these positions may also indicate a *function* of such multiperspectival imagery: it *may promote understanding of what is portrayed*. Multiperspectival memory imagery may be a way of thinking about the past which reflects the multiplicity of information available both from the

moment of encoding and at retrieval: ‘images *particularize* remembering by generating a *plethora* of details’ (Wagoner 2012, 1043 emphasis original).

Indeed, as we show next, the idea that memory imagery is a way of thinking about a past event, and that field and observer perspectives *particularise* different aspects of that past event, accords not only with a phenomenological analysis of memory imagery but also contemporary cognitive theory.

## **5. Observer perspectives as modes of presentation**

Developing the idea of the image as an act of consciousness, we argue that observer perspectives involve a distinct mode of presentation of the past event. We use the work of Husserl and Mark Rowlands to expound the notion that intentional states involve a tripartite structure. This tripartite structure of intentionality can help capture the complexity and variability of remembering one’s past. We provide support for this rich notion of a mode of presentation by drawing on work ranging from phenomenology to cognitive and social psychology.

Perceiving, remembering, imagining are intentional states. This means that they are essentially *directed toward* an object, or are *about* an object. This intentional directedness can be thought to involve a threefold structure. Husserl distinguished between the intentional act, the intentional object, and the intentional content (Spear n.d). The intentional act can be considered as the psychological mode, the particular kind of mental act one is engaged in: remembering, perceiving, or imagining say. Such mental acts are directed at a particular intentional object: a thing, event, or state of affairs. The intentional content relates to the *way* in which the subject thinks about the particular intentional object. One does not think of an intentional object *simpliciter*, one ‘always thinks of the object or experiences it from a certain

perspective and as being a certain way or as being a certain kind of thing' (Spear n.d, section 1a). For example, one perceives or remembers (the intentional act) the ocean (the intentional object) as clear and inviting or as cold and menacing (intentional content). One does not simply perceive or remember the ocean, but one perceives or remembers the ocean in a particular way.

Importantly, Rowlands refers to this third element of intentionality—intentional content—as the *mode of presentation*.<sup>21</sup> Rowlands tells us:

The intentional act is connected to the intentional object via a mode of presentation of that object. Thus, a subject, in virtue of its intentional act, is aware of an object, and the act makes the subject aware of this object because it is this object that satisfies the mode of presentation embodied in the act. The mode of presentation is what allows the intentional act to 'hook onto' the intentional object of that act. I shall refer to this as the *mediational* conception of intentionality. If we adopt this mediational conception of the intentional relation, then the relation between an experience as act,  $E_A$ , and an experience as object,  $E_O$ , is this:  $E_A$  presents  $E_O$  to subject  $S$  by way of a mode of presentation,  $P$ , of  $E_O$ . (2010a, 91 emphasis original)

This means that the *same* object can fall under *different* modes of presentation within the same act type: the explicit content of memory, say, can be presented in different forms to the subject. Not only can one perceive or remember or imagine the same content, i.e., not only can one have the same (intentional) object intended by different (intentional) acts, but one can also remember (or perceive or imagine) the same content in *different ways*.<sup>22</sup>

This way of thinking of the mode of presentation allows for a fuller understanding of the different ways the past can be presented to a subject at different times. It acknowledges that intentional acts are 'in various ways informed by valences, feelings, past experiences, and frameworks of reference and interest, and that they shape the way I actually see [or remember]

things' (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 115). On our understanding then, adopting an observer perspective is remembering the *same* past event under a particular mode of presentation.

This idea that the same object (explicit content) may be remembered (or perceived or imagined) in different ways, that is it may fall under different modes of presentation, may be what grounds Peter Goldie's notion of the ironic gap—the idea that what one *now* knows, thinks, or feels about a past event can infuse the memory of that same past event. Goldie holds that when this triply ironic gap (epistemic, evaluative, emotional) opens up between the past and the present, one is more likely to adopt an observer perspective when remembering. Importantly though, Goldie also acknowledges that 'field episodic memories—memories of what happened "from the inside"—can also be infected with irony, with what one now knows, and how one feels about what one now knows' (2012, 52).

In observer perspective memories there has not been a change in the explicit content *per se*: the event remembered is still the same, the explicit content is still the same. Nonetheless, drawing on the work of Rowlands, we argue that this explicit content falls under a different mode of presentation, and that the self-presence of observer perspectives arises implicitly from this mode of presentation. The same content is remembered in different ways.

Dylan Trigg alludes to precisely this point. Discussing a memory of a visit to Alcatraz, Trigg writes:

True, I can remember the feel of moistness inside Alcatraz, and to some extent relive that texture on recollection, but there is a surrounding detachment to this interior experience, as though looking at myself from above. I am, effectively, a player in the scene of my own memory. (2012, 59)

Trigg then informs us, in relation to this memory, that 'what is remembered can often concern less the affective experience of the subject and more the objective presentation of events in the

world' (2012, 53). This is compatible with the empirical evidence on remembering from a field or an observer perspective. The field perspective is associated with the recall of affective detail and the observer perspective with the objective circumstances of the past event. In both cases—field and observer perspectives—the intentional object (the remembered event) is the same; it is simply thought about in different ways, under different modes of presentation.

The idea that field and observer perspectives in memory reflect different ways of thinking about the same past event is the central tenet of Lisa Libby and Richard Eibach's model of imagery perspective. According to this model:

imagery perspective functions to determine whether people understand events bottom-up, in terms of the phenomenology evoked by concrete features of the pictured situation (first-person), or top-down, in terms of abstractions that integrate the pictured event with its broader context (third-person). (Libby & Eibach 2011, 186)

We can understand Libby and Eibach's claim as the idea that field and observer perspectives present the world, and help us understand the world in different ways, by falling under different modes of presentation. If intentional activity is a *disclosing activity*, in that it discloses or reveals objects or events or parts of the world (Rowlands 2010b, Ch. 7), then field and observer perspectives will reveal or disclose different aspects of the same event.

It may be argued that the mode of presentation, understood as the intentional content, is as much a part of the intentional act as the intentional object. Husserl makes a distinction between two constituents of the intentional content: act *quality* and act *matter* (*Logical Investigations* 2, §20).<sup>23</sup> Act quality 'is that inner feature of an act that distinguishes it phenomenologically from acts of other *kinds*' (McIntyre & Woodruff Smith 1989, 156 emphasis original). The difference in *quality* of perceiving or remembering makes such states phenomenologically distinct. On the other hand, McIntyre and Woodruff Smith tell us that 'the

matter in an act's content is that in the act which gives it its specific *representational character* (1989, 156 emphasis original). Moreover, the act's matter can vary either by representing different objects or by representing the *same* objects in *different* ways. In other words, the same object or event can be remembered in different ways. The mode of presentation relates to both the act (quality) and the object (matter) of intentionality. We argue that the mode of presentation may implicitly present aspects of the object through the activity of the act itself: aspects that are informed by *frameworks of reference and interest* (Gallagher & Zahavi: 2008, 115).

The self-presence of observer perspective memories is transparent, in the sense that it is not usually an object of one's awareness. One sees through the self to the event (intentional object) itself: 'we are ordinarily not even aware of this content; rather, the content is what makes our act a representation of an object, and this object is what we are aware of' (McIntyre & Woodruff Smith 1989, 155). The reason for this transparency is, we take it, that the self-presence of observer perspectives in memory arises implicitly as part of the mode of presentation of the past event. The self-presence of observer perspectives is due to a change in the form or mode of presentation of such past events. Changes in the form or mode of presentation will affect *how* one perceives or remembers a certain object not *what* one perceives or remembers. This is the reason why in remembering from an observer perspective one is *not* remembering having-seen-oneself at the time of the past event, one is, rather, simply remembering the event. Remembering from an observer perspective is simply remembering.

## **6. Conclusion**

The visual imagery of personal memory involves points of view. One may recall a past event from a field perspective or an observer perspective. Even though the visual perspective one

adopts may be fixed and steady, evidence suggests that we sometimes experience *both* field and observer perspectives in a single episode of remembering. When recalling a particular past event one may often switch between the two points of view, or perhaps one may even blend perspectives. Memory imagery may be multiperspectival.

Appealing to Sartre's phenomenological analysis of the image provides a way of understanding this plurality of perspectives. Thinking of the mnemonic image as a mode of presentation of a particular past event, as an image that is infused with and incorporates one's knowledge of the past, provides a way of understanding such multiperspectival memory imagery.

By integrating the insights of phenomenology and empirical evidence we develop a richer account of the nature of multiperspectival memory imagery. Where empirical evidence hints at the possibility of multiperspectival memory imagery, phenomenology elucidates how such imagery could arise. Uniting phenomenological and scientific perspectives on memory imagery offers us a way of elucidating the puzzles of point of view in personal memory.

## References

- Barnier, Amanda. J., John Sutton, Celia B. Harris, & Robert A. Wilson. 2008. "A Conceptual and Empirical Framework for the Social Distribution of Cognition: the case of memory." *Cognitive Systems Research*, 9 (1): 33–51.
- Berntsen, Dorthe. 1996. "Involuntary Autobiographical Memories." *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 10 (5): 435–54.
- Berntsen, Dorthe, and David C. Rubin. 2006. "Emotion and Vantage Point in Autobiographical Memory." *Cognition and Emotion* 20 (8): 1193–1215.
- Campbell, John. 2001. "Memory Demonstratives." In *Time and Memory: Issues in Philosophy and Psychology*, edited by C. Hoerl & T. McCormack, 169–186. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Campbell, Sue. 2014. *Our Faithfulness to the Past: The Ethics and Politics of Memory*, edited by C. M. Koggel and R. Jacobsen. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Casey, Edward S. 1981. "Sartre on Imagination." In *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre: Library of Living Philosophers (Vol XVI)*, edited by P. A. Schilpp, 138–66. La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company.
- Eich, Eric, Todd C. Handy, Emily A. Holmes, Juval Lerner, and Heather K. McIsaac. 2011. "Field and Observer Perspectives in Autobiographical Memory." Presented at Conference '14th Sydney Symposium on Social Psychology' URL: <http://www.sydneysymposium.unsw.edu.au/2011/chapters/EichSSSP2011.pdf>
- Freud, Sigmund. (1899/2001). Screen Memories. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, J. Strachey (ed.), (Vol. 3, pp. 303-322). London: Vintage.
- Gallagher, Shaun, and Dan Zahavi. 2008. *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science*. London: Routledge.
- Goldie, Peter. 2012. *The Mess Inside: Narrative, Emotion, and the Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Hopkins, Robert. 1998. *Picture, Image and Experience: A Philosophical Inquiry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Huebner, David M., and Barbara L. Fredrickson. 1999. "Gender Differences in Memory Perspectives: Evidence for Self-Objectification in Women." *Sex Roles* 41 (5-6): 459–67.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1900/2001. *Logical Investigations*. Translated by J. N. Findlay. London: Routledge.
- Kosslyn, Stephen Michael. 1980. *Image and Mind*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Lechte, John. 2003. *Key Contemporary Concepts: From Abjection to Zeno's Paradox*. London: Sage.
- Levy, Lior. 2012. "Rethinking the Relationship Between Memory and Imagination in Sartre's The Imaginary." *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 43 (2): 143–60.
- Libby, Lisa K., and Richard P. Eibach. 2011. "Visual Perspective in Mental Imagery: A Representational Tool That Functions in Judgment, Emotion, and Self-Insight." In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology (Vol 44)*, edited by M. P. Zanna and J. M. Olson, 185–245. San Diego: Academic Press.
- McCarroll, Christopher J. 2015. "Point of View in Personal Memory: A Philosophical Investigation." PhD Thesis, Sydney: Macquarie University.
- McGinn, Colin. 2004. *Mindsight: Image, Dream, Meaning*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- . 2015. *Philosophy of Language: The Classics Explained*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- McIntyre, Ronald, and David Woodruff Smith. 1989. "Theory of Intentionality." In *Husserl's Phenomenology: A Textbook*, edited by J. N. Mohanty and W. R. McKenna, 147–79. Washington D. C.: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and University Press of America.
- McIsaac, Heather K., and Eric Eich. 2002. "Vantage Point in Episodic Memory." *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 9 (1): 146–50.

- Moran, Richard. 1994. "The Expression of Feeling in Imagination." *The Philosophical Review*, no. 1: 75–106.
- Nigro, Georgia, and Ulric Neisser. 1983. "Point of View in Personal Memories." *Cognitive Psychology* 15 (4): 467–82.
- Pylyshyn, Zenon. 2004. "Mental Imagery." In *The Oxford Companion to the Mind.*, edited by R L Gregory, 582–85. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reynolds, Jack. 2006. *Understanding Existentialism*. Chesham: Acumen.
- Rice, Heather J., and David C. Rubin. 2009. "I Can See It Both Ways: First-and Third-Person Visual Perspectives at Retrieval." *Consciousness and Cognition* 18 (4): 877–90.
- Robinson, John A., and Karen L. Swanson. 1993. "Field and Observer Modes of Remembering." *Memory* 1 (3): 169–84.
- Rowlands, Mark. 2010a. "Consciousness." In *Handbook of Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*, edited by S. Gallagher and D. Schmicking, 85–97. Dordrecht: Springer.
- . 2010b. *The New Science of the Mind: From Extended Mind to Embodied Phenomenology*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. [1936] 1962. *Imagination: A Psychological Critique*. Translated by F. Williams. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- . [1940a] 1972. *The Psychology of Imagination*. London: Methuen & Co.
- . [1940b] 2004. *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*. Translated by J. Webber. London: Routledge.
- . [1943] 2003. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated by H. E. Barnes. London: Routledge.
- Schacter, Daniel L. 1996. *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past*. New York: Basic Books.

- Schacter, Daniel. L., and Donna R. Addis. (2007). "The cognitive neuroscience of constructive memory: remembering the past and imagining the future." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 362 (1481): 773–786.
- Spear, Andrew D. (n.d.). "Edmund Husserl: Intentionality and Intentional Content." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/huss-int/> (accessed 29/05/2015).
- Stawarska, Beata. 2001. "Pictorial Representation or Subjective Scenario? Sartre on Imagination." *Sartre Studies International* 7 (2): 87–111.
- Sutton, John. 2010. "Observer Perspective and Acentred Memory: Some Puzzles About Point of View in Personal Memory." *Philosophical Studies* 148 (1): 27–37.
- . 2014. "Memory Perspectives (editorial)." *Memory Studies* 7 (2): 141–45.
- Thompson, Evan. 2007. *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Trigg, Dylan. 2012. *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Tversky, Barbara. 2011. "Visualizing Thought." *Topics in Cognitive Science* 3 (3): 499–535.
- Vendler, Zeno. 1979. "Vicarious Experience." *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 84 (2): 161–73.
- Wagoner, Brady. 2012. "Culture in Constructive Remembering." In *The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Psychology*, edited by J. Valsiner, 1034–55. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Warnock, Mary. 1976. *Imagination*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Webber, Jonathan. 2004. "Philosophical Introduction." In Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, edited by Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre and Jonathan Webber, xiii – xxvi. London: Routledge.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. [1967] 1990. *Zettel*. Edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Wollheim, Richard. 1984. *The Thread of Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank Jack Reynolds and Richard Sebold for helpful and insightful comments on previous drafts.

<sup>2</sup> In his analysis of mental imagery Sartre acknowledges a debt to the phenomenology of Husserl. In this chapter we draw mainly upon Sartre's theory of imagery. Wittgenstein is another theorist who offered a similar characterisation of imagery to Sartre's. See for example Wittgenstein (1967/1990), 621.

<sup>3</sup> This idea relates to what Mary Warnock describes as the 'original doctrine of phenomenology', according to which imagination 'like the rest of consciousness...is essentially directed towards an object' (Warnock 1976, 162). Warnock goes on to say of Sartre's first characteristic of the image that 'apart from this direction towards something else, the image itself is nothing' (1976, 162).

<sup>4</sup> In fact Sartre outlines four characteristics of the image: the image is an act of consciousness; the phenomenon of quasi-observation; the imaginative consciousness posits its object as a nothingness; spontaneity. It is the first two of these characteristics that we are concerned with in this chapter. For Sartre the evidence of phenomenology is certain, whereas the hypotheses of science are merely probable: 'This relationship between first-person description and third-person experimentation is the 'phenomenological psychology' mentioned in [Sartre's] book's subtitle, and runs throughout the work' (Webber 2004, xxii). Even if Sartre overstates the incontrovertibility of his phenomenological analysis we can still retain his insights.

<sup>5</sup> It may be argued that Sartre's theory is a phenomenological analysis of the *imagination* not *memory*, and that therefore we cannot legitimately use Sartre's insights on imagination and apply them to memory. Sartre makes a distinction between memory (and anticipation) and imagination based on the differentthetic or positional character of the two intentional acts (Sartre 1940/2004, 181). However, Sartre's insights can still be utilised in relation to memory imagery: firstly, Sartre draws on many examples from memory to flesh out the ideas of his theory of imagery (Sartre 1940/2004, 181; Warnock 1976, 176; Levy 2012, 143). Secondly, there is evidence that Sartre did not view the division between memory and imagination as so clear cut. Discussing the Husserlian theory

---

of imagery in which a sharp distinction is drawn between ‘memory-images’ and ‘fiction-images’, Sartre writes that ‘there are so many intermediate forms between memory-images and fiction images that this sharp separation is unacceptable’ (1936/1962, 143). Finally, Sartre’s separation of imaginative and mnemonic acts relates to their distinctthetic characters. Yet, even if Sartre is correct about the different positional characters of memory and imagination, it does not undermine our use of his imagery insights as a way of explaining the puzzles of perspective in memory imagery. We make use of only two of Sartre’s essential characteristics of the image: that the image is an act of consciousness, and that the image only admits of quasi-observation. It seems highly improbable that Sartre would jettison the ideas that the memory image is an act of consciousness and is subject to only quasi-observation. Such a move would entail abandoning the thesis of the illusion of immanence, or at least modifying it to show that memory images are objects in consciousness while imagination images are acts of consciousness.

<sup>6</sup> Sartre takes Hume to be one who held such a view (Sartre 1940/2004, 5).

<sup>7</sup> Immanence relates to ‘indwelling’. The illusion of immanence involves thinking of the image in the mind as having the same status and reality as an external object: ‘The illusion relates to the sense that there is a reality embedded in the image as image’ (Lechte 2003, 122). The image is rather *transcendent*: the image is not in consciousness, it is directed at an object beyond consciousness. In Sartre’s words: ‘The illusion of immanence consists in transferring the externality, spatiality, and all the sensible qualities of the thing to the transcendent psychic content’ (1940/2004: 53).

<sup>8</sup> Of course, there may be optimal conditions for accurately remembering, just as there may be optimal conditions for a range of cognitive processes such as solving a mathematical problem or navigating an unfamiliar terrain. But just because some capacity has optimal conditions does not mean it is like *viewing* a picture or has optimal *viewing* conditions. Indeed we note that the conditions of recall (and encoding) can have an effect on the content of memory, but this is not the same as saying that mental images have similar viewing conditions to external pictures.

<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it is argued that if imagery is understood as an internal picture viewed by the mind’s eye then this leads to a regress (McGinn 2004, 64; Pylyshyn 2004, 583). See also Thompson (2007: 207-302) for Husserlian arguments against the notion that the image is a picture in consciousness.

<sup>10</sup> It could be argued that even though one cannot introspectively attend to it, the medium of the image will be a neural substrate which can be studied, just not through conscious reflection. This may be so, but this does not undermine our position. In point of fact, it seems to be an argument in favour of our Sartrean position that the image is a way of thinking or a mode of presentation. If mental images are similar to pictures then the medium of

---

the mental image should be sufficiently similar to the medium of the picture. The medium of the picture can be seen or viewed and inspected in and of itself. Therefore the medium of the image (if picture-like) should be able to be seen or viewed or inspected in and of itself. But this is not the case. Therefore the image is not sufficiently like a picture. If we take *thinking* to be grounded in or realised in a neural substrate, then accepting that the image is similarly grounded in a neural substrate aligns the image with a way of thinking rather than viewing a picture before the mind's eye. Thanks to Richard Sebold for pushing us on this point.

<sup>11</sup> There may be similarities between imaging and perceiving, and both should be understood as acts of consciousness. But this is not to say that one should treat the mental image as a reborn percept. The tendency with the theories Sartre attacks is to make imagination *too similar* to perception, to think of imagination as a type of internal perception of an inner mental object, i.e., the image. On such views to imagine is to *see* an inner object with the mind's eye, just as in perception one sees an object. One can admit that perception and imagination manifest similarities, while also highlighting how they are fundamentally different (e.g., Hopkins 1998; Thompson 2007).

<sup>12</sup> For Sartre, a range of disparate imaginative experiences—portraits, impersonators, caricatures—all belong to the same image family. These imaginings share the same function of depicting someone or something (real or imaginary), but they differ in the material—the representative matter or analogon—through which they depict. According to Sartre, the material of the mental image, the analogon, is comprised of subjective feelings such as kinaesthetic sensations of bodily movement and affective responses. The material of the mental image is mental not physical (Sartre 1940/2004, 17-93). It has been argued, however, that by holding the mental image to be composed of a material, albeit mental, Sartre too falls foul of the illusion of immanence (Hopkins 1998; Thompson 2007; Stawarska 2001). Even if this is the case, Sartre's point that the image is an act of consciousness can still be salvaged (Hopkins 1998; Thompson 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Berntsen & Rubin (2006, 1193). The original diary study is Berntsen (1996).

<sup>14</sup> See also Huebner & Fredrickson (1999), who write that 'Pilot data [from their study] indicated that 50% of participants reported some mixture of observer and field imagery within a single memory' (1999, 463, fn. 4).

<sup>15</sup> McGinn attributes the view that the memory image is a revived percept to Sartre. He writes that 'Sartre...denied that memory images are really images; he couldn't reconcile his radical distinction between image and percept with the idea that the memory image is merely a "reborn percept" (as he put it)' (2004, 34). Unfortunately McGinn does not provide a reference for this denial of mnemonic imagery on Sartre's part. The notion of the mental image

---

being a type of *revived* or *reborn* perception or sensation is precisely the view that Sartre is attacking, and we come across no reference where Sartre describes memory images in this way.

<sup>16</sup> For authors who deny the possibility of observer perspective memory imagery based on (broadly) preservationist grounds see, for example, Vendler (1979), and Wollheim (1984). See also Sutton (2010) for a discussion of how Wollheim's analysis of memory imagery relates to observer perspective imagery in memory.

<sup>17</sup> This line of thought is additional to Nigro and Neisser's principle hypothesis concerning the occurrence of observer perspective memories, that they are the products of reconstruction.

<sup>18</sup> For a fuller exposition of the possible nature of observer perspective experiences see McCarroll (2015).

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, in various cases in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre seems to adopt a switching rather than a blending model. For example, discussing an instance of touching one's leg with one's finger, Sartre proposes that 'To touch and to be touched, to feel that one is touching and to feel that one is touched - these are two species of phenomena which it is useless to try to reunite by the term "double sensation." In fact they are radically distinct, and they exist on two incommunicable levels' (1943/2003, 328). Sartre also suggests that two people cannot simultaneously look at one another, in the sense that looking involves the 'rendering of a subject as object. [And] This means that Beings-in-the-world are necessarily separated into a dichotomy; we are either the looker, or the looked upon' (Reynolds 2006, 99). However, at other points Sartre does seem to use the notion of blending. To follow up on the example of 'the look' and the subsequent feeling of shame, Sartre writes 'in the structure which expresses the experience "I am ashamed of myself," shame supposes a me-as-object for the Other but also a selfness which is ashamed and which is imperfectly expressed by the "I" of the formula. Thus shame is a unitary apprehension with three dimensions: "I am ashamed of myself before the Other"' (1943/2003, 313). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore these issues fully, but they point the way to interesting further lines for Sartre scholarship. Thanks to Jack Reynolds for making us think about this possible tension in Sartre's work.

<sup>20</sup> See also Sutton (2014, 143-144).

<sup>21</sup> This is different from Frege's notion of mode of presentation in philosophy of language, see for example McGinn (2015, Ch.1). For a discussion of Frege's influence on Rowlands' development of the notion of mode of presentation see Rowlands (2010b, Ch. 7).

<sup>22</sup> Rowlands makes a further distinction between empirical modes of presentation and transcendent modes of presentation (2010b, 185). Empirical modes of presentation relate to *aspects* of objects, they may present different aspects of the same object. Transcendental modes of presentation provide the 'condition of possibility' of being aware of intentional objects: 'A transcendental mode of presentation is what makes a given empirical mode of

---

presentation *possible*' (Rowlands 2010b, 185 emphasis original). We are concerned in this section with empirical modes of presentation.

<sup>23</sup> Husserl went on to develop these ideas into the two distinct but related aspects of a mental act: *noesis* and *noema*. These are complicated ideas and subject to different interpretations, which are beyond the scope of the present chapter. See, for example, Rowlands (2010b), and McIntyre & Woodruff Smith (1989).