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Representationalism and the phenomenology of mental imagery

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Abstract This paper sketches a phenomenological analysis of visual mental imagery and uses it to criticize representationalism and the internalist-versus-externalist framework for understanding consciousness. Contrary to internalist views of mental imagery, imagery experience is not the experience of a phenomenal mental picture inspected by the mind's eye, but rather the mental simulation of perceptual experience. Furthermore, there are experiential differences in perceiving and imagining that are not differences in the properties represented by these experiences. Therefore, externalist representationalism, which maintains that the properties of experience are the external properties represented by experience, is an inadequate account of conscious experience.

Keywords Mental imagery · Consciousness · Representation

1 Introduction

In the philosophy of mind, the internalism–externalism debate concerns whether features of the world necessarily contribute to a person's being in a certain mental state: externalists maintain that they do, and internalists that they do not. In recent

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discussions of consciousness, this dispute has been strongly tied to the representational theory of consciousness (e.g., Dretske, 1995; Tye, 1991, 1995, 2000). According to this theory, the phenomenal character of experience is entirely a matter of the representational content of experience. What it is like for me to see the grey expanse of the winter sky, for example, is entirely a matter of the way my visual perceptual experience represents the sky. Externalists maintain that the external or distal properties of the objects represented by an experience necessarily contribute or are equivalent to the representational content of that experience. Internalists deny this claim and hold that the representational content of an experience is not object-involving or world-dependent in this way.

This paper poses a challenge to representationalism in a way that also calls into question its internalism-versus-externalism framework for understanding consciousness. My focus is the experience of mental imagery. The considerations I advance are phenomenological and draw heavily from Husserl's analyses of imagery experience.[1] Contrary to the internalist view of mental imagery, I argue that imagery experience is not the experience of a phenomenal mental picture inspected by the mind's eye. This conception of imagery experience remains widespread in cognitive science, even among those who argue against the view that imagining mobilizes pictorial representations in the brain.[2] According to the account I extract from Husserl, in visual imaging or visualizing, we do not experience mental pictures, but instead mentally simulate perceptual experiences in certain ways. Contrary to externalist representationalism, however, consideration of the differences between perception and imagery also shows that the phenomenal character of experience is not equivalent to the external properties represented by experience. A perceptual experience and its mentally simulated counterpart in imagination, although possibly identical with respect to the object properties they represent, nonetheless differ in their phenomenal character. Therefore, contrary to representationalism, there are phenomenal differences in experience that are not representational differences. These differences, however, are not a matter of nonintentional sensational properties or qualia, the sort of mental property representationalists reject. Rather, they are differences in the experiential character of the mental activities of perceiving and imagining. By neglecting this aspect of experience—the subjective character of mental activities themselves as distinct from

[1] See Husserl (2006). My understanding of Husserl follows the explanation given in Bernet, Kern, and Marbach (1993, pp. 141–154). I have also been strongly influenced by Marbach (1984, 1993).

[2] Consider these examples: "we seem to be aware of images—pictures in the mind—playing an important role in thought" (Sterelny, 1990, p. 608). "The fact that we seem to use representations in our head in the same way that we use maps and diagrams is a special case of the similarity between perception and imagination. Just as we perceive the relative locations of two cities on a real map without apparent effort or inference, so too we seem to be able to employ the inner eye to perceive these locations on an inner, memory-generated, representation" (Sterelny, 1990, p. 615). "Cognitive science is rife with ideas that offend our intuitions. It is arguable that nowhere is the pull of the subjective stronger than in the study of perception and mental imagery. It is not easy for us to take seriously the proposal that the visual system creates something like symbol structures in our brain since it seems intuitively obvious that what we have in our mind when we look out onto the world, as well as when we close our eyes and imagine a scene, is something that *looks like* the scene, and hence whatever it is that we have in our heads must be much more like a *picture* than a description. Though we may know that this cannot be literally the case, that it would do no good to have an inner copy of the world, this reasoning appears to be powerless to dissuade us from our intuitions" (Pylyshyn, 2002, p. 157). "Nobody denies that when we engage in mental imagery we seem to be making pictures in our head—in some sense. The question is: Are we really? That is, do the properties in our brains have any of the properties of pictures?" (Dennett, 2002, p. 189).

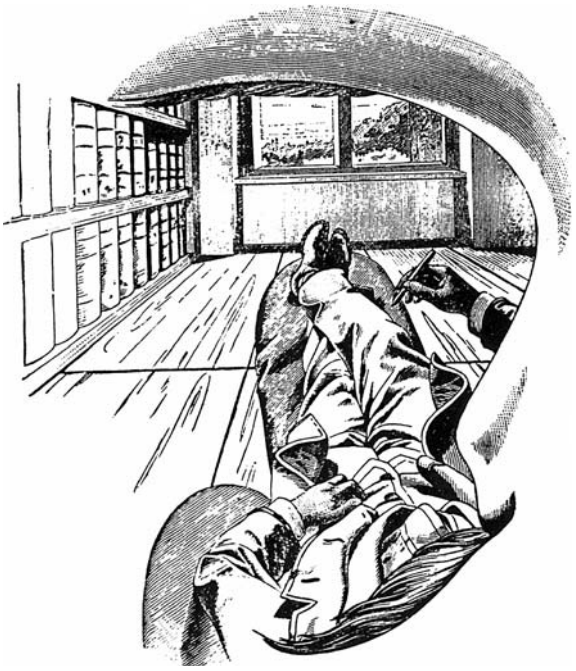

Fig. 1 The visual field as depicted by Ernst Mach

what those activities represent—internalist and externalist views of consciousness alike are unsatisfactory.

2 Picturing visual experience

To frame my discussion I propose to make use of Ernst Mach's famous attempt to portray his own visual field (Mach, 1959; see Fig. 1).[3] Lying on a divan with his right eye shut, Mach tried to depict not his room, but the content of his (monocular) visual field. We can consider his drawing on several levels. Firstly, the drawing exemplifies a certain pictorial conception of visual experience: The content of perception is like that of a realistic picture. Secondly, given this conception, it is natural to think that were Mach to close his eyes and imagine his view of the room, he would, on the basis of memory, be creating or calling up a mental image, a picture in the head (probably sketchy and indistinct by comparison with perception). Thirdly, Mach's drawing is itself a pictorial object; it is a material entity that depicts a certain scene. It is thus not simply an object of perceptual experience, but an object of pictorial experience. We need to look more closely at these three aspects of Mach's drawing.

Mach's drawing is meant to be a depiction of what it is like for him to see his study (with one eye), a depiction of the phenomenal content of his visual experience. The drawing also invites us, the external viewer of the picture, to imagine taking up Mach's position as the internal viewer of the represented scene, so that our visual experience would, as it were, coincide with his. There is readily available phenomenological evidence, however, that our visual experience is not like this depiction (see Noë, 2004,

[3] My use of Mach's picture builds on Thompson, Noë, and Pessoa (1999), and Noë (2004, Chap. 2).

pp. 49–50, 69–72). Consider that we have poor peripheral vision. Hold a playing card at arms length just within your field of view and you will not be able to tell its colour, suit, or number. Stare at a word or phrase on a page of text and you will be able to make out only a few of the other words. These simple demonstrations show, contrary to Mach's drawing, that we do not experience the entirety of our visual field as having the clarity and detail of what we focally attend to.

Barry Smith has interpreted Mach's drawing as a depiction of Ewald Hering's definition of the visual field as "the totality of real objects imaged at a given moment on the retina of the right or left eye" (Smith, 1999, p. 324, quoting Hering, 1964, p. 226). But this interpretation cannot be right. Given the poor resolution of peripheral vision, Mach must have moved his eye in order to draw the detail at the periphery. Furthermore, besides these *overt* shifts of *visual attention* involving eye movements, he must have made *covert* shifts of *mental attention* while holding his eye still (thereby changing his mental focus while holding peripheral vision constant). His drawing is thus a representation that abstracts and combines the contents of many attentional phases of visual experience. It is a static representation of a temporally extended, dynamic process of sensorimotor and mental exploration of the scene. It tries to present all at once visual contents that at any given moment are not present to one in the way of a detailed picture.[4]

Another important feature of Mach's drawing is his attempt to depict the indeterminacy of the peripheral visual field by means of fading to white (Noë, 2004, pp. 71–72). This feature may also be an attempt to depict the field as unbounded or topologically open, in the sense that there is no boundary that is part of the field itself (Smith, 1999, p. 324). Yet it seems impossible to depict these kinds of features of experience in a picture. The visual field is unbounded and indeterminate in various ways, but not by becoming white in the periphery. How to characterize these features is a difficult matter, but they do not seem to be pictorial properties. They do not seem to be qualities representable within experience, but rather structural features of experience.

What these brief considerations indicate is that our visual experience of the world at any given moment lacks many of the properties typical of pictures, such as uniformity of detail, qualitative determinateness at every point, and geometrical completeness. Although many vision scientists would accept this statement, they would also regard it as inconsistent with how our visual experience subjectively seems to us (see Pylyshyn, 2003, pp. 4–46). It is important to notice, therefore, that the foregoing considerations have been entirely phenomenological and have not appealed to any facts beyond what is available for one to experience in one's own first-person case.

3 Transparency and experience

Mach's attempt to depict his visual field presupposes that we experience or can introspectively attend to our *visual field*. Yet what Mach could not help but depict is his *room* and a portion of his *body* from a certain vantage point. Experience is in

[4] Of course, picture-viewing also involves sensorimotor and mental exploration of the picture. My point, however, is that visual experience is not determinate in its contents in the way the surface of a picture is determinate in its qualitative features.

this way often said to be "diaphanous" or "transparent."[5] In trying to attend to the qualities of experience, we as it were see right through them to the qualities of what is experienced.

Representationalists rely on this idea to argue that the phenomenal character of experience is entirely a matter of the representational content of experience, or that the qualities of experience are one and the same as the qualities of the world represented by experience (see Harmon, 1997; Tye, 1991, 1995, 2000). Philosophers who maintain that experience has, in addition to its representational content, intrinsic sensational properties or qualia, reject representationalism (e.g., Block, 1997). I wish to present a different criticism of representationalism. This criticism is phenomenological and is directly relevant to the task of clarifying the phenomenal character of mental imagery. The phenomenal character of experience includes both the *qualitative character of what we experience* (e.g., sensory qualities of the world and our body) and the *subjective character of the mental acts whereby we experience* (e.g., perceiving, remembering, and imagining).[6] Representationalism neglects the subjective character of experience. By contrast, phenomenological analysis focuses explicitly on the linkage between the qualitative character of what we experience and the subjective character of the mental activity whereby we experience it.

To bring out the import of this point we need to consider more carefully the claim that experience is transparent. Its *locus classicus* in recent philosophy is the following passage from Gilbert Harman:

> When Eloise sees a tree before her, the colors she experiences are all experienced as features of the tree and its surroundings. None of them are experienced as intrinsic features of her experience. Nor does she experience any features of anything as intrinsic features of her experience. And that is true of you too. There is nothing special about Eloise's visual experience. When you see a tree, you do not experience any features as intrinsic features of your experience. Look at a

[5] This idea goes back to G. E. Moore: "When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue; the other element is as if it were diaphanous. Yet it *can* be distinguished if we look attentively enough, and if we know there is something to look for." (Moore, 1922, p. 25). Note that Moore here states that the visual sensation is *as if it were* diaphanous, but that it *can* be distinguished, a view in keeping with his sense-data theory of perception. H. P. Grice, on the other hand, in his expression of the diaphanous idea, implied that we cannot introspectively distinguish any sensation distinct from what we see: "such experiences (if experiences they be) as seeing and feeling seem to be, as it were, diaphanous: if we were asked to pay close attention, on a given occasion, to our seeing or feeling as distinct from what was being seen or felt, we should not know how to proceed; and the attempt to describe the differences between seeing and feeling seems to dissolve into a description of what we see and what we feel" (Grice, 2002, p. 45). For discussion of the transparency thesis, see Kind (2003), Martin (2002), Siewert (2004), and Stoljar (2004).

[6] My use of the term "subjective character of experience" is thus somewhat different from Nagel's (see Nagel, 1979). Nagel introduced this term to refer to what a subject's experience is like for that subject. What experience is like in this sense involves both the qualitative properties of the subject's experience (qualia) and the subject's phenomenal first-person point of view. I use the term to refer specifically to how a given type of mental activity (e.g., seeing or visualizing) is implicitly and nonreflectively experienced from one's first-person perspective. My usage is close to Kriegel (in press). He uses "subjective character of experience" to mean the implicit and nonreflective "for-me-ness" of conscious experience. For both Kriegel and me, the phenomenal character of experience is the compresence (to use his formulation) of qualitative character and subjective character (for-me-ness). On this view, every conscious mental state (every mental state with phenomenal character) is implicitly and nonreflectively self-aware. This notion of nonreflective (or prereflective) self-consciousness is central to the accounts of consciousness in the phenomenological tradition from Brentano to Husserl to Sartre. For recent discussions, see Kriegel (2002, 2003); Wider (1997); and Zahavi (1999, 2004, 2005).

> tree and try to turn your attention to intrinsic features of your visual experience. I predict you will find that the only features there to turn your attention to will be features of the presented tree, including relational features of the tree "from here (Harmon, 1997, p. 667).

Harman's main concern in this passage is to undercut the sense-datum theory of perception, according to which the colours we are aware of are internal mental properties, not properties of external objects. Nevertheless, it is not clear what the exact argument of this passage is supposed to be or how it is supposed to support representationalism (see Kind, 2003; Stoljar, 2004). Let us focus on two core phenomenological claims that can be extracted from this passage. The first concerns experience in the sense of *awareness* (presented in the third-person about Eloise); the second concerns *attention* (presented as a prediction about what one will find in one's own first-person case):

> *Extreme Transparency of Awareness:* We are not aware of (intrinsic mental features of) our experience, but only of the objects and properties presented by that experience.
> *Extreme Transparency of Attention:* We cannot attend to (intrinsic mental features of) our experience, but only to the objects and properties presented by that experience.

Harman's passage clearly suggests these extreme transparency claims (as do statements by other representationalists).[7] I call them *extreme* in order to distinguish them from the following two *moderate transparency* claims:[8]

> *Moderate Transparency of Awareness:* We are not usually aware of (intrinsic mental features of) our experience, but only of the objects and properties presented by that experience.
> *Moderate Transparency of Attention:* We can (with effort) attend to (intrinsic mental features of) our experience, but not by turning our attention away from what that experience is *of* (i.e., what is presented by that experience).

I submit that the extreme transparency claims are demonstrably false and the moderate ones true.

Consider visual experience. When I see the bottle of wine in front of me on the table, I experience (am visually aware of) *the wine bottle*. But I also experience *my seeing*. In experiencing my seeing in this way I do not need to introspect or reflect; my awareness is instead an implicit and nonreflective one. I experience my seeing by living it nonreflectively. Suppose, now, that I close my eyes and visualize the wine bottle. The intentional object of my mental state is still the bottle (the bottle is "the seeming object of my image experience," not a mental picture of the bottle). But now what I implicitly and nonreflectively experience is *my visualizing*. Several points are important here. Firstly, there is clearly a significant difference in the intentional content of the visualization and the perception. The most striking is that the bottle

[7] Thus, Harman says, "Nor does she experience any features of anything as intrinsic features of her experience. And that is true of you too." Similarly, Ian Gold, citing Harman, writes: "Experience, it is sometimes said, is 'diaphanous': one sees through it to the object or property the experience is representing. The experience itself has no properties accessible to the experiencer (Gold, 2002, p. 190).

[8] See Kind, "What's So Transparent about Transparency?", p. 230. She distinguishes between "strong" and "weak" transparency claims, whose formulation differ from mine above.

as visualized does not have the immediacy and presence of the bottle as perceived; rather, it has a peculiar kind of phenomenal absence. As Sartre puts it: "in so far as he *appears to me as imaged*, this Pierre who is present in London, *appears to me as absent*. This fundamental absence, this essential nothingness of the imaged object, suffices to differentiate it from the objects of perception" (Sartre, 2004, p. 180). Secondly, this difference in intentional content is not, however, a difference in descriptive content; it is not a difference in the features or properties the experiences represent the object to have. Thus, there can be phenomenal differences in intentional content between experiences that are otherwise identical with respect to the object properties they represent. Thirdly, it is important also to notice the distinct experiential features of the intentional acts themselves. For example, the visual perception feels involuntary and effortless, whereas the visualization feels voluntary, effortful, and needing to call upon memory.[9] In these ways, I am aware not simply of the intentional objects and properties presented by my experience, but also of features of my experience, or rather of my ongoing activity of experiencing. These features include the specific intentional act or attitude component of the experience (perceiving or visualizing or remembering, etc.), associated qualities of this act (being effortless or effortful, etc.), and the invariant phenomenal quality of "mineness" or "for-me-ness" that characterizes all my experiencing (it is my seeing and my visualizing).[10]

We could summarize this last point by saying that the extreme transparency of awareness thesis neglects that constitutive feature of experience we can call (following Husserl and Sartre) *prereflective self-consciousness*. In my visual experience of the wine bottle, I am *explicitly aware* of *the bottle*, but also *implicitly aware* of *my visual experience* of the bottle.[11] This sort of implicit awareness is a kind of self-consciousness (I am implicitly aware of the visual experience as *mine*). But it is not a reflective or introspective self-consciousness, because there is no phenomenally conscious reflection or introspection that takes the experience as its object.[12]

[9] I do not mean to imply that all imagining is voluntary and effortful in this way. Daydreaming, reverie, and fantasy are usually not. Cf. Sartre (2004, pp. 18–19): "In most cases, no doubt, the [mental] image springs from a deep spontaneity that cannot be assimilated to the will . . . But involuntary and voluntary images represent two closely related types of consciousness, of which one is produced by a voluntary spontaneity and the other by a spontaneity without will."

[10] Dainton (2000, 2002) has criticized what he calls *awareness-content dualism* in theories of consciousness. Crucial to this dualism as Dainton describes it is the view that awareness is a bare act devoid of any intrinsic phenomenal characteristics. My differentiation of experience into intentional-act and intentional-object poles involves no commitment to this notion of bare awareness.

[11] Kriegel (2004) interprets this implicit self-awareness as a form of marginal or peripheral awareness (see also Kriegel, 2002, 2003). This view can also be found in Gurwitsch (1964). The problem with this view is that it treats one's nonreflective awareness of one's experiences on the model of one's implicit awareness of objects in the background of perception. Various arguments can be given to show, however, that experiences are not given as *objects* to self-awareness and that prereflective self-consciousness does not have a subject/object structure. See Zahavi (2004, 2005).

[12] Notice I say that the experience is not the object of another higher-order *phenomenally conscious* mental state. The reason is that I do not wish to beg the question against the higher-order thought theory of consciousness. According to this theory, a conscious mental state is one that is the object of an accompanying higher-order cognitive state that is not itself a conscious state. Thus, this theory attempts to explain *intransitive* consciousness (a mental state's being a conscious mental state) in terms of *transitive* consciousness (a mental state is intransitively conscious just in case one is transitively conscious of it, and to be transitively conscious of it is to have an accompanying higher-order thought that one is in that very state). This theory is meant to be a substantive hypothesis about what intransitive consciousness is, not a phenomenological description. My point in the text, however, is a phenomenological one: It is that experience involves an implicit self-awareness that is not a function

Rather, the experience itself is prereflectively self-aware. In Sartre's words: "every positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional [non-object-directed or intransitive] consciousness of itself" (Sartre, 1956, p. liii). This type of self-consciousness is arguably a constitutive feature of phenomenal consciousness (Kriegel, 2002; Zahavi, 2004, 2005; Zahavi & Parnas, 1998). It is hard to make sense of the thought that one could have a conscious perception without experiencing one's perceiving, or that one could have a conscious mental image without experiencing one's imagining, or that one could have a conscious memory without experiencing one's remembering. But if conscious experience is necessarily self-aware in this way, then contrary to the extreme transparency thesis, we are implicitly aware of constitutive features of our experience and not simply of the objects and properties our experience presents.

It also seems clear, contrary to the extreme transparency of attention thesis, that we can become aware of features of our experience by attending to them (instead of attending simply to the objects presented by that experience). In seeing, I attend to features of what there is to see. But I can also attend to how seeing feels, to what the activity of seeing is like for me, and to the ways it feels different from freely imagining and from remembering. In attending to experience in this way, I can become aware of features I do not normally notice (attend to), precisely because they usually remain implicit and prereflective.

The moderate transparency of attention thesis is compatible with these points. It acknowledges that we can (with effort) attend to experience. But it also makes the point that we cannot do so by turning our attention *away from* what that experience presents. Some philosophers do talk about turning attention away from the experienced object to the intentional experience itself. But this way of speaking does not seem apt. Usually when we talk about turning our attention away from one thing to another we imply that we *ignore* or *look away from* the first in favour of the second. It seems impossible, however, to ignore the experienced object when we attend to features of the experience (Siewert, 2004, pp. 35–37). This truth is what the transparency metaphor aims to convey. Thus, the right way to think about phenomenological analysis is not that we turn our attention *inward* (as the notion of *introspection* implies), but that we direct our attention to the *appearance* of the object, or the *appearance of the world* more generally, while vigilantly keeping in mind that appearances are objective correlates of subjective intentional acts (e.g., how something looks is correlated to and is a function of how one looks at it). Clearly, the sort of attention in play here is *cognitive* or *mental attention*, not perceptual attention. In attending to features of my visual experience, I do not (and cannot) look away from what that experience presents. Rather, I shift my mental or cognitive attention to how things look given my perceptual attitude. In this way, features of experience on the side of the intentional act, which usually remain implicit or latent, can be made explicit and available for phenomenological consideration. In sum, the way to think about what we do when

Footnote 12 continued
of conscious reflection or introspection. The higher-order thought theory is free to acknowledge this phenomenological point, but would aim to explain or analyze implicit self-awareness in terms of transitive consciousness and accompanying (nonconscious) higher-order thoughts. I think such accounts are unsuccessful, but I have not argued for this claim in this paper. For the higher-order thought theory, see Rosenthal (1997). For rebuttals of the higher-order thought theory on behalf of a one-level account of consciousness as intransitive self-consciousness, see Kriegel (2002) and Zahavi and Parnas (1998).

we attend directly to features of our experience is not that we turn away from the *outer* and ignore it in favor of the *inner*, but rather that we make *explicit* or *manifest* features that are usually *implicit* or *latent*.[13]

4 Picture-viewing

Let us return to Mach's drawing with these ideas in hand, considering it now as a picture seen by us. Following Husserl (2006), we can distinguish three types of intentional objects implicit in the experience of seeing something as a picture (e.g., a portrait, photograph, or landscape painting) (see Bernet, Kern, & Marbach, 1993, pp. 150–152). Firstly, there is the physical and perceptible *pictorial vehicle*, in our case, Mach's drawing on paper (the original and its reproductions). Secondly, there is the *pictorial image*, which also appears perceptually, but is not apprehended as a real thing like the pictorial vehicle. In our example, the pictorial image is Mach's field of view *as depicted*. Whereas the pictorial vehicle is something we can touch or move, the pictorial image as such is not. It is irreal, or as Sartre more provocatively puts it, "a nothingness" (Sartre, 2004, pp. 11–14, 125–136). Finally, there is the *pictorial subject* or referent—the person himself or herself who is the subject of the depiction (e.g., in a portrait), or the scene itself (e.g., in a landscape painting). In our example, the pictorial subject is Mach's actual field of view. The pictorial subject is absent and may or may not exist.

The phenomenological problem of the intentionality of picture-viewing is the problem of how these distinct types of intentional objects and their correlative intentional acts combine to form the complex experience of seeing something as a picture.

Following Husserl, let us distinguish between intentional acts of *presentation* and *re-presentation* (see Marbach, 1993).[14] Perception is presentational; imagination, memory, and picture-viewing are re-presentational. We can approach this distinction from two sides, the side of the intentional object and the side of the intentional act. In a perceptual experience, the object is experienced as present in its "bodily being," and thus as directly accessible. In a re-presentational experience, on the other hand, the object is not experienced as present and accessible in this way, but rather as absent. Yet this absence is precisely a *phenomenal absence*, for the experience is of the object*precisely as absent*. This difference on the side of the intentional object between bodily presence and absence corresponds to the difference on the side of the intentional act between presentation and re-presentation. A re-presentational experience intends its object precisely as both phenomenally absent in its bodily being and as mentally evoked or brought forth. In this way, the object is said to be mentally re-presented, rather than perceptually presented. It is important to note that what makes the experience re-presentational is precisely that its object is mentally evoked or brought forth while also phenomenally absent; it is not that the object is mentally

[13] There is a large phenomenological literature on whether this activity of making features of experience explicit and available for phenomenological consideration is primarily descriptive or interpretive, and whether it must involve an objectifying (and hence distorting) form of reflection. This important issue is beyond the scope of this paper. For some recent discussions, see Poellner (2003); Stawarska (2002); and Zahavi (2002).

[14] This distinction is between what Husserl calls *Gegenwärtigung* (presentation) and *Vergegenwärtigung* (representation).

evoked or brought forth *again*. The latter characteristic belongs to memory, but not to every type of re-presentational experience (such as fantasy).

Picture-viewing comprises both presentation and re-presentation in a complex way. The physical picture is present to perception, while the absent pictorial subject is re-presented, brought into presence by the pictorial image. In viewing and appreciating a picture, we are interested mainly in neither the physical picture nor the pictorial subject as such, but rather in the pictorial image that appears in the physical picture and represents the pictorial subject. The intentional object of picture-viewing is thus in a way double, for it comprises both the pictorial subject and the pictorial image of that subject appearing in the physical vehicle of the picture. One could argue that this physical vehicle counts as a pictorial entity thanks to the apprehension of an image appearing in it. On this view, imagination, in the sense of the mental apprehension of an image, is a necessary constituent of pictorial experience.

My concern here is not to defend this claim about pictorial experience, but rather to argue that imagining in the sense of visualizing has a different intentional structure from picture-viewing.[15] This point can be introduced by first considering the mental activity of remembering.

5 Remembering

Suppose Mach, having finished his drawing, later remembers having drawn his visual field while seated in his study. In what does the experience of this sort of mental activity consist? How is remembering different in its subjective character from perceiving and picture-viewing?

As noted above, perceptual experiences have a directness and immediacy that make them presentational in character rather than re-presentational.[16] In episodic or autobiographical remembering, however, a situation or event is experienced not as present, but as past. This past situation or event is thus necessarily re-presented. The phenomenological question is how this re-presentation subjectively works. According to the image theory of memory, when one remembers one apprehends a mental image of something experienced in the past. One problem with this theory is that in memory one does not take oneself to be imagining something that seems like what one remembers; one takes oneself to be remembering something as it occurred. The standard way to deal with this problem is to insist that what one remembers is the past occurrence, not the mental image, but that one remembers the past by way of the mental image. But this move highlights a deeper problem, which is that the image theory fails to account for how an image had in the present can yield a memory experience as of something past. Husserl's account of memory as the re-presentation of

[15] The claim that imagination is a necessary constituent of pictorial experience is controversial. Now classic discussions are Walton (1990) and Wolheim (1980, 1987). For recent discussions, see Levinson (1998); Lopes (1996); Hopkins (1998); Stock (in press); and Wolheim (1998).

[16] Cf. Searle (1983, pp. 45–46): "If, for example, I see a yellow station wagon in front of me, the experience I have is directly of the object. It doesn't just 'represent' the object, it provides direct access to it. The experience has a kind of directness, immediacy and involuntariness which is not shared by a belief which I might have about the object in its absence. It seems therefore unnatural to describe visual experiences as representations ... Rather, because of the special features of perceptual experiences I propose to call them 'presentations'. The visual experience I will say does not just represent the state of affairs perceived; rather, when satisfied, it gives direct access to it, and in that sense it is a presentation of that state of affairs."

a *past experience* aims to overcome this difficulty (see Bernet, 2002; Marbach, 1993, pp. 78–83).

Consider that when you remember a past occurrence or situation, you also implicitly remember your earlier experience of it. Mach remembers his field of view as it appeared to him from his couch, but in doing so he also implicitly remembers his earlier visual experience. Thus, in memory, one apprehends something absent (the past) not by means of an image, in the sense of a present mental picture, but through the activity of re-presenting an experience believed to have occurred in the past. Of course, one does not have to entertain this belief explicitly in the episodic or autobiographical memory experience. Rather, in remembering, the re-presented experience is simply subjectively given as having occurred in the past. In memory, one reproduces and relives, as it were, this past experience, but in a modified way, namely, precisely as re-presented, and thus as not occurring now, but posited as past. In other words, the past experience is not literally or really reproduced in the present, but is rather reproduced as part of the intentional content of the memory (Marbach 1993, p. 61). In Husserl's formulation, the present memory does not "really" contain the contain the past experience, but instead "intentionally implicates" it (Husserl, 1983, §99, p. 294, and Marbach, 1993, pp. 34–36, 69–70).

On this view, to say that I remember X is to say that I intend (or refer or mentally direct myself to) X by re-presenting an experience of X that is subjectively given as having occurred in the past (or in a more cognitivist vein, that is believed to have occurred in the past). Notice that the intentional object of the memory is usually the past occurrence, not the past experience (unless the two are one and the same, as in the case of remembering a past emotion or feeling). If the intentional object of the memory is the past experience itself, then the act of remembering is a reflective one. Usually, however, the re-presenting of the past experience operates only implicitly and prereflectively in one's memory of the past event or situation.[17]

The experience of recollection thus involves a kind of "doubling of consciousness" (Bernet, 2002), for in being the conscious re-presentation of a past occurrence, remembering is also the conscious re-presentation of a previous consciousness.[18] Seeing something as a picture, on the other hand, involves a double intentional object—the pictorial subject plus the pictorial image appearing in the physical vehicle. *There is thus a clear sense in which picture-viewing can be said to involve a mental image, for the image in a picture is arguably nothing other than an intentional correlate of the mental activity of picture-viewing.* This image has a clearly identifiable vehicle, namely, the physical material of the picture. Remembering, however, lacks this threefold structure of vehicle/image/referent. Moreover, appealing to mental images does not explain the intentionality of memory. The problem with the classical image theory of memory is that it turns memory into a kind of pictorial experience, and thereby distorts its intentional structure and subjective character.

[17] A tempting way to link this idea to cognitive science would be to say that memory does not involve "on-line" sensory experience—sensory experience appropriately constrained by current sensorimotor interaction with the environment—but rather "off-line," simulated sensory experience, or better yet, emulated sensory experience. An emulation represents an activity by reenacting it in a circumscribed and modified way (e.g., as an internal process that models, but does not loop through, peripheral sensory and motor systems). Remembering could involve emulating earlier sensory experiences, and in this way reenacting them. See Grush (2004).

[18] Here we touch upon the complexities of internal time-consciousness, which are beyond the scope of this paper.

6 Imagining

The same points hold for imagining or visualizing: Imagery experience is not a species of picture-viewing. In visual imagining, one apprehends an object not by means of a phenomenal mental picture, but by re-presenting that object as given to a possible perceptual experience. What needs to be clarified is how this sort of mental re-presentation differs from remembering.

Suppose Mach, while drawing his visual field, becomes distracted and visualizes his books rearranged on the shelves. We can suppose that he is not remembering any particular past arrangement and that he has no intention of actually rearranging them. He simply visualizes how they would look in a different arrangement. In this way, imagining (more precisely, imaging) does not require belief in the factual reality of the perceptual experience it intentionally implicates in its mental re-presentation of the scene. In other words, there is no implication either that such an experience has occurred in the past (as in remembering) or that it will occur in the future (as in anticipation or expectation). Rather, in imagining, this doxastic feature of belief in the actual (past or future) occurrence of the intentionally implicated experience is "neutralized."[19]

On this view, to say that I imagine X is to say that I mentally re-present X as given to a neutralized perceptual experience of X (see Marbach, 1993, p. 75). For example, in right now freely visualizing the Eiffel Tower, I re-present the Eiffel Tower as given to a perceptual experience whose actual (past or future) occurrence I am in no way committed to. What makes this mental act re-presentational is that the Eiffel Tower is phenomenally absent and mentally evoked or brought forth. What makes the act different from remembering is that I mentally re-present the Eiffel Tower as given to a perceptual experience that I do not posit as having occurred in the past. (Of course, the visualization in this case depends on memory, but that is another matter.) In sum, we could say that to visualize X is to mentally re-present X by subjectively simulating or emulating a neutralized perceptual experience of X.

This account thus accepts what Martin (2002) calls "The Dependency Thesis," which states, "to imagine sensorily a ϕ is to imagine experiencing a ϕ" (p. 404). According to this thesis, we visualize objects by imagining visually experiencing them. Martin, however, takes this thesis to imply that "one kind of phenomenally conscious state, an event of imagining, takes as its object another type of conscious state of mind, a sensory experience" (ibid.). On the Husserlian-inspired view proposed here, although visualizing an object requires imagining visually experiencing the object, the visual experience is not the *object* of the imagining; the intentional object is the visualized object. As visualized, however, that object must be given visually in some way or other, and this mode of visual givenness on the part of the object entails a correlative mode of visual experience on the part of the subject. The visual experience co-imagined in visualizing an object is thus simply the intentional correlate of the imaged object's mode of visual appearance in the visualization. The intentional object of the transitive imaging consciousness is the imaged object; the correlative and co-imagined visual experience is experienced only intransitively and prereflectively. In other words, this experience is "lived through" without usually being noticed, attended to, or reflected upon (if it is taken notice of in these ways, then the imaging experience becomes

[19] For this notion of the "neutrality modification" applied to belief, see Husserl (1983, §109, pp. 257–259). For discussion of the role that neutralization plays in imagination, see Marbach (1993, pp. 75–76).

a reflective one). I take this intentional structure to be the reason why, as Martin puts it, "imagery seems to give us the presence of an imagined scene rather than a mere imagined experience of the scene" (2002, p. 416) (though, as noted earlier, this presence is also a kind of phenomenal absence; see Sartre, 2004, pp. 11–14, 126–127, 180).

Several comments about the noncommittal quality of imagining are in order. Firstly, the neutralization or suspension of belief that makes for this noncommittal quality belongs to the co-imagined visual experience of the imaged object. It is thus independent of belief in the existence or nonexistence of the imaged *object* or *scene*. I believe that the *Eiffel Tower* exists in Paris. Nevertheless, in visualizing the Eiffel Tower as given to (say) a perception from Trocadero, I also mentally evoke a visual experience whose actual occurrence at any time in the past or future I am in no way committed to. On the other hand, if I visualize a flute-playing centaur (see Husserl, 1983, §23), then not only is my mentally evoked visual experience neutralized, but I also take the object of my visualization to be purely fictional. Thus, in visualizing, there remain various ways in which the object or scene can be mentally re-presented. For example, I can take it to exist (the Eiffel Tower), to not exist but to be possible in this world (a fantasy house in which I could live), or to not exist and to be purely fictional (a flute-playing centaur).[20]

Secondly, neutralization does not imply that one is noncommittal with respect to the *imagined scene*. For example, in visualizing the Eiffel Tower from Trocadero, I am not noncommittal about whether the imagined scene contains a tower seen from across the river Seine. In other words, my commitment to these features is not itself imagined, but actual.[21]

Nevertheless, thirdly, there are different ways in which the visualizing act can "posit" its object. Sartre distinguishes four ways: "it can posit the object as nonexistent, or as absent, or as existing elsewhere; it can also 'neutralize' itself, which is to say not posit its object as existent" (2004, p. 12). The first three types of positing concern the imagined object and are all variations on the way it appears as absent in imagining. The fourth type concerns the positing act itself and has a different structure.

In the first type, the object is posited as nonexistent, and hence not able to be perceptually present at all. Such objects are fictions (e.g., a flute-playing centaur) (Sartre, 2004, p. 20).[22] In the second and third types, the object is posited as existing, and so as something that could be brought into one's presence and perceived. On the one hand, the object could be posited simply as absent with no further qualification; on the other

[20] See Marbach (1993, pp. 76–77). He distinguishes between "imagining a real possibility concerning, e.g., a thing, event, situation, etc. that one believes to exist in the real world" and "imagining a mere possibility, i.e. something purely fictional."

[21] Martin (2002) makes this point and uses it to construct an argument against representationalism analogous to the representationalist's phenomenal transparency argument against the sense-datum theory.

[22] The status of fiction in relation to the imagination is a distinct problem in its own right and beyond the scope of this paper. As Stawarska (2001, p. 101) observes: "One wonders ... whether it is ... justified to subsume the *non-existence* of purely fictional characters under the heading of 'absence.' It seems more appropriate to take *non-existence* as the contrary of *existence* and to ascribe *absence* and *presence* (existential categories) to beings that are posited as *existent* only. A centaur cannot be absent (nor present) since it does not belong to the class of things posited as existent." Indeed, Sartre himself notes, "It is only on the ground of sensory intuition that the words 'absent', 'far from me', can have a sense, on the ground of a sensory intuition that gives itself as not being able to take place" (2004, p. 13).

hand, it could be posited as absent and elsewhere. For example, in now imagining my friend Alva, I can posit him simply as absent, or as absent and in Berkeley.

The fourth type of positing is suspension of belief in the existence of the object, but without positing its nonexistence. So defined, suspension can occur not only in imagination, but also in perception: "This is what happens in perception when I see a man coming towards me and I say 'It is possible this man is Pierre'. But, precisely, this suspension of belief, this abstention, concerns *the man approaching*. Of this man, I doubt that he is Pierre; I do not thereby doubt that he is a man. In a word, my doubt necessarily implies a positing of existence of the type: a man coming towards me" (Sartre, 2004, p. 13). Sartre's example of neutralization in imagination is a case of picture-viewing: "if I look at the photos in a magazine, they can very well 'say nothing to me', which is to say I look at them without positing their existence. Thus, the people whose photographs I see are indeed reached through these photographs, but without my positing their existence, just as the Knight and Death are reached through Dürer's engraving, but without my positing them" (Sartre, 2004, p. 24).[23] Sartre's point is that I can look at the photographs and see them as photographs of people, not simply as glossy papers, but without thinking that these people are alive or dead, existent or nonexistent. Rather, I remain noncommittal; my pictorial experience simply does not go into or broach this matter.[24]

There is thus a difference between the way Sartre employs the idea of neutralization and the way I presented it above. On the one hand, as Sartre makes clear, "what distinguishes the different positional types is the thetic character of the intention, not the existence or nonexistence of the object" (2004, p. 24). In other words, the noncommittal quality belongs to the intentional *act* rather than the intentional *content*. On the other hand, what Sartre takes to be neutralized is belief in the existence or nonexistence of the imagined *object* (e.g., the people in the photograph), whereas in my presentation what is neutralized is belief in the actuality of the *visual experience* that is implied in one's re-presenting the imaged object. In other words, the noncommittal quality belongs to the mentally simulated or emulated seeing that is constitutive of visual imagining. It is thus firmly on the act-side rather than the content-side of the intentional structure.

[23] Earlier in the text (p. 20) Sartre uses the figures of the Knight and Death in Dürer's engraving as an example of objects that are posited as nonexistent, i.e., as fictions. Sartre's account of imagination actually contains a tension between assimilating imagining to a kind of pictorial consciousness, and conceiving of imagining as a *sui generis* type of mental activity that cannot be analyzed in pictorial terms. See Stawarska (2001) and McCulloch (1994, Chap. 5).

[24] Nevertheless, Sartre states in a footnote: "This suspension of belief remains a positional act" (2004, p. 197, n. 10). As he also makes clear later in the text: "one of the essential factors of the imaging consciousness is belief. This belief aims at the object of the image. All imaging consciousness has a certain positional quality in relation to its object. An imaging consciousness is, indeed, consciousness of an *object as imaged*, and not consciousness *of an image*" (p. 86). Suspension of belief is positional because it is a feature of what Sartre calls positional or thetic consciousness, that is, object-directed consciousness (consciousness that posits an object). But image consciousness also includes (as does all consciousness) a non-positional or non-thetic consciousness of itself, that is, an intransitive (non-object-directed) and prereflective self-consciousness: "the imaging consciousness that we produce before a photograph is an act and this act includes a nonthetic consciousness of itself as spontaneity. We have consciousness, of some sort, of *animating* the photo, of lending life to it in order to make an image of it" (p. 25). This remark indicates that, for Sartre, prereflective self-consciousness does not have a subject/object structure (and therefore cannot be analyzed as a form of marginal, peripheral, or background awareness; see note 12 above).

The foregoing analysis of visual imagining tries to capture both the important similarities and differences between perceptual experience and imagery experience. On the one hand, visual imagining involves visual experience, but on the other hand, this visual experience is only intentionally implied, not actual. That it is internal to the nature of visual imagining that there is a re-presented visual experience whenever one visually imagines an object or scene may account for the similarities between visual perception and visualization (e.g., shared perspectival content). That the visual experience is only intentionally implied, however, means that its content is determined primarily by the imagining intention and the knowledge that intention contains.[25] Hence, unlike perception, the intentional content of one's imagining is not constrained by one's current sensorimotor activities and dependencies—one's "sensorimotor contingencies" (O'Regan and Noë, 2001) in the same way as in perception. In particular, there is not the same sort of correlation between what one is visualizing and how one is sensing and moving in relation to one's environment as there is in perception.

The supposition that the intentional content of an imagining episode is determined primarily by an intention not constrained by current sensorimotor contingencies in the same way as in perception might also explain another widely noted difference between imagery experience and perceptual experience, namely, a certain unexplorability of the imagined object by contrast with the explorability of the object for perception (see Casey, 2000, pp. 91–93). In perception, objects not only appear perspectivally, but present profiles that vary with one's movement. We experience objects as having "sensorimotor profiles," as things whose appearances would vary in precise ways as we move around them, or as they move in relation to us (Noë, 2004, p. 117). Perception thus implies "the necessity of *making a tour* of objects" (Sartre, 2004, p. 8). On the other hand, although the object as imagined appears perspectivally, "we no longer need to make a tour of it: the imaged cube is given immediately for what it is" (Sartre, 2004, p. 9). Whereas my seeing something as a cube is revocable—I could be mistaken, the object could show itself to be something else as I explore it—my imagining a cube is not revocable in this way. There is no possibility of still-to-be-disclosed profiles that could show the object not to be a cube, for to say it is no longer a cube, but rather (say) a diamond, is to say that I am now imagining a diamond, that is, that the intention of my imagining has changed and now determines a new intentional object. Exactly the same is true if I visualize a cube now from this angle, now from that angle: I do not explore or make a tour of the cube, but change what I imagine by changing my imaginative intention.[26] Although such intentions clearly embody sensorimotor knowledge, the movement from one to the next is not correlated to the sensorimotor

[25] See Sartre (2004, p. 57): "The image is defined by its intention. It is the intention that makes it the case that the image of Pierre is consciousness of Pierre. If the intention is taken at its origin, which is to say as it springs from our spontaneity, it already implies, no matter how naked and bare it may seem, a certain knowledge: it is, hypothetically, the knowledge (*connaissance*) of Pierre … But the intention does not limit itself, in the image, to aiming at Pierre in an indeterminate fashion: he is aimed at as blond, tall, with a snub or aquiline nose, etc. It must therefore be charged with knowledge (*connaissances*), it must aim through a certain layer of consciousness that we can call the layer of knowledge. So that, in the imaging consciousness, one can distinguish knowledge and intention only by abstraction. The intention is defined only by the knowledge since one represents in image only what one knows in some sort of way and, reciprocally, knowledge here is not simply knowledge, it is an act, it is what I want to represent to myself … Naturally, this knowledge should not be considered as added to an already constituted image to clarify it: it is the active structure of the image."

[26] Because of these characteristics of imagining—the determination of its content by knowledge and intention, as well as the essential unexplorability of the imagined object—Sartre describes the intentional attitude of imagining as one of "quasi-observation," by which he means an attitude of

dependencies that currently figure in one's relation to one's surroundings in the same way as in perception.

7 Conclusion

We are now in position to state the main upshot of this phenomenological analysis of imagery experience with respect to representationalism about consciousness and the internalism-externalism dispute. First, contrary to the internalist view of mental imagery, this analysis makes no mention of phenomenal mental images, in the sense of phenomenal mental pictures inspected by the mind's eye. In visual imaging or visualizing, we do not inspect a phenomenal mental picture, but instead mentally re-present an object by subjectively simulating or emulating a perceptual experience of that object. Secondly, there are differences in intentional content between a perceptual experience and its mentally simulated counterpart in imagination that are not differences in descriptive content, i.e., that are not differences in the features or properties the experiences represent their objects as having. Thus, contrary to externalist representationalism, there can be phenomenal differences between experiences that are otherwise identical with respect to the properties they represent. Thirdly, there are differences in the subjective character of the mental activities of perceiving and imagining that are not differences in the representational content of these experiences. Thus, both internalist and externalist versions of representationalism offer inadequate accounts of consciousness.

In reponse to the first of these points, someone might object that although phenomenal mental images or pictures are not the intentional objects of remembering and imagining experience, and so are not inwardly "seen," they are nonetheless "had" or "undergone" in those types of experience. How we should respond to this objection depends on what we understand a phenomenal mental image to be. If the proposal is that a phenomenal mental image is simply a subjectively simulated or emulated perceptual experience, then the foregoing analysis can be taken to support this proposal. Notice, however, that this proposal amounts to an important conceptual and phenomenological clarification of the notion of phenomenal mental image: A phenomenal mental image is not a phenomenal picture in the mind's eye, nor indeed is it any kind of static image; it is rather the mental activity of re-presenting an object by mentally evoking and subjectively simulating a perceptual experience of that object. On the other hand, if the proposal is that this simulated visual experience is itself a kind of mental picture, or more precisely that its intentional content is pictorial, then the fate of this proposal hangs on whether perceptual experience is pictorial. Earlier in this paper, we saw that there are ways in which the content of perceputal experience is unlike any picture. If perceptual experience is not pictorial, then there is no reason to think that the content of the simulated visual experience in remembering or imagining is pictorial, and hence no reason to think that this experience is some kind of mental picture. In sum, according to the view I am proposing, the only time visual experience is straightforwardly pictorial is when one has the visual experience of looking at a picture, or the experience of remembering or imagining looking at a picture.

Footnote 26 continued
observation, but an observation that does not teach anything (2004, p. 10). As McGinn (2004, pp. 19–20) notes, this formulation should be modified to allow for the possibility of cognitive enhancement (e.g., problem solving) by imagining.

In this paper, I have stressed for heuristic purposes the differences between perceiving and visualizing, as well as some of the differences among imagining, remembering, and picture-viewing. These differences are largely static, conceptual ones, having to do with the different intentional structures of these mental activities. If we were to analyze perceptual experience and imagination from a more dynamic perspective, however, then we would need to take account of how they can influence and condition each other, how they alternate and feed each other in our mental lives (see, e.g., Strawson, 1970). This important topic lies beyond the scope of this paper. I hope to have shown, however, that in order to approach this topic in any adequate way, we need to move beyond representationalism about consciousness and the misleading idea that imagining is the inspection of a phenomenal mental picture contained within the mind.[27]

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[27] For further discussion of the implications of the ideas presented here for the imagery debate in cognitive science, see Thompson (2007).

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