

imagine! sartre with ryle

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Sartre (1940) and Ryle (1949) took us on a tour that was entertaining in its exposure of what can mystify what we imagine. Their work gives us due caution in setting up our imaginings in a central place. Thought is liable to go haywire when we make a main theme of the imagination. Shall we philosophers raise it up for admiration, or lower it onto our laboratory bench for analysis? In paying close regard to imagination are we thus ‘on the side of the angels’? Dare we challenge the tradition of Reason that would make an odious comparison of imagination with observation, logic, and experiment? Sartre and Ryle are free of that comparison—and equally inclined not to elevate imagination on the rebound.

INTRODUCTION

I set out by sketching advances made by both Ryle and Sartre in understanding *imagining*. For them, it is a basic error to treat the mental image as the *object* of imaginative activity. They describe mental imagery in the context of a wide range of imaginative activity in thought and action. I reject objections to this strategy as ‘denying the reality’ of imagery.

Ryle and Sartre describe, richly, a diversity of imaginative activity for which mental imagery is incidental, at most. The subtle and attentive character of Sartre’s study in *L’Imaginaire* belies Edward Casey’s claim¹ that in contrast to Baudelaire

who would ‘create a world’, Sartre’s account belittles the imagination. I argue that Ryle and Sartre, in refusing to blur the difference between perception and imagination, are thus able to state more clearly what the achievement of perception owes to imagination, and how imagination and perception work so closely together within our ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ life

Paul Ricoeur also criticises Sartre and Ryle as continuing the tradition of imagination as degraded perception; he suggests that they do not recognise Kant’s ‘productive’ imagination. Ricoeur and Casey would seem to have a misplaced commitment to the mental image as *object* of the imagination—as if that is a criterion of being serious about it. Ryle and Sartre speak of *visually imagining* rather than of a perceived *mental image*. The *descriptive content* of imagining is undiminished by this shift in ontology’s syntax. Furthermore, to displace the image as the central *object* frees us to attend the diversity of imaginative activity—what is involved in painting and looking at paintings, in inventions and in assessing them, in composing music and in following it. Ricoeur does become generous in his praise of Ryle’s rich descriptions of such a variety of imaginative activities. Thus his recognition of Ryle’s philosophical *practice* belies his initial characterisation of Ryle (and Sartre) as situated in the philosophical tradition of derogating the imagination. Imagination has its power not in *presenting a mental object* but in evoking what is absent—as *elsewhere, perished, theoretically possible*—or downright *fantastical*.

ASPECTS OF SARTRE’S ACCOUNT

Sartre describes himself as imagining as being at his desk the very Pierre whom, at another time, he can perceive there. This would be impossible if what he imagines were ‘within’ the image he formed. Quine also recognises the same point –that it is *Pegasus* (though he is fictional) and not the *image* of Pegasus that is in question when we imagine or speak of that winged horse.² It then emerges as a corollary that the ‘image’ is not an object that stands to what we imagine on a par with a painting³ in relation to the painter’s scene. Within the painting (unlike the image) a structure of line and play of colour is the analogue of a scene.⁴

Sartre would refer to the image not as an object but as a mode of being conscious alongside other modes such as *perceptual* consciousness and *apprehensive* consciousness. It is true that Sartre finds it virtually impossible to escape the surface grammar of the image as ‘object’. He is prepared to ask, ‘What is essential to the image?’ even as he displaces the objectual status of the image as something to be

found *within* consciousness. People and paintings are to be found in an art gallery but nothing is found ‘in consciousness’. As I would put it, we find imagination displayed in the art gallery when we are arrested by Magritte’s ‘Time transfixed’—a steam train with smoke issuing from the funnel, projected out from an empty fireplace.

Thus Sartre would rather refer to *image consciousness* than to *images*, even while exigencies of syntax make him revert to ‘image’ as a quasi-thing. He compromises by writing of the *image* as *irreal*. As with Ryle (as we shall see) the differences between imagining, perceiving, hoping and regretting emerge in the differences between these modes of consciousness rather than in the status of their ‘objects’. If it *sounds* strangely iconoclastic—image smashing—to deny the *existence* of mental images we may deploy ‘mental image’ as an incomplete phrase (*the average human, say*). An incomplete phrase is fully defined only within a more extended syntax. ‘I have a visual image of Pierre sitting at his desk’ means, as a whole, ‘I am visually imagining Pierre sitting at his desk.’ There can be no conceivable loss of *content* in the richness of creativity of imagination in this shift. The (pseudo) qualities of the (pseudo) mental object all appear in specifying the content of my visual imagining.

Because of established syntax, the tendency to reify the image is endemic. Even as we demote mental images, ‘intentional’ objects will rise up as *things* to which ‘propositional attitudes’ relate. Ryle resists that formal reification, also. If I hope for *relief from the present drought*, I do not posit this (non-existent) *relief* as having a kind of being, simply in that I do hope for it. *That there will be relief from the present drought* specifies what my hope *is*.⁵

In claiming that mental images are not one more *kind* of imagery along with objects of observation such as sketches and photographs, Sartre accommodates the quasi-objectual mental imagery as ‘quasi-observed’. The business of *imagining* is to bring what is absent or non-existent before the mind as if real—thus *as if* ready to be observed. When ‘secure’ *knowledge* succeeds ‘ephemeral’ perception we can ‘think all of a thing’s attributes at once’. Within any one ‘take’ when I perceive a cube there are only some of its sides and angled corners whereas when I ‘know’ what a cube is I can think ‘all its sides and angles at once: ‘rectilinear three-dimensional object with six sides and twelve internal angles’.

There is a primary consciousness of the *object* not only when we *think* what a cube is, but also when we perceive some specific cube. In each case you can move to a reflective stage about that *consciousness* of the object. The difference lies neither in the object of awareness nor in one's liability to reflect upon consciousness. The difference is, Sartre claims, that the theoretical knowledge of the cube exists 'as at the heart of the object' rather than taking it in from various subtended angles of vision.⁶ In perception there is a 'multiplicity of appearances serving their apprenticeship'; in thought I 'apprehend its entirety [as if] in one glance'.

Sartre proposes that imagining is thus ambiguously located between thinking's overall grasp and the specific angularity of perceiving. With visual imagination, as in perception, the object 'gives itself in profiles' whereas intellectual imagination has no need to 'make a tour'.

[To form an image] is to link a concrete knowledge to elements made properly representative: I never find in the image anything I have not put there [...] imagining is constructing or producing, not discovering. There is an essential poverty in the image [...] there is no 'beam of light' to exhibit some [hitherto] unseen relationship. [...] The 'object' in the image is presented *as* having to be apprehended in a multiplicity of acts', but because 'the image [itself] does not teach anything' he reckons this a 'phantom' opacity.⁷ [Rather] we are in an attitude [towards it] of quasi-observation, as if we were going to observe when we are not going to.⁸

It is because there is something 'written' there only to the extent that I knew what to put there in the first place, that I do not 'read' the page of the book that I have imagined. Sartre's recognition of the [only] quasi-observable status of the image helps to explain how a 'poverty-stricken' image still has 'a rich and profound sense'. I bring to it exactly that 'profound sense' that I have already learned. The image need be no more than a sign of that.

Though, syntactically, we treat the image as if a knowable *object* it thus appears as a *mysterious* object that 'steadfastly refuses to yield up its secrets'. We have falsely considered it as an object: 'the image never precedes the intentionality of which it must therefore be a descriptor *post hoc*.' I want to jest that here we have *the first rule of the image game*: 'Don't say anything about the image'. Seriously—what you say does not adhere to the object; the description concerned the imagining *process* as a whole.

OBJECTIVITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In regarding its objects as other than itself, consciousness has its *objectivity*.⁹ “Consciousness is exhausted in its positing”, as Sartre will say.¹⁰ He can distinguish imagining from perceiving—in terms of modes of consciousness rather than ‘imaginary’ objects. He can do this because he understands consciousness as a ‘nihilation’ of its object. The imagining of Pierre may be as absent (for a time), ‘elsewhere (dwells permanently too far off to expect to perceive him again), or non-existent (Pierre is fictional). In all cases, Sartre claims, there is *at least* a *quasi-observation*; you imagine Pierre as he *is* or *would have to be* in virtue of what we know of him. Yet imagination is only *quasi-observation* since the image will not stay steady; its spontaneity means that it refuses to submit to examination: “My image of an absent person is a certain means of not *touching* him”.¹¹ To cast the image as an object of inspection is to turn it into a surrogate for your friend. The ‘image’ is a syntactical illusion cast by the internal accusative of imagining; imagining is thinking that is miscast as a kind of ‘seeing’ when it concentrates on sensible qualities, actions and events: ‘we can [only] try to react to an image [as] we do to perception.’ Imagining is charged with affect; the momentarily quasi-objectual ‘image’ is already part of the affect of which it is but a symptom.

When ‘the image’ is rethought as the accusative of an *imagining consciousness*, spontaneity emerges as a principal feature. A theory of consciousness begins to emerge from the particular instance of the *imagining consciousness*. Sartre explains the ‘image’ not by your relation to *it*, but to what you are conscious *of*. The ‘spontaneity’ that interests him need not be a delightful ‘rush’; the spontaneity is the (conceptual) indetermination, by what *is the case*, of what we imagine. Consciousness of what one imagines concerns its *object*, but as a *consciousness* it is thus a consciousness (of) itself. Sartre brackets the ‘of’ to indicate that one is not regressively engaged with consciousness *of* consciousness *of*.¹² As with ‘the city of Paris’, the ‘of’ indicates neither that the city *belongs* to the god Paris nor that it might have been the apple *of* his eye. It is the city, Paris, *tout court*. The consciousness *of* one’s imagining what Pierre is doing in Berlin is only this: in imagining what Pierre is doing in Berlin you are *ipso facto* in a state of consciousness. Using imagery hauntingly like Ryle’s, Sartre writes: “The image is not a piece of wood floating on the sea, but a wave amongst waves”.¹³

When Edward Casey claimed that Sartre could find no place for Baudelaire’s claim to ‘create a world’ he was right to note that Sartre *distinguishes* the imagi-

nary from what is real. In his language, one ‘nihilates’—‘makes nothing of’—what is directly perceived. One changes one’s mode of consciousness from perceiving to imaging. There is no reason, however, to follow Casey in judging Sartre to have *demoted* what is imagined as being in an ‘anti-world’, or to have “repudiate[d] the productive powers of the imagination, as promoted by Kant, Schelling, Novalis and Blake.”¹⁴ We also find Casey making these same charges, and the same comparison with Baudelaire, in a paper of his written a decade earlier¹⁵. Strangely, he himself then demotes Baudelaire as using mere ‘rhetoric’ or ‘poetics’ that ‘add little to an understanding of the *actual*’¹⁶ nature of imagination.’

Casey’s use of ‘actual’ demonstrates how, even in challenging Sartre’s division of the real and imaginary as too sharp, he himself draws the line between a ‘poetic’ remark about imagination and one that concerns what imagination is, *actually*. We may take a steadier view of the imaginary by looking within Baudelaire’s *actual* poetry. For instance, in the famous ‘L’invitation au voyage’ the narrator, addressing ‘mon enfant, ma soeur’ creates a lullaby to make dream of a renewed childhood, to yearn for an *impossible* ‘luxe, calme et volupté’. Sartre’s observation of imagination’s *strength* in presenting its object as *absent* is precisely to the point of the power of the poem to create beauty in evoking unsatisfiable desire. Baudelaire would be unhinged rather than the subtle poet he is if he took himself to be ‘reporting back’ from another ‘reality’.

Paul Ricoeur opens a discussion¹⁷ with remarks similar to those of Casey concerning Sartre’s treatment of the mental image. He remarks that Sartre’s opening treatment of the image does not “open the description of imagination to the traits of fiction”.¹⁸ Ricoeur thinks that Sartre has followed too closely a tradition that considers what we imagine as only *derived* from what we have perceived, and that Sartre’s account deals only with the role of physical images as a vehicle of imagination. Ricoeur finds Sartre’s analysis ‘brilliant’ in describing how the material analogue ‘disappears’ in directing imaginative consciousness to its object. Ricoeur thinks, however, that by taking a physical picture rather than mental one as his paradigm, Sartre’s has reinforced ‘the privilege of the original’. For Ricoeur, the upshot is that Sartre cannot account for imagination in *fiction*, which need not use a physical model to direct the reader’s attention to the world of the narrative.

Ricoeur agrees with Sartre that when I imagine a friend who is in another city, it is that friend himself who is the object of my imagination. He complains, however, that Sartre never clarifies ‘the relation of [such] absence to unreality’. Hamlet is

fictional rather than ‘absent’. (My example.) Let us open this question, then, if only for a moment. What *is* the object of imagination when I think about Hamlet? Does Sartre need a mental image rather than a physical being as the focus of imagining Hamlet? Certainly, Sartre’s *paradigm* is an absent friend whereas the paradigm of what I imagine in fiction concerns the character and actions of a non-existent figure. Ricoeur claims that here we have ‘two classes of phenomena’—to an imagined friend one might ‘ascribe to the magic of quasi-presence’ but to the other belong ‘the spontaneity of fiction’. He notes how Sartre, in describing a ‘fascinated’ consciousness, exhibits the spontaneity of consciousness and fascination as belonging to the *same* phenomenon. This is masterfully described (admits Ricoeur) as *spellbound spontaneity or fatality*. Why then is Ricoeur so doubtful that Sartre’s account of imagination could encompass fiction? When I think of Pierre as in Berlin, it is Pierre rather than some image that I am thinking of, as shown by the relevance of information that he is no longer alive, or has in fact returned and is about to enter the door. When I think of Hamlet as in a gloomy castle in Denmark, it is a fictional imagination that is at work, as evidenced by the fact that all and only the relevant information derives from Shakespeare’s script. Since *intentionality* applies equally, whether I imagine Pierre or Hamlet, that my friend is alive and real whereas ‘Hamlet’ is the name of a character in a play makes no difference to the problematic of *imagining*.

RYLE AND THE IMAGE: ‘WHY DO THE PEOPLE IMAGINE A VAIN THING!’

In a paper written a few years after *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle makes reference to Sartre’s work during the 1930s in *L’imaginaire*.¹⁹ He takes up the same line of thought as Sartre:

We are all strongly tempted to think of the human mind as a sort of private chamber, and to think of the things that we visually and auditorily imagine as, somehow, authentic occupants of this private chamber. *Imagining* then comes to be misconstrued as a special brand of *witnessing* the objects of which happen to be internal and private to the witness. Sartre, in his *L’imaginaire*, (1940), was partly concerned to attack this same conceptual misconception. There was another, connected conceptual mistake which I, like Sartre, tried to expose. Hume ... maintained that the difference between what is seen and what is visualised, between ‘impressions’ and ‘ideas’, was a difference in degree of intensity. So, presumably, very faint noises, such as barely heard whispers, would have to be auditory

images or ‘ideas’; and merely imagined shouts would have to be actually heard whispers. Which is absurd.²⁰

The recognition of this error is crucial to Ryle and Sartre’s success in treating imagining as directed at *what* we imagine—a winged horse, a perpetual motion machine or how one’s best friend is dealing with some difficulty. Neither of them would deny that there is such a thing as imagery—seeing ‘in the mind’s eye’, hearing ‘with the mind’s ear’ and so on. What they share is their diagnosis of the mystification of imagining—and consequent deconstruction of that mystification. Such imagining is not in itself an internal ‘image’ whose relation to what we imagine could be modelled on how a painting or photograph relates to what it pictures. What produces the mystification of imagining is to identify it with the occurrence of mental imagery—considered as inner pictures that we *witness*. To take mental imagery to be related to its object as a picture is to the object of which it is a ‘copy’ is part of the same confusion. What we attend to when we imagine—that in which we take our interest, and against which we test the accuracy and rigour of our imaginings—is the *object* of our imagination. We can show quite precisely why the power of the imagination is not to be identified or understood in terms of one’s propensity to produce, harbour or elaborate mental imagery considered as inner pictures that have qualities by which they represent the imagined object. We dislodge the (thus reified) mental image as centrepiece, but not in the spirit of iconoclasm.²¹

One may actively imagine what *is* or *might be* without having specific and relevant mental images of it. We mull over the issues propositionally; we make a sketch of what we are trying to imagine; we converse with a friend about the issue. The power of the imagination is crucial in explaining how sensory experience generates understanding of an event that we witnessed with initial incomprehension. In gaining a philosophical grasp of the ‘role of imagination’, however, we risk reifying this ‘power of imagination’ as some single, essential and quasi-magical factor. We ‘call upon the imagination’ but we do not call upon any such single essential function. We employ and demonstrate our powers of imagination in the multiple ways we sense, perceive, observe, and infer—as we come tentatively to reason, formulate theories, and gain knowledge. There is a problem in presenting the phenomena of imagination—how things are, might be or have been. We must demonstrate the distinctiveness of imagining, but without raising up IMAGINATION as a distinct and separable item in a recipe for baking accurate reliable and well-rounded knowledge.²²

While the simple occurrence of mental imagery is not yet a work of the imagination, the way of putting the point that thus emerges reminds us of the difference between the sheer occurrence of imagery, and the power of imagination in doing something with it. The power of imagination can be involved in what we do *in response to* the occurrence of mental imagery. This accent upon such facts reminds us that when we distinguish imagery from the work of the imagination we are not thereby derogating the having of imagery.

Preoccupation with the image as quasi-independent representation occludes another important issue. As dealing as much with what is unseen, unknown, or non-existent, imagination is prone to induce a sense of mystique about *what we imagine*. If to visually imagine this red apple to be green involves perceiving an ‘inner’ visual image that *is* green, this would be to ‘perceive’ something that green where nothing physical is green. The very existence of visual imagery would then establish a dualism of mental and physical properties. Ryle and Sartre’s domestication of Husserl’s ‘transcendental phenomenology’ derails such an argument. Like Husserl, they used the *intentionality* of various different modes of consciousness to displace empiricist notions of imagination as a (faint) idea derived from its progenitor impression. Locke’s model of how a visual image relates to what is imaged is the relation of a painting to the scene painted. This robust social model, however, has the unbidden consequence that the visual image (Locke’s *idea*) is itself, as is a painting, coloured, spaced, and configured. The model thus regenerates Cartesian dualism.

We can further disturb the identification of imagining with having images; we observe that a good deal of imagining is akin to thinking. ‘Imagine what it would be like to’, or ‘what it would be like if’ is just about the same as ‘think what it would be like to’, or what it would be like if.’ It takes more than having an image of undergoing something to really imagine what it would be like. Ryle achieves a sensitive, detailed and ampliative essay on the varieties of imagining, fancying, pretending and producing fantasies.²³ Part of his work consists in paying close attention to the myth of ‘hidden inner processes’ that we project onto the scene of actual capacities and tendencies. Looking in the wrong place, we thus misdescribe what we *do* find so as to make it fit. Yes, there are processes of mind but Ryle’s famous *dispositions* do not displace these; since we are no less *disposed* to thoughts and feelings. He understands a ‘non-visibility’ and ‘non-audibility’ of processes of thought and feeling so as to undermine an idea embedded in our syntax—that to imagine is to be a witness of images. Rather than a category mistake,

it is the misconstruction of that unobservability that makes a *hidden reality* both of imagining.

IMAGINING AS A PRIVATE EVENT: THE IMAGE AS A 'HIDDEN' OBJECT

The 'hiddenness' of imagining is like that of thinking.²⁴ Not able to see or hear it, I wonder what you are thinking. I do not wonder at it, however, as I would wonder at your having become invisible or get irritated at your inaudible remarks. You cannot be *deprived* of what it is logically absurd to propose. I can listen to your confidences but not your feelings; still they are not *inaudible* as your whispered remark might have been. And yes, I can see some of the objects that you espy even though, just as I cannot see your imagining them, I cannot see your seeing of them. As I might see what you are seeing I can *imagine* it, too; I can imagine the song you might be hearing and yet could not even *imagine* hearing your hearing of it. Denis Brain's playing of Mozart's first horn concerto is running through my head; like you, sitting beside me, I hear neither his playing nor myself imagining it; that imagining is not therefore strangely *hidden* from our senses. I sketch the face of an absent friend, which you can look at, while you cannot look at my image of him. Ryle, after Sartre, will retort that *I* cannot look at it, either, and that each of us has access to what I am imagining, nonetheless.

Ryle's critics have read him as engaged in reducing descriptions of what appears to be an inner, mental, private life, to descriptions of outward behaviour, and dispositions towards such behaviour.²⁵ Some reviled him for his attempt to so demean humanity's imaginative powers.²⁶ Others praised him for his bold, though sadly doomed effort to show that we can regard people as nothing more than physical bodies engaged in outward physical behaviour. Both those ways of reading his work ignore most of what is contained in *The Concept of Mind*, and his various other writings of the same era. His method is 'conceptual geography' rather than conceptual reduction—he works to remedy what we lack—detailed descriptions of a terrain with which we have a practical familiarity.

Ryle opens his discussion of imagination with these words: "Theorists and laymen tend to attribute 'other worldly' reality to the imaginary and then to treat minds as the clandestine habitats of such fleshless beings" (CM, 232).²⁷

Thinking in this way prompts the question of where these things that we imagine, exist. It would seem that they are imagined as *in this room*, or *in Juan Fernandez*, but they are seen there as ‘in the mind’s eye’, and it thus *that seeing* that is reckoned to require its special object, suited to such a special vision—something that is then dubbed, conveniently, a ‘mental’ image. Thus Ryle, in his project of disturbing the apparently innocuous common language that produces these ontological curiosities, takes it as a ‘crucial problem to describe what is ‘seen in the mind’s eye’ and ‘heard in one’s head’.

‘To see is one thing; to visualise, another’ Ryle declaims. We visualise with our eyes shut, or in the dark. And so too with hearing—a tune can run in the head; your neighbour hears nothing.’ We can deal with these phenomenological facts, Ryle implies in what he proceeds to do, by describing carefully what is involved, and what is wrongly assumed when we use certain idioms. For instance, Ryle will, in due course, point out that though my neighbour does not hear the tune running through my head, neither do I. If ‘inaudible’, the tune that runs through the head is not a strangely ‘inaudible’ version of what is *normally audible*. Thus Ryle does not ‘deny the existence of mental imagery’ in that he gives full attention to phenomena such as hearing a tune in one’s head. But to ‘hear a tune in one’s head’ is to *imagine* hearing a tune. To imagine something happening, even vividly, is not the same as having made it happen. We can add to Ryle’s argument here. We readily concur that to hear a tune as heard in the Berlin Philharmonie running through the head does not guarantee that we *are* in that concert hall. That is ‘only imagined’, of course. Yes, but in that case, why should we not fully admit that *hearing the music* is also ‘only imagined’.

It is not true that you must categorise *having* a visual image as a kind of *seeing*, if you are to recognise the reality of *having* visual imagery. In a series of examples, Ryle points out how misguided it would be to take the ‘as if I were seeing it again’ as licence for concluding that my mental imagining is a *kind* of seeing. His homely examples satirise the very idea. A doll does not come any closer to being a kind of baby in being ever more lifelike. It is a doll, not a baby that is lifelike. A forgery does not become an authentic signature by being executed ever more convincingly. And, if I may add my own twist to his argument, just imagine (*sic*) that while you were vividly imagining a friend she did walk into the room. That would be a totally different category of experience.

The same argument applies to the ‘earworm’—the persistent recurrence of a tune in one’s head. The persistence and the vividness of the ‘earworm’ does not challenge the difference of category between hearing a tune in the head, and hearing a tune being played. To say, ‘it is as if I were hearing it’ does not mean that you are almost taken in by your own imaginative spontaneity. As if, when you cannot get *Colonel Bogey* out of your head, you were to conclude that a brass band had installed itself in your study.

A critic might respond that even if *seeing something in the mind’s eye* is not *seeing* anything, it is the *having* of a visual image. Hence, we must admit the reality of the image that we *have*. Presumably, such a critic fancies that they know of the image ‘by acquaintance’ or ‘by introspecting it’. But nothing licenses such a critic to speak of ‘the image’ as a thing to be scrutinised in *any* way. ‘Having a visual image’ is a phrase that is explicated as a whole—either from the homely metaphor of ‘seeing in the mind’s eye’ or by some further phrase that it spins off, such as ‘visually imaging’.

An actor whose progressive performances of dying become ever more lifelike runs no increasing risk of death. It may not seem as absurd that ‘seeing in the mind’s eye’ might approach being a visual actuality as the visual image becomes more vivid, persistent, or insistent. That, *actually*, someone is vividly imaging something is the fact to be articulated. It is pointless for a critic of the Ryle/Sartre account to tell us of ever more vivid and persistent imaginings. The account accepts the reality of *having visual imagery*—of *seeing in the mind’s eye*. But that is in not to admit the image as an entity that *has* the properties one is *imagining* to pertain to what is imagined. The situation can be no different when considering sensory imaging—‘seeing in the mind’s eye a single coloured patch’. Only the hypostasis of an object that *has* the properties ‘seen in the mind’s eye’ entails a dualistic consequence.

Furthermore, the Sartre/Ryle account has no particular difficulty (*pace* Ricoeur) in saying what is achieved when a fictional character is enacted. To say that an actor portrays Hamlet flawlessly means, for instance, that the audience remains immersed in the character as the story unfolds. The price of the ticket does not include full admission to a *real though fictional world* that would, ontologically, match the allegedly ‘real’ colours of a visual image.

ON HAVING MENTAL IMAGERY

Despite all that can be said about not reifying *the mental image* on the ground of the activity of imagining this or that, still this ‘private’ process goes on, and one can question whether Sartre or Ryle fully deal with this. To raise this question of privacy—that my imagining cannot be yours and that I cannot observe your imagining—is to shift the ground of the argument about the *objects* of imagining.²⁸ That my imagining cannot amount to your imagining has the same status as the fact that my scrambling the eggs cannot amount your scrambling them. Such manifold ‘privacies’ in one’s possession of what one does are but specific forms of the general tautology, ‘I am not you’. To say, ‘Ah, but anyone can see my scrambling the eggs as well as they see your similar breakfast preparations. But only I can see my mental images.’ Whoops! Our critic had thought that one could relinquish the idea that mental images were objects to be seen, and still find trouble for the Sartre/Ryle project of understanding mind. The visual image, however, arises to be ‘seen’ (‘perceived’, ‘intuited’ etc.) only if reified already. Otherwise, the challenging difference between you and me—that only I perceive my image—disintegrates. Simply that *I* am engaged in my imagining whereas *you* are engaged in finding out about it, generates no aura of mystique. For similarly, if *I* am engaged in writing a letter then it is *you* who are engaged in your interpretation of that.

There is this tendency to pluck ‘mental image’ out of the noun phrase ‘the having of a mental image’ and use that part as the name of something that has its own properties. It is then that one seems licensed to say, ‘I know these properties from *having* the image, whereas for you have to be told, I make you a sketch, and so on. Formally, such a severance of part of an idiomatic phrase has nothing to recommend it. Quine reminded us that one could reify ‘sakes’ in the same way. I crack the eggs *for the sake* of making an omelette. I pluck *sake* out of *for the sake of*. Now I can tell you that it is simply in cracking the eggs that I know for what *sake* I do that, whereas you have to ask me, or attend to the course of my action.

One never lays these fallacies to rest because their related sources collude with each other:

- i. *my doing (whatever)* cannot be *your doing that same whatever*
- ii. *I can know what I am doing simply in doing it* whereas you must know *indirectly*
- iii. one reads literal meanings into parts of an idiom—*seeing* in the mind’s eye’.

iv. one's attention is shifted by vivid imagining from its object to its content.

Consider (iv), by way of example. A reader of this paper wanted to remind me that one becomes preoccupied with a tune in the head (an 'earworm'). The tune (in the head) becomes the object of attention. Thus one cannot escape the existence of the auditory image.

Though these reflections are posed as an argument that the auditory image is an object to be perceived, the objection *presupposes* the falsity of what it means to refute. For if to have a musical image is to *imagine* making or hearing music, then this attention to 'auditory imagery' is only an attending to oneself *as imagining* hearing or playing the music.

SARTRE'S ANALAGON: RYLE MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Ryle and Sartre move in parallel in undercutting the notion of the *mental image* as a kind of object. Sartre's terminology of the *analagon*, however, leads him into trouble. The notion itself is a simple one. When I imagine something, or act in the imagination of something, there is some 'vehicle'—the *analogon*—that I use to make the transition between the actual and the imaginary. In imagining my friend Pierre, I look at a photograph of him and, in gazing at that, bring Pierre to mind. A bad photograph may be enough. It may make me think, 'That isn't how I imagine him'. I am thus prompted to imagine him as he is. So, too, I may find a caricature that inspires my imagination better than does a photograph. Or, in imagining how a tune goes, I may whistle it, or play a moment from a recording, or sound out a few bars on the piano. On hearing or making these actual sounds I may I sense that I had moved off the track of the melody. In maintaining a fictional persona in a stage production, my *analagon* will consist of the usual props. The costume I put on, the deliberate limp I affect, the sounds of the prompter giving me the opening words of my speech—my imaginative 'creation' of my character employs any or all of these material devices. Nevertheless, I step out of character if they become the object of my imagination. Such supports and reminders 'stage' my imagining of myself into the character that appears to the audience in all its integrity.

When Sartre considers imagining when there is no such prop, he finds the *analagon* by casting the mental image itself in that role. At least verbally, this is to treat the image as if an object—something scrutinised in the way that one might

a photograph. But if to have a visual image of Pierre simply is to visually imagine Pierre (Sartre's principal line) then this is a mistake. Since for Sartre an image of Pierre is not an *object I use* when I imagine Pierre we should treat, as a glitch in terminology, his *deeming* the image as analogon. Let us see how Ryle, without such a formal notion, uses 'mental image' as but a syntactical derivative of statements of our *what we are imagining*—whether visual, theatrical, and so on.

In describing such 'unassisted' imagination Ryle suggests that it is because we do so often use observable representations when visually imagining that we raise up 'mental image' as if it were a semi-independent thing with its own, (partially) determinable qualities. We were free to recognise the properties of drawings and photographs as objects with their own properties. It seemed harmless enough to adopt the language of 'mental' 'visual' or 'auditory' images, as if we might scrutinise them, also, in our efforts to imagine something. We might have thus thought that having a visual image must *be* a kind of seeing when in my imagination 'it was just as if I saw Pierre. And yet, on reflection we realise, easily, that a painting of being at the seaside, however lifelike, cannot become a way of *being* at the seaside. No cooling breeze, no splash of saltwater, no cry of the seagulls, no matter how compelling the painting.²⁹ The metaphor of 'seeing in the mind's eye' (and 'smelling in the mind's nose') glosses (but can never overcome) our sense of the absurdity of taking a painting of the seaside as amounting to *being* at the seaside. I look at a painting thus *to see Brighton Beach in it*. It is no less absurd, though perhaps more recondite, to suggest that *having* an evocative mental image of Brighton Beach could amount to *seeing* something. (What? Brighton Beach? Brighton-Beach-in-the-image?) Rather than staggering at absurdity we have puzzled over metaphysical meaning.

That is the error that Sartre addresses, with such nuance and thoroughness in *L'imaginaire*. The defect in presentation, though, is that in exhibiting the chasm between 'seeing in the mind's eye' and seeing a painting, he has enjoyed the simple syntax of 'mental image' that makes of it a (grammatical) object. The work he does, however, is to undo its status as an object. He does not flatly *deny* the image. Rather, he *deconstructs* the whole picture of 'mental' objects in a 'private' picture gallery. His *expression* is then vulnerable criticism. He lets it appear that he accepts the mental image as a possible object of reflective consciousness. As an *object*, it is thus derogated as 'impoverished' in comparison with what we do see.

BROADENING THE FIELD OF THE IMAGINATION

Given the wealth of imaginative activity that Sartre and Ryle discover by decentring the image in account for imagination, however, it must be unjust to criticise them as derogating imagination. What we do find in those who make that criticism is a derogation of their wider field of imagination. For instance, Casey declares that “we do not ordinarily consider [pretending] to be [an] example of imagining the fullest sense.”³⁰ How can that be true? Surely, in pretending to be a bear a child is imagining being a bear. In rebuttal, Casey claims this: “the basic invariant function of imagining proper [is] *the conscious projection and contemplation of objects posited as pure possibilities.*”³¹ If this seems to us ‘trivial’ or ‘vacuous’ (as Casey fears) he explains that *his* possibilities are not the mere ‘hypothetical’ ones where we imagine ‘what might happen if’. *Proper* imagination’s possibilities are those we project “*for their own sake.*”³² Are we thus forbidden to say that a child playing at being a bear is ‘projecting objects (small alcove in her room) posited as a ‘pure possibility’ of it being a bear cave. That possibility is ‘pure’ enough. Cannot the child project these possibilities ‘for their own sake’? She might only later play to entertain her parents?

This appeal to propriety is used to push us philosophers back to an imagining that is ‘proper’ because it ‘has its own sort of object’, where that the *object* is an ‘imaginary’ state of affairs. Circularity threatens this defence of traditional territory, however. One cannot define imagination (proper or not) in terms of an *imaginary* object. For his part, in handling the phenomenon of imagining, Ryle does so without invoking a mental construct that is exclusively the concern of imagining. Once ‘*mental*’ (*visual, auditory etc.*) *imagining* has replaced the *visual-image-as-object-of-inner-perception* we can work out consequent details without impediment. On his side, Sartre, in demoting the mental image, does not ‘degrade’ *imagining*. Neither does his move ‘intellectualise’ the imagination.³³ Ryle’s emphasis on imaginative activity does not make a behaviourist of him, either.³⁴ Having ceased to fixate on mental imagery as at the centre of imagining Sartre and Ryle roll out the diverse forms of imagination. The concept of picturing, visualising or ‘seeing’ is a proper and useful concept, but its use requires no inner gallery in which to suspend such pictures. Tersely— *imagining* occurs, but mental images are not seen. I do have tunes running in my head, but no tunes are heard (not by me, let alone another) when I have these tunes running there. A person picturing his nursery *is* in a certain way like that person in seeing his nursery. The similarity consists in its being to him ‘just as if he were seeing it’. ‘He is not being a spectator of a resemblance

of his nursery, but he is resembling being a spectator of his nursery' (CM, 234).

AGAINST MENTAL IMAGES AS INFORMATIVE

I have remarked how, in explaining why we so easily reify images as perceivable, Ryle invokes our use of drawings, paintings and photographs:³⁵

When a visible likeness of a person is in front of my nose, I often seem to be seeing the person himself [there] though he [...] may be long since dead. Or when I hear a recording of a friend's voice, I fancy I hear him speaking [...] in that room, though he is miles away. The genus is seeming to perceive, and one very familiar species is seeming to see something, when looking at our ordinary snapshot of it. Seeming to see, when no physical likeness [such as a photograph] is before the nose is [but] another species (CM, 240).

I should make explicit a step that is tacit in this argument. There is a point in his emphasising that 'seeming to see, where no physical replica is present' is [but] another species of the same genus.' What this emphasis shows is this: in imagining something, inspiration from some physical replica was only incidental. If we can imagine something then we correct what some physical replica may wrongly suggest. Furthermore, as Ryle says (with Sartre), we can use a cartoon to prompt our imagination—often to greater effect than would be effected by a 'realistic' photograph. It is only to the extent that we have an initial imaginative grip on the object of the cartoon that we can see its exaggerated point. These facts show a degree of independence of *imagining an absent face* from *being presented with a perceivable image of that face*. The conclusion we should draw then (teasing out the threads of Ryle's argument), is that there is no need to postulate a visual image as a possible *object of scrutiny* in order to understand how we can imagine something in the absence of a perceivable (physical) replica to guide or prompt us. When we correct a proffered photograph as 'a very bad likeness' we do this not by (impossibly) setting it alongside a 'mental image'. We judge straight off that this photograph 'is certainly not my younger brother Ted, in any way that I can imagine him.'

Fundamentally, 'I see my younger brother in my mind's eye' means that I can visually imagine him—ready to correct any specific representation of him as atypical or distorting. I need no reified 'mental image' to scrutinise. It is not as if my 'visually imagining something' *failed* to access something equivalent to a photo-

graph. Any real object of scrutiny that might correct me is something that, in turn, I might correct while forming what I imagine.

THE PRIVACY OF IMAGINING

It might be said that even if we do not reify the mental image, still, imagining is a ‘private’ or ‘inner’ process that is thus an obstacle for Ryle’s (legendary) project of showing that all ‘mental’ phenomena, as communicable, are described by reference to observable behaviour. What Ryle does in describing imaginary episodes is at some distance from such a cliché of his intentions. Take, for example, the canny use he makes of a subtle difference between going through a tune in one’s head and *following* a tune to which we listen. In following a tune that we hear, we have some anticipation of how it will go; we bear in mind how far it has progressed; we retain something of the mood and progression of melody and theme that has occurred so far. For, when we follow the piece of music in this way we must be able to anticipate—and retain. The notion that we must need the ‘back-up’ of a second-order rendition of earlier and later sections is conceptually regressive. To follow the back-up. I would in turn have to retain and anticipate the course of the music, no less than in following the first-order performance. Certainly, one may read the score while listening to the music. Still it remains that in reading any section of it we keep in mind what had preceded that, and some anticipation of what is to come. Or shall we need a meta-score to interpret the score by reference to past and future phases and phrases? And so on *ad infinitum*?

Ryle points out that the ‘private performance’ is not hidden away in another world. When we go through a tune ‘in the head’ we deploy this same operative knowledge

Both [following a tune to which we are listening, and going through a tune in one’s head] are utilisations of knowledge of how the tune goes [which] is exercised in [...] following the tune, when actually heard, [also] in humming or playing it, and in fancying oneself humming or playing it, or [fancying oneself] listening to it (CM, 254).

Ryle’s point about the ‘purely imaginative exercise’ of hearing the tune in the head is this:

It is ‘more sophisticated than following the tune, when heard, or produc-

ing it’—more ‘sophisticated’ since it involves the thought of following the tune, in the way in which sparring involves the thought of fighting in earnest [...] we might say that imagining oneself [...] humming [the tune] is a series of abstentions from producing the noises which would be the right ones to produce [...] That is why learning to fancy one is .. humming comes later than learning to [...] hum [In a similar fashion] silent soliloquy is a flow of pregnant non-sayings’ (CM, 254).

Ryle proceeds to apply this analogy to visually imagining Mt Helvellyn:

[This] process involves the thought of having a view of Helvellyn [which is] one utilisation amongst others of the knowledge of how [that mountain] should look. The expectations that are fulfilled in the recognition at sight of Helvellyn are not [indeed] fulfilled in picturing it, but the [mental] picturing of it is something like a rehearsal of getting [those expectations] fulfilled [...] Thus, far from picturing involving the having of faint *sensations* [à la Hume], picturing involves *missing* just what one would be due to get, if one were seeing the mountain (CM, 255).

It is on the basis of this analysis that Ryle explicates the role of imagery in pretended actions—in games and on the stage. Ryle is not trivialising the imagination, as Casey thinks. One cannot sustain the notion Casey has—one that would also trivialise Ryle’s approach—that imaginative and pretended action scarcely deserves a philosopher’s attention.³⁶ Casey, as does Ricoeur, calls upon literary imagination as an exemplar. But surely the genius of an actor is comparable to that of the playwright. A philosopher should not scorn to keep company with the nimble wits of a child who turns a dull back garden into a dangerous jungle with the aid of plank or two. (You would meet Ryle there.) Sartre is also interested in the imagination demonstrated in acting. Casey claimed that Sartre’s is an “anti-Romantic program” that “repudiates the productive powers of the imagination as promoted by Kant, Schelling, Novalis and Blake”.³⁷ This is a strange assessment. Sartre has always had a central place in his philosophy for literary and other artistic works. His demotion of the mental image would seem irrelevant to such an evaluation of his work on the imagination.

What is it that Ryle writes that earns him Ricoeur’s rebuke for dealing only with Kant’s ‘reproductive’ rather than a ‘productive’ imagination? Ryle’s immediacy in describing involvement with music and his appreciation of Jane Austin do not

announce him as ‘repudiating the productive imagination’. Casey says nothing to indicate what it is about the provinces of imagination that interest his four great figures (mentioned above) that would place what they say or produce beyond bounds of Sartre’s interest in imagination. And in any case, it is not to ‘derogate’ imagination to observe that the detail of visual imagination is sparse compared with sensory perception. It is by the use of imagination that we find our way through the sensory jungle. As Arendt points out in *The Life of the Mind*, it is the power of thought to ‘de-sense’ what we recollect that gives the ‘withdrawal’ into thought a particular kind of power.³⁸ It is not *imagination*, as Casey claims, but the *reified mental image* that Sartre—and Ryle in his different fashion—recognise as ‘impoverished’ in content—in comparison with a perceptual object. That aspect of ‘impoverishment’ is tied to the view of the image as a quasi-object that we would inspect, as we inspect what we see or hear.

As a final example of how smoothly descriptions may proceed in the absence of reference to a reified image, we may recall Ryle adeptly taking up the imagining of odours—here we have no ready-made language of ‘smell images’. The description of imagining is in no way impoverished by the absence of a proprietary ‘object of the imagination’:

When someone mentions a blacksmith’s forge, I find myself back in my childhood. I can vividly ‘see’ the glowing red horseshoe on the anvil, fairly vividly ‘hear’ the hammer ringing on the shoe, and less vividly ‘smell’ the singed hoof. How shall we describe this ‘smelling in the mind’s nose’? [...] I have no way of paraphrasing [this] as ‘I smell a copy of the smell of a singed hoof. The language of copies and originals does not apply to smells (CM, 238).

I would remark that the smell of the hoof *in imagination* can be ‘vivid’, while the smell of the hoof in perception cannot warrant that sort of epithet. As Ryle puts it, “however vividly I [...] ‘smell’ the smithy, the smell of lavender in my room is in no way drowned. There is no competition between the smell and a ‘smell’, as there is a competition between the smell of onions and the smell of lavender” (CM, 239).

There is a lesson in the supple accounts of various kinds of imaginings that Ryle and Sartre’s methods allow them to construct. Their work moves directly in opposition to the derogation of imagination that is imputed to Sartre by Casey—and to both of them by Ricoeur, in his more nuanced fashion. It is in coming to under-

stand the rich complexity of imaginings, and the limited but real role of mental imagery in those general powers of the imagination that we can see ‘as from the inside’ as Ryle puts it, how our occasions of pretence, acting and parody are significant events in any life that is lived and thought through with imagination. It is in their very demotion of *the mental image* that Ryle and Sartre find the space for all that we imagine—*something happening, how to untie a knot, what a character in the novel must do next, whether to resolve the theme of a symphony I am writing, or simply, how to continue, silently, a line of thought I had begun in conversation.*³⁹

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NOTES

1. It is not *imagining* that is charged with the ‘impoverishment of form and content’, as Casey claims, but the mental image when considered as a quasi object, comparable with a visible thing. “Sartre on the Imagination”, *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, Ed. P. Schilpp. (Open Court, Illinois, 1981), 140. There is in the imaginary work only what is put into it. We cannot say that Hamlet is tall or short unless the text says so, or it can be deduced. That does not mean that it is an ‘impoverished’ *work of art*.
2. W.V.O Quine, “On What there Is” *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953).
3. To use this example is not to say that paintings must be ‘representational’. The point is only that there are paintings and photographs in which we can see people and scenes.
4. Quine points out that when we imagine Pegasus, it is not some idea or image of Pegasus with which we are concerned. Pegasus is winged, and a horse; the idea or image is neither of those. The image of Pegasus is *of something winged; of a horse that has those wings*. Imagination might itself ‘lend wings’ to an idea or image as it flits into the mind to ‘take wings’ as you generate a story.
5. Author’s example.
6. While we need not follow Thomas Nagel into his *View from Nowhere*, there is a reliable distinction there. It is the distinction between perception and thought rather than between common sense and scientific theory.
7. The ‘image’ has to be apprehended, on Sartre’s account, because the image’s opacity *is* phantom. *What I imagine* tests my efforts to imagine it. Only the image considered as an object to inspect is ‘phantom’.
8. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary*. Trans. Arlette Elkäim-Sartre. (London: Routledge, 2004), 9-10.
9. My use of this word rhymes with Sartre’s project. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. Trans H. Barnes. (London: Methuen, 1972). See Part III, Ch. 1, Section IV. Sartre introduces *objectivity* and thus opens up a space for consciousness to secure a certain objectivity.
10. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, xxvii.
11. Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 14.
12. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 75, 100.
13. Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 14.
14. Edward S. Casey, “Sartre on Imagination” *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*. Ed. P. Schilpp. (Open Court, Illinois: The Library of Living Philosophers, 1981), 140.
15. Edward S. Casey, “Imagination: Imagining and the Image.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, June (1971): 475.
16. My emphasis.
17. Paul Ricoeur, “Sartre and Ryle on the Imagination” *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*. Ed. P. Schilpp. (Open Court, Illinois: The Library of Living Philosophers, 1981), 167.
18. Ricoeur, “Sartre and Ryle”, 172.
19. Paul Ricoeur takes note of many parallels in their work. See Ricoeur, “Sartre and Ryle”, 167-178.
20. Gilbert Ryle, “Phenomenology versus ‘The Concept of Mind’” *Collected Papers* (Vol I). (London: Hutchinson, 1971), 179-96. This was originally published in ‘La Philosophie Analytique’ *Cahiers de Royaumont Philosophie* 4 (1962).
21. This is to speak of ‘image demolition’ within the life of the mind rather than as the smashing of statues.
22. There are valuable precedents for treating an activity or power as autonomous but not reified

as a separable entity to be precipitated in the philosophical test-tube. Hannah Arendt faced such a problem in her project of writing about the distinctive roles in the 'life of the mind' of thinking, willing and judging. Each of those activities arises only in the context of, and as colouring in the quality of, each of the others, and yet their contributions to a rich, critical and communicative 'life of the mind' are distinctive and different.

23. Casey complains that in his attention to such imaginative activities, Ryle is *derogating* imagination. Casey complains that such imaginative activities are 'not examples of imagining the fullest sense [and not] imagination proper'. "Imagination: Imagining and the Image", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, June (1971): 475.

24. It might be suggested (as by two readers of this paper) that even if mental images are not *what we are imagining*, persistent vivid imagery commands our attention and thus makes us *aware of* mental imagery.

25. A. J. Ayer once remarked (maybe in self-mockery) that Ryle is asking us to pretend to be anaesthetised.

26. The remarks that I have cited of Edward Casey, in their context, have this tone.

27. Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Penguin Books, 2000). Hereafter, 'CM'

28. There is some connection. To reify the image is to bestow upon it properties that are intrinsic to its privacy. Certainly, that exacerbates the problem of understanding such privacy.

29. A Chinese story makes a surreal joke in transgressing this logic. A painter is to be beheaded because his paintings of the emperor's palace are yet more beautiful than the palace. The painter seeks to paint one last scene—a deluge of water so lifelike that it becomes a torrent that pours out of the palace bearing the painter away.

30. Casey, "Imagination," 475.

31. Casey, "Imagination", 476.

32. Casey, "Imagination", 477.

33. Casey misjudges Sartre as trying to save perception from "contamination" and "fall[ing] into the embrace of intellectualist illusion". See Casey, "Sartre on Imagination", 158. To imagine is not to perceive (Sartre) but we can perceive imaginatively.

34. Those analytical philosophers who identify 'inner mental' life as processes in the brain make that imputation.

35. Sartre's point is that a photograph *can* be used as *analogon*. It may also be a work of art, or anonymous.

36. Casey, "Imagination", 475.

37. See Casey, "Sartre on Imagination", 140.

38. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971, 87.

39. For Casey to say "Ryle denies the existence of mental images" ("Imagination", 482) is misleading—as if Ryle were unaware that he could run a tune in his head, or visually imagine Mt. Helvellyn. It is not to under-rate the importance or richness of imagining to consider it as a *form* of consciousness, rather than as the scrutiny of an 'inner' object.