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# IMAGINING IN REMEMBERING FROM THE OUTSIDE

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**Abstract:** A hot topic in philosophy of memory is the status of observer memories. How can a genuine episodic memory involve the rememberer as an object in the remembered scene? Observer memories seem to be false or otherwise distorted episodic memories. Some voices have been raised against this seemingly straightforward view. Recently, McCarroll has offered new arguments in favour of the idea that observer memories should be legitimately considered as episodic memories, grounding it on an analysis of the perspectivity of imagination (i.e., the fact that, similarly to memory, imagination somehow involves a self or “point of view”). McCarroll argues against accounts that tie imagination to the experienceable, on the grounds that they presuppose an experiencer in the imaginary world, and thus an occupied point of view. According to him these accounts lend force to the idea that observer memories are not genuine memories, if we take for granted that episodic memories rely on imagination so construed. In this chapter I will consider how McCarroll’s worries can be used against one of the most promising theories of the imagination, recreativism. My goal is to block this kind of move while agreeing with McCarroll’s main tenet that observer memories are genuine memories. More precisely, I will show that, although recreativism links imagination to the experienceable, it is not committed to positing “full-blooded” occupied point of view from which the imagined scene is “experienced”. I will do this through a thorough analysis of the imaginative realm, of how experiences and the self (and different types of self) can be involved in our imaginings. I will focus on different strategies open to the recreativist, bringing to the fore the importance of the imagination for a careful study of memory.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When I was a kid, I had an accident playing football. One of my classmates and I threw ourselves at the ball, me with the head, her with the knee: I caught the ball, but she caught my chin! I ended up with several stitches on my tongue. When I episodically remember this event, I often “see” myself from a third person perspective: I see my body stretched out against the ball in the air and my friend’s knee hitting my head. This might sound as a strange way of recollecting an episode of one’s own past, insofar as I have never witnessed from the outside what happened to me. If I am to remember episodically, that is recollecting an episode I have personally experienced, I should “re-live” such an episode from the perspective I held when I underwent that experience. In the present case, I should not see my body, but only the playground, the ball, partially my classmate approaching me and,

at best, my arms. I should have a *field*, rather than an *observer* memory (Nigro & Neisser 1983; Sutton 2010; McCarroll & Sutton 2017).

How can a genuine (i.e., possibly veridical) episodic memory involve the rememberer as an object in the remembered scene? The fact that observer memories represent past situations from observer perspectives, which differ from the past subject's points of view, has led some authors to consider them as false or otherwise distorted episodic memories (see Fernández 2015): they would not be memories about one's own past, if memories at all. Some voices have been raised against this seemingly straightforward view.

In his *Remembering from the Outside*, McCarroll has offered new arguments in favour of the idea that observer memories should be legitimately considered as genuine episodic memories, grounding it on an analysis of the perspectivalty of imagination (i.e., the fact that, similarly to memory, imagination somehow involves a self or "point of view"). McCarroll argues against accounts that tie imagination to the experienceable, on the grounds that they presuppose an experiencer in the imaginary world, and thus an occupied point of view. According to him, these accounts lend force to the idea that observer memories are false episodic memories, if we take for granted that episodic memory relies on imagination so construed. Therefore, McCarroll's worries can be used against one of the most promising theories of imagination, namely recreativism – i.e., the view according to which imagination is the capacity to recreate non-imaginative mental states.

My goal, in this chapter, is to block this kind of move while agreeing with McCarroll's main tenet that observer memories are genuine episodic memories. More precisely, I will show that, although recreativism links imagination to the experienceable, it is not committed to positing "full-blooded" occupied points of view from which the imagined scene is "experienced".

After having spelled out McCarroll's worries against experiential accounts of the imagination and how they apply to recreativism (§2), I will focus on two different strategies open to the recreativist. The first (§3) conceives observer memories as episodic memories involving mental imagery only, where the latter is not understood as equivalent to a variety of recreative imagination (namely, perception-like or sensory imagination), but rather as a type of content. On this view, observer memories need not necessarily involve the experience of seeing and thus occupied visual perspectives.

The second strategy (§4) suggests that observer memories call for the visual modality of sensory imagination, thus implying the experience of seeing. I argue that this is not a problematic view. I will do this through a thorough analysis of the imaginative realm, of how experiences and the self (and different types of self) can be involved in our sensory imaginings.

Finally, I will consider some objections that can be raised against the ensuing three-term relation framework (§5), and I will close (§6) with some remarks about the importance of the imagination for a

careful study of episodic memory.

## 2. A CHALLENGE FOR EXPERIENTIAL ACCOUNTS OF IMAGINATION

A legitimate question to ask is: what is the ground for the scepticism about observer memories? Building on idea that episodic memories involve mental imagery,<sup>1</sup> a tempting reply is to say that a closer look at how the latter works (at least partially) explains why observer memories should not be considered as genuine episodic memories. The argument would roughly go like this:

- h1. Points of view in visual mental images are always occupied
- h2. Episodic memories cannot involve visual points of view occupied by selves other than the rememberer's self
- h3. Observer memories involve the rememberer's self as an imagined object and cannot involve it also as the origin of the relevant visual point of view
- c. Observer memories must be false episodic memories

This kind of move has been criticized by McCarroll, whose main target is h1 (McCarroll 2018, see especially chapter 4).<sup>2</sup> According to him, h1 is false, insofar as some visual mental images involve *unoccupied* points of view. He further suggests that h1 is the product of questionable views on imagination, which relate it too much to the experienceable (e.g., Vendler's account – see Vendler 1979). More precisely, h1 seems to stem from the idea that visual mental imagery necessarily involves the experience of seeing, thus presupposing an imagined experiencer, or better an imagined viewer, who occupies the relevant point of view.

The link between the experienceable and, at least an important variety of, imagination has ancient roots (it can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle) and, indeed, it is quite common in the literature. As Gaut remarks, “[o]ften when we talk of ‘imagining’ it is experiential imagining that we have in mind, which is a richer kind of imagining than the often minimal imagining involved in entertaining a proposition or the concept of an object” (Gaut 2003: 154). The richness of experiential imagination lies in its displaying an “experiential aspect”: experientially imagining a wet cat is like having an (e.g., visual) experience of a wet cat. Experiential imagination is a heterogeneous category encompassing imaginings which show different experiential aspects (e.g., visual-like, auditory-like, proprioceptive-like). In other words, experiential imagination is an imaginative genus that can be sorted into imaginative species. By pushing this line of thought further, “experiential imagination” can be seen as another label for “recreative imagination” (Currie

& Ravenscroft 2002) – i.e., the ability to recreate (simulate, mimic) non-imaginative mental states. The idea is that experiential imagination “means that different kinds of experiential states are re-created in the imagination” (Dokic & Arcangeli 2015a: 17).

It might be objected that recreative imagination is wider than experiential imagination, insofar as it includes forms of the imagination which recreate types of mental state that are not experiential (e.g., belief-like imagination). This is debatable, though. A revived interest in phenomenology has yielded a richer notion of “experiential state”, which goes beyond perceptual or sensory states and comprises cognitive states, such as (occurrent) beliefs, endowed with cognitive phenomenology (Kriegel 2015b). In what follows I will leave this issue aside and take on board the plausibility of the hypothesis that in a pertinent sense recreative imagination is experiential imagination.

On this interpretation, recreativism runs the risk of becoming a target for McCarroll’s worries. Indeed, if according to recreativism to imagine is to recreate non-imaginative experiences, McCarroll might contend that it is committed, when it comes to visual mental imagery, to the idea that the latter necessarily involves the experience of seeing.<sup>3</sup> In turn, recreativism would be led to endorse h1 (points of view in visual mental images are always occupied) and, potentially, to deny the status of genuine episodic memories (memories for short from now on) to observer memories, if the aforementioned argument is sound.

Is recreativism really cornered into this position? No. There are at least two ways out for recreativism: 1) denying that visual mental imagery necessarily involves the experience of seeing; 2) accepting this claim, but denying that it implies that points of view in visual mental imagery are always occupied in a full-blooded way. In what follows I will spell out these different strategies, which – to anticipate – in fact deal with two different notions of mental imagery.

### **3. OBSERVER MEMORIES & MENTAL IMAGERY**

Recreativism posits different varieties of imagination (Currie & Ravenscroft 2002; Goldman 2006; Arcangeli 2018). Although recreativists disagree on the range of recreative imagination (i.e., how many forms of recreative imagination there are), they all concur in considering sensory (or perception-like) imagination to be one of the most important varieties.

Through sensory imagination we can mimic perception and have quasi-perceptual or perception-like experiences. When planning a garden renovation, I can imagine what it would be like to see a lilac bush between the cherry-tree and the forsythia. I can also anticipate in my imagination the sweet smell of the lilac next spring. While reading a novel, I can imagine hearing the sound of a buggy on the cobblestones. When going to a restaurant, in my imagination I can foretaste the flavour and aroma of a

tempting dish listed on the menu.

The notion of mental imagery is widely used to refer to such a human capacity of doing *as if* we were perceiving, thus as a synonym for sensory imagination (e.g., Currie & Ravenscroft 2002; Gregory 2013; Nanay 2015; Stokes 2019; Liao & Gendler 2019). If visual mental imagery equates with the visual modality of sensory imagination, it would be legitimate to say – following McCarroll’s concern – that visual mental imagery necessarily involves the experience of seeing.

Mental imagery, however, is a fuzzy notion, which needs unpacking to gain philosophical weight. Although the term is often employed as an alternative label for sensory imagination, a less mainstream take on mental imagery holds that not all mental images entail the exercise of the imagination (this view can be traced back to Aquinas – see De Brigard 2017: 132-133; see also White 1990; Kind 2001; Gaut 2003; Hopkins 2018; Arcangeli 2020). This view has led to the idea that mental imagery is a non-imaginative capacity not sufficient for imagination.

In previous work (Arcangeli 2020), I urged the need for distinguishing between two senses of mental imagery, which pertain to two different mental phenomena, belonging to two different theoretical levels, which should not be confused with one another. On the first sense, mental imagery means a psychological *attitude*, which is perception-like in nature (i.e., sensory imagination). On the second sense, mental imagery stands for a type of mental *content*, which can be grasped via different psychological attitudes (e.g., memory, desire, belief).

To better grasp such a distinction, let’s consider in more detail the mental exercises I have just indulged in. Indeed, they are more complex than they may appear at first: at a closer look they involve both senses of mental imagery.

First, they involve sensory imagination. In imagining seeing how the lilac bush will look like when it will bloom, in imagining smelling its scent, in imagining hearing the sound of a buggy on the cobblestones, or in imagining tasting the flavour of an apple risotto, I am apprehending some mental contents (the look and aroma of a lilac bush, the sound of a buggy on the cobblestones, the flavour of an apple risotto) in a perception-like way. To put it differently, I am recreating perceptual experiences such as seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting. This is sensory imagination, which can be seen as a specific psychological attitude, insofar as it shows distinctive (e.g., will-dependence and truth-independence), as well as perception-like features (Arcangeli 2020).

Second, by engaging in such exercises I am also bringing specific mental contents to my mind, namely sensory contents. The look and aroma of a lilac bush, the sound of a buggy on the cobblestones, the flavour of an apple risotto, are pieces of information of a certain type, characterised by a certain quality and richness.<sup>4</sup> For example, an auditory presentation of the sound of a buggy on the cobblestones embodies a host of sounds with a great variety of determinate durations, heights,

amplitudes and timbres. This is mental imagery in its second sense: a type of sensory content, that is to say, a sufficiently rich and fine-grained content (Arcangeli 2020).

The distinction between sensory imagination (as an attitude) and mental imagery (as a type of content) puts under new light the claim that visual mental imagery necessarily involves the experience of seeing. This claim is true only for visual mental imagery in its attitudinal sense. If memory involves, at least in some cases, mental imagery (in its content sense) without sensory imagination, it does not always entail the recreation of a sensory experience. Therefore, h1 (points of view in visual mental images are always occupied) is undermined and the recreativist is not doomed to go down the slippery slope which ends up with the claim that observer memories are not genuine memories. Actually, the recreativist does not even step on it to begin with: if mental imagery is understood as a type of content, the challenge (introduced in §2) misses the target of recreativism.

On this line of thought, observer memories would turn out to be memories involving mental imagery, but not sensory imagination. This way of construing observer memories helps us to acknowledge that some memories may not involve the recreation of a sensory experience. It might be objected, however, that this does not straightforwardly prove the falsity of h1: there might be other ways to ground it, which apply to mental imagery (in its content sense, to repeat it).

I have suggested to regard mental imagery as encoding spatial configurations and other manifest properties – e.g., colours and shapes (Arcangeli 2020). It might be argued that this type of information is enough to deliver perspectival information as well (that is, information about the perspective from which the state of affairs at issue is represented). This might be true, but I contend that it is not sufficient to demonstrate that these perspectives are always occupied: spatially identifying a point of view does not say anything specific about who “occupies” the given perspective. To get such a self-relative information we need sensory imagination, but the working hypothesis here is that observer memories involve only mental imagery. Thus, h1 is still not warranted and McCarroll’s worry against recreativism is again kept at bay.

So far I have indicated a way out to recreativism, demonstrating that it has the resources to grant that, contrary to sensory imaginings, mental images do not involve any sensory experience. The further suggestion has been that some memories (including observer memories) hinge on mental imagery, without requiring sensory imagination, thus failing to imply an experiencer, an occupied point of view.

We might wonder, however, whether *some* observer memories engage our sensory imagination. If it were the case, the argument sketched in §2 would be limited as it would apply only to a subset of observer memories. Luckily, an alternative strategy is open to the recreativist: to claim that, though visual imaginings necessarily involve the experience of seeing, this does not mean that they always imply full-blooded occupied points of view. Let’s turn to this option.

#### 4. OBSERVER MEMORIES, SENSORY IMAGINATION & THIN SELVES

Recreativism holds that whenever we sensorily imagine we recreate a sensory experience. Recall previous examples. With the power of my imagination I can recreate a visual experience (as when I imagine *seeing* a lilac bush in my garden), an olfactory experience (as when I imagine *smelling* lilac flowers), an auditory experience (as when I imagine *hearing* a buggy on the cobblestones), a gustatory experience (as when I imagine *tasting* an apple risotto). In this sense, recreativism maintains that visual imaginings always involve visual experiences. But what does it really mean for a visual imagining to *involve* a visual experience? At least two interpretations offer themselves:<sup>5</sup>

- (i) the visual experience is part of the *imagining's content*
- (ii) the visual experience is part of the *imagining's attitude*

According to interpretation (i), all visual imaginings are about visual experiences: imagining seeing a lilac bush means “imagining *seeing a lilac bush*”, where a visual experience features explicitly in the sensory imagining’s content. This idea can be generalised to all perceptual modalities, making all sensory imaginings about perceptual experiences.<sup>6</sup> Imagining smelling lilac flowers would mean “imagining *smelling lilac flowers*”, where an olfactory experience gets into the sensory imagining’s content. Likewise, imagining tasting an apple risotto would stand for “imagining *tasting an apple risotto*”, where the sensory imagining’s content encompasses an explicit reference to a gustatory experience.

By following (i) we might be easily led to the view that points of view in visual imaginings are always occupied – i.e., a reading of h1 where “visual mental images” is to be understood in its attitudinal sense. It might be argued that (i) makes all visual imaginings about the imaginer’s self.<sup>7</sup> The idea is that imagining seeing, say, a lilac bush should be read as “imagining *oneself seeing a lilac bush*”. On this interpretation, the imagining’s content includes an explicit reference to both a visual experience and the imaginer’s self. Therefore, the visual imagining involves an occupied point of view. This can be generalised to all visual imaginings, thus ending up with h1.

What about option (ii)? It seems less obvious to jump from it to h1. Interpretation (ii) suggests that imagining seeing a lilac bush means “imagining-seeing *a lilac bush*”, where “seeing” rather than being an explicit constituent of the visual imagining’s content is a sort of operator which modifies and specifies our way of sensorily imagine (see Currie & Ravenscroft 2002: 27). Even in this case the



hypothesis can be generalised to perceptual modalities other than vision. Imagining smelling lilac flowers would be read as “imagining-smelling *lilac flowers*”. Similarly, imagining tasting an apple risotto would mean “imagining-tasting *an apple risotto*”. In both cases, neither an olfactory experience nor a gustatory experience gets into the relevant sensory imagining’s content. This is precisely how I have defined sensory imagination in §3: recreating perceptual experiences (i.e., sensorily imagining) is to grasp a given content in a perception-like way. In a nutshell, what ties sensory imagination to perception is in the first place to be found in their ways of representing (i.e., the psychological attitudes they are), rather than in what they represent (i.e., the mental contents they have).

Once the recreated visual experience is moved from the content level to the attitudinal level and it is seen as an operator specifying the type of imaginative attitude at stake, the reason why we should presuppose an imagined viewer occupying the relevant visual perspective is not clear. Option (ii) does not seem to make all visual imaginings about the imaginer’s self. It sounds awkward to read “imagining-seeing *a lilac bush*” as “imagining-seeing *oneself a lilac bush*”.<sup>8</sup>

It is true that (ii) does not straightforwardly entail that the visual imagining’s content should contain an *explicit* reference to the imaginer’s self. However, it might be argued that also (ii) is committed to posit the point of view from which the imagined scene is “seen”, by specifying the imagined viewer via an *implicit* reference. In imagining-seeing a lilac bush I would “imagine-seeing [myself] *a lilac bush*”, where the information about the self occupying the relevant visual perspective (i.e., myself) is not part of the visual imaginings’ content, but it is still somehow conveyed.<sup>9</sup> If generalised to all visual imaginings, this would be enough to grant the claim that points of view in visual imaginings are always occupied (i.e., h1). After all, h1 does not say anything about *how* (whether explicitly or implicitly) visual imaginings always imply occupied points of view.

The recreativist has two options: either arguing that (ii) is not committed to specify even implicitly the occupied point of view, or showing that, after all, this is not really problematic. Let me point out how this second option might be pursued. To do this, I need to say more about imaginings and implicit self-involvement.

So far I have taken for granted not only that sensory imaginings necessarily bring self-relative information (i.e., information about the type of self occupying the given perspective), but also that the relevant self must be the *imaginee’s* self. For example, “I imagine *a lilac bush*” or “I imagine *going to a party*” (where “imagine” should be read as “imagine-seeing”, that is as referring to the recreation of visual perspectives)<sup>10</sup> would report imaginings whose perspectives are occupied by the imaginer’s actual self. The self who in imagination sees the lilac bush or will go to a party would be the imaginer herself. In other words, the imaginer’s self would be involved as the occupant of the perspective internal to the imaginary visual scene.

Linguistic considerations seem to lend force to this idea. From a linguistic point of view, the sentence “I imagine *going to a party*” involves a covert element, PRO, as the subject of the infinitive clause. So it can be reformulated as: “I imagine PRO *going to a party*”. How do we account for PRO here? Does it have to refer to the imaginer’s self? Following Higginbotham’s analysis, we may say that PRO “presents the subject as the subject (or experiencer) of the event or state as given in the higher clause” (Higginbotham 2003: 514). For instance, if I remember giving a speech, or intend to give a speech, the speaker in each case can only be myself, as the remembering or intending subject. Does Higginbotham’s analysis extend to imaginative contexts? This seems to be the case. Indeed, we may rephrase the above sentence as “I imagine [myself] *going to a party*”.

However, this cannot be the end of the matter, because of the *prima facie* intelligibility, in the case of imagination, of so-called Lakoff sentences (Lakoff 1972),<sup>11</sup> such as the following:

(a) I imagine *going to a party with me*

The salient interpretation of (a) is very different from (a\*):

(a\*) I imagine [myself] *going to a party with me*

What makes the latter sentence unintelligible is that, contrary to (a), its content involves the imaginer’s self twice: first as the agent of the imagined action, and second as the object of that action. In (a) PRO does not present the imagined subject as the imagining subject; indeed the agent of the imagined action is not the imaginer. The imaginer’s self is present in the content of (a) only as the object of the action. Then, one may wonder whether in general the reference of PRO can count as someone else in contexts where imagination is involved. After all, in imagination we can take up different perspectives relative to different selves, thus we are not stuck with imagining ourselves. I can imagine going to a party from the visual perspective of my sister, a friend or even a person I am not really acquainted with (e.g., the actress Kirsten Dunst).

My opponent might agree with me, but insist that, although in cases of imagination PRO does not necessarily refer to the imaginer’s self, still it specifies an actual, full-blooded self. This would be enough to support h1 (points of view in visual imaginings are always occupied) and to threaten the status of observer memories. The latter would be memories involving visual sensory imaginings, whose points of view are fixed by full-blooded selves and whose contents feature the imaginer’s (viz. rememberer’s) self. This view respects h3 (observer memories would not involve the rememberer’s self twice), but fails to meet h2 (episodic memories cannot involve visual points of view occupied by

selves other than the rememberer's self), construing observer memories as illusory memories, which should belong to someone else, that is to the viewer who is at the origin of the relevant visual point of view.

Arguably sensory imaginings can involve selves other than full-blooded ones. Full-blooded selves are *thick*, but in imagination, we can also have *thin selves*. There are at least two ways to understand the notion of thin self. First, it might refer to an *underspecified* perspective. This is the case, for instance, when the imagined scene is witnessed by a teenager, whose identity is unknown to the imaginer. A self is involved, but not as a thick self, its traits (identity, personality, history, body...) largely remain unspecified. Second, a thin self might lack any traits, thus being a *virtual* perspective. In this case the first-person perspective from which the imaginer is visually imagining "can remain virtual or counterfactual, in the sense that she is imagining a situation from a spatial perspective that a normally-sighted subject *would* have if she were suitably oriented in the imaginary world" (Dokic & Arcangeli 2015b: 4). In what follows I will use the notion of thin self irrespectively of these two different senses, insofar as they point at two ways the self in imagination can fail to be thick.

As far as imaginings are concerned, the reference of PRO is highly variable, it might be the imaginer's self, another full-blooded self, an underspecified self or even a sort of virtual self. Acknowledging such a multiplicity of choices helps us to see that h1 is open to two interpretations:

h1.i Points of view in visual imaginings are always occupied by *a thick self*

h1.ii Points of view in visual imaginings are always occupied by *a self*, either thick or thin

We have seen that by endorsing h1.i we are likely to be conduced to doubt about the nature of observer memories, which would be understood as memories whose visual points of view are fixed by thick selves other than the rememberer's self. This is not the case if we opt for h1.ii. In being less strict than h1.i, the latter is compatible with a less problematic construal of observer memories as memories which involve visual sensory imaginings, whose points of view are fixed by thin selves and whose contents feature the imaginer's (i.e., rememberer's) self.<sup>12</sup>

To sum up, I have stressed that recreativism pictures sensory imagination as an imaginative attitude (specifically, the one recreating sensory experiences). Thus, the relevant recreated experience (e.g., a visual experience) is part of the sensory imagining's attitude, rather than of the sensory imagining's content (i.e., claim (ii)). I have further emphasised that according to recreativism sensory imaginings necessarily bring self-relative information, but the latter need not be explicitly conveyed through the sensory imagining's content. Moreover, imagination is freer than other kinds of mental

states and the given imagined sensory perspective can be occupied by selves other than the imaginer's self. Therefore, although recreativism – so understood – is committed to the idea that visual imaginings necessarily involve the experience of seeing, and thus it presupposes an imagined viewer occupying the relevant point of view, such an imagined viewer can be interpreted in a loose way without any commitment to the idea that it should coincide with either the imaginer's self or with any other thick self. The visual perspective involved by the imaginative projection can remain thin. The ensuing account is perfectly compatible with positive views on observer memories, which do not see them as distorted memories.

## 5. THREE-TERM RELATION ACCOUNTS & UNOCCUPIED PERSPECTIVES

The recreativist framework sketched above construes imaginings from the outside (i.e., imaginings explicitly involving the self) as based on a three-term relation (i.e., the imaginer's self, the implicit self, the explicit self),<sup>13</sup> where the second and the third term are to be understood as placeholders for selves that can be other than the imaginer's self.

In his defence of observer memories, McCarroll denies that all experiential imaginings involve three-term relations. According to him many, if not most, imaginings from the outside involve a two-term relation which gets rid of the second term, namely the implicit self (“the subjective self”, in his terminology). In favour of this view, McCarroll offers two main examples, one pivoting on the Sartrean understanding of mental imagery and the other invoking the kind of visual experience we undergo in installations like James Turrell's *Ganzfeld Sphere*.<sup>14</sup>

Sartre is well known to have forcefully argued against the idea that mental images are objects in our head that we can inspect, what he called “the illusion of immanence” (Sartre 1940). His target was the idea that the “seeing” of imagination is nothing but the “seeing” of perception with just the object being different. In imagination we would perceive degraded copies of the real object. As perception gives us snapshots of the world, imagination would give us faint copies of these pictures. On this view imagination is nothing but a less powerful perception.

Sartre's opposed view was that the “seeing” of imagination is categorically different from the “seeing” of perception. In visually imagining, say, Peter I am not aware of Peter's image, but of Peter himself. In line with the phenomenological tradition, Sartre put the emphasis on intentionality: mental imagery is “a certain way that consciousness aims at its object” (Sartre 1936: 144). To put it differently, it is a distinctive intentional psychological attitude with its own manner of “positing” its object, though bearing similarities with perception (see also Husserl 1900/1901 and 1913; Meinong 1902).

Given this view, McCarroll states:

If we (...) emphasize the Sartrean view that mental imagery does not involve viewing an object inside one's head, then the worries about requiring a point of view may also dissipate. (...) the Sartrean notion that the image is not an object in consciousness (...) puts further pressure on the idea that mental imagery must involve an occupied point of view and the experience of seeing (McCarroll 2018: 112)

However, McCarroll's conclusion is questionable, if Sartre's view is interpreted as recreativist. Arguably, Sartre endorsed an account of sensory imagination along the lines suggested above (§3, see also Kriegel 2015a). His notion of mental imagery is likely to be taken in its attitudinal, rather than content, sense. On Sartre's view, visual imagining is still like seeing, though it is a different kind of psychological attitude, thus obeying different laws.<sup>15</sup>

According to this interpretation of the Sartrean view, there would not be any pressure put on the idea that sensory imaginings involve experiences of seeing as part of the imagining's attitude (as per (ii)) and points of view occupied by either thick or thin selves (as per h1.ii).

Drawing on Benson's discussion of artworks and visual perspectives, McCarroll explores the possibility that in perception itself we might have no point of view. Benson maintains that the world of a work of art can be "entered" via four different perspectives: "any point of view, a defined point of view, one's own point of view, and no point of view" (Benson 2001: 195). To illustrate this latter perspectival entry, Benson calls upon Turrell's artworks and especially those that create experiences of *Ganzfeld* (i.e., a kind of visual phenomenon in which there is a total loss of depth perception, the visual field is made by a uniform light without any visible object).

Hence, McCarroll suggests that:

[T]his piece by Turrell creates the conditions that dissolve the boundaries of inside/outside, here/there, by, in part, removing visible objects, and hence the corresponding point of view on those objects. [...] Although the experiences Turrell evokes with his art are no doubt contrived and vanishingly rare, it does at least hint at the possibility of experiencing no point of view even in perception (McCarroll 2018: 112)

What we can infer from the kind of visual experience we undergo when immersed in Turrell's *Ganzfeld* installations is far from being straightforward. First of all there is the vexed question of how to conceive the kind of perceptual experience at stake in artistic contexts: Is it really perception or rather a *sui generis* kind of experience? Is it pure perception, or rather perception imbued with imagination? Notwithstanding the ontological status of perceiving artworks, it is questionable whether Turrell's *Ganzfeld* pieces put us in the position of having perceptual experiences without points of view.

I had myself the chance to go to one of these installations, the *Ganzfeld "Aural"*. Through gradual colour shifts, punctuated by flashes of light, whose source is not immediately clear to the spectator, the installation creates several illusory experiences. It was very difficult to me to understand the depth of the room, but I had the strong impression that a wall was in front of me, although there was none. It was a wall made by pure light. Colours were almost tangible and when closing my eyes I could see very vivid opposite colours, in a sort of hallucinatory experience I have never had before. When I reopened my eyes colours appeared far more intense and then lost intensity after a few seconds. Truly we might say that my eyes have been somehow deprived of their frame of reference, but I wonder whether we should talk about absence of (occupied) point of view or rather about absence of *privileged* point of view. More than lacking a specific point of view, what I missed was a special, epistemically advantageous point of view. More convincing examples are to be proffered in order to show that perception may involve no point of view.

Why should we give up three-term relation accounts of experiential imagination? The main worry voiced by McCarroll is that they do not do justice to cases in which the second term is unoccupied, as it is, according to him, in most observer memories. I pleaded for a three-term relation account which is not at odds with McCarroll's main goal (i.e., that of granting a veridical status to observer memories), insofar as it allows for second terms loosely occupied by thin selves.

One might object that my disagreement with philosophers defending the possibility of unoccupied visual perspectives in imagination (McCarroll among others, see also Williams 1976; Velleman 1996; Noordhof 2002) is a purely terminological one: what they call unoccupied perspectives is what I take to be perspectives occupied by thin selves, but in the end we are pointing at the same phenomenon. This might be the case, but I contend that it is not the end of the matter. Again the distinction between mental imagery and sensory imagination can be of help to see how the disagreement can be more substantial.

The failure to distinguish between these two notions runs the risk of subsuming under the expression "unoccupied perspectives" two different phenomena:

- (1) mental imagery without sensory imagination
- (2) sensory imagination involving thin selves

In §3 and §4, I have maintained that mental imagery brings perspectival information, but not self-relative information, which is conveyed by sensory imagination. On this view, only (1) will refer to genuine cases of unoccupied perspectives, purely spatial points of view which do not give any

information about the selves occupying them. By contrast, (2) hints at perspectives that are occupied, though in a minimal, virtual way.

When philosophers talk about unoccupied visual perspectives, it is not always clear which phenomenon they have in mind. Take for instance the following quote from Velleman:

[T]he imagination can frame a visual image without the thought that its vantage point is occupied. The result in that case is visualization rather than imagined seeing. The image represents objects as they would appear to a viewer, if one were present, but it doesn't represent them as so appearing to anyone (Velleman 1996: 50)

The first two lines of the quote seem to hint at pure mental imagery (i.e., to (1)), but once Velleman starts talking about a counterfactual viewer, a thin self comes in – and thus (2).<sup>16</sup>

Different issues are likely to get blurred without a proper clarification of the relevant notion of mental imagery (either in its content or attitude sense) at stake. It is important to keep in mind that (1) and (2) draw a conceptual, not merely a terminological, distinction. Indeed, while (2) points at an exercise of the imagination, (1) does not: mental imagery is not specific to imagination and other psychological attitudes can recruit it.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Why should we doubt the veridicality of observer memories? An answer to this question hinges on the fact that episodic memory exploits visual mental imagery, which always presupposes a visual experience and, thus, a “full-blooded” viewer. In this contribution, I have offered a novel critique against this view, which does not give up a specific experiential account of imagination, namely recreativism.

Building on the distinction between two senses of mental imagery (i.e., as a type of content and as a psychological attitude – viz. sensory imagination), I have shown that recreativism can yield two different construals of observer memories: as recruiting mental imagery only (thus not involving visual experiences and occupied perspectives), as recruiting also the visual form of sensory imagination (thus involving visual experiences and occupied perspectives, but by thin selves).

The ensuing account raises very interesting questions: Do we have both sorts of observer memories or only one type? More generally, is sensory imagination involved in all episodic memories or some of them are based on mental imagery only?

In the lively debate as to the role of imagination in episodic memory several expressions have been used to capture the relevant notion of imagination at stake, such as “episodic imagination”,

“experiential imagination”. It is not always clear, however, to what extent they are on a par and how they relate to the notion of sensory imagination as defined here (i.e., as different from mental imagery).<sup>17</sup>

A very tempting hypothesis is to say that when episodic memory involves re-living an episode of one’s own past, it calls for sensory imagination (possibly along other forms of experiential imagination). The latter would be at work also in episodic anticipation, that is when we mentally pre-live an episode of our anticipated future. This would explain what is common to past-oriented and future-oriented mental time travel exercises (Schacter & Addis 2007; Michaelian 2016), without necessarily subsuming under the same category episodic memory and episodic anticipation.<sup>18</sup> In other contexts episodic memory can come with mental imagery only, without triggering sensory imagination. Eidetic (or photographic) memories might exemplify such a case.<sup>19</sup> Anyway, what I hope to have brought to the fore is the extreme importance of a thorough analysis of the imaginative realm for a careful study of episodic memory.

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<sup>1</sup> To what extent episodic memory relies on mental imagery is an open issue in the debate. Langland-Hassan (2021) maintains that almost all philosophers agree in thinking that mental imagery (“imagistic imagining” in his own terms) is often, if not even always, exploited by episodic memory. The question is more complicated, though, once we acknowledge that the debate has failed to distinguish the two senses of mental imagery I will introduce in §3. In the conclusion I will come back to this point.

<sup>2</sup> Also h2 (episodic memories cannot involve visual points of view occupied by selves other than the rememberer’s self) can be a questionable claim, depending on what we mean by “selves other than the rememberer’s self” (see fn 12).

<sup>3</sup> Sometimes in the literature mental imagery (or sensory imagining) is not seen as a subset of experiential imagination (see, e.g., Kind 2016). Again, what might get blurred here are the two senses of mental imagery I will introduce in §3.

<sup>4</sup> A further claim, which I will not commit myself to here, would be to say that this type of information can be conveyed only by the means of a specific vehicle (or format). The famous “Imagery Debate” during the 1980s was concerned with the vehicle/format of mental imagery (*locus classicus* for a review of the debate is Tye 1991).

<sup>5</sup> There is a third option I won’t consider here: the visual experience is part of the *imaginative project*. This view is hostage to a clear definition of “imaginative project” (Williams 1976). Such a notion, however, is less intuitive than it might seem at first sight. Indeed, at least two different ideas of what an imaginative project is can be put forward: (a) an imaginative project is a set of relations between tacit and explicit imaginings, including actual and possible imaginings; (b) an imaginative project is a set of relations between tacit/explicit imaginings and tacit/explicit non-imaginative mental states (e.g., beliefs, intentions), including actual and possible mental states.

<sup>6</sup> This view has been endorsed by what Dorsch (2011) labels the “representational account” of the imagination, which is well represented by Hume and his tradition.

<sup>7</sup> Peacocke’s “General Hypothesis” about imagination (i.e., “To imagine something is always at least to imagine, from the inside, being in some conscious state” – Peacocke 1985: 21) has often been interpreted as making all imaginings about the imaginer’s self. For an alternative reading see Dokic & Arcangeli 2015a.

<sup>8</sup> A referee rightly pointed out to me that a change in the word order might sound differently: “imagining-seeing a lilac bush oneself” is not awkward. Still, this is so because “oneself” is not part of the content and relates to the subject of “imagining-seeing”. It is like saying: “I myself imagine-seeing a lilac bush”.

<sup>9</sup> The further question to ask is how exactly this self-relative information is carried. One strategy is to say that it is part of the imaginative project, but such notion needs further unpacking (see fn 5).

<sup>10</sup> This specification is needed, insofar as linguistic reports quite often under-determine the psychological phenomena they are meant to describe. This is even more complex in the case of imagination, if the latter is understood as the capacity of recreating different kinds of experience. In saying “I imagine *a lilac bush*”, I might mean that I imagine, for instance, visually or olfactory a lilac bush. Likewise, “I imagine *going to a party*” might refer to the recreation of, say, a visual or an agentive perspective. Moreover, although philosophical analysis aims at dividing phenomena in their basic blocks, real imaginative exercises are likely to be mixed cases in which different varieties of imagination blend together.

<sup>11</sup> I thank Jérôme Dokic for having drawn my attention on Lakoff sentences.

<sup>12</sup> Such a view does not meet a strong reading of h2, according to which episodic memories cannot involve perspectives occupied by thin selves. Arguably, this version of h2 should be rejected. I have already hinted at this interpretation of observer memories in collaborative work: an observer memory “involves the re-creation of a visual experience that someone could have enjoyed in the past, but this visual experience need not be attributed to any real person in the past or in the present” (Arcangeli & Dokic 2018: 142). By claiming that such a visual, sideways perspective “can be empty” we meant unoccupied by an actual full-blooded observer, rather than empty *tout court* (it is occupied by a thin self). This highlights a potential confusion when it comes to define what an unoccupied perspective is. I will be back to this later (§5).

<sup>13</sup> In Arcangeli & Dokic 2018 we used a different terminology to capture the same three levels of perspectives: the author (i.e., the representing, here imagining, subject), the narrator (i.e., the intermediary perspective), and the character (i.e., the represented subject).

<sup>14</sup> McCarroll also draws on Williams’ view. The latter, however, does not provide solid grounds, insofar as it is open to question due to its ambiguity on the notion of mental imagery (see fn 16).

<sup>15</sup> According to Sartre (1940) the richness of vision, the law of perspective, the principle of individuation and the principle of identity are laws of perception which do not apply to imagination.

<sup>16</sup> Also Williams’ analysis of mental imagery falls prey of a similar ambiguous interpretation. He distinguishes three different types of imagery: visualisation, “participation” imagery, and from the outside cases – where the latter are to be seen as a subclass of the first type (Williams 1976). Whether mental imagery is used by Williams in its attitudinal or content sense is open to debate. Moreover, what is blurred in Williams’ final dichotomy is that while his first type leads to the question of *what* self is involved in imagination (namely whether it is thick or not), what the contrast between the participation type and his third type points at is *how* the self can figure in our imaginings (as the origin of the relevant point of view, or as an imagined object).

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, actors within the so called “(dis)continuism debate” might risk to talk past each other, if they are using the notion of mental imagery in different senses. Langland-Hassan (2021) has urged the need of clarifying which notion of imagination they refer to. He claims that the relevant notion of imagination in the debate is neither “imagistic imagining”, nor “attitudinal imagining”, but rather “constructive imagining”. First, it is questionable whether constructive imagining is in a pertinent sense a kind of imagination (certainly it is not, if imagination is defined as

recreative imagination). Second, Langland-Hassan's analysis does not take into account the existence of sensory imagination, which in his view is reduced either to imagistic imagining (roughly my content sense of mental imagery or "imagistic mental states" – see Arcangeli 2020) or to attitudinal imagining (belief-like imagination in my view), thus failing to be complete. See Arcangeli 2021a for a brief comparison between Langland-Hassan's taxonomy of the imagination and mine.

<sup>18</sup> See also Arcangeli & Dokic 2018, where we suggest the existence of past-oriented mental time travel exercises that involve (constrained) experiential imagination without involving episodic memory.

<sup>19</sup> I have suggested this in Arcangeli 2021b.