

IMAGERY, THE IMAGINATION AND EXPERIENCE

Dominic Gregory

1. Introduction

Hume very famously held that ‘[a]ll the perceptions of the human mind’ could be put into two categories, ‘IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS’, with ‘[t]he difference betwixt these [consisting] in the degrees of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind’. The impressions—those ‘perceptions, which enter with most force and violence’—are ‘all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul’. And the ideas are ‘the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning’.¹

Hume’s claim to have described an exhaustive dichotomy of our minds’ contents has been widely rejected. But introspective evidence weighs in heavily behind his view that, alongside ‘our sensations ... as they make their first appearance in the soul’, ‘faint images’ of those items are also to be found. For many of our mental episodes revolve around mental images which feel rather like copies of perceptual experiences.²

Mental images display how things look or sound or ... The bulk of this paper will be concerned with the contents of *visualisings*, the simplest imaginings in which we use visual images to imagine situations: those cases where the features of the imagined situation are merely those which the situation must possess if the episode’s

¹ All quotations from D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1978), p. 1.

² Galton claimed to have uncovered evidence showing the existence of marked variations in the extent to which mental imagery is present in individuals (F. Galton, ‘Statistics of mental imagery’, *Mind*, 5 (1880), pp. 301 – 18). See W.F. Brewer and M. Schommer-Aikens, ‘Scientists are not deficient in mental imagery: Galton revised’, *Review of General Psychology*, 10 (2006), pp. pp. 130 – 46 for pretty convincing arguments that Galton’s data never really supported his conclusions, however. Whatever the outcome of that debate, the ‘us’ of the rest of this paper will sometimes need to be identified with the many among us whose mental lives do feature imagery.

accompanying visual imagery is to show how the situation looks.³ I will develop an approach to visualisings which meets a series of constraints identified in the next section. The position provides, in particular, a satisfying treatment of the controversial question whether, when we perform visualisations, we thereby imagine visual sensations.

2. Visual images and visualising

There are some important properties of visual images which are closely connected to their peculiar phenomenological character and with which any views about visualising ought to be consistent. Some terminology: if a sensory episode is described as a *sensation*, that description remains neutral on whether any sensory appearances figuring in the episode are veridical; but a sensory episode is a *perception* only if the sensory appearances which it involves are veridical.

One of the most striking features of mental imagery is its quasi-sensory nature; the ‘seeing’ that we do with our mind’s eyes, the ‘hearing’ that we do with our inner ears ... are phenomenologically similar to their real sensory counterparts.⁴ This is perhaps related to another notable feature of sensory mental images, that they make types of

³ Peacocke introduces a well-known distinction between ‘imagining’ and ‘S-imagining’ (see C. Peacocke, ‘Imagination, experience, and possibility: a Berkeleyan view defended’, in J. Foster and H. Robinson (eds) *Essays on Berkeley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 19 – 35, at pp. 25 – 6): S-imaginings feature the imposition of supposition-like elements which elaborate the contents of images. So, to use one of Peacocke’s own examples, we can S-imagine a situation containing ‘a suitcase with a cat wholly obscured behind it’ (Peacocke, ‘Imagination, experience and possibility’, p. 19) using the very same imagery which we might have employed in merely imagining a suitcase. Visual S-imaginings *are not* visualisings, as the properties of the situations which are imagined in S-imaginings aren’t merely settled by the fact that their accompanying visual images shows things as looking a certain way in those situations.

⁴ This phenomenological point is accepted even by those psychologists who are sceptical about whether there is anything distinctively sensory about the resources which the brain uses in processing imagery. Pylyshyn even suggests, for example, that ‘what it means to have a mental image of a chair is that you are having an experience like that of seeing a chair’ (Z.W. Pylyshyn, *Seeing and Visualising* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), p. 329).

sensations seem to us like ones which we are capable of enjoying. So, use visual imagery to imagine a purple cow. Then it seems that things could be, visually, like *that* for you.

Another characteristic of visual imagery which is related to the previous property will play an especially important part in the next section. Consider how things seem visually to you right now. The visual appearances that you are enjoying purport to show you how things are from a particular viewpoint. Given that sensory mental images seem to us to encapsulate possible types of sensations, and given the phenomenological similarities between real sensings and sensory mental images, one would expect visual images also to be perspectival. And they are. As Peacocke says, visualising ‘always involves imagining from the inside a certain (type of) viewpoint, and someone with that viewpoint could, in the imagined world, knowledgeably judge “*I’m thus-and-so*”, where the thus-and-so gives details of the viewpoint’.⁵

Any treatment of visualising needs to be compatible with the features of visual imagery just described, but it must also allow our visual imaginations to have the powers which they actually have. What sorts of things can we imagine through visualisation?

I’ll say that an imagining is *sensory* if it is an imagining of (perhaps among other things) a sensation. It seems that any visual image can be used in a sensory visualising. For consider some visual image. That image can be used to imagine a visual sensation in which things look a certain way; in particular, and employing an ostensive formulation which might naturally be used by one who produces a visual image, the visual image can be used to imagine a visual experience in which things look like *that*. A sensation in which things look like *that*—a sensation in which the way that things look is how the image shows them as looking—belongs to the image’s *corresponding sensation-type*.

⁵ Peacocke, ‘Imagination, experience and possibility’, p. 21.

It should be noted that my class of ‘sensory imaginings’ differs importantly from range of cases singled out using that phrase by Martin, whose ideas concerning visualising will be important to a lot of this paper’s subsequent discussion. Martin says that ‘[b]y sensory imagining [he has] in mind those distinctive episodes of imagining which correspond to our use of the distinct senses: so we talk of visualising corresponding to seeing, or listening in one’s head parallel to audition, and so on’.⁶ The question whether visual ‘sensory imaginings’, in Martin’s sense—that is, visualisings—are always visual ‘sensory imaginings’ in my sense—that is, imaginings of visual sensations—will in fact be a main topic of what follows.

Also, the notion of a sensory imagining employed here covers two importantly different kinds of cases: first, those imaginings where one imagines a sensation ‘from the inside’, as for example when imagining what it feels like to have a sore throat; and, second, those imaginings where one imagines a sensation without imagining it from the inside, as where one imagines meeting with someone whose throat feels sore. The arguments examined below for the conclusion that all visualisings are sensory imaginings would, if they worked, establish that visualisings are always sensory imaginings of that first ‘subjectively informative’ type; but, as the differences between the cases aren’t important to what follows, I’ve ignored them below.

An imagining is *nonsensory* just in case it only has nonsubjective objects—that is, if it isn’t an imagining of a sensation. Although the question whether visualisings are sensory imaginings is philosophically contentious, it is very natural indeed to think that

⁶ M.G.F. Martin, ‘The transparency of experience’, *Mind and Language*, 17 (2002), pp. 376 – 425, at p. 403.

some of our visualisings are nonsensory. Picture a lone tree to yourself.⁷ Then, we are inclined to think, you have thereby just imagined a tree without also having imagined an apparent seeing of the tree, or any other sensations.

Rather puzzlingly, though, it seems that there may be sensory visualisings and nonsensory ones which feature the very same visual imagery, at least in the sense of featuring visual images which looks just alike to the ‘inner eye’. Summon again your visual image of a tree. You earlier used that imagery in simply imagining a tree, or so it seemed; but you can also use it to imagine a visual sensation in which things look a certain way. Your imagery thus seems to have figured in both a sensory visualising and a nonsensory one. How is that possible? How can a single visual image, in showing how things look, characterise a sensation on one occasion and a tree but no sensation on another?⁸

To summarise, philosophical approaches to visualising ought ideally to meet at least the following conditions. First, they shouldn’t clash with the quasi-sensory nature of visual imagery: they should respect the similarities between visual images and visual

⁷ The rest of this paper is saturated in this kind of talk, in which we are said to have imagined things of various sorts even though there are no existing things which we’ve imagined. Section 7, too, uses singular terms to mark the identities of the merely imaginary viewpoints from where things are visualised in certain visualisations, where those singular terms function in much the same way as the problematic pronouns figuring in the ‘intentional identity’ reports discussed in P.T. Geach, ‘Intentional Identity’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 64 (1967), pp. 627 – 32. Those ways of talking, while perfectly comprehensible, raise a host of hard but very general philosophical questions which I make no attempts to resolve here.

⁸ Wollheim notes that ‘[w]hen I visually imagine, or visualize, an event, there are two modes of doing so. I can imagine the event from no one’s standpoint ... [o]r I can imagine it from the standpoint of one of the participants from the event, whom I then imagine from the inside’ (R. Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), p. 103). Peacocke, ‘Imagination, experience and possibility’ discusses the multiple uses of a single image in different imaginings (see, in particular, pp. 19 – 20 and p. 25) and chalks such cases up to his distinction between imagining and S-imagining. While the notion of S-imagining nicely accounts for some uses of a single image in imaginings with different objects, I think that Peacocke works it too hard. The recurrence of, say, a single image of a tree in the sensory and nonsensory imaginings which I’ve taken to be visualisings feels, to me at least, very different from (to take one of Peacocke’s own illustrations of the distinction between imagining and S-imagining) the recurrence of a single image of a suitcase in imagining a suitcase and in imagining a suitcase with a cat behind it.

sensations, the fact that visual images make types of visual sensations seem like ones which we could enjoy, and the perspectival nature of visualisations. And, second, they should allow for sensory and nonsensory visualisings, where some of the sensory and nonsensory cases feature the same visual images.

Our ideals sometimes outrun what's feasible, however. The next section presents an argument, owed to Martin, for thinking that we have here one such case, because the perspectival nature of visual imagery means that there won't be any nonsensory visualisings.

3. No nonsensory visualisings?

Visualise a red light on the left and a green light on the right. Then the red light, say, has been 'imagined as before and to the left of [a] point of view within the imagined situation'.⁹ But that imaginary viewpoint didn't occur in your visual image as 'an explicit element of how things are presented as being'¹⁰; your visual image didn't show how the viewpoint itself looks. So how did the viewpoint get into your imagining?

Reconsider visual sensations. There, 'the point of view from which one perceives is marked in one's visual experience through it being the point to which the objects perceived are presented—if one can fix the location of those objects, one [can] thereby determine the location of the point of view'.¹¹ Similarly, one might think, the imaginary point of view figuring in your visualising was distinguished by its being the viewpoint relative to which you *imagined* the visualised lights to be presented: '[t]he red light is

⁹ Martin, 'The transparency of experience', p. 410.

¹⁰ Martin 'The transparency of experience', p. 409.

¹¹ Martin, 'The transparency of experience', pp. 409 – 10.

imagined as before and to the left of the point of view within the imagined situation by being imagined as presented to a point of view within that situation'.¹²

But that leads us to another question. How was it that, in your visualising, the visualised lights were imagined as being presented to an imaginary viewpoint?

Well, we can easily answer that question if we assume that, in your visualising, you imagined a visual sensation in which things look as your visual image shows them as looking. For one who imagines an apparent seeing of a red light on the left thereby imagines an apparent presentation of a red light to a viewpoint. We can thus explain the perspectival nature of what you imagined during your visualisation, by supposing that '[t]he red light is imagined as before and to the left of the point of view within the imagined situation by being imagined as presented to a point of view within that situation, and hence as being experienced as to the left from that point of view'.¹³

Much more generally, we can explain the perspectival nature of what's imagined in any visualisation if we suppose that, in the relevant episode, 'an experience-relative aspect of a visualised scene, how it and its elements are oriented, is imagined through imagining an experience with the appropriate property'.¹⁴ But if Martin is right in claiming that the 'perspectival [nature] of visualising *can only properly be explained* by taking visualising to be the imagining of seeing'¹⁵, we should follow him in concluding that there are no nonsensory visualisings.¹⁶

¹² Martin, 'The transparency of experience' p. 410.

¹³ Martin, 'The transparency of experience', p. 410.

¹⁴ Martin, 'The transparency of experience', p. 410.

¹⁵ Martin, 'The transparency of experience', p. 407; italics added. (I'm indebted to two anonymous referees for forcing me to overhaul the unacceptably loose presentation of Martin's argument provided in an earlier draft of this paper, and for providing me with very useful advice on how to do it.)

¹⁶ Podro interprets Hegel as offering a related 'treatment of painting as a projection seen from a given viewpoint and so implying the presence of the spectator' (M. Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press (1982), p. 24).

A rejigging of the previous argument takes us a little further. Suppose that, in performing your earlier visualising, you did indeed imagine your red light ‘as before and to the left of the point of view within the imagined situation’ by imagining the light ‘as presented to a point of view within that situation, and hence as being experienced as to the left from that point of view’. Then your visualising was an imagining in which you imagined a red light ‘through imagining a visual experience as of’¹⁷ a red light. More generally, if the previous argument is sound then the nonsubjective objects of any visualising are always imagined *as seen*, in the sense that they are always imagined through the imagining of apparent visual encounters with suitable sorts of things.

The literature contains various discussions of that last view. Williams takes the infamous conceivability argument for idealism in Berkeley’s *First Dialogue between Hylas and Philonous* to raise the question ‘whether we can visualise something that is not seen’,¹⁸ to which Williams replies affirmatively.¹⁹ Others disagree. Peacocke claims that, for ‘imaginings describable pre-theoretically as visualisations, hearings in one’s head, or their analogues in other modalities [...] ... to imagine being ϕ in these cases is always at least to imagine from the inside an experience as of being ϕ ’²⁰; and ‘for such forms as “imagining a valley”, we can say that to imagine an F is always at least to imagine from the inside an experience as of an F (or more weakly, an experience of a sort which might be enjoyed in perception of an F)’.²¹ Martin supports Peacocke against Williams.²²

¹⁷ Martin, ‘The transparency of experience’, p. 411; Martin writes that ‘[w]hen I visualise an apple, I imagine it through imagining a visual experience as of an apple’.

¹⁸ B. Williams, ‘Imagination and the self’, repr. in his *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 26 – 46, at p. 27.

¹⁹ Williams, ‘Imagination and the self’, p. 37.

²⁰ Peacocke, ‘Imagination, experience and possibility’, p. 22.

²¹ Peacocke, ‘Imagination, experience and possibility’, p. 23.

²² Martin, ‘The transparency of experience’, p. 404.

The next section expounds a comparatively crude and nonexplanatory relative of Martin's explanatory argument against nonsensory visualisings. Despite the argument's relative simplicity, it dramatises some important issues, and the following section will also identify a simple response to it; that response will be considerably elaborated in sections 6 and 7 below. Section 7 also uses the resulting ideas to develop an account of nonsensory visualisings which blocks both Martin's explanatory argument against their existence as well as the nonexplanatory one that I'm about to present.

4. Another argument, and a simple response

So, here is another argument against nonsensory visualisings.

Perform a visualising. Your visualising's accompanying visual imagery shows the look of the situation which you thereby imagined; that is, the imagery shows how things look in that imaginary situation.²³ Things can only look some way by looking that way in the course of a visual sensation, though. So here is something which must be true of the situation that you imagined: it must contain a visual sensation in which things look as your visualising's accompanying visual imagery shows them as looking.

But an imagining is a visualising just in case the properties of the situation thereby imagined are determined entirely by how the situation must be, given that the episode's accompanying visual imagery shows how the situation looks. In particular, therefore, the situation imagined in your visualising must contain a visual sensation in

²³ Martin argues, on pp. 407 – 9 of 'The transparency of experience', that 'there must be a point of view within a visualised scene, at least where the visualising involves perspectival elements and those determine aspects of what is visualised'. I think that he's right about that, so I'll assume that some visual imagery shows how an imaginary scene looks just in case the imagery shows how things look in the scene.

which things look as the visual imagery shows them as looking. Your visualising was therefore an imagining of a visual sensation. More generally, there are no nonsensory visualisings.

In immediate response to that argument, it might be suggested that the earlier account of visualisings is too restrictive. In particular, maybe your visualising's accompanying visual imagery merely captured how things *would* or *might* look to you if you were to occupy a certain viewpoint in the imagined scene. But if your visualising's accompanying visual imagery did merely characterise how things would or might look to you, there needn't have been a visual sensation in the very situation which you imagined, even if there must be relevantly similar possible situations which do contain subjects who are having appropriate visual sensations.

That reply isn't good enough, however.²⁴ Use visual imagery to imagine a scene in which someone sees a cockerel. The imagined scene contains a seeing at a certain viewpoint *a*. But you can employ the very same image in imagining a counterpart of *a* which may be unoccupied. For you need only take your image and suppose that there is a viewpoint *b* in an imaginary scene, where *b* meets the following condition: if you were to occupy *b*, things would look to you as you previously imagined them looking to someone from *a*.

That second imagining was not an intuitive example of a visualising, however, as a supposition played a crucial role in determining the nature of the imagined scene. So, while you can certainly use visual images in imagining how things would look to you from some viewpoint, it's unclear that you can use visual images in that manner in the

²⁴ Peacocke, 'Imagination, experience and possibility' makes the following sort of point on p. 30; Martin makes a related move when discussing imagined hallucinations on p. 417 of 'The transparency of experience'.

course of *visualisings*—in the course of the simplest sort of episodes in which visual images are used to settle the properties of imagined situations. Another and more decisive response is needed.

We can identify your current viewpoint with the bundle of features of your current circumstances *at which* your current visual sensations *occur*: we can identify it with those features of your actual situation which combine to determine whether or not the visual appearances which form part of your current visual sensations are in fact veridical. (Your current viewpoint will include, for example, a location, plus directions marked as, say, upwards and forwards.) Viewpoints in general are simply those bundles of circumstantial features which include counterparts of the various components of the viewpoint in which your current visual sensations occur.

Now consider an *empty* viewpoint to your right. Consider, that is, a viewpoint on your right at which no visual sensations occur. (Note that the viewpoint's emptiness doesn't rule out the presence of an unseeing subject at its location.) That viewpoint involves a central location plus directions marked as upwards and forwards in relation to that central location.²⁵ It is thus easy enough for you to identify a way that things look from your chosen empty viewpoint: consider what you would see if you were rightly located and oriented within a scene that is otherwise just like your current one. That method involves your considering a possible scene in which you occupy your chosen viewpoint, of course. But there is nobody there now, and you still know how things in fact look from there.

²⁵ The notion of a viewpoint, as understood here, is similar to Peacocke's notion of a 'positioned scenario' combined with a 'scene' (see C. Peacocke, *A Study of Concepts*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), p. 64). I think that Peacocke (essentially following Evans) is wrong to claim, however, that the labels which are attached to the axes of his scenarios should mention bodily parts (see, for instance, Peacocke, *A Study of Concepts*, p. 65).

Those points suggest a sketchy line of response to the nonexplanatory argument presented at the start of this section.

Perform a visualisation. The visualisation's accompanying visual imagery shows things as looking a certain way. But, in performing your visualisation and thereby imagining how an imaginary situation looks, you needn't have imagined some visual sensation in which things look how the accompanying imagery showed them as looking. For your visual imagery might merely have shown how things look from a certain viewpoint within the imaginary situation. And, as we saw two paragraphs back, it's fairly natural to think that things may look some way *from a viewpoint* without things also looking that way *in the course of some visual sensation* which occurs at the relevant viewpoint.

The preceding reply will amount to very little, however, until more is said about how things could look some way from an empty viewpoint. I'll revisit that question in section 6. As we will see in the next section, however, the central idea employed in the reply just sketched—that we should distinguish between the notions of a way that things look from a viewpoint and a way that things look in the course of visual sensations which occur at that viewpoint—may shed some light on the little puzzle raised at the end of section 2, the question how a single visual image can figure in both sensory and nonsensory visualisings.

5. Showing how things look

Forget for the moment about the arguments against the existence of nonsensory visualisings presented in the last two sections. Now, visualise a red sphere. As we saw earlier, it seems that your visualising's accompanying visual image could feature in both sensory and nonsensory visualisings: it could be used to imagine a visual sensation in which things look a certain way, or it be used in just imagining a red sphere. But while your visual image could apparently be used in more than one type of visualising, there are constraints on the sorts of visualisings in which it could figure—you couldn't use your image to visualise a blue cube. Why not?

Whenever your image features in a visualising, it shows how things look. But visualisings are those imaginative episodes in which the properties of the situation thereby imagined are merely those following from the fact that some accompanying visual imagery shows how the situation looks. So it will be possible for a blue square to figure as one of the objects of a visualising which uses your image only if one of the ways which your image can show things as looking involves a blue square. And none of them does.

The fact that the visual images figuring in visualisings always serve to show how things look thus constrains the range of visualisings in which your visual image may feature. But if, whenever your image figures in a visualising, it must show 'how things look', how can that same image be used in both sensory and nonsensory visualisings? Assume, in accordance with the reply to the nonexplanatory argument sketched in the previous section, that things may look some way from a viewpoint without also looking

that way in the course of a visual sensation which occurs at the viewpoint. Then a photographic analogy may help us to answer that last question.

We naturally interpret photographs as showing how things looked. And we usually treat them as merely displaying the layout of a past scene—as showing how things once looked from a viewpoint within a previous situation. In those cases, we treat photos as like the visual images which feature in *nonsensory* visualisings. But we can also treat the same photos as showing how things looked in the course of past visual sensations; that is, in the course of visual sensations which occurred at viewpoints in past scenes. (Photos are sometimes used that way in recounting first-personal narratives in comics, for example.) And, in doing the latter, we treat photos as like the visual images which feature in *sensory* visualisings.

Those points suggest how it might be possible for your visual image to feature in sensory and nonsensory visualisings, while nonetheless merely ‘showing how things look’ in both cases. When your image features in a sensory visualising, it shows how things look in the course of some visual sensation that occurs at an imaginary viewpoint. But when the image figures in a nonsensory visualising, it simply shows how things look from an imaginary viewpoint. The range of contents which your image can confer upon visualisings is nonetheless tightly constrained. For the image must always show how things look—where that is either in the course of a visual sensation which occurs at a viewpoint or merely from some viewpoint.

So, once we distinguish between the ideas of how things look in the course of a visual sensation which occurs at a viewpoint and how things simply look from a viewpoint, we may be able to solve the puzzle of how a single visual image can feature in

sensory and nonsensory visualisings. But while there is some initial plausibility to the thought that the notions of how things look in the course of a visual sensation occurring at a viewpoint and how things look from a viewpoint may be helpfully distinguished, how exactly should we articulate that distinction? In particular, what is it for things to look a certain way ‘from a viewpoint’?

6. Viewpoint-relative looks

Consider an empty viewpoint c on your left. Just thinking about the matter intuitively, there can be visual images which capture how things *might* look to you from c but which don’t capture how things *in fact* look from c . The situation could have been rigged, for instance, so that if you were to occupy c then you would enjoy visual sensations whose accompanying visual appearances totally mischaracterise what things are actually like around c ; and someone could produce a visual image which captures how things would then look to you.

More generally, any type of visual sensations which is a way which things really look from c will have an important property which isn’t shared by some of those types of visual sensations which are merely ways that things might look to you from c : any subject who has a visual sensation in which things look to that subject how they really look from c thereby enjoys a visual sensation involving certain visual appearances which *correctly* characterise the layout of the world around c . But what is it for a type of visual sensations to be associated with a range of visual appearances which characterise correctly how things are laid out around some viewpoint? Or, to rephrase that question

more simply, what is it *for some type of visual sensations* to characterise correctly how things are laid out around some viewpoint?

Consider the visual appearances which you are now enjoying, appearances in which various external things are ‘oriented in egocentric space [...] presented as above one, below, to the left or to the right’²⁶. The precise identity of your current viewpoint is independent of how your situation looks to you to be laid out; you could occupy a different viewpoint and yet seem to see a scene laid out in the same way as the one which you seem now to be viewing. You and everything in your current environment could have been one foot to the right of its actual location, for example.

We can bundle up the contents of your current visual appearances using a locution which I will employ again below, by saying that it looks to you as though things are *thus*. Suppose you were to occupy a different viewpoint from which it nonetheless looked to you as though things were *thus*. Then the contents of the visual appearances which you would then enjoy—which are also the contents of your current visual appearances—either would or would not capture correctly how things were laid out around that viewpoint.

The contents of your current visual appearances are, therefore, accurate or inaccurate relative to each of the various possible viewpoints in which things look *thus* to you. But the correctness or incorrectness of those contents relative to those merely possible viewpoints is independent of how things are subjectively for you at those viewpoints, and indeed of how things are subjectively for anybody else. Visual

²⁶ Martin, ‘The transparency of experience’, p. 408.

appearances are, in that sense, *objective*: their contents don't make reference to any conscious happenings.²⁷

Now, consider a viewpoint d in some possible scene s , where you occupy d , with its looking to you as though things are a certain way. And consider a near-copy s^* of s , whose sole relevant difference from s resides in the fact that the counterpart viewpoint d^* of d is empty. (Recall that the notion of an empty viewpoint amounts to the idea of a viewpoint at which no visual sensations occur. So if the visual appearances which you are enjoying from d somehow reflect the presence of your body there, suppose that your body is positioned at d^* just as it is at d , but that you are unconscious.) The visual appearances which you are having at d will be either veridical or not. Suppose that they are veridical. Then those appearances correctly capture how things are laid out around d .

Their veridicality relative to d has nothing to do with how things are subjectively for anyone, however, because visual appearances are objective in the way just remarked. The features of s which make the appearances accurate relative to d will therefore be shared with s^* . Hence the contents of the appearances which you are having at d are accurate relative to d^* . That is, just as the contents of the appearances which you are having at d capture correctly how s is laid out around d , so they also capture correctly how s^* is laid out around the empty viewpoint d^* .

More generally, suppose that visual appearances with a certain range of contents *accompany* a type of visual sensations; suppose that each possible subject of a sensation of the chosen type thereby enjoys visual appearances with those contents. And suppose

²⁷ It's worth noting that the above claim is much stronger than what is strictly needed to establish that some visualisings are nonsensory. (For that purpose, it is enough that *some* suitable groups of visual appearances are objective. The stronger assumption used in the text combines with the account of nonsensory visualisings developed below to imply that *any* visual image can be used in a nonsensory visualising.)

that there could be a viewpoint at which some sensation of the relevant type occurs, where the visual appearances featuring in that sensation are veridical, because they capture what things are really like around the viewpoint. Then the preceding reasoning shows that the contents of the appearances which accompany the relevant type of visual sensations could be accurate relative to some empty viewpoint, on account of the objectivity of visual appearances—that is, because of the way in which the contents of visual appearances do not report back to us on subjective matters.

This part of the discussion was prompted by the question what it is for a type of visual sensations to characterise correctly how things are laid out around a viewpoint—that is, by the question what it is for a type of visual sensations to be associated with a range of visual appearances which characterise correctly how things are laid out around some viewpoint. We now have an answer:

(A) Suppose that V is a type of visual sensations and that e is a viewpoint.

Then V correctly characterises how things are laid out around e just in case the contents of the visual appearances which accompany V are accurate relative to e .

We noted, however, that a type of visual sensations is a way that the world looks from a viewpoint just in case the type correctly characterises how things are laid out around that viewpoint. Hence, and using (A), we have the following:

(B) Suppose that V is a type of visual sensations and that e is a viewpoint.

Then V is a way that things look from e just in case the contents of the visual appearances which accompany V are accurate relative to e .

We saw, though, that any visual appearances which can be veridical relative to some viewpoint are, because objective, such that their contents can be accurate relative to empty viewpoints too. So, by (B) and the fact that some visual appearances are veridical relative to viewpoints, some types of visual sensations are ways that things look from empty viewpoints.

But now consider a type W of visual sensations which is a way that things look from an empty viewpoint f . Viewpoint f is empty, so no sensations occur at f . In particular, therefore, no sensation of type W occurs at f . W therefore isn't a way that things look in the course of a sensation which occurs at f , even though W is a way that things look from f . Thesis (B) thus backs up the idea suggested earlier, that we should distinguish between the ideas of how things look in the course of a visual sensation which occurs at a viewpoint and how things look from that viewpoint.

Although the following point won't do any work in what follows, it is worth noting that there may be many ways that things look from a viewpoint. For there may be many types of visual sensations which are such that the contents of their accompanying visual appearances are accurate relative to a given viewpoint. So, perhaps there are types of visual sensations which can only be enjoyed by nonhuman animals but which are accompanied by visual appearances. And the contents of the appearances accompanying some of those types of visual sensations doubtless characterise correctly how things are

laid out around some of the very viewpoints whose environs are also characterised correctly by the contents of the visual appearances accompanying some types of humanly-accessible visual sensations. But if all that is right, there are types of humanly-accessible visual sensations which capture how things look from certain viewpoints, where types of humanly-inaccessible visual sensations also capture how things look from those very same viewpoints.

The next section will use (B) to fill out the account of nonsensory visualisings suggested earlier, on which those visualisings feature visual images which show how things look from imaginary viewpoints.

7. Nonsensory visualisings

Consider some visual image. Section 2 introduced the idea of the image's corresponding sensation-type: the type *X* of those sensations in which things look like *that*—that is, the type *X* of those sensations in which things look how the visual image shows them as looking. Your chosen image may serve, in some imaginative episode, to show how things look in the course of a visual sensation that occurs at a viewpoint in the imagined scene. If the episode is also such that the nature of the imagined scene is determined wholly by the fact that the visual image shows how things look in that situation, then it is a visualising and indeed a sensory one in which a visual sensation of type *X* is imagined.

But suppose that certain sorts of visual appearances accompany *X*. Recycling the locution employed in the last section, let's suppose that appearances of those sorts are ones in which it seems that things are *thus*. Then there's nothing to stop your image from

serving to show how things look from an imaginary viewpoint g —namely, as captured by X . More fully, and assuming (B) above, your image could function to represent the accuracy, relative to g , of the contents of the sorts of visual appearances which accompany X —it could represent things as being *thus* around g .

Suppose, though, that there is an imagining in which your image shows how things look from imaginary viewpoint g . And suppose—as is surely perfectly possible—that the character of the scene thereby imagined is determined merely by how things must be relative to g if your image is indeed to show how things look from there. Suppose, that is, that the imaginary scene’s features flow from nothing but the fact that it is one wherein things are *thus* relative to a viewpoint within it. Then the imagining is a particular type of visualising, one whose content turns upon how a visual image shows things as looking from a viewpoint.

The imagining is also nonsensory. For visual appearances are objective, as we saw in section 6 above. The fact that the imagining’s accompanying visual imagery shows things as looking a certain way from g —*thus!*—therefore doesn’t require that the imagined scene should contain a visual sensation, or conscious happenings of any other sort. But, as the episode is a visualising, the scene imagined in it is answerable only to how things *must be* around g if your image is to show how things look from there. Hence the imagined scene doesn’t contain any sensations. Putting everything together, then, we get that an imaginative episode like the one just specified is a nonsensory visualising.

Here’s a summary of what we’ve just found:

(C) Consider a visual image whose corresponding sensation-type is V . That image may serve to show how things look from an imaginary viewpoint e . In so doing, it characterises e as being such that the contents of the sorts of visual appearances which accompany V are accurate relative to e .

(D) An imagining is a nonsensory visualising just in case, first, it is accompanied by some visual imagery which serves to show how things look from an imaginary viewpoint e , and, second, the properties of the scene imagined in the episode are fixed solely by the fact that the episode's accompanying visual imagery shows how things look from the viewpoint e within the scene.

It seems to be perfectly possible for an imagining to meet the two conditions spelled out in (D), however, which vindicates section 4's sketchy response to the cruder, nonexplanatory, argument against the existence of nonsensory visualisings. For that response turned upon the idea that a visual image may show how things look, in the sense of showing how things look *from an imaginary viewpoint*, without thereby showing how things look *in the course of an imaginary visual sensation* occurring at the viewpoint. And that distinction is the crucial one that is exploited by the account of nonsensory visualisings embodied in (C) and (D).

The account also enables us to block Martin's more subtle explanatory argument against nonsensory visualisings. That argument offered the thesis that all visualisings are sensory as the best explanation of the perspectival nature of visualisings. It proceeded by

noting that, in visualisings, we imagine items as related to imaginary viewpoints. Those viewpoints aren't explicitly represented in the relevant visual images, however. Rather, or so the argument claimed, the viewpoints must enter the visualisings as those to which visualised items are imagined to be presented, in the sense that they are the viewpoints at which suitable sorts of visual sensations are imagined to occur.

We now have the resources, however, to see that there are two ways in which the perspectival nature of visualisings can be explained. One of those ways will properly apply only to sensory visualisings and the other only to nonsensory visualisings.

So, consider a visualising and its accompanying visual image. Suppose, first, that the visualising is a sensory one. Then, even though the visual image doesn't explicitly portray the imaginary viewpoint relative to which the visualised scene has been imagined, it is easy enough to explain how the viewpoint enters into the imagining. For the visualising is sensory, and hence one in which the accompanying visual image serves to show how things look in the course of a visual sensation that occurs at an imaginary viewpoint. In those cases, therefore, one does indeed imagine the items shown in the visual image as being presented to an imaginary viewpoint, by imagining a visual sensation which occurs at the viewpoint.

But assume, next, that the visualising is nonsensory. Then, again, the visual image doesn't openly show the imaginary viewpoint relative to which the visualised scene has been represented. But the presence of the imaginary viewpoint in the imagining is nonetheless unproblematic. For, given (C) and (D) and the visualising's status as nonsensory, the visualising is one in which the accompanying visual image serves to show how things look from a certain imaginary viewpoint. The perspectival nature of

nonsensory visualisings thus arises from the fact that they involve imaginary scenes which have been characterised in a perspectival manner—in terms of the viewpoint-relative truth of the contents belonging to visual appearances.

8. Revisiting some constraints

According to the framework articulated above, which I'll call the *bipartite* account of visualisation, there are two ways in which the visual images which feature in visualisations may function: they may, first, show how things look in the course of visual sensations which occur at imaginary viewpoints; and they may, second, simply show how things look from imaginary viewpoints. Where a visual image performs the first function, we have a sensory visualising; where a visual image performs the second task, we have a nonsensory visualising, in accordance with (C) and (D).

Section 2 pointed out some constraints which ought to be satisfied by philosophical views about visualisation. Does the bipartite account fit the bill?

The first group of constraints reflected the quasi-sensory nature of visual images. Accounts of visualising should be consistent with the fact that visual images are somehow similar to real seeings; they should respect the fact that visual images make types of visual sensations seem possible; and they should allow for the perspectival nature of visual imagery.

The first two of those constraints clearly don't create any problems for the bipartite view; in particular, there is nothing in (C) and (D) which is incompatible with the phenomenological similarities between visual images and real seeings, or with the

way that visual images make types of visual sensations seem like ones which we can enjoy. The bipartite account view also caters for the perspectival nature of visualisings, as we saw in the previous section.²⁸

The final constraint identified in section 2 related to our imaginative powers. It was suggested that accounts of visualisation should allow for sensory and nonsensory visualisings, where some of those cases feature the very same images. But the bipartite account clearly meets that desideratum, and it even explains how such overlapping visualisings are possible: a single visual image may, in sensory visualisings, serve to show how things look in the course of a visual sensation, while also showing, in nonsensory visualisings, how things look from a viewpoint.

The bipartite account also provides an interesting slant on Williams's question whether 'whether we can visualise something that is not seen'.²⁹ Construe that question as asking whether we can visualise a nonsubjective item without thereby imagining an apparent visual encounter with any similar things. Then the bipartite account agrees with Williams's own affirmative answer to the query, as opposed to the more counterintuitive negative one returned by Berkeley, Peacocke and Martin. For instance, one who performs a nonsensory visualisation of a tree thereby imagines a nonsubjective item; but, as the visualising is nonsensory, no visual sensations are also imagined.

But suppose, instead, that the question is understood as asking whether we can visualise a nonsubjective object while thereby imagining the imagined scene as *not*

²⁸ It's worth noting in relation to that last point that nonsensory visualisings do indeed involve imagining 'from the inside a certain (type of) viewpoint', as the quotation from Peacocke employed earlier put it—at least, they involve imagining how things look from a certain viewpoint. And if someone were to occupy that viewpoint and to experience how things look from it, she could indeed 'knowledgeably judge "*I'm thus-and-so*", where the thus-and-so gives details of the viewpoint', to quote Peacocke again (all quotations from Peacocke, 'Imagination, experience and possibility', p. 21).

²⁹ Williams, 'Imagination and the self', p. 27.

containing any apparent visual encounters with similar things. Nonsensorily visualise a tree, for instance. Then, by (C) and (D), your image characterises the contents of certain visual appearances as accurate relative to an imaginary viewpoint *h*, and that characterisation determines the nature of the imagined scene.

We saw earlier, though, that visual appearances are objective; their contents don't make reference to any putative conscious occurrences. Your image's characterisation of *h* as being such that the contents of certain visual appearances are accurate relative to *h* is thus compatible with the world around *h*'s being devoid of conscious happenings, which is what enabled you to perform a nonsensory visualising. But it is also compatible with, say, the occurrence of some visual sensations at *h*. Your visual image therefore leaves it open whether the visualised scene contains any conscious happenings.

More generally, the bipartite account implies that, while we can nonsensorily visualise nonsubjective things without thereby imagining those items *as sensed*, we cannot nonsensorily visualise nonsubjective things while thereby imagining those items *as unsensed*. And that seems pretty plausible. For how could what is shown by some visual image, where the image shows how things look from an imaginary viewpoint, *rule out* that the image doesn't happen also to reflect, say, how things look to a subject who occupies that viewpoint? It surely could not. Hence nonsensory visualisings won't be able to portray nonsubjective items as unsensed.

The bipartite account thus provides a satisfying account of visualisings, one which enables us both to rebut the earlier explanatory and nonexplanatory arguments against nonsensory visualisings and to meet the various constraints identified in section 2.³⁰

³⁰ Noordhof proposes, in his response to Martin's 'The transparency of experience', the *Similar Content Hypothesis*: 'the thought ... that modes of sense perception ... are phenomenally similar to equivalent

9. Conclusion

Here's a quick summary of what's gone before.

Most of the paper focused on the question whether there are any nonsensory visualisings; that is, on the question whether one who performs a visualisation thereby imagines a sensation. Martin's explanatory argument against the existence of nonsensory visualisings was presented, in section 3, along with section 4's simpler nonexplanatory argument to the same conclusion. That simpler argument crucially assumed that any visual image which shows things as looking some way must thereby show things as looking that way in the course of a visual sensation.

It was suggested in section 4, however, that a visual image may show how things look from a viewpoint without showing how things look in the course of a visual sensation which occurs at the viewpoint. Section 5 then proposed that nonsensory visualisings are those whose accompanying visual images merely show how things look from imaginary viewpoints. Later parts of the paper developed that proposal in some detail, by building upon the account provided by section 6's (A) and (B), of what it is for things to look some way from a viewpoint. We were eventually carried to section 7's (C) and (D), which encapsulated an account of nonsensory visualisings.

That account of nonsensory visualisings was then combined with an account of sensory ones, on which the latter are those visualisings whose accompanying visual

modes of sensory imagining' (P. Noordhof, 'Imagining objects and imagining experiences', *Mind and Language*, 17 (2002), pp. 426 – 55, at p. 439), in that they involve similar sorts of contents. The bipartite account provides support for that thought as it applies to vision and visualisation. In particular, just as accurate visual appearances show us *how things look* from real viewpoints, so the visual images employed in nonsensory visualisings show us *how things look* from imaginary viewpoints.

images show how things look in the course of visual sensations occurring at imaginary viewpoints. The result was a two-part account of visualisations in general. And, as we saw in section 7, the resulting bipartite view undermines both the nonexplanatory argument against nonsensory visualisings and Martin's explanatory argument against them. It also meets a range of important constraints, those that were described in section 2.

Concerns relating to modal knowledge have often surfaced in discussions of visualisation. Before closing, I'll briefly relate the bipartite account of visualisations to some of those important epistemological themes.

It might have been hoped that we could use our powers of visualisation to provide a swift response to phenomenologists like Berkeley, who claim that there cannot be unsensed nonsubjective items. We can, after all, visualise trees without imagining them as seen or otherwise sensed. So, if what we can visualise is possible, why shouldn't we conclude there can be unsensed trees?

The approach developed above provides no support for that argument, however. It may be that, if we can visualise an *F*, *F*s are possible. But, as we saw, the bipartite account implies that our nonsensory visualisings never feature unseen trees, even though we can visualise trees without thereby imagining them as seen. In response to that, however, someone might propose a stronger principle connecting visualisation and possibility: if we can visualise an *F* without thereby imagining it as *G*, there could be an *F* which is not *G*. But that principle is not at all appealing, and the reasons why it isn't appealing make it very hard to see how we could use our visual imaginations alone in arguing convincingly for the possibility of unsensed nonsubjective things.

Suppose that we can visualise an *F* without thereby imagining it as *G*. That might be so merely because our visualisation leaves it open whether the imagined *F* is *G* or not. And that is, in fact, precisely how things stand with our ability to visualise trees without thereby imagining them as seen. Yet why should the *sketchiness* of our visualisations lead us to assume that there can be *F*s which are *G*, even if their sketchiness is—as again in the current case—insurmountable?

Negative responses to imaginative arguments against idealism have been associated in the literature with writers like Peacocke and Martin³¹, who hold that there are only sensory visualisings. But the current discussion illustrates that those imaginative arguments should not really be endorsed by anyone; for we saw towards the end of the previous section how very plausible it is that we cannot, merely by performing nonsensory visualisations, imagine nonsubjective items as unsensed.³²

³¹ Martin, 'The transparency of experience', p. 412; Peacocke, 'Imagination, experience and possibility', pp. 27 – 32.

³² Very many thanks to Rob Hopkins and Rosanna Keefe, for lots of very helpful feedback on earlier versions of this paper, and to two anonymous referees for the *Philosophical Quarterly*, whose constructive, sharp and illuminating questions and comments aided me greatly. Finally, many thanks to the audience who attended a departmental seminar at Sheffield in which I presented some of this material.