Sartre's Exclusion Claim: Perception and Imagination as Radically Distinct Consciousnesses

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Abstract: In *The Imaginary* Jean-Paul Sartre makes what will strike many as an implausibly strong claim, namely that perception and imagination are incompatible kinds of experience - I call this the *exclusion claim*. This paper offers a reconstruction of Sartre's exclusion claim. First, it frames the claim in terms of cross-modal attention distribution, such that it is not possible to simultaneously attend to what one is imagining and what one is perceiving. However, this leaves it open that a subject can simultaneously imagine and perceive on the condition that either the perceived or imagined objects are *not attended to*. While this is a philosophically plausible position it fails to do justice to Sartre's intended position, which suggests a more radical exclusion between perception and imagination. In light of this section 3 develops a supplementary argument to remove one of the possible configurations of attention that the ban on divided attention leaves in place by arguing that the objects of imagining must be attended to, which follows from Sartre's characterisation of imagination as spontaneous. The resulting exclusion is as follows: attentive perception excludes imagination (and vice versa), given that the latter is necessarily attentive, but attentive imagination can co-occur with non-attentive or background perception (in this sense the exclusion is asymmetric in a way that Sartre fails to recognise). In concluding I detail how from this exclusion we get an important consequence – which Sartre wants the exclusion claim to have – namely that it rules out an imagination-based solution to the problem of perceptual presence.

1. The Exclusion Claim

In *The Imaginary* Jean-Paul Sartre makes what will strike many as an implausibly strong claim, namely that perception and imagination are incompatible kinds of experience; he writes that 'the image and the perception, far from being two elementary psychic factors of similar quality and that simply enter into different combinations, represent the two great irreducible attitudes of consciousness. It follows that they exclude one another'.[1] Call this the *exclusion claim*: Perception and imagination cannot synchronously combine in one overall cross-modal experience – they cannot co-occur. This is not to

[1] Sartre 2004a [1940]: 120. All quotes from Sartre are from the 2004 Webber translation. Husserl (2005 [1898-1925]: 180) gestures towards a similar claim.

deny that diachronically distinct perceptions and imaginations might alternate, following each other in an experiential series. And indeed there might be interesting relations between perception and imagination, for example a particular perceptual experience might typically cause a particular imaginative experience, or provide reasons for having an imaginative experience.[2] About such matters, the exclusion claim is strictly silent. Sartre repeats the claim in *Being and Nothingness*, referring back to *The Imaginary*, which by his lights demonstrated that 'perception has nothing in common with the imagination; on the contrary, it strictly excludes it, and vice versa'.[3] While this is hyperbole – Sartre should recognise, as he does at various points in *The Imaginary*, that both perception and imagination are intentional experiences, and so are object-directed[4] – we still find him expressing the exclusion claim.

The goal of this paper is to reconstruct an argument for the exclusion claim based on Sartre's characterisation of the distinctiveness of imagination, specifically its spontaneity, and the way attention works cross-modally between perception and imagination. It is worth noting that if true the exclusion claim would be a critical phenomenological discovery, and a surprising one. Taken at face value, it runs counter to a Kantian perspective on perceptual experience, which in various ways claims that the operation of imagination or imaginative capacities is central to our perceptual experiences having the phenomenal character and intentional content they do, specifically with reference to spatial perceptual experience.[5] I'll return to these issues in the final section, as an implication of the exclusion claim.[6]

Before proceeding to discuss the exclusion claim in detail, let me note three further points. As a topic of historical-exegetical interest, Sartre at the close of *The Imaginary* seems to contradict the claim

[2] Sartre (2004a: 183-4), is tempted by the stronger conclusion that any instance of imagination is necessarily motivated by a particular perceptual experience.

[3] Sartre 2018: 778.

[4] Sartre 2004a: 5-7, 183. Sartre subscribes to the Husserlian dictum that *all consciousness is consciousness of something* (see Sartre 2004a: 11; Husserl 2001, Investigation V §15; 1982: §36, 85).

[5] See Kant 1998 [1781]: A118-120; Sellars 1997: §16; Kind 2018: 165-180.

[6] Sartre (2004a: 15) also claims that conception and imagination exclude one another: I'm not going to defend this claim of Sartre's but just focus on the exclusion claim as it applies to perception and imagination.

in suggesting that imagination is in some respect essential to perception.[7] However, the contradiction is superficial. The relation between perception and imagination sketched in the conclusion of *The Imaginary*, turns on the idea that perception is structured by what Sartre calls projects, as orientations towards ends, which as such require the capacity to imagine the realisation of some end which is not currently actualised. For this to be the case, we only require that perceptual experience be structured by a temporally prior act of imagination, such that imagination is for Sartre, as Jonathan Webber puts it, 'a transcendental condition on perception having the structures that phenomenology reveals it to have: a creature that could not imagine could not have our kind of perceptual experiences'.[8] This transcendental claim could be true and not require that perception and imagination can co-occur. Indeed Sartre's awareness of the tension between these different claims is signalled by his qualification that perception and imagination exclude each other *in the strict sense*,[9] as concerned with possible co-occurrence. So despite first appearances, Sartre's commitment to the exclusion claim is not undermined by his transcendental claim concerning the relation between perception and imagination.

Next, a note on terminology. Throughout *The Imaginary* Sartre uses the term 'the image' or more simply 'image'. Sartre always means by this *imagining of the object*; there are for Sartre no mental images in the sense of that term that would pick out some mind-dependent item immanent to consciousness, as a facsimile of a picture which is 'in the mind' when we imagine, as analogous to classic conceptions of sense-data.[10] To posit mental images, so understood, is to fall into what Sartre calls the 'illusion of immanence'. So the word 'image', which Sartre continues to make use of, should be read as shorthand for imaginative consciousness of an object, as he explicitly notes, 'The imaging consciousness that I have of Pierre is *not* a consciousness of an image of Pierre; Pierre is directly reached, my attention is not directed at an image, but an object'.[11] Whether Sartre is right about this – whether the illusion of

[7] Ibid: 178-88.

[8] Webber 2020: 111-2.

[9] See Sartre 2018: 779.

[10] See Ryle 1949, for another analysis of imagination that, like Sartre's, does away with psychically immanent mental images.

[11] Sartre 2004a: 7.

immanence in this instance really is an illusion – is a matter of substantive debate, and I won't be concerned with defending Sartre's position on this particular issue.[12]

Finally, Sartre's discussion of imagination exclusively concerns what in contemporary terms is labelled sensory imagination, and so by dint of this the exclusion claim just concerns sensory imagining. Suppositional imagining – which it is doubtful Sartre would think of as imagination proper – is much closer in its structure to judgement or belief, as an attitude towards a proposition (e.g., supposing that I was the Emperor of France). Sensory imagining is an experiential state with a sensory phenomenology and sensory content.[13] Examples of sensory imagining are experiential states like visualising the front door of my house, or imagining the sweet smell of a lavender bush.[14]

The argument structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 offers a reconstruction of Sartre's exclusion claim in terms of cross-modal attention distribution, such that it is not possible to simultaneously attend to what one is imagining and what one is perceiving, as a ban on divided attention between perception and imagination. However, this leaves it open that a subject can simultaneously imagine and perceive on the condition that either the perceived or imagined objects are not attended to. While this is a plausible position it fails to do justice to Sartre's intended position, which suggests a more radical exclusion between perception and imagination. In light of this, section 3 develops a supplementary argument to remove one of the possible configurations of attention that the ban on divided attention leaves in place by arguing that the objects of imagining must be attended to, which follows from Sartre's characterisation of imagination as spontaneous. The resulting exclusion is as follows: attentive perception excludes imagination (and vice versa), given that the latter

[12] See discussion in Hopkins 2016. Cf. Kind 2001.

[13] See Peacocke 1985; Martin 2002. Sartre (2004a: 15) recognises this, talking of the way imagination supports 'the sensible qualities of its object'. Although his position is complicated by his idea that the content of imagination while not *non-intuitive* – like belief or what he calls 'conception' – is best thought of as 'intuitive-absent', such that the relevant object as imagined is given as 'absent to intuition' (2004a: 14). See my discussion of the 'sense of irreality' in section 3. The terminology here is reminiscent of Husserl's notion of intuitive content. For Husserl, sensory imagining has intuitive content although its objects are not given in an 'originary way'. For more on Husserl's complex and changing views on imagination see Husserl 2005 [1898-1925], and Hopp 2017.

[14] For a detailed study of sensory imagination see Hopkins 2024.

is necessarily attentive, but attentive imagination can co-occur with non-attentive perception (in this sense the exclusion is asymmetric in a way that Sartre fails to recognise). In concluding I detail how from this exclusion we get an important consequence – which Sartre wants the exclusion claim to have – namely, ruling out an imagination-based solution to the problem of perceptual presence.

2. Sartre's descriptive claims and cross-modal attention

What by way of argument does Sartre provide for the exclusion claim? Unfortunately, little in the way of direct argumentation. Rather, what he offers in the main is a description, making various controversial phenomenological claims, which already embed the truth of the exclusion claim:

> I have already remarked that when one aims at Pierre as imaged through a painting, one ceases by that very fact to perceive the painting. But the structure of images called 'mental' is the same as that of the images whose analogon is external: the formation of an imaging consciousness is accompanied, in this case as in the preceding, by an annihilation of perceptual consciousness, and reciprocally. As long as I look at this table, I cannot form an image of Pierre; but if all at once the irreal Pierre surges up before me, the table that is under my eyes vanishes, leaves the scene. So these two objects, the real table and the irreal Pierre can only alternate as correlates of radically distinct consciousnesses…(Sartre 2004 [1940]: 120)

Taking the latter half of the passage first (I return to the material concerning painting below) a fair response is to ask whether this description reflects the experiential facts. Is it phenomenologically impossible to, for example, enjoy a visual experience of a table before me in my field of vision, and *at the same time* be engaged in some imaginative project or undergo some imaginative experience? Arguably not. Consider the following example: Looking at the desk in front of me I imagine a black cube located in my visual field, 'placed' on the table. In such a case, it seems odd to say that the table 'vanishes' or 'leaves the scene'. Is that really how the phenomenology goes?[15] What seems at least as,

[15] See also Sartre's (2004a: 192) similar claim for audition; he claims that when listening to a symphony in a concert hall, 'the auditorium, the conductor, and even the orchestra have all vanished'.

if not more plausible, is the following claim: the visualised cube is imagined to be located at a particular point on the table, and so for the visualised cube to be given as such requires co-occurring perceptual experience of the relevant regions of the visual field.

Importantly, this example, and ones like it, do not beg the question against Sartre's additional phenomenological claim – which we will discuss later when considering the supposed 'irreality' of the imagined-object – that in cases like these (and indeed in all imagining) the cube-as-imaged is in some sense given as an 'absence', as *not there*. This is because for the cube to be 'given as not there' still requires awareness of the relevant 'there' where it is given as not being (hence the phenomenological difference between visualising a cube 'in one's mind', so to speak, and visualising it on the table).[16] The central point generalises: instances in which we visualise an object as located at points or regions in our visual field requires co-occurrent awareness of the relevant points or regions. Indeed, it is hard to see how I could be visualising specifically a cube located on the table if perceptual experience simply ceases, such that the visual field and objects located therein simply 'vanish' as Sartre suggests. Taken at face value, Sartre must say that such cases are phenomenologically impossible: *ex hypothesi*, given the exclusion claim, if I'm enjoying a perceptual experience I cannot at the same time be enjoying an imaginative experience, and vice versa.[17]

Given the above, we might think Sartre's exclusion claim falls at the first hurdle. That would be too hasty. In the rest of this section I reconstruct it as reflecting a point concerning the way conscious attention can be distributed cross-modally between perception and imagination, specifically in

[16] See Sartre 2004a: 126-7. We might ask is there some contrastive 'there', relative to the object-as-imagined being 'not there' in the case of pure visualising? Matters are complex: There is presumably a phenomenological difference between merely imagining a cube, and imagining a cube in a visualised space (so in which one visualises a kind of *scene* or even a room the cube is located in). In the first case the sense of spatiotemporal absence gets purchase contrastively, by reference to a perceptual sense of 'here', such that the visualised cube is *not here*. However, in the latter case it can't be quite right to say the cube is *not there* (e.g., 'in the room'). For Sartre to maintain his analysis across cases we would likely need to say something like the following: the entire 'visualised scene' is given as a spatial location and layout which is not that of present perception. So we get something like a *relative-to-the-visualised-scene* qualification on the visualised cube, where the scene taken in its entirety is given as spatiotemporally 'absent' relative to what is genuinely here in the perceptual environment. Indeed Sartre talks of the 'irreal character of imaged space' (Sartre 2004a: 127).

[17] See section 3 for more discussion of this case.

reference to the objects of those experiences. To get us there let's return to the first half of the passage, where Sartre references his discussion of the way imagination is operative in cases of photographs and paintings. Sartre's model for thinking of such cases is broadly as follows: at least some of the time we use paintings or photographs, that is material objects in the world, to intentionally aim, in the mode of imagination, at an intentional object which is not identical with some such material object – 'Pierre as imaged through a painting'. At the start of our quoted passage, Sartre emphasises the purported exclusion, 'one ceases by that very fact [by the fact that I'm now engaged in an imaginative experience] to perceive the painting'.[18]

Taken at face value Sartre's exclusion claim as applied to the case at hand seems false: It is false to claim that when looking at a painting or picture, and using it as a means to imagine an intentional object in a particular way – Pieree as imaged through a painting – that one 'ceases by that very fact to *perceive* the painting', if this is taken as the cessation of perceptual experience whatsoever (i.e., there would be no conscious awareness of the material object, what Sartre calls the analogical representative).[19] Compare: If the painting were to be removed from the visual field, or if I were to close my eyes – if it was literally to go out of view. If perceptual experience ceases entirely, there is no conscious awareness of a material object whatsoever. And then I could hardly be 'making use of' the painting as 'matter', as a material object with a certain set of sensible properties – what Sartre calls a material analogon – for imaginatively aiming at the relevant intentional object, in this case the 'flesh and blood Pierre', thus giving me Pierre as presented in this particular way precisely on the basis of the material object and its properties.

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[18] Sartre 2004a: 120.

[19] A note on Sartre's analogon: Sartre identifies a range of cases of imagining in which we have at our disposal a material analogon – a material thing in the world – for example imagining my absent brother by looking at a picture of him. In the case of purely sensory imagining however, there is no material analogon (unless we introduce 'mental images' as objects immanent to consciousness, something Sartre rejects as a form of the illusion of immanence), but we need something which can serve the same role as, say, the physically existing picture does in the case of imagining my brother. Sartre contends that in such cases the relevant 'mental analogon' is often provided by kinaesthetic sensations (for example, eye movements in the case of visualising), which trace out spatial forms, but more essentially by affectivity (see Sartre 2004a [1940]: 73-83; for critical discussion see Hopkins 2016; Webber 2020).

There is, however, a different reading of what Sartre thinks is going on in cases like this, which can avoid what seems at best problematic about the purported exclusion of perceptual experience. Earlier in the text Sartre offers us the following glosses: 'I look at the portrait of Pierre. Through the photo, I aim at Pierre in his physical individuality. The photo is no longer a concrete object that provides me with perception: it serves as matter for the image', and also, 'Presently my intention appears; I say: 'This is the portrait of Pierre' or, more briefly: 'This is Pierre'. Then the portrait ceases to be an object, it functions as matter for an image.[20] On the basis of these passages, we can reconstruct Sartre's thinking as follows. In the painting case I don't cease to perceive the painting; rather the material object ceases to be that which consciousness is currently attending to. Indeed I can't attend to it if I'm using it (in a sufficiently absorbed way) as 'matter', seeing 'Pierre through it', so to speak. Rather the painting 'fades into the background' or is no longer attended to qua material object. Importantly though, it is still there 'for consciousness' and is given as an object of consciousness; it needs to be such that it can be used as 'matter' by my imaginative intention (the 'act of imagining') of aiming at Pieree (intentional object) *through this particular painting*, such as to get me 'Pierre-as-imaged' through this painting. It is just that I can't simultaneously attend to the painting *qua* material object – as the bearer of certain sensible properties, like colours, textures etc – and *Pierre,* the intentional object of my imaginative experience.[21] And arguably something similar holds in the opposite direction: if I attend to the sensible properties of the painting or photo, perhaps the particular distribution of colours, then I cease to be attending to what is given through imagination and as such 'Pierre-as-imaged' fades into the background.[22]

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[20] Sartre 2004a: 21, 22.

[21] There are long-standing debates concerning pictorial representation, see for example Hopkins 1998; Lopes 1996; and more recently Jagnow 2019. One central issue in these debates, clearly relevant to Sartre's views, concerns the claimed two-foldedness of pictorial representations (originating from discussion in Wollheim's work), that is our ability to simultaneously consciously experience, say in the case of looking at a painting, both the three-dimensional depicted scene (e.g., the wanderer among the sea of fog in Casper David Friedrich's masterpiece) and the 2-dimensional material properties of painting's surface (e.g., the thickness of the brushstrokes or the texture of the canvass).

[22] For reasons that I explain in section 3, Sartre should deny that this can happen since there is no psychological reality to non-attentive imaginative experiences.

Turning briefly to issues of interpretation, Robert Hopkins suggests that more generally Sartre's 'analogon' is an object for consciousness, but not the object of attention, providing the 'material we animate' as a means to imagine something else.[23] However, this doesn't fit the letter of what Sartre at least sometimes says; after all he claims that 'the portrait ceases to be an object'.[24] There are two possible explanations for this. First – and fitting with our current reading – Sartre might be restricting 'object' to intentional object, where for him a condition on something being an intentional object is that it is what attention is currently directed towards. In this sense the analogon would not be an *object of consciousness*, even though we are aware of it. The second more troubling explanation is as follows. It is likely that Sartre's talk of 'matter' is drawn from the Husserlian notion of 'intentional matter'. In brief, Husserl's early and middle-period theory of perception claims that reference to a perceptual object can only be secured by the use of non-intentional sensory data, which while never an object for consciousness, nonetheless serve to 'animate' intentional acts. Such intentional matters – also called 'representative contents' or (later) 'hyletic data'– are, however, psychically immanent to consciousness.[25] If Sartre followed Husserl's construal of so-called 'intentional matter', then insofar as something is being used by imagination as matter for 'animating' an intentional act – in this case the matter could be a material entity in the world – then by dint of this it ceases to be an object of awareness at all (not just not an 'intentional object) and transforms into psychically immanent non-intentional sensory data. The philosophical problems with this view are legion, however let me note one troubling one for Sartre. Insofar as a material analogon – not to mention a 'mental analogon' – is construed along the lines of Husserlian intentional matter then Sartre is in danger of falling prey to something similar to the illusion of immanence (the positing of objects immanent to consciousness) namely, the positing of immanent psychic contents.[26]

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[23] See Hopkins 2016: 91.

[24] Sartre 2004a: 22.

[25] See Husserl 1982 [1913]: §85.

[26] In reply to this worry, couldn't Sartrean matter just be interpreted as part of the experienced physical world, but just not the intentional object *qua* current theme of attention? Perhaps, but surely in the painting case the relevant 'matter', the painting, plays a special role in my act of imagining Pierre through it that other parts of the visual field that I'm not currently attending to don't. NB: In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre categorically rejects

Returning to substantive issues, and with our attention-based explanation of Sartre's *painting case* in view, we can now say something similar concerning the possible distribution of attention cross-modally between perception and imagination more broadly. Rephrasing the relevant part of the passage we quoted at the outset we get the following reformulation of his exclusion claim:

> *Sartre Reformulated:* As long as I am attending to this table, I cannot attend to the image of Pierre [Pierre as given through imagination], but if all at once the irreal Pierre surges up before me, the table that is under my eyes ceases to be the object of the attention.

So reformulated the exclusion claim translates into a claim concerning possible attention distribution cross-modally between co-occurrent perception and imagination.[27] And it is somewhat plausible that this is the view Sartre had in mind, since it fits with passages in *The Imaginary* that make issues of attention central. For example, Sartre writes that 'the imaging consciousness that I have of Pierre is not a consciousness of an image of Pierre: Pierre is directly reached, my *attention is not directed at an image, but at an object*, and later 'if I want to represent to myself the face of Pierre, I must direct *my attention* through some determined objects', and finally that 'If I want to imagine the hidden arabesques, I direct *my attention towards them* and I isolate them, just as I isolate on the ground of an undifferentiated universe the thing that I presently perceive'.[28] That being said more textual evidence would be required to claim that this is definitively Sartre's view, and so we might prefer to take 'Sartre Reformulated' as a charitable reconstruction.

The main line of criticism against this view turns on the idea of split attention, specifically that we can split attention between the objects of perception and imagination *at the same time*. However, such an idea has little to recommend it. Any *prima facie* plausibility it might have likely turns on a confusion we guarded against in our introduction: nothing about the current reading of the exclusion claim need deny that it is possible to alternate between attending to the object of perception and the object of

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the notion of hyletic data – of psychically immanent sensory contents – as unintelligible (see his 2018 [1943]: 19-20).

[27] See Webber 2020: 107 who reads Sartre in this way.

[28] See Sartre 2004a: 7, 20-1; 181, my emphases.

imagination; attention can be split diachronically between perception and imagination. However, it is phenomenologically impossible to at the same time attend to an object given through imagination and an object as given through perception (what might more accurately be called dual attention rather than split attention) – call this the *cross-modal singular attention claim* (it functions as a premise in a supplementary argument in section 3). This claim leaves it open whether it is possible to attend to more than one intentional object in any particular mode of consciousness (something which seems doubtful but which this version of the exclusion claim need not rule out). And of course one can attend to an intentional object in any mode of consciousness which is not just one concrete particular; I can attend to a crowd of people in front of me, which may be composed of a variety of individuals.

All this being said, so formulated the exclusion claim clearly lacks some of the force of Sartre's statements of it, including his talk of the relevant modes of consciousness excluding each other (being 'radically distinct consciousnesses'), as reflected in his talk of their counterpart mode being 'annihilated' or 'ceasing'. So, while this reading offers a plausible version of the exclusion claim, it fails to justice to Sartre's intended position, which suggests a more radical exclusion between perception and imagination. In light of this the following section develops a supplementary argument to remove one of the possible configurations of attention that the ban on divided attention leaves in place by arguing that the objects of imagination must be attended to.

3. Imagination as necessarily attentive

3.1 The Supplementary Argument

To motivate a position closer to Sartre's claimed radical exclusion between perception and imagination we need to find a way of denying the phenomenological possibility of background imaginations: If there are no background imaginations, that is to say, if imaginative experience is necessarily what I will for shorthand call an attentive consciousness – that is one in which its objects and their properties are the current theme of attention – then we have better grounds for the kinds of exclusion between perception and imagination that Sartre seems to have in mind. Here is an argument reflecting this:

P1. Imagination is necessarily an attentive consciousness: insofar as imagination is taking place, it must be the case that we are attending to the object of imagination.

P2. Cross-modal singular attention claim: a subject cannot be attending to an object given through perception and an object given through imagination at the same time. Insofar as one is attending to what is given in perception, one is *not* attending to what is given in imagination, and vice versa.

Conclusion. Given 1 and 2, imagination (as necessarily attentive), can't co-occur with attentive perceptual consciousness. Put otherwise: attentive perceptual consciousness excludes imagination, and vice versa (imagination excludes co-occurrent attentive perception).

We have already established at the close of the previous section that P2 is plausible, and I proceed on the basis of its truth. Furthermore, the argument is valid, so the central question concerns whether it is sound, specifically with reference to the truth of P1. Before considering P1 in detail let me note an important feature of the resulting exclusion.

This argument's conclusion avoids what is implausible in some of Sartre's incautious statements that we discussed at the beginning of section 2. Nothing in the above argument – if it goes through – denies that it is possible to have a cross-modal experience in which what is given by way of imagination is the current object of attention, co-occurrent with what is given by way of perception in the background (i.e., not the object of attention). For example, I might be caught up in attending to 'Pierre-as-imaged', and in that moment my visual awareness of the book I was reading might fade into the background; so in one sense I cease to be the looking at it (i.e., attending to it), although non-attentive perception remains co-occurring with imagination. This kind of situation is phenomenologically possible, as has been also shown by the *painting case* and in the *cube on the table case* from section 1. So Sartre overstates the scope of the exclusion when he says that 'if all at once the irreal Pierre surges up before me, the table that is under my eyes vanishes, leaves the scene.' We should re-interpret this as (at least potentially) a case of the perceptual object receding into the background.

Importantly though, given the conclusion of this argument we have more excluding going on' so to speak, than was on offer from the interpretation from section 2, which delimited how attention

can be distributed cross-modally between co-occurrent perception and imagination, with a ban on divided attention. Given this argument, attentive perception excludes co-occurrent imagination and vice versa (imagination excludes co-occurrent attentive perception), given imagination's necessary character as attentive, but imagination doesn't necessarily exclude co-occurrent perception, on the condition that what we continue to be aware of through the relevant co-occurrent perception is in the background (i.e., is not what Sartre would call a 'posited object'). Put differently: If I'm attending to a perceptual object I can't at the same time be imagining, and if imagining I can't at the same time be attending to a perceptual object; but given that perceptual experience can co-occur with imagination on the condition that the object of perception is *not* the current theme of attention, then perceptual experience and imaginative experience do not exclude each other *per se*.

Interestingly, this supplementary argument also gives us the opportunity to clarify what was ambiguous in our original description of the *cube on the table case* (section 2), or Sartre's case of hallucinating a devil on a chair.[29] There are two ways of reading such examples. On the first reading the object of attention is a compound of perception and imagination, something like cube-on-table or devil-on-chair. On the second reading, the object of attention is the object-as-imaged, so cube-as-imaged or devil-as-imaged, with the (perceptually given) table or chair figuring in background awareness. Given our argument above, the second is phenomenologically possible – and indeed turns out to be the correct description of such cases – but the first is not since it necessitates a kind of attentional 'fusing' of the objects of perception and imagination which requires co-occurrent attentive perception and imagination (which the argument rules out).[30]

3.2 Spontaneity

With the supplementary argument and the resulting exclusion clarified, we can now ask what reason there is for accepting P1, that imagination is necessarily attentive, such that if imagination is taking

[29] Sartre 2004a: 149.

[30] This broadly fits with what Sartre says concerning these kinds of cases, as instances of hallucination (see his 2004a: 149-151) although there are outstanding issues to do with the experienced location of the imagined object which would require more detailed discussion than I have space for here (see fn.16).

place it must be the case that we are attending to the object of imagination. Sartre makes a claim that can be used to support P1, when he says that imagination has the characteristic of spontaneity. Here are the relevant passages:

> A perceptual consciousness appears to itself as passive. On the other hand, an imaging consciousness gives itself to itself as an imaging consciousness, which is to say as a spontaneity that produces and conserves the object as imaged. It is a kind of indefinable counterpart to the fact that the object gives itself as a nothingness. The consciousness appears to itself as creative, but without positing as object this creative character. (Sartre 2004a: 14)

> [Imagining consciousness] is spontaneous and creative; it supports, maintains by continuous creation, the sensible qualities of its object. In perception, the actual representative element corresponds to a passivity of consciousness. In the image, that element, in so far as it is primary and incommunicable, is the product of a conscious activity, is shot through with a flow of creative will. (Sartre 2004a: 15)[31]

Let me unpack these ideas concerning the spontaneity of imagination.

Sartre's central claim is that the object-as-imagined is given to the imagining subject as 'created and sustained' by their own conscious activity of imagining (by what he sometimes calls 'continuous creation'), and that imagination 'gives itself to itself' as having this spontaneous character (I'll say more about this 'givenness to itself' below). An illuminating contrast is to be made with perception, which Sartre thinks is characterised by phenomenological passivity: The object of perception is not experienced as produced or sustained by the intentional act of perception itself, but rather is given as receptive to how things are anyway, independently of me, as a seeming acquaintance with the real world (with what seems like mind-independent reality).[32] This distinction between spontaneity and

[31] See also Wittgenstein (1958: 39) on imagining as a 'creative act' more like 'doing than that of receiving'.

[32] This is compatible with certain kinds of subjective activities being in play in perception – say the operation of conceptual capacities, or the direction of attention – although perception would be for Sartre given as 'passive' at its core.

passivity is reminiscent of the Kantian distinction between receptivity, as something akin to the receiving of representations, and spontaneity, which is, broadly, the ability subjects have to form representations themselves.

It is worth getting clearer on the phenomenological awareness we have of the spontaneity of imagination according to Sartre. The spontaneity of imagination is part of what Husserl calls the act or noetic character of the relevant 'intentional act'.[33] A dictum of Classical Phenomenology is that intentional experiences as *lived through* (rather than as reflected on), afford awareness of their act-characters, but these are not 'objectified' (i.e., made into intentional objects).[34] Indeed, as Sartre indicates above in the case of imagination, 'the consciousness appears to itself as creative, but without positing as object this creative character'. For Sartre two further points are worth bearing in mind: (1) the noetic characters of intentional acts always have a 'noematic' (intentional content based) counterpart or in Husserlian terms 'correlate': in the case of imagination Sartre claims that the noetic character of imagination as spontaneity is an 'counterpart to the fact that object gives itself as a nothingness',[35] as having a sense of what he elsewhere calls 'irreality' (see below for more on this). Compare that the supposed noetic character of perception as receptive is at least partly responsible for the fact that the perceptual object is given as a spatially and temporally present denizen of the world, so having a sense of presence or reality.[36] (2) If imagination and perception didn't involve this pre-reflective awareness of their noetic act-characters as respectively spontaneous and receptive – and the way these are reflected in their noematic counterparts – we would much more regularly

[33] See Husserl 1982 §96.

[34] See Husserl 1982: §38; Sartre 2004b: 41-5.

[35] Sartre 2004a: 14.

[36] Husserl, along with a range of contemporary philosophers of mind, emphasises this dimension of perceptual experience in his talk of the object of perception being *given in the flesh*, 'as actually present, as self-given there in the current now', and so as possessing what is referred to in the contemporary literature as a 'sense of presence' (see Husserl 1997 [1907] §4: 12). For contemporary discussion see Matthen 2005; 2010; Dokic 2012; Dokic and Martin 2017. Indeed, Husserl, like Mohan Matthen and Sartre, draws a phenomenal contrast with imagination on this point: 'in phantasy, the object does not stand there as in the flesh, actual currently, present…it does not give itself as itself, actual and now' (see Husserl 1997 [1907] §4: 12; see also Matthen 2005: 305).

confuse these modes of consciousness than we do; which isn't to deny that such confusion is possible, especially in non-ecologically valid experimental settings.[37]

It is worth pausing to attempt to clarify what Sartre means in his talk of the objects of imagination being 'affected with the character of irreality',[38] since this is apt to seem obscure. There is one way of interpreting this which can't be right, namely as akin to the object-as-imagined being presented as *non-existent*.[39] Sartre clarifies what is intended by his talk of irreality, ruling out that this should be taken as suggesting that imagination in general 'posits' its object as *non-existent*, by a clarification of a case in which the referent of the act of imagination actually exists:

> We do not mean that Pierre himself is irreal. He is a being of flesh and blood who is in his room in Paris at this moment...We must no longer believe that there are two Pierres, the real Pierre of Rue d'Ulm and the irreal Pierre that is the correlate of my current consciousness. The only Pierre that I know (*connaisse*) and that I aim at is the one who is real, who really lives in this real room in Paris. It is therefore this Pierre that I invoke and that appears to me. But he does not appear here. He is not in this room where I write. He appears to me in his real room, in that room where he really is. But then, one might say, he is no longer irreal? It must be understood: Pierre and his room, real in so far as they are situated in Paris, three hundred real kilometres from my real position, are not so any more in so far as they currently appear to me. Even if I think, as Pierre as imaged is evoked, 'he is unfortunately not here', this must not be understood as distinguishing between Pierre as imaged and Pierre of flesh and blood. There is but one Pierre and it is precisely he that is not here; *to not be here is his essential quality*: in a moment Pierre is given to me as being in rue d'Ulm, which is to say as absent. And this *absenteeism of Pierre*, which I directly perceive, which constitutes the essential structure of my image, is precisely a nuance that colours him entirely, is what I call his irreality. (Sartre 2004a: 126-7 my emphasis).

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[37] See the experimental data in Perky 1911; for discussion of the philosophical implications of this data see Hopkins 2012; 2013; Nanay 2012.

[38] Sartre 2004a: 122. As Webber (2004: xxviii) notes Sartre's use of this term follows at least one of Husserl's uses of the term 'irreal' (see fn. 41 below)

[39] See Kriegel 2015 who interprets Sartre in this way.

The main thrust of Sartre's notion of the object-as-imagined being given as *irreal* (*irréel*) turns on the idea of spatio-temporal absence – to 'not be here [and now] is his essential quality'. Put otherwise: imagination is a way of presenting a referent or object under the aspect of spatio-temporal absence, thus presenting it (in this case the 'real Pierre of Rue d'Ulm') *under the aspect of irreality*. In this sense, as Sartre insists, there are no irreal objects per se or in the sense that would imply ontological inflation – there is but one Pierre however consciousness aims at him – since to posit such things would open the door to the illusion of immanence, with such irreal objects looking suspiciously close to psychically immanent mental images. There are rather intentional objects (with different existential statuses and existential modalities)[40] which are in imagination *irrealized* (to use Sartre's verb form), that is presented to consciousness under the aspect of spatio-temporal absence.[41]

All this being said the characterisation offered so far of the spontaneity of imagination – and the connected presenting of the object-as-imagined as having a 'sense of 'irreality' – is still rather thin. What is helpful in fleshing it out is considering a potential problem.

At first glance the supposed spontaneity of imagination stands in tension with the occurrence of unbidden or passively generated 'images'. Indeed, I might be haunted by a recurring unbidden 'image' of a horrific event which isn't subject to my will, but rather is initiated by factors over which I have little to no control (e.g., unconscious triggers). Alternatively, consider an annoying tune that one cannot get out of one's head – a so-called earworm.

However, Sartre claims that spontaneity isn't equivalent to being voluntary, as subject to the will; in general it is not that I necessarily initiate the relevant imaginative act, nor that I can necessarily bring it to an end, that gives imaginative experience the character of spontaneity. As Sartre writes:

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[40] See Webber 2020: 105 for how to make this privileging of absence in an understanding of the concept of *irreality* consistent with Sartre's claims concerning the fourfold existential positing possibilities for imagination.

[41] Husserl makes similar claims about imagination ('phantasy'), irreality and absence: 'the phantasm, the sensuous content of phantasy, gives itself as not present. It defends itself against the demand that it be taken as present; from the beginning it carries with it the characteristic of irreality. Primarily it has the function of being taken as something else' (Husserl 2005 [1898-1925], §39: 87).

> …involuntary and voluntary images represent two very closely related types of consciousness, of which one is produced by a voluntary spontaneity and the other by a *spontaneity without will*. One must in no way confuse intention, in our sense of the term, and will. To say that there can be an image without will in no way implies that there can be an image without intention. (Sartre 2004a: 19, my emphasis) [42]

Getting clear on cases of 'spontaneity without will' is key, since we can gain a better understanding of the distinctive phenomenology of imaginative spontaneity by isolating it from cases in which it is unhelpfully co-present with the phenomenology of willing.[43]

Before examining such cases, it is important not to be misled by Sartre's use of the term *intention* in the above quotation. By using the term he is not attempting to introduce some proprietary imaginative sense of *intending* where that is understood as something we *intentionally do* (i.e., deliberately do) which is nonetheless somehow not equivalent to willing. Rather, Sartre's sense of the term here and throughout *The Imaginary* is the broader – but also more technical – one of an intention as a Husserlian intentional act. And so intention is meant here in the sense of intentionality, or intending-towards an object, whereby all 'conscious acts' (i.e., conscious episodes) are, as Husserl puts it,

[42] Kriegel's (2015: 252) discussion of Sartre's views doesn't get the importance of this distinction into view, writing of unbidden images – which Kriegel claims, *pace* Sartre, are a class of 'phantasmagoric' experiences distinct from imaginative experience – that 'when an unbidden image of a smiling octopus pops up in my mind, the process producing it is introspectively inaccessible to me — the popping-up of the image is something that happens to me, not something that I do. I feel receptive and passive rather than spontaneous and active.' But this is to fail to recognise that for Sartre such unbidden images share with instances of imaginative experiences produced voluntarily a more fundamental spontaneity, even though they are *nonvoluntary*. Indeed it is, for Sartre, the fact that both imaginative experiences subject to the will and those that are not, share a phenomenology of productivity and sustaining, that justifies classifying them together as both imaginative experiences, since it is *spontaneity*, so understood (whether voluntary or involuntary) that is for Sartre the most fundamental feature of imagination.

[43] There is an interesting connection here between cases of involuntary spontaneity and what Sartre elsewhere calls 'captive consciousness' (see 2004: 41-9, 168-72), which is in play in hypnagogic imagery, dreams, and reading fiction. I save detailed discussion of this connection for a separate occasion.

'intendings that intend something' ([*Meinung seines Gemeinten*]).[44] In this sense Sartre could just as well say there cannot be a perception without intention.

Returning to our main thread, we can now attempt to clarify cases of 'spontaneity without will'. Let's consider the earworm case in more detail. As Hopkins writes, 'What is so frustrating about the recurring tune is precisely that in imagining it *I myself bring it back to life*. If instead it plagues me because you won't stop singing it, my annoyance has a quite different character'.[45] Unpacking this we can say the following. What is so annoying about the earworm isn't simply that it arrives 'in my head' and that I can't 'get it out'– that it is neither willed into existence, nor can I simply control, by act of will, when it goes – but more importantly that there is a sense that *it's me*, qua the occurrence of an ongoing act of imagination, which is 'creating it', giving it 'life' (what Sartre also describes as *lending life* to the image). More specifically we can say that what becomes clearer in such cases of involuntary spontaneity is the *phenomenology* of producing and sustaining the 'image': It is through me, as the subject of imagination, and specifically through my intentional act of imagining, that the 'image' is (i) brought back to life, and (ii) continued to be given life, and this is so regardless of the fact that it is not (directly) subject to the will.

Generalising, what is imagined is in this sense 'created' in and through the occurrence of an intentional act of imagining, interpreted in terms of a phenomenology of productivity and sustaining which is distinct from both the phenomenology of willing and the phenomenology of receptivity – or at least this will be true of voluntary and involuntary imagination that goes on for any significant duration.[46] So interpreted the spontaneity of imagination is not equivalent to the broader Kantian

[44] See Husserl 1977 [1931] §20.

[45] Hopkins 2016: 6. See also Kind 2001: 91. It is surprising that in Kind's (2001) discussion there is no reference to Sartre's study (cf. her 2020, which does discuss Sartre, but unhelpfully runs together voluntariness and spontaneity for Sartre, associating him at times with a 'will-dependence' view of imagination, and then later mainly interpreting him along the lines of Kriegel 2015).

[46] This Sartrean characterisation of the spontaneity of imagination finds close cousins in recent agential accounts of imagination, the most comprehensive of which is found in Dorsch 2012 (see also aspects of Kind 2001, Hopkins 2024: Ch.1; Casey 1981). Dorsch 2012 (5.6) critically discusses a spontaneity account of imagination, a version of which he finds in Sartre. A defence of the Sartrean position from Dorsch's criticisms is beyond the scope of this paper.

notion of spontaneity, as 'springing from' or 'originating from the self' rather than from something 'outside' of it – the phenomenology is more specific than that; it is what one might be tempted to call, using one of Sartre's phrases, a 'deep spontaneity that cannot be assimilated to the will'.[47]

However, it might fairly be asked what does this 'giving life' (and continuing to 'give life') to the object-as-imagined more concretely consist in? Understanding at least one important further aspect of this 'spontaneous' process turns on getting into view a key claim of Sartre's concerning 'how the image is constituted'. Let's start by noting that for Sartre intentional acts or 'intendings', do more than just serve as experiential vehicles through which consciousness lands on certain objects, what we might think of as *bare directedness*. Rather the distinctive 'noetic qualities' of the intentional acts are – as noted previously – claimed to be responsible for the specific way in which the relevant object is presented to consciousness, or to frame it in the terms Sartre and Husserl use, the intention 'constitutes' the relevant object as it appears. To clarify, Sartre thinks that the 'constitution of the image' requires specific instances of what Husserl would call *constitutive performances*, that is various forms of synthesising activity performed through these imaginative intentional acts in order for the object-as-imaged to show up in experience as it does. And one of Sartre's key claims throughout *The Imaginary* is that *knowledge* concerning the object is 'synthesised' (i.e., united in consciousness) with the relevant analogical representative (be that a material thing in the world or a 'mental image') in the intentional act of imagining to give us the object-as-imaged.[48] Here is how he puts it:

> In the image, indeed, a certain consciousness gives itself as a certain object. The object is therefore correlative with a certain synthetic act, which includes among its structures a certain knowledge and a certain 'intention'. The intention is at the centre of consciousness: it is the intention that aims at the object, which is to say that constitutes it for what it is. The knowledge, which is indissolubly linked to the intention, specifies that the object is such or such, adds determinations synthetically…My knowledge is nothing other than knowledge of the object, knowledge concerning the object. In the act of consciousness, the representative element and the knowledge

[47] Sartre 2004a: 18.

[48] See Peacocke 1985 for a similar point albeit in different terminology.

element are linked in a synthetic act. (2004a: 11, see also 2004:a 13, 'To produce in me the image consciousness of Pieree is to make an intentional synthesis that gathers in itself a host of past moments which assert the identity of Pierre across these diverse appearances and which give this object under a certain aspect').

As such, one critical component of imaginative spontaneity – of 'giving life to the image' – involves 'constituting it' on the basis of knowledge I possess. So, the synthetic activities in operation in imagination, which allow for the object to appear in such and such a way (e.g., Pierre with his particular gait and peculiar frown that I know him to have) in an additional and important sense 'originate in me', in that they are drawn from and constrained by my knowledge of the object. In this sense through the 'act of imagining', that is through the occurrence of imaginative experience, I do not merely 'give life to the image' generically, but do so on the basis of knowledge that I possess, and it is at least in significant part because of this that the object-as-imaged is represented in the particular way that it is. We might therefore say that the knowledge-informed synthetic activity of 'constituting the image' involved in imagination is part and parcel of its spontaneity, insofar as I 'give life and continue to give life to the image', by drawing on a well-spring of my knowledge concerning the object. This analysis therefore provides a deeper insight into the spontaneity of imagining, qua the image *originating in me*, via the role of a subject's knowledge.

However, there is an objection to attempting to illuminate imaginative spontaneity in this way, namely that perception might be thought of as bringing to bear a subject's knowledge, which might constrain the way the object appears. However, as Hopkins emphasises there is a critical difference in the case of imagination:

> If perceiving involves more than having sensory impressions, because those impressions must also be organized by concepts, isn't this last reasonably described as exercising 'knowledge'? However, even so, a strong contrast with imagining, as Sartre construes it, remains. Whereas in perceiving the sensory input tightly constrains the nature of the object of which we are conscious, in imagining almost all the work is done by knowledge. The analogon, while essential, is in many cases almost infinitely malleable, in terms of the things we might use it to imagine. The structure of imagining

> is thus consistent with quasi-observation and spontaneity - indeed, Sartre can even explain them, by appeal to the dominant role of knowledge in determining what is imagined. (Hopkins 2016: 11-12, cf. Peacocke 1985: 26-7).

Indeed as we have seen above Hopkins is right: imaginative spontaneity is illuminated by reference to the specific role that knowledge plays in 'constituting the image'.

As a final comment, for all that we have said it is also worth noting that insofar as the quality of imaginative spontaneity is supposed to be a 'noetic feature', then it might be resistant to entirely clear description by way of philosophical reflection. This would be an instance of a more general claim which runs through Classical Phenomenology, namely that noetic act-characters as lived through – what Husserl calls instances of 'operative consciousness' – are not given as intentional objects of consciousness.[49] Given that philosophical reflection 'objectifies' its theme then such noetic features cannot be described in terms which would capture them exactly how they are given in experience. Indeed, Sartre talks of the spontaneity of imagination being a 'vague and fugitive quality', that is an '*indefinable* counterpart to the fact that the object gives itself as a nothingness.[50] In this sense there is a well-motivated explanation for why this feature can only be brought to light somewhat obliquely, principally by engaging in the phenomenological contrasts we have with reference to specific cases (i.e., phenomenology of willing and phenomenology of receptivity), and emphasising the role of knowledge in the 'constitution of the image'.

3.3 Spontaneity and Attention

More could be said about many of the issues raised in the previous sub-section, but this clarification of the spontaneity of imagination suffices for our purposes. Our question is why this characterisation of the spontaneity of imagination would support P1 (remember P1 states that imagination is

[49] See Husserl 1982: §38; Sartre 2004b: 41-5

[50] Sartre 2004a: 14, my emphasis.

necessarily attentive: insofar as imagination is taking place, it must be the case that we are attending to the object of imagination) It can do so given the following considerations.

First, the conscious processes (the 'synthetic acts') involved in imagining as characterised by spontaneity – producing and sustaining 'the image' on the basis of information already held by the subject (knowledge), so constituting the object-as-imagined in a particular way – are sufficiently demanding on a subject's cognitive and conceptual resources as to require the subject's attention; conscious experience has to in some sense work to 'produce and sustain' the image in that particular knowledge-involving way, and to be operative in this way plausibly requires drawing on attentional resources (they are attention sapping). Put otherwise the relevant spontaneous processes in play just don't look to be compatible with what Husserl would call a *dull consciousness*.

Second, insofar as we understand the spontaneity of imagining as capturing the specific way the object-as-imagined originates *from the subject*, then a key point about the link to attention follows. Take perceptual experience: in perceptual experience there is plausibly a pre-attentive perceptual field, as what Husserl calls the field of passive data. Prior to any exercise of perceptual attention – whether that be voluntary attention in cases where we intend to attend, or cases of attention capture – we are aware of items in the pre-attentive perceptual field, as items which can be said to register with us prior to us 'taking notice' of them.[51] Contrast imagination: insofar as the object-as-imaged, qua its spontaneity, originates from the subject (and is given as such), there is no pre-attentive conscious field of imagined objects from which conscious attention somehow selects. In this sense imagination does not somehow provide objects to which we *might* attend; rather, when imagined-objects 'enter consciousness' they do so instantaneously as attended-to-objects. Indeed Sartre claims: 'to constitute an image in oneself a certain consciousness of the table is at the same time to constitute the table as an object of imaging consciousness. The object as imaged is therefore *contemporary* with the consciousness that I have of it… there will be never the smallest time-lag between the [imagined]

[51] For more detail see also Husserl 1973: §16, §17; and a similar idea in cognitive psychology from Neisser (1967 ch.4), who talks of 'pre-attentive processes' and the 'preattentive field'.

object and the consciousness. Not a second of surprise, the object that is moving is not alive, it *never precedes the intention'*.[52]

Finally, we can look to the 'syntheses' carried out by the imaginative 'intendings' as highlighting the link between the spontaneity of imagination and attention. Husserl draws an important distinction between two kinds of 'syntheses', the first of which is the passive sensory synthesis of perception. An example of such passive sensory synthesis is perceptual syntheses of identification: A perceptual synthesis of identification is an instance in which varying sensory appearances of the intentional objects of discrete perceptual experiences, occurring at different perceptual moments, are 'combined' in consciousness in such a way that over the course of a perceptual series – an extended temporal flow of perceptions – a subject experiences *one and the same object*. Contrastingly, there are also the active categorical syntheses of predicative judgement in which a general concept (e.g., blue, rectangular) is predicated of an object. This is an act of synthesis insofar as it 'brings together' an object with a specific (general) predicate; that is, it predicates of an object a certain general concept or 'category', ascribing a specific property or feature to it.[53]

Interestingly, according to Sartre the kind of 'syntheses' involved in imagination turn out to be something of amalgamation. Here is what he says:

> In the act of consciousness, the representative element and the knowledge element are linked in a synthetic act. The correlative object of this act is therefore constituted as a concrete, sensible object and at the same time as an object of knowledge. (Sartre 2004a: 11)

We might put this as follows: the kind of 'syntheses' involved in imaginative intendings are neither exactly like the passive sensory synthesis of perception, nor the active categorial syntheses of predicative thought, rather they 'borrow' something from each. They might be called *active sensory syntheses* in the following sense: they are *active* in that they are clearly an 'accomplishment' of the subject, producing and sustaining 'the image' based on knowledge the subject possesses, but sensory

[52] Sartre 2004a: 11.

[53] Husserl 1973 [1939] §2: 14 (my italics).

insofar as there is an 'intuitive' representative element in play (the analogon). But critically, for Husserl and Sartre, *active syntheses* are fundamentally linked to attention. As Husserl puts it:

> The investigation into the active accomplishments of the ego… operate in the medium of an attentive turning towards and its derivatives. Turning our attention toward is, as it were, the bridge to activity, or the bridge is the beginning or *mis en scène* of activity, and it is the constant way in which consciousness is carried out for activity to progress: All genuine activity is carried out in the scope of attentiveness. (Husserl 2012 [1920-1926]: 276)

So insofar as the spontaneity of imagination is such that the 'syntheses' carried out are active syntheses, then they are plausibly 'carried out in the scope of attentiveness'.

Given these considerations, it is fair to conclude that the characteristic spontaneity of imagination entails that imagination is an attentive mode of consciousness. Put otherwise, imagination, given the kind of spontaneity characteristic of it, is not a mode of consciousness whose object can exist in the background; insofar as imagination is taking place, what it presented therein – the object-as-imagined - is necessarily the object of attention.[54]

If the above is correct then P1 is true, and our supplementary argument goes through; imagination (as necessarily attentive), can't co-occur with attentive perceptual consciousness. Put otherwise:

[54] Much of what has been said here in a Sartrean vein is broadly compatible with a thought that occurs in a range of thinkers, namely that *imagining occupies attention* (understood as a resource), but does not provide possible objects to which we *might* attend, as was seen in the discussion of the lack of pre-attentive field of 'imaginary objects' (see e.g., Peacocke 1998; O'Shaunessey 2000: Ch.7; Hopkins 2024: Ch.5). Hopkins (2024: Ch.5) also details some critical respects in which key features of perceptual attention – principally 'overflow', whereby we have a sense that there is more to the perceptual object than what we are currently attending to – are not present in imaginative experience (see also Sartre 2004a: 10-11 for a similar claim). This leads Hopkins (2024: 140) to the conclusion that 'imagining does not furnish objects for attention: the things we imagine are not things to which we can attend to a greater or lesser degree'. However, even if this is right I don't think it provides a reason for thinking that imagination is not attentive, but rather a more limited conclusion, namely that the way attention works in imagination is significantly impoverished compared to paradigmatic perceptual attention. These are, however, complex issues, which would require a separate discussion (likely departing in various ways from the Sartrean framing).

attentive perceptual consciousness *excludes* imagination, and vice versa, imagination *excludes* attentive perceptual consciousness.

Before closing it is worth considering the following points. In denying the psychological reality of non-attentive imagination we only need deny this as it pertains to conscious episodes or occurrences. Nothing said here requires us to deny the possibility of non-attentive imagination at the non-conscious level (about this the Sartrean phenomenologist is, as one would expect, silent). Likewise, we shouldn't confuse the issue of the psychological reality of non-attentive imagination with the role of dispositional capacities to imagine, and the structuring role they may play in perceptual experience.[55]

Conclusion: An imagination view of perceptual presence

In concluding, I draw out one implication of the resulting exclusion. A fundamental issue for a phenomenology of perception concerns the structure of our perceptual experiences of three-dimensional objects. Consider the following: Standing in front of a house we are only visually presented with its front-side, given in terms of a particular array of colour and spatial properties from our perspectival location – only the front side is given with 'intuitive fullness', to use Husserlian terminology. Nonetheless, our visual experience is of a complete three-dimensional entity, or at least purports to be. We enjoy a visual experience as of a house, complete with hidden sides, not a *mere façade* of a house-like geometrical form (e.g., a stage-prop or collection of flat 2d surfaces). How then is it the case that we enjoy a visual experience as of the relevant complete three-dimensional entity, given the fact that we are limited in any particular perceptual moment to seeing (or at least seeming to see) the side(s) facing us from a specific spatial perspective?

There is one tempting solution to this problem of perceptual presence which appeals to conscious imagination. Take the visual case: the visual experience of an object as a complete three-dimensional entity would consist in a visual component – giving us the facing-sides of the object in their sensory determinateness – and a visualised component, that is some form of imaginative representation,

[55] See Introduction, above.

which gives us the 'absent' non-facing sides of the object. As such the inadequacy of what is given of the perceptual object by way of the perspectivally-limited visual component of spatial perception would be 'made up for' by the relevant visualisations.

Here is how Husserl, who rejects this view, frames it:

> …what does not properly appear would simply not appear in the *perceptual* sense, but would, on the contrary, appear…in the form of concomitant phantasy…Is it then permissible to charge the improperly appearing moments (e.g., the interior, the back side, etc.) of a perceived thing to the account of phantasy-presentations? (Husserl 1997 [1907] §18: 47)

Jennifer Church, the principal contemporary defender of the view, answers Husserl's question in the affirmative and articulates the view as follows:

> When we see a tree, we imagine distinct perspectives on distinct parts of that tree, and it is the combination of those distinctive perspectives and parts that gives us the experience of the tree as a well-rounded object in space. (Church 2011: 76; see also Kind 2018: 176).[56]

Sartre is alive to this kind of view with respect to a phenomenological clarification of the intentional structure of perceptual experience:

> It remains, evidently, that I always perceive more and otherwise than I see. It is this incontestable fact – which seems to me to constitute the very structure of perception – that psychologists of the past have tried to explain by the introduction of images into perception, which is to say in supposing that we complete the strictly sensory contribution in projecting irreal qualities on the objects. Of course this explanation required that a strict assimilation between image and sensation was – at least theoretically – always possible. If it is true that there is here, as I have tried to show, an enormous countersense, we must seek new hypotheses. (Sartre 2004a: 120-1)

[56] Both Church 2011 and Kind 2018 think the relevant imaginations in play are conscious and occurrent.

Now, if attentive perceptual consciousness cannot co-occur with imagination (as necessarily attentive), and vice versa, then Sartre is drawing an important implication of the argument we have presented. What would be required for this imagination-based solution to the problem of perceptual presence to be a live option is a phenomenological possibility that we have argued is impossible (a phenomenological countersense), namely that imagination could co-occur with attentive perception when we are looking at complete three-dimensional concrete particulars in our environment.[57] So, when he asks, in the context of the exclusion claim, 'how could the image, under these conditions contribute to forming the perception?',[58] the question is rhetorical, and the answer is that it could not.

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[57] Sartre does not merely identify what he takes to be the relevant phenomenological countersense, but diagnoses how we are led into this error, namely by confusing a constitutive claim with a causal one (see 2004: 121-22); see also Husserl 1997 [1907] §18) for a similar point. Notably Sartre (2004: 59) also rejects Husserl's claim (2001 [1901] VI §10: 210-1) that the empty intentions involved in understanding a declarative sentence, like "it is raining outside", can be fulfilled not just by direct perceptual experience, but also via the imagination, that is via what Husserl calls *indirect fulfilment in the imagination*.

[58] Sartre 2004a: 120.

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