

# Absence made present: the representation of time in imagination

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# ‘The image is a consciousness’

“Whether I perceive or imagine that chair, the object of my perception and that of my [imagining] are identical: it is that straw-bottomed chair on which I sit. It is simply that consciousness is related to this same chair in two different ways.” (Sartre, *The Imaginary*, p. 7)

“The expression ‘mental image’ gives rise to confusion. It would be better to say ‘consciousness of Pierre-as-imaged’ or ‘imaging consciousness of Pierre’” (*ibid*, p. 7).

“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.” (*ibid*, p. 7)

‘The imaging consciousness posits its object as a nothingness’

“The characteristic of the intentional object of the imaging consciousness is that the object is not there and is posited as such...”  
*(ibid, p. 13)*

Imagination “gives its object as not being” – as “absent to intuition”.

In the case of perceptual imagination, how do we accommodate the respect in which the imagined object is both 'made present' and 'given as absent' – without reifying a mental image and positing two objects?

E.g. as well as Pierre, “a certain portrait of Pierre in consciousness”? (p. 6)

# The 'irreality' of imagined time

“The time of the object as imaged is an irreality”. (ibid, p. 129)

“There is an absenteeism of time as of space...” (ibid, p. 131)

This involves denying that “the time of the flowing of the image consciousness is the same as the time of the imaged object”. (ibid, p. 129)

The time of imagining and the imagined time are “radically separated”. (ibid, p. 129)

# Spontaneity

“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”. (ibid, p. 14)

# Temporal phenomenology of receptivity

- (1) There is a respect in which the receptivity of perception is reflected in its phenomenology – and in particular in aspects of its temporal phenomenology.
- (2) This is relevant to a respect in which, from the subject's point of view, distinctive constraints are operative on the way in which she can exercise agency over this 'receptive' aspect of mind.
- (3) The relevant constraints aren't operative when it comes to the agency we are able to exercise over non-perceptual elements of the stream of consciousness, such as imagination.

# Temporal phenomenology of receptivity

From the subject's point of view, the domain of sensibility is restricted to items that fall within the bounds of the 'temporal present'.

This constrains the way in which one can exercise agency over this receptive faculty.

Spontaneity is not so restricted. In that respect, spontaneity is 'free and spontaneous' in a way that our receptive faculty of sensibility is not.



# Temporal perspective in perception

There is a respect in which perceptual experience doesn't seem to be temporally perspectival in quite the way that perceptual experience seems spatially perspectival (in e.g. the way vision seems to be spatially perspectival).

In the case of vision, the spatial point of view afforded by one's experience does phenomenologically seem to be perspectival in the following respect: it seems to involve the perception of X from Y, where X and Y are spatial locations, and where X is not identical to Y.

Whereas, the temporal point of view that is afforded by perception does not phenomenologically seem to be perspectival in that way: i.e. it doesn't seem to involve the perception of X from Y, where X and Y are temporal locations, and where X is not identical to Y.

# Temporal perspective in perception

The boundaries of the temporal interval do not seem to mark out for their subject the boundaries of time.

The boundaries of the temporal interval do not mark out for their subject the temporal boundaries of their experience – i.e. the beginning and endpoints of their perceptual experience.

# Temporal perspective in perception

There is an asymmetry in one's psychological orientation to what falls on either side the boundaries of the relevant interval of time.

This asymmetry in one's psychological orientation to what falls on either side the boundaries of the relevant interval of time amounts to a *tensed temporal orientation* to the *immediate past* and *immediate future*.

i.e. the boundaries of the relevant interval of time mark out *for the subject* of experience the boundaries between past and future.

# The experienced present and the stream of consciousness

Occurrence in the stream of consciousness (whether receptive or spontaneous) modifies the experiencing subject.

In particular, all occurrence in the stream of consciousness results in some kind of *psychological* modification of the experiencing subject.

All such modifications of the experiencing subject are to be specified, in part, in terms of these asymmetries in the subject's psychological orientation to time – the subject's psychological tensed orientation to the immediate past and the immediate future.

# Distinctive phenomenological temporal features of receptivity

From the subject's point of view, the temporal location of perceptual experience (as receptive occurrence) is passive with respect to the temporal location of its intentional objects. The temporal location of perceptual experience seems to be determined by the temporal locations of its intentional objects.

In consequence, from the subject's point of view, the intentional domain of sensibility is restricted to items that fall within the bounds of the 'experienced temporal present'.

This is what constrains the way in which one can exercise agency over this receptive faculty.

# The imagined perceptual perspective

In imagining an object or event, one *imagines* (and thereby represents) a perceptual perspective on that object or event.

When one imagines an object, that act of imagining is an act of spontaneity that represents a perceptual perspective on that object. It is an act of spontaneity that represents a perspective on the intentional object that is afforded by an act of receptivity.

# The imagined present

The act of imagining is the representation of a temporal present.

The represented temporal location of that represented temporal present is not determined by the temporal location of the act of imagining.

# ‘Making present’ the imagined object

Imagination represents a temporal perspective on its intentional object.

It represents the temporal perspective afforded by an act of receptivity.

That represented temporal perspective is one that presents the intentional object of imagination as ‘temporally present’. It is in that respect that imagination provides one with a distinctive way of ‘making present’ its intentional object.



# The imagined object given as 'not there'

The temporal present that is represented in imagination isn't presented as coincident with one's actual present – i.e. the actual time of one's act of imagining.

Perceptual imagination can serve to represent a 'here and now' that is not presented to one as one's actual 'here and now' – i.e. that is not presented to one as the actual here and now that is determined by the place and time of the act of imagining.