



THE IMAGINARY

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

**Also available as a printed book  
see title verso for ISBN details**

# The Imaginary

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) was the foremost French thinker of the twentieth century: philosopher, novelist, dramatist, literary critic and political theorist. He studied philosophy first in Paris and Berlin, before publishing his first novel, *Nausea*, in 1938. He was a prisoner of war during World War Two, and when he returned to Paris upon his release he became active in the Resistance movement. He published his philosophical masterwork, *Being and Nothingness*, in 1943, and subsequently gave up teaching to spend more time writing. In 1964 Sartre turned down the Nobel Prize for literature, because he did not want to be associated with any awarding institution. When he died in 1980, fifty thousand people turned up at his funeral in Paris.

To Albert Morel

Jean-Paul  
**Sartre**

## The Imaginary

A phenomenological psychology of the imagination

Revisions and Historical Introduction by  
Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre

Translation and Philosophical Introduction by  
Jonathan Webber

First published 1940 in French as *L'imaginaire* by Éditions Gallimard

This translation first published 2004 by Routledge  
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada by Routledge  
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group*

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004.

© 1940, 1986 Éditions Gallimard

Translation © 2004 Routledge

Historical Introduction © 2004 Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre

Philosophical Introduction © 2004 Jonathan Webber

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Sartre, Jean-Paul, 1905–1980

[*Imaginaire*. English]

The imaginary: a phenomenological psychology of the imagination/Jean-Paul Sartre; revised by Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre; translated and with an introduction by Jonathan Webber.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Imagination. I. Elkaïm-Sartre, Arlette. II. Title.

BF408.S263 2003

128'.3–dc21

2003012478

ISBN 0-203-64410-7 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-67463-4 (Adobe eReader Format)

ISBN 0-415-28754-5 (hbk)

ISBN 0-415-28755-3 (pbk)

## CONTENTS

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION BY ARLETTE ELKAÏM-SARTRE	vii
PHILOSOPHICAL INTRODUCTION BY JONATHAN WEBBER	xiii
NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION	xxvii
<b>PART I The Certain</b>	<b>1</b>
The Intentional Structure of the Image	3
1 Description	4
I. <i>The Method</i>	4
II. <i>First Characteristic: The Image is a Consciousness</i>	5
III. <i>Second Characteristic: The Phenomenon of         Quasi-Observation</i>	8
IV. <i>Third Characteristic: The Imaging Consciousness Posits         its Object as a Nothingness</i>	11
V. <i>Fourth Characteristic: Spontaneity</i>	14
VI. <i>Conclusion</i>	14
2 The Image Family	17
I. <i>Image, Portrait, Caricature</i>	17
II. <i>Sign and Portrait</i>	21
III. <i>From Sign to Image: Consciousness of Imitations</i>	25
IV. <i>From Sign to Image: Schematic Drawings</i>	29
V. <i>Faces in the Fire, Spots on Walls, Rocks in Human         Form</i>	35
VI. <i>Hypnagogic Images, Scenes and Persons Seen in Coffee         Grounds, in a Crystal Ball</i>	37
VII. <i>From Portrait to Mental Image</i>	50
VIII. <i>Mental Image</i>	52

<b>PART II The Probable</b>	<b>55</b>
The Nature of the Analogon in the Mental Image	57
I. Knowledge	57
II. Affectivity	68
III. Movements	73
IV. <i>The Role of the Word in the Mental Image</i>	83
V. <i>The Mode of Appearance of a Thing in the Mental Image</i>	85
<b>PART III The Role of the Image in Psychic Life</b>	<b>95</b>
I. <i>The Symbol</i>	97
II. <i>Symbolic Schemas and Illustrations of Thought</i>	107
III. <i>Image and Thought</i>	112
IV. <i>Image and Perception</i>	120
<b>PART IV The Imaginary Life</b>	<b>123</b>
I. <i>The Irreal Object</i>	125
II. <i>Conduct in the Face of the Irreal</i>	136
III. <i>Pathology of the Imagination</i>	148
IV. <i>The Dream</i>	159
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>177</b>
I. <i>Consciousness and Imagination</i>	179
II. <i>The Work of Art</i>	188
NOTES	195
INDEX	204

## HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

*by Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre*

Sartre was a young schoolteacher in Le Havre in 1934 when he undertook to write a work on imagination.<sup>1</sup> He taught pupils for the baccalaureate. At that time, and for a long time after, French school students were introduced to the four classical fields of philosophy: general psychology (later called ‘theoretical psychology’), metaphysics, morals and logic. Imagination belonged to the area of psychology that Sartre taught his pupils, along with perception, memory, attention, the association of ideas, the emotions, etc. Psychology was defined as ‘positive science of psychic facts and the laws governing them’, expressly ruling out ‘any immediately practical or aesthetic point of view, any ontological or normative concern’.<sup>2</sup> *The Imagination*, a short work that appeared in 1936<sup>3</sup>, and *The Imaginary*, written at the same time but published four years later, and which could have been the author’s doctoral thesis<sup>4</sup>, hardly depart from the aims of psychology thus defined – at least formally – except in the conclusions of this latter writing.

But as we will soon see, facts, as Sartre understands them here, and consequently laws, will not have the same meaning as in the official handbook of psychology.

Right from the start, *The Imaginary* manifests Sartre’s resolution to turn his back on the theories that he was taught and in turn had to inculcate in his pupils. He knew by heart the arguments for these theories based on certain facts and the objections to these arguments based on other facts, themselves more or less challenged by rival theories: Condillac’s sensualism, according to which all the human faculties can be produced by assembling elementary sensations; the associationist theories, due to Hume, Mill, Taine, etc., and all the nuances that distinguish them in their ways of conceiving the relation between sensory impressions and ‘states of consciousness’ as well as in their



ways of conceiving the laws that govern these; the rationalist theories that challenge associationism but in Sartre's view retain the spirit of it. In perusing this large student handbook of the time, or more detailed treatises of psychology, such as that of George Dumas who was authoritative, one can easily see how much their writers, partly accepting the theory of associationism without wondering about the nature of association, have trouble in effectively refuting the automatism of psychic facts which goes hand in hand with this theory, while at the same time they would like to show the synthetic activity of consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

'It must be that each man has been born to make, in order to understand the world, a new and solitary effort', the young Sartre wrote candidly in a notebook. He retained the ambition to construct a new and concrete philosophy and it is with the concrete that he intends to begin here.<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that in his exploration of the imaginary life, he will give primacy to matter, and even less so to the matter that science studies. He is convinced, for example, that 'cerebral localisations', however precise and complex the progress of technical instruments permits us to determine them, can explain nothing other than the conditions necessary for the existence of the psychic functions; they can never provide an account of the fact that I am a consciousness that perceives, remembers, imagines, and projects itself into the future.

It is worth remembering that another philosopher had, forty years earlier, opened a study of the psychic life by invoking concrete experience and intuition. It was Henri Bergson (1859–1914), whose *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* had originally given Sartre the taste for philosophy. Although he had first published his outstanding books, such as *Matter and Memory*, at the end of the nineteenth century, the originality of his philosophy was still fully felt in France in the thirties, as much among psychologists as among metaphysicians. The 1935 edition of Cuvillier's manual clearly counts his ideas as standing out strongly from previous theories, but with many reservations. Sartre cited it approvingly in his *Ecrits de Jeunesse*. Its relevance here is that the author of *Nausea* often has it in mind when writing *The Imaginary*, either to refute it, or to draw on one of its ideas, such as duration in psychic life. It is impossible to give even a vague idea of the whole of Bergson's philosophy, in which psychology and metaphysics are interlinked, within the scope of this introduction: I want only to outline the intellectual framework within which Sartre wrote this work. I am content to point out that the author of *Matter and Memory* intended to refute associationism; like Sartre, he held that the mental image is not a weakened perception, a more or less automatic revival, but that it differs from perception in its very nature and, more generally, that the metaphysical question of human freedom and that of the being of consciousness are closely linked. In *The Imagination*, Sartre

provided a detailed analysis of the contradictions that he saw in the position of the 'vitalist' philosopher for whom 'the evolution of life, from its origins to man, evokes the image of a current of consciousness inserted in matter like an underground passage'.

But the concrete that concerns Sartre is far from Bergsonian intuition, which he considers too subjective. Besides, it will lead the philosopher to argue less and less, to cosmic reverie which is foreign to Sartre's concerns. By 'concrete', he understands the points of support that make it possible for the data of experience to have sense. The most indubitable concrete is for him the cogito of Descartes. 'I think, therefore I am' is the affirmation that reflective consciousness is possible, and is a solid springboard for researching other truths: for Descartes, if I can be mistaken about the existence of the world so long as I have not proven that there is a God who guarantees its existence, I can at least be certain that I exist, since I think. It is the same for Sartre: 'someone who, in an act of reflection, becomes conscious of "having an image" cannot be mistaken'. One should therefore initially explore all that reflective consciousness can reveal about the specific characteristics of the image, about what occurs for me when I have an image.

But why does *The Imaginary* have as a subtitle 'A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination'? Let me first point out the Greek etymology of the word 'phenomenon': that which is shown, that which appears evidently, and which is therefore suitable to be described, to lead, as Descartes would have said, to 'clear and distinct ideas'. There is a truth of appearance. Sartre was convinced of this by reading Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). In 1933, he began to study the German philosopher – still little known in France – by reading his work *Ideas* in the original.<sup>7</sup> This study undoubtedly continued while he wrote *The Imaginary*. 'For me', wrote Sartre in February 1940, 'to exhaust a philosophy is to reflect within its perspectives, and create my own private ideas at its expense, until I plunge into a blind alley. It took me four years to exhaust Husserl.'<sup>8</sup>

The approach of the philosopher who holds Sartre's primary interest – and which seemed to him a radical foundation like the Cartesian suspension of judgement that allows the cogito – is to 'bracket the natural positing of the world'. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who translated Husserl's *Ideas* into French, wrote in his preface a comment expressing something similar to what Sartre had grasped:

I am at first lost and forgotten in the world, lost among things, lost in ideas, lost among plants and beasts, lost among others . . . Naturalism is to be understood as the lowest form of the natural attitude and as the level that includes its own collapse: for if I am lost in the world, I am already *lending myself the character of a thing in the world*.<sup>9</sup>

Treating consciousness ‘as a thing in the world’ is what contemporary psychology more or less does. But if one ‘brackets’ the controversial issue of the relation between consciousness and sensory givens – what Sartre calls the ‘matter’ of the image – what is left, as Husserl said, is that ‘all consciousness is consciousness of something’. Far from being a tautology, this affirmation means that all consciousness has an intentional structure; it means that in perception, mental imagery, and thought, consciousness, far from being a receptacle, is aimed at something outside itself. Psychology is offered a new perspective: to differentiate the modes of intentionality according to the situations where consciousness is at work – because consciousness is an act – and to treat sensory givens and knowledge in relation to intentionality. Sartre will adhere to this, for the case of ‘imaging consciousness’, in the first two parts of this work.

In the first part of *The Imaginary*, entitled ‘The Certain’, he outlines a phenomenological description of the mental image. The aim is to provide an inventory and an articulation, based on his own experience, of all that immediate reflection can reveal of the fact (or rather, the event) of having an image. This does not mean that he will reject what others have written about the image, or the experiments conducted before him, nor that he will definitively give up making hypotheses, but that he leaves his philosophical knowledge temporarily suspended.

The imagination is a broad field. It is not restricted to the mental image, the subjective evocation of an absent object, which is the most difficult form of imagination to describe, particularly because it occurs without obvious sensory support. It seemed necessary to Sartre to take a detour through other examples of ‘the image family’, more easily described since their sensible matter is present. He therefore considers the role of imaging consciousness in our dealings with portraits, caricatures, imitations, schematic drawings, etc., to try to discern, in each case, the interplay of the real (the perceived) and the unreal by which consciousness will aim at its object.

It is on returning to the mental image properly so called that Sartre takes up ‘the probable’. In his first attempt at phenomenological description, the more immediate, the question was: what is it for me to have an image? It is now a question of determining what an image is, at what consciousness actually aims, and what the structure of consciousness must be so that it is possible to imagine. However the mental image is almost inaccessible to reflection: as long as ‘I have an image’, I can say nothing of it without it vanishing, since the intentionality becomes different; when it is not there I cannot give a detailed account of it; in addition, when I evoke an image, for example, of an absent friend or the tune of a song, I am guided by no present sensory impression – visual, auditory, or otherwise. This is why, for some psychologists, the mental image does not exist.

For Sartre, there is indeed a sensible content, though it does not need a present perception as in the case of an imaging consciousness confronted by a performer's imitation of a celebrity, for example. To support this hypothesis, he has recourse to introspection, not only his own, but also directed introspection such as it is practised with a certain rigour in experimental psychology, by the German Würzburg school, the French psychiatrist Alfred Binet, and many others.<sup>10</sup> It will be seen how, in this second part, Sartre tries to demonstrate the manner in which knowledge, affectivity, and minute bodily movements come into play in the creation of the sensible matter of the mental image, which is to say the analogical representation of the real object of the imaging intention, and how the object aimed at and the *analogon* can enter into conflict. Contrary to Bergson, for example, for whom 'all images act on and react to one another in all their elementary parts according to constant laws, which I call the laws of nature' – which implies that the spontaneity of the sensible givens is an automatism – Sartre holds that the whole subject of the mental image spontaneously summons his strength to bring it about: the act by which consciousness presents itself with an absent object is similar to the incantation of a medium who claims, by a concentration of energy, to make the spirit of a dead person come into them.

The image is, according to most classical psychologists, a material trace, and thus affected with a certain inertia, whereas for Sartre, as one can see, it is the product of an act of consciousness, and so his conception of the relation between image and thought can only be different. It will not be a question of wondering how images can 'combine' so that thought is possible: the mental image is *already* on the side of thought. In the third part of his work, he subtly analyses the different levels of thought and the implications the image has for these levels, from the image-illustration that can paralyse or delay the effort of reasoning – or simply mark a pause – to the more evanescent symbolic schemas that partake of this effort while making possible, 'as a fugitive outside', the elaboration of a concept.

The fourth part is principally concerned with the irreality of the space and time of imaginary life. It is most particularly in the dream and in the pathologies of the image, like hallucination, that consciousness seems to be given if not a world, at least the 'atmosphere of a world' with its own space and duration. Sartre had read Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, without worrying too much about the theories underlying this work, pursuing his own path, interested especially in what the rich introspective material of the actual narration of the dreams can provide. He had also read the philosopher and psychiatrist Pierre Janet's clinical descriptions, short biographies of patients that this clinician had treated for years in a hospital environment.<sup>11</sup> Although Sartre queries his general theoretical ideas, he takes account of his concrete observations, most notably of the particularities of the patients' belief in their

deliriums and their hallucinations, and the contradictions between the reality of their often close daily relations with their psychiatrist and the unreal worlds into which their pathologies plunge them.

Nevertheless, the hallucinatory image long troubled the author of *The Imaginary*: can one talk of intentionality in connection with the hallucinatory image, even though the patient appears to undergo it, to suffer and fear it? Sartre discussed this with the psychiatrist Daniel Lagache, who had been his fellow student at the *École Normale*, and who had just written *Les Hallucinations Verbales et la Parole*.<sup>12</sup> Sartre decided to be an experimental subject himself: under Lagache's control, he was administered a mescaline injection, faithful to his determination to remain close to the concrete.

The two-part conclusion of *The Imaginary* is obviously a double move away from the field of psychology. The second, in line with his reflection in *The Imaginary*, is concerned with the activity of consciousness when faced with that irreal object, the work of art. One can suppose that the first, 'Consciousness and Imagination', was written last. It seems contemporaneous with his reading of Heidegger's *Being and Time* in April 1939.<sup>13</sup> Some psychologists contemporary with Sartre were anxious to discern the unity of psychology in its diverse areas of study. For forty or so years, many had been convinced that it was a science equal to physics and thrown themselves headlong into all kinds of psycho-physiological experiments and tests (measurement of feeling thresholds, intelligence tests, etc.). But 'what could be more different, for example, than the study of the stroboscopic illusion and the study of the inferiority complex?'<sup>14</sup> Otherwise put, what global understanding of human being does psychology offer us? One goal becomes clear to Sartre at the end of *The Imaginary*: 'To posit . . . as the object of our interrogation the human condition as an indivisible unity.'<sup>15</sup> A being without substance, which is nothing but the outside of itself, which can create images in the absence of the object concerned, consciousness effects the negation of the real. Nothing, absence, negation: the reader of *Being and Nothingness* will easily judge that the study of imagination was a significant stage in setting up this ontological drama between consciousness (or being-for-itself), the nothingness that it generates, and being-in-itself.

## PHILOSOPHICAL INTRODUCTION

*by Jonathan Webber*

What is imagination? What are we actually doing when we imagine? What are we aware of, and what kind of awareness do we have of it? The concept of imagination is central to a variety of debates, principally in aesthetics and philosophy of mind, yet these questions have rarely been addressed. Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Imaginary* is the most sustained and detailed account of the nature of imagination in Western philosophical literature. It is the result of more than a decade's work, over the course of which Sartre researched and formulated ideas about a wide range of issues. This range includes, for example, the nature of philosophical enquiry, the relation between philosophy and psychology, and the structures of emotion and of aesthetic experience. His theory of imagination is developed and defended partly through discussions and applications of these areas of his thought. As well as being of intrinsic interest, these discussions and applications and the theory of imagination they yield provide foundations for much of Sartre's later existentialist work on the human condition and our responses to it. His theories of freedom and bad faith, for example, and of the nature of literature, quietly draw on thoughts and themes elaborated in this book.

In *The Imaginary*, Sartre aims to show that a seemingly diverse array of experiences – including make-believe, watching an impressionist, watching a play, looking at pictures, forming mental images – share a fundamental structure. He further aims to delineate this structure and show that it is distinct from both the structure of perception and that of conceptual thought. At the root of his theory is Edmund Husserl's distinction between the matter of an experience and its form. In ordinary perception, according to Sartre, parts of our material environment provide the matter of experience. The form is provided by the attitude taken towards the matter. This attitude is a function

of knowledge, affections, and goals pursued. This attitude is reflected back to us as the form or sense of the object perceived. It is due to my knowledge, affections, and goals that I see a certain chunk of matter not as a metal protuberance from a piece of wood, for example, but as a door handle that must be turned if I am to enter the interview room. Or it is because I am angry that I find a certain person obnoxious and repulsive.

In imagination, the bestowal of sense is different. The matter is not experienced as properly having a certain sense, but as presenting a sense borrowed from some other object. We do not perceive the matter as having that sense, but rather imagine that other object. A child does not misperceive a hobby-horse as a horse, but imagines a horse by using the hobby-horse as a prop. A photograph is not confused for the thing it is a photograph of, but that thing is imagined through the photograph. This is the structure that unites the various kinds of event that Sartre understands as imaginings: the matter of the experience is endowed with the sense of another object, and is understood as in some way presenting that other object. As Sartre makes clear in his discussion of mental images, the matter involved in imagining need not be a part of the perceivable material world. Sensations of movement, for example, can play the role of matter for imagination, or 'analogon' as Sartre also calls it.

Sartre's use of this theory to explain the nature of depiction, or pictorial representation, provides an insightful contribution to the discussion of this issue in the philosophy of aesthetics. His discussion encompasses photographs, portraits, caricatures and schematic line drawings, and their relations to impersonations and images seen in patterns. This broad purview allows for a rich and detailed description of depiction. The nature of depiction is, perhaps surprisingly, very puzzling. A natural thought is that it might simply be a matter of resemblance. A landscape painting depicts a particular landscape, the thought runs, by sharing its arrangement of shapes and colours with that landscape at a particular time. Similarly, a picture of the grim reaper may share significant visual properties with the way the grim reaper is classically described as looking. And a picture may depict a horse without depicting any horse in particular by displaying significant visual properties shared by all, most, or paradigm cases of, horses.

This thought, however, is fraught with difficulties. One is that resemblance is a symmetric relation, so if an artist's self-portrait resembles that artist, then the artist resembles the self-portrait. But since the artist does not depict the self-portrait, depiction is not symmetric. Similarly, resemblance is reflexive where depiction is not: every picture resembles but does not depict itself. In fact, it is not even obvious that a picture could ever depict the thing that it will always most closely resemble: if you were to draw a picture that depicted only itself, what would it look like? A further difficulty arises with specifying the respects in which a depiction resembles the depicted. A picture of a café may

be grainy and monochrome, but the café may not. A photograph of an actor may be glossy and two-dimensional, but the actor may not. At least, not literally. Etchings, woodcuts, caricatures and schematic line drawings may have very little in common with the things they depict, and may differ from them in a great many respects. A depiction need share neither shape, nor colour, nor texture, it seems, with the thing it depicts.

These difficulties seem to suggest that it is a mistake to think of pictorial representation purely in terms of a relation between depiction and depicted. Resemblance is such a relation, which seems to hold independently of the thoughts and attitudes of the viewer. Linguistic representation, on the other hand, seems to be a matter of convention. Words and sentences represent what they represent in virtue of decisions and practices tacitly agreed upon by members of a particular linguistic community. Perhaps depiction should also be understood as conventional. Nelson Goodman has provided this kind of theory of depiction. His theory is that pictorial representation consists in systems of arbitrary but agreed symbols that, unlike linguistic systems, are such that even the slightest alteration to a visible symbol can make a difference to what it represents. So where the font or colour of a printed sentence make no difference to what that sentence represents, any alteration in a colour or shape on the surface of a canvas may affect how the depicted scene is represented as being. But as with languages, different pictorial systems can represent the same object or scene in different ways. The differences between cubist painting and black-and-white photography, for example, are akin to those between English and French: representations from each system can be equally adequate, but they rest on different conventions. Pictures that we find 'realistic' are simply those we can read most fluently.<sup>1</sup>

One source of unease about Goodman's theory is that it does not seem to take into account the visual nature of what is depicted. The theory seems to allow that just about anything, no matter how abstract, can be depicted. Of course, graphs might be described as pictures of abstract facts, but the kind of depiction we are concerned with here is one that seems to make the depicted object in some way present to the viewer, although not necessarily in such a way that the viewer mistakes the picture for the depicted object. This may underlie the natural thought that depiction is a matter of resemblance: the picture must in some way look as the depicted object looks. A second source of unease might be that in resting on the notion of convention, Goodman's theory makes depiction too arbitrary. Conventions need have no rationale apart from the rationale of having a convention. It does not matter whether we drive on the left or the right side of the road, so long as we all do the same (on a given set of roads). But presumably the reason we find yellow pictures of bananas more realistic than blue ones is not that we are used to depictions of them being yellow, or that we have all tacitly agreed to represent them



using yellow, but that bananas themselves are generally yellow. Again, this seems to indicate some resemblance between the visual nature of the depiction and that of the depicted.

Goodman's emphasis on public conventions might also be criticized for underplaying the personal nature of at least some experiences of pictures. In his book on photography, dedicated 'in homage to' Sartre's *The Imaginary*, Roland Barthes describes finding a photograph of his recently deceased mother taken when she was a child. 'In this little girl's image I saw the kindness that had formed her being', he writes. This kindness 'belonged to no system . . . I could not define it better than by this feature (among others): that during the whole of our life together, she never made a single "observation"'. This extreme and particular circumstance, so abstract in relation to an image, was nevertheless present in the face revealed in the photograph I had just discovered.<sup>12</sup> If Barthes is right to describe this kindness as present for him in the depiction, then it seems that depiction cannot just be a matter of public convention. The kindness depicted seems so abstract and detailed that no system of visual conventions could be so fine-grained as to capture it. And it seems, moreover, that it would require a particular knowledge of the woman in the picture to recognize it.

Sartre's theory is that depiction results from a combination of resemblance and the response this elicits in the viewer. He distinguishes pictures from signs on the grounds that signs need bear no visual similarity to the objects they signify. But the visual similarity between a picture and the object it depicts can be very slight indeed. A portrait or photograph resembles the person it depicts in respect of shape and perhaps also colour or patterns of light and dark. This resemblance, argues Sartre, stimulates an affective response similar to the response that would be stimulated by the presence of the person depicted. This affective response endows the picture with the same sense that the person depicted would have for the viewer. This explains why the same portrait or photograph can have different qualities for different viewers, and also why the same viewer might have different reactions to portraits or photographs that capture different expressions of the same subject. It explains, moreover, how a person can be presented through a portrait or photograph: endowing the pictorial matter with the affective sense of the person depicted gives, in conjunction with knowledge about that person, something of the feeling of being in that person's presence. This claim, of course, need not be restricted to paintings and photographs of people. So long as it is accepted that our experience of landscapes – and indeed all our visual experience – is suffused with beliefs and affections, then our experiences of paintings and photographs can in principle be suffused with the beliefs and affections normally associated with what they depict, or with things relevantly similar to what they depict.

This theory accommodates the intuitive appeal of the idea that depiction involves resemblance. But its emphasis on the viewer's response averts the difficulties of the simple resemblance idea. Similarly, it accommodates the thought that depiction crucially involves the response of the viewer, while avoiding the problems that beset Goodman's theory that depiction is purely a matter of convention. But this theory will not be enough to account for pictures that are very thin on detail, such as schematic line drawings.

This is why Sartre does not restrict the form of imaginative experience to knowledge and affective response, but adds that kinaesthetic sensations of bodily movement also play a role. Looking at a line drawing of a face, for example, the movements of our eyes following a line from one end to the other gives that line the sense of a nose, the movement away from the top of that line gives another line the sense of an eyebrow. Once the lines have this sense, they can operate as an analogon for a face, as matter for the image of a face. Awareness of eye movements also accounts for our ability to form images on the basis of arabesques on wallpaper, random patterns of spots on walls, patterns in flames or in clouds, and explains why we can sometimes see a face in the moon. The movements of our eyes along and around such patterns endows aspects of them with the same vectorial sense as familiar perceivable objects, and the patterns so organized can then function as matter for imaginative experiences. Sartre applies this theory to the puzzling phenomenon of hypnagogic imagery, images one can be aware of when falling asleep. In this case, he argues, the basis of the matter for the imaginative act is provided by phosphenes, or entoptic lights, which are patterns of light inside the eyeballs. In this case, however, the eyes cannot move along or around these patterns of light, since the lights are in the eyeballs and hence move with them. In so moving, however, phosphenes leave trails of light behind them, and these trails of light along with sensations of eye movement provide the analogon for imagining.

Depiction, then, is for Sartre a matter of animating an analogon, or representative matter, on the basis of our knowledge and our affective responses. In cases of portraits and photographs, the analogon is already constructed for the viewer. In the case of less rich, more suggestive depictions, and in cases where pictures are seen in patterns not designed for this purpose, the analogon is constructed by the viewer's awareness of lines and patterns and of eye movements in relation to those lines and patterns.

Sartre extends this account of imaginative consciousness to our aesthetic experiences of watching plays and reading novels. In the case of plays, the imaginative apprehension of the scenes cannot be explained only in terms of the resemblance between the scenes and what they represent. An author's description of a fictional character need not be so detailed as to

allow resemblance between a particular actor, however dressed, and that character, and anyway the audience does not need to be familiar with the author's description. So while cardboard trees on a stage resemble real trees, not all aspects of the audience's imaginative engagement with a play can be stimulated by resemblance. Sartre addresses this problem when he discusses how Franconay, a short, plump, dark-haired woman, can successfully impersonate Maurice Chevalier, a tall, thin, light-haired man. He relies here on his distinction between signs and pictures. Signs, such as words, need not resemble what they signify. When Franconay dons a straw hat at a rakish angle, this signifies Maurice Chevalier, which evokes in the audience knowledge and affective responses appropriate to Maurice Chevalier, allowing the audience to imagine Maurice Chevalier through Franconay. Similarly, the setting, title, programme notes, and the ways the actors address one another on stage are signs on the basis of which the audience imagine the characters through the actors. The knowledge and affective responses involved largely result from general experience of life, but may also result from the play itself, accumulating as the story develops, or from previous acquaintance with the play. But the bodies of impersonators and actors become analogons by means of signification, not resemblance.

This theory can be extended to film and television. The difference here, of course, is that it is not bodies of actors that function as analogons but coloured or monochrome patterns of shapes on a screen. But can the theory be extended to reading? If a picture paints a thousand words, can a thousand words paint a picture? Sartre seems to think so. He argues that in the imaginative experience of reading a novel, the words cease to play the straightforward role of signs. Once the reader has understood the signs, they become suffused with the reader's background knowledge of what they signify and become analogons for imagination. Through the phrase 'Pierre's office', for example, the reader may imagine an office in a particular location, with a particular layout, as described earlier in the novel. Through imaginative engagement with the words, that is, the reader may experience the world they describe.

In this way, Sartre aims to present a unified theory of aesthetic appreciation as imaginative experience. The sensory pleasure gained from arrangements of colours and shapes on a canvas, he argues, should not be confused with the aesthetic pleasure gained from experiencing an imaginary object through the canvas. The artist presents the audience with an analogon, a canvas, through which the audience can imaginatively apprehend the aesthetic object itself. Similarly, the novelist presents the audience with a book, through which an aesthetic object can be imaginatively apprehended; and a performance of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony is an analogon through which the audience can imagine the symphony itself.

This position affords interesting views of various problems in aesthetics. Take, for example, the issue of our emotional involvement with fiction. How can we be moved by the fate of Anna Karenina? There are various ways of understanding this question, such as whether it is rational to be so moved, or how it is psychologically possible to be so moved, but the core of the issue is that we are aware that fictional characters are fictional, that the events that move us are imaginary and not real, and yet we are still moved. It cannot simply be that we suspend our disbelief and consider the fictional scenes of films, plays, and novels as though they were real, for we do not engage with fictional events as though they were real: we do not, for example, try to intervene in the action, or call the police when a character is murdered, or run screaming when a monster appears. Sartre's theory of the nature of imagination provides a way of answering this question. Our emotional involvement with fiction seems puzzling because it seems as though our emotions are reactions to the scenes that we imagine and that we are aware of as imaginary. But if Sartre is right, this puzzlement is based on a misunderstanding of the relation between imagination and affection. If it is rather that our affections are constitutive of our imagining the tribulations of Anna Karenina, then this emotional involvement is perfectly compatible with understanding the imaginary to be imaginary. In fact, it is required for it.<sup>3</sup>

This view of aesthetic experience also grounds Sartre's later insistence, in *What is Literature?*, that writers can only ever address their contemporaries, whether they realize this or not. Reading is an imaginative act, involving knowledge and affectivity. The writer must therefore suppose certain areas of knowledge and certain kinds of affective reaction on the part of the reader. Writer and reader must share a common context. Later readers might engage with the text in the way the writer intended, but this can only be fortuitous: the writer cannot foresee cultural changes that might prevent this.<sup>4</sup> Although Sartre makes this point only with reference to literature, it can be extended to other arts. The sounds of rustic bagpipes and shepherd flutes would have been familiar to eighteenth-century audiences. Oboe and flute passages in the works of Bach and Handel, therefore, would have had rustic connotations for their first audiences. Although we might be able to learn about these connotations, our lack of familiarity with rustic bagpipes and shepherd flutes prevents us from imaginatively engaging with those passages in the way that eighteenth-century audiences would have done.

Aesthetics aside, Sartre devotes much of the book to developing aspects of his theory of imaginative engagement with pictures, patterns, words, and sounds into a theory of mental images formed without the aid of such props. Daydreaming, memory recall, or simply considering how something might look can all involve visualizing or picturing something, and running through a tune in one's head might be thought to involve an auditory version of the

same ability. But how should this ability be understood? The history of philosophy and psychology offers us two basic models of the visual case. On the *pictorial* model, forming a mental image is simply conjuring up a picture. So when you form an image of the Panthéon in Paris, for example, you are aware of a mental picture of the Panthéon. On the *experiential* model, forming a mental image is simply bringing about an experience subjectively similar in relevant ways to perceiving the imaged object. So when you form an image of the Panthéon, you have an experience like that of seeing the Panthéon.

Sartre presents important criticisms of both of these models, as well as an interesting alternative. But he does not clearly distinguish the pictorial and the experiential models that he attacks. This is probably because in the three hundred years preceding the publication of *The Imaginary*, perception itself was generally understood as involving mental pictures. On such a view, to say that mental imagery consists in contemplating mental pictures is to say that it is akin to perceptual experience, and vice versa. This is the view that Sartre calls 'the illusion of immanence'. The difference between perception and imagination, according to the illusion of immanence, consists in the reason the picture appeared, the relation between the picture and the world beyond the mind, and perhaps the vivacity of the picture. Throughout *The Imaginary*, Sartre is concerned not only to refute this view of the mind, but also to understand the pressures that have pushed theorists in its direction. The acceptability of an alternative model will, at least in part, be a function of how well it dissipates these pressures or can explain why they should be resisted.

Although Sartre does not distinguish the pictorial and experiential models of imagery, however, we should do so. After all, one might think that imagery involves pictures where perception does not, or think that neither imagery nor perception involve pictures but are alike in some other important respects. One reason to reject the pictorial model is that it is based on an overly simplistic understanding of the nature of depiction. It seems to suppose that being faced with a mental picture is enough to explain our imaginative relation to the thing that is depicted. But, as we have seen, depiction is not so simple. In fact, depiction cannot be explained without reference to the kind of experience involved in looking at the picture. Once this kind of experience has been delineated – as Sartre is aware – the resources for a theory of mental imagery are in place without the need to postulate mental pictures. Mental imagery, for Sartre, involves the same kind of experience as is involved in looking at photographs and portraits, but does not involve anything relevantly similar to a photograph or a portrait, mental or otherwise.

Some of the points that Sartre makes against the 'illusion of immanence' can be directed at the experiential model. These points are among the most interesting and insightful observations on the nature of imagination made in

this book, or anywhere else for that matter. One fundamental difference between perception and imagination, argues Sartre, is that perception involves observation of the object perceived, whereas imagination involves only 'quasi-observation'. An imagined object, like a perceived object, is presented in profile. To visualize a cube is not to visualize all six faces of it together, but rather to visualize how it might look from a particular angle. Unlike perception, however, there is nothing that can be discovered about the object as it is imaged. It is immediately certain that what I am visualising is a cube, and not for example some trick object that merely looks like a cube from this angle. There is always more to the perceived object than we can see, but imagination shares with conceptual thought the trait of its object having all and only the properties that it is presented as having. In perception, knowledge of the object is consequent upon the experience of it, whereas in imagination knowledge is prior to experience. You cannot learn how many columns support the pediment of the Panthéon in Paris, he points out, just by forming a mental image of the Panthéon. Your image will have the number of columns you believe the Panthéon to have, and may even have an indeterminate number of columns. Although Sartre always refers to 'knowledge' as a component of imaginative experience, it seems that the concept he requires is belief or opinion. You can know only what is the case, but you can form images on the basis of false beliefs. Your image can still be of the Panthéon even if it does not show eighteen columns supporting the pediment.

A related distinction between perception and imagination is that perceived objects can bear relations to one another independently of whether the perceiver is aware of those relations. But in imagination, objects are related in all and only the ways they are imagined to be related. Some of René Magritte's paintings are based on this phenomenon. His *Personal Values*, for example, depicts a comb larger than the bed it is resting on, a shaving brush occupying the whole top surface of the wardrobe it is lying on, a match half the length of the bed, and a glass as big as the wardrobe. But it remains indeterminate whether these are giant objects in an ordinary bedroom, ordinary objects in a doll's house, or just a collection of objects represented without any intended relations of size. The same painting can be seen in any of these ways, depending on the attitude of the viewer. Similarly, you can form a mental image of a banana next to a banana-sized model of the Eiffel Tower and you can form a different image of a giant banana the same size as the Eiffel Tower and standing next to it. The visual aspect of these two experiences can be exactly the same. So you cannot tell by observation whether you are imagining a souvenir in a fruit bowl or a giant banana in Paris. But imagining one is not the same as imagining the other. So mental images include aspects that are not purely visual, and which cannot be discerned by inspecting the visual aspect.

Thus, in imagination the relations between objects are stipulated, where in perception they are discovered.

So the experiential model is no more acceptable than the pictorial: the kind of experience involved in mental imagery is different from that involved in perception. Yet mental imagery, unlike conceptual thought, makes its object seem in some way *present*, not merely indicated. Sartre argues that this presence is due to mental imagery involving the same kind of experience as depiction, a bestowal of sense that specifies an object other than the matter it is bestowed on. The matter in mental imagery, however, is not a perceivable part of the material world.

Herein lies a methodological issue for Sartre. His discussions of the relation between form and matter in aesthetic experiences are based on phenomenological description. They are based, that is, on first-personal reflection on the nature of the experiences under discussion. The matter of the experience in these cases is easily discernible. A portrait or photograph, for example, can be seen for itself. In the case of mental imagery, however, there is no obviously discernible matter. Sartre therefore consults the findings of experimental psychology in order to discern the matter involved in mental imagery. But he does not simply accept the pronouncements of psychologists. Rather, he critiques their experiments in the light of his phenomenological findings. For experimental data to be acceptable, the experiments must not have presupposed a conception of imagination at odds with the data of phenomenology. Theories based on acceptable experimental data, moreover, will never be more than probable: there will always be other possible ways of accounting for the same data. But phenomenological description, Sartre believes, is certain. This relationship between first-person description and third-person experimentation is the 'phenomenological psychology' mentioned in the book's subtitle, and runs throughout the work.

On the basis of a critical review of experimental psychological literature, Sartre concludes that the matter involved in mental imagery is constructed out of purely subjective feelings. In some cases, this matter can be provided by affective feelings that you have towards the object or person to be imagined. Knowledge of (or beliefs or opinions about) this object or person then animates these feelings, giving them the sense of the presence of the object or person felt about. But in cases where movement or a specific visual shape is to be imagined, there may be no relevant affections. Sartre draws here on his analysis of schematic line drawings and images seen on the basis of patterns. The formation of some mental images involves bodily movement, and the kinaesthetic sensation of this movement provides the matter for the act. Try, for example, to form an image of a garden swing, or of the pendulum of a clock swinging to and fro. Your act of imagining, according to Sartre, will have involved some bodily movement on your part, however slight. Most

probably, he claims, it will have been eye movement. The image was formed by giving the sensation of eye movement the sense of following a swing or pendulum. You can to some extent assess this claim for yourself. Try the experiment again, this time focusing your eyes on the page number on this page. Could you form a moving image? If so, did your eyes leave the page number as the image began to move? Or did any other part of your body move?<sup>5</sup>

The nature of mental imagery is an interesting issue in the philosophy of mind in its own right. But it may also have ramifications elsewhere. In particular, if hallucination can be understood as a form of imagination, as Sartre argues that it can, then the theory of imagination might have important ramifications for the theory of perception. The central issue in the philosophy of perception is the relation between perceptual experience and the world that it is experience of. How does perception provide us with knowledge? Is perceptual experience the direct manifestation of our surroundings, or is it simply grounds for inferences about those surroundings?

Those who claim that perceptual experience does not directly reveal the world tend to argue that the experience involved in perception is the same as can be involved in hallucination and so cannot reveal the world as it is. If the experience I have when I see a tree, for example, is an experience I could have while hallucinating, then that experience cannot itself reveal the tree to me. At best, if I also believe that I am awake and probably not hallucinating, then the experience gives me reason to think that there is a tree in front of me. Those who oppose this view, on the other hand, argue that if experience falls short of the world in this way, then we have no way of knowing what the world is really like. Beyond the veil of our experiences, they argue, could lie just about anything, so long as it accounts for the regularity and predictability of those experiences. Not only that, but it is difficult to see how our ordinary concepts of worldly objects, such as 'rainbow', 'donkey', and 'carburettor', can have any meaning unless they gain their meaning from actual or potential experiences of rainbows, donkeys, and carburettors.<sup>6</sup>

If Sartre is right that hallucination is a form of imagination, and the experience involved in imagination is different in kind from that involved in perception, then perception and hallucination do not involve the same kind of experience. The claim that perception involves the direct manifestation of the world then seems more acceptable. Of course, if Sartre's theory of imagination itself turns out to be in need of revision, then so will any related theory of hallucination. There is one immediate difficulty, however, that must be obviated. It appears to be characteristic of hallucinations that they seem like perceptions. Imagination, on the other hand, is typically experienced as a creative act. Images may arise unbidden, of course, but they are not mistaken for perceptions.



Sartre does not deny this aspect of imagination. In fact, he gives it a central role in his theory. Where perception involves taking an object to be real and present, he claims, imagination ‘posits its object as a nothingness’. This means that the object is never posited as present. An imagined object can be posited as elsewhere, meaning existent but not present, as for example when I imagine the surface of the planet Mars. Or it can be posited as nonexistent, as when I imagine a unicorn, knowing that there are no unicorns. Or it can be posited simply as absent, without any commitment either to its existence elsewhere or to its nonexistence, as I might imagine a car that runs on water, without any belief about whether there are such things but believing nonetheless that there is not one present to me. Or, finally, it might simply not be imagined without any commitment to its existence, presence, or absence, as for example I might imagine a tree in some detail without any commitment to whether there is or is not any such tree in front of me or anywhere else. In none of these cases is the imagined object taken to be a present object tracked by experience.

Sartre adds to this that imagination is distinguished from perception by a feeling of spontaneity. Both perception and imagination include ‘nonthetic’ awareness of the kind of experience involved, and so the two seem different to the subject. Perceptual experience seems like a response to independent objects presented to it, argues Sartre, whereas imagination seems creative in relation to its object. He describes this feeling of spontaneity as a ‘counterpart’ of the fact that imagination posits its object as a nothingness. But there are three possible readings of this claim. It could mean that the sense of the imagined object as a nothingness indicates that it is being imagined, not perceived. Or it could mean that the object is posited as a nothingness precisely because the subject is aware of the creative spontaneity of the experience. Finally, it could simply mean that the subject has ‘nonthetic’ awareness of the structure of the imaging consciousness, and this structure is responsible for the object being posited as a nothingness.

So Sartre holds that hallucinations and dreams are imaginative experiences whilst also holding that imaginative experiences cannot be confused for perceptual ones. How, then, does he account for the fact that hallucinations and dreams can involve behaviour that seems appropriate to believing that the hallucinated or dreamed events are real? Such behaviour, he argues, does not arise from mistaking the imaginary for the real, but from taking up a new attitude towards the imaginary. This is imaginary behaviour with imaginary beliefs and imaginary feelings, a kind of make-believe. Sartre dramatizes this idea in his play *The Condemned of Altona* (or *Loser Wins*).<sup>7</sup> The central character, Franz Gerlach, has kept himself locked in the attic of his father’s house for thirteen years since fighting for the Nazis on the Russian front. He imagines that his beloved Germany has gone to rack and ruin, and records speech after