

the review of  
**metaphysics**

*a philosophical quarterly*

---

Imagining and Remembering

Author(s): Edward S. Casey

Source: *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Dec., 1977), pp. 187-209

Published by: [Philosophy Education Society Inc.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20127046>

Accessed: 29/05/2014 11:02

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



*Philosophy Education Society Inc.* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Review of Metaphysics*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## ARTICLES

### IMAGINING AND REMEMBERING

EDWARD S. CASEY

#### I

IMAGINING and remembering, two of the most frequent and fundamental acts of mind, have long been unwelcome guests in most of the many mansions of philosophy. When not simply ignored or overlooked, they have been considered only to be dismissed. This is above all true of imagination, as first becomes evident in Plato's view that the art of making exact images (*eikastikē*) tends to degenerate into the making of mere semblances (*phantastikē*). Kant, despite the importance he gives to imagination in the first edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, nevertheless considers images to be lowly "monograms" that are unruly and thus untrustworthy. In more recent times, Sartre, who is nearly as ambivalent as Kant on the subject, has stressed imagination's "essential poverty"—its character as "debased thought"—while Ryle, in covert counterpoint, has attempted to conceive imagining as parody and pretense: as mere make-believe.<sup>1</sup>

In all such questioning of the legitimacy and cognitive value of imagination, memory is willy-nilly implicated as well. This is not only because memory is so frequently confined to a passively reproductive function of low epistemic status. It is also because remembering is held to be intrinsically imagistic in nature; it takes place, according to a widely accepted view, by the animation of what are significantly called "memory images." As Aristotle said, launching a whole tradition, remembering is "the having of an image regarded as a copy of that of which it is an image."<sup>2</sup> Quite apart from the special problems

---

<sup>1</sup> See Plato, *Republic*, 595a–602b, and *Sophist*, 235d–236c, 264b–d; Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, A 570–B 598; Sartre, *Psychology of Imagination* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), pp. 11, 19, 143–53, and 170; Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1949), pp. 245–79.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*, 451a 15–16; see also 450a 11: "Memory, even the memory of objects of thought, is not without an image." Here and below I use Richard Sorabji's translation in his *Aristotle on Memory* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1972).

arising from a copy theory of memory, what is striking in Aristotle's position is the way in which he thrusts imagining and remembering together: "it is the objects of imagination that are remembered in their own right."<sup>3</sup> After Aristotle, the conception of imagination and memory as twin faculties, as the Dioscuri of mind, became a commonplace of medieval and Renaissance thought, and Hobbes could even claim that "Imagination and Memory are but one thing, which for divers considerations hath divers names."<sup>4</sup> This statement is certainly false, but it is also highly revealing: for imagination and memory *might as well be the same thing* in the eyes of an entire philosophical tradition which has systematically downplayed the significance of both, scarcely deigning to notice their existence and then only to consider them imperialistically as mere outposts or offshoots of some more primordial act.

Perception, sensory perception in particular, has characteristically been regarded as this more primordial act—as the act of acts, from which all other acts of mind are seen to stem. The primacy of perception is a basic tenet of Western philosophy—at many points *the* basic tenet—and when Aristotle observes nonchalantly that "it is apparent, then, to which part of the soul memory belongs, namely, the same [primary perceptual] part as that to which imagination belongs,"<sup>5</sup> he is only foreshadowing Merleau-Ponty's view that imagining, and *a fortiori* remembering, are forms of "teleperception," that is, diluted and extended modes of perceiving.<sup>6</sup> Hume, in this context a close cousin of both Aristotle and Merleau-Ponty, holds that imagination and memory are to be distinguished mainly by their relative "vivacity," a criterion itself borrowed from the analysis of sensory perception. And the latter is said to be the origin and exclusive source of imagination and memory alike: "both these faculties borrow their simple ideas from impressions, and can never go beyond these original perceptions."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 450 a 24–5.

<sup>4</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Gretna, LA: Pelican, 1968), p. 89.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*, 450a 22. Cf. also *ibid.*, 451a 17–18 and *De Anima*, 428b 32–3. (The term "primary perceptual part" is Aristotle's own.)

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 311.

<sup>7</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 85. At pp. 8–9, Hume proposes another

We may take this familiar statement of Hume's as emblematic of what many mainstream Western philosophers have maintained, implicitly or explicitly, concerning the proper place of imagining and remembering within the mind. The gist of their thinking may be summed up in two closely correlated propositions:

*Proposition #1.* Imagining and remembering have approximately or even exactly equivalent standing in the mind; if they are not in fact the same act viewed in different respects, they are at least comparable in epistemic status and in their basic operations.

*Proposition #2.* Both are strictly derivative from sensory perception, which provides them with all of their content.

The two propositions are closely linked because to assert that imagining and remembering stem straight from perception is *ipso facto* to give the two acts an equivalent and equally subordinate, position *vis-à-vis* their parent act. If each is a direct derivative of perception, each may be regarded as a form of what Hobbes called "decaying sense." To differentiate them further becomes a matter of nuance, depending merely on whether we wish to stress the factor of "decay" or not.<sup>8</sup>

Just here a series of questions arises. What if the two acts are neither directly derivative from perception nor basically similar to each other? What if, on the contrary, they are essentially *dissimilar* in structure and operation, and quite distinguishable from perception as well? And what if, despite their dissimilarity (and perhaps even because of it), they prove to be part of the very fabric of human experience—including perceptual experience itself? It is to these questions that I wish to address myself in this essay.

## II

First of all, is it the case that, as proposition #2 asserts, imagining and remembering are "strictly derivative from sensory per-

---

basis of distinction between imagination and memory, to wit, that the "order and form" of the original impressions is retained in memory alone; but he rejects this criterion later on p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 89: "this *decaying sense*, when wee would express the thing it self . . . wee call *Imagination* . . . . But when we would express the *decay* and signifie that the Sense is fading, old, and past, it is called *Memory*." Hume discusses the factor of decay in the *Treatise* on pp. 85–6.

ception, which provides them with all of their content"? This is doubtful. It is one thing to argue that perception is *presupposed* by other cognitive activities and quite another to claim that the latter ineluctably draw their entire content from previous perceivings. It may certainly be admitted that perception is a general precondition of other, perhaps even of all, acts of mind: if we were not perceivers, we could not also be imaginers, rememberers, or even thinkers. To be-in-the-world at all, even in the most minimally responsive way, is to be there as perceivers, as differentially sentient beings.

But to grant the basic indispensability of perception—its *sine qua non* status in human experience—is not thereby to be committed to the much more extreme claim set forth in proposition #2. On closer inspection, this claim breaks down into two sub-theses:

- (a) Perception is the *specific cause* of "postperceptual" acts such as imagining and remembering (this is implicit in the notion of derivation itself).
- (b) Perception is the *unique source* of content for these two acts.

Let us examine each of these sub-theses briefly and with special reference to imagining and remembering. To find them problematic will be to question the fundamental assumption of the primacy of perception on which they are ultimately based.

(a) To hold that an act of perception is the specific cause of another act is to maintain either that the perceptual act is the first member of a series of causally concatenated acts giving rise to the other act or that it is the precipitating factor immediately preceding the latter. But we must ask at once: is one or the other of these two forms of causal precedence always at work in actual instances of imagining and remembering? Surely I can imagine or remember in such a way and at such a time that my act is *not* precipitated by some particular perceptual experience either directly or through a series of intermediary causal links. Indeed, even when I *am* able to trace my present imagining or remembering back to an initial perception, this perception does not necessarily serve as a *cause* of my contemporary experience: it may only set the stage for it by establishing its context or primary parameters.

(b) It is even more manifest that former perceptions are not the sole source of content for acts of imagining and remembering. Sometimes, of course, they are such a source (just as they are also sometimes causally efficacious in their regard): for example, in imagining a classically conceived centaur on the basis of illustrations in myth-

ology books or in remembering what one's childhood home looked like. At other times, however, this is simply not so: I can imagine a creature I have never perceived before, and not merely as a composite of already perceived parts (as on the empiricist model); likewise, I can remember such non-perceptual items as a former thought, an emotion, even a prior memory. Given this essential independence of imagined and remembered contents from previously perceived content, it is mistaken to claim, as does Hume, that all imagining (and, consequently, all remembering) "amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience."<sup>9</sup> Hume himself cites a critical exception to his rule of strict derivation—the famous missing shade of blue<sup>10</sup>—and if this single exception is allowed many more are possible. Thus the second of the sub-theses of proposition #2 survives scrutiny no better than the first, and we are forced to reject the proposition as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

### III

If imagining and remembering are therefore to be regarded as noncontinuous with perceiving in terms of causation and content, how are they to be viewed *vis-à-vis* one another? So far, we have lumped them together much as the tradition has done, as if to endorse Vico's bald Hobbesian declaration that "memory is the same as imagination."<sup>12</sup> To espouse such a view is to subscribe to proposition #1, namely, that the two acts "have approximately or even exactly equivalent standing in the mind; if they are not in fact the same act viewed in different respects, they are at least comparable in epistemic status and in their basic operations." In questioning

<sup>9</sup> Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. C. W. Hendel (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955), p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Nor can we adopt the milder version of this proposition, according to which we always imagine or remember things which, if not actually perceived before, *could have been*. For we can very well imagine how to think a certain thought or remember how it was to feel in such and such a way, where in neither case is the content we imagine or remember the sort of thing that is even in principle subject to sensory perception.

<sup>12</sup> Vico, *The New Science*, trans. T. G. Bergin and M. H. Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 313. Cf. also p. 75 ("imagination is nothing but extended or compounded memory") and p. 264 ("imagination is nothing but the springing up again of reminiscences").

this claim, we need not go to the opposite extreme and concur with William Blake that “imagination has *nothing* to do with memory.”<sup>13</sup> But we do need to acknowledge some of the fundamental differences between the two acts—differences that prevent us from altogether assimilating one to the other. Four such differences merit mention here:<sup>14</sup>

First of all, in remembering proper or “recollection,” we normally proceed by *positing* the former existence or occurrence of whatever it is that we are recalling: we impute to what we recollect a unique (though not necessarily specified) temporal position in the past. No such positing activity is intrinsic to imagining, in which we may entertain what we imagine as something that indifferently might appear, arise, or happen at *any* given time or place—or even at no given time or place at all. Imagining is in this respect non-positing in nature, and involves an attitude of sheer supposal that contrasts with the committed character of remembering—committed precisely to stationing its content at some particular point in past experience.

A second and closely related difference between imagining and remembering is found in the factor of *familiarity*. Basic to remembering, but not to imagining, is the sense of being already acquainted with what we remember. The content of memory not only forms part of *the* past but part of *our own* past; and as such it is something with which we are familiar, however partially or imperfectly. In contrast with this, we are able to imagine objects and situations with which we are quite unfamiliar. The Romantics and the surrealists, for all their excesses, were right in this regard: imagining may herald the advent of the genuinely new in our experience, of what has never before been projected or contemplated by us.

Thirdly, memories are inherently *corrigible*; they may present as having happened what did not in fact happen (or happened differently); they can deny that something happened when in fact it did, and in still other ways mislead us concerning our own previous experience. Imagining, on the other hand, is incapable of misleading us in this respect; not purporting to depict something as it really

---

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Crabb Robinson’s diary as reprinted in Arthur Symons, *William Blake* (New York: Dutton, 1907), p. 301. My italics.

<sup>14</sup> For a more complete discussion, see my “Comparative Phenomenology of Mental Activity: Memory, Hallucination, and Fantasy Contrasted with Imagination,” *Research in Phenomenology*, 6 (1976).

is or was (though often projecting what might be or might have been), it cannot be called to account for *misdepicting* it either. Imagining is thus, and to this extent, non-corrigible.

Finally, imagining and remembering diverge from each other with regard to their fundamental *act-forms*. Imagining, as I have attempted to show elsewhere,<sup>15</sup> has three basic forms: imaging (in which quasi-sensuous content is entertained in the guise of simple objects or events), imagining-that (in which states of affairs, quasi-sensuous or not sensuous at all, are envisioned), and imagining-how (wherein we project a situation in which we are ourselves actively involved). Remembering, contrastingly, has more than three major forms. There is, to begin with, remembering in the form of contemplating a simple object or event as past (this corresponds to imaging), and there are also frequent instances of remembering-how (something was done or experienced) and of remembering-that (such and such occurred). But in addition we can remember *to do X or Y* (including remember to remember), and we can also remember *on the occasion of* (my birthday, my return home, etc.). None of these latter forms of activity has a direct analogue in imaginative experience, which is in this respect at least a less luxuriant phenomenon. It is almost as if the intrinsically limited content of memory (limited precisely to experiences posited as past) has led, by way of compensation, to a greater multiplicity of act-forms by which to diversify the presentation of this content.

#### IV

Now that imagining and remembering have been seen to be more than mere extensions or modalities of perception and to be demonstrably distinct from each other, we must turn to the still more urgent task of demonstrating that the two acts are fundamental, and not merely adventitious, forms of mental life. To show this is to call into question the widespread tendency, evident in philosophical theorizing and in common sense alike, that seeks to belittle the significance of imagination and memory—to trivialize them by supposing that they perform easily eliminable or transferable roles within the economy of mentation: we were “just imagining” or “only remi-

---

<sup>15</sup> *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), ch. 2.

niscing,” we sometimes say, as if we were not doing anything of any real consequence.

Against such a disparaging view, it would not be difficult to cite various ways in which imagining and remembering, taken separately, are each of importance in human experience. On the one hand, what Dewey called “dramatic rehearsal in imagination”<sup>16</sup> is crucial to such diverse activities as artistic creation and ethical reflection (in both of which the possible results of actions need to be foreseen). On the other hand, remembering is essential to our very sense of personal identity—of persistence over time as continuously the same person or self.<sup>17</sup> But instead of discussing such familiar instances, I want to consider a comparatively neglected set of cases. In these, the two acts acquire significance not in isolation from each other but precisely in their *conjoint* action. In other words, I shall take the “and” in the title of this essay quite seriously by inquiring into various ways in which imagining-*and*-remembering functions as a single (though often internally complex) unit of mental activity.

We may begin by distinguishing between two different sorts of cases in point: contingent and non-contingent collaboration. In contingent collaboration, the conjunction of imagining and remembering is a possible but not an inherent or required feature. Everyday examples are found in the mixed modes of consciousness wherein we spontaneously combine imagining and remembering to form an aggregate act: as when I remember myself as a small boy imagining how delightful it would be to be an adult—for you could then stop the car wherever you desired and collect roadside rocks to your heart’s content. Here an act of imagining becomes the content of an act of remembering. The converse is also possible, since I can very well imagine myself remembering any number of things, including remembering to imagine myself remembering . . . to imagine myself remembering. And so on.

Such contingent (and often quite trivial) combinations nevertheless make manifest the mutual inclusiveness and co-iterability of the

---

<sup>16</sup> John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: Random House, 1957), pp. 190–91.

<sup>17</sup> On the relationship between memory and personal identity, see R. S. Benjamin, “Remembering” in D. F. Gustafson, ed. *Essays in Philosophical Psychology* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1964), pp. 171–2 and John Perry, ed. *Personal Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), especially Parts II and III.

two acts, their inbuilt co-operativeness. On many occasions, moreover, one act seems designed to solicit the other—to call the other to its aid. What we cannot remember we can try to imagine, and what we cannot imagine we can try to summon up in memory as an analogue from the past. A striking case of such reciprocal solicitation, but one that is no longer contingent in status, is found in the historian's activity of reconstructing past events. It is just because the historian cannot, from his own experience and resources alone, imagine a given past event in full detail that he seeks out the testimony of those who once witnessed it—which is to say, he seeks their rememberings in lieu of his own. Yet precisely because these rememberings are notoriously untrustworthy (frequently being based on what still others remembered or were reported to remember), the historian must correct and supplement them by his own imaginings in the present. Indeed, his imaginings are needed even when his sources *are* to be trusted. For no amount of historical evidence, however copious or firsthand it may be, can restore the past event itself as seen from every significant perspective. It cannot, in particular, incorporate the historian's *own* perspectival position, which has to be imagined *into* the original event. And, still more generally, the historian must imagine how the event as a whole held together and was experienced as a single, datable happening. In the end, what Collingwood terms "the web of imaginative construction"<sup>18</sup> extends to the entirety of each epoch or period studied by the historian and is not limited to his interpolations between attested facts: the "facts" themselves, as reconstructed in his mind, are compounded of imagined and remembered elements, and necessarily so. Even if the historian writes as if he were himself remembering the events he recounts, such quasi-remembering is highly imaginified; it is in fact the product of an extensive collaboration between imagination and memory.

## V

Historical reconstruction represents a relatively conspicuous instance of non-contingent collaboration between imagining and remem-

---

<sup>18</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 244: "The web of imaginative construction is something far more solid and powerful than we have hitherto realized."

bering. In this kind of collaboration, the respective roles of the two acts are not only difficult to disentangle but, more crucially, *each proves to be uneliminable*. Or more exactly: each act is indispensable *in its collaboration with the other*. Each is not just essential but *co-essential*, essential in its very co-ordination with the other. I want now to take up three less obvious but even more exemplary cases of non-contingent collaboration.<sup>19</sup> Two of these, screen memories and dreaming, emerge from a reading of Freud; the third, time-consciousness, is based on the writings of Husserl.

Like historical reconstruction, screen memories concern the past—but this time the remote past of the individual himself. They are those vivid, recurrent, and apparently innocent memories which we seem to recall from earliest childhood. In fact, however, they are not simple, straightforward recollections, but complex combinations of imagined and remembered components in which what we recall (or appear to recall) cloaks phantasies whose naked expression in full consciousness is disallowed. These phantasies are imaginings of scenes of satisfaction which did *not* occur at the time of the remembered event, though they were (and still are) ardently wished for. In Freud's own autobiographical example, the screen memory of stealing flowers from a younger female cousin in a country meadow concealed his longing to “deflower” a peasant girl whom he had met when he returned as an adolescent to the small Moravian town in which he had spent the first few years of his life. It also screened his wish that his family had remained in Moravia, where life seemed easier and simpler than in teeming Vienna.<sup>20</sup> A screen memory

---

<sup>19</sup> Still another case is found in the ancient “art of memory.” Its mnemotechnical method brought together imagination and memory by the use of a set sequence of “places” (e.g., the rooms of a large imaginary building), which were memorized in advance as a basic grid and to which were affixed mental images signifying the items to be remembered. As Frances Yates writes in commentary on Quintillian, “we have to think of the ancient orator as *moving in imagination through his memory building*, drawing from the memorized places the images he has placed on them” (*The Art of Memory* [London: Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1966] p. 3; my italics). Thus the art of memory involved “the use of imagination as a duty” (p. 104), i.e., in a required relationship of the non-contingent sort to be described below. In this relationship, images serve as more than a mere *aide-mémoire*; they are the very foundation of systematic remembering.

<sup>20</sup> I have simplified Freud's account by omitting mention of another part of the same screen memory in which a peasant woman offers a piece

such as this is a vehicle for the fulfillment of phantasy, yet only as covertly contained in a memory. As Freud says, the screen memory “offers phantasy a point of contact—comes, as it were, half way to meet it.”<sup>21</sup> The result is a compromise formation in which the interests of memory and imaginative phantasy alike receive satisfaction. And they do so precisely by colluding with each other. On the one hand, the childhood memory would not have such vivacity, or be so recurrent, were it not for the festering phantasy that has singled it out for special stress. On the other hand, the phantasy in turn needs the memory as a cover (hence the *Deck- of Deckerinnerung*), as a concrete representation that, precisely because of its ostensibly historical character, lends credibility and substance to what is otherwise mere wish, mere imagining. The interaction extends still further. For the memory may itself be modified and even falsified in order to suit the phantasy, retaining just enough of its original content to present itself plausibly as an actual scene from childhood. Thus Freud can conclude in a highly skeptical vein that “it may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all *from* our childhood: memories *relating to* our childhood may be all that we possess.”<sup>22</sup> If this is so, it is due to an intimate and often undetected liaison between imagination and memory, a liaison which serves to reshape continually the apprehension of our personal past.

Dreams are regarded by Freud as comparable to screen memories in important respects.<sup>23</sup> Just as a screen memory is an ambiguous amalgam of actual memories and phantasies, so a dream combines the same two constituents in still another compromise formation. But in dreaming the situation is further complicated by the fact that imagination and memory conjoin on two distinctively

---

of delicious black bread to Freud and his playmates. In Freud’s analysis, the bread symbolizes the bucolic and secure existence which he wished to regain as a young man. See Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), 3: 309–20. (Hereinafter cited as “*SE*.”)

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322; his italics. Freud continues: “our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of arousal, the childhood memories did not, as people are accustomed to say, *emerge*; they were *formed* at that time.” See also *SE* XVII, p. 51.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *SE* XII, p. 148: screen memories “represent the forgotten years of childhood as adequately as the manifest content of a dream represents the dream-thoughts.”

different levels, latent and manifest, thereby producing a *double* commixture of imagistic and remembered elements—much as the full dream is also doubly articulated with regard to its imagistic and signifying elements. A dream is therefore imagined-and-remembered twice over, just as it is also always a twice-told tale. How is this so?

At the latent level of dreams, that of basic wishes or “dream-thoughts,” memory enters in the form of imprints or “traces” left over from experiences of need and its satisfaction in earliest infancy, that is, in a period predating even the origin of screen memories. Freud invokes the questionable notion of memory-trace because he wants to emphasize that we do not remember these archaic experiences as such, in their explicit, fully detailed content; we remember them only engrammatically—schematically, as it were. It is just because of such schematicalness that we must, as adults, *imagine* something specific enough to convert empty traces into the images of an experience of satisfaction repeating, or patterned on, an archaic experience. Such imaginative filling out of memory-traces occurs at the latent level in the form of unconscious phantasy—which is why Freud can say that “the unconscious activity of the imagination has a large share in the construction of the [latent] dream-thoughts.”<sup>24</sup>

The full expression of such activity is accomplished, however, only at the manifest level, i.e., in the “dream scene” that we explicitly experience and recount. Like a screen memory or a neurotic symptom, the manifest dream must manage to bring about the satisfaction of a suppressed wish while at the same time concealing it *as* satisfaction. The means by which this delicate, self-deceiving operation is performed are again both imaginative and mnemonic in character. While the dream scene itself is vividly imagistic, even to the point of hallucinatory intensity,<sup>25</sup> much of the detailed content of the manifest imagery of dreams derives from the “day’s residues,” that is, from the short-term memory of miscellaneous objects and events encountered in the last twenty-four hours or so. Because of their topical and often trivial nature, the day’s residues furnish

---

<sup>24</sup> *SE* V, p. 592.

<sup>25</sup> “What are truly characteristic of dreams are only those elements of their [manifest] content which behave like images . . . dreams *hallucinate* . . . they replace thoughts by hallucinations” (*SE* IV, pp. 49–50; his italics).

an ideal mode of disguise for latent wishes whose satisfaction cannot be expressly represented. Thus one form of residue, the most recent, serves to conceal another form, the original memory-trace underlying unconscious wishes; and the two residues are conjoined by the activity of imagination, first in the guise of unconscious phantasy and then as that type of imagining which shapes the day's residues into the finished facade of the dream. The result is a unique dual collaboration between imagination and memory, which rejoin each other at both latent and manifest levels.

Therefore, when Freud concludes that "our experience in dreams is only a modified kind of imagining made possible by the conditions of the state of sleep,"<sup>26</sup> he might well have added: and also a modified kind of remembering *qua* trace and day residue. Dreaming is a modified and redoubled activity of imagining and remembering—of imagining *by* remembering and of remembering *by* imagining. As Freud's frequently used compound term *Erinnerungsbild*, "mnemic image," suggests, dreaming is a composite act of imagining-*cum*-remembering. But it is a composite act raised to the second power. Without two-tiered memories, dreams would lack both sensory intensity and any basis for drawing upon the dreamer's recent and distant past; and without a shaping and synthesizing imagination at work at both levels of their formation, they would lapse into a mere mishmash of rememberings.

## VI

When we come to time-consciousness, we encounter a collaboration between imagining and remembering that is not only non-contingent but continuously operative. Our sense of being in time and of time's passing is not merely episodic or intermittent—as are occurrences of screen memories or dreams. It is pervasively present and gives to our lives their most cohesive and recurrent structure; as such, it is the source of what Dilthey called "*der Zusammenhang des Lebens*." Time binds—even if it does not always heal.

Our consciousness of time manifests itself in a series of closely related and often overlapping phases which we conventionally label "past," "present," and "future." Let us begin with the present,

---

<sup>26</sup> *SE* XV, p. 130.

which is in many respects the most problematic because of the tendency (especially noticeable in Aristotle, Augustine, and Descartes) to reduce it to an instantaneous point, an extensionless now. An entire countertendency, led by Bergson and James, has resisted this reduction, arguing that the notion of a punctiform present fails to represent our actual experience of time. With this objection one cannot help but agree from a descriptive or phenomenological point of view. What the upholders of the prolonged present leave unresolved, however, is the question as to how the present's prolongation is effected. What, in James' celebrated terms, turns the knife-edge into a saddleback?<sup>27</sup> What makes it the case that, as Husserl says, "it belongs to the essence of lived experiences to have to be spread out in such a way that there is never an isolated punctual phase"?<sup>28</sup>

It is Husserl's own analysis of internal time-consciousness, perhaps the most subtle such analysis ever performed, that points the way to an answer. Punctiformity is overcome in one direction by a continuous streaming backwards of every new experience—a streaming which is to be likened to the tail of a comet. Husserl's technical term for this tail is "retention," a penumbral phase or continuum of phases actively shadowing the ever-changing contents of consciousness, holding them in mind even as they lapse from explicit impressional awareness. As modified in retention, these contents sink back or down in consciousness until they reach imperceptibility. In so doing, they stretch out the initial moment of perception regarded as the "now-point" or "source-point," and thereby create what James calls "the rearward portion of the present space of time."<sup>29</sup>

The activity underlying this whole process of retentional *Herabsinken* is designated as "primary memory" by Husserl. It is a form of *memory* because it involves the consciousness of something as having already happened, and it is *primary* because it concerns itself with the immediate past, with what has *just* happened. In fact, the past of primary memory is a past that, paradoxically, is still

<sup>27</sup> "The practically cognized present is no knife-edge, but a saddleback, with a certain breadth of its own on which we look in two directions into time" (William James, *The Principles of Psychology* [New York: Dover, 1950], I, p. 609; hereinafter "PP").

<sup>28</sup> Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), p. 70. Here as elsewhere I have modified Churchill's translation, hereinafter referred to as "PIT."

<sup>29</sup> James, *PP*, I, p. 647. Husserl's main discussion of retention is in sections 8–13 of *PIT*. The analogy of the comet's tail is on p. 52.

part of the present: it is the present-as-just-past, the present in the very process of *becoming* past. Primary memory, through the agency of retentions, allows the merely momentary to linger as the just-having-been, the *soeben gewesen*.

But the punctiform present or now-point is extended in a second way as well. In addition to being drawn back in retention, it is also drawn forward in a prospective direction by “protentions,” which give to the present its aura of immediate futurity. Without this aura, we would arrive at the end of experienced time, for we would lack any sense of what is about-to-be, any sense of onward movement. Protentions bring about this consciousness of forward flow, of intercepting the future in the making. What does the protending is what I would like to term “primary imagination”—not “primary expectation” as Husserl calls it.<sup>30</sup> Expectation implies an attitude of anxious awaiting, an expectancy, which is foreign to the spontaneity of protending. This spontaneity is a spontaneity of projecting the proximal future in acts of primary imagining. Just as in primary memory we grasp what has just-come-to-be, so in primary imagination we glimpse what is just-coming-to-be in the very process of its coming to be; and this is the case even if we do not explicitly intuit what is *not yet* or the future proper. Among mental acts, imagining is best suited for engendering a protentional consciousness of this sort. For the single most characteristic operation of imagination consists in projecting possibilities, among which are those possibilities predelineated on the growing edge of the present. To protend such possibilities is what is *primary* imagining, which thus allows the present to move forward and to become an ongoing, never-fully-concluded enterprise.

Primary memory and primary imagination combine forces in the generation of what Husserl calls the “living present,” a temporal expanse sedimented with the immediate past in retentions and alive with the immediate future through protentions. Retentions and protentions may also be considered the “primitive” or “first” forms of the past and the future.<sup>31</sup> But if so, they do not constitute the past

---

<sup>30</sup> See Husserl, *PIT* sections 16, 24, and 26. William James also contrasts “memory” with “expectation” as respectively “the retrospective and the prospective sense of time” (*PP*, I, 606).

<sup>31</sup> “Retentions and protentions are the primitive, the first and fundamental, forms of the past and the future” (Husserl, *Analysen zur Passiven Synthesis* [The Hague: Nijhoff, 1966], p. 326).

or future proper. For these latter are not mere extensions of the living present; they are temporal domains in their own right, and call for separate analysis. The past proper is that part of experienced time which has become so thoroughly dissociated from the present that it can *only* be recalled or recollected—called back to consciousness from the waters of Lethe in which all retentions are eventually immersed. James, who influenced Husserl's analysis of time so profoundly, put it this way:

an object which is recollected, in the proper sense of the term, is one which has been absent from the consciousness altogether, and now revives anew. It is brought back, recalled, fished up, so to speak, from a reservoir in which, with countless other objects, it lay buried and lost from view.<sup>32</sup>

As "*Wiedererinnerung*," one of the several German words for recollection, intimates, recollecting is remembering *again*, and involves a "secondary" memory pursuant upon (and also dependent upon) primary memory. In secondary remembering, we re-collect<sup>33</sup> a previous present (as constituted by its retentions and protentions) from the standpoint of our *present* present, that is, the present of the act of recollection itself, which of course has its own retentions and protentions and is likewise subject to subsequent recollection. Such remembering is secondary, therefore, not in its overall importance but in its necessary posteriority to, and discontinuity with, the experience we are recalling. It is a way of giving that experience a second chance, a second life.<sup>34</sup>

Secondary memory thus operates by means of revival: by the *re*-presentation, the experiencing again, of an original experience, not "just as it was" but as it can now be reconstituted in recollection. This recollective re-experiencing is made possible by the fact that the experience being recalled, lacking fresh retentions and protentions (indeed, having had all of its protentions turned into now-fixed retentions), has gained the compression and closure required for becoming the content of secondary memory. What we recollect

---

<sup>32</sup> James, *PP*, I, p. 646. See also Aristotle, *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*, 451a 31–451b 4.

<sup>33</sup> I hyphenate this word to indicate that a full act of recollection involves the apprehension of a *setting* for the remembered event. On this point, see James, *PP*, pp. 654–58.

<sup>34</sup> Husserl warns, however, that even if "I can re-live the present . . . it can never be given again" (*PIT*, p. 66)—i.e., given again as a pristine present.

has not only sunken down in consciousness but has contracted in such a way as to acquire what Husserl calls “the unity of the remembered.”<sup>35</sup> We remember discrete objects and events which, *precisely as discrete*, can be given determinate positions in a continuum of past experiences and thereby be posited as actualities in the specific temporal mode of “once-having-been.” (This is what enables us to say that “the past rises up before us”; it does so not by auto-resurrection but by having gained sufficient unity to be remembered as such).

The future proper, by way of contrast, lacks the contractedness, the felt density, of the recollected past. Although it does momentarily assume a determinate guise in prophetic visions (visions which we often distrust just because of their specificity), normally it is quite indeterminate in content and its exact form is left in suspense.<sup>36</sup> For the most part, we leave future time *open* — open for the appearance of what must, from the perspective of the present, be merely projected there: put there as a possibility. This is so even when we try to tie down the future by means of calculation and planning; as we know, the best-laid plans often dissolve into the pointless or the irrelevant when the planned-for future itself arrives.

The future proper is projected by a form of imagining which, rather than prolonging the present into what is about-to-happen (as in primary imagining), ranges freely over the more remote reaches of the not yet. Such specifically *secondary* imagining concerns itself with possibilities beyond those already predelineated in the present or already realized in the past. They are to this extent *pure* possibilities, possibilities untethered to any particular point in time or to any particular event or set of events. Even the probabilities which are sometimes imputed to future events represent a subset of the purely possible. For to project any event (however highly probable) as taking place in the future we must *imagine* it as being there; and this is necessarily to place it under the sign of the purely possible: which is to say, still possibly quite different from what we may presently anticipate. The future, not yet being (being still open, being unanticipatable), does not, in contrast with the past, deliver itself to us in closed wholes. Rarely being exactly what we expect it to be (concerning it we must, as Heraclitus said, “expect the unex-

<sup>35</sup> *PIT*, p. 75: “*die Einheit des Erinnerten.*”

<sup>36</sup> For Husserl’s discussion of prophetic visions, see *PIT*, p. 80.

pected"<sup>37</sup>), it has to be actively projected, projected as purely possible, by acts of secondary imagining.<sup>38</sup>

In sum, there are two fundamental levels of collaboration between imagining and remembering in the structure of time-consciousness. At one level, the two acts are jointly responsible for extending our experience of the present beyond the purely punctiform. Here the collaboration consists in a bi-directional action of distension backward on the part of the retentions of primary memory and of distension forward by the protentions of primary imagination. At another level, of which we are usually more explicitly aware, imagining and remembering serve to demarcate whole regions of time—regions which are discontinuous with the living present of the first level. These regions, the past and future proper, are never experienced in their entirety, but only in fragmentary form, through partial perspectives. Such perspectives are opened up and maintained by secondary memory when we seek to reilluminate already expired experiences, and by secondary imagination when we attempt to light up possible experiences to come. Again there is movement in opposite directions, but this time as beginning from a fully constituted present (the present precisely of the act of imagining or remembering itself) and aiming at a strictly non-present period of time. The farther this period is from the immediate present of the imaginer or rememberer, the more requisite is his activity. Events distant enough from this present (that is to say, out of the range of retentional and potential consciousness) can in fact *only* be imagined or remembered—and when they are extremely remote, as in the case of ancient history or early childhood, they are often attainable only by a complex and covert commingling of secondary remembering and secondary imagining such as we have seen in historical reconstruction and screen memories. There is no temptation here

---

<sup>37</sup> Heraclitus, Fragment 19. The full statement is: "Unless you expect the unexpected, you will never find [truth], for it is hard to discover and hard to attain" (Philip Wheelwright's translation in *Heraclitus* [New York: Atheneum, 1968], p. 20).

<sup>38</sup> This is not to say that all possibilities entertained by such imagining are situated in the future. Although there is a natural affinity between the purely possible and the futural, my point is only that our consciousness of the future involves a special use of secondary imagining. The latter is consequently more free-ranging than secondary memory, which remains confined to the past proper; we can imagine pure possibilities as situated in the past, but we cannot remember the future.

to consider imagining and remembering as forms of perception (as Husserl was tempted to do in the case of retentions and protentions),<sup>39</sup> for in their secondary forms memory and imagination *take the place* of perception, of a perception which we no longer have or do not yet have. The two acts serve to summon up the absent, the not-now-existent, and thus precisely what eludes present perception.

It should also be stressed that the very distinctness of secondary imagining and remembering from each other—in terms of their respective conditions and modes of operation, their experiential sense and resulting products, and in other ways indicated earlier such as corrigibility and familiarity—makes their collaboration all the more intricate and variegated. We do not need to claim equivalence or even similarity between the two acts to make out a case for their collaborative capabilities. They co-operate precisely by being directed to the possible and to the actual respectively; by the crossing-over of one into the domain of the other (as when imagining fills in the gaps in imperfectly remembered material or when remembering offers an explicit basis for the projection of the future); and, more generally, by the fact that each effects what the other cannot—and yet needs as complementary to its own activity. The re-presentation of a stably situated past and the projection of an unsituated future call for each other as equally requisite epicenters of a time-consciousness whose moving center is the living present.<sup>40</sup>

## VII

Imagining and remembering have shown themselves to be essential, and not merely contingent, co-ingredients in four separate cases: historical reconstruction, screen memories, dreams, and time-consciousness. If I have lingered longest over time-consciousness, this is not only because it exhibits the collaboration, indeed the *double* collaboration, between the two acts in its most convincing and complete form. It is also because time-consciousness is a much less isolated instance than the others. Where we suspect that the first

<sup>39</sup> See *PIT*, sections 14, 16, 17.

<sup>40</sup> The same point applies to primary remembering and primary imagining. While it is true that these acts realize a basically symmetrical co-action of elongation, the elongation itself proceeds in two different directions and is realized by retentions which are always already full and by protentions which are essentially empty.

three examples of non-contingent combination are of largely local significance—each having its own discrete realm of application, e.g., in selected stretches of the past, in early childhood, and in the R E M periods of sleep—we are no longer bound to any such special regionality in our consciousness of time, which is so intrinsic to human experience that no part of it is without some tinge of the temporal.

To point to such panchronicity is hardly to say anything unfamiliar in the context of the preoccupation with time so characteristic of this century's physics, philosophy, psychology, and literature. What may be less familiar, however, is the inference implicit in the discussion of the last section: if time-consciousness is so deeply pervasive a phenomenon and if imagination and memory are indispensable parts of it, then these latter must *themselves be pervasive features of human experience*. Their intimate involvement (or better, their *inter*-involvement, in Merleau-Ponty's term) in the constitution of time-consciousness is necessarily an involvement in the constitution of all experience as we know it.

But there is another, more controversial contention which I want to consider in closing and which takes us back to this essay's point of departure: namely, that imagining and remembering are co-constituents of *perception*. This is implied by the close link between perception and time-consciousness itself: a link stressed by Kant to the point of virtual identity.<sup>41</sup> I would not want to claim identity—especially not if it requires recourse to an elaborate apparatus of mediating temporal schemata—but I do want to underline the following ways in which imagining and remembering reveal themselves to be equally essential constituents of the very structure of perceptual experience:

1. Turning first to immediate perception in the present, we find that what we perceive is given as (a) already *consolidated* to some degree as a form of sensuous presence, and as (b) *adumbrating* more of itself than has hitherto been given, i.e., as still-to-be-given. The consolidation, I would propose, is the work of the same kind of activity that we have seen to be operative in time-consciousness under the

---

<sup>41</sup> I have especially in mind Kant's position in the Second Analogy, where he writes that "it is a necessary law of our sensibility, and therefore a *formal condition* of all perceptions, that the preceding time necessarily determines the succeeding" (A 199), and that "only insofar as our representations are necessitated in a certain order as regards their time-relations do they acquire objective meaning" (B 243, where "objective" means reference to an object of perception).

heading of “primary memory.” For what we perceive gains its consistency and coherence mainly through the amassing of aspects which have been perceived in earlier viewings. These aspects are held in mind and as such sediment themselves into our ongoing perceiving as *already* belonging to what we perceive. Adumbration, in contrast, concerns what we are *about* to perceive, thanks to a spontaneous projection of possible parts and profiles suggested by present and past perceivings. This projection is effected by what I have termed “primary imagination,” since it is a matter of following out possibilities predelineated by what has come before in the phase of consolidation. That we are tempted to call such adumbration “proten-tional,” just as we are also inclined to call consolidation “retentional,” comes as no surprise. For it is by means of the same basic activities of primary remembering and primary imagining that, on the one hand, our sense of the plenary present arises and that, on the other, the felt objectivity, the robust well-roundedness, of what we perceive within this present is constituted.

2. But the objectivity of what we perceive is not restricted to what is immediately felt or purely palpable. Consolidation and adumbration bear only on the object of my current perception—what I am now perceiving in the distended present described above. Yet for anything to be fully an *object of perception*—where “object” has its full Kantian sense of “object of experience”—it must possess at least three additional characteristics: recognizability, repeatability, and projectability. These are the direct concern of secondary memory and secondary imagination. I shall confine myself to the briefest of indications as to how this is so.

(i) First of all, perceived objects must possess a minimum *recognizability*: if not as unique individuals (as *this* particular house, which I may never have seen before), then at least as objects of a certain kind or type (as a *house* or as *houselike*). All such recognizability implies secondary memory, that is, the possibility of the recollective consciousness that I have perceived this very house, or objects significantly similar to it, before. That the activity of memory is often only implicit in perceptual recognition—that it is frequently a matter of what I *could* recall rather than of what I *do* recall on a given occasion—renders it not any the less important. For the status of secondary memory is here *de jure* and not *de facto*, which means that *it must be possible*, at some point and in favorable circumstances, to effect the relevant recollection.

(ii) Secondary memory is even more closely bound up with the trait of *repeatability*. A fully constituted perceptual object is an object which can be re-encountered, if not again in perception (for it may cease to exist in the meanwhile), then in a subsequent recollection. This is more than a matter of reidentifiability or selfsameness over time, in which primary and secondary memory are *both* involved. For if I could never remember, at any time or under any circumstances, what I now perceive in the present, it would not count as a perceived object in the first place: to be an object of perception is necessarily to be memorable as having once been perceived. Such subsequent remembering is a form of repetition, and thus we can say that *perceptual objectivity requires repeatability in secondary memory*.<sup>42</sup>

(iii) *Projectability* refers to a final crucial feature of the objectivity of perceptual objects. Not only must these objects be recognizable and memorable; they must also be such as are capable of being envisioned in a future state. Not to be envisageable in the future at all is to lack an essential dimension of being perceivable; and this is true even of presently perceived objects on the verge of extinction: their future is precisely not to figure into the future that I populate projectively with other, non-extinct objects, and yet also to be positable as having-once-existed from the standpoint of this projected future. What does the envisaging or projecting is secondary imagination, which we have seen to be equal to this very task because of its predilection for the purely possible—for what *might be* in contrast with what *is, was, or must be*. It should be evident that I am not claiming that, on every occasion of perceiving, we do in fact imagine what the future state of the object we perceive will be. Rather, it is that we must be *able* to project such a state as possible if what we perceive is to be a fully objective *perceptum*. Perhaps this is what Kant had in mind when he said in an aside that “imagination is a necessary ingredient of perception itself.”<sup>43</sup> To this we need only add that so too is memory—and that each is necessary in its primary as well as its secondary form.

---

<sup>42</sup> Again, the point is not that I must *actually* recall my prior perception but that I *must be able* to do so in principle. Moreover, that the recollection is here situated in the future does not diminish in any way its indispensability.

<sup>43</sup> *The Critique of Pure Reason*, A 120 n.

## VIII

By the foregoing remarks, I do not mean to suggest that perception is wholly engendered by, or even adequately understood in terms of, the structures I have singled out for emphasis. I only want to underscore the fact that imagination and memory are ineluctably involved in the total operation of perception, that they are involved *together* as essentially different from (and complementary to) each other, and that their relationship within perceptual experience is remarkably analogous to their relationship in time-consciousness since there is a matching or pairing of their respective functions in each instance. In perception as in time-consciousness—as indeed in dreams, screen memories, and historical reconstruction as well, though in structurally divergent ways in these latter cases—imagining and remembering are continually conjoining in non-contingent forms of combination.

If this is true, and especially if it is true that imagining and remembering are essential components of perceptual experience, one conclusion is inescapable, a conclusion that controverts the traditionalist position examined above in section II. Imagining and remembering are not the mere offshoots or pale replicas of perception, for *we cannot regard as derivative from perception what is constitutive of perception itself*. And if the two acts are not forms of “decaying sense” but are ingredient in sense itself, a second conclusion also presents itself: imagining and remembering, far from being the mere marginalia of mind, its *disiecta membra*, emerge as absolutely central in any appraisal that attempts to do justice to human experience in its full variety and ramifying richness. Or more exactly, they are *con*-centric in such an appraisal, since what I have tried to demonstrate is that, rather than eccentric extensions, they are co-essential members of mind, basic in their very collusiveness and complementarity to its own most basic activities and functions.<sup>44</sup>

*State University of New York at Stony Brook.*

---

<sup>44</sup> This essay was originally presented as an invited paper at the December, 1976 meeting of the American Philosophical Association in Boston. I wish to express my thanks to Phillip Glotzbach, George Kline, and Hugh Silverman for their helpful comments on an earlier draft.