

# The Image and the Real: A Consideration of Sartre's Early Views on Art

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In *The Imaginary* (*L'imaginaire*, 1940), Jean-Paul Sartre offers a phenomenological account of the imaginative experience. The volume was the one of the earliest on imagination by a French phenomenologist. From an aesthetic point of view, however, we may observe that Sartre's theory of imagination provides the basis for his account of the experience of art. In fact, in *The Imaginary*, Sartre makes several discerning remarks on the experience of art. We can detect the characteristics of Sartrean aesthetics especially in his emphasis on the appreciator's capacity for imagination. This stress placed on the role of the appreciator has greatly influenced subsequent French scholars ranging from Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Mikel Dufrenne to Roland Barthes.

Yet, at the same time, some philosophers have criticized Sartre's theory. Some claim that Sartre underemphasizes the function of materiality in artworks and that Sartrean imagination is an escape from the real world. For example, Michel Sicard said that, in Sartre's theory, the appreciator faces a "dispersal of materials."<sup>[1]</sup> These criticisms perhaps derive from a strong reading of Sartre's theses: "[T]he work of art is an irreality" (IMR188/362), "[T]he aesthetic object is an *irreality*" (IMR189/363) and "Beauty is a value that can only ever be applied to the imaginary" (IMR371).<sup>[2]</sup>

But we have reason to pause here. It is a historical fact that Sartre, as a critic of art, praises artists who emphasize the materiality of artwork such as Alberto Giacometti and Wols (Wolfgang Schulze).<sup>[3]</sup> This fact tells us that Sartre does not always show insufficient appreciation for the materiality of artworks. Furthermore, we must not overlook the significant fact that Sartre's claims about art were sometimes associated with his well-known existential concept: *engagement*. He seems to believe that art can, in some capacity, have an effect on the real world. On this basis, we cannot easily conclude that Sartre's theory separates the imagination and the reality of the object proposed by the artist. Would the objections above, rooted in a strong reading of Sartre's theses, not be a misreading of Sartre's core argument?

In the paper quoted above, Sicard claims that the period in which Sartre cast his focus on the materiality of artwork begins after 1961. Historically, this claim may be correct. But in this paper, I want to reconsider the relationship between real objects and the appreciator's imagination as found in Sartre's early theory of the imagination. In doing so, I hope to locate "the role of the image in aesthetic experience" found in Sartrean phenomenology.<sup>[4]</sup>

## 1. Some Basic Claims in Sartre's Theory of the Imagination

Let's begin with a fundamental survey of the basic claims regarding the imagination found

in Sartre's early theory. Sartre makes most of his claims on the imagination in two volumes: *Imagination* (1936) and *The Imaginary* (1940). In *Imagination*, he inveighs against the antecedent theories set forth by Hume, Bergson and the experimental psychologists. Additionally, Sartre proposes his original theory of imagination in *The Imaginary*.

At this point, we will benefit from a formulation of his criticisms found in *Imagination*.

1. The image is an act, not a *thing*. It is the mode of our consciousness that makes our attitude imaginative. To imagine is not to perceive an object that is somehow created *in consciousness*. This claim is made against those who argue that the image is a new thing created *in consciousness* (IMT132/145, IMT146/162).
2. The image is given *all at once* (*d' un seul coup*). Once created, we cannot connect, divide or move it. This claim is made against those who argue that the retroactive manipulation of the image is possible, such as the experimental psychologists (IMT23–25/26–28).
3. We must not confuse imagination with perception.[5] This claim is made against those who regard all cognition as “imagination.” This camp is represented by Hume (IMT111–112/109–110).

Based on these claims, Sartre put forth several remarks on imagination, which are under the strong influence of Husserl's account of *intentionality*. Sartre understands it as the account that “every consciousness is consciousness *of something*,” that is to say, “[a] radical distinction naturally follows between consciousness and that of which there is consciousness” (IMT131/144).

Four years later, in *The Imaginary*, Sartre proposes his own, and very original theory of imagination. He offers his claims as follows:

- i. The image is one mode of consciousness. To imagine is to intend an object *outside of* consciousness in the mode of imagination, not the mode of perception.
- ii. One of the characteristics of imagination is *quasi-observation*. That is, the imaging consciousness has the characteristics of both perception and conception, though the former is clearly distinguished from the latter.
- iii. The imaging consciousness posits its object as a *nothingness* (*néant*).
- iv. The image is created by the spontaneity of consciousness. On the other hand, perception is categorized as a passive act.

As there is a great deal of research dealing with these claims, we do not have to examine the individual claims in detail in this paper.[6] I would, however, like to analyze the third of these theses and examine the concept of “nothingness.” I hope that this examination will help clarify the nature of the role played by the materiality of artworks.

A comparison to the theory set forth by Husserl shows that the concept of “nothingness” is not original, but is nevertheless a strong characteristic of Sartre's theory. Husserl thinks that when we imagine, the object's position is *neutralized*. The consciousness toward, for example, a photograph of an apple aims at the apple itself with the position of its existence suspended. Husserl himself uses the term “Neutralitätmodifikation.” The term is used to suggest that the act does not affirm or deny the existence of the object.[7] On the other hand, Sartre takes the suspension of “the position of its existence” as grounds to show that there is no existentiality of objects. “The image has wrapped within it a certain nothingness” (IMR14/34). As a consequence, this “neutrality of being” is admitted into the category of “negative,” which also

contains such characteristics as *nonexistence* and *absence*. In other words, “the existence is neutralized” falls into the same category as “there is no object imagined in the real world (*nonexistence*: e.g. a Centaur)” or “there is no object imagined before those who imagine it (*absence*: e.g. a friend who lives abroad.)”[8] After all, with regard to all imaginative acts – imagination which makes no use of real things is contained in these acts – Sartre provides a strongly negative interpretation. These acts don’t posit their objects as the real ones in front of the imaginer.[9]

It should be noted that Sartre uses words such as “nothing” and “negativity” for *objects in the mode of imagination*. An event (an angel speaking to Mary) in a painting, or a person (Marilyn Monroe) photographed, are good examples of such objects. The angel and Marilyn do not exist in front of the appreciator. On the other hand, the real thing before the appreciator – the painting or the paper on which the photo is printed – is called an “analogon” or an “analogical representative (*représentant analogique*).”[10] In such a case, what is denied is the reality of the event or the person in question, *not* that of the picture or the photograph. With this classification, Sartre claims that what should be appreciated is the irreal object, which is imaginatively created through the analogon, and that the existing object, such as the paper on which the photograph is printed, is not the object appreciated. As noted earlier, these claims have traditionally been criticized. According to critics, Sartre’s theory of art underemphasizes the materiality of artwork and considers only imaginative experiences.

To be sure, Sartre does not regard the mere perception of real things as aesthetic experience. But when we appreciate the irreal event or object imaginatively, what role is played by handling photo paper? Where do the paints of the painting go? Here, we should focus on the methodological difference between the *reflective description* and the *construction* of the theory of the structure of appreciation. Here, the claim – that in the experience of artwork, consciousness imaginatively aims toward the object appreciated and such an act is different from perception – is what is “described” as the reflective intuition. When we appreciate a painting, we don’t merely perceive the real paint or the color. Our intentions involve the domain of the image. By contrast, in order to consider the relationship between an imaging consciousness and real things, we should take a perspective that sees the structure organizing the appreciation, though based on reflection. If we would like to offer a fair critique of Sartre, we should examine how real things such as paint or photo paper relate to the appreciative consciousness on his theory.

In the next section, we will examine the relationship between the imaging consciousness and the real things proposed by the artist, focusing on the concept of “the imaginary (*l’imaginaire*)”. When we reconsider Sartre’s art theory, focusing on the structure of appreciation, should we say that the materiality of the artwork is lost in imagination?

## 2. On the Existence of the “Imaginary” and its Relation to the Real

Let us review Sartre’s terminology of the image. When Sartre refers to the appreciation of art, he uses not only the word “image,” but also “the imaginary (*l’imaginaire*).” It should be noted that the extension of the concept “image” in the book is very loose. We must also note,

however, that the extension of “the imaginary” is clearly differentiated from those of “the mental image” and “the voluntary image” (see figure 1). As noted earlier, the appreciation of artwork occurs within the domain of “the imaginary.” In the next section, we will locate the role of “the imaginary” in his theory, and shed some light on the structure of Sartrean appreciation of art.

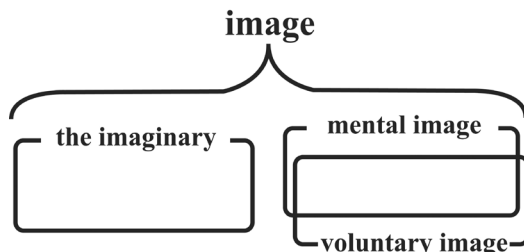


Fig. 1 Sartre's Terminology

### 2.1 Real things provide motivation to produce the imaginary

In appreciating art, consciousness has some relation with real things outside of us. We can easily understand this merely by reflecting upon our experience of artworks. For example, we are confronted with a picture that measures one by two meters, a statue fifty centimeters high, or a book printed in a Gothic font. Sartre thinks that the consciousness of these existences outside us serves as the *motivation* for aesthetic consciousness. This notion of motivation, which Sartre borrows from Husserl, implies that the relationship between the two succeeding consciousnesses is just a successive one and not a causal one. In other words, the imaging consciousness is not necessarily derived causally from the consciousness of existence outside.

The experience of art is a special case of these experiences which have as their starting point of motivation some real existence outside us. As we saw earlier, this experience is not the experience of mere perception. But another comment should be added here: in the experience of art, what the consciousness is composed of is *not* a mental image. In Sartre's imagination theory, the adjective “mental” is attached to the noun “image” only if its analoga are perfectly mental.[11]

### 2.2 The imaginary is produced by pre-willing spontaneity

The imaginary is produced through the motivation and the spontaneity of consciousness. In Sartre's theory, images are generally characterized as spontaneous in nature, as opposed to perception, which is passive. Yet imagination is not always voluntary. Rather, *the absence of will* is one of the most important characteristics of the imaginary. The imaginary differs from the image created by clear will. It is produced by the consciousness affected through motivation.[12]

Because of this difference in origin, the nature of the imaginary is different from that of the voluntary image. In the case of imaginative experience without will, the knowledge used in the experience – one of the analoga – degrades. This degradation of knowledge makes the definition of the objects ambiguous and enables the imaginary to connect spatially and temporally. As seen in Section 1, in the case of the voluntary image, objects are imagined *all at*

once so that retroactive manipulation of the imagined object is impossible.[13] But in the degraded imaginary, the retroactive manipulation or connection becomes possible.[14] We will return to the role of this degradation in the experience of art in Section 3.

### 2.3 The reality in total becomes motivation for the production of the imaginary

In his conclusion to *The Imaginary*, Sartre applies the word “motivation” not only to objects as analoga, but also to worlds or situations.[15] In other words, Sartre thinks that the motivation for the imaging consciousness is not only the perception of the individual object, such as a picture, but also the recognition of total reality – including artwork – as *a world*. Behind each imaging consciousness, there are relevant recognitions of reality, and the imagined object corresponds precisely to the recognition.[16] For example, the consciousness that imagines the Centaur possesses the negation of the reality of the Centaur, and the imagination is equal to the recognition of reality as the world without any Centaurs.[17]

In *The Imaginary*, Sartre expands on this. From the consideration of the state of consciousness (how does our consciousness intend toward the object of imagination?) to that of the structure of recognition (how does our recognition relate to imagination?). Here, the imaginary no longer opposes perception. The two interrelate and even cooperate. Although we cannot directly look at this simultaneous relation, this structure is present on the basis of evidence obtained from phenomenological reflection.[18]

If the imaginary is contained in the consciousness of reality, and if it relates to total reality including not only an artwork but also other nearby objects and the situation, we should say that it is inappropriate to interpret Sartre’s art theory as an “escape from the real world.” In consideration of the arguments seen in Section 1, the “negation” of the object of appreciation simply means that the object is not placed in the category of the real. This doesn’t mean that the appreciator excludes from their consciousness the real object in front of them. Generally, the consciousness which intends toward something is accompanied by various other states of consciousness. In the case of the appreciation of an artwork, the consciousness continues to possess the consciousness of reality behind the intention aimed at the object of appreciation, and from the epistemological point of view, it becomes a part of total consciousness. Put differently, the real object is clearly incorporated in Sartre’s art theory.[19]

## 3. Dreams and the Experience of Art

Certainly, we have to concede that Sartre’s writing style is misleading in some ways. One of these is, as we have seen, the looseness of the extension of the word “image.” There is another reason for confusion: Sartre often talks about art *in comparison with dreams*.

Sartre claims here and there that the experience of art is something like dreaming.[20] The reasons for this claim are shown in several characteristics of the experience of art: the appreciator’s loss of will, and the magical power of artworks. Such an argument correlating dreams with art is not completely inappropriate. It is an undeniable fact that there are some similarities between dreams and aesthetic experience. In fact, many scholars base their arguments on these similarities. We can see such a tendency especially in the fields of

surrealism and psychoanalysis.[21]

However, it should be noted here that in Sartre's imagination theory, the experience of art is clearly differentiated from that of dreams. Focusing on this difference, we can refute the interpretation of Sartre's theory as escape to an imaginative, dream-like world. In the following, Section 3, we will clarify how consciousness connects with reality in the experience of art and will compare this connection to dreaming.

### 3.1 The concept of a "world" in *The Imaginary*: the impossibility of an imaginative world

In order to clarify the difference between dreaming and appreciation of art, it is useful to focus on the concept of a "world." Let's start this section by locating the concept in *The Imaginary*. Sartre says about the (real) world:

A world is a dependent whole, in which each object has its determinate place and maintains relations with the other objects. The very idea of a world implies for its objects the following double condition: they must be strictly individuated; and they must be in balance with an environment (IMR132/254).

In this way, the recognition of the *real* world is characterized by (a) the individuation of objects, and (b) a balance of those objects with an environment.

In contrast, how is "*imaginative* world" characterized? The two characteristics given in the last quotation are precisely the reason why any "world" cannot be constructed in an imaginative universe. Sartre does not accept the notion of an "imaginative world."

Let's examine this in detail. First, as to (a) the individuation of objects. Sartre says that imaginative objects cannot be individuated, since there is "at once *too much* and *not enough* in them" (IMR132/254, my emphasis). Let me explain these two characteristics.

The first characteristic "too much" derives from the fact that the imagined object (image) possesses various factors. For example, various factors of affectivity or knowledge are included, as some of the analoga, in an imagination, so that the imagined object sometimes possesses inconsistent factors. Perception can be "clear and distinct," and be reassuring. By contrast, image is "suspect", for in it, various factors are loosely connected. From a positive point of view, those factors might give image a depth or complexity, but from a negative point of view, they give "a semblance of opacity" (IMR132-3/254).

On the other hand, image has "not enough." This expression "not enough" indicates the characteristic that "[n]one of its qualities are pushed to the limit." That is, there is an *essential poverty* in image – the characteristics of an entity which does not have subsistence.

In summary, there are excremental factors and essential poverty in an image. Because of these, imaginative objects remain ambiguous and cannot be strictly individuated. This is the first reason for the impossibility of an "imaginative world."

Next, we will address the characterization of a "world" as (b) a balance of objects with an environment. Images have another nature which is inappropriate for this condition of objects in a "world." "Balance with an environment" means that an object is equivalent with its environment. In seeing the real world, we can intentionally change the relationship between

the object and its environment. That is to say, this condition means “free changeability of aspects.” However, since an image is produced individually and *all at once*, it cannot have any retroactive relation with other images. The relations which an image has are, whether they are spatial or temporal, ones that the image possesses originally. Although it is possible that some relations are added to an image as its properties, it is not possible for images to have any relation each other after they are produced individually. Such a conception is no more than the “*illusion of immanence*,” which Sartre always refuses, namely, the conception to handle images as physical things.

So, images cannot make an environment where objects have relations to each other. And the environmental properties installed in an centrally imagined object in advance are not equal to other nearby objects. Thus, condition (b) is not met.

In sum, the nature of image is incompatible with the two conditions for construction of a world. Based on Sartre’s theory, an “imaginative world” is impossible in principle. We should keep in mind that, based on these considerations, such phrases as “irreal world,” “world of image,” or “dream world” are not used literally in *The Imaginary*. They are used reservedly, just “for greater convenience.”[22]

### **3.2 “World” by fascination of aesthetic consciousness: Addition of “atmosphere of world” through degradation and belief**

In fact we commonly use the word “world,” albeit metaphorically, in talking about dreams or works of art. Sartre himself cannot but use the word in such phrases as “dream world” or “imaginative world” in parts of his book. How should we understand such a “worldliness,” which is outside of Sartre’s definition of a world? We should capture the implications of the metaphor of “imaginative world.”

I would like to focus on two key concepts. The first concept is “degradation.” We have already seen this concept above. Again, “degradation” means that knowledge – which is one of the mental analoga – decreases the function of definition. Degradation of knowledge does not decrease the power of connection, but that of division or articulation.

The second key concept is “belief.” Through the act of believing, consciousness changes in quality. Consciousness aims at imaginative objects – which are not in fact objects of perception – as if it were aimed at a *perceptible* object. Belief gives imagined objects a sort of quasi-objectivity.

Because of *degradation* and *belief*, an image comes to lose its clear articulation, *but* it gains objectivity. Therefore, the restrictions of the two above conditions are relaxed. Each image acquires objectivity (= relaxation of condition (a)), and a fuzzy articulation enables images to connect with their environment (= relaxation of condition (b)). Finally, the image comes to be accompanied by “worldliness” as long as consciousness adds to the image. This does not mean that at first several images are produced, and then they connect to each other and thereby create a world. Rather, consciousness simply intends toward *an* object which has some relations as properties attributed by the consciousness. “Worldliness” is the only additional property which is given through degradation and belief. Sartre expresses this as follows: each imaginary object carries with it “the atmosphere of a world” (IMR167/323).

It is not only spatiality but also temporality that is attributed to the image here. Temporality is, like spatiality, attributed as long as the consciousness attributes it. When the imaginative world opens, imagined objects are temporally related to each other.

In this way, our consciousness falls into a sort of mystification, where objects seem to be animated and move by themselves. This is the state of fascination created by “pre-willing spontaneity.” Sartre considers this state in part IV of *The Imaginary*, “the imaginary life.” Although these objects themselves are constituted by our consciousness and they do *not* actually possess their original power or dynamics, we can no longer arbitrarily change nor dispose of these imagined objects. Sartre calls such an image “the imaginary.” This is not the same with an image, such as when we voluntarily imagine an apple or the *Venus de Milo*.

### **3.3 Differences between an aesthetic experience and a dream: the ontological state of the analogon, the awareness of possibility of reflection, and the nature of affectivity**

A dream is the experience wherein the addition of worldliness is executed at the most extreme level. Sartre says that a dream is a realization of an entirely closed consciousness, that is to say, “an imaginary that one absolutely cannot leave and on which it is impossible to take any external point of view” (IMR165/319). This state of *being closed* is one of the reasons why dreams and the experience of art are closely related. Nevertheless, as I will show, appreciating art and dreaming are clearly different experiences. Confusing the two because of their similarity is nothing but making the definition of the experience of art ambiguous. Although Sartre says frequently that the experience of art is like a dream, he draws several clear lines between the two in *The Imaginary*. Focusing on these delineations, we can understand Sartre’s conception of the experience of art, which has in the past often been regarded as similar to dreaming.

To begin with, let’s remark briefly on the similarities between the two. As we have seen, one of the reasons they are considered similar is that both objects are in the universe of the imaginary. In both experiences, imagination is involved. Moreover, awakening from either experience carries with it a sort of “disenchantment.”[23] Another similarity is the fact that we are in a state of fascination and lose our own will. We cannot dream voluntarily, and aesthetic imagination is also not based on the individual will. One important characteristic of the experience of art is consciousness’ *being forced to aim at* the universe of image. Certainly, most experiences of art start with an intent to look or hear or read the artwork. But there, we do *not* intend to imagine. According to Sartre’s theory, the experience of art consists in being forced to imagine.

So, where are the differences between the two? One difference is *existence of their analoga*. Artworks really exist independently of appreciators. By contrast, in the experience of dreams, there is not any such independent and voluntarily-apprehended analogon.[24] By this point, we can define the first difference between the experience of art and dreams. In the experience of art, although the consciousness of the imaginary is involved, the viewer is still aware of the reality of the artwork’s existence. Consciousness in the experience of art does not fall perfectly into the imaginative universe; without artwork, it is just a delusion or daydream. In the experience of art, however dream-like an experience it is, consciousness maintains a



relationship with real objects.[25]

The second difference is the *facility of reflection*. Typically, an experience of art is destroyed by slight real disturbances from others, boredom or fatigue with the artwork, and so on. However, we cannot easily slip out of dreams. And there is no way to finish a dream due to boredom or fatigue.[26] Moreover, in a dream, since consciousness is closed in the state of fascination, consciousness cannot distance itself from its objects[27]: Except for the properties that are given as constituent, we cannot turn to or reflect on the relation between appreciator and object, the circumstances of the object, the possibilities of the object, and so on. Sartre remarks that if the consciousness of the reader of a novel were completely fascinated, his or her aesthetic appreciation of the book would be hampered.[28] In reading a novel, “I can awaken at every moment, and I know it; but I do not want to; reading is a free dream” (WL37/57).

Moreover, we can consider as a third difference *the nature of affectivity*.[29] The feeling affected in dreams is “a feeling of belonging.” In other words, a dreamer *identifies* entirely with the character in the dream so that the dreamer has the same emotion which the character has. In contrast, in reading a novel, the reader’s feeling is still – despite his partial identification with a character – a *sympathetic* one, the feeling of an observer.[30] This appreciative sympathy is not authentic emotion, but simply imaginative emotion.[31]

To sum up, we can distinguish dreams and the experience of art in three ways: (A) The ontological state of the analogon: in order to experience art, there must be an independent and voluntarily-apprehended analogon. (B) The awareness of possibility of reflection: in the experience of art, the appreciator is aware of reality. (C) The nature of affectivity: the appreciator does not identify herself with the character. We should understand consciousness during the experience of art as a form of consciousness which maintains a connection with reality in a very different way from the dreamer’s consciousness, although they are similarly fascinated with the image and lose their will in the experience.

In appreciating art, our consciousness is not perfectly fascinated, so the contact with reality still remains. This is the conclusion of my paper, and a response to the critics of Sartre.[32]

#### **4. Conclusion: the imaginary and the reality. Further problems of *The Imaginary*.**

So, let’s turn to the initial question of my paper and consider the role of artworks’ materiality in Sartre’s imagination theory.

We have characterized the experience of art in Sartre by comparing it with and differentiating it from dreams, but Sartre also characterizes the experience of art with the word “enjoyment.” This enjoyment is derived not from the fact that the consciousness is oriented to the imaginary,[33] but from the fact that the appreciator apprehends the *ensemble* of the imaginary.[34] So, if we try to examine the role of materiality in appreciation using Sartre’s theory, we should note that the appreciation of materiality relates to this ensemble of the imaginary.

Then, should we think negatively that artworks’ materiality is finally dispersed? Probably not. As we have seen so far, in Sartre’s theory, the imaginary always works in close cooperation

with reality. In fact, the two are indivisible. Imaginative consciousness in appreciation is not something like an escape to “imaginative world.” Sartre’s claim is not eccentric, but rather it is an ordinary claim. Sartre does not deny the appreciation of materiality at all. He just claims that the consciousness appreciating materiality is also accompanied by an apprehension of the imaginary ensemble. This imaginary involved in appreciation is always located in the situation or in the world. If critics tried to deny this part of Sartre’s claim, they would have to claim that the aesthetic appreciation of the imaginary is perfectly independent from the perception of artwork’s materiality. I think it is impossible, or at the very least, a very difficult task.[35]

So, how should we assess the criticism that such an experience is an escape from the real world? If this criticism means that Sartre *cuts off* the connection with real artworks, such a criticism would be easily refuted by the arguments thus far. If the criticism means that Sartre *diminishes and obscures* the connection, we might say that the experience of art maintains the connection between real artworks and their situation. Imagined objects are firmly connected to their background reality. Moreover, the imagined object is firmly connected to the appreciator’s knowledge or affectivity as an analogon. We could analyze the connection from the point of view of these analoga used in the appreciation, or the situation surrounding the work of art.

But if we change the perspective slightly and accept the criticism as one related to the concept of “engagement” – the criticism that the experience of art is divided from some social matters (for example, antiwar movements or protests against racial discrimination) –, then the answer to the criticism cannot but become a little bit complex.

Simply put, this paper cannot fully answer to the criticism, since this paper has a limited focus on Sartre’s *early* theory of imagination. In the early Sartre, there is a lack of consideration: lack of the perspective of temporal theory and historical consideration. *The Imaginary* limits its scope to considerations of the present momentary state of consciousness, so the book is insufficient to answer questions such as the following: How do history and our facticity restrain our own present consciousness? What effect does our present aesthetic experience have upon our future existence? Moreover, *The Imaginary* does not fully deal with problems of temporal consciousness: How does a reflection – which tries to capture the antecedent self – relate to present consciousness?[36]

Sartre’s early theory of art – which takes the state of “captivity” or “pre-willing spontaneity” as a necessary condition for the experience of art – is actually a theory that focuses only on some parts or on a limited span of the experience of art. That is to say, although the theory provides some insightful remarks about the momentary states of appreciative consciousness captured by artworks, it does not consider such problems as, how are the work’s *importance* and its *value* understood after slipping out of the captivity? The importance or the value of artworks relates to problems belonging to a different perspective. How do we, living people in the real world, reconsider the experience of being affected and captivated by artworks? How does the reflective experience affect our apprehension of the real world? Such questions belong to perspectives other than that describing the present state of aesthetic consciousness in a phenomenological manner.

Historically, Sartre did not overlook this problem. He noticed the insufficiency of his

theory – lack of consideration of time – after publishing *The Imaginary*, then he went on to write *Being and Nothingness* (1943).[37] There, the problems of existence or freedom are dealt with, and artistic activity is reconsidered within such frames. Sartre moves from the consideration of the structure of consciousness in experience of art, to the consideration of the importance or value of the experience. However, again, in the period of *The Imaginary*, Sartre did not yet connect the experience of art with the concept of *engagement*.[38]

## Bibliography

### By Sartre

(In several quotations, translations are slightly modified by me. The page number in the English translation is followed by the page number in French text).

IMT : *Imagination*, The University of Michigan Press, 1972; *L'imagination*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1950.

IMR : *The Imaginary*, Routledge, 2004; *L'imaginaire*, Gallimard, 1998 (idées).

BN : *Being and Nothingness*, Routledge, 2003; *L'être et le néant*, Gallimard, 2003 (tel).

WL : *What is Literature?*, Routledge, 2003; *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, Gallimard, 1985.

WD : *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phony War, November 1939–March 1940*, Verso, 1999; *Les Carnets de La Drôle de Guerre*, Gallimard, 1983.

## Notes

- [1] Michel Sicard, “Esthétiques de Sartre,” *Oblique*, 1981, 24–25, pp.139–154.
- [2] “It is a radical fault that Sartre underemphasizes the spectacle of natural beauty or the material aspect of artworks.” (Sasaki Ken-ichi, *Bigaku Jiten* [Dictionary of Aesthetics], p. 85, University of Tokyo Press, 1995); “Sartre purifies the image so much that he homogenizes the artistic product (in Husserlian terms, ‘physical imaging (*physische Bildlichkeit*)’) – which is constructed on the basis of physical analoga – at the level of image in general.” (Kanata Susumu, *Geijutsu-Sakuhin no Genshō-gaku* [The Phenomenology of Artworks], p. 79, Sekai-shoin, 1990). (These citations are translated by me.)
- [3] “La recherche de l’absolu,” in *Situations III*, Gallimard, 1949. “Doigts et non-doigts,” in *Situations IV*, Gallimard, 1964.
- [4] Early on, Sartre did not draw a clear distinction between “the experience of art” and “aesthetic experience.” But, in fact, this ambiguity was problematic, since aesthetic experience of non-artworks (nature, ordinary objects) is also possible. Nevertheless, Sartre does not think that all experience of art is aesthetic. See note 35.
- [5] In Sartre’s theory, ordinary consciousness is in a mixed state of perceiving and imagining. Put colorfully, we might interpret the relationship between the two with an analogy: oil and vinegar in dressing. Oil (perception) and vinegar (imagination) themselves can be distinguished, but typically they are mixed. That is to say, our ordinary realizing consciousness consists of the harmony of the two. Moreover, in Sartre’s theory, although we can have the state of vinegar only (i.e. an entirely imaginative state – dreams), probably we could not attain the state of pure oil, since realizing consciousness without imaging consciousness is impossible (IMR188/361).
- [6] To touch very briefly on a broad tradition, see Roland Breeur, *Autour de Sartre: La Conscience Mise à Nu*, J. Millon, 2005; Philippe Cabestan, *L’Être et La Conscience: Recherches sur La Psychologie et L’ontophénoménologie Sartriennes*, Ousia, 2004; Beata Stawarska, “Defining Imagination: Sartre between Husserl and Janet,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 4, no. 2 (2005): 133–153; Tomoyuki Kitamura, “Sartre et les problèmes de l’imagination,” *Bigaku* 37,

no. 2 (1986): 36–46.

- [7] See his *Ideas* §119–111.
- [8] We must consider the relation between imagination and nothingness in Sartrean philosophy from the metaphysical and ontological points of view, focusing on such concepts as objectification or reification. However, this is not the aim of the present paper and will not be fully addressed herein.
- [9] One might see some similarities between Sartre’s framework and Wollheim’s one. Especially, when Wollheim speaks of his original concept “Seeing-in” and characterizes it in terms of “twofoldness” and “nonexistence,” we can see the similarities between them. (Richard Wollheim, *Arts and its Objects*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1980, pp.212–217.) In fact, Wollheim says that “Sartre, who is keen to distinguish the phenomenology of seeing *y* in a representation from that of seeing *y* face to face, at the same time insists that seeing the object of a representation not merely does not depend upon, but is incompatible with, attending to the material features of the representation” (215). However, it should be noted that while Wollheim thinks “seeing-in” as a sort of perception, Sartre obstinately distinguishes appreciation and perception.
- [10] We might say that there is a fifth claim here that *all images are accompanied by analoga*. In Sartre’s theory, an “analogon” means a general material whose function is to be used for producing an image. It can be either a spatio-temporal entity or a mental entity. See the next note 11.
- [11] “Mental image” is defined by two points. First, the mental image is an image whose analoga are perfectly mental. What are regarded as mental analoga are (1) knowledge, (2) affectivity, (3) kinesthetic sensations and (4) words. (Yet on the fourth mental analogon, words, Sartre’s position is somehow ambiguous.) These mental analoga are of course used in the ordinary imaginative act of the non-mental image, as well. By this first definition, the imagination related to the experience of art is distinguished from experience of mental image, since the experience of art involves the perception of real artwork. For example, the image that the consciousness has while reading a novel is *not* a mental image. The moment in which the mental image is created is when we close the book and imagine its fictional characters or events without reading the book (IMR63/126).
- Second, that analoga are perfectly mental does not necessarily imply that the image is a mental image. Sartre says that mental images “although exclusive of perception, can be born only if a constant passage from perception to imagination is possible and, one could say, only on the ever-present ground of perception” (IMR164/317). In this way, the mental image is distinguished from the image in dreams. The dream is *not* composed of mental images. We will deal with this topic again in section 3.
- In sum, in order to have a mental image, consciousness uses only mental analoga and its attitude maintains a connection with reality.
- [12] One of the achievements of *The Imaginary* is that it deals with “the imagination without will” from the phenomenological point of view. Stawarska see here a strong influence from one of the most influential psychological pathologists of those days: Pierre Janet.
- [13] “The unreal changes are inefficient or radical” (IMR133/256).
- [14] “The imaging consciousness is an act that is formed at a stroke by will or pre-willing spontaneity. But only the pre-willing spontaneity can bring final developments from this consciousness without the primitive object disintegrating” (IMR134/258).
- [15] “It is the situation-in-the-world, grasped as a concrete and individual reality of consciousness, that is the motivation for the constitution of any unreal object whatever, and the nature of that unreal object is circumscribed by this motivation” (IMR185/355).
- [16] “Thus the *situation* of consciousness must appear not as a pure and abstract condition of possibility for all of the imaginary, but as the concrete and precise motivation for the appearance of a certain particular imagination” (IMR185/355).

- [17] Simply put, we can schematize Sartre's conception of the sequence from reality to imagination in the following way: (1) reality, (2) consciousness accepts and apprehends the reality in the mode of situation, (3) In this apprehension, the denial of the reality and the imaginary produced from it are involved. The first move (1-2) implies the relation of motivation, but the second move (2-3) is a very strong relation, nearly an equal one. Sartre thinks we can perform such an imaginative act because human beings have freedom and cannot be captivated only by real things. If consciousness did not have this ability to construct reality as the world, we could not apprehend reality as situation, and we would lapse into a "being-in-the-midst-of-the-world" (IMR183/353).
- [18] In this sense, we could say that in Sartre's concept of "the imaginary" there are two aspects: a creative one – to recall or produce something that is not present –, and an apprehensive one – to function in the apprehension of the present real object.
- [19] Criticizing Sartre, Kanata says that Sartre "homogenizes artistic product (in Husserlian terms, 'physical imaging (*physische Bildlichkeit*)') – which is constructed on the basis of physical analoga – at the level of image in general" (ibid., p. 79). But, as we do in this section, focusing on the difference between the voluntary image and the imaginary, and on the reality which the imaging consciousness possesses in the background, we should say that this criticism of Kanata's is inappropriate. In Sartre's theory, an artistic product remains in the category of the real, and plays as analogon an important role in imagination.
- [20] For example, "Aesthetic contemplation is an induced dream." (IMR193/371); We can also find such remarks in (WL36–37/57) or *Situations IX*, p.15, Gallimard, 1972.
- [21] For example, Hanna Segal deals with art from the psychoanalytic point of view (*Dream, Phantasy and Art*, Routledge, 1991). On the other hand, in the field of analytical aesthetics, Kendall Walton, (*Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Harvard University Press, 1990) and in the field of philosophy of mind, Colin McGinn (*Mindsight: Image, Dream, Meaning*, Harvard University Press, 2004) deal with the aesthetic experience, focusing on the difference with dreams.
- [22] "[F]or greater convenience I will use the expression 'dream world,' since it is in current use, and simply warn not to take it unreservedly" (IMR167/323).
- [23] Sartre says "[b]eauty is a value that can only ever be applied to the imaginary" (IMR193/371). And from this, he sometimes infers forcibly or poetically that reality is nauseating. In his famous novel *Nausea*, Sartre represents a scene in which Antoine Roquentin has a nauseous feeling toward the reality of a chestnut tree.
- We should note that the first argument – which distinguishes between the real and the imaginary, then puts beauty into the category of the imaginary – does not imply the last claim that the real is nauseating. Nevertheless Sartre eagerly claims that when we slip out of the field of the imaginary, reality appears to be nauseating. From such a claim, we might see Sartre's conception of reality: in ordinary attitudes, the imaginary always plays the role of a *protective wall*.
- [24] I use the expression "voluntarily-apprehended," because it is possible for a simple outside analogon to have some function in dreams (e.g. the ring of an alarm clock), but such a stimulus from outside would not be apprehended voluntarily.
- [25] Sartre explains this difference, referring to the difference between image-in-reading and image-after-reading (IMR63/126).
- [26] Of course, in the case of experiencing art, it might also be the case that the appreciator is so captivated that he or she does not notice other things around the artwork. But the fascinating power is not as strong as that of dreams. Some might think the difference in fascinating power to be a quantitative difference, but the fascination in dreams does not imply the consciousness of reality. We should think the difference is a qualitative difference.
- [27] From this claim, Sartre goes on to claim that the dreaming consciousness cannot envision future possibilities. The dreaming consciousness does not have freedom. "[N]o more is it determined, it

is the inverse of freedom, it is fatal” (IMR169/327). McGinn describes such a characteristic as “modally exhaustive” (McGinn, *ibid.*, p.80).

- [28] IMR171/331
- [29] Daniel Giovannangeli also mentions the absence of reflection and the degree of identification, but he seems not to focus on the essential difference of affectivity (“Imaginaire, monde, liberté,” in *Sartre Désir et liberté*, coordonné par Renaud Barbaras, P.U.F., 2005).
- [30] This “feeling of belonging” is the feeling of empathy or identification: Sartre distinguishes “empathy” and “sympathy,” and he categorizes the feeling of reading a novel into the latter. Now, such a view – which takes the feeling of appreciating a narrative as sympathy, not empathy – is supported by many philosophers (Noel Carroll, Matthew Kieran.) Alessandro Giovannelli objects to such a view. See his “In and Out: The Dynamics of Imagination in the Engagement with Narratives.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66, no. 1 (2008): 11–24.
- [31] “[T]he affective element that constitutes the analogon is reduced to a simple emotional abstraction. In that case the affective factor is entirely exhausted in the constituent act” (IMR137/264). Sartre calls such feelings in imagination “imaginary feelings,” as opposed to “genuine feelings” (IMR145/280). In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre also uses the expression “affective images” (BN355/371).
- [32] One hint which seems to support this claim is the notion of “nonthetic consciousness (of) self.” When I appreciate an artwork, my consciousness continues to hold nonthetically onto the consciousness of my act itself and apprehend the artwork’s situation. Sartre thinks that a feeling placed against such a background cannot be a genuine feeling. On the other hand, in dreams, “the nonthetic consciousness of dreaming carries in it none of the restrictive and negative characteristics that we find in the judgment ‘I am dreaming’ (‘I am dreaming’, *therefore* I am not perceiving)” (IMR162/313).
- [33] If so, all dreams, daydreams, and delusions also would be aesthetic enjoyments. This is not the case.
- [34] Three years later, in *Being and Nothingness* (1943), beauty is considered in connection with such concepts as “totality” or “freedom” (BN217–8/231).
- [35] Of course, we can focus in a perceptive way on some parts of artworks: oil paint on a painting or the edge of an object in a photograph. It might be an experience of “a pleasure of the senses,” but Sartre thinks that if such parts are focused on independently from the artworks themselves, such an experience cannot be an aesthetic experience (IMR190/364). From this claim, we can say that Sartre thinks that aesthetic experience is different from simple pleasure derived from artwork.
- [36] To be precise, it is not true that there is no consideration of temporal matter. Sartre deals with *the movement in image*, mentioning the concept “pretention” and “retention” (IMR73ff/145ff), but there is little consideration of the temporal flue which consciousness itself possesses.
- [37] Sartre writes in his diary (February 18, 1940): “I feel strangely bashful about embarking on a study of temporality. Time has always struck me as a philosophical headache, and I’ve inadvertently gone in for a philosophy of the instant (which [Alexandre] Koyré reproached me for one evening in June ’39)” (WD208/256).
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