

# Against the Additive View of Imagination

## Abstract

According to the additive view of sensory imagination, mental imagery often involves two elements. There is an image-like element, which gives the experiences qualitative phenomenal character akin to that of perception. There is also a non-image element, consisting of something like suppositions about the image's object. This accounts for extra-sensory features of imagined objects and situations: for example, it determines whether an image of a grey horse is an image of Desert Orchid, or of some other grey horse. The view promises to give a simple, intuitive explanation of some puzzling features of imagination, and further, to illuminate imagination's relation to modal knowledge. I contend that the additive view does not fulfil these two promises. The explanation of how images come to be determinate is redundant; the content constituting the indeterminate mental images on which the view relies is sufficient to deliver determinate images too, so the extra resources offered by the view are not required. When applied to modal epistemology, the view either delivers implausible results or offers no distinctive insight. Since the view is sold on its explanatory merits, and since these are dubious, the additive view should be rejected.

**Keywords:** Imagination, mental imagery, conceivability, additive view, modal epistemology, sensory phenomenology.

## 1 Introduction

If you visualize Desert Orchid, you visualize a grey horse. That same mental image could just as well stand for another grey horse. So what makes it an image of Desert Orchid? One explanation, offered by both Christopher Peacocke and Peter Kung, is what I will call the *additive view* of imagination (Peacocke 1985; Kung 2010). They say that sensory imagining involves two kinds of content: qualitative content, which gives the experience its sensory phenomenal character, and non-qualitative content, which specifies details of the imagined situation that are not manifest in the qualitative content.<sup>1</sup> Thus, visualising Desert

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<sup>1</sup>'Qualitative content' refers here only to sensory aspects of experience. In a wider sense, 'qualitative content' might include other felt aspects of experience, such as affective qualities.

Orchid involves grey-horse-like qualitative content, and non-sensory content which determines anything about the imagined situation not manifest in the qualitative content, such as the identity of the horse, the colour of his occluded flank.<sup>2</sup>

Explaining how such things are determined in imagining is some achievement. A view that manages this might do more besides. For example, we often use imagination to consider possibilities, such as whether a sofa in the shop will fit up the stairs at home. Peacocke and Kung both think that the additive view tells us about imagination's evidential relation to possibility. But the additive view does not deliver on its promises. The explanation offered of how images can be determinate is redundant, and it gives little insight when applied to modal epistemology. The view is sold to us on these explanatory merits, and we shouldn't buy it.

I'll spend the next section substantiating the additive view. The third section examines its credentials as an explanation of imagination's determinate character, and the fourth explores its application to modal epistemology.

## 2 The view expounded

Cases where an indeterminate mental image could contribute to one of several determinate imaginings have been mooted by several philosophers.<sup>3</sup> I will concentrate on Peacocke and Kung, since they explicitly advance the additive view to explain them. Peacocke presents two kinds of case. The first includes situations where the same image could figure in two or more different imagined situations. For example, there is a difference between imagining a suitcase, and imagining a cat occluded by a suitcase (Peacocke 1985, p. 19). Since 'the same conscious subjective image will serve to meet both requests', something besides the image makes the difference (Peacocke 1985, p. 19).

The second kind of case includes situations where you imagine some particular thing, using an image which could just as well be of some other particular. Peacocke's example, taken from Wittgenstein, is of imagining King's College on fire (Wittgenstein 1942, p. 39; Peacocke 1985, p. 20). Wittgenstein suggests that your mental image might just as well represent any of several buildings. So what makes it an image of King's aflame, rather than another building?

Kung also refers to this example, and presents similar ones (Kung 2010, p.626, fn.10). For instance, he asks you to picture Marlon Brando and his dop-

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<sup>2</sup>Throughout, 'imagining' unqualified means 'sensory imagining'. I assume that what I say about visualising applies equally to other sensory modalities.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, (Williams 1966; White 1990, p. 92; Kind 2001, p. 101; Martin 2002, p. 403; Noordhof 2002, pp. 428-9).

pelgänger Stanley, one seated, one standing. Which is which? Nothing in the image tells you, and you can switch at will between Marlon-seated and -standing situations, in which case '[t]he phenomenal character of what you see in your mind's eye might remain the same. . . but nonetheless you are imagining something different' (Kung 2010, p. 624).

These two kinds of case raise two related questions. First, what makes it so that your mental image is of some particular? Second, what makes it so that your imaginative experience has non-qualitative features such as the involvement or otherwise of occluded cats? Kung and Peacocke think the additive view answers both questions. Since the content of the mental image neither dictates what (if any) particular it is an image of, nor dictates invisible aspects of the imagined situation, this dictation must be done by some additional non-image content. The image gives the experience its qualitative aspects, and represents an appearance; the additional non-image content stipulates exactly what the image represents, and fills out any other non-qualitative details of the situation.

Kung and Peacocke articulate this view differently. Here is Peacocke's proposal:

[T]he differences between imaginings which, though having a common image, still differ. . . are differences in which conditions are S-imagined to hold. 'S' is for 'suppose' (Peacocke 1985, p. 25).

Peacocke's model incorporates an image, and additional non-qualitative content, S-imaginings. While 'S' is for suppose, 'S-imagining is not literally supposing, but shares with supposition the property that what is S-imagined is not determined by the subject's images' (Peacocke 1985, p. 25). What is S-imagined can vary without variation of the image, and so determines whether a visualized suitcase hides a hyena, and whether your imagined building is King's or a ringer.

Kung's view is similar: '[i]magination has two kinds of content, qualitative content and assigned content' (Kung 2010, p. 632). But he gives more detailed descriptions of these contents. Qualitative content is 'what we might. . . pretheoretically describe as the mental picture' (Kung 2010, p. 623). It provides the 'basic observational content' of imaginative experiences: the presentation of 'three-dimensional space filled with objects of varying colors and shapes' (Kung 2010, p. 623). Kung calls qualitative content 'images' for short, and dissociates himself from views on which 'image' denotes 'the whole of what's imagined'; he uses it to refer only to 'the qualitative phenomenal component' of imagining (Kung 2010, p.623, fn.5).

Assigned content 'covers background stipulations and the labels and foreground stipulations made about the objects presented by the mental image' (Kung 2010, p. 625). 'Labels' make an image of one thing, rather than another:

they establish that you are imagining Brando rather than Stanley, or a head rather than a flesh-coloured ovoid (Kung 2010, pp. 624-625). ‘Stipulations’ establish things about the imagined situation that aren’t visible. ‘Background stipulations’ dictate things like the time of day, and ‘foreground stipulations’ ‘make claims about objects in the mental image that are not depicted by the image’; for example, that two visualized people are friends (Kung 2010, p. 625). Stipulations consist in ‘propositional content that goes above and beyond the mental image’ (Kung 2010, p. 625). What labels consist in isn’t settled. They might just be stipulations, or they might be ‘non-basic qualitative content’ (Kung 2010, p. 625). Kung says that the former makes things easier for him, so I will treat labels and stipulations alike as propositional content going beyond the image.

The distinction between background and foreground stipulations brings the substance of the additive view into focus. Background stipulations are, plausibly, generic non-sensory imaginings. But foreground stipulations are a special sort of content, introduced as a theoretical posit to explain certain features of imagery. ‘S-imagining’, I take it, is equivalent to ‘assigned content’, and a similar distinction can be made among S-imaginings; since I’m mostly concerned with foreground stipulations, I’ll use ‘S-imagining’ to refer to those only.

By saying that foreground stipulations are a special theoretical posit, I mean they are different from familiar kinds of non-sensory imagination. Non-sensory imagination is generally characterised (not too helpfully) as the sort of imagination employed to imagine things without images. Conceiving is one kind of non-sensory imagination. Supposing might be another. Some philosophers think that supposing is an imaginative counterpart of belief. Others think that supposing is a kind of thinking, not a kind of imagining.<sup>4</sup> In any case, if foreground stipulations were equivalent to supposing or conceiving, Kung and Peacocke would be employing a familiar sort of imagining in a new role. But they’re not.

Regarding supposition, Peacocke tells us that S-imagining is ‘not literally supposing’ (Peacocke 1985, p. 25). Likewise, Kung tells us that stipulation and supposition are not identical: ‘stipulation, unlike pure supposition, is still subject to imaginative resistance’ (Kung 2010, p. 632).<sup>5</sup> You can suppose anything at all, but you can only stipulate what you can believe. This mirrors the distinction between supposing and conceiving. For example, you can suppose that a square is round, but you can’t conceive it.

But foreground stipulations, at least, must be different from conceiving if

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<sup>4</sup>Supposing is imagining: (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002, p. 35; Goldman 2006, p. 48). Supposing isn’t imagining: (Gendler 2000; Meskin and Weinberg 2006). Useful discussion: (Kind 2013).

<sup>5</sup>Imaginative resistance is the phenomenon of certain things, especially immoral things, proving difficult or impossible to imagine. See (Walton 1994; Gendler 2000; Weatherson 2004).

they are to perform the role the additive view accords them. This is because they say things about images (or about objects depicted in images). Thus, they can't be characterised without reference to those images. Peacocke suggests this of S-imagining:

in the S-imagined condition that there is cat behind a suitcase, that suitcase is thought of as the one which is seen in the imagined experience of a suitcase. Were there not ultimately some such connection with the imagined experience, we would have not a case of S-imagining, but a case of pure supposing (Peacocke 1985, p. 26).

So S-imaginings here depend constitutively on images. While *what* they say is independent of what the image shows, *that* they say anything requires that an image shows something. If this is so, a token stipulation only exists if a token image exists. Stipulations are dependent parts of total imaginative contents. This contrasts with conceiving, which doesn't depend on the existence of its object in order to 'say' anything about it. Further, it isn't a dependent part of a larger content; it is a complete experience in itself.

So foreground stipulation is neither supposing nor conceiving. Kung and Peacocke introduce a special kind of non-sensory imagination that fulfils a certain role in sensory imagination. I'll argue that the role they posit for foreground stipulations is redundant. So there's no reason to think such things exist.

Unlike foreground stipulations, background stipulations are, plausibly, just non-sensory imagining or conceiving. But everyone can agree that non-sensory imagining exists, and that it sometimes accompanies sensory imagining. The point at issue is whether sensory imagining involves a special sort of non-sensory imagining, playing a certain specific role. That's the nub of the additive view. To avoid confusion, I'll assume that background stipulating is conceiving, and refer to it as such. Meanwhile, as a way of referring indifferently to S-imaginings and foreground stipulations, I'll use 'suppositions'.

I've concentrated on Kung and Peacocke because their views are explicitly additive and explained in detail. While I've presented their views as similar, Kung remarks that he finds Peacocke's view of imagination implausible (Kung 2010, p.634, fn.17). But this is because Peacocke thinks that all imagining is 'from the inside', and Kung doesn't. The two don't agree on every detail, but the structure of the views they propose is the same. Other philosophers have sketched views with the same structure, even if they differ over details.<sup>6</sup> One such difference concerns the nature of the propositional element. For example,

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<sup>6</sup>Among others: (Williams 1966; White 1990, p. 92; Kind 2001, p. 101; Martin 2002, p. 403; Noordhof 2002, pp. 428-9).

rather than stipulating that an image represents King's, you might intend that it do so.<sup>7</sup> I haven't space to explore such alternatives here, but I suspect any view paralleling the lines proposed by Kung and Peacocke would be prey to parallels of my arguments.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps, in fact, those alternatives aren't meant to be versions of the additive view. They're often just sketched or mentioned, usually in pursuit of a larger project.<sup>9</sup> But Kung and Peacocke certainly hold the view, it is apparently abroad more widely, and it is interesting and plausible enough to warrant attention.

This attention should be directed towards the view's explanatory achievements. It isn't offered as a description of how imagining seems to be, and it doesn't entail phenomenological claims. The view's primary merit is its aptitude for explaining puzzling features of imagination. Both Kung and Peacocke also suggest that it can illuminate imagination's capacity to evince possibilities. I'll argue later that any such illumination is dim; now, I'll argue that the explanation regarding images is redundant.

### 3 Explaining mental images

The additive view says that imagining involves a mental image with representational content, which it has independently of suppositions. Imagining Desert Orchid involves a mental image that, by itself, represents a grey horse (or a grey-horsey-object). Neither Peacocke nor Kung addresses the question of how the image represents a horse. They instead address the question of how it represents Desert Orchid. But a theory of imagination that relies on indeterminate mental images should have something to say about how such representations are constituted. My argument is that, when we try to say something about this, we render the additive view otiose.

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<sup>7</sup>Williams and Noordhof both suggest intentions are added to images (Williams 1966; Noordhof 2002, pp. 428-9).

<sup>8</sup>In as-yet-unpublished work, Kathleen Stock auditions four candidates for the role of addition to a mental image, and concludes that none are suitable to play it (Stock n.d., §5). The candidates are beliefs, intentions, suppositions, and *sui generis* content of the sort I attribute to Kung and Peacocke. Stock's paper concerns the 'multiple use thesis' (MULTIPLE), which says that the 'same' mental image can recur in different imaginings. This thesis seems to be entailed by the additive view, and perhaps it entails the additive view: if the same mental image can recur in different imaginings, something besides the image makes the difference. Since the additive view and MULTIPLE are connected, Stock and I characterise our targets similarly, and our arguments are complementary. Stock argues that four quick arguments (§2, §4), and one detailed argument derived from Peacocke (§3), do not establish MULTIPLE. Meanwhile, I argue that the additive structure incorporating recurrent images is explanatorily redundant. Many thanks to Stock for letting me read her paper before publication.

<sup>9</sup>Stock says similarly that MULTIPLE is often assumed without argument (Stock n.d., §1).

As a preliminary, consider indeterminate mental images. I assume neither Kung nor Peacocke thinks imagination involves an inner eye inspecting literal mental pictures.<sup>10</sup> But the images they invoke share certain characteristics with depictions (Kung even talks of objects being ‘depicted by the image’; (Kung 2010, p. 625)). Like depictions, images represent one or more objects and some qualities thereof, and do so by presenting qualitative approximations of objects’ appearances: shapes and colours arranged object-wise in a three-dimensional space. If you are talking about images, you are at minimum talking about these approximations of appearances.

That’s the minimum. Depictions, and likewise mental images, perhaps represent more than mere appearances. Kung and Peacocke differ on this. Kung’s mental images certainly represent objects: they present ‘a three-dimensional space filled with objects of varying colors and shapes’, and more-or-less equivalently, a ‘way that space can consistently be filled’ (Kung 2010, pp. 623, 637). Besides the objects themselves, then, images represent spatial relations among them, and space itself. But they don’t represent much more than this. Though he entertains the idea that label content is part of qualitative content, Kung’s settled position is that it isn’t. And when he introduces labels, he says they make the difference between imagining a head, and imagining a flesh-coloured ovoid (Kung 2010, pp. 624-5). Call Kung’s images *impoverished*; they represent bare objects, three-dimensional coloured solids. Everything else is encompassed by additions.

Peacocke is less explicit and specific about image-contents, but indicates that they include sortal concepts, labels, and suchlike, besides bare objects.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps, for Peacocke, an image can represent a head on its own, without a label. Call Peacocke’s images *rich*.

Given that Peacocke’s images are so rich are they really indeterminate? The term ‘indeterminate’ is mine, and is troublesome. Either ‘under-determined’ or ‘ambiguous’ would be equally apt, and equally awkward. The trouble is that, sometimes, all you imagine is a head, but nobody’s head in particular. In such cases, Peacocke’s rich image suffices to determine the total content of the imagining. But the head-image is still indeterminate in this sense: if it is to have particular identity, S-imaginings are needed. Images can only go so far on their own.

Or so the additive view says. My argument is that mental images don’t need suppositions to be determinate. The elements of content sufficient for indeter-

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<sup>10</sup>This view, the pictorial view of imagination, is widely discredited; among others, see (Sartre 1940, Part 1 ch.1; Tye 1991, ch.1; Hopkins 1998, ch.7.1-3; McGinn 2004, ch.5). However, some psychologists endorse something similar; see for example (Kosslyn 1996). For criticism, see (Tye 1991; McGinn 2004, ch.5; Gregory 2013, ch.5).

<sup>11</sup>See especially his discussion of the view’s applications (Peacocke 1985, pp. 32-35).

minate images suffice for determinate ones as well. To make this argument, I need a sketch of image-content's constitution. Since sensory imagining is a kind of qualitative sensory experience, I can develop a theory of the content of images based on a theory of the content of qualitative sensory experiences. There is a plethora of such theories about perceptual content. Given any such theory, we can consider whether the kind(s) of content it involves are apt to constitute mental images.<sup>12</sup> My conjecture is that any satisfactory model of image-content developed thus will render the additive view redundant. The conjecture is too general to be substantiated here, but I can demonstrate the point by developing one possible view. Given the argumentative context, I'll start with Peacocke's own view of perceptual content, from which Kung derives his view of qualitative content (Peacocke 1992, ch.3; Kung 2010, 623, fn.7).<sup>13</sup>

According to Peacocke, perception involves two kinds of non-conceptual content (Peacocke 1992, ch.3). Perceiving an object requires *scenario content*, which represents such things as surfaces, colours, and a perspective taken on these; and *proto-propositional content*, which represents properties of and relations among the surfaces and spaces presented by scenario content (Peacocke 1992, pp. 6-63, 77). Simplifying slightly, scenario content represents an organised array of colours, shapes, and so on, and proto-propositional content represents relations among items in that array, such that a certain object is perceived. What object is perceived depends on the interaction between the two. To take one of Peacocke's examples, scenario content might manifest a symmetrical four-sided red shape, and proto-propositional content will dictate whether that shape is 'given in experience' as a square or a diamond (Peacocke 1992, p. 79; Peacocke 1998, p. 381).

Perhaps it's a leap of interpretation to take Peacocke as saying that scenario content provides an array, which is brought to object-hood by proto-propositions. But it's not an unreasonable leap. Peacocke's discussion of scenario content consistently refers to representation of surfaces, not of objects—and there is more to representing an object than representing its surfaces. For example, surfaces have to be understood as standing in relations to one another such that they constitute a coherent whole. Since proto-propositions provide relations, Peacocke is plausibly interpreted as saying that scenario content provides surfaces, and proto-propositional content binds those surfaces. This is the best way to extend the discussion of squares and diamonds to accommodate the difference between, for example, seeing a set of rectangles oriented in various ways to each other, and seeing a cube.

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<sup>12</sup>Direct realists think perception doesn't have content, but I don't have space to address what they might say about mental images. For an idea, see (Martin 2002).

<sup>13</sup>I take it that the additive view is best interpreted in this light, rather than that of Peacocke's earlier view of perceptual content (Peacocke 1983).

This model of perceptual content can found a model of image-content. We have a sensory array, and the representation of relations among the surfaces and shapes in that array, such that an object is manifested to us. This gets us as far as Kung's impoverished images. But now we come to an important difference. In (veridical) perceptual experience, the array of colours and shapes represented in scenario content will be determined by what's available to be seen. and the viewer's perspective. Similarly, context will play a role in establishing what proto-propositional content is applied to the scenario. Symmetrical four-sided shapes perceived in the context of a card game will typically be given in experience as diamonds.<sup>14</sup> But when we imagine, the world doesn't provide the scenario, and nor does it provide a context in which that scenario is interpreted. So there are open questions about why one scenario rather than another is given, and why some proto-propositional content in particular is applied to it.

Plausibly, these things are in the gift of the subject. You actively generate an image by deploying a concept, which calls up sensations sufficient for a scenario, and simultaneously dictates what proto-propositional content is applied to that scenario. Peacocke says the advocate of scenario content should 'insist on the partially conceptual character of the perceptual content when one sees something to be a dog' (Peacocke 1992, 73; see also p.88). So concepts come into the perceptual story when objects are seen as a kind of object (as they do, as labels, on Kung's view of images). Peacocke also allows that conceptual content can influence what contents figure in experience at the non-conceptual level: the flow of influence goes both ways (Peacocke 1992, p. 90). So concepts can influence what proto-propositions are applied to a scenario in perception. My suggestion about images is that a concept always figures in the story, and always exerts this influence. A concept secures representation of an object by prompting the generation of a scenario and the application of proto-propositional content to it. The concept deployed dictates what object is presented by the image.

This immediately casts doubt on the stability of Kung's impoverished images, since it seems that some sort of conceptual apparatus will be needed to generate even the simplest of object-images. So images are infused with sortal or general concepts at the most basic level (of course, Kung is open to this, in that he is open to labels being part of qualitative content). This is just what Peacocke's rich image version of the additive view says. But carried further, the line of thought vitiates the appeal of that view too. There's no reason why the concept deployed in generating a mental image should always be a sortal concept, rather than a concept of a particular. If I produce a scenario and a set of

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<sup>14</sup>Sean Kelly argues that Peacocke's view needs to be augmented by a sensitivity to the role played by context in determining how scenario content is interpreted, though Kelly concentrates on things such as colour constancy (Kelly 2001).

proto-propositions adequate for an image of a horse by deploying the concept *horse*, I can likewise produce content adequate for an image of Desert Orchid by deploying the concept *Desert Orchid*. What makes my image of Desert Orchid, rather than of some other horse, is that the image is generated by deployment of that concept. But if this is right, there is no special work for suppositions about the image to do. Just the same elements of content that generate an indeterminate image can generate a determinate one. The additive view is rendered redundant.

At least, it is so far as particularity goes. Do we need suppositions to determine whether imaginary luggage hides a leopard? I don't think so, though this is trickier to show, and requires developing our sketches of perceptual and image-content further than Peacocke does.

Part of apprehending an object as a three-dimensional item, and as a certain sort of item, is entertaining various expectations and anticipations about how that object would appear from other viewpoints.<sup>15</sup> Call these the object's *horizons*.<sup>16</sup> Horizons are, plausibly, a sort of proto-propositional content, consisting in (among other things) relations among past, present, and anticipated perceptual experiences. The horizons an object is apprehended as having are partially constitutive of the experience of the object. So, for example, applying one set of horizons rather than another will make the difference between seeming to perceive a barn rather than a barn façade, and this difference will manifest in a felt difference in experience. If you think you're seeing a barn, you'll expect the object of your perception to have a substantial presence, and be surprised if it turns out to be flimsy.

Similarly, when one imagines a suitcase, part of this experience is grasping the appropriate horizons, and these are provided by proto-propositional content, which is in turn dictated by the concept deployed in the imaginative experience. But the difference between imagining a lonely suitcase and one occluding a cat is a difference in what one expects would happen were one to change one's viewpoint on the suitcase.<sup>17</sup> This is just a difference in the horizons the imagined suitcase is accorded. And this means we can capture the difference between the two situations using just the same apparatus of content we used to generate an image of a suitcase. It is necessary to have horizons if one is to imagine a

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<sup>15</sup>Hardly a novel notion; see, for example, (Husserl 1900; Merleau-Ponty 1945; O'Regan and Noë 2001; Noë 2004; Hopp 2011).

<sup>16</sup>The term is derived directly from Walter Hopp (Hopp 2011), and thus indirectly from Husserl, though I doubt Hopp would endorse my sketch of image-content.

<sup>17</sup>For imagination, 'expectation' is really the wrong term. When imagining, you (in some sense) already know what you're imagining. So rather than *expecting* that an object will appear a certain way when viewed differently, you already know how it will appear. I cannot address this complication here.

suitcase at all, and just those horizons can provide the relevant difference between the two situations. Once again, there is no special work for suppositions to do here, and so once again the additive view is obviated. I'm not arguing that *every* aspect of imaginative experiences is captured by the same content used to generate images. Affective content probably can't be. But I am arguing that the aspects for which the additive view is a putative explanation require no special content beyond that needed for indeterminate images.

Withdrawing the focus from this specific model, a general way of opposing the additive view becomes visible. The view's heart is its commitment to mental images which represent indeterminate objects, motivated by cases in which it seems obvious that you achieve two things: imagining a horse-image, and imagining Desert Orchid. But this is only obvious if the cases are correctly described as involving indeterminate images, and there is no reason to accept that unless you are already minded to accept the additive view. By way of analogy, consider depiction. We might ask two questions about a portrait. First, how does it represent a person at all? Second, how does it represent some particular person? We might construe these as different questions, and we can describe the content of the picture at the indeterminate and the particular levels. But almost every theory of depiction says that the resources employed at each level are the same. The portrait represents a person, and a particular person; it does so by resembling them, or by denoting them, or by prompting us to make-believe that we are seeing them.<sup>18</sup> No resources are needed to explain depiction of a particular besides those that explain depiction of a person. But the additive view starts from descriptions of cases in which these two things are pulled apart. Representing an object at all is described as a separate achievement from representing a particular object, and it's assumed that the second achievement requires extra resources. The additive view offers an explanation of the second achievement, but not of the first. The moral of my argument, and my analogy, is that explaining the first achievement suffices to explain the second.

The account of images sketched above is an outline of a view on which you achieve just one thing when you imagine Desert Orchid. Call this the *unity view*. My conjecture (again, unsubstantiated) is that any satisfactory account of mental images will lead to the unity view, and thus to the suspicion that the additive view trades on a form of double-counting. The fact that you can describe the contents of imaginative experience on two levels, the general and the particular, doesn't mean there are two separate imaginative achievements in the same experience. Nor does the one achievement involve two experiences. Another analogy with depiction: it's commonly thought that experiencing a picture as

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<sup>18</sup>Resemblance: (Hopkins 1998). Denotation: (Goodman 1976). Prop-oriented make-believe: (Walton 1990).

depicting an object involves mental representation of both the picture's design (properties like the configuration of paint on canvas) and the depicted object. It could be that object and design are represented by separate experiences. But a better explanation is that pictorial experience involves a single, complex content, within which it is impossible to separate the elements of content representing the design and those representing the depicted object. You can, in a certain sense, describe those elements as abstractions from the whole, but in so doing, you don't describe elements of content that can in principle be disunified (Hopkins 2010). Similarly, I suggest, mental images have singular, complex, unified content, whose elements cannot be separated. This suggestion echoes Sartre's idea that in imagination, we are not 'dealing with *images*, which is to say with elements of consciousness. . . [but] with complete consciousnesses, which is to say complex structures that 'intend' certain objects' (Sartre 1940, p. 8). Imagination does its intending in the image; the suppositions proposed by the additive view are obsolete.

Perhaps there are other kinds of cases, besides those explicitly raised by Kung and Peacocke, where the additive view has an explanatory advantage over the unity view. Non-sensory imagination doesn't provide such cases. The additive view doesn't explain pure non-sensory imagining; it appeals to a special kind of non-sensory imagining to explain features of sensory imagining. Conversely, the unity view doesn't entail the denial that there's such a thing as non-sensory imagining. But what about cases involving both imagery and non-sensory imagining? visualize Desert Orchid galloping in training, and imagine that he's preparing for the Grand National. This latter element of the scenario can't be captured by horizontal content. Does the additive view offer better explanation here than the unity view?

Only if the additive view has an exclusive right to the sort of non-sensory imagining involved. I don't think it does. Granted, the case involves what Kung calls background stipulation; but to give it a name isn't to claim ownership. The unity view need not deny that non-sensory imagining can accompany mental images, and that the two together can provide a richer imaginative experience. The contrast between the two views is just over the question of whether a special sort of non-sensory imagining is necessary to give mental images determinate content.

Here's another analogy. Think of a film with a voice-over. The interaction between the voice-over and the filmed events delivers a richer scenario than either could manage alone. Nonetheless, often, either could stand alone as a narrative. The question between the additive and unity views is whether images, the filmed events, can only have certain features if they involve propositional content. Both can agree that voice-overs add to images. There's much more to be said by someone pursuing the unity view about how this is so. But the

additive view doesn't say much about this either. There's nothing to choose between the two in this sort of case. But in the cases which are the bones of contention, this is something to choose; and I contend that the unity view should be chosen.

In summary, the additive view needs some account of how indeterminate mental images represent anything at all. But such accounts over-generate. A plausible sketch of the content of indeterminate mental images also covers determinate images, and the representation of certain non-visible features of imagined situations. So the special suppositions proposed by the additive view are otiose; the explanatory work they are meant to do is already done. Since the argument for the additive view is just that it does this explanatory work, the view is now redundant, especially since an alternative is available.

However, the additive view is advertised as having two explanatory achievements. Its second alleged achievement is that it illuminates imagination's role in modal epistemology. I will now argue that it doesn't achieve this either.

## 4 Imagining possibilities additively

A theory of imagination's nature isn't primarily in the business of explaining imagination's applications, and can't be impugned for failing to do so. But if it *can* illuminate an application, that's a mark in its favour. Kung uses the additive view to explain how imagination provides excellent evidence for everyday possibilities, and in so doing hopes to suggest how it might evince possibility in other cases. Peacocke also discusses modal epistemology, and suggests, relatively briefly, that the additive view undermines imagination's claim to evince certain abstruse possibilities, such as inverted spectra. I'll consider the two separately; Kung is first.

If you can't find a way to sort perceptual illusions from veridical perception, you might fall become sceptical of perception's reliability. Similarly, if you dwell on cases where imagination misleads you about possibilities, you might become sceptical about its ability to evince them (Kung 2010, p. 633). Nonetheless, the common practice of using imagination to evince possibilities seems broadly reliable. Perhaps there are other ways to evince possibilities, and perhaps, when it comes to abstruse claims, visualising alone can't do the job (Kung 2010, pp. 650-5). But you can believe all that, and still think that visualising is an excellent way to decide if the sofa will fit up the stairs. We can justify that thought by explaining how imagining evinces such everyday possibilities. In so doing, we will also get a firmer grip on whether, and when, it evinces outré possibilities. Accordingly, while acknowledging that 'hardened modal skeptics' won't be swayed by his arguments (Kung 2010, p. 638), Kung attempts to ex-

plain how '[w]hen we correctly exploit [mental] imagery, we get evidence for possibility', and thus to give a 'principled distinction' between 'probative' imaginings, which evince possibility, and 'non-probative' ones (Kung 2010, pp. 645, 633).

Kung argues that 'pure supposition' isn't probative, because we can suppose anything at all. Stipulation operates under tighter constraints: we can only stipulate what we can believe (Kung 2010, pp. 622, 634-5). But this is still rather slack. That something is believable doesn't imply that it's possible. So mere stipulation isn't probative either. Since stipulation isn't probative, any sensory imagining in which a possibility-claim at issue is established by assigned content alone isn't probative. Qualitative content needs to do some of the work. Kung summarises his account of when imagining is probative thus:

Imagining situation S provides new evidence that P is possible just in case:

- i. The qualitative content Q and the assigned content V (if any) make it intuitive that, in S, P is the case.
- ii. Without qualitative content Q, it would not be intuitive that, in S, P (Kung 2010, p. 639).<sup>19</sup>

Kung follows Kripke in saying that 'a proposition is intuitive on the basis of content A if one feels rationally compelled, in virtue of grasping the proposition and its ingredient concepts, to judge that [it] must be true given A' (Kung 2010, pp. 639-40). He also endorses Kripke's doctrine that intuitions provide 'heavy evidence' for a claim (Kung 2010, p.640, fn.24, quoting Kripke 1972, p. 42). Kung is clear that rational compulsion is not a matter of logical implication (Kung 2010, pp. 639-42). This seems quite right. It is neither necessary nor sufficient for rational compulsion that a proposition follow from some content. On sufficiency, you can feel uncompelled by the ineluctable conclusion of a valid argument. On necessity, the literature on cognitive illusions suggests that certain propositions can seem rationally compelling even when they don't follow from content we're entertaining (Kahneman 2011).

That's what rational compulsion *isn't*; but what *is* it? Kung doesn't give much gloss, but the idea seems to be that a proposition is rationally compelling if you just *feel*, on the basis of some content, that it's rational to accept the proposition. Perception, for example, rationally compels the belief that things before you are as they seem; it has, as Pryor puts it, 'phenomenal force' (Pryor 2000, 547, n.37).

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<sup>19</sup>There are three further conditions. One demands that assigned content be 'authenticated'; the others ensure that certain *recherché* possibilities cannot be evinced by imagination (Kung 2010, pp. 642, 654-6). My argument concerns the first two conditions only.

So Kung says that an imagined situation evinces the possibility of a proposition if you feel compelled to accept the proposition is true in the situation, and the image does some of the compelling. Images do so by ‘present[ing] a way that space can consistently be filled’; they ‘display a way that objects could be arranged in space, for direct inspection, as it were’ (Kung 2010, pp. 637, 657). They thereby make it highly rationally compelling that space could so be filled, much as perceptual seemings compel beliefs that space is filled a certain way. While images must make a contribution to an imagining in order for it to be probative, stipulations can also provide some of the phenomenal force, especially those we already know are possible (Kung 2010, pp. 639-640). This is to be expected. As we saw above, stipulations are subject to imaginative resistance; and plausibly, you don’t get resistance without compulsion.

Kung’s account is a ‘challenge model’ (Kung 2010, §5). When we feel compelled to think that a proposition is true in an imagined situation, and thus that it is possible, we should ask whether the compulsion would be present without the image. If it would be, the imagining isn’t probative. But if the image is decisive, the imagining is probative. Now, as I said, Kung’s first aim here is to show how imagination is probative in everyday cases, prior to addressing recondite ones. My argument is that his account in fact classes an implausibly small number of everyday imaginings as probative.

First, a clarification. Kung’s condition (ii) admits of two readings:

- ii.a. There is no possible imagining of S in which P would be intuitive without qualitative content.
- ii.b. In this particular imagining of S, P would not be intuitive without qualitative content.

On the strong reading (ii.a), almost no imaginings will be probative. Almost any appearance can be described in compelling detail. So for almost any visualized situation, you could compose a set of suppositions describing the situation, such that P’s truth in it is rationally compelling. Kung must intend the weaker reading, on which all (and only) imaginings where the image is decisive in making P intuitive count as probative. This requires that the image represents *something* without suppositions. If it doesn’t represent anything, it can’t provide evidence of anything. Kung thus needs to reconcile two convictions: that sensory imaginings involve suppositions, and that imaginings in which suppositions alone make the relevant proposition intuitive aren’t probative. If an imagining is to be probative, suppositions need to act like ideally loving parents. They need to provide enough support, but not too much: enough that the image can represent a situation, but not so much that the image’s contribution to saying what’s true in that situation is superfluous.

Now consider an example. Desert Orchid never ran the Grand National, so whether he could have won it is an open question. Could he possibly have done so? There are many ways to imagine the situation. One way is to visualize Desert Orchid passing the winning post. According to Kung, your mental image shows a grey, horse-shaped object passing a post-shaped object on a grassy-looking surface. This image needs plenty of support to manifest the requisite situation. You need to label Desert Orchid and Aintree; you need to stipulate ‘it’s Grand National day’, and that no other horse has passed the post. These facts aren’t manifest in the image, and you’ve not imagined Desert Orchid winning the National if they don’t obtain. But now it seems that the truth of the relevant proposition would be rationally compelling on the basis of the assigned content alone. If you are simultaneously entertaining all the suppositions and labels mentioned, it’s a short intuitive leap to the claim ‘Desert Orchid has won the National’. This rational compulsion is achieved without an image; it’s not essential to picture Desert Orchid passing the post any more. So, in this case, assigned content alone suffices to make the possibility intuitive, and the imagining doesn’t count as probative.

But this is implausible; the imagining surely evinces the possibility in question. It’s not a complex or contentious case; it’s the sort of everyday possibility that imagining should be able to evince unproblematically, if it can evince any possibilities at all. So on Kung’s view, an implausibly small number of imaginings count as probative. This is even so if some impoverished image could do the trick. Perhaps, if you imagine Aintree from above, and run the race like a film, the image makes an essential contribution. But the implausibility remains: surely the sort of image I described should just as well evince possibility as the bird’s-eye view.

This isn’t an argument directly against the additive view. It is an argument that, as Kung applies it, the view can claim no explanatory merit. Far from illuminating our understanding of modal epistemology by explaining how imagination evinces everyday possibilities, the view undercuts the conviction that it does so.

But what about a rich images view, on which images can represent much more without suppositions? Kung suggests that labels might be part of qualitative content, so perhaps he would be amenable to this. On such a view, many imaginings would indeed be counted as probative by Kung’s model. But they would mostly be probative by virtue of the image-content alone. Assigned content would do no explanatory work in sorting good cases from bad ones, except in the most recondite of imagined situations. This is just what Peacocke seems to think; but the putative illumination offered by the additive view in such cases is not proprietary to that view.

Peacocke uses the additive view to address certain cases where imagining

seems to demonstrate possibilities, and argues that imagining doesn't really play a distinctive role in them. His principal aim is to defend Berkeley's claim that imagining an unperceived tree is impossible. Peacocke argues that to imagine is always to imagine an experience. When you imagine a real tree, you imagine a perceptual experience. This is stipulated in S-imagining. You cannot then consistently stipulate that the tree is unperceived (Peacocke 1985, p. 28). So Berkeley's envisaged opponent can't argue that unperceived objects are imaginable. Thus, even if we are 'taking imaginability here as sufficient for possibility', no such possibility is established (Peacocke 1985, p. 32).

Peacocke further suggests that in some other cases, the additive view 'undermines a natural account of the relation between imagination and understanding' (Peacocke 1985, p. 32). Consider inverted spectra: is it possible that you see as red what I see as blue, and vice versa? The 'natural account' is that you can evince this possibility by imagining my experiences of azure apples and scarlet seas. But the same images could illustrate two possible situations: a world in which everyone sees things so, and a world where only I do. To imagine the second, you need to S-imagine that the imagined experience is mine in the actual world. Since it's this stipulation that determines you've imagined the case, you need to prove 'the possibility of the S-imagined conditions' if your imagining is to evince the possibility, and this 'will have to be established by... something other than imagination' (Peacocke 1985, p. 34).

Peacocke's idea in tree and spectrum cases alike is that, since S-imaginings dictate what possibility is being imagined, whether or not they are possible and consistent dictates whether the imagined situation is really possible. So whenever someone claims that 'imagination has some distinctive role in our grasp of a particular range of possibilities', we should ask whether our grasp is actually secured by suppositions about images; if it is, there is no 'distinctive role' (Peacocke 1985, p. 32). This is akin to Kung's model above. But unlike Kung, Peacocke isn't concerned with the quotidian. He only wishes to show that, when we consider *recherché* possibilities, suppositions about the nature of the imagined experience often establish the relevant possibility; the image, and thus imagination, plays no special role.

This may be so, but the pertinent question for present purposes is whether the insight is available only to the additive view. I emphasised above that, as I construe the view, it appeals to a special sort of imaginative content to explain features of imagery. I denied that such an appeal is necessary, but I agreed that sensory imagination is sometimes accompanied by non-sensory imagining which enriches the imagined scenario. Peacocke's thought is that imagining typically involves general, tacit assumptions about what you're imagining. These, I think, are more plausibly construed as the sort of generic non-sensory imagination that both additive view and unity view can appeal to.

Suppose Peacocke's right that imagining involves these implicit assumptions. Plausibly, perception involves similar things. You generally assume that your perceptual experience is veridical, and that there's no gap between what you seem to see and what's really the case. As Austin says, in the normal run of things, seeing a pig doesn't give you *evidence* for porcine presence; it makes the fact of the matter manifest (Austin 1962, pp. 114–17). But sometimes, you might think you're being deceived. In such cases, you might treat what your eyes tell you as defeasible evidence. This is to suspend the veridicality assumption. But in so doing, you're not altering the content of your experience. You're changing assumptions about how that content relates to what it represents.

Likewise with imagination. Peacocke's thought is that you generally assume that your imaginings are of the real world, from your own perspective, and so on. Perhaps we do assume those things, but if we do, the assumptions aren't the sort of special imaginative content at the heart of the additive view. They're generic non-sensory imaginings, or even thoughts, accompanying the imagery, which (again) concern the relation between the image-content and what it represents. There's no need to appeal here to the sort of special imaginative content that the additive view involves. And so Peacocke's insights are not the unique preserve of the additive view.

So according to Kung, the additive view tells us how imagining is probative in everyday cases. But if we apply his model and his impoverished images, we get an implausibly small class of probative imaginings. On the other hand, if we adopt rich images, many imaginings are probative; but they are so in virtue of image-content alone, and suppositions only matter in recondite cases like Peacocke's. However, in such cases, the alleged insight of the additive view is that suppositions about the nature of the experience establish the salient possibility claim. This insight is not proprietary to the view; you can agree with it, but argue that these suppositions are just generic assumptions, not the special sort of imaginative content at the heart of the additive view. So neither version of the additive view illuminates imagination's relation to modal epistemology.

## 5 Conclusion

The additive view is plausible, intuitive, and mistaken. The idea that sensory imagining consists in an indeterminate mental image with propositional content added is simple, elegant, and promising. But a simple account of the content of indeterminate mental images renders the view's explanations otiose, and casts doubt on the descriptions of the cases which motivate it; and it does not illuminate imagination's relation to modal epistemology. The additive view of

imagination should be rejected.<sup>20</sup>

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