

# BOOK REVIEW

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## Showing, Sensing, and Seeming: Distinctively Sensory Representations and their Contents

DOMINIC GREGORY

OUP, 2013. PP. XII + 230. £35 (Hbk).

Many pictures, imaginings, and memories are ‘distinctively sensory’ representations: they ‘show things as looking or sounding or otherwise standing sensorily certain ways’ (vii). The aim of Dominic Gregory’s *Showing, Sensing, and Seeming* is to see what can be gained by theorizing about these representations as a class. The book makes a convincing case that the answer is: quite a lot. Clearly written and well argued, it offers a theory of distinctively sensory representations—the first of its kind—and then uses it to weigh in on a range of debates. Some of the book reworks material from earlier articles by Gregory. Even in the rare cases where there is overlap, though, the ideas are better appreciated within the context of Gregory’s theoretical framework of distinctively sensory representations, which is only developed in the monograph. In this reviewer’s opinion, *Showing, Sensing, and Seeming* deserves the attention of anyone interested in mental imagery, pictures, or indeed any type of distinctively sensory representation.

The book divides into two parts. The first half (Chapters 1–4) presents the theory of distinctively sensory representations, while the second half (Chapters 5–8) considers applications of the theory to issues concerning specific types of distinctively sensory representations. The bulk of the theory is presented in Chapter 3, though it resists tidy summary, as it builds on preparatory material developed in Chapter 2 and is then further refined in Chapter 4. Nevertheless, there are three guiding ideas to the theoretical framework (these are stated as Principles (3A)–(3D)):

*Distinctively sensory showing comes from sensory informativeness.* ‘Distinctively sensory contents single out ways for things to stand sensorily in *subjectively informative* ways: they single out types of sensations just in terms of what it is like to have sensations of the relevant kind. And that is why distinctively sensory representations *show* things as standing sensorily certain ways’ (48).

*Scene-showing corresponds to seeming.* ‘A distinctively sensory representation shows an *F* which is *G*, on account of the ways that the representation shows things as standing sensorily, just in case there is some way that the representation shows things as standing sensorily which is such that anyone who has a sensation of that kind thereby seems sensorily to encounter an *F* which is *G*’ (52).

*Distinctively sensory representations are sensation- or perspective-characterizing.* Distinctively sensory representations can single out their sensation-types for the purpose of either characterizing a sensation or a perspective. A distinctively sensory representation is sensation-characterizing just in case its content ‘characterizes one or more sensations as being instances of ... sensation-types’ (54), whereas it is perspective-characterizing just in case it ‘characterizes the appearance-contents of ... sensation-types as being true relative to one or more perspectives’ (57).

One of the aims of this half of the book is to show how this theory can explain some key features that distinctively sensory representations share—features which Gregory identifies in Chapter 1. For example, distinctively sensory representations are perspectival: they show things as standing certain ways from perspectives. Gregory shows how this perspectivalness follows from his account. An interesting feature of this

part of the book is how Gregory uses the account to argue against Peacocke's (1985) and Martin's (2002) provocative contention that visualizings are always imaginings of visual experiences.<sup>1</sup> Gregory does this by arguing that distinctively sensory representations come in two varieties: sensation-characterizing and perspective-characterizing. While sensation-characterizing visualizings are visualizings of experiences, perspective-characterizing visualizings are not.

The second half of the book applies the theory to issues concerning specific types of distinctively sensory representations: mental imagery (Chapter 5), pictures (Chapters 6–7) and distinctively sensory records (Chapter 8). Chapter 5 revisits the thesis that visual mental images are stored in a picture-like format, which seems to be the orthodoxy among psychologists. Several fascinating studies by Kosslyn and others have been used in support of this view.<sup>2</sup> Gregory's aim is to show that this behavioral and neurological data can be explained by assuming only that visual mental images have the same sorts of *contents* as pictures or visual experiences, a consequence of Gregory's theory. Gregory argues that this strategy works better than Pylyshyn's attempt to rebut the orthodoxy, which requires that visualizings involve the simulation of visual experiences.<sup>3</sup> Gregory's strategy may prove fruitful here: if correct, it suggests that similar potential data about the other sensory modalities (if it can be found, that is: the topic is far less explored) could be subjected to a similar strategy.

Chapters 6 and 7 cover pictures. An important theme in Chapter 6 is that there is a fundamental divide between two types of pictures, and we should

not expect accounts of depiction to cover both. In particular, while many pictures fall into the class of distinctively sensory representations ('distinctively visual pictures'), many others do not (prime examples of the latter are toddler's drawings and Cubist paintings). Gregory suggests that it is unclear whether extant accounts of depiction aim to be fully general, or instead cover just distinctively visual pictures but, in any case, suggests that they be interpreted as only aiming at covering the latter. When thus interpreted, Gregory evaluates three major styles of accounts against a criterion, which emerges from his theory. He argues that accounts in terms of recognition or pretence do not meet the criterion, while accounts using experienced resemblances do. Here Gregory briefly remarks that an account that makes use of 'objective' resemblances might fare at least as well (155, n. 58). I would have liked to see this possibility explored further. I am also curious to see how Greenberg's account of depiction, which does not neatly fit into Gregory's taxonomy, would fare.<sup>4</sup> Chapter 7 considers several other issues concerning pictures—notably, it provides an account of lifelikeness in pictures, and discusses the importance of ambiguity to understanding many pictures.

The final chapter deals with 'distinctively sensory records', or distinctively sensory representations that show things as standing certain ways from past perspectives or in past sensations. Gregory addresses epistemological differences among distinctively sensory records to explain, for example, why it is that photographs are typically better able to transmit information than handmade pictures, or why it is that sensory memories can generate knowledge. In doing so, Gregory heavily relies on Burge's entitlement framework and in particular its principle to trust appearances.<sup>5</sup> Gregory uses it to suggest that apparent sensory memories have a special epistemic status not shared by photographs, for example. Yet Gregory

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1 Christopher Peacocke, 'Imagination, Experience, and Possibility', in John Foster and Howard Robinson (eds), *Essays on Berkeley: A Tercentennial Celebration* (Oxford: OUP, 1985) and Michael G. F. Martin, 'The Transparency of Experience', *Mind and Language* 4 (2002), 376–425.

2 See, for example, Stephen M. Kosslyn and William L. Thompson, 'When is Early Visual Cortex Activated During Visual Mental Imagery?', *Psychological Bulletin* 129 (2003), 723–746.

3 Zenon W. Pylyshyn, *Seeing and Visualizing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

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4 Gabriel Greenberg, 'Beyond Resemblance', *Philosophical Review* 122 (2013), 215–287.

5 Tyler Burge, 'Content Preservation', *Philosophical Review* 102 (1993), 457–488.

says very little about how the issues should look to epistemologists not working within this framework. It seems plausible that for someone only interested in the reliability or safety of the method employed, apparent sensory memories will lack this special epistemic status.

In the Conclusion, Gregory gestures at the relevance of his theory to other issues. I'll conclude by highlighting its relevance to two additional debates. A key consequence of Gregory's theory is that distinctively sensory representations have the same kinds of contents as their experiential counterparts. So, if the property of being a table can figure in the contents of visual experiences, then it also can figure in the contents of visualizings and other distinctively visual representations. Gregory stays neutral on whether the contents of visual experience include tablehood and other high-level contents (8). Yet the account seems to interact in interesting ways with this issue. One way that low-level content theorists have pushed back on alleged cases of visual experiences with high-level contents is to remark that we mistake visual imaginings or memories with parts of our visual experiences, owing to their phenomenal similarity.<sup>6</sup> Gregory's theory suggests a constraint any such response should obey: the same types of contents figure in the distinctively visual representations as in the visual experiences; so the low-level

theorist's response cannot assume that the contents of visual imaginings or memories include high-level contents. Rather, the idea has to be that visual imaginings with low-level contents co-occur with visual experiences with different low-level experiences to change the overall character of our experience. A second potential application concerns the role of distinctively sensory representations in the epistemology of the future as well as the epistemology of possibility. Gregory focuses almost exclusively on their role in the epistemology of the past. Yet mental imagery seems to be capable of generating knowledge of future and merely possible scenarios. It seems that one way I can come to know that I can grasp the mug in front of me involves my visually imagining a scene slightly different from the one presently before me. What role Gregory's theory can play in accounting for knowledge like this remains to be seen. All this is to say that *Showing, Sensing, and Seeming* contributes a theory of relevance to many philosophical issues.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Price, 'Aspect-Switching and Visual Phenomenal Character', *Philosophical Quarterly* 59 (2009): 508–518.