1992

Make-Believe and Its Role in Pictorial Representation and the Acquisition of Knowledge

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Make-believe is not just for children. Many adult activities are best understood as continuations of children's make-believe, and can be illuminated by comparing them with games of dolls, cops and robbers, and hobby horses. One adult activity that involves make-believe is that of making and looking at pictures. What are pictures? How do pictures of a man differ from the word 'man'? In a nutshell, pictures are props in visual games of make-believe.[2]

In "Meditations on a Hobby Horse," Ernst Gombrich compared pictures to a simple hobby horse, a stick—perhaps with a wooden "head" attached, but perhaps just a plain stick—on which a child "rides" around the house. Gombrich considered and rejected describing this stick as an 'image of a horse,' an "imitation of [a horse's] external form." He also considered and rejected thinking of it as a sign that signifies or stands for or refers to a horse, or to the concept horse. Pictures also, he suggested, are not to be thought of in either of these ways. He proposed thinking of pictures and hobby horses, rather, as *substitutes*. A hobby horse substitutes for a horse; a picture of a man substitutes for a man.[3]

"Meditations on a Hobby Horse," famous though it is, has been largely ignored. It is fair to say that most discussions of pictorial representation during the last forty years have proceeded in one or the other of the two directions Gombrich advised against. There are resemblance theories of representation (some more sophisticated than others). And there are semiotic theories, such as that of Nelson Goodman, who declares flatly that "denotation is the core of representation."[4] Even Gombrich's own later work, including *Art and Illusion*, has been understood by some to advance the idea that pictures are imitations of the external forms of objects. Others find in it the conception of pictures as symbols or signs that signify or stand for what they are pictures of.[5] Neither interpretation is entirely without justice. But Gombrich's original characterization of pictures as substitutes, and his comparison of pictures with hobby horses, was on the right track.

Two central thoughts stand out in Gombrich's reflections on pictures and the hobby horse. First, he emphasizes that "art is 'creation' rather than 'imitation'." "The child 'makes' a train either of a few blocks or with pencil on paper," he observes – she doesn't *imitate* or *refer* to a train; she *makes* one.[6] "All art is 'image-making' and all image-making is rooted in the creation of substitutes."[7] But is it mere substitutes that the image maker creates? Gombrich described the child as making a *train* out of blocks or on

paper, not a substitute for a train. To cement the uncertainty he states: "By its capacity to serve as a 'substitute' the stick becomes a horse in its own right, it belongs in the class of 'gee gees' and may even merit a proper name of its own."[8] What is it that the artist creates when she draws a man, a man or a substitute for a man?

The second central idea that Gombrich derives from the association of pictures with hobby horses is an emphasis on function rather than form. "The 'first' hobby horse was ... just a stick which qualified as a horse because one could ride on it." "Any ridable object could serve as a horse." A ball represents a mouse to a cat, he says. And to a baby, who sucks its thumb as if it were a breast, the thumb represents a breast. "The ball has nothing in common with the mouse except that it is chasable. The thumb nothing with the breast except that it is suckable."[9] Function rather than form.

But the distinction between function and form may seem to be just where hobby horses and pictures diverge. Yes, a mere stick with hardly any of the form of a horse, just enough to be "ridable," serves as a horse. But pictures capture the *appearance* of the things they picture. One doesn't ride a picture of a horse; one looks at it. But a single object can have more than one function. One function of a horse is to be ridden, but another function, which some horses have for some people, is to be looked at. Maybe pictures of horses substitute for horses as objects of seeing.

Much of what Gombrich said in spelling out the analogy between hobby horses and pictures is blatantly and straightforwardly false. (Maybe this is one reason why his early essay was ignored.) The notion that the stick is (literally) a horse, or that a picture of a man is (literally) a man, is as blatant a falsehood as one can find. The stick is a stick and the picture is a picture. Nevertheless, as Gombrich observes, it is perfectly ordinary for perfectly sane people to point to a picture of a man and say, in all seriousness, "That is a man." It is also perfectly natural for a perfectly normal child to point to the stick and say, "This is a horse."

Are these just short ways of saying, "That is a *substitute* man" or "This is a *substitute* horse," it being understood that substitutes are not the real thing? But the hobby horse is not much of a substitute for a horse. Had Paul Revere's horse been sick the night of the British attack, he could hardly have made do with a hobby horse borrowed from a neighborhood child. Not even a wonderfully realistic hobby horse with a carved head and carpet tacks for eyes would have enabled him to beat the British to Concord. Hobby horses are *not* ridable, not *really*; so they can't really substitute for actual horses. And if someone wants to look at a horse, a picture of a horse is not a very satisfactory replacement. To see a picture of a horse is not to see a horse, not really. And the viewer of the picture does not even enjoy an illusion of seeing a horse. In all but the rarest of cases it is perfectly obvious that what one is seeing is a flat surface with marks on it, not a horse.

Figure 1:
Jonathan Eastman
Johnson
The Old Stagecoach,
1871
Oil on Canvas
36 1/4" x 60 1/8"
Layton Art Collection,
The Milwaukee Art
Museum

The children in Jonathan Eastman Johnson's *The Old Stagecoach* (figure 1) have something better than sticks to use for horses; some of them play the parts themselves. But children are not really horses any more than sticks are. They are not much better than sticks for riding—Paul Revere couldn't have replaced his sick horse with a neighbor's child any more successfully than with the child's hobby horse. And even four children can't pull a stagecoach very far. Not really.

But the children in this picture have created a *fictional world*—the world of their game of make-believe. *Within this world* there are horses—real ones, not substitutes; and they really do pull the stagecoach. Let's say that it is *fictional*, fictional in the world of the game of make-believe, that real horses are really pulling the stagecoach. Speaking in the real world, I must say that the horses are merely real-in-the-world-of-the-game, that it is only fictional that they are real. But if I could get inside the fictional world myself and speak *there*, I could say that the horses are real, *period.*

The children you see *are* in the fictional world. It is fictional, true-in-the-world-of-the-game, that some of them are riding in a coach pulled by real horses. And they can say, within the game, "Those are real horses" (if they feel it necessary to belabor the obvious). It is only when we stand outside the game, when parents are talking about the fun their children are having with the old broken down stage coach, for instance, that saying "That is a horse" is a blatant falsehood. Yes, Paul Revere can not replace an ailing real horse with either a hobby horse or a child. But that is because the British attack comes in the real world. If the British attacked in the world of make-believe, a child might ride off on his hobby horse or on another child—on what in the world of the game is a real horse—to spread the alarm.

Figure 2:
Clarkson Stanfield
On the Dogger Bank, 1846
Oil on Canvas
30" x 27 1/2"
By courtesy of the Board of Trustees
of the Victoria and Albert Museum

Pictures have worlds also. There is a ship in the world of Stanfield's *On the Dogger Bank* (figure 2)—a real ship, not a substitute. From my position here in the real world I have to tell you that this isn't really a real ship; here in the real world we have nothing but a picture consisting of light projected on a screen, a picture of a ship; it is merely fictional that there is a real ship here. But if I could somehow get inside the picture, inside the picture world, I could then say, "That is a real ship."

Gombrich's analogy between pictures and hobby horses now seems in jeopardy. A child playing with a hobby horse belongs to the world of her game of make-believe. But the spectator of a picture does not belong to the world of the picture. Real people can and do get inside make-believe worlds. But all we can do with picture worlds, it seems, is observe them from outside.

But wait! How did the ship get into Stanfield's picture? Maybe I can get in in the same way. (Figure 3.)
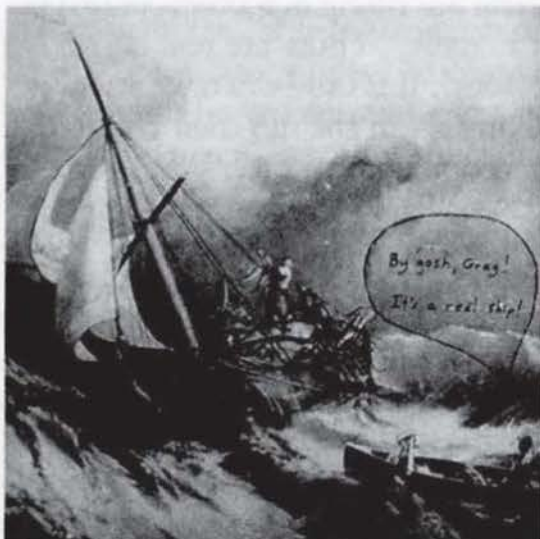

Figure 3:
Doctored version of *On the Dogger Bank*

I brought my son along to help me paddle. It really is me in the picture world. It is fictional, "true in the world of the picture" that I, Kendall Walton, am paddling a canoe in heavy seas close to a small sailing ship. I got into the picture world in almost the same way the ship did. It was painted in; I was pasted in, and that is just as good.[10] While I am in the picture world I can with perfect appropriateness declare the ship to be real.

But this is disappointing, and not just because I ruined a nice picture. I am not present in the picture world in the way a child playing hobby horses is present in the wild west world of her game of make-believe. The trouble is that I am still *here* in the real world, giving a lecture in Brockport, New York. And I am looking not at a ship, but just at a *picture*, a picture of myself looking at a ship. The difference in the two ways of being in fictional worlds is partly this: What is in the picture world depends on the picture, on a pattern of shapes and colors on a flat surface. But what exists in a game of make-believe depends on the children who are playing the game, as well as on properties of the stick and other props. It is because of the pattern of light on the screen (or colors on the flat surface), because of the extra shapes caused by doctoring the picture, that my son and I are paddling a canoe in the picture world; where I (really) am and what I am actually doing now is irrelevant. But it is because of what the child is actually doing, because she is straddling the stick and jumping around the house, that she belongs to the world of her game and, in that world, rides a horse.

Maybe instead of trying to squeeze myself into a picture, I can make the picture world bigger, big enough to include me where I am. It will have to expand in the third dimension, like this:

Figure 4:
Drawings by
F.B. Modell;
© 1951, 1979
The New Yorker
Magazine, Inc.

This gentleman is not in the picture world proper, inside the frame, but there is a larger world extending in front of the picture that includes both him and the saguaro cacti in the picture. He has the right kind of presence in this world: it is by virtue of his actually standing in front of the painting that it is fictional in the expansion of the picture world that the desert sun casts a shadow behind him.

This might seem fantastic, however, beyond the capacity of real world mortals. Most painted suns aren't brilliant enough to cast actual shadows into the real world. But the idea was not to make fictional things real; our thought was to get the actual spectator into a fictional world, to expand the picture world around the spectator. Caravaggio's *Bacchus* (figure 5) is a real life picture whose world really does expand to include you and me.

Figure 5:
Caravaggio
Bacchus, c. 1595
Oil on Canvas
37 3/8" x 33 1/2"
Uffizi, Florence

Bacchus offers you a drink. You may not be able to take the glass of wine from his hand, but even before you do he has you in a fictional world—not the world of the painting proper, but a larger world that includes both you and what is in the picture. It is fictional in this larger world that Bacchus offers you a glass of wine. And what makes this fictional is the fact that you are actually here in this auditorium looking at the image on the screen. By placing yourself in front of the picture you put yourself in position to be the recipient of Bacchus' offer.

Think of this larger world as the world of a game of make-believe in which the picture is a prop. There is a parallel with the child's hobby horse. When the hobby horse leans unused in the corner of a room, we can think of it as, by itself, establishing a fictional world something like the world of a picture (or a sculpture). There is a real horse in that world, but a child playing checkers on the other side of the room does not belong to it. When the child takes the stick and uses it as a prop in a game, the world of the hobby horse expands into a world of a game of make-believe, and in *this* world the child rides the horse. The larger world is established by the prop, the stick, together with what the child does with it.

Normally spectators don't do anything with pictures as physical as riding them; museums have rules about not touching paintings. But we do look at pictures, and looking at Caravaggio's *Bacchus* in the normal

manner lets one in for an offer of a drink—in the world of the game of make-believe. (We are sometimes tempted to play more physical games with pictures, however. A portrait of a despised politician makes a wonderful prop in a game in which we, fictionally, throw darts at him.)

Bacchus is a special case. Looking at most pictures does not make it fictional that one is offered a drink. But it is fictional not only that Bacchus offers you a drink, but also that you see him. And depending on the manner in which you examine the picture, it may be fictional that you look into his eyes, or that you avert your gaze; that you identify and count the fruit in front of him, or that you fail to notice the fruit—all this in the world of the game with the picture.

In looking at Stanfield's seascape we expand the picture world, which itself contains a ship floundering in the sea, into a larger world of make-believe in which *we* see the ship. We use the picture as a prop in a game in which it is fictional, by virtue of our actually looking at it in the way we do, that we see a ship. It may be fictional also that we examine the rigging, or watch the sailor in the stern trying to retrieve the broken spar from the sea, or focus on the wave in the background that is about to lift the ship's bow high in the air.

So I *can*, after all, while standing here in this auditorium, say "See that ship? It's a real one!"— provided that in saying this I am participating in the game of make-believe, speaking within the world of my game. Just as straddling a stick and jumping around establishes a fictional world in which one rides a horse, looking at a picture establishes a fictional world in which one observes things of the kind the picture depicts.

We now have a better way of understanding what it means to call the stick or a picture a *substitute*. The stick is neither a real horse nor can it really be used as a horse; one can't ride it. But it can be used in a game of make-believe within which it is real and is really ridable. The picture is used in games in which it is fictional that one really sees a real ship.

Games of make-believe are *imaginative* activities. As they climb on and in and around the old stage coach, the children do not merely observe that it is fictional that the stage is moving at high speed, drawn by four horses, that Rodney (let's call him that) is handling the reins, and so forth. They also *imagine* all this to be true.

A mere spectator of the game could imagine this as well, of course. So what is the advantage of *participating* in the game? In part, it is the fact that participants imagine about *themselves*. Rodney imagines that he, Rodney, is driving a stage. But this is not all. He also imagines riding driving a stage. Imagining *doing* something or *experiencing* something is not the same as imagining *that* one is doing or experiencing it. Remember the canoe expedition my son and I took into the Stanfield painting. As I looked at the doctored picture noting within its frame the photographic image taken on a canoe trip on the Mississagi River, I imagined *that* I, Kendall Walton, was paddling a canoe with my son in dangerously heavy seas near a

battered sailing ship. But I did not imagine *paddling* a canoe in dangerously heavy seas. What I imagined *doing* was *watching* myself paddle a canoe in heavy seas. This is the main reason why my excursion into the picture world was disappointing, why my presence there was less satisfying than the presence of children in their games of make-believe. The child playing with his hobby horse does not imagine merely that he is riding a horse, he imagines riding one.

Besides the overt *physical* participation I have considered so far, children participate *verbally* and *psychologically* in games of make-believe. Rodney "shouts directions to the horses": He really does shout—he does make loud vocal noises and in doing so he makes it fictional that he shouts to the horses. He imagines shouting to the horses, and he imagines of the noises he actually emits that they are his shouts to the horses.

Psychological participation is especially important. It is fictional that Rodney is thrilled and a little nervous, as he strains to control the team, and maybe it is fictional that he swells with pride at the momentous responsibility entrusted to him of taking the stage safely to its destination. He really is tense and excited. And it is in virtue of this that fictionally he is tense and excited. He is not *really* proud of his responsibility for the stage; he realizes perfectly well that he doesn't actually have that responsibility, that he is only playing a game. But he does really experience a swelling sensation, as he *imagines* bearing this responsibility. It is partly this sensation that makes it fictional that he swells with pride in the importance of his position. Aware of his swelling sensations, he spontaneously imagines them to be swellings of pride in his responsibility for the safety of the journey.

Where does the swelling sensation come from? What causes Rodney's feelings of tension and excitement? These actual feelings result from his imaginings, from his imagining, vividly, driving the stage, looking out for bandits, bearing the responsibility for the safety of the stage and its passengers. There is a complex interplay between Rodney's actual feelings or sensations and his imaginings; they interact with and feed each other. His vivid imagining of his momentous responsibility stimulates actual swelling sensations, which he imagines to be feelings of pride in his responsibilities.

Spectators of paintings participate psychologically, as well as visually and verbally, in games of make-believe in which the pictures are props.

I feel tension as I notice the enormous waves in Stanfield's seascape and the ship's disarray, and I "interpret" this tension as a combination of fear for the safety of the ship and awe at the power of the sea. I really do feel a certain tension, as I look at the picture. I don't *really* fear for the ship, since I know that what is before me is not a ship but a painting. But it is fictional in my game that I see a real ship and see the difficulty it is having in high seas. I imagine seeing this, and I imagine fearing for the ship's safety. My actual feelings of tension are incorporated into my imaginative experience:

I imagine these actual feelings to be feelings of a combination of fear for the ship and awe at the power of nature.

Compare a dream in which you are on your way to school, and the school bell rings while you are still two blocks away. This means a tardy slip and half an hour of detention at the end of the day. On waking from the dream, you realize that the school bell was really the sound of your alarm clock, and that you still have an hour before classes begin. The sound of the alarm was actual and you really did hear it while you were dreaming, but you "interpreted" it in your dream as the school bell. You imagined hearing the school bell, and you imagined what actually was the hearing of the alarm to be your hearing of the school bell.

Pictures, as I said, are props in visual games of make-believe. A picture of a turtle is a prop in games in which it is fictional that viewers see a turtle, and in which they imagine seeing a turtle, and imagine their actual visual experience of the picture to be their seeing of a turtle.

Most accounts of pictorial representation realize only the world of the *picture*, and have the viewer standing outside that world and observing it. Theories differ as to the manner in which a picture picks out the propositions constituting its world. Some say it does so by virtue of resemblance or similarity; the picture resembles states of affairs of the kind the propositions it picks out express—a picture of a turtle resembles or looks like a turtle (the state of affairs of there being a turtle). Others say conventions of some sort are involved. (These correspond roughly to Gombrich's two rejected alternatives.) In either case, the viewer's job is to ascertain what propositions the picture picks out, what is "true in the world of the picture," by noting the relevant resemblances or by adducing the relevant conventions.

Here is an example to demonstrate the inadequacy of understanding picture perception as merely a matter of ascertaining what is "true in the picture." Consider two films of a roller coaster ride. Both were made by a camera attached to the last car of the roller coaster. In one case, the camera is hung from a support in such a way that it remains aligned with the horizon even when the car rolls from side to side. In the other case the camera is attached rigidly to the roller coaster so as to tip back and forth as the car does. In the first film, the horizon remains horizontal on the screen, and one sees the roller coaster sway to the right and the left. In the second film, the image of the roller coaster remains upright on the screen, while the horizon tilts. Let's add that both films have circular rather than rectangular images on the screen. The two films contain exactly the same information; the world of the picture is the same in both cases. In fact, we could make a showing of one indistinguishable from the other just by rotating the image at the appropriate times.

But the viewer's experiences of the two films will be very different. The viewer of the one made by the rigidly attached camera has the impression of riding in the roller coaster, of swaying dangerously right and left as the

roller coaster goes around turns. The viewer of the other film has the impression of watching the swaying roller coaster from a stable position outside of it. The viewer of the former is more likely than the viewer of the latter to feel sick. The difference lies in the spectators' games of make-believe and their experiences of imagining seeing. The spectator of one film imagines seeing the roller coaster from a perspective fixed relative to the careening roller coaster. The spectator of the other film imagines seeing the same roller coaster careening in the same manner, but from a perspective fixed relative to the earth and detached from the roller coaster.

Words are not pictures. And the difference is much more fundamental than is suggested by saying merely that words and pictures are symbols of different kinds. Words do not essentially have anything to do with make-believe at all. If you tell me that San Antonio is the site of the battle of the Alamo, you are just conveying to me a piece of information. Your words do not call for imaginings on my part at all like the imaginings a child engages in when she "rides" a hobby horse, or the imaginings of spectators when they look at pictures.

When language is used fictionally, however, in novels and stories and theater, for instance, it is used as a prop in games of make-believe. Spectators at a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, like those portrayed in figure 6, engage in make-believe in which they, fictionally, not only watch Juliet and Romeo but also listen to their words. The spectators' actual tears are not actually tears of grief for the characters, since the spectators fully realize that there is nobody really to grieve for. But they "interpret" their tears, in the game, as tears of grief; they imaginatively grieve for Romeo and Juliet and imagine their actual tears to be tears of grief.

Figure 6:
Thomas Rowlandson
Tragedy Spectators
(1789)

Where did the tears come from in the first place? They result from the spectators' vivid imaginings of the tragedy and of the sufferings endured by Romeo and Juliet. The vivacity of the imaginings depends to a consider-

able extent on the skill with which the actors portray the tragedy, of course. A bad performance will fail to elicit vivid imaginings and actual tears that can be imagined to be tears of grief.

Novels and stories are not usually props in *visual* games of make-believe. But we do use them in games that have psychological dimensions. The reader of *Anna Karenina* does not merely note that it is fictional that Anna is unfaithful to her husband, suffers the disapproval of society, and is finally driven to throw herself under the wheels of a train. It is fictional in the reader's game that he learns about all this, that he sympathizes with Anna, and suffers with her. He imagines learning about an actual Anna, and imagines sympathizing and grieving for her.

The words of many novels and stories are "substitutes" not for people and events of the kinds they describe, but for serious reports about such events. We use the text of *Gulliver's Travels* in a game in which it is fictional that it is the text of the journal of a ship's physician, a certain Lemuel Gulliver. We imagine, of our actual reading of the novel, that it is a reading of such a journal, and we imagine learning from it about Gulliver's adventures in various exotic lands.

What is the point of all this make-believe? It consists largely in the imaginings props elicit in participants, in their imagining seeing, or reading about, or learning about, or knowing about, events of this or that sort, and imagining feeling one way or another about them. The value of these imaginings is in part cognitive. We gain understanding about the real world by engaging in them.

There are plenty of ordinary instances in which imagining assists us cognitively. In many of them it is crucial that one imagines *doing* or *experiencing* certain things; imagining merely that certain states of affairs obtain or that certain events transpire doesn't do the job. This suggests that the cognitive value of representational works of art depends heavily on their prompting appreciators to imagine seeing, or reading about, or learning about, or knowing about, events of this or that sort, and to imagine feeling one way or another about them. Merely recognizing the world of the work and imagining it to be actual doesn't suffice.

(a) How will your study look if the walls are painted the color of this paint chip? In order to decide, you imagine the walls being that color, but you also imagine seeing them when they are that color. How does it then look, in your imagination? If you are better at imagining colors than I am, you will have learned how your study would look, in reality, if it is painted that color.

(b) If you have two right hand gloves whose mates are lost, can you make a right into a left by turning it inside out? Try it in imagination. Imagine peeling the glove off your right hand so that it turns inside out, and then fitting it onto your left hand. Yes, it fits! It is crucial to the success of this experiment that one imagine seeing the glove turned inside out and then fitting onto your left hand. Just imagining that it has been

turned inside out doesn't do the trick.

(c) If you face a difficult decision and can't make up your mind, try flipping a coin. Shall I take a job with a rodeo, or work in an accounting firm? Which do I prefer? The coin itself doesn't know my mind. But suppose that it tells me to go with the rodeo. I may then find myself dismayed at the outcome. Alternatively, I may be relieved at having escaped the accounting firm and glad that my way is now clear to join the rodeo. Now, *I* know my mind. And I do what I now know I want to do, regardless of what the coin toss decreed.

This technique has a serious drawback. I can't use it deliberately, knowingly. If I plan from the start to do what I want to do, in the end, and use the coin just to figure out what I want, the coin won't do its job. I won't feel dismayed or relieved at the result of the coin toss, since I have already decided not to be bound by the result anyway. So I won't learn from the coin toss what it is that I want. I have to deceive myself, to really think, somehow, that I will do what the coin tells me to, in order to find out what I really want. Only then can I change my mind and follow my newly uncovered preference, rather than the coin.

Imagination to the rescue. Rather than using the coin, I *imagine* deciding one way or the other. I then notice whether, in my imagination, I am relieved or disappointed. This reaction tells me what I really want to do, and that is what I do.

(d) What *is it like* to live a life of abject poverty, or to be discriminated against, or to be suddenly bereaved, or to be condemned to die, or to suffer neurotic paranoia, or to be intensely lonely? I imagine myself having these experiences, and this helps me to understand what it is like to have them.

When children engage in make-believe they learn from their imaginative experiences in ways like those I have illustrated. So do adults, when they appreciate representational works of art.

I *might* learn how *I* would feel, were I to suffer bereavement, by imagining the loss of a loved one. But I might get it wrong. If I should later suffer such a loss in real life, it might turn out that my experience is not at all like what I imagined it would be. (I already know not to trust my imagination in ascertaining how a room will look if it is painted a certain color.)

But I may learn something important by imagining being bereaved, even if I don't learn what it would be like for me actually to be bereaved. I may learn what a certain possible experience is like; I may come to understand what it would be like to experience in a certain way the loss of a loved one, even if I have no idea whether or in what circumstances I would experience the loss of a loved one in that way. We do not, in general, start with knowledge of a range of possible experiences, and then, by exercising our imaginations, learn which of these experiences one would actually have in what circumstances. The more important job for our imaginations is that of expanding our repertoire of understood experiences. Imaginings help us to understand what it is like to feel a certain way, and only secondarily and

uncertainly, enable us to realize that that is how we, or others, would actually feel in circumstances of a certain sort.

It is usually *characters*, people *inside* pictures and novels, who have the interesting experiences. Appreciators just watch. It is a character who must choose between love and duty, or who is shipwrecked alone on a desert island, or who suffers bereavement. Appreciators, in the worlds of the games they play with the work, observe or read about or learn about the character's dilemma or his experiences on the desert island. In reading Yukio Mishima's "Death in Midsummer" I imagine learning about the tragic drownings of three children and about how their parents respond to it. But the experience of reading the story does not help me to understand merely what it is or might be like to *learn about* such tragedies befalling other people; it is likely to give me insight into what it is or might be like to suffer such a tragedy oneself, to lose one's own children. How does this happen? A quick answer is that I *empathize* with the parents in the story. This empathy involves imagining myself in their shoes, imagining suffering bereavement myself, and responding as they do. But I imagine this, I empathize with them, as a result of imagining learning about *their* tragedy and noting how they deal with it.

Figure 7:
Van Gogh
Sorrow (1882)

Van Gogh's lithograph, *Sorrow* (figure 7) is, in obvious respects, much less explicit and detailed than Mishima's story. We have no way of knowing why the woman is sorrowful. And the picture is more suggestive than explicit concerning her expressive behavior. We don't even see her face; all we have to go on is her hunched posture. Perhaps we "empathize" with her, imagining ourselves to be sorrowful in the way we take her (fiction-ally) to be. But perhaps not. I am not sure that I actually imagine being sorrowful myself, when I contemplate the picture. I do imaginatively respond to the woman, however, in ways that are not easy to articulate. Understanding another person's feelings involves experiencing certain feelings oneself—feelings about the other person. By imagining feeling as I

do toward the woman, I imaginatively understand her. And this imagina-tive experience gains for me an understanding of what a particular kind of sorrow is like.

All this began with the expansion of the picture world into a world of make-believe big enough to include the perceiver as well as the contents of the picture world. Rather than merely standing outside the picture and imagining what it depicts, imagining a sorrowful woman sitting hunched with her head and arms resting on her knees, I imagine myself seeing her and observing her sorrow. This leads to imagining feeling about her and for her, and perhaps with her, in ways that enable me imaginatively to understand her sorrow. Thus I come to understand what it is like to feel this way.

None of this would be possible if pictures were merely imitations of visual forms, or if they were merely signs signifying or standing for things of the kind they represent. None of this would be possible if pictures were not, like hobby horses, props in games of make-believe in which people participate visually, and also psychologically.

Notes

[1] Earlier incarnations of this lecture were presented as the Stieren Distinguished Lecture at Trinity University in San Antonio, and, in revised form, as the first of three Carl G. Hempel Lectures at Princeton University in 1991. Part of it appeared in *Art Issues* 21 (January/February 1992), pp. 22-27. I develop the theory of make-believe sketched here more thoroughly in *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Harvard University Press, 1990).

[2] For a more complete statement of my account of depiction, see *Mimesis as Make Believe*, Chapter 8.

[3] Ernst Gombrich, "Meditations on a Hobby Horse," in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays* (London Phaidon Press, 1963), pp. 1-3.

[4] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, second edition (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), p. 5.

[5] See David Summers, "Real Metaphor: Towards a Redefinition of the 'Conceptual' Image," in Norman Bryson *et al.*, eds., *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 234-235.

[6] p. 3.

[7] p. 9.

8   p. 2.

9   p. 4.

10 Actually, I am not in the world of *Stanfield*'s picture; we now
    have a different picture. But I am in a fictional world, the
    world of this new picture.