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CHAPTER 36

Imagination and Film

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Introduction

This discussion will address some of the explanatory virtues and limits of contemporary theories of the imagination in our understanding of films. We will begin with a preliminary sketch of the general tenets of those theories, which are largely drawn from cognitive psychology, and then turn to their use in addressing such topics as the role of the imagination in our learning of what facts hold within a fictional film, including what characters' motivations, beliefs, and feelings are; how our perceptual experience of an actor enters into the visualizing of the fictional character he or she plays; how films exploit the imagination to generate certain affective and evaluative responses; and how such responses compare to those we may adopt toward analogous circumstances in real life. We will not discuss the creative imagination, that is, the discovery of original techniques or contents.[1] Rather, our discussion will be oriented around what has been called the *recreative imagination*, when our imaginative activity is guided by and responsive to the prescriptions to imagine that typify our engagement with film.[2]

[1] Gaut (2003a).
[2] Currie and Ravenscroft (2003).

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Cognitive Theory of the Imagination

Recent philosophical and empirical literature on the imagination addresses its role in a vast range of activities, from playing games, fantasizing, dreaming, hallucinating, manipulating symbols, problem-solving, planning for the future, performing thought experiments, inquiring into metaphysical possibility, wishing, remembering, empathizing, adopting another person's point of view, to, of course, responding to works of art. It's disputed whether a univocal concept of the imagination can serve in such diverse explanatory contexts. Here, I will describe just those dimensions of the theory of the imagination about which there is both a good consensus and which are especially relevant to the philosophy of film.

Described very generally, the imagination is a capacity to mentally represent something (an object, a state of affairs, an event, etc.) where one's representation need not be counterfactually dependent on any independent state of its target. A dominant line of thought identifies such representations in functional terms: imaginings, like other mental states such as beliefs and desires, are to be individuated from one another, not by their contents, but by the pattern of causal interactions they exhibit in our mental economy.[3] For example, if I desire that *p* I will typically behave in ways, ceteris paribus, to bring *p* about; if I believe that *p* and I believe that if *p* then *q* then I will also typically believe that *q*. If I imagine that *p*, I may act in ways that are consistent with *p* being false. If I believe it's a holiday, I'll sleep late; if I only desire or imagine that it's a holiday, I'll get up for work. Here, imagining exemplifies a distinctive or *sui generis* type of mental attitude not reducible to other attitudes such as beliefs.[4]

Although there is no canonical set of the factors that would serve in all contexts to individuate imaginings from other kinds of mental states, some important distinctions are as follows:

1. Our imaginings are normally—although not exclusively—caused and constrained by our will, unlike occurrent beliefs and perceptions which depend much more on our other beliefs and perceptions.
2. Connected to the previous point, beliefs, perceptions, and other factive mental states such as remembering are *normatively* characterized as "aiming" at what is true. Imaginings, by contrast, are not essentially constrained by the truth, even if in some cases they can be employed for truth-tracking purposes, as in thought experiments.[5]
3. Given the presence of a motivational state such as desire or emotion, beliefs and other truth-apt states tend to have behavioral consequences that are not typical of imaginings sharing the same contents. If I desire to

[3] On functionalism about mental states, see Block (1996).
[4] Nichols (2006, 8).
[5] Velleman (2003).

stay dry and believe it is raining, I will open my umbrella. If I only imagine it is raining, no such action would be expected.

4. Finally, imaginings, unlike beliefs, tend to be context-dependent.[6] What I imagine depends on the particular circumstances that motivate and causally sustain the imagining: watching a film provokes one set of imaginings, reading a novel, planning a trip, and daydreaming provoke different imaginings. By contrast, beliefs tend to be context-independent: once formed, if suitably connected to my other beliefs, they remain stable elements in what I believe. That imaginings are not combined to form a single generally applicable stock makes it possible to imaginatively represent many different states of affairs (say, the New York City of *Marathon Man*, *Annie Hall*, and *Ghostbusters*) without any impetus to reconcile their mutual inconsistencies.

Focusing on forms of imagination itself, one important distinction is between *propositional* imagining and *sensory* imagining. The first of these involves adopting a mental attitude of imagining toward some propositional content, as when one imagines *that* such and such is the case. As we will discuss below, such imagining exhibits a ready parallel to believing; indeed, some theorists speak of this form as "belief-like imagining." Sensory imagining, by contrast, involves an imaginative attitude toward some content that is of the kind that could be the object of perception. Just as I might see some object in my environment, I might "visualize" it in a self-generated way.

A distinct form of imagining—treated by some theorists as a third kind but by others as a subset of sensory imagining—is *experiential imagining*. To engage in sensory imagining of a cat in a tree is to form a visual mental representation of it. However, to experientially imagine the cat in the tree is to imagine my seeing it thus—to imagine what I visualize as belonging to my egocentric space. Such experiential imagining requires a sensory dimension, but also involves, at least implicitly, a commitment to the sensory experience belonging to oneself as one sees, hears, feels, and so on, whatever it is that is the content of one's thought. We will return to what sort—sensory or experiential—best characterizes our experience of film, but let us first discuss the more fundamental role imagination plays in coming to know what is true in the story a film represents.

Fictional Truth in Film

One of the essential dimensions of our engagement with a film is determining what facts hold in the scenarios that it represents. Many theorists characterize this process as coming to understand what is "fictionally true" in a story, but this should not be taken to refer to a special kind of truth; rather, it only marks out a class of statements that are represented *as true* according to the story.

[6] Currie and Ravenscroft (2003, 18).

Some of what a film represents as true—say that the Empire State Building is in New York City—is indeed true, other things that the film represents as true—that King Kong climbs the Empire State Building—are not. Our determination of what is true in a film is conceptually prior to, and provides the grounds of, symbolic, allegorical, or other sorts of interpretations of the work that we may defend. However, there may in practice be a reflexive relationship between what we take to be true in a film and what interpretation of the story we find apt. At the end of Christopher Nolan's *Inception* audiences are left unsure whether what Dom Cobb, the main protagonist, undergoes is the content of a shared dream. How we answer that question about what is factual within the story of the film and what interpretative meaning we attribute to the work may be internally related.

In principle, one could explain the discovery of much of what is propositionally true in a film without adverting to the imagination. One could, for example, determine that such and such is the case by reading a detailed plot summary or discovering that the work's creators stipulated that some truth is held within its story. However, the perceptual truths within a cinematic fiction seem much less determinable independent of our imaginative engagement. For perceptual and experiential imaginings are much more inflected than propositional ones by dimensions of the vehicle of representation—such as the medium, technique, style, and tone—in and through which a film tells its story. The same natural setting can look soulless and forbidding or warm and inviting according to the color rendering of the depiction.

The procedures by which we discover such truths within the fictional world of a film parallel in many ways those by which we discover truths about the real world. (Note: in what follows "world of a film" is just a façon de parler referring to what is true according to the film.)

For example, just as inferences among our propositional and sensory beliefs can lead to new beliefs about the actual world, so such reasoning among our propositional and sensory imaginings of what is true in a fictional film can lead to new imaginings of what is true in it. We also tend to monitor departures from consistency among our imaginings in relation to a given story, just as we do with our beliefs, sometimes giving up what we thought was true when contradictory, but more reliable information emerges as a film narrative unfolds.

However, no fictional story can represent all the facts that it asks us to entertain as true. Thus, much of what we know to be the case in a film is imported from our beliefs about the real world, such as beliefs about physics, human psychology, and how things look, taste, or feel. If a character is in London one day and New York the next, we assume without needing to be shown that he traveled by plane. Here, our everyday beliefs allow us to infer new imaginings of what is true in the fiction from the imaginings that we already have.

Beliefs that saliently contradict what a film asks us to imagine are not typically admitted into our inferences among those imaginings. For that would

result in our imagining contradictions to exist in even the most quotidian naturalistic representations. Furthermore, we may hesitate to import certain beliefs into a fictional story if it represents a world highly dissimilar to the one we know. We are on shaky ground, for example, in attributing everyday psychological states to the pleasure trippers in Antonioni's *L'Avventura,* who have an affectively muted constitution that seems to be significantly different from our own.

Imaginings, of course, are typically *quarantined* from playing a role in inferences among our beliefs.[7] One may concurrently imagine that *p* and believe that not *p,* without feeling any rational pressure to hold one of these thoughts to the exclusion of the other. Relatedly, what we imagine to be true does not tend to motivate the behavior that it would if we believed it.

There are also important asymmetries between our patterns of forming imaginings about a fictional world and beliefs about the real one. These are explained by the *internal* and *external* perspectives that, when conjoined, are exclusively applicable to the contents of fictional representations.[8]

We take the internal perspective when we refer to facts in the film that motivate us to imagine certain other propositions as true within the story; we adopt the external perspective when we refer to factors outside the fictional content that perform that imagination-generating function. We might, from an internal perspective, explain that the protagonist exploring an abandoned house is in danger through appealing to facts within the story, such as the house being haunted; however, from an external perspective we can explain that fact through appeals to the conventions of the film's genre and the eerie soundtrack that accompanies shots of the house's exterior. In general, the external stance on a cinematic work explains its contents in terms of its identity as an artifact, with reference to the functioning of its plot, style, medium, tone, lighting, point of view, duration of shots, depth of focus, color, and other aspects of the vehicle of representation. The internal stance, by contrast, identifies the content of that representation as if it were real.

It isn't always easy to determine whether a feature of a film that we note from the external stance makes a difference in the facts of the story considered from an internal stance. Two actresses, Carol Bouquet and Angela Molina, play the role of Conchita in Buneul's *That Obscure Object of Desire*, alternating from one scene to another and sometimes switching places in the middle of a scene. Whether this phenomenon is to be imagined as a fact in the world the film presents, or recognized as only a feature of the cinematic representation of that world, is unclear.

In any case, only some grounds of what we determine to be true in a fiction lie within the scope of the operator "it is to be imagined that." Other sources lie outside. We can usually assume, for example, that no one is seriously hurt in

[7] Gendler (2003).

[8] For discussions of internal and external stances on a fiction, see Lamarque (1996), Chapters 2 and 8, and Currie (2010, 49–64). An analogous distinction is noted by Walton (1979, 21).

the wreckage caused by an automobile chase in a comedy. We make that assumption not because the film gives us any final tally of the damage but because bodily injury to bystanders would be inconsistent with the light-hearted aims of that genre.

In general, a fiction's overt descriptions of what is true supply an opportunity to make an indefinite number of potential inferences about what else is the case. That only a much smaller subset of mostly shared inferences are in practice activated in our engagement with a work is explained by how its descriptions manage our attention and interests, making certain conjectures and conclusions *relevant* to us in our experience of the fiction.[9] Indeed, a film can frame its contents in ways that divert us from inferences that would reveal inconsistencies in the story or potential explanations of events that compete with those that the film prescribes for us to imagine.

The preceding addressed how we recognize what is true within a film representation. But what makes such things true? Some approaches treat truth within a fiction very broadly, so as to incorporate whatever would be true if a fiction were a veridical representation of actual events. (David Lewis suggests this approach in relation to literature but it can be adopted to film.)[10] Here, what is true within a film (or other fiction) is conceptually prior to what an appropriate audience is elicited to imagine. But that kind of construal tends to mischaracterize our identification of what happens in a story. For it wrongly directs us to identify as true within a story many aspects of a film's representational content that we are meant to ignore or at least not take as indicative of states of affairs within the film. For example, we would have to attribute a superhuman ability of visual recall to adult characters whose memories of their childhood are represented on screen. Or if we see an American actor's measles inoculation scar in an epic set in the eighteenth century, we would need to imagine that he traveled back from the future. Other theories respond by narrowing the scope of what counts as true within a representation, construing it as the product of an engagement wherein only certain dimensions of the fiction count as generating facts within it, while others are to be ignored. One approach that has gained widespread acceptance characterizes this engagement as involving a structured pretense akin to a game of make-believe. There, what is true in the fiction is identical to what audiences are prescribed to imagine in their engagement with it.

In Kendall Walton's influential theory of fictions, works such as films, paintings, and novels serve as props in such a pretense, what Walton calls a game of make-believe.[11] A simple game of that sort is exemplified by children pretending to duel with wooden sticks as if they were swords. Some of the rules that

[9] Nichols (2006), cites some of the large empirical literature showing that differences among readers' goals (e.g., entertainment or knowledge) in engaging with a narrative text explain differences in the kind and degree of inferences they make as they read. These findings can be generalized to all fictional works, including films.

[10] Lewis (1978).

[11] Walton (1990).

structure this game may be formally agreed upon, but others may have a naturalness in that context such that, without being explicitly stipulated, they govern what counts as properly playing the game. If a stick breaks, so has the sword it represents. Walton proposes that all works of fiction, including films, can have analogous roles as props in more tightly constrained forms of pretense, where, for example, we imagine seeing a visual recording of actors and studio sets, that we are witnessing actual events. Whereas the rules of a children's game are often ad hoc and readily revised, the rules that structure our engagements with works of art tend to be relatively stable. Among those rules, of course, are those specifying that certain features of a fictional representation (e.g., that the narrator has miraculous powers of recall) are not counted as facts in the make-believe world of the story.

As noted above, a standard part of the experience of any fiction is importing propositional and perceptual beliefs from our experience of the real world into our imaginative representation of the fictional world. In the case of a visual work of fiction such as a film, we may import elements of what we literally perceive on screen into the imagined visual representation that the film elicits. In some cases, we imagine of an actor that he is a character who looks very much like the actor himself, inheriting the latter's beauty or charisma. In other cases, a fiction prescribes an imagining of perceptual features that depart from or are inconsistent with what we literally see represented. Dustin Hoffman was 29 and Anne Bancroft 35 at the time of the filming of *The Graduate* but audiences are not supposed to import that comparatively small difference in how old the actors appear into the film's prescription that her character is (and could appear to be) twice his age. It is generally true of works of fiction that we import only some facts about the vehicle of representation into the content of the representation. But what is distinctive of works of fiction that essentially depend on perceptual properties of their vehicles is that there is often a question of which features of what we see (or hear) belong solely to the work's vehicle of representation and which are (also) to be attributed to the content of what the work elicits us to represent in our imagination. Let us now turn to some debates about the formal structure of that imaginative engagement.

The Nature of the Imaginative Experience Elicited by Film

In watching a traditional film, we are placed in immediate contact with a changing pattern of light projected onto a screen from a recording of actors pretending to be individuals who typically don't exist in real life. However, the most natural way of describing this experience is to say that we see the characters that those actors play, the scenarios that constitute the film's fictional content.

The imagination is widely acknowledged to play some role in this experience, but what role is that? There are two forms of visual experience here that need to be examined: the first concerns our tendency to see the shifting patches

of light and color as the objects and persons they serve to depict and the second is found in the tendency to see in the moving picture the fictional character, not the actor who plays him, or the fictional location, not that in which the film was made. Let us address these in turn.

The first form of visual experience exemplifies what Richard Wollheim has identified as the phenomenon of *seeing-in*.[12] Seeing-in describes an experience common to all forms of depiction in which we see things in photographs, films, drawings, and paintings. In Wollheim's characterization, the phenomenon involves a viewer both recognizing (in a minimal sense) what is depicted in a picture and being aware of the marked surface of the representation in virtue of which such depiction is achieved—a single experience composed of two parts that he calls *twofoldedness*. Some of Wollheim's remarks suggest that twofoldedness is a necessary condition of seeing-in. For without any conscious awareness of the surface, one's experience is not as of a depiction but is rather taken to be as of the thing itself (e.g., in trompe l'oeil), and, without seeing the object depicted "in" the painting, one doesn't have a depiction, only an abstract design.[13] In any case, it is not clear that the imagination plays an essential role in seeing-in. Gregory Currie, for example, argues that recognizing what a cinematic image represents depends on the same sub-personal, largely automatic processes that are involved in recognizing that thing in the flesh.[14] My recognition of a train rolling toward me on screen involves the same subpersonal capacities (the activation of feature-detectors indexed to my concept of "train") as recognizing a train in real life. I see an x in an x representation via the same capacities that allow me to see an x.

The kind of visual experience in which the explanatory power of appealing to the imagination is more likely indispensable is that which occurs once seeing-in has done its work: where we don't just see the actor but see the actor as the person he portrays.

One proposal for how to describe the connection between these two forms of experience—seeing-in and visually imagining would be to say that we first literally see the actor in the pattern of light project on a screen and only subsequently imagine of that actor that he or she is the fictional character. That may occur sometimes, especially in cases in which we are not yet absorbed in an ongoing imaginative experience. But a more typical experience is one in which such literal seeing and sensory imagining are reflexively related. Once I am engaged in an imaginative exercise, my perceptual attention will be directed both by dimensions of that experience, for example, what features are relevant to the story, and by dimensions that are external to the fictional world (such as lighting, focus, point of view, music, and mood) that affect what I find salient in it.

[12] Wollheim (1980).

[13] Another characterization would be that he sees twofoldedness as a normative requirement on seeing a depiction as a depiction. It is a norm that is not constitutive of, for example, the proper perception of clouds, even though they can support seeing-in as well.

[14] Currie (1995, 20).

Is there a common formal structure of such content? One significant dispute is over whether, in our experience of film, all visual imagining is imagined seeing. *Participation* theorists argue that our imagining is of the experiential sort described in section "Cognitive Theory of the Imagination": in watching a film, audiences imagine themselves seeing the events depicted. They imagine being part of the fictional story, an invisible or inert presence in the scene. Thus, George Wilson explains "[t]he spectator *knows* that he is in the theater, but *it is make-believe for him* that he is watching from within the space of the story."[15]

Proponents of the participatory theory argue that we imagine seeing (and hearing) what is presented as occurring in a film because, more generally, we imagine we are located in some sense in the space represented by the film—specifically, we are said to imagine occupying the position that is, in fact, occupied by the camera. A feature of films that contributes to the intuitive plausibility of this thesis is that the point of view we are given on the scenarios visually represented in a film is an internal part of the representation, independent of where we happen to sit in relation to the screen. From this, it is natural to assume our visual imagining of the film's goings-on is identical to imagining seeing that content from that internal point of view.

Currie disagrees, arguing that except in unusual cases imagining in cinema is impersonal: viewers do not imagine themselves in sensory contact with the film's represented content.[16] His objection is that if visual imagining is always personal or participatory, this would result in our being forced to attribute absurd or impossible states of affairs to even the most mundanely naturalistic films. For example, if a shot is taken from a point of view of looking down on a bed, the participatory theory implies that we are to imagine ourselves as not only seeing the state of affairs thereby presented, but doing so while somehow suspended from the ceiling. Comparably, some events in a film are shown as occurring unseen by anyone; to impute a viewer into those contexts creates a contradiction—the event is both witnessed and unwitnessed; finally, although the point of view furnished by the camera seems a natural place to locate ourselves within the film, the participatory thesis is hard to square with cases in which what we are presented is the point of view of a character—in which case we would be forced to conclude that it is true in the film that we and the character are co-located.

Walton's general reply to such worries is the point noted above (section "Fictional Truth in Film") that fictions may ask us to imagine something without prescribing us to imagine all its causal or conceptual consequences. Also, most fictional representations make salient certain lines of inference at the expense of others that could in principle be followed, and our desires and interests in engaging with the fiction—which are motivated by the fiction—also

[15] Wilson (1986, 55–56). See also Walton (1990), Chapter 8; Levinson (1993); and Smith (1997).

[16] Currie (1995), Chapter 6.

shape which lines will be pursued. However, the nature of the dispute is not clear. Walton and Wilson appear to make a conceptual claim that depiction is necessarily imagined seeing, whether we are talking about depictions in paintings, drawings, or films, whereas Currie argues just that it is exceedingly rare for the visualizing involved in the experience of a film to be imagined seeing. One point in favor of participatory imagining being *contingent*, if not rare, is that if we conclude that all visual imagining is imagined seeing, we are unable to explain why overt indications of participatory imagining seem to have significant thematic import. If participatory imagining is a default mode of engaging with a film, how are we to explain the distinctive kind of content it may play in a work such as Michael Haneke's *Caché,* where audiences seem to be asked to imagine that they exist within the film's fictional world voyeuristically following the goings-on of a justifiably paranoid couple through their window? If participatory imagining is constitutive of all visual imagining, this would implausibly render all such clandestine observations unremarkable.

Affective Response

We noted earlier three modes of imagining that films elicit from us: propositional, sensory, and experiential. Each of those forms presents a fictional world as being in a certain way. In doing so, they can make it true within the fiction that the grounds for a given emotion are present. To elicit anxious suspense in audiences, a film may foreshadow a potential disaster; to elicit pity in audiences, a film may show someone they care about suffering; to elicit disgust, a film may present a close-up view of exposed viscera or bodily contaminants. These are not merely responses triggered or caused by our confrontations with fictional films; rather, they instantiate evaluations of the states of affairs represented therein.

A plausible psychological explanation of why we respond emotionally to what we know to be fictional is that this tendency reflects a general capacity serving practical rationality to affectively respond to imagined representations.[17] This mode of emotion elicitation via imagining might thus instantiate the way psychological systems can be *exapted*, or redeployed, to operate beyond the domain in relation to which they initially developed.[18] Here, systems employed for the registration of the value of actual states of affairs may have widened their scope to realize the benefits of counterfactual thinking and from there come to serve the multifarious functions of fictions.

A discrete emotional response is directed toward a particular object (a person, an event, a state of affairs) and presents that object as bearing qualities that would justify or explain the emotion—as fear presents its object as dangerous, sadness presents its object as being a significant loss, and so on. By contrast, moods, a distinct kind of affective response, are much more diffuse, exhibit a

[17] Damasio (1994). See also Harris (2000, 86–7); and Gendler and Kovakovich (2006).
[18] Sterelny (2003).

greater temporal (less episodic) extension, and seem to color one's whole environment with congruent qualities.[19] Because they lack a particular object, moods tend not to have the force or vividness of ordinary emotions, but that global applicability allows them to have broad effects in shaping audience responses to any particular objects to which a work directs their attention.[20] Specifically, when a given mood is expressed by and elicited in audiences of a work of art, it lowers the threshold for the particular mood-consistent (directed) emotions a work is designed to provoke.[21] Moods not only serve as a scaffolding for the particular intentional or directional emotions that a work elicits—lowering the threshold for their evocation—they also help sustain over time the attentional and informational processes that those emotional experiences depend upon.[22] Feeling a given mood, one continually "discovers" grounds for and confirmation of the mood outside of oneself, a phenomenon exploited by filmmakers who, through setting a mood, can cause us to project some property into some fictional scenario (e.g., a threatening presence) without directly visually or verbally describing that scenario as possessing that property.

Indeed, that such moods can be elicited by processes whose workings are outside of conscious awareness allows them to affect our evaluations and judgments in ways that might not be possible if the grounds of those responses were cognitively assessed. Sound, lighting, and editing techniques of films, for example, can express and elicit moods that direct the attention of viewers to the film's mood-congruent visual features, invoke mood-congruent expectations, and promote particular evaluations of characters.[23] If a viewer is unaware of the source of these effects in the mood developed through such techniques, she is much more likely to attribute them to evaluative facts about the imagined states of affairs in the film. (A third source in the imagination of emotional responses—identification with characters—is discussed in section "Simulation and Identification".)

Those who adopt a widely held pre-theoretical stance on emotions and moods—call them *realists*—take it for granted that both sorts of emotional responses are genuine. Indeed, substantial sources of emotional elicitation in empirical studies designed to probe real-world emotions are fictional films and stories.[24] However, some philosophers—call them *irrealists*—argue against that assimilation of fiction-directed emotions to those based on beliefs, perceptions, and other factive attitudes.

All parties to the debate acknowledge that there are typically qualitative differences between the emotion-like responses we have to what we take to be real

[19] Griffiths, Sizer argue for the predominant view that moods have no intentional objects.

[20] For the role of moods in altering our attention to focus on those elements of a filmic representation that would fit with or justify the mood, see Smith (2003).

[21] Ekman (1994).

[22] On affective states as being experienced as giving information about objects in one's situation, see Clore et al. (2001).

[23] See Tan et al. (2007).

[24] For illustrations, see Coan and Allen (2007).

and those elicited by fictional representations. Fear evoked by the refined techniques of a horror film may be more powerful than that which is typically evoked by ordinary experiences. Grief over the death of someone one cares for in a fiction isn't typically as long standing as sadness over a real friend. Furthermore, we may regulate or tamp down our emotions according to social norms and practical expediency, while giving full vent to them when—in the context of fictional entertainments—such social and practical demands are suspended.

Irrealists about fiction-directed emotions go further in arguing that our respective behaviors in response to fictions and facts are not different in quality or degree but different in explanatory kind. For example, that we know that the monster in the movie that provokes our fear is a fictional creature doesn't just diminish our tendency to flee, it forecloses the relevance of any such motivation. And whereas our grief over the loss of a real person seems to suffuse our thoughts and feelings about unconnected states of affairs, our grief over the death of a beloved protagonist in a novel is compatible with being full of cheer once our attention is directed away from the fictional representation.

In order to explain these, and other behavioral and affective asymmetries between our emotional responses to what we take to be real and what we know to be only imagined, irrealists argue that we must posit that the relevant feelings we have in responses to fictions are, as a class, distinct from ordinary or *genuine* emotions.[25] Irrealists acknowledge that genuine emotions can be provoked by a work of fiction—as when the misogyny expressed in a novel leads to resentment toward its author. Yet they argue that those emotions that are felt in virtue of imagining that the contents of a work of fiction are actual are not literally experienced, despite often being accompanied by the standard physiological and phenomenological dimensions of emotions prompted by what we take to be true. Instead, irrealists situate our experience of such fiction-directed emotions as *within* the pretense or imaginings that fictions elicit from us. It is part of our participation in a pretense involving the fiction's contents that we make-believe we feel sad.

One argument advanced by irrealists is that there seem to be significant differences between fiction or imagination-directed emotions and those based on beliefs with respect to such features as their respective motivational potential or behavioral effects. Pity felt for a person who is hurt in the real world tends to be accompanied by a motivation to help alleviate her suffering, even if other motivations forestall that concern from being acted on. Pity felt for a character in analogous circumstances within a play appears to carry no such motivation.

One problem with this distinction is that if the motivation in question is a conscious desire, the distinction between the presence of such motivation in the real-world case and its absence in the fictional case can be explained by the fact that desires depend on relevant beliefs to be acted on, and there is no such

[25] The case for such pretend or "quasi-"emotions was introduced by Walton (1978).

belief in the fictional case.[26] That is, we don't need to posit a different kind of affective state operative in the fictional and real cases in order to explain their different motivational character; we can appeal instead to a difference in the accompanying beliefs. Alternatively, if the motivation in question can be identified with an unconscious desire-like state, it is not clear that it is absent in the fictional case. A widely studied phenomenon is how imaginatively representing one's own or another's behavior initiates activity in brain regions that are engaged when actually performing the analogous behavior: we exhibit a motor readiness to act in a way consistent with the behavior that we merely imaginatively represent.[27] Also, a belief with some content and an imagining with that content may not entrain similar behavioral or affective consequences because of the influence of other beliefs and content bearers, as well as motor routines, behavioral scripts, and other inhibitory factors that constrain the affective and behavior-generating output of our imagining.[28]

In any case, contra the irrealist's assumption, spectators who are absorbed in experiencing fictions may indeed feel motivated to perform actions congruent with the emotions those fictions elicit. As Susan Hurley notes, "movements can be induced by actions you actually perceive or by actions you would like to perceive – as when moviegoers or sports fans in their seats make movements they would like to see."[29] As we watch the characters in a film try to find their way out of some fix, we don't (typically) shout to them from our seats, but we may make judgments about where, within the fictional scenario, they ought to seek recourse, scanning the scene, for example, to see where they can take shelter. No doubt, such behavior can sometimes be classified as part of the activity of understanding the content of the fiction. Yet, the process of making such judgments is a kind of helping behavior, the only sort available to audiences excluded from the fictional world.

Peter Goldie notes that with fictions we "allow ourselves to a considerable degree to *indulge* our profound feelings for humankind, and let our sentiments run away with us without concerns about their connection to action."[30] The implication is that with respect to fictional representations we allow ourselves to experience emotions that we would inhibit, because of their behavioral consequences, if the representations were of real things. But that doesn't describe a distinction between emotional responses to fictions and to real life so much as emotional responses that would justify relevant actions and those that would not. When there are no behavioral consequences to our emotions this may not be because they are directed at fictions but because acting from those emotions can serve no point.[31] One might be appalled by the treatment of enslaved

[26] Carruthers (2006).

[27] Munzert et al. (2009).

[28] The hypothesis here is that the inhibitory mechanism that prevents acting from the motor preparation is generated in parallel with the preparation for motor activation. Lotze et al. (1999).

[29] Hurley (2008).

[30] Goldie (2003, 62).

[31] Gaut (2003b).

people one reads about in a historical representation, but that feeling, even though directed at real individuals, can no more motivate behavior to alleviate their condition than can emotions felt for fictional characters lead to actions that would help them.

Realists thus point out that there is something unsatisfyingly ad hoc about treating emotions that are fiction-directed as only pretend in virtue of their lack of behavioral effects, when emotions directed at the contents of a wide range of other sorts of representations that don't have motivational potential, or for which actions would be beside the point, are uncontroversially counted as genuine.[32] This point can be generalized to say that emotions may be supported or partly constituted by mental attitudes other than belief. Fantasies, desires, anticipations, perceptions, acknowledged hallucinations, and, most relevantly here, thoughts that need not be truth apt such as imaginings can serve to represent an emotion's target.

Simulation and Identification

One important dimension attributed to our capacity to imagine counterfactual states of affairs is the role it plays in understanding other people's minds. *Simulation* theorists argue that understanding someone else's experience sometimes involves imaginatively representing their beliefs, desires, perceptions, and other mental states, as if they belonged to oneself. Because we share with others similar ways of processing the contents of such mental representations, we can imaginatively entertain having another's beliefs and desires and discover from those inputs to one's theoretical and practical reasoning mechanisms what outputs in behavior are likely to result.[33] Although initially posited as an explanation of how we can predict the behavior of others, simulation theories are often appealed to in explanations of our ability to discover and imaginatively experience others' emotions. The proposal is that I do not typically become aware of a person's affective state solely through inferential reasoning about her beliefs and desires. Rather, I also, or instead, more directly just imagine having her beliefs and desires and can attribute to her the emotions or other states that this process generates in me "offline," that is, disconnected from their usual behavioral consequences.[34] Unsurprisingly, such simulation theories have been posited to explain how we understand the thoughts, behaviors, and emotions of fictional characters as well.[35]

Critics of simulation as an explanation of our understanding of fictions do not claim that it never occurs. Rather, they argue that its scope is limited. First, simulating the minds of fictional characters, unlike simulating those of real

[32] Moran (1994).

[33] Some representative treatments are Heal (1995); Gordon (1995); and Goldman (2006).

[34] The alternative "theory-theory" places greater stress on our reliance on a tacit body of knowledge of how people think. See the papers collected in Carruthers and Smith (1996).

[35] See Feagin (1996), for an application of this approach to literature.

persons, seems cognitively onerous in ways that would limit its prevalence: for I must not only imagine that what I see on the screen or read in the novel represents some real state of affairs, I must also imagine what it is to be in the shoes of those characters whose existence I must entertain as part of the larger imaginative project. Second, we can plausibly account for much of what we know of a character's thoughts and feelings in a film from descriptive information the work provides about the mental state of the character and via inferences from what the character says and does. We may also come to understand the mental state of a character, as well as predict her behavior, because we recognize in the fictional state of affairs reasons she would have for those thoughts and behaviors we attribute to her. Finally, as noted above, some of our knowledge of what is true in a fiction, including how a character thinks and behaves, comes from our familiarity with the genre, style, period, and so on, to which the work belongs. One can typically predict that when a film features a babysitter hearing strange noises coming from the attic, she is unaccountably not going to flee the house.

There are other notions of identification with fictional characters that draw on the imagination but do not presume the explanation of our knowledge of other minds favored by simulation theory. One is the proposal that our identification with a character is not a global imagining of being the character or occupying her situation in all respects but rather partial and aspectival. Here, to identify with a character may be to imagine sharing only one or some of her dimensions: for example, her perceptual experience but not necessarily her beliefs or her feelings.[36] A point-of-view shot, for example, invites us to perceptually identify with a fictional character, but that identification (as in shots from the killer's perspective in horror films) need not entail that we identify with the character in other respects, such as his desires.[37]

A related notion of imaginative identification posits that it gives us not only knowledge of how a character feels, but a similar experience of those feelings themselves. In a process that is sometimes identified with *empathy,* one's imagining of oneself in the shoes of another—including a character within a fiction—can lead to feeling what the other feels. As Shelley Duvall's character flees Jack Nicholson's in a hedge maze in *The Shining*, we don't only fear for her but with her, responding with the racing pulse, shortness of breath, and greater skin conductance that, no doubt, the character undergoes according to the fiction. Sometimes, such affective identification can induce us to adopt a character's or narrator's emotional appraisal of what his circumstances require (say a mobster's need to eliminate his rivals) even when the facts in the story would not justify that evaluation if the circumstances they describe were real.[38]

[36] Gaut (2010, 258).

[37] For criticisms of point-of-view shots as constituting an identification with the relevant fictional character, see Currie (1995, 174–6), and Smith (1995, 157).

[38] Gilmore (2011).

A critic of such notions of simulation and identification who sought an alternative explanation of such emotions could point to the phenomenon of *affective contagion*, an automatic, largely unconscious, tendency to mimic expressions, postures, and movements with those of another person, which leads to a sharing of the other's affective state.[39] Such mimicry has been shown to be reliably caused by exposure to a wide range of emotional responses such as laughter, embarrassment, and disgust and is especially salient in relation to facial expressions of the emotions.[40] Such subdoxastic mimicry is particularly effective in eliciting emotions from film spectators, as our visual experience of the face of an actor on film can be significantly similar, with respect to emotional contagion, as the experience of perceiving a person in the flesh.[41]

If such motor mimicry were merely a case of a spectator adopting the physical appearance of a target in a given emotional state, it would not be relevant to explaining the actual triggering of emotional feelings among audiences. However, performing such motor mimicry can *cause*, or at least prime, one to experience the emotions of one's target, even when one is unaware of their source. That point distinguishes such mimicry from the more self-aware processes of identification involved in empathy and simulation.[42]

The apparent low-level, automaticity of emotional contagion makes it possible for a work to evoke affective reactions, and their concomitant evaluative perspectives, that may conflict with conscious and more reflective affective responses. As Goldie notes, "what is typical of contagion is that the agent is not aware of the contagion: the agent takes his experience as original and not as caught from another."[43] This means that, when "infected," one may look for, and end up identifying, the putative justification of one's emotion in some state of affairs, even though the emotion is arationally caused.

Of course, empathetic identification can explain only some of the emotions we experience in watching a film. For often our emotional responses do not match those of the character with whom we putatively empathize: he feels wildly optimistic about the plan, we feel wary of its pitfalls. Indeed, there our imagining would not be central or participatory but acentral—an imagining from the outside.[44] In such a case the proponent of imaginative identification as a source of emotions may observe that our wariness is felt in virtue of our recognition of the character's optimism, and it is that latter feeling that is generated empathetically. However, other emotions we may feel for a fictional scenario are sufficiently *decentered* that they may not refer to any particular emotions of characters in the fiction.

That the contents of a story are amusingly grim may be due to the mordant way it is framed or represented, not to the feelings of any individual represented

[39] Hatfield, et al. (1992).
[40] Dimberg et al. (2000).
[41] Coplan (2006).
[42] Adelmann and Zajonc (1989). See also Cacioppo et al. (2010).
[43] Goldie (2002, 191).
[44] On central and acentral imagining, see Wollheim (1984, 74).

therein. We can thus laugh at the physical torments of a character in a comedy but feel revulsion if we were to learn of them occurring to a real person. For facts in a scenario that are criterial for one kind of emotion can be highlighted, while those criterial for contrary emotions can be diminished.[45] Determining what a film expresses about its contents involves attending to the particular form in which that content is represented—for example, grimly, parodically, disgustingly, joyfully, and so on. It need not involve imagining having the attitude of some other real or fictional person, except perhaps in the sense that in experiencing that content in accord with the emotional perspective made salient by the film, we may imagine possessing an evaluative outlook highly alien to our own.

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[45] Carroll (1997).

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