

representational models of other kinds. The principle we see at work when running a simulation is that representations are severed from their worldly connections, ‘played with’ in constructing suppositional scenarios and running simulations that make use of their interconnections, and then restored to their online input-output profile so that the conclusions that have been worked out offline can be used to guide behaviour.

The literature on simulation and imagination shows that people are able to engage in this process deliberately, driven by conceptual thought. I start with a thought like, *Will the chair I saw earlier fit in the car?* The concepts involved in the thought are connected to various kinds of information. The concept MY CAR calls up an imagistic representation of the spatial dimensions of the car. I imagine different ways of manoeuvring the chair into it. I then categorise the result: IT FITS OR IT DOES NOT FIT. We have thereby arrived back in the general-purpose system of conceptual thought. A few steps of reasoning then lead to the intention to buy the chair. I have arrived there via ‘playing with’ representations in special-purpose systems.

Concepts act as an interface in this process. They plug into special-purpose systems, driving simulations. But they also plug in at the other ‘end’—they plug into the general-purpose compositional structures of conceptual thought. A concept is a plug-and-play device with plugs at both ends. It provides an interface between the informational models and content-specific computations of special-purpose systems, at one end, and the general-purpose compositionality and content-general reasoning of deliberate thought, at the other.

Conceptual thought gives us a general-purpose capacity to use representations offline—both concepts themselves, and the special-purpose sensorimotor, affective, evaluative, and amodal representations which are accessed through concepts. A concept, it seems, gives us the capacity for offline use of any of the special-purpose representations to which it is connected, and a way to manipulate many of the representations of objects, properties, and relations in those systems.

We saw in [Chapter 2](#) that the general-purpose combinatorial system of conceptual thought—whether it is language-based or a separate competence—contrasts with the special-purpose modes of combination at work in structural representations. The representational competence of concept combination is not restricted by subject matter. A thinker who can think *Layla loves Rishi* has the capacity to represent *aRb* using any of the singular and relational concepts that they possess (meeting the generality constraint). Less recognised is the fact that this normally underpins a second capacity, the capacity to construct a suppositional scenario corresponding to the thought. When thinking recombines existing concepts to formulate a novel thought, that can often prompt a simulation of a novel scenario. Whether the thinker will succeed in simulating a scenario equal to the thought is another matter. They may face ‘imaginative resistance’ ([Gendler 2000](#); [Yablo 2002](#)),