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Source: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Jun., 1991, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Jun., 1991), pp. 379-382

Published by: International Phenomenological Society

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2108134>

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## *Précis of Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*

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*Mimesis as Make-Believe* is primarily an exploration of the workings of the representational arts, among which I count novels, stories, figurative painting and sculpture, theater, and film as paradigmatic instances. I give approximately equal billing to literary and depictive forms of representation, although my commentators concentrate somewhat on the latter. The vehicle by which I conduct this exploration is an analogy with children's games of make-believe. No one will find this analogy surprising or far fetched, but it is distinctly unconventional. My approach contrasts sharply with the more common emphasis, especially in recent discussions of the representational arts, on analogies with language.

The practice of make-believe extends far beyond children's games and the representational arts. I articulate a general theory of make-believe likely to have many other applications as well. But except for treating problems concerning fictitious entities and existence claims, I concentrate on the insight that the notion of make-believe can provide in understanding novels, paintings, films, and the like—what it is for a work to be representational, the nature and significance of differences among representations, and the ways in which representations of various kinds are important in our lives.

Children's games and representational art both involve *fictional worlds*. There is the world of a game of cops and robbers, and there are worlds of stories and paintings. Understanding and appreciating such worlds, in both cases, involves exercising the *imagination*. These evident points of similarity do not get us very far, however. The main advantage of pursuing the analogy lies elsewhere.

Children are active participants in make-believe, and they belong to the worlds of their games. It is "true in the world of a game of cops and rob-

bers" that one child is a cop and another a robber. It might appear that appreciators of representational art, by contrast, merely stand back and observe fictional worlds from the outside. Appreciators (usually) do not belong to the worlds of paintings and novels; nothing is "true" of the reader "in the world of *Crime and Punishment*." I claim, however, that appreciators use paintings and novels as props in games of make-believe, much as children use dolls and toy trucks, and that appreciators participate in these games. In addition to the world of the work, there is a world of the appreciator's game. And the appreciator belongs to *this* world. What is most distinctive about my approach is its emphasis on appreciators' participation in games of make-believe. The analogy with children's games brings out this participation, helps to clarify its varieties and limitations, and points toward the ways in which it is important.

I erect the basic structure of the theory of make-believe in Chapter 1, using as a foundation a somewhat refined notion of imagining. Propositions that are "true in a fictional world," or *fictional*, are propositions that, in a given social context, are to be imagined as true. What is to be imagined usually depends on features of the real world. If a doll is in a child's arms, participants in the game are to imagine that the child is holding a baby. So it is fictional in the game that he is holding a baby. The words of a novel or markings on canvas may prescribe imagining that a certain Emma Bovary married a doctor, or that a unicorn is enclosed by a circular fence, thus making it fictional in the novel or painting that this is so. Things that generate fictional truths in this manner I call *props*. *Representations* are objects whose function or purpose in a given social group is to serve as props in games of make-believe.

Dreams and daydreams are more like games of make-believe than one might have thought. Dreams are important in bringing out the idea that imagining need not be a deliberate activity, that many imaginings are spontaneous. I also examine socalled abstract or nonrepresentational paintings, and conclude that many of them are representations, although they differ from *figurative* paintings in that the "characters" in their fictional worlds are simply the actual colored patches on their surfaces. A section that is especially important for the later development of the theory investigates the nature and varieties of imaginings about oneself.

Chapter 2 examines the distinction between fiction and nonfiction (especially works of fiction and works of nonfiction). I favor an account on which fictions are simply representations in my sense, things possessing the function of serving as props in games of make-believe. This notion of fiction has little to do with contrasts between fiction and *reality* or *truth* or *assertion*. Fiction in my sense is not parasitic on nonfiction, and it is not

paradigmatically a linguistic phenomenon. Construing fiction this way enables us to see that legends and myths from other cultures which we treat as fiction may have been understood in their original settings in much the way we understand them, as fiction, whether or not they originally were believed to be true or were told as true.

Chapter 3 treats *objects* of representation, what it is for a work to be a representation *of* something (of some actual thing), and the ways in which representing things can be important. Objects of representation are not essential, however, and representationality is not to be understood in terms of the representing of things. My main target here is Nelson Goodman's claim that "denotation is the core of representation."

What is fictional in the world of a particular work depends on the work's features. Which fictional truths a given set of features generates is governed by the *principles of generation* operative in the relevant social context. These principles also guide or reflect the interpretive practice of critics in ascertaining, on the basis of the work's features, what fictional truths it generates. Chapter 4 examines the enormous diversity of principles of generation applicable to representations of various sorts, a fascinating hodge podge about which few useful generalizations can be made. Some of the diversity is nicely explained by conflicting needs representations may be expected to serve. Certain principles give the artist more control over what is fictional than others do, for instance, but other principles do more to promote or enhance participation by appreciators in their games of make-believe.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 (*Part Two*) examine the nature of participation and argue that appreciation of representational art, in central cases, consists in such participation. I explain the experience of being emotionally caught up in a fiction in terms of psychological participation. The notion of participation is crucial in discussions of the paradoxes of tragedy, of asides to the audience, of differences between time arts and static ones, and of the role of suspense and surprise in works of various kinds. Most representations restrict or inhibit participation in certain respects, and they differ importantly in the nature of their restrictions. In extreme instances we have *ornamental* representations, works which call to mind certain games of make-believe but are not actually to be used in them. (They are to be used in other games in which it is fictional that they are to be used in the former ones.)

Up to this point, I have emphasized what can be said about representations generally, what verbal and pictorial representations, especially, have in common. *Part Three* explores differences among them. In Chapter 8 I develop an account of pictorial representation, arguing that depictions are representations whose function is to serve in specifically *visual* (or percep-

tual) games of make-believe, games in which appreciators participate visually. This opens the way for explanations of differences among pictorial styles, including differences in degrees and kinds of *realism*, and in pictorial points of view. I find some unexpected similarities between music and pictorial representation.

Chapter 9 concentrates on literature. My theory of make-believe clarifies some of the confusion about *narrators*—whether they are to be found in all literary works, in what senses they mediate between the reader and the events of the story, and differences between *reporting* and *storytelling* narrators. It also provides insight concerning irony, metaphor, “free indirect style,” etc. as well as several varieties of literary realism and literary points of view.

The two chapters of *Part Four* treat the ontological and semantic problems concerning fiction that have driven metaphysicians and philosophers of language up walls. But it treats them as a natural extension of the aesthetic theory developed in the preceding chapters. Make-believe is central here as well. I claim that names like ‘Emma Bovary’ do not actually refer to anything, that it is merely fictional that they do. And I offer an account of what people assert when they say things like, “Emma Bovary married a doctor.” It is not a long step from here to a way of understanding singular claims of existence and nonexistence. Many such claims have nothing to do with any established fiction or anything like representational works of art, and the content of what is said may not involve make-believe. Yet the notion of make-believe plays a crucial role behind the scenes. In this and other respects also I have tried to traverse, in both directions, what seems to me a continuous and natural, although often badly marked path between aesthetic matters, including concerns of critics and historians of art, and the sometimes abstruse problems of philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, and metaphysics.

It is a very considerable honor to have one’s writings examined with the intelligence and care Noël Carroll, Patrick Maynard, George Wilson, Richard Wollheim, and Nicholas Wolterstorff have brought to bear on *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. Their thoughtful and insightful responses—their agreements and disagreements both—do much to further our understanding of the representational arts and the roles they play in our lives. I am deeply indebted to each of them.