In Other Shoes

MUSIC, METAPHOR, EMPATHY, EXISTENCE

KENDALL L. WALTON

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide.

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Published in the United States of America by
Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Walton, Kendall L., 1939-
[Essays. Selections]
In other shoes : music, metaphor, empathy, existence / Kendall L. Walton.
pages cm
Includes index.
ISBN 978–0–19–509871–6 (hardcover : alk. paper)—ISBN 978–0–19–509872–3 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Aesthetics. 2. Music—Philosophy and aesthetics. 3. Art—Philosophy. I. Title.
BH39.W327 2015
781.1'7—dc23
2014021506

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2
Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

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PREFACE

Many of my thoughts about the disparate topics listed in my subtitle have something to do, positively or negatively, peripherally if not centrally, with what I call *other-shoe* imaginative experiences. Empathy will probably seem to most of us to involve such experiences; the other topics may not. But in "Empathy, Imagination, and Phenomenal Concepts," I argue that to empathize is *not* necessarily to engage in other-shoe imagining, nor indeed to engage in imagining of any kind. In "*Thoughtwriting*—in Poetry and Music," I claim that the appreciation of expressive qualities of much poetry and music, which has often been said to consist in something like other-shoe experiences, does not necessarily, and also need not involve imagining at all. This volume might better have been titled, "In and Out of Other Shoes." Moreover, although "Fictionality and Imagination: Mind the Gap" concerns other-shoe experiences only indirectly, it too treats imagination negatively. It argues, contrary to the position I took in previous writings, that prescriptions to imagine a proposition are not sufficient for its being fictional, true in a fictional world. It will be evident, nevertheless, from other essays in this collection, that I think imaginings, in particular other-shoe imaginings, play important though varied roles in many areas where they may not be suspected.

Although shoes are designed to be worn by persons, many stand empty for much of their lives; some are never worn at all. My title relies on the metaphor of imagining oneself in, imaginatively occupying, *someone else's* shoes, but it focuses on the shoes themselves, not their wearers. Some of the essays do examine experiences of imaginative identification with a person (actual or fictitious) or other imaginings targeting a person. But these are special cases of *other-shoe* experiences—by which I mean imagining oneself in a certain situation, or having certain experiences, or being a certain way, whether or not one has in mind another person (actual or fictional or imaginary or hypothetical) who is in that situation or undergoes those experiences or is that way. A recurring theme in much of my

writing has been resistance to the often gratuitous and distorting postulation of fictional or imagined beings whose shoes appreciators imagine occupying, and insistence on the prevalence and importance of *mere* other-shoe experiences.

I present the following essays, with one exception, in reverse chronological order,[1] beginning with essays that are wholly are partly new in this volume. Any arrangement by topic would have highlighted some connections among them while obscuring other equally significant ones. So I opted for the more neutral chronological order. The exception is "Spelunking, Simulation and Slime," which I place at the end of the volume immediately following the much earlier "Fearing Fictions." "Fearing Fictions," as well as chapters 5 and 7 of my *Mimesis as Make-Believe*,[2] has been widely misunderstood. "Spelunking" was designed partly as an antidote, clarifying my earlier discussions and also expanding on them. I urge readers interested in the nature of appreciators' emotional responses to fiction to consult "Spelunking" alongside "Fearing Fictions" and the related parts of *Mimesis*.

Readers who want to pursue particular issues according to their own interests will find discussions of the following topics in the chapters listed below (in some cases without using these words):

- *Empathy*: Chapters 1, 3, 4, 8, 11.
- *Existence and fictitious entities*: Chapters 6, 7.
- *Expression in the arts:* Chapters 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 12.
- *Fictionalist metaphysical theories*: Chapters 7, 10.
- *Fictionality ("truth in fiction"):* Chapters 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14.
- *Ineffability*: Chapters 1, 8, 10, 12.
- *Mental simulation* and *emotional contagion*: Chapters 1, 3, 4, 8, 15.
- *Metaphor*: Chapters 7, 8, 9, 10, 12.
- *Music*: Chapters 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.
- *Narrators, apparent (fictional, implied) artists, musical personae*: Chapters 2, 3, 4, 8, 9.
- *Prop oriented make-believe*: Chapters 7, 10.
- *Responses (especially emotional responses) to fiction*: Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 14, 15.

I have added postscripts to some of the previously published essays and inserted new notes [in square brackets] in many of them, some pointing out connections or conflicts with more recent writings by other theorists, or links among my own. I apologize for occasional overlaps among the essays. Each is designed to stand alone.

[1] An approximation thereof anyway; the date of origin of some of them is ambiguous.

[2] *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

In Other Shoes

1

Empathy, Imagination, and Phenomenal Concepts

I. What Is Empathy?

Definitions of "empathy" are all over the map.[1] But one ingredient usually included is the idea that empathy is or essentially involves a special kind of imagining, an imaginative experience described variously as role taking, perspective taking, imaginative identification, or imagining oneself "in another person's shoes." I shall argue that, although many or most empathetic experiences do involve some such imaginative experience, empathy is best understood as not requiring this, indeed not requiring any imagining at all. The work imagination is supposed to do is actually accomplished instead by the deployment, in empathetic experiences, of *phenomenal concepts*.

Empathy, as I understand it, always has an object, a target; it is like sympathy in this respect. To empathize is necessarily to empathize with someone or something. Gregory Currie (2004: 181–184) has identified tricky questions about the nature of this object directedness.[2] My account will provide a simple and satisfying answer to them.

Alvin Goldman (2006: 201ff.) more or less identifies empathy with *mental simulation*. I do not. I take simulation not necessarily to have a target. One may simulate being in a certain situation, for instance, without simulating the

[1] Along with many philosophers and psychologists, I distinguish empathy from *sympathy* (in its modern sense), i.e., from feeling or being sorry for someone's misfortune. Empathy often leads to sympathy, but doesn't necessarily, and one can sympathize without empathy. Also one can empathize with a person who does not suffer misfortune and so is not a candidate for sympathy. My interest is not, of course, in the proper use of the word, "empathy." I aim to understand better what happens and what matters in many or most cases that are frequently counted as instances of empathy.

[2] Currie points out that these questions are similar to ones concerning what makes joint attention joint. He proposes a functional account of the link between the empathizer and her target. My proposal is very different.

experience of any particular person in a situation of that kind. The simulator need not be thinking even of a fictional or imaginary or hypothetical or merely possible person in the situation in question, even if she is aware that it is possible that someone should be in that situation. Simulation, or a close relative, frequently targetless, is the fundamental kind of experience one enjoys when one is caught up in a story or a fiction of one kind or another. One simulates an experience of learning about or knowing about or (in the case of visual fictions) observing the characters or events or activities of the fiction. Sometimes there is a narrator or character whom one simulates, with whom one might empathize, but often there is not.[3] Empathy must have a target; simulation needn't. (There may be other differences as well.) My interest now is in empathy.

Empathy is often said to be a source of knowledge about the mental state or activities of the person empathized with—knowledge of a special kind, *Verstehen*, or knowledge of *what it is like* for the target, not, it is said, mere propositional knowledge. My account will explain how empathy might provide (or constitute) such knowledge. But I will argue that it is best understood as propositional, as a special kind of propositional knowledge.

We must, of course, allow that one who seems to know or understand a target by empathizing with him may get him wrong. If we take "empathy" to be a success term, as I prefer to do, this will be a case of merely apparent empathy; it may amount to an illusion about how it is with the target. I make no claims about how often empathizers are right about their targets, nor how likely one is to be right in any particular case. We often have the impression of empathizing successfully in any case, and such impressions, illusory or not, figure importantly in our thinking about others and our interactions with them.[4]

Tolstoy (1899) thought that the primary function of art is to bring people together, to foster a sense of community. He might have, though he didn't, put this by saying that art enables appreciators to empathize with the artist and with other people who experience the same work, sharing emotions with both. Notice that the sense of community, of togetherness, that Tolstoy thought so important can be fostered by art even if the apparent empathy is illusory, even if appreciators are mistaken in thinking they share the emotions of the artist and other appreciators.

Nancy Eisenberg and Janet Strayer (1987: 5) "define empathy as an emotional response that stems from another's emotional state or condition and that

[3] I argued for this in Walton (1997: 37–49).

[4] Even when empathizers are right about their targets, one might consider the justification for their judgments insufficient for their beliefs to qualify as knowledge. (Thanks to Robert Stecker.) I won't worry about this here. For a discussion of how reliable a source of knowledge empathy is, see Matravers 2011.

is congruent with the other's emotional state or situation." This is one definition that does not mention anything like role taking or other-shoe imagining. It is clearly inadequate as it stands, for reasons to be found in Currie (2004: 181). It doesn't require a sufficiently intimate connection between the empathizer's experience and her target. Emily's psychological state might be similar to (or "congruent with") Oscar's and might have been caused, in one way or another, by his (or by his situation as she understands it), without her empathizing with him. It won't help to add that she is aware of the similarity and realizes that his state caused hers. Her experience might still fail to be one of empathy.

Is other-shoe imagining what is needed? What makes Emily's experience count as empathy with Oscar, it may seem, is that it results from imaginatively occupying Oscar's shoes. This is not a satisfactory answer. For one thing, it is not at all clear what kind of imagining, perspective taking, or whatever, empathy involves, what it is to imaginatively occupy another's shoes in the required sense. As we shall see, some possibilities don't connect the empathizer and her object sufficiently or in the right way, and others are difficult to make sense of. There is a better way to understand the link between the empathizer and the target.

II. Parallel and Fancy Imagining

On learning that Oscar is exploring a cave, Emily imagines doing so herself. She then finds herself experiencing a feeling that she identifies as "panic." Thinking that Oscar's psychological make-up is like hers in relevant respects, she infers that he experiences panic; she describes him as feeling "panicked."[5] Emily is engaging in what I call *parallel* imagining, imagining "parallel" to Oscar's actual experience. She imagines herself, Emily, to be in a certain situation and to be performing certain activities, ones like those she takes Oscar to be in and to be performing. Oscar is not in the content of her imagining.[6]

Emily's experience does not amount to empathy (even assuming she is correct in thinking he feels panic). Empathy, central instances of empathy at least, or the most important kinds of empathy, require a closer, more intimate link between the empathizer's experience and her impression of or judgment about

[5] Cf. Walton 1997: 37–49.

[6] What Amy Coplan (2011) calls "self-oriented perspective-taking" and Peter Goldie (2011) "in-his-shoes perspective shifting" are parallel imaginings. We need not restrict parallel imagining to imaginings about oneself. If Emily imagines *exploring a cave* without imagining herself doing so (if this is possible), her imagining will count as "paralleling" Oscar's actual experience. What makes it merely parallel is that it is not imagining about Oscar. The instances of parallel imagining I will consider, however, are ones in which one does imagine about oneself; one imagines oneself doing or experiencing what another person does or experiences.

the target person's experience. Moreover, Emily's experience as described does not involve anything like *Verstehen*, knowing what is like for Oscar in the cave. She acquires mere ordinary propositional knowledge about him, knowledge *that he feels panic*.

Maybe what is required is a stronger sense of imagining, imagining that does not merely parallel the experience of the target. Simon Baron-Cohen (2003: 24) offers a colorful characterization that seems to point to something more interesting:

> Empathy involves a leap of imagination into someone else's head. While you can try to figure out another person's thoughts and feelings by reading their face, their voice and their posture, ultimately their internal world is not transparent, and in order to climb inside someone's head one must imagine what it is like to be them.

What sense can be made of this? Shall we say that to empathize with Oscar Emily must imagine herself *being Oscar*, not just being similar to him and/or in a similar situation and/or performing similar actions? If this means imagining an identity between Emily and Oscar, what is imagined (that Emily = Oscar) is metaphysically impossible, something that, some claim, cannot be imagined.

Coplan (2011) and Goldie (2011) both take imagining *being* another person to be necessary for empathizing with her (in their preferred senses of "empathy"). What is crucial for them seems to be that one take on, in imagination, relevant aspects of the target's personality, character traits, emotional dispositions, desires and inclinations, etc. This would not seem to require imagining being (literally) the other person, however. I might imagine *myself* with inclinations and interests like those of my target, imagine myself being extroverted, as my target is, even if I am introverted. This would be parallel imagining, in my sense; Goldie (2011) calls it "ambitious in-his-shoes perspective-shifting." In fact, it is not clear to me how to distinguish between imagining *being her* and possessing many of her properties, and imagining just being *myself* and possessing all of the same properties, while knowing that they are properties of her. Of course, there is the question, in either case, of whether or to what extent people are capable of imagining having desires or personalities different from their actual ones. Goldie is very skeptical about this; Coplan much less so.[7]

Richard Wollheim (1984: 75) questions the intelligibility of imagining oneself to be identical to someone else and introduces instead a notion of imagining

[7] Goldie (2011) argues interestingly that empathetic perspective-shifting is conceptually impossible, not just ruled out by contingent limitations of our imaginative abilities. I am not (yet) convinced.

another person "centrally." According to Goldie in an earlier essay (2000), to empathize with someone is simply to imagine her centrally, in Wollheim's sense.[8] I do not have a very good grip on the notion of imagining centrally, however, and Wollheim's explanation of it is inadequate.

In imagining the Sultan Mahomet II's entry into Constantinople in 1453, Wollheim says, he might imagine the Sultan "centrally." This is not to be confused, he thinks, with "centrally imagining *myself* in the Sultan's shoes . . . and therefore doing what I know he did there and then. . . . Imagining myself in the Sultan's shoes [what I call parallel imagining] . . . leaves it open to me at any moment to imagine myself brought face to face with the Sultan. And that is something that [imagining the Sultan centrally] clearly rules out" (Wollheim 1984: 75–76).

I don't see that this is clearly ruled out. To imagine the Sultan, "centrally" or otherwise, coming face to face with the Sultan would be to imagine something incoherent. But it seems that we do sometimes imagine incoherencies—when we dream, for instance.[9] Moreover, it is not clear that parallel imagining, "imagining myself in the Sultan's shoes," does "leave it open to me . . . to imagine myself brought face to face with the Sultan." If my project is to imagine myself doing and experiencing things as the Sultan actually did, I surely won't imagine coming face to face with the Sultan.

What to do? I take no stand here on whether it is possible to imagine an identity between oneself and another person. I don't rule out making sense of imagining someone "centrally." And perhaps another stronger-than-parallel kind of imagining or imaginative identification is the key to the notion of empathy. But there is an easier way. We can do an end run around the mysteries of imagination, for the purpose of explaining empathy. Mere parallel imagining will turn out to be enough. Indeed, as I mentioned, empathy does not require any imagining at all.

III. Phenomenal Concepts; Samples

In Walton (1999) I noted that in many instances in which we learn about others by imaginatively "occupying their shoes," what we learn contains a demonstrative element. If, imagining myself in the shoes of a person who misses his plane or a person crawling in a cave, I feel upset or panicked and judge him to be upset or panicked, the content of my judgment, in the first instance, is that he feels like

[8] Cf. also Smith 2011: 100.

[9] For what it is worth, this incoherence strikes me as less unimaginable than imagining that Kendall Walton is identical with the Sultan.

this (or something like this), where "this" refers to an aspect of my own current state of mind. I am using my feeling of upset or panic to represent his.[10] I might also find a predicate to characterize his state; I might describe him as "upset" or as "panicked." But the predicate is likely to be considerably less specific than what I represent to myself about him using my own mental state. It does not exhaust the content of my thought when I say to myself, "He feels like this." Judgments of this kind employ what have been called "phenomenal concepts," although this notion was introduced to serve an entirely different purpose.[11]

Sometimes "this," in judgments of the form, "She feels like this," refers not to one's actual mental state but to the content of one or another of one's intentional attitudes, the content of one's imagining, for instance. More about this presently. I will focus, now, on cases in which it is an aspect of one's actual state of mind that one uses as a sample.

To judge that a person feels "like this" is to use one's own mental state as a sample, indicating a property that one then attributes to her. It will be useful to look briefly at the work samples in general do, in our thinking and speaking.[12] A witness to a bank robbery uses a sample to describe the getaway car: "They drove off in that kind of car," or " . . . in a car like this one," she says, pointing to a vehicle parked in front of the police station. To modify an example from Jane Heal: I might say, "She sang thus," followed by a warbly, out of tune rendition of Yankee Doodle.[13] My vocalization serves as a sample of a manner of singing that I attribute to the other person, and perhaps also, though not necessarily, a sample of a way of singing Yankee Doodle. Samples can be picked out by means of descriptions or proper names, of course, as well as by demonstratives. The witness might describe the getaway car as being like the one her mother drives. We might describe a child as "another Mozart" or "another Einstein." Fictional objects are often used as samples: We speak of a "Cinderella team," a "catch 22," a "Trojan horse."

In all such cases, a particular thing (actual or fictional[14]) is used to call to mind or indicate a kind, a property, one that the particular saliently

[10] Heal (2003a, b) made similar suggestions and explored the more general notion of indexical predication.

[11] Brian Loar (1997) introduced it first, so far as I know, in connection with the mind-body problem. Cf. also Lycan 1996, Papineau 2002, Tye 2003, and others. Loar and others appeal to phenomenal concepts to support materialism, the idea being (roughly) that although we have both mental concepts (phenomenal concepts) and physical ones, they pick out properties of only one kind, physical properties. I take no stand on whether this defense of materialism is successful. Nor will I attempt to choose among the various definitions of "phenomenal concepts" in the literature.

[12] What I say about samples owes much to Nelson Goodman's (1968) notion of *exemplification*. A somewhat similar notion of *exemplarization* is central in Keith Lehrer's (2012) theory of art.

[13] Heal 2003b: 206. Cf. also Herbert Clark's (1996: 172–174) discussion of *demonstrations*.

[14] Here, as so often is the case, it is convenient to speak or write as though fictional entities exist. No ontological commitment is implied.

possesses (or a property it is thought saliently to possess or one commonly associated with it). The sample thus functions as a predicate: Like linguistic predicates, it picks out a property, which a speaker may then attribute to something else.[15]

To use a particular as a sample in this way is not to say something *about the sample*, any more than using a linguistic predicate to attribute a property to an object is to assert something about the predicate. What the robbery witness asserts is not that the vehicle she points to and the getaway vehicle are similar or of the same kind. She asserts that the robbers made their getaway in a vehicle of a certain sort (e.g., a recent model red pickup truck)—using the sample vehicle rather than a linguistic predicate to indicate what sort it is.

A given particular possesses many properties any of which it could serve as a sample of. Which one (or ones) does it pick out on a given occasion?[16] This is obviously a highly context dependent matter. The relevant property will be one that is salient in the context, where the context includes background information possessed by the speaker and her hearers, the point of the conversation, etc. Sometimes a speaker will specify what kind of property the relevant one is ("This *shade of color*," "That *kind of architecture*," "That *make of automobile*"), while still relying on the sample to indicate which property of the specified kind it is. But often this is unnecessary. We can think of a sample as a highly ambiguous predicate, disambiguated (partially or wholly) in a given conversational situation in roughly the ways ambiguous linguistic predicates are disambiguated.[17]

I emphasize that we needn't have a linguistic predicate or phrase or any way of saying, with words, what the property is (even when the sample does pick out a fairly definite property); using the sample may be our only way of identifying it. This is obviously true of shades of color, most of which have no names. (Even if we do have a name, e.g., "burnt sienna," we can't reliably ascertain whether something possesses the property without comparing it to a sample.)[18]

[15] "Many of our beliefs have the form: 'The color of her hair is ____', or 'The song he was singing went ____', where the blanks are filled with images, sensory impressions, or what have you, but certainly not words" (Kaplan 1968: 208).

[16] "A sample is a sample of some of its properties but not others" (Goodman 1978: 64). Clark (1996: 173–174) points out that in using demonstrations for communicative purposes, the speaker must rely on the hearer's recognizing, somehow, which aspects of the demonstration are intended to depict the subject of discussion and which are not.

[17] Sometimes the ambiguity is left unresolved, perhaps deliberately. The speaker's point may be simply to induce listeners to think about what features of the sample might also characterize the subject. This is the point also of some metaphorical attributions.

[18] Cf. Heal 2003b: 196–222.

IV. Empathy Again

Back to the special case in which one uses one's own psychological state as a sample, as when Emily empathizes with Oscar. We access our psychological states by means of introspection (or anyway, I assume, in some first person privileged manner). So although Emily's mental state serves as a sample in conceptualizing her judgment about Oscar, it will be of limited usefulness in explaining to a third party what she knows or believes about him. If she identifies her own state as an instance of "panic," she can tell another person, Thomas, that she thinks Oscar feels "panic." But she won't thereby be telling Thomas all that she knows or believes about Oscar. Her judgment is that Oscar experiences a particular sort of panic ("panic like *this*"), one she may not be able to express in words.[19]

It is open to Thomas to declare that Oscar feels "like *that*," referring to Emily's state of mind. He might have good reason to think her state is a fair sample of Oscar's. But there is a sense in which he won't know what property it is that he is thereby attributing to Oscar. (Compare: I might assert, truly and on good authority, that a person suffers from *ribose-5-phosphate isomerase deficiency* without having the foggiest idea what this is.) It is not clear that Thomas will even have disambiguated the predicative sample. In saying "Oscar feels like that" he might mean just that Oscar's and Emily's mental states are similar, that there is a property that they share. This is not using her state as a sample, a predicate, to specify a particular property.

There remain difficult questions, which I won't attempt to answer, about how it is that Emily picks out one aspect or property of her current mental state, as opposed to others, which she attributes to Oscar, and what it is for her to do so. Presumably Emily attends to one property rather than others, one that is salient to her in the context. These are questions also for those who use the notion of phenomenal concepts for other purposes, of course. [20] I assume that they can be answered satisfactorily.

[19] Peter Goldie (2000: 181) claims that "to understand another's emotions, we must be able . . . to say what the emotion is which that person is experiencing." According to Alvin Goldman (2006: especially 127, 224, 259), we classify our mental state, then attribute it to the other person. If saying what the state is, or classifying it, means having words for it, neither is necessary for understanding the target person. One can use one's own mental state as a sample.

[20] "A mental sample that exemplifies one phenomenal property will exemplify many. . . . Which of the exemplified properties is the one to which the demonstrative concept THAT PHENOMENAL PROPERTY refers? It seems that appealing to a mental sample does not help to fix the reference of the phenomenal concept at all" (Tye 2003: 95). Tye's conclusion is too strong. Yes, pointing to the sample does not *by itself* fix the reference. But this does not mean that pointing to it doesn't help; it may even be necessary.

In paradigm or standard instances of empathy, the empathizer uses some aspect of her current mental state to understand the target's, in the way I have described. I count this as a necessary condition, at least, for empathy.

Is to empathize necessarily to judge, or believe, or know, that the other person is "like this"? That seems too strong. Let's count as instances of empathy cases in which a person *experiences* a target as feeling "like this" or is under the *impression* that she does, without requiring that she say to herself anything like "He feels like this."[21] This will help to accommodate what has sometimes been called "automatic empathy," empathy based on emotional contagion, for instance.[22]

The empathizer's use of her own current mental state as a sample constitutes an especially intimate link between her state and her judgment about or impression of the target's experience. This, I submit, is the link we are after, the ground of the object directedness of empathy. It is by virtue of this that Emily's experience counts as empathy with Oscar.

Emily's judgment or impression is not merely that "*I am panicked, and so is Oscar*," but rather, "*Oscar is as I am, like this*." She can appropriately say, "I know how it is with him" or "I know how he feels," where "know" carries a connotation of intimacy, acquaintance.[23] This is close to what one might call *Verstehen*, or "knowing what it is like" for Oscar. Notice that the content of what she knows is in propositional form: She knows *that Oscar feels like this*. But this is propositional knowledge of a special kind, with the sample taking the place of a linguistic predicate in the formulation of what she knows. *What* Emily knows, the proposition she knows to be true, is not special or unusual. The very same proposition could be expressed in other ways, as (*a*) "He feels *X*," where *X* is a predicate indicating the same property that "like this" does (we might not possess such a predicate, but there could be one); or as (*b*) "He feels as Patricia did on such and such occasion." What is special is Emily's way of understanding this proposition, her way of accessing and thinking about it. She does so by means of a demonstratively indicated sample or a sample identified in some other way, rather than a linguistic predicate. Her knowledge of this proposition, her knowing *that he feels like this*, is special. It is knowledge of a (not so special) proposition that she represents to herself in a special way.

It looks as though much of the explanatory work we expect of a notion of empathy is done by the role of phenomenal concepts in the empathizer's experience, rather than some sort of in-her-shoes imagining or imaginative identification. As a first stab, I propose to define "empathy" as, simply, using some aspect of one's current mental state as a sample to understand another person, in the

[21] Merely apparent empathy, if the supposed empathizer's impression is mistaken.

[22] Cf. Goldman 2006: 40, 207–208.

[23] Assuming that her judgment or impression of him is correct.

way I have described, i.e., judging or experiencing the target person to be feeling "like this."

Refinements are needed. Suppose I learn by some non-empathetic means that Sadie is sad: She tells me that she is, or her shrink does, or I apply a theory, inferring from her actions or facial expressions that she is sad. Suppose also that, as it happens, I am sad as well. Now I am in a position to say, "She feels like this," referring to my state of mind and using it as a sample indicating (just) the property of being sad. This hardly qualifies as an instance of empathy, for two distinct reasons. (*a*) Sadness is a very unspecific mental state. We might want to require that, to count as empathizing, one must use one's mental state as a sample of a much more specific property. (An empathizer is likely to say not merely, "I know how you feel," but "I know *just* how you feel"—although this is an exaggeration if it means that the empathizer knows *exactly* how the target feels.) (*b*) My mental state, my sadness, is not the source of my knowledge about Sadie (or of my impression of how it is with her). It is because I knew already that she was sad, that I was able to use my state in characterizing hers. In paradigmatic instances of empathy, the empathizer judges or has the impression that the target feels a certain way, because *she* (the empathizer) does.

V. Empathy without Imagination

What, then, does imagining have to do with empathy? Certainly imagining is an important ingredient of many empathetic experiences, perhaps most of them, including Emily's as I described it. Her imagining crawling in a cave, when she learns about Oscar's adventure, makes two important contributions to her experience: It induces in her the panicked feeling that she uses as a sample in understanding Oscar's state of mind. And (on the assumption that Oscar's psychological makeup, etc., is sufficiently like hers in relevant respects) the fact that her feeling was generated by the imagining—by imagining being in a situation like the one Oscar is in—arguably gives her some reason to think that it is a fair sample of Oscar's state of mind, that her judgment that Oscar feels "like this" has a reasonable chance of being true. This is mere *parallel* imagining. I didn't postulate any fancier variety, and I see no reason to think empathy requires anything fancier.

Moreover, circumstances other than imagining can make the contributions imagining makes in Emily's case.

Sometimes an empathizer is actually in a situation similar in crucial respects to that of her target. If you and I have a mutual friend who has suffered misfortune, we may both grieve for him. I might then judge that you feel "like this," referring to my own feeling of grief (a fairly specific kind of grief). My actual

situation generates the state I use as a sample, and the fact that my situation is similar to yours may give me some reason to think it is a fair sample, may help to justify my judgment. My grief is not caused by yours, or by my knowledge of the situation you are in. Yet I may think of you as feeling "like this." And I can say that I know "how you feel" or "what it is like for you." This should count as an instance of empathy.

Alternatively, you and I may both experience grief but for different persons. I grieve for a friend of mine, and judge that you, in grieving for *your* friend, feel "like this." Then the property my statement serves to indicate is different; it is not grief *for so-and-so*, but just grief (probably a particular sort of grief) for someone or other. Still, in using my statement as a sample, I am empathizing with you.

That being in a situation similar to the target's helps one to empathize with him is certainly not news. But the usual idea is that being in a similar situation makes it easier than it would be otherwise to "put oneself in his shoes" or to "imaginatively identify" with him." My proposal is that this last step is unnecessary. Actually being in a parallel situation is enough.

What about contagion? Entering a jolly gathering, Carol forgets her troubles and finds herself in a cheerful mood. Some count such contagion as a kind of empathy; some do not.[24] Carol might be entirely unaware that she caught her mood from the others, if she even notices their good spirits. In that case she won't judge or have the impression that "they feel like this," and her experience won't qualify as empathy. But if she is aware of the contagion (implicitly at least), and does judge or have the impression that they feel "like this," attributing an aspect of her mental state to them, she is empathizing with them. Imagination seems not to be involved.[25]

A science fiction example: By manipulating my brain, doctors produce in me an affective (and/or perceptual) state that I can use as a sample. There may be good scientific evidence that my artificially acquired brain state is correlated with an experience of a certain kind, an experience of severe claustrophobia, or of drowning, or undergoing a near death experience, or smelling durian, or feeling ostracized. Knowing this, I use my state as a sample to understand the experience of a target person who suffers claustrophobia, or drowns, or smells durian, . . . I judge that she feels "like this." If my judgment is correct, I am empathizing with her. This is empathy without imagining. It is not imagining, neither parallel

[24] Hoffman (2001) does; Goldman (2006: 207–208) apparently does, citing Hodges and Wegner (1997); Coplan (2002, 2011) doesn't.

[25] At least it is not obvious that imagination is involved. Perhaps the mechanism of emotional contagion includes (implicitly) imagining behaving as the infecting persons are behaving. This is not imagining oneself in their *situation*, as in the instances of parallel imagining I have considered. It is in a different sense imagining oneself "in their shoes."

nor fancy imagining, that causes my experience or justifies my taking it as a fair sample of the target's experience.

Memory may be responsible, in either of two ways, for a state of mind an empathizer might use as a sample. I would count both of them instances of imagining, but some would not. In any case, only parallel imagining is needed.

A person might "re-live" a previous automobile accident, feeling panic or terror again, and judge that a target person experiencing an accident feels "like this"—i.e., in certain respects like she now feels. The empathizer imagines (I would say) a huge SUV bearing down on her *now*, imagines facing a clear and present danger. (She does not really think she is in danger, for a second time, while she is re-living the past experience.)

In other cases, memory traces left from previous experiences, rather than re-living or recalling any particular one or ones, may affect a person's experience as she imagines being in a similar situation. (Having been inebriated previously, one might feel nauseous on imagining downing a bottle of whiskey.) The imaginer may then judge that a target person feels "like this."[26]

VI. Extensions, Variations, Relatives

Empathy, as I have explained it, is an occurrent state (or experience, or activity), in which one uses one's own current mental state as a sample. Call this the primary sense of "empathy."

We can, of course, recognize a dispositional sense as well. One may be disposed to empathize, occurrently, with a particular target or targets of a certain kind, or able to do so if we set our mind to it. We can describe someone as an empathic person, if she is uncommonly capable of empathizing with others or does so uncommonly often.[27]

I have concentrated on empathy with a target's phenomenological states. One can empathize also with a person's beliefs, desires, hopes, intentions, etc., and with his coming to believe something, changing his mind, forming intentions, seeing his hopes dashed, etc. The extension of my account in these directions is not entirely straightforward. If an empathizer does not believe what the target person believes, for instance, she cannot judge, "He believes like this," with the demonstrative referring simply to a belief of her own (nor can she judge, "He came to believe like this," where "this" refers to her own coming to believe something).

[26] Cf. Walton 1999: § VII.

[27] Thanks to Sarah Buss.

I mentioned that one sometimes uses, as a sample, not one's actual mental state but the content of one or another of one's intentional attitudes, the content of an imagining, for instance.[28] This is true of viewers' experiences of point of view shots in film. Following a shot of a character looking out a window, there is a shot of a scene outside. Watching the second shot, we imagine observing the scene, and we judge that the character looking out the window has an experience "like this," like the one we imagine enjoying. We do not attribute to the character an experience (much) like our *actual* visual experience, a visual experience of a *film* shot, of a *depiction* of the scene outside the window. The experience we attribute to the character is like our actual one only insofar as imagining seeing is like actually seeing.

Emily might, possibly by putting herself in Oscar's shoes as he crawls in the cave, imagine deciding (after deliberation, or spontaneously, in a spirit of desperation or one of studied calmness) to back slowly through the passageway, hoping to find a place where she can turn around. Or she may imagine planning to sue a tour operator who assured her that the cave was perfectly safe for novice spelunkers. She does not *actually* decide to back out or to sue the company, and she does not really hope that she will find a place to turn around; she is not in a cave and no tour operator assured her of a cave's safety. But she might judge (or speculate) that Oscar did or will make decisions or plans or entertain a hope "like this," i.e., like the decisions or plans she finds herself imagining making or the hope she entertains in imagination.

This probably should count as empathy only if Emily's imagining is of an appropriately experiential sort (like that of the viewer of the point of view shot). Imagining *that I decide to back out*, and judging that Oscar decides "like this," i.e., as I imagine that I decide, may be just to judge *that he decides to back out*. I take *imagining deciding to back* out to be richer and more experiential, probably including phenomenological elements, than merely *imagining that I decide to back out*. Judging (or having the impression) that another person decides as I imagine deciding, in this richer sense of imagining, may reasonably count as

[28] Compare what Herbert Clark calls *demonstrations*: A person who, pretending to drink tea in a certain manner, declares, "She drinks tea like this," attributes to her what he pretends to do, not just aspects of what he actually does (Clark 1996: 172–174). The pretender's action is an *icon*, Clark will say, of *a way of drinking tea*. It is not itself a sample of that; the pretender is not (actually) drinking tea. But if the pretender uses an actual teacup in his demonstration, it is a sample of a way of bringing a teacup to one's mouth; otherwise it is a sample at least of a way of moving one's hands toward one's mouth. Many or most icons used in demonstrations, in Clark's sense, are or include samples. I am not sure whether all things used as samples should count as icons. In any case, many *uses* of samples are not demonstrations in Clark's sense, i.e., many of them are not *communicative signals*, the speaker having Gricean intentions to produce an effect in a hearer. I am interested especially in cases in which samples enable one to articulate a thought, but don't (or can't) serve a communicative purpose.

a case of empathy, of empathizing with the target's deciding. The same goes for empathizing with a person's hoping, believing, intending, desiring, etc.

To empathize in the primary sense, again, is to use an aspect of one's *current* mental state as a sample. (We can now add that this may include the content of a current imagining.) In the automobile accident example, the empathizer's sample is her present experience of re-living the accident she had previously. If she remembers the experience but does not re-live it, she could use her previous state, her actual experience of the accident, as a sample, judging that the target "feels like *that*, like I did then." Her previous experience may, of course, have been more like the target's experience than a present re-living would be. It will include actually fearing the SUV, not just experiencing a feeling of panic, and perhaps (not necessarily) a more intense feeling of panic. But judging that the target feels "like *that*" won't be empathizing with him, in the primary sense.

One might, however, have something like empathy consisting primarily in recollections of a previous experience, without using one's current mental state or the content of a current imagining as a sample.[29] I will call this *sort-of* empathy (introducing a new technical term). Suppose that I remember an experience I once had, without in any way re-living it, without now feeling anything like I did then; I may be incapable even of imagining being in that state. But, let's say, I have good reason to think that my previous state is a fair sample of how another person, Joan, now feels. (A perceptive mutual friend tells me, "You know the way you felt last April? That's how Joan feels now.") This is not empathy in the primary sense. I may not even be empathizing dispositionally (in the primary manner) with Joan. But I may remember some of the consequences of my previous experience, without experiencing even an echo of its phenomenology. I might remember what I was inclined to do or to believe as a result of feeling as I did: that I was really upset, or strangely calm, that I tended to notice certain things and was oblivious to others, that I felt close to, or alienated from certain people, etc. Given that I take Joan to be having a phenomenal experience like my previous one, I expect her to have inclinations to believe and act and feel similar to the ones I had—all without my now experiencing anything like the phenomenology of the experience. These are expectations that I might have had as a result of re-living my previous experience. If I am right about Joan, about what she is inclined to do or to believe or feel, we can count this as knowing, in a way, what it is like for her, even though this knowledge—my *sort-of* empathy—is based just on memories of my experience, not my re-living it. (A variation: I might re-live some aspects of the experience, some of my previous inclinations to do or believe or feel.)

[29] Thanks to Peter Railton.

Jonathan Weinberg has emphasized what he calls *situational* empathy—by which we know what it's like to be in love, or to go on the job market for the first time, or to go through the breakup of a relationship.[30] Situational empathy, he says, concerns "phenomena that are extended in time, often involving distinct qualitative characters at different times"; it "includes not just the phenomenology, but affective, practical, behavioral, cognitive, etc. elements"; and it "can be primarily past-tense, without needing to be produced via a re-imagining of a past experience." Situational empathy comes in many varieties, and there is a lot to be said about it.[31] I submit that combinations of empathy in the primary sense, empathy in which one uses contents of one's imaginings as samples, *sort-of* empathy, and dispositions to experience the above, as well as awareness of one's possession of such dispositions, will go a long way toward accounting for these cases.[32]

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[30] In comments on an earlier version of this paper, presented at the 2011 Chapel Hill Colloquium in Philosophy.

[31] A terminological preference: I don't call it "empathy" unless there is a target, a person in love or on the job market or . . . with whom one empathizes; otherwise it is simulation.

[32] This essay began as a talk at a conference on *Empathy*, organized by Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, in 2006. I am much indebted to Coplan and Goldie and to audiences on this and later occasions for helpful discussion, and especially to Sarah Buss, Gregory Currie, Ron Endicott, Iskra Fileva, Stacie Friend, David Hills, Mitchell Green, Fred Kroon, Bence Nanay, Peter Railton, Robert Stecker, Damian Wassel, and Jonathan Weinberg.

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2

Fictionality and Imagination—Mind the Gap

The notion of truth in fiction, of a proposition's being "true in a fictional world"—*fictional*, in my terminology—is absolutely central to my theory of fiction, to my proposals about what fiction is, how we understand and appreciate and respond to works of fiction, and how they are important in our lives.[1] This notion is far more important than that of works of fiction, the distinction between fiction and nonfiction. Many theorists begin with and emphasize the latter. My strategy, in Walton (1990), is the opposite.

In Walton (1990) and elsewhere, I offered a reductive account of fictionality in terms of imagining: A proposition is fictional, I said, just in case there is a prescription to the effect that it is to be imagined. More precisely, a proposition is fictional in (the world of) a particular work, *W*, just in case appreciators of that work are to imagine it, just in case full appreciation of *W* requires imagining it.[2] I have come to realize, belatedly, that this is only half right. Prescriptions to imagine are necessary but not sufficient for fictionality.[3] This means that the notion of fictionality is even more fundamental than I thought it was, and more difficult to pin down.

Before explaining, it will be helpful to remind ourselves of an important feature of imagining, a respect in which imaginings differ from beliefs.

[1] Thanks for discussion and comments to Carola Barbero, Gregory Currie, Daniel Groll, Stacie Friend, David Hills, Fred Kroon, Patrick Maynard, Jerome Pelletier, Shaun Nichols, Dawn Phillips, Denis Robinson, Richard Woodward, Steven Yablo. Thanks especially to David Braddon-Mitchell for numerous very helpful conversations during an extended visit at Sydney University..

[2] Walton 1990: 39–41, 57–61. I added an important qualification which needn't concern us now: "A proposition is fictional . . . if it is to be imagined (in the relevant context) *should the question arise*" (1990: 40, emphasis in original).

[3] This realization was provoked first by conversations with Jerome Pelletier. Stacie Friend and Patrick Maynard also called my attention to counterexamples.

1. Imagination (and Belief)

Several theorists have remarked that imaginings (propositional imaginings) are much like beliefs with respect to their functional role. One similarity is supposed to be that "imagination preserves the inferential patterns of belief" (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002: 12–13). Inferences from a set of imaginings (together with some beliefs) to further imaginings correspond to inferences from a set of beliefs to further beliefs.[4] This mirroring of inference patterns is supposed to be true not only for free standing imaginative experiences, e.g. daydreams, but also for imaginative responses to fiction (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002: 13–14). We imagine what is made explicit in a work of fiction. Then we draw inferences from it; we infer that certain other propositions are also true in the fiction, and we imagine them. These inferences are supposed to parallel inferences we would make from propositions we believe initially to others which we come to believe as well.

Inferences from imaginings to imaginings do sometimes parallel inferences from beliefs to beliefs, but very frequently they do not. In the case of imaginings in response to works of fiction, they do (roughly) when what I call the *Reality Principle* of implication is operative. But the applicability of the *Reality Principle* is very limited (Walton 1990: ch. 4). I will focus now on an especially fundamental way in which imaginings differ from beliefs, one that makes for differences in inference patterns that do not result from limitations of the *Reality Principle*.

Fictional truths come in clusters, and so do one's imaginings of the propositions that are fictional. Different clusters correspond to different fictional worlds, the worlds of different works of fiction, for instance, or different fantasies or daydreams. Fictionality is always relative to a particular fictional world: a given proposition is not fictional *simpliciter*, but fictional in the world of a particular novel, story, movie or daydream (Walton 1973: 287–288; 1978: 10; 1990: 35–36). Much of the recent literature on the imagination ignores this clustering, or pays insufficient attention to it.[5] Nichols and Stich's (2003: 36) boxological diagram of mental architecture features one box for beliefs, and another one for imaginings—all of them.

The importance of the clustering lies partly in how imaginings combine with one another. Contents of different clusters don't combine to justify inferences in the way that contents of the same clusters do. If *p* and *q* are both fictional, and belong to the same cluster, usually the conjunction, *p*&*q*, is fictional also, and is to be imagined. This is not so if *p* and *q* belong to different clusters, different fictional worlds. Reading Kafka's *Metamorphosis* I imagine that a boy was

[4] Currie and Ravenscroft 2002: 12–14; Nichols and Stich 2003: 29–32. All agree that imaginings differ functionally from beliefs with respect to their connections with action.

[5] An exception is Skolnick and Bloom 2006.

transformed into a bug. Reading *War and Peace*, I imagine that things like that just don't happen. (Or I would imagine this should the question arise.) There is no pressure at all to imagine the conjunction, to imagine that someone turned into a bug and people never turn into bugs, nor is there any tension between the conflicting imaginings. While watching a performance of *Othello*, I fantasize about taking Othello aside, telling him about Iago's treachery and forestalling the threatened disaster. I imagine doing this, but I also imagine, in accordance with the events on stage, that no one intervenes and that the tragedy unfolds as scheduled. I certainly do not imagine that I do and do not reveal Iago's treachery to Othello, and there is no tension at all in the fact that I have imagined incompatible propositions. These imaginings belong to different clusters.

Nothing quite like this clustering is true of beliefs. Any beliefs that I possess will combine with any others to justify the inference to their conjunction. If I find myself believing contradictory propositions, I have a problem. I feel obliged to change one or the other of my beliefs to avoid being committed to the conjunction.[6]

2. Fictionality

My original account of fictionality, again, is this: a proposition is fictional in (the world of) a particular work, *W*, just in case appreciators of that work are to imagine it, just in case full appreciation of *W* requires imagining it. This proposal hasn't been especially controversial. Many writers have gone along with it, sometimes changing the terminology.[7] However, it simply will not do, and not just because it is a little fuzzy, which of course it is. It gives us a necessary condition for fictionality in a particular world, but not a sufficient one. [8]

Counterexamples to its sufficiency, cases in which appreciators of a given work are to imagine propositions that are not fictional in it, come in several

[6] A certain kind of clustering of beliefs does occur. One might entertain different sets of beliefs in different contexts without paying attention to how they are related, and without actively believing conjunctions of propositions believed in the different contexts. I may not notice that in one context I believe *p*, and in another *q*. But if someone points this out to me, I will certainly expect to be committed to *p&q*. And if I should notice that I believe *p* in one context and *not-p* in another, I will feel obliged to revise one or the other of the beliefs.

[7] Lewis' (1983) account of "truth in fiction" is very different, but his objectives are also different from mine. His definition is meant to capture the circumstances by virtue of which propositions are fictional (what I call the "mechanics of generation"), whereas mine is based on the function that fictional truths serve. A definition of the kind he proposes will turn out to be drastically disjunctive, it seems to me, given my conclusions in Walton (1990: ch. 4). I am aiming for a more univocal one.

[8] It might be true that a proposition is fictional if and only if it is to be imagined, if this means that it is fictional *in some world or other*, if and only if it is to be imagined.

Figure 1 Vermeer (van Delft), Jan (1632-1675). *A Young Woman Standing at a Virginal,* about 1670-2. Oil on canvas, 51.7 x 45.2 cm. Bought, 1892 (NG 1383). National Gallery, London, Great Britain. © National Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY.

varieties. I will present more than are needed to demonstrate the insufficiency, in order to block some tempting but inadequate fixes, fixes that work for some kinds of cases but not for others. Also, some of the examples are interesting in their own right.

The most obvious counterexamples are what some call *iconic meta-representations*. Vermeer's *A Young Woman Standing at a Virginal* (fig. 1) depicts a framed picture of Cupid on the wall behind the woman. Viewers are to imagine a picture of Cupid. But they are also to imagine Cupid, a naked, winged child with a bow; they are to imagine that there is such a child.[9] Full appreciation of the painting includes looking at the part of the canvas that depicts the picture, and being induced to imagine Cupid, or anyway a child with wings and a bow, to imagine that there is such a being. Yet it is not fictional in *Woman at a Virginal* that there is a winged child with a bow.

[9] I am assuming that, in the cases we are interested in at least, imagining a ϕ entails or implies imagining that there is a ϕ. Obviously the reverse entailment doesn't hold.

Figure 2 Photograph of a Doll. Photograph Kendall Walton © 2014.

The point of imagining Cupid is, of course, to discover what the picture on the wall depicts. We learn that it is fictional in *Woman at a Virginal* that the picture on the wall is a picture of Cupid, when we find ourselves imagining Cupid. The depicted frame lets us know that we are to imagine that there is a *picture* of Cupid, and that it is fictional in *Woman at a Virginal* that there is only a picture of Cupid there.

We can think of the small portion of the canvas inside the depicted frame as having its own fictional world, one in which it *is* fictional that there is a child with wings. That part of the canvas illustrates the content of the depicted picture, in the world of the larger picture, but it remains true that spectators, *qua* viewers of Vermeer's painting as a whole, are to imagine that there is a child with wings, although this is not fictional in Vermeer's painting.

We can't always recognize a part of a work and attribute to it its own fictional world. It is fictional in fig. 2 that there is a doll, a representation of a child with red hair wearing a frilly pink dress. How do we know that that is what the doll represents (and that it is a doll)? Looking at the photographic depiction, we imagine a child with red hair wearing a frilly pink dress; we imagine that there is one. There is a prescription, to viewers of the photograph, to imagine this; *qua*

appreciators of the picture, they are to do so. But it is not fictional in the photograph nor in any part of it considered alone, that there is a child with red hair wearing a frilly pink dress.

Many other iconic meta-representations are counterexamples to the sufficiency of my original account of fictionality. There are stories within stories (e.g. *One Thousand and One Nights*), dream sequences in film, Hamlet's play about Gonzago's murder in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and the film, *Rashomon* (Kurasawa, 1950).

So far, the problematic examples are meta-representations, works representing other representations and their contents, but we shouldn't rush to find a solution specific to meta-representations. Counterexamples of other kinds are on the way.

Some fictions represent illusions and the contents of the illusions. When the illusion is suffered by a character, the work will qualify as a meta-representation, a representation of the character's mental representation. I mentioned dream sequences in film, and there are ordinary point-of-view shots: A shot of a character eating mushrooms, then wobbling around, stoned, with glazed eyes, is followed by a shot of a purple elephant flying through the air. It is fictional that the character hallucinates a purple elephant, that he seems to see a purple elephant, but it isn't fictional in the film that there is a purple elephant. In order to ascertain what the character seems to see, the viewer must, in the second shot, imagine seeing a purple elephant, imagine that there is a purple elephant. Is the viewer to imagine merely *seeming* to see a purple elephant, and not that there is one? How does she figure out what it is that she is to imagine seeming to be the case? She finds herself imagining seeing a purple elephant, and there being one.

Sometimes a work represents simply an illusory situation, without portraying anyone suffering from the illusion. It is fictional in the photograph, fig. 3, that the cactus looks soft and cuddly, but (by virtue of obvious background information) fictionally it is actually prickly, not soft and cuddly. The viewer is to imagine the cactus being soft and cuddly, although it is fictional only that it *looks* soft and cuddly. It is by engaging in this imagining that they discover how, fictionally, the cactus looks (how, fictionally, it would look were someone to see it from the right point of view).

Since it is not fictional, in the world of the picture, that anyone experiences the illusion, it is a stretch to call this a meta-representation. It is not fictional even that someone has a non-veridical mental representation. But the fuzzy cactus photograph does involve what we might call a "secondary content." Now for counter examples to the prescribed imagining account of fictionality that don't even have a secondary content. The imaginings of propositions that are not fictional, in these cases, do not in general help one to ascertain what is fictional; they serve different purposes.