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Fiction, Cognition, and Non-Verbal Media

The concept of fiction is as difficult to define technically as it is easy to grasp intuitively. The layman's interpretation is easily captured by the definition of the online encyclopedia Wikipedia: "Fiction (from the Latin *fingere*, 'to form, create') is storytelling of imagined events and stands in contrast to non-fiction, which makes factual claims about reality." This is followed by a list of all the genres of fiction: novels, short stories, fables, fairy tales, and beyond literature: films, comics and video games. If it is that simple to define fiction, this is very bad news for the philosophers and literary theorists who have sweated over the problem for the past 20 years. Aren't they trying to reinvent the wheel?

Fortunately for the theorists and philosophers, Wikipedia's definition leaves many questions unanswered. A truly meaningful theory of fiction should be more than an instrument by which to sort out all texts into fiction and non-fiction: it should also tell us something about how we experience these texts, what we do with them, why we consume them, and why it is important to make a distinction between fiction and non-fiction. It should, in other words, have a phenomenological and a cognitive dimension.

By cognitive dimension I do not mean that a theory of fiction should rely on cognitive science in a technical sense. This paper will not deal with how neurons fire in the brain when we experience fiction, nor with the importance of the creation of fictional worlds for the life of the mind, even though it is a topic of prime importance.[1] What I mean with cognitive dimension is that the judgment "is it a fiction" must influence the use of a text or the interpretation of a behavior. Here are three cases where these responses depend crucially on the judgment of fictionality.

The first example comes from a famous fictional character, the comic book hero Tintin, but we can imagine that the events happened in real

1 See Schaeffer 1999, Dutton 2008 and Boyd 2009 on the importance of fiction for the life of the mind.

life, rather than being part of a story. In *Cigars of the Pharaoh*, Tintin hears a woman being savagely beaten in the Sahara desert. A good boy scout that he is, he rushes to her rescue, but instead of being thanked for his chevaleresque behavior, he discovers that he has stumbled upon a movie set, and he must suffer the anger of the entire film crew. The action was feigned, and the participants were actors playing a role.

Whereas the failure to recognize fiction in the Tintin story is due to honest mistake, the 1999 movie *Blair Witch Project* deliberately seeks to produce misidentification. The film was presented on an advertising Web site as the content of the camera of three young people who were investigating reports concerning a witch and who were found dead in a forest in Maryland. Needless to say the advertisement was a hoax: the film was not an authentic document discovered *post-mortem*, but a simulation filmed by the actors themselves. A spectator who believes the Web site will watch the movie with much greater horror than a spectator who knows how the film was made.

In literature, the importance of the judgment of fictionality is demonstrated by a novel titled *Marbot: A Biography* (1981; Engl. trans. 1983) by the German author Wolfgang Hildesheimer. The novel tells the life of Sir Andrew Marbot, a nineteenth century British intellectual who frequented German and English romantic poets and published several books about aesthetics. The seriousness of the scholarship is demonstrated by footnotes and an index, and the authenticity of the hero is attested by illustrations, such as a photograph of Marbot's ancestral castle, his portrait by Eugène Delacroix, and the portrait of his mother by Henry Raeburn. The text makes no use of the narrative techniques typical of the novel, such as representations of the private thoughts of characters, and it uses hypothetical constructions to distinguish speculative interpretations from verifiable reports of facts. All these features fooled some early critics into taking the text for a genuine biography, especially since Hildesheimer had previously penned a Mozart biography. But Sir Andrew Marbot is an invented character, and the text is a fiction. A reader who mistakes the text for a biography may be tempted to look up Sir Andrew Marbot on Wikipedia, to search for his works in the catalog of a library, or even to write a dissertation about him. By contrast, a reader who correctly identifies the work as a novel will be entertained by the author's clever imitation of scholarly writing.

What the case of Marbot demonstrates is that one cannot always tell whether or not a text is a fiction by inspecting the text. There are admittedly what Dorrit Cohn (1999) calls "signposts of fictionality," and these signposts concern form as well as content: a text that makes heavy use of stream of consciousness, or that starts with "once upon a time," or

that tells about a prince being turned into a toad is likely to be a fiction. But these signposts are optional.[2] While a text of non-fiction cannot use fictional devices without losing its credibility, a fictional text can always imitate non-fiction. It follows that fictionality is not a semantic property of texts, nor a stylistic one, but a pragmatic feature: a feature that tells us what to do with the text.

Philosophical approaches to fiction

Modern literary criticism (by this I mean the tradition of academic criticism that started in the twentieth century) was slow to discover the importance of the concept of fiction. It wasn't until the seventies that philosophers of the analytic school discovered fiction as a topic of interest. They were not particularly interested in the experience of literature and in the appreciation of works of art: what mattered to them were the truth conditions of sentences that refer to fictional individuals, such as Anna Karenina and Santa Claus. But this problem could not be divorced from the attempt to capture the nature of fiction through formal definitions.

Theories of fiction can be divided into two classes: those that take language-based storytelling as their starting point, and those that are neutral with respect to medium and narrativity. Among the approaches that treat fiction as a form of verbal storytelling are those of the philosophers John Searle, David Lewis, and Gregory Currie.

For Searle (1975), fictionality is an operator that affects the speech act of assertion. An assertion is a speech act that commits the speaker to telling the truth. But in fiction, the author only pretends to make assertions, or imitates the making of assertions. This act of pretense relieves the author of the responsibility to fulfill the sincerity conditions that relate to assertion: having evidence for the truth of the asserted proposition p, and believing the truth of p. Searle distinguishes a deceptive from a non-deceptive form of pretense, the first corresponding to lies, and the

2 In her discussion of the signpost of fictionality, Cohn (1999: 117) shrewdly observes that the example that Searle (1975: 325) chooses, reportedly at random, to show that "[t]here is no textual property, syntactic or semantic, that will identify a text as a work of fiction" flagrantly disproves his case: "Ten more glorious days without horses! So thought Second Lieutenant Andrew Chase-Smith recently commissioned in the regiment of King Edwards Horse, as he pottered contentently in a garden on the outskirts of Dublin on a sunny Sunday after-noon in April nineteen-sixteen." (From Iris Murdoch, *The Red and the Green*). The report of inner life discredits this passage from being non-fiction. But I think that this unfortunate example does not invalidate Searle's claim, because he is speaking of necessary properties.

second to fiction. Though the language of fiction is often indistinguishable from the language of nonfiction, readers are protected from taking the textual statements as genuine information by their recognition of the author's act of pretense. Insofar as fictionality is determined by the author's intent, a text cannot pass from nonfiction to fiction or vice versa. The notion of fiction as pretense has been widely accepted, but Searle's account is problematic in its handling of the statements within fiction that refer to real-world entities. According to Searle, Conan Doyle pretends to make assertions when he refers to Sherlock Holmes, but he makes serious assertions when he refers to London. It is hard to reconcile this patchwork of fiction and nonfiction with the homogenous impression that the world of the Sherlock Holmes stories makes on the reader. Moreover, the "pretended assertion" analysis remains ambiguous as to who is doing the pretense: Searle claims that in the case of a fiction told by a heterodiegetic, invisible narrator (what followers of Ann Banfield would call the no-narrator type of fiction), the author pretends to be a version of himself who believes in the truth of the story, while in the case of homodiegetic narration, the author pretends to be a radically different individual. While it is indeed much more difficult for authors to distanciate themselves from the views of anonymous heterodiegetic narrators than from the judgments of individuated ones — the narrator's personality acting as a shield — this analysis could lead to the questionable view that readers project the individuating features of the author unto heterodiegetic narrators. Finally, the idea of "pretended assertion" should be extended to "pretended speech act" if the theory is to account for the rhetorical questions and mock commands to the reader that pepper fictional discourse.

Another philosopher of the analytic school who addressed the issue of fictionality is David Lewis, the most prominent theorist of the plurality of worlds. For Lewis (1978), fiction is a story told as true about a non-actual possible world by a narrator situated within this other world. A nonfictional story by contrast is told as true about our world by one of its members. The difference between fiction and nonfiction is consequently a matter of reference world.

In Lewis' model, possible worlds stand as various distances from the actual world, depending on how many propositions take a different truth value in each world. The close worlds will contain many individuals who have counterparts in the actual world (for instance, the world of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*), while the remote worlds will have an entirely different population (the world of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*). Counterparts of the same individual can have different properties in each possible world: for instance, the Napoleon of a historical novel could say things that he never said in reality or even win the battle of Waterloo. This idea of

counterpart relation solves the problem encountered by Searle when the text refers to actual entities. For Lewis, the world of the Sherlock Holmes stories is not created by a mixture of fictional and nonfictional statements, but by a fully fictional discourse that describes a possible world linked to the actual world through many counterpart relations. But since counterparts are not exact copies of each other, the author of the Sherlock Holmes stories is fully free to modify the geography of London or the biography of Napoleon.

While Searle describes fiction as a particular modality of the speech act of assertion — this is to say, as a meta-speech act — Gregory Currie (1990) regards it as an alternative to assertion. His definition of fictionality is formulated through a model inspired by Searle's analysis of the speech acts of assertion, command and promise, and by the philosopher H. Paul Grice's account of meaning in language. According to Currie, a speaker S performs the illocutionary act of uttering fiction if S utters a proposition P to an audience A with the intent that

(1) A would make-believe P
(2) A would recognize S's intention of (1), and
(3) A would have (2) as a reason for doing (1).[3]

The principal merit of this analysis is to open up the definition of fiction from a purely logical to a cognitive and phenomenological account by introducing the important notion of make-believe. But make-believe is not a distinct type of speech act, it is a use of the imagination that manifests itself in a wide variety of human activities: not only in storytelling, but also in dramatic acting, in playing with dolls or toy soldiers, in wearing masks and costumes, in adult role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons, and of course in those computer games where players identify with an avatar. Currie regards fictional make-believe as a subset of this larger class of make-believe (1990: 71). For him, storytelling illustrates fictional make-believe, while playing with dolls and toy soldiers would illustrate the nonfictional form.

For Kendall Walton, by contrast, all make-believe is in essence fiction, and all fiction is make-believe. This postulate enables him to propose a truly medium-free theory of fiction. As Walton declares, "not all fiction is linguistic. Any adequate theory of fiction must be able to accommodate pictorial fictions, for instance, as well as literary ones." (1990: 75). Walton's central thesis is that "in order to understand paintings, plays, films,

3 This is a somewhat simplified formulation. I have left out the specifications that are not directly relevant to my presentation of Currie's approach.

and novels, we must look first at dolls, hobbyhorses, toy trucks and teddy bears" (1990: 11). In their games of make-believe, children takes objects and pretend that they are something else: for instance, a doll is taken by the players for a baby, a toy soldier for a real soldier, and a certain tree for the jail in a game of cops and robbers. By standing for something else, the objects manipulated by the players become what Walton calls "props in a game of make-believe." The function of a prop in a game of make-believe is to encourage the play of the imagination.

Walton's notion of "game of make-believe" thus involves two distinct features: taking something as something else; and inspiring the imagination rather than conveying information. Both of these features can be applied to narrative literature as well as to children's games: readers pretend that the text written by the author is the discourse of a fictional narrator, and they use this discourse to construct the mental image of an imaginary world, just as children pretend that a certain stump is a bear, and use the stump to imagine a world where they are being chased by ferocious animals.

My own approach to fiction is a blend of ideas inspired by all these theories. Like Walton, I regard fiction as a mode of representation; this is to say, as an essentially mimetic activity. It is common to talk about an opposition between fiction and reality, and also about an opposition between representation and reality. Some theorists, especially those influenced by post-modern theory, conclude that every representation and every narrative is a fiction. I call this stance the "Doctrine of Panfictionality" (Ryan 1997). But the association of fiction and representation on the basis of their common opposition to reality rests on a fallacious symmetry. If we look at the three examples of fiction that I gave above, namely *Tintin*, *Blair Witch* and *Marbot*, only the *Tintin* example opposes directly fiction and reality. Tintin must decide if the events he is observing are pretended or if they really count. The contrast pits represented actions against real actions, and fiction designates the act of representing actions. But in the other two examples, *Marbot* and *Blair Witch*, fictional representation is not opposed to reality, but rather to another type of representation: we must decide if the author of *Marbot* represents a real or an imaginary person; and if the movie footage of *Blair Witch* captures real or simulated events. The notion of pretense, or make-believe, allows us to bring *Tintin*, *Blair Witch* and *Marbot* under a common denominator. In *Tintin*, fiction consists of pretending to perform actions as opposed to performing these actions for good, while in *Marbot* and *Blair Witch*, fiction consists of pretending to represent reality, as opposed to representing reality. In contrast to the Doctrine of Panfictionality, this account recognizes both a fictional and a non-fictional mode of representation.

Why do people care about "pretending to represent reality"? If fiction matters to us, it is because it evokes a world to the imagination, and the imagination takes pleasure in contemplating this world. But even though fiction represents a foreign world, it represents this world as if it were actual, using in language the indicative rather than the conditional mode. By taking the appearance of factuality, it asks its users to transport themselves in imagination into this foreign world. I call this act of transporting oneself fictional recentering (Ryan 1991: 21–23).

Recentering should not be confused with another phenomenon associated with fiction, namely the phenomenon of immersion. Whereas recentering is a logical operation which we deliberately perform whenever we read (or watch) a work of fiction, immersion is an experience created by artistic devices. The text must be able to bring a world to life, to give it presence and to capture our interest in a story. All fictions require recentering to be properly understood, but only some of them turn recentering into immersion. This lack of immersivity can be a matter of artistic failure, but it can also be a deliberate effect. Many postmodern texts try to block immersion through the use of self-referential devices that remind the reader of the constructed nature of the fictional world. Conversely, immersion is not restricted to fiction. I can be immersed in a true story without having to recenter myself into a foreign world.

When recentering takes place, the text is no longer regarded as making statements about the real world, or at least, not directly,[4] and the fictional world is contemplated for its own sake. It would seem that recentering occurs whenever a text describes an imaginary world, but this is not the case. When I make a counterfactual statement, for instance "If Napoleon had not invaded Russia he would not been exiled on St Helena," I invoke an imaginary state of affairs, but my purpose is to say something about the real world: namely that invading Russia was a critical mistake of Napoleon. By making this statement I remain centered in reality. The same is true of the practitioners of the genre known as counterfactual history (Ferguson 1999). When historians speculate about other directions that history could have taken, they present these alternative histories from the point of view of a member of the real world, and they do so in order to evaluate the decisions of the people who control the course of history. The non-fictional variety of counterfactual history must however be distinguished from its fictional counterpart, the novel of alternate history (Hellekson 2001). A good example of this genre is Philip Roth's novel *The Plot Against America* (2004), which represents an America where Charles Lindbergh is elected President in 1940, supports the Nazi regime, and takes humiliating measures against the Jewish population. In counterfactual fiction there are no formal markers of irreality, and the reader pretends that the imaginary situation really happened.

4 In the equivalent of an indirect speech act, a fictional text can suggest that its moral, or its general statements (of the form: all x) are valid not only in its own world, but in the real world as well. This is a case of double reference. Statements concerning individuals (there is an x, such as...), by contrast, cannot participate in this double reference.

Extending concept of fiction to other media

The importance of the judgment of fictionality lies in the fact that it determines with respect to which world the information transmitted by the text should be evaluated. If the judgment says fiction, this information concerns a non-actual possible world, where it is automatically true (unless the narrator is judged unreliable), since the world is created by the text. If the judgment says "non-fiction," the information describes the actual world, but since this world exists independently of the text, it can be either true or false with respect to this world. The judgment of fictionality is most important for language, because language articulates clearly defined propositions that make a truth claim, and truth value is evaluated with respect to a specific world. For instance, "Emma Bovary committed suicide by taking arsenic" is true in the world of Flaubert's novel but false in our world; while "Napoleon died on St Helena" is true in our world, and in many fictional worlds, but false in the novel of Guido Artom *Napoleon is Dead in Russia* (1970).

Images present a much more problematic case for the theory of fictionality because, as Sol Worth observed (1981), they are unable to make propositional acts with unambiguous content. Think of the sentence: "The cat is on the mat." It has a well-defined argument — cat; through the definite article, it picks a specific referent — this cat, no other; and its predicate tells us that it is about a specific property of the cat: being on the mat, not about its color or its breed or how much of the mat the cat's body is covering. The message of a picture representing a cat on a mat is much fuzzier. The spectator will certainly identify the image as representing a cat, but instead of reflecting on the fact that the cat is on the mat he may pay attention to the green eyes of the cat, to its long fur, to the fact that the cat is looking at the photographer, and so on. The picture shows a cat by showing many of its visual features, but unlike language, it does not unambiguously force some of these features to the attention of the spectator at the expense of others. We know what the picture shows,

but we can't tell exactly what it says, because saying requires an articulated language with discrete signs.[5]

If the image is a photograph and not a painting, however, it will say something much more specific. Because photography is a mechanical method of capture, it bears witness to the existence of the cat and to its presence in front of the camera. An image obtained by mechanical means is not only an icon bearing a visual resemblance to an object, but also an index related to its referent through a causal relation: the mark on a sensitive surface of the patterns of light reflected by the object. This is why Roland Barthes wrote: "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent... Discourse combines signs which have referents, of course, but these referents can be and are most often 'chimeras.' Contrary to these imitations, in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*" (1981: 80).

The same, of course, holds for film and videos. Thanks to their technological objectivity, photos and movies offer a much more convincing testimony of the objects or events they represent than images created by the human hand, or even verbal descriptions. We need only think of the importance of the video tape in the Rodney Clark affair, or of the scandal created by the photos showing prisoners being humiliated at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. Photo and film may admittedly be manipulated, in which case they will not give a reliable testimony of the existence of their referent or of its presence in a certain place at a certain time. A manipulated photo or film is the equivalent of a lie in language, unless the manipulation is meant to be recognized. But it is precisely the ability to make truth-functional statements that make it possible for a type of signs to either lie, tell the truth....or be used as fiction.

Fiction and film

If there is one medium besides language for which the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is unanimously considered relevant, both by theorists and by the public at large, this medium is film. The relevance of the distinction comes from the fact that film can be used to convey truths about the real world. In a documentary film the camera captures two types of events: first, events that happened in the world independently of their being filmed, for instance rescue efforts after an earthquake, and

5 The expressive — and narrative — power of pictures can however be enhanced by segmenting them into discrete units, as is the case in comics.

second, events staged for the camera, in which people perform real actions, or speak in their own name without playing a role, for instance a basket-weaver demonstrating her trade and talking about her life. Fiction film, by contrast, captures simulated events that do not count in the real world, namely the role-playing of the actors, and it relies on the pretense that the actors really are the characters.

The distinction between make-believe and behavior that counts also affects photography, even though the fictional use of photography is much less widespread than the fictional use of film. But the work of the Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron illustrates the difference: one of her photographs, titled "King Lear and His Daughters," captures actors who impersonate the characters of Shakespeare's drama, while another, "Alfred, Lord Tennyson," represents a historical character. From the portrait of Lord Tennyson we can derive information concerning the real world — how the poet looked like — but the King Lear picture only helps us imagine the non-actual world of Shakespeare's drama.

Virtually every theorist of fiction and every theorist of the cinema will agree that when we watch a film we imagine that the actors are the characters. But this observation does not exhaust the question of what exactly we pretend to be doing when we watch a film. Here we have a choice between two possibilities.

The first is to extend to film the analysis that describes our experience of language-based storytelling. In the medium of language, we do not perceive events directly, but rather read or hear a report of events by a narrator. We do not merely imagine that p and q happened, but that a narrator reports p and q to any audience, and sometimes we suspect that p and q were not exactly as reported. If we extend this analysis to film, when we watch a film we do not imagine that we are witnessing events, but rather, that somebody is showing us the events through the medium of film. In other words, when we watch a fiction film, we imagine that it is a kind of documentary film, and that the images on the screen are just that — images captured by a camera. Or less literally, we imagine that the fiction film is a story told by a narrator using certain visual devices, and that this narrator is distinct from the actual filmmaker(s), since he is showing as true what we know to be simulated. In this view, fiction film involves in make-believe a storyteller, just as literary fiction involves a narrator. There is a whole school of film critics who endorse such a view: Seymour Chatman (1990), François Jost and André Gaudreault (1990), and even Christian Metz (1970), who coined the term "Grand Image Maker" to designate the filmic equivalent of the narrator.

The alternative to a narrator-based conception of film is to claim that film presents life unmediated. This is, in its broad lines, the view

defended by David Bordwell (1985) and Gregory Currie (1995). This approach does away with the concept of a filmic narrator, and treats the spectator as an eye, or as a consciousness directly focussed on the scene of the action. In drama, this is known as the missing fourth wall: nobody "shows" the events on the stage to the spectator, the spectator just happens to see them, as if he were looking through a hole in the wall. While the narrator-based approach regards the fiction film as some kind of imaginary equivalent of the documentary film, this approach drives a wedge between the two. When we watch a documentary, we are aware that the events were captured on film by a camera, and this knowledge is what gives the documentary its testimonial value. What we watch is not the events themselves, but the recording of these events by technological means, a recording that brings proof that the events really happened. But when we watch a fiction film, according to the direct perception analysis, the medium disappears from our mind; it is not part of our game of make-believe that somebody filmed the events.

I personally prefer this approach to the idea of a filmic narrator, but the idea that the spectator pretends to observe life unmediated is not free of problems. As Gregory Currie has argued (1995: 170–79), we should not cast the spectator into the role of a hidden observer who witnesses the events, because this would lead to unnatural assumptions. For instance, if the spectator plays the role of an observer, a movie could not suggest that a murderer enters a house without being seen by anybody. When a film shows a close-up of lovers, the spectator certainly does not imagine that he is spying on the characters and that he is located a few inches away from them. And since in film image and sound often come from different sources, for instance in the case of extradiegetic music or voiced-over narration, the observer would have to be split in two in order to apprehend both the image and the soundtrack. I cannot think of an entirely satisfactory solution to this problem; the best answer I can come up with is to say that the spectator does not pretend to be a flesh-and-blood observer located on the scene, but rather sees himself as disembodied consciousness that moves around the fictional world as freely as the camera.

Fiction in painting

I have already stressed the main reason for the questionable status of the concept of fiction in man-made pictures: they lack the ability of language to make precisely identifiable truth claims; and they lack the ability of mechanical methods of capture to bear witness of the existence of what they show. The problematic character of the idea of pictorial fictionality is demonstrated by the variety of responses that the question has generated.

The most radical position is that of Kendall Walton. For Walton, fictionality in the visual domain is synonymous with pictorial representation: "Pictures are fictions by definition" (1990: 351). Why does Walton claim that all pictures are fictional? Let's recall that for him a fiction is a "prop in a game of make-believe." In the case of pictures, the game of make-believe consists of pretending that we are directly seeing the depicted object. For instance, if I see a picture and I identify it as the picture of a ship, I imagine that I am seeing a ship, even though I know that I am facing a canvass covered with paint. My game of make-believe consists of identifying the various features of the ship: this is the hull, this is the mast, this is the sail, etc. As soon as we identify a shape as the shape of an object, we engage in a game of make-believe, since we know that the shape is not the object that it depicts.

Walton's position encounters two problems. First, it may be true of paintings done in a realistic style that we imagine facing the represented object and seeing it directly; but in other cases, for instance with representations done in a very sloppy or schematic style, we will process the image as the sign of an object, rather than directly as an object, because they do not convey a sense of its presence. We may say of a schematic representation "this is a ship," but we really mean "this represents a ship."

Second, this treatment of pictorial fictionality creates a deep asymmetry between visual and language-based representation. In the case of language-based representations, Walton distinguishes fictional ones, which give rise to make-believe, and non-fictional ones, which give rise to belief. In language, "fictional" designates a particular mode of representation. But in the case of the visual arts, "fictional" becomes synonymous with representation itself. Now if all pictorial representations are fictional, the diagnosis of fictionality becomes automatic, and it does not carry cognitive consequences. Why not then admit that fictionality does not matter in painting?

This is the position taken by the Swiss theorist and artist Lorenzo Menoud (2005). For Menoud, fictionality depends not only on the ability to convey truths, but more fundamentally, on the ability to tell stories. Since narrative is about the evolution of a world in time, the only media capable of fictionality are those that present a temporal dimension, namely: language, the theatre (including mime and dance) and the cinema. Pictures cannot be fictional, because their static nature makes them unable to represent changes of state. It is consequently pointless to raise the issue of fictionality in painting and photography. The problem with this interpretation is that pictures are not entirely devoid of narrative ability.

A series of still pictures can very well be used to tell a story, even without language, as we see with some comics and sequences of paintings. Even an isolated picture can suggest a story if it captures what Lessing (1984) called a pregnant moment: a moment that suggests both a past and a future.

Yet another conceivable solution to the problem of pictorial fictionality is to regard the domain of painting as more or less evenly divided between fiction and non-fiction, with every individual picture falling on one side of the border. This approach rests on the notion of reference world. Just as language-based texts can represent either the real world or an imaginary world, so do visual representations: "View of Delft" by Vermeer can be said to convey information about the real world Delft, while "Swans Reflecting Elephants," a painting of a fantastic landscape by Salvador Dali, only pretends to represent reality: it inspires make-believe rather than belief. This is the position taken by Gregory Currie (1990) and by the French theorist Jean-Marie-Schaeffer (1999). For Currie, a painting of a unicorn will be fictional if it suggests that unicorns exist in the world of the painting, and if the painter does not believe in unicorns. On the other hand, the portrait of the Duke of Wellington by Goya is non-fictional, because it captures the artist's perception of the Duke; this means that the spectator can use it to gather information about what the Duke of Wellington looked like. In this interpretation, the painter records faithfully what he sees, and his eye and brush function as a kind of photographic camera. But Currie encounters difficulties with the portrait of Henry Kahnweiler by Picasso, an image done in a Cubist style that bears only the slightest resemblance to a human being. Currie (1990: 40–41) suggests that the appearance of the portrait is a kind of metaphorical representation, the visual equivalent of describing a real person by saying that he was a "giant," or an "angel," or a "greedy vulture." But later he admits that we cannot derive any kind information about Henry Kahnweiler's appearance from this portrait. Would a fictional explanation do better? We could perhaps say that the painting is a fictional representation of a counterpart of Henry Kahnweiler in a non-actual possible world, just as the novel *War and Peace* represents a counterpart of Napoleon in a world where Pierre and Natasha exist? This interpretation does not offer a viable solution either, because we would have to imagine that in this possible world Kahnweiler is flat and broken up into a hundred of little pieces. Regarding this portrait as a fiction is no more satisfactory than regarding it as non-fiction.

The three approaches to pictorial fictionality discussed so far do not exhaust the field of possibilities. I would like to defend a fourth position: some pictures are fictional, some are non-fictional, and for some of them the decision is irrelevant.

There is a whole class of pictures for which the judgment of fictionality makes sense, because these pictures are illustrations of texts that are themselves either fictional or non-fictional. For instance, the illustrations of a guidebook for the identifications of birds or flowers are clearly non-fictional: we use them to gather information about the real world. On the other hand, the illustrations of a fairy tale display an imaginary world for its own sake. In all these examples, pictures inherit their fictionality from a text, and the analysis of language-based fiction applies indirectly to them. But this criterion does not work very well for paintings that illustrate stories told to be believed, such as Biblical narratives. Consider a nativity scene from the Italian Renaissance. Is it fictional of factual? We could say that it is fictional because the painter used his imagination, or we could say that it is non-fictional because the painter meant it as the illustration of a story told (or received) as true. But in this case the question of fictionality does not really seem to matter: we will not look at the picture differently if our particular theory makes us decide one way or another.

Rather than inheriting fictionality from a text, some pictures could be considered fictional by analogy with the fictionality of language, film and drama. Here the common denominator is the notion of game of make-believe. A painting will be considered fictional if it represents models who are playing a role. Conversely, we could say that when the models pose as themselves, the image documents the appearance of the model, and it can be considered non-fictional. In both cases, the image must be done in a reasonably realistic style to allow a judgment of fictionality. By this standard, a portrait of Simonetta Vespucci by Botticelli titled "Portrait of a Woman" is non-fictional, but a portrait of the same model where she poses as the Virgin Mary would be fictional.

Does this mean that in non-fictional painting artists represent their perception, and in fictional painting they pretend to do so? The trouble with this analysis is that because artists only represent their perception to some degree, the judgment of fictionality becomes highly subjective and no longer depends on a reasonably clear-cut authorial intent, as it does in literature.

Another problem with this idea is that many paintings, because of their style, cannot be regarded as a record of perception, whether genuine or faked. When we look at the "portrait" of Henry Kahnweiler, we do not think: "this how Henry Kahnweiler appeared to Picasso," but rather: this is what the sight of Henry Kahnweiler inspired to Picasso's imagination. The painting is neither a record of perception, nor a make-believe record of perception. It is just a image. With such a painting, it is not necessary to decide whether it represents our world or another world, because such a judgment does not carry any cognitive consequences.

A very large number of man-made pictures fall into this no-man's land between fiction and nonfiction. We appreciate them without asking ourselves any questions about their relation to reality. The spectator does not run the risk of misinterpreting them by relating them to the wrong world, and if this risk does not exist, there is no need to make a judgment of fictionality. Even when a painting presents itself explicitly as a representation of a real-world referent, as is the case with Vermeer's "View of Delft" or the Duke of Wellington portrait by Goya, we don't care about its documentary value when we look at it as an *artwork*. If Vermeer had added features to the skyline of Delft for purely compositional reasons, if Goya's portrait of Wellington were not faithful to the model, this would not affect our appreciation of the art of the painter. Similar liberties would not be forgivable in the text of a historian about either Delft or Wellington. The aesthetic attitude toward a painting makes the diagnosis of non-fictionality irrelevant. The same could perhaps be said of language-based texts; when we read Rousseau's *Confessions* as a literary work, we are much more forgiving toward its potential inaccuracies than when we read it as a historical document. But the main difference between painting and language-based texts is that only some texts, but almost all paintings are created as aesthetic objects. This means that almost all paintings, but only some texts, invite us to cancel the importance of the question of accuracy with respect to reality.

Indeterminacy in various media

Painting is not unique in producing works that lie outside the dichotomy of fiction and nonfiction. All media present a zone of indeterminacy. The size of this zone varies from medium to medium, depending on the ability of this medium to articulate precise truths and to narrate a story. In language, fictional and nonfictional uses are roughly of equal importance, but the indeterminate zone is minimal. It is occupied by concrete poetry, or by some lyrical poems, especially by poems that make general rather than particular statements. When I read Baudelaire's poem "Les chats," for instance, I do not need to decide whether the cats described in the poem belong to the actual world or to a fictional world, and whether the poet plays a role or speaks in his own name. I am not alone in questioning the fictional status of poetry: Käte Hamburger (1968), one of the pioneers of the modern theorization of fiction, considered lyric poetry to be what she called a "Wirklichkeitsaussage," a discourse about the real world, rather than a fictional genre. I will not go as far as Hamburger — I call some poems, but not all of them, fictionally indeterminate. We cannot ascribe the entire lyrical genre to either fiction or non-fiction, as we can with the genre "novel"[6]: when it comes to fictionality, poems should be judged on an individual basis.

In film, fiction is more widespread than documentary, and it is hard to find cases that fall in the middle. The indeterminate zone could perhaps be represented by certain artistic montages of images recorded from real life that do not tell a story. Photography is mostly non-fictional. I will place in the no man's land a picture strongly manipulated by Photoshop or a collage of different images. Abstract works, whatever their medium, will always fall in the indeterminate zone, since both fictionality and non-fictionality presupposes a mimetic dimension. Media such as architecture and music, which are unable to articulate propositions, will fall entirely in the indeterminate zone, unless they present an inherited fictionality. This will happen when they illustrate a fictional text, as do Cinderella's castle at Disneyland or the symphonic poem *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Paul Dukas. On the other hand I would not call Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* non-fictional, even though it refers to historical events, because it does not make precise and verifiable statements about these events.

Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to return to the question of the relations between fictionality and narrativity. There is no doubt that language-based narrative is the cradle of the theory of fictionality. Some time between the eighteenth and early twentieth century, the notion of fiction became a recognized category in Western cultures, arguably as the result of dual causes: the rise of the novel as the most prominent form of literature, and the importance of the notions of truth and falsity in these cultures. In earlier times, people were not concerned with fiction and its poorly defined opposite of non-fiction, but rather, with poetry, and within poetry, with the three classical genres of epic, drama and lyric.[7]

Once the concept of fiction took roots in Western culture, it quickly grew branches that stretched beyond its original domain of application. Since invented stories exist in all cultures, the concept was easily extended

6 I write this fully aware of the existence of a genre called the "nonfiction novel" or "true fiction." Insofar as authors are not asked to provide documentation for their claims, it still abides by the convention of a fictional contract.

7 The lack of a culturally recognized category equivalent to our concept of fiction does not mean that the members of this culture are unable to distinguish stories told as true about the real world from stories about imaginary worlds; it rather means that other taxonomic criteria are considered more relevant.

to older forms of narrative native to cultures that did not make use of the concept of fiction: forms like fairy tales, legends, jokes, tall tales, fables, and epic poetry. Even myths were occasionally treated as fiction, even when in their culture of origin they were told as sacred truth and not as invented stories.

Another expansion was toward what Plato called mimetic forms of storytelling. Plato distinguished two ways of presenting stories: in the diegetic mode the story is reported, while in the mimetic mode the story is directly shown. Since both modes are capable of presenting invented stories,[8] there is no reason to limit the concept of fiction to the diegetic mode. Through its extension to drama and to film, the concept of fiction became emancipated from language.

During the twentieth century, literary authors started producing prose texts that subverted narrative structures, but were still a product of the imagination. Narrativity thus became an optional feature of fiction. For instance, many of the texts gathered by Jorge Luis Borges under the title *Ficciones* (1962) do not tell stories. They consist instead of philosophical reflexions, of descriptions of imaginary books, or of ethnographic accounts of non-existing cultures. Another example of non-narrative fiction is Samuel Beckett's novel *The Unnamable* (1965), which represents the thoughts that pass through the mind of a speaker. Since it does not assert anything about the external world, it does not tell a story.

When philosophers invoked pretense and make-believe to explain the nature of fiction, they created a bridge between literature and games. On one hand, games of make-believe were recognized as an activity that represents the same spirit of play as fictional storytelling, maybe even as the ancestor of literary fiction; on the other hand, role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons or computer games became widely recognized as a form of fiction. Whenever a game creates a concrete world and invites the players to play a role in it, it becomes a fiction.

Once a theory has been elaborated, there is a strong tendency to expand its domain of application. If narrativity could become an optional feature of fiction, if language could become optional, why not go all the way and look for manifestations of fictionality in non-verbal media of very limited narrativity, such as painting, or even architecture and music?[9] But these applications of the concept of fiction no longer correspond to culturally recognized modes of classifications. The general public cares

8 It is dubious that the mimetic mode can function non-fictionally: in the theatre, for instance, the mere fact that characters are impersonated by actors makes the performance fictional, even when the story is "true to life."

9 See for instance Rabinowitz 2004 for the claim that music can be fictional.

about fictionality in film and verbal texts; but it is only the theorists who ponder fictionality in painting, architecture and music. The further the notion of fiction is stretched from its original domain of language-based narrative, the more this stretching becomes a purely theoretical game, and the less it corresponds to cognitively meaningful judgments. This is why the zone of undecidability grows, as we extend the notion of fictionality to more and more art forms and to more and more media.

As we play the game of theoretical expansion, we should avoid two strategic errors. The first is to try to fit all media into a rigid mold inherited from language-based narrative. This is what happens when one regards visual media such as film as the discourse of a fictional narrator. This approach provides a solid definition of fictionality, but it ignores the particular nature of each medium. The second *caveat* is to completely re-design criteria of fictionality, as we adapt the concept to new media. This is what happens when Walton claims that all pictures are fictional by definition, but makes a distinction between fictional and non-fictional representation in language. Such an approach respects the differences among media, but at the cost of a unified conception of fictionality.

How then can we reconcile the centrality of language-based narrative for the phenomenon of fiction with the idea that fiction can appear in other forms and media? I propose to start from an account of fictionality in language-based narrative, and to expand it by analogy to other cultural artifacts but without insisting on a literal or on a complete equivalence. There will be prototypical and marginal forms of fictionality, depending on how many features they share with the prototypical case of language-based narrative. Since an analogy requires only partial resemblance between its two terms, not a complete identity, this proposal avoids the problems of the first and the second approach: unlike the first, it respects the particular nature of each medium; and unlike the second, it attributes common features to both the typical and marginal forms. These features are those that truly make a cognitive difference: pretense, make-believe and the display of an imaginary world for its own sake.

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