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Imagination

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The standard cognitive theory of art[1] claims that art can be insightful while maintaining that imagining is motivationally inert [Walton 1990] even when some epistemic advantage is claimed for it [Currie 1995]. However, if we assume art *as art* can be insightful, we also assume that the imagining it occasions has a lasting impact on belief. In this chapter, I argue that imagining of the kind occasioned by art can be held non-occurrently [Schellenberg 2013] without delusion (cf. Egan [2010]) and can motivate behaviour [Gendler 2000, 2003, 2006a/b; Langland-Hassan 2016]. As such, certain features of imagination can be understood in a new light.

1. Introduction

Cognitive theories of art that are currently treated as the standard are grounded in contradictions and confusion. Given that they claim that art *as art* engages imagination and art *as art* increases understanding by providing insights, then the implication is that imagining can provide insight. But 'acquiring insight' influences decision making and behaviour. However, given it is only 'belief' that influences or holds affordances for

[1] Contra Peter Kivy's arguments to the contrary [1997], I find that many sensible things can be said about art conceived generically. As how my account applies to music for example, consider the kind of imagining that might be involved if Susanne Langer is right about the structure of musical form [1953].

behaviour, then, to acquire insight is to acquire new belief.[2] Hence, assuming that art *as art* can be insightful implies that at the very least, imagination can impinge on belief. However, on the one hand, imagining when treated as belief is a case of delusion [Egan 2010], and on the other, research has shown how successfully humans quarantine imagining from belief [Currie and Ravenscroft 2002; Leslie 1987]. The standard cognitive theories of art are defined by their aim to avoid grounding the cognitive content of art in imagining for this reason. This suggests that either art *as art* conveys information like any other form of communication, hence not especially imaginatively; or it does engage us imaginatively and as such has no lasting effect on knowledge or behaviour unless we are delusional.

[2] The relation of belief to motivation is not explored in this chapter. The orthodoxy is that it can be rational to consider a belief a reason for action whereas it is irrational and delusional to consider imagining a reason for action. It is on the basis of certain beliefs that intentions to act are formed but not on the basis of imagining, unless it is to sketch how to instantiate certain intentions formed on the basis of beliefs. But to form an intention based on an imagining has been considered delusional. In fact, fiction is distinguished from non-fiction by the imagining it occasions which is treated as motivationally inert. Belief is necessary but not sufficient for desire, intention or motivation; but imagining has been deemed only relevant as a handmaiden to belief. To support the view I sketch in this chapter, where imagining can motivate action, see Scanlon [2010: 179-89] for a discussion of how reason to act can be considered a belief; and White [2004] for an argument that perception is intentional, that is, perceptual belief is an affordance and as such motivational.

Treating art as a source of information reduces it to a historical artefact or journalism, as I will argue shortly, so I set aside this possibility for now.[3] Regarding imagination's lasting efficacy, recent theories of imagination (e.g. Gendler [2000, 2003, 2006a/b], Schellenberg [2013], Langland-Hassan [2016]) provide the resources to argue that art *as art*, that is as imaginative engagement, can be insightful but this argument involves rejecting the standard cognitive-value-of-art type accounts (e.g. Young [2001], Walton [1990]) in favour of an account of art that focuses on the expressive and formal qualities of artworks. I argue that art does not provide us with new facts or knowledge because artistic representations must be found plausible or normatively valid to begin with, in order to win our cooperation to imagine. The sense in which art *as art* can be insightful is through imaginative engagement that restructures or reconfigures schemata of already held beliefs through which we subsequently can experience (ascribe meaning and significance to objects) afresh.

Before setting out the paradox in more detail, consider the defining features of a cognitive theory of art. A standard cognitive theory of art [Young 2001; Currie 1995; Walton 1990] holds that the defining content of art is representational and that this representational content can be either propositional or non-propositional. Propositional content involves explicit claims and inferences, while non-propositional content, often characterised as 'know-how' refers to knowledge about how something feels, how to do something or recognise something. A very influential cognitive theory of art is Kendall L. Walton's which comes to us in virtue of his account of representational arts [1990]. According to Walton, representations are 'prescribed imaginings … serving as a prop in a game of make-believe' [281]. Participation in fiction involves taking part in 'games of make-believe' where the

[3] Of course you can learn how to write a novel or poem from reading novels and poems but my claim regarding learning refers to what is considered the artwork's content.

propositions that are represented are fictional truths which are 'prescriptions to imagine' and which lead to being caught up in the fictional world [274]. The aspect of a work other than propositional content, he discusses in terms of 'ornamentation' [288]. He thinks that in order to create enough 'distance' between the work and the viewer in order to evoke reflection, some ornamentation is useful to lessen the impulse to be caught up in the fictional world [288-89]. This is the context in which he claims that Van Gogh's brush strokes intrude upon the viewer's participation in imagining, as they call attention to themselves [277] and in this sense are examples of ornamentation. At best, they are thought to create a distance between us and participation in the 'make-believe' or fictional truths of the work. For Walton, the only time art can provide the kind of engagement which involves us in importing back into our actual world insight prompted by the work, is not through imagining *per se* which for Walton is make-believe and keeps us in the fictional world, but when we are distanced from the work through 'ornamentation' and are prompted to reflect upon the actual world significance of our imaginative engagement.

Now an implication of Walton's account is that fictions which carry us along without prompting distance and hence reflection, are fictions from which we do not import any beliefs or insight back into our actual world. This is because we are simply caught up in make-believe which evokes quasi (motivationally inert) emotions in response to fictional truths, in a fictional world. This suggests that imagining itself provides no input into our cognitive system.[4] I will return to this claim in *Cognitive problem 3* in Section 3 below.

[4] Walton recognised that all imagining is anchored in some sense in the real world [1990: 21]. Through imagining, actual world knowledge is imported into the fictional world, but without ornamentation, none of the fruits of the imagining are exported back into actual world perspectives. The two world view is Walton's, not mine.

Walton suggests that it is due to the formal and stylistic elements that anything can be learned from art. Nonetheless his is a cognitive account because it is the propositional content by which epistemic advantage is occasioned, even though the distance which prompts reflection is required for this advantage to be realised. However, his account also suggests that fictions without a distancing mechanism, no matter how violent and obnoxious they might be, do not prompt the importation of any content back into actual world perspectives as the imaginative engagement involved is quarantined from belief and as such is motivationally inert as imagining is generally taken to be in cognitive accounts of art. While I argue that Walton is partly right to think reflection is prompted by how a work is formed or styled, he is mistaken regarding the relation of form, style and reflection to imagining. Walton does not treat reflection as a component of the imagining engaged by fiction. That is, he fails to see the role of form, style and reflection in what constitutes imagining.

I argue that imagining does not pertain to make-believe, quasi-emotions, fictional truths and fictional worlds within which they remain motivationally inert, but rather imagining has an impact on belief and as a result, on behaviour in the actual world. In what follows I do not focus exclusively on Walton but treat the objections, replies and further refutations to cognitive accounts of art in broad outline in order to establish the main tenets of the position I propose. In order to do this I also consider what has been presented as the main 'competition' to cognitive theories of art: the standard aesthetic theory of art. For the past century, the standard aesthetic theory of art has been understood in terms represented in what I call the 'straw' version. This is the version constructed by those who seek an easy foil to their

standard cognitive theories of art. I will refute this 'straw' version and in the course of this chapter, outline a more robust aesthetic theory of art.[5]

I begin in section 2 by briefly outlining the paradox that arises when imagining is understood as motivationally inert, which is the view central to the standard cognitive theory of art. In section 3, I structure my objections to the standard cognitive accounts, and in section 4, their standard foil, the aesthetic account, by explaining each of my objections, including likely responses from supporters and in turn the basis of my refutation of these.

The next stage in the argument acknowledges that, as I am rejecting what is generally accepted as a standard account of art due to its mistaken underlying theory of imagination, the onus falls upon me to explain how imagining can be motivational without delusion. So after resolving the paradox in section 5, I present theories of imagining in section 6 which explain how art can engage us imaginatively and in virtue of this imaginative engagement, provide us with insight, where insight implicates belief without delusion. I then draw the chapter to a conclusion by considering an objection to my argument and responding to it in section 7, before briefly outlining the theory of art to which an updated theory of imagination gives rise, in section 8.

2. The paradox

i) *Art is thought to provide insight, and insight involves belief*

Insight involves coming to understand something one had not understood before, or alternatively, coming to perceive something more clearly or accurately than previously. It

[5] See McMahon [2017] for a detailed explanation of how this standard 'straw' aesthetic theory of art differs from Kantian formalism with which it is usually erroneously associated.

involves epistemic advantage and hence, if any activity is assumed to offer the possibility of insight, by the same token it must have some impact on belief.

ii) *The definitive process in artistic creation and reception is imagining*

If we learn from art *as art* then we learn from art in virtue if the imagining it engages. This contrasts with learning from art under various other aspects such as historical artefact or visual journalism. Learning historical or political facts, or social conventions, from art, would require corroboration from other non-art sources before we could accept the art work as evidence rather than an artist's invention. The point is that what distinguishes our concept of art from our concept of historical artefact or journalism is that art is not required to meet truth conditions but rather plausibility conditions for the purpose of engaging imagining.

iii) *Imagining makes no lasting contribution to cognition, hence does not result in belief, and in this sense, is motivationally inert*

Andy Egan [2010] argues that imagining impacts on belief to the extent that one is deluded. Greg Currie and Ian Ravenscroft [2002] and the psychologist Alan Leslie [1987] have argued that many studies have shown that imagining is strictly quarantined from belief. In fact, when imagining was not quarantined from belief a syndrome, Leslie referred to such cases as 'representational abuse' [1987: 414].

iv) *Hence insight and imagining are incompatible, and so art cannot be insightful*.

If art's insight is a delusion, then art at best is entertainment, a diversion into fictional worlds, the content of which is not imported back into our actual worlds. To import insight drawn from imaginings back into the actual world would be to operate under delusions.

3. Ruling out the standard cognitive theory of art

The standard cognitive theory of art assumes that art can be insightful in virtue of its representational, both propositional and non-proposition, content. I will list the problems with the standard account, provide the typical response from those holding such accounts and then show why such responses do not hold up.

Cognitive Problem 1:

If the propositional and non-propositional content defines art, then there is no role for imagining. We simply learn from art as we would from observation and inference in the actual world. But if this is the case, the knowledge gained from art would be susceptible to unreliability and delusion unless we corroborated the facts and know-how with what we observed or experienced in the actual world or gleaned from historical reports. But if this is the condition on which art can be taken as reliable and not deluded, then no new knowledge can be acquired from art because we only accept from art what is corroborated with what we already know or can find a basis for in the actual world. Seeing is believing in the actual world but not as presented in art.

Response to cognitive problem 1

Art is not defined by its propositional and non-propositional knowledge but in virtue of the imagining it prompts rather than direct observation and inference. It is not a case of 'seeing is believing', but imagining (Walton 1990; Currie 1995).

Cognitive problem 2 arises from the typical response to cognitive problem 1.

Consider that this would mean a case *not* of 'seeing is believing' but '*imagining* is believing'. The unreliability and delusion worries remain.

Response to cognitive problem 2

Imagining in art is like imagining in scientific and legal reasoning. It provides the hypothesis or scenario which is then tested (this is Young's view [2001: 106-7]).

Cognitive problem 3

In scientific and legal reasoning, the hypothesis or scenario serves as a guide to research. If knowledge is acquired, it is not treated as knowledge on the basis of the hypothesizing. It is treated as knowledge on the basis of the evidence found. Now consider what this would mean for our engagement with art. We take in what an artwork communicates and then only if we find it is corroborated with what we subsequently find in the actual world, do we judge it insightful. So for example, on reading a Jane Austen novel, we imaginatively engage with the characters and on doing so form hypotheses about people. We then subsequently search for evidence in the actual world and when we find the evidence to support the hypotheses we then retrospectively judge the work insightful.

This is not the way we engage with art. Engaging imaginatively, entails hooking into a work subjectively. The way subjectivities are engaged are determined by the way a work is structured, and if it is successful, it engages us imaginatively. If the work is structured artfully, the kind of imagining engaged leads to reflection rather than mere escapism. But this involves a constant looping backwards and forwards between actual memory, experience and the fiction. We test the fiction's plausibility, resonance or relevance by bringing to bear upon the fiction at certain crucial points, knowledge acquired from actual experience and knowledge. We do not escape from the actual world into a fictional world and then step back into the actual world (metaphorically speaking) when ready to test the hypotheses of the

fiction [Young 2001] or when distanced from the fictional world by ornamentation [Walton 1990: 287-89].

Walton thinks the imagining evoked by fiction is separate from reflection. For Walton, reflection on what one has imagined could be the only source of insight (see Walton [1990: 274-89]). But as we will see in section 6, when a fiction engages imagining, there is a continual interaction with real world constraints as though we impose plausibility considerations along the way and live out the scenarios imaginatively on the one hand, and in the case of very successful prescriptions to imagine, on the other reflect upon their significance for our real world perspectives.[6] This is ongoing. The reflection is part of the

[6] As corroborated by David Lewis: 'I have said that truth in fiction is the joint product of two sources : the explicit content of the fiction, and a background consisting either of the facts about our world … or of the beliefs overt in the community of origin …. Perhaps there is a third source which also contributes: carry-over from other truth in fiction' [1978: 45], although in relation to the last of these, he points out that this might be unreliable as when Conan Doyle contradicts himself from story to story about the location of Watson's old war wound [46]. In any case, Lewis considers the possibility of blatantly impossible fiction – the man who squared the circle - as vacuous [45-46]. And Fred Kroon includes a consideration of the implications of Lewis' theory for Walton's make-believe account. He argues that 'make-believe' accounts involve a commitment to actual referents of the props in the game of make-believe [1994]. Lewis, in contrast, avoids the problem by naturalising the terms of the imagining process. Nonetheless, this leads to a further problem. In a later paper, Kroon distinguishes a version of fictional realism according to which fictional objects are social objects, either intended by individuals or communities/societies, which he ultimately rejects [2013]. To the two problems he sees for fictional realism ((i) the imaginary companion

imagining, enriches and motivates it. I return to theories of imagination which ground such an approach in section 6**.**

An art work is unsuccessful when it occasions a resistance to imagining. Then the work becomes at best a second hand report or a decoration. But resistance to imagining is finding a work implausible or being required to feel in ways alien to how we would feel in the actual world, such as being asked to find something funny that is not funny in the actual world, or find something surprising that would not surprise us in the actual world. In other words, while talk of two worlds, an actual world and a fictional one, may sometimes be useful, at other times it is misleading. Art when successful encodes experience rather than simply entertaining possibilities. So imagining as engaged by art is not like hypothesizing in scientific and legal reasoning.

Response to cognitive problem 3

We learn from art and fictions through the imagining it evokes and imagining is a form of simulation where we put ourselves into the shoes of another person [Currie 1995]; it is not limited to propositions or know-how acquired from actual experience.

Greg Currie thinks imagining involves the perceptual system run offline and is motivationally inert. Nonetheless he thinks it exploits our mind-reading disposition and in this respect offers

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problem and (ii) indiscernible fictional object problem), my account would suggest responses to both: (i) parallel representations distinguish fiction from actuality (see fn.9 this chapter); and (ii) fictional characters are determinate in their role relative to the plot, and this determinacy is achieved by leaving some of their details indeterminate.

some epistemic advantage, an adaptive advantage to understand other people's minds [1995:145]. According to Currie, when engaging in fictions 'I use my own mind to simulate the mind of another' [1995: 144]. However, he points out that a mental state has a representational and functional aspect: in imagining, processes are disconnected from their normal sensory inputs and behavioural outputs. The representational content can be the same as in a belief but its function in imagining is different. The cause of perceptual belief is occurrent observation and its effect is to motivate action whereas the cause of imagining is not direct occurrent observation but the triggering of memory in some sense and the effect is motivationally inert.[7] As such, imagining at best might provide an opportunity to imagine certain scenarios but it could not provide knowledge without corroboration from actual world experience. And behaviour motivated by imagining that was not corroborated by actual world experience would be unreliable or delusional.

Cognitive problem 4

Imagining conceived as motivationally inert has been the orthodoxy in philosophy of art.[8] We do not act on an imagining of a tiger attacking us in the way we would act on an actual tiger

[7] Currie thinks imagination as engaged by fiction involves perception run off-line for the purposes of approximating our responses to those of our peers and this provides the kind of understanding that can be drawn upon in decision-making [1995: 146-147, 150]. However, he does not explain why we would take such imaginings seriously if they are 'off-line' nor does he explicitly qualify the motivational inertness of imagining given the role he gives it in decision-making [1995: 150].

[8] I am not suggesting that we are not motivated to keep imagining. Rather I mean by motivationally inert that inferences to act are not drawn. According to the paradox of fiction,

attacking us. If we did we would be deluded. However, if offline and motivationally inert, it is unclear how simulating other people's minds could grant us an epistemic advantage. Underlying both Walton and Currie's approaches is the view that imagining is strictly quarantined from belief. As such, perceptual processes run 'off-line' without the normal sensory inputs and behavioural outputs [144] would keep us in a fictional world.

So either art is mere diversion or we are deluded in which case we are back to Cognitive Problem 2.

Summary of cognitive account of art

On its own terms, a standard cognitive account of art inadvertently suggests that the content of art *as art* cannot be propositional as it would be vulnerable to unreliability and delusion. But neither can its content be identified in virtue of imaginings as imaginings do not result in belief. So either we are deluded or we have acquired no lasting belief from art. Either way, the standard cognitive account of art does not explain nor provide the basis to argue that art can be insightful.

4. Ruling out the standard aesthetic theory of art

An alternative to a cognitive account of art is an aesthetic account. The standard aesthetic account which is presented by cognitive theorists holds that to engage with art *as art* involves engaging with the expressive, figurative and formal properties of the work for their own sake. This is construed as an alternative to a cognitive account so that engaging with these qualities

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a belief that a tiger approaches evokes fear which leads to action (escape), whereas an imagining with the same content evokes fear which does not motivate action.

is thought to be purely affective. The idea is that you simply respond to how these qualities strike you with no cognitive mediation.

No one to my knowledge actually holds an aesthetic theory of art as it is characterised by cognitive theorists. Allen Carlson thinks Kant advocates an aesthetic account which strips the natural world of meaning and that Kant inadvertently advocates we perceive nature in a mindless fashion, as though it were framed like a painting of landscape [2002: 4, 24-26]. Many have assumed that this is the standard aesthetic account of art for the purpose of contrasting it with their own cognitive theories or in analysing particular cognitive accounts (see Saito [2001] and Shusterman [2000] as examples of the former and Shapshay [2013] the latter). Even Emily Brady in developing her cognitive account which adopts certain features of Kant's formalism, sees herself as moving beyond Kant when she advocates a cognitive component to the reflection evoked by imaginative engagement in artworks [1998, 2003]. The point is that the caricature or 'straw' version of the aesthetic theory of art is so pervasive it warrants attention, even though no one holds it and the Kant that is meant to have originated the view is a fictional one (see fn.5).

Aesthetic Problem 1

A cognitivist can hold that expressive and formal qualities are merely to engage and entertain, or to create a distance [Walton 288-9], but make no cognitive contribution to imagining or propositional and non-propositional content. In fact these qualities are often construed by the cognitivist as a distraction from the representational content of a work; (as we saw above, Walton's account suggests that the brushstrokes in a Van Gogh painting distract from the fictional truth of the work [277]). So at best, aesthetic qualities distance us from the imagining evoked by a work or alternatively they simply entertain and decorate.

Response to aesthetic problem 1

It has been persuasively argued by Richard Moran [1994] that it is the expressive and formal qualities which prompt imagination into the kind of imaginative reflection from which insight can be forthcoming.[9] This argument is not difficult to defend. Moran compares Shakespeare's verses with more mundane ways of representing the same ideas. Walton would say it is the style that distances and subsequently prompts reflection but for Walton neither style nor reflection engages imagining. Instead, the props in the form of representations and their propositional content engage make-believe (imagining) for Walton. By his account, imagining operates on representational content which he conceives as separate from aesthetic qualities and as distinct from reflection. So for Walton, art does not provide insight directly, that is, truths imported from the fictional world into our actual world, but rather indirectly, by prompting reflection upon what has been imagined. But as argued above in *Cognitive*

[9] Moran argues that anyone who comes to Walton's conclusion regarding the dominance of propositional truth in fiction has approached the problem by asking the wrong questions, including why we care or experience emotions about fictions [75]. Furthermore, Moran thinks that 'the case of fictional emotions gains a misleading appearance of paradox from an inadequate survey of examples' [79]. Moran argues that much of what we feel concerns things in the past or in the future rather than present to us here and now; and we find no inclination to call such feelings quasi-emotions (as Walton called responses to fictions). Also wincing when someone else has an accident is not seen as a quasi emotion [77-78]. In addition, no one finds it a paradox that we respond with 'mirth and merriment' to fictional events [81]. See Jonathan Weinberg and Aaron Meskin [2006] for an alternative approach to the typical questions which have characterised the framing of the so called paradoxes of fiction.

Problem 3, this is not reflected in the actual structure of our engagement in fictions. As we will see, Peter Langland-Hassan's theory of imagining [2016] presents a structure which more intuitively captures the structure of imagining as evoked by fictions which I will turn to in the next section. And on a purely theoretical level, Walton's account with its proliferation of special entities – quasi-emotion, fictional world, fictional truths, make-believe (including his ad hoc distinction between prop-oriented and content-oriented make-believe [1993]), ornamentation, distance and reflection – seems too convoluted to be an accurate account of something we do so frequently and effortlessly.[10]

[10] My view is that fictions motivate in the way suggested by Gendler (section 6 this chapter), that is, in a dispositional sense. The idea is that I bring to a fiction, situations or characters that I have witnessed in the world or can imagine do occur in the world, given my cognitive stock. I feel actual emotions in response to the fiction and in addition, in response to my present situation, for example, sitting in a cinema. Matravers [2010] discusses this simultaneity of perspectives in terms of parallel representations. We could employ Matravers conception of these parallel representations to refute the basis of Stacie Friend's defence of Walton [Friend 2003: 36]. However, I reject Matravers view that 'imagination' has no explanatory power [2010] and his view that emotions felt in response to fictions, in spite of parallel representations, are nonetheless motivationally inert [2006]. On the contrary, 'imagination' explains why we do not learn new facts from art but can nonetheless acquire insight or understanding. Nonetheless, his conception of parallel representations explains why the effects of imagining are different to the effects of believing with the same contents (see Weinberg [2008] and as discussed in Stock [2011: 277]. Weinberg argues that imagining is configurable [2008: 217] and hence we can adjust which mechanisms it interacts with. This is an example of a 'soft assembly' of mechanisms [279] which is the kind of structure we need in order to understand the way imagining impinges on belief as suggested by Schellenberg

Aesthetic problem 2

The standard aesthetic account of art inadvertently rules out the possibility that art might have a trustworthy impact on behaviour. That is, the relevant content of art, if art is to be a source of learning anything at all, is the propositional content. As such, we are returned to cognitive problem 2: delusion and unreliability. The aesthetic qualities may create a distance to evoke reflection [Walton] but the reflection will be ultimately on the propositional content imagined, or the expressive and formal properties would provide a springboard into one's own memories, experience and knowledge. In this latter case, the artwork would provide an occasion for personal reverie like daydreaming. So in other words, at best art could be a diversion or entertainment; but not an occasion for insight.

Summary of the aesthetic account of art

Art is either a dressing up in decorative garb of cognitive lessons in which case it is vulnerable to the same objections as directed at a cognitive theory of art. Or art is merely diversion and entertainment in which case it cannot be insightful.

5. Resolving the paradox

A cognitive theory of art cannot answer the unreliability and delusion objections without imagination. But with imagination it rules out the possibility of belief and motivational force and hence insight.

[2013]). The difference between imagination and belief is not in motivation *per se* given the source indifference of 'priming'.

The problem with the standard aesthetic theory of art, which conceives aesthetic qualities as non-cognitive, is it either envisages that imagination distracts from any available learning; or leads to personal reverie like daydreaming. On such an account, imagining is a diversion or entertainment, and cannot result in genuine insight. So we either have learning which effectively eliminates the aesthetic, or a conception of the aesthetic which eliminates learning.

The paradox posed above arises from treating as the only two alternatives, the cognitive theory of art and the aesthetic theory of art as conceived by the standard cognitivists. That they have been able to be conceived as diametrically opposed is largely due to the way imagining has been understood. Hence the premise which is the problem in the paradox as originally stated is (iii): 'imagining is motivationally inert'. The mistaken assumption is that imagining cannot impact upon belief without becoming susceptible to unreliability and delusion.

However, if imagining could be shown to be motivationally impactful and hence contributing to cognition and impacting on belief, without becoming susceptible to unreliability and delusion, then a third type of philosophical theory of art would be available. On this account it would *not* be the explicit literal representations that engage imagining, but the way the representations are structured to elicit subjective responses.

The imagining then which is prompted by the expressive, figurative and formal properties, might influence how one engages with the work and whether the work is subsequently found insightful. The result would be an aesthetic account, according to which it would be in virtue of the very aesthetic qualities derided by cognitivists as a distraction from the truth of a work,

that insight in art would be possible. This is not a standard aesthetic account and so for this reason I introduce a new name for it to distinguish it from standard aesthetic accounts of art. I will refer to it as cognitive aesthetic formalism.[11]

The onus is on the cognitive aesthetic formalist to show that imagining can impact on belief without undermining the reliability of belief. To this end, we might accept that imagining, grounded in actual world experiences, and structured by art, prompts us to encode experience anew. That is, in cases where art is experienced as insightful, the experience is of having the familiar made unfamiliar; or having what was held as fragmented, disconnected items in memory, reconceived as unified and newly meaningful.

The experience hooks one subjectively into the fictional world of the work but provides a lens or framework relevant to the actual world. In other words, art can prime the viewer in ways which impact upon future experiences in the actual world. If imagining was evoked by art in this way, accounts of art would no longer have to choose between art as make-believe

[11] In the way figurative and formal properties of an artwork constitute the work's content, they operate as metaphors. This is because, when we experience a line, colour or phrase as pert, or lugubrious, or a gesture or passage as staccato or languid, we experience a resonance in our physical movements, capabilities and limitations. Our experience is grounded in a metaphoric representation of the material (see Lakoff and Johnson [1980]). This applies to all art forms equally (cf. Walton's distinction between prop-oriented make-believe and content-oriented make-believe [1993]: the latter refers to metaphor but I would argue this distinction is an ad hoc method to extend his theory of make-believe beyond entertainment and diversion).

and so motivationally inert; and art as decoration so cognitively trivial. And it would explain the possibility of insight that so many seemingly non-deluded people claim that they have acquired from particular instances of art.

6. Imagination as impacting on belief

The task now is to establish how imagining can impact on belief without undermining the reliability of belief for effective action in the world. The orthodoxy on imagination and belief is that unless imaginings are quarantined from belief, our belief system would be unreliable and deluded. The view is that belief is directly linked to perception while imagining is indirectly linked, such as through memory. Otherwise they engage many of the same processes such as inference, affective responses and updater systems which make any new belief or imagining compatible with already held beliefs and imaginings.[12] This implicates various cognitive domains. The important difference though, between imagining and belief, as mentioned earlier, is that belief motivates action and imagining does not. And this is the sticking point which leads to the paradox of insight.

Now imagining has been understood in these terms largely by considering children's make-believe and our reactions to scary images at the cinema. Children do not export their fantasies into actual life typically and we know the different responses required from images at the cinema compared to their counterparts in the actual world. However, research that moves

[12] See Shaun Nichols and Stephen Stich [2000] but see Langland-Hassan's rather damning estimation of their reliance on what they call the 'script elaborator' which Langland-Hassan argues [2016] is simply a matter of boxing the hard problem of imagination and giving it a name, rather than solving the problem. Nonetheless, many have adopted this boxicology uncritically, such as Weinberg and Meskin [2006: 181-2].

beyond these examples arrives at a different conclusion regarding the impact of imagining on belief and action. Psychological research relevant to this issue has been around for a long time but the implications it has for understanding art has largely been ignored. I am referring to the research into the effects of priming: on belief, on thresholds for sufficiency of evidence, and on interpretation, behaviour and action.

Tamar Gendler has written extensively on the impact of imagining on belief (e.g. [2006a/b, 2003, 2000]). Priming occurs when an immersion in some scenario or situation, involves an investment of our subjective responses. Such an experience can contribute to the contents of knowledge schemata but also the accessibility of knowledge schemata. Knowledge schemata or knowledge structures are sets of associated ideas, objects and actions which are stored in memory so that the perception or imagining of one item in the set, can trigger the idea of the whole set or at least, the behavioural norms associated with the set. This is understood to be an economical way for our limited cognitive apparatus to deal with the vast amount of information with which it needs to contend.

Imagining can impact upon the significance and contents of such schemata, as it has been found that experiences that activate one's affective systems prime the person by making the related schemata more accessible than those not activated for longer periods and can also establish relations between previously unassociated mental items. And relevant to the aesthetic cognitivist, it has been found that priming is source indifferent. That is, priming is

equally effective whether the investment of one's affective systems is prompted by an actual perception or by an imagining.[13]

The effects of priming are quite substantial. Not only can it influence the way experiences are interpreted, but what is experienced. That is, it can influence what we notice, and the meaning we ascribe to it. This in turn can influence what counts as evidence and the threshold at which the available evidence is considered sufficient to justify belief. The upside is that repeated experiences within the one domain can result in expertise in assessing data quickly to recommend action. The downside is that the very same kind of expertise in a different data set can result in what we call bias. The source indifference of priming provides a way of understanding the efficacy of imagining and *ipso facto* the possibility of insight through art. The orthodoxy of conceiving in terms of 'make-believe' the imagining we exercise in virtue of engaging with art has overshadowed the more serious impact of imagining through art.

Other researchers have developed accounts which corroborate the interpretations that Gendler has drawn. Susanna Schellenberg develops and defends a continuum thesis for imagination and belief [2013]. According to her view, both imagination and belief are defined by a cluster of functional roles. When the state of mind drops some roles which characterise imagination and pick up others which characterise belief, then imagining and belief admit of degrees, with imagination blurring into belief. Earlier I mentioned Egan who would cast this blurring of imagination into belief as a case of delusion [2010]. Egan argues that there are intermediate representations/propositional attitudes between beliefs and imaginings which explain the

[13] Imagining engages us subjectively beyond simply thinking of a proposition, as Kind suggests [2016: 146-47].

nature of delusion. He treats such intermediate representations as maladaptive unless they are not taken seriously by the imaginer. Langland-Hassan argues on the contrary that imaginings in a non-deluded person are constrained by plausibility, provide the content of ideals and models of behaviour, and can be exploited to inspire significant achievements [2016]. The ideals and models involved are not taken as belief nor are they explicit desires, but instead are initially endorsed because of fit and plausibility. An important aspect of Schellenberg's account, and as we will see Langland-Hassan's theory of imagination, is that they provide the means to acknowledge the crucial role that the Arts play in facilitating the contents of our intentions. There is a difference between imaginings when they impinge on belief as meaning-making and when they occupy an intermediate position between belief and imagining as a delusion. This is a possibility not considered by Egan.

Schellenberg effectively sweeps aside Egan's narrow account when she entertains the possibility of a non-occurrent imagining that affects behaviour, which she calls a dispositional belief. According to Schellenberg, dispositional belief is simply a matter of blurring the roles of imagination and belief without that being incompatible with more sub-level functions by which the roles of imagination on the one hand and belief on the other, can remain pure (in the traditional sense by which we distinguish imagination and belief). In any case, Schellenberg's view that a disposition to behave in a certain way is a case of belief that admits of degrees of imagining, leads her to argue that non-conceptual states can have conceptual content [2013: 516-17]. In other words, understanding can be present and demonstrated in behaviour without this necessarily meaning that the understanding can be articulated or has ever been experienced in terms of state-able principles. Of interest to us is the range of imagining engaged through art of the kind we would not articulate as

propositions, from demeanours and attitudes to certain values and norms, all of which we might be primed by art to privilege in actual behaviour.

Langland-Hassan argues that the way imagination proceeds is sufficiently constrained by experience, training and education to ensure that its structures are compatible with and useful to problem-solving processes. We intervene at certain points to redirect the flow of imagination but we do not stipulate every aspect. Each stipulation generates inferences based on our experience of real world possibilities. But we can and do intervene to generate the direction of imagining and in this sense, imagining is Guiding and Chosen (GC).

The accounts by Egan, Walton and Currie suggest that if a Chosen Imagining is used to motivate action, this would place us in the realm of delusion. Their idea would be that only non-guiding imagining, that which is motivationally inert, such as fictions, are chosen and controlled, unless one is deluded. However, Langland-Hassan argues that when imaginings are subject to the will they do confer epistemic advantage, as when we imagine a travel route or how someone will respond to a particular gift. In this sense Chosen Imagining can guide behaviour.[14] Langland-Hassan targets Amy Kind's view [62], which adopts the general position of Egan, Walton, and Currie, when he writes that: 'we cannot … [hold] that only non-guiding imaginings are chosen and controlled' [63]. Kind, like so many of the theorists working on imagination, treats imagination when engaged by art and cinema as

[14] Peter Fazekas and Bence Nanay [2017] provide an account which shows how imagery (as top down) is the mechanism by which the cognitive penetration of perception is mediated. Their research though focussed on a different problem, further corroborates the active role Chosen and Guiding imagining can play in shaping behaviour. See also Nanay [2010].

unconstrained compared to 'our constrained imaginings that are important for our attempts to learn about the world' [Kind 2016: 158].

According to Kind and Peter Kung, there are three topics which dominate philosophical discussions on the imagination and these are: engagement with fiction, modal epistemology and mindreading [2016: 13, 23]. They argue that in all such discussions imagination is either treated as transcendental or instructive. The transcendental use of imagination is when it can, in their words 'fly completely free of reality' [2016: 1] such as when engaged in day dreaming and fantasy.[15] The instructive use in contrast is when imagination results in learning about the world. In this instructive mode, imagination is anchored in reality and is under certain constraints. This distinction allows them to set aside engagement in fiction as exercising the transcendental mode of imagination presumably because they assume engaging in artworks including fiction, does not provide any lasting impact on our epistemic resources [Kind and Kung 2016: 15-16]. Kind and Kung join company with those who inadvertently

[15] The distinction between transcendental and instructive is blurred when Kind and Kung claim that when transcendental imagining is anchored in reality, then it can have instructive capability [2016: 16]. One might ask in what sense such a case of imagining is transcendental rather than instructive given the definition for instructive imagination is its use in learning about the world [1-2, 17]. Walton recognised that all imagining is anchored in some sense in the real world [1990: 21]. Currie on the other hand, according to Kind and Kung [2016: 15-16], associates 'make-believe' with day dreaming and fantasy [Currie 1990: 18, 21].

treat art as mere diversion (e.g. Walton [1990] and Currie [1995] notwithstanding their cognitive-theories-of-art ambitions).[16]

To understand GC imaginings Langland-Hassan argues that we need to posit three features of their cognitive architecture [63]:

1. Initial involvement of top-down intentions
2. Use of *lateral constraints* in the development of an imagining
3. The cyclical involvement of top-down intentions throughout the course of an imagining.

Accounts by Gendler [2000, 2003, 2006a/b], Schellenberg [2013], and Langland-Hassan [2016], provide the means to envisage art as insightful. They do this by showing how experience can be structured by imagining. Certain schemata are made accessible and in some cases new combinations are facilitated. The insight would be a matter of acquiring the resources to encode experience anew.

7. An objection considered

While this approach to imagining does not claim it is the same as believing, it does suggest that imagining has as much motivational power. It also suggests that imagining is ubiquitous in cognition as many events in our day evoke our subjective responses through imagining and

[16] Kind argues that imagining does have epistemic significance when it is constrained by reality in the relevant way and logical inference in the relevant way. She treats science fiction as so constrained but not other artforms. Other artforms, presumably like fantasy, are not constrained by plausibility or logical inference; they simply stipulate propositions of any kind at any point [2016: 150-51]. My argument shows why and how this conception of imagining occasioned by art is mistaken.

such priming is involved in our capacity to learn. This might suggest cognitive aesthetic formalism is vulnerable to *Cognitive problem 2*, where imagining is believing.

However, by way of an answer to this objection, consider that cognitive aesthetic formalism is not vulnerable to *Cognitive problem 2* because belief and imagining can be defined by a cluster of functional roles. Generally belief achieves knowledge about what is actually the case while imagining, exercising quite flexible powers, can re-combine the items of our memories and knowledge-sets in various ways for various purposes. For example, believing it is raining I take an umbrella. In contrast, imagining it is raining, awakening the feel of soaked clothes and squelchy shoes, makes it more likely that I will remember to take an umbrella and wear galoshes, the next time the weather is overcast.

The former motivates action and the latter develops the disposition to be appropriately equipped and attired when the weather closes in. So we can grant that at a sub-level, the functions of belief and imagining are quite distinct while at a higher level for particular purposes, some functions of imagining may be dropped and replaced with some of the functions of believing.

8. Implications for a theory of art

According to cognitive aesthetic formalism, insight through art is grounded in our previous experience, that is, what we already know, but involves making sense of what we already know in new ways. I have not distinguished between propositional (imagining that something is the case) and sensory imaginings (mental imagery) even though the distinction is so entrenched in the philosophical literature. Langland-Hassan argues that propositional imagining is 'plausibly the normal cognitive component of pretending that p' [64], but in

addition he suggests that all sensory – episodic - memory involves sensory imagining [Langland-Hassan 2016: fn.7, 64-65]. This would suggest that all cognition that involves sensory imagery are cases of imagining but this is usually rejected.[17] What is standardly accepted though is that sensory imagery 'outruns any linguistically expressible concepts' so in this sense, if we accept Langland-Hassan's treatment of sensory imagery as a case of imagining, imaginings can be more informative than the intention to imagine [Langland-Hassan: 66] and for many theorists imagining is useful to the extent that it is more informative than what we could literally assign to the content of our mental state. The view I hold conceives imagining as a complex set of representations involving both assigned propositions and more informative sensory imagery. I hold this view because of its intuitive appeal and explanatory power. An attractive upshot of this position is that it applies to all art-forms, not just the obviously representational ones[18] and explains how imagining impinges on belief through effects similar to priming.[19]

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[17] The difference between CG imagination and cognitive noise is that the former involves intention, lateral constraints and a cyclical structure; and Langland-Hassan suggests all imagination properly so called involves this cognitive architecture [81].

[18] Langland-Hassan explains the different kind of processes involved in sensory imagining in terms of their more direct connection to the sensori-motor system [70].

[19] The kind of insight provided by art requires a longer treatment than I have scope for here. For a demonstration of the way literature can be insightful or encode experiences rather than simply repeat them, see Moira Gatens [2009], J. M. Coetzee [2007] and Edward W. Said [1994]. For an analysis of insight gained through music, see Said [2008] and for visual art, contemporary curators offer some examples. See Carolee Thea's interviews [2001].

The possibility of insight through art is grounded in its expressive, figurative and formal aspects. These are the aspects which engage our affective responses in imagining and in virtue of which we can reassemble our knowledge schemata. This is to be primed to perceive our world in new ways. The experience is of insight.

To borrow an example used by Moran, whose account I treat as a forerunner to cognitive aesthetic formalism, here is Macbeth's soliloquy on sleep:

-the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleave of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast. (II, ii) (Quoted in Moran [1994: 85])

Moran refers to the passage's evocation of associations of innocence and death; routines of eating, bathing, sleeping, and mending with their associated emotional responses.
He asks us to contrast Macbeth's words with: 'I could really use a rest' [1994: 85]. Macbeth's words evoke images which draw out our own associated experiences whose meaning and significance for us outrun the literal meaning of the words. This is imagination at work and it has nothing to do with 'make-believe'; that is, it is not presented as a prop in a game of any description. Rather it requires resources of knowledge, experience and training imported from the actual world interwoven with reflection on its significance to the play and to us, such that,

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In each case, the relevant motivation would be to an orientation which impacted upon self-conception and the conception of others in a world. Art might hold up what one might intend (see Cullity in this volume: 114).

when reflection endorses the plausibility relative to the actual world, aptness to the fictional world and relevance to our own personal experience, we continue to imagine. A deep engagement with the work is commensurate with a deeply felt resonance in our actual experience including drawing new conclusions regarding the attitudes and perspectives we take to relevant issues in the actual world.

On this account the expressive, figurative and formal features do not distract from the insight available, nor distance us from imagining; instead they in part constitute it. The only account to accommodate this is cognitive aesthetic formalism in which imagining is the key term.[20]

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[20] Audiences at two 'Arts and Imagination' Workshops, the first held in San Francisco as the *American Philosophical Association's* Post-conference in April 2016; and the second as part of the *Australasian Association of Philosophy* conference in July 2017 provided helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter. I would like to thank them, and would also like to thank Fred Kroon for his helpful comments on a penultimate draft. I also acknowledge the *Australian Research Council* Discovery Grant 150103143 for supporting the research for this chapter.

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