

Art, Representation, and Make-Believe

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Imprint Routledge, 2021

ISBN 9780367370169, 9781032013978,
9780367808662, 9781000396195,
9781000396201

Permalink <https://books.scholarsportal.info/uri/ebooks/ebooks7/taylorandfrancis7/2022-07-12/1/9780367808662>

Pages 147 to 163

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9 The Puzzle of Make-Believe About Pictures

Can One Imagine a Perception to Be Different?

Sonia Sedivy

Kendall Walton explains what is special about pictures and our perception of them in terms of perceptual make-believe. To support our intuitive view that we perceive pictures, he argues that such perceptions involve imagination in games of perceptual make-believe. We *imagine seeing* what a picture depicts. Walton's make-believe framework proposes that representational works in any medium are props that draw us to participate in games of make-believe where we imagine what a work makes fictional. Applied to pictures and depictions more generally, the view is that "Depictions are . . . things whose function in a given social setting is to serve as props in sufficiently rich and vivid perceptual games of make-believe" (Walton, 2008c, p. 136). So Walton needs to explain how perceptions combine with imagination to yield perceptual make-believe. I will examine his approach by considering how well it fits with competing theories that explain perception in terms of contents, or relations to objects, or both contents and relations.

Here is Walton's proposal that seeing a picture makes one imagine a different seeing.

The viewer of Meindert Hobbema's *Water Mill with the Great Red Roof* plays a game in which it is fictional that he sees a red-roofed mill. As a participant in the game, he imagines that this is so. And this self-imagining is done in a first-person manner: he imagines seeing a mill, not just that he sees one, and he imagines this from the inside. . . . [H]is actual act of looking at the painting is what makes it fictional that he looks at a mill.

(Walton, 1990, p. 293)¹

Specifically, Walton suggests that one imagines *of* one's perceptual experience of the coloured canvas that it is a different perceptual experience. (He uses both notions – picture or canvas – to specify the face-to-face seeing, and I will follow in using both.) To put it simply, he proposes that one imagines a perceptual experience to be different. He insists

that the make-believe experience of a picture is a single – complex but unified – whole.

The spectator imagines seeing a mill, and also imagines *her actual perceiving of the picture to be her perceiving of a mill*. These elements are integrated into a single experience which is at once imaginative and genuinely visual. It is this experience that makes depiction special among the various modes of representation, and especially visual.

(Walton, 1991, p. 425)

One does not first perceive Hobbema's picture and then, in a separate act, imagine that perception to be of a mill. *The phenomenal character of the perception is inseparable from the imagining which takes it as an object*.

(Walton, 1990, p. 295)

That is, the perceptual experience of the canvas evokes the imaginative act but these are not two separate experiences, rather they together make up one "experience that is both imaginative and visual" (Walton, 1991, p. 423). It is this larger unity that the technical formulation is designed to capture: that one imagines *of a perception of a canvas that it is a different perception, seeing a watermill*. To succeed, Walton's account needs to explain how perception and imagination can cooperate in the way he specifies: that a perception can be the *de re* object of an imaginative act in a complex but unified perceptual experience. This is the key contention at the heart of Walton's approach to pictures, yet it has not been examined in detail.

We will see that Walton suggests that this complex unity can be explained by the following claims about perception:

- (i) Perception is penetrated by thought – which includes imaginative thought and other capacities;
- (ii) Perception is contentful – perceptual experiences have contents;
- (iii) The visual actions one performs with respect to the picture to 'ascertain' what is fictional are more or less similar to the visual actions one would perform with respect to the world to 'ascertain' what is true – in the example, scanning from left to right discerns trees and then a mill in the picture just as it would discern trees and then a mill in the actual scene.

Walton uses these three hypotheses to explain the distinctively 'two-fold' yet unified nature of our experiences of pictures. If perceptions are contentful, then the content of seeing a picture can be unified through cognitive penetration with the content of imagining seeing something different. The complex experience is perceptual since the imagination informs perception through cognitive penetration. This helps secure Walton's

emphasis that: “*The phenomenal character of the perception is inseparable from the imagining which takes it as an object*” (Walton, 1990, p. 295). Cognitive penetration also explains how understanding of the practices in which pictures are prompts for prescribed imaginings can inform the experience. The third clause outlines kinds of interdependencies between seeing and imagining that make the experience of pictures rich and vivid. This third condition allows that pictures can prescribe some visual actions that are unlike those one would perform with respect to actual scenes – for example one scans a scrambled picture differently from the way one would scan the actual scene – with the proviso that there is a mapping from one to the other that one could easily learn.

The first two conditions – that perception is contentful and cognitively penetrated – reach out to theories of perception and in particular to theories of perceptual content. But over the past thirty years since *Mimesis as Make-Believe* was published, theories of perception are also increasingly concerned with the relational nature of perception.² Relational theories aim to explain perception as a basic relation, much like Russellian ‘acquaintance’, so that the nature of a perceptual experience depends on and involves its objects. For example, the qualitative properties of the experience are the properties of the objects which are constituents or figure in the experiences. By now there is a three-way divide between explaining perceptions in terms of only contents, only relations to objects, or in terms of both contents and relations.

My starting point for this chapter was that theories of perception might help us get clearer about the unity of perception and imagination Walton posits. Very simply, the question is: *can one imagine a perception to be different?* An intuitive worry is that if one imagines one’s seeing of a canvas to be a different perception, seeing a mill for example, the imaginative act would take over or “overwrite” seeing the canvas. We will see that Richard Wollheim (1998) raises this concern. Yet once we reach out to theories of perception, we are embroiled in the current debate over contents and relations. Even though the issues over perceptual contents and relations make us get into a fair bit of detail, I hope to show that it is fruitful. If we take this divide in theories of perception into account, we can pose the following progression of questions that help us get clearer both about Walton’s view and about relationships between perception and imagination.

The first evident question is whether Walton’s approach succeeds in its own terms, in terms of theories of perceptual content? But second, is Walton’s view compatible with theories that explain perception as involving its objects? The third is a more general question: if objects figure in perceptual experience, does this put bounds on what one can imagine of such experiences? Fourth, since Walton’s view turns on proposing that a perceptual experience figures as a *de re* object of an imaginative act in a single unified experience, his view leads to examining the notion of *de re* attributions. The question is: what view of *de re* attributions would best

explain the idea that we can engage imaginatively with our own perceptual experiences?

I will argue that Walton's view succeeds when cashed out with precise proposals about perceptual content and that it also works with hybrid views that emphasize that perception is both contentful and relational; it does not work with purely relational views; and it works best with a non-standard view of *de re* attributions that posits *de re* senses. This shows that Walton's proposal that we play perceptual games of make-believe can be compatible with recognizing that perception relates us to objects.

The chapter will proceed in three steps. The first section fleshes out Walton's brief appeals to perceptual content, cognitive penetration, and *de re* attribution of experiential states to explain his proposal that seeing and imagining make up *a single unified experience* when it comes to pictures. The second section will examine whether Walton's view can be captured by content, relational or hybrid approaches to perception. I will consider a couple of variants of each type of approach. Finally, the third section brings these results together to consider the unity of perception and imagination Walton proposes. We will see how taking theories of perception into account allows us to answer the question: *can one imagine a perception to be different?* The answer will be 'yes' but with a number of qualifications.

I. Walton's Make-Believe Approach to Pictures – The Unity of Perception and Imagination in a Single Experience

Walton's well-recognized reason for positing perceptual games of make-believe where we imagine a perception to be different is that this distinguishes depictions or pictures from "verbal representation and from description generally" (Walton, 1990, p. 296). The difference is that a reader of a description in a fictional text imagines what is described, Emma Bovary for example, and may even imagine seeing what is described, but the reader does not imagine *their perception of the text* to be a perception of what it described.³

Yet Walton's point is not simply to distinguish depictions from textual representations. He argues that the perceptual-imaginative state explains the deep impact depictions have on us. One needs to imagine seeing the object, a sorrowful woman for example, in order to engage in other mental acts that he argues are connected with and dependent upon imagined seeing.

Rather than merely standing outside Van Gogh's lithograph and imagining what it depicts, imagining a sorrowful woman sitting hunched with her head and arms resting on her knees, *I imagine seeing her and observing her sorrow*. This leads to imagining feeling about her and for her, and perhaps with her, in ways that enable me

imaginatively to understand her sorrow. Thus I come to understand what it is like to feel this way. None of this would be possible if pictures were simply imitations of visual forms, or if they were just signs signifying or standing for things of the kind they represent. None of this would be possible if pictures were not, like hobby horses, props in games of make-believe in which people participate visually, and also psychologically.

(Walton, 2008b, p. 78, my italics)

1. *Cognitive Penetration*

Walton suggests that in a game of visual make-believe, the experience of seeing a picture “is penetrated by the thought, the imagining” that her seeing is of something else, a sorrowful woman or a mill for example (Walton, 1990, p. 300). The connection between perception and imagination in the experience of a picture is neither causal nor external but rather cognitive penetration: “one imagines one’s seeing of the canvas to be a seeing of a mill, and this imagining is an integral part of one’s visual experience of the canvas” (1990, p. 301). Moreover, Walton suggests that the cognitive penetrations is “*mutual interpenetration*” (1990, p. 301). That is, the relationship goes both ways: seeing the picture involves and depends on imaginatively seeing what it is of, and imaginatively seeing what the picture is of involves and depends on seeing the picture.

I do not mean just that thoughts have causal effects on one’s experiences, but that the experiences *contain* thoughts. Imaginings also, like thoughts of other kinds, enter into visual experiences. And the imaginings called for when one looks at a picture inform the experience of looking at it. *The seeing and imagining are inseparably bound together, integrated into a single complex phenomenological whole.* And . . . they must be thus integrated if the picture is to qualify as a picture. It is this complex experience that is distinctive of and appropriate to the perception of pictures.

(Walton, 1990, p. 295, second italics mine)

To convey the strength or nature of the interconnection, Walton draws an analogy to the unity of judgement and perception. The viewer

is best regarded not as seeing the picture and also engaging in this spontaneous imagining, but as enjoying a *single* experience that is both perceptual and imaginative, her perception of the picture is colored by the imagining. . . . The experience of recognizing an (actual) tree as a tree is not a *combination* of a pure perception and a judgement that what one perceives is a tree. It is rather a perceptual experience

that is also a cognitive one, one colored by the belief that what one is experiencing is a tree. Likewise, to see a horse in a design is to have a perceptual experience colored by imagining one's perception to be of a horse, a perceptual experience that is also an imaginative one.

(Walton, 2008c, pp. 137–138)

This quotation is indicative of Walton's commitment to the thorough interconnectedness of a person's capacities. He suggests that his appeal to cognitive penetration just applies the 'commonplace' or 'familiar' idea that there is no 'innocent eye' disconnected from our understanding and other capacities.⁴ But far from being a commonplace, cognitive penetration is highly disputed with much debate over the extent of penetration if any.⁵ Though one cannot assume that perception is cognitively penetrated, this view is consistent with content theories of perception as well as some hybrid views.

2. *The Two-Folds of Contentful Experience: Wollheim Versus Walton*

Walton explicitly espouses a content theory of perception in his reply to Richard Wollheim's objection that perception and imagination cannot combine as Walton suggests. Wollheim's intuition is that the imagined seeing evoked by seeing the painting would cancel out the 'original' experience. Both experiences could not be maintained and integrated or unified. Wollheim presses this objection even though he presupposes that perception is contentful. He does not advert to any facts or theories about perception in making the objection. Here is his intuition, which threatens the core idea that we might play perceptual games of make-believe:

My difficulty . . . is how to understand the core project, of imagining one perceptual experience to be another. For, if we succeed, in what way does the original experience retain its content? For, what is left of the experience of seeing the surface when I successfully imagine it to be some other experience? However, if I do continue to see the surface, or this experience retains its content, how have I succeeded in imagining it, the experience, to be an experience of seeing a face?

(Wollheim, 1998, pp. 224–225)

Wollheim argues that the problem is posed by perception:

[T]his problem arises exclusively where (one) what we imagine to be something different from what it is is something perceptual and (two) what we imagine it to be is also something perceptual. There is

clearly no fundamental difficulty in my moving my hands and arms in a jerky and irregular fashion and imagining of it that I am conducting some great orchestra, nor, for that matter, in my looking hard at an old enemy and imagining of it that I am burning him up with my gaze. In the first case neither experience is perceptual: in the second case, only one is perceptual.

(Wollheim, 1998, pp. 224–225)

Walton's reply turns to the notion of perceptual content. He denies that imagining one perception to be a different one is any more problematic than imagining an object to have properties different from those it possesses on the ground that there is no reason to think that perceptual content could not be complex in the specific way of unifying with an imagined content to yield one larger contentful state.

This does not seem to me to be a problem at all. Why should imagining a perceptual experience to have one *content* while recognizing that it actually has a different *one* be any more difficult than imagining an object to have properties different from those one realizes it really possesses—imagining a glob of mud to be a pie, for instance?

(Walton, 2008a, p. 154)

I don't want to get into the heterogenous examples Walton gives to support his view. These are cases where one imagines *of* perceiving one object that one is perceiving a different object, where Scottie in *Vertigo*, for example imagines *of* seeing Judy that he is seeing Madeleine.⁶ My point is that Walton turns to the notion of intentional content to make his case without being specific about the nature of such content.

In all of these cases, not only is the actual object of a person's perceptual experience in fact different from what she imagines it to be and not only does she know this to be so, it is likely that the actual *intentional content* of her experience is different from what she imagines *it* to be, that is, the "original experience retains its *content*" even as she imagines it to have a different *content*.

(Walton, 2008a, p. 154)

The impasse seems genuine. On the one hand, Wollheim's intuition seems to have purchase: if one imagines a particular perceptual experience to be different, wouldn't the imagined experience take over or replace the 'initial' perceptual experience? But on the other hand, when one thinks about the potential complexity of content, it seems reasonable that perceptual content could have the complex structure Walton envisions.⁷

3. *Experiences as De Re Objects Within More Complex Experiences*

Walton proposes that seeing a picture is a *de re* object of imaginative seeing in a larger experience to capture two facts about pictures. Firstly, this explains how seeing and imagining are connected in a single complex perceptual experience. Secondly, Walton suggests that if seeing a picture is the *de re* object of imagining, this captures his contention that the imaginative seeing is not ‘deliberate’ but “a spontaneous response to the marks on the canvas; [the viewer] just finds herself imagining in a certain manner as she looks at the picture” (Walton, 2008c, p. 137).

However, Walton does not specify his understanding of *de re* attributions of experiences. This suggests a standard interpretation of *de re* attributions as referentially transparent.⁸ For Walton’s account, this would entail that any specification of the initial seeing (that refers to that seeing) would preserve the truth of the whole attribution. Recall that Walton writes that a viewer of Hobbema’s painting “imagines [their] seeing of the canvas to be a seeing of a mill” (1990, p. 301). Such referential transparency has been argued to be associated with the fact that the *res* – in this case seeing the canvas – figures as an object in the complex experiential state independently of any specification by the experiencing subject so that the specification used in the attribution is irrelevant as it were, allowing for substitution by co-referring terms.⁹

An alternative view is that attributing part of an experience *de re* does not deny that the subject uses some means to pick out the experienced object; rather it expresses the fact that the means the subject uses depend in part on the object. I will appeal to the Evans-McDowell approach.¹⁰ McDowell and Evans trace the idea back to Frege that we are capable of thoughts that are determined both by their contexts and by the cognitive repertoire of the particular subject. McDowell argues repeatedly that an object cannot figure in thought or experience independently of any means used by the subject to pick out the object. That is why context-dependent thoughts or experiences depend both on the subject’s capacities and on contextual factors. This dependence is explained with the idea of *de re modes of presentation* or *de re senses*. We have the ability to think of objects or to perceive them “under modes of presentation whose functioning depends essentially on (say) the perceived presence of the objects” (McDowell, 1998, p. 219). Applied to Walton’s view, this suggests that in perceiving a picture, the viewer uses some understanding or skill to see the picture so that it figures in her experience, and her imaginative seeing is *of* this object-dependent seeing.

Note that on a standard view of *de re* attributions Walton’s repeated phrasing is misleading insofar as it states that the subject imagines something specifically of her own perception. Walton seems to suggest that what is transparent is what the subject perceives, but what would be transparent is what state the subject is in at all. Walton writes that she

“imagines of her perceiving which is in fact a perceiving of the canvas that it is a perceiving . . . of a horse.” But even this is going too far. On a standard view, what the *de re* attribution states is that: she *imagines of herself or her own state – which is in fact her perceiving the canvas – that it is a perceiving . . . of a horse.*

Getting more precise about *de re* attributions will pay off in the next section as we consider how Walton’s view fits with a range of contemporary theories of perception.

II. Walton’s View and Theories of Perception

1. Pure Content Theories of Perception

Walton’s view is compatible with content theories of perception which propose that perceptions have contents that present the way things are though things might not be that way.¹¹ In general, contents are individuated in terms of the conditions that would obtain for a content to be true or accurate.¹² Most approaches propose that contents specify conditions for objects and properties. It follows that an experience might have a certain content even if there is no object that satisfies the conditions. Theories divide over the kind of content they posit. Two leading proposals explain perception in terms of Existentially Quantified content (McGinn, 1982; Davies, 1992) or Fregean content (Burge, 1991; Chalmers, 2004).

Let’s take as our example throughout this section Atikah’s perception of a picture of ships on the high seas. On the first approach, perceptions have existentially quantified contents that specify conditions that particular objects and instances of properties might satisfy. Independently of any theory of pictures, the existentially quantified content of Atikah’s perception of a picture of ships on the high seas would be captured as follows:

- there is at least one thing such that it is a picture & it is of ships on the sea

Walton’s distinctive proposal is that seeing a picture is a complex unified perceptual experience made up of seeing the picture and imagining *of it – the seeing* – that it is different. An existentially quantified view of perceptual content (McGinn, 1982; Davies, 1992; Tye, 1995) captures Walton’s proposal through *conjoined* conditions that make up the complex content: there is at least one thing that is a seeing *and* an imagining *of it* that it is different. This captures the unity Walton emphasizes. More precisely – and tortuously – the content of Atikah’s experience might be put this way:

- there is at least one thing such that it is a *seeing* of a picture & it is an *imagining of it* [the seeing] that it is seeing ships on the high seas

An indexical component such as ‘5 feet in front of me now’ could be added to further specify the content.

- there is at least one thing such that it is a *seeing* of a picture 5 feet in front of me now & it is an *imagining of it* [the seeing] that it is seeing ships on the high seas about 50 feet distant from me now¹³

Alternatively, Fregean views (Burge, 1991; Chalmers, 2004) propose that perceptual contents consist in modes of presentation. A mode of presentation is a specific way that the subject understands an object in picking it out (or referring to it) and the specific way that a property is attributed. The leading idea is that there may be several modes of presentation that refer to or designate the same individual or property. Because of this potential variety, the content of a particular experience needs to be specified at the ‘finesse’ of grain provided by the mode of presentation whereby a particular perceiver picks out what is before them and attributes properties to it. The content of perceiving a picture would be captured intuitively as:

- the picture *is of ships on the high seas*¹⁴

A Fregean approach to perceptual content also captures Walton’s view readily. It does so in terms of the mode of presentation that individuates the object of Atikah’s experience and attributes a property to it. Keep in mind that Walton is proposing that the *object* of Atikah’s perceptual experience is *seeing the picture* – and the property attributed to it is being an *imagined seeing of ships on the high seas*. The perceptual content of Atikah’s experience can be captured straightforwardly by a Fregean view:

- seeing the picture *is imagined to be seeing of ships on the high seas*

2. *Pure Relational Theories of Perception*

Purely relational theories of perception deny that perceptual experiences have content. They propose that a perceptual experience is a primitive acquaintance or referential relation to objects (and their properties) so that a particular object is a constituent of the experience. Atikah’s experience would be captured as *Rso* – (*Relation*, Atikah, picture). To see that Walton’s view is not compatible with relational approaches, let’s consider two varieties.

One option developed by Charles Travis (2004) is that it is the look of the complex object, the look of a picture of ships on the high seas, that is constitutive for the experience. According to this view, perception registers the looks of things without making any commitment to what the things are. So Atikah experiences the look of the painting of ships on high seas – (*Relation*, Atikah, look of painting of ships on high seas).

A second option from John Campbell (2002) is that it is the material object with low-level visual properties, the coloured canvas, to which one stands in the primitive acquaintance-like relation. This alternative is associated with the view that perceptual experience is restricted to low-level properties at spatial locations, so that it is the material object with its low-level properties such as colours and contours (at a spatial location) that is constitutive for the experience. On this view, what a picture is of – ships on the high seas – depends on applying cognitive capacities such as beliefs to experience. Atikah experiences the brightly coloured canvas – (*Relation*, Atikah, brightly coloured canvas).

Neither approach squares with Walton's proposal. Firstly, insofar as we experience the look of a picture, it is for example, *the look of a picture of ships on the high seas*. The experience is individuated by the look of the picture with its specific content. According to this view, the experience would not have the two "folds" that Walton's theory of make-believe strives to capture – seeing a canvas and imagining *of* it that it is a seeing of ships on the high seas. There is only a unitary perceptual experience constituted by the object's particular look. Though the look may be described as having a complex duality – looking like a painted canvas of ships on the high seas – the subject's experiential state does not have a duality that might explain the duality of the look of a picture.

Secondly, relational theories that restrict perceptual experience to low-level vision have the consequence that any higher-level properties like being a picture, or being a perception of a picture are determined by non-experiential states like beliefs. If the object of the experience is the material object with its low-level properties – a coloured flat surface – then what the picture is of, ships on the sea for example, is determined by cognitive effects such as imaginings. This is an additive view, with two states, one experiential and one not – precisely what Walton was arguing against.

In short, neither alternative is consistent with the complex unity for which Walton argues. On the first alternative, perceiving a picture is experiential, but Walton's insistence that the experience is a two-part whole is lost. On the second alternative, perceiving a picture is a conjunction of an experiential state and a "cognitive effect" – so Walton's insistence that the whole is experiential is lost.

Is this a problem for Walton or for relational theories? The lack of fit between the two approaches is at least unfortunate given the explanatory power of the make-believe framework and the force of the intuition that perception involves relations to objects. I suggest that on the one hand, the fact that Walton's view eludes these relational approaches identifies a problem. Neither theory can accommodate the idea that perception and imagination might make up a *unified experiential* state as Walton suggests. These theories can countenance that one can imagine *of* a perception that it is different but not in a single experiential whole. In other words,

Travis and Campbell could hold that Walton offers the best approach to depiction in terms of make-believe, but they would have to deny the kind of experiential state central to his proposal.¹⁵ On the other hand, the lack of fit with relational theories would be a problem for Walton's view if this showed that his approach is incompatible with countenancing perceptual relations to objects – that his approach depends on claiming that perception is only contentful. But hybrid relational–contentful views offer another avenue for countenancing relations to objects in perception with which Walton's view might be compatible.

3. *Hybrid Relational – Contentful Theories of Perception*

Hybrid views propose that perception is both relational and contentful – experiences depend on and involve their particular objects in contentful states. Two principal varieties propose that perceptual experiences can be modelled as 'Singular when filled' Content Schemas or in terms of *De Re* Senses or Modes of Presentation.

According to the first view, a perceptual experience is modelled as a Russellian proposition or 'content schema' with a 'slot' for the object: (*picture* [object slot], painting of ships on the high seas).¹⁶ Walton's view is rendered as follows. If Atikah sees the painting of ships on the high seas, her seeing fills the object slot in the larger contentful experience:

- *seeing the canvas* [object slot], imagined seeing of ships on the high seas

In contrast, according to the second approach, the contents of perceptual experiences involve *de re* senses or modes of presentation that specify an object (or a property) and depend on it.¹⁷ Such modes of presentation help secure the relation to the object while also depending on the object in doing so. One might think of demonstrative expressions such as 'this object' or 'this picture' for a model – a demonstrative expression helps to pick out a particular object (or property), but the demonstrative can only do so if the object exists and is present to the speaker and hearer. Walton's specific proposal would be captured as follows:

- *this seeing the picture* is imagined to be seeing ships on high seas

Both hybrid approaches can capture Walton's proposal – at least in part. But there is an important difference. On the content schema view Walton's insistence on cognitive interpenetration is lost because the object of the complex experience – in this case, seeing the picture – just 'fills the slot'. Filling the slot does not involve or depend on any means at the perceiver's disposal so that there is no interpenetration between seeing the picture and imagining seeing ships on the seas. In contrast, the view

that perception involves *de re* senses explains this unity: the *de re* mode of presentation that individuates and involves seeing the picture can interpenetrate with the imaginative seeing.

This difference is important because it shows that it is not perceptual relations to objects that place constraints on whether imagination can combine with perception experientially but rather how those relations are explained. If objects figure in perception by virtue of a relation independent of any perceptual skill or understanding – or fill a slot in a content schema independently of any skill or understanding – then imagination can only be “added” to perception of objects as a causal or cognitive effect. In contrast, if objects figure in perception in a way that depends on some of the subject’s skills or understanding, then imagination and seeing can interpenetrate.

III. Can One Imagine a Perception to Be Different – as Walton’s Make-Believe Account of Pictures Proposes?

We can now answer this question in three steps. First, taking theories of perception into account clarifies the following issues. Models of perceptual content clear Walton’s proposal with respect to the objection voiced by Wollheim that one can’t maintain one’s experience of the picture while imagining a different seeing. Walton’s approach is readily captured by pure content approaches to perception. Though Walton’s proposal is not compatible with at least two influential relational approaches that hold that perception is a primitive relation to objects, his view can be fully explained by hybrid theories that appeal to *de re* modes of presentation to explain how perceptions relate to objects. This is important because it shows that we can secure the relational nature of perception and the constitutive role of particular objects while also providing the contents and cognitive penetration requisite for Walton’s make-believe approach. In other words, this hybrid approach is important because it allows us to appreciate that seeing the picture can depend on and involve *its* object, *the picture*; just as imaginatively seeing what the picture is of depends on and involves *its* object, *seeing* the picture.¹⁸

Second, the foregoing discussion shows that Walton’s proposal that imagination can enter into and ‘colour’ a perceptual experience is constrained by theory of perception. Content and some hybrid theories allow that an imagination might be unified with a perception in a single complex state, relational views do not. We have seen that according to purely relational approaches, imaginative thought can be evoked by a perception and only causally or externally added to it. But if perceptual relation to the object is secured by an object-dependent mode of presentation, imagination can interpenetrate with that mode of presentation. This is possible even given the complexity of Walton’s view where the imagination takes an experiential state – seeing a picture – as its object in a larger

phenomenological whole, while seeing the picture involves and depends on the picture itself.

But third, Walton also suggests that one can't just take any perception and imagine it to be a different one. The properties of the prop matter.

[W]e are *not* free to play any game we like with a given prop. It would be awkward at the very least to play visual games with texts as props, . . . and next to impossible to use them for visual games of any significant richness and vivacity. Some things are better suited than others to serve as props in games of certain kinds. A tree makes a fine mast on a pirate ship. A tunnel or a watermelon would make a terrible one. A game of pirates in which to crawl through a tunnel or to eat a watermelon is fictionally to climb a mast is unlikely to be at all rich and vivid. (What would count as fictionally swaying with the mast in the wind, or fictionally grabbing a spear to keep from falling, or fictionally scanning the horizon for merchant vessels?) Flaubert's text is singularly unsuited to a game in which visually examining it in various ways is, fictionally, visually examining Madame Bovary.

(Walton, 1990, pp. 303–304)

Walton's point here is general, namely that the nature of the prop is important for imaginative games about one-self, and his examples range across different kinds of make-believe. Let's briefly consider pictures as well as "free-form" perceptual make-believe.

According to Walton, pictures have the socially instituted function of being props for perceptual games of make-believe and their specific nature matters for this function. That is, pictures can evoke and prescribe imaginings insofar as there are practices with norms for such imaginings. We saw at the outset of the chapter that Walton explains that one can imagine a perception to be different if perceiving the picture evokes at least some visual actions that are similar to those one would undertake concerning the depicted object. The properties of the picture matter for the richness and vivacity of the imaginings it can evoke and prescribe.

What about "free-form" make-believe that does not depend on specific norms that prescribe kinds of imaginative activity? Perhaps, the visual actions a child performs with a glob of mud or a tree stump need not be very similar to the visual actions one would perform with a pie or a bear. But Walton argues in the previous quotation that there are limits even on the power of childhood make-believe, which depends on props at least to some extent for its richness and vivacity. How free is perceptual make-believe beyond childhood? Recall Scottie in *Vertigo*. He doesn't imagine seeing any woman to be seeing Madeleine, he needs to see Judy for his imaginative experience. It is *of* seeing Judy, that Scottie imagines seeing Madeleine. The properties of the prop matter if the game is to be rich and vivid.

Walton's emphasis that props constrain and feed the richness and vivacity of imaginative seeing makes especially good sense if we countenance

that perception is relational as well as contentful: the object of the perceptual experience matters and constrains what one can imagine oneself to be seeing. At a limit, where the prop doesn't allow for perceptual games of any richness and vividness, we are not playing a perceptual game, we are imagining *that we see* something or just imagining *that* something is the case.

These considerations suggest that the answer to the question "*can one imagine a perception to be different?*" is a qualified *yes* – according to certain theories of perception and depending on the object that functions as a prop or just serves as one.

IV. Conclusion

Though Walton clearly reaches out to philosophy of perception to show that his make-believe framework can encompass pictures, his proposal has not been examined in light of theories of perception. Yet the proposal depends on being able to show that there might be perceptual games of make-believe wherein perception and imagination combine. Walton goes further and emphasizes the experiential unity of perceptual games of make-believe: we see a picture and imagine *of* that seeing that it is different in a single experiential state. I have focused on showing that detailed competing models of perceptual experience matter critically for explaining the unity Walton insists on. Pure content theories vindicate his view. But it is important that Walton's view is not restricted to such theories. Walton's account can countenance that perception involves relations to objects, depending on how those relations are theorized. Hybrid theories that posit *de re* senses also capture the unified perceptual–imaginative experience Walton emphasizes. The relational nature of perception is important for another facet of Walton's approach, his emphasis that the nature of a prop matters for the richness and vivacity of the perceptual games of make-believe we might play with it.

I also tried to bring out that Walton's view can inform theories of perception, it doesn't just rely on them. If Walton is right that perception and imagination can combine in a single experience, then a theory of perception needs to be able to explain such experiences. Walton's approach shows that some relational theories of perception rule out a kind of imagination.¹⁹ This is a significant consequence. Beyond such specific implications, Walton's account of pictures offers an expansive exploration of seeing imaginatively that details a kind of imagining and a kind of perceptual experience we might not have considered otherwise.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the audience at the London Aesthetics Forum for helpful discussion of an earlier version of this chapter, and special thanks to John V. Kulvicki and Zachary Weinstein for comments on an earlier draft.

Notes

1. Walton argues that imagining from the inside or self-imagining is such that one is aware that one is imagining about oneself, which also means that one is aware that one is imagining. He argues that imagining doing or experiencing something is self-imagining. See Walton (1990, pp. 28–29).
2. For example, Brewer (2011), Campbell (2002), Travis (2004).
3. See Walton (1990, pp. 294–296).
4. See Walton (1990, p. 295) and Walton (2008c, p. 141), respectively.
5. See Firestone and Scholl (2016).
6. The example of Scottie in *Vertigo* is owing to Patrick Maynard; see Walton (2008a, p. 154).
7. Walton's view of empathy confirms that he is comfortable with content theories of perception that argue that perceptual experiences can be rendered in propositional form and that it is not mistaken to interpret his view in terms of theories that attribute perceptual contents. He argues that what makes empathy special is that it is a distinctive way of knowing a proposition, where one takes one's own state and uses it in a demonstrative judgement as a sample of the property one's own state shares with another's. This explains the experiential nature of empathy that one doesn't simply judge or affirm a similarity of experience because one uses one's own experience as a sample of what is shared. "Emily's judgement or impression is not merely that 'I am panicked, and so is Oscar,' but rather, 'Oscar is as I am, like this'" (Walton, 2015, p. 9).
8. For example, see Quine (1956).
9. For example, see Burge (1977).
10. See Evans (1982, chs. 1, 6, 7) and McDowell (1998, pp. 214–227).
11. For an overview see Siegel (2016).
12. Content views do not commit one to representative realism, the view that one is related to a content and only in this indirect way to the world that the content is of. Rather, we can hold that perceptions are transparent, what we are aware of is some bit of the world, yet insofar as there is a way that we are aware of the world – from a certain perspective, for example, we explain this fact as a perception being a contentful state or episode.
13. More precisely, the indexical component would be an additional conjunct. I think that the content of seeing on Walton's view would be rendered as: there is at least one thing such that it is (a seeing of a picture & 5 feet in front of me now) and (an imagining of it that it is a seeing of ships on the high seas & about 50 feet distant from me now).
14. Such contents might be modelled as predicative or objectual but I leave out objectual contents for ease of exposition. The objectual content in the example would be (the picture, of ships on the high seas).
15. Thanks to John V. Kulvicki for this clarification.
16. See Tye (2009, pp. 80–83).
17. John McDowell's (2013) view of perceptual experience is the prime example of a hybrid Fregean view. Susanna Schellenberg (2010) offers a hybrid view that is somewhat different in that it restricts Fregean Modes of Presentation to low-level visual properties.
18. We could take a slightly different perspective on Walton's approach and theories of perception in terms of the distinction between low-level and high-level approaches: those that hold that perception only represents or relates us to 'low-level properties' such as colours and contours and those that allow for high-level properties such as being a painting or a seeing. It will be clear that Walton is committed to high-level approaches to perception. If we went over the layout I have presented, his approach would not work with pure content or hybrid theories that restrict perception to low-level properties.
19. Thanks to John V. Kulvicki for highlighting this point.

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