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TWOFOLD PICTORIAL EXPERIENCE, PROPOSITIONAL IMAGINING AND RECOGNITIONAL CONCEPTS: A CRITIQUE OF WALTON'S VISUAL MAKE-BELIEVE

abstract

Kendall Walton has defined pictorial experience as a visual game of make-believe, which consists in imagining our actual seeing the representational prop to be a fictional face to face seeing the represented subject. To maintain a twofold awareness of these two visual aspects while avoiding a phenomenal clash between them, Walton needs to characterise visual make-believe as involving a propositional imagining. Unfortunately, the strategy does not seem to be successful. Whether propositional imagination is taken as a simple descriptive report or as conceptually penetrating our perception, Walton's account is not able to secure the visual and the twofold character of pictorial recognition.

keywords

Walton, depiction, make-believe, twofoldness, image recognition

Among the various attempts to define which kind of experience corresponds to pictorial representations, a very important contribution has been offered by Kendall Walton with his notion of "visual game of make believe" (Walton, 1973; 1990; 1992; 2008). Differently from the other theories on that issue, Walton has argued that imagination plays a central role in recognising the depicted subject. In his view, seeing a picture is a matter of *fictionally seeing*, that is, of imagining that seeing the material prop of the image is seeing the corresponding fictional subject. More concretely, following one among Walton's examples (1990, p. 215), the spectator imagines his actual experience of admiring the painted canvas of Van Der Velde's *The Shore at Scheveningen* to be another experience, namely the one of facing the depicted nautical scene itself.

This theory aims to preserve and better explain some important intuitions about how pictorial recognition works. In particular, Walton claims that it should clarify how perceivers are able to reconcile their *twofold* visual awareness of the image material *medium* and the image subject itself into the unitary experience of *seeing a picture of* that subject. The heart of his proposal is exactly that the two sides are held together by means of an imaginative switch, converting the perception of the mere prop into a fictional experience of the depicted scene.

In this paper I will examine this strategy, to finally argue that it fails to maintain its explanatory *desiderata*. The reason, as I will show, is that a composite perceptual experience intermingled with imagination is not able to preserve both the *visual* and the *twofold* character of image experience. I will start with Section 1 by clarifying how Walton's visual make-believe bids to accommodate the idea of pictorial twofoldness in terms of imagining the visual experience itself of the prop to be a visual experience of the subject. In the light of some objections advanced by Richard Wollheim, I will claim that Walton's project is better served by a notion of propositional imagination rather than by a notion of visual imagination, or visualisation. In Section 2 I will examine the suggestion that propositional imagination provides visual make-believe with a report concerning the subject to be recognised in the picture. My objection is that image recognition seems here deprived of visual character: its content is not treated as offered by our visual experience, directed simply at the prop *qua* prop, but only by our propositional imagination. In Section 3 I will explore an alternative reading of visual make-believe as a case of cognitive penetration on vision. Just as it happens with recognitional concepts acquired through perceptual learning tasks, the content of our propositional imagining the subject can directly alter the content of our seeing the prop. However, I will argue that this proposal is of no help for Walton. Imaginative penetration is

not suited to capture pictorial twofoldness: the dual experience of the picture surface and the picture subject cannot be equated with the shift from a not penetrated to a conceptually penetrated perception. As I will finally point out in Section 4, these difficulties undermine Walton's account of depictive experience.

The most detailed account of the dual character of pictorial experience has been given by the philosopher Richard Wollheim, who coined the term *twofoldness* (Wollheim, 1980; 1987; 1998). Twofoldness is the main feature of the distinctive experience directed at pictorial representations. According to the author, it consists in simultaneously noticing the arrangement of the material properties belonging to the two-dimensional picture surface (like the brushstrokes or the thickness of the canvas) and the properties of the three-dimensional appearing scene itself. These two attitudes are treated by Wollheim as two *aspects* of the same perceptual experience, defined as a *seeing-in* experience: the *configurational aspect*, focused on the medium, and the *recognitional aspect*, concerning the depicted subject. It is important to underline here that these aspects are not just accidentally retained together in the spectator's awareness, but they are rather integrated in a single but still complex whole state. Twofold seeing-in is both a composite and an unitary experience, so that being aware of one of its constituents does not prevent the awareness of the other.

1. Twofoldness and visual make-believe

Although many philosophers have questioned Wollheim's proposal to define depiction as the experience of seeing-in, his intuition about twofoldness has been more widely accepted. For his part, Walton appeals to the issue in a quite distinctive way. Not only, in fact, he acknowledges the relevance of the twofold structure of pictorial experience;[1] he also claims that his theory has the resources to explain it even more clearly than Wollheim's account, often taken to not go in deeply enough on this point. Thus, Walton conceives the experience of visual make-believe as a tight nexus between the mere perception of the prop and the imaginary grasping of the subject: the latter is sustained by the former, while the former is in turn re-shaped by being "colored" by the latter (Walton, 1992, p. 138).

Walton explicitly warns about a misguided interpretation of this dual structure of visual make-believe, according to which seeing and imagining would simply alternate themselves as two different co-occurring experiences. As he argues, this misunderstanding actually results in some objections raised by Wollheim himself to the visual make-believe hypothesis. According to Wollheim's reconstruction (1991, pp. 404-405), our perception of the material prop just prompts us to visually imagine, namely to visualise, the fictional world represented. However, in that case, there could well be no connection between the perceptual and the imaginary sides of visual make-believe, so that the two states would just accidentally happen to be entertained together. Such an account would thus fail to capture the difference between actually recognising the beach depicted by *The Shore at Scheveningen* and, as an example, visualising, while seeing the picture, a beach visited in Italy many years before. Walton's reply points out that a visual game of make-believe consists in imagining the *experience* of seeing the pictorial prop to be *another experience*, namely the one of seeing the full-blown scene. The fictional shift provided by visual make believe, he explains, does not just concern the objects, but the "intentional contents" itself of the two visual experiences (Walton, 2002, p. 32). Walton does not really develop the terminological distinction between "objects" and "contents" of experience which he is relying on; nevertheless, talking about contents is undoubtedly a way of putting more stress on the structure of the experiential states constituting visual

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1 «Twofoldness is important. I'm sure that it has a lot to do with the interest that visual representation has for us» (Walton, 1992, p. 135).

make-believe. The expression "intentional contents" seems here to refer broadly to how an experience provides access to and characterises its object:[2] in other terms, to the phenomenal features of that experience (the sense modality employed, the kind of properties attributed, the aspectual features manifested, and so on). Such remarks clarify what Walton means by claiming that the two sides of visual make-believe are connected the one to the other in a single complex experience: *our imagining is about our act of seeing itself.* This is the crucial difference between imagining that seeing the canvas is facing the shore of Scheveningen and simply imagining that the canvas itself is the shore. What serves as prop in the game of make-believe is not just the material object seen, but the overall visual perception of it. Nonetheless, there still lies a challenge for Walton to suitably characterise the nature of the imaginative act involved in the experience of fictionally seeing. What Wollheim's objection actually points out is the problem of integrating the experiences of seeing something and *visualising* it as something else into one and the same twofold experience. In fact, in a visual game of make-believe our imagination is supposed to alter the value of our perception of the actual prop, allowing us to get in touch with the depicted scene. However, following this line, it seems hard to retain in a unitary experience both the contents of seeing the prop and visualising the fictional subject, since they attribute two conflicting visual appearances to the same object (Wollheim, 1998 pp. 224-225; see also Nanay, 2004, pp. 287-288). The problem here is with visualisation as a *perceptual* form of imagining. Staring at the pictorial surface counts as if it were an imaginary look on the flesh-and-blood subject, but this means nothing more than replacing our visual awareness of the former with a visual awareness of the latter. Walton has a double counter-objection to this criticism. First, the problem outlined threatens no less Wollheim's concept of seeing-in, which takes the contents of two incompatible visual perceptions to be integrated as two aspects of a single experience (Walton, 2002, p. 33). Second, the visual make-believe theory can still be amended so as to escape the trouble, because it is in no way committed to explain pictorial experience by appealing to some *visual* form of imagination (Walton, 1991, p. 404). However, this strategy simply begs another question for Walton: if any appeal to visualising is off-limits, which kind of imagination appropriately defines a visual game of make-believe?

2. Propositional imagining and image recognition

The only move still available to Walton is to understand visual make-believe as a matter of *propositional imagining.* Such a possibility is not actually explored by the author himself, so he gives almost no clues about how his theory can benefit from this suggestion: nevertheless, it seems worth going deeper into the matter. For one thing, differently from visualising, propositional imagination seems more similar to a verbal narration or a description than to a quasi-perception. For example, imagining propositionally the shore at Scheveningen is not like conjuring up its visual appearance as if we were seeing it with our own eyes, but rather like reporting how it might look like.[3] Along this line, the imaginary contents of visual make-believe should not have a perceptual-like nature, but a conceptual and belief-like one. The strategy could seem odd at first glance, but it is not inconsistent in principle: the trick is all about explaining how this form of imagining integrates with visual perceiving in the whole twofold pictorial seeing.

It could be thought, for instance, that propositional imagination just makes our seeing the material image *count* as facing the represented subject. The actual experience would be taken to be the fictional one by *imagining that* it is a different experience. In that case, entertaining

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2   As Bence Nanay (2004, p. 286) proposes to understand, too.
3   For a more detailed account of the features of propositional imagination, see Currie and Ravescroft (2002).

the contents of perception and the contents of propositional imagining in one single twofold experience seems less difficult to conceive: it is just to imagine that our seeing the prop is seeing the depicted subject. It is not required here to reconcile two conflicting perceptual-like contents (seeing the prop and imagining seeing the pictorial subject), but rather a perceptual content (seeing the prop) with a propositional content (imagining, about that seeing, that it is seeing the pictorial subject). On the one hand, what we imagine about the fictional world would be visually "fleshed out" by seeing the configuration of the depicted canvas; on the other hand, our experience of the material prop is reconsidered in accordance with the propositional content of imagination. Such an interaction appears to match with what can be called the "twofold claim": the perceptual and the imaginary aspects of the whole experience play distinct roles but they are also deeply interconnected the one with the other. Nonetheless, this proposal needs also to accommodate our intuitions about the genuinely visual character of pictorial images. Unfortunately, the appeal to propositional imagining risks to misreport our most basilar intuitions about the experience of recognising depictions. It seems uncontroversial that we recognise the scene depicted by a picture *by seeing it*: a "visual representation" makes its subject available precisely exhibiting its appearance. This captures an obvious difference between pictures and words: the latter ones do not surely enable us to get a view on the objects they refer to. A satisfactory theory of depiction, even when calling propositional imagination into play, has to preserve this evidence.

It might be supposed that the visual character of the whole pictorial make-believe experience is basically granted by our perception of the pictorial prop. The recognition of the represented subject should consist in turning our actual seeing the prop, which is undoubtedly a visual kind of experience, into our fictional seeing the depicted scene. The conversion is still operated by our propositional imagining, but the resulting twofold experience borrows its visual phenomenology from our seeing the prop. Yet, this hypothesis is precisely meant to make clear how the *recognition* of the image is obtained by engaging in a visual game of make-believe. The strategy seems to imply that the content of our visual recognition of the pictorial subject is not essentially granted by our visual perception, which targets the material prop *as the material prop*, but rather by the propositional imagining, which re-interprets that perception as our seeing the depicted scene. However, this account does not fit with our shared intuition about the visual character of pictorial recognition. The subject recognised in a picture is *visually* specified by our experience, not just *propositionally*. It is highly implausible to spell image experience out as the relation between an imaginary propositional content, corresponding to the recognition of the depicted subject, and a visual perception of the physical prop; this strategy appears to distort the phenomenon to explain. *Recognising* the pictorial subject, by an appeal to our propositional imagination, is here outlined as a prior condition, independently assessable, to be able to *see* that subject depicted by the image. Put otherwise, it is as if it were required to recognise the represented scene in order to visually perceive it, rather than the opposite.

The troubling question for this reading of visual make-believe is how propositional imagination gets its content, informing us about the pictorial subject to be recognized. This problem is brought to light more clearly by considering Walton's general definition of what a game of make-believe is. According to him, in this kind of activities imagination is not running totally unconstrained, but it has to be governed by some *principles of generation* (Walton, 1990) prescribed by the prop itself. Those principles state what is part of the content of the fictional work (to use Walton's expression, part of the "world of the work"). Relating this idea to depictive representations, one might wonder how the relevant principles of generation, specifying the content of propositional imaging (and thus of recognising the pictorial subject), can be identified in visual make-believe contexts. Apparently, they would not seem derived by

our *seeing the prop*, given that this state is meant to be only about the concrete pictorial surface and not about the scene represented. However, if we concede that propositional imagination is not sustained by our experience of the prop, Walton's idea of visual game of make-believe turns out to be in conflict with his same fundamental definition of game of make-believe. Those considerations about the principles of generation also show how visual make-believe, conceived as a matter of propositional imagining, fails to capture the distinctiveness of pictorial experience. According to such an interpretation, in fact, the content of visually perceiving the material prop, taken at face value, is not informative about the content of the imaginary experience of the subject, thus the former state is not related in any intrinsic way to the latter. Surely, as Robert Hopkins (1998, p. 21) points out, this claim is too loose to rule out many different practices of a clear non-pictorial kind: for example, it would also be appropriate to describe an activity like considering a verbal description of a scene (perhaps by following some instructions or by reading a book), then looking at a not depictive surface (like a white wall), and imagining that our seeing it is our facing what has been described. In this case, no depictive representation is obviously involved, neither the experience is in itself twofold, because the perceptual and the imaginary states are just accidentally tied together; no features of our seeing a not depictive surface play an essential role in making us imagining that we are seeing a fictional scene.

3. Recognitional concepts and twofold experiences

At this point, one might worry that the arguments proposed so far do not give a fair sketch of the interaction between imagination and perception in visual make-believe, because they basically rely on a not fair sketch of the interaction between complex cognitive states and perception in visual recognition. Embedded in a game of visual make-believe, propositional imagination enables us to grasp complex meaningful scenes on a suitably marked surface; in other words, it helps turning our perception of some indeterminate material configuration into the recognition of the pictorial subject. The question is then how new perceptual determinations can be brought about by a propositional kind of imagining. The natural suggestion would be that the concepts involved by the propositional imaginary content of make-believe can to some extent affect our perceptual recognition of the depicted subject. Those concepts could be considered as *recognitional concepts*, that is, in a broad sense,[4] concepts specifying which features of a scene can be visually recognised when we look at it.[5] Possessing such concepts would allow us to be visually sensitive to certain high-level properties of objects, like quite abstract or complex kind-properties (for example, the property of "being a wardrobe"): put otherwise, we would be able to *see* those objects *as* objects of a particular kind (for example, to see an object as a wardrobe). Therefore, for what concerns pictorial experience, it seems plausible to think that, in a similar vein, the conceptual content of some cognitive states can determine what we recognise to be the subject of a picture.

This idea is not without some appeal; Wollheim himself appears in many passages to endorse it (1987, p. 66; 1998, p. 223; 2003, pp. 11-13), by allowing that a picture can either depict an individual (like Monet's wife) or a subject merely of some general kind (like *a* woman not individually specified). Since all that is depicted by the picture coincides for Wollheim with what can be seen in it, it should be possible to distinguish by sight between depictions of

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4   Using the label "recognitional concepts" does not purport here to discuss the stronger claim that recognitional concepts are *only* those concept which *must* include in their possession conditions the ability of perceptually recognise something as an instance of that concept (see for example Fodor, 1998). "Recognitional concepts" is taken here, in a more open spirit, as any concept playing a substantial role in the visual recognition of objects as falling under it.
5   A similar idea about the role of recognitionally-based concepts in pictorial recognition is defended in Roelofs (2001).

particulars and depictions of non-particulars. Put differently, what artists have to do when producing a *depictive* representation is to make their representational intentions (like the intention of representing a particular woman rather than a woman in general) clearly visible in it, but this presupposes that the spectator's experience has to be sufficiently informed to visually pick out those intentions. Therefore, Wollheim concludes, concepts referring to individuals and to kinds must permeate and influence pictorial seeing, if we need to account for a perceptual difference in recognising pictures of particular and generic subjects.

To support this line it could also be noticed that, on a general level, the case for the impenetrability of perception to thought is far from being settled in an uncontroversial way. Without any expectation to exhaust such a debated topic, it will be enough here to point out that, when it comes to analyse our ordinary visual experiences, a divide between non-conceptual seeing and conceptually fine-grained recognition does not seem to be drawn in a sharp way. It is not clear at all what could be for us to perceive first exclusively elementary properties like shapes, hues or contours as such, and then, separately, to come up with a classification of an object according to some concept; the two aspects tend rather to integrate each other. Consider as an example, an instance of visually recognising a wardrobe by perceiving properties like "being a dark region of space", "being a brown big mass", "being a brown big parallelepiped", "being a wooden wardrobe", "being a wooden empire-waist wardrobe": can a general criterion be deployed here to determine precisely at which stage basic perception gives way to informed recognition? According to this "conceptual Sorite test", acquiring conceptual determinacy appears as a matter of grades, rather than a clear-cut switch from low-level to high-level visual awareness. Such an intuition seems exactly to comply with the worries of those sceptical about the idea of an "innocent eye",[6] completely free from theoretical influences.

What all these considerations suggest is thus to understand Walton's notion of visual make-believe in the light of a distinctive kind of interaction between a complex cognitive state and a perceptual state. More specifically, pictorial recognition would result from a case of *cognitive penetration*, insofar as our visual perception of the material prop is affected by our propositional imagination. This interpretive proposal has been indeed put forward by many authors, like Fabian Dorsch (2016) and Alon Chasid (2016). Chasid's reconstruction in particular relies on a general claim about the influence of *recognitional beliefs* on our visual experience of high-order properties, as it is most notably provided by Susanna Siegel (2006; 2012, ch. 4). According to Siegel's hypothesis, learning to recognise complex kinds of objects, by association of a perceptual configuration to some kind of instruction (expressed by a proposition like, in Siegel's example, "this is a pine tree"), determines a substantial change in the content and the phenomenal character of our perception. The visual experience occurring after having acquired such recognitional belief is not just phenomenally different from the one which was not yet cognitively penetrated; it also comes to represent some high-level properties (like "being a pine tree") formerly not included in its perceptual content.

Since propositional imagination is similar to recognitional belief in referring to its objects in a conceptual way, the notion of cognitive penetration can be extended to explain the interaction of seeing and imagining in visual make-believe. The early perception of the material pictorial surface can be considered to be conceptually unspecified to a certain degree, at least to the extent that our seeing does not yet convey information about the depicted scene. The intervention of propositional imagining modifies this experience, whose content is enriched so as to make visible the properties of the pictorial subject.

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6   As Walton (1990, p. 294) admittedly considers himself.

It is easy to see how such a reading in terms of imaginative penetration enables Walton's theory to overcome the difficulty to account for the visual character of image recognition. The integration of perception and imagination in this whole experience is tighter than it might be in a mere imaginary interpretation of a given sensory state.[7] As a cognitively penetrated state, visual recognition is not only an assessment on what is seen in the light of some separate thoughts, but it is a perceptual achievement in its own right. The content of visual experience is extended by cognitive penetration; our imagining brings about a change in the perceived properties, so that the features of the depicted scene become genuinely seen. Therefore, it is not just propositional imagination which does all the work required by image recognition: the subject is still presented in our experience in a strong visual way.

Note however, that the propositional imagining involved in a visual game of make-believe has a more complex content than the recognitional belief which classical examples of cognitive penetration rely on. In the latter cases, certain thoughts about a particular *object* put us in the position of perceptually detecting it and its characteristic features, resulting in a suitably modified experience. On the contrary for Walton an imaginative state about an overall *experience*, namely seeing an object, determines the actual experience of another object (the pictorial prop) to change accordingly. The contrast between the two statements is not merely a matter of lexical choices. First of all, Walton's account needs to set out unambiguously the idea that experiencing a picture does not allow to attribute to the surface itself the properties of the represented subject. Moreover, the notion of visual make-believe relates two experiences, rather than two objects, to stress the non-accidental nature of pictorial recognition. To clarify the point, consider this case based on a standard example of cognitive penetration: Jill's belief that her friend Jack is angry makes her seeing his face as expressing anger. Jill's resulting experience of Jack's facial expression does not bear any important relation to Jill's ordinary experience of Jack as not angry. It is just her idiosyncratic belief, which is simply about Jack rather than about an experience of him, to drive her to perceive the friend as angry. Were Jill convinced, for some reason or other, that Jack was happy or amused, she would perceive traces of happiness or amusement on his face. On the other hand, recognising the subject of a depictive representation is a radically different kind of experience from Jill's example. The content of visually perceiving the depicted subject is dependent in a relevant way from the one of perceiving the pictorial surface: as Alberto Voltolini rightly points out, "the fact that we see a certain scene as being present before us [...] is *justified* by our perception of a suitably enriched vehicle" (2015, p.149). Recalling Walton's own terms, the experience of the prop provides us with the principles of generation influencing, by means of imagination, our recognition of the represented item.

In the light of these requirements, an attempt to develop pictorial make-believe as an instance of imaginatively penetrated recognition seems hard to carry on. According to Walton's statements, the content of our perceiving the pictorial surface should be modified by our imagination about an experience of seeing the depicted subject. However, it is not entirely clear what could mean for a perceptual experience to come to represent in its content the properties of another experience, rather than simply of an object. Of course, "having a certain content" could be maintained as a property of a perceptual state. Nevertheless, the content of a visual experience represents basically the properties of a visual object. Therefore, representing the content of an experience in the content of another experience should amount to nothing else than representing the object of the former in the content of the latter.

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7   See also Voltolini for the claim that recognising the pictorial subject is not «a mere interpretative byproduct of an already perceptual state» (2015, p. 155).

Such a result appears to neglect the idea that the imaginative penetration involved in visual-make believe brings about a change in the properties of the experience itself.

This problem might induce to suspect that imaginatively penetrated visual recognition does not exhaust the explanatory demands entailed by the twofold character of pictorial experience. After all, Walton's clarification about imagining the experience itself of the prop to be the experience of the fictional scene is introduced to explain twofoldness away in terms of visual make-believe. However, the core idea behind twofoldness is that two mutually incompatible kinds of perceptual properties, namely two-dimensional marks and three-dimensional shapes, are experienced as instantiated by the same object without any irreconcilable phenomenal conflict. This seems to obtain because, when the two aspects get integrated in a twofold state, they are no longer the same as when occurring separately. On the other hand, appealing to cognitive penetrability may be a strategy to secure that a certain perceptual experience is rich enough to include in its content more determinate kind-properties other than low-level visual features. According to Siegel's account, the cognitively penetrated state differs from the original one in being enriched in its representational scope and undergoing a change in its phenomenology. Nothing in this model entails that there should be a principled tension between low-level and the high-level properties to be reconciled in a complex cognitively penetrated perception. This suggests that pictorial twofoldness cannot just be reduced to an instance of imaginative penetration; the latter consists simply in an *extended* or in a *modified* perception, while the former requires to combine two competing visual aspects in a peculiar but still tenable single experience.[8]

To illustrate the point with an example, the scene depicted by *The Shore at Scheveningen* appears with an entirely *sui generis* phenomenology compared to any face to face encounter with a similar scene. Such distinctiveness lies in the fact that one and the same twofold experience individuates two conflicting kinds of visual features, and thus it opens up the possibility to recognise its object according to two intentional characterisations: as a two-dimensional marked surface and as a three-dimensional scene. In contrast, instances of cognitively penetrated visual recognition, like Siegel's example of training to spot pine trees, do not appear as radically distinctive kind of phenomenal states, compared to cases of seeing not affected by conceptual thoughts. In fact, there is no feeling of visual clash between the high-level and the low-level properties of the resulting experience. Recognitional concepts alter the content of our perception, but they do not introduce any kind of twofold awareness of competing aspects.

Clearly, such a conclusion does not prevent in principle cognitive penetration from playing any role at all in other theories of pictorial experience. As shown before, Wollheim holds that the recognition of the depicted subject is influenced by complex cognitive states and background information.[9] However, he also maintains that our overall engagement with depictive representations has to be characterised as an irreducible perceptual state, namely seeing-in, whose distinctive mark is twofoldness. This account exploits the idea of cognitive penetration to explain how figurative recognition takes place in a twofold seeing-in; therefore, Wollheim's strategy takes this latter notion as prior in order to define pictorial seeing. On the other hand, Walton does not entirely reject the intuition of twofoldness, but he aims at reassessing it in terms of a visual game of make-believe, that is, a visual experience affected

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8 Dorsch (2016) appears to endorse a similar point when he claims that «while cognitive penetration involves only one object of awareness, seeing-in involves two distinct ones (i.e. the picture and the depicted)» (p. 224).
9 Voltolini (2015, p. 157) also talks about the recognitional fold of a seeing-in experience as being cognitively penetrated for what concerns both its content and its phenomenal character.

by the concepts provided by an imaginative state. As I have tried to show, there are strong reasons to question this project. The point, as Dominic Lopes (2003 p. 221) rightly argues, is that the divide between non-conceptual and conceptual contents of experience does not match with the one between being aware of the pictorial surface and of the depicted subject. If we do not possess a relevant concept to define what we are seeing, we fail in recognising it according to that concept. This does not entail, however, that we fail to recognise a picture *as a picture* just because we do not possess the concept of what is depicted: we are simply failing to recognise its subject.

4. Conclusions

Rather than escaping Wollheim's objections about visual make-believe, Walton's appeal to propositional imagination ends up running into trouble. Taken as just a descriptive interpretation of the depicted scene, this kind of imagining fails to provide the right connection between the actual experience of the prop and the fictional experience of the subject: such an account seems unable to capture the *visual* character of pictorial recognition. It does not get much better if visual make-believe is construed as imaginatively penetrated perceptual recognition. Here, our experience of the depictive surface is influenced by the conceptual content of our propositional imagination, so that the properties of the subject become visually salient to us. However, this strategy faces problems in accommodating the twofold character of pictorial make-believe, which according to Walton lies in imagining *an experience*, and not just an object, as another one. When it comes to pictorial phenomena, our intertwined visual awareness of both the marked surface and the subject cannot be explained solely in terms of a passage from non-conceptualised to conceptualised experience. Given the relevance of our intuitions concerning the visual nature and the twofoldness of pictorial experience, the difficulty to preserve them casts serious doubts on Walton's theory of visual make-believe.

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