The Paradox of Interactive Fiction

A New Approach to Imaginative Participation in Light of Interactive Fiction Experiences

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De paradox van interactieve fictie

Een nieuwe benadering van verbeelding in het licht van interactieve fictie-ervaringen

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"My friends are my power!"
– Sora, *Kingdom Hearts* (Square Enix 2002)

Writing this dissertation on our interactions with the fictional worlds, characters, and objects represented in videogames was in many ways a fun endeavor. This is the case not only because it involved some actual videogame play, but also because I learned a lot in the last three years. I sincerely hope this dissertation also provides its readers with interesting insights, and helpfully contributes to the philosophy of fiction, which still has a remarkable focus on non-interactive works of literature, theatre, and film. At least in that way, my fearful encounters with zombies, stressful rescue missions of aliens, and countless deaths also gain some relevance outside of the respective fictional worlds in which they occurred.

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Kendall Walton has reminded us of the logical oddities of our relations with fictional characters. For example, we can talk of them affecting us but not, in any straightforward way, of us affecting them. They seem to be able to induce in us sorrow, fear, contempt, delight and embarrassment. But we have no comeback with them. We cannot thank them, congratulate them or frighten them, or help, advise, rescue or warn them. There is a logical gap between us and them and those who think that fiction and reality are inextricably mixed should reflect on just how wide this gap is. Exploring the nature of the gap will be at the heart of this investigation.

(Lamarque 1981, 292)

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Introduction

> *I cannot have a feeling of impotent anger that I can do nothing to stop Mercutio's death, as I might have if I were physically prevented from intervening in a real fight. I cannot feel ashamed at my cowardice in doing nothing, since fear cannot prevent me interfering on Mercutio's behalf. And so on. The reason I can do nothing to save Mercutio has nothing to do with my capacities, or physical or temporal position, but has everything to do with the kind of reality Mercutio has.*
>
> – Michael Weston on the paradox of fiction (1975, 84)

> *I failed to save Solaire. Oh god I killed all Sunlight Maggots but unfortunately missed one. And that one is the one that infected him oh my god. I can't believe I missed something that has glowing red eyes. I'm sorry my friend. I'll save you next time.*
>
> – Reddit user bokuwanivre on failing to save the Knight Solaire in *Dark Souls* (FromSoftware 2011)[1]

Many discussions within philosophy of fiction are grounded in the idea that there is an "asymmetry between physical and psychological interaction between the real world and fictional worlds" (Lamarque 1981, 292). While the possibility and specificities of our psychological interactions, such as imaginings, emotions, and desires about or towards fictional characters and events, have been investigated at length by philosophers of fiction, the possibility of causal interaction with fictional worlds has been dismissed as simply impossible. As Kendall Walton writes: "We cannot kiss or kick or save something that is believed or wished or said or denied to exist but does not; neither can we interact in any of these ways with something that exists only fictionally" (1990, 205). As illustrated by the example above, however, the noted 'asymmetry' between psychological and physical interactions with fiction is a consequence of the nature of philosophical discussions on fiction rather than the nature of fiction itself. The idea of asymmetry originated in and is sustained by an exclusive focus on works of fiction that are typically non-interactive, such as works of literature, theatre, and film. Videogames, however, and maybe even more obviously virtual reality and augmented reality games, often present their players with fictional worlds that can be entered, interacted with, and altered. Mercutio and Solaire are both fictional characters, but while Mercutio cannot be saved, Solaire can not only be saved, but also conversed with, befriended, or killed. As interactive fictions, videogames offer new ways of experiencing fictional characters, events, and worlds, which go against

1 There is currently no consensus on how academics should reference videogames, even within game studies. In this thesis, I make use of the reference system described in Gualeni, Fassone, and Linderoth (2019).

the ingrained idea that the very nature of fictional worlds makes any kind of interaction impossible. With the goal of re-examining and revising such ideas, this thesis will focus on interactive fiction experiences, and more specifically on the fiction experience connected to the playing of videogames.

Both from the perspective of game studies and philosophy of videogames, the fictional dimension of videogames has already been thematized and discussed in detail (cf. Juul 2005; Aarseth 2007; Tavinor 2009; Robson and Meskin 2012b, 2016; Patridge 2017; Wildman and McDonnell 2017; Bartel 2018; Willis 2019). Yet, these works on videogames as interactive fictions are largely left unacknowledged within debates that generally concern the imaginative experience of, emotions towards, and potential interactions with fictional worlds. Indeed, although videogames are nowadays a (if not the most) prominent and popular fictional medium, philosophical debates about our experiences of fiction often make no mention of them at all. One of the most striking examples in this regard is the on-going discussion on the paradox of fiction, or the question how we can be emotionally moved by fictional characters and events if we know they do not actually exist. Within this discussion, videogames are not only not mentioned, but there is also a disregard for the interactive possibilities of fiction in general. The general idea within philosophy of fiction is that there is a logical or ontological gap between fictional worlds and the real world, so that any emotion or desire we might feel towards fictional particulars cannot motivate any actions directed at them (Walton 1978b; Lamarque 1981; Neill 1993; Currie and Ravenscroft 2002). Even contemporary philosophers of fiction still explicitly claim that it is simply impossible to even try to manipulate objects, interact with characters, or change the course of events that are merely represented (Matravers 2014; Friend 2016; Stock 2017). In the end, our experiences of interactive fictional works such as videogames are all too often overlooked within philosophical discussions on fiction.

In this thesis, I argue that videogames can helpfully shed new light on the relation between fiction, imagination, emotions, desires, and actions. One aim of this dissertation will thus be to use experiences of interactive fictions to unmask certain established ideas within philosophy of fiction as being mere consequences of the exclusive focus on non-interactive forms of fiction. I will re-examine problems that have been discussed within philosophy of fiction, such as the paradox of fiction and the puzzle of imaginative desires, with specific regard to the fictional experience of videogames. Doing this, I will also reveal specific problems that originate in the often-overlooked possibility of interaction with fictional words. More specifically, I want to show that not only the already well-investigated psychological interactions with fiction cause puzzles and paradoxes, but that there is also a specific paradox connected to the possibility of our apparent physical interactions with fictional worlds. After all, videogames allow us to shoot zombies, although we know these zombies do not actually exist. But how is that possible, what do we actually act on if there are no zombies, and why are we even motivated to do this? This problem, which I will call the paradox of interactive fiction, will form the focus of this dissertation.

Structure of this Dissertation

In this thesis, I will explore the particularities of the interactive and self-involving imaginative experiences that videogames can offer to their players, and the distinct ways in which such experiences evoke emotions, actions, and desires towards fictional game worlds. Throughout the five chapters of this thesis, I will discuss, re-examine, and ultimately modify the way philosophers of fiction have conceptualized the imaginative experience of fiction, in light of the interactive fiction experience.

In chapter one, I clarify what I mean when I say that videogames are works of fiction. For this purpose, I first describe two influential definitions of fiction, which are both grounded in the belief that fiction has a special connection to imagination. The first definition I describe is Walton's make-believe account of fiction (1990), which says that something is a fiction when it has the function to serve as a prop in a game of make-believe. Secondly, I discuss the fiction definition that is based on authorial intention (cf. Currie 1990; Stock 2017), which says that something is a work of fiction when it is created with the intention that its content be imagined. I show how videogames can be defined as works of fiction according to both of these fiction theories. I then point out the specific value of taking on a Waltonian perspective on fiction when talking about interactive works of fiction such as videogames. Walton's fiction theory allows for a special focus on the imaginary activity and participation of the fiction consumer, which is especially relevant when investigating works the content of which depends on the decisions made by the one appreciating it. Ultimately, I argue that the interesting question when investigating the relation between fiction, imagination, emotions, and actions is not whether videogames are works of fiction, but whether players experience them as fictions. I conclude this chapter by applying Walton's fiction theory to describe videogames as offering fiction experiences.

In chapter two, I elaborate on the role of imagination in the videogame experience. More specifically, I argue against the claim that imagination is not necessary in videogames because what would need to be imagined by players is directly represented for them to see or believe. Derek Matravers, for example, argues that fiction appreciators need not imagine what they can already perceive (2014). This could mean that videogames, as visual fictions, do not ask of their players to imagine the fictional worlds and events they present, but merely show these worlds and events. Geert Gooskens, on the other hand, specifically argues against the need of imagination for players to feel immersed in videogame worlds (2012). He argues that videogames represent the player's presence in the fictional world, thus making imagination obsolete for immersion. I argue against both of these claims, and show that imagination is crucial both for the formation of mental models about what happens in videogame worlds, and for the feeling of presence in these worlds. In a last part of this chapter, I describe Kathleen Stock's theory of fiction, which says that even elements of fictional works that can be directly perceived or believed by appreciators, can mandate imaginings and be part of the fiction (2016). I then apply this reasoning to show that videogames and, more importantly, augmented and virtual reality games present fictional content, even if some of that content is also believed or perceived

to be true by players (such as their own bodily involvement, or the presence of real-life places within the game).

In chapter three, I turn my attention towards the ways in which works of fiction evoke emotions. This chapter starts with an exploration of the debates on the paradox of fiction, or the question how we can be emotionally moved by fictional characters and events, while we know that they do not actually exist (Radford 1975). I discuss the three most influential solutions to this paradox: the illusion theory, the make-believe theory (Walton 1990), and the thought theory (Lamarque 1981). Afterwards, I apply the paradox of fiction to the experience of videogames, which is often characterized by an identification with a fictional character, a feeling of presence within the fictional world, and, most importantly, the possibility of interaction with and manipulation of fictional objects, events, and characters in the game world. I discuss how these specific characteristics have not been considered in debates on the paradox of fiction, and how emotions towards fiction have therefore been mistakenly interpreted as strictly incapable of motivating the performance of actions towards fictional objects and characters. I thus reassess the discussed solutions to the paradox of fiction while taking into account the emotional experiences of interactive fictions such as videogames. In a last part of this chapter, I also explore a paradox concerning the ludic or gameplay emotions players of videogames might feel, and which can also be interpreted as being in some way paradoxical (Juul 2013). After all, why do player love playing games that make them experience failure over and over? I specify how such gameplay emotions originate in a ludic attitude taken on by the player, which is similar but not identical to the make-believe attitude in which emotions towards fiction originate.

In chapter four, I discuss the so-called paradox of interactive fiction, or the question how we can perform actions towards characters, events, and objects we know to be fictional. When playing videogames, players often say that they 'shoot zombies', 'catch Pokémon', 'save aliens', etc. What do they mean, however, if they know that the zombies, Pokémon, and aliens do not really exist? I start this chapter by describing the three claims that make up the paradox of interactive fiction. The first says that it is impossible to act on fictional objects, the second that videogame objects (like zombies) are fictional, and the third that players act on these videogame objects. Although these claims seem to be plausible at first sight, they cannot be true at the same time as a contradiction would follow. In the second part of this chapter, I discuss two possible solutions to this paradox. The first one consists in saying that the game objects at which player actions are aimed are not fictional objects, but rather virtual, or real, computer-generated objects (Aarseth 2007: Sageng 2012; Chalmers 2017). The second one is based on Walton's make-believe theory (1990), and consists in the claim that the actions we perform towards fictional game objects are not real actions, but fictional actions. In the end, I follow a largely Waltonian strategy and acknowledge that, while it is impossible to actually manipulate fictional objects, we can fictionally interact with them. Moreover, I specify that such fictional actions can be influenced by the emotions we feel towards fiction, in ways that were already partly discussed in the previous chapter.

Finally, in chapter five, I zoom in on two concepts that are crucial to solving the paradox of interactive fiction: fictional actions and imaginative desires. First of all, I specify what it means for works of fiction to involve their appreciators within the fictional world they present. With specific regard to videogames, I describe both the nature of immersion or incorporation within videogame worlds (Calleja 2011), and the way in which players imaginatively identify with a certain proxy within these worlds and form a so-called "I-in-the-gameworld" (Vella 2015). Unlike Walton, I claim that self-involvement and imaginings about oneself do not play a role in every interaction with works of fiction, but are rather a specific characteristic of particular fiction experiences, such as those of many videogames. I then use my description of imaginative involvement to modify the concepts of actions and desires towards fiction as they have been described within philosophy of fiction. First of all, I redefine the concept of fictional actions as it is described by Walton, as Walton's view is often adopted by game researchers (Tavinor 2009; Bateman 2011). Walton takes any appreciator who somehow interacts with a fictional work to be performing fictional actions: a reader who reads a fictional story fictionally reads about true events, a viewer of a painting of boats actually pretends to look at real boats, and a child picking up a doll fictionally picks up a baby (Walton 1990, 215-226). I argue, however, that to perform fictional actions, appreciators need to play a game of make-believe in which they, themselves, are involved. And this is not, as Walton says, always the case when interacting with fictional works. After redefining the notion of fictional actions, I focus on the desires motivating these fictional actions. Why do people shoot zombies, catch Pokémon, and save aliens if they know that they are not actually shooting, catching, and saving anyone? Taking into account the self-involving imaginings that many videogames evoke, I reappreciate the often rejected concept of imaginative desires, which refers to the desire-like imaginings we can have with regard to the fate of fictional characters and the course of fictional events (Kind 2011). My aim is to show how this concept can be helpful to explain the desires players feel whilst immersed in fictional game worlds and to clarify how players are motivated to perform fictional actions within these worlds.

The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to give a comprehensive and general account of our appreciation of works of fiction, be they interactive or not, while acknowledging the particular characteristics of different kinds of fiction experiences. In the conclusion to this thesis, I therefore summarize my findings and distinguish between different categories of fiction experiences, depending on whether or not this experience is interactive and/or self-involving. For each of these categories, I specify in which way appreciators deal with the fictional worlds they are presented with, how imagination is involved in the fiction experience, and in what ways emotions, desires, and actions are part of the fiction experience. In the end, I aim to solve both the paradox of fiction and the paradox of interactive fiction by focusing attention on often-overlooked particularities and varieties of imaginative experiences evoked by particular works of fiction.

1. The Fictional Experience of Videogames

The goal of this thesis is to investigate the specificities of the relation between imagination, fiction, emotions, and actions. For this purpose, I aim to investigate the videogame experience, as this experience has not only been underexamined within the philosophy of fiction, but can also show us the way emotions and actions towards fiction interact with each other. To elucidate the fiction experience in general, I want to apply existing fiction theories, which were developed to clarify the experience of more traditional fictional media such as literature, theatre, and film, to the videogame experience. I will then investigate the adequacy of these theories to explain both our emotions and actions towards videogame characters and events. For this aim to be of any use at all, though, there is one question that needs to be answered first: Are videogames even fictions? In this thesis, I will focus on games belonging to the class of *interactive fictions*. However, as the notion of interactive fiction as such is quite problematical when viewed from the perspective of the philosophy of fiction, I believe an explanation of the way I interpret the concept of fiction is in place.

First of all, there is no agreement on whether videogames are fictions (see, most notably Aarseth 2007 and Chalmers 2017), let alone on how we could interpret their fictional status. The great majority of works that approach videogames as fictions makes use of a Waltonian framework to describe and explain the fictionality of videogame worlds (Tavinor 2009a; Bateman 2011; Robson and Meskin 2012b; Wildman and McDonnell 2019). It is, however, noteworthy that on many other occasions, this very same framework is rejected because it is deemed as giving an overly complicated or inadequate description of our experiences of fiction. Philosophers tend to reject Walton's fiction theory when it comes to, for example, the extreme broadness of the Waltonian fiction definition (Stock 2016, 206), Walton's idea that experiencing fictions consists of the playing of make-believe games (Carroll 1990, 74-75), his conviction that imagination is necessary to interpret almost any kind of visual representation (Matravers 2014, 116), and his interpretation of emotions towards fiction as quasi-emotions (Lamarque 1981, 295). Therefore, whenever videogames are clarified as fictional media, this clarification is accompanied by the expression of doubt about or even outright rejection of some elements of the fiction theory that is being used to do this. Philosophers often feel the need to explicitly limit their claim that videogames are fictions to the claim that videogames are *Walt-fictions* (the term Stacie Friend (2008, 154) invented to denote works that are fiction in the way Walton describes it) (cf. Robson and Meskin 2012, 201; Wildman and McDonnell 2019). In this way, they often implicitly add the condition '*if* one was to accept Walton's theory of fiction' to the claim that videogames can be interpreted as fictions.

Secondly, the very notion of 'interactive fiction' seems to clash with some of the core ideas on fiction developed within the philosophy of fiction. This thesis will focus on one paradox in particular that is specifically caused by this concept: the paradox of

interactive fiction. The notion 'interactive fiction' seems to suggest that it is possible to interact with (the content of works of) fiction, but, as we will see shortly, since one of the main characteristics of fictional objects is that they have no actual existence, but merely an existence that needs to be imagined, it is unclear how anyone would ever be able to interact with them. How would you even touch, manipulate, or change the course of objects and events that are described in works of fiction and that have no actual existence? This very question, and the accompanying idea that acting on fictional objects must be impossible, sometimes leads to an interpretation of videogames as not belonging to the class of fictional works, or at least as being non-fictional as far as they are interactive. Espen Aarseth famously said that the presence of objects that can be interacted with in videogames indicate that videogames are not really works of fiction, but rather belong to the category of the virtual or the "simulated" (2007, 37). His theory will be discussed in chapter four as one possible solution to the paradox of interactive fiction. For now, however, it should be mentioned that Aarseth's conceptualization of videogames as virtual is based on a limited understanding of what fiction is: he uses an unfortunately simple dictionary definition of fiction as "invented phenomena" (2007, 38). Videogame philosophers and researchers often seem unwilling to dig deep into the long debates on fiction definitions which philosophers of fiction have had in the past decades. Philosophers of fiction, on the other hand, often ignore the existence of videogames when specifying the characteristics of fictional works (Matravers 2014; Stock 2016; Friend 2016). In this chapter, I want to investigate the fictional status of videogames from the perspective of the long history of fiction-defining within the philosophy of fiction. I will thus start from a discussion of a much broader question: What is fiction?

The purpose of this chapter can be broken down into two sub goals. First of all, I would like to investigate existing fiction definitions and show why, if we make use of these definitions, videogames would easily fit into the field of the philosophy of fiction. Secondly, and more importantly, I will argue that the question 'Are videogames fiction?' is, ultimately, only of secondary importance. The interesting question when we want to investigate the relation between fiction, imagination, emotions, and actions, is whether we *experience* videogames as fictions. In line with this, I will claim that, both for the investigation of videogames and for the planned research in this thesis, the Waltonian theory of fiction is quite useful, as it already marks the importance of fiction consumers' *participation* in works of fiction, and describes and clarifies the ways in which appreciators *interact* with fiction. I will not, however, exclusively take on a Waltonian perspective. Throughout the chapters that follow, I will pinpoint flaws in Waltonian fiction theory, show the strength of some arguments of Walton's critics, and amend some of Walton's basic concepts to better fit and clarify the interactive fiction experience.

1.1 Defining Fiction: An Overview

What is fiction? Although fiction and our experience of it form the research object of the philosophy of fiction, philosophers within this field seem to have a hard time answering this question. The distinction between fiction and non-fiction is an integral part of a lot of philosophical discussions, and yet there is no consensus when it comes to the question how exactly to make this distinction. There are no formal qualities on the basis of which we can distinguish fictional from non-fictional works: the perceptual inputs typically caused by fictions do not differ noticeably from those caused by nonfictions (Currie 1990, 2; Matravers 2014, 26-27; Stock 2016, 212). Both fiction and nonfiction can be presented in the form of text, (moving) images, spoken words, etc. When it comes to the represented content, on the other hand, a first and obvious characteristic of fiction seems to be that its content is untrue, and its descriptions do not refer to real persons and events. Merely looking at truth and reference is not sufficient to distinguish fiction from nonfiction, however. As Stacie Friend says: "Many works of fiction refer to real people, places, things and events, and many works of nonfiction make false claims, whether through ignorance or deception" (2008, 151). Most importantly, defining fiction as that which is untrue or refers to non-existents entails a failure to recognize the difference between fiction and lies. Fiction is unlike lies, as we are not usually misled or deceived by fiction. That is because, unlike non-fiction and lies, we simply tend to not believe everything that happens in fictional works. This important insight about our experience of fiction lies at the basis of an idea with which the vast majority of philosophers of fiction agree: that non-fiction is connected to belief, but fiction is connected to imagination instead.[2] This idea was introduced by Walton (1978a; 1990) and led to a near consensus within the philosophy of fiction that fiction should be characterized in terms of its relation to *imagination* (Matravers 2014, 2-3).[3] The fiction definitions that will be described in this chapter offer two different versions of the contemporary idea that fiction is *that which is to be imagined* (and not believed).

Something authors within philosophy of fiction are surprisingly vague on, however, is their definition of imagination. In *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Walton describes imagination as make-believe. When wondering whether we need to be more precise when defining either imagination or make-believe, however, Walton dismisses the issue, stating: "Yes, if we can. But I can't. Fortunately an intuitive understanding of what it is to imagine, sharpened somewhat by the observations of this chapter, is sufficient for us to proceed with our investigation" (1990, 19). After having considered, and dismissed,

2 An exception is Derek Matravers, who believes the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is not only unhelpful, but can also not be made based on our imaginative activities (Matravers 2014). Part of his theory will be discussed in chapter 2.1.

3 Consequently, this idea that fiction and imagination are inherently connected discredited theories which defined works as fiction based on their "lack of semantic connections with the world" (Currie 1990, 5), and pretense theories which defined discourse as fictional when its utterer merely pretended to assert it (Currie 1990, 7). These types of fiction definitions will not be further discussed here, as Currie (1990) does an admirable job in discussing and refuting them.

some possible characteristics of imagining, Walton concludes: "'Imagining' can, if nothing else, serve as a placeholder for a notion yet to be fully clarified" (1990, 21). This inability to define imagination more precisely is still apparent in contemporary works on fiction. As a consequence, imagination has become a very broad and unspecific notion, culminating in Noël Carroll's remark that imagination has become "the junkyard of the mind".[4] Even Amy Kind's introduction to the *Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination* (Kind 2016a), which has the express intention of clarifying the concept of imagination, ends up rather vaguely situating imagination within our cognitive architecture, openly admitting that no chapter in this collected volume provides "a clear and univocal sense of what imagination is" (Kind 2016a, 1). In the end, Kind only describes some general points of consensus about imagination, with the added statement that "there is considerably more consensus on the issue of what imagination is not than there is on the issue of what imagination is" (Kind 2016a, 2). Lastly, it is striking that imagination is often defined on the basis of its connection to fiction or fictional objects. As Kendall Walton said: "Imagining aims at the fictional as belief aims at the true" (1990, 41). This has the danger of turning the definitions of imagination and fiction into circular statements: fiction is that which needs to be imagined, and imagination is a mental act aimed at the fictional.

I am thus faced with writing a thesis on fiction, a concept which is defined based on our activity of imagining, which itself is seldom described in a precise way. This issue becomes even more complex since the intention of this thesis is to *rephrase* the way imagination has been used within the philosophy of fiction, to be able to account for the (imaginative) activities connected to our interactive fiction experiences. Some philosophers describe imagination as an 'offline' state (Currie 1995, 144) and many of them point out that imagination is bracketed from behavioral outputs (Ibid.; Matravers 2014, 26-27; Friend 2016, 220). This presumed characteristic of imagination is, however, at least partly incompatible with the research object of this thesis: interactive fiction, which grants its users agency within a fictional (or merely imagined) world. This means that the way I will describe imagination throughout this work might clash (and deliberately so) with the way the concept is used in some of the sources I cite. Various aspects and specifics of our imaginative activities will thus only be clarified more precisely throughout the next chapters, when discussing several aspects of the interactive fiction experience. Therefore, for now, a limited and preliminary conceptualization of imagination must do. I will specify what I mean with 'imagination' in this thesis by generally describing the act of imagining based on characteristics about which philosophers of fiction have reached a minimal agreement.

There seems to be a consensus on the fact that imagination can be defined by contrasting it to *belief*. Although both imagination and belief are considered to be *inten-*

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4 As Amy Kind reports, Carroll made this remark during *2015 Pacific Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association* (Kind 2016a, 1).He was, at the time, commenting on Derek Matravers's *Fiction and Narrative* (2014), a work which criticizes the notion of imagination as it has been used within philosophy of fiction to distinguish fiction and nonfiction.

tional, in the sense that they are always *about* something (Kind 2016a, 3), they differ in the way this intentional object is experienced by the imaginer or believer. While beliefs aim at truth, imaginings are "not constitutively constrained by truth" (Kind 2016a, 3). A state of affairs which we know does not truly exist can easily be imagined, but cannot be believed. In line with this, imagination is often described as a kind of *thought* (Carroll 1990; Stock 2016, 206). As Noël Carroll explains:

> To have a belief is to entertain a proposition assertively; to have a thought is to entertain it non-assertively. Both beliefs and thoughts have propositional content. But with thoughts the content is merely entertained without commitment to its being the case; to have a belief is to be committed [to] the truth of the proposition. (Carroll 1990, 80)[5]

In similar fashion, Elizabeth Picciuto and Peter Carruthers describe imagination as "a form of non truth directed thought" (Picciuto and Carruthers 2016, 314). The consensus about imagination within the philosophy of fiction seems to be that imagination does not have a connection to truth and is not bound by the real existence of its intentional object. This idea is not exclusive to philosophy of fiction, however. Edmund Husserl already wrote about acts of imagining as non-positing acts, describing them as a kind of judgements which lack the typical affirmative quality of judgements. When describing the imagination, Husserl also inherently connects our experience of fiction to our acts of imagining. He defines our imaginative activity by describing the way we deal with the content of fictional novels:

> Judgements are passed in a certain manner, but they lack the character of genuine judgements: we neither believe, deny or doubt what is told us - mere 'imaginings' replace genuine judgements. [...] We rather enact, instead of a judgement affirming the state of affairs, the qualitative modification, the neutral putting in suspense of the same state of affairs. (2013, 165)

In Husserlian terms, imagining can be thought of as "an experience of something in the mode of 'nonactuality' or 'irreality' (Unwirklichkeit)" (Jansen 2016, 70). Similarly, Sartre talks about the imagination as a consciousness that posits its object as a nothingness (1940, 11). This view of imagination as an experience that is neutral to the truth or existence of its intentional object also connects to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's idea of the suspension of disbelief. Coleridge describes this suspension as a state of "negative faith, which simply permits the images presented to work by their own force, without either denial or affirmation of their real existence by the judgement" (*Biographia Literaria*,

5 Carroll is unwilling to use the term 'imagination' because he thinks this solely refers to an active, content-creating activity. This is probably what Currie and Ravenscroft meant when talking about creative imagination (2002, 9). The reason why Carroll talks about 'thoughts' when talking about our experiences of literature or film, is the fact that we let our thought-contents be determined by the texts or images, without needing to make up content for ourselves (1990, 88). This, however, perfectly fits with what most philosophers interpret imagination to be like, and what Currie and Ravenscroft would call *recreative* imagination (2002, 8-9). Carroll himself suggests that when 'imagination' is used in his sense of "entertaining a thought nonassertively", it could be used to describe our fiction experience (1990, 88). This is what I do here. Finally, it is noteworthy that Carroll himself sometimes uses 'thought' and 'imagination' as interchangeable terms (1990, 80).

XXII). When imagining, both disbelief and belief are suspended, as the imaginer is simply not interested in the truth value of the imagined state of affairs.

Lastly, although 'imagination' has the word 'image' at its root, I will not interpret imagining as an activity that necessarily involves mental imagery. Instead, I will use the word 'imagination' as a synonym of the word 'make-believe' (as both Walton (1990) and Currie (1990) also do). Following the taxonomy of imagination in *the Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*, I acknowledge the possibility of multiple kinds of imagining: propositional (or 'belief-like') imagining (imagining *that* there is a monster), sensory imagining (imagining the monster, how it looks, what it sounds like, etc.), and experiential imagining (imagining seeing or hearing the monster in first-person) (Kind 2016a, 5-6).

Based on these general characteristics of imagining, I will in this thesis make use of the following preliminary concept of imagination:

> Imagining a proposition or a state of affairs means thinking about it, either by entertaining a proposition, by generating mental imagery (which can be visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, etc.), or by projecting ourselves into the state of affairs, in the mode of *non-actuality*, that is: without actively affirming or denying its existence (or the existence of the objects it refers to) and without interest in its truth value.

Note that this definition of imagination also succeeds in distinguishing imagination from intending, wanting, hoping, dreading, which Picciuto and Carruthers remark a good definition of imagination should do (2016, 316). After all, we are still invested in the (future) truth value or existence of whatever we intend, hope, want, or dread. *Imagining* something, however, means we are inherently disinterested in its being true, having been true, or ever being true. Note that this does not necessarily mean that we lose all interest in plausibility, consistency, and coherence. As we will see later, the thing we are interested in when imagining something, is its *fictional* truth. We now have a general description of the activity that is used to define fiction within the philosophy of fiction.

In the next two parts I will focus on two kinds of definitions of fiction which are based on the connection between fiction and imagination. Although I will not go into all the specifics and the differences between various authors defending the same kind of definition, this overview of fiction definitions will include the general principles of the most influential fiction definitions within the philosophy of fiction. This also means that I will not focus on Matravers's dismissal of the link between fiction and imagination (2014), which will be discussed in the next chapter, or on Stacie Friend's insightful, but less clean-cut, definition of fiction as a genre (2012). First, I will discuss Kendall Walton's highly influential and controversial definition of fiction based on the notion of make-believe games. Secondly, I will, based on Kathleen Stock's categorization of fiction definitions (2016), group together and describe multiple fiction definitions that were formulated by philosophers who believe the key to defining a work as fiction lies in the intentions of its creator.

1.1.1 Kendall Walton: Fiction and Make-Believe

As said before, Walton was the one who launched the idea of defining fiction based on its connection with the imagination, or, as he calls it, make-believe. In *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Walton writes that something is a fiction when it has the function of serving as a prop in a game of make-believe (1990, 51). Make-believe games are, according to Walton, the key to understanding fiction. He models his entire fiction theory on the make-believe games children play. A famous example he describes is that of two boys, Eric and Gregory, playing a game in which they pretend that every tree stump they see is actually a bear (1990, 37). Eric and Gregory thus imagine things in a structured way: they agreed on a certain principle of generation ('all treestumps are bears'), according to which fictional truths are generated based on real features of real objects. The treestumps function as props: objects that truly exist, but prompt certain imaginings within the game of make-believe. These props make sure that the imaginings of people interacting with these props are not just free-floating fantasies: they are both structured and constrained by the features of the prop (1990, 38-39). When Eric and Gregory observe a particularly big treestump, for example, they will imagine as a result that there is a big bear in their vicinity.

Walton says that the appreciation of representations or fictions (he uses these terms interchangeably) involves precisely these kinds of constrained make-believe games. To understand the way we appreciate representational works of art, Walton says we need to look at the specific way in which we imaginatively participate in these works (1990, 208). When reading a novel, watching a play, or looking at a painting, for example, we play make-believe games in which we use the novel, the actions of the actors, and the painting as *props*. Certain principles of generation are then in play which structure our imaginings. Just like the size of the treestumps determined the size of the imagined bears, the objective features of representations determine what kind of imaginings are appropriate when appreciating them. In the case of the novel, for example, we imagine certain states of affairs to actually take place based on the sentences in this novel. Unlike the treestumps used as props in Eric and Gregory's game of make-believe, however, fictions are representations that have the *function* of serving as props like this. That is, unlike the treestumps, which are ad hoc props only used as props because Eric and Gregory agreed on this, a work of fiction actually has the function of prompting certain imaginings. Walton thus defines fictions as things (utterances, writings, visuals, etc.) which have the function of serving as a prop in a game of make-believe. When describing this 'function', Walton is deliberately vague:

> I was deliberately vague about the notion of function, introduced in §1.7. Fiction, understood in terms of function, inherits this vagueness. What is it for a work to have as one of its functions the job of serving as a prop in games of make-believe? What counts as fiction will depend on whether we understand a work's function to depend on how its maker intended or expected it to be used; or on how, typically or traditionally, it actually is used;

> or on what uses people regard as proper or appropriate (whether or not they do so use it); or on how, according to accepted principles, it is in fact to be used (whether or not people realize this); or on one or another combination of these. There is no point in trying to be precise here. (1990, 91)

One of the most important aspects of Walton's fiction definition, and the aspect that marks the difference with the intentional definitions of fiction which will be described in the next section, is the fact that a representation's 'function' is *not* exhaustively determined by (the intentions of) its creator. Walton says that the function of a work is rather relative to the social group in which this work is appreciated:

> Since functions are society relative, so is fiction. The ancient Greek myths may have been nonfiction for the Greeks but fiction for us. [...] Perhaps nonfiction for adults is sometimes fiction for children. The fuzziness of the distinction derives partly from uncertainties about what to take as the relevant social group. (1990, 91)

Walton adds that games of make-believe need not be social affairs at all, but are usually very personal: "Although the work that serves as a prop is publicly recognized and appreciated by many, each appreciator ordinarily plays his own game with it" (1990, 216). The principles of generation that are in force during a game of make-believe depend on what principles the appreciator playing the game accepts or takes to be in force (1990, 216). Moreover, a representation does not even need to be created with any intentions at all to be taken as a fiction by particular appreciators, as it may still function as a prop in a game of make-believe without there being any intention for it to do so.

> Contrast a naturally occurring story: cracks in a rock spelling out 'Once upon a time there were three bears...' The realization that the inscription was not made or used by anyone need not prevent us from reading and enjoying the story in much the way we would if it had been. It may be entrancing, suspenseful, spellbinding, comforting; we may laugh and cry. Some dimensions of our experiences of authored stories will be absent, but the differences are not ones that would justify denying that it functions and is understood as a full-fledged *story*. [...] To restrict 'fiction' in its primary sense to actions of fiction making would be to obscure what is special about stories that does not depend on their being authored, on their being vehicles of persons' storytellings. The basic concept of a *story* and the basic concept of *fiction* attach most perspicuously to objects rather than actions. (1990, 87)

Walton thus argues that naturally occurring cracks in a rock which coincidentally spell out a story, or a cloud that by chance takes on the form of an animal or a face, can also be fictions, as many appreciators will take them to function as props in games of make-believe:

> Stories do not often occur in nature, but fictional pictures do. We see faces, figures, animals in rock patterns and clouds. The patterns or clouds are not vehicles of anyone's acts of picturing, of fiction making. But to rule that this automatically disqualifies them as pictures or that it makes them such only in a secondary sense would be to slight their role as props. (1990, 87)

A fiction is thus something that has the function to serve as a prop in a game of make-believe. What is fictional in a certain work is that which is imagined within a game of make-believe that uses this work as a prop. Or, as Wildman and Woodward summarize Walton's definition of fictionality: "[T]he fictionality of p with respect to a work w is tied to the existence of a prescription to imagine p when one engages with w with the goal of fully appreciating that work" (2018, 116). As Wildman and Woodward note, however, this is only one out of two definitions of fictionality that play a prominent role in Walton's make-believe theory. After all, Walton makes a distinction between fictionality as connected to what is fictionally true in a given work, and fictionality as connected to what is true according to a specific, personal game of make-believe (Wildman and Woodward 2018, 116).

Indeed, for Walton, there is a difference between something being fictional and something being part of a work of fiction (Walton 1990, 60). For example, when reading *Gulliver's Travels*, it is fictional that whoever is reading this work is reading the journal of ship's physician Lemuel Gulliver (Walton 1990, 215). This is the right way to read this work: "It is almost inevitable that in reading it, one should understand it to be fictional that one is reading such a journal" (1990, 215). As Walton remarks, however, the reader of *Gulliver's Travels* is not a character in *Gulliver's Travels*. Therefore, nothing is fictional about them in the actual story of *Gulliver's Travels*. Or, as Walton writes: "It is fictional in the game the reader plays with *Gulliver's Travels*, not in *Gulliver's Travels* itself, that she reads the journal of a ship's physician" (1990, 215.). It is true in the reader's make-believe game, but not in the actual novel, that the journal is being read by someone. This shows that, for Walton, there is a clear distinction between things being fictional (imagined by the appreciator in a specific game of make-believe) and things being part of the fiction (fictionally generated by the work itself). Walton marks this difference by talking about two kinds of fictional worlds associated with our appreciations of representations. First of all, there is the game world, or the fictional world associated with the make-believe game we play with the work of fiction as a prop. Secondly, there is the work world, built up out of every fictional truth generated by the actual work itself. In other words: what is fictional in a work is that what is fictional in every possible authorized make-believe game that can be played with this work (Walton 1990, 60). *Official* or *authorized* games of make-believe are then simply defined as make-believe games in which it is the function of the work to serve as a prop. In simpler terms, what is true in the game world is everything the appreciator imagines in their personal game of make-believe based on the work they appreciate, while what is true in the work world is everything that is true in all the games of make-believe that are specifically mandated by the work in question.[6]

Let us apply this distinction to some examples. In the case of Eric and Gregory playing a game of make-believe featuring tree stumps, there is no work of fiction, and thus no work world, involved: the tree stumps are what Walton calls ad-hoc props, only used as such in the specific game Eric and Gregory agreed upon. Therefore, although many things are

6 In this thesis, I will refer to these terms as *Waltonian* game worlds and *Waltonian* work worlds

fictionally true in Eric and Gregory's game, like the fact that the boys see bears and run away from them, they are in no way part of a *work*. In this case, there is only a Waltonian game world, and no Waltonian work world at all. In contrast, when two people read *Harry Potter*, there is a work world involved which is, of course, the same in both cases: it consists of everything that is fictionally true according to the actual descriptions in the book. As there is no one-on-one relation between the actual work of fiction and the make-believe game appreciators of this work play, however, there is a gap between what is fictional in the Waltonian work world and what is fictional in the Waltonian game world:

> Billy could play a game according to which Harry is an evil child and Alice could play a game according to which Harry is a good child. Then even though their games of make-believe are tied to the same work of fiction, they are distinct insofar as they have different contents that are generated on the basis of different principles of generation. But not all games of make-believe are born equal: there is clearly some sense in which Billy is playing the wrong game and Alice is playing the right one. (Wildman and Woodward 2018, 119-120)

To use Walton's jargon: Billy is playing a game that is *unauthorized* for *Harry Potter*, while Alice is playing a make-believe game that is *authorized* for this particular work of fiction. We now have the terminology necessary to understand Walton's definition of fictionality: fictions or representations are *props* which are used in *make-believe games* and prompt imaginings based on certain accepted *principles* of *generation*. If the representation is used according to its *function*, the game of make-believe is *authorized*. Imaginings based on authorized games of make-believe that are prompted by the representation itself generate fictional truths that form the Waltonian *work world*. Imaginings based on the personal games of make-believe of a specific appreciator, who incorporates themselves in this game and might even misinterpret or misuse the representation in some way, generate the fictional truths that belong to the Waltonian *game world*.

In conclusion, a work of fiction is defined by Walton as something that has the function to serve as a prop in a game of make-believe, because its creator intended it to function like this, because there is a social practice pertaining to how it is used, because its function is typically interpreted like this, etc. What is 'fictional', however, can diverge from what is part of a fiction: people can make all kinds of things fictional in their games of make-believe. Some things can be fictional because they are imagined as such in a personal game of make-believe based on a certain work. If these imaginings are prompted by a certain representation that has the function to be used as a prop in imaginings like these, they are authorized (or official). These imaginings can also be unauthorized (or unofficial) for the work in question, because the appreciator of the work misunderstands it or deliberately interprets it differently. In both cases, however, what is imagined within the make-believe game becomes fictional. Lastly, in rare cases, Walton points out that certain states of affairs can be fictional because they are

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to avoid confusion. After all, the term 'game world' will often be used in this thesis to refer to the fictional world associated with specific videogames, as in statements like "In *Pacman*, the game world is a maze filled with ghosts."

prompted by props that were not intentionally created at all, as in the case of a cloud which prompts the imagining of a rabbit. Although fictions are objects that have the function to mandate certain imaginings, that which is fictional is thus not always that which was *created* to or *intended* to be imagined.

1.1.2 Definitions Based On Authorial Intention

Walton's fiction definition, which was probably never meant to be very precise and was rather formulated in the context of his general discussion of our experience of representations, received widespread criticism despite (or maybe due to) being highly influential within the philosophy of fiction. The main target of disapproval was the definition's extremely wide scope:

> [W]hat the theory gains in scope, it loses in ability to make satisfying distinctions: though it might be interesting to discover that clouds and novels appear in the same explanatory category, we presumably also want some more fine grained category into which to put novels – along with some poems, short stories, thought experiments, and so on – but not clouds or photographs. (Stock 2016, 206)

As Currie puts it, the main problem with Walton's fiction theory is that it does not distinguish between something's *being fiction* and it *being treated as fiction*. Currie states that "[i]f we don't make the distinction, we have to say that *The Origin of Species* would be fiction if some or most people adopted the attitude toward it appropriate to a reading of fiction: surely an unacceptable result" (Currie 1990, 38). We could indeed treat *The Origin of Species* as if it was fiction. But, for Currie, this would not turn this work into fiction. The same goes for cracks in a rock that coincidentally spell out a story: we might treat it as fiction, but ultimately, it is not (Currie 1990, 36). Currie's critique of Walton connects to the fact that an important part of the appreciation of fiction consists in the fiction consumer's consciousness of the *artificiality* of the fiction's content. The reader or viewer knows that this content was *created*, and interprets this content in line with this. As will be discussed later, the way readers, viewers, and players interpret fictional works is often influenced by their assumption that these works are *crafted* and that there is a creator that had a specific intention with them (Currie 1990, 76; see also part 1.2.2). The very word 'fiction' itself comes from the Latin word 'fingere', which means to form, to shape. Therefore, it might seem strange that something that was not created with any imaginative intention at all, like a cloud or a story appearing in naturally created cracks in rocks, could be called a *fiction*.

This is why some philosophers, following the example of Currie (1990), constructed fiction definitions in which the intention of a work's creator, and not the activity of the work's appreciator, is the decisive factor for calling this work fictional (Davies 2007, 43-48; Stock 2016, 213-215; Stock 2017). In these definitions "[f]iction is characterized, partly at least, as originating in a particular kind of authorial intention: an intention

that story content be imagined" (Stock 2016, 206). The main target of these definitions is not quite 'fiction' though, but rather 'the fictive utterance':

> A 'fictive utterance' is characterized as the sort of utterance where, if a sufficient number are present in a text, the whole counts, for that reason, as a fiction. That is, it's what we might call a 'fiction making unit' [...]. These accounts offer at least one necessary condition upon fiction, as a whole: it must contain fictive utterances. (Stock 2016, 205)

As Currie says: fiction requires fictive utterances. A fictive utterances, in its turn, is an utterance that is performed with a fictive *intent* (Currie 1990, 35). That means that a fictive utterance "*prescribes imagining*: in uttering, its author intends, and intends to communicate her intention, that the reader (or hearer) should imagine the utterance's content, as a response to understanding it" (Stock 2016, 205-206). Fiction is then that which produced by utterances that are made with the intention that their content be imagined (Currie 1990, 42). Whereas Walton's theory distinguishes between things being fictional (imagined in a game of make-believe) and being fictions (things that have the function to serve as a prop in a game of make-believe), intention-based theories define both fictions and that which is fictional as having content that is uttered with the express intention of it being imagined.

Note that the focus on 'utterances' should not be taken to mean that the intention-based definitions only talk about narratively structured fictions (Currie 1990, 38). It is true that most philosophers who describe an intention-based definition of fiction focus on *authorial* intentions and thus limit their definition to fictional *texts* (Stock 2016, 205). Currie, however, points out that this definition can just as easily be applied to visual media: "What is it that makes a painting, sculpture, or photograph fictional? I say it is this: that the artist intended the audience to make believe the content of what is represented" (Currie 1990, 39). In general, we could summarize that every representation the content of which is represented with the intention that it is imagined is a fictional representation.

More precisely, Currie offers the following definition of the fictive utterance (slightly altered here to account for fictional representations in visual media too), which is heavily influenced by Grice's account of the meaning of (actual) utterances:

> U's utterance [or representation] of S is fictive if and only if (iff) U utters [or represents] S intending that the audience will
>
> (1) recognize that S means P;
> (2) recognize that S is intended by U to mean P;
> (3) recognize that U intends them (the audience) to make believe that P;
> (4) make believe that P.
>
> And further intending that
>
> (5) (2) will be a reason for (3);
> (6) (3) will be a reason for (4)
>
> (Currie 1990, 31)[7]

7 Davies quotes this definition verbatim (2007, 43) and Stock's definition of fictional content

Although this seems like an overly complicated version of the simple idea that what is fiction is that which is uttered with the intention of being imagined, Currie has good reasons for the extra conditions he adds. After all, the intention-based definition of fiction is often dismissed as being an instance of the so-called intentional fallacy. This concept was originally introduced by Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946).[8] These authors suggested that it would be fallacious to base judgements about the success, value, or meaning of a literary work on knowledge that is external to the content of the work itself, especially knowledge about the intentions that the creator of the work had while writing it. Applying Wimsatt and Beardsley's argument to the intentional definition of fiction, the worry is that something (and anything) can become fictionally true in a given work as long as the author intends it to be true in his work of fiction. This would mean that a work of fiction cannot make anything fictional by itself: the appreciator of the work would always need to be informed about the actual intentions of its creator to know what actually happens within the fictional world represented in the work.

Gregory Currie's carefully crafted fiction definition is guarded against this critique. As Currie says, even if Arthur Conan Doyle, for example, had the firm belief and intention that Sherlock Holmes was actually a member of a peculiar race of aliens, this would have no consequences for our understanding of his stories:

> [H]e might have intended his audience to take his story of the distant, quirky, and highly intelligent Holmes as a story about one of these aliens (that's how these aliens are, according to Doyle's strange belief system). But even if Doyle's private correspondence revealed this intention, we would go wrong in concluding that it was true in the story that Holmes is an alien being. (Currie 1990, 109)

The reason for this is that "[t]o make a proposition P true in his fiction the author has to compose sentences that, against the background of relevant community belief, make it reasonable for the reader to infer that [P is fictionally true]" (Currie 1990, 109-110). That is: to make something fictionally true, authors must not only have the intention that the reader imagine what they utter, but also that the reader can *recognize* this intention. Only that which is uttered with the intention that the reader will (be able to) imagine its content is called fictional. Currie still argues that the intention of the author is decisive when defining something as fiction (something of which Wimsatt and Beardsley would likely still say it is an instance of the intentional fallacy), but at least does not argue that everything a writer intends to be fictional is therefore fictionally true in his work.

Lastly, to rule out some exceptional cases in which authors might prescribe imaginings about content that is actually true, most intention-based fiction definers add some extra conditions to their fiction definition. Currie adds the condition that "if the

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is, although slightly divergent from Currie's in its formulation, ultimately synonymous with the definition presented here (2017, 15).

8 For Currie's entire critique of Wimsatt and Beardsley's text on the intentional fallacy, see *The Nature of Fiction* (1990), p. 109-119.

work is true, then it is at most accidentally true" (Currie 1990, 46). Davies adds that a proposition can be fictional in a work even if it is true, as long as "[t]hat proposition being true is not the *reason* for its inclusion in the narrative" (2007, 46). Stock adds the condition that, although some utterances in a work might be true, the entirety of the work can still be called a fiction as long as these true utterances are connected to utterances the content of which is invented and intended to be imagined (2016, 213; this idea will be further discussed in chapter 2.3). Although these theories thus differ in the extra conditions they say are necessary for something to be fiction, they can be grouped together for the purpose of this thesis.[9] After all, they all agree on the fact that for something to be fiction, there needs to be an *intention* for it to be imagined. This definition, together with the added extra conditions, narrows down Walton's broad category of fiction/representation, and thereby succeeds better in capturing the folk concept of what fiction is (something which Walton did not try to do with the fiction theory he outlines in *Mimesis*) (Stock 2016, 206). Moreover, the intention-based definition of fiction grasps and explains the fact that there is a *right* way to interpret works of fiction. Whereas Walton's description of which games of make-believe are authorized or official, based on the 'function' of a work of fiction, is pretty vague, intention-based definitions of fiction allow us to say that a reader of a novel does something inherently *wrong* when they imagine a story that was not intended to be imagined by the writer of this novel. It is simply not fictional that, for example, Harry Potter is an evil child, despite any reader imagining he is.[10] Only what was uttered with the recognizable intention that it be imagined can truly be called fictional.

A last definition of fiction that I want to discuss in this section is that of Lamarque and Olsen (1994). Although their description of fiction is taken to belong to the class of fiction-definitions based on authorial intention (Stock 2016, 205), even by the authors themselves (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, 45), I believe their theory diverts from fiction definitions based on authorial intention such as Currie's, Davies's and Stock's. Lamarque and Olsen explicitly describe fiction as a *practice*: "[T]he fictive dimension of stories (or narratives) is explicable only in terms of a rule-governed practice, central

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9 Another difference between some of these theories is whose intentions are taken to determine what is fictional. Stock, for example, argues for *extreme intentionalism* or *actual author intentionalism*, which "characterizes fictional content in terms of what the actual author intended" (2017, 14). Currie believes it is the intentions of the implied author that determine what is true in a fictional narrative (Currie 2010, 25-26) with the implied author being "the agent who we imagine produced this narrative; an agent with intentions corresponding to the implicatures it is reasonable for readers to attribute to the author given relevant background knowledge" (Currie in Maes 2017, 214). I do not go into more detail about this difference because Stock's and Currie's ideas about what fiction or fictional content is are ultimately similar. This becomes apparent if we compare Stock's basic definition of fictional content with Currie's aforementioned definition: "An author Au's utterance x (or set of utterances S) has fictional content that p, if and only if: Au utters x (or S) intending that i) x (or S) should cause F-imagining that p in her intended readership R; ii) R should recognize this intention; and iii) R's recognition of this intention should function as part of R's reason to F-imagine that p" (Stock 2017, 15).

10 Walton would say Harry being evil is, in this case, fictionally true in the personal make-believe game of this reader, but not in the world described in the actual *Harry Potter* stories: it is

to which are a certain mode of utterance (fictive utterance) and a certain complex of attitudes (the fictive stance)" (1994, 32). At first sight, both the fictive utterance and the fictive stance seem strongly interwoven with the intention of the fiction-creator: the fictive utterance is something that is uttered with the intention of being imagined, and the fictive stance is an attitude appreciators of works take on when they recognize the fiction-creator wants them to imagine their work (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, 45). This is perfectly compatible with what Currie argues (Currie 1985, 387). However, Lamarque and Olsen significantly nuance their position when they say that the fiction-creating intention can also be an intention the *appreciator* of a work has, thus considerably closing the gap between their and Walton's treatment of fiction:

> *[A]ssigning an object a role* in a game of make-believe is as much a kind of making – and intentional action – as the construction of a prop in a more literal sense. Walton's examples of the 'naturally occurring story' (the cracks in the rock that by coincidence spell out 'Once upon a time there were three bears') and the 'natural objects' like clouds and constellations which we often treat as representations do not establish the case against making an intention. It is not until someone deliberately does something with these natural phenomena, at least adopt an appropriate stance towards them, that they become fictions. They are *made* into fictions by this purposive attitude on a specific occasion. (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, 48; emphasis original)

Lamarque and Olsen's treatment of fiction seems to possess all the advantages I will ascribe to Walton's theory in the next sections. It does so, however, only because it becomes almost indistinguishable from Walton's theory: taking on the 'fictive stance' becomes virtually synonymous with the (intentional) playing of Waltonian make-believe games, and the focus is put on the activity of the fiction appreciator instead of on the characteristics of the work and its creation.[11] In the end, Lamarque and Olsen go even farther than Walton. Although they argue that an object *being intended* or *having* the *function* to be treated as a fiction is not enough for it to be called a work of fiction, they seem to suggest that it can be called a work of fiction anyway when someone approaches it as such (1994, 48). Their description of when something is fiction thus again makes place for a description of when something is *treated* as fiction. As Lamarque and Olsen say:

> [T]here are circumstances in which the act of treating an object or text as fiction can constitute the act of making the object or text into a fiction. The cracks in the rocks seem to

true in the game world, but not in the work world. Currie would at most allow that Harry being evil is 'make-belief'. For Currie, only the content of imaginings that are based on an utterance/representation that was intended to be imagined can be called fictional. 'Make-belief' is the term Currie reserves for the content of imaginings that are not based on a communicative act that had the intention of making someone imagine its content (Currie 1990, 72). Despite marking a difference with Walton's theory (in which 'make-belief' and 'fictional' are used as synonyms), this aspect of Currie's theory also shows that Currie is still indebted to Walton's theory of make-believe.

11 In his review of Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Lamarque argues that "a great deal more needs to be said about the fictive stance - much of which could usefully draw on Walton's own account" (1991, 162).

> be just such a case. They cannot count as a work of fiction, we have agreed, until they are utilized in a certain way; but that use, grounded in the intention that the fictive stance be adopted, just is the creation of a work of fiction. (1994, 48)[12]

Lamarque and Olsen's lenient interpretation of the fiction-making intention, which they say can also be ascribed to the appreciator of a work, makes it hard to categorize them together with scholars who define fiction based on authorial intention such as Currie, Davies and Stock. Yet, for the purpose of this thesis, Lamarque and Olsen's description of the fictive stance is especially valuable as a kind of bridge between the intentional and the Waltonian fiction definition. First of all, Lamarque and Olsen make Walton's controversial idea that clouds and cracks in rocks can be works of fiction more plausible by again connecting such works of fiction with a specific and intentional act of fiction-creation (albeit not by the creator, but the appreciator of the object that becomes fiction). Secondly, their approach to fiction again seems to allow for a focus on the experience of the fiction consumer who takes on a fictive stance and forms a personal interpretation of a work or object. In this way, their description of the creation of fiction connects to the experiental definition of fiction which I will describe in the next sections.

1.2 Videogames and Fiction(ality)

Based on the previous paragraphs, we can already answer the question whether videogames are fiction. Many videogames seem to unproblematically fit both kinds of the discussed fiction definitions. They seem to be no different from literature, theatre, and movies in that their contents are intended to be imagined: game developers make up stories, build 3D-models, and record voice lines, with the intention that players imagine that the represented events happen within the represented world, that the 3D-models are characters with personalities, and that the voice lines are being said by them. Moreover, they offer their users representations which have the function of serving as props in games of make-believe: based on what the game shows them, players imagine going through all kinds of adventures within the game's world. There seems to be no reason at all to exclude videogames from the fictional works that are discussed within the philosophy of fiction.[13] Videogames are fictions, and both Walton's definition of fiction as well as definitions that focus on authorial intention allow us to define them as such.[14]

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12 It is interesting to note that Lamarque and Olsen here succeed in integrating the etymological origins of the word 'fiction' into a largely Waltonian understanding of fiction. They interpret the 'fictive stance' the appreciator takes on towards certain objects as a potential way of creating fiction. They thereby acknowledge that fiction is always something that is created, while at the same time endorsing Walton's idea that appreciators have the power to make something (like cracks in a rock) into a work of fiction by treating it in a certain way.

13 Unless you take issue with the way fiction was defined within this field, and more particularly with the assumed connection between imagination and (visual) fiction: for criticisms like this, see chapter 2.

14 Philosophers of videogames still disagree on some games's fictional status, most famously

The harder question, however, is what exactly *becomes fictional* when playing a videogame. The intention-based definition would say that, within the videogame experience, that which is fictional is that which was intended to be imagined by the videogames' creators. Walton's fiction definition, on the other hand, would allow more states of affairs found in videogame to be called 'fictional', as videogame representations can be used as props in make-believe games in many more ways than how they were intended to be used. In this thesis, I make use Walton's fiction definition as a starting point of my discussion of the videogame experience, mainly because of Walton's strong focus on appreciator participation and the activities of the fiction consumer, which proves especially helpful when discussing interactive works of fiction and explaining our interactions with them.

The fact that I take Walton's fiction theory as a starting point for my discussion is a consequence of the very purpose with which this fiction theory was formulated. As Kathleen Stock rightly points out in the chapter "Imagination and Fiction" in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*, the purpose of fiction definitions can differ: by defining fiction in a certain way, philosophers might want to offer either a conceptual analysis of fiction or an explanatory theory of fiction. Answering the question 'What is fiction?' via conceptual analysis has the goal of "aiming to capture, in terms of a limited set of governing conditions, the thing identified by ordinary language/'the folk' as *fiction*" (Stock 2016, 204), thus clarifying what is meant when one uses the term 'fiction'. Defining fiction might also be done by offering an explanatory theory. As Kathleen Stock summarizes:

> The primary goal of an explanatory theory is, unsurprisingly, to offer explanatory power. Examples might include: helping explain relations between entities in an enlightening way, and solving puzzles about them; fitting nicely with scientific discoveries about mind/behavior; or justifying some aspect(s) of our current practice. Ideally, the theory should also aim to display traditional theoretical virtues: for instance, to cover a wide range of interesting cases; and to be simple and elegant relative to rivals. (2016, 204-205)

As the aim of this thesis is to explain the relation between fiction, imagination, emotions, and actions, it is already clear that an explanatory definition of fiction will be a more appealing starting point. Kendall Walton's fiction theory, which tries to describe and explain our interactions with any fictional work, thus already has an edge on the intention-based fiction theory that focuses more on a conceptual analysis of fiction.

Note that I am not here making the claim that the Waltonian fiction definition is more adequate than the (nowadays predominant) intention-based one. In fact, I mainly use Walton's fiction theory to describe and explain the actual use or appreciation of works of fiction, or what becomes fictional for a certain appreciator when interacting with a work, while

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games like *Tetris* (Pajitnov and Gerasimov 1985), *Chessmaster* (The Software Toolworks 1986), and *Puzzle Bobble* (Taito 1994). This causes many authors to write that *most* games are fictions (Robson and Meskin 2016, 166; Bartel 2018, 9-23; Wildman and Woodward 2018, 125). I will elaborate on the fictional relevance of these kinds of games in parts 4.1.2 and 5.2.

I recognize the intention-based fiction theory as more useful when it comes to a conceptual definition of fiction. Therefore, I will be combining the Waltonian fiction-definition with the intention-based fiction definition when describing videogames as fiction experiences in part 1.3. The intention-based fiction definition will serve an important role when it comes to describing works of fiction and what is officially fictional within these works, while the Waltonian framework will prove helpful to describe and explain appreciators' experiences of these works and what becomes fictional within their personal games of make-believe.

I deem such a combination of two, at first sight completely different, perspectives on fiction to be justified. After all, there are ultimately many similarities between Walton's description of fiction and intention-based fiction definitions. First of all, as mentioned before, Lamarque and Olsen, who position themselves among the intention-based fiction definers, devise a fiction theory that is very similar to Walton's theory when describing how fiction appreciators have the power to make something into a work of fiction by adapting a fictive stance towards it (1994, 48). Secondly, Walton himself argues that the intention of the fiction creator can be important when deciding what is fictional in a certain work when he formulates his so-called 'charity principle':

> The generation of fictional truths is sometimes blocked (if not merely deemphasized) just, or primarily, because they make trouble – because they would render the fictional world uncomfortably paradoxical. [...] This can be understood as an instance of the influence of what the artist seems to have intended to make fictional on what is fictional. If there is another ready explanation for the artist's inclusion of a feature that appears to generate a given fictional truth, it may not seem that he meant especially to have it generated. And *this* may argue against recognizing that it is generated. (Walton 1990, 183; emphasis original)

And lastly, Currie himself adopts Walton's distinction between something being fictional in the actual work and something being fictional in the appreciator's personal make-believe game:

> We must also distinguish between what is *fictional* in a work of fiction and what is make-believe in the corresponding game. [...] There are things that are make-believe in games of fiction that are not true in the corresponding fictions. It can be make-believe in a game of fiction that I am reading an account of events that have occurred, but that is not part of the fiction itself, since the story says nothing about me. In this way each reader's reading generates a fiction larger than the fiction being read: a fiction in which the reader plays a role of one in touch with the events of the story. (Currie 1990, 72-73)

It is this last category of 'larger fiction', in which the appreciator themselves play a role, that is of special interest when investigating *interactive* works of fiction, in which the appreciator is always in some way 'in touch' with the fictional events. Even though Currie recognizes the possibility of appreciators making things fictionally true outside of the boundaries of the actual work of fiction, this is most certainly not the focus of his work. Currie calls cases in which the appreciator imagines to be part of the story mere

'make-believe' and never truly 'fictional', because he only took into account works of fiction that do not mandate their appreciators to play a personal game of make-believe in which they themselves play a role (as opposed to videogames, which are so-called 'self-involving interactive fictions', cf. Robson and Meskin 2016). It is Walton who elaborates on such personal and self-reflective games of make-believe, and who discusses the category of fiction as a category that is much broader than that which is intended to be imagined by the fiction creator.

The biggest difference between intention-based fiction definitions and Walton's fiction definition is thus their *focus*. In this regard, we can compare Currie's remark that "[r]eaders, collectively and individually, do not make and unmake fiction. Fictional status is acquired by a work, not in the process of its reception but in the process of its making" (1990, 11) to Walton's statement that "[t]he institution of fiction centers not on the activity of fiction makers but on objects – works of fiction or natural objects – and their role in appreciators' activities" (1990, 88). While intention-based fiction definitions focus on the practice of fiction-creation, and the relation between the creator and the work they create, Walton focuses on the practice of fiction-appreciating and the relation between the work/object and the one experiencing it. Both definitions thus differ in the way they define works of fiction: respectively as a work consisting of utterances intended to be imagined by its creator, and as a work that has the function of mandating imaginings to its appreciators. More importantly, they also differ in the way they define what is *fictional*: either as that which was uttered with the intent that it would be imagined, or as that which is imagined within a personal game of make-believe.[15] Walton's fiction definition (and entire fiction theory) permits more focus on the *actual* use of certain works by their consumers, which not only allows to define the fictionality of something from the phenomenological point of view of the one experiencing it, but also allows to clarify aspects of this experience itself.

In the next sections, I will first argue that the actual use of a work of fiction (that is: what becomes fictional for a certain someone interacting with a certain work), to which Walton's theory draws attention, is actually more interesting than its intended use if we want to investigate the connection between fiction, imagination, emotions, and actions. I will do so by discussing the behavior of people who do not actually realize they are dealing with fiction or are very naïve in their experience of fictional works. Secondly, I will argue that Walton's theory, which focuses on the imaginative activity of fiction consumers, is more suitable than intention-based fiction definitions to describe what becomes fictional within the videogame experience. For this, I will describe videogame situations in which it becomes clear that the players themselves are responsible for making things fictionally true in the game world, regardless of the intentions of the game designers.

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15 For Walton, it might be fictional for a certain individual that there is a unicorn in the world depicted in a painting if this individual imagines a unicorn based on some rogue paint splotches. For Currie, it can only be fictional that there is a unicorn in the world depicted in a painting when the actual painter intended for us to imagine a unicorn being present (Currie 1990, 39).

1.2.1 Uninformed, Naïve, or Tricked Consumers

The problems I want to focus on in my investigation, the paradox of fiction and the paradox of interactive fiction in particular, already point out the importance of taking into account appreciators' interpretations when defining fiction. In its most simple form, the paradox of fiction asks the question 'How can we be emotionally moved by characters and events when we know them to be fictional and thus non-existent?' while I construe the paradox of interactive fiction as the question 'How can we be moved to undertake actions towards characters and objects we know to be fictional and thus non-existent?'. The important aspect of these questions is the fact that they are only relevant when the fiction consumer in question knows that they are dealing with fiction. It is somewhat uninteresting for philosophers of fiction to investigate people's reactions to works of fiction if these people do not know that the work they are reading or watching is fictional at all.

For example: why would we, when investigating people's reactions to fiction, care about children's fear for monsters under their bed if these children believe the monsters to really exist? Their fear is unambiguously real and unproblematical, since they perceive the intentional object of their fear (the monsters) as real. Their fear is only paradoxical when they would fully know the monsters to be fictional, non-existent, and thus unable to be a real threat. In the situation of the children fearing monsters under their bed, the monsters are not unambiguously fictional: to the children, they are very real indeed, and object of belief rather than imagination. Now imagine that these children start believing that monsters are under their bed because they read about them in a children's book. These monsters were created with the intention that they would be imagined, and are in that way fictional. But that is does not matter when trying to explain the frightened children's reactions to them. After all, these children believe the monsters to really exist. In such cases, what matters to explain children's emotions and actions towards the monsters from the children's book is not the intended imaginary status of these characters, but the way they are perceived by the fiction consumer in question. When children do not imagine or make-believe the existence of the monsters because they believe them to actually exist, describing these monsters as fictional has no explanatory power. In this sense, it might be useful to have a fiction theory which takes into account that something is fictional when it is imagined within a game of make-believe or approached with a fictive attitude, as opposed to it being fictional when it is intended to be imagined.

Contrary to what the examples given above might suggest, it is not only children who sometimes mistakenly believe fictional characters or events to actually exist. The recent influx of fake news websites shows that almost everyone is susceptible to treating non-existent events as actual. People's indignation at a horrible article published on the fake news site *The Onion* is not paradoxical, as it is caused by their *belief* that what they read is an actual report of real events. In similar fashion, some people's alleged hysterical reactions to the radio broadcast of Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* in 1938,

if there was any panic at all,[16] would not have been paradoxical: these people might have simply missed the introduction of this show as portraying a fictional story, and thus acted on real beliefs they had about aliens invading earth. In the experience of these people, the radio broadcast was simply not fictional. Likewise, the question whether Greek myths are fictional does not have a clear-cut answer. Instead, the answer seems to depend on the way the consumer perceives the myths, or the way the work in question is interpreted within the experience of this consumer. As Kendall Walton says: "The ancient Greek myths may have been nonfiction for the Greeks but fiction for us" (1990, 91). In similar fashion, Santa might be fictional for grown-ups, who perceive him as a character whose existence is mandates to be imagined, but is often perceived as real by children.[17] It seems that, when something is fiction, it can only be usefully described as fiction by virtue of being *perceived* as such by someone. In general, our experience of and interaction with works and objects of any kind depends on whether these works and objects are fictional or non-fictional, not in the sense that their existence or the truth of their content is intended to be imagined or believed, but in the sense that we *perceive* their existence or content as intended to be imagined or to be believed.

Recent consumer interactions with virtual reality perfectly substantiate this point. As many people are only just getting to know the medium of VR, their interactions with it are naïve and uninformed by the specifics of the medium, like the fact that the virtual environment is represented as completely surrounding you, whilst of course not being susceptible to touch. People who approach VR in such a naïve way often fall into the trap of leaning on virtually represented fences, or trying to sit down on chairs depicted in virtual reality (and many funny *Youtube*-videos show countless people in this exact situation). However interesting such behavior is, it need not concern us here, as the focus of this work is the experience of *fiction*. After all, many naïve VR-users do not experience the virtually represented worlds they are confronted with as having mere *imagined* existence, but are very much under the illusion that what they see is *real*. As David Chalmers indicates, it requires a period of cognitive orientation to be able to experience virtual reality as it was meant: "[A]fter this period of cognitive orientation, a sophisticated user of VR may perceive virtual objects as virtual. They will not perceive the objects as present in physical space, any more than we perceive objects as being on the far side of the mirror" (2017, 19).[18] People trying VR for the first time sometimes fail to *imagine* that the virtual objects they see exist, and instead *believe* them to exist. Their situation, while relatively uninteresting from the point of view of philosophy

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16 The reports of mass hysteria caused by Welles' radio show are known to be highly exaggerated (Campbell 2011). Campbell writes that only a few Americans were actually frightened or disturbed, while most listeners recognized the show for what it was, a work of fiction.

17 This, of course, does not mean that Santa is, in some way, actually real. It only means that he is perceived as real by children, and thus not fictional for them. When it comes to children, Santa is more of a lie than a fiction: something that is untrue but mandated to be believed.

18 Chalmers would not say, however, that these virtual objects should be viewed as fictional. I elaborate on his position in part 4.2.1.

of *fiction*, can be explained by a theory that was deemed inadequate to explain true fiction-experiences: the illusion theory, or the theory that, whenever we experience fiction, we temporarily believe that what we read or watch is real (Suits 2006). The naïve VR-user, being completely surrounded by the virtual world, can easily be brought under the illusion that what he sees (and hears, and possibly even feels, when some kind of haptic feedback is integrated in the VR-system) is real. This is why, from the perspective of fiction philosophy, it is more interesting to focus on VR-experts, and more generally, on people who know how to interpret fictional works: people who are not fooled into believing that the characters, objects, and events they get to know through works of fiction have actual existence or real presence in their egocentric space.

To conclude, it is often the case that people are confronted with objects that only have imagined existence, and yet do not take the fictive stance, or the perspective of the fiction consumer, since they themselves do not know they are dealing with fiction. While these people do not use the objects they are confronted with as props in games of make-believe, these objects could still be meant to be imagined. In this case, it would be quite uninteresting to focus on the fact that these objects are fiction, as they do not necessarily evoke a fiction-experience. The inherent qualities of objects like Santa, monsters under our bed, Welles' aliens, Greek gods, and VR-fences, like the fact that they were created to be imagined or have no actual existence, are rather uninteresting if we want to investigate the way people experience fiction. If we want to investigate this, what matters is how consumers *perceive* these objects: do they treat them as fiction and take on a fictive stance, regardless of the fact that they were meant to be treated as such? That is: do the consumers use these objects or works as props in make-believe games? Fiction definitions that focus too strongly on authorial intention or characteristics a work has regardless of the way it is perceived by its consumers do not, for this reason, fare well as explanatory theories of fiction. As conceptual analyses of fiction, they might give us a better idea of what we call (and are to call) fiction or non-fiction, and offer a more precisely delineated category of fiction. Contrary to Walton's theory, however, they do not tell us much more about our experience of fiction and the way we react to it. Our interactions with fiction, the emotions we feel towards fictional objects, and the actions we undertake when dealing with fictions, can only be usefully investigated when we focus on objects the existence of which not only needs to be imagined, but which are also perceived as objects that only have imagined existence. Walton captures this idea by focusing on make-believe games: a specific attitude fiction appreciators take on and through which they make things fictional. Lamarque and Olsen express the idea by saying that fiction should be explained as a *practice*, to which the fiction appreciator taking on a specific attitude (the fictive stance) is central. This idea will also be fundamental to this thesis: a work's fictional status is only relevant in the interaction with its consumer. Therefore, the so-called weakness Currie identified within Walton's fiction theory, namely Walton's inability to distinguish between something's 'being fiction' and it 'being treated as fiction', is only a weakness if the goal is to gain conceptual clarity about the concept of fiction. If we want to focus on a description

and explanation of appreciators' experiences of fiction, on the other hand, it might be a strength, as we then need to look at the experiences of appreciators' who treat a certain work as fiction.

1.2.2 The Case of Videogames

In the case of videogames, the statement that the videogame's fictional status is only relevant in interaction with its player is maybe even more intuitively graspable. After all, in many videogames, the fictional story can only unfold when it *is being played*. Players themselves have to *make* things fictional within videogame worlds: if they do not play the game, no fictional events take place. Developers often do not intend for one clear narrative to be fictional, but foresee multiple options the player can choose from to build a narrative. Moreover, players often decide *how* the in-game events are brought about: they can investigate all secrets in the game world or sprint directly toward their goals, be on the verge of dying constantly or not even get hit by the enemies, etc. This means that it is very hard to say what is fictional in a game before it has been played. There are other easily indicatable aspects of the videogame experience that point out the relative unimportance of the intention of the fiction creator (in this case, the developer), and show instead the importance of the particular imaginative interaction undertaken by the player when deciding what is fictional in the game. These will be described in the next paragraphs and used to show the advantages of the Waltonian fiction definition over fiction definitions that exclusively focus on authorial intention.

First, however, I want to stress that the intentions of the designer do play a certain role when we investigate the fictional content of videogames from the perspective of the player's experience and interpretation of this content. What players make fictional when playing games and what they choose to do within the fictional worlds of the game is often heavily influenced by what they perceive the intention of the designer might be. Virtual worlds are very much experienced as artefacts, as players are always aware that these worlds were created by someone for them to enjoy and use in a certain way. Games contain many clues for players to infer what the designer might have intended them to do. Some of these intentions might be quite explicitly represented in the game: think of fictional characters explaining to the player how to use the controller, or signs or pop-up text boxes telling the player what to do and where to go. Other can be more subtly embedded into the game world. Character dialogues can give hints as to where to go next, the predetermined goals in the game give players hints about what they can do, enemies that are too hard might suggest to players that they should level up in other area's first, and the way the game rewards players (in the form of currency or experience points) is a clear indication that whatever they did was desirable and might be worthy of repetition. All of these game elements are usually interpreted as indications for what to do in the virtual world precisely because players perceive them as intentionally present within the game. Whatever the player perceives as what the

designer intended to happen within their game, thus very often guides how players interpret the fictional world of the game, and what they decide to do within it. Thi Nguyen even goes so far as to say that games have *prescriptive ontologies*, because the appreciation of games requires the following of their rules (Nguyen 2019). In part 1.3, I will elaborate on the way in which the intentions of game designers are a guide to finding out what is 'officially' fictional in videogames, thus using the intentional definition of fiction as a modification to Walton's fiction theory.

This does not mean that designer intentions *fix* what becomes fictional when a game is being played, however. First of all, what players make fictional is not necessarily determined by the designer's intentions, but at most influenced by what the player *perceive* the designer's intentions to be, based on their interpretation of the representations the game offers them. These interpretations are highly dependent on players' own context, sensitivities, and background knowledge, especially about game conventions. Secondly, players can consciously go against what they perceive as the 'intended' way to play a game. They can ignore prescriptions to imagine certain events, make up their own fictional events, or integrate videogame events that are represented in the game without being intended by the game's creators, such as glitches, within the fictional world they imagine based on said game. All of these player activities show that what is fictional in a game is heavily dependent on how the player plays the game, rather than fixed by the way in which the designer designed it.

VIDEOGAMES AS HALF-REAL

First of all, there are varying degrees to which players can choose to interact with a game's fictional world. Games are often interpreted as 'half-real', following Juul's description of them:

> Video games are two different things at the same time: video games are real in that they consist of real rules with which players actually interact, and in that winning or losing a game is a real event. However, when winning a game by slaying a dragon, the dragon is not a real dragon but a fictional one. To play a video game is therefore to interact with real rules while imagining a fictional world, and a video game is a set of rules as well as a fictional world. (Juul 2005, 1)

These two aspects of games make it possible to play them in different ways, either focusing on their fictional worlds and narratives, or playing them to win them, to achieve a high score, to beat friends, etc. This means that not every player will take a fictive stance when playing a game: some players will interpret the game as sports, seeing it as a challenge in which they have to make the right movements (like pressing buttons) at the right times (like when certain things are shown on the screen). Nowadays, many esports (electronic sports) tournaments are organized with the exact goal of playing videogames as a competition. In these kinds of events, the focus is on the real events connected to videogames: winning the game by defeating all opponents leads to the winning of real monetary prizes. Competitors in such tournaments will often not interact with the games they play as representations of fictional worlds: the fictional

world of the game simply does not interest them. In this regard, Juul mentions the (not at all exceptional) situation in which competitive players of the game *Quake III Arena* (id Software 1999) downgraded the graphics of this game, showing their complete lack of interest in the game's fictional environment: "[T]hey would modify the graphical settings on their machine to get higher frame rates (and thereby faster feedback) at the expense of graphical detail. [...] Experienced players shift their focus from the fictional world of the game to the game as a set of rules" (Juul 2005, 139).[19] Another example of gamers being uninterested in the game's fiction is the practice of speedrunning. When speedrunning a game, players try to finish the game as quickly as possible, often skipping entire sections of the game's story to get to the end faster. These players are about as interested in the story or the fiction of the game as people who would try to flip the pages of a novel as quickly as possible are interested in the story of said novel. In the end, designers of games cannot decide whether their game will be interpreted as a representational work of fiction or rather as a competition or challenge. Despite the designers' intentions of creating vivid fictional worlds and characters (and players' recognition of this intention), players might just focus on the game *as a challenge* and pay little attention to its fictional content, by not playing the make-believe game that was intended by these designers.

Note, however, that it is hard to completely ban the fiction from the game experience. In this regard, Juul's claim that a game's "rules can function independent from fiction" (2005, 121) is a bit misleading. Many games will likely become unplayable when players completely ignore their fictional dimension. It is only because a shape represents a zombie that players know they should kill it or run away from it. Moreover, it is often only after having played the game as a work of fiction (that is: after having determined the use and function of every game object by inferring it from their fictional nature), that gamers can succeed in playing the game purely as a challenge. Usually, the fictional dimension can only be ignored after it has already served its purpose in clarifying and showing the player what the game's rules and the game objects' purposes are. Juul does not coincidentally write that it is the *experienced* player who often shifts their focus from the game fiction to the game rules (2005, 139). Nevertheless, because of the dual nature of games as rule-based challenges and fictional worlds, players are able to play games with little or no regard for their fictional content, effectively only paying attention to the functional role of the game objects and not to their fictional relevance.

Many games that were originally meant to evoke an imaginative world, thus often do not do so at all. In this sense, it is hard to say that a game has one specific function,

19 Interestingly, these players will often still utter sentences like 'I picked up a gun' or 'I punched that guy', which refer to fictional events and thus seemingly betray these players' fictional engagement with the game. Other than showing how inherently mixed the gameplay and the fictional experience of games often are, these sentences might also be easy shortcuts to refer to gameplay elements that do not have anything to do with the imagination. Compare this to a chess player referring to a chess piece as a 'knight', which does not necessarily mean that they are imagining a knight when looking at this piece (see also Patridge 2017 for a critical discussion of the linguistic practices of videogame players).

as players might decide to play the same game in different ways. Videogames' intended use and actual use often clash. Take the game *Pacman* (Namco 1980) for example, in which you play as a yellow, round character with a big mouth that needs to eat all white pellets before being caught by ghosts in various colors. Are you meant to imagine being a perpetually hungry creature, being chased by ghosts, and having the ability to gain superpowers when eating bigger-than-normal food? It is probable that originally, this was the intention of Pacman-creator Tōru Iwatani. But who actually plays the game like this way nowadays? What matters for most players who play *Pacman* is the score they get, and how long they succeed in pressing the right buttons to not lose a live by touching the ghosts. Meanwhile, the ghosts are rarely seen as anything other than objects to be avoided, the fruit is merely interpreted as a way to score points, and no player really cares about making sense of the strange way in which the ghosts become vulnerable when Pacman eats the white power pellets. For most Pacman players, it would make no difference at all to their gaming experience if you would change all graphic representations (or *sprites*) in this game. As David Chalmers points out, fictional worlds might not be salient in the experience of many videogames: "For an extreme case, the game of *Pong* can be interpreted as representing a game of tennis in physical space, but few users will interpret it this way" (2017, 335). Again, what is fictional when playing a game highly depends on the way the player approaches it, and not on the way it was *intended* to be approached.[20]

UNAUTHORIZED MAKE-BELIEVE AND TRANSGRESSIVE PLAY

Secondly, when players do decide to play games as fictions, they not always make fictional what was *intended* to be fictional by the game's developers. Developers might, for example, not have intended anything to be fictional in the game at all, or only intended a very minimal world to be imagined, while some players still manage to build and imagine a fictional narrative based on their playing of it. A famous example of this can be found in Janet Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1997). In this book, Murray describes her experience of the game *Tetris* (Pajitnov and Gerasimov 1985)[21] as follows:

> *Tetris* is a perfect enactment of the overtasked lives of Americans in the 1990s—of the constant bombardment of tasks that demand our attention and that we must somehow fit into our overcrowded schedules and clear off our desks in order to make room for the next onslaught. (Murray 1997, 144)

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20 Ironically, developers themselves, who might have the explicit intention of creating a game-world that should be imagined by their players, are often unable to play their own game as a fiction. Most of the time, they approach their game purely in terms of its function as *software*, looking at the game's world not as a fictional one, but as a representation of coding that needs to be rid of all bugs. They are then similar to readers of a novel who do not imagine the content of what they read, but are merely interested in finding grammatical mistakes.

21 *Tetris* is a game in which you need to arrange falling tetrominoes, or blocks that consists of four randomly connected squares, in a horizontal line to make this line disappear and to score points.

According to the definition of fiction that is focused on authorial intention, Murray's imaginative game would not make anything fictional about her playing of *Tetris*. After all, *Tetris* was never meant to be played as an enactment of the American life in the 90's, as *Tetris*, or more specifically Тетрис, was created by Russian developers in the 80's. Does that mean, however, that it was not fictional for Janet Murray that she was dealing with an overly full schedule and trying to clear off tasks to make place for new ones? That seems silly, as Murray herself reports that is exactly what was fictionally true for her. In Walton's terms, the make-believe game Murray played might not have been an official one, as it is not *Tetris*'s function to serve as a prop in this kind of make-believe game, but it was still a(n unauthorized) make-believe game in which *Tetris* served as a prop, thus making things fictionally true about Murray's playing of it. That is: it is not true in *Tetris*' Waltonian work world that the schedule of an overtasked person is being filled by ever new tasks, but this might have been true in the Waltonian game world connected to Murray's playing of this videogame.

Another example of players making things fictional that were not intended to be fictionalized by the creators of the videogame is the situation in which players play transgressively. While players might very well recognize what developers intended to be imagined based on their game, they might choose to consciously rebel against these perceived intentions. Players can do this by, for example, *cheating*. In the game *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* (Naughty Dog and SCE Bend Studio 2007), there is a way players can make the main character Nathan Drake walk through walls. Nathan Drake is portrayed as a human being, and the walls in this game are represented as solid walls. Yet, when performing a specific button combination, Nathan phases through the walls of the game world. Of course, players can utilize this trick to be able to finish the game faster, skipping entire areas of it. Such players might make it fictionally true in their game that Nathan walks through walls when cheating in this way.[22] They might make up their own narrative in which Nathan simply has the power to walk through walls. In that case, they are making something fictional that was never intended to be fictional by the developers. Indeed, the walking through walls in *Uncharted* is a perfect example of an exploit, a specific kind of cheating that is defined by its going against the intended use of the videogame:

> In computer science, an *exploit* is a use or manipulation of a piece of computer technology that creates an unanticipated effect, usually at odds with its intended use. In gaming, exploits are behaviors performed by gamers that take advantage of the bugs or vulnerabilities in a game, and again which are at odds with the intended use; as such, they form a way in which gamers can breach the norms of gaming practice. (Tavinor 2009a, 107)

22 Of course, game testers and game developers themselves can play the game like this to test the (unintended) possibilities in the game world. This shows that players do not necessarily play a game of make-believe when they are pressing the buttons needed to walk through walls, but might merely perceive this as a manipulation of representations and coding. When players cheat, they either make something fictionally true that was not supposed to be fictional in the gameworld, or largely disregard the fictional world of the game.

Again, the act of cheating creates representations that might very well be taken as mandating imaginings about the player-character walking through walls, and makes things fictional regardless of the fact that their presence was never intended to be in the game.

GENERATIVE VIDEOGAME GLITCHES

A last aspect of videogames that points out the irrelevance of authorial intention to decide whether some object or event is made fictional is the occurrence of glitches. Glitches are technical malfunctions within the videogame, which cause the videogame to misbehave, the fictional world to be rendered incorrectly, the videogame objects or characters to do things they were not meant to do, etc. Glitches, such as the texture or ragdoll glitches,[23] are often subjected to the charity principle (Walton 1990, 183): recognizing that they are unintentional mistakes caused by a faulty rendering of the fictional world, players are 'charitable' towards the fiction creator by disregarding the mistake and not using the faulty representations to imagine anything about the world of the game. Not all glitch-experiences are necessarily like this, however. Some glitches really do seem to affect what is fictional in a videogame. A famous example of such a glitch is that of the so-called 'manimals' in the western game *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar San Diego 2010). Due to some weird software malfunction, the animals that strolled around in this game's world, most famously the birds, were sometimes inexplicably replaced by a kind of human-animal hybrids (Janik 2017, 74). More specifically: while the bird-behavior stayed intact, the 3D-models of small feathery birds which were intended to follow this behavior were replaced by 3D-models of fully sized men with cowboy hats. As a consequence, players of the game encountered adult men dressed like cowboys, flapping their arms and floating through the sky. Occasionally, one of these birdmen would land on a fence and happily whistle a bird-song with retracted legs and arms behinds its back. A similar thing could happen to the pigs, bears, and cougars of the *Red Dead Redemption* world.

A glitch like the manimal glitch can be called a *generative* glitch: it generates fictional truths within the game.[24] Players seeing the birdmen in the game are likely to imagine their existence in the game's world, and interpret these strange creatures as fictional beings who could make noise, move around, and be shot. These manimals were, however, not an intended part of the game (and many players realized this). The fact that their presence was unintentional is corroborated by the fact that the developers removed these creatures from the game by updating it as soon as they found out about them. According to fiction definitions that define something as fictional when it is intended to be imagined by its creator, the manimals would not be fictional

23 When a texture glitch occurs, surfaces of the represented environment of the game world become blurry or pixelated instead of accurate representations of, for example, leaves, windows, or doors. When a ragdoll glitches occurs, character models, most often the supposedly lifeless bodies of defeated enemies, start spinning around and flailing their limbs.

24 For a more in-depth discussion of generative glitches, see Van de Mosselaer and Wildman (forthcoming).

(unless you are willing to perceive the glitch as the intention of the malfunctioning software, and this software as a fiction-creator). In practice, however, the manimals are fictionally indistinguishable from the non-malfunctioning animals in the game: they function as the exact same kind of prop. Initially, there was not even a way for the player to be sure whether the birdmen were meant to be in the game or not. It seems silly to say that the fictional status of the birdmen could only be interpreted by players who had the right background knowledge about their creation. Moreover, recognizing the fact that the presence of manimals in the game is unintentional does not make it less valid to say that there are flying men in the fictional world of the game: everyone seeing their representation in the game would conclude this. Fiction definitions that are based on authorial intention simply cannot explain the occurrence of generative glitches, in which something becomes fictional without an author-driven mandate to imagine it. Again, what seems more interesting is thus to make use of a fiction definition that focuses on the player's experience and conclude that the manimals were fictional whenever they functioned as props within the players' make-believe games, regardless of the (presumed) intention of the game's creators.

VIDEOGAMES AND UNINTENTIONAL FICTION

To conclude, the differences between videogames and more traditional fictions pose a challenge for existing fiction definitions, which were developed with a strong focus on the experience of (non-interactive) literature. As interactive fictions, videogames represent their fictional content in a way that is not only determined by the creators of this content who wrote the coding for it, but also, and importantly so, by computer systems who translate this coding into representations, and by players who need to interact with these systems to make something fictional in the first place. Moreover, videogames are both fiction and rule-based challenge, so that players often have the choice to largely ignore the fictive intent of game designers, and merely play the game as a challenge. Lastly, the system behind the representation of the videogame world does not always work as intended. As this representation happens through codes that are set up by designers and not always flawlessly interpreted by computers, many malfunctions or so-called glitches can distort the way the fictional world is revealed to the player. These videogame characteristics make clear that, when investigating videogames as fictions, the focus should not be on the relation between the creator and the object of fiction, but rather on the relation between the object and its appreciator, who is now also a *user* and *participator*. Walton's theory of fiction thus holds up quite well when applied to videogames. The previously criticized broadness of Walton's fiction definition now allows us to explain elements of games that seem to clearly belong to the fictional world of the game, but would have to be regarded as non-fictional according to intention-based definitions, such as the events created by generative glitches. Additionally, Walton's fiction theory offers a terminology and explanation for the fact that players can perform behavior to create fictional events which diverge from the original intentions of the game developers: players sometimes make things fictional which were not intended to be imagined, because they play *un-*

authorized games of make-believe. The authorial intentions of game developers are not decisive when determining what is fictional in videogames, as this highly depends on the way in which the game is played by the players, and on whether or in what make-believe game the videogame is used as a prop.

1.3 Videogames as a (Waltonian) Fiction *Experience*

In the past, many videogame scholars and philosophers writing about interactive fiction already resorted to defending Walton's fiction theory when arguing that videogames are fictions. Videogames are fictions, the argument went, because they are fictions in the sense Walton talks about fiction. Now, we can reverse the argument, and say that Walton's fiction theory has an important edge over other fiction theories because it succeeds better in explaining the fictionality of the videogame experience. While definitions based on authorial intention, or even theories that state fiction must be interpreted as a genre (Friend 2012), would also show videogames to be fictions, the specific focus on appreciator participation in Walton's fiction definition is especially valuable when explaining the videogame experience as a fictional experience. In the following sections, I will discuss the way in which Walton's theory enables us to talk about videogames as fictions, while at the same time offering helpful clarifications about diverse aspects of the videogame experience. I will also point out the usefulness of expanding a Waltonian framework of videogame fiction with a specific attention to the importance of game designers' intentions.

As Grant Tavinor already mentions, Walton's theory of fiction is suitable to describe the playing of videogames: "Given that participating with videogames is also primarily an act of engaging with a representational prop, such a theory of fiction is entirely apt to capturing the nature of the fictive practice involved in videogames" (Tavinor 2005, 30). Indeed, the playing of videogames can be described largely in the same way as Walton describes Eric and Gregory playing with the tree stumps. Players of videogames use the representations on the screen, the game sounds, and the controller in their hands as props to make-believe, for example, that zombies are chasing them down alleyways. When the controller vibrates, this might be a prop to imagine that they are being hit by a zombie. Moreover, just like Eric and Gregory themselves became props in the game of make-believe with the stumps, players of videogames very often become characters within the videogame world: when playing a racing game, for example, they consider themselves to be racers. As Robson and Meskin argue, videogames are interactive fictions that are *self-involving*, because players themselves are involved in the make-believe games they play with the videogame (2016, 168).[25] They become props themselves, imagine

25 As I will be using the phrase 'self-involving interactive fiction' often in this dissertation, it is important to clarify that I do not use it in the exact same way as Robson and Meskin do. These authors specify that self-involving interactive fictions make things fictionally true about their appreciators in the (Waltonian) work world evoked during the interaction with the work in question

things to be true of themselves, and thus become fictional themselves. Although the controller, the images, sounds, and players themselves truly exist, they all have fictional counterparts in the make-believe game that is played based on the videogame: the images of the zombies really exist, but the zombies themselves are brought to life only within the imaginative engagement of the one playing the game. Likewise, the players really exist, but their identification with the player-character in the game and their associated first-person statements like '*I* killed all the zombies' are to be interpreted fictionally. As Wildman and McDonnell (2019) argue, the proper engagement with videogames and virtual reality is a kind of make-believe, which features props (such as digital elements like images and sounds, and haptic feedback mechanisms in controllers) and principles of generation (such as 'if these pixels move towards your character, you are being attacked by a zombie') that are specific to these interactive media. It is only when the player decides to interact with the game in a certain way, namely by playing games of make-believe, or, to say it with Lamarque and Olsen's words, by taking on a fictive stance, that fictional truths are generated within the videogame world.

I thus defend the videogame experience as a fiction *experience*, that is: videogames are only usefully approached as fictions if they are experienced as fictions by their players. The intentions of the game's creators are only of secondary importance in this process, as what they intend to be either fictional or non-fictional in the game often does not coincide with what is or is not imagined by players of the game or what these players take to be intended within the game. In fact, intentional definitions of fiction would severely impoverish the discussion about the fictional experience of videogames by limiting that which is 'fictional' to that which was intended to be fictional by the games' developers. Indeed, many more things than that become fictionally true within specific playings of videogames, as videogames are props that not only depend on (often malfunctioning) computer systems that render the virtual representations, but that also allow a lot of freedom in what players imagine while using them.

A possible, and at first sight justified, objection to my approach to videogame experiences as fiction experiences is that everything and anything can become fictional, as long as the imaginative player tries hard enough. It is true that anyone can choose to play any kind of make-believe game, thus creating related fictional truths. That does not mean, however, that any work of fiction can make anything fictionally true: there are still 'right' and 'wrong' ways to interpret a work's fiction. For this, remember that Walton devised very useful terminology: there are 'authorized' and 'unauthorized' games of make-believe. Although it is possible to play *Tetris* as a reflection on American life in the 90s, as Janet Murray (1997) seems to do, it is not the function of *Tetris* to serve

(2016, 171). As I will describe shortly, however, I interpret the concepts of the work world and game world differently than Robson and Meskin do when it comes to videogame experiences. In the rest of this thesis, I thus use the phrase 'self-involving interactive fiction' to refer to those works that are, by their appreciators, experienced as works that present a fictional world in which the appreciator can take on a role, and with which the appreciator can interact, somehow changing the course of the events within this world. I elaborate on this in chapter five.

as a prop in that kind of make-believe game. Murray is thus playing an unauthorized game of make-believe. Many of the cases discussed in section 1.2.2 can be explained as unauthorized make-believe games, in which players make things fictional although it is not the function of the videogame to make these things fictional. Indeed, videogames allow for very new and innovative ways of playing unauthorized games of make-believe. Players can generate fictional truths that do not fit the videogames' actual function by modding videogames, by which they change the very structure of the props themselves, by cheating or making use of exploits, by which they create non-official versions of the game's narrative, or by incorporating glitches and bugs within the states of affairs they imagine based on the videogame, although their presence is not truly part of the game's official fiction. Walton's terminology can be easily be applied to describe and explain what happens to a videogame's fictional world when players misuse games and imagine states of affairs which were never mandated to be imagined by the game itself.

One problem that follows from this is of course how we should define a game's 'official fiction'. Following Walton, we might claim that all fictional truths that are generated within all possible games of make-believe in which it is the function of the videogame to serve as a prop form the official, work world of the videogame. Two problems follow from this, both of which I will discuss and resolve. Firstly, this way of interpreting videogame fictions relies heavily on Walton's confusingly vague notion of a representational work's 'function'. Secondly, the distinction between Waltonian work worlds and game worlds has proven difficult to apply to videogames. This has prompted Grant Tavinor (2009a) to claim that videogames do not actually fit the Waltonian description of fictions, which focused on non-interactive media. After all, how can we distinguish what is fictional 'according to the work itself' from what is fictional 'according to the specific game the appreciator plays with the work as a prop', if nothing at all becomes fictional within videogames if they are not played by someone? Grant Tavinor argues that the distinction between Waltonian work worlds and game worlds is smudged if we start focusing on videogames (2005, 34). According to him, the worlds of videogames are only fictionalized once a specific make-believe game is being played with the videogame as a prop. Players can fictionalize this world in many different ways, depending on how they play the game. There is thus simply no Waltonian work world connected to videogames, and if there is one, it is the very same fictional world as the Waltonian game world (Tavinor 2009a, 58).

Robson and Meskin (2012b) argue against Tavinor and say Waltonian work worlds and game worlds are still very much to be found in our interactions with videogames. They rightly show that there are cases in which the fictional truths in the Waltonian work world and fictional truths in the Waltonian game world diverge when playing videogames, thus showing that the distinction still makes sense. During strategy games, for example, players often imagine giving orders to entire armies, while in the game, there is no one performing this role: "So, it is fictional in game worlds that players control the squad during various battles and coordinate their strategies as they try to defeat their enemies, but it is not fictional in the work world [...] that anybody performs this role"

(Robson and Meskin 2012b, 214). Robson and Meskin go on to define Waltonian work and game worlds in their own way. Instead of looking at the videogame itself as a work of fiction, they interpret individual *playings* of games as works of fiction (2012b, 214). The Waltonian work worlds associated with videogames are thus not fully determined by the pre-existing work. That is: only when someone plays a videogame, they generate the fictional truths that make out the Waltonian work world. The game world, on the other hand, consists of the fictional truths that are generated without being forced by the representations that appear within the specific playing of the game, such as the player imagining they are the army commander while there is no such person shown in the game. Although Robson and Meskin expose interesting aspects of the playings of videogames by treating them as performances, there is one important downside to their suggestion. After all, when following their theory, it becomes much harder to usefully apply Walton's distinction between authorized and unauthorized games of make-believe to videogames. Every player action becomes part of the work world according to Robson and Meskin's theory. A player cheating to walk through walls in *Uncharted* thus makes it true in the work world that Nathan Drake walks through walls. But then how can we still say that this player is *misusing* the videogame as a work of fiction?

This is why I suggest to interpret Waltonian work and game worlds in videogames differently. The Waltonian game world, and thus the set of fictional truths generated within the player's specific make-believe game with the videogame as a prop, is formed within a specific playing of the game. Players make certain choices and so shape the fictional world, for example when choosing whether Commander Shepard is a morally good or rather vicious person in *Mass Effect* (BioWare 2007). Players are usually restricted in their choices by the possibilities offered to them in the game, possibilities that have been determined by the game's creators. They can, however, as discussed above, work around these predetermined choices, by cheating, modding, making use of exploits, or incorporating glitches in their make-believe games. Whatever they choose to do and imagine, generates the fictional world Walton called the *game world*. The Waltonian work world, on the other hand, consists of all those fictional truths that can be generated in an authorized use of the game (which is precisely how Walton defined work worlds (1990, 60)), that is: following the predetermined options the game's creators wanted to give their players.

The Waltonian work world is then no set of definite fictional truths, but rather a collection of potential fictional truths as determined by the game's creators. Using a visual metaphor, we might describe the work world of a videogame as an intricate tree structure, showing every choice a player can possibly make at any point in the game, following the way the game was intended to be used by its creators.[26] This inherent

26 'Intricate' might be an understatement here. The tree structure would be fairly straightforward if it would only detail the *narrative* choices players make in games (such as choosing to kill a main character or not). However, we might also interpret *every single action* players can, according to the way in which the game creators wanted their game to be used, undertake in videogame worlds as a fictional event in this world (such as jumping, taking two steps to the left, picking up

possibility of different fictional paths is connected to the fact that fiction in videogames is presented *virtually*:

> When users (players) experience, traverse, and manipulate computersimulated worlds, instant after instant, their screens display the present (actual) state of that particular world or sub-world. Each state of a digital world has the inherent possibility of developing and changing into innumerable other potential configurations that have a perceivable logical (causal) connection with the present one. All the hidden paths and all the unexpressed possibilities offered by virtual worlds exist virtually within the way the software was designed and the possibilities offered by its affordances. (Gualeni 2015, 55)

Following this line of thought, we can define the Waltonian work world of videogames as the set of all potential fictional truths that can be generated within any kind of make-believe game that uses the game as a prop and agrees with the way the game was intended to be used by its creators. The Waltonian game world, on the other hand, is then the collection of all fictional truths actually made true in a specific playing of the game by a certain player, by being imaginatively entertained by this player, regardless of these fictional truths being intended by the game's creators or not.

Note that we can thus define the 'official' or 'authorized' fiction, or the fictional truths that belong to the Waltonian work world, much clearer than Walton ever did, by simply using the intentional definition of fiction. Instead of relying on Walton's vague definition of a work's 'function', we can clarify what official or authorized games of make-believe are by using Currie's definition of fiction as that which is (recognized as being) communicated with the intention of being imagined. The authorized use of a work is then decided by the way game designers and developers intended their game to be used and interpreted by players (or, at least, by the intentions players believe the creators of a game to have based on their experience of this game). As described in part 1.2.3, players can often derive many intentions of the game designer fairly easily from the game itself. I now argue that every possibility intentionally offered to players by the game's designers belongs to the official fiction, or to the tree structure that defines the game's Waltonian work world. Notice that I thus fuse the intentional definition of fiction with a Waltonian framework: that what is 'officially' fictional according to a videogame, is that which its players can recognize as being intended to be imagined by its designer. Contrary to Currie, however, I still acknowledge that many more things can be fictional than what was intended by the game's creators: besides the Waltonian work world, there are the things that are fictional within the Waltonian game world. Simply put, other than the things that are fictional according to a proper use of the videogame and that will be true in every authorized playing of the game, players can make many things fictionally true in their personal game of make-believe that do not belong to the game's official fiction. For example, fictional truths that are generated through a misuse or misinterpretation of the game do not belong to the game's official

a gun and dropping it again, etc.). In that case, the tree structure that represents a game's work world takes on infinite proportions, detailing every single movement a player can make at any point within this world.

fiction, but are still fictional by grace of being imagined by players. This can happen when players cheat to make a character walk through walls, while this character, officially, is human and solid.

Videogames can thus usefully be interpreted as representational props generating fictional truths. Walton's distinction between that which is fictional within game worlds and that which is fictional within work worlds moreover allows us to classify the states of affairs that players imagine without there being an intention that they be imagined as fictional. This in turn allows us to focus on the videogame experience as a fiction *experience*: that which is fictional when playing videogames is that which the player experiences as fictional in their personal game. Moreover, I showed how it is possible to adapt Walton's concepts of authorized and unauthorized make-believe games to videogames without making use of his problematical concept of the 'function' of representational works. Instead of basing the work world, the authorized imaginings, or the official fiction of videogames on the videogames' 'function', we can make use of the intentional definition of fiction and say that what is officially fictional according to a videogame by itself, is every state of affairs which is possible to fictionalize within a playing of the game that is in accordance with the intentions of the game's creators. Although there is thus a *proper* or *authorized* experience of every videogame, the fictional truths connected to videogames are dependent on the personal experience of every single player. This player can choose to follow the game's predetermined options, make up their own narrative, or even merely approach the game as a challenge, with disinterest in its fictional content.

1.4 Concluding Remarks

To conclude this chapter, videogames do offer us fiction experiences. Philosophical definitions of fiction can quite easily be applied to videogames and used to explain how we experience events and characters in videogames as fictional. The discussion and application of existing fiction theories on videogames has shown the importance of the appreciator's imaginative activities in the videogame experience. Conversely, and perhaps more interestingly, videogames can also tell us something about philosophical theories on fiction. Most importantly, they show the limited value of the idea that what is fictional is decided solely by the intentions of the fiction creator.[27] During the videogame experience, many events can become fictionally true without being *intended* to be imagined by their creators, because they become objects of imaginings that are based on the player's (mis)use of the game or on the computer's inability to represent the fictional world the way it was meant to be. Likewise, events that were meant to be imagined might simply not spark the player's imagination, as games are not only

27 Unless, of course, we interpret videogame players as co-creators of videogame fiction. This, however, would not differ much from Lamarque and Olsen's fiction definition, which, as argued before, comes very close to the Waltonian one that I defend here.

engaging as fiction, but also as rule-based challenges. Videogames show the value of a focus on the interaction between a work of fiction and its appreciator when it comes to explaining how we deal with fictions, something Walton already advocated when the field of fiction was dominated by non-interactive fictional media such as literature, theatre, and film. The inclusion of videogames within the field of the philosophy of fiction now raises the question of whether or not *all* works of fiction are more relevantly defined as fiction experiences. Indeed, it seems like nothing can usefully be called a fiction without it being experienced by someone approaching it as such.

This chapter has given us a first example of how philosophy of fiction can help us analyze videogames, and conversely, how an attention to and discussion of the videogame experience can help us expose problems and indicate possible reformations in philosophical ideas about the connection between fiction and imagination. In line with this, this chapter has shown Walton's fiction theory to be especially suitable to talk about the videogame experience as a fictional experience. This does not mean, however, that Walton's theory does not need to be amended at all to account for both our non-interactive and interactive fiction experiences. In this chapter, I already pointed out how Walton's vague notion of the 'function' of a representational work can be usefully replaced by Currie's notion of the intention of the fiction creator: the imaginings it is the function of a work to serve in, are then simply the imaginings the creator of the work intended to be prompted by the work. In similar fashion, later chapters will zoom in on different aspects of Walton's fiction theory, apply them to specific parts of the experience of videogames, scrutinize them, and reframe them.

2. Imagination and Videogames

In the previous chapter, videogames were described as fictions because their content is (mandated to be) imagined by their players. A question that remains, however, is what exactly is the role of imagination when playing videogames. After all, videogames are a (largely) *visual* fictional medium. In her chapter "Fiction and Imagination", Kathleen Stock already points out that most authors who discuss the inherent link between fiction and imagination focus on the textual medium (2016, 205). Exceptions in this regard are Gregory Currie (1990; 1995), Noël Carroll (1990), and of course Kendall Walton (1990), who describe how the experience of visual fictions like movies and paintings also necessarily involves the imagination. Their approach has not persuaded everyone about the need to invoke imagination to describe and explain the way we interpret visual fictions, however. Whereas it is quite intuitively and widely accepted that reading literature involves imagining the content of what is read, some philosophers assume that the experience of visual representations, like videogames, might not call for any imaginings at all, or only to a much lesser degree (Aarseth 2007, 37; Matravers 2014, 149; Tullman 2016, 774-777). After all, why would you imagine what you can already directly perceive? Why would videogames be experienced as fiction at all, if they just explicitly offer you representations of the objects and characters you would normally need to imagine?[28]

The following paragraphs describe two arguments that are based on the assumption that you do not need to (or are even able to) imagine something when you can either directly perceive it or already believe it. As these arguments could be important refutations of the claim that videogame experiences involve imagination, make-believe, or a fictive stance, each will be discussed in turn. I will show how both of these arguments ultimately cannot prove that imagination is not necessary in either the visual or immersive experiences of the videogame player. Moreover, in the last part of this chapter, I will argue against the truth of the assumption that what is directly perceived or believed cannot be part of a fiction. Drawing from Kathleen Stock's theory of fiction (2016), I will argue that fictional works can contain directly perceivable or believable elements, without thereby being less coherent in their fictionality.

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28 Moreover, many videogame companies strive towards increasingly realistic depictions of videogame worlds, to the point of *Red Dead Redemption 2* (Rockstar Studios 2018) portraying the shrinking of horses' testicles when the in-game weather gets colder. This obsession with realism, extreme details, perfect simulation, and faithfulness to the actual world for some people seems to go against an interpretation of videogame worlds as fictional (cfr. Aarseth 2007). And yet, the fact that games such as *Red Dead Redemption 2* are described in terms of 'realism' already betrays a fictional attitude towards these games. When it comes to representational works, realism is a term that is typically reserved not to talk about non-fiction, but to talk about representations the subject matter of which is represented in a way that gives it a semblance of truth or verisimilitude. Realistic effects in games are an attempt to make fictional events feel real, rather than a way to present non-fictional events. This is comparable to the so-called reality effect created by seemingly insignificant details in literature (Barthes 1968). I want to thank Prof. Dr. Steven Malliet for raising the issue on realism during the DiGRA Flanders 2018 conference.

2.1. Derek Matravers on Imagination and (Visual) Fiction

In the last chapter of his book *Fiction and Narrative*, Derek Matravers states that imagination has no role to play in the experience of film. By extension, his argument can be taken to show that imagination is not necessary in experiences of visual representations in general. Since videogames arguably belong to the category of the moving image (Meskin and Robson 2010), Matravers's argument might be problematical for the view that the videogame experience is an imaginative (or fictional) experience, even though he never talks about videogames himself. Matravers's argument is two-sided. He argues both against the claim that imagination is necessary to establish a relation between the audience and the events depicted on the screen, and against the claim that imagination is necessary to interpret the content of movies (2014, 147). Both of these claims are defended by Walton. The first one implies that the relation between the viewer of a visual representation and the content of it can only be explained by invoking imagination. According to Walton, whenever we interpret a depictive representation, we play a make-believe game in which we, ourselves, are incorporated. Walton uses children's make-believe games as an inspiration when discussing our experience of representational works. For example, when looking at the painting "Shore at Scheveningen" of Willem Van de Velde, this painting becomes a *reflexive* prop:

> The viewer – let's call him Stephen – might well remark, on examining the painting, 'I see several sailing ships,' and in much the same spirit as that in which he might say 'There are several ships sailing offshore.' If, as seems likely, the latter is to be understood as prefaced implicitly by something like 'It is fictional that,' probably the former is to be understood similarly, as the assertion that fictionally he sees several sailing ships. It would seem that in making either of these remarks Stephen is expressing a truth. So it seems to be fictional not only that there are several sailing ships offshore but also that Stephen sees them. His looking at this picture makes this fictional of himself. (Walton 1990, 215)

As Walton sees it, for Stephen's interpretation and utterances about the painting to make sense, there has to be a relation between him and the content depicted. Walton says this relation necessarily involves the imagination. Likewise, when watching a movie, we make it fictional of ourselves that we are watching the events depicted on the screen. In this regard, Walton famously talks about Charles, a man who watches the horror movie *The Green Slime*, and sees a green slime monster creeping across the screen, towards the camera. As a consequence of his viewing, Charles imagines of himself that he sees the slime, and that he is in danger of being attacked by this slime (Walton 1990, 242). It is only through imagination that a relation exists between Charles and the slime. And it is only because this imaginative relation was established, that Charles can interpret what happens in the horror movie and can truly be frightened. In short, according to Walton, all our interactions with representations involve *self-reflexive* make-believe games. Only when we ourselves become fictional, we can be said to see the fictional content of the representations.

Matravers rightly argues, contra Walton, that not all depictive representations are necessarily props that involve their viewer within the make-believe game. He points out that, while Walton uses the example of Charles' self-reflexive make-believe game as an archetype to explain all our interactions with fictions, this example is actually more of an exception. After all, in most of our interactions with fictional works, such as paintings and movies, we are not involved in the represented content whatsoever. Only when a work asks us to involve ourselves in the world it depicts, it can be said to mandate self-reflexive make-believe games. This is the case when, for example, there are asides in which characters communicate directly to the audience, or other instances of the fourth wall being broken, through which the audience becomes involved in the fiction themselves. As Walton believes that we are *always* part of the imagined world when experiencing fiction, his theory seems to imply that asides to the audience or a breaking of the fourth wall are "intrinsic to engaging with representations" (Matravers 2014, 116). We know, however, that they are not: most works of fiction do not force us to be part of the fictional world that is shown or described. *The Green Slime* is an exception because the movie truly gives us the impression that the slime is looking and coming at *us*, so that it becomes fictional that we are in danger. But, unless there is such a breaking of the fourth wall, there is no prompt at all for watchers of movies (or paintings) to imagine of themselves that they are watching the depicted content, as they are not part of the make-believe game that needs to be played to interpret this content. The painting of the Shore at Scheveningen, for example, does not ask us to imagine anything about ourselves: we need not make it true of ourselves that we are *fictionally watching* ships to be able to interpret the painting as depicting ships. The same applies to our experience of movies: "There is no role for the imagination: we do not need to imagine of our seeing the film that it is a seeing of the story told" (Matravers 2014, 156). Theories that posit the need of imagination to interpret visual fictions have no substance according to Matravers, because they "are attempting to do a job when there is no job to be done" (2014, 156). Matravers concedes that *de se* imagination might play an important role in children's games of make-believe (2014, 11), but refutes Walton's idea that we generally interpret depictive representations in the same way children play pretend games (2014, 14).

So far, I agree with Matravers's critique of the Waltonian approach to film. There is indeed no reason at all to think viewers of movies need to *imagine of themselves* that they are truly watching the depicted events. As Gregory Currie says:

> What I imagine while watching a movie concerns the events in fiction it presents, not any perceptual relations between myself and those events. My imagining is not that I see the characters and the events of the movie; it is simply that I imagine that these events *occur* – the same sort of impersonal imagining I engage in when I read a novel. (Currie 1995, 179)

When watching movies, we do not (necessarily) imagine ourselves to be in the place of the camera, watching the events unfold from within the movie's world: we need not make anything fictional about ourselves to make sense of what we see. We simply

imagine the content of what we see. When watching Shore at Scheveningen, for example, we can imagine there to be boats, without imagining of *ourselves* that we see these boats. Matravers also promptly agrees with the way Currie eliminates all need for *de se* imagining from the movie experience. However, he still criticizes the fact that Currie invokes the imagination to explain the experience of film, stating that it is based on "flawed reasons for thinking that imagination is the mental state peculiar to fiction" (2014, 156). For Matravers, imagination has no role to play whatsoever: not in the relation between audience and depicted content, and not in the interpretation of the content itself.

To prove that we do not need imagination to interpret what happens in films, Matravers calls upon theories of Wolfang Iser and Richard Wollheim (2014, 149). Matravers seeks to explicitly contrast imagination and perception. He refers to a passage by Wolfgang Iser, of which he says it shows us that "the plenitude of film renders the imagination otiose: in contrast to the written word, there is nothing left for the imagination to do" (Matravers 2014, 149). Iser's passage reads as follows:

> If one sees the mountain, then of course one can no longer imagine it, and so the act of picturing the mountain presupposes its absence. Similarly, with a literary text we can only picture things which are not there; the written part of the text gives us the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things; indeed without the elements of indeterminacy, the gaps in the texts, we should not be able to use our imagination. The truth of this observation is borne out by the experience many people have on seeing, for instance, the film of a novel. While reading Tom Jones, they may never have had a clear conception of what the hero actually looks like, but on seeing the film, some may say, 'That's not how I imagined him'. The point here is that the reader of *Tom Jones* is able to visualize the hero virtually for himself, and so his imagination senses the vast number of possibilities; the moment these possibilities are narrowed down to one complete and immutable picture, the imagination is put out of action, and we feel we have somehow been cheated. (Iser 1978, 283)

In this passage, Iser makes an interesting point about the difference between the experience of literature and the experience of film. With this, Iser wants to show that imagination has a role to play in the experience of literature, but not in the film experience. However, Iser seems to use 'imagination' as a synonym for 'visualization' or 'picturing', a meaning the term has long outgrown within contemporary philosophy of fiction (Kind 2016a, 5-6). Obviously, films eliminate the need for movie-consumers to visualize and make up mental pictures of what they see, as the movie simply already offers them visual representations. Currie's kind of imagination is untouched by this argument, however: the movie consumer is still invited to entertain thoughts about the movie events as truly occurring, without actually assuming their truth or existence. Iser's passage rightly shows that *visualizing* fictional content is not something the movie viewer has to do, but it does not show that imagination in general (as it is defined in contemporary philosophy of fiction) is not necessary for the appreciation of movies. Matravers seems to realize that Iser uses 'imagination' differently than philosophers

like Currie do. Indeed, when first quoting Iser's paragraph in an earlier chapter of his book, Matravers himself says that the way Iser talks about imagination reminds us of "the use to which the term 'imagination' was put prior to contemporary philosophy of fiction", a use in which 'imagination' was still inherently connected to the creation of mental images (2014, 74). Iser thus only seems to argue against the necessity of forming mental images when watching movies, but not against the necessity of imagination as it is used in contemporary philosophy of fiction. Matravers, however, further strengthens his argument against the necessity of imagination when watching movies by referring to Wollheim's theory on imagination and perception.

Wollheim states that "imagination has no necessary part to play in the perception of what is represented" (1986, 46). When faced with representational works, Wollheim says we can see their content *in their surface*. In this regard, he talks about the two-foldedness of our experience of visual representations: we are simultaneously aware of the surface or the *physical image* we are looking at, and the content depicted by this image. Matravers adds that, when watching films, the audience is typically not aware of the surface *as a surface*: "Someone who is looking at a film typically believes they are looking at a screen on which coloured light is projected but does not usually experience the screen as a screen on which coloured light is projected. Typically, they see only the content of the film" (2014, 152). For Matravers, watching movies is a case of 'collapsed seeing-in', a term he borrows from Hopkins (2008, 150): when watching movies, we see the *characters*, and not the actors playing the characters (Matravers 2014, 153). We thus do not need our imagination, as Currie would claim, to form an idea about the unfolding events behind the visual representations of the movie, or about the characters behind the actors. Matravers concludes that "we simply see a representation of the story told, and form our mental model on the basis of that" (2014, 156). We do not need our imagination, he writes, as we can simply *see* the characters and the occurring events and form a mental model about what happens in the movie's world on the basis of this perception.

However, it is somewhat hard to see the difference between Matravers's mental models and imagination. Matravers describes these so-called mental models we construe when watching (or reading, or listening to) fiction as representations of the state of affairs described or shown by the work: "The general schema is this. When engaging with a representation, we draw on our information sources (the text, our background knowledge, modified by context and our goals), using our various memories, to construct the mental model" (2014, 63). Matravers wants to emphasize that the construction of this mental model is neutral to the representation being fictional or non-fictional (2014, 58). He states that the mental models we construe when experiencing fictional representations are not necessarily imaginative. Their content is simply compartmentalized from our pre-existing structures of belief, and it is not necessary to postulate a distinctive mental state such as imagination to explain our entertainment of this content (2014, 95). Matravers explicitly argues against what he calls 'the consensus view', the view that there is an inherent connection between fiction and imagination (as opposed to belief). This is probably his most controversial claim: the view criticized by Matravers is called a

consensus view by him precisely because it is often taken for granted within philosophy of fiction. Lamarque even calls it 'the commonsense view' (2016, 618). Ultimately, Matravers seems to be unable to escape this consensus/commonsense view himself. After all, his own description of the mental models we form when appreciating fictions still relies on a specific relation between nonfiction and belief, and, arguably, between fiction and imagination. Matravers describes the construction of these mental models as a two stage process, saying: "The first stage is neutral between non-fictional and fictional representations: we build a mental model of the representations that is compartmentalized but not isolated from our pre-existing structures of belief" (2014, 90). After this stage, "we go through a second stage of either certifying or 'unaccepting'" the content of our mental model (2014, 97). That is: the content of our mental model either gets integrated in our structures of belief, or stays compartmentalized. Matravers cites psychologists' investigations of this second stage of mental model-building. He writes:

> Unsurprisingly, Potts and his colleagues found that there was greater integration when subjects believed they were engaging with non-fictional narratives: 'higher degrees of incorporation are achieved when subjects believe they are learning real information' (Potts, St. John et al. 1989, 331). (Matravers 2014, 97)

The fact that some parts of the content of our mental models are integrated in belief structures and others stay compartmentalized, might be just another description of imagination: propositions that are *not* integrated in our belief structures, are thoughts we have without affirmation of the existence or truth value of their intentional content. As Kathleen Stock asks: "Why deny that this integration, which takes place in one case but not the other (whether at a 'second stage' or not), can form a basis for a distinction between fiction and nonfiction?" (2017, 168) Why deny that this process of integration shows that fictional propositions are indeed imagined and not believed? Instead of showing that imagination and fiction are not inherently linked, Matravers merely obscures their relation behind the description of mental models. Ultimately, the content of these mental models still seems to be imagined or believed depending on the (non)fictionality of the representations based on which the model was constructed. As such, rather than a critique of the consensus view, Matravers's view seems to be an updated and nuanced version of this view. In this regard, his description of how our own background knowledge and memories influence our mental model-building, and how this mental model is, in a first stage, neutral to a representation being fictional or not, seems especially valuable. In the end, we can agree with a large portion of Matravers's argument, and still say that the construction of a mental model which viewers of fiction films partake in is an *imaginative* activity, which is not very different from the playing of a make-believe game. Appreciating fictional movies then simply involves building a mental model in which the represented states of affairs are eventually compartmentalized from belief structures and in which the movie images, based on the background knowledge and memories of the viewers, are used as props to imagine that these states of affairs become fictionally true.

Lastly, it is important to note that Matravers talks about *film*, not about videogames. Although he ultimately seems to be unable to conclusively show that the imagination is not necessary to appreciate films or visual representations, his critique of Walton is still legitimate: there is no reason at all to say of viewers of films (or photographs, or paintings) that they have to imagine *of their viewing* that it is a viewing of the depicted content. There is no reason at all why viewers of films should themselves be part of the make-believe game they play, unless there is a breaking of the fourth wall. And thus: there is no reason to say that the appreciation of representations necessarily involves *de se* imagination. Players of videogames, however, are often inherently part of the world they imagine when approaching the videogame as a fictional work. After all, in the case of videogames, not only the content of the visual representations needs to be imagined, but also the relation between the player and this depicted content. Most videogames belong to the class of *self-involving* interactive fictions. This self-involvement means that videogame players, just like the children in the make-believe games Walton describes, "are almost invariably characters in the fictional worlds associated with video games" (Robson and Meskin 2016, 167). And this is how Walton's *de se* imagining comes back into play. Unlike the viewer of movies, who can merely imagine the viewed content taking place, the player of videogames is not merely a passive viewer, but an active participant within the fictional world. Videogame players also need to imagine *being the character* they watch (and control) throughout the game, and *being present* in the space that is represented to them on the screen. Related to this, they need to imagine of every object and event in the game that it relates to them somehow: when being presented with a certain room, they imagine of this room that *they are in it*; when seeing a zombie approaching, they imagine of this zombie that it is dangerous *to them*, etc. Players thus imagine of their viewing of the fictional world in the game, that it is a viewing done by a character within the fictional world: players, unlike moviegoers, *imagine* seeing the depicted world (from the inside). Although Walton never talked about videogames when describing his theory in *Mimesis*, what he said about *de se* make-believe games seems especially applicable to videogames, as players always need to imagine a relation between themselves and the depicted content.

A critical note is in order here, however: although the videogame experience indeed shows the relevance of Walton's descriptions of *de se* imagination, they thereby also reveal a fault in Walton's theory. After all, Walton's conviction that any act of imagining is an act of *de se* imagining results in a complete inability to explain the main difference between the imaginative activities of viewers of movies and the (typically) *de se* imaginative activities of videogame players.[29] Whereas film viewers need only imagine the events represented to them, as Currie argues, videogame players very often also need to imagine themselves as an actor within the fictional world. Videogames reveal the value

29 I say 'typically' because some videogames do not ask of their players that they imagine anything about themselves at all. Puzzle games and strategy games often only ask of the player that they manipulate objects within the world presented to them, without assigning any particular fictional role to the player. More on this in chapter five.

of Walton's notion of *de se* imagining only through showing its irrelevance in explaining our appreciations of non-interactive works of fiction. Only when a work incorporates its appreciator or user within the fictional world it represents, is *de se* imagination useful to explain the appreciation of this work. This critique of Walton's disposition to call all imagination *de se imagination* will be elaborated on further in chapter five.

To conclude, Matravers's two-sided argument against the necessity of imagination in the interpretation of visual fictions cannot be used to argue against the necessity of imagination in the videogame experience. On the one hand, Matravers wants to show that imagination is unnecessary to interpret the content of visual fictions. He states that viewers of movies can simply build mental models based on their perception instead of their imagination. His notion of mental models itself, however, still seems to rely on imagination when it comes to mental models about *fictional* representations. On the other hand, Matravers argues against the need for *de se* imagination in the interpretation of movies. Indeed, viewers do not need to imagine anything about themselves or the relation between them and the images to understand the movie. Nevertheless, this argument does not work for videogame fiction. As Robson and Meskin point out, even if we put aside Walton's idea that every kind of depiction is necessarily a fiction, most videogames still belong to the class of fictions in virtue of engaging players' imagination in other ways than through involving visual representations (2012b, 207). The phenomena of identification and immersion, which are inherently connected to the videogame experience, show that players imaginatively project themselves within the represented fictional world. The self-referential make-believe games Walton described thus seem to be especially relevant with regard to videogames, in which the player becomes a character and feels present in the represented space.

2.2. Geert Gooskens on Imagination and Immersion

Contrary to Matravers, Geert Gooskens explicitly talks about imagination within the videogame experience. In his PhD thesis "Varieties of Pictorial Experience" (2012), Gooskens argues that imagination is not even necessary for the experiences of immersion and identification within videogames. After all, these experiences are, according to Gooskens, *pictorial experiences* which are a direct effect of what is represented in videogames. It is important to first clarify what I mean when using the term 'immersion' in this thesis. I will be using Gooskens's own definition of this term as the feeling of being present in a represented space (Gooskens 2012, 71-74). This is only one of the very specific meanings that have been ascribed to the term 'immersion'.[30] Within

30 Gordon Calleja offers a nice overview of the different ways in which 'immersion', 'absorption', and '(tele)presence' are used with regard to virtual reality in "In-Game: From Immersion to Incorporation" (2011). Mel Slater and Sylvia Wilbur, for example, use immersion as "a description of a technology that describes the extent to which the computer displays are capable of delivering an inclusive, extensive, surrounding and vivid illusion of reality to the sense of a human participant"

psychology, immersion is often referred to as absorption, or the phenomenon in which a person's attention is completely involved within one certain activity (such as reading, driving, or watching movies) to the point of losing their sense of time and the consciousness of their surroundings (Tavinor 2009a, 52). Within philosophy of literature, the term is often used quite broadly to refer to the experience of being "lost in a book" (Nell 1988), or to the mental process of readers who picture, model, and imaginatively transport themselves to alternative worlds by reconstructing the characters and their contexts based on their reading (James 2015, 213). The kind of immersion I will talk about is a more specific process than this, and does not occur with every interpretation or imaginative experience of fictional worlds. As Gooskens writes:

> [M]ost visual representations do not prompt their viewers to claim they are in the represented space. Whilst watching *Lord of the Rings*, the spectator might be overwhelmed by the landscapes she sees. But she will not be inclined to say she is in The Shire when asked to specify where she is. In the case of virtual reality, by contrast, a sense of being located in the represented space seems to be a structural feature of the viewer's experience. (Gooskens 2012, 71)

Immersion can thus be understood as a feeling of being present in the represented space, to the point that the appreciator can, and often will, actually remark on and pinpoint their own location within the fictional world. When reading *Lord of the Rings* we might imagine the Shire and all the events that take place there, maybe even visualizing the Shire and its inhabitants, but we cannot say that *we are there*. We are not part of our imagined Shire, as it is simply not part of the story that we, the reader, are present.[31] When playing a *Lord of the Rings* videogame, however, players make comments like 'I'm in the Shire now' all the time. They truly occupy a position within the represented space and are spatially related to the events and characters inside it (Gooskens 2012, 74), to the point of describing the videogame space as their own location. The way Gooskens, and I in this thesis, use the term immersion is thus akin to how Bob Witmer and Michael Singer define it, namely as a "a psychological state characterized by perceiving oneself to be enveloped by, included in, and interacting with an environment that provides a continuous stream of stimuli and experiences" (1998, 227). It is also very similar to Calleja's description of immersion as 'incorporation', which he describes as a feeling of embodied habitation of videogame environments (2011, 169, see also part 5.1.1). Although I will be using the same definition and talk about the exact same phenomenon as the one Gooskens is describing, I argue that imaginative activities on the appreciator's part are crucial for immersion to occur, while Gooskens argues that imagination is not necessary at all for the feeling of being present in represented spaces.

(1997, 606). Within game studies, on the other hand, immersion has been used to describe "experiential states as diverse as general engagement, perception of realism, addiction, suspension of disbelief, identification with game characters, and more" (Calleja 2011, 25).

31 And even if we would imagine ourselves being in the Shire, we would no longer imagine the actual Shire represented in *Lord of the Rings*, but a Shire that is unauthorized by the actual books: a Shire of our own making, in which we are present.

Starting from the premise that "[w]hat is represented does not need to be imagined by the viewer of a representation" (2012, 84), Gooskens argues that the player's presence in the represented videogame space does not need to be imagined, because it is directly represented: "Virtual realities do not just represent three-dimensional spaces; they also represent their users' presence in these spaces" (2012, 84). Gooskens says that virtual realities (with which he refers to any reality that is represented in videogames, regardless of it being represented through a VR-headset or on a screen) thus create immersive experiences without any interference of imagination. Two conditions need to be fulfilled for this to occur. Firstly, the virtual reality system must represent a body (2012, 85). This body can be either *externally* represented, from a third-person perspective, or given through an *internal* or *embodied* representation, from a first-person perspective. Secondly, the user needs to have control over the represented body:

> For immersion to occur, there should be a causal link between the movements of the user behind her computer and the visual information on her screen. [...] When, for example, the joystick is pushed forward, the represented body moves forward as well. There is a link between the user's *motor-input* (i.e. the movement of her hand on the joy-stick) and the *sensory-output* (i.e. the visual information on screen). (Gooskens 2012, 87)

Therefore, when the player of a game pushes the joystick forward and sees, as a consequence of this action, that the represented body starts moving, they can *perceive* that they, in the guise of a game character, are moving. The game system directly represents both this movement of the character under influence of the player's movements and the user's spatial relations to the depicted objects in the game world. As a consequence, Gooskens says, the imagination has no role to play in the experience of identification with the game character or the feeling of immersion in the represented space. The player merely needs to perceive the represented body and recognize that their actions correspond to certain changes in the visual information they receive. Gooskens concludes:

> S does not have to imagine being present in the space represented by the VR, as her presence in this space is represented by the VR through the internal or external representation of an embodied point of view and a causal link between the actual movements of S and changes in the sensory information she receives. (2012, 87-88)

Gooskens's theory seems to show that the important difference between film and videogames, namely the identification and immersion players might feel while playing, are not proof of imaginative activity at all, as was argued in the previous section.

In the next paragraphs, however, I will argue that there is reason to believe that imagination is crucial for the feeling of presence in represented spaces. After all, Gooskens's claim that players can feel present in a represented space without any connected imaginative activity seems strange. What would it mean for players to be aware that they are *not* present in the virtual environment, but at the same time feel as if they are? It certainly seems like these players are entertaining or thinking about their presence within the virtual environment in the mode of non-actuality, that is: without either affirming (or actively denying) it actually being the case. Or, formulated differently:

these players imagine being present in the represented space without actually believing they are. I argue that it is hard to talk about the feeling of presence in represented spaces without reference to any imaginative activity. To show this, I will discuss some videogame situations which demonstrate that Gooskens's two conditions might be necessary, but not sufficient for immersion in videogames. These examples will demonstrate that a specific imaginative activity needs to take place for identification and immersion to occur.

A first example that supports my argument against Gooskens can be found in the way players approach the videogame *The Sims* (Maxis 2000). In *The Sims*, players control multiple characters called 'sims' and decide their everyday life: players decide what jobs the sims get, in which house they live, what they say to their friends, and even when they go to the toilet. *The Sims* games fulfill Gooskens's conditions for immersion: they overtly represent bodies, and there is a clear causal link between the players' actions and the movement of these bodies.[32] That does not mean, however, that every player of *The Sims* identifies with the sims and feels immersed in their world. Looking at multiple *Youtube* videos of people playing *the Sims*, there are clearly two categories of Sims-players. One group of players can be heard saying things like 'I'm gonna look for a job now!' and 'I want to invite some friends for dinner', clearly identifying with the sim they are controlling, referring to these characters in the first person, and feeling present in 'their' in-game house.[33] Another group, however, can be heard saying things like 'Now I'm gonna make you look for a job, you need to make some money!' or 'You really need to clean this room'. These players refer to their characters in the second person, and to themselves, as external players, in the first person.[34] They do not seem to feel present in the represented space, as they simply decide what happens in the virtual environment without being part of it themselves. There thus seem to be two possible ways of playing *The Sims*. Players could use the representations of the sims as props to imagine they are the sims, thus playing a *self-involving* make-believe game. In this case, players take on

32 One might argue that the videogame *The Sims* does not represent bodies or the player's influence on these bodies in a way that fulfills Gooskens's conditions. After all, players of *The Sims* move around the bodies in this game by giving the characters commands rather than directly moving these characters' bodies by pressing buttons. In the end, this would not change the argument offered here in a major way, as the experience of *The Sims*, regardless of it offering the representations Gooskens thinks are crucial for immersion to occur, shows that Gooskens's conditions are either not necessary or not sufficient for immersion to occur. After all, some players of *The Sims* are immersed when playing this game, while others are not. The fact that some players do feel present in the environment represented in this game, shows that even if Gooskens's conditions are not fulfilled by this game, their fulfillment is not necessary for immersion. The fact that some players do not feel immersed at all, shows that if Gooskens's conditions were fulfilled by the representations in *The Sims*, these conditions are not by themselves sufficient for immersion. Either way, what seems crucial for immersion to occur is not exactly what is represented by the game, but the way players use these representations in their personal game.

33 An example can be found on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttzBZTB7Tfg (Accessed on January 15th 2020).

34 An example can be found on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOUxX9TbVus (Accessed on January 15th 2020).

an internal perspective within the game world. Alternatively, they could take on an external perspective to the game world and play a make-believe game in which they themselves do not play a role at all. In this case, they would manipulate the sims in the same way an author controls the actions of the characters in his own novel: from outside of the fictional world.[35] Playing *The Sims* might thus entail a feeling of identification and immersion, but this is completely dependent on the kind of imaginative game the player decides to play, or the thought they entertain whilst playing (either that of being the character, or merely manipulating the character as themselves).

Moreover, recall the fact that some players, like most players of *Pacman*, play games as challenges and are relatively disinterested in the game's fictional world. These players can be said to take on an external perspective, playing the game as themselves and merely manipulating the representations on the screen in a way that will make them achieve the highest score. Even if there is a represented body and a represented correspondence between the player's movements and this body's movements, players might not identify with this body at all. It is perfectly possible to play *Pacman* without imagining yourself to be Pacman or feeling immersed or present in the represented maze in any way, despite *Pacman* meeting the conditions Gooskens talks about. Again, this seems easily explained by the fact that these non-immersed players simply do not play any *de se* make-believe game: they do not use the representations in the game as props to imagine anything about themselves at all. The situation of non-imaginative *Pacman* players can then be compared to users of computers, who see a cursor represented and move this cursor around within the virtual environment, but do not feel present in these environments themselves. These users simply do not imagine of themselves that they are the cursor, but merely see the cursor as a tool to manipulate virtual environments from the outside. Pacman can be approached in the exact same way, thus not giving players the feeling that they are in the maze, but merely that they are manipulating what happens in the maze from the outside.

In conclusion, Gooskens's argument that imagination is not necessary for identification with videogame characters or immersion in the videogame world is inadequate. He states that both of these phenomena arise when two conditions are fulfilled: there is a representation of a body, and the player perceives a correspondence between their movements and the movements of this representation. However, as examples of videogame experiences show, both of these conditions can be fulfilled without there being

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35 This is largely compatible with Marie-Laure Ryan's distinction between internal and external interactivity. I say 'largely', because Ryan describes internal interactivity as the mode in which "users projects themselves as members of the virtual world by identifying with an avatar, who can be shown from either a first-person or a third-person perspective" (2006, 108), while I say there does not even need to be an overtly represented avatar for an internal mode of interactivity. Moreover, Ryan describes external interactivity as the mode in which "users are situated outside the virtual world. They either play the role of a god who controls the virtual world from above, or they conceptualize their own activity as navigating a database" (2006, 108). I, however, argue that taking on the role *of a god* would mean the player interacts with the game world from an internal perspective, since they take on the role of an unrepresented proxy (the god) in this world. The internal and external perspective on videogames will be further discussed in chapter five.

immersion or identification. What does seem necessary and sufficient for identifying with game characters and feeling present in the represented game world, is the player using the videogame representation of a body that moves according to their actions as a prop in a *de se* make-believe game. That is: a make-believe game in which the player involves their own bodily movements and sensory experiences as props to imagine that they are a character within the game's world. Contrary to what Gooskens argued, imagination is the key to explain differences between players' being immersed in a videogame and players merely approaching the very same game from an external viewpoint, without identifying with any game character. Gooskens's might thus be right when saying that a represented body and the possibility to control this body are necessary for the feeling of presence in a represented space to occur. But just by themselves, these representations are not sufficient for immersion. The player also needs to use these representations to imagine being in the represented space, by imagining their actions being actions of the represented body, and not just manipulations of the game world that are performed from outside of this world.

2.3. Kathleen Stock: the Principle of Associated Imaginings

Both Matravers's and Gooskens's arguments cannot be used to show that the imagination is not necessary for the videogame experience. However, both authors at first sight seem to have a good point when they say that something that is already perceived or believed is not at the same time object of imagining, and thus fictional. With regard to movies, Matravers writes that "the plenitude of film renders the imagination otiose: in contrast to the written word, there is nothing left for the imagination to do" (2014, 149). Likewise, Gooskens writes that imagination is not necessary to interpret what is presented in pictures: imagination, he writes, is "relieved from its duty once perceptual access to the aspect of interest is achieved" (Gooskens 2012, 83).These comments connect to Iser's quite radical idea that perception and imagination are mutually exclusive. "If one sees the mountain," Iser writes, "then of course one can no longer imagine it" (1978, 283). If imagination is defined as an intentional state without any interest in the (real-world) truth value or existence of the intentional object, and belief as the intentional state the object of which we affirm to be true or truly existent, it seems, at first sight, impossible to say something can at the same time be believed (for example, because it is perceived) *and* imagined. Gooskens seems to sympathize with this assumption also when it comes to the visual experience of videogame worlds. In the following paragraphs, I will argue against the idea that what is believed or perceived cannot be imagined, and show how the perceived and believed content of videogames can still be part of the fictional game experience.

Up until now I have largely focused on videogame elements that are quite unproblematically fictional because they are (merely) imagined by the player, such as the player's presence within the fictional world. Gooskens, however, argued that many

elements of videogame worlds are directly perceivable, such as the gray color of a videogame sword, so that no imagination is needed to interpret them. Recall in this regard also Jesper Juul, who said games are *half-real*, in the sense that they consist of real rules and fictional worlds. Espen Aarseth, moreover, writes that many elements in videogames are *simulations* rather than fictions. More importantly, both augmented reality and virtual reality games make explicit use of real-world elements. In augmented reality, the real world is used as the environment in which the game takes place. When players of *Pokémon Go* (Niantic 2016) see a Pokémon appearing in their game, it will always appear at an actual place close to them: a church, a school, a statue, etc. Their gaming experience thus seems at least partly non-fictional, for example when they truly go to an actual place as a part of the game. Contrary to this, the environment in virtual reality experiences is artificially created and represented to the player through a VR-headset for them to imagine. In virtual reality, however, players' actual bodies play an important role in the interaction with the virtual environment. In VR games, there is often no fictional avatar for players to inhabit, as they just use their own bodies and movements to make things happen within the game. Many videogames thus seem to contain elements that players can directly perceive or believe to exist, such as the gray color of the sword, the church in *Pokémon Go*, the player's own body in VR, etc. This might be a problem: is it helpful or even possible to consistently analyze the experience of (AR/VR) videogames as fiction experiences, if they inherently contain *both* fictional elements and elements that are directly perceived or believed?[36]

In the following paragraphs, I will argue that videogames can still usefully be regarded as coherently fictional, even if we consider AR and VR games. For this, I will make use of an important modification Kathleen Stock makes to the authorial intention definition of fiction, which I will denote as the principle of associated imaginings. Although I have already argued that this specific fiction definition is unhelpful to explain our experiences of videogames, Kathleen Stock's variation of it contains a helpful insight to make sense of directly perceivable or believed elements in fiction in general, and in the videogame experience in particular.

In her chapter on fiction and imagination in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*, Kathleen Stock specifies the relation between believing and imagining to further develop her definition of fiction. More specifically, she shows that it is not at all impossible to, at the same time, believe (or know, or perceive) that p and imagine that p. As Stock says, a necessary condition for imagining that p is that "one either does not believe that p, or believes that p and is disposed to inferentially connect the thought of p to further propositional content which one does not believe" (2016, 213). I call this the *principle of associated imaginings*, as it says that something can be imagined while at the same time being believed, as long as it is associated with some further content that is merely imagined. To clarify this principle of associated imaginings, Stock cites

36 There is a long-standing, but unconcluded, debate within the philosophy of fiction about how much non-fictional elements a work of fiction might contain while still maintaining its fictional status (see Currie 1990, 49; Friend 2008, 163; Matravers 2014, 38; Stock 2016, 208).

Alan Leslie's "Pretending and Believing: Issues in the Theory of ToMM" (1994). In this article, Leslie describes an experiment in which a child has to imagine of an empty cup that it is filled with tea, and then turned upside down:

> The child is encouraged to 'fill' two toy cups with 'juice' or 'tea' or whatever the child designated the pretend contents of the bottle to be. The experimenter then says, 'Watch this!', picks up one of the cups, turns it upside down, shakes it for a second, then replaces it alongside the other cup. The child is then asked to point at the 'full cup' and at the 'empty cup'. (Both cups are, of course, really empty throughout.) (Leslie 1994, 223)

The children in this experiment all pointed to the cup that had been turned upside down as being the 'empty cup'. These children thus had a belief and an imagining with the same content: they perceived, knew, and believed the cup to be empty, but also *pretended* it to be so. As Stock concludes, "it seems reasonable to say that, for this to be the case, the child must also be disposed to conjoin her present imagining that *the cup is empty* with other thoughts whose content does not replicate any simultaneous belief of hers: for instance, that *the cup was full a minute ago, before it was upturned*" (Stock 2017, 146-147; emphasis original).

An example of something that is believed and imagined at the same time that can be found in fiction, is the fact that in Arthur Conan Doyle's stories about Sherlock Holmes, there is street named 'Baker Street' in London. There seems to be no need to imagine this, as it is true: there truly is a Baker Street in London. Yet, within the *Sherlock Holmes* universe, this fact about London is closely connected to something readers do need to imagine: namely, the fact that the legendary detective Sherlock Holmes and his friend Dr. John H. Watson lived at 221B Baker Street. In Stock's terminology, readers of *Sherlock Holmes* can imagine that 'There is a street named Baker Street in London', even while believing this, as long as they are disposed to inferentially connect this thought with something they do not believe, as is the case when they need to imagine that 'Holmes and Watson lived in this street'. The Baker Street that is mentioned in the *Sherlock Holmes* stories and that should be imagined when reading these books can be rephrased as 'the street where Holmes and Watson lived'. We can thus say it is *fictional* in Doyle's books that Baker Street exists in London. As Stock concludes:

> We now have a new proposal concerning the nature of fiction's negative relation to truth/belief: though parts of a fictional text can be believed true by the reader (and be true, and included for truth related reasons), the whole cannot. [...] More precisely, then: a fiction is any passage of text (or string of utterances) that prescribes imagining, in my sense, its total content (explicit and implicit), whether or not it prescribes believing some of that content. [...] Fictions that prescribe the belief that p also prescribe imagining that p, so that there need be no discontinuity in attitude. (2016, 213-214)

Stock's principle of associated imaginings can show us how non-fictional elements in fictional works still invite the fictive stance, or the playing of make-believe games, because of their relation to the fictional elements in this work. In this way, she shows that fictional works can be a patchwork of fictional and non-fictional utterances, without thereby eliciting a discontinuity in the imaginative attitude of its readers. Although

Stock seems to limit her claim to written fiction, it can easily be integrated in Walton's fiction theory and applied to other fictional media, including visual representations and videogames. Her principle can then be used to argue that even elements of videogames that are directly perceivable, precise simulations of existing objects, or even elements imported from the real world, can still perfectly be called fictional.

Take, for example, a sword in a videogame like *Dark Souls III* (FromSoftware 2016). The sword has a sword-shape, is iron-coloured, and is accompanied by sword sounds when it hits walls and enemies. As Aarseth would say: it is a *simulated* sword (2007, 37). Does that mean that the sword cannot be a fictional one, too? That is: can the virtual sword still function as a prop in a game of make-believe if it is already represented as having all the properties that would need to be imagined? Let's take a look again at what Geert Gooskens said about the unnecessity of imagination when the supposed object of imagining can be directly perceived. He argues that, when a child receives a real sword to play with from his parents, this child does not need to imagine it 'being a sword with swordproperties', as it can directly perceive it is (2012, 83). According to Gooskens (and Matravers), viewers of pictorial representations do not need to activate 'the productive powers' of their mind to form an idea about characteristics of a represented object, when the visual representation of this object already represents these characteristics: "What is represented does not need be imagined by the viewer of a representation" (Gooskens 2014, 184). The principle of associated imaginings shows, however, that even if the sword-properties of the (either real or simulated) sword do not need to be imagined because they are immediately perceptually accessible, they can still be fictional by association. When the child plays with the real sword, it might still imagine itself to be a knight, and therefore imagine of the sword that it belongs to a knight. In that way, the child's sword is still a fictional sword within the child's game, even if it is a real sword.

Gooskens rejects this claim: "Of course, [the child] can imagine to be a knight that holds a sword. But that would be an imagination about himself, rather than an imagination about what is in his hand" (2012, 83). With this, Gooskens ignores the fact that the child imagining to be a knight *entails* that the sword is a knight's sword and that it is being used by the knight to defeat all his (fictional) enemies. The sword is not simply believed to be a sword given to the child by its parents, but imagined to be another, not really existent, sword. Moreover, Gooskens seems to make the child's game a very complex one, that involves both fictional and non-fictional elements and that constantly asks for a discontinuity of attitudes: a fictive stance towards the child itself and its role as a knight, and a mere perception of non-fictional elements like the sword and its sword-properties. Note too that the child can perfectly play a make-believe game using the real sword as a prop, in which it pretends the sword to be gold instead of its true iron-color. The real sword is a prop like any other, even though less imaginative power is needed to use it as a fictional sword than playing with a branch would. Likewise, the player of *Dark Souls III* uses the directly perceptible characteristics of the virtual sword as a prop in a make-believe game, in which they also imagine the sword to belong to them, the Ashen One, who rose from his grave to defeat the Lords of Cinder. Even if the player believes that the sword

is iron-colored because it is represented as such, the iron-color of the sword is still part of an imaginative game. After all, players do not think about this sword as the virtual 3D-model that it actually is and that was colored by a graphic artist, but imagine it to be a sword that they are holding and fighting with. The principle of associated imaginings can be used to explain that the experience of the directly perceived characteristics of the virtual sword neatly fits in the fictional experience of the entire game, without there being a change in (fictional) attitude by the player.

Likewise, the principle of associated imaginings shows that the non-fictional elements in VR and AR games can seamlessly be integrated in the fictional experience. When we are playing augmented reality games such as *Pokémon Go*, our real environment forms the backdrop for our gaming experience: Pokémon appear at real landmarks in our vicinity, such as statues, churches, and schools. Therefore, the *Pokémon Go* experience, which consists of visiting these actual places, seems largely non-fictional. However, as the principle of associated imaginings shows us, these non-fictional elements can just as much be part of the fictional world of the game as the pokémon are. When the player says 'I'm going to the statue', they truly believe this, but also imagine it, since this sentence is strongly connected to the fiction of the game, to the point in which the players of *Pokémon Go* can just as easily say 'I'm going to the statue, where the pokémon appeared'. In Stock's terminology, the thought of the statue is inferentially connected to something the players of *Pokémon Go* need to imagine: the presence of a pokémon. In Walton's terminology, the statue is an inherent part of the make-believe game players of *Pokémon Go* play, using both the games' representations and the real-life buildings that are integrated in the game as props. In a similar fashion, when we are immersed in virtual reality, even the movements of our own body (which *really* happen) become the object of imagining. A player shooting zombies in a virtual reality game might know that they are making certain arm-movements, but at the same time imagine of these movements that they are true manipulations of an actual shotgun. This phenomenon of movements which are at the same time believed and imagined to take place is not exclusive to VR-games. Increasingly complex input-devices (such as motion sensors, camera's, and hardware which looks like the inside of a car for racing games) make that players can often use their actual movements to act within game worlds. The Nintendo videogame Wii Sports, for example, integrated the players real-life physical movements into the fictional game world. While players truly believed they swung their arms, this arm-swinging was also object of imagining: players imagined of their swinging of the Wii Remote that it was a swinging of tennis rackets.[37]

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37 Note in this regard that, completely in line with Gooskens's argument, game developers like to make input-devices that truly look like the thing they represent in the game to diminish the imaginative activity needed by the player. The Wii Remote could be placed in plastic casings in the shape of a steering wheel or a crossbow, or accompanied by a board that could be placed on the floor and on which the player would stand, depending on whether the player was playing a racing, shooting, or snowboarding game.

In the remainder of this thesis, I will discuss many aspects of the videogame experience, which at first sight seem to be non-fictional because they are *believed* or *perceived* to really exist or take place. In these discussions, I will follow the principle of associated imaginings, which shows that these aspects can *at the same time* be part of the fictional experience, because they are associated with things we need to imagine, and as such *also* function as props in games of make-believe. Even though, when playing a shooter game, we really perceive things that look like zombies, with gaping mouths and a greenish complexion, these elements are still part of the imaginative game we play. In contrast to what Gooskens says, the player does have to *imagine* these elements to appreciate the fiction within the videogame. Even if a real statue is incorporated in our playing of *Pokémon Go*, this statue is also (and should be, if we are approaching *Pokémon Go* as a work of fiction) object of imagination in the player's make-believe game, as it is interpreted as a spot in the Pokémon world. The principle of associated imaginings can thus help us make sense of the videogame experience as a coherent fiction experience.

2.4. Concluding Remarks

Many of the discussions described above are a direct consequence of the fact that the concept of imagination was never precisely clarified within the philosophy of fiction. Both Matravers and Gooskens seem to overestimate the role philosophers of fiction give to the imagination in the fiction experience. Matravers writes that "the imagination cannot bear the weight that has been placed on it by contemporary philosophers of fiction" (2014, 157). Gooskens states that the explanation of videogame immersion that is based on the imagination "asks too much of the user" (2012, 88). However, the problem is not that imagination cannot explain what philosophers of fiction want it to, but rather that Matravers and Gooskens themselves have a very demanding view of what it means for someone to imagine something. They both seem to present imagination as an *active, conscious mental state* that is deliberately maintained and clearly delineated from any other kind of mental state. Instead, I propose to look at the imagination as a kind of intentional state which does not affirm its object to truly exist, contrary to beliefs, or as a kind of experience of something in the mode of 'nonactuality'. The playing of make-believe games then consists in taking on an attitude towards fiction in which we entertain thoughts about the represented objects without affirming either their truth or existence (with the added critique to Walton that the playing of make-believe games does not necessarily entail *de se* imagination). As Kathleen Stock's fiction theory shows, this attitude is consistent even when we encounter elements in the fiction which we do believe or directly perceive to be true. The playing of videogames, either on a screen, in virtual reality, or augmented reality, can then be seen as an experience of fiction. After all, videogames are Waltonian props: on the basis of (our interpretations of) their representations, the actions we perform through input devices, and potential controller feedback, we play make-believe games and form non-assertive thoughts

about worlds, characters, objects, and events we know do not really exist. This not only comes very close to Matravers's theory about mental models, which he deems to be a good explanation for our experience of fictional representations, but also explains the specifics of many videogame situations and player experiences better than Gooskens's pictorial experience theory can.

3. Videogames and The Paradox of Fiction[38]

The paradox of fiction, or the question how we can feel emotions towards fictional characters and events, which we know do not really exist, has occupied philosophers of fiction ever since Colin Radford published his article "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina" in 1975 (cf. Radford 1975; Weston 1975; Paskins 1977; Walton 1978a; Lamarque 1981; Carroll 1990; Levinson 1990; Neill 1993; Dadlez 1997; Yanal 1999; Joyce 2000; Kim 2005; Robinson 2005; Stecker 2011; Matravers 2014; Tullman and Buckwalter 2014; Barbero 2014; Friend 2016; Ferran 2018). The paradox of fiction is commonly represented by three apparently plausible premises that cannot be true at the same time, as a contradiction would follow:

1. To have an emotion towards an entity, we must believe that this entity exists.
2. We do not believe that fictional entities exist.
3. We often feel emotions towards entities we know to be fictional.

In the last decennia, many philosophers of fiction have tried to show that at least one of these premises is untrue. Indeed, although the paradox of fiction is still widely discussed, investigated, and solved time and again, it is ever more revealed to be a straw man argument (cf. Matravers 2014, 106). After all, quite a few ideas that underlie the paradox's articulation have been shown to be unsubstantiated or have long been refuted altogether. Examples of such discredited ideas are the often exclusive focus on a work's fictional content (as opposed to its form) as the cause of our emotions towards this work (cf. Dammann 1992; Van de Mosselaer 2018c), the groundless distinction between how we feel emotions towards fictional events and how we feel emotions towards real-life events (which, as it stands, are actually equally hard to explain) (cf. Matravers 2014, 111), the assumption that our experience of emotions towards fiction is phenomenologically different from our experience of emotions towards real life (Carroll 1990), and the strongly cognitive conception of emotions on which the paradox's first premise is based. Especially this cognitive definition of emotions as consisting of, or at least based on, judgements or beliefs, has lost much philosophical support in the last decades:

> [T]here are only a few proponents of cognitivism left. Most philosophers, literary critics and psychologists advocate, for example, appraisal theories (cf. Frijda 1986; Scherer/

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38 The discussion of the paradox of fiction and its solutions in this chapter contains thoughts expressed in my article "Emoties door onware proposities: een bredere kijk op de fictieparadox" which was published in the *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte* (Van de Mosselaer 2018c). The application of the paradox of fiction to videogames described in part 3.2 is based on my article "How Can We Be Moved to Shoot Zombies? A Paradox of Fictional Emotions and Actions in Interactive Fiction" published in the *Journal of Literary Theory* (Van de Mosselaer 2018a). The description of gameplay emotions evoked by videogames at the end of this chapter is based on "Only a game? Player misery across game boundaries", which I presented at the Digital Games Research Association Conference in Kyoto in 2019 and published in the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* (Van de Mosselaer 2019a).

> Schorr/Johnstone 2001; Robinson 2005), perceptual theories (cf. Döring 2003; Prinz 2004; Kauppinen 2013; Tappolet 2016), feeling theories (cf. Goldie 2009) or construal theories (cf. de Sousa 1987; Roberts 2003). According to these theories, emotions do not involve judgements or beliefs. (Konrad, Petraschka, and Werner 2018, 193-194).

The first premise of the paradox of fiction is thus highly contested. Konrad, Petraschka, and Werner even write that the falsehood of the first premise leads to the radical conclusion that "there is no paradox of fiction" (2018, 194).

That does not mean, however, that discussions on the paradox of fiction do not have any value whatsoever. Interestingly, many philosophers of fiction have used their solution to the paradox as a starting point for describing the relations between fiction, imagination, and emotions in general (see Walton 1978a; Walton 1990; Lamarque 1981; Carrol 1990; Yanal 1999). Although originally used by Colin Radford as proof of our irrationality whenever we are dealing with fiction, the paradox of fiction's main contribution to philosophy thus lies in the fact that it has served as a gateway into explorations of our experience of fiction (cf. Konrad, Petraschka, and Werner 2018). As Robert Stecker says, "[t]he paradox of fiction has been a valuable tool for exploring the nature of both imaginative and emotional responses to fiction" (Stecker 2011, 308). Studying the paradox of fiction and the debates that have been held on this subject can reveal questions, solutions, and crystallized misconceptions about, among others, the nature of emotions towards fiction, the difference between real and fictional intentional objects of mental states, the rationality of (fictional) emotions, the difference between illusion, imagination, and belief, and the way we interact with fictional characters and events. Discussions on the paradox of fiction have given rise to comprehensive theories about fiction and imagination and form an interesting starting point for an investigation of many aspects of the fiction experience. This is reflected in the philosophical works that continue to appear on the subject of the paradox of fiction (Matravers 2018; Adair 2019; Mendonça 2019; Teroni 2019).

In this thesis, I will be using the discussions on the (so-called) paradox of fiction as a starting point to discuss our interactions with fiction, and the interplay between imagination, emotions, and actions. This discussion finds it origin in the discovery of a remarkable limitation within discussions about the paradox of fiction, and, more broadly, within the philosophy of fiction in general: although interactive fictions such as videogames are very popular fictional media and famously evoke many emotions in their users, they are rarely ever mentioned in these discussions. Philosophers of fiction tend to make assertions which are intended to apply to fiction in general, but which do not take into account the possibilities of interacting with fictional characters, influencing fictional events, and immersing oneself in fictional worlds as is possible in videogames. This is remarkable because, as discussed in the previous chapters, videogames are interactive works of fiction, and should also fall within the research field of the philosophy of fiction. In this chapter, I will therefore discuss the paradox of fiction with specific reference to *interactive* fictions. To a degree, and typically from the perspective of game studies, this has been done before (cf. Tavinor 2009a; Bateman 2011;

Mason 2014). This thesis, however, goes further than a mere description of videogames in light of the paradox of fiction. More importantly, the application of the paradox of fiction to videogames in this chapter serves as a starting point to reflect on and criticize some of the basic assumptions about emotions and actions towards fiction within the philosophy of fiction in general.

At first sight, videogames only seem to make the paradox of fiction an even more complex problem: not only can we be made to feel emotions towards fictional characters or events, but these characters and events can also motivate us to undertake actions, even when we fully know they are not real. This will be the subject of chapter four. On the other hand, a more in-depth analysis of this new element of action in our experience of interactive fictions might usefully supplement and clarify existing discussions on the 'paradoxical' emotions we feel towards fictions. Throughout this chapter, I will argue that videogames as interactive fictions reveal new elements of the relationship between fiction, emotions, and actions that have been previously neglected because of the focus on literature, theatre, and film, which are, typically, non-interactive.

For this purpose, I will first give an overview of the paradox of fiction and its solutions as they have been discussed within philosophy of fiction. Note that videogames will not be mentioned in this description of the paradox of fiction, simply because the existence of videogames was not mentioned, and often even clearly forgotten within the philosophical discussions on this paradox. Nevertheless, the solutions to the paradox that I will discuss are quite important to the general argument of this thesis, as the articulation and analysis of the paradox of interactive fiction in chapter four is heavily influenced by the way in which the paradox of fiction has been introduced and discussed in the last decennia. In the second part of this chapter, I will apply the paradox of fiction to videogames and investigate what consequences interactivity in fiction might have for our emotions towards fiction as they have traditionally been discussed. Moreover, I will discuss another paradox of emotional interaction that is unique to videogames, and concerns the emotions players feel towards the (non-fictional) gameplay elements of videogames. Although this chapter is mainly about *emotions* towards fiction, it will also address some first issues regarding *actions* towards fiction, thus forming the transition to the fourth chapter about the paradox of interactive fiction.

3.1 The Paradox of Fiction

In his article "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?" (1975), Radford presents his readers with a hypothetical situation. Imagine an unknown man in a bar telling you a heartbreaking story about his sister. The story of the man emotionally moves you and you get sad while listening. After having observed your emotional reaction, however, the man simply tells you his story was made up: he does not even have a sister. When this happens, Radford argues, you will not remain sad about the sister. After all, there is no sister to be sad about. From this, he concludes that "[i]t would seem that I can

only be moved by someone's plight if I believe that something terrible has happened to him. If I do not believe that he has not and is not suffering or whatever, I cannot grieve or be moved to tears" (Radford 1975, 68). To have an emotion, we should at least believe that the object of that emotion actually exists. Otherwise, there is simply nothing to be moved by. This idea is the basis for the first premise of the paradox of fiction: to have an emotion towards an entity, we must believe this entity exists (or, at least, has existed).

Radford's example of the man telling a story is ultimately inadequate. Radford wants to compare the man's story about his sister with fictional stories: if we stop being moved when we find out the man's sister does not exist, then why are we moved at all by the fate of Anna Karenina, if we know from the very beginning that she does not exist at all? The comparison is not valid, however. The man's story is simply not a fictional one, as it is not told with the intention that we imagine it, or in a way that appreciators hearing the story would make-believe its content instead of believing it. It is precisely because we were *deceived* by the man, that we stop being sad about his made-up sister. Our sadness, after all, was aimed at a real person, and now we find out that she is not a real person after all. When reading Anna Karenina, the situation is different: we know that we are supposed to *imagine* the existence of Anna. We are thus never deceived, and our emotions are, from the very beginning, aimed at a character who we *imagine* to exist. Radford's example thus does not prove that it is impossible or irrational to be emotionally moved without believing in the existence of the object of the emotion, but rather that it is impossible or irrational to have emotions that are based on beliefs that have been revealed to be false or mistaken.

Moreover, as said before, the premise that we must necessarily believe in the existence of the intentional objects of our emotions is only taken to be true within largely discredited cognitive theories of emotion. Martha Nussbaum, for example, describes emotions as judgements of value. Fear consists of the judgement that "bad events are impending; that they are not trivially, but seriously bad" (Nussbaum 2003, 28) and anger of the judgement "that some damage has occurred to me or something or someone close to me; that the damage is not trivial but significant" (Nussbaum 2003, 29). She adds that judgements of value that make up emotions are always, in a way, 'eudaimonistic': they pertain to the well-being of the person feeling the emotion (Nussbaum 2003, 31). Emotions "contain an ineliminable reference to *me*", and always refer to "*my* scheme of goals and projects. They see the world from my point of view" (Nussbaum 2003, 52). Nussbaum acknowledges that this does not mean that the intentional object of an emotion needs to exist in reality. After all, an emotional perception of a state of affairs can simply be wrong or mistaken. There is, for example, nothing paradoxical about children fearing monsters under their bed, although these monsters do not exist at all. The children's fear is simply caused by their (mistaken) judgement that the monsters are there, and that they can be hurt by the creatures. Nussbaum describes the judgement that an emotion can consist of as "an assent to an appearance" (Nussbaum 2003, 37). She adds that "[w]henever [people] accept a way the world seems as the way it is, they can be said to have a judgment in my sense" (Nussbaum 2003, 39). The children's (mis-

taken) judgement does, in a way, seem necessary for their fear however: if the children would not believe at all that there were monsters under their bed, it would be strange for them to fear them. Indeed, even when not following a strictly cognitive theory of emotion and when recognizing the inadequacy of Radford's example, there seems to be at least some intuitive credibility to the claim that to feel an emotion towards an entity we must believe that this entity is somehow actually relevant to us.

Sometimes, however, we have emotions that are aimed at characters or states of affairs that we know have only imagined existence, and of which we thus know that they can have no real influence on our well-being. As the second premise of the paradox of fiction describes, when we knowingly read or watch a work of fiction, we know fully well that the characters and events we read about or watch do not really exist, and can in no way hurt us, or physically enter and influence our lives. When we learn the fates of characters like Anna Karenina or Mercutio while reading Tolstoy's novel or attending a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, we do not think that we are learning about what actually happened to people that really exist or have existed. Radford points out that, nevertheless, our tears for these characters are no less real: "We shed real tears for Mercutio. They are not crocodile tears, they are dragged from us and they are not the sort of tears that are produced by cigarette smoke in the theatre" (Radford 1975, 70). Moreover, Radford emphasizes, it is precisely that which we know to be *fictional* that moves us in these cases. When readers of *Anna Karenina* cry, their tears are for the fictional or imagined Anna and her equally fictional fate: "We pity her, feel for her and our tears are shed for her" (Radford 1975, 75). And this is what Radford finds so problematic: "How can we feel genuinely and involuntarily sad, and weep, as we do, knowing as we do that no one has suffered or died?" (Radford 1975, 77) How can we feel fear, pity, or anger for characters and states of affairs we know to have a mere imagined existence?

With this question, Radford unleashed the philosophical debate about the so-called 'paradox of fiction'.[39] Although Radford already tries to solve the paradox in his article, every solution formulated by him is also rejected by him. In the end, Radford accepts all three premises, and thus the paradox itself, and concludes that our interactions with fiction show us that we simply are inconsistent beings: "I am left with the conclusion that our being moved in certain ways by works of art, though very 'natural' to us and in that way only too intelligible, involves us in inconsistency and so incoherence" (1975, 78). Radford's claim is often taken to be a normative one: emotions towards fiction are simply not justified (cf. Joyce 2000). Radford seems to interpret an emotion as justified only if "the evaluation associated with it is adequately responsive to one's evidence about the situation" (Friend 2016, 225). Emotions are thus unjustified when they are felt *despite* evidence that would invalidate them: "[A]nyone who knows Santa does not exist but still

39 Although his article is almost always cited as the first description of the paradox of fiction, Radford was not the first one to point out the paradoxical nature of our emotions towards fiction. Radford himself, for example, refers to a few lines of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as containing an earlier thematization of the paradox of fiction: "'What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba / That he should weep for her?" (*Hamlet* Act 2, scene 2).

harbors hopes of his largesse can be described as incoherent. Since this seems to be our position with fictional emotions – we are fully aware that no appropriate object exists – Radford takes them to violate this normative constraint" (Friend 2016, 225). Fictional emotions are thus inconsistent, and feeling them makes us irrational. This conclusion has some far-reaching consequences: should experiences of fiction not be carefully avoided, if they turn us into irrational beings and involve us in inconsistency and incoherence?

Radford's 'irrationality thesis' found little support within philosophy of fiction, prompting some to say that Radford belongs to "a school of thought with one student" (Yanal 1999, 20). Many philosophers have tried to solve the paradox of fiction by refuting one of its premises. In the following sections, I will briefly discuss three of the most influential theories that were presented as solutions to the paradox of fiction: the illusion theory, the make-believe theory, and the thought theory. Each of these rejects a different premise. The illusion theory denies the second premise, stating that when we experience fiction, we temporarily believe whatever we see or read. Kendall Walton's (1990) make-believe theory refutes the third premise, stating that we do not *really* feel emotions towards fictional entities, but only fictionally have these kinds of emotions. And finally I will discuss the thought theory, most famously defended by Peter Lamarque (1981), which denies the first premise and states that we can and often do feel emotions that are not based on beliefs, but on vivid imaginings or thoughts.

3.1.1 The Illusion Theory

The illusion theory solution to the paradox of fiction consists in rejecting the truth of the second premise: appreciators of fictional works, this theory says, temporarily *do* believe that the fictional entities they read about or watch exist. Appreciators of fiction are under the illusion that what they see or read is real, simply because they are so absorbed or caught up in the fiction. This theory has often been linked to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's idea of 'suspension of disbelief' (cf. Lamarque 2008, 213): while experiencing a fictional work, we do not actively and consciously disbelieve its fictional content, but rather let ourselves be carried away by whatever statements are made within this work. According to defenders of the illusion theory, we really do form *beliefs* based on the descriptions within the fictional work. As a consequence, it is not paradoxical, irrational, or impossible at all for us to have emotions towards the fictional characters and events. We simply believe them to exist whilst experiencing the fiction.

The illusion theory does not enjoy a lot of support within philosophy (an exception being Suits 2006). Most philosophers simply reject the idea that every time a fiction appreciator feels an emotion towards the content of the work of fiction, they do so because they mistake the fiction for reality (Dammann 1992, 13-14; Currie 1990, 188-189). Peter Lamarque does not even describe the illusion theory in detail when listing the solutions to the paradox of fiction, because the way the fiction appreciator is depicted within this solution "seems to describe the child or simpleton" (Lamarque

2008, 213). Indeed, although the illusion theory explains how our emotions towards fiction might be rational after all, it does so by reducing every fiction appreciator to a naïve or confused believer of falsehoods. In some cases, this might very well work to explain fiction consumers' reactions to fictional events. As mentioned in section 1.2.1, many first-time users of VR might react the way they do because they are deceived by what they see within the virtual environment: instead of imagining the existence of the represented objects within the virtual reality, they are under the illusion that these objects truly exist. These people might attempt to lean on virtually represented tables, or duck away out of fear for virtual objects that are flying towards them. In these cases, the illusion theory can be evoked to explain that these users indeed temporarily have false beliefs, and feel emotions because of it. There are, however, important differences between rare cases like these and many other cases of emotions towards fiction. The naïve VR-user might be fearful because they are under the illusion that objects are flying towards them and might hurt them, an event which can be very credibly simulated within VR (cf. *Beat Saber* (Beat Games 2018)). The person fearing what Voldemort will do next while watching a *Harry Potter* movie, on the other hand, is clearly not deceived in the same way. Their fear is simply not caused by a belief that Voldemort exists or that Voldemort can truly hurt them. Two aspects of this fiction consumer's behavior, which are often cited within debates on the paradox of fiction, support this claim: their *lack of action* based on what they see in the *Harry Potter* movie, and the fact that they can still easily *enjoy* watching Voldemort commit atrocities.

Fiction consumers' lack of action has been the most convincing argument that contributed to the downfall of the illusion theory (cf. Price 1964, 158; Walton 1978a, 7; Boruah 1988, 106). Solutions to the paradox that are grounded in the claim that fiction appreciators believe the content of fictional works completely fail to explain why these appreciators do not act on what they believe to be true, and have been heavily criticized because of it. Mounce writes that "when Othello kills Desdemona one is disturbed. This shows one is treating the play as if it were real. But one does not send for a policeman. This shows one is not taking it for real" (Mounce 1980, 95). Noël Carroll argues that the illusion theory does not accord with the observed behavior of viewers of horror fictions:

> That is, if one really believed that the theater were beset by lethal shape changers, demons, intergalactic cannibals, or toxic zombies, one would hardly sit by for long. One would probably attempt to flee, to hide, to protect oneself, or to contact the proper authorities (the police, NASA, the bishop, the United Nations, the Department of Sanitation). People, that is, just don't behave as though they really believed there were monsters in the vicinity when they consume horror spectacles. (1990, 63)

Indeed, appreciators of fiction who would actually believe that what they see or read is true, would act on these beliefs, like the naïve VR user who ducks away out of fear of being hit by non-existent flying boxes. The complete lack of such actions suggests that fiction appreciators do not believe in the existence of the fictional characters and events, which would also mean the emotions they feel towards these fictional entities are not based on such beliefs.

A related argument against the illusion theory is the *enjoyment* we often feel when watching or reading horror or tragic fiction. This enjoyment is connected to two paradoxes: the paradox of horror and the paradox of tragedy. The paradox of tragedy was introduced by David Hume in "Of Tragedy": "It seems an unaccountable pleasure, which the spectators of a well-written tragedy receive from sorrow, terror, anxiety, and other passions, that are in themselves disagreeable and uneasy" (1998, 126). Noël Carroll introduces a twist to the paradox of tragedy, with specific reference to the horror genre, which he dubs the paradox of horror:

> This paradox amounts to the question of how people can be attracted by what is repulsive. That is, the imagery of horror fiction seems to be necessarily repulsive and, yet, the genre has no lack of consumers. Moreover, it does not seem plausible to regard these consumers—given the vast number of them—as abnormal or perverse in any way that does not beg the question. Nevertheless, they appear to seek that which, under certain descriptions, it would seem natural for them to avoid. (126)

The illusion theory fails to adequately deal with both of these paradoxes: if we truly believe something tragic or horrific is taking place when we are watching or reading a tragedy or a work of horror, then surely we would not enjoy it like we tend to do? Suits argues that people who go to horror movies might actually be people who enjoy feeling genuine fear, just like mountain climbers might be adrenaline junkies who consciously seek out danger and enjoy feeling genuine fear (Suits 2006, 375). But then, endorsing the illusion theory would mean endorsing the claim that horror fans genuinely enjoy seeing people slaughtered while temporarily believing that what they see is actually happening. In the end, the illusion theory simply does not explain why we are not as horrified by the murder of a fictional character as we are when witnessing an actual murder in real life.

To conclude, the illusion theory cannot explain the fact that the emotions we feel towards fictional entities do not motivate actions like emotions towards real-life events do, nor the fact that we might enjoy feeling sad or fearful towards horrific fictional events. The theory might be valuable to explain people's behavior in rare cases where these people are deceived into believing that certain fictional events and objects are actual, such as the naïve VR user. Nevertheless, the illusion theory is not an adequate description of the way we generally feel emotion towards what we know to be fictional.

3.1.2 The Make-Believe Theory

Kendall Walton's solution to the paradox of fiction consists in rejecting the third premise: he claims that we never *truly* feel emotions towards particulars we know to be merely fictional. The feelings we do have towards fiction, are mere *quasi*-emotions. Walton illustrates both the paradox of fiction and his solution to it on the basis of the, now (in)famous, example of Charles, a man who gets scared while watching a horror movie about a green slime monster:

> Charles is watching a horror movie about a terrible green slime. He cringes in his seat as the slime oozes slowly but relentlessly over the earth, destroying everything in its path. Soon a greasy head emerges from the undulating mass, and two beady eyes fix on the camera. The slime, picking up speed, oozes on a new course straight toward the viewers. Charles emits a shriek and clutches desperately at his chair. Afterwards, still shaken, he confesses that he was 'terrified' of the slime. (1990, 196)

How could Charles say that he is scared if he knows that the monster is merely fictional? Walton explains this odd situation by describing Charles's psychological participation in the horror story and detailing what it means for fiction consumers to be 'caught up' in a story (1990, 249). As already mentioned in 1.1.1, Walton discusses fiction experiences as a kind of make-believe experience, in analogy with the make-believe games children might play. He makes use of this make-believe theory to explain our emotions towards fiction. Walton argues that, just like children use blobs of mud in their make-believe games to make it fictional that there are pies, Charles uses the representations in the movie as props to make-believe or imagine that what he sees is real. By using his imagination based on the movie images, Charles makes it fictionally true that a monster attacks people and that the monster is green and slimy. This is true in the *work world* of the movie: the movie itself makes these things fictionally true. In Charles's personal game of make-believe, however, it also becomes true that Charles himself is in danger because of the green slime monster. That is: in the *game world* that originates in Charles's personal imaginings based on the movie images, it is true that the monster is approaching Charles. Charles himself becomes a reflexive prop in his game of make-believe. His appreciation of the movie entails *de se* imaginings, or imaginings about himself. Charles generates fictional truths about himself, such as him being part of the world depicted in the movie. It thus becomes fictional that Charles is threatened, and as a result of this, Charles is fictionally afraid (Walton 1990, 242).

Charles's fear is thus part of the Waltonian game world that is created within Charles's personal, imaginative engagement with the movie. This personal nature of make-believe games is quite important when clarifying the different ways in which people might react to the same work of fiction. As Walton says: "Different people react differently to horror movies; the differences in reaction reflect differences in their personalities and character" (Walton 1997, 43). Charles's personal interpretation of the movie determines the way he uses this movie as a prop for a make-believe game, and thus also his fictional fear for the monster represented in this movie. Charles's fear is part of the way in which he interprets and participates in the movie. His utterance that he 'is afraid' is just as fictional as his statement that there 'is a slime monster on the loose' (Walton 1997, 45). The fact that Charles plays a make-believe game explains how he can have strong feelings about something he knows to be non-existent: these feelings are quasi-emotions which are caused by, and part of, Charles's imaginings about the movie events and his relation to it.

Walton's make-believe theory has been heavily criticized, especially because the emotions we feel towards fiction do not seem to be a consequence of pretense. As Carroll says, whenever he feels fear towards fictional monsters, he does not feel like he was only

pretending to feel fear: "Walton's theory appears to throw out the phenomenology of the [emotional] state for the sake of logic" (Carroll 1990, 74). Carroll dismisses Walton's quasi-emotions on at least two grounds. First of all, we are not consciously playing a game of make-believe when we are scared by monsters in horror movies: "It does not seem correct to say that we are playing a game, of make-believe or otherwise, if we do not know that we are. Surely, a game of make-believe requires the intention to pretend. But on the face of it, consumers of horror do not appear to have such an intention" (Carroll 1990, 75). Secondly, we actually *do* feel something, and not merely *pretend* to feel something towards scary, pitiful, or sad fictional characters. Both of Carroll's critiques of quasi-emotions seem to be based on a misunderstanding of their nature.

First of all, Walton explicitly states that the playing of make-believe games need not be a deliberate or reflective act. When appreciating representational works of fiction, we more or less automatically know which fictional truths they generate, without having to consciously think about this:

> Representational works of art generate make-believe truths. *Gulliver's Travels* generates the truth that make-believedly there is a society of six-inch-tall people. It is make-believe that a green slime is on the loose in virtue of the images on the screen of Charles's horror movie. These make-believe truths are generated because the relevant principles of make-believe are understood to be in force. But few such principles are ever formulated, and our recognition of most of them is implicit. Some probably seem so natural that we assume them to be in force almost automatically. Others we pick up easily through unreflective experience with the arts. (Walton 1978a, 12)

Both Charles's imagining that there is a slime monster that is running around and killing people, and his imagining that he is threatened by the monster and thus afraid of it can be unreflective and seemingly automatic consequences of his engagement with the horror movie as a prop. Carroll's statement that we do not consciously play make-believe games when watching horror movies is thus compatible with Walton's theory. Carroll also argues that the playing of games of make-believe surely requires an *intention* to pretend, and this intention is not found in consumers of horror movies. This is not true, however. One could say that starting to watch a horror movie (by going to the cinema, starting to play a dvd, etc.) simply is the expression of a desire to start pretending that what we see happening in the movie is real and, as a consequence, that we are scared by it. Choosing to start appreciating a work of fiction simply is choosing to start playing a game of make-believe.

Secondly, Walton never says that appreciators of fiction only *pretend* to have feelings towards fictional events and characters. On the contrary, they really do experience quasi-emotions, which Walton describes as "constellations of sensations or other phenomenological experiences characteristic of real emotions, ones that the appreciator who 'pities Anna' or 'admires Superman,' for instance, shares with people who really pity or admire real people" (Walton 1990, 251). What appreciators of fiction *pretend* is not that they have feelings, but rather that the feelings they do have are real emotions felt towards actual persons and states of affairs. As Alex Neill writes:

> By labeling this kind of state [of feeling towards fiction] "*quasi*-fear," Walton is not suggesting that it consists of feigned or pretended, rather than actual, feelings and sensations. (Indeed, it is hard to see what a 'feigned sensation' might amount to.) Rather, Walton labels Charles's physiological/psychological state "quasi-fear" to mark the fact that what his feelings and sensations are feelings and sensations of is precisely what is at issue. [...] On his view, we can actually be *moved* by works of fiction, but it is make-believe that what we are moved to is *fear*. (Neill 1991, 49-50)[40]

On Walton's account, Charles does not merely pretend that he has feelings directed at the green slime monster. Rather, he pretends that he is threatened by the monster, based on what he sees happening in the movie, and as a result actually feels something that is very similar to fear. Phenomenologically, quasi-emotions are identical to real emotions. What Charles feels for the movie monster cannot be real fear, however, as Charles knows that the monster which caused these feelings is non-existent. While participating in the horror movie, and being 'caught up' in the story, Charles pretends of his feelings that they are true feelings of fear, and that they are directed at the monster, which he pretends to be real too: "What he actually experiences, his quasi-fear feelings, are not feelings of fear. But it is true of *them* that *make-believedly* they are feelings of fear" (Walton 1978a, 22). According to Walton, any kind of feelings appreciators of fiction have towards fictional characters and events can at most be called quasi-emotions, because they differ from real emotions in at least three ways.

First of all, Charles has no beliefs whatsoever that the object towards which his feeling is directed really exists. He does not actually believe to be in danger, but merely make-believes that the slime monster presents a threat to him and the people he sees represented in the movie. For Walton, this marks a clear difference between Charles's mental state and full-fledged fear:

> The fact that Charles is fully aware that the slime is fictional is, I think, good reason to deny that what he feels is fear. It seems a principle of common sense, one which ought not to be abandoned if there is any reasonable alternative, that fear must be accompanied by, or must involve, a belief that one is in danger. Charles does not believe that he is in danger; so he is not afraid. (Walton 1978a, 6-7)

Walton thus firmly clings to a cognitive definition of emotions. Seeing that the feelings we have towards fiction are not accompanied by any beliefs in the existence of the objects at which they are directed, Walton concludes that these feelings cannot be real emotions at all. They are quasi-emotions, which are based on *make-believing* the occurrence of fictional events or the fates of fictional characters.

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40 Walton later confirmed this interpretation of his theory: "It goes without saying that we are genuinely moved by novels and films and plays [...]. Some have misconstrued my make-believe theory as denying this. [...] That would indeed be a mistake. [...] My make-believe theory was designed to help explain our emotional responses to fiction, not to call their very existence into question. My negative claim is only that our genuine emotional responses to works of fiction do not involve, literally, fearing, grieving for, admiring fictional characters" (Walton 1997, 38).

Secondly, there is no link between Charles's feelings and his action generating systems. For Walton, it is an inherent characteristic of emotions that they motivate us to undertake certain actions. And since Charles does not try to run away from the monster in the movie, does not alert to police, or try to save other people threatened by the slime, the feelings he has as a result of seeing the slime monster cannot be true fear: "To deny this, to insist on considering Charles's non-motivating state to be one of fear of the slime, would be radically to reconceive the notion of fear. Fear emasculated by subtracting its distinctive motivational force is not fear at all" (Walton 1990, 201-202). For Walton, who defends a nowadays dated, cognitive definition of emotions as 'belief-desire complexes' (1990, 202), the passivity of fiction appreciators betrays the fictional character of the emotions they report to feel.

Lastly, Charles's feeling connects to other emotions in different ways than real fear would. Unlike real sadness, fear, or pity, the emotions we feel towards tragic or scary fictional stories do not need to be unpleasant. Walton argues that his theory can thus explain how Charles might *like* watching a movie that evokes quasi-fear, offering a solution to the paradox of horror and the paradox of tragedy. He claims that the fear and sadness we feel towards fictional characters and events are mere quasi-emotions: emotions felt from within a game of make-believe. The one who feels these emotions fully knows that their intentional object is non-existent, and quasi-emotions thus have no real-life relevance. Feeling fear and sadness for fictional characters and events is a mere consequence of being caught up in a story and is in no way incompatible with the real, narrative external enjoyment of this story (1990, 257).

In conclusion, the sadness, fear, and pity we feel towards fiction differ from real sadness, fear, and pity both in their input (not being caused by beliefs, but mere imaginings) and their output (not leading to actions and often accompanied by *pleasure*). They are mere *quasi*-emotions, thus solving the paradox of fiction: although it is indeed possible to feel emotions towards characters and events we know to be merely fictional, we can perfectly *make-believedly* feel emotions towards them. Although quite influential, Walton's solution is not particularly popular. Walton himself laments the fact that almost all discussions about his theory concentrate on his "negative claim that it is not literally true, in ordinary circumstances, that appreciators fear, fear for, pity, grieve for, or admire purely fictitious characters" (Walton 1997, 38). Walton's quasi-emotions are a misunderstood concept, but also a concept that ultimately gives the impression of being constructed specifically to solve the paradox of fiction. Moreover, quasi-emotions' relation to fiction seems to be equally paradoxical as that of real emotions was said to be. As Walton himself says: "One can't help but wondering why Charles's realization that make-believedly he is in danger produces quasi-fear in him, why it brings about a state similar to real fear, even though he knows he is not really in danger. This is important, but we need not speculate about it here" (Walton 1978a, 14). Walton might underestimate just how important this question actually is when it comes to solving the paradox of fiction. After all, we can easily rephrase Radfords question so that it pertains not to fear and pity, but the feeling of fear and pity which Walton denotes

as 'quasi-emotions': How can we be quasi-moved by the fate of Anna Karenina? How can a fictional character, someone who we knows does not really exist, evoke feelings within us that are indiscernible from real emotions?

Maybe the question of how precisely imagination leads to us feeling (quasi-)emotions is a question more suited for psychologists and empirical researchers. For now, what matters is Walton's claim that, although works of fiction cannot lead to full-fledged emotions, they can move us to feeling quasi-emotions because of the way we imaginatively participate in them. Walton explains that the reason why events in fictional worlds can feel *so close* to us is not because we start believing that they are actual or existent, but rather because we participate in these worlds:

> On my theory we accomplish the 'decrease of distance' not by promoting fictions to our level but by descending to theirs. (More accurately, we extend ourselves to their level, since we do not stop actually existing when it becomes fictional that we exist). [...] Rather than somehow fooling ourselves into thinking fictions are real, we become fictional. (Walton 1978a, 23)

Our emotional reactions to fiction can be explained by our pretending or make-believing that we are part of the represented fictional world. And this power of imaginative participation is exactly the positive side of his account that Walton wished fiction researchers would focus on (Walton 1997, 46). This idea that it is our imaginative participation with works of fiction that emotionally moves us is nowadays often taken to be the very key to solving the paradox of fiction (Friend 2016, 227). It also forms the basis for the thought theory, which will be discussed now.

3.1.3 The Thought Theory

The third solution to the paradox of fiction is to deny the first premise: to have emotions towards an object, we do not need to believe this object exists. For an emotion to arise, it is enough to *vividly imagine* or *think about* a certain state of affairs or the existence of an object or person. This solution is called the thought theory, and is most famously described and defended by Peter Lamarque (1981). Other defenders of the thought theory are Carroll (1990), who first called this solution the 'thought theory', and Yanal (1999). Although very often contrasted to, and originating in an explicit rejection of, Walton's make-believe theory, the thought theory departs from largely the same starting point: the idea that our feelings towards fiction are not caused by beliefs, but by vivid imaginings we have based on the representations and descriptions of fictional events. The big difference between Walton and thought theorists, however, is that the latter say that the emotions we have as a result of imaginings are unambiguously real fear, pity, sadness, and so forth.

In the earliest reaction to Radford's article, Michael Weston already hints at solving the paradox of fiction by refuting the first premise:

> In order to establish his thesis, Doctor Radford needs to show that a belief in the factual or probable existence of their objects is a necessary condition for our being said correctly to respond in the required ways. But there is an immediate obstacle in doing this, for if it is claimed that we are moved in those ways by fictional characters, why shouldn't this be used to show that such a necessary condition doesn't exist? (Weston 1975, 81)

Instead of taking our emotions towards fiction as paradoxical because they are not based on beliefs, thought theorists take our emotions towards fiction as proof that emotions do not necessarily need to be based on beliefs after all. They argue that the cause of our emotions towards fiction are not beliefs in the existence of the fictional states of affairs, but rather our *thoughts* or *imaginings* about fictional particulars. As Lamarque writes: "Vivid imagining can be a substitute for belief" (2008, 216).[41] Carroll spells out the difference between believing something and merely entertaining it in thought or imagining it:

> To have a belief is to entertain a proposition assertively; to have a thought is to entertain it non-assertively. Both beliefs and thoughts have propositional content. But with thoughts the content is merely entertained without commitment to its being the case; to have a belief is to be committed the truth of the proposition. (Carroll 1990, 80)[42]

When reading fiction, we do not believe in the truth or existence of the fictional events we read about, but we entertain them in thought based on their representation in the work. And even when we know that nothing real corresponds to the content of our thoughts, our thoughts can still be *frightening* to us (Lamarque 1981, 294). As Carroll writes, one can have "the thought of Dracula as an impure and dangerous being without believing that Dracula exists" (Carroll 1990, 84). As such, being fully aware of the fact that Dracula is merely fictional does not make it impossible to fear Dracula, as he can still be perceived as a terrifyingly dangerous creature in imagination. In other words,

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41 Some thought theorists hope to reveal the absurdity of the first premise by giving examples of emotions that do not require beliefs in the existence of their object. Carroll considers sexual arousal: "If an attractive member of the sex of one's preference is described or depicted, desire will not be staunched by saying the description (or the depiction) is concocted. Or just daydream about the body in question; it may be make-believe, but the arousal is not" (1990, 77). Barbero considers mirth: "We laugh, and that's it. No one would ever think of asking us 'why are you laughing?' or 'are you laughing for real?'. [...] If instead of considering *Anna Karenina* we had focused on any one joke, it probably would have taken much less to find a solution to the paradox of fiction" (Barbero 2014, 92-93). Following these examples, it indeed seems intuitive that a belief in the existence of the intentional object is not necessary for an emotion to be possible or rational. Both Carroll and Barbero admit, however, that their argument might not apply to emotions such as fear, pity, and sadness (Carroll 1990, 77; Barbero 2014, 92-93).

42 Carroll himself acknowledges that his description of 'thought' might as well be used to define 'imagination' (Carroll 1990, 88). The only reason he does not use 'imagination' is because of the creative and visual connotation he believes this word to have. Lamarque, on the other hand, often refers to the imagination when clarifying his thought theory. He writes: "I intend to admit as thoughts everything we might consider as mental contents, including mental images, imaginings, fantasies, suppositions, and all that Descartes called 'ideas'" (1981, 293). According to the definition of imagination that was given in chapter 1, it is safe to say that the thought theory argues that imaginings can cause emotions.

what is necessary for emotions is not that we believe their object to exist, but merely that we evaluate this object in a way that merits this emotion. Even if we believe Anna Karenina does not exist, we can still judge her situation to be pitiful. The more vivid our imagining of Anna's situation, and the more involved we are with the thought of it (for example by giving it a lot of attention and thinking about all its specificities and possible outcomes), the more Anna's situation will be able to move us to pity and sadness (Lamarque 1981, 295).

An obvious critique of the thought theory is that appreciators of fiction simply do not fear their own thoughts. As Walton says, describing Charles's fear as directed at his own thought flies in the face of phenomenology (1990, 203). In a mocking reductio ad absurdum, Walton argues that no fiction appreciator is ever heard saying things like 'Oh, that poor thought content!', or 'Yikes! A horrible fictitious slime!' (1997, 48). Walton also gives an example of a situation in which a fiction consumer actually might be truly afraid of his own thoughts: Charles might be an old man with a heart condition who is afraid that his thought of terrible monsters might trigger a heart attack. This is, of course, a very rare case. In normal circumstances, Walton argues, what Charles fears is *the slime*, not the thought of it (1990, 202-203). He concludes that the thought theory gives an inadequate description of what goes through the mind of a fiction consumer. His analysis is, however, not at all incompatible with what Lamarque argues. Lamarque writes: "We are frightened by thoughts, though we are not frightened *of* thoughts, except in special circumstances" (1981, 294). The distinction between the real or causal object of our emotions towards fiction (what we are moved *by*) and the intentional object of these emotions (towards which the emotions are felt) is crucial within the thought theory. This theory says that, although the emotions we feel towards fictional particulars are caused by the thoughts we form based on specific descriptions in novels or images we see when watching a movie, they are not directed at these thoughts. When feeling fear for the green slime monster while watching the horror movie *The Green Slime*, our thinking about the movie's monster causes us to feel fear. We do not, however, actually fear our own thought. We fear the *content* of that thought. We fear the thing we think about, or the object we vividly imagine based on the movie, namely the green slime monster (Lamarque 1981, 296; 2008, 217). In *The Opacity of Narrative*, Lamarque summarizes his solution to the paradox of fiction as follows:

> The claim is that while people might not believe that the fictional events they perceive are real, nevertheless they bring to mind those events or entertain them in thought. In turn, such thoughts, [...] can bring about (i.e. cause) the disputed emotions like fear and pity. (Lamarque 2014, 141)

The thought theory explains how emotions can be caused when there is no real object corresponding to them. Fear cannot be caused by Dracula, because he does not exist. But it can be caused by our thought about Dracula. The fear we feel is then a fear *of* Dracula, because it is directed at the vampire as he is presented to us in our imagination, as the content of our thought.

Lamarque helpfully clarifies what exactly he means by emotions being *directed at thought-contents*. Ultimately, Lamarque believes thought-contents to be the form in which fictional characters enter our worlds (1981, 292). And because fictional characters enter the real world in the form of thought-contents, it becomes possible for us to psychologically interact with them (1981, 293). Yet, when reading fiction, we of course never say that we 'feel sorry for the content of our thought about Anna Karenina'; we simply feel sorry for Anna Karenina herself. Lamarque therefore asks the question: "What thought-content must we be responding to for us truly to be said to be fearing Othello or pitying Desdemona?" (Lamarque 1981, 300) According to him, we can only be said to feel pity for Anna Karenina, if there is a *causal* and *content-based* connection between our pity-inducing thought and the descriptions about Anna's situation in Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina*. In its most narrow sense, this causal, content-based connection implies that our thought must be directly caused by the descriptions and propositional content of Tolstoy's story, so that our thought of Anna is constructed based on and identified through the very propositions expressed by Tolstoy (Lamarque 1981, 300). However, the connection can also be more indirect. Our touching thoughts about Anna Karenina might also be caused by propositions that are logically derived from Tolstoy's novel or from propositions that adequately complement his story (for example propositions that are part of a personal interpretation of the story that is not explicitly expressed in the novel, but supported by it). By including the possibility of personal interpretations in his theory, Lamarque takes into account the personal way in which fiction readers can respond to fictional works: since the emotions of fiction consumers depend on the thoughts and mental representations they form during their interpretation of the work of fiction, emotions towards this work can vary greatly among appreciators. In the end, Lamarque's summary of the thought theory reads as follows: "[W]hen we respond to fictional characters we are responding to mental representations or thought-contents identifiable through descriptions derived in suitable ways from the propositional content of fictional sentences" (Lamarque 1981, 302).

As such, our emotions towards fictional characters and events are directed towards these fictional particulars, who enter our world in the form of thought-contents. Moreover, these emotions are unambiguously *real*, and caused by real objects, namely the thoughts or imaginings we form based on the descriptions or images in works of fiction. Lamarque and Carroll explicitly argue against Walton when emphasizing that emotions towards fiction are real, and not quasi, pretend, or make-believe emotions (Lamarque 1981, 295; Carroll 1990, 86). One of Walton's argument for saying that emotions towards fiction cannot be genuine emotions is that they do not motivate us to perform the actions that would normally accompany real pity, fear, or sadness. Charles, Walton said, does not manifest the behavior we would expect from someone who is afraid of the green slime: he does not try to save anyone or call the police. "Indeed not," Lamarque writes, "for he knows well enough that there is no real slime for the police to investigate. Nevertheless, there might be behavioural evidence that he is frightened by the thought of the slime. He might close his eyes, light a cigarette, and try to bring other things to mind" (1981, 296). Although Charles cannot fight or run away from the green slime (because he knows it is

merely fictional), he can do something about the object that causes his fear for the green slime: his thought about it, based on the representation of the slime in the movie. Charles can mitigate his fear for the monster by not looking at its representation in the movie, by starting to think about something else, or by assuring himself that the slime is not real, thus reducing the vividness of his imagination about the monster. The thought theory thus not only explains the actions fiction appreciators do not undertake (such as running away or trying to help fictional characters), but also the actions they do undertake (such as trying to stop themselves from imagining the fictional situation by distracting themselves when a fiction becomes too scary or sad) (Lamarque 1981, 296; Carroll 1990, 80-81).

In conclusion, the thought theory portrays our emotions towards fictional characters and events as a consequence of our bringing these fictional events and characters alive by vividly imagining them and their repercussions, based on the sentences or images offered by the work of fiction. A last interesting aspect of the thought theory is the fact that it allows us to describe the influence of the way a work of fiction presents its content on the way we imagine this content and, by extension, on the emotions we will feel towards the fictional particulars described or shown in this work. This connection between a work's style, structure, word-choice, etc. and the emotions it invokes in its readers or viewers is often overlooked within discussions on the paradox of fiction, which are heavily focused on the propositional content of fictional works. The authors of the most influential works on the paradox of fiction often readily assume that what causes our emotions towards fictional works is the content of these works, without taking into account the importance of the actual mode in which this content is presented (cf. Radford 1975; Lamarque 1981, 302; Carroll 1990). Weston laments the fact that Radford ignored that "our responses to characters in fiction are responses to works of art" (1975, 81). He states that we should never forget the larger context (of the entire play, movie, or novel) in which characters occur when trying to explain our emotions towards them. Dammann writes that "[i]t is not the truth of the story which moves me, but the way I tell it to myself, or the way it is told to me" (1992, 20). And in *The Opacity of Narrative* (2014), Lamarque corrects his earlier exclusive focus on the propositional content of fictional sentences by emphasizing the importance of the 'opacity' of fictional works for the way we react to them. Lamarque describes how the events and characters that make up the content of a fictional work "are *constituted* by the modes of their presentation in the narrative" (2014, 3). The fictional world presented within a narrative is determined by the descriptions through which we get to know it. It is impossible to appreciate the fictional content of a work independently of the way it is presented in this work: changing the descriptions would entail changing the content (Lamarque 2014, 3). Lamarque connects this idea of opacity to his thought theory, explaining how our emotions towards fiction are always influenced by the intricately connected form and content of fictional works:

> Merely appealing to entertaining thoughts, imagining or making believe does not itself do justice to those complexities [of our responses to literary fiction]. A great deal of scene-setting – the fictional mode, narrative voice, reference (implicit and explicit), textual connectedness – must be in place for the appropriate thought and imagining to be grounded. (Lamarque 2014, 148)

Lamarque thus not only explicitly points out the connection between the *form* of fictional works and the way we imagine their content, but also describes how this connection influences the emotions we might feel towards fictions. Our emotions towards fictional works are never directed exclusively at the content of these works, as the very characters and events presented in fictional works, and by extension our emotions towards them, are shaped and influenced by the way they are presented, interpreted, and imagined.[43]

In the end, most critiques of the thought theory are based on the misunderstanding that this theory says that fiction appreciators feel emotions for their own thoughts (cf. Radford 1982; Walton 1990). The thought theory nowadays seems to be the most popular solution to the paradox of fiction, with many variants of it being defended within philosophy of fiction (Lamarque 1981; Carroll 1990; Yanal 1999; Moran 1994; Feagin 1996; Gendler 2008; Adair 2019). Even though some still express doubts about what exactly it means for a thought content to be the intentional object of an emotion, and about how this thought content can be called a fictional or imagined object (cf. Stecker 2011, 297), the thought theory solves the paradox of fiction by following the general strategy that is most widely supported. It refutes the premise of the paradox that is based on an outdated cognitive definition of emotions: the premise that says that we need to believe an entity to exist to be able to feel emotions towards it. This main idea underlying the thought theory is by now agreed upon by most philosophers: beliefs are simply not necessary to feel actual emotions (cf. Ferran 2018; Konrad, Petraschka, and Werner 2018; Matravers 2018).

3.2 Videogame Emotions and the Paradox of Fiction

Interactive fiction has been overlooked within many of the discussions on the paradox of fiction. Therefore, the following part will investigate how this paradox fares when applied to videogames. This application has far-reaching consequences, as it shows that not only emotions, but also actions towards fictional characters and events are the object of a paradox. The paradox of fiction will form the starting point for a broader investigation of what the videogame experience can tell us about the relation between fiction, imagination, action, and emotion. Most of this investigation will take place in the next chapters, in which I will discuss the paradoxical elements of the actions we perform towards fictional objects. In this part, I will first focus on the new elements introduced to the paradox of fiction when it is applied to interactive fictions, and on what the videogame experience can teach us about the emotions we feel towards fiction. Due to its interactive aspects, videogames show that emotions towards fiction are much more connected to action than was assumed within the debates on the paradox

43 Note that this idea is not incompatible with Walton's make-believe theory. Translated into Waltonian terms, Lamarque's opacity theory would say that the way we use the descriptions and images offered in works of fiction as props is influenced by the specific form of these descriptions and images. What we imagine depends on the nature of the props (their form, color, style, etc.) we base our make-believe game on. As such, our imaginative participation in and emotions towards a work of fiction very much depend on the way this work presents it content.

of fiction. Moreover, the experience of videogames as a challenge arouses emotions in players that, at least at first sight, are no consequence of any fictional elements. Being able to perform actions within fictional worlds also means that these actions can become object of assessment and critique and, subsequently, of emotions: you can play games well (pushing the right buttons, getting high scores, not losing any lives, etc.) or you can play them badly (failing at puzzles, getting killed by enemies, falling of platforms, etc.). Players often feel elation and frustration directed at non-fictional game events like these. Although these emotions are often treated as unparadoxical because they do not seem to have anything to do with the game's fiction, I will discuss how they are still closely connected to the paradoxes of fiction, tragedy, and horror.

3.2.1 The Interactive Green Slime

As discussed in the first chapter, videogames, just like literature, movies, and theatre, can present their audience with fictional worlds and stories. There are, however, a few important differences between videogames and these traditional fictions. First of all, videogames are inherently interactive: they allow their players to perform actions that influence what happens in the world they depict. Moreover, the narrative development in videogames often depends on these actions of the appreciator (cf. Thabet 2015, 42), as the story is shaped by what players choose to make fictional with their actions in the game's world (cf. Wildman and Woodward 2018, 112-113). Unlike appreciators of non-interactive novels and movies, videogame players are granted agency within the fictional world presented in the game, by being assigned a role within this world. In videogame philosophy and studies, this character is called the avatar or the player-character (cf. Tavinor 2009a, 205), to refer to the complex of player and character together, or: the videogame character as it is animated by the player through their actions on a controller. Note that this character need not be explicitly represented within the game world. Many racing games, for example, do not show the drivers of the cars with whom the player is to identify, while they still clearly imply which fictional role the player fulfils. During their playing of videogames, gamers thus identify with (overtly represented or merely implied) fictional characters or take on fictional roles and often refer to them in the first person, in statements like 'I shot a zombie' or 'I won the race' and statements that betray the player's immersion in the game world, such as 'I am in a spaceship'. Videogames are thus not only interactive, but also, "in some important sense, about those who consume them" (Robson and Meskin 2016, 165). As fictional media, videogames introduce many new elements to the fiction experience: interactivity, agency, identification, immersion, and self-involvement. Most importantly, they allow their players to enter their fictional worlds in the guise of a fictional proxy, with which players identify and through which players perform actions, such as picking up guns, racing spacecraft, helping aliens, shooting zombies, etc. These interactions give rise to a new twist on the infamous paradox of fiction.

By revealing that fictional objects can be presented in a way that allows for interaction, videogames reveal flaws and gaps in the way the paradox of fiction has been discussed. Let us for this purpose re-examine Kendall Walton's famous description of Charles, who is paradoxically scared of a green slime monster in a fictional horror movie:

> Charles is watching a horror movie about a terrible green slime. He cringes in his seat as the slime oozes slowly but relentlessly over the earth, destroying everything in its path. Soon a greasy head emerges from the undulating mass, and two beady eyes fix on the camera. The slime, picking up speed, oozes on a new course straight toward the viewers. Charles emits a shriek and clutches desperately at his chair. Afterwards, still shaken, he confesses that he was 'terrified' of the slime. (1990, 196)

Now imagine Walton's example in a videogame setting: Charles is playing a horror game about a terrible green slime. He is shocked when a green slime monster suddenly comes creeping towards him on the screen, mowing down every person it comes across. Charles shrieks in terror and hurriedly moves the control stick on his controller to run away from the slime. After seeing that it is much faster than he is, he fears for his life, turns around and starts pounding the monster with his fists. The monster moans in pain, but manages to kill him. Afterwards, still shaken, Charles sighs: 'That's the fourth time it killed me.'

Note that, in many regards, this situation is similar to the original one suggested by Kendall Walton. Just like the green slime from the movie, the game slime is not real but still manages to make Charles afraid. Moreover, Charles's fear is a result of the fictional attitude he takes on towards the slime monster: it is only because he is vividly imagining being in the presence of the slime (that is, imaginatively taking on the role of the character being attacked by the slime), because he is immersed in the fictional world, and because he imagines the game situation to have some relevance to himself, that he can actually fear the slime without believing in its existence. Moreover, just like in the original situation, not only the paradox of fiction, but also the paradox of tragedy and horror are involved in Charles's playing of the *Green Slime* videogame. For some reason, Charles seems to enjoy being fearful and playing a game which depicts the tragic deaths of many people (otherwise, why would he play this game at all?). More interesting than these similarities to the original Charles, however, is that videogamer Charles's situation is also characterized by new elements that are a result of the interactive nature of the fictional work he is experiencing.

First of all, in both the original Green Slime example and the interactive Green Slime example, Charles not only fears the slime, but he seems to fear it because he feels *threatened* by it. Walton's original Green Slime example was considered to be quite unusual, because movies do not often make us scared *for ourselves*. As argued in chapter two, Derek Matravers rightly writes that Walton's Charles example depends on a rare violation of the conventions of representation in the movie (namely, a breaking of the fourth wall) (cf. 2014, 116). *De se* emotions like fear for ourselves are, however, very common in videogaming. Because of the active role players have in the fictional world and the way they identify with a player-character that is part of this world, they might have emotions about the way fictional beings relate *to them*. As Tavinor remarks, the emotions

we feel when playing videogames can be "more strongly focused on our own role in the developing fiction than are the emotions appreciators have for traditional fictions that are essentially sympathetic or empathic in form" (2005, 39). Note that the Charles who played the horror videogame said he was fearing for his *own* life and reported that the slime killed *him*. While watching a movie or reading a novel, first-person statements like these would be exceptional and depend on violations of convention, but they are very common and quite normal in videogame practice (cf. Matsunaga 2016; Robson and Meskin 2016). Moreover, while emotions like fear for ourselves in our experience of non-interactive fiction can often be dismissed as automatic affective reflexes (cf. Carroll 2003, 524), they seem more problematical in interactive fictional situations. Self-reflexive emotions in non-interactive fiction experiences are usually triggered by sudden movements on the screen or unexpected sounds blasting through the speakers. The emotions we feel for ourselves when engaging with interactive fictions, on the other hand, often depend on our (player-character's) relation to the things and events within the fictional world. Feelings such as Charles's feeling of being threatened by the videogame slime are thus not often mere affective reflexes, but rather consequences of our imaginative presence in the fictional world.

Secondly, when Charles runs away from the monster or turns around to hit it, he seems to be motivated to do so because of a *fictional* event and a *fictional* monster. As Matravers points out, it is not unusual for a fictional work to motivate us to undertake certain actions. For example, a good fiction film set in India might inspire its viewers to visit this country (2014, 26-27). Matravers adds, however, that even if fictional situations often lead their appreciators to undertake actions, these actions can never be performed *within* that fictional situation, or on the fictional objects within that situation (2014, 26-27). But this seems to be exactly what happens in videogames: videogame players' actions are not only *caused* by objects, characters, or events in a fictional world, but also *performed* on these fictional particulars. Charles manipulates the fictional situation with his actions: he tries to make sure he is not caught by the monster, and might even manage to injure the fictional slime.[44]

Lastly, the actions Charles undertakes within the videogame seem at least partly inspired by his fear for the fictional monster: it is his fear that makes him hurriedly move his control stick away from the monster and start mashing his attack button when the monster comes too close. Imagine a less anxious Charles who does not fear the slime monster, but rather feels anger towards the creature because it already killed him three times before. It is likely that this Charles would not be similarly motivated to use his control stick to run away from the monster, but would rather move the stick towards the monster and start pressing his attack button more deliberately. Emotions towards a certain videogame character can thus influence the actions players perform towards this character. Conversely, videogame actions can also influence the emotions felt by

44 I will elaborate on such interactions with fiction in the next chapter, which is dedicated entirely to the paradox of interactive fiction and questions how it is possible to interact with objects we know to be fictional.

the player. The characteristics of the videogame experience described above, the self-involvedness of the player within the videogame world and the fact that the player can act within this world, make a wider array of emotions possible as a reaction to videogame fiction (Tavinor 2005, 39). Contrary to non-interactive fictions, videogame fictions frequently cause guilt and shame in their appreciators. A game like *Undertale* (Fox 2015), for example, can make the player feel guilty or ashamed about their murderous actions, by only revealing that no character in the game needed to be killed for the player to proceed when the player has most likely already done so.

3.2.2 The Solutions to the Paradox of Fiction Revisited

As the videogame *Green Slime* example shows us, interactive fictional works can make us feel emotions for ourselves, based on our imaginative presence within the represented fictional worlds. Moreover, this example shows that there is a mutual influence between the actions we undertake (as a fictional proxy) within the fictional worlds represented in these works, and the emotions we feel towards these worlds. Interactive fictions allow for a greater variety of emotions towards fiction, including guilt and shame, because they offer us agency, and thereby also responsibility for the actions we perform within their fictional worlds. Furthermore, and central to the investigation in this thesis, videogames show us that the emotions we feel towards fiction can have motivational power, as the emotions felt by gamers guide their behaviour and the actions they decide to perform. A player who is fearful of videogame zombies is more likely to try and stealthily walk past the monsters, while a player who does not feel this fear might just run towards them with a shotgun. Or, as Tavinor describes his fearful experience of playing *System Shock 2* (Irrational Games 1999): "Occasionally, when I was getting low on health and ammunition in the game, I got myself into situations where faced by a formidable foe, all I could do was panic. My ability to deal with the situation briefly left me, and I would hurriedly run away" (2005, 37). Moreover, contrary to our pity for Anna Karenina, our pity for videogame characters in need might actually motivate us to try and help these characters. Videogame emotions can clearly motivate and guide our actions.

This last point is especially remarkable, as emotions towards fictions have often been considered to differ from real emotions in that they do not motivate any actions towards their objects (Friend 2016, 220). A puzzling element of emotions towards fiction that always resurfaced within discussions on the paradox of fiction is the fact that, although these emotions feel real to the people who have them, their difference from 'real' emotions is that they cannot motivate us to perform any actions. The main reason why the illusion theory was rejected as a solution for the paradox of fiction, is because it is completely incompatible with our inactivity while watching or reading fiction. If we truly temporarily believe what we see whilst watching a horror movie, and are thus truly scared, then why do we not run away out of the cinema? And if we temporarily believe anything we read in fictional novels, then why can we relax in the couch and do nothing at all while reading

about an impending apocalypse in a novel? Many philosophers who tried to formulate a solution to the paradox of fiction prided themselves in also explaining the non-motivationality of our emotions towards objects we know to be fictional (cf. Lamarque 1981, 296-302; Carroll 1990, 86; Walton 1990, 201-202; Yanal 1999, 60-61; Suits 2006, 374-375). Their endeavours have now been revealed to be misguided, however, as our experience of videogames shows that emotions towards fiction can motivate us to perform actions after all, as long as the appreciator is offered possibilities for action.

Walton argues that emotions towards fiction, such as Charles's fear for the green slime monster he sees on the cinema screen, are not real emotions, but rather *quasi*-emotions precisely because they cannot motivate us to undertake actions (towards their intentional object): "[T]o insist on considering Charles's non-motivating state to be one of fear of the slime, would be radically to reconceive the notion of fear. Fear emasculated by subtracting its distinctive motivational force is not fear at all" (Walton 1990, 201-202). As we saw, however, Charles's fear for the green slime monster does, in a way, become motivational when he is not watching a horror movie, but is playing an interactive videogame version of *The Green Slime* instead. Walton clearly did not have interactive fictional works in mind when describing so-called quasi-emotions. He did not take into account situations in which Charles can indeed decide what to do based on his (emotional) experience of a fictional world, such as when he decides to steer his character away from the slime monster because he fears it. The question is then whether, according to Walton's theory, the fear felt by videogame player Charles would be a quasi-emotion, because it is felt towards a fictional character, or a real emotion, as it seems to have a 'distinctive motivational force' and guides Charles's behaviour. Walton's theory on quasi-emotions at least needs to be rephrased to be able to account for interactive fiction experiences.[45]

Defenders of the thought theory, on the other hand, argue that our emotions towards fictional characters and events are real emotions, which are not based on beliefs but on imaginings. The thought theory, however, does not really fare better when trying to account for the motivational force of emotions felt during interactive fiction experiences. After all, Lamarque argues that the intentional object of these emotions towards fictions are thought-contents we form on the basis of fictional works. He cites this as the reason why appreciators of fiction never undertake any actions towards the fictional characters or events which evoke strong emotions in them (1981, 296). Yanal writes that "our emotional reactions to fiction might well have motivating force though a motivation that is never exercised because we acknowledge the metaphysical impossibility of interacting with what does not exist" (Yanal 1999, 61). As Carroll writes in his defense of the thought theory: "Since we are horrified by thought contents, we do not believe that we are in danger, and do not take any measures to protect ourselves" (1990, 86). The only actions we might undertake as a reaction to our fear for a fictional monster, is to try and distract ourselves from the thought content our fear is directed at in the first place (Lamarque 1981, 296; Carroll 1990, 80-81). But this is not the kind of action we undertake when being confronted by

45 In part 4.2.2, I discuss how quasi-emotions can be rephrased as unable to motivate real actions, but able to motivate the performance of fictional actions.

videogame monsters. In videogames, we do not merely react to our own thoughts, but actually act on the represented objects themselves: we do not merely avert our eyes from terrifying videogame zombies and try to think of something else, but we actively try to kill or get away from the creatures within the fictional world. This is something Lamarque, Yanal, and Carroll did not take to be possible because they only considered non-interactive fictional works (literature and movies in particular). The statements these thought theorists make about the link between emotions and actions towards fiction are thus, again, quite unhelpful when trying to explain why the emotions videogame players feel towards the fictional world of the game *are* able to guide the actions they undertake.[46]

At first sight, the illusion theory, which was originally rejected based on the fact that it could not explain fiction appreciators' *inactivity* while feeling strong emotions towards fictional characters and events, seems more promising when trying to explain the actions appreciators of interactive fictions *do* undertake based on their emotions towards the fictional world. In contrast to the make-believe and the thought theory, the illusion theory at least tries to offer an account of the relation between emotions and actions towards fiction. Many of the actions people perform in virtual reality, for example, seem to be motivated by fear, which in turn is caused by these users' belief, however temporarily, that what they see in the VR environment or on their screen is *real*. Most people who enter VR for the first time get scared and duck away when objects are represented as flying towards them. In this case, the illusion theory seems apt to explain both these users' emotions and actions, and the relation between them. Note, however, that these are very specific cases in which people are fooled by the VR system's realistic representations and do not treat them as fictions, often because they are not used to the VR medium. The illusion theory's explanation of the link between emotions and actions towards fiction cannot at all be generalized to all interactive fiction experiences. Take, for example, players who get scared of represented zombies in a videogame and run away from them as a result. The illusion theory would explain that these players temporarily believe that there *really are* zombies, get truly scared of these zombies, and are consequently motivated to run away by this real fear. Note, however, that this account is erroneous. After all, as a reaction to their fear of the fictional zombies, videogame players do not *actually* run away from these zombies, but *they press a button*, which makes their *in-game character* run away from the zombies. The illusion theory account of this situation would not make sense: if these fearful players really did believe that they were actually confronted by zombies, like the illusion theory says, they would (try to) actually run away from the represented zombies they believed to be real. This is not the action which such players are motivated to undertake, however. They do not run away: they merely press a button. The illusion theory thus also fails to adequately clarify the relation between emotions and actions towards fiction.

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46 What is helpful, however, is Lamarque's distinction between the intentional object of our emotions towards fiction (the fictional characters and events), and the real or causal object of our emotions (our thoughts about these characters and events, according to the thought theory). When elaborating on our interactions with fictional worlds in part 4.2, I will make a similar distinction between the intentional object of our actions towards fiction (fictional characters, objects, and events) and the actual, causal object of our actions (the virtual or computer-generated shapes and objects).

To conclude, the traditional paradox of fictional emotions and its solutions do not seem to cover all the problems that are associated with our experiences of interactive fictions. Whereas emotions towards fiction used to be discussed as feelings completely isolated from any possibility of action, videogames show that there might be a strong connection between emotions towards and actions performed on fictional worlds. The passiveness that was associated with emotions towards fiction in the past appears to not be a consequence of the fact that these emotions are felt towards *fictional* objects and characters, but to be a consequence of the fact that these emotions have only been investigated with regard to non-interactive fictional media, which obviously do not allow for any action towards the represented fictional objects. As Grant Tavinor concludes: "[T]he traditional focus has been on narrative fiction where causal interactions with fictional worlds are not evident. Interactive videogames thus allow us to see how the paradox of fiction is not distinctive to ostensible emotional relationships to fictional worlds but a more general one concerning our interaction with fictional worlds" (2009a, 141). If we focus on interactive fiction, another paradox emerges, which is quite similar to the paradox of emotional responses to fiction and possibly connected to it. I will call this paradox the paradox of interactive fiction. In the next chapter, I will discuss this specific paradox associated with our experience of interactive fictional works, which raises the question how it is possible for us to act towards objects we know to be fictional.

3.2.3 A Paradox of Gameplay Emotions?

Before diving into the paradox of interactive fiction, it is useful to first specify which particular emotions felt while playing videogames are involved in the paradox of fiction and, more importantly, which emotions are not. After all, there are many emotions caused by works of fiction that do not seem to involve the paradox of fiction. Appreciators of works of fiction often feel emotions that are not aimed at the fictional events, but at the way these events are presented. They then feel emotions which are aimed at the work as an artefact, like admiration for an author's writing style, the specific framing of a movie, or the use of color in a painting, sadness about the fact that the plot did not turn out the way they hoped it would, or disappointment about the graphics of a game. In this case, the intentional object of the emotion is something real: a specific aesthetic characteristic of the work or representation itself. Videogames introduce yet another category of emotions, which are not aimed at the game's fiction or its aesthetics: game(play) emotions (cf. Frome 2006).[47]

47 I largely follow the categorization of emotions introduced in Jonathan Frome's article "Representation, Reality, and Emotions Across Media" (2006). Frome helpfully distinguishes between three categories of emotions we can feel towards works of fiction, in which he also includes videogames (2006, 22-24). A first category of emotion he discusses are the so-called 'world emotions', aimed towards the world represented within the work of fiction. A second category of emotions are the artefact emotions felt towards the way the work of fiction was constructed. Game emotions form the third category, and are felt towards elements of the actual gameplay, such as winning, losing, beating levels, having to start over, etc.

In chapter one I argued that, depending on the way the player approaches the videogame, and what they imagine whilst playing, the game can be approached either as a fictional world or as an actual challenge, consisting of non-fictional rules and non-fictional events such as winning and losing. Within videogame philosophy and studies, many authors seem to acknowledge this double status of videogames, agreeing that the playing of videogames contains both fictional and non-fictional elements. One of the most influential descriptions of this characteristic of games can be found in Jesper Juul's *Half-Real. Videogames between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds*:

> [V]ideo games are two different things at the same time: video games are real in that they consist of real rules with which players actually interact, and in that winning or losing a game is a real event. However, when winning a game by slaying a dragon, the dragon is not a real dragon but a fictional one. To play a video game is therefore to interact with real rules while imagining a fictional world, and a video game is a set of rules as well as a fictional world. (2005, 1)

As a result, some of the emotions felt by videogame players are not a consequence of the game's fiction, but rather of the games' rules and the challenge it offers. Gamers can feel elation when they believe to have achieved the highest score or succeeded in executing a difficult button combination. They can feel frustrated because they lost progress and have to start over. These are typical game(play) emotions:

> Game emotions are emotions of competition, the emotions generated due to winning, losing, accomplishment, and frustration. Game emotions also can be social emotions, such as regret at failing to protect a partner, loyalty to a team member, or schadenfreude (pleasure at the misfortunes of others) when a competitor accidentally blows himself up with a grenade during a competitive game of *Halo* (Bungie, 2001). [...] The context of game emotions are the game rules, which define the game's parameters, legal moves, and outcomes. (Frome 2006, 19).

Let us look at these gameplay emotions in more detail, starting from an example. In the 'Challenge of Hades' level of *God of War* (SCE Santa Monica Studio 2005), the player is asked to traverse very narrow wooden beams hanging over an abyss. One step wrong, and the character Kratos plummets to his death. As if that was not hard enough, the designers added some spinning sharp blades to the scene. These blades hurt Kratos when he touches them, and, if that does not kill him, easily push him of the platform he is standing on. After inevitably dying a couple of times, the game cheekily asks the player whether they want to switch to 'easy mode'. Many players have reported 'breaking their controllers' and 'screaming' at this part of the game.[48]

This kind of frustration is often argued to not have anything to do with the game's fiction or with what players *imagine* to be the case. As Chris Bateman says, when "a digital game has frustrated you by forcing you to pursue the same task over and over again – it is not fictional that you are annoyed, you are genuinely angry, and nothing in the game

48 This is based on player reactions on threads like https://www.ign.com/boards/threads/hades-walking-the-planks-with-the-spinning-blades.93421648/ and https://www.neoseeker.com/forums/21842/t807045-challenge-of-hades-walking-on-beams/.

makes this experience part of the fiction" (Bateman 2011, 185). Indeed, there are many emotions connected to the *real* events of failing or losing a game. As Grant Tavinor says:

> When they become frustrated in videogames, it is typically because a gamer believes that they have failed at a level or task. Similarly, elation often coincides with the belief of a gamer that they have passed a tricky level or completed a difficult game. These are beliefs about real events, and we can see why they are emotionally relevant ones. Videogames demand a huge amount of effort on the part of the player, as they confront the player with obstacles that are difficult to overcome. Failing at a level for the umpteenth time is bound to be frustrating, enough so that one might throw down the controller in disgust. (2009a, 133)

Tavinor describes emotions like elation and frustration towards videogames as non-paradoxical and quite easily explained. These emotions do not involve the paradox of fiction, he believes, as they are, just like emotions towards the fictional work as an artefact, based on and caused by beliefs the player really has. Tavinor thus quickly dismisses these, according to him unambiguous, emotions caused by games' non-fictive qualities, to focus on the 'more interesting' emotions caused by the fictional elements of games (Tavinor 2009a, 134).

Winning and losing a game are non-fictional events: players really did fail or succeed in pressing the right buttons and making the right things happen on-screen. However, we should not be too quick to dismiss the connection between the feelings evoked by failure and success in videogames on the one hand, and the fictional dimension of our experience of videogames on the other. Players' feelings of success and failure are, contrary to what Tavinor and Bateman argue, in some ways similar to the emotions discussed within debates on the paradox of fiction and are certainly worthy of further investigation. Jesper Juul, for example, dedicates an entire book to videogame failure and the emotions connected to it. Unlike Tavinor, Juul argues that calling failure in videogames 'real' obscures the fact that the emotions felt towards videogame failure are, in a way, paradoxical. He outlines a so-called 'paradox of failure':

1. We generally avoid failure
2. We experience failure when playing games
3. We seek out games, although we will likely experience something that we normally avoid

(Juul 2013, 33)

This paradox is an almost direct translation of the paradoxes of horror and tragedy we discussed with regard to fiction. With this paradox, Juul point out how the feeling of failure associated with games differs from real-life feelings of failure: although the feeling is an unpleasant one, gamers voluntarily expose themselves to it time after time. The *Dark Souls* (FromSoftware) videogame series, for example, got immensely popular by offering a game experience that largely consists of dying and trying again. So why does game failure lead to frustration, but is also part of an experience that we generally describe as enjoyable?

To solve the paradox that he introduces, Juul refers to the way a game is bracketed from real life: to play a game is "to participate in a carnival where, for a short period,

our normal rules and regulations do not quite apply" (Juul 2013, 45). Failing is not only a feature of the game, but its consequences are also mere parts of the game. Our feeling of failure is therefore in an important way *deniable* by reminding ourselves of the fact that "it's only a game" (Juul 2013, 43-45). In this regard, Salen and Zimmerman talk about the *frame* of a game, or, referring to Johan Huizinga's work (Huizinga 1949), the *magic circle*, as a specially demarcated space and time related to the playing of the game: "The magic circle of a game is the boundary of the game space and within this boundary the rules of the game play out and have authority" (Salen and Zimmerman 2004, 96). Within game studies, theorists often talk about a 'lusory attitude' connected to the specific game space and time. Bernard Suits defines the lusory attitude as "the acceptance of constitutive rules just so the activity made possible by such acceptance can occur" (Suits 1978, 40). As Calleja writes, "[t]he lusory attitude is closely tied to the notion of the magic circle because it is similarly built on the assumption that players voluntarily step into an attitude which is apart from ordinary life; an experiential mode that occurs only during game playing" (Calleja 2012, 84). The frustration connected to losing in a game is an effect of such a lusory attitude and only finds its relevance within the bracketed game space. Although the frustration itself is not enjoyable, it is an integral part of the enjoyable experience of playing. The enjoyability of playing games is mostly caused by the feeling of *fiero*, the proud feeling of triumph that is connected to competitive play in both sports and games. Nicole Lazzaro argues that frustration is a requirement for fiero: "Players cannot push a button and feel fiero; they must feel frustrated first because fiero is the reward for accomplishing something difficult" (Lazzaro 2009, 23). The frustration makes the obstacles in the game worth overcoming, which causes a satisfying feeling of fiero in its turn. Both feelings are a consequence of the player taking on a role as a competitor, and approaching the game as a challenge.

Playing the game as a challenge thus asks for a lusory attitude just as playing it as a fiction demands a fictive attitude, and both of these attitudes can lead to the feeling of certain emotions. These two attitudes have sometimes been described as diametrically opposed to one another (cf. Callois 2001). However, the contraposition of lusory or competitive attitudes and fictional or make-believe attitudes has in recent years been heavily nuanced, as most videogames invoke both kinds of attitudes simultaneously (Nguyen 2019, 59). Moreover, the distinction between the lusory and the fictive attitude is sometimes hard to make with regard to videogames. After all, the interaction between rules and fiction in videogames is significant to the point of them often being inseparable: knowledge about the rules of the game determines the player's fictional experience, and the player's perception of the fictional world of the game can make it clear what the rules of the game are and how a player can win the game (Juul 2011, 136). Knowledge about videogame rule conventions might help players deduce details about their fictional situation. For example, a free stash of weapons and health items might be a welcome sight to some players, but might also be a cause for worry for the player who is more sensitive to game conventions, and who now fears that they have

only been given these valuable resources because a strong monster is waiting behind the next corner. Conversely, the rules of the game can also be deduced from the fictional situation. The player seeing that a fictional room has a lava floor might easily deduce that touching the floor will drain their health, thus fearing to fall into the lava. In the end, it is often hard to say of emotions whether they are caused by a lusory (rule-based) or a fictional attitude.

Stronger still is the idea that the 'magic circle' and the lusory attitude connected to it do not differentiate between game-rules and fiction at all. As Sebastian Deterding argues, the idea of the magic circle got associated with and limited to games because of Salen and Zimmerman's interpretation of it as "a special place in time and space created by a game" (Salen and Zimmerman 2004, 95). When Huizinga first formulated it however, he had in mind a much broader category of 'play' and 'magic circle', which explicitly includes fiction: "Sports, games, children's play, theatre, movies, ritual: all are identical in their social form according to Huizinga" (Deterding 2009, 10).[49] Formulated like this, there seems to be a clear parallel between the magic circle and Kendall Walton's idea of make-believe games, and the fictional world created within these games. And indeed, Walton himself expresses the idea that the lusory attitude often is a kind of make-believe attitude. In a parallel to Juul's argument about a game being 'only a game' when it comes down to it, Walton wrote the paper "It's Only a Game! Sports as Fiction", explaining that the attitude we take on when experiencing emotions with regards to sports is comparable to the make-believe attitude we take on when experiencing fiction:

> It is hard to resist comparing the avid sports fan to the playgoer who sheds bitter and voluminous tears over the tragic fate of Romeo and Juliet, and twenty minutes later has a jolly good time with her friends at an espresso bar. The fan imagines that the outcome matters immensely and imagines caring immensely - while (in many cases) realizing that it doesn't actually matter much, if at all. She is caught up in the world of the game, as the spectator at the theater is caught up in the story. Afterwards, like the playgoer, she steps outside of the make-believe and goes back to living her life as though nothing much had happened - even if the home team suffered a devastating and humiliating defeat. It's just a story; it's just a game. (Walton 2015, 77)

Like the sports fan, players of videogames take on an attitude that allows them to interpret their winning and losing a game as *important*, causing them to feel negative emotions upon failing, but that also allows their failing not to be too painful because it is bracketed from their real-life. Like the appreciator of fiction, the attitude of the videogame player who approaches the game as a challenge can involve a degree of make-believe. Instead of imagining the events and world represented in the game, however, this player's make-believe game is more subtle: they consist of imagining that, for example, the goals of the game are truly valuable, the rules of the game all-encompassing, or its outcome

49 Zimmerman himself commented on Salen and his narrow interpretation of the magic circle in "Jerked Around by the Magic Circle: Clearing the Air Ten Years Later" (2012).

truly important. As Gordon Calleja says: "Juul's assertion that games are made of 'real rules and fictional worlds' (Juul 2005, 1) hides the fact that both game rules and the representation of fiction are designed constructs, neither of which carries or denies a claim to reality" (2012, 84). Even the elements of games that are *real* and *truly believed*, such as the event of failing the game and having to try over, only cause emotions that are relevant to a specific game-context and attitude.[50] Anyone who observes someone being devastated over failing a level for the tenth time, but is not themselves involved in the videogame and does not take on the lusory attitude, has no reason to take this person's misery very seriously. It is interesting to note that, according to a Waltonian framework, many gameplay emotions can be treated in a similar way as emotions towards fictionally represented events: as a result of a make-believe attitude, relevant only within a specific, limited context, bracketed from real life.[51]

I want to stress, however, that there is good reason to treat the lusory and the fictional attitude as distinct. Although the lusory attitude might involve make-believe, there is an inherent difference between this kind of make-believe and the make-believe game played by someone taking on a fictional attitude. Nguyen writes that the Waltonian position results in a complete reduction of the lusory attitude to a fictional attitude:

> Take, for instance, a game of tennis. Even when we are absorbed in the present moment and its physical details, there is still a subtle fictiveness, and a crucial use of the imagination, for we are infusing dull matter with meaning. The white lines on the tennis court are, outside of the game, simply paint strips, but in play we transform them into crucial boundaries. Outside of play, the ball is a trivial object, but during the game, the ball becomes all-important. (Nguyen 2019, 65)

Walton himself, however, never argues that the lusory attitude is simply a fictional attitude. First of all, Walton would arguably agree that the kind of make-believe involved in gameplay is of a different kind than the one evoked by our interactions with fictional works: the kind of imaginings involved in gameplay seem to be what Walton calls metaphorical or 'prop-oriented' (Walton 1993). This means that taking on a lusory attitude involves treating certain objects as props and imagining certain things about these objects, but without any interest in the fictional truths that are thereby generated. Such cases of make-believe are merely convenient ways of indicating what

50 Walton would likely say these feelings are mere quasi-emotions. I do not believe, however, that the invocation of a lusory or make-believe attitude makes the emotions felt within the context created by this attitude less real. Even though these emotions are bracketed from real-life and only relevant within a specific game context, they can feel very real to the person having them.

51 I say 'many' here, as some gameplay emotions still seem to be straightforward consequences of real beliefs about real consequences of the game. Think, for example, of players who get truly frustrated for having to do a repetitive task in a game over and over again. In *Dark Souls*, players who fail to beat the endboss have to walk through the same enemy-infested rooms every time they want to face the boss again, which quickly gets tedious. It is hardly necessary to invoke a make-believe attitude to explain their frustration about this situation. Referring to a lusory or make-believe attitude might be necessary, however, to explain why the player even keeps playing a game that asks them to do this, or why this player ascribes any value to finishing the game.

the function of these objects is within the game and how they work (Walton 1993, 40). Nguyen defends a similar position when he says that the imaginings involved in gameplay tend to be instrumental (Nguyen 2019, 61): players imagine certain states of affairs for the sake of understanding the game. Rather than transporting a player to a fictional world, the make-believe involved in the lusory attitude marks a specific way of looking at and giving value to real-life events. Make-believe, Nguyen argues, can be an excellent technique for producing good environments for gameplay, as is exemplified by the tennis example (Nguyen 2019, 66).

Secondly, Walton admits that sports and games can unparadoxically evoke emotions that are not connected to any make-believe. Players themselves may care about the outcome of the game not because of any fictional value they ascribe to it, but because of real-life consequences, be it monetary or psychologically:

> There remains the fact that, unlike Romeo and Juliet, teams and player exist and really do fare well and ill in competition. So we can genuinely care about them, and sometimes do; sometimes it really matters. It usually matters to the competitors; the salaries and careers of professionals are on the line, and so are the egos of amateurs. (Walton 2015, 77-78)

Even spectators of games might, for whatever reason, be genuinely concerned about the outcome of competitions and games: "The spectator is likely to experience sensations of excitement, pleasure, and disappointment, as the game proceeds, because of her genuine concern, quite apart from any make-believe" (Walton 2015, 78).

Walton thus does not argue that our interactions in sports and games always and necessarily involve a make-believe attitude. Instead, his text seems to be a call to recognize the similarity and interaction between the make-believe involved in gameplay and fiction (2015, 78). And this is an interesting insight when it comes to the videogame experience and the emotions it evokes. Non-fictional events such as winning and losing that are connected to gameplay might still evoke emotions that are similar to emotions towards fiction, because of the fictional *value* players ascribe to these events whilst playing. There is thus an interesting link between the lusory and fictive attitude within the videogame experience which is, both within philosophy and game studies, often overlooked.[52]

To explain why the rest of this dissertation focuses on the fictional rather than the lusory attitude, however, I would like to end this section by emphasizing the difference between both attitudes. Even if we acknowledge that make-believe is involved in the lusory attitude, this does not mean that the mere playing of a game mandates the imagining of fictional objects or worlds. At most, it mandates pretending that certain objects and events have, within the context of the game, a meaning and value that they do not have outside of this context.[53] Nevertheless, winning and losing are actual events,

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52 As Nguyen remarks, it is quite striking that "the connection between video games and sports is rarely discussed in the contemporary literature, while the connection between video games and cinema is constantly highlighted" (2019, 57).

53 Olli Tapio Leino talks, in this regard, of the gameplay condition, as the temporary agreement to strive for a certain goal, which transforms real-life objects into game tokens (Leino 2009, 133).

and there is nothing fictional about the skill players exhibit. Moreover, in contrast to gamers who take on a fictive attitude, the engagement of players who treat a game as a challenge does not necessarily involve imagining a fictional world, imaginatively taking on the role of a character within this world, and imaginatively engaging with fictional objects, characters, and events. And as it is precisely these elements of the videogame experience that form the subject of this thesis, the chapters after this one will focus mainly on (the make-believe connected to) the fictive attitude rather than the lusory one.

3.3 Concluding Remarks

Within their discussions about the paradox of fiction, philosophers have strongly focused on the non-interactive fictional media of literature, theatre, and film. Videogames differ from these fictional media in two important ways: the fact that they are inherently interactive and immersive, and the fact that they present their players with both a representational, fictional dimension and a non-fictional challenge that can actually be failed or overcome. That is why applying the paradox of fiction to videogames can reveal new elements of and wrong assumptions about emotions towards fiction, while also exposing the paradoxical nature of player emotions aimed at non-fictional game elements of videogames.

These gameplay emotions are often seen as unambiguous and unparadoxical, because they are directed at non-fictional, real game elements such as winning and losing the game. I argued, however, that these, too, are often the result of the player taking on a specific kind and context-bound attitude towards the game. Mostly referred to as a 'lusory attitude', this attitude has many similarities with the fictive attitude described within debates on the paradox of fiction. Just like emotions towards fiction, emotions towards the game elements of videogames are often the result of the player interacting with the videogame in a specific way, interpreted as being bracketed from real life, and only relevant within a specific context created around the experience of the videogame. I described how this lusory attitude often involves a kind of prop oriented make-believe which is often overlooked within discussions of videogame experiences in philosophy and game studies. Due to the subject of this thesis, however, the following chapters will not elaborate on the lusory or gameplay dimension of videogames, but rather on the representational dimension of games as presenting fictional worlds. The rest of this dissertation will thus not focus on non-fictional events such as winning and losing games, but rather on fictional elements of games, and more particularly on player interactions with the fictional objects, events, and characters represented in videogames.

The emotions directed towards these fictional videogame elements seem to entail the so-called 'paradox' of fiction just like emotions towards literature, theatre, and film did. Moreover, by reframing Walton's famous example of Charles, the scared watcher of a horror movie, into an example of Charles, the scared player of a videogame, it becomes

clear that videogames introduce a lot of new elements to the paradox of fiction as it is traditionally discussed. Because of the player's involvement in the fictional narrative or the represented world in the game, *de se* emotions, such as fear for oneself, and reflexive emotions, such as guilt and shame, are much more common within videogames. More importantly, emotions in videogames seem intricately connected to the actions undertaken by players. Although it has often been, and still is, assumed that emotions towards fiction are non-motivational, the emotions players feel towards fictional characters and situations within videogames clearly have the power to make these players undertake certain actions: fear can make them run away from zombies in a game and pity for a certain character can make them try to save it. Interestingly, situations like these not only show that the debates on paradox of fiction have been severely impoverished by the limited focus on non-interactive fictions, but they also show that fiction cannot only invoke emotions towards fictional characters and events, but also actions towards these fictional particulars. As Grant Tavinor contends, interactive videogames allow us to see that not only our emotions towards fiction, but the way we interact with fictional objects in general is quite paradoxical (2009a, 141). What can it possibly mean to perform actions on and interact with objects and characters we know to be merely fictional, and we thus do not believe to exist? In the following chapter, I look at the paradox connected to our actions on fictional objects within videogames, which I will call the paradox of interactive fiction.

4. A Paradox of Interactive Fiction[54]

Within debates on the paradox of fiction, the truth of the idea that we cannot act on fictional objects has always been readily assumed. Ever since Kendall Walton noticed an asymmetry between our psychological and physical interactions with fiction (1978a, 5), the idea that actions towards represented fictional objects, characters, or situations are impossible has been crystallized in what Derek Matravers calls 'the consensus view' within the philosophy of fiction (2014, 26). As Peter Lamarque summarizes:

> Kendall Walton has reminded us of the logical oddities of our relations with fictional characters. For example, we can talk of them affecting us but not, in any straightforward way, of us affecting them. They seem to be able to induce in us sorrow, fear, contempt, delight and embarrassment. But we have no comeback with them. We cannot thank them, congratulate them or frighten them, or help, advise, rescue or warn them. (1981, 292)

The idea that the appreciator of representational works cannot affect the fictional world within this work in any way underlies all debates on possible solutions to the paradox of fiction. Radford described fictional situations as situations in which we know that we can do nothing to interfere (1975, 74). The illusion theory was refuted based on the fact that it could not explain fiction consumers' lack of action towards fictional characters and events. Kendall Walton explained this inaction by stating that fiction consumers merely make-believe the existence of fictional particulars and feel mere unmotivational quasi-emotions towards them. Peter Lamarque explained the passivity of fiction consumers by describing how these consumers can merely interact with fictional entities in the form of thought contents, thus making any form of physical interaction impossible. The consensus seemed to be that when we vividly imagine the existence of characters and events, we can have feelings towards them, but we cannot perform actions towards them: there is simply nothing to physically act *upon*. As Robert Yanal concludes, it may even very well be that our feelings or emotions towards fiction are motivational after all, but as there is simply no way to act on the intentional objects of these emotions, because they are fictional and thus non-existent, there is no way to satisfy this motivation (1999, 61). Recent work within philosophy of fictions still holds onto this idea that actions towards fictional particulars are necessarily and inherently impossible. Derek Matravers, for example, claims that there are no actions available that could influence or manipulate represented objects, situations, or persons (2014, 26-27) and Kathleen Stock argues that possibilities of action towards invented particulars characterized in fiction are always obstructed (2017, 168).

In the past decennia, however, the medium of interactive fiction has challenged these ideas. Videogames, especially augmented and virtual reality games, specifically offer us agency within their fictional worlds. As such, videogames seem to be direct proof that the

54 The presentation of the paradox of interactive fiction and its solutions in this chapter is partly based on my article "How Can We Be Moved to Shoot Zombies? A Paradox of Fictional Emotions and Actions in Interactive Fiction" published in the *Journal of Literary Theory* (Van de Mosselaer 2018a).

old intuition is faulty: players of computer games can interact with fictional objects, save characters that are invented, and kill monsters that are clearly non-existent within worlds that are mere representations on a screen. In videogames, we see that there is not a mere psychological relation between the player and the fictional world, but also a physical one. When encountering a zombie in a dark hallway, players are not only moved to fear these monstrosities, but also to undertake certain actions. They can be motivated to run away from the monsters, shoot them, and save their friends from them within the game world. After such an encounter, players can often be heard saying things like 'I shot the zombie!'. In the past years, the popular augmented reality game *Pokémon Go* made players go out and run around in the real world in search of Pokémon to catch. In even more immersive virtual reality games, we can enter the fictional world and manipulate its fictional objects with our own bodily movements. But how to explain actions that seem to be motivated by and performed on fictional objects, assuming that the player is never deceived to think that the world of the videogame is real? In a parallel to Radford's original question about the paradox of fiction, we might ask: how can we be moved to shoot fictional zombies or catch fictional Pokémon, when we know they are not real?

4.1 A Paradox of Fictional Actions

Videogames grant their players agency in a fictional world, by letting them shoot zombies, catch Pokémon, pilot spaceships, etc. Videogame players thus act on and influence fictional worlds. As described above, however, there is a long-standing tradition in the philosophy of fiction of denying the possibility of action towards objects or characters we know to be fictional. It is often treated as a defining feature of fiction that it is impossible for the appreciator to influence what fictionally happens in the fictional world of a certain work. Kendall Walton discusses this as our physical isolation from fictional worlds: "We cannot kiss or kick or save something that is believed or wished or said or denied to exist but does not; neither can we interact in any of these ways with something that exists only fictionally" (1990, 205). Peter Lamarque and Alex Neill respectively talk about a logical and an ontological gap between the real and the fictional in this context (cf. Lamarque 1981, 292; Neill 1993, 4). Thus, a new paradox arises, consisting of three premises that cannot be true at the same time:

1. It is impossible to act on fictional objects.
2. Videogame objects are fictional.
3. Players act on videogame objects.

Which one of these needs to be rejected? Before trying to solve this paradox, it is helpful to discuss each of these premises in more detail. As will be discussed in the second part of this chapter, available solutions to the paradox of interactive fiction involve denying either the second or the third premise, and thus respectively deny that videogame objects are fictional, or that players act on these objects at all. The first premise on the

other hand, which will be clarified shortly, follows from the very way in which fiction itself is defined and is relatively uncontested.

4.1.1 It is Impossible to Act on Fictional Objects

As described above, the idea that it is impossible to act on fictional objects is deeply ingrained within philosophy of fiction. And it is with good reason: as the fictional is defined as that which is (mandated to be) imagined, and imagination is that which, contrary to belief, posits its object as not present and/or non-existent, fictional objects are simply not present to us to be acted on. As Walton writes: "Physical interaction is possible only with what actually exists. That is why Charles cannot dam up the slime, and why in general real people cannot have physical contact with mere fictions" (1978a, 6). The idea that interaction with fictional entities (in the sense of us changing, manipulating, or influencing them) is impossible is (either implicitly or explicitly) present in the vast majority of philosophical works about the experience of fiction. To gain more clarity about what exactly this first premise means, the following paragraphs will specify what kind of interactions are targeted by this premise, by contrasting it to kinds of 'interaction' that are deemed possible within our experiences of works of fiction.

ACTING ON VS ACTING BECAUSE OF FICTIONAL OBJECTS

When Gregory Currie describes imaginings, he contrasts them to beliefs by saying that they are "run off-line, disconnected from the normal perceptual inputs and behavioural outputs" (Currie 1995, 144-145). He and Ravenscroft emphasize that "imagination does not have the motivational force of belief; we do not act on our imaginings as we act on our beliefs" (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002, 16). Imagination is often described as "quarantined" (Gendler 2003), as our imaginings are "compartmentalized from our beliefs about the world, so that it does not guide our ordinary actions" (Friend 2016, 222). It is the unmotivating character of imaginings that, in the debates on the paradox of fiction, is often mentioned when explaining that we feel emotions towards fictional objects, while we do not undertake actions towards these imagined particulars. Since our engagement with works of fiction triggers our imaginings, and imaginings are non-motivational, works of fiction do not cause us to try and save characters or run away from the represented dangers.

This interpretation of imagination as an 'off-line state' should not be misunderstood, however. As Matravers says: Currie never makes the false claim that imagination can never result in action (Matravers 2014, 26). After all, the 'off-line' nature of imagination does not mean that imaginings are completely incapable of guiding our actions. Imagination can, and very often does, play an important role in the generation of action:

> Humans perform actions not just on wwhat we take to exist in our immediate environment. We also act in relation to objects, spaces, properties, and events that are remote in time, actual space, possibility space, or epistemic space. We gesture the size of creatures that are not before us and operate control panels that only exist in fictions. When we don't know

> which possibility is actual, we represent the ones that are relevant, if we imagine well, and then act. Thus, various forms of imagining surround humans with possibilia, representations of which guide action in the world. (Van Leeuwen 2016, 297)

Interestingly, Derek Matravers points out that not only imaginings about what is possible can motivate us to act in a certain way, but that even our imaginative engagement with works of fiction can generate actions. Someone might give up smoking after watching a grueling medical drama, or plan a trip to India after having seen a fiction film set in this country (Matravers 2014, 28).

In all these cases in which our actions are guided by imagination, however, it is clear that the action is not caused by imagination exclusively. As Van Leeuwen stresses, actions based on imaginings "rely also on factual beliefs to guide them, since those actions take place within the confines of the real world and agents use factual beliefs to track reality" (Van Leeuwen 2016, 291; see also Schellenberg 2013, 503). Imagination only leads to action when it is mediated by certain beliefs (about our environment, about what we can achieve, or about what want to achieve). When we travel to India based on our vivid imaginings about this country triggered by a fiction film, this is only possible because we believe India to exist. In this case, "one's imaginings connect to one's beliefs in a way that produces means-end beliefs appropriate for motivating action" (Sinhababu 2013, 161). What is impossible, however, is travelling to the exact India that is portrayed in the fiction film: the India in which the fictional characters live and the fictional events have taken place. This India only exists in imagination. As Matravers says, when Currie identifies imagination with 'off-line simulation', he does so because, although imaginings might lead to actions, they can never lead to actions towards the imagined objects, for the obvious reason that imagined objects are not in the egocentric space of the one imagining them (Matravers 2014, 28). In this regard, Matravers makes a distinction between confrontation and representation relations:

> [I]n confrontation relations our mental states are caused by perceptual inputs from the objects of those states, and which cause actions towards objects in our egocentric space. In representation relations our mental states are not caused by perceptions of the objects of those states, and do not result in actions towards objects in our egocentric space (although, of course, they can still cause actions). We could say, although it hardly needs saying, that acting on objects not in our egocentric space is not possible because we have no instrumental beliefs (we could have no instrumental beliefs) that could make it possible. (Matravers 2014, 50)

When it comes to fictional objects, we are always in a representation relation with them. After all, knowing something to be fictional entails entertaining this object in imagination, without asserting or committing to the actual existence and presence of this object.[55] As such, the instrumental beliefs necessary for the performance of actions are typically missing in the case of fictional objects: we simply do not believe these objects to be within our egocentric space.

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55 Note that this is also true for the object in augmented reality that were discussed in chapter two. While playing *Pokémon Go*, the player of course believes a church to actually be in their egocentric space. What is not really there, however, is what the church represents: a Pokémon gym.

Of course, even when such instrumental beliefs *are* present, actions towards fictional objects remain impossible. People who try to lean on a table that is represented in virtual reality do have (false) beliefs about the presence of this table within their egocentric space, which is why they undertake the action of leaning on it in the first place. They undertake this action because they, wrongly, do not take the table to be a fictional one. They quickly find out that the table is only fictionally present, however, when realizing that leaning on it is impossible and falling to the floor. Cases such as these reveal an interesting discrepancy between the first premise of the paradox of interactive fiction and its counterpart in the paradox of fiction. The first premise of the paradox of fiction states that it is impossible to feel emotions towards fictional objects or characters not because these do not really exist, but because we do not believe them to be real or existent. Likewise, the performance of actions on fictional objects is typically blocked because we perceive these objects as not truly existent, real, or present. However, the first premise of the paradox of interactive fiction expresses an even more general impossibility than this: even if we mistakenly do perceive them as physically present and perform an action towards them, objects that are not in our egocentric space or that only have imagined existence can simply never be truly acted on. The action itself would reveal the mistake that lies at the basis of the action: the pool table is revealed to be fictional after all, because we fall through it when trying to lean on it.

Actions on fictional or imagined particulars are impossible because they are not part of our own environment. And they are so necessarily and inherently: fictional entities are never present, but merely represented. Lamarque marks this impossibility of interacting with fictions by stressing the *logical gap* between the real world and fictional worlds, which makes physical interaction between these worlds impossible: "Fictional characters as such can never cross these logical barriers. In the fictional world they exist as people, in the real world they exist only as the senses of descriptions" (Lamarque 1981, 299). In this regard, Alex Neill talks about an ontological gap between fiction and reality, which precludes any rivalry or physical interaction between us and fictional characters (1993, 4). The impossibility that is articulated in the first premise is thus not that of being motivated to undertake actions *by* what we imagine or encounter in works of fiction, but that of being motivated to act *on* objects that only exist within our imagination. This is why the first premise is articulated as it is: as marking the impossibility of acting *on* fictional objects, and not of acting *because of* imagination or fiction.

CREATION VS INTERACTION

There seems to be another obvious way in which the first premise can be called false: authors of fiction act on fictional objects all the time, bringing them into existence during acts of creation and deciding the fate of their characters by writing it down. Yet, these authors do not truly *interact* with their characters, but rather make it true of these characters that particular things happen to them by creating them in a certain way. As Walton says: "A painter or author can arrange for it to be fictional that an evil man dies, or that everyone lives happily ever after. But in doing so he does not kill the evil man or

give everyone eternal bliss" (Walton 1978b, 17). Indeed, the 'actions' on fictional objects that are deemed impossible in the first premise of the paradox of interactive fiction refer not to mere authorial actions of creative imagination, but to actions performed on fictional objects themselves. These are the actions Lamarque talks about when he says it is impossible to help, warn, or save characters like Anna Karenina (1981, 292). A reader of Anna Karenina who wants Anna to survive and live happily ever after might try to make this happen. This reader who is displeased with Tolstoy's original story may well create their own fan fiction (either by writing it or by ripping out the pages of Tolstoy's novel in which unpleasant things happen to Anna) or freely imagine another version of the story in which Anna survives. However, this person has then not truly saved Anna, nor interacted with her in any way, but merely created a different Anna. In these examples, none of the described readers interacted with the person Anna Karenina, but merely with Tolstoy's story about her. They did not interact with fiction, but rather engaged in an act of *fantasy* or *creative imagining*.

When it comes to objects we entertain in our fantasy or private imaginings, 'interaction' is not a word that aptly describes our relation to these objects. As Sartre says, when we entertain a certain object within imagination (or, as he would say, image consciousness), we can imagine anything we want, but there is no way for us to 'act' on this object:

> The object as imaged is [...] contemporary with the consciousness that I have of it and it is exactly determined by that consciousness: it includes in itself nothing but what I am conscious of; but, inversely, everything that constitutes my consciousness finds its correlate in the object. [...] This is also why the world of images is a world where nothing happens. I can easily, at my liking, move such-and-such an object as imaged, turn a cube, make a plant grow, make a horse run, there will be never the smallest time-lag between the object and the consciousness. Not a second of surprise: the object that is moving is not alive, it never precedes the intention. But neither is it inert, passive, 'worked' from the outside, like a marionette: the consciousness never precedes the object, the intention reveals itself at the same time as it realizes itself, in and by its realization. (Sartre 2004, 11)

As such, the object we entertain in image consciousness cannot be *acted on* by us. After all, our consciousness of this object completely determines the object itself. There can be no interaction between us and the object we imagine, because the object is, per definition, not independent from us. There is no encounter between us and the objects we imagine, because the object simply *is* what we imagine it to be. The intention to move or modify the object of our imagination in any way would automatically entail this very change in the object.

Lambert Wiesing helpfully clarifies the difference between creating and transforming objects in fantasy on the one hand, and interacting with them on the other. For this, he compares the experience of seeing a real horse standing in a pasture near us, to both the experience of conceiving a horse in fantasy, and that of seeing a horse depicted in an image, such as in Ferdinand Hodler's painting "Auszug deutscher Studenten in den Freiheitskrieg". While the perception of the real horse implies a consciousness of the horse as being present, and thus truly existent, the free imagining of the horse presents the horse as irreal, or, as

Sartre would say, as a nothingness (Wiesing 2010, 91). Imagining a horse means having a consciousness of this horse which posits the horse as not (perceptually) present. The imagined horse is subject to what Husserl calls "the protean character of phantasy" (2005, 63): "The imaginary object of fantasy can suddenly become another object, can be moved and manipulated – and all of this without any hindrance, any friction, any resistance whatsoever" (Wiesing 2010, 92). Within the experience of seeing the *image* of a horse, however, a consciousness is generated which mediates between perception and imagination:

> [T]he image object stands between the object of perception and the object of the imagination. On the one hand, it possesses properties of perception, for the viewer of an image thinks he or she can see it. Yet on the other hand, the image object has properties of the imagination, for the viewer nonetheless does not think of it as really being in attendance. (Wiesing 2010, 92)

This is exactly the kind of fictional object the first premise talks about: an object that is not merely *created* by us in imagination, or fantasized about, but that we are mandated to imagine by a certain work of fiction; an object that is entertained by us in imagination, based on our experience of the way it is presented within the work of fiction. Unlike the object of fantasy or creative imagining, this object cannot be freely changed by us, as it is simply not in our control: "It is, of course, possible to paint completely new images, but the things displayed in an already existing image cannot be changed. Even if some idiot destroyed Hodler's image, he or she wouldn't be able to make the depicted horses trot" (Wiesing 2010, 92-93). The image object that is given to us in an existing image cannot be *interacted with*. It is possible to freely create images and thus decide what objects are displayed, and it is possible to interact with the actual carriers on which images are displayed. However, it is not possible to manipulate and change the objects represented in existing images. The same goes for moving images in film: the events depicted in a movie are predetermined and inevitable. There is no way for the viewer to change the way they unfold (Wiesing 2010, 94).

Note that, although Wiesing here speaks exclusively of objects presented through images, this unchangeability is, within the larger context of the philosophy of fiction, taken to be characteristic of any object presented to us in fiction.[56] As argued above, just like we cannot make the painted horses trot, we cannot save Anna Karenina, unless we create a new Anna. This is because, just like the objects depicted in images, fictional objects are presented to us in a fixed, unalterable way: the way in which the creator of a novel, play, or movie represents them in the respective work. In conclusion, the first premise does not say it is impossible to create fictional objects, either by freely imagining them or by representing them in a work of fiction of our own making. It does, however, express the impossibility of interacting with such fictional objects.[57]

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56 During the "Image, Imagination, and Virtual Reality" conference at the University of Antwerp on the 3rd of May 2019, Wiesing himself referred to the image object as an example of an 'object of fiction'.

57 Wiesing does argue that interaction with image objects becomes possible in VR, although

INTERACTING WITH FICTIONAL OBJECTS?

In conclusion, many forms of 'interactivity' with fiction are deemed possible. We can undertake actions based on fictional stories or things we imagine. We can create fictive events by imagining them and decide the fates of fictional characters in the stories we write ourselves. What the first premise of the paradox of interactive fiction expresses is that it is impossible to undertake actions towards objects that we imagine based on their representation in works of fiction: it is impossible to change the fate of Anna Karenina, fight the green slime monster from the horror movie, or warn Romeo about Juliet still being alive. After all, we have no beliefs whatsoever about these fictional objects being present in our egocentric space. Due to the (onto)logical gap between our world and the world of fiction (cf. Lamarque 1981, 299; Neill 1993, 4), the motivation or instrumental beliefs necessary for us to even try and act on them are missing, and even if we did try, there is no way for us to actually manipulate or modify fictional objects, as they only exist in imagination.

4.1.2 Videogame Objects are Fictional

The second premise refers to the fact that videogames present us with fictional objects. At first sight, this is quite intuitive. After all, as discussed in chapter one, videogames are works of fiction. The objects represented in videogames, such as guns, cars, and zombies, are fictional because they are mandated to be imagined by players, either by the game's creator or because of the way the work represents them and the player interprets them. These objects are not truly present, existent, or real, but merely entertained in imagination by players based on their representation in the game. Yet, this second premise needs some nuance. After all, some videogame objects might not (seem to) be fictional at all, as players do not imagine anything based on them: these objects might be presented within games that are not interpreted as works of fiction, or the presence of these objects within the world of the game is simply not mandated to be imagined. Let us first look at these non-fictional videogame objects.

First of all, some videogames seem to present no fictional objects whatsoever, because they themselves are not works of fiction. Both within game studies as within the philosophy of videogames, many researchers agree that some games, such as *Tetris* (Pajitnov and Gerasimov 1985), *Chessmaster* (The Software Toolworks 1986), *Pong* (Atari 1972), and *Puzzle Bobble* (Taito 1994), are not fictions (Juul 2005, 142; Tavinor 2009a, 24; Robson and Meskin 2016, 166; Wildman and Woodward 2018). Rather than fictional objects, these games are said to merely offer their players graphical representations on a screen. As Tavinor says: "*Tetris* does not seem to be a fiction, because it is no part of

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he also mentions how paradoxical this is. Wiesing seems to agree with the first premise of the paradox, but much of his discussion is devoted to describing how, in the end, users of VR do interact with the image object depicted by the VR system. I will discuss this part of his theory in 4.1.3, when clarifying the third premise of the paradox.

that game that we imagine a corresponding fictional world; arguably, the game is just comprised of the real manipulation of virtual representations or symbols on a screen" (Tavinor 2009a, 24). The representational function of objects in games such as *Tetris* has often disappeared completely, similar to the way in which it is irrelevant that some pieces represent 'knights' when playing chess (cf. Walton in Bateman 2010). In some videogames, game objects are no longer usefully interpreted as fictional objects within a fictional world, but merely treated in terms of the function and the rules connected to these objects within the gameplay. Nevertheless, some philosophers and game theorists have pointed out that the playing of games like *Tetris*, *Chessmaster*, *Pong*, and *Puzzle Bobble* still involves imaginings about the represented content. *Tetris* is then described as a work that mandates its players to imagine that blocks are falling under influence of gravity (Bateman 2011, 43) and that these blocks are spinning and stacking (Robson and Meskin 2012b, 207). *Chessmaster* is sometimes interpreted as mandating its players to imagine that there is an actual, three-dimensional chess board with matching pieces (Bartel 2018), *Puzzle Bobble* that colored bubbles bump into each other and pop, and *Pong* that "the paddle is hitting the ball" (Bartel 2018). Indeed, I see no reason to deny that these games mandate the imagining of (very minimal) fictional worlds. However, even if we acknowledge that there is a fictional dimension to these games, this dimension is often completely irrelevant or uninteresting to their players and thus effectively absent from the game experience. The representations of tetrominoes, chess pieces, bubbles, and paddles are, in the majority of cases, perceived as mere shapes to be manipulated to win the game.

Connected to this, and as already discussed in chapter one, players might play a videogame purely as a *challenge*, not necessarily paying any attention to the game's fictional dimension (even if it is clearly there), and thus not perceiving the game objects as fictional objects. Think, in this regard, of the players of *Quake II Arena* (id Software 1999) who downgraded the graphics of their game because they were only focused on winning the game as a challenge, and willing to ignore the game's fictional world to make sure their computer could run the game more smoothly (Juul 2005, 139). Think also of the players of *Pacman* (Namco 1980), who rarely imagine anything about their playing and just interpret the game as a manipulating of shapes on a screen. Such players merely perceive the game's objects as real, graphical representations instead of fictionally existent ghosts, guns, and zombies. It might not be useful whatsoever to invoke the notion of fiction to describe these players' experiences of and interactions with game objects.

Thirdly, some objects represented in videogames seem to be mere indications of the rules of a game rather than representations belonging to its fictional world (cf. Juul 2005). Objects such as menus, text depicting the player's high score, health bars, or arrows showing the player where they should go next are not always part of the fictional world of the game. They are unlike objects such as doors, zombies, guns, or characters, in the sense that their presence in the fictional world should not be imagined. There are not really floating health bars in the fictional world of the game, and a game menu only exists for the player, not for the inhabitants of the game world. These objects should

also not be perceived as fictional. It is interesting to briefly zoom in on them, however, as they are still relevant for the game's fiction, despite not being part of the fictional world themselves. Many interface-elements in videogames mandate imaginings: a red, only slightly filled health bar represents a character's bad health condition, while a number on the top of the screen might represent how many coins a character has, and symbols within game menus show what other items this character has in its possession. Interface elements that are not parts of the game's fictional world are thus very often symbols which mandate the player to imagine something about their (character's) fictional status and environment. Or, as Juul argues, indications of the game's rules play an important role when reconstructing a game's fictional world, as this world very much depends on the rules the objects within it follow (Juul 2005, 139).

Based on all of these examples, I acknowledge that there are game objects that are, can, or should be interpreted as non-fictional. There are, however, two reasons why these game objects are less interesting when it comes to discussing the paradox of interactive fiction. First of all, they are usually not objects players can interact with in the sense explained in 4.1.1. Players cannot move health bars, directly manipulate the text that displays their high-score, or manipulate the icons which represent the items their character has in its inventory. Secondly, even when these objects can be interacted with, they do not cause any paradox. When players, for example, are opening and navigating a game menu, they are simply manipulating shapes on the screen, without these shapes presenting anything fictional. They are not part of the fictional world, but of an interface that makes interaction with the fictional world easier for the player.

Moreover, the previous paragraphs focused on rather exceptional videogame objects. Most videogames offer their players unambiguously fictional objects to interact with: objects that are not truly present or existent, but are (mandated to be) imagined as such. It is clear that players also interact with these objects as fictional objects. First of all, this becomes clear in the way players talk about their game experiences. They do not say that they 'made a group of pixels disappear', but that they managed to shoot a zombie, clearly referring to videogame representations as their fictional counterparts (cf. Robson and Meskin 2016, 169-170). Secondly, players, as discussed in chapter 3, often feel *emotions* towards videogame objects. Many players, for example, feel sad when one of their team members dies in *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare 2010), are terrified of the zombies in *Uncharted* (Naughty Dog and SCE Bend Studio 2007), or pity the monsters in *Undertale* (Fox 2015) when they see the consequences their actions have on these poor creatures. Such emotional reactions can only be explained if players perceive these objects as fictions, that is: as mortal people, violent zombies, and pitiful monsters. After all, players would not feel sadness, fear, or pity for these characters if they perceived them as mere graphical representations, heaps of pixels, or computer-represented 3D-models which move according to pre-determined rules stipulated by the game's code. Lastly, players' motivation for acting the way they do towards the objects in videogames is heavily influenced by the fictional nature and status of these objects within the larger fictional world of the game: players run away from certain pixel-constructs because these represent ghosts,

they navigate towards other shapes because they represent guns they know they can use, and they understand that touching a certain shape in the game will hurt their character because it looks like fire.

Ultimately, players often perceive, treat, and interact with videogame objects as fictional objects. The rare cases in which videogames seem to present us with non-fictional objects to interact with, such as game menu's or (as some would say) the representations of tetrominoes in *Tetris*, will be further discussed in chapter five. The paradox of interactive fiction, however, is grounded in our interactions with more typical, clearly fictional objects, such as the shooting of zombies, the saving of fictional characters, and the racing of spacecraft. Given improvements in computer graphics and storage, the emphasis on game fiction in contemporary games increases progressively. This results in ever more elaborate fictional game worlds and sophisticated (both with regard to their graphics and the affordances they offer) fictional objects for players to discover and manipulate. As such, the next parts will focus on that majority of videogame objects that are unambiguously fictional.

4.1.3 Players Act on Videogame Objects

The third premise of the paradox is fairly straightforward: playing videogames simply consists of manipulating the game objects presented to you as a player through your actions on a controller. Players of videogames interact with the kind of videogame objects that were just discussed: they shoot fictional zombies with fictional guns, race fictional cars, save fictional aliens, etc. And yet, these entities do not actually exist and are not truly present in the player's egocentric space. The videogame objects that we identified as being fictional in 4.1.2 are interacted with by players in a way that was deemed impossible in 4.1.1, thus creating a paradoxical situation. And yet, this third premise seem intuitively plausible and widely accepted. It lies at the basis of videogames being called interactive fictions (cf. Tavinor 2009a; Robson and Meskin 2016; Wildman and Woodward 2018), and becomes apparent in every playing of a game, in which players report how they influence the game's world and the fates of its inhabitants.

INTERACTIVE WORKS OF FICTION

Taking into account the inherent incompatibility of actions and fiction discussed in 4.1.1, it is quite astounding that there even is a category of works of fiction that are called 'interactive'. What can it mean for a work of fiction to allow for interaction? As it is, 'interactivity' has been used in so many ways that it is hard to reconstruct what it actually means (Salen and Zimmerman 2003, 58; Eichner 2014, 53; Stang 2019). In the broadest sense of the term, any work of fiction can be said to be interactive. After all, we at least need to look at sentences in a novel, listen and look at movie images or actors on stage, interpret what we perceive, and imagine the corresponding fictional events for a fictional world to come alive (Robson and Meskin 2016, 167). This is the

very minimal kind of interactivity that arguably characterizes all works of fiction (Lopes 2001, 68). Moreover, the appreciator of a work of fiction can decide when which part of the fictional world is accessed, by reading, listening to, or looking at the representations of this world in a certain way and order, such as when choosing to read the chapters of a novel in a specific order, or to examine the bull depicted in Picasso's *Guernica* before looking at the horse (cf. Wildman and Woodward 2018). Of course, this kind of interaction with fiction is not what is deemed impossible by philosophers of fiction. Dominic Lopes calls this kind of fairly uninteresting interactivity 'weak interactivity' and contrasts it to a more meaningful kind of interactivity:

> Whereas in weakly interactive media the user's input determines which structure is assessed or the order in which it is accessed, in strongly interactive media we may say that the structure itself is shaped in part by the interactor's choices. Thus strongly interactive artworks are those whose structural properties are partly determined by the interactor's actions. (Lopes 2001, 68)

Lopes later slightly modified his account to say that interactive works "prescribe that the actions of [their] users help generate [their] displays" (2010, 36). This stronger interpretation of interactivity succeeds in differentiating the interactivity found in videogames with that found in, generally referred to as 'non-interactive', works of fiction such as novels and movies. Videogames are interactive media precisely because their users influence the very structure of the fictional world presented in the game, and because they are prescribed by the work to undertake actions that generate this work's display:

> Playing as Niko Bellic in *Grand Theft Auto IV*, the player does not merely cue the representation of parts of an artwork that have been previously encoded, as they might by choosing in which order to read the chapters of a novel or listen to tracks on an album – both of which are among Lopes' examples of weak interactivity (2001, 68-69). Rather, players shape what actually occurs in the game. My playing of *Grand Theft Auto IV* is likely to be unique to me in that the fictional events that occurred in my playing of the game were dependent on my decisions: the game in all its detail was rendered only after I had my input. (Tavinor 2009b, 4-5)

Indeed, videogames are interactive in the way human-computer interaction theorist Brenda Laurel defines it: "[S]omething is interactive when people can participate as agents within a representational context. (An agent is 'one who initiates actions.')" (Laurel 1993, 112). Laurel here identifies an important aspect of videogame interactivity: videogames offer us agency within represented worlds. As such, videogames have characteristics both of what Derek Matravers calls confrontations and of representations. Although videogame worlds are presented to us on a screen, and place us in an indirect, representation relation to fictional entities such as aliens, zombies, and spaceships, they at the same time offer possibilities for action like Matravers said only confrontations can. We can save the aliens, shoot the zombies, and fly the spaceships. Videogames let us not merely alter the order or way in which fictional events are represented, but rather influence those events themselves. And this is precisely the kind of interactivity with fictional objects that is supposed to be impossible.

INTERACTING WITH THE IMAGE OBJECT

In his book *Artificial Presence* (2010), Lambert Wiesing contextualizes the interactions possible in videogames and virtual realities within the evolution of visual media. In the discussion of the first premise, I already mentioned Wiesing's discussion of the image object as standing in between the object of perception and the object of imagination, as it is both perceived, but also not thought of as being present. I clarified how any object displayed on images, and by extension, any fictional object, cannot be truly interacted with. Wiesing argues, however, that interacting with imaginary image objects *did* become possible because of the emergence of new visual media. Specifically, he argues that virtual realities[58] have generated both an assimilation of the image to the imagination and an assimilation of the perception of the image object to the perception of a real thing (2010, 89). As a consequence, VR offers us two new ways of modifying and manipulating image objects that were previously only possible with objects entertained in fantasy or with objects that are actually present to us. Wiesing exemplifies this by describing the two possible ways in which computer systems can give us the possibility of manipulating, for example, a horse displayed on the screen.

> First, the computer can display on the screen a horse that is movable arbitrarily and without limits, a horse that can, by means of morphing, transition into any other shape whatsoever at any rate whatsoever. This is the case of animation. In a digital animation of this kind, the image object is completely without substance, without resistance and a freely available modeling mass without real mass. It is, literally, a surreal world. (Wiesing 2010, 98)

The very protean transformability that characterized the object of our fantasy is thus transferred to the way we can modify images presented to us on computer screens: "What is at stake is an assimilation of the possibilities of modification of image objects to the possibilities of modification of the objects of one's fantasy" (Wiesing 2010, 97). We can actually make visible the very processes that were previously only possible in one's private imaginings, by, as Vilém Flusser said, projecting our imaginings and making them external and shareable on computer screens (Flusser 1990, 123). In this process of modifying digital images, however, there is still no *interaction* with fictional objects involved. There is merely the creation and animation of image objects, based on the whims of the imaginative animator. This is not the true interaction that was deemed problematical in the first premise (cf. part 4.1.1).

It is only with what Wiesing calls *simulations* that interaction with image objects becomes possible. This happens when a computer simulates, for example, a horse with artificial properties. A simulated horse cannot just be moved or modified arbitrarily, but rather behaves according to laws (Wiesing 2010, 99). Wiesing takes as examples any kind of horse within videogames: we can only modify and move these simulated horses within the limits that are predetermined by the game's creators.

> In simulations we do not have a surreal but a virtual world full of surprises. In the virtual reality of a digital simulation the viewer cannot do whatever he wants with the image

58 With 'virtual reality', Wiesing refers to any computer generated space (2010, 88).

> objects; rather, he interacts with them. He can determine the movement of the pictorially displayed thing only within limits, for the image object, although it is a thing made of pure visibility, nonetheless possesses - in simulated fashion, precisely - material properties and thus is subject to an artificial physics. This physics that is artificially implemented in the image world can but does not have to be the physics of extrapictorial reality. Realities that do not exist can be simulated. (Wiesing 2010, 99)

Videogames thus allow us to interact with represented, fictional realities (that is, not just with the representation of this reality, but with the represented reality itself): we can control and determine the movements of fictional objects, such as a fictional horse, that are given to us through computer systems. Objects the existence of which is an imagined one become objects we can act on. We do not merely transform them into something else entirely, or recreate them within our own, free creative imaginings, but truly interact with them as they are presented to us by a certain work of (interactive) fiction.

Wiesing's analysis thus clarifies what it means when we talk about 'interactions' with objects the existence of which is not to be believed but rather imagined. The actions we undertake on fictional objects in videogames are not a mere case of protean transformability found in animation, or the creative act of shaping original worlds found within videogame design, but an interaction with objects that are *encountered* within a fictional world that is presented to us. Velleman also remarks on this difference between the way in which people engage with fictions in their personal free-floating imaginings and the way players engage with fictional objects depicted in videogames:

> These objects and events have the determinateness and recalcitrance characteristic of reality, and so the players tend to have more realistic attitudes toward them. Their cognitive attitudes must conform to the truths of a world that is not of their invention, and that world can frustrate or disappoint them as their own fantasies cannot. (Velleman 2008, 411)

Wiesing contextualizes our ability to truly *interact* with objects that are not actually part of our egocentric space as a consequence of the way visual media have evolved. Immersive virtual reality, he writes, "emerges from the assimilation of the perception of the image object to the perception of a real thing" (Wiesing 2010, 89). Interaction with image objects, which was unthinkable before, has become possible because of the way these objects are presented to us within videogames and virtual reality systems.

With this, Wiesing does not, however, explain or solve the paradox of interactive fiction, nor say that it is unambiguously possible, after all, to act on fictional objects or objects that are given in image consciousness. If anything, he rather emphasizes yet again the peculiarity of the objects that are presented to us within virtual environments, highlighting their highly paradoxical nature as both image objects and objects we seemingly physically interact with:

> The image object, which is detached from the laws of physics, is artificially materialized and thereby becomes a seemingly physical thing, even though that is not what it is and can never be, since it will always remain an image object. [...] A virtual reality is only given

> if the image no longer serves as a medium for referring to something absent, but rather if the image becomes a medium by means of which a particular kind of object is produced and presented - an object, that is, that is exclusively visible and yet, like a ghost, acts as if it had a substance and the properties of a substance. (Wiesing 2010, 99-100)

As such, the paradox of interactive fiction is given: virtual realities present us with image objects that act like they have substance and can be acted on because they are seemingly physical things. But ultimately, they are not. They are objects that only have physicality within our imagination, and should not allow for interaction of this kind at all.

4.1.4 The Paradox

Having discussed all three premises, we can slightly alter the paradox of interactive fiction to account for the possibility that not all objects in videogames are necessarily fictional (in the sense that they mandate us to imagine something):

1. It is impossible to act on fictional objects.
2. Many objects in videogames (such as doors, zombies, and trees) are fictional.
3. Players act on these videogame objects (they open doors, shoot zombies, and climb trees).

In the end, it is still impossible for all three premises to be true, as a paradox, here dubbed the paradox of interactive fiction, would follow. The second premise seems to be obviously true: many videogame objects, such as doors, zombies, and guns are fictional, in the sense that their existence is mandated to be imagined. Players encountering these objects do not perceive them as *actual* zombies, guns, and trees, but know that they are part of the fictional world. However, as third premise specifies, playing videogames consists of manipulating these game objects. Players shoot the zombies, pick up the guns, and cut down the trees: they act on *fictional* objects. The last two premises then contradict the first one, which states that it is impossible to perform actions on fictional objects.

Can we still hold on to this first premise, knowing about the evolution of image media described by Wiesing? Are videogames and virtual realities not proof that we can act on fictional objects in the way that is deemed impossible in this first premise? At first sight, the paradox of interactive fiction seems solvable by conceding that actions towards fictional objects are possible after all, similar to how the traditional paradox of fiction could be solved by saying that we can be moved by objects without believing in their existence (cf. Lamarque 1981; Van de Mosselaer 2018c). And yet, the paradox of actions seems to be harder to solve than the paradox of emotions: while it might be understandable how we can feel real emotions towards objects of which we know they do not really exist, but about which we have vivid thoughts or imaginings (cf. Lamarque 1981, 293; Carroll 1990, 80), it is hard to see how we could actually act on objects that only have imagined existence and are not truly present (nor perceived as present) in our egocentric space. Indeed, within existing philosophical discussions

on fiction, the first premise is never really questioned. In the next part of this chapter, we will look at two possible solutions to the paradox that are based on the refutation of either the second or the third premise.

4.2 Solutions to the Paradox of Interactive Fiction

In the previous part, the paradox of interactive fiction was formulated as follows:

1. It is impossible to act on fictional objects.
2. Many videogame objects are fictional.
3. Players act on these videogame objects.

As said before, the first premise is quite firmly embedded in the way fiction is defined, and seems hard, if not impossible, to deny. Within existing discussions on interactive fiction, we can discern two strategies to solve this paradox. The first one is to deny that the game objects at which player actions are aimed are fictional at all (cf. Aarseth 2007; Sageng 2012; Chalmers 2017). The second one is based in Walton's make-believe theory, and, similar to Walton's solution to the original paradox of fictional emotions, says that the actions we perform towards fictional game objects are not real actions, but fictional actions (cf. Tavinor 2009a; Robson and Meskin 2016; Thabet 2017, 42). Both of these will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

4.2.1 Videogame Objects are not Fictional

As stated in chapter one, it seems intuitive and in line with how fiction is defined and discussed to call videogame objects fictional, in the sense that their existence is prescribed to be imagined. On the other hand, the fact that we can act on videogame objects clashes with the fact that fictional objects are taken to be non-existent, not present in our egocentric space, and impossible to be interacted with. With regard to this, Sageng notes that the way we interpret the ontological status of objects and events represented within videogames drastically changes from the moment we can actually interact with them:

> By themselves, as a sequence of animated pictures on the computer screen, they are taken to depict happenings that the viewer does not regard as real. However, once the player is performing actions with these depictions, something fairly dramatic occurs with the intuitive conception of their reality status since it no longer seems right to call the reported 'runnings', 'shootings', 'breakings' and the like as nonexistent happenings. (Sageng 2012, 221)

As Sageng writes, the possibility of action in videogames makes it harder, if not impossible, to interpret videogame objects as mere fictional objects:

> [I]f we take an in-game action report such as 'Paul opened a door in EverQuest' and stick to the appearance it has of stating something Paul did under that description, the following inference follows:
>
> (I) Paul opened a door in EverQuest
> (II) Paul caused something to happen to the door
> (III) The door does not exist
> (IV) Paul caused something to happen to something that does not exist
>
> (Sageng 2012, 221)

This drastic change in the perception of videogame objects' ontological status when they are acted upon cuts to the core of the paradox of interactive fiction: how can we still perceive objects as purely fictional when they are part of an action we are actually carrying out as players?

A first solution to the paradox of interactive fiction thus consists in simply not taking objects or events as having a mere imagined existence when they can be interacted with. This solution targets the second premise of the paradox and claims that videogame objects (or at least the videogame objects towards which our actions are directed) are not fictional after all. Instead, defenders of this solution state that these objects have a different nature: they are not fictional, but *virtual*. This would mean that there is no paradox of interactive fiction, because the second and third premises no longer contradict the first one:

1. It is impossible to act on fictional objects.
2. Videogame objects are not fictional, but virtual.
3. Players act on videogame objects.

Players of videogames then never act on fictional objects, but only on virtual ones. Scholars do not seem to agree, however, on what it means for an object to be 'virtual'. I will thus discuss two different versions of the claim that the actions we perform when playing videogames are aimed at virtual objects, one of which is defended by Espen Aarseth (2007), and the other by John Richard Sageng (2012) and David Chalmers (2017).

THE VIRTUAL BETWEEN THE FICTIONAL AND THE REAL

In "Doors and Perception. Fiction vs. Simulation in Games", Aarseth supports the first and third premises, saying that videogame players can fight dragons in videogames, although acting on fictional objects is impossible. He argues against the second premise by saying that videogame objects such as those dragons are not fictional, but virtual (2007, 39). He states that "games may well contain fictional content. But they also contain content that is different from the elements we recognize from older media. These elements are ontologically different, and they can typically be acted upon in ways that fictional content is not acted upon" (2007, 36; emphasis original). These elements that can be acted upon are, according to Aarseth, virtual elements: "In short, games are not fictions, but a different type of world, between fiction and our world: the virtual" (2007, 39).

Aarseth's refusal to call videogames fictional seems to be the result of his unwavering conviction that it is impossible to act on fictional objects. Instead of taking videogame

players' actions as proof that actions towards fictional objects are possible after all, he denies that the objects players act on are fictional. He gives the example of represented doors in videogames like *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* (Gray Matter Interactive 2001). Many doors in videogames are mere textures on walls that look like doors, but do not function like doors, as they cannot be opened. Others, however, "actually do behave in a door-like manner; they can be opened, closed, seen through, walked through and fired through" (Aarseth 2007, 42). Aarseth argues that these two kinds of doors are very different. He states that the first type of door, which is unusable, is obviously fictional. The second type of doors, however, consists of simulated doors, which work like real doors do. Aarseth says these are not fictional, nor real, but virtual (2007, 42). Aarseth's theory thus makes the so-called paradox of interactive fiction disappear by negating the second premise: every game object that can be acted upon is not a fictional, but a virtual object. The contradiction between the three premises is thus lifted:

1. It is impossible to act on fictional objects.
2. Many videogame objects are not fictional, but virtual.
3. Players act on these virtual videogame objects.

There are, however, a few problems with the way Aarseth defines both 'virtual' and 'fictional' in his text.

First of all, it is unclear what it exactly means for something to be 'virtual' or 'simulated'. Aarseth describes videogame doors as fictional when they are merely representations of doors which do not function like doors. He describes doors as virtual or simulated when they behave like real doors: "[T]hey can be opened, closed, seen through, walked through and fired through" (Aarseth 2007, 42). He thus distinguishes between fictional and virtual videogame doors based on the affordances they offer. But he seems to make a fairly arbitrary selection of affordances when making this distinction. Even the doors that Aarseth calls 'fictional doors' in videogames can be approached and investigated by the player, who cannot even know that these doors cannot be opened without trying it. And many other doors in videogames that can be opened, cannot be closed again afterwards, thus making these doors interactive, but not very accurate simulations of real doors. Aarseth's treatment of the concept of the virtual as a simulation raises a question that is hard to solve: when is something a good enough simulation of the real thing, while not being the real thing, to be called a virtual version of it?

Moreover, Aarseth's category of the virtual or simulated becomes even harder to grasp when the object he believes to be simulated does not have a real-life correspondent. In his text, Aarseth discusses simulated dragons in videogames. He contrasts them to fictional dragons in novels: "[T]he literary, fictional dragon, say Tolkien's Smaug, is different from the simulated dragons we find in a game such as *EverQuest* (Verant Interactive 1999)" (Aarseth 2007, 37). Dragons in videogames are not fictional, according to Aarseth, precisely because they are simulations instead: they are made of dynamic models with which we can interact (Aarseth 2007, 37). Aarseth's use of the word simulation is unclear, however: what exactly is being simulated when we inter-

act with these dynamic models? Aarseth himself suggests that these models simulate dragons. But surely, that means that a fictional dragon is being simulated (as real dragons obviously do not exist). The very fact that Aarseth talks about the game object as a virtual 'dragon' seems to indicate that this virtual model prescribes the one interacting with it to imagine that it is a dragon. The 'virtual dragon' in *EverQuest* which Aarseth talks about is then both a fictional representation and a virtual, dynamic model. Indeed, it is not clear why Aarseth thinks a game object should be either fictional or virtual, as those two do not seem to be mutually exclusive categories.

A possible explanation for the false dichotomy between the virtual and the fictional that Aarseth proposes could be the fact that he makes use of a strikingly simple dictionary definition of fiction in his article, that describes fictions as 'invented phenomena' (2007, 38). This definition not only fails to explain the difference between what Aarseth calls invented, fictional doors that cannot be opened and equally invented virtual doors that can be opened, but also seemingly ignores the history of philosophy of fiction, in which fiction has been defined in a more sophisticated and explanatory way than merely as 'invented phenomena'. As discussed in chapter one, there seems to be a consensus within the philosophy of fiction that, for something to be called a fiction, there needs to be a mandate to imagine it (cf. Matravers 2014, 21). The game objects that Aarseth calls 'virtual' objects also fit this description: when we shoot a zombie in a videogame, there is a mandate to imagine that the thing we defeated was an actual, dangerous and scary monster (and not merely a group of pixels or a polygonal model).

Ultimately, Aarseth's use of the concept 'virtual' is quite unhelpful, and based on a circular argument. First off, Aaresth says it is impossible to act on fictional objects, which is in agreement with the description of fictional objects within philosophy of fiction as objects that are not existent nor actually present. From this, however, Aarseth concludes that the invented game objects we act upon in videogames must be virtual, which he defines as "neither physically nor conceptually real", but still able to be acted upon (2007, 42). Aarseth's new ad hoc concept of the virtual thus does not help us: why would acting on virtual objects be less problematic than acting on fictional objects, if they are equally non-existent? Aarseth not only creates a new, confusing, and vague ontological category of the virtual, but this category also fails to explain anything. The virtual objects Aarseth describes still evoke the paradox of interactive fiction: they have imagined existence, are not really present in the player's egocentric space, but are nevertheless interacted with.

VIRTUAL OBJECTS AS REAL, COMPUTER-GENERATED, GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATIONS

A second variant of the claim that the videogame objects we act on are not fictional can be found in John Sageng's chapter on "In-Game Actions" in *The Philosophy of Computer Games* (2012) and David Chalmers' article "The Virtual and the Real" (2017). Just like Aarseth, these philosophers argue that the videogame objects we act on are not fictional, but virtual, thus solving the paradox of interactive fiction. Unlike Aarseth, however, Sageng and Chalmers do specify what exactly they mean when talking about 'the vir-

tual'. In his chapter, Sageng criticizes the way the concept of 'the virtual' has been used as an empty concept, only invoked because it would solve problems like the paradox of interactive fiction, but ultimately unable to provide any explanation. Although he does not mention Aarseth, his critique is clearly applicable to Aarseth's definition of the virtual as 'simulated' and as a category between the fictional and the real:

> If it is the case that the notion is called for simply because we are uncomfortable with calling the player's [actions] either 'fictional' or 'real', then it seems that the term 'virtual' really is used to postulate a kind of existence that is meant to accommodate this fact. Sometimes words are used to provide an explanation, and other times they are used to stand in for an explanation. In the latter case we are left with the problem of what the word means, which is not much progress. (Sageng 2012, 227)

Instead, Sageng interprets virtual objects as unambiguously real, graphical representations generated by computers. For Sageng, there is no such thing as "a separate ontological category of virtuality", simply because virtual objects, as graphical representations, straightforwardly belong to the ordinary physical world (Sageng 2012, 229). Similarly, Chalmers believes virtual objects to be real, digital objects: "They can be regarded as data structures, which are grounded in computational processes which are themselves grounded in physical processes on one or more computers" (Chalmers 2017, 317). Virtual objects are thus "part of the real world, in virtue of existing on real computers" (Chalmers 2017, 320). Sageng and Chalmers thus rephrase the second premise as follows:

1. It is impossible to act on fictional objects.
2. Videogame objects are real, computer-generated objects.
3. Players act on videogame objects.

As players simply interact with real objects, there is no more paradox of interactive fiction. As Sageng says, player actions simply consist of the manipulation of a controller, with the intention of manipulating the graphically represented objects generated by their computer (Sageng 2012, 229).[59] In other words, players are not interacting with image objects, but simply with the graphical shapes themselves: the pixels or polygons shown to them on the screen. As Sageng writes:

> The player is on this account allowed, in the most literal sense, to perform an action with the help of these graphical shapes. [...] According to this account, the player is indeed performing very real and identifiable actions in a video-game that are plain to see and

59 Chalmers' ultimate account of virtual actions is much more confusing, as it is not entirely clear whether he believes that player actions consist of the mere manipulation of graphical representations, or are something more than that. He writes: "At least for sophisticated users of VR, what seems to happen in VR by and large really happens. [...] One may seem to be virtually flying, and one really is virtually flying. I would add that virtual actions are plausibly real actions (albeit with a virtual body), so that when one performs virtual actions, one really is doing something" (Chalmers 2017, 339). Chalmers' text is unclear on many accounts, as it is not even clear whether he defends that virtual objects are digital objects, or are merely dependent on digital objects. For the current argument, however, it only matters that Chalmers' treatment of virtual objects as real objects might be a solution to the paradox of interactive fiction, similar to Sageng's more extensively described solution to this paradox. A thorough and convincing critique of Chalmers' work can be found in Wildman and McDonnell (2019).

> identify when he plays a game. There is nothing mysterious about these actions other than the fact that they are made possible by a highly artificial sort of environment whose special purpose is to facilitate gaming acts. (Sageng 2012, 229)

When describing and clarifying player actions, both Sageng and Chalmers deem it unnecessary to involve any fictional content: the intentional objects of actions in a videogame are always real objects.

However, despite defining virtual objects as real, computer-generated objects, both Sageng and Chalmers acknowledge that very often, there is (or might be) a fictional layer to our experience of these objects. Sageng admits that games in which all presented objects are merely treated as graphical shapes are rare. He gives the example of *Tetris*, which he believes to have no representational dimension whatsoever. He agrees, however, that "games in general depend more heavily on representing fictional events and settings" (Sageng 2012, 230), thus acknowledging that our interpretation of virtual objects in videogames very often involves pretence or make-believe. Surprisingly, Chalmers, who specifically argues against interpreting virtual objects as fictional objects, also heavily nuances his anti-fictionalist position throughout his paper. When he addresses the relation between digital and fictional worlds (cf. Chalmers 2017, 334-337), Chalmers admits that sometimes, virtual realities might involve fictional worlds. This happens when, for example, the virtual reality represents a world from a work of fiction (like in a *Lord of the Rings* videogame) or refers to historical events (such as games about the Second World War). He even acknowledges that every virtual world possibly involves fictional content, because we imagine the virtual objects as "occupying physical space and as having shapes, sizes and relative positions" (Chalmers 2017, 335):

> Any three-dimensional virtual environment (including *Second Life* and the like) *can* be interpreted or imagined as involving objects in physical space, and it will typically be natural to interpret it in this way. Given that in real physical space, there are no objects arranged in this way, it seems that this interpretation of a virtual world must involve fictional content. (Chalmers 2017, 335)[60]

Both Sageng and Chalmers stress, however, that the fictional dimension of videogames is, in a significant way, optional. Sageng claims that "the fictional pretence can peel entirely off if there is reason to think that it does not matter to the player" (Sageng 2012, 230). Chalmers writes:

> I think one should agree that every virtual reality environment can be associated with both a digital world (with virtual space) and a fictional world (with physical space). However, the digital world is always present. The fictional world involving physical space is optional. The invocation of a fictional world depends entirely on the interpretation of the user, and in many cases that interpretation will not be present at all. (Chalmers 2017, 335).

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60 Note that Chalmers thus nuances his position to the point of it becoming quite confusing. In the end, it is not clear how fictionality or imagination might not play a role in our experience of virtual worlds, if interpreting a virtual space as involving objects in physical space already involves fictional content. How else would users of virtual reality interpret virtual spaces, if not as (fictional) three-dimensional physical spaces?

In the end, both Sageng and Chalmers argue that a videogame world's fictional dimension is only of secondary importance when it comes to the way the player interacts with this world. As such, the fact that there is often a fictional layer to the experience of virtual worlds does not play a very important role in these philosophers' views on the actions players undertake on videogame objects. They argue that, regardless of there being a fictional layer to the virtual world in question, player actions are always simply aimed at what is actually there: the computer-generated graphical shapes and colors. In the case where the virtual world or objects the player is confronted with actually do mandate imaginings, Sageng describes player actions as follows:

> [T]he player's intentional object will change from the fictional happenings originally cursivated to the things he now interacts with, which are simply the computer generated spatio-visual graphical shapes that he sees before him on the screen. Thus, normally when the player intends to perform a 'shooting' or 'walking' in the context of gameplay the contents of his mental states have shifted reference to graphical happenings on the screen. (Sageng 2012, 228)

Thus, when a player shoots a zombie in a game, they press certain buttons with the intention of creating a graphical representation of their avatar shooting a zombie, of which this player imagines it is an actual case of shooting a zombie (Sageng 2012, 230). The action is a real action, performed on real, computer-generated objects (even when the player then imagines of these objects that they are fictional zombies, guns, or bullets). Relatively similarly, Chalmers writes: "We could at this point be dualists about virtual worlds, saying that there are two kinds of virtual worlds: digital worlds and fictional worlds. It is digital worlds that users really interact with, but it is fictional worlds that they perceptually represent" (Chalmers 2017, 336). Again, although the virtual objects that are shown to players on a screen might prompt the imagining of fictional entities, insofar as they are *interacted with*, they are simply real, digital objects. Sageng concludes that, while the graphical environments of videogames "offer action types that often differ from those available in our ordinary surroundings, the conditions of agency are exactly the same as in any other environment" (2012, 231).

Chalmers and Sageng are of course right when they say players can only interact with what is actually there: the controller and the computer-generated graphical representations. What I take issue with, however, is their apparent conclusion that the intentional object of the actions a player performs is thus, always, an actual object. It is simply not the case that players have the intention of 'creating the graphical representation of a zombie dying' when they press certain buttons on their controller in a zombie game: they want to kill *the zombie*. Yet, in Chalmers and Sageng's explanation of player behavior, the zombie is a fictional object and only of secondary importance. As Wildman and McDonnell write when discussing Chalmers' interpretation of the virtual: "[W]hile it is certainly clear that a genuine causal interaction can be traced from the user, via the controller, to the computer, and back to the user via the headset, nowhere in that chain does a gun or a zombie appear" (Wildman and McDonnell 2019, 11). Chalmers and Sageng simply argue that players first and foremost act on virtual objects, or computer-generated graph-

ical representations, and fictional objects play no role in the explanation of these actions.

Playing a videogame is more than just interacting with graphical representations, however. There are three important aspects of videogame play that cannot be satisfactorily described without referring to fictional entities: the specific decisions players make, the emotions players often feel towards videogame characters, and the way they can be immersed in the world of the game. First of all, and as already discussed in 4.1.2, the specific actions players decide to perform in-game are highly dependent on the fictional content they imagine based on the representations the game offers them. For example: the reason why a player shoots some virtual objects and tries not to hit other virtual objects with the virtual bullets that are available to them, is (most of the time, at least), because of what these virtual objects represent. Players steer their avatar away from some virtual objects and towards others precisely because they perceive the first group as zombies, villainous aliens, or wild beasts and the second group as civilians, team members, or helpful merchants. To explain such behavior, it is thus necessary to talk about the fictional dimension of the virtual environment, or what players *imagine* to interact with.

Secondly, describing their actions as actions performed on real, computer-generated objects does not seem to correspond to player experience, especially when we take into account how emotional players can be about certain videogame characters. Players of *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare 2010) do not just play well because they want to have more 3D-models depicted in the final scene of the game; they want to save all the characters they came to regard as their *friends*. Just like Radford remarks that the emotions we feel for fictional characters are truly felt *for them* (1975, 75), the same seems to be true for the actions we perform towards fictional characters. As discussed in part 3.2.1, player actions towards fictional characters are very often motivated by the emotions we feel towards them, which seems to indicate that these actions and emotions share the same intentional object. When we save our team members in *Mass Effect 2*, we want to save *the people we care about and sympathize with*, not some computer-generated construct. Our emotional interactions with game objects generally betray that we do not treat them as the really existing, computer-generated objects they are, but interact with them as *fictional* characters embedded in fictional worlds and stories.

Lastly, consider again Sageng's description of players who shoot a zombie in a game: these players, by pressing certain buttons on a controller, carry through an intention to produce a graphical representation of a zombie being shot, of which they pretend that it is an actual shooting of a zombie (Sageng 2012, 230). This description does not take into account that, especially skilled, players can be truly *immersed* in the world of the game. They are embodied in the game or their avatar in such a way that they do not have to intend their actual actions: they do not intend to push buttons to make pixels in the shape of zombies disappear, but they simply intend to kill the zombies. Velleman describes this process as follows:

> When he first joins a virtual world, the player finds it difficult to control his avatar, not yet having mastered the technique with keyboard and mouse. At this point, he can act

> with the intention of manipulating the keyboard and mouse in various ways, and with the further intention of thereby causing his avatar to do various things. As the player gains skill in controlling his avatar, however, manipulations of the keyboard and mouse fall out of his explicit intentions. He still controls the avatar by manipulating his keyboard and mouse, but only in the sense in which he types the word run by moving his two index fingers. When he was just a beginner at typing, he still had to intend the movements by which he typed the words; but now those piecemeal movements have been incorporated into skills with which he can perform higher-level actions straightaway. [...] Similarly, the skilled player in a virtual world does not explicitly intend his manipulations of the input devices. (Velleman 2008, 412-413)

Again, although these skilled players do of course actually interact with their input device, the intentional object of their action is not the input device, but, for example, the fictional character they are fighting in-game.

In the end, I acknowledge that Sageng and Chalmers are, in some cases, right about the nature of the actions we perform towards virtually presented objects. Many actions undertaken within virtual worlds are indeed direct manipulations of computer-generated objects and representations.[61] The flipping of tetrominoes when playing *Tetris*, for example, can be adequately described as the manipulation of graphical representations on a screen through the performance of actions on an input device, without any fictional dimension being necessary in this description of these actions.[62] However, such a description is not generalizable to all actions performed towards videogame objects. The fictional layer of virtual worlds is revealed to be of crucial importance when explaining (the relation between) player behaviour, emotions, and immersion. In the following part, I will therefore discuss a strategy to solve the paradox of interactive fiction that does treat videogame worlds and characters as fictional, and explains our interactions with them based on the fictional relevance they have.

4.2.2 Players *Fictionally* Act on Videogame Objects

Another strategy for solving the paradox of interactive fiction is based on the theory of fiction described in Kendall Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1990). Walton, at least for certain purposes, treats fiction and representation as interchangeable (1990, 3), which would mean that most or perhaps all videogame objects are fictional objects in virtue of being representational (Robson and Meskin 2012b, 207). The Waltonian strategy thus supports the second premise, which says that (many) videogame objects are fictional objects. However, as has been said before, Walton was also convinced that it is impossible to perform actions on objects we know to be fictional, as there is

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61 Think, in this regard, of the prop oriented or merely functional forms of make-believe described in chapter three, which are engaged in by players who treat a videogame as a challenge, without regard for its fictional content.

62 I will discuss this in more detail in part 5.2.

an unbridgeable physical gap between fiction and reality (cf. 1990, 205). He thus also accepts the first premise: it is impossible to act on fictional objects. Walton, however, adds something to this statement: even if it is impossible to truly influence fictional events and act on fictional objects, we might *fictionally* influence them and act on them (1990, 195). This idea can inspire a strategy that solves the paradox of interactive fiction by denying the third premise. We can then say that it is simply not true that when we are manipulating videogame objects through our actions on a controller, we are also truly manipulating the fictional objects that are represented by those videogame objects. While we can truly press X and make some representation of a zombie disappear from our screen by creating a representation of a bullet in the right spot, we can only fictionally kill a fictional zombie. The paradox of interactive fiction is solved when we say gamers never truly interact with fictional worlds, but can do so fictionally.

Although Walton describes his make-believe theory in his book *Mimesis as Make-Believe* without ever mentioning videogames (he started formulating this perspective on fiction in the 1970s), two elements of his theory seem to make it easily applicable to interactive fictional media. First of all, Walton argues that when we appreciate fictional works, we do not just observe their fictional worlds from without, but live in them, "together with Anna Karenina and Emma Bovary and Robinson Crusoe and the others, sharing their joys and sorrows, rejoicing and commiserating with them, admiring and detesting them. True, these worlds are merely fictional, and we are well aware that they are. But from inside they seem actual" (Walton 1990, 273). He argues that appreciators of fictional works "imagine, from the inside, doing things and undergoing experiences" (Walton 1990, 214). As Chris Bateman remarks, Walton's descriptions of the make-believe games played by readers of novels and viewers of movies gesture at something "players of digital games are intimately familiar with", since videogames allow us to enter their fictional world and experience them from the inside in an even more straightforward way (Bateman 2011, 167). Walton's theory thus seems especially appropriate to describe the videogame experience.

Secondly, although Walton is convinced that it is impossible to influence or act on the fictional objects in the representational works we appreciate, he has an elaborate theory on pretence and children's games of make-believe, in which he explains how it might be possible to perform fictional actions. To investigate Walton's notion of fictional actions, we should look again at his discussion of two children playing a game in which they pretend tree stumps are bears (1990, 37). These children use the tree stumps as props in a game of make-believe to imagine that there are bears. These props allow for physical interaction: when the children hit a tree stump, they can use their real action of hitting this fictional proxy of a bear as a prop to imagine that they are hitting a bear. By running away from the tree stumps, they make it fictionally true of themselves that they are running away from bears. In other words: they are fictionally running away from bears. Walton adds that all fictional works invite such make-believe games: a painting of a boat, for example, mandates a make-believe game in which the viewer sees a boat. This viewer then fictionally sees a boat (1990, 215).

As Tavinor remarks, Walton's theory of make-believe is perfect to describe the videogame experience: "Given that participating with videogames is also primarily an act of engaging with a representational prop, such a theory of fiction is entirely apt to capturing the nature of the fictive practice involved in videogames" (2005, 30). In chapter one, I already described videogames as Waltonian props: the graphical representations on the screen can be used to imagine that the depicted events are really experienced by the player. More importantly for the current argument, players can also use the real actions they perform on controllers and the graphical representations they thereby create as a prop to imagine that they are actually performing actions within the fictional world. Videogame manuals are even made to explain how the player's real actions are related to fictional actions in the game world. They spell out what Walton calls the 'principles of generation' of fictional truths (1990, 38), by stating relations between 'pressing X' and 'jumping', which shows how players can generate the fictional truth that they are jumping in the fictional world by performing an action in the real world. Using this framework, we can not only describe when a player action is a fictional action, but also what exactly happens when the player fictionally does something: a player performs a fictional action ϕ when they use their real action of manipulating a controller and thereby creating a graphical representation on the screen as a prop to imagine they really are doing ϕ. For example: a player performs the fictional action of shooting a zombie when they press a button on their controller and thereby create a representation of a zombie being shot on the screen, and use this action as a prop to imagine that they are shooting a zombie. Walton's theory also might explain why players feel like they themselves are performing the fictional action, since they use their own action as a prop to imagine that they are doing the fictional action.

Thus, when asking a player what she is doing, she might answer 'I'm shooting a zombie'. In this case, it is not strange at all to ask her 'Yes, but what are you really doing?', asking her about her real action, or specific skill in manipulating the controller. The player will most likely immediately understand this question and answer, for example, that she is 'pressing the R1 button, while aiming with the right joystick'. Videogame players seem to do exactly what Walton suggests players of make-believe games are doing: they use themselves and their own actions as reflexive props to imagine they are performing actions within the fictional world of the videogame. We can then rephrase the three discussed premises of the paradox of interactive fiction to eliminate the paradoxical elements:

1. It is impossible to act on fictional objects.
2. Videogame objects are fictional objects.
3. Players fictionally act on videogame objects (by using the real actions they perform via some form of controller as props to make-believe that they are performing actions on videogame objects like zombies, aliens, and racecars).

This solves the paradox of interactive fiction, as these three premises no longer contradict each other. Moreover, this solution is different from that of Sageng and Chalmers, in

that it interprets videogame objects as fictional objects. On the Waltonian solution, it is still true that the only thing players can *truly* act upon are actual objects: the controller and, by extension, the computer-generated graphical representations. Unlike Chalmers and Sageng, however, the Waltonian solution is compatible with the claim that the *intentional object* of the actions players perform is not the controller nor the heap of pixels or polygons on the screen, but that what is represented by these pixels or polygons: the zombies, aliens, guns, and racecars that belong to the game's fictional world.[63] Instead of saying that we can act on videogame objects because they unambiguously belong to our world, in the form of graphical representations on actual computers, the Waltonian solution says we can act on fictional objects because *we ourselves* become fictional when playing. This solution has the important benefit of explaining players' behaviour and emotions towards the objects represented in videogames: players are emotionally moved by and motivated to undertake actions towards videogame objects because they imagine these to be scary zombies, sympathetic teammates, or princesses in distress who inhabit the world that they, in the guise of a certain fictional proxy, also reside in.

The beauty of Walton's theory is then that it can explain actions towards fiction the same way as it has always explained emotions towards fiction. Just like when Charles said he was 'terrified of the green slime', the gamer who says he 'killed a zombie' is playing a make-believe game. In both cases, the self-report is fictional. As Tavinor says, "[t]his shows that as well as fictional attributions of intentional, emotional, or cognitive attitudes toward fictional worlds, gamers may also make fictional attributions of causal interactions with those worlds" (2009a, 141). Walton says that appreciators of fiction who seem to feel certain emotions towards fictional objects, characters, or situations, are actually only using the feelings they have as props to pretend that what they are feeling are emotions towards these fictional particulars (cf. 1990, 242-243). Charles became a reflexive prop in his own make-believe game and imagined himself to be near the green slime, thus imagining himself to be fearful of the monster. In reality, however, Charles did not experience the emotion of fear, but only the quasi-emotion of fear: his feelings of fear were part of the make-believe game he was playing. Quite similarly, videogame players become reflexive props, imagining themselves to be their avatars in the game world and imagining of their real (controller-manipulating) actions that they are actions in the fictional world, performed on fictional objects by their fictional proxies. In reality, the actions they say to perform are fictional actions. To feel emotions and to perform actions towards fictional objects, appreciators of fiction must, according to Walton, (imaginatively) become a part of the fictional world themselves, using their real selves, their feelings, and their actions as props in games of make-believe. Although Walton never talks about videogames, his conclusion about the possibility

63 Similar to Peter Lamarque when it came to emotions towards fiction, I thus make a distinction between the intentional object of our actions towards fiction, and the actual or causal object of these actions: we really act on computer-generated graphical shapes, but the intentional objects of these actions are (often) the fictional characters or objects represented by these shapes.

of actions in fictional worlds seems especially relevant in the interactive fiction context: "What happens in the fictional world – what fictionally is the case – can indeed be affected by what happens in the real world. But one person can save another only if they live in the same world. Cross-world saving is ruled out, and for similar reasons so is cross-world killing, congratulating, hand-shaking, and so forth" (Walton 1990, 195). Acting in videogames' fictional worlds is then only possible when we enter these worlds and become fictional ourselves, making the actions we perform within these worlds equally fictional.

QUASI-EMOTIONS TOWARDS INTERACTIVE FICTIONS

Walton's theory explains our (only apparently real) emotions and actions towards fiction by making both of them part of the fictional world as respectively quasi-emotions and fictional actions. Just like Charles, the watcher of the horror movie, is only fictionally (or quasi) afraid of the fictional green slime monster, Charles, the player of the videogame, can only *fictionally* run away from or kill the slime. In both cases, Charles plays a make-believe game in which he becomes part of the fictional world of the green slime, making both his emotions and actions towards this slime part of the fiction themselves. The beauty of Walton's make-believe theory is thus that it rids us of two paradoxes with one theory: both the paradox of fiction and the paradox of interactive fiction can be explained by using his notion of make-believe games. Although Walton originally formulated his theory on make-believe games to explain our experiences of (non-interactive) fiction, it seems perfectly applicable to new forms of interactive fictions such as videogames, virtual reality, and augmented reality. The downside of Walton's theory, however, is that it obscures certain differences between non-interactive and interactive forms of fiction, and that the similar way in which he treats both emotions and actions towards fiction might not be equally valid. While interactive fiction experiences show the usefulness and explanatory power of Walton's make-believe theory when it comes to fictional actions, they also seem to demonstrate the inadequacies of Walton's concept of quasi-emotions.

When we look at Walton's green slime example more closely, there seems to be a difference between emotions towards fiction such as Charles's fear and actions performed towards fictional objects such as those of the videogame player. When we would ask Charles what he feels when watching the slime, he would undoubtedly answer that he is scared. In that case, contrary to the player action case, it would seem ridiculous to ask Charles 'Yes, but what are you really feeling?'. Charles would probably be quite baffled, and answer yet again that he is scared. While it is clear that we can talk about 'fictional' actions in the videogame case because gamers perform real actions, such as the pushing of buttons, of which they pretend they are actions done by their fictional proxy within the fictional world, it is not equally clear why we would need the notion of fictional or quasi-emotions to explain the emotions appreciators of fiction might feel. While no sane gamer would ever argue that they really killed zombies, rescued their team members in space, or rode a dragon over Mordor, it does not seem to be weird at

all when they would insist that they really feared the zombies, were concerned about their team members in space, or felt bad when their dragon was mercilessly killed by orcs. While players of videogames can only act within the fictional world of the game through the player-character within this world (they didn't really eat a ghost, Pacman did), players do not ascribe their emotions to fictional characters: these emotions are truly theirs. As such, we might say that it is fictional that players shoot zombies (they don't really do this, they just push buttons), but it is not as easy to say that it is only fictional that players fear these zombies. While Walton's theory on fictional actions proves useful when applied to videogames, it also puts his theory on fictional emotions in perspective, showing quasi-emotions to not be as useful and phenomenologically intuitive as the concept of fictional actions.

Moreover, one of Walton's arguments for calling emotions towards fictions 'fictional' or 'quasi-emotions' was that they cannot motivate to any action: "[T]o insist on considering Charles's non-motivating state to be one of fear of the slime, would be radically to reconceive the notion of fear. Fear emasculated by subtracting its distinctive motivational force is not fear at all" (1990, 201-202). This argument is still used to distinguish emotions towards fiction from 'real emotions' in recent discussions on the paradox of fiction (cf. Friend 2016, 220). However, videogames show us that these emotions can have motivational power, as the emotions felt by gamers guide their behaviour and the actions they decide to perform. A player who is fearful of zombies might want to try and stealthily walk past the monsters, while a player who does not feel this fear might just run towards them with a shotgun. Or, as Tavinor describes his fearful experience of playing System Shock 2 (Irrational Games 1999): "Occasionally, when I was getting low on health and ammunition in the game, I got myself into situations where faced by a formidable foe, all I could do was panic. My ability to deal with the situation briefly left me, and I would hurriedly run away" (2005, 37). Moreover, contrary to our pity for Anna Karenina, our pity for videogame characters in need might actually motivate us to help these characters. Videogames give their appreciators the possibility of manipulating the fictional world and events through their actions and show that emotions towards fiction can perfectly be motivational, as discussed in 3.2.1. As such, there seems to be no need at all to posit a concept of quasi-emotions. First of all, the emotions we feel towards fiction are phenomenologically identical to emotions we feel towards real-world events and people, as Walton himself admitted (1990, 251), and as has been discussed in chapter three. Secondly, the emotions we feel towards fiction are equally able to motivate us to perform actions (as long as there is a possibility for action at all) as emotions towards real-world events.

A possible counter to the presented argument is that Walton's distinction between quasi-emotions and real emotions is still useful, since we can call emotions 'quasi-emotions' when they do not motivate to undertake any real actions, but can only stimulate us to undertake fictional actions: our fear for videogame zombies does not (usually) make us run away from our TV, but rather makes us steer our character in the game world away from the monsters. Our fear for videogame zombies could then be qua-

si-fear because it does not motivate us to really run away, but to run away in the game. However, it is not entirely clear why we would need the new mental state of quasi-emotions to explain these in-game actions. More likely, the emotions we feel in either real or fictional situations can always be explained as real emotions, but their motivational powers depend on the different contexts in which they arise: emotions combined with beliefs about our context might lead to real actions, while emotions combined with imaginings about our fictional context might lead to fictional actions.

It was not entirely fair of Walton to say that all emotions towards fictions are only quasi-emotions because they are not motivational: how could they be, when Walton only took into account traditional literature, theatre, and film, which do not give us opportunities for action or for influencing their fictional world?[64] Videogames give their appreciators the possibility of manipulating the fictional world and events through their actions. Therefore, they might show us that there is no reason to talk about 'quasi-emotions' versus 'real emotions', since our behaviour towards fictions can be explained by our real emotions towards fictional contexts, which combined with imaginings about a non-interactive fictional world might not allow for any useful action (how would you even try to save Anna Karenina?), but combined with imaginings about interactive fictional worlds (and our fictional proxies within these worlds) might cause us to perform fictional actions. The conclusion is then that Walton's concept of 'quasi-emotions' still seems counterintuitive and redundant when it comes to the emotions appreciators of (either interactive or non-interactive) fiction might feel, but his concept and explanation of fictional or make-believe actions helps us a long way towards solving the paradox of interactive fiction.

4.3 Concluding Remarks

The common definition of 'virtual' as 'computer-generated and able to be interacted with' (cf. Vella and Gualeni 2019; Silcox 2019, 6-7) already reveals a central problem when it comes to the virtual objects we encounter in videogames, virtual reality, and augmented reality: can these virtual objects be interpreted as fictional objects, if they can be interacted with? After all, interaction with fictional objects, or objects with mere imagined existence, should be inherently impossible. In this chapter, I have shown that it is not necessary to interpret the virtual objects we interact with in videogames as either real or as objects belonging to a category other than the fictional or the real. Rather, I argue that the virtual marks a mode of presentation in which fictional stories can be conveyed. As Tavinor says, virtual and fictional are non-contradictory categorizations: a fictional gun in a videogame is presented through the virtual medium, so that the gun is "virtual as well as fictional" (2009a, 46). Virtual representations are, just like

64 I say 'traditional', because there are instances of interactive literature, such as 'Choose Your Own Adventure' books, interactive (improvisation) theatre, and interactive film, in which readers and viewers can make story determining decisions.

words in literature and moving images in film, one of many ways in which fictions can be presented. And just like words and moving images, the virtual medium has its very own possibilities and influences the way in which we imagine the described or shown fictional world. While words leave a lot to the imagination of the reader, and moving images provide us with more visual information about the fictional world, virtual or computer-generated fictional worlds also allow their users to enter them, often in the guise of a computer-rendered proxy, and explore them by acting (as this proxy).

The fact that we can interact with virtual, fictional objects can be clarified by making use of Walton's fiction theory and interpreting virtual objects as 'props' that mandate certain games of make-believe. Just like text in literature or images in film, virtual objects are part of the real world (as pixels, polygons, or shapes on a screen), but represent objects that are not actually present or even existent, like guns, zombies, or aliens. Unlike non-interactive works of fiction, however, videogames not only provide us with props to imagine a fictional world, but also with props to imagine ourselves 'present' in this world, by offering players input devices to control a character or proxy within the fictional world they present. Walton's theory explains in what sense we can interact with the fictional worlds of videogames by describing videogames as props that mandate certain *de se* imaginings: both we and our actions become part of the fictional world within the make-believe game that is mandated by videogames. We thus only fictionally interact with videogame characters, objects, and events. Like all fiction theories, Walton's make-believe theory was developed to clarify experiences of literature, theatre, and film. In contrast to other theories, however, Walton heavily based his fiction theory on children's games of make-believe, in which children themselves are part of the fictional world and interact with fictional characters, objects, and events. As such, the advantage of Walton's make-believe theory is that it can account not only for non-interactive works of fiction, but also for new and interactive fictional works.

There is also a big downside to this wide applicability of Walton's fiction theory, however. Exactly because this theory is used to account for both the experience of interactive fiction and the experience of non-interactive fiction, it fails to discriminate between these two experiences. Although these experiences are similar in some regards (such as the fact that imagination is involved and the objects represented in fiction are always only present in imagination), they are very different in others (most specifically in the way imagination is involved, since, contrary to non-interactive works of fiction, interactive works of fiction often prompt the appreciator to imagine their own presence within the fictional world). This inability of distinguishing non-interactive from interactive fiction experiences is a consequence of Walton's conviction that all fiction experiences require the appreciator's participation and that "all imagining involves a kind of self-imagining (imagining *de se*)" (1990, 12). For Walton, *any* fiction appreciator is participating in the fiction and performing fictional actions: the reader of a fictional novel pretends to read (or fictionally reads) an account of true events, and an observer of a play, movie, or painting fictionally sees the represented events, characters, and locations (1990, 213-215). Walton goes even so far as to say that every emotion we

feel towards fictional events and characters are themselves part of the fiction: when feeling an emotion towards fiction, Walton argues, we imagine of ourselves that what we are feeling is a true emotion, while it is actually a mere 'quasi-emotion'.

With this, Walton's theory is not able to account for the fact that interactive works of fiction such as videogames typically mandate *de se* imaginings in a way that non-interactive works of fiction do not. In the next chapter, I will therefore focus on the kind of self-imaginings undertaken by players of videogames, and specifically the actions they imagine themselves to perform (so-called fictional actions), and the desires they imagine themselves to have (so-called imaginative desires). I will show how the imaginings undertaken by appreciators of interactive works of fiction differ from the imaginings undertaken by those of non-interactive works of fiction, and how a clear distinction between imagining and *de se* imagining is necessary to clarify this difference.

5. *De se* Imagination, Fictional Actions, and Imaginative Desires[65]

In chapter four, I introduced the paradox of interactive fiction as the question 'How can we be moved to shoot fictional zombies?'. I interpreted this question as asking how it is possible to shoot fictional zombies, if we know that these creatures do not actually exist. I formulated the answer that, while we cannot truly shoot fictional zombies, we can do so fictionally. For this, I made use of a Waltonian interpretation of fictional actions. In the end, however, I concluded that Walton's fiction theory is ultimately unable to satisfactorily distinguish the imaginative engagement of appreciators of interactive fictions from that of appreciators of non-interactive works of fiction. As such, I argued that Walton's notion of fictional actions needs to be reconceptualized in light of interactive fiction experiences. Moreover, looking at my original formulation of the paradox of interactive fiction more closely now, it becomes apparent that it has another dimension as well. It is not only puzzling how we can shoot fictional zombies, but also why we should even be motivated to do so at all. Why do we want to shoot creatures of which we know they do not truly exist? What are the desires that underlie fictional actions?

In this chapter, I will dig deeper into the paradox of interactive fiction by discussing, in more detail, the two interrelated concepts of actions and desires towards fiction. For this, I will zoom in on Walton's approach to fictional actions (1990) and the philosophical debate on imaginative desires (cf. Nichols and Stich 2000; Currie and Ravenscroft 2002; Carruthers 2006; Doggett and Egan 2007; Kind 2011; Kind 2016b). Although philosophers have discussed both actions and desires towards fiction in much detail, I will show how their discussions, once again, focus largely on non-interactive media such as literature and film. Looking at their arguments through the lens of interactive fiction experiences shows that many of the philosophical ideas about fictional actions and imaginative desires are in need of revision. This is because the interactive fiction experience is characterized and defined by a kind of participation of its appreciator that was not taken into account within older debates on actions and desires towards fiction. I am talking about the kind of participation that Robson and Meskin thematize when they call videogames 'self-involving' (2016),[66] and that involves the appreciator of the

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65 The description of fictional actions in this chapter is based on a paper I presented during the Philosophy of Computer Games conference in Krakow in 2017, which was later published as the article "Fictionally Flipping Tetrominoes? Defining the Fictionality of a Videogame Player's Actions" in the *Journal of the Philosophy of Games* (Van de Mosselaer 2018b). The discussion of imaginative desires is a revised version of my article "Imaginative Desires and Interactive Fiction: On Wanting to Shoot Fictional Zombies", which I presented at the Videogames and Virtual Ethics conference in London in 2017 and published in the *British Journal of Aesthetics* (Van de Mosselaer 2019b).

66 It should be noted that, although there are many similarities between the way I will describe the self-involving element of videogames and the way Robson and Meskin do this, our conceptualization of self-involvement ultimately differs. Robson and Meskin state that self-involving

work of fiction in a game of make-believe in which they themselves play a certain role. This self-involving aspect of videogames marks a crucial difference between the fictional media that evoke the paradox of interactive fiction, and the fictional media of literature, theatre, and film that have always been, and often still are, the focus of discussions within philosophy of fiction. In the following, I will first describe the imaginative participation of the videogame player in more detail. In light of this description, I will then show how the concepts of fictional actions and imaginative desires as they have been discussed within philosophy of fiction are both useful, but also in need of redefinition.

5.1 Half-Real Appreciators

When describing videogames, Jesper Juul uses the term 'half-real', saying videogames consist of real rules and fictional worlds (2005). Juul writes this as if it distinguishes videogames from other fictional media such as literature and film. His goal is to point out the unique dual nature of videogames as both narratives and challenges, as consisting of both fiction and gameplay. In a sense, however, all fictional media or representations can be said to be 'half-real': every work of fiction is real in the sense that it is an actual representation, consisting of text, colors, shapes, moving images, etc., which is prescribed to be interacted with in accordance with certain rules or principles of generation (appreciating a novel or a movie, for example, consists in imagining the content of what is written or shown to be true), and which, based on these, evokes a fictional world. This 'half-realness' of representations and works of fiction has already been thematized by philosophers in the past. Sartre, in this regard, introduces the notion of the 'analogon' as something real and actually present that consciousness engages and animates and through which imagined or fictional particulars are presentified (1940). Fink emphasizes the double nature of playthings such as dolls, which exist both in the real world as actual objects and in a world we imagine based on our interaction with the plaything (1968). And, as already discussed, Walton describes how every fictional work is a 'prop', or an actually existent object that mandates the playing of a certain make-believe game and the imagining of a fictional world (1990).

As described in chapter one, many videogames provide us with actual presentations that (are meant to) evoke a fictional world when engaged with. This is not a unique characteristic of videogames, but rather shows how videogames fit into the larger categories of representations, works of fiction, or are what Walton, Sartre, and Fink respectively call the prop, analogon, and plaything. What distinguishes videogames from fictional

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interactive fictions make things fictionally true about their appreciators in the (Waltonian) work world evoked during the interaction with the work in question (2016, 171). I, on the other hand, merely conceptualize self-involvement in fiction as the playing of a make-believe game in which the imaginer themselves take on a fictional role within the world they imagine. This disparity between Robson and Meskin's and my theory is caused by the different ways in which we define the (Waltonian) work world of videogames (see part 1.3).

works such as novels is not their half-realness, but the way they can make their appreciators half-real. That is: when playing the game, players themselves become 'doubled': they, their bodies, and their movements are used as props or analogues through which something is made fictional about these players. Sartre already described how people can take their own gestures as analogues to be able to imagine something being true about themselves. In "Patterns of Bad Faith", he describes how one might play at being a waiter in this way:

> I cannot be he, I can only play *at being* him; that is, imagine to myself that I am he. [...] I can be he only in the neutralized mode, as the actor is Hamlet, by mechanically making the *typical gestures* of my state and by aiming at myself as an imaginary café waiter through those gestures taken as an 'analogue'. (Sartre 1943, 103)

Similarly, but with a specific focus on the playing of games, Fink describes how not only the plaything, but also the player typically has a double existence. When playing, players treat themselves and their own movements as part of both the real and the imagined world. They take on a double personality that is, according to Fink, essential to play:

> [H]ere we find a quite peculiar 'schizophrenia,' a kind of split personality that is not to be mistaken for a manifestation of mental illness. The player who participates in a game executes in the real world an action of a familiar type. Within the context of the internal meaning of play, however, he is taking over a role. Here we must distinguish between the real man who 'plays' and the man created by the role within the play. The player hides his real self behind his role and is submerged in it. He lives in his role with a singular intensity, and yet not like the schizophrenic, who is unable to distinguish between 'reality' and 'illusion.' (Fink 1968, 23)

And, of course, as already described in chapter four, Walton argues that appreciators of fiction participate in the represented fictional worlds, by taking themselves and their own movements and activities as props which generate certain fictional truths about themselves.

When it comes to the videogame experience, this process in which people use themselves and their own bodily movements as props or analogues to undertake certain imaginings, and interpret themselves as dually existent within a real and an imagined world is often crucial. As Robson and Meskin say, most videogames belong to the category of self-involving interactive fictions: works of fiction that mandate their users to imagine that they themselves are involved within the presented fictional world (2016). In the following, I will focus on two aspects of the videogame experience that are related to this imaginative participation of players: immersion in the game world and identification with a proxy within this world. Although these two have been mentioned before in this dissertation, I would like to focus attention on them once more. First of all, because they are the aspects of the game experience that lie at the basis of the possibility of performing fictional actions, which are the subject of this thesis. Secondly, because these aspects are often ignored in philosophical discussions such as the one on imaginative desires.

5.1.1 Being Present in Virtual Worlds

In chapter two, I discussed immersion as the feeling of presence in represented spaces (cf. Gooskens 2012). In this chapter, I argued that immersion in videogames is an imaginative experience, which is dependent on the kind of prop videogames offer their appreciators, and the way in which these appreciators utilize these props in their personal games of make-believe. In contrast to fictional media such as novels and movies, videogames make it possible for their appreciators, or even mandate them, to play self-involving make-believe games in which they imagine their own presence within the represented game world. In this part, I want to elaborate on both the difference and the similarities between the concept of immersion as it is used with regard to non-interactive fictional media and the immersion I earlier described with regard to videogames.

In his book *In-Game: From Immersion to Incorporation*, Gordon Calleja argues that the metaphors of 'presence' and 'immersion' are inept to describe virtual environment habitation (2011, 169). He is convinced that the feeling of presence we have when playing videogames is very different from the feeling of presence or immersion appreciators of novels or movies can have. He writes that game environments afford experiences that are not available through non-interactive media: "One of these experiential phenomena is the potential to metaphorically inhabit their virtual spaces not just through our imagination, but also through the cybernetic circuit between player and machine" (2011, 167). To account for the way players inhabit the virtual spaces presented within videogames, Calleja makes use of the term *incorporation*. When defining this concept, he clarifies the two levels on which virtual environment habitation works:

> On the first level, the virtual environment is incorporated into the player's mind as part of her immediate surroundings, within which she can navigate and interact. Second, the player is incorporated (in the sense of embodiment) in a single, systemically upheld location in the virtual environment at any single point in time. Incorporation thus operates on a double axis: the player incorporates (in the sense of internalizing or assimilating) the game environment into consciousness while *simultaneously* being incorporated through the avatar into that environment. [...] Put in another way, incorporation occurs when the game world is present to the player while the player is simultaneously present, via her avatar, to the virtual environment. (2011, 169; emphasis original)

One level, that of internalizing the fictional environment, can arguably be found in the experience of many fictional media, such as literature, theatre, and film. In these experiences, fiction appreciators might imagine the described or shown fictional worlds in such a vivid way, that it seems present to them and they speak of being 'immersed' in it. The second level that Calleja describes, however, consists of the player being incorporated within the presented fictional environment and feeling as if they themselves are present in the represented space.

Interesting about the two levels of incorporation that Calleja describes, is how they mark both the continuity and difference between the fictional works that are usually the focus in philosophy of fiction and fictional works like videogames. Equally inter-

esting is the way in which this definition of incorporation sheds new light on one of the main disagreements between Lamarque's thought theory and Walton's make-believe theory. To explain how we can feel strong emotions about fictional events and characters, Walton and Lamarque suggest two opposite accounts of how appreciators of fiction interact with fictional worlds. Walton argues that appreciators always enter the fictional worlds of the works they appreciate. According to him, fictional works mandate *de se* imaginings, and their appreciators participate in the world presented in the work by playing self-involving make-believe games (1990, 212-214). Lamarque, on the other hand, suggests that appreciators do not enter fictional worlds, but fictional characters rather enter ours:

> How can fictional characters enter our world? What is it in our world that we respond to when we fear Othello and pity Desdemona? My suggestion, which I shall work out in detail, is that fictional characters enter our world in the mundane guise of descriptions (or strictly the senses of descriptions) and become the objects of our emotional responses as mental representations or, as I shall call them, thought-contents characterized by those descriptions. (Lamarque 1981, 292-293)

While Walton thus emphasizes what Calleja would call the embodiment in the fictional environment, Lamarque focuses on the internalization of the fictional environment within the consciousness (or thoughts) of the appreciator.

The specific immersion or incorporation of videogame players seems to show how both of these can be present within one fiction experience. More importantly, it shows how both Lamarque and Walton are wrong to assume that fiction experiences can be described in terms of either one or the other. Lamarque generally describes fiction experiences as experiences in which fictional characters and events enter our world through thought contents. By doing this, he seems to overlook the possibility of some fictional works actually asking of their appreciators to participate in their worlds. Walton, on the other hand, describes *every* fiction experience in terms of *de se* imagination and participation. As such, he does not acknowledge that the way in which some appreciators of fictional works, such as the players of videogames, are involved in represented worlds is dependent on the unique kind of prop these works offer. Self-involving participation is not, as Walton argues, characteristic of all fiction experiences, but rather becomes possible because of the specific props some works constitute for their users: props that specifically prescribe or make it possible for them to incorporate themselves within the make-believe game they are playing. For Calleja, videogames do this by presenting their players with avatars. Avatars, he writes, constitute "the systemically upheld embodiment of the player in a single location" which makes it possible for players to imagine themselves present in the avatar's context (2011, 169). As we will see shortly, however, videogames do not have to explicitly present players with avatars to function in self-involving games of make-believe.

5.1.2 The I-in-the-Gameworld

For Calleja, as well as many other videogame researchers, the avatar, or representation of a certain body within the game world, is crucial for the player to be able to imagine being in the gameworld (cf. Tavinor 2009a, 60; Gooskens 2012, 85). It is through an identification with a represented character, these authors write, that players can take on a certain role within the fictional world (cf. Tavinor 2017a, 28). This is how the 'player-character' is formed. The concept of the 'player-character' refers to the complex of player and character together, or the fictional character in the gameworld as it is animated through the player. Tavinor argues that the player-character is the epistemic and agential proxy for the player, allowing them to fictionally step into the worlds of video games (Tavinor 2009a, 61–85). He calls player-characters the key vehicle for the player's performative contribution to the narratives and fictional world of video games (Tavinor 2017a, 27).

However, it is important to note that videogames can invite self-involving games of make-believe without there being an explicitly represented body or character for the player to identify with. Players might adopt a role within the fictional world without there being an avatar. Games might merely *imply* a player-character, for example by showing the game's world from a certain perspective. A game in which players command an army need not represent the actual commander of the army for the player to take on this role. In this regard, Chris Bateman makes the interesting distinction between 'avatars' and 'avatar dolls'. He uses the term 'avatar doll' for the way an avatar is represented in a game and the term 'avatar' to refer to the role the player fulfils in the game's fictional world (2011, 106). This is especially helpful as players might play self-involving games of make-believe that are not supported or decided by the nature of the avatar (doll) that is represented in the game. Players might simply not agree with certain personality traits of the character they are supposed to identify with, and adopt a role in the fictional world that does not include these. It thus seems that the way the representation of avatars (or avatar dolls) in games influence the player's self-involving games of make-believe should be nuanced: the role of the player in the fictional world is not completely decided, and need not even be supported, by the representation of a body or character within this world.

Therefore, it is perhaps more precise to designate the role the player takes on in the gameworld as the subjective 'I-in-the-gameworld' the player crystallizes through engaging with the game (Vella 2015, 22). This I-in-the-gameworld can be seen as the fictional role, proxy, or subject position within the fictional world of the game that players construct for themselves while interacting with the game's world, and to which they refer in the first person (Vella 2016, 3). The construction of this I-in-the-gameworld is based on players' interpretation of available information, context, and affordances this world offers, like a narratively embedded character for them to control, a virtually represented environment for them to explore, or pre-determined tasks for them to fulfil. The fictional role players take on is thus determined by the way they interpret the world

of the game, which in turn is heavily influenced by the players' own identity, emotions, and goals.[67] As Vella says, the subjective I-in-the gameworld the player takes on "must be maintained as clearly conceptually separate from the diegetic character on the one hand, as it is separate from the player as an actual individual on the other" (Vella 2016, 3). In the end, the 'I-in-the-gameworld' is not fully determined either by the fictional character or context players are given, or by who they are themselves, but is rather a fictional proxy constructed by the player based on both of these. One player might take on the role of a pacifist child whilst playing *Undertale* (Fox 2015), while another can go on a murderous rampage while playing the very same game: the represented character and gameworld are the same, but the subjects these players refer to in the first person whilst engaging with the game's fictional content are very different.

Interpreted as an 'I-in-the-gameworld', it should be clear that the fictional role players take on in videogames can, but does not have to, be based on a representation of a character in the fictional world of the game. Players might construct the role they imaginatively project into based on an explicit representation of an avatar, on the implicit representation of a character through devices like camera view, on mere narrative hints given in the game world, or construct one for themselves independently from any game aspect. Not every game seems to mandate their players to imagine being part of the gameworld, however. Some games are explicit props that invite self-involving games of make-believe, for example games like *Uncharted* that present their players with a character or avatar, in this case Nathan Drake, to identify with. Others, like *Tetris*, typically do not ask of players to imagine being part of the represented world. Surely, the way games are constructed by their designers, and the way players interpret these designers' intentions, greatly influences the kind of (self-involving or not) make-believe games that are played with the game as a prop. However, the specifics of the make-believe game ultimately depend on the player. As said in chapter two, games like *The Sims* (Maxis 2000) can be played in different ways, depending on what players imagine. Some players take on the role of represented characters, and talk about the game world from the perspective of an 'I' within this world, while others play the game as themselves, manipulating the fictional world from the outside.

5.1.3 Self-Involving, Interactive Fiction Experiences

In this chapter, I focus on the fictional self-involvement present in the experience of videogames or, more generally, of works of fiction that function as props in games of make-believe in which the fiction appreciators themselves are involved. Self-involvement in fictional worlds is of crucial importance when talking about the paradox of

67 In this regard, Vella and Gualeni talk about players taking on their own 'virtual projects' within videogame worlds. These authors frame the player's adoption of a certain 'virtual subjectivity' in the gameworld "as a practice undertaken from the perspective of one's actual subjectivity" (Vella and Gualeni 2019).

interactive fiction and the ways in which appreciators can interact with fictional characters and events. Yet, within philosophy of fiction, the specificities of self-involvement, incorporation, and the construction of a so-called 'I-in-the-fictional-world' have often been overlooked. Many discussions within philosophy of fiction focus on literature, film, theatre, which typically do not evoke self-involving make-believe games. This often leads to a complete disregard of self-involvement in fiction. As discussed before, Lamarque, for example, states that appreciators simply do not enter the fictional worlds of the works they appreciate, instead arguing that fictional characters enter our world (1981, 292-293). Such rejections of the possibility of appreciators entering fictional worlds ignore important aspects of many fiction experiences, like those of videogames in which players imagine experiencing the fictional world from the inside. Walton, on the other hand, considers 'imagining from the inside' to be present in all fiction experiences:

> Given my earlier conclusion that representations have the function of serving as props in games of make-believe, it can hardly be controversial that appreciators normally participate in the minimal sense of considering themselves subject to the 'rules' of make-believe, constrained to imagine as the works prescribe. What is not so obvious, but of very considerable importance, is that viewers and readers are reflexive props in these games, that they generate fictional truths about themselves. [...] And as in the case of participants in children's games, it is in a first-person manner that appreciators are to, and do, imagine about themselves; they imagine, from the inside, doing things and undergoing experiences. (1990, 213-214)

This causes his fiction theory to be perfectly applicable to many interactive fictional works such as videogames. However, it also causes quite some problems if we want to consider the differences between self-involving fiction experiences, such as that of playing *Uncharted*, and non-self-involving fiction experiences, such as appreciations of most paintings, novels, and movies, but also typically videogame experiences such as that of playing *Tetris*.[68]

Many discussions within philosophy of fiction do not account for the specificities of self-involving fiction experiences. That is why, in this chapter, I will evaluate two philosophical concepts in light of the imaginative self-involvement evoked by most contemporary videogames. Firstly, I will re-examine Walton's concept of fictional actions. Walton's description of fictional actions is quite problematical because of its all-inclusivity: Walton interprets all appreciators of representational works as undertaking some kind of fictional activity. Secondly, I will reconsider philosophical discussions on the desires underlying fictional actions: so-called imaginative desires. These discussions suffer from a disregard of the possibility of incorporation in fictional worlds. The goal is to discuss fictional actions and imaginative desires whilst acknowledging the possibilities of involvement in fictional worlds, but without overgeneralizing self-involvement as present in any fiction experience.

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68 Of course the fictional experience connected to the appreciation of a painting differs from that of playing *Tetris* in that the represented world cannot be manipulated by the appreciator. Yet, the similarity focused on here is that both of these fiction experiences do not typically involve *de se* imaginings. In the conclusion to this thesis, I will summarize my views on the (non-)self-involvement and (non-)interactivity of different kinds of fiction experiences.

5.2 Fictional Actions

In the previous chapter, I presented Walton's make-believe theory as a suitable solution to the paradox of interactive fiction. Especially Walton's concept of fictional actions is of crucial importance when it comes to interactive fictions such as videogames. And indeed, many authors, both within the philosophy of videogames and videogame studies, make use of a largely Waltonian concept of fictional actions when describing what players are doing when they say they are, for example, shooting a zombie, while knowing fully well they never truly met one (cf. Velleman 2008; Tavinor 2009a; Bateman 2011; Matsunaga 2016; Robson and Meskin 2016). Videogames seem to be model Waltonian props. The graphical representations on the screen can be used to imagine that the depicted events are really experienced by the player. Moreover, players can use the real actions they perform on controllers and the graphical representations they thereby create as a prop to imagine that they are actually performing actions within the fictional world. In chapter four, I used Walton's framework to describe what happens when a player fictionally does something: a player performs a fictional action ϕ when they use their real action of manipulating a controller and thereby creating a graphical representation on the screen as a prop to imagine they really are doing ϕ. For example: a player performs the fictional action of shooting a zombie when they press a button on their controller and create a representation of a zombie being shot on the screen, and uses this action as a prop to imagine they are shooting a zombie.

Although Walton's description of fictional actions at first sight seems very apt to describe and clarify the videogame experience, there are some problems with it that make many authors reject a fully Waltonian approach to videogames. The central problem in this regard is Walton's conviction that appreciators always make things fictional about themselves and their actions, even when interacting with fictional works that do not specifically invite any appreciator involvement. In the next paragraphs, I will discuss problems generated by Walton's notion of fictional actions. In the end, the goal is to offer an updated description of fictional actions that is not only useful when explaining player actions, but can also account for the differences between self-involving and non-self-involving fiction experiences.

5.2.1 Against a Waltonian Framework

Walton's theory on fictional actions is heavily influenced by his idea that appreciating fictional works means participating in the world of this work. As we have just seen, this idea overgeneralizes what happens when appreciating fiction. Both when it comes to non-interactive fictional works such as novels and movies, but also to interactive works of fiction such as videogames, it is simply not true that we always imagine to be part of the represented fictional world. The fact that Walton says we are always involved in represented content we appreciate has critical consequences for his theory about

fictional actions. Indeed, any person looking at, or reading any kind of representation would be performing a fictional action according to Walton:

> I observed that imagining something (in the sense we are interested in) seems to involve, perhaps necessarily, imagining (one-self) believing or knowing it. So an appreciator who participates in a game in the minimal sense of imagining what is fictional will engage in self-imaginings as well. It should not be surprising that, when the appreciator recognizes that *p* is fictional and imagines believing or knowing that *p*, as well as *p* itself, it is fictional that he believes or knows that *p*. (Walton 1990, 214)[69]

Recall, in this regard, Walton's description of a person looking at a painting of sailing ships. According to Walton, this person makes it fictional of themselves that they are looking at a group of sailing ships. The painting, Walton writes, draws its appreciators into a make-believe game in which they imagine things to be true about themselves. Upon seeing the painting, appreciators could say things like 'I see several sailing ships' or 'there are several sailing ships'. As Walton argues, both of these should be understood as implicitly preceded by the prefix 'it is fictional that'. Walton writes that "it seems to be fictional not only that there are several sailing ships offshore but also that [the appreciator] sees them. His looking at the picture makes this fictional of himself" (Walton 1990, 215). It is unclear why appreciating a painting would necessarily entail *de se* imaginings, however. As mentioned in chapter two, it is unnecessary to say that experiences of representations like novels, movies, or paintings involve making things fictional about ourselves. We can quite easily imagine events to be happening, imagine certain states of affairs, without imagining anything about ourselves (cf. Currie 1995, 179). Walton seems to go too far when he says that *de se* imagination and fictional actions are always involved in fiction experiences.

Even when it comes to videogames, this overgeneralization of Walton is problematic. Walton's description of both fiction and fictional actions is so wide-ranging that following his theory would lead to defining more player actions as fictional than is intuitive and

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69 Earlier in *Mimesis*, Walton says he does not agree with Christopher Peacocke's proposal that "to imagine something is always at least to imagine, from the inside, being in some conscious state" (Peacocke 1985, 21). Walton here writes that his own suggestion "is weaker: that all imagining involves a kind of self-imagining (imagining *de se*), of which imagining from the inside is the most common variety" (1990, 29). He says that there are two kinds of *de se* imaginings: there is *de se* imagining in the first person or 'from the inside' (imagining doing or being something) and third person *de se* imagining 'from the outisde' (imagining that you yourself do something or are something). I do not take into account this distinction here, because Walton himself ultimately defends that all imagining involves *de se* imagining *from the inside*, just like Peacocke does. First of all, all of the examples Walton gives in opposition to Peacocke's claim themselves involve *de se* imagining in first person. Secondly, throughout Mimesis, Walton uses 'imagining that p' synonymous with 'imagining believing p'. In the quote above, he even states that every "minimal sense of imagining what is fictional" will involve self-imaginings in the first-person, such as imagining believing or knowing p (Walton 1990, 214). Thirdly, when it comes to the appreciation of representations, Walton does explicitly say that all appreciators partake in *de se* imaginings 'from the inside': "[A]s in the case of participants in children's games, it is in a first-person manner that appreciators are to, and do, imagine about themselves; they imagine, from the inside, doing things and undergoing experiences" (1990, 213-214).

explanatory useful or desirable. The most typical example authors within videogame studies and philosophy mention in this regard is *Tetris*. Both the game itself and the actions performed by players of *Tetris* would be fictional in a Waltonian sense. As Robson and Meskin write:

> Walton treats 'representation' and 'fiction' as interchangeable—at least for certain purposes (Walton 1990, 3). This suggests that—in Walton's sense—most (perhaps all) videogames belong to the class of fictions. Even *Tetris* plausibly involves Waltonian representation. Of course if Walton is right about depiction then this is easy to establish, since the game plausibly involves pictures of tetrominoes and, hence, mandates imagining of one's looking at the display that it is an instance of looking at those tetrominoes spin and stack. But putting depiction aside, it seems to us that when playing *Tetris* one is supposed to imagine manipulating the tetrominoes. If this is right, then even *Tetris* counts as a walt-fiction and not merely in virtue of it involving pictures (Robson and Meskin 2012b, 207).

According to a Waltonian description, when a player plays *Tetris*, they push buttons, create the representation of a turning tetromino, and imagine of their pushing of buttons that it is a flipping of tetrominoes. As many authors point out, however, it would be counterintuitive and unnecessary to call the actions a *Tetris* player performs fictional, as they only seem to be really manipulating the graphical shapes in this game (Juul 2005, 167; Sageng 2012, 229-230; Tavinor 2009a, 24). Moreover, and probably even worse than the *Tetris* case, it is not exactly clear why opening a menu in a game would not be a fictional action according to a Waltonian framework: the player uses their action of pressing a button as a prop to imagine that they are actually opening a menu. The fact that a Waltonian description of fictional actions seems to result in counting many more actions as fictional then authors in the philosophy of videogames and videogame studies want to, usually leads to a (partial) rejection of the Waltonian approach, often with explicit mention of *Tetris* (Juul 2005; Tavinor 2009a; Robson and Meskin 2016; Matsunaga 2016).

5.2.2 A New Definition of Fictional Actions

I believe we need a modification of Walton's notion of fictional actions, which takes into account that not all interactions with representations evoke, as Walton argued, the performance of fictional activities. More precisely, in the next parts, I will try to describe fictional actions in a way that does not encompass the act of flipping tetrominoes, opening a game menu, or looking at a painting of boats, but does allow us to describe saving aliens, shooting zombies, riding dragons as fictional actions. I will first discuss and reject a description of fictional actions that is based on the notion of fictional affordances (cf. Tavinor 2009a; Thabet 2017). Lastly, I will show how Walton's concept of fictional actions can be more usefully described by narrowing down the specific kind of imaginative self-involvement connected to the performance of fictional actions.

FICTIONAL AFFORDANCES

In Grant Tavinor's *The Art of Videogames*, Tavinor at first seems to agree with a largely Waltonian description of the player's experience (2009a, 41). When he finally describes player actions under the heading "Acting in Game Worlds", however, he never mentions Walton once (Tavinor 2009a, 79-85). Here, Tavinor suggests the following description of videogame actions as fictional actions:

> The possibility of fictional action comes about when various elements of the fictional environment are given the potential to cue game events: or what we might call affordances for action. [...] A fictional affordance in the case of a videogame is thus an interactive aspect of a fictive representation that determines what a player can fictionally do (2009a, 80).

Thus maybe, we might say a player's action is fictional when it is enabled by a fictional affordance, or an action possibility that is part of the fictional environment of the game. Players fictionally do something when they make use of the fictive means the game provides them with (Tavinor 2009a, 109).[70] In this description of fictional actions, Tavinor seems to depend on Juul's description of games as 'half-real', or consisting of rules and fiction. Affordances merely dependent on the rules of the game result in non-fictional actions, while affordances that depend on (fictional objects within) the fictional world of the game result in fictional actions. Opening a door in a videogame is then a fictional action because the possibility for this action is a part of the fictional world itself (the fact that, fictionally, there is a door, and it can be opened). Opening a menu in a game would not be fictional at all, because the possibility for this action is purely rule-based ('pressing start opens the menu'), and not embedded in the fictional world of the game. Tavinor himself indicates how this new description might fix the problem of being forced to call actions in *Tetris* fictional actions when he says that the interactive potential of the affordances in *Tetris* are completely exhausted by the formal structure of the game (2009a, 108). In other words: in *Tetris*, the action possibilities of the player are completely determined by the rules of the game, without any fictive means being offered to the player. As such, the player is not fictionally, but really flipping the tetrominoes. In the end, it follows from Tavinor's description of fictional actions that actions in *Tetris* are not fictional because this game does not contain fiction.

Tavinor's use of the concept of fictional affordances might offer a surprisingly simple definition of fictional actions that saves us from calling actions in games like *Tetris* fictional. When looking at more marginal cases, however, the new description of fictional actions as reactions to fictional affordances still raises some problems. First of all, it is unclear what it means for affordances to be embedded in the fictional world of the game. On the one hand, Tavinor seems to shy away from using 'fictional' in the Waltonian sense here, since he wants to exclude *Tetris* affordances from being interpreted as fictional. On the other hand, however, he does describe a fictional world in a videogame as a world with an imagined existence only (2009a, 24). If that is the case,

70 This description is also used by Tamer Thabet when he introduces the concept of fictional actions in *Game Studies All Over the Place* (2017, 42).

who is to say *Tetris* does not have a fictional world? As described in part 4.1.2, the representations of tetrominoes slowly gliding down our screen in *Tetris* might very well (be intended to) make us imagine that there are blocks falling down. This could mean that there is a fictional, albeit very limited, world connected to *Tetris*, in which blocks fall down and stack. In "Definition of Videogames" Tavinor admits an imagining of this kind might be present in *Tetris* and concludes that, when it comes to fictionality, "*Tetris* is indeed an ambiguous case, and a great deal more argument would be needed to establish whether it is or is not a case of interactive fiction" (2008). But if *Tetris* does have a fictional world, it seems as if, in Tavinor's words, its affordances are fictionally embedded after all. And if we define fictional actions as Tavinor suggests we should, this would mean that actions like the flipping of tetrominoes in *Tetris* are, after all, fictional actions.

Secondly, Tavinor's description might do its job rather too well, as it may not only exclude actions in *Tetris* from being fictional, but also videogame actions that do seem to be imaginatively performed by the player. An example might be found in *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* (Naughty Dog and SCE Bend Studio 2007). Players of this game discovered that the player-character Nathan Drake, if moved around in a quite unconventional way next to a wall, could walk through these walls. This exploit is called 'wall-clipping'. Note that it is not a fictional action possibility given by the fictional environment that Nathan can walk through walls. On the contrary, the fictional world of *Uncharted* is such that Drake is a human being and walls are impenetrable by both humans and bullets. It seems like Tavinor would agree that this kind of cheating is not a reaction to a fictional affordance, as he describes exploits as manipulations of games' encodings or as taking advantage of bugs in the game (2009a, 107). Thus, when we walk through a wall in *Uncharted*, we are not responding to an affordance that arises from the fictional world of *Uncharted*. We are merely making use of a bug in *Uncharted's* coding. As discussed in chapter one, however, there is no reason to conclude that walking through walls in *Uncharted* cannot be an action the player imagines to be doing. After all, this action may very well take place within the fictional world the player personally constructs whilst playing *Uncharted*. Recall that Walton's make-believe theory provides us with concepts that could neatly explain the strange fictional behaviour of walking through walls. When walking through walls in *Uncharted*, players are using the game as a prop for a make-believe game in which it was never intended to serve as a prop. Walton calls this kind of make-believe game an unofficial game: what is true in this make-believe game was never meant to be fictionally true in the world of the videogame, but it is fictionally true in our personal playing of it (1990, 406). Thus, although wall-clipping in the world of *Uncharted* is an unofficial action, it is still an action we can fictionally perform.

In the end, the description of fictional actions as reactions to fictional affordances does not allow for the useful distinction between authorized and unauthorized fictional events and actions established in chapter one. Moreover, this definition exchanges the problematical distinction between fictional and non-fictional actions for the equally problematical distinction between fictional and non-fictional affordances.

ACTIONS OF A FICTIONAL PROXY

Although he does not really elaborate on it in detail, Tavinor suggests another condition by which we could identify fictional game actions, when he says: "In games without player-characters, the player directly manipulates the fictive qualities of the game without taking on a role in that world" (2009a, 62). Tavinor describes the player-character as "the player's fictional proxy in the world of the game, allowing them the ability both to perceive and to act in the world of the game" (2009a, 60). Tavinor suggests that players act fictionally when they act through an avatar, while they directly and really manipulate what is fictionally true in the game when they do not act through an avatar (as would be the case in *Tetris*).

Robson and Meskin retort that an avatar is not necessary at all for a player to perform fictional actions (2016, 168). They give the example of the racing game *WipeOut* (Psygnosis 1995). This game presents no avatar, but that does not mean players of this game directly manipulate what is fictionally true. As Robson and Meskin argue, the player still performs fictional actions in the fictional world of *WipeOut*, as is made clear by the way players describe themselves, as 'moving at breakneck speed' and 'being hit by a missile', etc. (2016, 168). An avatar thus does not seem necessary for a gamer to be able to fictionally act. Robson and Meskin elucidate their claim by comparing it to a child's game Walton discusses: "According to Walton (1990, 209), when a child 'pushes a toy truck too small actually to ride in across the floor, it is probably fictional that he is driving it' just as, on our account, it is fictional of the player in *WipeOut* that she is driving the racing craft" (2016, 168).

Robson and Meskin certainly seem to be right, contra Tavinor, that you do not need an overtly represented avatar to make fictional actions possible in a videogame. The way they argue for this, though, is somewhat unfortunate, as their example of *WipeOut* still contains a very clear fictional role or 'I-in-the-gameworld' (Vella 2015; 2016) with which the player is to identify.[71] *WipeOut* is a racing game, so it seems obvious that there is a mandate for the player to imagine that they are the driver of the racing spaceship. A different example, in which not only the representation of an avatar is absent, but there is not even character or object in the fictional world with which the player can imaginatively identify, might show that Robson and Meskin are actually on the same track as Tavinor: what is necessary for fictional actions is not an explicitly represented avatar, but that the player identifies with someone/something in the fictional world who can perform actions in that world. More specifically, what is necessary for the performance of fictional actions, is taking on the role of a fictional I-in-the-gameworld.

Tavinor himself provides us with examples of games without such a fictional role that the player is mandated to imaginatively adopt: *Tetris*, *Age of Empires* (Ensem-

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71 Recall, in this regard, Bateman's use of the term 'doll' for the way an avatar is represented in a game and the term 'avatar' to refer to the role the player fulfils in the game's fictional world (2011, 106). This is relevant here, as it seems to be Bateman's 'avatar' that is necessary for the performance of fictional actions, not his 'doll'. Although Tavinor is not quite clear on this, his further discussion seems to suggest that he understands 'avatar' as Bateman does (Tavinor 2009a, 72).

ble Studios 1997) and *Rise of Nations* (Big Huge Games 2003) (Tavinor 2009a, 72). In these games, players are granted agency not as explicitly represented characters in the fictional world (players have no avatar), not as implied characters (there is no being in the fictional world with which players are mandated to identify), but just as themselves (players receive an interface that lets them give real commands to represented objects/characters). As such, when a player says that they flip a tetromino, they must be really flipping a representation of a tetromino. They can make it fictionally true in the fictional world that a tetromino turns, but the action they perform is not itself part of that world and thus cannot be fictional. For a player to be able to fictionally act, and not just really manipulate the fictionally represented world from the outside, there must be someone or something in the fictional world who they can identify with.

Recall, however, that Walton says that if someone sees a painting of a boat, they imagine it to be a real boat, and are thus fictionally seeing a boat. The dedicated Waltonian might thus retort that if you flip a representation of a tetromino, of which you imagine that it is a real falling tetromino, then surely you must be fictionally flipping a falling tetromino. That is not necessarily true, however. Just like Robson and Meskin did, we can clarify this point by comparing such a player situation with a child's game of make-believe. Imagine a child who is playing with a doll, imagining it to be a toddler, but not imagining herself to be part of the fictional world she imagines. She might imagine, for example, that the toddler can walk on its own, by pushing the doll forward. The girl thus pushes the representation of the toddler, imagining it to be a real toddler, but she does not fictionally push the toddler: fictionally, the toddler is walking on its own.[72] In a very similar way, the player of *The Sims* can make the representation of a sim go swimming, imagining the sim to be a person who goes to swim, without fictionally making him go swimming: fictionally, in his own world, the sim is not forced by anyone to go to the pool. In the same way, the player of *Tetris* can make it fictionally true that a tetromino turns, without fictionally flipping it. In these cases, fictional actions are simply not necessary to explain what the player is doing. Instead, we can follow Sageng's position outlined in chapter four to clarify what happens here: these players simply press buttons to manipulate the virtual representations, be it pixels or polygons, offered to them by the game, and thereby produce graphical representations on the basis of which they imagine certain fictional events (such as the turning of a tetromino) to take place within the world of the game (Sageng 2012, 230). Since the player is not present in the fictional world as a proxy, their real actions do not correspond to fictional actions performed in this world, but rather correspond to fictional *events* within the game world. Through their actions, this player causes something to happen in the fictional world, but they do not fictionally make this happen.

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72 It is striking that Walton himself suggests this example, but still denies the possibility of there being a fictional world evoked by the doll that does not contain the one playing with the doll. He writes that a child "might, fictionally, hold a child while it practices walking, but without a fancy mechanical doll, she cannot very conveniently make it fictional that a child learns to walk on its own" (1990, 226).

Again, when players do not imagine to be part of the fictional world, the performance of their actions cannot be either: their actions are real manipulations of the computer-generated shapes and colours that represent the fictional world, and not fictional actions. We can thus formulate a new condition for fictional actions:

> Someone can only be said to perform a fictional action ϕ when they imaginatively project into (the situation of) someone/something who does ϕ in the fictional world.

This not only fixes the *Tetris* problem, as shown above, but also the problem of the opening of a game menu being called fictional: as the player who opens the menu does not imaginatively project into someone (or something) in the fictional world who does the opening of the menu, it is rather a real manipulation of game elements.

This new condition has a few important consequences. A first one is that this new description of fictional actions still allows us to interpret *Tetris* as representing a fictional world, albeit a very limited one, without having to say that the actions players perform when playing *Tetris* are fictional. The reason that no fictional actions are performed in *Tetris* is not because this game has no fictional world, as many authors have argued (Juul 2005, 167; Tavinor 2009a, 24; Sageng 2012, 229), but because, even if there is a fictional world, no action a player of *Tetris* performs is done while imaginatively projecting into a character/role in this fictional world. That is: it could very well be that players make things fictionally happen when playing *Tetris* (they, for example, make fictional tetrominoes rotate), but they do not, usually, fictionally make these things happen (they do not fictionally rotate the tetrominoes).[73]

A second consequence is that the very same action in a videogame can be fictional or non-fictional, depending on whether the player takes on a perspective that is internal or external to the game world. Take two players of *The Sims* (Maxis 2000) who both, in their own playing of the game, make one of their sims go for a swim. One of them plays the game from an external standpoint, not imagining herself to be part of the fictional world that is inhabited by the sims (which probably corresponds to what *The Sims* mandates its players to imagine). Her actions make it fictional that one of the characters goes swimming, but, as has been said, she does not fictionally make this so. The other player, however, pretends to be an evil god in his playing of the game. Indeed, the only reason why he makes the sim go for a swim is to subsequently take the ladder out of the pool, leaving the sim to hopelessly drown. This player not only makes it fictional that the sim goes swimming, but also fictionally makes the sim go swimming: it is the player himself who, in the guise of an evil, all-controlling god in the fictional world of the game, makes the sim go to the swimming pool.

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73 Of course, and as will be discussed shortly, players might play a make-believe game that is arguably unauthorized for *Tetris*, and somehow pretend to be present within the world presented by this game. One could, for example, but somewhat strangely, imaginatively identify with each consecutive falling block.

The above is an example of how actions in a game without an overt avatar can be fictional or non-fictional depending on the approach and imaginings of the player. When there is no clear fictional role to play, players might make them up for themselves. Games that do have an overt player-character, however, clearly mandate the player to imaginatively identify with this character. Playing *Uncharted* without imaginatively identifying with Nathan Drake or taking on the role that is represented by this character would not only be hard and quite weird (because, how would you play the game and what would you imagine instead?), but also a clearly unofficial make-believe game to play with this game. As such, the fictionality of player actions is not entirely determined by the way the player decides to play or imagine: there are still 'official' ways a game is intended to be played, which would often be very hard or even impossible to reject in a personal playing of the game, and which decide whether and which actions in this game would normally be fictional or non-fictional.

Lastly, this discussion on fictional actions in videogames reveals a criticism to Walton's theory on fictional actions or pretence. Recall that Walton said that readers and viewers are always making things fictionally true about themselves when appreciating a work of fiction, be it a novel, painting, play, or movie (1990, 215). Walton acknowledged that this would lead to some odd questions: if a person looking at an image of a Pterosaur from the Jurassic period fictionally sees this creature that was never seen by any human being, who is actually doing this fictional seeing? And does this person have to imagine seeing the unseen? In Mimesis of Make-Believe, Walton dismisses these kinds of questions, simply filing them under the heading of 'silly questions', of which it would be pointless and inappropriate to investigate them any further (1990, 174-183).[74] Videogames, however, show that the so-called silly questions Walton identifies here are more problematical and that the way he treats them is rather unsatisfactory. After all, as opposed to non-interactive novels, paintings, and movies, videogames introduce a new way of becoming part of fictional worlds. Games like *Uncharted* let us enter their fictional world in the guise of a fictional proxy, in this case Nathan Drake. When we see something in *Uncharted's* world, we truly fictionally see it, made possible by the fact that we identify with someone who is present within the fictional world. When we see something in *Tetris*, however, it would be strange to say we are fictionally seeing something, because fictionally, there is no one in the world of *Tetris* watching the tetrominoes fall. Since Walton's theory says of every fictional work that its appreciation causes *de se* imaginings, however, it cannot distinguish between games like *Uncharted* and games like *Tetris*, or between fictionally doing something and making something fictionally happen.

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74 In a later article, Walton admits that these kinds of questions deserve to be treated more thoroughly. In this article, however, he still defends that looking at the fictional Pterosaur entails fictionally looking at the Pterosaur. He writes that the person looking at this image is mandated to both imagine seeing the Pterosaur and imagine that the beast was never seen by anyone (2013, 20-22).

5.2.3 Conclusion

It is ultimately an element of Walton's make-believe theory that made his theory seem perfectly applicable to videogames, namely the idea that appreciators always enter the fictional world of the work they appreciate (1990, 273), that stands in the way of differentiating between games as *Tetris* and games as *Uncharted*. After all, we do not enter into the fictional worlds of all games equally. While we quite obviously enter and influence the world of *Uncharted* from the inside, we only manipulate the (arguably fictional) world of *Tetris* from the outside. A *Tetris* player might make it fictionally true that tetrominoes turn, but does not fictionally flip them. Only actions players do from within, through a proxy in the videogame's fictional world, can properly be called fictional actions. This allows us to formulate a new condition to add to the description of fictional actions: someone can only be said to perform a fictional action ϕ when they imaginatively project into (the situation of) someone/something who does ϕ in the fictional world that is imagined. Of course, this condition alone does not explain what happens when videogame players fictionally act, or how their real actions are related to their fictional ones. This is solved by adding this condition to the Waltonian description of fictional actions, which has already proven its worth by allowing us to explain the imaginative games videogame players play using their own actions as props and how these games might differ from the official make-believe games a videogame was intended to serve in. The full new description then becomes:

> Someone (for example, a videogame player) performs a fictional action ϕ when they imaginatively project into the situation of someone/something who does ϕ in the fictional world (for example, a world presented in a videogame), by performing a real action (such as the manipulation of graphical shapes through a controller) which they use as a prop to imagine that they, in the guise of the fictional proxy, are doing action ϕ.

Unlike Walton, I thus do not say that someone performs fictional actions simply by interacting with a representation of fictional characters or events. Rather, one needs to imaginatively project into someone undertaking an action within the fictional world to be performing a fictional action.

This update of the Waltonian description of fictional actions has at least two important advantages. First of all, this description retains Walton's useful distinction between unauthorized and authorized make-believe games, allowing us to categorize fictional game actions into ones that are merely part of the players' imaginings and ones that are actually (intended to be) part of the world depicted in the game. Secondly, and contrary to Walton, this description makes it easy to specify two ways in which players can interact with the worlds of videogames. First of all, there are the fictional actions specified above. Secondly, there are actions that influence the fictional world but are not fictional themselves, a category of actions that is hard to explain using Walton's theory. Players might take on a perspective external to the fictional world, manipulating the objects within this world by acting on the graphical shapes and colors representing these objects. This

regularly happens in games that do not present a subject position or role for the player to take on, such as *Tetris*. In that case, no fictional actions are necessary to explain the way players influence the fictional game world. We can just follow the solution of Chalmers and Sageng that was explained in the previous chapter: players, by pressing certain buttons on a controller, carry through an intention to produce a graphical representation (of which they might pretend that it is a certain fictional event) (Sageng 2012, 230). No *de se* imagination is involved. The situation is quite similar to when someone looks at a painting representing certain fictional events: this person need not imagine anything about themselves to appreciate the painting as a representation, but merely needs to imagine the existence of the things depicted.

5.3 I-Desires

Up until now, I have discussed the question how it is possible for us to act on objects we know to be fictional and thus to not actually exist. The answer I have given in this thesis is that we can only fictionally shoot fictional zombies. What I have not yet discussed, however, is the question how and why we are even motivated to fictionally shoot zombies. When players fictionally shoot zombies in a game, they actually perform actions on a controller to manipulate graphical shapes on a screen and imagine of their actions that they are the actions of someone within the fictional world. The button press or the occurrence of certain colors and shapes on the screen is then not the actual intention of their action: what players want to do is to kill monsters. But how is that possible? How can anyone even desire anything about a fictional character, if they know very well that this character does not really exist? What desires can motivate the performance of a fictional action? Questions concerning desires we might have towards fictional characters, events and worlds, have unleashed quite the debate within philosophy of fiction (cf. Nichols and Stich 2000; Currie and Ravenscroft 2002; Carruthers 2006; Doggett and Egan 2007; Kind 2011; Kind 2016b). Again, however, the philosophical investigations of this subject have largely ignored the existence of interactive works of fiction such as videogames. In this part, I will therefore re-examine philosophical arguments on desires towards fiction and see how they fare when it comes to videogame experiences.

Let us, for this purpose, start from an example. Consider the following situation, which can occur when playing the game *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*:

> I am in an old bunker on an island somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. My friend Elena just got captured by mercenaries and I must help her if I want her to survive. For now, though, I am stuck in a dark room. Suddenly, a zombie starts to rush me. The pale monster terrifies me and I want to run away, but the creature is much faster than I am. I frantically start to shoot and manage to kill it. Two more show up however and I am quickly killed. The screen blackens and I am put back in the dark room. This time, I grab my gun even before the monsters show up. I want to kill them all.

This description of the desires felt when playing *Uncharted* is problematic for at least two reasons. Firstly, what is the actual content of the desires expressed by 'I want to shoot all the zombies' or 'I want Elena to survive'? The players of this game know that zombies do not exist and that Elena is merely a fictional character in a videogame, so why would they desire anything about them at all? Secondly, and related to the paradox of interactive fiction, when the gamer expresses the desire to run away from the zombies, they of course do not mean that they want to run away from their PlayStation. What they want is to get the character they are controlling, Nathan Drake, away from the zombies. The desire felt thus does not motivate them to really run away, but merely motivates them to perform the fictional action of running away.

The desires in this imaginative context are difficult to explain based on our traditional understanding of desire. Amy Kind calls this 'the puzzle of imaginative desire' (Kind 2011, 422). Based on cases in which people feel desires towards fictional characters and are motivated to pretend-act by these desires, some philosophers suggest that the mental state doing the work in these situations is not a real desire, but rather an 'imaginative analogue of desire' (Doggett and Egan 2007, 5). They call these states 'desire-like imaginings' (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002) or 'i-desires' (Doggett and Egan 2007). These philosophers would say that when someone wants to shoot zombies in a game, they do not merely imagine that they want to shoot them, but imaginatively desire to shoot them. I-desiring truly is a novel mental state (Kind 2011, 422). Other philosophers have, however, argued against the necessity of this new mental state, saying that it is a needless complication of human psychology (Kind 2011; Carruthers 2006; Nichols and Stich 2000).

The debate about i-desires has always focused on non-interactive fictions like literature, theatre, and film, and on the pretend actions performed by children in make-believe games. In the following, I will therefore reassess existing discussions on the two issues surrounding the content and motivational power of (i-)desires towards fiction in light of the experience of interactive fictions like videogames. The purpose of this investigation is to show how a reappraisal of the concept of i-desires and an application of this concept to videogames can help us gain insight in the interactive fiction experience. I will argue that imaginative desires are a helpful notion when explaining the desires players feel whilst immersed in fictional game worlds and when clarifying how players are motivated to perform fictional actions within these worlds. Moreover, I will discuss how i-desires are a useful conceptual tool within videogame development, and how they can shed new light on the apparent immorality of violent actions in videogames.

5.3.1 Narrative-External and Narrative-Internal Desires

Opponents of i-desires would say that the desire a gamer has when they say that they want Elena to survive is actually the real desire that Elena survives in the fiction. Proponents of i-desires dismiss this suggestion by giving a counterexample: take a reader of E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* who likes fictions with tragic endings, but also wants the main character

to survive while they are immersed in the story. Opponents of i-desires would have to say that this reader wants Charlotte to survive in the fiction while they actually do not have this desire about the content of the fiction at all, as they like bad endings. Since this reader would have conflicting desires, Doggett and Egan conclude that while the desire for tragedy is a real desire, the desire that Charlotte survives must be an i-desire (Doggett and Egan 2007, 13-14). Similarly, Currie and Ravenscroft call the desire towards the course of the narrative a real, narrative-external desire, and the desire towards the character a narrative-internal desire-like imagining (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002, 202).

It is, however, not clear why both of these desires could not be real desires. As Kind points out, we can and often do have desires that contradict each other (Kind 2016b, 171-172). Someone might want to get some work done, but also have the desire to start playing *Uncharted* instead. So even if we often have different desires concerning one fictional story, there is no reason to define one of them as a (narrative-external) real desire and the other one as a (narrative-internal) i-desire. As Kind concludes, the reader of *Charlotte's Web* can desire one thing about the fictional character Charlotte and another thing about the content of the fiction *Charlotte's Web* (Kind 2016b, 172). Both desires are narrative-external and real.

Kind's argument might work well for traditional fictions such as literature, theatre, and film, but is not as obvious in the case of interactive fiction such as videogames. In traditional fictions, we are always spectators or readers who have to approach the fictional world from the outside. If someone has the desire for a tragic ending and the desire that Charlotte survives, then both of them are truly theirs: they belong to them as a reader. Both of these desires can easily be described as the real and narrative-external desires that something must happen in the fiction, which the reader feels after reflecting on the story from the outside. As Martha Nussbaum says, there always remains a certain distance between the consumer of traditional fictions such as novels and the fictional world, "since the story is not ours" (Nussbaum 1990, 48).

As I have discussed before, however, many videogames are "fictions that, in virtue of their interactive nature, are about those who consume them" (Robson and Meskin 2016, 165). A player takes on the role of someone within the fictional world, often denoted with the term player-character, and typically makes decisions that are partly based on the narrative context that surrounds this fictional persona. I say partly because players might not always agree with the actions, statements, or personality of the character they are supposed to identify with. Moreover, sometimes there is not even an explicitly represented character with which the player may identify. Recall, in this regard, that it might be more precise to designate the role the player takes on in the game's world as "the subjective 'I-in-the-gameworld' the player crystallizes through engaging with the gameworld" (Vella 2015, 22). Players of videogames construct a subject position for themselves whilst playing, which is either based on an explicitly represented avatar, implied by the game's camera view or narrative, or simply imagined by the player. As gamers thus actually enter the fictional world in the guise of a character or proxy in the game world, the desires they feel are desires that can be ascribed to this I-in-the-

gameworld, that are translated into actions through this character or proxy, and that seem more truly *narrative-internal*. When people say they desire that Charlotte survives when reading *Charlotte's Web*, they mean that they themselves would like Charlotte to live. When people say they want Elena to survive when playing *Uncharted*, they mean that they, in their role of Nathan Drake, want to save her. While the desires felt towards literature, theatre, and film are desires we take on towards the fictional world, the desires we feel when playing videogames are very often themselves part of the fictional world and caused by the fictional context of the subject position we take on in this world. Note, though, that such desires felt by videogame players are not mere pretend-desires. They are not desires players imagine to have.[75] They are actually felt desires that are caused from within the fictional world and that can be ascribed to the complex of player and character together, or to the fictional I-in-the-gameworld constructed by the player throughout their engagement with the game's world.

As such, videogames, in contrast to non-interactive forms of fiction, place us more straightforwardly in the position Currie and Ravenscroft describe when they explain what happens when we have desire-like imaginings: "I imaginatively project into the situation of one who believes P and desires Q when I have the belief-like imagining that P and the desire-like imagining that Q" (Currie and Ravenscroft 2002, 22). Indeed, players of *Uncharted* do not imagine that they desire to shoot zombies, nor do they desire to imagine that they shoot them. More accurately, they imaginatively take on the role of Nathan Drake who is surrounded by zombies and therefore form the desire to run and gun from within the fiction. In contrast to desires felt towards non-interactive fiction, like the desire that Charlotte survives, many desires felt by gamers resist being explained as narrative-external, real desires. As such, videogames also more strongly support the existence of desire-like imaginings.

However, the concept of desire-like imagining we are talking about here is not equal to the original concept suggested by Currie and Ravenscroft. After all, they said i-desires can be felt towards literary, theatrical, and cinematic fictions that do not cause true immersion in the fictional world, while I suggest the reason for invoking i-desires lies in the fact that we can form desires from within a fictional world if we are immersed in it as a player-character. The question then becomes whether this kind of immersion found in videogames can shed new light on the concept of i-desires. Interestingly, some philosophers have already mentioned immersion as a reason to accept the mental state of i-desires (Velleman 2000; Doggett and Egan 2007). Even more interestingly for the purpose of this thesis, these authors argue that i-desires are a necessary concept to explain the imaginative immersion that is inherently connected to the performance of fictional actions. Velleman and Doggett and Egan argue that when we perform fictional actions,

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75 It is important to note that imaginative desires are thus not the same as what Grant Tavinor calls 'fictional motivations'. Tavinor rightly ascribes fictional motivations to videogame characters (Tavinor 2017b, 5). Imaginative desires, on the other hand, are to be ascribed to actual videogame players, and are a consequence of their projecting into the situation of a certain fictional character or proxy within the game.

we are motivated by desires that are internal to the fictional world in which we perform these actions (Velleman 2000; Doggett and Egan 2007). Not accepting the existence of i-desires, they say, "rules out a familiar sort of imaginative immersion" (Doggett and Egan 2007, 8). They do not mention videogames, however, and the focus of their argument lies on children's immersion in their games of make-believe. In the following section, I argue that the specific kind of immersion in videogame worlds, which Calleja calls incorporation (2011), might strengthen the relation between i-desires and pretend behaviour.

5.3.2 I-Desires and Fictional Actions

Recall the gamer who fictionally runs away from zombies. The fact that they know these monsters do not really exist and that they do not really run away (but merely press buttons) can be explained by saying that their running away is a fictional or pretend action that is motivated by the imaginative desire to get away from these monsters. Opponents of i-desires, however, most famously Nichols and Stich, suggest a different explanation for pretend actions that does not rely on i-desires. They say people perform pretend behaviour because they have the real desire to pretend, or to behave in a way that is similar to how someone would behave if the imagined situation were actual (Nichols and Stich 2000, 128). Kind defends Nichols and Stich's influential solution and supports it with an example: "When my son imagines that he is a dog, he wants to act as dogs act. Given that he believes that dogs say 'woof woof', his desire to act like a dog motivates him to say 'woof woof'" (Kind 2011, 433). If pretenders are motivated to act by the real desire to pretend or make it fictional that they do something, i-desires are obsolete.

Velleman, however, argues that someone motivated to pretend by such a real desire would always "remain securely outside the fiction, thinking about it as such" (Velleman 2000, 256-257). Doggett and Egan agree and state that these real desires would rule out the immersion we often experience: they do not allow for "'losing yourself' in what you are pretending" (Doggett and Egan 2007, 8). It strikes them as implausible that every pretender would have to reflect on the fictional world from outside to decide what actions to perform within this world. Kind dismisses this worry and states that even if we do not like the real-desire solution to pretend behaviour, it does not mean this solution is not correct: "The problem is not (or, at least, need not be) that the explanation goes wrong, but, rather, that giving any sort of explanation demystifies the action and, in doing so, robs the action of its sense of romance, its comic elements, or its whimsy" (Kind 2011, 435). Kind thus maintains that i-desires are not necessary to explain pretence.

Again, Kind's argument might work well for children's make-believe games, on which the literature on pretence focuses (cf. Nichols and Stich 2000, 117), but is not as obvious in the case of all videogames. After all, as described before, many videogames are characterized by a special kind of immersion or incorporation, in which players actually

take on the role of a character or proxy within the fictional world. When a child barks in pretend play, it indeed does so because it wants to pretend to be a dog. In contrast, when a player shoots zombies, it does not seem to be the case that they are guided by a desire to pretend to shoot or a desire to make it fictional that they shoot zombies. After all, this would require them to step out of their character every time they decide on what they want to do, after which they would perform the preferred action in the guise of the character. Note that children do this all the time, for example when they say 'Now I'll be the cop who catches the thief!' when playing a make-believe game of cops and robbers. This marks an important difference between children's make-believe games and videogames. While children really do have the desire to pretend and actually devise what they want to (fictionally) do from outside of the fictional world, players of videogames are often incorporated in a fictional world and form desires within this world based on the fictional context of their character (or the context surrounding the subject position they constructed for themselves whilst playing). Therefore, it is harder to rephrase the i-desires that motivate players' in-game actions as real desires. Again, the immersive videogame experience seems to provide a stronger argument for the existence of i-desires than the examples of children's games that are mentioned in discussions about imaginative desires.

5.3.3 Gameplay Desires and Immersion-Fuelled I-Desires

Even if we do not accept the theory that the desires that prompt our actions in videogames are real desires to pretend to do something, there is another way in which these desires could be real desires. After all, as pointed out before, besides offering their players fictional worlds to interact with, games also have a non-fictional, competitive component: "[T]hey consist of real rules with which players actually interact" and "winning or losing a game is a real event" (Juul 2005, 1). As such, games do not merely engage players by offering them possibilities for role-playing or for simulating a life other than the player's own life, but also by offering them challenges. Games challenge their players to overcome difficult obstacles, defeat monsters, collect treasures, etc. And thus, many of the desires players feel towards a videogame are felt towards its actual gameplay elements: players desire to finish a game, beat high scores, successfully overcome the obstacles within a given time, etc. As mentioned in chapter three, such gameplay desires often have nothing to do with the game's fictional dimension, but are rather caused by the players' actual concerns and aimed at real-life events: they are ludic rather than imaginative. In light of this, the desire to shoot the zombies in *Uncharted*, for example, might simply be an instrumental desire that serves the higher desire to finish the level (and to be able to brag about possessing the skill necessary to finish this level). This kind of gameplay desire is narrative-external: it is not part of the fictional world of the game, and must be attributed to the actual player, not to the player-character or any player-constructed proxy within the game world. There might

thus be no reason to call the desire to finish a game and desires related to this goal 'i-desires'. The question then becomes whether we cannot simply explain every desire felt by videogame players as a real desire to successfully finish (a part of) the game (or a desire instrumental to this desire).

At first sight, this real-desire explanation seems to be a disenchanting description that goes against the phenomenological experience of players who feared the zombies and shot them because of it. To many players of *Uncharted*, the desire to shoot the zombies feels like the narrative-internal or immersion-fuelled desire to leave a wretched, zombie-infested place. To them, it might seem absurd to say that their actions are merely motivated by the desire to finish a level in a videogame, a desire that is clearly situated outside of the horrifying world they feel they, at least temporarily, inhabit. As Kind says, however, the explanations for our actions and desires are often more demystifying than we would like them to be (Kind 2011, 435). Maybe not just some, but all players of *Uncharted* shoot zombies simply because they desire to play the game by its rules, and not because they want to save Elena or kill the creatures.

Then again, the *Uncharted* example is hard to evaluate because in this case the immersion-fuelled desires lead to the same actions as the usual gameplay desires would. This often happens, as it seems to be good practice in videogame development to make sure gameplay desires and immersion-fuelled desires are aligned. Many developers ensure that save points, for example, are not only gameplay elements for the player, but are also narratively embedded in the fictional world and thus do not feel out of place from the perspective of the character. In *Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones* (Ubisoft 2005), players can save the game quite non-intrusively by stopping and drinking at a fountain in the game world. A clearer picture of immersion-fuelled desires is achieved when these desires clash with what is desirable from a gameplay-perspective. *BioShock* (2K Boston 2007) is infamous for eliciting such a clash. This game gives the player the choice to kill certain characters for power (thus making these killings desirable from a gameplay-perspective), while these characters are actually represented as innocent little girls (thus, hopefully, making the player hesitant to kill them from the perspective of the role they take on within the game's fictional world). Tavinor describes his choice whether to kill one of these girls as follows: "Those big eyes, pigtail, and the pretty flock; I couldn't do it. Instead, I decided to save her, and as I did so, [...] an emotion of sympathy and brotherly care swept over me" (Tavinor 2009a, 130). Besides real desires towards the game as a challenge, there thus also seem to be videogame desires felt from within the fictional world, towards narrative-internal elements instead of gameplay elements.

In conclusion, interactive, self-involving kinds of fiction like videogames are able to make their appreciators feel two kinds of desires which do not arise during the appreciation of non-interactive fictional media. Firstly, by virtue of their immersive and interactively fictional nature, videogames cause narrative-internal, imaginative desires that can be ascribed to the I-in-the-gameworld players construct whilst engaging with the game's fictional world. Secondly, by virtue of their nature as challenges, games

cause real, narrative-external desires concerning the gameplay they offer. In the next two sections I will describe the importance and usefulness of recognizing these two kinds of desires that are at play within the interactive fiction experience, both when designing videogames and when morally evaluating player actions.

(I-)DESIRES AS DESIGN TOOLS

In this part, I will elaborate on something that was already hinted at in the previous section: the fact that the distinction between gameplay and narrative desires is a useful conceptual tool for game designers. It is, moreover, a tool that is already often used in game design, although without explicitly being identified as such. When designing games, creators can choose to appeal to players' gameplay desires or to design an immersive world that makes them experience i-desires, or, ideally, both. Constructing situations in which players are asked to make decisions based on who they are within the game's fictional world, and thus act on their imaginative desires, will strengthen their immersion in and emotional connection to this world. Moreover, this also gives players the feeling that their choices matter in a more salient way than when they are just making decisions based on how to finish the game: not merely their 'high score' is on the line, but the very lives of many characters, and the future of the fictional world. A game that does this masterfully is *Life is Strange* (Dontnod Entertainment, 2015). In this game, none of the decisions players make in the fictional world is crucial from a gameplay perspective. For example, whether players choose to save their best friend (or lover, depending on the player's choices) Chloe, or rather save all the people living in the village of Arcadia Bay, they will finish the game successfully. Players are thus invited to make decisions that are completely based on their fictional context and to witness the far-reaching consequences their choices have within the fictional world of the game without any interference of narrative-external considerations.

Indeed, appealing to players' i-desires like *Life is Strange* does can make for very interesting and immersive game experiences. However, focusing solely on narrative-internal, imaginative desires might also be detrimental to the replayability of the game. Having gone through the game by having made all the choices that they deemed feasible for their I-in-the-gameworld to make, players might have no reason at all to explore the same fictional world again. Unless, of course, there are still unknown parts of the game to explore, or new challenges for them to overcome. The desire to finish the game on a higher difficulty, get a higher score, or make different decisions to explore other game areas and gameplay possibilities are only some examples of (real) desires that can make players replay a game.[76] Many popular game platforms (such as Steam, PlayStation 4, and Xbox One), encourage or even force game developers to make players more likely to replay their games by adding 'achievements' to them: extra challenges the completion of which rewards players with virtual medals, trophies, or points.

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76 Cfr. Juul 2005, 139. Here, Juul describes how experienced players tend to "shift their focus from the fictional world of the game to the game as a set of rules".

Additionally, when appealing to both gameplay and imaginative desires, game designers can choose to align these desires, or to make them clash. Designers often choose to align these desires for the most immersive fictional experience, such as when making sure that actions the player might desire to perform from a gameplay perspective (such as finishing levels and saving the game progress) do not interfere with what players desire from within the perspective of the game's fictional world. Typically and ideally, the actions players need to perform to finish a game are also justified and motivated from within the fictional world (cf. Gibson Bond 2014, 57-58). When playing *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* (Nintendo 2003), for example, players are motivated to go on a quest to save the kidnapped little girl Aryll not only because they need to do this to finish the game, but also because Aryll is their (that is, player-character Link's) beloved sister. Related to this is the widespread design practice in which gameplay desires are narratively embedded in the game by presenting game menus or user interfaces as part of the fictional world (cf. Tavinor 2009a, 82). In the previous section, I already mentioned the way players can save their game in *Prince of Persia* by drinking at a fountain in the fictional world. Another example is *Grand Theft Auto IV* (Rockstar North 2008), in which the game menu can be accessed through the player-character's smartphone, thus aligning the player's real desire to open the menu with the character's desire to look at their phone.

On the other hand, designers might choose to make immersive-fuelled desires clash, or at least potentially incompatible, with gameplay desires. By doing this, they can create unique and compelling dilemmas for players, in which players have to act either on the basis of what they, as a character within the fictional world, i-desire, or on the basis of what they desire to achieve within the game as a challenge. Many games with 'karma' or 'morality' systems do this: they reward players with more power to overcome the game's challenges when they make decisions that might be undesirable from a fictional perspective, such as killing innocent people. As mentioned above, *BioShock* famously elicits such a clash between i-desires and gameplay desires. Players can also experience this clash in games like *inFAMOUS* (Sucker Punch Productions, 2009), which gives more explosive powers to players who are mean to citizens in need, and *Prototype* (Radical Entertainment 2009), which lets players heal their character by brutally killing innocent bystanders. Such games can cause clashes between imaginative and goal-related desires that create tension in the player, which itself can become an inherent part of the game, as another obstacle to overcome (Lankoski 2012, 48).

PLAYERS' IMMORAL (I-)DESIRES

The distinction between real, gameplay desires and narrative-internal i-desires is not only useful when designing compelling player experiences, but also when morally evaluating these experiences. Videogames are often under severe moral scrutiny because of the violent acts they invite their players to perform, like hit-and-runs, mass shootings, or even downright torture. As mentioned earlier, players of videogames do not of course really commit these immoral acts, but only fictionally do so within the world

of the videogame. Most people would agree that no one is actually harmed by acts of virtual murder (Luck 2009, 31). As Tavinor says, "a violent videogame no more involves real violence than a zombie movie involves real zombies" (Tavinor 2009a, 151). As a consequence, the moral panic surrounding videogames often does not stem from the fact that players frequently perform acts of fictional violence, but rather from the fact that they apparently want to perform them (cf. Young 2014). Indeed, even if violent in-game acts are merely fictional, are not the desires or attitudes underlying these acts morally condemnable?

First of all, a lot of the violent actions performed in videogames are based on gameplay desires. Many players simply play games as challenges, while not or only minimally engaging with their fictional worlds. These players do not really desire to engage in fictional acts of killing or shooting, but rather want to perform (real) acts of pressing controller buttons to overcome obstacles in the videogame. As such, their desires are hardly morally worrisome, even though they might result in virtual murder. But how to judge the immoral desires of players who actually do engage with the videogame as a fiction? These players indeed might express statements like 'I want to kill everyone in sight'. As argued in this subchapter, however, the expressed desire is not truly the player's in this case: the 'I' in this statement does not refer to the player, but rather to the 'I-in-the-gameworld' the player has constructed. The desire is felt from within the fictional world of the game and only arises because the player temporarily takes on a specific role within this world. It is an imaginative desire to kill, which is as much part of the fictional world of the game as the virtual killing itself is.[77]

In conclusion, invoking i-desires might not only soften the moral condemnation of videogames, but also explain why non-psychopaths can enjoy violent games. Players do not act violently in games because they really want to be violent, nor because they want to pretend or vividly imagine being violent. Rather, they perform violent in-game acts either because they play the game as a challenge without too much regard for its fictional world, or because they imaginatively take on the role of a non-existent character and form desire-like imaginings on the basis of a fictional context. If they are gameplay desires, the player's desires have little to do with the immoral actions that are represented in the game's fictional world. If they are i-desires, immoral in-game desires only have moral significance within the world of the fiction and are not felt outside of this world.

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77 In his article on the 'gamer's dilemma', Morgan Luck points out that there is a general consensus that fictional, in-game actions of rape or pedophilia are morally detestable, even though acts of virtual murder are often taken to be morally permissible (Luck 2009, 31). The concept of i-desires might help us understand this dual standard when judging game actions. After all, while acts of virtual murder are likely the result of imaginative desires, and of a player taking on a specific role within the fictional world, the desires underlying actions like virtual rape or pedophilia are usually perceived as belonging to the player themselves. The moral uneasiness surrounding virtual rape might thus stem from the fact that virtual rape is typically taken to be the result of real, immoral sexual desires, and not of mere 'as if' arousal (Gooskens 2011, 42). As Garry Young says, "it is difficult to believe that someone could play a game involving virtual rape or pedophilia without harbouring the desire to engage in the act for real" (Young 2014, 136).

5.3.4 Conclusion

The desires players feel when playing videogames and performing fictional actions within game worlds give good reason to reappraise the concept of i-desires, even if we do not accept the usefulness of this concept when it comes to literary, theatrical, or cinematic fictions. Doggett and Egan suggest that, if it can be shown that not every pretender is a "belief-consulting, desire-consulting actor, remaining securely outside the fiction" (Doggett and Egan 2007, 9), then real desires cannot exhaustively explain all instances of pretend behaviour we perform in fictional contexts. Indeed, I suggest that the desires caused by narrative elements in videogames are felt from within the fictional world and are the cause of our actions in this world. Moreover, I have argued that the concept of i-desires is especially helpful when describing, morally evaluating, and even designing videogame experiences. Above all, however, I hope to have shown that the widely criticized concept of desire-like imagining itself and the arguments in favour of it should be reconsidered or reformulated in light of interactive fiction experiences.

5.4 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I discussed and re-examined the concepts of fictional actions and imaginative desires in light of the self-involvement and incorporation in fictional worlds that is characteristic for many videogames. Past philosophical discussions about these concepts have often either overgeneralized or ignored the specific way in which some works of fiction can involve appreciators in their fictional worlds. Walton argued that self-involvement, *de se* imagination, or imaginative participation is present in all fiction experiences, thus being unable to pinpoint what exactly is unique in self-involving interactive fictions such as videogames. Philosophers such as thought theorist Peter Lamarque and opponents of the concept of imaginative desires, on the other hand, often neglected this kind of self-involvement when discussing our emotions, actions, and desires towards fiction.

In the end, both the limits and specificities of self-involving interactive fictions are significant when discussing our interactions with fiction. Moreover, although Robson and Meskin use the term 'self-involving interactive fictions' to denote a certain kind or category of fictional works, it is important to keep in mind that this category of fictional works is dependent on the imaginative activities of their appreciators. In a last, concluding part of this thesis, I will use the imaginative 'doubling' of the player as an I-in-the-fictional-world that takes place in many videogames as a basis to synthesize my conclusions from previous chapters. I will offer a framework that integrates videogames within the larger context of findings within philosophy of fiction, but also acknowledges the differences that are inherent to different categories of works of fiction, be they interactive, self-involving, or not. Only then, I believe, can we comprehensively discuss the emotions, actions, and desires we feel towards fiction.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to examine and clarify the relation between imagination, fiction, emotions, and actions. More specifically, I have re-examined existing philosophical discussions on this relation in light of the interactive fiction experiences offered by videogames. In the process, I noted that the general claims philosophers of fiction tend to make about emotions, actions, and desires towards fiction are often not applicable to the interactive and self-involving fiction experiences offered by many videogames. One of the more successful fiction theories to apply to literature, theatre, film, and videogames alike, is that of Kendall Walton (1990). The broadness of Walton's make-believe theory and his wide-ranging interpretation of fiction as representation have made it possible to apply many of his insights to videogame experiences, although he never talked about these specifically in *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1990). Yet, as discussed throughout the chapters of this thesis, Kathleen Stock has a good point when she says that what Walton's theory "gains in scope, it loses in ability to make satisfying distinctions" (Stock 2016, 206). In the quest for a single, unified theory of fiction one easily falls into the trap of erasing many of the particularities of specific fiction experiences: the 'immersion' one might talk about with regard to literature is different from the self-involvement and the feeling of presence in videogame worlds; the emotions we feel towards literary or movie characters cannot motivate us to perform certain actions towards these characters like emotions towards videogame characters are likely to do; and the desires we feel towards events in non-interactive works of fiction are rarely felt from a perspective internal to the presented fictional world like it is often the case for videogame players.

In this thesis, I tried to incorporate the interactive experience of videogames within the larger field of philosophy of fiction while doing justice to the particularities of different kinds of fiction experiences. For this purpose, I reconsidered the paradox of fiction, clarified the problem of the paradox of interactive fiction, and modified the concepts of self-involvement in fiction, (quasi-)emotions towards fiction, fictional actions, and imaginative desires in light of the role they might play in interactive fiction experiences. In the following, I will distill from my findings different categories of experiences of works of fiction, based on whether or not they are interactive and self-involving, and describe how imaginative participation is not, as Walton argues, equally connected to each of these experiences.

6.1 Summary

Before making the necessary distinctions to describe and explain our interactions with different kinds of fictional worlds, I will summarize the most important conclusions of the chapters of this dissertation that contribute to my categorization of fiction experiences.

In chapter one, I argued that, for investigating how people react to and interact with fictional worlds, it is more interesting to interpret the fictional as that which the appreciator imagines within a certain game of make-believe, rather than what the creator of a work intended to be imagined. This is especially the case for works of fiction that allow their appreciators to decide what becomes fictionally true within the presented fictional world, such as when playing videogames. Using a largely Waltonian framework, I described how videogames offer fiction experiences: experiences in which the player uses the videogame as a prop to imagine a certain fictional world, and events happening within this world.

In chapter two, I focused on the way imagination is involved in the fictional experience of videogames. I showed how, even if many elements of (AR and VR) videogames can be directly perceived or believed by their players, these elements can still be part of a coherent fictional or imaginative experience. After all, actual elements like the player's real movements or immediate surroundings (in AR) are, in these games, still props which mandate the player to imagine of them that they are part of the presented fictional world. Most importantly, this chapter already emphasized the importance of *de se* imagining within the videogame experience. Following Matravers and Currie, I argued against the Waltonian idea that our appreciation of fictional works always involves *de se* imaginings. The *de se* imaginings Walton identifies as present in all fiction experiences are actually dependent on the occurrence of metafiction and fourth wall breaks (cf. Matravers 2014, 116). As Currie says, most fiction experiences merely mandate us to imagine the described or shown events, but not that we are present in the fictional world to witness these events (Currie 1995, 179). Self-involving make-believe games are, however, often crucial when experiencing interactive works of fiction such as videogames, which make the player imagine not just the events that are represented to happen within the fictional game world, but also their involvement in these events, and their presence within this world.

In chapter three, I investigated the emotional experience of videogame worlds. I applied the problem of the paradox of fiction to interactive fiction experiences, and reassessed the three most influential solutions to the paradox of fiction in light of these experiences: the illusion theory, the make-believe theory, and the thought theory. I noted that many philosophical arguments on emotions towards fiction do not take into account or even simply reject the possibility of these emotions motivating the performance of certain actions towards their intentional objects. When applying the paradox of fiction to works in which appreciators can interact with the presented world, it becomes apparent that the paradox of fiction not only applies to our emotions towards fiction, but to the way we interact with fictional objects in general. At the end of this chapter, I acknowledged the dual nature of videogames as both representing fictional worlds and as actual challenges. I discussed two attitudes players can take on when engaging with a videogame: the fictive or make-believe attitude and the ludic or gameplay attitude. Although these attitudes can occur simultaneously and are similar to one another, in that they create a game space that is bracketed from everyday life and make-believe (albeit of a different kind) might play a role in both, I ultimately emphasized their differences. After all, while

the fictional attitude consists of imagining a fictional world, imaginatively taking on the role of a character within this world, and imaginatively engaging with fictional objects, characters, and events, the ludic attitude is directed at the actual events of winning and losing, and the exhibition of real-life skills.

In chapter four, I discussed the paradox of interactive fiction, or the question how we can interact with videogame characters, objects, and events. As it is impossible to act on fictional objects, and the objects represented in videogames are fictional, it should be impossible to act on videogame objects. Yet, players of videogames interact with the worlds represented in these games all the time. I considered two possible solutions to this paradox. The first one consists in saying that the game objects at which player actions are aimed are not fictional, but rather real, computer-generated or virtual objects (Aarseth 2007: Sageng 2012; Chalmers 2017). Especially Sageng's variant of this solution is of interest here. He argues that, when we interact with videogame characters, the intentional objects of our actions are actually the computer-generated graphical shapes and colours that represent these characters, and of which we imagine they are these characters. The intention behind our videogame actions is always to create a certain graphical representation, of which we might then imagine that it is a fictional event (Sageng 2012, 230). I indeed acknowledged that this description of game actions is applicable to at least some player actions. In the end, however, I believe the connection between emotions and actions towards fictional game characters is often better explained by making use of Walton's make-believe theory (1990). Based on the Waltonian fiction theory, we can solve the paradox of interactive fiction by saying that the actions we perform towards fictional game objects are not real actions, but fictional ones. Fictional videogame characters are then actually the intentional object of both the emotions players and the actions they perform: players do not intend to make shapes disappear from a screen, but actually aim their fictional actions towards the zombies that scare them. Players who fictionally shoot zombies in a videogame play a self-involving game of make-believe. They imagine of themselves that they are shooting zombies, by using their actual actions of pressing buttons as a prop.

In chapter five, I elaborated on the self-involvement of players in the make-believe games they play based on videogame representations. Unlike Walton, I identified self-involvement as a unique characteristic of some, but not all, make-believe games. Self-involving imaginings are typically connected to the videogame experience, and more specifically to what is described in game studies as the incorporation in the fictional world of the game (Calleja 2011), or as the adoption of a subject position within this world (Vella 2015). Players of games do not just imagine the represented events taking place within the game world, but also imagine being present in this world and being able to change the course of these events. In light of this imaginative self-involvement evoked by most contemporary videogames, I re-evaluated the two philosophical concepts of fictional actions and imaginative desires. I concluded that discussions on these concepts typically suffer from either a disregard of the possibility of incorporation in fictional worlds, or, in the case of Waltonian fiction theory, an overgeneralization of self-involve-

ment as present in any fiction experience. In the end, I described both fictional actions and imaginative desires as only occurring if people take on an internal position to the fictional world, by using themselves as a reflexive prop and imagining of themselves and their own actions that they are part of the represented world.

6.2 Imaginative Participation and Experiences of Fiction

In this dissertation, I made use of a largely Waltonian method of describing the experience of works of fiction as the playing of make-believe games. This allowed for a specific focus on the imaginative activities of fiction appreciators. I did, however, argue that Walton's way of describing make-believe games, specifically as games that always involve imaginings about the one who plays them, obscures some of the differences between the way we experience non-interactive fictions such as novels and interactive fictions such as videogames. The same critique is applicable to the philosophical ways of conceptualizing fictional actions and imaginative desires. In the following, I will make a distinction between different kinds of fiction experiences to be able to better account for the particularities of the imaginative experiences of different kinds of works, such as novels, plays, movies, or videogames, and the imaginative participation of the appreciator within these works. Although I will describe all of these experiences in terms of the playing of make-believe games, I will distinguish different kinds of make-believe games, based on whether they are (non-)interactive and (non-)self-involving. It is important to emphasize that the following is a categorization not of different kinds of works of fiction, but of different kinds of experiences of such works. In the majority of cases, these experiences will indeed be mandated by the works they are experiences of. It is impossible, for example, to interact with the world that is represented in a strictly non-interactive work of fiction. However, in line with what has been said in the chapters of this thesis, I believe that the nature of a work of fiction cannot always entirely determine the fictional experience the work will give rise to. Ultimately, whether the experience of a work of fiction is self-involving or not often depends on the appreciator, the way they perceive the intentions of the creator of the work of fiction, and the way they use this work and, potentially, themselves as a prop in the game of make-believe they are playing.

First of all, there are fiction experiences in which the appreciator is unable to change anything or make anything fictionally true within the world that is represented in the work they appreciate, and do not imagine to be present in this world. In fact, this kind of fiction experience has been the focus of the vast majority of works situated in the philosophy of fiction. Typically, such experiences are evoked by non-interactive paintings, or works of literature, theatre, and film. The imaginings involved are not *de se*, and thus not directed at the appreciator themselves, but merely at what is represented by the work. Currie describes them as impersonal imaginings that certain events occur (Currie 1995, 179). Both the emotions and desires involved in such fiction experiences

are, ultimately, fairly uncomplicated. The emotions are directed towards the imagined fictional characters and events. As discussions on the paradox of fiction, and especially the defenders of the thought theory, have already shown, there does not have to be anything paradoxical about these emotions: they are simply emotions that are not accompanied by beliefs, but find their origin in vivid imaginings or thoughts that are evoked by descriptions and/or images within works of fiction. Likewise, the desires involved in such experiences of fiction are best described as actual desires towards fictional characters and events. As opponents of the concept of imaginative desires have argued, desires we have towards the fates of characters in novels and movies are typically narrative-external and real: rather than fictionally wanting something to happen, appreciators of non-interactive works of fiction simply want something to happen "within the fiction" (cf. Kind 2016b, 172). To sum up, a first kind of fiction experience is non-self-involving and not in any way interactive: appreciators merely imagine the represented events to happen, without being able to change these and without imagining to be present while they unfold. Despite being the focus of philosophers of fiction in the last decades, these fiction experiences ultimately seem to be the least compatible with Walton's influential fiction theory. After all, Walton presumes fiction experiences to be characterized by a kind of participation in the fictional world that is simply absent in many experiences of novels, movies, plays, and paintings.

It should be noted that the experience of non-interactive works of fiction can, in some cases, involve *de se* imaginings, and thus a higher degree of participation in the fictional world. This is what Walton described in his now famous example of the *Green Slime* movie: Charles feels threatened by the slime, because he imagines of himself that the green slime is slithering towards him. Likewise, a novel like *Gulliver's Travels* mandates its readers to imagine of themselves that they are reading the journal of Lemuel Gulliver. Walton would, in these cases, talk about participation and involvement in the fictional world: Charles is fictionally looking at the slime, and the reader of *Gulliver's Travels* is fictionally reading Gulliver's journal. In light of the interactive fiction experiences that have been discussed within this dissertation, the kind of self-involvement connected to cases such as the *Green Slime* and *Gulliver's Travels* is still very limited. First of all, the appreciator might imagine to be present in the fictional world, and to be susceptible to what happens within this world. But they often do this only temporarily (not during the entire movie, but only when the slime monster is shown to be slithering towards the camera), and not to the point of also imagining to be able to influence the represented states of affairs. Secondly, the so-called self-involvement is often not even imaginative in these cases, but a mere consequence of the appreciator temporarily being under the illusion that they can be affected by characters within the fictional world. Indeed, Walton's very example of Charles and the *Green Slime* could be a case of Charles being deceived by the realistic representation of a monster crawling towards the camera, and being afraid because of it, rather than of his imagining that he is in the presence of the monster. To conclude, there might be non-interactive fiction experiences which involve *de se* imaginings, but these are ultimately characterized not

by participation or what Calleja (2012) would call incorporation, but by a limited kind of immersion or imagined presence within the represented, fictional world.

The fiction experiences that are the subject of this thesis, on the other hand, are characterized by a distinct possibility of shaping the fates of fictional characters, influencing the course of fictional events, or manipulating objects within fictional worlds. As such, I described them as evoking the paradox of interactive fiction: within interactive fiction experiences, appreciators act on objects that only have imagined existence. The main problem addressed here is one that Kendall Walton already acknowledged when he said that, between the real and the fictional world, no cross-world interactions can be possible (Walton 1990, 195). Throughout the last two chapters, I acknowledged that there are two ways in which players can interact with the fictional environments represented in videogames, depending on whether they take on a perspective that is internal or external to the game world. Therefore, I will here distinguish two interactive fiction experiences: ones in which appreciators manipulate what happens in the fictional world from a position that is external to this world, and ones in which appreciators play a self-involving make-believe game and (fictionally) interact with the world that is represented from a perspective internal to this world.

First of all, appreciators might take on a perspective external to the fictional world that is interactively represented. In videogame experiences, this happens most often because the game does not present an internal perspective for the player to take on: games like *Tetris*, *The Sims*, and *Rise of Nations* let players manipulate fictional worlds without giving them clear roles to fulfil within the represented world (cf. Tavinor 2009a, 72). However, players themselves might also choose, for whatever reason, to play a game from an external perspective. They might, for example, not identify with the character they are controlling, but approach the game as an experiment to see what they can make fictionally true in the game. They control their character from the outside as a kind of puppet, or even cheat and exploit bugs in the game code. These players are not part of the fictional world, whilst interacting with the world in question. That does not mean that there is so-called 'cross-world interaction', however. After all, in these cases, the interactions are with the medium that represents the fictional world rather than this world itself: as Sageng describes, these players manipulate graphical shapes that are generated by a computer, to make things fictionally true in the represented world (Sageng 2012, 230). The props involved are only the graphical shapes on the screen. The players themselves are not props: they do not use their own body or actions to imagine that they are someone who is present within the fictional world. There is simply no incorporation or 'I-in-the-gameworld' connected to the fiction experience. When these players use the first person while engaging with fictional worlds in this interactive but non-self-involving way, they do not refer to any proxy or character within the fictional world, but just to their actual selves. These kinds of fiction experiences can be clarified by comparing them to children's game of make-believe in which children use props, but are not themselves props. Take, for example, the child who is making a Superman and a Batman doll fight: it is not true, in the fictional world created by the

child, that Superman and Batman are slammed into each other by a giant child-like creature. The child itself, and its actions, are not part of the fiction. The child is making it fictionally true that the superheroes fight, but is not fictionally making them fight. Likewise, when a player flips a tetromino, they do not do so fictionally: they merely flip the computer-generated shape of the tetromino, making it fictional that, in the world of *Tetris*, a tetromino turns. The actions of the player cause fictional events in the game world, but are not themselves direct interactions with this world. The desires that underlie such player actions are simply real, narrative-external desires to make something true in the fiction. The participation of the fiction appreciator, in cases of non-self-involving, interactive fiction experiences, is thus still limited: although they can change what happens within the fictional world, they do not do so by entering this world. In the end, they are just themselves, manipulating fictional worlds with real actions performed on the medium representing these worlds.

Secondly, appreciators might take on a perspective internal to the fictional worlds that are interactively represented. These kind of self-involving fiction experiences often evoke first person statements such as 'I shot a zombie' and 'I saved the alien'. And this is where the paradox of interactive fiction emerges: How can anyone say to be shooting a zombie, if this creature exists only fictionally? In this thesis, I referred to the imaginative participation that Walton describes as present in any fiction experience to formulate an answer to this paradox. In cases where the appreciator interacts with fictional particulars, this appreciator not only uses the work of fiction as a prop, but also themselves: they imagine of themselves that they are part of the world they imagine based on the work of fiction. Compare this to a child who plays a make-believe game by using their action of cradling a doll to imagine that they are cradling a baby. In this case, not only the doll, but also the child and their movements are used as props to imagine certain fictional events taking place. When playing videogames, players use their own movements on a controller in unison with the representations on the screen to imagine that they are exploring fictional worlds and interacting with fictional objects, characters, and events. They imaginatively take on a subject position in the fictional world: they are incorporated in this world, or form a certain I-in-the-fictional-game-world (cf. Calleja 2011; Vella 2015). As they become a part of the fictional world, their interactions with the fictional objects and characters in this gameworld are fictional as well. Players of *Uncharted*, for example, imaginatively project into the situation of someone who shoots a zombie in the fictional world of the game, by actually pressing buttons on a controller, which they use as a prop to imagine that they, in the guise of Nathan Drake, are shooting a zombie. The desires that are connected to these kind of fiction experiences, and that underlie the player's fictional actions, are imaginative desires. They are desire-like imaginings the player has by projecting into someone in the fictional world who has a certain desire, for example to shoot zombies. The intentional objects of both the imaginative desires and fictional actions in these fiction experiences are not computer-generated shapes, pixels, or polygons, but actual fictional particulars, in this case the zombies. Note that these fiction experiences still do not involve cross-

world interaction from the real world to the fictional one. Players become fictional themselves and imaginatively adopt the role of someone within the fictional world, making the actions they perform within these worlds equally fictional.

To sum up, imaginative participation is not characteristic of all fiction experiences, even if we define these experiences in terms of make-believe games like Walton does. The non-interactive, non-self-involving fiction experience typically evoked by novels and movies does not have any role for the appreciator to play within the presented fictional world. Quite rarely, and often through metafictional devices, these works might evoke non-interactive, self-involving fiction experiences, and the appreciator somehow imagines to be involved in the represented events. Very often, however, such experiences are not fictional, but rather illusory in nature. Moreover, what is involved in these experiences seems to be a mere imaginative presence in the represented world rather than participation in this world. Lastly, there are the interactive, but non-self-involving fiction experiences of appreciators who approach interactive representations from a perspective that is external to the represented world. Again, however, these involve no participation in the fictional world, but rather an external manipulation of what is fictionally true, through actual interactions with the medium that represents the fictional world. What I conclude is that imaginative participation is best defined as the imaginative adoption of a role or subject position within a fictional world, which is possible by the appreciator using their own body and actions as props to imagine that they are present within this world and interact with its inhabitants. A paradigmatic example of this kind of participation, which is often overlooked in philosophical discussions on fiction, is found in the videogame experience. When playing videogames, players can enter fictional game worlds and shoot zombies, save aliens, and race anti-gravity cars. This imaginative participation might evoke a paradox at first sight, but is actually not in contradiction with the idea that it is impossible to interact with what exists only fictionally. After all, as argued in this thesis, the only way for us to be able to shoot zombies is to do so fictionally.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

In this thesis, I discussed how videogames fit within the field of research of philosophy of fiction, and in what ways it is possible for us to interact with objects, characters, and events that exist fictionally. In light of the differences between experiences of videogames and those of literature and movies, I re-examined and reformulated the concepts of imaginary self-involvement, fictional actions, and imaginative desires. Much more, however, can be said about these concepts, and the way they were reformulated in this thesis calls for further investigation.

A first potential future research project would be to explore more precisely how the actions and self-involvement of players are linked to (their interpretation of) the intentions of the game's designers and the way the game system renders the world of

the game. Designers of videogames might influence what players imagine and do by, for example, designing visible affordances, placing markers on a map as waypoints for the player, or rewarding players with in-game currency or experience points to indicate that whatever they did might be worthy of repetition. Likewise, the game system, and its potential malfunctions, can influence the way players experience and act in the presented fictional world. This thesis already hinted at how the fictional world of a game is often formed through a complex interplay of player, designer, and game system. This interplay can undoubtedly be further clarified.

A second subject that calls for further research would be the way in which the concepts of fictional actions and imaginative desires might influence moral judgements of videogame experiences. In the last chapter of this thesis, I already discussed how fictional actions and imaginative desires might diminish the moral concern surrounding players' violent in-game actions. I did not, however, look into the role of the game designer and their moral accountability for the fictional actions and desires players are sometimes mandated to imaginatively adopt. After all, even if the player can isolate their in-game actions and desires from their real life, it might be morally condemnable to ask players to imagine performing or desiring violent, dishonest, or indecent activities. It would be interesting, in this regard, to confront the experience of videogames with arguments about the immorality of imaginings (Cooke 2014; Smuts 2016) and about the moral responsibility of the designers of representations that mandate potentially immoral imaginings (Bartel and Cremaldi 2018).

Thirdly, as this dissertation focused on the imaginative experience of videogame worlds, the role of illusion in self-involving interactive fiction has not here been examined in depth. I acknowledged that, especially within virtual reality, players often do not merely imagine the represented world to really exist, but are rather under the illusion that it really does exist. Such experiences that are governed by illusions or false beliefs undoubtedly evoke emotions in players and motivate them to perform actions differently than the fictional experiences described in this thesis do. A more thorough application of the illusion theory, which is generally rejected as a solution to the paradox of fiction, to the videogame experience might shed light on such emotions and actions that are based in illusory experiences of virtual worlds.

Lastly, it was outside the scope of this dissertation to investigate the way make-believe is involved in non-ludic virtual environments, such as those of social media, training simulations, and everyday software like text processors. Due to my focus on virtually presented fictions, I did not account for the interesting interplay between fictional, nonfictional, and nonrepresentational elements within our experiences of virtual environments in general. This interplay is an especially interesting subject for further research because the distinction between the nonrepresentational and the representational, between nonfiction and fiction, and between truth and lies, is more complex in virtual environments than it is in literature, theatre, and film. It is not only unclear, but also underresearched, what role make-believe plays within our experiences of these environments, which are often interpreted as actual tools or sub-areas of the

real world rather than as fictional environments. Social media, for example, have the main goal of connecting actual people through virtual means. Training simulations have the aim to develop actual skills by representing realistic, virtual situations. And text processors seem to be interacted with for the sake of the virtual environment itself (as a tool to write texts), instead of what it represents. Further research might explore both the differences and similarities between our experiences of these virtual environments and the fictional videogame experiences described in this thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the interactive and self-involving imaginative experiences that are offered by videogames, which have often been overlooked in philosophical discussion on fiction. Specifically, it is an investigation of the distinct ways in which such experiences can evoke emotions, actions, and desires towards fictional gameworlds. The aim is to discuss, re-examine, and modify the way philosophers of fiction have conceptualized the imaginative experience of fiction in light of the interactive fiction experience.

In chapter one, I show how videogames can be defined as works of fiction according to both Walton's make-believe account of fiction (1990), and fiction definitions that are based on authorial intention (cf. Currie 1990; Stock 2017). Ultimately, however, I argue that the interesting question when investigating the relation between fiction, emotions, and actions is not whether videogames are works of fiction, but whether players *experience* them as fiction. I conclude this chapter by applying Walton's fiction theory to describe videogames as offering fiction experiences.

In chapter two, I elaborate on the role of imagination in the videogame experience. More specifically, I argue against the claims that fiction appreciators need not imagine what they can already perceive (Matravers 2014) and that imagination is not necessary for players to feel immersed in videogame worlds (Gooskens 2012). In the last part of this chapter, I make use of Stock's theory on fiction (2016) to show that videogames (and AR and VR games) present fictional content, even if some of that content is also believed or perceived to be true by players.

In chapter three, I discuss the paradox of fiction, or the question how we can be emotionally moved by fictional characters and events, while we know they do not actually exist (Radford 1975). Based on a description of the particularities of emotional experiences of videogame fiction, I reassess and show the inadequacy of the three most influential solutions to this paradox (the illusion theory, make-believe theory, and thought theory). At the end of this chapter, I also discuss the emotions evoked by the non-fictional, gameplay elements of videogames. I argue that they originate in a specific ludic attitude, which I compare and contrast to the make-believe attitude of fiction consumers.

In chapter four, I discuss the so-called paradox of *interactive* fiction, or the question how we can perform actions towards characters, events, and objects we know to be fictional. I first describe the three claims that make up this paradox: 1) it is impossible to act on fictional objects, 2) (many) videogame objects are fictional, and 3) players act on videogame objects. I then discuss two possible solutions to this paradox. A first one consists in saying that the game objects at which player actions are aimed are not fictional, but rather virtual, or real, computer-generated objects (Aarseth 2007: Sageng 2012; Chalmers 2017). I will defend a second solution, which is based on Walton's make-believe theory, and consists in the claim that we can only *fictionally* interact with fictional objects

In chapter five, I elaborate on two concepts that are crucial to solving the paradox of interactive fiction: fictional actions and imaginative desires. First of all, I specify what it means for works of fiction to involve their appreciators within the fictional world they present. In light of my description of this imaginative involvement, I then reassess discussions on actions and desires towards fiction, modify the concepts of fictional actions and imaginative desires, and show how useful these concepts can be to describe the interactive fiction experience.

Finally, in the conclusion to this thesis, I distinguish between different categories of fiction experiences, based on their interactivity and the way they involve their appreciator. For each of these categories, I specify in which way appreciators deal with the presented fictional world, how imagination is involved, and in what ways the appreciator's emotions, desires, and actions are part of the fiction experience.

Samenvatting

Deze verhandeling onderzoekt de interactieve, fictionele ervaringen van videogames, die vaak over het hoofd worden gezien in filosofische discussies over fictie. Meer specifiek wordt onderzocht op welke manieren dergelijke ervaringen kunnen aanzetten tot het ondernemen van acties, of het voelen van emoties en verlangens ten aanzien van fictieve werelden. Het doel is om de manier waarop filosofen van fictie de ervaring van fictie hebben beschreven, kritisch te onderzoeken en de rol van verbeelding in deze ervaring te herformuleren in het licht van de interactieve fictie-ervaring.

In hoofdstuk één laat ik zien hoe videogames gedefinieerd kunnen worden als fictiewerken, zowel volgens Waltons fictiedefinitie (1990), als volgens fictiedefinities die zijn gebaseerd op de intentie van de auteur (Currie 1990; Stock 2017). Uiteindelijk betoog ik dat de interessante vraag bij het onderzoeken van de relatie tussen fictie, emoties en acties niet is of videogames fictiewerken zijn, maar of spelers ze als fictie ervaren. Ik gebruik in dit hoofdstuk Waltons fictietheorie om het spelen van videogames te beschrijven als een fictie-ervaring.

In hoofdstuk twee ga ik dieper in op de rol van verbeelding in de videogame-ervaring. Meer specifiek argumenteer ik tegen de bewering dat fictieconsumenten zich niet hoeven te verbeelden wat visueel is gerepresenteerd (Matravers 2014), en de bewering dat verbeelding niet nodig is voor spelers om zich aanwezig te voelen in videogamewerelden (Gooskens 2012). In het laatste deel van dit hoofdstuk maak ik gebruik van Stocks fictietheorie (2016) om te laten zien dat videogames (en AR- en VR-games) fictieve werelden presenteren, zelfs als delen van die werelden echt bestaan of echt worden waargenomen door spelers.

In hoofdstuk drie bespreek ik de paradox van fictie, of de vraag hoe we emotioneel bewogen kunnen worden door fictieve personages en gebeurtenissen, terwijl we weten dat ze niet echt bestaan (Radford 1975). Op basis van een beschrijving van de emotionele ervaring van videogamefictie, onderzoek ik en laat ik de ontoereikendheid zien van de drie meest invloedrijke oplossingen voor deze paradox (de illusietheorie, de 'make-believe' theorie, en de 'thought' theorie). Aan het einde van dit hoofdstuk bespreek ik ook de emoties die worden opgeroepen door de niet-fictieve gameplay-elementen van videogames. Deze emoties vinden hun oorsprong in een specifieke spelattitude, die ik vergelijk en contrasteer met de attitude van fictieconsumenten.

In hoofdstuk vier bespreek ik de zogenaamde paradox van interactieve fictie, of de vraag hoe we kunnen interageren met personages, gebeurtenissen en objecten waarvan we weten dat ze slechts fictief zijn. Ik beschrijf eerst de drie beweringen waaruit deze paradox bestaat: 1) het is onmogelijk om met fictieve objecten te interageren, 2) (veel) videogame-objecten zijn fictief en 3) spelers interageren met videogame-objecten. Vervolgens bespreek ik twee mogelijke oplossingen voor deze paradox. Een eerste oplossing bestaat uit de claim dat de spelobjecten waarop spelersacties worden uitgevoerd, niet fictief zijn, maar eerder virtuele of echte objecten zijn (Aarseth 2007: Sageng 2012;

Chalmers 2017). Ik verdedig een tweede soort oplossing, die is gebaseerd op Waltons 'make-believe' theorie en bestaat uit de bewering dat we alleen fictief kunnen interageren met fictieve objecten.

In hoofdstuk vijf bespreek ik twee concepten die cruciaal zijn voor het oplossen van de paradox van interactieve fictie: fictieve acties en verlangens over fictie. Allereerst geef ik aan wat het betekent wanneer de lezer, kijker, luisteraar of speler van een fictiewerk wordt betrokken in de fictieve wereld die wordt gepresenteerd in dit werk. In het licht van mijn beschrijving van een dergelijke betrokkenheid in fictieve werelden, onderzoek ik vervolgens filosofische discussies over de noties van fictieve acties en verlangens over fictie, pas deze noties aan en laat zien hoe nuttig deze concepten kunnen zijn om de interactieve fictie-ervaring te beschrijven.

Ten slotte maak ik in de conclusie van dit proefschrift onderscheid tussen verschillende categorieën fictie-ervaringen, die ik onderscheid op basis van hun interactiviteit en de manier waarop ze hun lezer, kijker, luisteraar, of speler betrekken. Voor elk van deze categorieën specificeer ik hoe de fictieconsument omgaat met de gepresenteerde fictieve wereld, op welke manier verbeeldingskracht betrokken is bij de ervaring en op welke manieren de emoties, verlangens en acties van de fictieconsument deel uitmaken van de fictie-ervaring.