

Play as a creative factor in the visual arts: a hermeneutical reflection

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This article demonstrates in a hermeneutical context how the interrelation between play, *mimesis* and fiction contribute to the interactive making and interpretation of visual artworks. A theoretical model is employed in order to incorporate a holistic analysis pertaining to the operation of play in the visual arts and to illustrate how (i) artworks, (ii) artists, (iii) viewers, and (iv) worlds contribute interactively to a creative relation of play. In line with the expectation that the application of this model may add didactic value to higher education in the teaching of fine art students, some student works are analysed to illustrate applications of the model. This study found that the fictional worlds of art and play encompass the coexistence of the real and the possible as irreconcilable worlds. As a matrix for generating meaning, this structure of double meaning plays a fundamental role to expose expectations about the state of the everyday world for what it really is. This duality acts as a creative negation of assertions about the state of the everyday world. Theories of art as play assume that products of the imagination have a hypothetical status. Instead of that what 'ought to be', the meaning of artworks may imply that what 'could have been', namely a multitude of interpretations that may be imagined in order to put expectations about reality to the test. As an outcome of this 'reality testing' the passive role traditionally assigned to *mimesis* is transformed in a productive game of chance which elicits imaginative interpretations of the everyday world.

Keywords: creativity, fiction, *mimesis*, hermeneutics

Spel as 'n kreatiewe faktor in die visuele kuns: 'n hermeneutiese besinning

Hierdie artikel toon binne hermeneutiese verband hoe die onderlinge verband tussen spel, *mimesis* en fiksie bydra tot die interaktiewe skepping en interpretasie visuele kunswerke. 'n Teoretiese model word gebruik om 'n holistiese analise rakende spel in die visuele kuns te onderneem en om te illustreer hoe (i) kunswerke, (ii) kunstenaars, (iii) vertolkers, en (iv) wêreld interaktief meewerk aan 'n kreatiewe spelverhouding. Ooreenkomstig met die verwagting dat hierdie model didaktiese waarde tot hoër onderwys kan toevoeg in die onderrig van beeldende kuns studente, word 'n aantal studentewerke ontleed om toepassings van die model te illustreer. Die studie het bevind dat die fiktiewe wêreld van spel en kuns die samebestaan van die werklike en die moontlike as onvereenselwigbare wêreld omvat. As medium vir die generering van betekenis speel hierdie struktuur van dubbele betekenis 'n wesenlike rol om verwagtinge aangaande die stand van die alledaagse wêreld te ontbloot vir wat dit werklik is. Hierdie dualiteit dien as kreatiewe negering van bewerings aangaande die alledaagse wêreld. In plaas van dit wat 'behoort te wees', kan die betekenis van kunswerke dit impliseer wat 'sou kon wees', naamlik 'n meersinnigheid van interpretasies wat bedink kan word om verwagtinge aangaande die realiteit uit te toets. As uitkoms van hierdie 'realiteitstoetsing' word die tradisionele passiewe rol van *mimesis*, omskep in 'n produktiewe soort kansspel waarmee verbeeldingryke interpretasies van die werklikheid voortgebring word.

Sleutelwoorde: kreatiwiteit, fiksie, *mimesis*, hermeneutiek

Through the ages artists' play with the fictional worlds represented in works of visual art have formed part of a debate in connection with imitation, authenticity and truth. The Greek thinker Plato compared *paidía* (children's play) with the fine arts, which was characterised as imitative play (Sparshott 1970; Spariosu 1982). The views of the ancient Greeks pertaining to *mimesis* as imitation resulted in erroneous assumptions with regard to the ontological differences and aesthetic relations between art and other realities. In terms of this view of *mimesis* an artificial distinction was made between technical imitation and productive *poiesis* (Schutte 1993: 1-2).

The hypothesis proposed in this article is that *mimesis* in representational works of art is actualised as a form of creative play with reality whereby artists represent reality as a fictional world in their works in order to elicit the disclosure of new and unforeseen interpretations of the everyday world. In order to determine how creative play with reality elicits these new and unforeseen interpretations of the world, this study will be conducted within the framework of the hermeneutic tradition. With the aim of avoiding the pitfalls of a 'generic' approach towards

hermeneutics which prevailed since the mid nineteen eighties and which have continued to date, the literature consulted in this article is predominantly confined to the period preceding 1985.¹

This article aims to demonstrate how the interrelation between play, *mimesis* and fiction may contribute to the interactive engagement between artists and viewers in the making and interpretation of visual artworks. A theoretical model is employed in order to illustrate how such interactive engagement may transform the making and interpretation of visual artworks into a creative act. This model, derived from an exposition by Dirk van den Berg (1994: 6), engages (i) artworks, (ii) artists, (iii) viewers, and (iv) worlds, namely four structural categories² that may be regarded as relatively constant and which are analysed in terms of a relational diagram (figure 1). The aim is to determine how these four structural categories contribute interactively to establish a creative relation of play in the making and interpretation of representational artworks. In order to achieve this aim the contribution of the four categories will be listed and discussed separately in the text under appropriate headings in terms of the relational diagram. The expectation is that it will be possible through this approach to incorporate a holistic analysis pertaining to the operation of play in the visual arts. A further expectation is that the application of this model may add didactical value to higher education in the teaching of fine art students. Against this background some paintings by a fourth-year fine-art student of the Central University of Technology, Free State are employed to illustrate applications of the model.

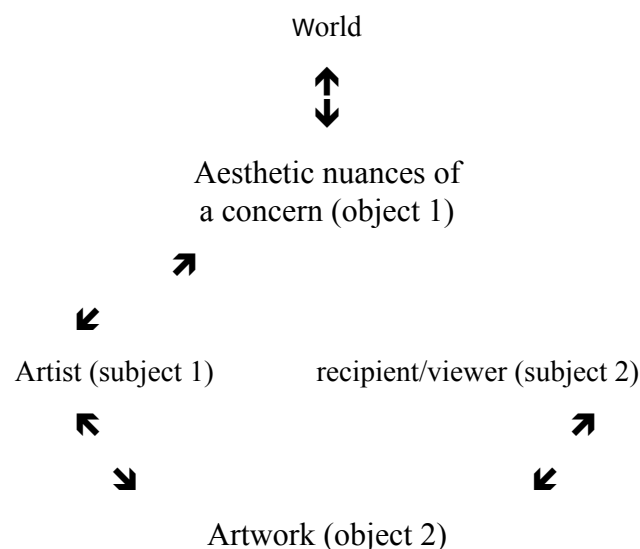


Figure 1
Art theoretical model: relational diagram.

Artists and viewers' creative play with the fictional worlds represented in works of visual art will be analysed in terms of the following:

- The playful impetus of fiction in the creative disclosure of reality.
- Negation of reality as a factor in the creative exploitation and disclosure of playful interests.
- The influence of fictional truths as clues in creative play.
- Changeability in play as a factor in the creative disclosure of possible worlds.
- The effect of chance on the creative revision of expectations about reality.

***Mimesis* and play: the creative role of fiction**

The artwork

On account of its autonomous character, play does not have to serve as a representation of

anything outside of its realm. Likewise, works of visual art refer to an existing world, but also have the capacity to produce self-contained representations of fictional worlds. In this regard works of visual art may incorporate representations which were previously inaccessible to consciousness and in this way elicit visualisation and interpretation of several possible worlds.

In his discussion of the connection between art and play, Uri Rapp (1984) characterises *mimesis* as a form of creative play. He also identifies a direct connection between creativity, imagination, fiction, play and *mimesis*. For Rapp (1984: 142-143) simulation³ fulfils a central role in play and he argues that play, like art, is not only confronted with a world different from itself, which it pretends to re-present in some way, but that it carries this confrontation within itself. The strange double meaning implicit in art and play, in the sense that both is self-contained while also relating to an outside reality, implies a ‘dissimilarity of the similar’, since these two factors do not coincide in the mimetic object. Consequently the artwork’s dependence on reference to a model is incompatible with its self-referential existence.

The artist

Through the ages both this incompatibility and artists’ creative play with reality often remained a contentious issue. Writers of fiction and poets were often accused of fabricating deceitful stories, even though they were fully aware of this deceit. The British poet Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) reacted as follows to these accusations in his *Apologie for Poetrie* (1579-81):

Now for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth. For, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false [...]. But the poet (as I said before) never affirmeth. [...]. And therefore, though he recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not [...] (Philip Sidney cited by Shepherd 1965: 123).

In line with Sidney’s apology a similar explanation may be offered in the visual arts. The fact that artists do not hide, but rather disclose the fictionality of their works is indicative of the condition which set the intent with their works apart from the act of lying. In response to Sidney’s apology the German literary theorist Wolfgang Iser (1990b: 939) identifies the significance of a duality in fiction and fictionalising. He explains that the nature of this duality will depend on context. In this regard lies and literature are the different outcomes that results from a process of doubling where each oversteps the margin of its contextual reality. Instead of merely imitating the existing world, and akin to the duality incorporated in literary fictions, visual artists overstep everyday reality by representing it in a context that de-familiarizes reality. Consequently both lie and the artist’s representation always include two worlds. In this regard the artist employs the lie in order to incorporate the truth and the purpose for which the truth must be concealed. When fictionalising is conceived as an outcome of the artist’s overstepping of the existing world, it is important to remember that the reality overstepped is not left behind: it remains present. In that way the overstepped reality instil fiction with a duality that may be creatively exploited by the artist.

The viewer

This overstepping of reality serves as a challenge to viewers of visual artworks to creatively participate in a game of make-believe and also guides them to discover imaginary worlds which exceed their experience of everyday reality. Mikel Dufrenne (1978: 17) aptly characterises the mindset conducive to viewers’ participation as follows:

[A]rt invites us to a festival where prohibitions are lifted, but on condition that the festival is given by us and not for us [...]. Art only frees us if it is our own, and the mission that certain artists have assigned to themselves is to appeal to our creativeness, not so much by giving us a model to imitate, as a master does to a disciple, that is, to a prospective master, as by giving us an example of freedom to be lived.

In the visual arts play offers a fictional orientation where discoveries of imaginary worlds may be creatively shared and interpreted. Since fictionalizing simultaneously encompasses the real

and the possible, this inseparable duality presents itself as the structure of double meaning. Iser (1990b: 945) indicates that this structure of double meaning should not be regarded as meaning itself, but rather as a matrix for generating meaning. Double meaning takes on the form of simultaneous concealment and revelation, always alluding to something different from what it means in order to adumbrate something that oversteps what it refers to. In this regard the manifest meaning represented in visual artworks is turned into signs for disclosing a hidden reality.

Neither the coexistence of the real and the possible nor the double meaning resulting from this coexistence should be confused with the intent to mislead the viewer. The German philosopher Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) referred in the arts to the term *Schein* as a kind of feigning in play which disregards reality. *Schein*, however, is not a deception that is intended to mislead viewers, but at best refers to the pleasure found in conscious self-deception⁴. *Schein* offers viewers of visual artworks a framework according to which the 'lie' of fiction may be consummated 'as if' it is true.

The world

Fictional worlds represented in visual artworks may in many respects be false — on the one hand in terms of viewers' diverse convictions on the nature of reality; on the other hand also on account of artists' imaginative exploitation of deceptive fictional worlds in order to elicit creative disclosure of the state of the world. In spite of the deceptiveness that is sometimes implied in the worlds represented in visual artworks, Nicholas Wolterstorff (1980: 147) argues that such works are often praised for its deceptiveness and for the way in which it undermines the convictions of those who participate in its interpretation. Accordingly artworks permit people to delve into a fictional world which differ from the everyday world and help them to gain insight into the conflicts and realities, the boredom, confusion and indisposition of the everyday world.

Whether the fictional world represented in an artwork is presumptuous and imposing or whether it manifests itself as questioning, it presupposes a fictional situation. Participants in the game are therefore invited to simply consider the world of the work. In this regard Wolterstorff (1980: 134) emphasise that the adoption of a fictional point of view does not imply an assertion that a fictional situation represented in an artwork should be regarded as true. Likewise the adoption of a fictional point of view neither presupposes an appeal that a particular fictional situation should become true, nor is it expressing the wish that it should be regarded as true. It rather serves as an invitation to the viewer to consider a fictional point of view.

Deductions from the theoretical model

Thus far the application of the theoretical model (cf. figure 1) has provisionally revealed how the interrelation between artwork, artist, viewer and the world is affected by the coexistence of the real and the possible in art and play. This duality which presents itself as the structure of double meaning, offers those who engage in art and play the somewhat bizarre opportunity to be in the midst of everyday reality and to simultaneously be outside of it. As a matrix for generating meaning, the structure of double meaning emerged in this analysis as a fundamental aspect which may be creatively exploited in order to expose hidden realities. Instead of serving as a mere imitation of the existing world in terms of the traditional concept of *mimesis*, the fictional worlds generated by art and play require a reconciliation of the irreconcilable which makes it possible to make sense of the state of reality.

Negation: the creative exploitation and disclosure of playful interests

The world

Since the inner world of imagination finds itself in disagreement with the everyday world in a situation of fiction and play, it is important to determine how this variance contributes in the visual arts to elicit creative participation in games of make-believe. Creative participation in the disclosure of hidden realities is impeded by idiosyncratic worldviews. Wolterstorff (1980: 123-125) argues that the artist gives shape to an imaginary world for the viewer's consideration. In this respect the potential to bring about fiction does not depend on the artist's ability to make assertions about the everyday world, but rather on a capacity to shape an image of the imaginary world, separate from the everyday world. Although the fictional world of a work should not be identified with false fabrications of the world, artists may, by means of a representation of their imaginary world, still make assertions about the world that may either be true or false. In short, their representation of a fictional world may act as creative negation of assertions about the everyday world.

This allows humankind to actually discover the state of the everyday world. In this way pleasure is found in a fictional world of the work where the state of the world is negated. Rapp (1984: 153) explains the rudiments pertaining to this negation of the world as follows:

The "world" is taken into play, transformed, turned into semblance. [*P*]lay is turning away from the "real" world, and turning toward it, simultaneously. It deals with the same world in a way specifically different from other dealings with the world. This is a specific way of understanding what we have called simulation.

The artist

The artist's simultaneous affirmation and negation of reality is indicative of the difference perceived by American philosopher Ralph Barton Perry (1916-1957) between real and playful interests, as well as the connection which he identifies between playful interests and feigning. An artist's exploitation of a playful interest becomes noticeable when "[a]n action system, having a certain normal result, is only partially executed; not because it is externally thwarted, but because it is only partly consistent with some predominant action system" (Perry cited by Rapp 1984: 149).

By employing playful interests in their works, artists expose viewers to experiences that are partially consistent with everyday reality on the one hand, while exploiting strategies on the other hand which negate these everyday experiences of reality. This operation may best be explained in terms of four main patterns of play, each of which allows for a different type of game. Roger Caillois (1961: 44) identify these play patterns as follows:

*Agon*⁵ is a fight or contest and applies to a pattern of play which centres on conflicting norms and values. Artists exploit this contest in their works as a stimulus which entice the viewers to assume a point of view on opposing norms and values.

Alea is employed by artists as a pattern of play based on change and the unforeseeable. Its basic driving force is de-familiarization. By overturning the everyday reality of participants, it reaches out into the hitherto inconceivable, and frustrates their convention-governed expectations.

Mimicry is a play pattern designed by artists to generate illusion, either as a representation of the world as if it is a reality or to expose the world for what it really is.

Ilinx is employed by artists to subvert, undercut, cancel, ridicule or even overthrow various perceptions of everyday reality by playing off these perceptions against one another.

When the artist limits the game to a single pattern of play, it yields a result, leading to the ending of the game. However, Iser (1989: 256; 1990a: 217) demonstrates that the artist may not only combine patterns of play with one another, but that the play patterns may also be played off

against each other. For instance, if *ilinx* plays against or is combined with *agon*, two possible types of game emerges: on the one hand *ilinx* gains the upper hand, in which case the contest becomes illusory, or on the other hand *agon* dominates and then the contest becomes more differentiated.

The viewer

Iser's (1989: 141) analysis of negation in literary works offers a basis for the application of this strategy in works of visual art. He shows how the negation of meaning in literary works enhances the indeterminacy of the text and challenges readers to discover its hidden meanings. Likewise when viewers of visual artworks realise that the negations of reality alluded to in the artwork are not offering a specific orientation, they have to disclose the artist's playful interests hidden in the possible meanings of the work. When their interpretations are negated in successive attempts to trace the meaning of the artwork they realise that their own experience of everyday reality is leading them to a dead end, since it is based on mere suppositions. When viewers add latent meaning that is not conforming to their experience of reality, they engage in a potentially creative act by generating other possible meanings of the work. Once it is no longer possible to consider the implied negations of reality in the work within any given frame of reference, viewers have to consider a multitude of interpretations. In order to find consistencies in their interpretations of reality, they have to make conjectures about possible playful interests of artists which served as impetus for the negation of reality in their works. This incites them to reflect on preconceived notions of reality which they have hitherto regarded as true. This reflection liberates their minds to disclose other realities that would have otherwise remained inconceivable.

The artwork

The explanation by the German philosopher Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) of the dual functions of the imagination provides informative background on the operation of negation in works of visual art. Adorno (1970) maintains that a genuine work of art is pervaded by a basic rift. This rift occurs as a consequence of countervailing activities of the imagination on account of a dual function which underlines its operation. In this regard it is the intention of the imagination functioning in the creation of the artwork to reproduce reality (Adorno 1970: 110ff). As a result of this intention the imaginary and the conscious never exist separately from one another. Yet, in imitating reality the imagination creates appearances which, consecutively, mark the presence of something nonexistent. In this respect a significant characteristic of the artwork is that it grants access to an appearance of something inconceivable. In this manner the artwork endows a figment with illusory reality.

The result of this interplay between producing and negating operations is semblance. As an outcome of its dual character semblance simultaneously includes the mutually exclusive, that is to say, both the punctured illusion and the illusion of something nonexistent. Adorno (1970: 161) shows that semblance reveals itself as the rift by which the aesthetic in the artwork is discerned. On the one hand the rift may indicate irreconcilability between the existent and the nonexistent (in this instance, semblance as reconciliation of the irreconcilable becomes a representation of reality). On the other hand this rift may indicate that by incorporating separate worlds together an impetus is set free that goes beyond the existent (in this instance, semblance exemplifies the rift as a matrix for the performative character of the artwork). Semblance highlights the rift as an invariable toppling of the positions assembled in the artwork. In its mimetic function, the rift embodies the nonexistent within what is (Adorno 1970: 129,138,200,219). To attain this purpose, the performative function of the artwork has to be set in motion. This function

necessitates a negating of the representative imagery in order to give presence to something which escapes the mimetic grasp.

Deductions from the theoretical model

The patterns of play derived from Caillois (1961) emerged in this analysis of the theoretical model (cf. figure 1) as a key factor which demonstrated how the interrelation between the artwork, artist, viewer and the world is affected by the negation of assertions about reality. In spite of its merits, it is important not to confuse the potential of these patterns of play with a simple formula that will guarantee creative making and interpretation of the worlds represented in works of visual art. At best they offer a framework which gives some insight into the formation of negation as a creative factor in play and art. Moreover, it is unlikely that artists and viewers have specific patterns of play in mind when they are respectively engaged in the creative making and interpretation of reality represented in the artwork. In this regard creative engagement do not so much depend on knowledge of play patterns, but rather on the responsiveness to find in these negations of reality a directive or clue about the state of reality which may expose it for what it really is.

Practical application of the theoretical model

In a student work, aptly entitled *Together as One* (figure 2) the irreconcilable concepts of an initiation ceremony and a scene of the Nativity are represented as coexisting worlds. The representation of the ritual dancers in an everyday rural environment provides an unlikely setting for the Nativity scene and is at odds with traditional dignified and sacred representations of this theme in Christian art. By placing the Nativity in a context that de-familiarizes traditional conceptions of this theme, it is instilled with a duality. As a matrix for creative concealment and revelation of meaning implied by the coexisting worlds of the initiation ceremony and the Nativity, this representation alludes to something different from its manifest meaning. In this respect it serves as an adumbration to something that oversteps what it refers to. The deceptive representation of the Nativity scene and the initiation ceremony as irreconcilable concepts neither presupposes an appeal that the fictional situation of the dancers participating in the Nativity event should become true, nor is it expressing the wish that it should be regarded as true. It rather serves as an invitation to consider a fictional point of view where the 'lie' of the irreconcilable worlds of the Nativity and the initiation ceremony may be consummated 'as if' it is true.



Figure 2
Solly Bele. *Together as One*, oil on canvas, 100 x 150 cm. 2007.

Instead of being a false fabrication of the world, the representation of these irreconcilable worlds acts as creative negations of assertions about the state of the everyday world. By simultaneously affirming and negating reality, a playful interest is employed by the artist in order to expose viewers to experiences that are only partially consistent with reality. By means of the play pattern *agon* viewers are challenged to assume a point of view on the conflicting norms and values suggested by the concepts of the Nativity and the initiation ceremony. In this regard the ritual dancers' credence in the supernatural, forming part of their celebration of sexual maturity is played against the celebration of the miraculous and pure supernatural birth of Christ. The playful allusions to the activity of the dancers, who are not only celebrating their own sexual maturity but also the Virgin Mary's ultimate fulfilment of sexual maturity through the birth of Christ, bring viewers in conflict with accepted Christian norms and values. Through an exploitation of *alea* as a play pattern, the Nativity is depicted in a seemingly blasphemous context that de-familiarizes reality. Consequently the viewer's expectations with regard to traditional representations of this theme are overturned and frustrated. The play pattern mimicry is employed in this work in order to create an illusion of the incompatible worlds of the Nativity and the initiation ceremony as if it is a reality or to expose this 'reality' for what it really is. When viewers realise that the negation of reality alluded to in the world of this work is not offering them a particular orientation, they are prompted to disclose the artist's playful interest with the choice to specifically represent the Nativity and the initiation ceremony as coexistent worlds in this particular rural setting. Moreover they are challenged to weigh up their own preconceptions about traditional rituals against their understanding of the supernatural birth of Christ.

The representation of the conflicting worlds of the Nativity and an initiation ceremony creates appearances that mark the presence of something nonexistent: that is, the presence an illusory reality as an apparent surplus of meaning to what exists in the work. The result of this interplay between producing and negating the dualistic worlds of the Nativity and initiation ceremony is semblance. Semblance simultaneously incorporates the mutually exclusive worlds of the Nativity and the initiation ceremony and reveals itself as the rift by which the aesthetic in this artwork is discerned. This rift indicates that by incorporating the separate worlds of the Nativity and the initiation ceremony together an impetus is set free that goes beyond the existent. In its mimetic function the rift embodies the nonexistent within what is represented in this artwork.

Responsiveness to clues as a creative factor in play

The artwork

The American philosopher Kendall Walton's (1990: 39) explanation of fictional truths generated by the artwork demonstrates how artworks guide viewers' creative participation in play. He characterises a fictional truth as a prescription or directive to imagine something. Furthermore fictional propositions are propositions to be imagined. Within the framework of play the nuance of features in a work plays a crucial role in suggesting what is fictional in that particular work. Conversely an indistinctness in its features may not only result in uncertainty about what is fictional, but may also lead to indecision about what principles of generation are applicable to a given work. Walton (1990: 40) characterises principles of generation as conditional prescriptions or rules about what is to be imagined in what circumstances. Although he uses the term 'rules', he rightly clarifies the implications of this term as follows:

Calling them rules may suggest that they are established by explicit fiat or agreement and consciously borne in mind in the contexts in which they are operative, [...] I make no such assumptions. A principle is in force in a particular context if it is understood in that context that, given such-and-such circumstances, so and so is to be

imagined. The understanding need not be explicit or conscious. I do not assume that it must be “arbitrary” or “conventional” (Walton 1990: 40-41).

The fictionality of what a picture explicitly ‘shows’ if it is in fact fictional, may well depend on the fictionality of propositions the work expresses only ‘implicitly’. Whereas ‘indirectly generated’ fictional truths depend on other fictional truths; ‘primary’ or ‘directly’ generated fictional truths do not (Walton (1990: 142). Walton (1990: 52) also identifies the existence of meta-rules (implicit rules signified by the work) and he emphasises that these rules should not be confused with any particular type of game. They rather signify which types of games or games with what type of rules are played.

The artist

Artists hardly rely on formulas to fashion their works so as to make them generate preconceived fictional truths. They rather invent strategies that may guide viewers by means of a rich variety of particular considerations which seem somehow reasonable in one or another specific case. In this regard artists neither establish fictional truths in a simple and orderly manner, nor do they consult a limited number of very general principles according to which fictional truths are generated (Walton 1990: 138). The extent to which the artist emphasises one or another fictional truth is important, as well as the manner in which fictional truths are generated in order to call attention to what principle of generation is operative in particular cases.

A vital part of their creativity depends on the means that artists discover for generating fictional truths. Walton (1990: 142-143) shows that occasionally the most prominent and noteworthy fictional truths are generated indirectly. In this regard the very indirectness of its generation is sometimes utilized by the artist to give a fictional truth more prominence. The subtlety employed by the artist in constructing a representation may often prove to be the actual stimulus which focuses the viewer’s attention. Walton (1990: 166) concludes that when an artist has devised for a work to generate fictional truths that in one way or another call attention to some further proposition, it is likely that his or her reason for doing so was to make this proposition fictional as well.

The viewer

Viewers are supposed to play certain kinds of games which are subject to prescriptions, deriving from the rules of the games and the nature of the work. In this regard they have to imagine certain propositions — those that are fictional in the work (Walton 1990: 61). Viewers have a dual kind of perspective on artworks since they simultaneously fulfil the role of participants and observers of the game. In this respect Walton (1990: 49-50) shows that they attend to those features of the representation that are important, as well as the principles of generation that are operative.

Walton (1990: 139) emphasises that viewers seldom have definite principles of generation in mind, even when they are sure of the fictional truths yielded by the artwork. Moreover, it is unlikely that viewers assemble a complete list of primary fictional truths represented in artworks. Consequently Walton (1990: 146-7) argues that there is no guarantee that primary fictional truths are specified or confined. Therefore viewers are only able to roughly focus on a collection of fictional truths that are evidently generated by the representation. Instead of compiling an inventory of primary fictional truths which are generated in the work, viewers rather have to sustain sensitivity towards the work as a whole. Walton (1990: 185) concludes that the ability to recognise fictionality in the work does not depend on the fact that a viewer knows, or that s(he) have somehow learned the principles of generation operative in the work. A work just strikes viewers as generating certain fictional truths when they experience it in its context (broadly conceived). Although there is a sense in which a viewer’s opinion about what

is fictional cannot ultimately be justified, Walton (1990: 186) argues that this is not grounds for denying that such a viewer's opinion can be regarded as correct or incorrect, true or false.

The world

Whatever opinions participants in play might have with regard to fictional truths generated by the artwork, it should be free of predetermined, external and self-righteous prescriptions about the world. Only then can it guide creative making and interpretation and can it truly act as a generating force of culture. Since it is crucial to be responsive to the qualities of artworks, Walton (1990: 40, 184) concludes that the significance of representational works is not only confined to the generation of fictional truths. Responsiveness to for instance the medium, genre, representational tradition, the implied world of the work, as well as themes, moral considerations, admonitions, insights and visions for which fictional truths are partially responsible is also important.

Deductions from the theoretical model

In spite of providing a proposition or mandate in some context to imagine something, it became evident in this analysis of the theoretical model that fictional truths generated by the artwork at best serve as clues about the state of the everyday world. In this regard creative participation in play require responsiveness: that is, a gameness to unravel these clues which implies the capacity to explore, a tolerance for ambiguity and the flexibility to find one's way by trial and error. Such responsiveness enables participants in play to discover possible truths about the everyday world implied in the fictional truths generated by the artwork.

Changeability in play: the creative disclosure of possible worlds

The world

In order to respond creatively towards the fictional truths generated by artworks, participants in play have to free themselves from the actuality, coercion and predictability of their everyday worlds. Fantasy plays a key role in giving substance to this freedom. For Rapp (1984: 151), fantasy entails the inner world of the imagination posed against the adversity of the objective world. The inner-constructed character of fantasy bestows symbolic meaning on its contents. Each fantasy not only refers to an object but also signifies a state of mind. Different individuals would respond differently to the 'same' fantasy. In this regard there is an element of veiling in symbolising, leaving room for a multitude of interpretations.

The imagination offers a boundless range of possibilities where viewers may break their relation with the direct world of perception, and thereby disclose new ways of being in the world. In this regard, for instance, the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur defines the function of imagination in myths or in poetry as a "[d]isclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening onto possible worlds which transcend the limits of our actual world" (Ricoeur cited by Kearney 1991: 141).

The artist

In line with Ricoeur's definition, theories of art as a form of play or as semblance assume that products of the artist's imagination have a hypothetical status. By means of the attitude in terms of which artists assume circumstances, events, or situations as a hypothetical possibility, objects and the state of affairs represented in their works are regarded as if they are real. Artists' representation of these 'as if' or hypothetical situations may be distinguished from attitudes in perception and memory where objects are postulated as factual realities⁶. According to Casey

(1976: 115) this hypothetical approach is actualised in terms of hypothesizing, pretence and anticipation.

Hypothesizing may be employed by artists to suggest an idea or a succession of ideas as a provisional and possible explanation of a certain phenomenon.

Playful pretence is the artist's emphatic implementation of an 'as if' strategy. Such pretence applies equally to children's play and adult parody in the sense that both are postulated as if they are real, even though both are postulated with a relative aloofness towards that which is real.

By means of anticipation the artist envisages what possible form the future might take, in order to be better equipped to deal with a projected object or to cope with a situation when it happens.

These hypothetical possibilities are indicative of the way in which artists challenge the viewers of their works with a rich divergence of possible fictional truths.

The viewer

Walton (1990: 174) emphasises that the fictional truths generated by an artwork may be mutually dependant, where none of these truths are generated without the support of the others. Therefore viewers have to reach to and fro between provisionally accepted fictional truths until a convincing combination is found⁷. Consequently viewers' creative participation in play do not so much depend on their identification of a particular fictional truth, but rather on the responsiveness to distinguish the playing field which influences the overall purport of divergent fictional propositions in a work. Likewise the ability to specifically find connections and to discover appropriateness within this divergence is a defining aspect in viewers' participation in the game. Similar to artists who consider several possible fictional truths generated by their works, viewers engage in a process of tracing the artist's possible playful interests with these fictional truths. In this respect the imagination allows viewers to be responsive to fictional truths that they have hitherto not understood, and which are provisionally purely possible in status.

The artwork

Walton (1990: 169) confirms that indirect fictional truths generated by the artwork are not controlled by a simple set of principles, but rather by a series of complex, changing, and often competing combinations of insights, precedents, local conventions and principal characteristics. On account of these divergent principles which have to satisfy different needs and which are at work in the artwork in different cases, it is unlikely that there would be any general or systematic meta-principles that can be employed to determine what principles are applicable or when it is applicable.

Edward Casey's (1976: 204-5) reference to the term 'possibilizing' in order to illustrate the autonomy of the imagination⁸, resembles Walton's (1990) explanation of the diverse principles which contribute to the generation of fictional truths in artworks. Casey demonstrates that the function of 'possibilizing' cannot be reduced to a predetermined end that is established in the artwork by representation or expression. As an activity of the imagination 'possibilizing' opens up a domain of experience in works of art which would otherwise have been inaccessible to artists or viewers. Therefore the function of autonomous imaginary acts in visual artworks makes a considerable difference to the way that the transformative and re-creative character of the aesthetic experience may be conceived. Instead of being content with that what 'ought to be', the meaning of artworks may imply that what 'could have been', namely a multitude of possible interpretations pertaining to the state of the everyday world that may be disclosed by the imagination. John Dewey (1958: 268) describes this condition as follows: "Possibilities are embodied in works of art that are not elsewhere actualized; this embodiment is the best

evidence that can be found of the true nature of imagination". On the one hand such embodied possibilities disclose the artwork for the viewer, while on the other it gives rise to an aesthetic experience which is unique to every artwork, and which for the very reason of its indefiniteness, brings about a multitude of possible interpretations.

Deductions from the theoretical model

In this analysis of the theoretical model the multitude of interpretations generated by fictional truths operative in the artwork emerged as a significant factor which brings about changeability in play. Responsiveness to this changeability implies the creativity of artists and viewers as participants in play to hypothesise: that is, the capacity to make an informed guess about possible fictional truths that are operative in the artwork. Through their testing of the validity of hypotheses, the creative engagement of artists and viewers in play is in itself put to the test. In this respect creative making and interpretation can only come to fruition in play when artists and viewers are ready to acknowledge the limitations of their expectations about everyday reality. Only then is it possible to creatively disclose the state of the everyday world for what it really is.

Practical application of the theoretical model

In a student work entitled *Isolation* (figure 3) the religious world of a group of rural worshippers acts as a fictional truth, prescribing that the viewer should imagine that they are raising their hands in praise towards an unknown force as an expression of their spiritual elation. Since the child in the right hand foreground is represented in terms of Western conventions with an emanating halo, this representation prescribes the fictional truth that viewers should imagine that the child represents a holy figure. The fact that the praising figures are turning their backs on this holy figure, serves as a fictional proposition that the child is deprived from the dignity and grace normally associated with portrayals of saintly figures. A stray dog, seemingly looking for food in the remnants of a toilet in close proximity of the holy child, acts as an indirectly generated fictional truth which prescribes that the viewers should imagine the degrading act of the dog as analogous, and as contributing to the undignified situation of the child. In terms of its context (broadly conceived) the work itself prescribes the fictional truth that viewers should imagine the apathy of the praising women towards the characteristic Western image of the holy child to be typical of an inclination to seek spiritual salvation outside of the conventions of Christianity.

However, at this point it is crucial to remember that the fictional truths generated in artworks are purely provisional in nature. It may well be that the fictional truths identified from my analysis of this painting are still merely confined to my personal norms, values and expectations on what should be regarded as appropriate in religious representations. Moreover, factors like the creative exploitation of the dualistic structure of art as a form of play as well as the creative employment of negation which formed part of the earlier analysis of the student's work have thus far not been included in this latest analysis. Of course these factors have a decisive impact on the creative generation and interpretation of fictional truths. Yet, instead of lingering on these factors again, it is at this stage more desirable to briefly demonstrate in the rest of the analysis how changeability in the interpretation of fictional truths affects the creative disclosure of possible worlds in this artwork.



Figure 3
Solly Bele. *Isolation*, oil on canvas, 100 x 150 cm. 2007.

In order to respond creatively towards the fictional truths suggested in this work, viewers have to free themselves from their everyday religious experiences. Their responsiveness to discern the existence of a range of possible meanings in the work and to recognise negations of their expectations regarding religious practices as a challenge to disclose other and unforeseen fictional truths are pivotal aspects in their creative interpretation of this work. In order to disclose these fictional truths, viewers have to hypothesise: that is, they need to make an informed guess about the artist's possible playful interests with this somewhat unconventional depiction of a religious theme. By reaching to and fro between provisionally accepted fictional truths, it is likely that creative viewers will discover something about the fallibility of their own religious preconceptions, which will in turn serve as an impetus to re-evaluate the validity of their initial interpretations.

Improvisation: the creative revision of expectations about reality

The artwork

It was informative to note in successive analyses how the fictional propositions in representational artworks entice viewers during initial interpretations to accept these propositions virtually as gospel truth, only to expose the fallibility of their expectations about truth during later interpretations. In contrast with the actualisation of the imagination in the everyday 'reality' of the technical field or the sciences, the relationship that exists in artworks between illusion and reality remains in a state of flux and uncertainty. This situation is evident in a creative relation of play where the fictional propositions in the artwork constantly put participants' expectations about reality to the test. Rapp (1984: 164) expresses the role of artworks in this twofold relationship between illusion and reality and its prompting of a productive engagement in play as follows:

The dual attitude towards reality is sustained in the outward appearance of the work of art, which is not *seen*, but “seen as...” If we consider the imagination to be an inherent feature of consciousness, as postulated by Sartre and by Ryle, each in his own way, then the work of art is the fullest and most emphatic expression of human consciousness — it is the game of pretending transformed into creation, a synthesis between play and productivity (or performance, in the sense of doing and achieving).

Rapp’s reference to a synthesis between play and productivity illustrates how fictional propositions in artworks elicit creative performance of participants by challenging them to engage in the to and fro movement of play. The German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) provides the following explanation of the way in which artworks contribute to put the creative performance of participants to the test:

Human production encounters an enormous variety of ways of trying things out, rejecting them, succeeding, or failing. “Art” begins precisely there, where we are able to do otherwise. Above all, where we are talking about art and artistic creation in the pre-eminent sense, the decisive thing is not the emergence of a product, but the fact that the product has a special nature of its own (Gadamer (1987: 125).

The viewer

In response to negations of reality in their successive interpretations of fictional propositions in the artwork, viewers are required to participate in an improvising game of chance in order to put their expectations about reality to the test. Arnold Berleant (1970: 116) aptly characterises aesthetic participation as the viewer’s engagement in a free, direct, and spontaneous act, analogical to the activities of abstract expressionists like Pollock and De Kooning. This activity presupposes an engagement in the imaginary, rational, sensory and impulsive qualities of play which may be characterised as an improvisation.

A striking characteristic with regard to the ‘rules’ applicable to games of make-believe is how these rules make provision for the viewer’s performance and creative improvisation. In this regard the explanation by Desmond Morris pertaining to the rules of play serves as a telling example. In his account of play as concomitant with exploration and following this idea through to the arts, gymnastics, sport, writing, and speech, Morris (Rapp 1984: 147) formulated the following ‘play-rules’ imposed on adult information-communication systems:

1) you shall investigate the unfamiliar until it becomes familiar; 2) you shall impose rhythmic repetition on the familiar; 3) you shall vary this repetition in as many ways as possible; 4) you shall select the most satisfying of these variations and develop those at the expense of others; 5) you shall combine and recombine these variations one with another; and 6) you shall do all this for its own sake, as an end in itself.

The artist

Like the viewers of their works artists have to be receptive to these ‘rules’ of play. Such receptivity necessitates that artists will allow their materials to guide them towards surprising and unpredictable outcomes which may be achieved through responsive judgement and improvisation. Their technical play with defiant materials requires responsiveness to discover and creatively exploit the adventitious possibilities in the qualities of these materials. The following remark by Dufrenne (1978: 167) exemplifies the nature of this adventitious discovery and exploitation of possibilities during the artist’s making process:

Art cannot so easily forget the primitive *techné*. For art is above all doing, a setting up as Souriau would say, or *poiesis*, as Valéry would put it. Doing in the sense of perfecting, with pleasure, with taste. A loving battle with a resisting material, friendship with the tool that extends the body, a flirtation with the obstacle, a game of chance in which one never establishes enough control to eliminate all surprise. Ask the engravers and the potters. They will tell you that what is most authentic in art is the tinkering, and even musicians and architects will not deny it. This tinkering is the hand of technique, which art, of necessity conceals.

Artists’ engagement in a game of chance is of course not limited to their technical play with resisting materials, but also includes an encounter with unexpected fictional truths which bring them in conflict with their expectations about reality. Instead of prematurely rejecting such unexpected fictional truths as inappropriate or as an unruly by-product of their making

process, creative artists are guided by their responsiveness to recognise its potential and to exploit these fictional truths in their works. Such unforeseen fictional truths do not only guide artists to engage in a contest with their expectations of reality, but to also anticipate re-creative responses to fictional propositions in their works. Rapp (1984: 152) concludes that although much anticipatory imagination includes daydreaming, wishful thinking and fears, an important part also consists of rehearsals and dress-rehearsals which include in the imagination the parts played by others. He argues that such anticipation comes close to reality testing in the Freudian sense.

The world

The responsiveness of participants to revise their expectations about the everyday world plays a key role in the realisation of their creative participation in the game. Through play, participants seem to manifest a kind of independence from the world as though they are creating a sphere of existence that belongs to them completely. However, Rapp (1984: 153) emphasises that this condition hardly implies a divine kind of creativity that can do without the world. In this regard participants negate the everyday world in the freedom of their play, but also affirm it through the content of their play. Analogical to play, art establishes alternative worlds within everyday reality. Rapp (1984: 154) argues that the ability of alternating between two ‘worlds’ is a main component in experiencing freedom, for artists and viewers alike.

Deductions from the theoretical model

Dufrenne’s (1978: 167) characterisation of productive engagement in art as “a game of chance in which one never establishes enough control to eliminate all surprise” aptly captures the rudiments of creative improvisation in art and play that emerged in this analysis of the theoretical model. Such productive engagement is not a preconceived outcome of the artist’s generation or the viewer’s interpretation of fictional truths, but rather comes to fruition on the basis of an interactive connection of the artist and the viewer with the artwork together with the fictional worlds represented in the artwork. In terms of this interactive connection each contributes to generate simulations of the world which challenge participants in play with unexpected fictional truths, moving them to review their everyday expectations about reality. As a result of this interactive connection the passive role traditionally assigned to *mimesis* is transformed into a productive game of chance which may constantly guide participants to discover alternative and unexploited interpretations of reality.

Practical application of the theoretical model

The coexistence of heavenly and earthly worlds represented in the work entitled *The Message* (figure 4), provides a matrix for viewers to generate meaning and to put their expectations about reality to the test. The existence of the earthly world is affirmed by the fictional proposition that viewers should imagine that the two prophet-like figures in the foreground, sitting in a typical rural environment, is engaged in a debate. In turn, the existence of the heavenly world is affirmed by the fictional proposition to imagine that an angel is delivering a message to the earthly world. This proposition is affirmed as a fictional truth since it seems to be consistent with expectations that angels proclaim divine messages and since it also conforms to viewers’ expectations that this depiction of angels is typical in religious representations of this theme. Moreover, this fictional truth seems to be consistent with the prescription that viewers should imagine that the light projecting from the angel onto the landscape, together with the pages released by the angel is indicative of the angel’s attempt to establish a consecrated connection between heavenly and earthly worlds.

Although it seems reasonable to provisionally accept the above interpretation of fictional truths, it is equally reasonable to accept that the artist anticipated such predictable response to

his work. As a matter of fact, artists rely on the impulsive inclination of viewers to search for consistency in their interpretations by connecting the fictional propositions in the artwork with their expectations about everyday reality. By simultaneously affirming and negating fictional truths in this work, the artist challenges viewers to assume a productive attitude towards the work — to participate in a game of chance in order to put their expectations about reality to the test. For instance, the initial affirmation of expectations pertaining to the angel's attempt to establish a connection between the heavenly and earthly worlds is negated by the fictional proposition to imagine that the angel's divine message is incompatible with the propagandistic messages attached to the rock-wall. Since these messages are incompatible with their norms and values pertaining to the traditional dignified religious representations in art, viewers are challenged by means of the play pattern *agon* to assume a point of view on the conflicting norms and values respectively embraced by propaganda and religion.



Figure 4
Solly Bele. *The message*, oil on canvas,
100 x 150 cm. 2007.

However, the initially accepted fictional truth that the angel is establishing a connection between the heavenly and earthly worlds is reaffirmed by the indirectly generated fictional truth that the crow contributes to signify this connection. This indirectly generated fictional truth is supported by the compositional prominence of the crow, the fact that it is flying in the ray of light projecting from the angel, and given that it is carrying some manna-like bread in its beak as if it is serving in the needs of the earthly beings. By means of the artist's creative exploitation of the play pattern mimicry, the illusion of a divine connection between heavenly and earthly worlds is therefore represented as if it is a reality. Yet, this fictional truth is once again negated by the

fictional proposition that the prophet-like figures in the foreground is leaving the messages delivered by the angel untouched. Moreover, this negation also gives rise to a negation of the previously accepted illusion that the crow is suggestive of a connection between heavenly and earthly worlds. In this respect the play pattern *ilinx* overthrows viewers' various perceptions of reality when they realise that a crow as a typical forager, is an unlikely bearer of heavenly food to an earthly realm.

Perhaps the collective consideration of affirmations and negations of fictional truths in this work might ultimately guide us to discover the irony that we, like the two prophet-like figures depicted in this painting, are so blinded by our expectations about reality that we leave the disclosure of hidden truths untouched in our daily lives. Although the above analysis is hardly the only possible interpretation of this work, it hopefully provides some insight into the way that we engage in a creative game of chance in art as a form of play by constantly reviewing our expectations about reality.

Concluding remarks

The theoretical model employed in this study not only proved to be vital in locating subtle nuances in the operation of play as a factor in the visual arts, but also underlined the crucial need to provide an inclusive account of aesthetic engagement in the arts. In response to the application of the theoretical model there might be those who argue that they simply do not need the interference of a model in the 'natural' progression of their making and interpretation of visual artworks. The validity of such an argument can of course not be disputed. Conversely it is important not to confuse the results that emanated from the application of the theoretical model with an instruction manual on creative making and interpretation in the visual arts. At best, if anything significant emerged from the theoretical model that remotely suggests any form of instruction, it may well be the instruction to use this model as a framework towards sensitising our understanding about the operation of the imagination in art and play. Moreover, the application of the theoretical model demonstrated how vital it is to sensitise our understanding about the interconnection between the artist and the viewer with the artwork as well as the fictional worlds represented in the work. Such sensitisation provides the prospect of disclosing critical aspects that affects the passiveness in our experience of everyday reality and to engage more productively and more attentively in works of art when testing the validity of our expectations about reality. Ultimately through this kind of engagement we might be able to move beyond traditional conceptions of *mimesis* in our quest to expose assertions about reality for what it really is.

Notes

1. Gianni Vattimo (1997: 1-3) concludes that in the recent literature the primary philosophical basis of hermeneutics is often reduced to a vague generic philosophy of Western culture. In this regard he rightly criticises the degeneration of hermeneutics since the mid nineteen eighties into an 'ecumenical' form which deprived twentieth century hermeneutics of precise definition. In this generic sense not only key figures like Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur are characterised as hermeneutic thinkers, but also rather deceptively Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel, Richard Rorty and Charles Taylor, as well as Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas are also classified as part of the hermeneutic tradition.
2. These four categories include the following:
 - (i) Artworks (whether conceived of as works, products, artefacts, *objets d'art*, collectibles, aesthetic objects, representations, performances, autonomous texts or sites of conflict).
 - (ii) Artists (whether conceived of as empirical subjects, aesthetic emotion, auctorial intentions, artistic will, or implicit authorial functions).
 - (iii) Viewers (whether conceived of as patrons, collectors, empiric spectators, art public, interpretative communities, implicit viewers or readers and critics).
 - (iv) Worlds (whether conceived of as models,

- topoi, themes, ideas, discourses, practices, cultures, social classes, societies, historical situations, or alternative global contexts) (cf. van den Berg 1994: 6).
3. Rapp (1984: 142) defines simulation as “an exploration of processes within a system by transferring some of its parameters and strategies to the analogue”. He argues that such transference to the analogue is required since the original system is unavailable. Both Rapp and the Dutch physicist J.H. Santema (1978) characterise models as products of the simulation process. A model may for instance be an artefact, a conceptual system (that is, of a mathematical formula or a specially constructed game — something that is not physical in nature. Since the original system is unavailable, the simulated pattern is therefore represented by something else. In this respect Rapp (1984: 142) rightly refers to a paradox which results from a focus on the appearance of the original (absent) system in order to determine its essence or reality.
 4. Karl Groos, one of the earliest theorists to investigate the phenomenon of play, defined the element which jointly manifests in art and play in terms of ‘aesthetic illusion’ as a form of conscious self-deception (*bewusste Selbsttäuschung*) (Rapp 1984: 144).
 5. Play as a contest or *agon* is evident in terms of the Homeric notion of *areté* (generally translated as virtuousness or excellence). Homeric *areté* refers to the ethical ideals of the *aristoi* (the aristocracy and nobility). *Agon* and *areté* have a common etymological origin. Both meanings emphasise the competitive, rather than the co-operative nature of these notions (Spariosu 1982: 14).
 6. Casey (1976: 116) uses the term ‘pure possibility’ in order to distinguish the character of what is contrived by the imagination from other kinds of experience. In this regard he demonstrates that ‘pure possibility’ is considered in terms of its own interest. ‘Pure possibility’ is therefore not considered in terms of its real or potential value in the actualisation of projects which exceed the imaginary act itself. Consequently ‘pure possibility’ does not fill any position in perception or memory, since perception and memory both postulate the real (empirical) reality as the primary character of observational content.
 7. In this regard Walton (1990: 184) argues that as far as conjectures are concerned, there is no substitute for good premonition. Therefore a combination of imagination and common sense, an informed approach towards the medium, genre and tradition to which the work belongs, as well as an understanding of the outside world is important. Eventually all these factors are naturally combined with responsiveness towards the most subtle qualities of the work itself.
 8. The autonomous status of the imagination and its basic connection with the generation of possibilities is confirmed as follows by the Swiss psychologist Karl Gustav Jung (1875-1961): “This autonomous activity of the psyche, which can be explained neither as a reflex action to sensory stimuli nor as the executive organ of external ideas, is, like every vital process, a continually creative act...it is the mother of all possibilities” (Jung cited by Casey 1976: 213). The British mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) characterised this activity of the imagination as “imaginative freedom” (Whitehead 1960: 202).

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