

“ On the ‘hyperinsulation’ and ‘transparency’ of  
imaginary situations ”

Jérôme Pelletier

► To cite this version:

Jérôme Pelletier. “ On the ‘hyperinsulation’ and ‘transparency’ of imaginary situations ”. Frapolli. Saying, Meaning and Referring – Essays on François Recanati’s Philosophy of Language, Palgrave, pp.165-178, 2007. <ijn\_00355817>

HAL Id: ijn\_00355817

[https://jeannicod.ccsd.cnrs.fr/ijn\\_00355817](https://jeannicod.ccsd.cnrs.fr/ijn_00355817)

Submitted on 24 Jan 2009

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# “On the ‘hyperinsulation’ and ‘transparency’ of imaginary situations”

Jérôme Pelletier<sup>†</sup>

According to Recanati (2000), imaginary situations may belong at least to two different realms: the realm of the fictional and the realm of the ascription of beliefs. Let’s call ‘fictional situations’ the imaginary situations of the first realm and ‘ascribed situations’ the imaginary situations of the second realm. ‘Fictional situations’ are imaginary situations one entertains while, for instance, playing a game of make-believe, writing fiction or watching a fiction film. ‘Ascribed situations’ are situations one entertains while metarepresenting in thought or in language someone else’s beliefs. Recanati describes ‘ascribed situations’ as imaginary situations since, like fictional situations, ascribed situations are representations entertained through mental simulation and ‘decoupled’ from the actual world<sup>1</sup>. In what follows, I make a few comments concerning the way Recanati analyses imaginary situations in these two realms.

## 1 Are fictional situations ‘hyperinsulated’?

### 1.1 Recanati’s claim

According to Recanati, imaginary situations in the fictional realm have the property of ‘hyperinsulation’ :

“There is (...) a general property which distinguishes imaginary from real situations (...). The property I have in mind I call *hyperinsulation*. (...) [R]eal situations are insulated from each other because the facts which hold in them need not hold outside them. Thus if a fact belongs to the nonpersistent variety, it may hold in a situation  $s$  without holding in a situation  $s'$  comprising  $s$ . Persistent facts which hold in  $s$  will necessarily hold in  $s'$ , however. Thus if there is a man with a hat in this room, there is a man with a hat in the building of which this room is a part. That is because existentially quantified facts are persistent, in contrast to universally quantified facts. (If everybody is happy in this room, it does not

---

<sup>†</sup> University of Brest and Institut Jean-Nicod (Paris),  
Jerome.Pelletier@ehess.fr

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Recanati (2000, 50).

follow that everybody is happy in the building.) Now, if we turn to imaginary situations, we see that even persistent facts holding in such situations need not hold in situations comprising them (...).

Take a book: that is a real world entity which supports a number of facts hence can (like any other entity) be construed as a situation. Among the facts in question there will be facts concerning who authored the book, when it was issued; and so forth, as well as facts about the content of the book – the situation which it describes. We can therefore distinguish a number of situations ordered by the comprise relation. First, we have, say, the reading situation  $s_1$  in which (let us suppose) I presently find myself, with a certain book in my hands. The book in question itself is a situation  $s_2$ , supporting a number of facts (e.g., the fact that there are twelve chapters and 156 pages). The imaginary situation described in the book is a third situation  $s_3$ . Situation  $s_1$  comprises situation  $s_2$  which comprises situation  $s_3$ . Now suppose that, in the imaginary situation described by the book, there is a man who can fly. We have:

(2)  $s_1 \perp_{@} \langle\langle s_2 \perp_{@} \langle\langle s_3 \perp_{w} \langle\langle \text{There is a man who can fly} \rangle\rangle \rangle\rangle \rangle\rangle$

In other words: it is a fact concerning my present reading situation ( $s_1$ ) that it contains a book ( $s_2$ ) which ‘contains’ a situation ( $s_3$ ) in which there is a man who can fly. But it does not follow that in my present situation  $s_1$  there is a man who can fly, even though  $\langle\langle \text{There is a man who can fly} \rangle\rangle$  is a persistent fact. *It is because  $s_3$  is an imaginary situation (whose factual set is relative to a world  $w$  distinct from @) that the facts it supports, whether ‘persistent’ or not, do not persist when we move upward from that situation to the situations comprising it.*

That is the property which I call hyperinsulation (Recanati, 84; emphasis mine).<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2 A new name for an old fact?

One may wonder first whether ‘hyperinsulation’ is a new name for an old fact concerning fictional truths, i.e., the fact that fictional truths are isolated from actual truths. This fact has been put forward most notably by Lewis in ‘Truth in Fiction’.

---

<sup>2</sup> See also Recanati (1996, §6)

In 'Truth in Fiction', Lewis suggests to think of a fiction not in the abstract as, for instance, a string of sentences but as a story told by a storyteller on a particular occasion. Lewis adds that, depending on the world one considers, a same story may be told either as fiction or as known fact. In our world –the actual world-, storytelling is nothing but pretence. But nothing prevents us to consider worlds where the same story that the one which is told as fiction in the actual world is told as known fact. On that basis, Lewis presents the view that true statements about fiction are true in virtue of the states of affairs in a possible world where the story is told as known fact.

“A sentence of the form “In the fiction  $f$ ,  $\phi$ ” is true iff  $\phi$  is true at every world where  $f$  is told as known fact rather than fiction”  
(Lewis 1978/1983, 268).

Lewis is also well-known for his modal realism according to which other possible worlds are just other flesh-and-blood worlds. Other possible worlds are not, for Lewis, in any way, ontologically subordinated to this world, the actual world. This is the reason why Lewis attaches a great importance to the boundaries between worlds. How then are worlds to be individuated? Lewis answers that what separates worlds one from another is spatiotemporal disconnection. A world is unified, according to Lewis, by the spatiotemporal interrelation of its parts. In other words, if two things are not spatiotemporally related, they are not worldmates. All this implies that there does not exist any path – either spatiotemporal nor causal - from one world to another<sup>3</sup>.

Two consequences of Lewis's theory of truth in fiction matter for our discussion. First consequence: there is no path from a possible world where a fiction is told as known fact to the actual world where the same story is told as fiction. Second consequence: there is no path between the many possible worlds where a fiction is told as known fact. Let's call 'fictional world' a possible world where a fiction is told as known fact rather than fiction. For Lewis, there is no path either from a fictional world to the actual world or between two different fictional worlds. In Recanati's terminology, Lewis claims that fictional worlds are twice 'hyperinsulated': they are first 'hyperinsulated' from the actual world and secondly they are 'hyperinsulated' from each other.

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lewis (1986, 69-81).

### 1.3 *One or two Superman?*

Remember that it is a fact concerning my present reading situation ( $s_1$ ) that it contains a book ( $s_2$ ) which ‘contains’ a situation ( $s_3$ ) in which there is a man who can fly. Let’s add that the man who can fly is called in the story ‘Superman’. The hyperinsulation of imaginary situations from the actual world entails, according to Recanati, that they *need* not be in the actual world a man who can fly called ‘Superman’. On that basis, the question one wants to raise is whether they *can* be in ( $s_1$ ) a man who can fly bearing the same name as the man of whom it is said in ( $s_3$ ) that he can fly.

To give to this question a more dramatic turn, let’s imagine that one finds in my present reading situation ( $s_1$ ) a man who can fly called ‘Superman’ who possesses all the characteristics of the man who can fly described in the book ( $s_2$ ). Does the hyperinsulation of imaginary situations from the actual world entail that, contrary to what it seems to a non-philosopher<sup>4</sup>, the Superman of ( $s_3$ ) and the Superman of ( $s_1$ ) cannot bear the same name?

A philosopher who would have lost his pre-kripkean innocence would certainly claim that the Superman of ( $s_3$ ) being essentially fictional cannot exist and, as a consequence, that the nonexistent Superman of ( $s_3$ ) and the existent Superman of ( $s_1$ ) cannot and do not bear the same name. For the post-kripkean philosopher, both names are nothing but homonyms<sup>5</sup>. On Kripke’s

---

<sup>4</sup> A non-philosopher would certainly claim that the Superman of ( $s_3$ ) and the Superman of ( $s_1$ ) do actually bear the same name. Moreover the non-philosopher would claim that both Superman are the same individual and that, after all, the Superman of ( $s_3$ ) exists.

<sup>5</sup> The homonyms mentioned here are different from the ones Kripke has in mind when he allows that a name of a fictional object like ‘Superman’ is ambiguous between two uses, one of which is parasitic on the other. According to Kripke, as the name ‘Superman’ was originally introduced, it has no referent whatsoever and it is used all the way in pretense as a name for a person. At a later stage, this use in pretense ends up creating a fictional character which Kripke conceives as an abstract and existing artifact. In the end, this metaphysical move gives rise to a nonpretend use of another name ‘Superman’ to refer to that existing artifactual entity. In effect, there are for Kripke two different names ‘Superman’: one for a person which does not exist, one for an existing abstract entity. By contrast, the two names which are considered here as homonyms are two names for two different concrete individuals who bear different names with the same spelling.

view, the name ‘Superman’ of the Superman of ( $s_3$ ) is a rigid nondesignator designating nothing either in a fictional world or in the actual world<sup>6</sup>. And the name ‘Superman’ of the Superman of ( $s_1$ ), if it designates anything in the actual world, rigidly designates, on Kripke’s view, the same individual in every possible world in which this individual exists. As a consequence, they *cannot* be in ( $s_1$ ) a man who can fly bearing the same name as the man of whom it is said in ( $s_3$ ) that he can fly.

Note that what has just been said is true only because the Superman of ( $s_3$ ) is a native from ( $s_3$ ): the Superman of ( $s_3$ ) does not exist in the actual world and is not imported from the actual world into ( $s_3$ ). If this were not the case, if for instance the author of the book I am presently reading knew about the existence of the Superman of ( $s_1$ ) and intended to tell a fictional story about this individual, the Superman of ( $s_3$ ) would then certainly bear the same name as the Superman of ( $s_1$ ). Nothing prevents a member of the actual world - for instance, a city or a famous individual - to migrate into an imaginary situation. Imaginary situations are hyperinsulated from the real world without the real world being hyperinsulated from imaginary situations.

#### ***1.4 Fictions within fictions***

If one is ready to admit that Recanati follows Lewis when he claims that fictional situations are ‘hyperinsulated’ from the real world, still, one may wonder whether Recanati would be ready to follow Lewis and to claim that fictional worlds are ‘hyperinsulated’ one from another. In other words, is Lewis right when he claims that fictional worlds are ‘hyperinsulated’ one from another?

This last question really matters to any theory of fiction which aims to give an account of fictions within fictions. Whenever an author of fiction writes fictions within fictions, he or she is led to embed fictional situations within other fictional situations. One of the questions which matters in this context is whether the so-called property of hyperinsulation applies to embedded fictional situations or not.

To answer this question, let’s construct a follow-up of Recanati’s story about the man who can fly. Suppose that the author of the book I am currently reading is a postmodern writer who enjoys fictions within fictions. Suppose then that, in the imaginary situation described by the book, the man who can fly – Superman – is said to be an author of fictional stories. Suppose finally

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Kripke (1972/1980, 157-8).

that in the course of writing a book, Superman creates a beautiful woman. We have then embedded in the imaginary situation  $s_3$  another imaginary situation  $s_4$  - the book written by Superman - a situation supporting<sup>7</sup> a number of facts (the fact that there are 5 chapters and 98 pages). Moreover, we have the imaginary situation  $s_5$  described by the book written by Superman, an imaginary situation which supports among other facts the fact that there is a beautiful woman who, let's say, is called 'Sarah', the factual set of  $s_5$ ,  $w'$ , being different from the factual set of  $s_3$ ,  $w$ . We have in Recanati's symbolism:

(3)  $s_1 \perp_{@} \ll s_2 \perp_{@} \ll s_3 \perp_{w'} \ll \ll \text{'There is a man who can fly who is called 'Superman' and writes a book} \ll s_4 \perp_{w'} \ll s_5 \perp_{w'} \ll \ll \text{'There is a beautiful woman who is called 'Sarah' } \gg \gg \gg \gg$

In these new circumstances, it is a fact concerning my present reading situation ( $s_1$ ) that it contains a book ( $s_2$ ) which 'contains' a situation ( $s_3$ ) in which there is a man called 'Superman' who can fly and writes a book ( $s_4$ ) which 'contains' a situation ( $s_5$ ) in which there is a woman called 'Sarah' who is beautiful. Still it does not follow that there is a beautiful woman called 'Sarah' neither in my present reading situation  $s_1$ , nor in the imaginary situation  $s_3$  described by the book I am reading even though  $\ll \ll \text{'There is a beautiful woman called 'Sarah' } \gg \gg$  is a persistent fact. It looks then as if imaginary situations in the fictional realm still have the property of 'hyperinsulation', even when they contain other imaginary situations embedded in themselves. Lewis's theory seems vindicated and it seems that Recanati would be justified if he followed Lewis all the way and claimed that fictional worlds are 'hyperinsulated' one from another.

### 1.5 A 'metaleptic' meeting

Still one may wonder whether it is possible to generalise what has just been said to *all* instances of fictions within fictions. Consider a fiction containing another fiction (as in the last example) but in which the author allows some of the characters belonging to the embedded fiction to meet some other characters from the embedding fiction. Actually there exist many fictions which allow the boundary between embedded and embedding fictions to

---

<sup>7</sup> Recanati explains what he means by 'to support' in this context in the following way: "Whenever a fact  $\sigma$  holds in a situation  $s$ , or equivalently, whenever a proposition is true at  $s$ , we say that the situation in question *supports* the fact or proposition. In symbols:  $[s] \perp \sigma$  (Recanati, 64)".

dissolve<sup>8</sup>. It is relatively easy to construct a fiction of this kind. It suffices to continue the preceding story a little further. Suppose now that in the imaginary situation ( $s_j$ ) described in the book (fictionally) written by Superman, Superman falls in love with the beautiful Sarah and makes her pregnant<sup>9</sup>. This is an instance of what Genette labels “metalepsis”. Metalepsis is defined as:

“[...] any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse (as in Cortazar)[...]” (Genette 1980, 234-235)

In our example, Superman is the (fictional) extradiegetic author of a particular fiction ( $s_j$ ) in which he himself intervenes. Superman who, in the embedding fiction ( $s_3$ ), is said to be the author of a story about a character called ‘Sarah’, is also said in an embedded fiction ( $s_j$ ) to make pregnant his own character. Let’s call ‘metaleptic’ a fiction which has the following two characteristics :

1. It contains embedded in itself at least another fiction.
2. At least one character in the fiction is said to intervene at a particular level of the fiction at which this character is not a native.

The story (fictionally) written by Superman is an instance of a ‘metaleptic’ fiction. Metaleptic fictions create a problem for theories of truth fiction in the style of Lewis’s theory. If the possible worlds in which a fiction is truthfully told are entirely isolated one from another or, in Recanati’s terminology, entirely ‘hyperinsulated’ one from another, it becomes difficult if not impossible to find a possible world in which a metaleptic fiction would be truthfully told. In fact, metaleptic fictions would require to admit an overlap of fictional worlds and, also, the existence of trans-world individuals. In order to give an analysis of the fictional truth that Superman meets Sarah and makes her pregnant, one should allow that different fictional worlds ( $s_3$ ) and ( $s_j$ ) have parts in common or that Superman, and maybe also Sarah, exist in ( $s_3$ ) as well as in ( $s_j$ ). But Lewis’s modal realism is a modal realism without overlap of

---

<sup>8</sup> Le Poidevin (1995) gives many illuminating instances of fictions of this kind.

<sup>9</sup> In *At Swim-Two-Birds*, Flann O’Brien writes a story of this kind in which a fictional author, Dermot Trellis, creates the beautiful Sheila Lamont. Sheila Lamont is so beautiful that Trellis is said in the fiction to ravish her and to make her pregnant. On this example, see Le Poidevin (1995, 230-1).



worlds and Lewis's counterpart theory is not a trans-world identity theory<sup>10</sup>. A metaleptic fiction is, for Lewis's style theories of truth in fiction and modal realism, an instance of an impossible fiction.

### *1.6 Are 'metaleptic' fictions too unorthodox?*

It is likely that, in order to make his case, an adept of Lewis's theory of truth in fiction and modal realism might object that metaleptic fictions are too bizarre and unorthodox to be analysed in the same way as normal fictions. According to this objection, the fact that it is impossible to find a possible world in which a metaleptic fiction would be truthfully told does not constitute a real difficulty for Lewis's possible worlds analysis of true statements about fiction. If there is a real problem here, it lies with metaleptic fictions themselves which, according to the objection, break the rules of fiction, not with Lewis's analysis of truth in fiction.

To this objection, one may reply that metaleptic fictions may also be considered as the modern follow-ups of those fictions in which a narrator enters into the narrated world. The reply, relying on Genette's definition of metalepsis, suggests that there is a continuity between metaleptic fictions in which a character intervenes into a narrated world and fictions in which the narrator enters into the narrated world, for instance to comment on it or to invite the narratee to enter himself or herself into the narrated world. Here are some examples of fictions in which a narrator enters into the narrated world:

**“Leaving it** [the coach] to pursue its journey at the pleasure of the conductor aforementioned [...] **this narrative may embrace the opportunity of ascertaining the condition of Sir Mulberry Hawk,** and to what extent he had, by this time, recovered from the injuries consequent on being flung violently from his cabriolet, under the circumstances already detailed” (Dickens, 1982, ch. 38, inside the chapter)

“He stretched himself. He rose. He stood upright in complete nakedness before us, and while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! We have no choice left but confess – he was a woman. The sound of the trumpets died away and Orlando stood stark naked. No human being, since the world began, has ever looked more ravishing. [...] Orlando looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing signs of discomposure, and went, presumably, to his

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Lewis (1986, 210-48).

bath.

**We may take advantage of this pause in the narrative to make certain statements.** Orlando has become a woman – there is no denying it.” (Woolf 1989 137-8)

“Mrs. Tow-wouse [...] began to compose herself, and at length recovered the usual serenity of her temper, **in which we will leave her, to open the reader the steps which led to a catastrophe**, common enough [...] yet often fatal to the repose and well-being of families, and the subject of many tragedies, both in life and on stage [i.e. adultery].” (Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* I, xvii)

“As we have now brought Sophia into safe hands, **the reader will, I apprehend, be contented to deposit her awhile, and to look a little after other personages, and particularly poor Jones**, whom we have left long enough to do penance for his past offences, which, as is the nature of vice, brought sufficient punishment upon him themselves.” (Fielding, *Tom Jones*, Book XI, end)<sup>11</sup>

It's been a long time since fiction writers have included in their narrative an extra-fiction concerning the narration itself. Those fictions have become classic. This extra-fictional move on the side of fiction writers requires to consider the narrative itself as an embedded fiction and the narration itself as an embedding fiction. The extracts which have just been mentioned show that the narrator who belongs to the embedding fiction is sometimes said to enter – or, as in the last extract, to intervene - into the embedded fiction, the narrated world. What is remarkable is that these metaleptic passages in no way disrupt the fictional involvement of the reader. Once again they are considered as classic.

It is true that our story about Superman and Sarah represents the intrusion not of a narrator but of a character belonging to an embedding fiction into an embedded fiction. And this certainly makes a difference with the extracts just mentioned. Still one may easily find a continuity between metaleptic fictions of this kind and fictions in which, as in the extracts mentioned, the narratee is invited to make-believe that he can deposit some personages and look at other personages. As soon as one admits that there is such a continuity, the objection concerning the unorthodox status of metaleptic fiction is weakened.

---

<sup>11</sup> One may find some comments on these literary extracts in Pelletier (2003).

## 2 Metarepresentation and transparency<sup>12</sup>

### 2.1 Recanati's 'transparency thesis'

According to Recanati, when a speaker characterizes how the world is according to somebody's beliefs, he does not characterize the actual world but, through mental simulation, someone else's belief world. In saying 'John believes that Morocco is a Republic', the speaker characterizes John by describing the world as it is according to him and the function of the prefix 'John believes that...' is to shift the world with respect to which the fact represented at the primary level 'Morocco is a Republic' is evaluated<sup>13</sup>. On that basis, Recanati claims that what I call 'ascribed situations' are imaginary situations in the following sense :

"In metarepresentations, the fact represented at the primary level is located in the *imaginary* realm rather than in the actual world" (Recanati 2000, xiv).

According to Recanati, metarepresentations are intrinsically simulative. The simulative essence of metarepresentations follows from the intuitive observation that in order to metarepresent, to have a second level belief about a first level belief, one needs to display the content believed - the 'ascribed situation' - at the first level. This is what Recanati calls the 'iconic' dimension of metapresentations. Metarepresentations are 'iconic' in so far as they resemble or replicate the beliefs they are about<sup>14</sup>. The linguistic format of our belief reports, the way belief reports are displayed, is then be, for Recanati, another evidence in favour of the simulation theory of metarepresentations.

The 'iconic' dimension of metarepresentations in turn explains why the ascriber needs first to entertain the content of the first-level representation he or she attributes to the ascribee. This last move leads Recanati to claim that metarepresentations are 'transparent' representations. Metarepresentations do not constitute an opaque interface between the ascriber and the ascribee's thoughts since the ascriber needs to entertain the semantic content of the representation he attributes - the 'ascribed situation' - to the other person. In

---

<sup>12</sup> This part of the paper is a sequel of Pelletier (2002).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Recanati (2000, 168).

<sup>14</sup> On the iconicity of metarepresentations, cf. Recanati (2000, 9-12).

my terminology, ‘ascribed situations’ are, for Recanati, transparently represented.

In all these moves, Recanati relies on the syntactic format of indirect discourse to deduce some of its semantic properties: the iconic presence in the metarepresentation at the syntactical level of the object representation or ‘ascribed situation’ entails, for Recanati, that in order to attribute a belief one needs first to entertain the semantic content of the ascriber’s belief. This is the ‘transparency thesis’, the fact that whichever state of affairs the object representation represents, the metarepresentation also represents: whenever a meta-representation displays the content  $x$  of an object-representation, then the metarepresentation is bound to be about  $x$ . According to Recanati, a genuine metarepresentation  $dS$  (where  $d$  is the tag and  $S$  the radical) satisfies the following schema:

“Schema (I):  
One cannot entertain the proposition that  $dS$  without entertaining the proposition that  $S$ .

For example:

One cannot entertain the proposition that John believes that grass is green without entertaining the proposition that grass is green.”  
(Recanati 2000, 10)

## ***2.2 An empathetic conception of simulation?***

Recanati’s proposal has for it a pre-philosophical intuition about the truth of our belief reports. According to that intuition, a true belief report contains a that clause whose terms have the same *references* as the ones used by the subject of the report. As is well-known, this pre-philosophical intuition goes against what has now become the standard Fregean philosophical intuition according to which the that-clause of a belief report has to express some sort of conceptual content that the subject of the report believes in order for the report to be true. To use Davidson’s phrase, Recanati tries to recover this ‘pre-Fregean semantic innocence’<sup>15</sup>.

Recanati’s proposal has also for it a long philosophical tradition when he stresses the vital role of simulation in belief reports and metarepresentations. In the now classic debate in the philosophy of mind about the cognitive

---

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Davidson (1968, 108).

mechanisms involved in ‘mindreading’<sup>16</sup>, the ‘theory theorists’ claim that the ability to think about other’s mental states can be explained by our (maybe tacit) possession of a theory of the structure and functioning of the mind while the ‘simulation-theorists’ maintain that the ability to understand the mind of others is grounded in our ability to engage in mental simulation. Recanati is a friend of simulation theory. As other simulationists, Recanati has behind him a long philosophical history going back as far as Vico, Dilthey and Weber, an history which has recently enjoyed a resurgence in Quine (1960), Goldman (1989) and, most notably, in Gordon (1986)<sup>17</sup>.

What is mental simulation? It is an exercise of the imagination commonly described as putting oneself or imagining being ‘in someone else’s shoes’. At least, two steps are involved in a simulation:

1. In this imaginary move, the simulator finds himself having certain feelings, certain beliefs and desires, he finds himself choosing a certain course of action...
2. The simulator is then in a position to judge that the simulatee is *actually* having such and such states, *similar* or at least *analogous* to the simulator’s own imaginary states.

Is there in this very general description of an exercise of mental simulation some grounds in favour of Recanati’s ‘transparency thesis’? It is said in this general description that the process occurring in the simulator *models* the process occurring in the simulatee, or that the simulator uses his own mental states *to represent* another’s mental states. But nowhere it is said, contrary to Recanati’s claim, that the simulator literally thinks what the simulatee thinks. Generally, it is said that when we engage in mental simulation, we attribute psychological states to others on the basis of our experience of the same psychological states, or at least *similar* or *corresponding* or *analogous* ones. All these phrases point towards the presence of a non-transparent or opaque ingredient in simulation. Simulation theory, as it is traditionally conceived, is non-transparent. Let’s quote Goldman:

---

<sup>16</sup> See Davies & Stone (1995a, 1995b), Carruthers & Smith (1996) and Dokic & Proust (2002).

<sup>17</sup> On the philosophical antecedents of simulation theory, see Goldman (1995, 188-9).

“Let us (...) describe the simulation heuristic (...). The initial step is (...) to imagine being “in the shoes” of the agent (...). This means pretending to have the same initial desires, beliefs, or other mental states that the ascriber’s background information suggests the agent has. The next step is to feed these pretend states into some inferential mechanism, or other cognitive mechanism, and allow that mechanism to generate further mental states as outputs by its normal operating procedure. For example, the initial states might be fed into the practical reasoning mechanism which generates as output a choice or decision. (...) More precisely, the output state should be viewed as a pretend or surrogate state, since presumably a simulator doesn’t feel the *very same* affect or emotion as a real agent would. Finally, upon noting this output, one ascribes to the agent an occurrence of the output state (Goldman 1995, 189)”.

Goldman rightly stresses that presumably a simulator doesn’t feel the *very same* affect or emotion as a real agent would. One should add, following Goldman, that presumably a simulator doesn’t think the *very same* thought as the simulatee. On that basis, one may doubt that simulation is as transparent and innocent as Recanati apparently believes it is. Actually, the very opposite may be true. Of course, it may happen that the shoes that the simulator occupy are enough like those of the simulatee. In these circumstances, as Recanati suggests, the simulator can metarepresent in a transparent and innocent way. But one may wonder whether, in these particular circumstances, the simulation of the ascriber involves an imaginative experiment since, in these circumstances, imagining may not be necessary to think what the other thinks.

Following simulationists like Goldman, Recanati claims that one needs to put oneself into someone else’s shoes in order to entertain a genuine metarepresentation. But, unless one follows radical simulationists like Gordon and adopts *contra* Goldman what may be called an empathetic conception of simulation, the former claim does not by itself entail Recanati’s ‘transparency thesis’, that is the thesis that the ascriber needs to think what the ascribee thinks.

There is here a risk of confusion between two different imaginative projects which may be involved in an exercise of simulation. To put oneself into someone else’s shoes in the manner of Goldman is a very different imaginative project from the project of thinking what someone else thinks in the manner of Recanati. The main difference between the two imaginative projects is, according to Wollheim (1984, 76), that while the former leaves it

open to the simulator at any moment to imagine himself being face to face with the simulatee, the latter rules out such possibility<sup>18</sup>. The distinction between these two projects is present in the phrase ‘Imagining being X’ which, at the conceptual level, is an ambiguous phrase. Its sense can vary between two extremes, from ‘imagining *oneself* in X’s place’ to ‘imagining that one is X *rather than oneself*’<sup>19</sup>. Only the latter project rules out for the imaginer to imagine being brought face to face with X. Following Mackie (1977), Goldie (1999) notes that what is characteristic of the modest ‘imagining being X’ in the sense of ‘imagining *oneself* in X’s place’ is that, contrary to what is required by empathy, it involves a mixture of the imaginer’s properties and of the X’s properties<sup>20</sup>. And I believe an exercise of simulation – as it is traditionally conceived in simulation theory – shares many more characteristics with the modest imaginative project rather than with the other.

As a conclusion, I suggest that Recanati’s conception of simulation is an empathetic conception. Only such a conception can motivate Recanati’s ‘transparency thesis’ for it is only through a process like empathy that the ascriber can lose sight that he or she has a different point of view than the ascribee. For Recanati, empathy is a process by which a person imagines, not only the emotions and affects of another person, but also the thoughts of another person. But whereas there is no doubt that some degree of empathy is needed to detect someone else’s affects and emotions, one may wonder whether the same mechanism is at work to ascribe beliefs to someone else.

## References

Carruthers, P. & Smith, P. (dirs.) 1996 : *Theories of Theories of Mind*, Cambridge University Press.

---

<sup>18</sup> “[I]magining myself in the Sultan’s shoes (...) leaves it open to me at any moment to imagine myself brought face to face with the Sultan. And that is something that the imaginative project I have in mind [empathizing with the Sultan] clearly rules out (Wollheim 1984, 76)”.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Goldie (1999, 397).

<sup>20</sup> To adapt Goldie’s excellent example to our times, the question: ‘What would I do if I were in G.W. Bush’s shoes?’ does not motivate an answer like ‘Obviously, just as G.W. Bush would’ nor an answer which supposes that I, with all my characteristics, am strangely catapulted into Bush’s chair in the Oval Office. Cf. Goldie (1999, 412).

Davidson, D. (1968), 'On Saying That' reprinted in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, 93-108.

Davies, M. & Stone, T (dirs.) (1995a) *Folk Psychology : The Theory of Mind Debate*. Oxford : Blackwell.

Davies, M. & Stone, T (dirs.) (1995b) *Mental Simulation : Evaluations and Applications*. Oxford : Blackwell.

Dickens, C. 1982, *Nicholas Nickleby*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Dokic, J & Proust, J (dirs.). (2002) *Simulation and Knowledge of Action*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Advances in Consciousness Research series, Amsterdam/Philadelphia.

Genette, G. 1980. *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Goldie, P. (1999). "How We Think of Other's Emotions", *Mind and Language*, 14, 394-423.

Goldman, A. I. (1989). "Interpretation Psychologized." *Mind and Language*, 4, 161-85.

Goldman, A. I. (1995). "Empathy, Mind and Morals", in M. Davies & T. Stone (dirs.) (1995b) *Mental Simulation : Evaluations and Applications*. Oxford : Blackwell, 185-208.

Gordon, R. (1986): "Folk Psychology as Simulation." *Mind and Language*, 1, 158-71.

Le Poidevin, R. 1995. "Worlds within Worlds? The Paradoxes of Embedded Fiction", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 35, N°3, 227-238.

Kripke, S. 1972/1980. « Naming and Necessity », in D. Davidson et G. Harman (eds.), *Semantics of Natural Language*, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1972, republished in S. Kripke, 1980, *Naming and Necessity*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

Lewis, D. (1978/1983) « Truth in Fiction », *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. XV, p. 37-46., reprinted in David Lewis, 1983, *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1, New York, Oxford University Press, p. 261-280.

Lewis, D. (1986) *On the Plurality of Worlds* Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

Mackie, J. (1977) *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. London: Penguin.



Pelletier, J. (2002). "Reply to François Recanati", in J. Dokic & J. Proust (dirs.), *Simulation and Knowledge of Action*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Advances in Consciousness Research series, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 173-184.

Pelletier, J. (Forthcoming 2003). "Vergil and Dido", *Dialectica*.

Recanati, F. (1996): "Domains of Discourse", *Linguistics and Philosophy* 19, 445-475.

Quine, W. V. (1960): *Word and Object*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Recanati, F. (2000) *Oratio Obliqua, Oratio Recta – An Essay on Metarepresentation* Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press)

Walton, K. (1990). *Mimesis as Make-Believe : On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

Wollheim, R. 1984. *The Thread of Life*. Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press.

Woolf, V. 1989. *Orlando. A Biography*, San Diego : Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.