The meta as an aesthetic category

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Abstract
Philosophical logic defined a metalanguage as a language about a language. After that, the word “metapicture” was used by Mitchell to identify a picture about a picture. Once we are not dealing with language, we may think that we are not dealing with signification. However, the word “meta” and its aboutness may assume that a picture has to be interpreted and has a meaning. We think that this is not accurate in order to understand the meta. The present article proposes to define the meta as an aesthetic category and not as a logical one. The analysis takes into account viewers’ attention to self-referential works of art so as to propose an embodied aesthetic analysis. We want to show that the experience of meta in art is a reflective experience. A picture is seen as a metapicture relative to the attention that viewers have on it: they can or cannot see it as a metapicture. Obviously, activating the meta quality changes the perception of the picture. One might think that the meta quality is due to paradoxes. In fact, self-reference often leads to paradoxes. We precisely want to show that paradoxes are not a necessary ingredient to induce the meta specific feeling. Why? Probably because the mere work is not reflective; it is not a speech. The reflexivity that is supposed to be in the work is actually the reflexivity of the cognition of spectators projected in the work. Similarly to Kant’s definition of the sublime, the structure “meta” lies in the subject, not in the picture. The experience of the metapicture should actually be named as the meta-experience of the picture.

Keywords: reflexivity; embodied aesthetic; meta-cognitive; representation; sublime; attention; paradox

The main theme of this paper is to approach the meta as an aesthetic category. This kind of approach is unusual because of the close links between meta and logic. The prefix “meta” is polysemic; it could mean “after,” as well as “beyond,” “with,” or “about.” Although the origins of the term “metaphysic” are discussed, the term “metalanguage” is clear. It is commonly admitted that a metalanguage is a language applying to a language. Thus, the terms “word,” “sentence,” or “comma” belong to a metalanguage. We understand that such a language is used in relation with a first language. The richness of the prefix is then clear, and in this framework scholars develop various terms.

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Citation: Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, Vol. 6, 2014 http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/jac.v6.23009
constructed with the prefix understood in a logical way: a meta-thing is a thing about the same thing. Thus, pictures nested in other pictures are called metapictures. The word “metapicture” seems to be used according to its logical meaning in reference to the word “metalanguage.” The mere fact that some pictures are “metapictures” presupposes that the picture is about something. Pictures may have various objects, and some pictures (i.e. metapictures) may be about pictures.

That is why metapictures are usually defined through a field that envisages what pictures mean. Even though Mitchell considered with caution the relationship between metalanguage and metapicture, he considered metapictures within the framework of iconology. Mitchell did not manage to extricate himself from the logical framework; in fact, these two fields aim at studying the meaning of signs. Mitchell was right when he said he did not want to “derive a model for pictorial self-reference from art or language,” but we think that he should not have added “but to see if pictures provide their own metalanguage.” He wanted to show that pictures are “capable of reflection on themselves,” but they are not. He rightly wanted to bypass the logical field, but he replaced it with “the ‘ordinary language’ view of pictures and images,” which is a kind of spectrum of logical metalanguage. A picture does not talk; we are not able to listen to or to read a message from it. It is, therefore, necessary to leave behind the hermeneutical posture that still seems fundamental to define metapictures. It is all the more important to dispense with the logical posture, contrary to what Nöth and, after him, Grishakova did. This is necessary in order to understand how metapictures affect perceiving subjects and how one can aesthetically experiment with the meta.

The main hypothesis is that a metapicture does not have any “meta” quality, but its apprehension activates a specific cognitive function that is based upon an interweaving pattern. Held to be the cause of this cognitive status, those pictures are seen as metapictures. This structure articulating subject and object is the same that Kant described in the sublime: the vast ocean is not absolutely large, but the effort made by the faculties of subjects confronted with the vast ocean, meanwhile, is absolutely large. Furthermore, since all aesthetic experiences are reflexive, that is to say involving the same self-referential loop found in the “meta” structures, aesthetic experiences generated by metapictures exemplify aesthetic experience in all its radicality.

First, we want to show that it is impossible to consider pictures and metapictures without taking into account the viewer’s attention and cognition. Thus, a “metapicture” is not an objective concept but a subjective and cognitive one. Then, we propose to describe the experience of metapictures without using logic and metalanguage. Meta is then qualified as a cognitive process so as to describe the experience of metapictures as a metacognitive and embodied experience.

SPECIFIC SUBJECTIVE ATTENTION, PICTURES, AND NESTING PICTURES

At first, a metapicture seems patterned upon the model of Russian dolls, as if there were a box containing a doll. The doll is the content like the nested picture, and the box is the container like the metapicture. At first sight, only two elements appear to be involved—the metapicture and the nested picture—as if there were just container and content. However, a metapicture involves several elements, not only two. The other elements are not new objects; they emerge from new kinds of perception of the same objects as boxes or as dolls. This principle is that a same object functions as different elements depending on how it is considered. An additional element appears as soon as one realizes that a box is not only a package, not only a container, but also a doll, hence content. Russian dolls, or nesting dolls, have trivialized the strangeness that emerges from such structures. Indeed, the basic situation of dolls nested within one another is objectively accurate. But, when we are interested in the perception of these structures, things get complicated. Perceiving an object as container and perceiving an object as content respectively represent two different actions. Thus, in the case of a doll inside another doll, there is the internal doll seen as a doll, the external doll seen as a box, the internal doll seen as content, and the external doll seen as a doll. Through these different ways of perceiving the elements, through these different possible attentions to the perception of objects, the perception of nesting dolls emerges. Metapictures follow a similar process. An element seen as a container cannot simultaneously be seen as content. Its function is not the same.
In order to better understand the issues related to the functionality of an object, we ought to remember that being a work of art is not a quality, but a function, of the object. An object is not essentially a work of art; it needs to be implemented; “implementation [means] all that goes into making a work work.” Thus, generally regarded as a work of art, an object may not work as an object in certain situations. An example of this is the famous case of reciprocal readymade by Marcel Duchamp. He suggests that we use a Rembrandt painting as an ironing board. And, conversely, an object that is not usually recognized as art can be put in such a situation that makes it work as a piece of art: The Bottle Rack, created by Duchamp in 1914, or Campbell’s Soup Cans produced in 1962 by Andy Warhol are two famous examples of such a transfiguration of the commonplace. The situation in which objects are activated to function as works of art is called the “implementation” of the work by Goodman. We have to add that implementation is not radically objective. We usually hang photographs of our holidays as we hang a painting, even as we hang pots and pans on kitchen racks: the objective part of the implementation is not sufficient to make an object work as a piece of art. Implementing an object as a work of art may be necessary for the activation of some objects, but it might not be enough. Objective criteria are not sufficient to define implementation and activation. The cognitive attention by which the viewer apprehends the object also has to be taken into account. For example, two people fist fighting in the street are seen in different ways if we think of it as a street art performance or as a real fight.

Of course, every work of art is not a picture and every picture is not art, but the remark made on the subjective and cognitive implementation of a work of art can be applied to pictures. The viewers’ attitude when they apprehend a picture is highly critical: if they immerse themselves into the picture, they temporarily inhibit the picture qualities of representation in order to apprehend the picture like a nesting presentation. On this point, metapictures appear to raise the possibility of such an immersion. Indeed, when one sees a picture nested in another picture, a hierarchy of representation seems to emerge: the picture in the picture seems less real than the picture in which it is located. In return, the overall picture seems truer; it seems more real. Spectators seem to have to set themselves in the virtual space represented by the picture to see the internal picture as a nesting representation. But the fact is that there is only one picture. The painting represented in L’Appel des cimes by Magritte in 1943 is painted with the same paint as the rest of the painting. Seeing a picture in another would mean neglecting the distinction between pictures and represented things, between signifier and signified. It would mean forgetting the treachery of images that Magritte stigmatized when he painted in 1929 “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” (“This is not a pipe”) under a picture of a pipe, in a work entitled The Treachery of Images. Moreover, such a surface is a picture for a subject injecting sense in it. Therefore, this stratification of representation has no objective legitimacy, or even a priori legitimacy. This way of perceiving pictures stems from a long historical and social development.

METAPICTURES AND INTERPRETATION

The main issue in metapictures is to establish whether, when we consider the aboutness of a metapicture, it remains a picture—or whether, on the contrary, our attention moves away from
the function “picture” to substitute the function “message.” Viewers would see a metapicture either as a picture or as something about a picture. These two functions do not seem compatible, yet they need to be in order to provide the experience of the metapicture.

An interpretation seems necessary to get a metapicture, but it may also prevent viewers from perceiving a picture as a picture. Therefore, we have to determine the conditions required for the interpretation not to be a shift of the “picture.” Whereas language can quote words, a picture cannot quote another picture in the same way. Pictures do not constitute language. Most often, viewers project onto the picture the speech they are willing to confer to the picture. At best, the picture would act as a mediator between the one who produced it and those who receive it; it would allow the viewer to meet the intentions of the artist. Yet, the problem with such a postulate is that it raises the picture as a degenerate form of speech, or at least a non-complete form of speech. Thus, the picture is no longer a picture. It would have to be decoded and deciphered, and become a text, as if it could not stand on its own. We do not have to look at pictures and works of art as coded messages waiting to be decoded; that would be regrettable. Yet, the prefix “meta” causes the crisis of the picture; it postulates that a speech is required. But, the term is not without meaning. It describes precisely pictures that use the mise en abyme (i.e. pictures in which one can see other pictures). Many examples could be mentioned of this phenomenon because picture nesting is an artistic way to exploit the porous border between presentation and representation. Its main feature seems to be the fact that a picture is necessarily a picture of something. Drawing a two-dimensional representation in a picture allows the artist to exploit the medium and manages to highlight the difference between representation and presentation. Therefore, painting metapictures means managing to create pictures with a reflective approach. Herein lies the difficulty: the “meta” seems to deny the characteristics of the picture as a picture in order to relegate it as a proto-text; but, simultaneously, it seems to be an efficient way to achieve an understanding of what a picture is. This ambivalence in the use of metapictures reveals a problem that is specifically related to the reception of pictures. Thus, when one is looking at a metapicture, does one apprehend it as a picture or as something dealing with a picture? The question has to be raised because attention is selective and a dual focus seems difficult. Thus, once the “metapicture” quality of a picture nesting another picture is perceived, its quality as a picture fades away to the benefit of the picture to which it relates. This is not anymore a picture, but this is like a speech. Conversely, since a picture does not provide speech, its qualities of meta vanish if the metapicture is seen just as a picture. However, the appeal of the interpretation of a metapicture precisely lies in the fact that the interpretation concerns a picture and does not concern something else. Therefore, to apprehend a picture both as a picture and concerning a picture, it has to be a self-referential picture. A hermeneutic attitude would not be an end in itself in this case, but it could be a means to complete the understanding of pictures. Indeed, we have to highlight the aesthetic specificity of metapictures. Metapictures should deal with themselves and not with another picture that is represented in them.

**SELF-REFERENTIAL PICTURES AND METAPICTURES WITHOUT INTERNAL FRAME**

At first glance, this possibility seems hardly feasible: the picture should have to be embedded in itself without any required frame. But the frame is not inevitable for metapictures: since the viewer’s attention is the most fundamental parameter in order to make picture nesting, an internal frame is not required to create metapictures.

For example, Fabio Rieiti has painted on the Quai des États-Unis, in Nice, France, a mural showing a landscape of the French Riviera with blue sky and palm trees. The mural stands perpendicular to the sea so that we can see both the Mediterranean Sea and the painting. If the sea is in front of us, the picture is on our right; therefore, no one would be tricked by the painted sea. A ladder put against the wall of the trompe-l’œil and a painter currently completing a palm tree are also shown on the mural. Thus, the trompe-l’œil features the realization of another optical illusion: the aim is not to make people believe that the painted palm is a real palm but that the painted ladder is a real ladder. This picture is painted with two layers without any internal frame. Undoubtedly, this mural would not be seen in the same way without the shadow
of both painter and ladder. These shadows are depicted on the nesting representation of the trompe-l’œil in order to make us believe that the painter is painting the sea. But the painter and the ladder are also painted. There is no internal frame visible because it coincides with the outer frame: the two pictures are embedded in the same image. The nesting picture lies in the thickness of the virtual picture and not in a portion of its surface. This mural brings to mind An Attempt at the Impossible by Magritte in 1928: an artist is represented in the process of painting a woman. However, a fundamental difference persists: a proper hierarchy is not possible in Magritte’s painting. The painter and his painting share the same virtual space; it is not possible to distinguish them, even in the depth of what the picture represents. Specifically, since the man is painting the woman, she clearly lies in a level of reality that is embedded in the man’s level, but what can we say about the level of the place where the two characters stand? The woman and the painter seem to stand on the same floor. There are no breaks in the floor. Oddly, the painter and his painting are in the same environment. The title of the work also draws attention to the possible sharing of space, but once again, we have to remember that the picture has neither space nor depth, apart from those that a subject wants to see. Since the painter and his painting share the same virtual space, it is impossible to draw a line between the two layers of representation. Therefore, it is also impossible to draw a line between the metapicture and the picture that is apparently nested in the first one. Finally, a similar conclusion can be proposed for pictures with internal pictures: the drive to isolate a picture from another picture means that we thought that the internal picture would mask some part of the whole image, a part that the viewer could easily fill mentally. But nothing could be masked by anything because everything evolves on the same surface, the surface of the picture. Therefore, if there is no distinction, why do we continue to talk about metapictures? What could be nested, since there is not more than one single picture? Furthermore, we understand that the distinction proposed by Nöth between metapictures and self-referential pictures is not applicable. In fact, if we cannot draw a line separating a metapicture from the embedded picture, we will not be able to distinguish between another picture in the picture and the same picture in the picture: there is only one picture, and it is the picture itself.

A metapicture can exist without internal frame; therefore, a self-reference picture is possible. The metapicture would be the only picture that could be interpreted without disabling its iconic status: as soon as a metapicture deals with itself as a picture, a metapicture can be seen simultaneously as a picture and as concerning a picture.

PARADOXES, METALANGUAGE, AND METAPICTURE

The interest of the metapicture would lie in this nesting of the work of art in itself. In terms of logical vocabulary, it is as though metapictures induced a paradox by breaching the laws of hierarchy, in a similar way to Epimenides’ paradox of the Cretan liar who says, “I’m lying.” This statement is, in fact, really different from the proposal “The sentence of Peter is false,” said by someone else. Yet both are sentences that belong to metalanguage. The question is whether or not the first seems more appealing because it is a paradoxical statement. It would be perfectly normal to think so. Self-reference and paradoxes are often associated; the second one is like the limiting case of the first one; the paradox points to the singularity of self-reference. Thus, all this also indicates what makes it attractive. These proposals led logicians to establish strict rules on how metalanguage and object language could interfere: the main rule is that we must banish the paradox of the logical framework. This situation probably marks the profound separation between the two meanings of the term “meta”: on the one hand, in logic, and on the second hand, in aesthetics as connected to the picture. Contrary to what Nöth proposed, we should not model the self-reference in pictures on logical paradoxes. In fact, while it is true that in an everyday conversation we never hear a statement similar to “I’m lying,” and therefore that the paradoxical statement, in addition to being a logical abnormality, has no practical reality, it is also true that there is no law in art prohibiting an artist from producing a picture that seems paradoxical. Metapicture and logical metalanguage are different. Many pictures by Escher are depicting a paradoxical world. Here a misleading perspective, there a concave volume becoming convex; the paradoxical pictures of
Escher are certainly not all paradoxical because of the metapicture quality of his pictures. However, *Drawing Hands*, one of his most famous lithographs, and an example taken by Noëth, derives its peculiar interest from its self-reference. This picture shows two hands drawing each other. Levels of reality are impossible; no linear hierarchy is plausible; an inconceivable circularity is obvious: while the picture seems to work as a whole, it cannot be viewed in its entirety as a picture of something. The picture is, therefore, not possible as a realistic picture, but it is still perceived as a picture; it is seen as a paradoxical picture.

Accordingly, an epistemological problem arises: what context would be able to give us a full understanding of the concept of “metapicture”? The logic certainly raises the use of the prefix, but, whereas the logic radically distinguishes the metalanguage from the object language and prohibits any proposal from intermixing them, the aesthetic concern is interested in the possibility of articulating them in the same visual proposition. Hence, the paradox vanishes: since there is no logical framework to distinguish right from wrong, the paradox itself loses its meaning. The place of self-reference is the only remaining position, and the statement “I am telling the truth” does not exploit metalanguage in a less self-referential way than the proposal “I’m lying.” The inability to raise a level in which one would be the “meta” of the other persists, as if only the relationship between two levels could generate metapictures. In this sense, Escher’s *Drawing Hands* is compelling: assigning a different level to each of the two hands would be absurd because each needs the other. If the attention focuses on the left hand as it draws the right, the viewer apprehends the picture of a hand in the process of drawing another hand. Both hands are apprehended, but they evolve in two different levels of reality. There is no problem in this case to establish a hierarchy in the representation, but the viewer’s attention can switch and reverse the hierarchy. Then, what are the two levels of the picture? The structure patterned upon the left hand on one side and the right hand on the other side is meaningless; there are at least two different ways of perceiving the picture. Those two possible perceptions of the same picture could be combined to give the impression of a nested hierarchy. However, such a hierarchy is not fixed; its order can change. In other words, it is impossible to qualify a level of pure picture and a level of metapicture, but different perceptions of the picture might be articulated by the apprehension of the spectator. Hence, without two distinguishable levels in the picture, why do we even talk about metapictures? The prefix “meta” does not, actually, apply to the picture. The picture is certainly strange, and it has a peculiar strangeness, but there is nothing in the picture that is “on,” “beyond,” “with,” or “about” the picture; there is no overlap in the picture. This observation is obvious in the case of Escher’s lithograph, but we must recognize that this picture is remarkable: it is a metapicture without internal frame. Is it possible to make the same observation for pictures with an internal frame? We determined that a picture was seen as a metapicture as soon as the spectator perceived layers of representation, and this happens with *Drawing Hands*. This picture contains layers, but no nesting. Actually, the hierarchy of layers is the problem: which one is behind the other, and which one is about the other? This question, in turn, obviously admits answers neither posed about Escher’s picture nor posed about a picture provided with an internal frame. In this way, the first picture is about the second one, but the second one is also about the first one. Finally, which picture is about which? According to the context, the spatial and graphic overlapping seems to be preferred to the contextual and hermeneutic one, but the mere fact that both are considered indifferently shows the limits of the conception of a metapicture as a picture about another picture. This kind of retroactive phenomenon disrupts any hierarchy of strata. A Russian doll is perceived as sometimes internal, sometimes external. The structure seems built in a complex relationship that results in a reciprocal exchange. With or without frames, there is no overlap in the picture.

**METAPICTURE AS METACOGNITIVE AND EMBODIED EXPERIENCE**

While there is no overlap in a picture, we cannot make the same statement about cognition in these pictures. In order to realize the strangeness of the picture described as a metapicture, spectators have to distance themselves from their perceptions in order to collect these perceptions from the inside. Thus, in this apprehension, the possible
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significance of the picture is no longer the aim; the experience of contemplation of our own perception of the picture becomes the aimless result. In this case, a metapicture is actually a picture that requires an act of metacognition, that is to say, a cognitive process based on a nesting.

The metacognitive act is not a rare and isolated case exclusively related to the metapicture. This act is common and can take different forms. We can, for example, assess our own knowledge, realizing that we are or are not able to answer some questions before we even seek the answer. Knowing that we know or knowing that we do not know forms a part of the daily metacognitive acts. There is knowledge about knowledge. The metacognition involved in the aesthetic experience of metapictures takes a different form. Its cognitive act not only involves the so-called high-level processes, but also explains why an aesthetic experience is possible: the metacognition does not occur “intellectually, through the consciousness of our intentional activity,” but “through the mere inner sense and sensation.” In paragraph 9 of the Critique of the Power of Judgement, Kant phrased in those terms one of the most fundamental questions of the analytic of the beautiful dealing with the awareness of the free play of the faculties of cognition. He wrote that the free play of faculties reached the consciousness of the subject through sensation. We have to understand the act necessary for metacognitive experience of the metapicture in this sense. Perceiving subjects feel a particular arrangement of their cognitive faculties; they see themselves as perceiving subjects. They perceive the dynamism of their faculties, and the simple act of perceiving emphasizes this momentum. All the elements of a meta-structure are put together; we are still to understand why such metacognition would happen suddenly. Probably because the object apprehended is difficult to determine. We must remember that the perception was primarily established in order to ensure the survival of the living, not to obtain knowledge of the world. A basic tendency is to identify what is perceived. In addition, there is no doubt that the boundary of representation tends increasingly to be dissolved in the so-called low-level processes: the primary reaction in front of such a picture of reality is not different from a reaction to the mere thing. Identifying a picture is identifying what it shows. Therefore, a metapicture cannot be labeled. One’s perception is lost once it is in front of this type of visual proposition, as it can get lost while listening to a pun. Since it is no longer able to identify an object, the perception is no longer a means to ensure survival through action, and therefore the content of perception has no other alternative than to become an end. Perception as a mechanism becomes its own object. The experience of metapicture gets all its aesthetic relevance simply because it initiates a particular cognitive process failing to clearly identify the object of its perception so as to optimize the action. Thus, a second cognitive level emerges and intermingles with the first one. When the perception is detached from its connection to action, metacognition takes over. We think that this description enables the understanding of the wildness of some metapictures like the Duck-Rabbit. We must not forget that Mitchell classified multistability pictures in the category of metapictures, although the first ones are a very specific kind of picture. We think that the link lies in the cognitive processes that are required: the same cognitive loop emerges, and the individual is used to externalizing this feeling of cognitive loop.

This process seems to be the same for the spectator of any aesthetic experience. This is exactly what happens during the experience of vertigo. Biologically, the perception of void alerts human beings and enables them to make sufficient arrangements to ensure their survival. Such stimulations become meaningless when individuals know that they are safe. Individuals can then focus on their embodied sensations associated with these stimulations, and then they can enjoy these sensations or not without worrying about some aims. Becoming a spectator means becoming the spectator of one’s own accession to the world. This is essentially a reflexive posture because movement returns to the subject. This structure is rarely thought of in those terms when we enjoy an experience described as aesthetic. But in the singular experience of metapictures, this structure manifests itself in a conscious way precisely because those pictures seem built like the involved cognitive structure. Furthermore, metapictures seem to embody objectively the reflecting and subjective process of all aesthetic experiences. In this sense, metapictures exemplify the aesthetic experience.
CONCLUSION

Once viewers have extracted the supposed content of the work, what would remain of their relationship to the work of art? Would they still apprehend it as a work of art or just as any container that might have a different look? If so, the interpretation would have no artistic relevance anymore.

Metapictures, because of their apparent aboutness, may raise this issue more than other pictures. However, the experience of metapictures is a rare moment where one can apprehend a picture. The viewer gets to see the picture as a picture, not just for what that represents. Apart from metapicture, this situation is certainly possible, but it happens by highlighting the material cause of the picture, such as a thicker stroke. But in these cases, the picture is no longer just seen as a picture, but as a painting, a drawing, or a photograph. On the contrary, the singularity of the metapicture makes it possible to see pictures just as pictures. However paradoxical it may seem, apprehending a metapicture means experimenting with the picture in an aesthetic way. “Aesthetic” because individuals become aware of their own perceptions: their experiences are reflexive ones. In fact, only some appearances give the impression that the relationship between the viewer and the metapicture is not aesthetic. This is because the subject is confronted with a picture that he or she cannot identify. The viewer’s attention then turns to something other than what the picture represents: a metapicture acts as an attentional or pre-attentional decoy enabling the individual to become a spectator. Since being a spectator is primarily not being a spectator of an object, but of one’s own means of perception and cognition, the experience of the metapicture should actually be named as the meta-experience of the picture.

Kant points to the same analogy by using the word “sublime.” According to the philosopher, qualifying the nature as sublime is wrong. The sublime does not lie in an object, but in the faculties of subjects. However, the transfer is done. This situation is just like a hypallage in literature: the predicate does not describe the thing to which it refers grammatically, but it describes something with which a relation is maintained. The term “metapicture” is a hypallage. Similarly to Kant’s definition of the sublime, the structure “meta” lies in the subject, not in the picture.

Notes

1. William John Thomas Mitchell, Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 36.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Winfried Nöth, “Metapictures and Self-Referential Pictures,” in Self-Reference in the Media (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 61–78; and Marina Grishakova, “Intermedial Metarepresentations,” in Intermediality and Storytelling (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 312–32.
5. Nelson Goodman, “Implementation of the Arts,” The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 40, no. 3 (Spring 1982): 281–3.
6. Arthur Danto, The Transfiguration of the Commonplace (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).
7. Op.cit.
8. The strangeness that emerges from this observation results from the twofoldness of the image defined by Richard Wollheim, Painting as an Art (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); and Richard Wollheim, “On Pictorial Representation,” Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 56 (1998): 217–26.
9. Bruno Trentini, “Jeux de Langage et de Vision: Torsions et Tensions de l’Imitation,” in Paralangues (Paris: Philologicum, 2010), 249–58.
10. Jim T. Enright’s works on changes of the accommodation while one apprehends different plans of a two-dimensional representation make relevant the concept of virtual thickness of the image: beyond a mere intellectual knowledge, the image seems to have some depth (“Art and the Oculomotor System: Perspective Illustrations Evolve Vergence Changes,” Perception 16, no. 6 [1987]: 731–46.)
11. Op.cit.
12. Ibid., 75–6.
13. Accustomed to these images, they seem familiar. Yet, the view required makes them strange. The Freudian category of uncanny is able to characterize the experience of the metapicture. Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” in The Penguin Freud Library, Volume 14: Art and Literature (London: Penguin, 1990).
14. Joëlle Proust, “Metacognition and Metarepresentation: Is a Self-Directed Theory of Mind a Precondition for Metacognition?” Synthese 159, no. 2 (2007): 271–95.
15. Immanuel Kant, op.cit., 103.
16. Ibid., 104.
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17. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 17.
18. Mitchell, op.cit., 45–57.
19. For the same reasons, unlike Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), Kant wrote that the safety is a necessary condition for the feeling of the sublime.
20. Op.cit., 129.
21. Ibid., 129–32.