



Kafkaesque worlds in real time

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Abstract

We read in a linear fashion, page by page, and we seem also to experience the world around us thus, moment by moment. But research on visual perception shows that perceptual experience is not pictorially representational: it does not consist in a linear, cumulative, totalizing process of building up a stream of internal picture-like representations. Current enactive, or sensorimotor, theories describe vision and imagination as operating through interactive potentiality. Kafka's texts, which evoke perception as non-pictorial, provide scope for investigating the close links between vision and imagination in the context of the reading of fiction. Kafka taps into the fundamental perceptual processes by which we experience external and imagined worlds, by evoking fictional worlds through the characters' perceptual enaction of them. The temporality of Kafka's narratives draws us in by making concessions to how we habitually create 'proper', linear narratives out of experience, as reflected in traditional Realist narratives. However, Kafka also unsettles these processes of narrativization, showing their inadequacies and superfluities. Kafka's works engage the reader's imagination so powerfully because they correspond to the truth of perceptual experience, rather than merely to the fictions we conventionally make of it. Yet these texts also unsettle because we are unused to thinking of the real world as being just how these truly realistic, Kafkaesque worlds are: inadmissible of a complete, linear narrative, because always emerging when looked for, just in time.

Keywords

cognitive literary studies, fictional worlds, imagination, Kafka, vision, perception, reader-response, Realism, time

When we read a text, we read in a linear fashion: we start at page one and read to the last page; we read sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, page by page.¹ And it feels as though we also experience in a linear way: we feel like unified selves going through the world, registering events as they happen, having experiences that succeed one another

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in a temporal flow – something like the flow of a stream. As William James, the founding father of modern psychology, has it: the stream of consciousness.²

Vision is the primary human sense: the sense by which we get most of our information about the world.³ Vision has been a subject of philosophical and scientific inquiry since Antiquity, and many of these investigations have sought to explain the nature of visual experience with recourse to the discrete images that are received by the retina. The continuity of visual experience which we may conceive of as a Jamesian flowing stream has often been characterized as a sequence of images succeeding one another in a sort of internal picture show, or inner theatre – with the self as the privileged audience of one.⁴ For a tradition which stretches from Aristotle through Kant and into modern science and folk understanding, seeing is observing a current pictorial representation of the world. According to this widespread way of thinking, seeing requires that we build up a detailed picture of a situation as we enter it: we make rapid eye movements, or saccades, around the scene, and take in visual information through the eyes, which is transmitted to the brain, where the information is processed to create a mental, picture-like representation of the scene – and this process constitutes seeing. If we pay sufficient attention to certain things or look at them closely enough, they ‘reach’ conscious awareness; that is, they arrive upon the mental ‘screen’ or ‘stage’ on which they are played out.⁵ So, according to this notion of what seeing is, to be consciously perceiving the environment is to have built up a sufficiently detailed internal representation of it.

However, this model of vision, currently still espoused by pictorialist theorists, would imply that we take some time to piece together a scene: that seeing a new environment means first seeing a sharp small area in the centre of the visual field,⁶ and this area gradually expanding, so that the rest achieves clarity as we move our eyes and accumulate information. But seeing does not feel like this: we come into an environment, or wake up in a room, and the world is there, all at once, just like that, just as it always is. How is it that we can see instantaneously, if seeing is a process of building up a pictorial representation?

For a literary critic concerned with how fictions engage their readers, these questions are fundamental. If we want to have any chance of understanding how narrative texts induce in the reader an experience of the fictional world they depict, we must acquire as deep and accurate an understanding as possible of the processes by which we experience the real world around us. The close links between vision and imagination make such understanding all the more imperative: much research on visual perception and mental imagery has established strong connections between the two processes, in terms of cortical activation and neural pathways.⁷ When reading a text we visually register the words on the page; but we experience the world of the text, its reality, through the imagination. The textual ‘representation’ of ‘reality’, which was the ideal of traditional 19th-century Realist writers and commentators (see e.g. Plumpe, 2003: 222), requires that the text effectively engage the reader’s imagination. The text must make us imagine the fictional world almost as though we were really seeing it. As Zenon Pylyshyn puts it in his extensive work on mental imagery *Seeing and Visualizing: It’s Not What You Think* (2003), ‘Prior to the development of an adequate theory of mental imagery, the term “mental image” is only the name for the experience of “seeing” without the presence of the object being seen’ (2003: 419).⁸

An investigation of how the imagination is stimulated by a text must therefore begin by exploring how vision connects us with the world, and how ‘conscious experience’

thereby occurs. When we then apply to literary analysis the phenomenological insights we have gained into the workings and the nature of visual consciousness, we find that some texts more directly engage our cognitive and perceptual processes than others. For instance, the novels and short stories of Franz Kafka are remarkable for the imaginative force with which they establish their fictional worlds – a force so characteristic that it has earned the name ‘Kafkaesque’, defined by the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* as: ‘Of or pertaining to the Austrian writer Franz Kafka (1883–1924) or his writings; similar to or suggestive of the nightmarish atmosphere or situations portrayed in his stories’.⁹ Dictionary definitions of the term vary, but all have in common the reference to a situation or an atmosphere, equated with an experiential state or qualified in experiential terms.

The popularity of the term ‘Kafkaesque’ shows no sign of abating. Just the first few pages of a Google search yield results ranging from ‘Renewing my driving license online: a Kafkaesque experience: Part 2’ to ‘Kangaroo Tribunals Give a Kafkaesque Edge to Guantanamo’; we find Amnesty International’s condemnation of Guantanamo Bay as Kafkaesque, as well as the online riposte entitled ‘Guantanamo: Kafkaesque, in a Good Way’. Wikipedia (<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kafkaesque>>. 17.9.2007) gives 17 ‘cultural references’, listing uses of the term in a wide range of media, including Woody Allen’s 1977 film *Annie Hall*: ‘Rolling Stone Reporter: Having sex with you is a really Kafkaesque experience. I mean that as a compliment. Alvy Singer: Umm ... thank you.’ (1977, dir. Woody Allen. USA: Rollins Joffe).

Popular usage and dictionary definitions yield an overall sense of the ‘Kafkaesque’ as a descriptor of an actual experience which is highly compelling, yet at the same time somehow unsettling: reference to that which feels ‘auf rätselvolle Weise bedrohlich’, for instance, invokes an element of threat, but also a mystery which invites or even demands unravelling. The *Oxford English Reference Dictionary* (2nd ed., 2002) speaks of an ‘impenetrability’ that implies a desire to get beyond the oppressiveness to its cause. The popularity of ‘nightmarish’ horror films, and the whole Freudian discipline of ‘Traumdeutung’, or the interpretation of dreams (e.g. Freud, 1932) also remind us that nightmares are often far from unequivocally repulsive.

The term ‘Kafkaesque’ conveys a certain way of being in the world: a paradoxical combination of feeling compelled and yet simultaneously unsettled. As will be shown in this article, this duality is a salient characteristic of the experience of reading Kafka. In the following, I will try to elucidate *why* Kafka’s texts make us feel and imagine in these ways. I will show that the power of Kafka’s fictional worlds to induce an imaginative experience in the reader can be connected with the processes by which we see the world around us.

An exploration of vision and consciousness should seek to reconcile the phenomenology of visual experience and what we know about the apparatus of visual perception and cognition. I suggested earlier that from a first-person, subjective point of view the pictorial model of seeing, which proposes a cumulative process of looking, building up an internal picture, and then seeing, does not quite seem to fit the experiential facts. Theories such as Stephen Kosslyn’s (1994), which attempt to account for the basic phenomenology of looking out and seeing the world by positing ‘veridical displays’, or pictures-in-the-head of any sort, also encounter insurmountable theoretical and empirical obstacles.

The most basic of the former is the unavoidable invocation of an infinite regress, as a corollary of the homuncular fallacy: if there is a picture-like array inside the head, which presents either an image of external sensory stimuli or internally generated 'mental images', it has to be cognized, observed, by some internal faculty of observation – a homunculus of some sort. And if I need a little man inside my head looking at my internal pictures, he must need one inside his, looking at his pictures ... and so on.¹⁰

Pictorialist thinking like this nonetheless remains so alluring because it is reassuring to assume that at all times we have an accurate pictorial 'representation' of the world around us, and a singular self located somewhere in the head or brain, perceiving it. We look out and seem to see a picture of the world, and we try to explain this by saying that this happens because we are seeing an internal picture. Yet, as Pylyshyn notes, 'while the literal picture-theory or cortical display theory is what provides the explanatory force and the intuitive appeal, it is always the picture *metaphor* that people retreat to in the face of the implausibility of the literal version of the story' (2003: 418). Visuo-spatial metaphors proliferate in thought (both everyday and philosophical/scientific) about cognition and consciousness. These metaphors range from streams of consciousness to the contents of consciousness, from pictures to theatres to 'global workspace' (e.g. Baars, 1997). 'Pictures in the head' are a 'natural' way of thinking about imagining, or a 'helpful' analogy, but most modern pictorialists would not admit to positing 'actual pictures' – implying that positing 'functional' pictures somehow evades all the difficulties.¹¹ However, the Cartesian dualism inherent in such forms of thought is no less fundamental for being metaphorical: the metaphors are hard to shed in the shift from thinking about experience to accounting for it.

This pictorial model also seems intuitively plausible, since most of the time we feel that we manage successfully to interact with an accurately represented world, as singular embodied agents separate from it. The assumption that we are able to see because our brains can build up vivid and detailed pictures of the world¹² remains such a prevalent assumption largely because of the remarkable fitness for purpose of human vision: we have so many parallel interconnecting processes contributing to our experience of 'seeing', from pop-out detectors to edge recognition and contrast-controlling mechanisms, that it is easy to believe that all the 'parts' go to make a pictorial 'whole'.

However, in addition to such insoluble conceptual obstacles as the homuncular fallacy and infinite regress, there is substantial empirical evidence from the fields of psychology and the cognitive sciences, notably in the burgeoning field of 'enactivism', to suggest that this way of thinking about seeing is fundamentally flawed. We will now consider two examples which demonstrate that vision cannot operate through a simple progress of looking, building up an internally cognized pictorial representation, and then seeing. We will then be in a position to suggest an alternative answer to the question: what really does happen when we see?

The first example of the inadequacy of a pictorial model of vision and consciousness is drawn from Daniel Dennett's (Dennett, 1991) discussion of the still-controversial question of whether the brain 'fills in' for the blind spot¹³ – and hence more broadly whether we need, or can possibly have, all the visual detail in our heads, as opposed to leaving it out there in the world. This example has been cited by numerous researchers since, notably Blackmore et al. (1995).¹⁴ Tackling this question, Dennett asks us to imagine walking into a room wallpapered with identical portraits of Marilyn Monroe. You walk in, and you see at a glance, 'instantly', that they are all the same – and would notice straight away if one had

a hat or a silly moustache: ‘You would see in a fraction of a second that there were “lots and lots of identical, detailed, focused portraits of Marilyn Monroe”’ (Dennett, 1991: 354). You can make only four or five saccades per second, so you could focus on only a couple of the Marilyns ‘in the time it takes to jump to the conclusion *and thereupon to see* hundreds of identical Marilyns. We know that parafoveal vision cannot distinguish Marilyn from various Marilyn-shaped blobs, but nevertheless, what you see is not wallpaper of Marilyn-in-the-middle surrounded by various indistinct Marilyn-shaped blobs’ (1991: 354). You do not see, as the limitations of saccades and foveal fixation¹⁵ would suggest, one clear portrait and lots of bleary blobs, before turning to the next, focusing on that, identifying it as Marilyn, and so on. You see ‘all Marilyns’; yet you cannot possibly have had time to look at them all.

There is an apparent temporal disparity: we haven’t had time possibly to have looked – yet we ‘see’. This immediate sense, or illusion, of totality is repeatedly evoked in Kafka’s narratives: in both *The Trial* and *The Castle*, for example, the protagonist often enters a new environment – or wakes up in a room – and sees it all at once, just like that. In *The Trial*, Josef K., having woken on his 30th birthday to be arrested for an unknown crime, spends a long time searching high and low in a large tenement building for the room in which he is to have his first interrogation. Here he enters the chamber at last:

K. felt as though he were entering a meeting. A mass of the most varied people – no one paid any attention to the man entering – filled a middle-sized two-windowed room, which was encircled close to the ceiling by a gallery that was also completely full, and where the people could stand only hunched over and hit the ceiling with their heads and backs. K., for whom the air was too close, left the room again. (Kafka, 1990a: 57)

In this passage, Josef K. is described only in terms of the acts of entering the room and leaving it again; the air suffocates him, so he remains only a brief moment. Yet in this instant, he is aware of the dimensions of this decent-sized room, of the different people it contains, of the gallery running around near the ceiling, the postures of the people there, its being completely full. The way in which Josef K. is defined solely as ‘der Eintretende’ (‘the man entering’) prompts the reader to infer that the process does not take long; in terms of the basic limits of physiology and physics, therefore, he simply cannot have had time physically to look at all that he is described as seeing.

We might imagine how Josef K.’s eyes will have been darting around the scene as he is confronted with it – but what he will actually have been able to look at and focused on clearly will have been gappy and sparse. What he sees, though, is the room in its entirety; he has a sense – an illusion – of totality, conceptual as well as purely visual: ‘a meeting’. He instantly ‘sees’ (visually and cognitively) the concept of a ‘meeting’, instantaneously imposing meaning on his sensory experience. It might be objected that this is narrated statement rather than the character’s inferential perception; but in the context of free indirect speech which is sustained throughout the novel and which limits the reader largely to what K. experiences, the reader tends to assume that what is evoked here is what K. himself sees. Furthermore, a change to the manuscript makes it clear that the instantaneous cognitive-perceptual classification is the character’s own: the change from ‘K. entered a meeting’ to ‘K. felt as though he were entering a meeting’ (Kafka, 1990b: 187) establishes that the definition of the situation as ‘a meeting’ is K.’s immediate

impression rather than a separately given fact; it renders all that follows equally perceptually relative. Nonetheless, it might also be objected that such examples of scenes seen all at once¹⁶ demonstrate nothing more significant than the imperative of narrative efficiency, which merits a degree of poetic licence on Kafka's part: this is simply a way of efficiently conveying information about the fictional world to the reader.

However, I argue that such evocations of the remarkable event of instantaneous perception – of the world just being there when we open our eyes, when we enter a new place – reflect a fundamental feature of how vision operates; and that evocations of this sort can therefore help us understand how texts such as these stimulate the reader's imagination so powerfully. The factor of temporality in sensory experience that is here brought to the fore gives us a starting point for questioning further whether the processes of visual perception really are pictorial, linear, and cumulative. In general, we have the impression that, at any given moment, we are seeing much more than is actually the case. There are many instances in which the temporality of events itself limits our ability to experience them, although we might expect their salience to make them unmissable. You would very likely assume that if you were talking to someone, and their jacket began to change colour, and very gradually changed from red to blue as you continued speaking to them, you would notice. But experiments on the phenomenon of 'change blindness' force us to reconsider our opinions of what constitutes our visual – and hence also our imaginative – experience.

Detailed empirical work on change blindness and inattention blindness, beginning in the 1980s, has brought about a significant shift in vision science, challenging the pictorial model of visual perception. Experiments in which observers fail to notice a strikingly salient change in a scene challenge the very idea, appealing and long-held as it has been, that vision consists in building up a rich and detailed internal representation of the world – or even any sort of representation at all.¹⁷ I have discussed how we can 'see' things that we cannot possibly have looked at, in the sense of having focused on clearly: we come into a room and see a whole room, not a series of fragmentary foveal 'images' built up over time into a total pictorial 'representation'. The converse is also true: we can be 'looking' directly at something and fail to see it. Change blindness was first observed in contexts where a change in the display – even such a salient change as two people exchanging heads – was made at the moment in which the eyes make a saccade (Grimes, 1996), but it has since been observed in many other forms: when there are brief flashes or blank screens between pictures (e.g. Blackmore et al., 1995), with image flicker (Rensink et al., 1997), during cuts in films (Levin and Simons, 1997), and as a consequence of gradual change (Simons et al., 2000). Viewers fail to notice such salient changes as the disappearance of an object in the centre of the visual field – a large black rock in the foreground of a river scene, for example (Simons et al., 2000) – even though they may be trying to do nothing other than find what is changing.¹⁸

Change that occurs so gradually as to be imperceptible – or that renders it impossible to judge whether or not anything has changed – is also evoked in Kafka's works as a feature of ordinary perceptual experience. In *The Castle*, for instance, K. is perpetually attempting to gain access to the castle, perpetually unsure of whether he is making any progress at all. Soon after arriving in the village, he meets Barnabas, and walks with him, he knows not where:

Then Barnabas stopped. Where were they? Weren't they going on? Would Barnabas take his leave? He wouldn't be able to. K. held Barnabas' arm so tightly that he himself almost felt the pain. Or should the inconceivable have occurred, and they were already in the Castle or before its gates? But as far as K. was aware, they hadn't climbed at all. Or had Barnabas led him on such an imperceptibly climbing path? "Where are we?" K. asked quietly, more to himself than to Barnabas. (Kafka, 1982: 50–1)

K. simply cannot tell whether the path has been going uphill so gradually that he has failed to notice it, or whether his senses are indeed not fooling him, and nothing has changed at all. Such instances of essential indeterminacy are a dominant feature of Kafka's narratives, and bring home the extent to which perception is as much about a sense of familiarity – about memory and expectation – as it is about actual processing of currently incoming sensory information. Seeing the world is knowing how it would be if you looked – or thinking you know (see e.g. O'Regan and Noë, 2001: 945). Kafka makes us recognize this fact not least by depriving us of our usual sense of familiarity with commonplace entities and spaces such as paths and castles. His techniques of defamiliarization bring out the extent to which we rely on our confidence in what is familiar, as it is potentially available to us.

This element of potentiality – knowing how it would be *if* you looked – is crucial to recent enactive, or sensorimotor theories of perception, which offer a promising way out of the deadlock that has developed between the pictorialist and the propositionalist camps in discussion of vision, consciousness and mental imagery. The 'pictorialist/propositionalist' debate is most conspicuously headed by Kosslyn and Pylyshyn respectively (see e.g. Kosslyn, 1980; Pylyshyn, 2003). The picture theorists conceive of the image as 'analogue' representational array; the propositionalists conceive of language-like representations as sufficient to account for all cognitive processes, including the effects attributed to imagery. Representation, whether analogue or propositional, is at the explanatory heart of both – and so are all its attendant difficulties, as touched upon earlier. The sensorimotor theory of vision, which avoids these difficulties, is most notably propounded by O'Regan and Noë in their 2001 article 'A sensorimotor account of vision and visual consciousness'.

In O'Regan and Noë's article, seeing is described not as a process of building up pictorial representations of the world, but as an enactive process of interacting with the world with knowledge of the changes that would occur if you moved in such and such a way – that is, with mastery of the relevant sensorimotor contingencies. Seeing the 'whole' apple 'now' is knowing how the light and shadow will fall differently on it if you move a bit, how the specular highlights on its surface will vary, how the back side will start to come into view, and so on. Your perception of the apple is at any moment only partial, yet you recognize the apple as a whole. Thus the 'now' of experience is imbued with potentiality, with knowledge of the past and of possible futures, to the extent that it makes little sense to ask, of any given moment, 'what precisely was I conscious of then?'¹⁹

Such a question is nonsensical, because experiences are not momentary pictorial representations, singular events in time; they are ongoing interactions with the world: 'experiences are not acts; they are not representations; they are activities, events themselves; they are temporally extended patterns of skillful engagement' (Noë, 2006: 31–2). We

store not information about the world, but the information needed for further exploration of it. The visual input is continually thrown away; we have, inside our heads, no pictorial representation or version or detailed information about the world around us, because we can leave the detail out there in world.²⁰ We never have, never need to have, all the Marilyns in our head at once: 'no matter how vivid your impression is that you see all that detail, the detail is in the world, not in your head' (Dennett, 1991: 355). The hundreds of Marilyns are not pictorially represented in your brain: 'Your brain just somehow represents *that* there are hundreds of identical Marilyns' (Dennett, 1991: 355). Pictorial representation is not involved; there is a crucial distinction between the 'representation of presence' and the 'presence of representation'. Pictures cannot depict simply 'more of the same'; the canvas must be filled in with something in particular, rather than by indeterminacy denoting repeated particularity. There are no pictorial representations in the brain, but there is increasing evidence that some information is retained between saccades, otherwise we would have to start all over again with each blink or movement of the eye. However, this information is very minimal, having been characterized variously as constituting a 'sketchy higher-level representation' (Blackmore et al., 1995), a 'gist' (Simons and Levin, 1997), or a 'virtual representation' (Rensink, 2000).²¹ The basic point holds true: we feel we see far more than we do, because usually, when we need to check whether we saw something, we can simply look again. Seeing is about ongoing skilful interaction with the world, not about painting internal pictures of it. There is no internal picture show or Cartesian theatre (see e.g. Dennett, 1991: 39) in which all the accumulated contributing experiential data are played out. We do not pictorially represent the world to ourselves at all; we do not need to, because the world is always there when we look.

There are no pictures in the head, either when we see or when we imagine. It may be tempting to think that the creation in brain area V1 (primary visual cortex, which is active in both seeing and imagining) of a topographically mapped area of the seen or imagined stimulus²² can explain the quality of the visual or imaginal experience. However, we must remember that the neural representation, the 'picture in the head', may be spatially isomorphic, but it is also hugely distorted and is not, for example, 3D or coloured. There can be no reverse engineering by which we deduce the nature of the percept from its cortical map.

The logic of isomorphism takes us only so far, and where it gives out it shows the fallacy of the whole: no explanatory gap is really being bridged. The hard problem of how brain states 'give rise to' conscious experience remains as hard as ever, while on the sensorimotor account it becomes a 'pseudo-problem'.²³ The sensorimotor account of vision can be extended to encompass the processes of imagination: they, too, do not involve having pictures in the head, but consist in an activity of exploration, like visual perception (Thomas, 1999). Just as we experience the world 'as if' we were seeing it all in vivid detail, so we imagine as if we were seeing the corresponding object. Seeing is the active exploration and interrogation of the environment, and imagining is partial enactment of this exploration in the absence of the appropriate object: 'Imagining a cat is seeing nothing-in-particular *as* a cat' (Ishiguro, 1967, cited in Thomas, 1999: §2.3.1). We go through the motions of an interrogation but wholly or partially disregard the answers we get back – because what we are imagining does not correspond to anything actually 'out there' in the external world, any actual stimulus that would have been responsible for the present 'visual' experience.

This way of thinking about imagining is advocated by the philosopher Thomas, a proponent of the Perceptual-Activity theory of perception and mental imagery; he explicitly aligns this theory with the ‘enactive’ approach that has emerged out of O’Regan and Noë’s original (2001) sensorimotor theory of visual consciousness. According to the Perceptual-Activity or sensorimotor theory of imagining, when we imagine, we are not looking at an internal array as if we were looking at the external world; we are activating the sensorimotor knowledge of what it is like to be looking at something (knowledge accrued in past experiences of such looking). This might mean that we have a preparedness to look in some particular way, or activate the colour system in a relevant way, and so on. We do not represent the perceptual world, either the external or the imagined; we enact it: ‘we enact the world by skillful exploration’ (Noë, 2005: 244). The reading process is thus enactive in the most fundamental sense. Kafka’s writing taps into the fundamentally non-linear, non-pictorial processes of perception, precisely by evoking the fictional world through the perceptual enaction of it, which directly stimulates the reader’s imagination. *The Trial* begins thus:

Someone must have falsely accused Josef K., because without his having done anything wrong, one morning he was arrested. His landlady Frau Grubach’s cook, who brought him his breakfast at about eight o’clock every morning, didn’t come this time. That had never happened before. He waited a little while longer, saw from his pillow the old woman who lived opposite and who was watching him with a quite uncharacteristic curiosity, but then, at once disconcerted and hungry, he rang the bell. Instantly there was a knock at the door, and a man whom he had never seen in the house before came in. ... “Who are you?” K. asked, and immediately half sat up in bed. (Kafka, 1990a: 7)

The novel’s opening establishes the narrative situation with remarkable power, yet neither for Josef K. nor for the reader is there a detailed picture built up of the room as seen from the bed, in which things then begin to happen. Just as the reader is introduced to the scene ‘in medias res’, so Josef K. wakes up in the room, which becomes visually available to him as it was not during sleep.²⁴ The first thing we learn about where Josef K. is is that from his pillow he can see the old woman opposite; we infer the bed from the pillow, and know nothing more about the bedroom until there is a knock at the door – in the German (‘klopfte es’) the door is not even explicitly named as such. Yet we imagine it fluidly, as Josef K.’s attention is directed towards it. The details of the world emerge as required: as he interacts with them, as we need to know about them.

The perpetual potential for looking, and having mastery of the changes that would occur if we did so, characterizes the ways in which we see and imagine. Kafka powerfully exploits the extent to which the minimal can be sufficient, in both vision and imagination.²⁵ His evocations of the fictional world through the eyes of the protagonist convey visual experience with an accuracy in minimalism that powerfully stimulates the reader’s imagination. As in the opening of *The Trial*, he often gives us very little, yet in such a way that, as in the real world, we do not experience a lack.

In the case of both the extent of the fictional world and the detail of its description, the sufficiency that Kafka’s texts achieve through the fragmentary or the indeterminate can be attributed to the fact that in the perceptions of the character, the world or its details are

simply there, as given, as soon as required. To take one small example: Josef K. needs a clean shirt (1990a: 19), so he goes to his wardrobe, which was there before and which he (and hence we) will have 'seen' inasmuch as he saw no gap where it wasn't; but which he has not seen, in the sense of attending to it, until he needed the shirt – at which point the colour or size or shape of the wardrobe is not what he is attending to, because he just needs the shirt. K. is unlikely to register the specifics of appearance of his own wardrobe as he hastily seeks a shirt to confront his arrestors; and so, as we read of his fetching the shirt, we do not register the *absence* of specifics because our attention, too, is otherwise directed. The experiential convergence of character and reader through evoked visual perception and induced imagining makes us feel we really 'see' what he does.

This has the effect of making our imaginative experience particularly true to actual visual experience: it has the ease of apparent spontaneity, and gives us the sense of a world available to be interacted with. We experience as Josef K. does, incompletely yet sufficiently; the world emerges as required. Thus the narrative is one which corresponds less to the narratives we retrospectively create about our experience than to the nature of sensory experience itself.

Part of the magic of Kafka's texts lies in their allowing this confluence of the narrated perception and the imaginative processes of the reader to be so complete. In this respect Kafka can be contrasted with traditional nineteenth-century Realist writers, whose novels often open with detailed depictions of the scene in which the action will take place (see e.g. Fontane, 1971: 7, 319). Such scene-setting seems to be predicated on the assumption that we need verbal 'pictures' to be painted of the narrated scenes so that we can vividly, accurately imagine them – and that this (creating pictures in the head of the reader) will correspond most closely to what it is like actually to see these situations, because seeing itself occurs through a process of creating pictures in the head of the observer. The impression that this is realistic is supposedly enhanced through accumulation of spatial, visual, and even geometric specificities, especially at the openings of narratives. Fontane is often cited as a major German exemplar of the Realist tradition, and especially in the openings of his novels, the geometric precision of the descriptions is striking: indicators of distance, angle, orientation, and direction proliferate;²⁶ and these are interspersed with vivid, discrete, precisely profiled and located objects and edifices.²⁷ The construction of the scene typically operates by conveying exactly what can be seen from a clearly defined standpoint, as in his 1888 novel *Erring, Straying* (*Irrungen, Wirrungen*): 'a house, which ... could easily be seen from the street that led past it.'²⁸ All this delays the onset of the plot proper; the time it takes to read all of this highlights the artifice of the textual construction of perception. Kafka, by contrast, gives us just enough so that we feel no lack; although no scene is conventionally set, we are drawn fluidly into the fictional world. Yet we are somehow also slightly unsettled, because we are not used to being given so little.²⁹

The opening paragraph of *The Castle* is a striking example of how little Kafka gives us, and of how powerfully he thereby prompts an imaginative response. The novel begins:

It was late evening when K. arrived. The village lay in deep snow. Of the castle hill there was nothing to be seen, fog and darkness surrounded it, not even the faintest glimmer of light hinted at the great castle. For a long time K. stood on the wooden bridge that leads from the country road to the village and looked up into the apparent emptiness. (Kafka, 1982: 7)

The fact that these lines make such a powerful opening demonstrates the force of not specifying, of leaving space for the potentiality that comes from indeterminacy. All we are told about the castle is that it cannot be seen; yet it is so important a part of the scene that we cannot help ‘seeing’ it. The intriguing interactions of what is and is not described in this passage may cause us to ‘see’ the castle in detail in our ‘mind’s eye’ – *even though all we are told is that it cannot be seen*. This raises many questions about the interrelations between the words and the imaginative experiences they induce. Nonetheless, it is clear that the cognitive and emotional salience of that castle somehow compels us to give it visual form – just as K. does, looking up into that emptiness which he somehow knows is only ‘apparent’.

Seeing is not about seeing everything, all at once; it is about feeling that one could. Visual perception *seems* like seeing everything; in fact, our insatiable desire to look, our ever-imminent looking, is itself enough to make us *seem* at every moment to be perceiving it all. As O’Regan (1992) provocatively puts it: ‘Perception is an *illusion* created by the desire to look ...!’ Our experience of the world consists not in looking and then seeing, but in our perpetually imagining looking, and imagining what we would see. Kafka here evokes K. enacting this illusion, and makes us enact it too.

How, then, can we say what precisely is part or not part of these perceptual experiences? Kafka’s texts confront us with the fact that there is no single stream of experiences, which can be neatly charted in the traditional Realist fashion; there are multiple threads, or drafts,³⁰ any of which can at any time be made to seem ‘conscious’ by probing, by paying attention, by asking the question, ‘am I conscious of that now?’ All of these threads are simultaneously providing information, for use by the brain’s multiple systems for regulating ongoing actions, but they are not part of our ‘conscious’ experience until we ask. Kafka’s writing works with the fact that sensory experience, or ‘consciousness’, cannot be pinned down to a singular pictorial representation, or ‘final draft’. This is equally true of the fictional worlds that Kafka evokes, and which we experience through the imagination. Neither when we see, nor when we imagine, are we working towards some static point of representation, anywhere in space or at any moment in time; there is no place, or time, at which all those threads come together and ‘reach consciousness’. Yet we like to think that there is such singularity, such temporal clarity.

We tell stories about our experience as though it were possible to say with certainty, ‘this happened then’, and ‘I saw it then’ – just as the traditional Realist text does, we set the scene and recount the events. Such processes of narrativization (making ‘proper’ narratives out of experience) are one of the basic features of human consciousness.³¹ In *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, Jaynes describes the compulsion to narrativize as a universal feature of human experience. Narrativization is the ubiquitous construction of the idea that, to paraphrase the illusion as Jaynes (1976: 63) encapsulates it, ‘I am seated where I am, I am reading a journal article and this fact is embedded more or less in the centre of the story of my life, the time of which is spatialized into a journey of my days and years’. Jaynes (1976: 64) summarizes the automatic nature of this process in more general terms: ‘Consciousness is ever ready to explain anything we happen to find ourselves doing.’

If we recognize that this sort of narrativization is what is going on in our sensory experience all the time, we can then seek better understanding of our familiar narratives, both cognitive and literary. We might start to consider other ways of making narratives

of experience, which are not rigidly linear or experientially coherent, continuous, total. We might also acknowledge the limitations of the conventional processes of narrativization. Most of the time, they work fine: they serve the purpose of allowing our lives to retain the impression of a single path trodden by a singular subject, in which each change of direction is the consequence of a freely willed decision and to which a precise time and place can always be ascribed. But sometimes we may be led to see these narratives for what they are: simply post-hoc fabrications, imposing apparent coherence where there is none.

The phi phenomenon, first systematically studied by the Gestalt psychologist Wertheimer in the early 20th century, provides an example of such processes of narrativization, and their ubiquity on the very smallest scale of sensory experience. Here (Wertheimer, 1912), two dots are presented to the viewer, flashing alternately at a speed and distance such that the viewer sees apparent motion: a dot appears to move across the screen between the locations of the two flashing dots. The philosopher Goodman later asked whether the illusion of motion would be preserved if the two dots were different colours: would the viewer then report seeing the colour of the 'moving' dot change from red to green in 'mid-flight'? In fact, as reported in a study by psychologists Kolers and von Grünau (1976), this is precisely what many experimental subjects report. This presents a temporal conundrum: how does the brain know that the dot is going to turn green before the green dot has even appeared yet? Did the brain retell the experience after the event, to add the colour change and make us remember seeing something we did not? Or did it 'redraft' the experience even as it occurred? (See Dennett, 1991: 114–15, 120–8). There can be no definitive answer to this question; yet, as we watched the dot moving and changing colour as it moved, it all seemed quite simple, it all made perfect sense. We construct plausible retrospective narratives of our experience like this all the time. But if, as here, we are prompted to ask, 'did I really see that then?', 'did I see or imagine it?', the nature of the 'experience' – retrospective fabrication – is exposed: we stop and think for a moment, and question the story we have just told.

Kafka exposes the processes of narrativization for what they are, by several different means. He shows how common it is for a seemingly adequate experiential story to have been told, but then to be revealed as lacking, and have to be retold: both *The Trial* and *The Castle* are notable for the protagonists' repeated failures of perception, and their attempts to assimilate or compensate for these failures. Josef K., in *The Trial*, repeatedly fails to notice things, or recognize people:

Then K. remembered that he hadn't noticed at all the departure of the inspector or that of the guards, the inspector had hidden the three clerks from him and then the clerks in turn the inspector. That did not testify to great presence of mind, and K. resolved to be more careful in this regard in future. (Kafka, 1990a: 28–9)

Josef K. here realizes his past failures to perceive, tells a plausible story to account for both failures, and then resolves to do better in future – to pay closer attention. Josef K. – and the reader – realizes that there was a gap in his experience. But at the time he felt no gap, and nor did the reader. The narrative world with which by now we may feel ourselves to be reasonably familiar is defamiliarized; we are forced to recognize that our

conception of perceptual processes as reliable and complete representations of the world is an illusion. The incomplete nature of perceptual experience is momentarily exposed, before the totalizing linearity of the experience, as the character retrospectively narrates it to himself, is restored. Here, the linear, totalizing nature of narrativization is momentarily broken, before being reinstated. Elsewhere, however, this process of sense-making is evoked less in its inadequacy than in its simple superfluity.

As we saw in the excerpt from the opening of *The Trial*, Kafka conveys perception as a fluid enactive process, in a way that makes conventional linear, cumulative, totalizing narrative redundant. The same effect is achieved through the notable preponderance of the pluperfect tense in both *The Trial* and *The Castle*. Repeatedly, in the simplest narrative situations, an event is narrated as having already happened: 'The farmers behind him had already come up very close to him' (Kafka, 1982: 38). The pluperfect is here not used as a subsidiary to the simple past tense in a main clause; the pluperfect stands alone, and indicates that the time of experience and that of narration have not been completely congruent. Yet in general, at such moments, we feel no jolt back into the recaptured 'present'. We accept that there was a gap and that we did not notice it, that it did not matter, and that it is now being 'filled in' – just as the character accepts all this. The free indirect mode of narration in these two novels, with shifting intrusions of a narratorial voice that is temporally, spatially, or cognitively incongruent with that of the protagonist,³² further increases the reader's awareness that the processes of narrativization are to a large degree arbitrary. We are made aware that perceptual experience is characterized by an essential indeterminacy, which may be retrospectively resolved into a coherent story, but which in many cases – and in either of these novels taken as a whole – permits no temporal or experiential certainty to be gained. No proper story can be told.

Thus Kafka shows not only the ways in which we habitually create linear, totalizing narratives about the world, but also the fundamental inadequacies of such narratives, and their superfluity. Kafka often gives us so little, and so equivocally – and yet, as in our experience of the real world, there is always enough – at least until the moment at which something prompts a backwards glance, a 'what was I conscious of a moment ago?' on the part of a character, or a 'how much was I really given?' on the part of the reader. Then the attempt made, by character or reader, to achieve reassuring clarity will be nothing other than a more or less successful fabrication.

Although the ways in which we habitually make sense of experience are thus unsettled, the reader's experience is nonetheless one of ease, and apparent spontaneity. If we accept the notion of 'vision as action', many of the narrative descriptions of actions – such as that first evocation of Josef K.'s sitting up in bed in *The Trial* – can themselves be considered part of the narration of sense perceptions, and thence of the perceived situation itself. The description of action can thus be considered part of the evocation both of perception and of the fictional world – so that the durative nature of descriptions of the fictional world, the idea that 'chronology is always disrupted by spatial indications' (Bal, 1997: 139–40), is undercut.

We do not have to wait while the story stops, and a new scene is set in which the action can then continue to unfold; the narrative world is constructed through the character's temporal exploration of it. This also challenges the notion of what Uspensky, citing Foucault, describes as the basic linguistic 'translation' of space into time: 'a verbal

description of any spatial relationship (or of any reality) is necessarily translated into a temporal sequence' (1973: 77). Kafka minimizes the rigid linearity of the textual temporality, precisely through what Uspenksy describes as the other basic feature of language as opposed to pictorial art: its prerogative of spatial indeterminacy (1973: 76). In Kafka's texts, this indeterminacy is given by and manifest in the essential connection between the world and action within that world. The posited 'essential relationship' of literature to time rather than to space is here redefined; the 'translation' of space into time is so efficient as to make it seem almost untranslated. We are drawn fluidly through the narrative by the narrated interaction of character and situation, which makes sufficient concession to conventional processes of narrativization not to alienate us, while also showing their inadequacies and superfluity. The chapters often open with reassuring indicators of location and season ('On a winter's morning – outside snow fell in a dull light – K. sat, extremely tired despite the early hour, in his office', 1990a: 149), or with summaries of the protagonist's habits ('During that spring, K. used to spend his evenings...'. 1990a: 30; 'During the following week, K. waited from day to day for another communication', 1990a: 73), or of recent events, often in the pluperfect ('K. had been informed by telephone', 1990a: 49).³³ Yet these are soon superseded by a plunge into the ambiguities of vacillating free indirect speech, or by minimally determined actions, or any of the other techniques discussed here by which traditional Realist precepts are undermined.

Thus we see how the whole reading experience is an effectively orchestrated imaginative process, induced in a way that feels wholly natural, because it corresponds so closely to the fundamental processes by which we see and imagine – but which also feels unnatural, unsettling, because we are accustomed to reading written stories that correspond to the cognitive stories we like to tell ourselves. We can now appreciate that Kafka's texts rid us, or rob us, of the reassuring illusion that it is possible to make totally linear, complete stories of perceptual experience; of the illusion that we see everything, from start to finish.

And so we close a book like *The Castle* or *The Trial* and return to the time of external, visual experience; and perhaps we find it subtly defamiliarized and redefined. Returning from the 'Kafkaesque' to the real world, we might find we have learned to see the world anew, through different eyes – or learned, indeed, to hear it with different ears.³⁴

Think of those times when you are sitting reading or writing, and you suddenly realize that the clock is striking. William James vividly evokes how it can seem as though you have only just noticed it, yet you can count back and know exactly how many chimes there have been.³⁵ So, did you 'hear' the first chime? If you did not, why can you so clearly 'remember' it in your mind's ear? But if you did, why do you have such a strong sense of having just become aware of the chimes?

There is no answer; no 'fact of the matter'. Kafka shows us that the truth of perceptual experience is stranger than the fictions we make of it – and that the most powerful fictions are those that chime with the strange truths of our temporal experience of the world. Such fictions confront us with the fact that there is no answer to the question, 'what was I conscious of a moment ago?', 'did I see or imagine that?', 'did I hear or imagine it?' – neither for us nor for the fictional characters. In the penultimate chapter of *The Trial*, Josef K. spends a long time in a vast and dimly lit cathedral: 'In the distance on the main altar there gleamed a large triangle of candle flames. K. could not have said with any

certainty whether he had seen them before. Perhaps they had only just now been lit' (Kafka, 1990a: 280; 1990b: 304). As in the example of K.'s having failed to notice the clerks and the inspector, K. in this case felt no gap, if he did fail to see the candles before: he felt no candle-shaped hole where the candles should have been. And nor did we; and there is no telling, now, whether there was a gap at all; perhaps the candles simply had not been lit. We are left with nothing but the knowledge that there might have been a gap, and that we will never be sure.

This works so powerfully, these texts draw us so irresistibly into and through the narrative worlds they evoke, because this is precisely what our experience of the world is like: far more full of gaps than we would ever care to admit. William James identifies this as one of the fundamental features of visual experience:

It is true that we may sometimes be tempted to exclaim, when once a lot of hitherto unnoticed details of the object lie before us, 'How could we ever have been ignorant of these things and yet have felt the object, or drawn the conclusion, as if it were a *continuum*, a *plenum*? There would have been *gaps* – but we felt no gaps'. (James, 1890, vol. i: 488)

There would have been gaps – but we felt no gaps.

Kafka evokes a world in such a way that we ought to feel Jamesian gaps everywhere, but we do not – because these gaps correspond to the gaps that there are in our experience of the world around us all the time. Thus the Kafkaesque fictional world is compelling, because it is far more cognitively realistic than the traditional Realist world, which is evoked through linear, cumulative, totalizing processes of retrospective narrativization. Yet the Kafkaesque world is also unsettling, because we are comfortable with narratives that make such satisfying sense of experience. The cognitive realism of the Kafkaesque is as precarious as it is compelling, because it forces us to see our storytelling for what it is. This, Kafkaesque realism confronts us with the fact that there can be no complete, linear narratives – because this cognitively realistic, Kafkaesque world, just like the real world, always emerges just in time:³⁶ as we look; as we read; as we ask the question.

Notes

- 1 The comprehension of written words proceeds linearly at the sentence level, despite the fact that visual processing of individual words is subject to numerous non-linear factors, including regression, prediction and skipping words that have been confirmed parafoveally using semantic, syntactic, or phonological knowledge. Reading is far from a passive process of word-by-word identification, but is one in which the reader is continually making choices about where and when to fixate. See for example O'Regan (1979) for a seminal study on saccades in reading and, for a concise history of eye-movement research in reading, Paulson and Goodman (1999).
- 2 '[T]he Stream of Consciousness ... [is] the ultimate fact for psychology' (James, 1890, vol. i: 360).
- 3 See for example (Gregory, 1998: 1). See also Sweetser (1990: 39) on young children's use of visual features to discriminate between verbal categories.
- 4 Aristotle's conception of the imagination, with which this tradition of inquiry begins, posits the faculty of *phantasia* which 'presents' the messages of the senses to the conscious mind as an "appearance", a unified picture; the rational part of the mind then recognizes this picture,

and attaches a conceptual label to it (e.g. Aristotle, *De anima*, 1976: 428a). Kant (see e.g. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1926: [1781/1787] A120–1) added further weight to the notion that *phantasia* combines sensations into a ‘presentation’ interpreted by the mind, which latter is thus treated as something like the ‘conscious self’.

- 5 Kosslyn (1980, 1994) is the main current proponent of the pictorialist approach to vision. In Kosslyn’s account [scare-quotes in the original], there is a ‘visual buffer’, which is composed of the several retinotopic maps of the brain’s occipital cortex, the visual processing centre of the brain. In the ‘visual buffer’, ‘quasi-pictorial entities’ or ‘surface representations’ are constructed out of ‘deep representations’. These quasi-pictorial entities are then, as it were, available to ‘consciousness’ (that third semi-stage) as images, and the information in them is extractable by the ‘mind’s eye’ that ‘looks at the display (1980: e.g. 6, 18, 139). See also Thomas (1999: §2.1.1). The accumulation of scare-quotes in Kosslyn’s account testifies to its own conceptual fragility. I quote Kosslyn’s 1980 volume as the most eloquent statement of his position; his 1994 work *Image and Brain: The Resolution of the Imagery Debate* adds a wealth of empirical studies in support of his theory, and nuances the ‘quasi-pictorial’ argument, but retains essentially the same thrust.
- 6 See for example Dennett’s ‘Marilyn’ argument (1991: 354–5), discussed later in this article. This argument, as well as the remarks by William James quoted here, are used by psychologists such as Susan Blackmore to discuss the nature of conscious experience; I here develop these associations in order to apply them to the reading of literary texts.
- 7 See for example Pylyshyn (2003: section 6.5) on the ways in which the imagination (or ‘mental imagery’) makes use of the visual system – ways which do not, however, provide support for a pictorial theory of either process. See also for example Johansson et al. (2005) for an experiment using eye movements to demonstrate this connection, and relating the findings to the theories of Kosslyn, O’Regan, and Pylyshyn, amongst others.
- 8 Pylyshyn, 2003: 419. I eschew the term ‘mental image’ for its pictorialist connotations, but this statement on phenomenology can be applied to imagining without implication of any neurological specifics.
- 9 *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 6th edn, published 2007; and *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* published 1993.
- 10 See e.g. Dennett on the ‘undischarged homunculus’ (Dennett, 1978: 101). See also Kenny (2007: 218): ‘whatever needs explaining in the human turns up grinning and unexplained in the shape of the manikin’.
- 11 The ‘picture theory’ of vision is also seductive because the pictorial analogies which sustain it can so easily be amassed as mere ‘metaphors’, denied literal validity while still being relied upon for explanatory power; see e.g. Kosslyn (1980: e.g. 6, 18, 139). For criticism, see for example (Thomas, 1999: §2.1.1).
- 12 The neurological specifics of vision are being ever better understood; see for example Snowden et al. (2006) for a reader-friendly introduction to vision science, and Burke (2008) for a summary with reading-relevant issues in mind. Scientific progress on this ‘micro-level’ can be assimilated into any of the three major ‘macro-level’ explanatory systems: pictorialism, propositionalism and enactivism. Noë (2009) quotes an ‘authoritative textbook’ propounding the commonplace view that “‘the brain constructs an internal representation of external physical events after first analyzing them into component parts’” (2009: 130).

- 13 This is the place in the retina where the optic nerve passes through it, and where there are hence no photoreceptor cells; this part of the visual field is therefore not perceived.
- 14 See also Noë et al. (2000) for a critical discussion of Dennett (1991) and Blackmore et al. (1995).
- 15 The fovea is the small (0.3 mm-diameter) area at the centre of the retina responsible for sharp central vision; this is the only area that allows for a high-resolution image—acuity over the rest of the retina is quite poor. Parafoveal describes the area surrounding the fovea, corresponding to the retinal area from 2 to 10 degrees off-centre. Peripheral is the region of the retina outside this central 10-degree area.
- 16 For other examples in this novel, see for example Kafka (1990a: 8–9, 53; 1990b: 161, 185).
- 17 For a summary, see for example Blackmore, 2003: 87–8, 90–2.
- 18 In general, these experiments demonstrate the crucial role played by attention in determining what we see/notice or fail to see (the related phenomenon of ‘inattention blindness’ has most famously been demonstrated by Simons and Chabris’s (1999) study ‘Gorillas in our midst’). However, even when attention is directed at the salient parts of the picture in which the changes also occur, detection often fails to take place. Changes occurring in the centre of the visual field have also been shown to be subject to the same selective processes. The series of experiments by Simons, Franconeri, and Reimer (2000) using gradual changes have provided another refinement of the original studies.
- 19 As Noë (2005) has it, ‘there is no place to draw a line such that what is on this side of the line I really experience and what is on the other I experience as present without really seeing it’ (2005: 26); we experience the hidden parts of the apple ‘*as absent, but as available to perception through appropriate movement*’ (248). See also Noë (2004: 77) on the ‘visual potential of objects and colours (2004: 135): ‘Qualities are available in experience as possibilities, as potentialities, but not as givens’ (135).
- 20 Of course, when we read about a fictional world, there is no world there to look at, beyond the aspects of it that the words of the text evoke; however, the sort of non-pictorial representation discussed earlier in this article provides the sense of cognitive continuity that is needed as we turn the page or momentarily lose concentration. Further, the similarities between seeing and imagining exploited by authors such as Kafka, who evoke the fictional world with such perceptual accuracy, allow us to be content with thinking we *could* look if we needed to; everything is experienced with a still higher degree of potentiality than when we see, because all that we imagine is sufficiently determined by intentionality (see e.g. Sartre, 1972: 9–10): I am imagining a whole bedroom if that is what I know myself to be imagining. Emmott (1997: 117–18) also makes a comparison between the assumptions we use to keep track of the fictional world and the real world; in both cases we rely to some extent on contextual assumptions. Emmott, however, concludes that the reader of fiction is actually more like a blind person than a sighted one, and depends on a ‘mental representation’ of the fictional world that requires continual updating.
- 21 See Noë (2002: the exchange between the author and Dan Sperber) for further discussion of the ambiguities of the term ‘representation’. Flint Schier (1986) provides a detailed discussion of the philosophy of pictorial representation.
- 22 See Snowden et al., 2006: 73–5. The cortical magnification factor by which the foveal area of the retina is accorded a disproportional amount of primary visual cortex, plus the left–right reversal of cortical processing of stimuli, mean that the ‘map’ of the world found in V1 is extremely distorted.

- 23 O'Regan (in Blackmore, 2005: 161) declares that David Chalmers's (1996) 'hard problem' of consciousness (how physical processes in the brain give rise to conscious experiences) is rendered a 'pseudo-problem' if one takes a sensorimotor view.
- 24 A deleted section in the manuscript of the novel deals with the precarious moment of waking, 'the most risky moment of the day': 'an infinite cognitive presence, or better, quick-wittedness, is required to seize everything, as one wakes, more or less in the same place as one left it in the evening' (Kafka, 1990b: 168). He invokes the oddity of the fact that the danger and effort and achievement of waking are so rarely noticed. When we wake everything does in general simply seem to be as it was and should be; the sensory 'grasping' of 'all that is there' happens so reliably and completely that we can take the major cognitive processes responsible for its happening almost wholly for granted. The enactive mastery that enables the seamless transition from nightly sensory deprivation to the day of incessant over-stimulus, activating multiple memories and instantaneous cognitive and physiological calculations of place and time, remains nonetheless a small repeated miracle. The bedroom is in a sense as new to Josef K. as it is to the reader.
- 25 The manuscript changes illustrate the subtlety of Kafka's means to balancing simplicity and indeterminacy: they manifest a general tendency towards a noticeably sparser form of linguistic expression, whether leaving indeterminate (e.g. Kafka, 1990a: 84 and 1990b: 200), or creating maximal impact with minimal words (e.g. Kafka, 1990a: 92–3; 1990b: 205); both strategies only enhance the imaginative power of, as Uspensky (1973) has it (see later in this article), the basic linguistic transformation of space into time.
- 26 In the first paragraph of *Effi Briest* (1895) alone: 'the front of the house', 'on the side facing the park and gardens', 'then out over', 'at its centre', 'around the edge', 'some twenty paces further on', 'corresponding exactly in line and length', 'only in one place', 'behind', 'at whose open end', 'close by', 'horizontally', 'slightly out of true', 'between' (Fontane, 1971: 7).
- 27 In the same passage: 'a wing built on at right angles', 'a white and green flagstone path', 'a large roundel of flowers with a sundial at its centre and a border of canna lilies and rhubarb around the edge', and so on (Fontane, 1971: 7).
- 28 *Irrungen, Wirungen* (1888), in Fontane (1971: 319).
- 29 Schema theory deals, similarly, with the necessary gaps in texts (no text can describe everything; nor would any text, Realist or otherwise, even seek to) and how readers bridge them; but both the nature of the schemata themselves, and the ways in which readers use them, are still subject to much theoretical and experimental clarification. The approach offered in this article has a narrower focus: the specifically perceptual 'gaps' that need 'filling', and the reasons why the very concept of problematic gaps may be misguided. Schema theory itself raises many questions, and makes many assumptions, regarding the nature of mental 'representations'; this article has sought to show how circumspect we must be as regards the term 'representation' and its cognitive reality.
- 30 See Dennett's 'Multiple Drafts' model of consciousness (1991: 111–43).
- 31 The linearity of the cognitive processes of narrativization resembles the linearity of a Realist text irrespective of the non-linear perceptual processes of perception and cognition by which such a text is read and comprehended (see also note 1).
- 32 See for example Sheppard (1977: esp. 397–8); and Robertson (1985: 124–5, 1993: 67–9). For a helpful summary of 'style indirect libre', 'free indirect speech', and '*erlebte Rede*', see also

- Pascal (1977). Fludernik (1993) presents an exhaustive account of free indirect speech as a device that blurs the boundaries between narrator and characters, or the narrating process and the plot level of the fictional world, and incorporates terminology and findings from German literary criticism as well as English and French, redefining the territories of literature and linguistics. For a discussion of perspective in Kafka, see Pascal (1982).
- 33 See for example Robertson (1985: xx) on the passages of narratorial summary characteristic of the opening chapters of the novel.
- 34 O'Regan and Noë discuss the relevance of the sensorimotor theory of vision to other sense modalities; the qualitative differences between the different sensory experiences can be accounted for by considering which sensorimotor laws are governing the exploration of the world (see e.g. 2001: 943, 962). These differences are thus naturally explained, without recourse to any special essences or mechanisms inherent to each modality (2001: 971).
- 35 (James, 1890, vol. i: 646). James cites the contemporary physiologist Sigmund Exner: "When deeply absorbed, we do not hear the clock strike. But our attention may awake after the striking has ceased, and we may then count off the strokes. Such examples are often found in daily life." This example is amongst those cited frequently by Blackmore (e.g. 2002) as a way of illustrating the problems of trying to define a given experience, or part of an experience, as either 'conscious' or 'unconscious'.
- 36 Rensink (2000: 32). Rensink's notion of vision as based on 'virtual representation' still entails that object representations are built up; however, they are built up one at a time, as needed, and dissolve when attention moves elsewhere. Rensink brings out how crucial the temporal element of potentiality is to seeing: we have the impression of a rich visual world because we can always make a new representation 'just in time' using information from the world itself. Furthermore, these 'representations' serve not to *construct* copies of the world, but to *coordinate* the actions of the perceptual sub-systems involved (2000: 33).

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